

We had plenty of opportunity to notice that poor old Jane McEvoy seemed to have lost a good number of her marbles already over the past few weeks and it was obvious that this was going to be the last straw by a pretty substantial margin.

Piper and I tried to occupy Alby while she crashed around the house wailing with grief and army wives kept arriving to console her like such a thing was possible and Alby, who didn't get at all that his father was dead, kept playing his favorite game which consisted of Bashing Things and then Bashing More Things and then Bashing Anything That Was Left. After about six hours of Bashing he ran out of Things and started to grab on to his mother and howl which just made everything worse.

Major McEvoy's friend and driver Corporal Francis, who everyone called Frankie, went with a couple of other guys to try to retrieve the bodies but they couldn't get near the checkpoint due to warning shots being fired at anyone who approached. When he came to stay at the house that night I tried to talk to him about getting Mrs. M some sedatives but I never saw a person look tired or more dispirited than him and I got the feeling he was already doing so much more than his best on so many fronts that digging up a prescription for Valium would be one job too many, and anyway he was the one who could've used a few hundred milligrams.

Piper and I scraped together something like an omelet with a few eggs and some of Alby's milk and we cooked some beans from the farm and cut up some plums and we gave most of it to Frankie who didn't eat much and Alby who did, and then we put Alby to bed and went to bed ourselves right afterwards leaving Frankie with Mrs. McEvoy and two of the army wives crying in the kitchen which by this time was almost totally dark.

That night was bad and Piper kept jerking awake wide-eyed and shaking and saying she kept seeing the face of the boy who got shot and then she started to sob and say she wanted her mother and I'd just get her calmed down and asleep and it would start all over again. When I thought about Joe I felt fairly bad that he got his head blown off but mostly furious that because of him being such a fool Major Mac had to die.

When I finally got to sleep I found Edmond and told him everything that happened, and he stayed with me for hours and whether I was dreaming or just borderline schizophrenic I didn't know and didn't care either.

At around 6 a.m. when everyone was still sleeping four soldiers came bursting into the house looking for Frankie and said we had to leave immediately, that a vigilante group had started up and they went in the night to ambush the checkpoint soldiers and now The Enemy was going house to house and killing anyone they didn't like the look of.

All hell broke loose.

Mrs. M stayed frozen in one position like she didn't understand English or even how to walk anymore but everyone else was shouting and running. I tried to talk her into getting Alby, but she didn't even look at me and then Frankie took over and told me to get dressed and I grabbed some clothes and two warm blankets and told Piper to take one of Major M's sweaters and save a place for me in the truck and then I stuffed a few useful things inside the blankets including a jar of olives from the pantry and a jar of strawberry jam which was just about all that was left in there and as I was looking around for anything else that might come in handy I saw a silver compass on a little plinth with Major McEvoy's name on it and an inscription, and feeling like a grave robber I smashed it on the floor to pull it loose and the

compass came off and I stuck it in my pocket along with the little knife I had from fruit picking.

I assumed Jet would just follow us into the truck, but when it came time to leave there was no sign of him, maybe because of all the noise. Piper looked stricken and whistled and called with her voice getting higher and more hysterical and much as everyone wanted to see a little girl reunited with her dog there was no way they were going to risk everyone's lives waiting for it to happen so I pulled her in beside me and we drove off without him.

Piper didn't even cry, but just sat there looking completely blank which was worse.

We all sat dazed and speechless in the truck, Alby quiet for once and Mrs. M still frozen, and we drove south according to my compass and only stopped once to pick up some of the army guys I recognized from Meadow Brook and who could just cram into the back with us.

Other people tried to flag us down as we drove along, the sound of a truck these days was enough to get people running out of their houses to see what was going on, and some of them tried to get us to stop by standing in the middle of the road or jumping onto the side of the truck but Frankie just said in a low voice to keep our heads down and he kept driving and didn't even slow down.

Piper and I were hanging on to each other feeling stupefied with fear and loss and Mrs. McEvoy was holding on to Alby like a drowning person and Alby just sat there thrilled that he was going in a car and could see all the trees rushing past him and as the tears streamed down Mrs. McEvoy's face faster and faster I thought Her husband's dead and maybe her older son too and now she has to leave her house and all she's got left is one drooling kid without any idea what's going on and she didn't even think to bring him some milk.

We drove for ages until we got to a big barn with lots of army trucks parked around it and everyone got out and Frankie said We'll stay here for a while and we went inside and it was a huge hay barn filled with guns and sleeping bags and all the signs that the army was using it as a barracks and Piper and I found a corner of the loft that didn't have anyone else's stuff in it and put our things down and then sat down and waited to see what would happen.

