

think I am? The Pied Piper leading kids out of the city through some mountain? There is no way out. The Buffer's all you've got."

"Border Patrol—" I start.

"Go when they're not looking. If you know they want your blood, what the hell are you still doing here anyway?"

My eyes sting with tears and I reach inside my pocket for Annie Rose's rainy-day money.

I hold the curled notes out to Silvan, cross with myself because my hand is trembling. "An air rifle then."

Silvan puts up his hands and laughs. "Look, you've got the wrong idea about me, oak girl. The penalty for a gun, in here..." He takes his forefinger and cuts it across his throat. "You should know that."

"We'll need to eat," I say.

"Take all the supplies you've got. Whatever you can carry." He's rifling through a cupboard and I think he's about to give me protein balls or vitamin sticks or some other bogus city food, but he brings out a rusty metal box and places it on the table, triumphantly.

I frown. "What is it?"

"From the days of the rats, seeing as you seem to think this is Hamelin. It's a trap."

"You think we should eat rats?"

"I think you should eat whatever you can catch. If you want to survive."

"Does it work?"

Silvan shrugs and snatches the notes from my hand. Did I just exchange all our savings for a rusty box?

"I'm not sure about this," I start to say, but Silvan's rummaging through the cupboard again. Finally he brings out these little blister packs. "You should take these too. I've no use for them."

"What are they?"

"Antibiotics."

"We're resistant," I say, confused.

"Look, kid, I don't know who you are and I don't want to know, but there are degrees of resistance. Sometimes the immune system needs a kick-start. If you get bitten, which you will—"

I nod, though I feel sick inside.

"Take three tablets a day. They might help."

"Thanks," I say, not even trying to hide my disappointment as I look at the blister packs. Even if we took one tablet a day each, there wouldn't be enough for the whole journey. Not for both of us.

"I wish you luck. You and your brother. But then maybe you've already got all the luck you need, being able to escape this place."

"Did you know?" I can't help asking. "Back then. When the disease was released. Did you know you'd be shut in here too?"