

“Bear!” I say crossly, pulling myself loose from him. “You ran off. I spent the whole of yesterday searching for you, thinking all kinds of things. I’m hungry and tired even if you’re not.”

Bear hangs his head and kicks his foot into the floor.

“Come in then,” the woman says as though it’s settled, and she ushers us both into the cottage before her.



There’s an old stone fireplace and a fire’s burning full pelt in the iron grate, and I’m drawn to it – to the warmth and the flickering flames.

There’s a strange smell I don’t recognize but that tugs at my stomach.

The cottage windows are small, closed. Some are boarded up. I didn’t notice from outside. At one of the windows, a fat blue fly is slamming itself against the dirty pane. A bluebottle, Bear would say, if he was talking normally.

The woman catches me looking. “There’s no point cleaning them. Not out here.” Her voice is defensive.

“No, of course,” I say quickly, smiling in case she thinks I’m disapproving.

“It’s not what you’re used to, in your shining city.”

I shake my head because that’s not what I meant. I’m not bothered about dirty windows. “You live by yourself?”