



After we reach the city edge, we walk into the hills and it's colder every single day. Bear and I crawl into our sleeping bags the moment it gets dark, tight against each other for extra warmth. We put the space blanket around us like a shield.

Foraging is virtually impossible. The blackberries are long gone and most of the sweet chestnuts too. Even the nettles are shrinking back into the ground and now when we make Gloop it's really just hot water.

But Ghost feeds us now. Each day as the light falls out of the forest, she slinks away and finds us later, bringing something fresh.

"We're carnivores, aren't we?" Bear says. He's good with the knife, as good as I am. You learn what to cut out, what to discard. What colour of pink tastes too raw when you cook.

One day there's a whole deer. Ghost drags it over to us, and it's delicate and beautiful and still warm. Its eyes look at me as I dig the knife into its flank and I feel I should say something, offer up some kind of blessing for it. A prayer. We could feast for days from this deer, but the next morning we have to move on, and I just take a few cuts for that day and the next, which I hang with bloodied string from our rucksacks. All the rest we leave for some other animal.

Ghost doesn't mind. She doesn't even look back. This is the one thing she knows about us – we keep walking.

Sometimes we find more signs – the water ones, but others too. Notched twigs. Rags woven through branches. Carvings. There are even bones – the V-shaped ones you get in the necks of pigeons. Wishbones.

We can't figure out what any of them mean, except for the water, but somehow it still feels like we're following something. Something good.

One morning I pan out on the GPS and there it is, our first lake. We should reach it tomorrow.

"We're getting closer, Bear!" I say, allowing myself to feel excited.

"Will she be waiting?" For a moment, I don't understand what he's talking about. I think he means Ghost, but she's here already, right behind us. Then I get it.

"Mum?"

"Yes."

"I don't know. I don't think so. How would she know we're coming?"

"I suppose," Bear says thoughtfully.

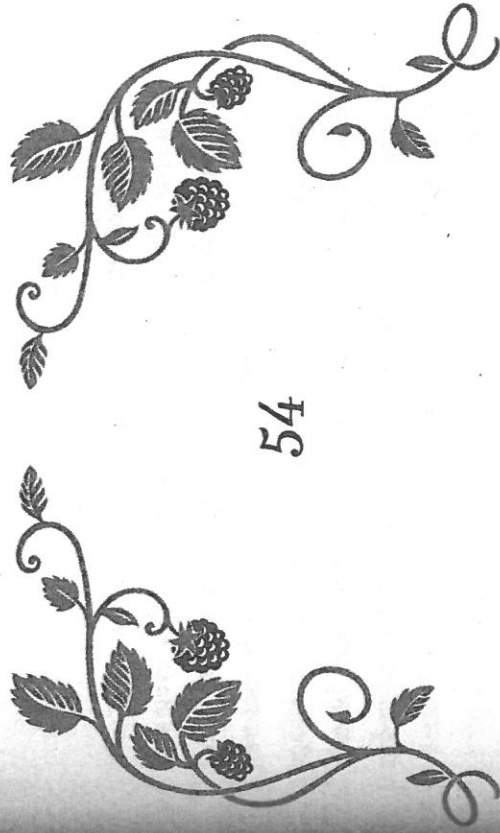
"If she knew, she would've come to get us."

"I suppose," he says again.

I steer Bear on to Ennerdale instead. Just Ennerdale. Our journey's end. Our safe harbour. We have to imagine this, it's what keeps us going. One day after another, getting closer.

Bear has all these amazing what ifs. What if they live in tree houses? What if they live on the lake, on rafts so the wolves can't get to them? What if they've tamed the wolves? What if Ghost is actually an Ennerdale cat and has come to take us there?

I'm listening to him, imagining them out, all these amazing possibilities, when it happens. When my left foot descends into the most pain I've ever felt. Touches so much pain that I fall down to the ground. That I scream, louder than I've ever screamed before. Louder than you could ever scream in the city.



I don't know how long it takes me to come round.

There are trees above me. Branches and leaves, like I used to always dream of. I should be happy. Except there's a blinding pain. A pain so big I can't work out where it's coming from.

I'm lying down and Bear's next to me, holding my left foot, binding it tight.

"Juniper!"

He's completely pale, completely scared, but focused – binding a white ribbon bandage around my foot and ankle.

"What happened?" I ask through gritted teeth.

