

ANH DO

WOLF

GIRL 2

THE
GREAT
ESCAPE



PRAISE FOR



‘I really enjoyed this book. It was intense and I couldn’t wait to see what happened next. Five stars!’

Poldy, age 11

‘Wolf Girl kept me on the edge of my seat the whole time . . . I never knew what was going to happen next.’

Piper, age 13

‘Wolf Girl is an exciting and adventurous book. I loved how brave Gwen is, and with the help of her pack she is strong enough to survive anything!’

Cate, age 12

‘I loved it because it was full of adventure. The best thing was the ending, which was so exciting. I can’t wait until the next book.’

Olivia, age 9

‘Each page was more exciting than the last!’

Leo, age 12



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ANH DO

WOLF GIRL²

THE
GREAT
ESCAPE



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1

TAKEN

I held onto the bars at the back of the truck and howled to my dogs as they fell further and further behind.



Sunrise, Brutus, Zip, Nosey and Tiny all ran as hard as they could, but there was no way they could keep up.

My pack was all I had left in the world. It had been four years since the night my family fled our home. Four years since I had run into the forest and lost them. If not for my animals, I don't know if I would have survived.

And now I was going to lose them too.

I howled again, as loudly as I could.





‘Quiet, you!’ snapped Moustache Man.

When I’d burst out of the forest that morning, and seen the two men working, I was overjoyed. I’d been desperate to find people again, so I wasn’t as wary as I should have been. My pack had taught me to tread carefully, to read other creatures and anticipate their next move, but I’d let my excitement take over. For one stupid moment, I’d acted . . . human.

The men had pushed me into their truck and taken off, leaving my dogs behind.



I wondered if the men had something to do with the attack on our town all those years ago. They were probably part of an army.

My dogs were now just a blurry shape in a cloud of dust. The wind blew, the dust swirled . . . and a moment later, my pack was gone.

I wondered if I would ever see them again.



I heard a shriek and looked up to the sky. Eagle! She was just a dot far above, but she was still following. No truck was fast enough to outpace her!



A crisscrossing canopy of branches closed over the truck like a green curtain, cutting off my view of Eagle. I spun around and saw we were driving into what looked like a long green tunnel of trees.

I watched and waited, searching for a gap in the branches. I lost track of time as we travelled around bends and curves, winding our way through the forest. Finally, there was a break in the foliage, and I strained my neck to see the sky.

There was no sign of Eagle anywhere.



I slumped back in my seat. I knew my dogs were loyal. I was sure they would come for me. They may not be as fast as a truck, but they were excellent trackers, especially Nosey. Besides, it was just one long road; all they had to do was follow.

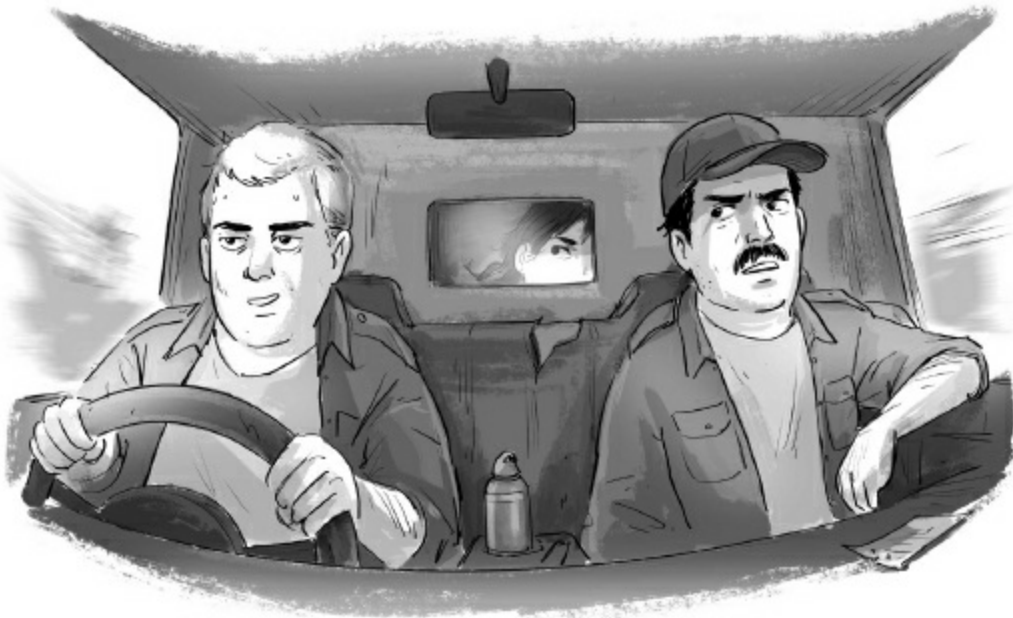
But then my heart sank. A crossroads appeared ahead, and the road split in three.

I growled loudly.



The driver glanced back at me, slightly nervous. ‘Maybe we should tie her up?’

Moustache Man scoffed. ‘She’s just a little girl.’



We turned down the right-hand road. How would my dogs know which

direction we'd gone? I had to do something to help them, maybe give them a scent to follow. The only thing I could think of was to pluck some hair from my head and throw the strands through the bars.



The strands whipped away behind the truck, gone in an instant. It didn't seem like much, but I hoped the hair would leave a trail. Would it be enough to show the dogs the way?

I tried to have faith in Nosey's incredible sense of smell. It had surprised me enough times before.

As we drove on, I tugged more hair free, letting strands go one after the other.



Suddenly Moustache Man turned in his seat. ‘So what were you doing out in the forest, anyway? Eh?’

I glared at him angrily. I wasn’t going to tell him anything.

‘Did you hear me, little girl? I asked you a question!’

I stared at him like I stared at Brutus when he challenged me.



After a moment, he sniffed and turned away. ‘It doesn’t matter whether you talk or not. Fran will still find a use for you.’

I slipped my hand inside my shirt and closed it around my sling. It gave me a sense of hope. These men thought I was just a normal girl.

‘She’s . . . baring her teeth at me!’ said the driver.

‘Never mind her,’ said Moustache Man. ‘We’re here.’

We pulled out of the green tunnel into sunlight.



2

THE YARD



We came to a stop in a clear area surrounded by tree stumps. In front of us was a high wall patrolled by soldiers.

A huge gate swung open and we drove through. I looked up at the walls – much too high for any dog to climb or leap.



We entered a large yard and my nose twitched. I smelt sweat and things I hadn't smelt in years – rubber, petrol, sawdust. I had grown so used to fresh air and fern leaves that these smells were now confusing and disorienting.

But they also took me back years, to the garage with my dad. He used to fix cars and I would help him, handing him a screwdriver or spanner when he asked. It hit me then how much I missed him. How much I missed all my family.





I looked up to see a wooden building and behind it rose a rocky mountain. A strange sound bounced off its slopes . . . **thunk, thunk, thunk.**

The gate made a different kind of thunk as it closed behind me, one which seemed to echo through my soul. *You are trapped*, it said.

I shook the feeling off. I was going to get out of this!

Moustache Man appeared by the side of the truck. He knocked on the window and gave me a nasty smile. Then he walked towards an approaching group of soldiers who were led by a lean woman with jet-black hair.



I pricked up my ears. They probably didn't think I could hear them, but after years of listening out for lizards in the undergrowth, a nearby conversation was not even a challenge.

'... seemed to be following her around, Fran,' Moustache Man was saying.



‘What do you mean?’ Fran demanded.

‘I, er . . .’ Moustache Man muttered.

‘She was with a pack of dogs?’

‘We had to leave quick or they would have attacked us,’ added the driver.

‘I think one of them was a wolf.’

‘A wolf?’ Fran raised her perfectly sculpted eyebrows.

‘Yes,’ said the driver, nodding. ‘And another one was a chihuahua.’

‘A wolf and a chihuahua?’ said Fran. She glanced at her soldiers and burst out laughing. Quickly, they joined in.



‘Well, it was,’ the driver protested.

Fran waved a hand, and the soldiers fell silent. ‘Do you think the girl could have escaped from one of the other camps?’

‘She doesn’t look like a camp kid,’ said Moustache Man. ‘She seems . . . well, wild.’

‘Show her to me,’ said Fran.

Moustache Man gave a quick bow, and they all turned towards the truck.

I ducked below the headrests, my heart thumping. Now was my chance. If I could take them by surprise and get past them, maybe I could find a way out? I squeezed into the gap behind the seats and prepared to spring.

The key slid into the truck door and the handle turned. A sliver of light shone through the crack and I sprang forward!



The door swung open, hitting Moustache Man hard in the chest and sending him sprawling backwards with a yell.



I landed on all fours and took off.



‘Get her!’ shouted Fran.

A soldier leapt after me, but I swerved around him and bolted towards the scaffolding.

‘Raise the ladders!’ shouted Fran.

Soldiers on the walls began to hoist up the ladders. I ran towards one and jumped, catching the bottom rung with both hands. I swung myself up and started climbing.



But the soldiers above must have realised they were helping me, and they let go of the ladder. My teeth clacked in my head as the ladder jolted downwards, but I managed to hold on. More soldiers clustered above.

I glanced to my left and saw another ladder. I sprang towards it and landed lightly, then I shot upwards like a lizard in a tree.