Alby was having a fine old time running around looking at everything and the only thing we could do that was useful was to try to keep him away from the guns that were just lying around. I wasn't about to have him blow himself to smithereens on account of it would clearly be the end for his poor old deranged mom.

As the day went on the army guys kept coming and going and they all seemed to have some sort of plan like ants in an anthill going about their business in a nice orderly fashion until a foot comes along and stamps on the whole structure.

Piper and I slept a little and we found some magazines hanging around and borrowed whichever ones didn't feature extremely obscene pictures of naked women, which were few and far between. And eventually Piper said in an apologetic way that she was a little bit hungry and she went off to see what she could find and came back with half a loaf of bread which was about as easy to get hold of these days as a piece of the True Cross and she also had some cheesy stuff they called curd and it tasted pretty good.

Early in the evening the soldiers started coming back from patrolling The Locality in groups of three or four and some of them came over and told us what it was like out there which as far as we could tell wasn't very nice what with all those laid-back enemy troops suddenly getting aggressive and diving into action which generally seemed to involve killing people like us whenever possible.

I obviously didn't think this was a good thing, but it did coincide a whole lot more closely with my understanding of what a war was supposed to be.

Anyway, lots of them talked to us or recognized Piper from the farm and nobody said Where's Jet? or What happened to Major Mac? because we were all catching on to the fact that some questions were better not asked.

Piper and I were thinking more or less the same thing, namely, first we were five plus Jet, Gin and Ding and then we were three with Jet and now we were Just Two.

If you haven't been in a war and are wondering how long it takes to get used to losing everything you think you need or love, I can tell you the answer is No time at all.

22

It was strange sleeping in the barn with all those soldiers and it felt a lot less safe than you might have thought, given how many guns were around. It probably had something to do with realizing that the Bad Guys might want to find out where all the Good Guys were sleeping and then ambush them. But there wasn't a whole lot we could do about it.

Piper and I had a little corner with a kind of overhang that made us feel protected and we put down the two blankets and rolled up some clothes for a pillow and as a last thought I went to see if Mrs. McEvoy and Alby were OK and warm enough and yes, they were warm enough, but not OK. I sat and tried to talk to Mrs. M for a while but it didn't do much good because she seemed to have lost track of everything in the world and whatever words I could think of to say just came out sounding stupid.

I couldn't stay with her too long in case her desperation rubbed off so I made an awkward excuse and climbed back up into the loft.

Piper and I huddled together under the blankets and it was noisy and busy all around us as the soldiers made some food and cleaned up all their weapons and yelled jokes at each other across the barn most of which you couldn't repeat, and finally they turned down the hurricane lamps and in shifts they slept too, with a watch that changed every few hours. It wasn't the best night's sleep I've ever had but we were getting used to strange circumstances and it wasn't the worst either.

One of the army guys called Baz, who we knew from milking, came over to us in the morning with some oatmeal and milk and cups of tea and we were so grateful and he was so in love with Piper that he sat and stayed with us while we ate and told us As Much As He Knew.

He said that the murders of Major Mac and Joe had sparked off a nasty battle in that area and it was exactly what everyone had been trying to avoid. The Enemy apparently wasn't any more anxious than we were to start fighting and shooting, and they had proved it by letting our army get on with whatever they had to do for the better part of three months.

But no one was happy now, and there were a lot of stupid brave Country Folk armed with duck hunting rifles taking potshots at tanks and most of the time getting slaughtered for their trouble.

Baz was smart and trying to be funny to cheer us up and said we shouldn't worry and found some trashy paperbacks for us to read while we were hanging around all day. He said he'd come see us that night after he got back from patrol.

When he did come back Piper was off helping the cook and I took the chance to tell

him about my plan to get back together with Piper's family though I swore him to secrecy, and he looked pretty worried at the thought of us setting out alone but didn't actually say the words Don't Be Crazy which was moderately encouraging.

I asked if he thought it was possible Isaac and Edmond and Osbert were all still living together and he shrugged and said Anything's possible, but there's a lot of trouble about. He looked at me for a minute like he was trying to size up what I was likely to do and finally said No place is really safe. You're better and worse off here with us—

He stopped for a second but then pretended he'd just been distracted by a noise and started talking again.

—but if you did set off alone and kept off the roads and away from obvious danger you might be OK. The trick is to avoid contact with anyone you can't positively identify because everyone's tired and up against the clock and most of The Enemy know they're never going home again and don't have a heck of a lot to live for.