"It was a trap. I took your boot off," Bear says, pointing, and the abandoned boot swims into view next to me. It's torn and covered in blood, my blood, and it's all I can do to stop passing out again.

I take a deep gulp of air and focus on Bear's face. "Did you

clean the wound?"

"It was bleeding a lot, Ju," Bear says, his eyes wet. "I thought I should stop the bleeding." He points to Annie Rose's little first-aid book with comic-strip-style pictures, which he's found in my rucksack. It's lying open at a page headed 'Severe Bleeding' and is covered in small bloody fingerprints. The first and most important action, in big letters and bold type, is the one we can't do – dial 999.

I gulp. "I need to get up. We can't stay here."

I try, but I collapse back down again. I can't put any weight on my foot. And I'm dizzy. Everything is moving. The ground around me – the tapestry of leaves – is bright red, painted with my blood, and there's blood coming through the bandage too, despite Bear's efforts. And somewhere beyond that is this broken metal contraption that Bear has smashed in with a stone.

"Ju, what are we going to do?"

Ghost's here, a way off. Occasionally she makes one of those yelps again, that little nervous cry. I look around for drones, but that's not why she's crying.

I talk through my teeth, which are clasped tight with pain. "Can you get my bag off? Put it under my foot?"

Elevate the wound. You elevate the wound and apply pressure to get the bleeding to stop. I don't even need to look at the first-aid book to know that, it's one of the few things I remember. Everything else is hazy though, just

Bear's face is clear – his face and his voice too. "What now, Juniper?"

And this is what I keep telling him – elevate the wound and keep the bandages tight and I'll be OK soon.

I'll be OK because I have to be. No one knows where we are, no one has any idea, not even those stupid drones. We disappeared too well. Gave them the slip. We're dead to them already, all burnt up with that cottage.

I'll be OK because Bear needs me. I need him too. He puts my left leg up on my rucksack and wraps the foil blanket around me and puts his own bag under my head so I can rest.

I've already found the blister packets of tablets Silvan gave me. Antibiotics. We didn't need them for the ticks, but I need something for this. I'd take any medicine I had right now.

Bear holds a water bottle to my lips. "Drink, Juniper!"

"We don't have much left," I mutter. "You have some too."

"You need it. I can get more."

"You can't. You're too little."

"I'm not."

"I have to try and move soon. We can't stay here," I repeat.

Bear nods silently. There's nothing he can say. We can't stay here, but I can't move. Not yet.

That trap belonged to someone. It's rusty, old, but not fifty years old. Something that old would be powder out here by now.

Was the trap set by the same person who made the signs? Some of the twigs were looped round, like flowers. Was it to snare us in? What do they want us for?

I watch Bear as he collects sticks and leaves and arranges them expertly in front of me. Then he's off again, kicking up leaves and burying down, looking for nuts. There's a big chestnut tree a few metres away. We know them now – the long pointed oval leaves, yellow and veined; the twisted, fissured trunk and the cases of lime-green nuts beneath, spiked like little hedgehogs. Most of the nuts have gone, but Bear digs down and finds the few that the birds and squirrels haven't got to.

I watch him – the ritual of it, building the fire, opening up the prickly cases, taking the knife to carve crosses on the sweet nuts inside and then shaking them in the dry pan over small, smouldering flames.

He's a proper camper now. He was born to be out here.

I shift my position to see what weight my foot can take. I can't even think about putting my boot back on. My ankle is OK – it's my foot itself that's the problem. It's heavy and throbbing and I want to scream when I put any weight on it at all, but if I grit my teeth, bite my lip, I can walk.

"We need more water, Ju."

It's morning and we're walking on. Or Bear is. I'm limping beside him, dragging my left foot. It's hurting less, but not in a good way. I don't know if I'm getting used to the pain or a numbness is setting in.

The land's too steep today and after a while I collapse, exhausted. We need more water. My throat's so dry it hurts.

"I'll find a stream," Bear says, like he's reading my mind.

"No," I protest, thinking of the bloodied trap. "We have to stick together."

"You could rest."

"I couldn't rest. Not without you." We have to stay in sight of each other. We can't be further apart than that.

I stagger on to the nearest stream and then once Bear's got the water, as if on cue, Ghost appears beside us, a pigeon hanging from her jaw. I fall down, grateful, like the