

over her face, matted with leaves and dirt. Her skin's thick and tight like leather, and she has small sharp eyes. I think of the fox in the Emporium.

"I wanted to look for you. I wanted to come back," Bear's saying breathlessly, pulling at me. Tugging at my sleeve to bring me lower, taking both my hands in his. "Juniper!"

"But it was too dark, wasn't it, when I found you last night?" the woman says kindly to Bear. "Didn't it happen just like I told you it would? That we'd light the fire first thing this morning and your sister would come. Like a moth to a flame. Our signal worked!" She's beaming at me.

I don't say that it wasn't the smoke. That it was our lynx cat.

Ghost's disappeared anyway. I look around the line of trees but she's already gone.

"I found your brother as the light was falling. Wandering around sobbing his heart right out. Without his coat as well!"

"Thank you! Thank you for finding him!" The words fall out of me.

The woman's laugh is shrill. "He made it easy. The volume he was crying at!"

I shake my head, confused. "I didn't hear anything. I was calling, calling."

The woman smiles. "Sounds are funny out here. The wind takes them away. Sounds can disappear, just like people can."

"I thought I wouldn't ever find him. I thought—" My

voice is breaking and the woman cuts in. I must sound pretty crazy.

"I've got water boiling on the fire. I can make you a hot drink and something to eat. I've not been able to get your brother to accept anything."

"Bear?" I say astonished, my relief coming out in a burst. "That's not like you. You must be famished!"

Bear shakes his head furiously.

"Well, I am," I say enthusiastically, to make up for his reticence. We should keep the woman on side. She could help us.

Bear tugs at my sleeve again. "Ju, our journey!"

"We need to rest, Bear, and eat."

"We can eat as we walk."

"We've barely got anything left. You know that. You've told me enough times!"

The woman's still smiling her bright smile.

"Ju!" Bear says. His shoulders are all high and tight, like they always were at school. He's never been good with other people. Only us and Etienne. But this woman found him. She kept him safe. And she seems so delighted to have us here. She can't see many people. I'm still reeling over the fact she's here at all.

"Juniper! Let's go. Please!" Bear hisses, still trying to pull me away. The woman's smile fades. It's obvious Bear doesn't like her.