He stopped again.

This time it was because he saw Piper coming back from the cooking area with some soup and she smiled her beautiful smile when she saw Baz and folded herself down into the straw, leaning up against him like a cat to eat her supper.

One thing you sure couldn't miss was how many strange alliances were forged in a war. You could see Baz was as happy as he'd ever been in his life just sitting next to Piper, war or no war, and not in a creepy way either. You could just tell that after months around nothing but big smelly burping farting men, the presence of Piper with her big eyes and pure soul made him feel like all he wanted was a chance to die to protect her. I didn't seem to have that effect on anyone but it would have been a waste for both of us to be saints.

That night Baz moved his sleeping bag from across the loft where he'd been all along and laid it across our corner. Hours after I fell asleep, I woke up to see him half sitting, awake and watchful. And the way he occasionally looked over to make sure we were safe reminded me exactly of Jet.

For almost a week we stayed like that, bunked up with various members of the Territorial Army. Piper seemed to go inside herself more than usual but for me it was just one more chapter of my increasingly surreal Normal Life and I had a calm feeling most of the time, like nothing could happen anymore that would surprise me.

Except for Mrs. McEvoy we were the only females in the barn with over a hundred men and they acted like we were the Queen and Princess of Sheba, bringing us food and coming over to talk and play cards and generally treating us like prize mascots or holy relics when in fact we were two grubby kids surrounded by soldiers in a dusty place without windows waiting for the war to catch up with us.

Most of the soldiers were so much more normal and friendly than you ever would have expected back in the olden days before everyone in your entire circle of friends and acquaintances had something to do with the army. I guess they were just regular people who probably never expected to get drafted when they signed up as part-timers. Most of the time you got the feeling they were lonely and fed up and wanted to go back home to their other lives as much as we did.

Since there wasn't much to talk about except the war, I kept asking them all questions about camping and surviving in The Wild and finding food and all those kinds of things and I doubt they gave a whole lot of thought as to why I was so curious about survival skills since most of them loved to talk about the subject at length anyway.

Piper and I weren't encouraged to go outside much so we read a little and helped in the mess and slept. It wasn't so different from being back at the McEvoy's except there were lots more people to talk to, and with all that time on my hands I couldn't help wondering why life in a windowless barn thousands of miles from America surrounded by soldiers felt more real than most of the real life I'd ever lived through.

We got used to sleeping with Baz guarding us, and being brought food, and having shy twenty-year-olds sidle up to us and start up awkward conversations just for something to do. Even the noises of all those men around us, not all of which were exactly suitable for polite company, got to be reassuring in a certain way.

Baz seemed to get a special status from being Piper's minder and after that first day the two of them fell into a kind of brother and sister thing that I'm sure came from the fact that almost every relationship in Piper's life up till now had been with all those brothers. Baz was more normal than any of the ones she had at home, but he had something of that watchful stillness I associated with her gang. Birds of a feather find each other, I guess.

Well obviously all this Girl Scout Happy Families stuff wasn't going to last forever.

At about four in the morning a few nights later we woke up to the noise of a lot of scuffling and shouting and Baz saying Get all your stuff together and Stay Here and then him disappearing into the chaos and us not being able to see anything much because there were no lights but then there was gunfire and then he was back and leading us out through the stable door back where the latrines were and he took our stuff and told us to follow him and we ran and ran until I thought my sides were going to rip open from the pain and I kept tripping because there was no moon and it was blacker than black and finally we got to an open space and we just stood there panting and Baz said Look you can see the sky getting a little lighter over there, that's east, just keep walking in that direction and use your compass to find NNE,

not NE, he said, or you'll overshoot.

I was glad to know this fact because being from New York City where everyone's born knowing uptown is north but not a whole lot else, I didn't know anything about NNE vs. NE and was glad someone had let us in on that secret.

By now Piper realized Baz was leaving us and was starting to cry and he picked her up in his arms like she weighed nothing more than a handful of hay and just held her as tight as he could and finally he kissed her cheek and said Daisy will take care of you and he winked at me behind her back like we were in cahoots which I guess we were.

Then he gave her one last squeeze and shoved a heavy package into my hands and before I had a chance to see what it was he was running back in the direction we came.

Come on Piper, I said, let's keep going while it's still dark and we can find someplace to hide and then we'll rest when it gets light.

