

its little bobtail, but it doesn't move. It stands there on its long legs, watching us, watching both of us, shifting its eyes between us as if studying our connection.

I stretch an arm out for Bear to bring him closer. Together we're bigger, stronger.

"It could've come from a zoo," Bear's saying. "It could've escaped all the shooting. Some animals must have done." He's not scared at all, only curious and annoyed that he can't identify it. Like his books have failed him.

Then suddenly I know. School taught me something useful after all.

"It's a lynx. The ReWilders released some."

"A lynx." Bear says the name slowly. You didn't get them in books about British wildlife. Lynx were long gone by the time those books were written. We'd already hunted them to extinction hundreds of years before.

"They weren't meant to come over, they were outlawed, but the ReWilders brought them anyway. They brought them from Russia." They needed something – something more organic than guns, something that would still be here after the ReWild – to keep down deer and rabbits, otherwise their numbers would have exploded and with all those plant-eaters the forests could never regrow. Of course, on our Education Board syllabus, lynx cats were another example of the ReWilders' irresponsibility – letting dangerous predators loose on an overcrowded island.

"Why's it watching us, Ju?"

It's watching us intently, like it's curious. Its eyes are beautiful and outlined in black, like eyeliner, like Kohl. I shrug. "Maybe it never saw a person before."

"Here, pussy, pussy." The words sound familiar in Bear's mouth, though he just learned them from stories.

"Bear!" I whisper, aghast. "It's not that sort of cat."

"It wouldn't hurt us."

"We don't know that."

"It could be our friend."

"It's wild, Bear."

Bear frowns. "Wild's good, isn't it?"

"Not always." The cat is blinking slowly but its body is completely still. Someone's got to make a move. I start to back away, pulling Bear after me. "Come on!"

"Bye bye, pussycat," Bear says. "Should we still be walking backwards, Ju?"

"I think so. Until it can't see us any more. Come on, we need to find water and then somewhere to camp, and it has to be away from anything that might eat us, OK?"