As I leapt from the ladder onto the scaffolding, a soldier made a grab for me but I dodged out of his reach.

I raced along the scaffolding as soldiers closed in from either direction. From up here, I could see the source of the thumping. Past the wire fences against the mountainside was a field full of children – dozens of them – breaking rocks with hammers.



I looked over the side of the wall and saw a long straight drop, without anything to grab onto.

‘Come here, you brat!’

I spun to see a burly soldier coming at me. I ducked under him and slipped right off the scaffolding onto a ladder, jolting it downwards. It stopped a metre from the ground, and I leapt off and raced away.



Half the soldiers were now up on the scaffolding.

‘You fools!’ shouted Fran.

I made for the main building, but more soldiers spilled from its front doors. I turned instead towards the wire fence.

Moustache Man and the driver tried to cut me off. I scooped up a handful of rocks from the ground.



I slipped one into my sling and swung it over my head. I sent the rock whizzing through the air. It hit Moustache Man right in the forehead, and he fell backwards, unconscious.



I let loose a second rock and hit the driver in the knee. He yelped and doubled over.

I leapt onto his back, using him to spring at the wire fence.





After years of climbing trees and vines, this fence was a breeze. Adrenaline coursed through me as I went up.

But suddenly, a firm grip seized my leg and flung me backwards through the air. I landed with a thud as my breath shot out of me. A boot planted down heavily on my chest.



I looked up to find Fran standing over me. I tried to scratch her, but my fingernails did nothing against the leather of her boots.

She chuckled as soldiers circled around us.

'My, my,' she said. 'You're a spirited one. What's your name, girl?'

I glowered at her.



Fran frowned. ‘Very well. Maybe some time in a cell will loosen your tongue. Lock her up.’ She lifted her boot as soldiers grabbed my arms. ‘And for goodness sake, somebody take that sling away from her.’

3

**LOCKED
UP**



Two soldiers took my sling and bound my hands with rope. They unlocked a gate and led me through. As we reached the crest of a slope I could see dozens of kids working. Kids like me.

Kids who should have been playing soccer or skipping rope or chasing each other around in a school playground. What was this place?!



The soldiers pushed me into a building.



We entered a big room with narrow windows, too narrow for anyone to squeeze through. In the dim light coming in through the windows, I saw rows of mats on the ground down the length of the room.

The floor was dirt, and the air was sour with sweat and mildew.



One of the soldiers saw me wrinkle my nose and laughed. ‘You wish you had it so good,’ he said, and turned me towards a flight of stairs.

At the top of the stairs was a corridor with closed doors lining either side. I looked around, trying to collect as much information as I could. The corridor ran the whole length of the building towards another flight of stairs going down at the other end. Escape. ***How can I escape?***

We came to an open door leading to a little room. There was another soldier playing with cards at a desk. He was short with a shaven head. ***Baldy is the perfect name for you,*** I thought.

When Baldy saw us, he hurriedly got up.

Baldy reached for a ring of keys that was hanging on the wall behind his desk.



My captor put out a hand to take them, but Baldy held them out of his grasp.

‘Uh-uh,’ said Baldy. ‘The keys are my responsibility.’

My captor scowled. ‘Fine. While you’re at it, stow this somewhere.’ He tossed my sling onto Baldy’s desk.

Baldy stepped out of his office and led us further down the corridor to a row of cells. He unlocked one and the soldiers shoved me in. My wrists were still tied.



The cell was small and cramped, and the air was humid. There was nothing

inside but an empty bucket, a filthy pillow, and a pile of straw on the ground.

Baldy closed the door and locked it.

My heart pounded and my breath came in gasps. I hadn't been alone in a locked room – in *any* room – for years. I fought to keep control.





I forced myself to think back, to remember the Gwen I was before all this started. I used to love being by myself in my bedroom. I'd read and draw and do whatever I wanted undisturbed. My sister Kate would have to knock, and I got to decide if I would let her in. But this place was very different.

I sniffed around the cell. It stank!

The barred window above was too high for me to see out of, but a breeze blew in, and I could catch a whiff of the forest. How I longed for the trees and my dogs.

The panic threatened to return. I threw back my head and howled.



CHECKUP

From the light angling through the window, it must have been around mid-afternoon when Baldy returned.

‘On your feet,’ he said, unlocking the gate with the jangling keys.



I wanted to launch at him snarling and snapping, but I fought the urge. If I

was going to get out of this place, I needed to be smart, and I wasn't going to escape easily while bound.

I held my tied hands up at him.

'I don't think so,' said Baldy. 'Not without Fran's approval.'

He drew a baton from his belt and waved it at my face.

'They tell me you're quick on your feet. Feel free to make a break for it, and we'll see how far you get.'



He gestured for me to lead the way. We went back down the corridor and came to a closed door. Baldy tapped on it with his baton.

'Enter!' came Fran's voice.

We stepped through into what looked like a doctor's office. Fran was in there with a man I didn't recognise.

'Here she is, ma'am,' said Baldy. 'Do you need me to . . .'



‘That will be all,’ said Fran, in a clipped tone.

Baldy bowed and left.

Fran looked down at me sternly. ‘The workers who found you are telling me you were raised by wolves . . . Wolf Girl, they call you.’ She arched an eyebrow. ‘I would rather have your real name.’

I stayed silent.

Fran rapped her knuckles on the desk.



‘Name!’ she screeched.

I stood defiant, staring directly into her eyes.

The man next to her intervened.

‘Hello, young lady. I’m Doctor Andrews. Is it all right if I take a look at you?’



I hesitated. He seemed nice enough, but I couldn't trust anyone here.

He sensed my indecision. 'What if I undo the rope?' he said, gesturing at my hands. He looked up to Fran, who nodded.

Andrews turned back to me. 'Do we have a deal, Wolf Girl? It's just a few little tests to make sure you're okay.'

I nodded once.

'Wonderful,' said Andrews. He produced a scalpel and carefully cut at the ropes around my wrists. 'Up you hop, then.' He patted the examination table, and I climbed on.



He then shone a light into my eyes and ears, listened to my breathing, poked and prodded me. When he asked questions, I would nod or shake my head in answer.

Eventually he turned to Fran. ‘She seems fine,’ he said. ‘Could probably do with a bath.’

‘Couldn’t we all,’ said Fran. ‘Now then, girl, it’s time to stop this foolishness. I know you can talk. I’m told you asked about your family after you came out of the forest. So, who are you? What were you doing out there?’



I lowered my head, letting my tangled hair fall over my eyes. I thought about my dogs, wondered where they were. What if they stumbled across some soldiers? Would they attack, or have the sense to hide?

Thinking about them made me anxious.

‘What about these dogs you were with?’ said Fran, as if reading my thoughts.

I could not help but glance at her angrily.

‘Are they trained?’ said Fran. ‘Are they attack dogs? Did you all escape from another camp?’

I remained silent.

‘Hmm,’ said Fran. ‘Perhaps I should send the hunters out to look for them. They could take their net gun, maybe capture them all?’

I scowled at her.

‘And then,’ Fran said, leaning forward, ‘we could throw them in a river.’

I sprang at her.



I scratched her face and she yelled with rage. She grabbed me and held me at arm's length while I lashed at her.

Baldy raced back in with another guard and they hauled me off her, forcing my arms behind my back.



‘Back to her cell!’ Fran shouted, as she touched a finger to her reddened cheek. ‘No food until she talks!’

As Baldy dragged me out of the room, Doctor Andrews said, ‘At least you’re in the right place to get a bandage.’

I almost thought he winked at me.

5

OTHER KIDS

I sat in my cell trying to ignore my rumbling stomach. I hadn't had anything to eat since that morning – back when I was free in the forest with my dogs.



I thought about them then. Was Nosey able to pick up the scent? Would Sunrise be leading the pack now that I was gone? Was Tiny able to keep up? I missed them.

It was dark outside now, and I could no longer hear rocks being smashed. Then came the sound of many feet shuffling across the floor downstairs, and children speaking in low, tired voices. Would I be put to work like them?

I had to escape this place!

I heard footsteps on the nearby stairs. Cautiously, I slipped into the shadows at the back of my cell but it was impossible to hide. A small group of kids appeared in the corridor outside, slouching along together. They stopped when they saw me.

‘That’s her,’ whispered one.

‘Her hair is crazy,’ said another.

‘And her clothes are weird and covered in patches.’

I felt like telling them how they looked themselves – scrawny and underfed, covered in dirt and dressed in rags.

‘I heard she doesn’t speak, only howls at the sky.’

‘What’s your name?’ asked a boy with big brown eyes and floppy hair, about my age.



I said nothing, just stared at the kids in front of me. Had they been here the whole time? Had they been stuck here for four years?
The boy stepped closer. 'I'm Rupert.'



I thought about answering. These kids were prisoners like me. They might all be from towns like mine, they might have all fled in the night like I did. I wanted to know how long they had been kept here, and what was actually going on at this place.

But I wasn't ready to trust anyone yet. Trusting without thinking was what had landed me here.

I just wanted my dogs. They were the only ones I could trust.
I turned and howled at the window.



‘Wow,’ said a little girl. ‘She really is an animal.’

Rupert shushed her. ‘Don’t be rude.’ He turned back to me. ‘Maybe that’s how she communicates. Let’s see . . .’ He gave a little cough to clear his throat, then opened his mouth to attempt a howl of his own.

