

You pull, but the tick has to release itself. I think it's not going to happen, that I'm going to rip a piece of Bear's skin off instead, but suddenly the tick comes away and the engorged black mite flails helplessly between the metal fingers of the tweezers. I throw the tick down and grind it into the forest floor with my boot heel.

I get the antiseptic wipes from our first-aid kit and dab gently at the red bead on Bear's neck. "It's OK, Bear cub. It's OK. It's gone now."

He looks up at me, big-eyed and grateful. "I won't get sick will I, Ju?"

I shake my head. "We just have to keep an eye on the wound. Keep it clean. Come here. I need to check the rest of you." I trace my hand along his neck and down his top, on to his shoulders, feeling for bumps on his smooth skin. We should have done this first thing this morning, although I bet that tick was from today. It was probably from the river. Anyway, there's no point spending much time looking now. It's too dark to see.

"Come on. Let's find somewhere to make camp. We've gone far enough for one day."

We lay our groundsheet under a tree, but don't put the top layer on, not yet. We want to look up.

Bear's imagining creatures in the sky, drawn out in the stars. He's got my sketchbook, the one unessential item I allowed myself, and has his torch directed at the page.

You never saw stars in the city. Not really. There was way too much light pollution. So many people, so tightly packed. Someone, somewhere was always awake.

There were three more ticks – two on Bear's right ankle, one on my shin. We found them after we made camp. We took off clothing, one bit at a time so we didn't get cold, and ran our fingers along our goose-pimpled skin. You don't feel them at first, not when they bite. All the time the tick was on my leg, for however long it was there feeding, I didn't notice anything. As they're sucking out your blood, they're sending painkillers into you, to deaden you to any