

"I think we should go," Bear says, insistent.

"You said you liked it here."

"I don't any more. Something's up."

We're losing the light. The days run out so fast now. I haven't even had a chance to look at the GPS to recalculate our route.

But the noise Ghost is making is picking up in volume and her movements are faster. She's really frightened.

"OK," I say at last. "Let's pack up our things."

I'm still hoping to cook the nuts before we leave, but Ghost comes almost to the door. She's frantic and still making those yelps, like little stifled roars.

"You win, Ghost!" I sigh. "I'm just going to check upstairs, in case there's anything useful."

As soon as I get to the top floor, I see them through the window. Five of them – silver drones like giant ticks, hovering behind the cottage. A swarm. Waiting. Keeping just enough distance that we don't hear.

I duck down below the window ledge.

We couldn't see them at all from the front of the house and the pilots back in the city must know that. They're tracking us. They've probably been tracking us since Violet's cottage. Maybe it's not about capturing us any more. Maybe it's about finding out where we're going.

I run down the stairs.

"Bear!" I whisper loudly, already rolling things up. Our

wet clothes and sleeping bags and the tarpaulins. "There are drones. Out the back."

"They found us?"

"Maybe they never lost us. Or maybe Violet's message got through. There's five now."

"Five?" Bear gasps.

I nod. "We have to go."

The colour fades from Bear's cheeks and he starts stuffing everything into his bag. "Ghost was right?"

"Yes." I've got out one of our knives, the smaller one, and I start cutting round the back of the kingfisher painting.

"Ju?" Bear looks baffled.

I go on cutting. Releasing the bright blue-and-orange bird from its frame like I'm letting it out of a cage. Then I roll up the canvas and stuff it into the same pouch as my sketchbook.

"We're taking it?" Bear asks.

"Saving it. In case there aren't any kingfishers left. We're saving it so people can remember."

"Saving it from what?"

I'm breaking up more of the old crates and throwing them around the rest of the pictures.

"Ju?" Bear wails. "Saving it from what?"

I shake my head. We don't have time for explanations. I've got the matches in my hand and I'm already striking.

"Ju!" Bear cries, aghast. "You can't."