It came out all strangled and weak, and the other kids laughed.



I crouched deeper in the shadows so they wouldn't see my eyes. They were treating me like some kind of freak. Teasing me. I had been right not to trust them.



A door slammed open down the hall.

‘What’s all that racket?!’ came Baldy’s shout.

The kids took off in a hurry, scurrying back down the stairs. I wondered if I would soon be as thin as they were. **No, no, no**, I told myself. ***I’m going to get out of here.***

I smelled food – fresh food! Baldy arrived outside my cell, holding a plate of hot bread and cheese. My mouth watered.



He peered through the bars and held out the plate to show me.

‘Here’s what everyone else is getting,’ he said. ‘None for you until you start talking.’

It made me so mad I leapt at the bars, my hand shooting for the food. Baldy jumped in surprise and dropped the plate.



He tried to cover his fright by scowling as he bent to pick up the food.
'You're not doing yourself any favours, Wolf Girl,' he said.

He quickly walked away. I sank back to the floor and lay down in the dark,
trying not to think about food.

All I wanted were my dogs.

Where were they?

CROSSROADS

Nosey led the pack along the road, following the scent of truck exhaust. To him, the trail was as clear as a line drawn in the dirt.



They had been running for hours and were all panting heavily.

Where is she? asked Zip for the fiftieth time.

We will find her, growled Sunrise.

Tiny yapped with determination. **We're coming, Gwen!**

They pushed on throughout the heat of the day, only slowing down to lap up water from puddles.



When evening finally fell, the cooler air was a welcome relief.

Nosey ran out into a clear area where the trail got all muddy, seeming to spread in different directions.

Sunrise growled. **What's wrong?**

Too many smells, barked Nosey. Different paths ahead.

I don't know which way to go, muttered Nosey.



He began sniffing around, moving in ever wider circles. Sunrise joined in, carefully combing the ground, searching for any clue.

Let's help, said Tiny, staring up at Brutus.

Fine, said Brutus.

You look high and I'll look low, said Tiny.

Duh.

Together they sniffed and sniffed, all around the crossroads. They smelt rubber and fumes and earth and forest. They circled until they began to smell themselves.

Maybe we could try splitting up down the

paths? said Zip.

No, growled Sunrise. **We stay together.**

They sat down and panted for a bit, while Nosey ran up and down the paths.

Maybe she wants to be with the two-legs? said Brutus.

She wouldn't leave us! yipped Tiny.

They are her own kind, barked Brutus.

That's enough! snapped Sunrise. **We are hers. She is ours. We are a pack.**

Sunrise walked up to Brutus and looked him square in the eye.

When Gwen found you, you attacked her. But still she fed you and accepted you.



Brutus bowed his head and retreated away.

We must find her, said Sunrise.

Suddenly Nosey gave a loud bark from down the path to the right.

What? What? called Sunrise, racing ahead of the others.

Her hair! said Nosey, prancing happily around a single brown hair.



As the others rushed over to the single strand of hair, Nosey was already off further down the road.

I can smell another! he barked. **And another!**

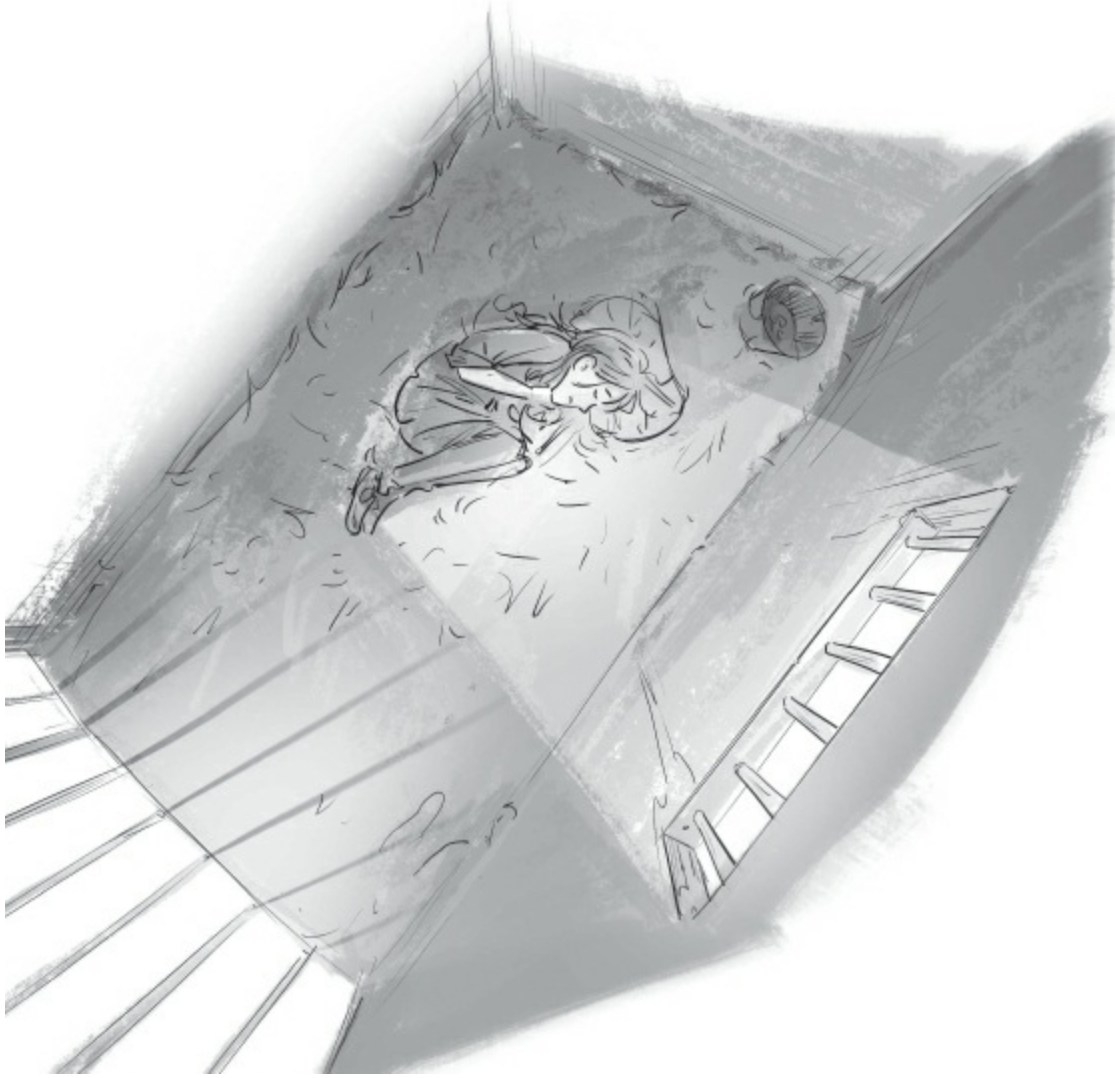
Come on, yelped Sunrise. **Let's find Gwen!**

The others barked excitedly, and they took off into the night.



7

KINDNESS



I woke with my face pressed against the mouldy pillow. The bits of straw I'd pushed together to try and make a bed had left marks all over my skin. It was so much more uncomfortable than sleeping against the soft fur of my four-legged family. My heart sank as I remembered where I was.

I was hungry and thirsty, and wondered if Baldy would soon taunt me with more food. I listened out for him, but there didn't seem to be any noise within the building. Outside I could hear the now-familiar thumping.

I stared up at the cell window. If I could get up there, I could hang onto the bars and look out.

I backed up as far as I could, and with a good running start, I leapt up at the window. By bracing against the wall with my legs and holding onto the bars with my hands, I could see outside.

I could see the entire mountainside quarry. There were many large chunks gouged from the cliff face. How long, I wondered, had the kids been working here? There must have been around fifty of them, all heaving hammers, lugging rocks and pushing wheelbarrows.





Below my window were piles of rocks. I saw Rupert at one, filling up a wheelbarrow. He was a skinny kid and was working really hard just to lift the rocks.

Once his wheelbarrow was full, he wheeled it away, across the field towards the outer wall. There, a couple of soldiers were standing on either side of another gate. They inspected Rupert and his wheelbarrow, then opened the gate and let him through.



So, there was more than one way out of this place.

I kept watching, hoping for more information. I was light and strong, but soon my hands got sore from hanging onto the bars. I ignored the pain.

Soon Rupert returned through the same gate with an empty wheelbarrow. Where had he taken the rocks?





Rupert made his way back over the field towards the piles below my window. Would he go back and forth all day?

His eyes flickered upwards, and he caught me staring at him. I felt suddenly exposed, and let go of the bars. I landed lightly on the floor of my cell, trying not to panic.

Would he tell the soldiers he had spied me looking out?

I heard a quiet **thump** on the outside wall. What was that? It wasn't enough for Rupert to tease me? Now he was throwing things at my cell?



There was another **thump**. Then, a moment later, something flew through the window. I stared, disbelieving.



It was a hunk of bread.

Without thinking, I bit into it. It was hard and stale, but I didn't care. I was starving and it tasted amazing. I chewed and chewed until it was gone, then looked up at the window.

I sprang up again and grabbed the bars. Rupert was still below, piling more rocks into his wheelbarrow, but deliberately being slow about it. When I appeared in the window, he smiled up at me.