And as we walked along and the noises of guns got to sound like little pops I told her about knowing where Isaac and Edmond were staying and having a map and talking to Baz about my plan and pumping every soldier in the barn for clues on how to survive in the wild. Piper seemed pretty substantially cheered up by all this surprising information and I said Once the sun starts to come up we'll look for a place to bivouac and we both burst out laughing at my use of technical Boy Scout terminology and I said Honestly! That's what it's called.

Now here's a good time to explain that footpaths are god's gift to people trying to travel long distances without using roads. I guess in America we'd have to crash a path through the woods but here it was all nice and civilized and half the time they were even marked with little arrows leading to gates to climb over and even when we left the farm and moved much more into open ground without fences you could still see indications of paths.

We felt like we were about a thousand miles from any other human being and even though it had been a cold night, by about 8:30 a.m. when I thought it was time to find someplace to hide we'd been walking for hours and the sun was up and we were starting to feel warmed through.

The path we followed was fenced in on one side by stone walls covered in blackberries and other thorny bushes and there were smallish trees just beyond and though most of the undergrowth wasn't higher than a few feet, it got pretty dense pretty quickly which kept us from straying off into it.

We were completely clueless about how safe we'd be walking around out here. One of the soldiers I'd talked to said there were hundreds of people heading into the countryside away from the action in order to try to disappear and wait out the trouble which suggested it would be like walking around in a shopping mall. On the other hand I got the feeling that there were more than enough footpaths in England and the average refugee wouldn't be interested in socializing. The soldier's theory was that most of the people we were likely to meet would be English people but he also said That doesn't mean they won't shoot you on sight.

I couldn't really believe that a whole bunch of enemy soldiers were going to spend their spare time crashing around in the undergrowth looking for stray people to shoot but it still seemed like a good idea to keep a low profile for as long as possible or at least while you were pretty sure the world had lost its mind.

As the sun got hotter we decided to stop and rest and we found a nice dry piece of ground about fifty feet off the path that was pretty much out of sight if you were sitting or lying down which is what we felt like doing anyway.

The package that Baz gave me started out heavy and was getting heavier by the minute and I was glad to put it down and figure out how to untie the covering and find out whether it was worth lugging around. Inside were all the things we probably should have thought of taking along with us and hadn't, like a plastic bottle full of water and some flat bread and a pretty big piece of hard cheese, some salami, matches, a big folded-up lightweight plastic sheet, a nylon rope, a little metal bowl. And a gun. I wrapped the matches and the gun back up in the bag for emergencies and added the rest of the food and other things to our blankets and supplies, namely the olives and strawberry jam, which was about the extent of it. To cheer us up on our first day on the road I made jam sandwiches for breakfast and they tasted hopeful.

We drank some of the water and with the sun getting hot we lay down in the grass for a rest and if we hadn't been on the run going god knows where we would have been pretty happy. After sleeping for a while, we collected blackberries and ate them and then because it was so incredibly silent all around us except for the birds and bugs we decided to set off again in the light of day because although it's a great theory to travel by night, it's a lot easier said than done if you have no idea where you're going and there's no moon. Trying to follow the path and watch the compass all at the same time was proving difficult enough in broad daylight since the path headed slightly southeast and we wanted to go NNE but I figured we'd just have to try to swing up to the north when we got a chance.

One thing there was no shortage of was blackberries, and for lack of anything else we ate handfuls of them, which made your stomach feel pretty bad but they tasted good so we didn't care.

We walked for four or five hours and as the sun got lower we started looking for a place to spend the night and once we thought we saw a house but it was almost burned to the ground with only one wall standing so we gave it a wide berth. The temperature dropped fairly quickly now that it was September and although it wasn't exactly cold, we weren't exactly SAS troops either and I didn't think we should be stuck out without shelter so we stopped while there was still a little light and managed to tie the rope from a tree to a stick we jammed as deep as possible into the ground like a peg, and hung the plastic over it and weighed the edges down with stones. It collapsed about a hundred and fifty times before we managed to get it strong enough to hold when we crawled in with our blankets, and it was uncomfortable, but we were used to lying on the ground and also pretty exhausted and managed to go to sleep.

It rained a little during the night but we stayed mostly dry and some of the rain ran down into a curled-up corner of our tent, and we slurped it straight out of the plastic in the morning to save the water in the bottle and because we were so thirsty. We'd both been bitten by something or other in the night and it didn't improve my mood to have a face covered in itching welts and wild hair and no toothbrush and also to feel so grubby from not having a bath in ages. I was glad I was too thin to get my period because that would have pushed me over the edge.

