

and the North Edge was the one good thing, you know? The one thing that kept me going." His voice is breaking. "You can't trust Sam. He's gone to their side. Maybe he didn't want to, but he did anyway. Etienne!" I take hold of his hand and shake it. He can't ever go back there. Even if Sam was trying to help him in the beginning, Etienne can't be involved in this.

Etienne looks at his fingers in mine and his face softens. "OK, Ju, seeing as you're so insistent. I won't go back."

"You swear?" I say. "Cross your heart?"


"Yes."

"Say it!"

Etienne laughs gently. "I swear, Juniper." This gush of panic and sadness wells up inside me. "You won't need to anyway, because you're a Plant Keeper here now. You'll watch out for Annie Rose, won't you, Etienne?" Etienne smiles. "Of course I will. I promise. I'll come down every day. You know how jealous I always was of you having the Palm House? Your very own garden. Just like Mary Lennox. Now you'll see the moors too and the hills. You're going home, Juniper Green."

"I'm not ready."

Etienne squeezes my hand. "You were always ready, Juniper, you and Bear. That's why you have to go."



I go back to the kitchen and make Bear help me put all our old books under the floor, where the journey things were. They'll be seen as incriminating evidence if Portia Steel's officers come looking.

"It feels like we buried a person," Bear says as we drag the chest back over the top.

"They did their job," Annie Rose says. "And maybe they will again one day, for another person."

"I don't want anyone else having *Birds of the World*," Bear says fiercely. "That's just mine."

Annie Rose smiles. We had a fight on our hands getting Bear to leave that one. "OK, Bear. I'll keep it safe for you. Your bird book isn't going anywhere."

I look round at the meagre amount of food left on the shelves. Anything she could get to fit, Annie Rose has stuffed in our bags for the journey – energy bars and fruit