'Thank you,' I said.

Rupert's smile widened with amazement. I'd forgotten that I wasn't supposed to be talking to anyone.



‘So you *can* speak,’ he loud-whispered at me.

‘Yes,’ I said.

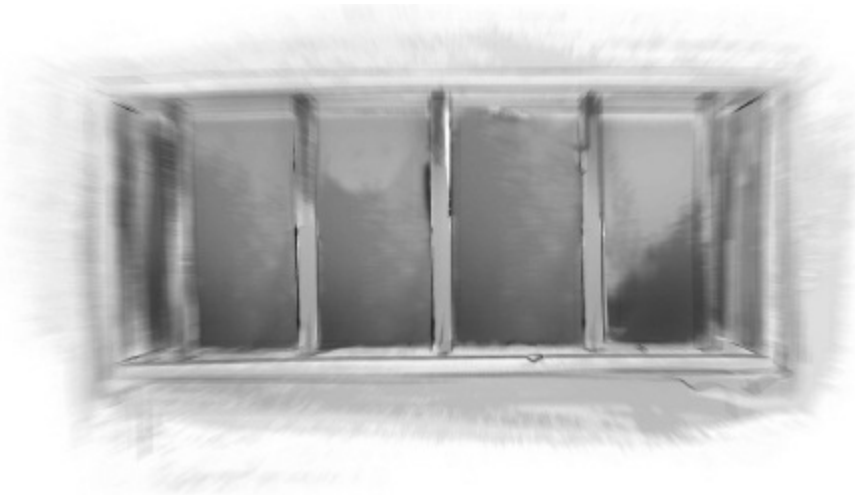
‘Would you like some more food?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

He took another piece of bread out of his pocket and broke it in half.

‘Hey!’ someone shouted.

Rupert spun to see a soldier striding towards him. The man grabbed Rupert roughly around the neck, snatched the bread from his hand, and looked up at my window.



I quickly let go of the bars and dropped down onto the cell floor.
I could hear the soldier outside. ‘So, you’re not hungry, huh? You’ve got so much food you can just give it away?’
I heard scuffling and then a thud as Rupert whimpered.
‘Let’s go see what Fran thinks of this,’ said the soldier.

For the rest of the day, I wondered what had happened to Rupert. I climbed up to the window and looked out, but I couldn't see him. I couldn't see the soldier who had taken him away either.

Finally, as evening fell, footsteps sounded from down the corridor. The soldier appeared, along with Baldy, pushing Rupert along. They opened the cell opposite mine and shoved him into it.



‘You have a good think about the rules,’ said the soldier. ‘Maybe next time you’ll mind your own business.’

Rupert started to cry, and the soldier turned to me.

‘As for you, Wolf Girl, I hope you enjoyed your crumbs. You won’t be getting any more.’

The soldier walked off. Baldy took a moment to sneer at me and Rupert before walking away too.



I padded over to my cell door and peered into Rupert's cell. He was sniffing on the floor.



‘I’m sorry you got in trouble for helping me,’ I said.

Rupert wiped his nose and tried to hide his tears.

‘Where were you all day?’

‘In Fran’s office. She was out of the camp for some reason, so they just left me there, tied to a seat.’

‘Don’t worry,’ I said. ‘We’re going to get out of here.’ I tried to sound more certain than I was.

‘How?’

It was a good question.

‘I’m thinking about it,’ I said.

I thought about it for a while – long enough to hear the sound of Baldy’s snores drifting down the corridor. It was also long enough for Rupert to stop sniffing and start asking questions.

‘Say,’ he said, ‘since you aren’t as wild as you look, why were you howling before?’

Should I tell him the truth?

Should I tell him about Sunrise? About Nosey? About how I’d spent the last four years living with a wolf and dogs? How we’d hunted, ate, played and slept as a pack? How I hadn’t seen a single human until the men from the truck grabbed me and brought me here?

‘I was calling to my family,’ I said.



8

ANOTHER WAY IN

The dogs ran under the light of a full moon, the hairs on the road shining to them like beacons of hope. Every time the road split, Nosey looked for another strand – and every time he found one.



Tiny struggled the most, as he had to work three times as hard to keep up and it was all starting to get a bit much. He huffed and panted along, but after a while he began to fall behind.

Sunrise lowered herself down before the little chihuahua.

Tiny, she gestured with her head, **get in the backpack.**



Thanks! Tiny yelped. He collapsed gratefully in the pack, and they started off again.



They followed the road until even Sunrise was starting to weary. Suddenly they turned a bend and saw a break in the trees. There were lights shining through!

I smell two-legs! barked Nosey.

Into the trees, said Sunrise. **We must not be seen.**

They ran off the road into the forest, their tiredness forgotten. Soon they reached the tree line bordering the camp, and peered out at the wall. Up on top of it, figures were moving about.

This is where Gwen's trail leads, said Nosey.

We cannot jump that wall, said Brutus.



Maybe there's another way in? said Nosey.

Staying hidden within the tree line, the dogs prowled around the entire camp. As they neared the cliffs on one side, they came to a place where the forest was closer to the wall. Things seemed quiet on the other side, and there was no one moving about above.

Look there, said Tiny, from his high vantage, pointing his snout towards the wall. **The earth looks loose.**

Could we dig our way in? said Nosey.

Perhaps, said Sunrise. **But we must be quiet.**



They slunk from the trees and slipped into the shadow of the wall. Zip dug a paw into the ground and raised it up. Dirt fell from his claws.

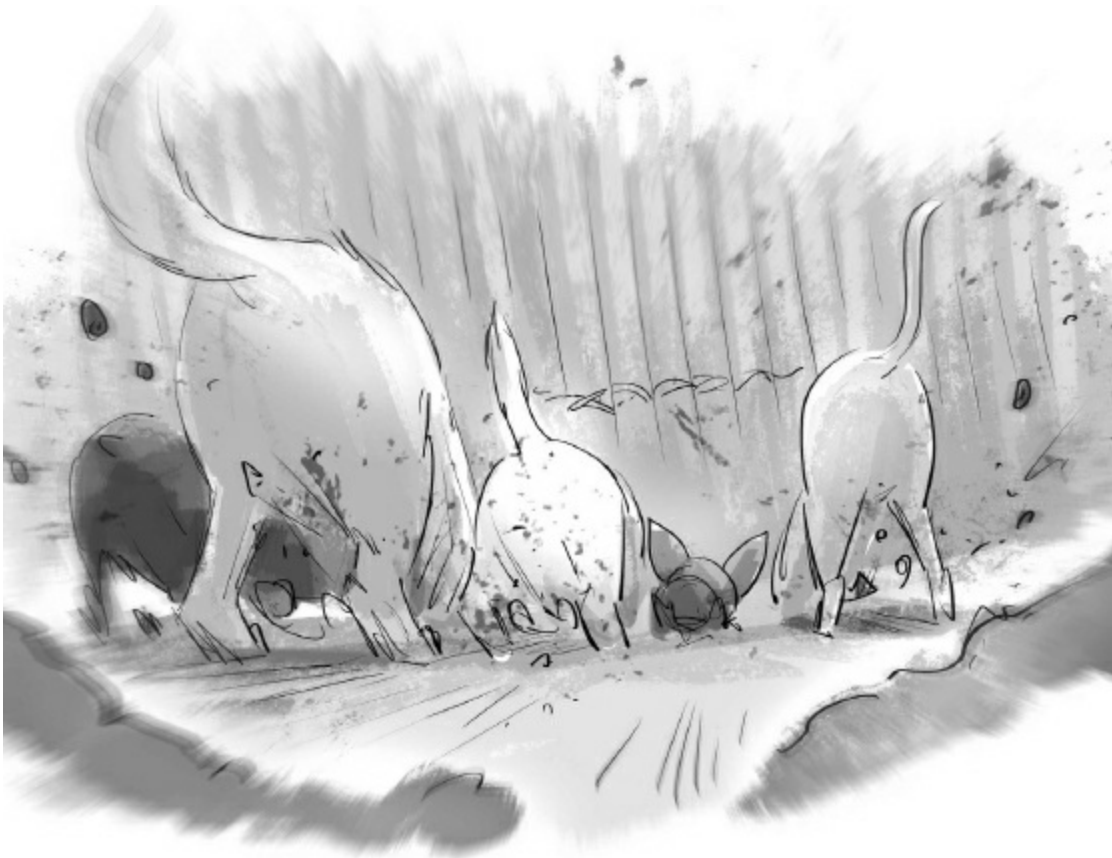
It's soft, he said.

Excited, he started to dig, and sent dirt spraying into everyone's eyes.

Zip! said Sunrise. **Move aside and make room.**

She nodded to Brutus and they positioned themselves beside Zip. Together they began to dig a hole under the wall.

Finally, there was a space under the wall big enough for even Sunrise to fit through. She went down on her belly and clawed her way under. One by one, the others followed.





They emerged behind a shed. Sunrise looked around the corner and saw a field covered in rocks.

How do we know where to go? said Brutus.

Nosey? said Sunrise.

Nosey sniffed around for a bit but couldn't find Gwen's scent.

She has to be somewhere in this place, said Sunrise.

We just have to look.



Sunrise kept low to the ground as she led them out into the field. In the distance, torches flashed about as a patrol of two-legs made their way around the quarry.