We packed up all our stuff and this time I made it into two bundles. I carried the big one and Piper took the small one and with the bundles slung crossways on our backs it wasn't as bad as you might think and anyway we weren't exactly pressed for time.

We walked and walked and walked and the path swung up to head more north than south which was a big relief, and when it started to rain again we stopped to rest and tried to get all our stuff and us under the plastic sheet and collect a little rainwater in the bowl at the same time.

Piper and I had been together for so long now that we barely talked any more than we

had to. We were tired and hungry and lost and our feet hurt and there didn't seem a whole lot to say and I was very glad she wasn't the type of kid to ask stuff like Are we there yet? because There Yet wasn't a notion I felt up to addressing at the moment.

So we rested. Then we walked some more. Past another burned house. Past a child's shoe abandoned on the path. We kept walking. Then we rested. And walked. We didn't see anybody but there were signs they'd been there. Discarded clothing. Paper. A dead cat. We ate some of the food and drank some of the water and only occasionally wondered what the hell we thought we were going to find at the end of the road.

We could have kept going for another hour or two but around midafternoon we saw something that looked like a falling-down hut and it was a little way off the path and hadn't been burned so we climbed over the wall and crashed our way through the tangled thorns and grass until we got to it and it was big enough to lie down in and fairly dry inside though it smelled like rotten wood. We felt as relieved as if we'd suddenly come across a five-star hotel and before the rain started up again we collected armfuls of long grass to make a nest that was nearly soft enough to rest on comfortably and then I opened up our two backpacks and laid the blankets out and it was amazingly cozy and actually pretty civilized if you didn't count the spiders.

Piper was out picking flowers to put in our new home like we were going to stay there for years and suddenly she shouted Daisy! and my heart stopped and I shot over to where her voice was coming from and she said Look! And when I looked I didn't see anything but a shrubby tree and papery acorns underneath it and she said Hazelnuts!

It was lucky Piper was my faithful companion just then because I wouldn't have recognized a hazelnut if it tapped me on the shoulder and asked me how to get to Carnegie Hall but we collected a shirtful of them and then smashed them open on a rock and ate as many as we could without throwing up and I found myself wondering why hazelnuts weren't everyone's idea of five-star cuisine.

When we'd eaten about a thousand of them we collected as many more as we could and cracked them open and put them in with the rest of our provisions and had a few olives and some bread and then blackberries for dessert.

Then with nothing else to do except notice how hungry and thirsty we were and how much our blisters hurt we went to sleep and only woke up when the world started crashing with thunder that sounded about six inches above our heads but amazingly our little hut turned out to be watertight enough so that if you stayed away from the left side and stuffed the plastic in a certain way through a hole in the roof you didn't get soaked and could go back to sleep. Also the rain seemed to discourage the bugs which was an unexpected plus.

In the middle of the rainstorm I remembered our bowl and reached out to get it, filtered off the stuff that was swimming on the top and drank the water down. Then I put it out again and in only about ten minutes it was full and I woke Piper and told her to drink it while we had it. After about four bowlfuls of water each we both felt a lot better except for stomach cramps I guess from the cold water or maybe the nuts and I filled the water bottle and went back to sleep.

When we woke up again it was still raining and there didn't seem any point in moving from our happy home until we had to. It seemed like an incredibly bad idea to get our few clothes and blankets wet given that we didn't have any others.

Piper was looking dreamy and seemed happy enough lying under the blankets singing to herself and I decided I was desperate to get clean so I used the bowlful of cold water and the

rain to try to have some kind of bath which wasn't very effective especially with no soap. Then I came back in and got dressed and huddled up to Piper to get warm again and for a while we played an incredibly convoluted word game called Mental Jotto that involved trying to remember how many letters of all different words were in the word the other person was thinking of and it was exactly complicated enough to pass the time.

She had just guessed Skate which was right and now it was my turn to guess but after a minute or two of trying Bacon, Cable, Deary there was no answer so I said Piper? but she was sound asleep. I lay there for a while listening to Edmond's voice in my head and it was calm and familiar and a little bit wistful and I started to relax and forget about everything but him and that was another day gone.

24

Now here's a really amazing fact: My eighth-grade math teacher actually turned out to be right about one thing, namely that someday I was going to need to know the answer to the question where $X = \text{Piper and Daisy}$ and $Y = \text{three miles an hour}$ and $Z = \text{carrying a twelve-pound load}$ and $N = \text{a north-northeasterly direction}$ and $4D = \text{four days}$.

