

sensation that they're there.

That first bite, on Bear's neck, is red and sore, but it doesn't seem to be spreading, not yet. That's what you've got to watch out for – red angry weals, radiating outwards.

We've eaten the last of the sandwiches and Bear's had a snack bar too, and a few metres away, under a tree, we've laid the trap.

I can feel my energy waning. We need protein. Maybe we'll go a few miles first, in the morning, before we cook it, whatever 'it' is. Then we can make a fire and we can eat something warm that will actually fill us up.

We need to go back to the river too. I've no idea when it's going to rain, despite what I said to Bear. The sky was red tonight – bleeding across the sky, haemorrhaging – and I think that means something about the weather, only I can't remember what. I think it was some extreme, though it's just an old rhyme. Sailors or shepherds or something.

"Ju, it's the cat again," Bear whispers, but casual, so casual that I look down at the sketchbook on his lap, thinking that's what he means, that he's added the lynx to his constellations. But Bear's hand is pointing out into the darkness and when I look, I see the dim shape under the trees.

It takes a while for my eyes to make out the full picture. It's a cat, just like we saw before. It's lying down, head on its paws, watching.

"You think it followed us?" Bear asks.

"I don't know."

"But we don't have to move our camp, do we? I don't want to walk any more today. I can't!" There's a moan forming in his voice.

I don't want to walk further either. My legs and body ache, and my head aches too. It's just a cat. It's big, but not big like a lion or tiger would be big, and we've been sitting prey for ages. The cat could have got us already, if that's what it wanted.

"Let's just watch it for a while. See what it does."

"I miss the Sticks," Bear says.

"Do you, Bear?" I ask, giving him a squeeze. "They'll be OK, you know. They have a good keeper."

Bear smiles. He gave his vivarium to Etienne the night we left. "I hope Etienne takes them to the Palm House, for adventures. They like it there."

I nod. I want to say something more, that Etienne will do everything he can for the Sticks, and for Annie Rose, that we don't need to worry, but I can't. Thinking about Etienne and Annie Rose makes this lump in my throat. Plus it might not be true about Annie Rose, that we don't need to worry.

Will Steel's Border Patrol officers really accept her story – that we broke the glass on our own, that we were running from Annie Rose too? They're not stupid.