

I pick too, for the rush of it on your tongue. The sweet and the sharpness together. The berries here are different to the North Edge though – they're a dull black and there are no small firm ones waiting to ripen. These are the last this plant's got. They're OK, but there's a cloudiness, like the beginning of rot.

"I could go through here, Ju." Bear's at a parting in the undergrowth. Something's been here before us. Some animal, going down to drink. Maybe that lynx cat.

"OK," I say warily. "Go steady, OK?" The ground's slippery and we have to put our hands down on to the bank to stop ourselves sliding too fast. Does the river come this high sometimes? Or perhaps it rained recently. We have no idea about weather outside the city.

I hold on to Bear's shoulders as he walks ahead, his flat soles slipping on the bank. The moment we reach the water's edge he swings round to face me. "I want to do it, Ju! You've got Etienne's GPS! It's my turn now!"

I hand over a strip slowly. "You have to hold it in the water for ten seconds, OK?"

I get this urge to shut my eyes, or look up to the sky and will the strip to show the same colour. To wait for Bear to call out the word. Blue.

I don't though. I stare at the thin rectangle in Bear's hand as it moistens, darkens. It takes a few seconds for any colour at all to show. I don't know where on the scale

it would be, what the name would be on my paint palette, but it's a blue turning into green. Some kind of turquoise. It's what I always think the sea would look like.

"That's good, Bear, that's really good."

"We can drink it?"

"We can drink it."

Bear makes space for me beside him and we cup the water in our hands and pour it into our mouths. Long wet gulps of it.

It's icy and makes us shiver, but there's something else too that isn't just cold. It's fresh. Deliciously, beautifully fresh. So different to the stale city water that cycled around forever. There was some horrible statistic you had to try and forget, about how many bodies it had passed through already and how much of it was actually plastic.

The sun's a low blaze in the sky and we probably shouldn't linger, but I've got the triumph of finding water playing in my head, one of our first and most important goals. If only there was a way to send word to Annie Rose.

"There must be fish here!" Bear says, bending low over the water.

"Maybe."

"We could eat them!"

"Maybe," I say again. "If we can catch them."

"I could, Ju. And there will be some. There'll be loads!"

I smile at Bear's certainty. I hope he's right. It would mean