

December by the time we get to Ennerdale. Proper winter. I can't very well tell Bear we'll be walking for an entire month. And that's not even factoring in detours for water, or diverting round other cities, or getting lost.

Bear's stopped listening anyway. He's gulping in the air. "Sniff it, Ju! It doesn't smell clean like in the city."

I can't resist smiling. "That wasn't clean, Bear. That was disinfectant and weedkiller."

"Oh yeah," Bear says, opening his mouth wide to breathe in the forest. And suddenly, in that instant, I remember it – the smell of earth and leaves and bark. This flood of something wells up inside me and maybe there is a voice I remember and maybe it is Mum's, I don't know. But she's all that way north and she never came back for us. I've got Bear now. He's mine to take to her.

I can't think about all that. I make myself busy rolling up the tarpaulins and the sleeping bags and the space blanket. Bear's carrying the blanket but he's weirdly possessive about his rucksack and insists he puts it in by himself.

"What have you got in there?"

"Nothing!"

I give him a strange look. What has he stashed away in there? What couldn't he leave behind? It's too late now anyway. We have what we have. "Come on, Bear. We should be on our way."

We follow the arrow on the GPS along some old road.

The surface is broken up with trees, their roots bursting through the tarmac, all covered in moss and the ferns I've been drawing for years.

"Juniper!" Bear's voice is shrill. "Look!"

It's a bird, already taking to the sky, its wings fluttering, panicked. High in the trees before I see it properly – a flash of brown and blue and white.

"Why did it fly off so fast?" Bear asks.

"Maybe it never saw anything like us before."

"I think it's a jay!" Bear says. "I wish we had my book."

"You don't need it. You know this," I say quietly, envious of him. How he can notice everything and not just be looking for danger.

"And look! Look, Ju! It's a squirrel!"

It's running up the tree, fast, like it's flying too. Grey with a white belly and flecks of red on its back. Its tail, thick and coiled, moves with it like an extra limb. There are rabbits too, brown and skittish.

The footprints of before are everywhere, though it's all hidden under tangled mounds of plant life. Moss, thorns, brambles. Like when the princess pricked her finger on a spinning wheel and slept for a hundred years. Like Mary Lennox's secret garden.

At first I don't get what it all is, it's just random lines of debris, but then I start to see the shapes. The markings-out. What would once have been a house. What would once