Don't let them see us, said Sunrise.

Hide behind that thing! said Tiny, running towards a dark shape ahead.

The others followed, running quietly into the shadow of a tent. The patrol turned in another direction, and for a moment the dogs were relieved. Then, from inside the tent, came the sound of voices.

Sunrise tensed, her eyes shining . . . but the two-legs in the tent were only laughing. A smell wafted through the air that made every dog's mouth water. It was meat being cooked.

Food! suggested Brutus.

It's too dangerous, said Sunrise.

I'm hungry, said Brutus.

The two-legs must not see us, said Sunrise firmly.

Gwen feeds us. We keep looking. We eat when we find Gwen.

They moved on, trying to ignore the intoxicating smell.



Soon they found themselves among piles of rocks alongside a big, long building.

Such a big place, snarled Brutus. **How can we...**

Wingbeats flattened the fur off their faces, and they spun towards the gusts with teeth bared.

Just then, Eagle landed on a rock pile before them!





Eagle! said Sunrise.

Eagle! said the others.

We thought we'd lost you! said Tiny.

Eagle nodded her head at him, as if to say, **It's good to see you too, little guy!**

Do you know where Gwen is? said Nosey.

Eagle gave a low croak and turned to look at the building beside them. Then she took off, landing on the roof above a window.

Does she mean Gwen is in there? said Sunrise.



A HOWL IN THE NIGHT

‘Your family?’ said Rupert. ‘What do you mean? Why would you howl to your family?’

I wondered what to tell him.

‘I umm . . . got separated from my parents when the bombs started dropping. In the forest, I met a pack of dogs, and . . . well, we’ve been together ever since. I’m sort of . . . their leader.’

Rupert’s eyes went wide.

‘The dogs were lost too, and we became a family.’ I realised how silly the story sounded and waited for him to tell me he didn’t believe me.



‘That’s so cool,’ he said.

I was relieved he didn’t think I was crazy.

‘So where are they now?’ said Rupert.

My smile fell away. ‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘I last saw them a long way back down the road, at the place where I was taken. That could’ve been the last time I’ll ever see them.’

As soon as the words left my mouth, I felt an awful heaviness in my chest and a lump started to rise in my throat.

‘So,’ I said, changing the subject, ‘what’s your story?’

Rupert shrugged and looked at the floor. ‘Not much of a story, I guess. I play . . . played a lot of video games – never had a brother or sister, and I’ve always been awful at sport. I can remember bits of my parents talking about trouble coming, but they didn’t really believe it, and I was too busy playing games to pay much attention.’

Rupert gave a little smile that quickly turned sad.



‘So it was all a bit of a surprise when the soldiers came to Monville and rounded everyone up into trucks,’ he said.

‘You’re from Monville?’

‘Yeah, why?’

‘I’m from Firwood. We were pretty much neighbours,’ I said.

Saying my hometown’s name for the first time in four years felt strange, like it was now on another planet. Rupert seemed to be thinking the same.

After a while, he frowned. ‘I’m sorry about the other kids, by the way – for the way they acted last night.’

‘That’s okay,’ I said.

‘I wasn’t trying to make fun of you when I howled,’ said Rupert.

‘You’re really bad at it,’ I said.

Rupert straightened up. ‘Wasn’t that bad, was it?’

I chuckled.

Rupert opened his mouth and started howling.

It was terrible.



‘It has to come from deep inside your stomach.’

I inhaled a great lungful of air and puffed up my chest. I thrust back my shoulders, opened my mouth, and unleashed a howl into the night . . .



As I howled, I heard something outside that made me suck the air back in and choke.

An answering howl!

It sounded like . . . but it couldn't be . . .

Quick as a flash I sprang up to the window and looked outside.

There, looking up at me, was my pack!



As soon as they saw me, their tails started wagging hard enough to knock rocks off the piles. Zip ran in circles, Tiny's tongue lolled out in a big grin, Brutus gave a happy whine, and Sunrise just stared at me meaningfully.

How do we get to you? Sunrise seemed to ask.

A shadow flashed across the bars and almost startled me into losing my grip . . .

Eagle landed beside the dogs. They were *all* here! They had found me. I couldn't believe it!



My worry that I would never see them again vanished . . . only to be replaced by new worries. ***How are we all going to get out of here?***

I pulled my head away from the window, listening, wondering if the commotion had woken Baldy – but no, his snoring continued.

‘Eagle,’ I said, in a low voice, ‘can you bring me Tiny?’

Eagle cocked her head at the little dog. The two of them had worked together in the past during hunts or when Tiny couldn’t make a jump crossing a stream.



But the cell window was much higher than any boost Eagle had ever given Tiny before.

Could they do it? Did they even understand what I wanted?

The big bird stared down at the little dog with her piercing eyes. Tiny looked at Eagle, looked at me, then ran around in a circle. Eagle moved her head . . . could that have been a nod? . . . then raised a claw and took him by the scruff of his neck. She began to beat her wings. Tiny looked down as his paws left the ground, then looked back up at the window. Together, they rose into the air.

I stuck my hand out the window.



It was difficult for Eagle to hover near the window. Her wings were wide enough that the tips of them kept brushing the wall.

I reached out as far as I could, crushing my cheek against the bars. Tiny's worried eyes went past.



‘Drop him in my hand,’ I grunted.

A moment later a soft weight landed in my palm and I closed my fingers. I had caught Tiny!



I pulled him through the bars and dropped back down into the cell.

Tiny immediately leapt all over me. He jumped at my face and licked me frantically. I laughed and hugged him.

‘I missed you,’ I told him.

I realised Rupert was staring at us with wonder. From his cell, he had just seen a dog fly in through the window.

‘How did he get up here?’ he said.

‘Oh, I forgot to tell you,’ I said, happily squeezing Tiny’s silly face. ‘I have an eagle too.’



CLICK

I scratched Tiny behind his ears as I thought about the key to my cell, hanging over the desk in Baldy's office.

Over the years, I had developed a way to communicate with the dogs, a mixture of speaking and miming. Sometimes we just sensed each other's needs.

I remembered a time back when we were still camping at the abandoned cars. One day I had found Tiny standing over a locked suitcase. He could smell something inside.



I had hunted around the cars nearby, and eventually found a key in a glove box. Tiny had watched with keen interest as I put it in the lock and turned it.

‘Click,’ I had said.



Inside the suitcase was a bag of pork curls. I gave the curls to Tiny and didn't think much more of it.



Now I wondered if I could use this.

I picked Tiny up and took him to the cell door. I held him up so he could see the lock, and then mimed turning a key in it.

'Click,' I said.

Tiny's ears pricked up. **You need a click?** He looked this way and that.

I pointed off down the corridor. 'The click is down there. But you have to be . . .' I held my finger up to my lips, a sign I taught the dogs for hunting. ' . . .

. quiet.'

I set Tiny on the floor and he squeezed through the bars and scurried off down the corridor, his radar ears swivelling.



11

CLEVER BOY

Tiny came to an open door and found the source of the snoring. A two-leg was slumped over a desk, asleep.





Then Tiny noticed something hanging on the wall above the desk. His tail twitched – he hadn't been too sure what Gwen had wanted, but now that he saw it, he was certain. It was a whole ring of clicks!

With the two-leg right there, he had to be very careful. Tiny had learnt quickly that not all two-legs were like Gwen. Not all humans could be trusted.

There was another chair to the side of the desk, with a couple of books piled on it. Tiny padded softly into the room and looked up at it. He tensed, focused, and sprang up onto the chair.

He landed messily – his paws came down on one of the books and it slipped away under him. As he slid down onto his stomach, the book fell off the chair, hitting the floor with a **thump**.



The two-leg stirred. Tiny froze, his little heart thudding in his chest. For a few seconds, he dared not move . . . but then the snoring started again.

Tiny got up, careful not to make more noise, and looked at the desk. He didn't want to knock over any more stuff, but he couldn't see what was up there. Still, he had to take the risk.



Tiny jumped, landing close to the two-leg's head.

Tiny walked over to the keys, his claws tapping treacherously on the desk. The clicks were hanging off a nail in the wall. It would be simple enough to reach up and grab them.



But as he pulled them towards himself, the clicks started to jangle! Tiny froze, his teeth still clamped on the clicks.

Careful as he could, Tiny drew the clicks off the wall. They jangled even more as they came loose! The two-leg stirred again and coughed. Fearing the worst, Tiny ran to the edge of the desk and jumped off.

He landed on the floor with a thud and a clank. The man's eyes opened!



Tiny watched with growing fear as the man grunted and looked around. He seemed to blink at the place on the wall where the clicks should be.



Then his head fell back as he started snoring again, this time at the ceiling. Tiny dared to breathe again. Stupid two-leg! How could anyone sleep so deeply? Then again, Tiny was very stealthy and clever – despite knocking down books and jangling the clicks, of course.

Tiny padded over to the doorway and made his way back down the corridor to the cells.

Gwen's scent grew reassuringly stronger. Finally, he reached her cell and slipped through the bars. When she saw him with the clicks in his mouth, she gave a warm exclamation and scooped him up.

'Oh, Tiny,' said Gwen as she hugged him. 'You clever, clever boy.'

I know, purred Tiny. **Very clever indeed!**



12

SMASH!

