

dared, not after Ghost got shot. She's following us again and off, but limping. She's nervous of us now. Frightened of fast movements. Frightened when we talk too loud. I'm terrified of scaring her away all over again.

I can't bear to think of losing Ghost now. It feels like she's the only thing keeping us safe.

But I can't stall any longer because Bear's right. That trap's not going to catch us anything. I don't know why I'm even still carrying it.

I've been playing with the air rifle. I think I've figured out how it works. I've bent it back, like that woman did, and inserted a silver pellet into the barrel before snapping it straight again.

"We'll find our own lunch, Bear," I say, holding it up.

Bear looks scared in a way I hadn't anticipated. I wish he wouldn't. It makes me backtrack and I think of those carcasses back on the table in the cottage. The stench of them, rotting, food for flies.

"What if the woman hears?"

"She won't, Bear. We're miles away. We lost her."

"I can do it, Ju," Bear says graciously. "I know you don't want to shoot anything."

I shrug. "You just have to out here, don't you?"

The water bottle and pans are full of water from where I left them overnight. I thought if we caught enough rain, then before we set off we'd make nettle tea. We've not had

anything warm since the cottage. We've been too scared to light a fire.

I hadn't thought through what rain means though. Everything is wet. There's no dry wood left to burn.

There's a tight knot in my stomach. The rain's stopped, but water drips down on us from the trees and the ground's wet and slippery. The soles of Bear's shoes skid hopelessly along.

The clouds are dark, like they're full up with rain, and it's so cold, colder than ever – our wet clothes sodden against our skin. We're hungrier than ever too.

We look for rabbits and birds and I keep the air rifle ready, but for the first time we don't really see them. Occasionally there's a squirrel – a flash of grey in the leaves, or a bird in the canopy, but they're always gone before I realize. I wouldn't have a chance today.

Bear's given up with his acorn collection, but even they seem in short supply. Maybe the rain brought down more leaves from the trees and covered them. Only I worry that that's not it, and wouldn't the rain have brought down more nuts too? Unless there just aren't that many left to fall. We're further north and closer to winter. Even acorns won't last forever.

The squirrels know what they're doing – scurrying off with them, hoarding them for a colder, darker day than this one. That's how you survive out here.