Where are you? the hills howled back at him.

The old pain was opening up in his chest. First Fa, now Wolf. Please, not Wolf . . .

Renn stood blinking at the mouth of the cave.

‘Why did you let him off the leash?’ he cried.

She swayed. ‘I had to. Had to set him free.’

With a cry, Torak started rooting around in the wreckage.

‘What are you doing?’ said Renn.

‘Looking for my pack. I’m going after Wolf.’

‘But it’ll be dark soon!’

‘So we just sit here and wait?’

‘No! We salvage our gear, we build a shelter and a fire. Then we wait. We wait for Wolf to

find us.’

Torak bit back a retort. For the first time, he noticed that Renn was shaking. She had a bloody scrape down one cheek, and a bruise the size of a pigeon’s egg coming up over the other eye.

He felt ashamed. She’d faced the bear. She’d even had the courage to shoot at it. He shouldn’t have shouted. ‘I’m sorry,’ he said. ‘I didn’t mean . . . You’re right. I can’t track him in the dark.’

Renn sat down heavily on a boulder. ‘I had no idea what it would be like,’ she said. ‘I never thought it would be so . . .’ She covered her mouth with both hands.

Torak unearthed an arrow from the rubble. The shaft was snapped in two. ‘Did you hit it?’

he asked.

‘I don’t know. I don’t think it matters. Arrows can’t bring it down.’ She shook her head.

‘One moment it was after me, and the next, it was after Wolf. Why?’

He tossed away the broken arrowshaft.

‘Does that matter?’

‘Maybe.’ She glanced at him. ‘Did you get the stone tooth?’

He’d almost forgotten about it. Now, as he reached inside his jerkin and brought out the mitten, he just wanted to be rid of it. Because of the Nanuak, Wolf might be dead. No more uproarious nibbles in the morning; no more uproarious games of hide and hunt . . . Torak bit his knuckle, fighting his fear. He couldn’t lose Wolf.
Renn took the mitten and turned it in her fingers. ‘We’ve got the second part of the Nanuak,’ she said thoughtfully, ‘and lost the first. But why did Wolf take it?’

With an effort, Torak forced his mind to what she was saying. Something flickered in his memory. ‘Do you remember,’ he said, ‘when I found the river eyes – it was as if Wolf could hear them. Or sense them in some way.’

Renn frowned. ‘You think – the bear can too?’

“All the shiny shiny souls,”’ he murmured. ‘That’s what the Walker said. Demons hate the living, they hate the brightness of the souls.’

‘And if the souls of ordinary creatures are too bright,’ said Renn, getting to her feet and beginning to pace, ‘then how much brighter – more dazzling – must the Nanuak be!’

‘That’s why it attacked you, because you had the river eyes -

‘And that’s why Wolf took the pouch. Because he knew. Because -‘ she stopped pacing and stared at Torak. ‘Because he was luring the bear away from us. Oh, Torak. He saved our lives.’

Torak stumbled to the edge of the trail. The fog was clearing at last, and below him, the vastness of the Forest marched away into the west. What chance did Wolf have out there, alone against the bear?

‘Wolves are cleverer than bears,’ said Renn. ‘He’s just a cub, Renn. He’s not even four moons old.’

‘But he’s also the guide. If anyone can find a way, he can.’

Wolf raced between the beech trees, the wind at his tail and the shining, singing ravenskin gripped tight in his jaws.

Far away, he heard the lonely howl of Tall Tailless.

Wolf longed to howl back, but he couldn't. The wind was gusting the demon’s scent towards him. He smelt its rage and its terrible hunger; he heard its tireless breath. Strongest of all, he sensed its hatred: hatred for him and for the thing he bore.

But Wolf knew with a fierce, bright joy that it would never catch him. The demon was fast, but he was faster.

He no longer felt like a cub who must wait for the poor, slow taillesses to catch up. He was a wolf – racing between the trees in the swift wolf-lop that goes on for ever. He revelled in the strength of his legs and the stretch of his back; in the suppleness that let him turn at full speed on a single paw. Oh no, the demon would never catch him!