Rupert couldn't believe his eyes. 'Oh my God! Your dog is so smart!'
'Ssh!' I hissed.



‘If they find you out of your cell, you’ll be in so much trouble!’ Rupert whispered.

‘That’s why I’m not going to hang around waiting to be caught,’ I said irritably.

I found a key that fit snugly in the lock, turned it, and the door swung open. Tiny trotted out into the corridor, keeping watch as I walked over to Rupert’s cell.

‘Do you want to come with me?’ I said.





Rupert looked uncertain and fearful.

‘Or,’ I said, ‘you could stay here and smash rocks.’

‘I’m coming,’ he said.

I unlocked his door and he opened it carefully, trying to avoid any squeaking.

‘What about the other kids?’ I said. ‘Shall we go and get them too?’

Rupert edged out into the corridor nervously. ‘We can’t.’

‘Why?’

‘They’re weak and starving. There’s no way we’ll be able to sneak them all out together. Even if we make it to the forest, how would we feed them all?’

‘We can’t just leave them here to be slaves.’

Rupert frowned thoughtfully. ‘If we free the adults first, maybe they can help us with the kids?’

‘The adults? What are you talking about?’



‘Oh, you don’t know?’ said Rupert. ‘Further along the mountain, they’re using adult workers to build a big compound. My mum and dad are there.’
His parents were close by? If that was true, maybe my own were there too! I quickly reached into my shirt and pulled out my locket.
‘These are my parents,’ I said. ‘Have you seen them?’



I tried to keep my voice steady, but I was desperate for the answer.

Rupert frowned at the photo. Every second until he answered felt like a year. Eventually he said, 'Ah . . . yes, I have.'

I almost screamed with excitement. I couldn't believe it. I began shaking. My parents – after all this time! So close by, and I hadn't even known.

Since I'd been captured, my only thoughts had been getting back to the pack, but now I was flooded with a hundred memories of my parents and my sister.

My mind started swirling with thoughts of Mum and Dad, of how they would have to let me keep the dogs, and when this whole thing was over, we'd all be together, all of us!

'Are you sure?' I said.

Rupert gave a little nod.

'What about her?' I said, pointing at my sister. 'Have you seen Kate?'



Rupert coughed. ‘There’s no kids over there. She would be in this camp if she was anywhere, and I haven’t seen her. I’m sorry.’

That was disappointing, but not enough to stop a surge of excitement rising up inside me. Not only was I going to get out of this place, I would rescue my parents as well! Then we could work out what to do about Kate. Together.

A thought stopped me. My pack was very good at survival, but this was completely different. This was going on the attack, and we would need to be sneaky. Half-blind Zip and excitable Tiny would need to be sneaky . . .



I looked at Tiny, who was clearly still pleased with himself for getting the key.

We could do this.

‘I need to get my dogs,’ I said. ‘Then we’re going to free the adults.’

Rupert went pale. ‘But how can we do that? There’s only the two of us.’

He seemed a bit flighty. Freeing the adults had been his idea, but now he didn’t want to follow through? Hesitation could be the difference between bringing down prey and becoming prey yourself.

Was Rupert going to slow us down? Maybe . . . but it didn’t matter, I needed his knowledge.

‘Come on,’ I said firmly.



I picked up Tiny and walked off down the corridor. After a moment, Rupert followed.

We reached Baldy's open office door. He was still in there, snoring away. The other offices were dark under their closed doors. I motioned for Rupert to wait.

'What are you doing?' he mouthed at me.

I crept into the office. It wasn't hard to find my sling.



Baldy hadn't bothered to move it from where the soldier had tossed it, which was good for me – there was no way I was leaving without my sling.

I snuck out of the office and quietly shut the door, using the set of keys to lock Baldy in the room.

We went down the stairs and made our way towards the entrance.

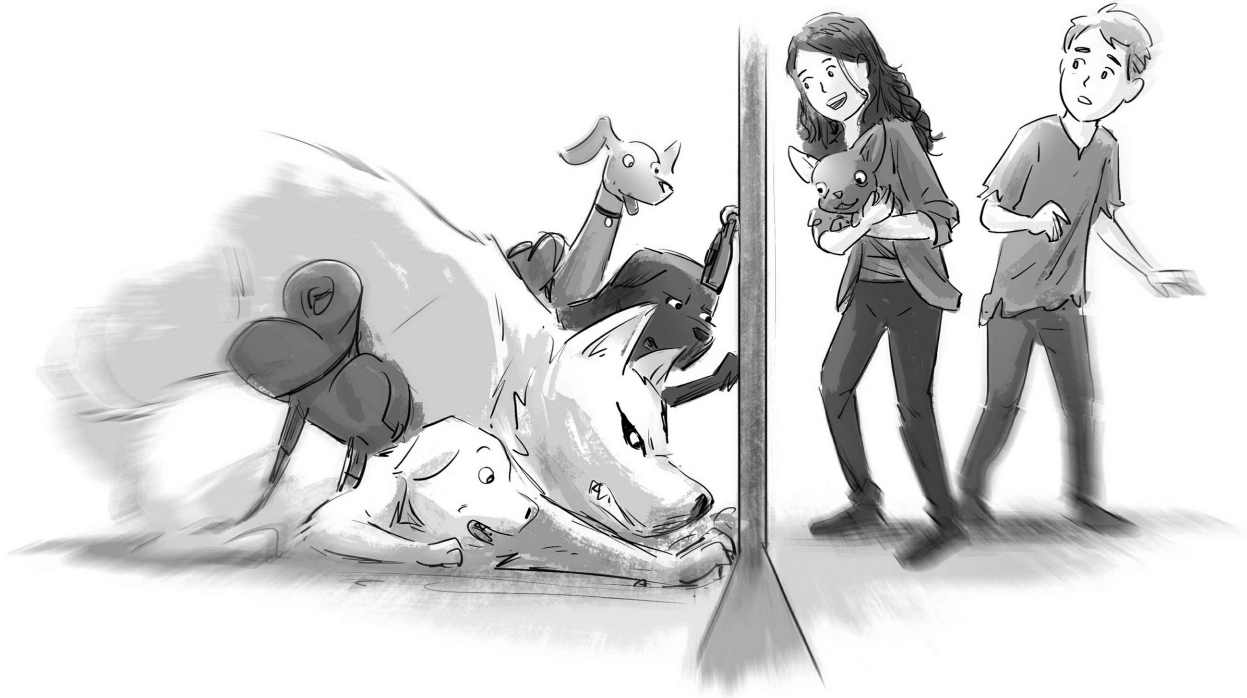


I began to make out the bumps and humps of kids slumbering on their dirty mats. I felt bad for leaving them, but I knew we would be back.

I went to the entrance door. I still had the keys, but I couldn't find a lock on our side.

'It's padlocked from the outside,' whispered Rupert.

I heard a scratching and sniffing coming through the door. There was a low growl, which I instantly recognised.



‘Sunrise!’ I hissed. ‘It’s me! We can’t open the door.’ I tapped on the door where I thought the padlock would be, although I wasn’t quite sure how that would help my dogs.

Suddenly, there was a heavy impact against the door, and it shook in its frame. A second later, another blow came, and I recognised an accompanying grunt as Brutus.

They were trying to smash in the door!



‘Back up,’ I whispered to Rupert.

The thuds came repeatedly, and I hoped my dogs wouldn’t hurt themselves. Nails began to shake loose, and the frame splintered. The noise echoed through the whole place, and I heard kids begin to murmur. Some of them sat up and rubbed their eyes.

There was an almighty **SMASH!** and the door crashed to the floor.



I ran to them, overjoyed, and threw my arms around my family. Nosey and Zip ran up to nuzzle their way into a big group hug. Zip couldn't contain himself and started barking his foolish head off. I hushed them. I knew this was no time for reunions. We had to get moving.



We heard a thump upstairs and shouting sounded from every direction outside.

‘Come on!’ I said.

I got to my feet and ran out the door. My pack circled around me, and I glanced back to make sure that Rupert was following. He looked nervously at Brutus, who was running by his side, and Brutus looked back at him.

Who is this guy?



I looked around. There were wire fences up the hill, mounds of rubble along the building, and a big field full of dark shapes. Torches flashed from multiple directions. I didn't know which way to go.

Follow me, Sunrise growled.

She bounded off to the side. I picked up Tiny and ran after her as fast as I could. It felt good to have the wind whip through my hair. My nostrils flared to take in fresh air.



Torches grew rapidly closer, bobbing up and down as soldiers jogged along. Sunrise reached the wall and sped off along it. As the rest of us followed, I heard footsteps on the scaffolding above. They were coming at us from all sides!

Did Sunrise know what she was doing? We came to a shed, and Sunrise ran behind it. I followed and saw a glimpse of her tail disappearing through a hole under the wall.

I dived after her, releasing Tiny just before I hit the ground. The little dog

shot forward from my hands and through the hole. I landed hard, but there was no time to be winded. I dragged myself on my belly through the dirt. My hands felt grass on the other side, and I pulled myself up.



I turned as Nosey, Brutus and Zip burst up from the hole one after another. The soldiers' shouting grew louder on the other side.

'Rupert!' I hissed.

Rupert's hand appeared, reaching out. I grabbed it, but I couldn't pull him through.

'My leg's stuck!' he yelled.

