

I've been aware of a river for miles now, from the GPS and from this sound just a few trees away. This watery murmur. But I've been scared somehow of what we might find. We can't wait any longer though and we start walking towards the water.

Before the ReWild, the rivers were running brown and orange and polluted. Chemical waste from landfill, from the clogged-up land, had found its way in. There were rivers that gave chemical burns if you touched them. There were rivers that would set alight if you struck a match. Annie Rose said that one of our most essential pieces of camping kit is the little tin of strips that test for clean water. She showed us how to use them before we left. I didn't have the heart to tell her the water from our kitchen sink made the strips turn orange, meaning unsafe to drink.

The river water doesn't look like it will show up blue on

the strips either. It's dark, murky.

"Can I do it, Ju?"

We're standing on the bank, the tin of strips in my hand. "I don't know. Maybe. But I think it's too steep here."

The incline down to the water is thick with roots and brambles. If we tripped, we could fall right in. It's hard to tell how deep it is, but we can't see the bottom and we never learned to swim. The pool in the city was too disgusting to think about. This oily lacquer clung to the surface, this scum – disinfectant and human secretions combined.

"We have to walk upstream," I say, the new word light in my mouth. Upstream. "Somewhere it's easier to get to the water. But watch out for ticks."

The plants are high here and close together. There must be ticks everywhere. This is their perfect terrain. Ticks are like vampires – they drink blood and hate the sun; they like dark damp places best. Somewhere with thick vegetation where they can wait unseen for something with warm blood to pass. Questing, that's what it's called.

"Blackberries! Like you got at the North Edge, Ju!" Bear squeals.

He's right. It's the same plant – the bramble, strudded with little black fruits.

"We can be hunter-gatherers!" he says, already with juice around his mouth. Any doubts he had about eating them are long gone.