Wolf paused to drink at a noisy little Wet, dropping the ravenskin for a moment. Then he snatched it up and settled back into his stride, climbing higher towards the Great White Cold that he’d only ever smelt in his sleeps.

A fresh scent drove that from his head: he was entering the range of a pack of stranger wolves. Every few paces, he passed their scent-
markings. He must be careful. If they caught him, they might attack. When he needed to spill his scent, he waited till he reached another little Fast Wet, and spilt into that, instead of marking a tree. His scent would wash away, and neither the stranger wolves nor the demon would smell him.

The Dark came. Wolf loved the Dark. In it, smells and sounds were sharper, but he could see almost as well as in the Light.

Far ahead, the stranger pack began its evening howl. That made Wolf sad. He remembered how joyfully his pack used to howl; how keenly they greeted each other after their sleeps. The snuffle-licking and the rubbing of scents against each other; the smiling and playing as they encouraged one another for the hunt.

Quite suddenly, as Wolf thought of his pack, he began to tire. He felt each pad strike the rocks as never before. He felt an ache running up his legs. He began to hurt.

Fear gnawed at him. He could not go on for ever. He could not go on much further at all. He was far from Tall Tailless, and crossing the range of a stranger pack. And the demon was tracking him relentlessly through the Dark.

Torak dragged what remained of their gear into the yew branch shelter, then kicked at the fire, sending sparks shooting skywards. This waiting was terrible. He’d been howling since dusk. He knew that he risked drawing the bear, but Wolf was more important. Where was he?

It was a cold, starry night, and even without looking up, he could feel the red eye of the Great Auroch glaring down at him. Relishing his turmoil.

Renn emerged from the darkness, bearing an armful of leaves and bark.

‘You were a long time,’ Torak said curtly.

‘I needed the right things. No sign of Wolf?’

He shook his head.

Renn knelt by the fire and tipped her load on to the ground. ‘When I was looking for these, I heard horns. Birch-bark horns.’

Torak was horrified. ‘What? Where?’

She nodded towards the west. ‘Long way away.’

‘Was it – Fin-Kedinn?’

Again she nodded.

Torak shut his eyes. ‘I thought he’d have given up by now.’

‘He doesn’t give up,’ said Renn. There was a hint of pride in her voice which irritated him. ‘Have you forgotten,’ he said, ‘that he wanted to kill me? “The Listener gives his heart’s blood to the Mountain”?’

She rounded on him. ‘Of course I haven’t forgotten! But I’m worried about them! If the bear isn’t up here, then it’s down there, where they are. Why else would Fin-Kedinn blow the horn?’

Torak felt bad. Renn was worried, and so was he. Fighting didn’t help.

From his belt he untied the little gruse-
bone whistle he’d made when he’d first found Wolf. ‘Here.’ He held it out. ‘Now you can call Wolf too.’

She looked at him in surprise. ‘Thanks.’

There was a silence. Torak asked her why she needed the herbs.

‘For the stone tooth. We’ve got to find some way of hiding it from the bear. If we don’t, it’ll track us down.’

Like it’s tracking Wolf, thought Torak. The ache in his chest deepened. ‘If the rowan leaves and the pouch couldn’t hide the river eyes,’ he said, ‘why do you think bark and wormwood can do any better?’

‘Because I’m going to use them for something stronger.’ She chewed her lip. ‘I’ve been trying to remember exactly what Saeunn does. She’s always trying to teach me Magecraft, and I’m always going hunting instead. I wish I’d listened.’

‘You’re lucky there’s something you can do,’ muttered Torak.

‘But what if I get it wrong?’

He didn’t answer. He could feel the red eye mocking him. Even if Wolf did find a way back, he’d be bringing the bear with him, drawn by the river eyes. And the only way Wolf could shake off the bear would be by losing the river eyes – which would mean there’d be no chance of destroying the bear.

There had to be a way out; but Torak couldn’t see it.