'Quick, dogs!' I shouted.

The dogs ran in to clamp down on Rupert's sleeve, and we all backed up together. He glanced up terrified to see so many teeth pulling on him – but they only held him by his clothes.



A moment later we wrenched him free, and he slid out of the hole onto the grass.

Rupert staggered to his feet, gasping.

‘Into the forest!’ I said, and together, we ran for the trees.

I was used to the forest at night, but Rupert wasn’t. As we ran, I heard him cry out, bumping into branches and rocks. I dropped back and caught his arm.

‘I’ll guide you,’ I said, ‘but we have to move quickly.’



I steered him around obstacles and pushed him pretty hard. He kept saying things like ‘Whoa’ and ‘Ouch’ – but I needed him to keep moving.

Sunrise growled at him. **Make him be quiet.**

‘Is that an actual wolf?’ said Rupert, his mouth hanging half open.



‘Her name is Sunrise and she wants you to be quiet,’ I said.
We ran on in silence, and after a good while we were deep in the trees.
‘Hold up,’ I said, noticing that Rupert could run no longer. Thankfully, we
were far enough away that I felt we could stop. ‘We need to rest.’
The dogs circled around, looking up at me.



I dropped to my knees and flung out my arms. They all jumped on me at once, and we continued our interrupted reunion hug.





‘I’m so glad to see you guys.’

We’re glad to see you too!

I’m so happy, I wanna bark!

No Zip! No barking, just hugging!

Eagle screeched from above.

I looked up at Rupert, remembering his worries from before.

‘It’s not just me and you breaking into the compound,’ I said. ‘It’s the two of us, plus . . .’ I nodded at my rag-tag pack of dogs, nuzzling me and licking my face. ‘. . . them.’



THE GATE

We made our way towards the mountain, which loomed above us and covered the horizon. We soon reached the road that ran between the kids' camp and the adults'.

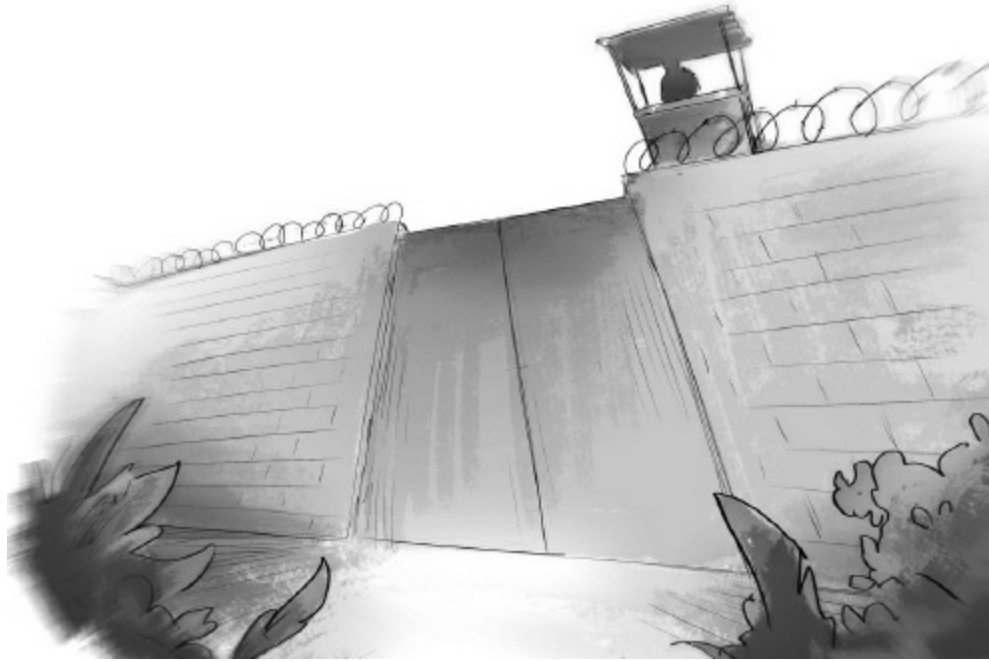


We followed the road from the safety of the forest, keeping a lookout for soldiers. ***They probably won't search for us here,*** I thought. After all, why would someone who's just escaped choose to go somewhere even more dangerous?

Rupert said it wasn't too far to the adults, and soon enough, we sighted a high brick wall.

'No digging under that,' I said, as I scratched Zip behind the ears.

The road ran up to an iron gate set in the wall, with a platform above it. There was a soldier on the platform, keeping watch.



As we sat thinking about what we were going to do next, there came the sound of a vehicle approaching.

‘Stay still, everyone,’ I said.

A jeep, with its headlights blazing, drove up to the gate. The driver had a ponytail, and two bearded men stood on the back.

‘Oi,’ called down the Gate Soldier. ‘The mighty hunters return. What have you brought us for breakfast, boys?’

The men didn’t seem pleased. Red Hunter and Blond Hunter both scowled up at Gate Soldier.

‘It’s been a difficult night,’ called Ponytail. ‘There are not as many beasts in these parts as there once were. We may have to start venturing further afield.’

‘You caught nothing?’ said Gate Soldier. ‘Nothing at all, not even a sparrow?’

‘Let us in!’ shouted Red Hunter.



‘Okay, okay. Keep your beard on.’

Gate Soldier pressed a button on a panel next to him. The metal gate

beneath swung inwards, and the jeep bounced along through. Gate Soldier walked to the other side of his platform and watched them drive off.



‘How are we going to get in?’ I said.

Rupert frowned. Then he opened his mouth but didn’t say anything. I could sense he was thinking about something that made him afraid.

‘What is it, Rupert?’

He took a deep breath. ‘Well, I get in there all the time. The soldiers are used to seeing kids with loads of rocks. See those wheelbarrows leaning against the wall?’ he said as he gestured to a dozen of them. ‘If you were to hide in one of those, and we put some rocks on you, I could probably just wheel you right in.’



I saw a problem. ‘What about the dogs?’

‘You’d never all fit. We’d have to leave the dogs behind.’

I looked around at the upturned eyes of my pack.

You’re not leaving us behind again.

Where you go, we go.

Yeah. Forget this guy if that’s what he thinks.

‘Maybe not,’ I said. ‘They could go up to the wall when no one’s looking. Then, when the gate opens for us, they could run along the wall and slip after us. If the gate guy does the same thing as with the jeep, he’ll walk to the other side of the platform to watch us enter. Then the dogs could sneak in before the gate closes.’

Rupert looked doubtful. ‘Sounds complicated. Are they going to understand all that?’

‘We’ve been hunting for years together and they understand me,’ I said, then proceeded to explain the plan to the pack.



‘So, doggies,’ I said, down on one knee before them, ‘you get all that?’

YEP, YEP, YEP.

‘Amazing!’ said Rupert.

‘How do you think we survived so many years out here, if not by working together?’ I said.

He stared at me for a moment, then sighed. ‘Okay then, Wolf Girl. Let’s do this.’

THE HUNTERS

I lay cramped in the wheelbarrow as stones jostled around on top of me. Some of them were pretty heavy.

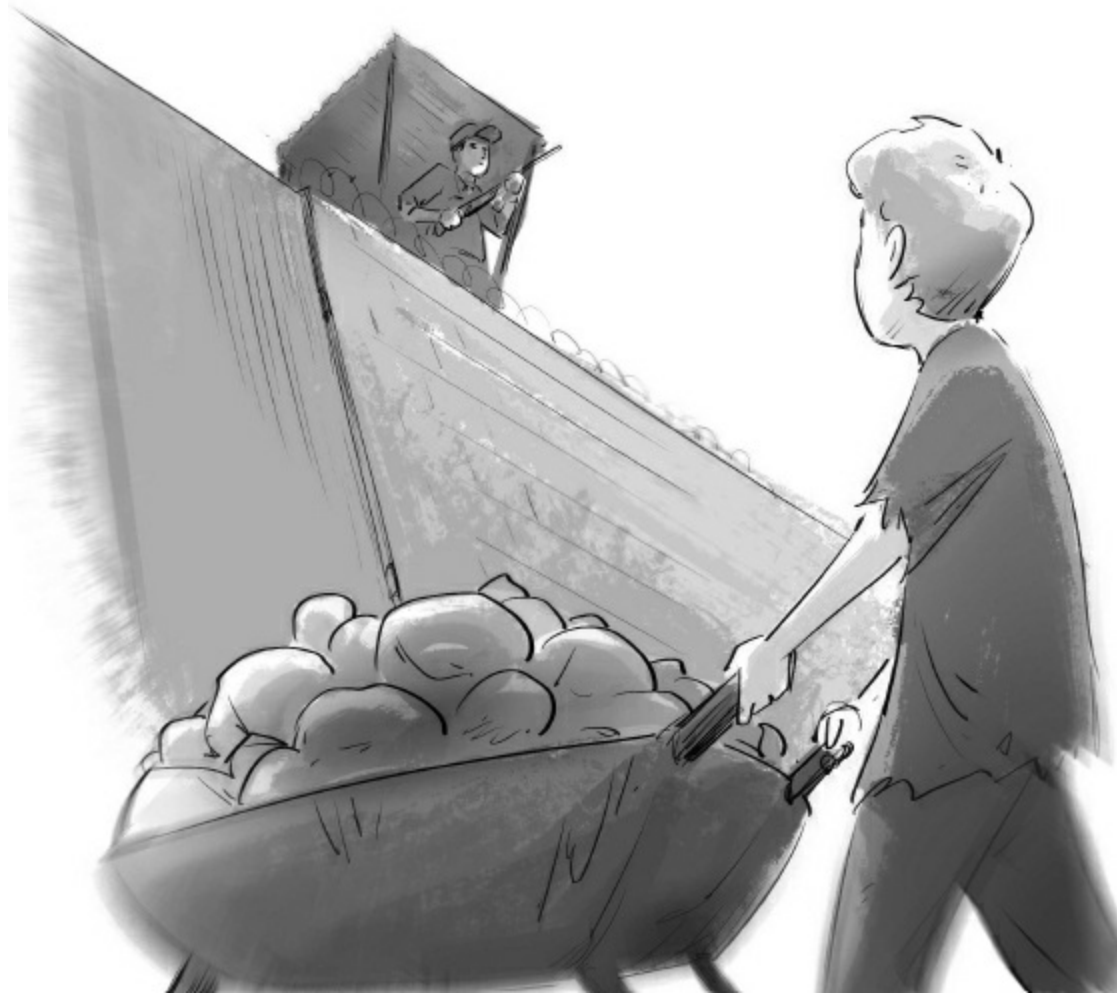


I grabbed a few of the smaller, loose rocks bumping against my hand and put them in my pocket.

