

the rivers are better now. When the ReWild happened, any fish were long gone. Annie Rose said first the rivers were full of dead, bloated fish bodies, then the bodies rotted away and you were just left with the decay. The algae that took the place of the fish, clogging up the water like a big old net.

Maybe all that made it easier to leave behind — the rivers and trees and whatever else was left by then. It wasn't beautiful any more. Then when people started getting sick and everyone saw how deadly the disease was, you can kind of see why they went along with everything. They walked into a cage and they locked the door behind them.

We haven't seen fish yet, but there are insects — long black bodies with four legs outstretched like a cross. They're balancing precariously on the surface.

"Pond skaters," Bear declares.

There's better than that too. Bear sees it first.

It's another insect, perched on a reed. It's long and thin and bright electric-blue, with four separate wings that are shiny and clear and partitioned, like that glass from our old apartment-block door.

"Dragonfly!" I say exultantly, because this one I know.

"Or damselfly, I'm not sure," Bear says.

"Dragonfly sounds better!"

The creature takes to the air, into the swirls of flies clustered over the river. Its prey. It's like a relic of a time

when there really could be dragons. I think I hear its wings, beating.

I wish I didn't have to say we should move on, but what if those flies the dragonfly's catching are mosquitoes and what if the disease did transfer to them?

It's getting dark too. We have to move on so we can make camp while we can still see. I start filling our bottles, from as far out in the river as I can reach so it's as pure as you get. I'm doing it slowly, not wanting to lose this feeling, swirling my fingers through the water, when Bear screams.

"Ju! What's that?"

He knows already. I hear the fear in the pitch of his voice. And we know that sound like we know our own heartbeats. The buzzing and whirring Annie Rose said was like a fly in your ear. Only the glyphosate killed most of the flies, so an annoying buzz has only ever meant one thing to Bear and me. A surveillance drone.

It's just a couple of metres above water level. The river provides the perfect path. Bear's fumbling with his rucksack. I want to say leave it, just run, but we need everything in that bag. I hoist it on to his shoulders and grab my bag, and we tear through the brambles. Back into the trees, deeper into the forest.

I was stupid to let us dawdle by the river. Of course Border Patrol would look for us. Of course they would. Abbott will have sent word first thing. The moment he