

I ask, changing the subject.

The woman nods and I see her teeth through her smile, all brown and yellow. "I'll make tea."

There's an old sofa by the fire and I sink into it - I can't help it. I pull Bear down too. "Bear? What's up with you?"

"I don't want a cup of tea!" he grunts.

"I'll make one for him anyway. Then I'll sort out food. I'll have to pop out, to find something. A rabbit!" the woman says, triumphant, like she's just solved a problem. "I'll get you a rabbit!"

"You don't need to go to any trouble," I say and my eyes can't help go to the table where there are dead animals laid out in a row - rabbits and birds. That's what the smell is. And that's where the bigger buzz of flies is coming from. I can see them now. Crawling over the carcasses.

The woman's watching me. "I don't bother so much for myself, but you two don't look like you're used to being out here. Your stomachs won't be as strong as mine. You'd be better with fresh."

She goes over to the kitchen area to make the tea, still beaming every time she turns back to look at us, even though Bear's silent and sullen beside me. It's sort of surprising she doesn't ask more questions. We must be as miraculous to her as she is to us.

Though it doesn't seem like that. She just seems pleased.

Like we're neighbours who've dropped by to drink tea with her.

"Why are you here? Who are you?" I ask in a sudden rush as the woman returns with two mugs of steaming liquid.

"Violet." She places one of the mugs into my hand.

"Violet," I repeat and I smile at her. "What tea is it?"

"It's a kind of root. I can show you later. Drink now."

I take a sip, even though the rim of the mug is grimy. The tea's sweet and strange. I smile again at Violet's expectant face. "How long have you lived here?"

She pulls a strange face. Maybe I'm being rude, asking too much, but then she smiles again. "A long time. Too long. But now it's your turn. I'm curious. Where are you running off to?"

"Nowhere really." I shrug. There's something about 'running off' that irritates me and Bear's hand is in mine now. He's digging his nails into the flesh of my palm.

"You must have somewhere in mind," Violet says, bidding me to drink more of the strange tea.

I shake my head as I drink. "Just away from the city."

"Why would you want to do that?" She's still smiling brightly, in a way that makes me wonder why she's not tired already, of looking happy.

Bear's fingernails dig in tighter and I glare at him. "We just had to get away. It wasn't safe for us." I pause, not sure how to say it. "Maybe the city isn't how you remember it."