So now go figure how much closer to Kingly did $X(Y + Z) + N^3 4D$ make us?

Our footpath crossed over four single-track paved roads but except for a cow grazing by one of the roads we hadn't seen another creature bigger than a hedgehog. There was the occasional barn and once a row of little houses but they looked deserted and we didn't want to risk finding out for sure.

The path seemed to switch directions constantly but overall we were now headed more or less in the right direction. Though for some reason I kept remembering a show I saw on TV about navigation in whaling ships and how the tiniest error could mean you missed the island you were aiming at by five hundred miles.

At one crossing we could actually see a road sign that said Strup $1/4$ mile and East Strup $1/2$ mile. I was so excited at getting a bearing that my hands were shaking almost too much to open the map, but when I did look more or less where I thought we should be there was no sign of anything like Strup and Piper said There might just be a couple of houses so it's not worth putting on the map.

For some stupid reason I started to cry then and I felt completely choked with despair and worthlessness and I couldn't believe I was trying to lead Piper miles across England to find something the size of a microbe on a map when in my real life I couldn't even find a clean pair of underpants in a chest of drawers. But unfortunately no one else jumped up and volunteered to take over and the way Piper just stood there holding my hand and waiting for me to stop crying made me buck up and start walking again.

After the hazelnuts we found an apple tree and more blackberries but the chances of coming across a nice steak sandwich seemed remote and our food resources, which had started out running low, were now within a stone's throw of the bottom of the bucket. At least it was raining on and off so we didn't run out of water but it made walking slippery, and wet sneakers rubbing on blisters isn't my favorite feeling so that was about the extent of our good luck.

We stopped for lunch that day around eleven in the morning and couldn't even spread out a blanket to make an event of it due to the ground being wet so we had to perch on rocks, when either of us would have given anything to stretch out someplace warm and dry, and I was

unwrapping our last piece of cheese to eat with a few olives and the end of our nuts when Piper said Daisy? And when I looked at her she said What's that noise?

And I listened and listened but didn't hear anything at all. But she had that look on her face that I knew from Isaac and Edmond and I knew she was hearing something and I just hoped to god it wasn't something horrible when her face suddenly burst into a thousand-watt smile and she said It's the river! I'm sure it's the river!

And we left all our stuff and ran down the path and sure enough about a hundred yards farther down it came to the river and when we looked at the map we were pretty sure it was OUR river and if we could just manage to follow it without getting too waylaid it would take us more or less exactly where we wanted to be.

Then we did a little dance and whooped and laughed and hugged each other and ran back to our supplies and packed them all up again and set off feeling light-footed instead of just light-headed for the first time in days and we walked till sundown and then camped near the river.

It wasn't particularly warm but we got undressed and dipped ourselves in the water to wash anyway and for the first time I noticed how skinny Piper was which once upon a time I would have thought was a good thing and now I thought was just what happens when you're nine years old and don't have enough food to grow properly.

As the freezing water flowed around us we rubbed the dirt off our bodies and without dirt both of us looked white as ghosts with farmer's tans on our face and neck and arms. Against the whiteness you could see every mark standing out in bright red hieroglyphics telling the story of our journey. Both of us had feet covered in raw and half-healed blisters and raised scratches on our arms and legs from being too tired to hold back thornbushes that got in our way and insect bites we'd scratched till they bled and nettle rash pretty much all over and I had a wide scrape on one knee that was weeping pus and made me limp because it hurt so much to bend it. Aside from that we were both covered in bruises from sleeping on stones and being too exhausted to get up and rearrange things once we were lying down.

We got out of the water shivering like crazy but more or less clean and tried not to look at each other because it was too depressing to acknowledge what we looked like and we stood for a little while in the cold evening wind to dry off because it had become kind of a fanatic compulsion to keep our blankets dry.

So much for the healthy country life.

The next day we set off again and the path followed the river and after half a day of walking, the river forked off and checking the map we knew EXACTLY WHERE WE WERE for the first time since leaving Reston Bridge.

And that was the second time I cried and Piper laughed and told me to stop wasting water, but I couldn't because it was for relief and disbelief in equal amounts and although knowing where we were told us fairly clearly that we hadn't made nearly as good progress as I thought we had, at least we were going in the right direction and knew where we had to go next.

The map showed we had twenty miles to go, and once when I went on a Five Boroughs Sponsored March against poverty or something, I walked twenty-two miles in one day and I wasn't eating a lot more that day than this one.

That night I slipped into the place in my head where I could talk to Edmond and for once I had good news.