

wouldn't be laughing. Or something worse!" He's wading out of the nettles furiously. "It's all right for you with your boots. I've just got my school shoes! I'm stung all over my ankles as well."

"Oh, Bear," I say sweetly, trying to keep a straight face. "Isn't there some leaf that's meant to help with nettle stings? Don't you remember, in *First Aid Naturally*..."

"The dock leaf," he says slowly, like he's talking to an idiot.

"That's right. I'll find us some."

"You wouldn't even know what they look like," Bear says, scowling at me.

"Tell me then," I coax. "Describe them."

I let Bear find them - veined leaves with pinkish stems. They always grow near nettles. That's the bit I remember - the poison and the treatment, side by side.

We sit rubbing the dock leaves on to our skin, crushing them against the rash. I don't know if they really help, but gradually the stinging ebbs away. Maybe it's having this moment to take it all in, that we made it out here, to where things grow and plants can sting.

There's a flash of movement a few metres away and Bear's up. He slips behind a tree.

"This would be the best hide-and-seek ever!" His muted voice comes back at me.

"Don't you dare!" I cry, properly shouting. "Come back!"

Bear appears from behind the tree and looks at me strangely. "I'm just here, Ju."

"I know, but..." But what do I say? That I'm worried the forest will swallow him up? He's out here, where he was always meant to be. I can't keep him on a lead.

"We should eat," I say instead.

"What have we got?" Bear says coming back, interested. "Annie Rose made sandwiches. We should eat those, before they go stale."

"That bread's always stale anyway. It's like plastic." Bear pulls a face. "I want wild food."

"There'll be time for that: Let's eat what we have first."

There's a log, like a bench, next to where we made our tent and we sit beside each other. Nature providing, I think, like Annie Rose told us it would.

"How many miles now?" Bear asks.

"A long way. It's almost three hundred miles, remember."

"Is that too far?"

"It's just how far it is." We don't know about miles and time. We never had any distance to walk in the city. Annie Rose said adults could walk maybe fifteen to twenty miles a day, but there's no way Bear could manage that. She said maybe eight miles a day, on average. Working it out makes my head spin.

Even if we managed eight miles a day, that's more than thirty days' walking. More than a month. It will be