The wheelbarrow came to a stop, and a ray of light from the rising sun pierced the cracks in the rocks and fell right in my eyes. I shut them tightly and hoped we wouldn't be here too long.

'Boy!' came Gate Soldier's voice from above.

'Got another load for the piles, sir,' called Rupert.



I heard the gate swing open. I couldn't see my dogs, but I prayed they had understood the plan. I might have sounded confident about it to Rupert, but this was a new experience for us all.

The wheelbarrow trundled forward, moved under the platform. I tensed, listening for sounds of alarm – but none came.

'The dogs are in,' whispered Rupert. 'They're all around us under the platform.' There was a note of wonder in his voice.

I wish I could say I relaxed a bit, but really, nothing about the situation was relaxing.

Rupert pushed the wheelbarrow onwards and I heard the gate close behind us. Hopefully Gate Soldier would go back to watching the road, the dogs would stick close to Rupert, and no one would see them as we—

‘Hey!’ Gate Soldier yelled. ‘What are all those dogs doing with you?’



Oh no.

‘Ah . . .’ Rupert said. ‘I don’t know, sir. I think they’re just . . . harmless strays?’

‘Dogs!’ shouted Gate Soldier. ‘Hey, there’s a bunch of wild dogs over here!’

I wasn’t going to lie in hiding while my pack was in trouble! I burst out of

the wheelbarrow, showering rocks everywhere.



Above me, Gate Soldier wore a look of great surprise. My dogs circled around me as I took in my surroundings.

We were in a yard similar to the one back in the kids' camp, but much bigger. Ahead, a building rose several storeys high. Off to the side, workers moved about among trucks. The hunters were unloading gear from the back of the jeep.

They looked over at the sound of Gate Soldier's cries.

'Intruders!'

The hunters dropped everything and scrambled back into the jeep.

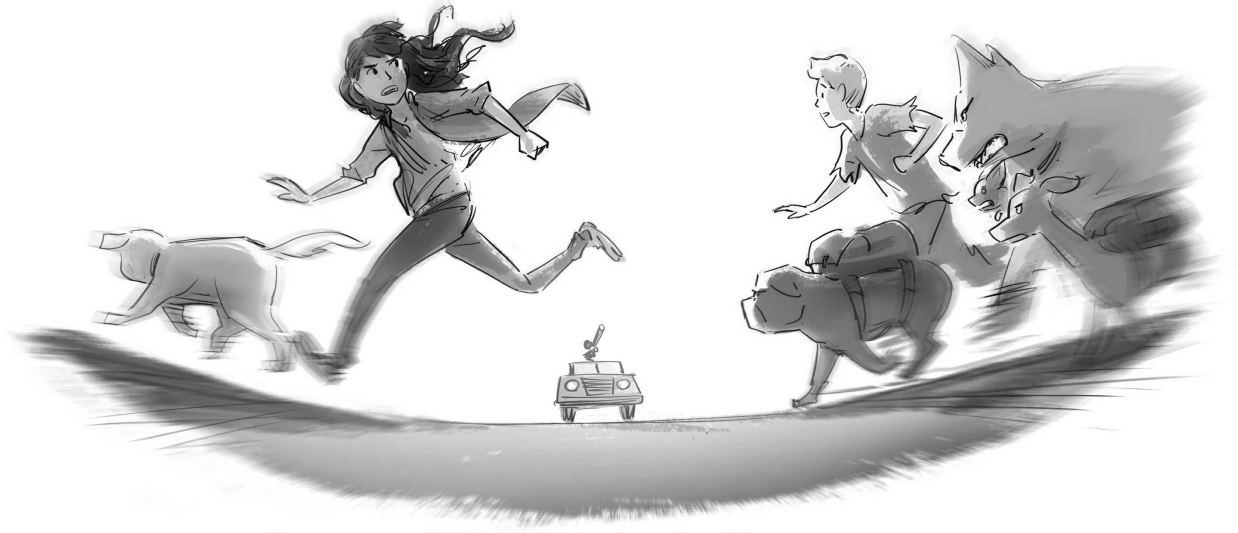


‘What do we do?’ said Rupert, pale as ice.

We were out in the open and completely exposed. To have any chance at all, we needed to get inside.

‘**Inside!**’ I said and broke into a run towards the open doors of the main building.

‘**Everyone, with me!**’



The jeep's engine revved and it lurched towards us, quickly picking up speed. As soon as my dogs saw it coming, they started barking. I could tell they didn't like it at all. The memory of the last time they had seen men in a vehicle was still very fresh.

Stay away, two-legs!

We'll protect you, Gwen!

'Let's get inside!' I shouted.

The dogs were too worked up to pay attention. Sunrise growled savagely and broke from the pack, directly towards the oncoming jeep. Tiny was quickly after her, yapping angrily.

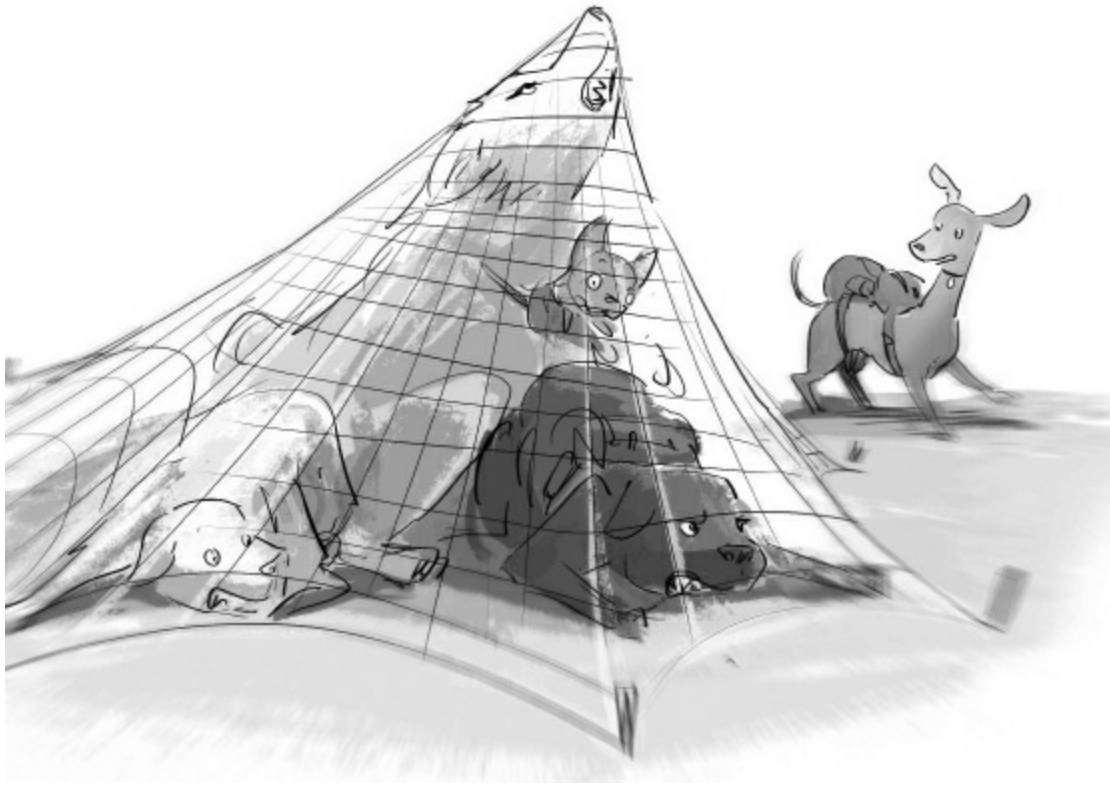
'Doggies, stay with me!' I called out to them.



It was no good. As soon as Sunrise and Tiny tore off, the others were hot on their heels. I could see Blond Hunter raising something up towards them. I went cold. Was it a gun? It seemed too bulky.

The pack converged in a tight formation, except Zip, who zoomed ahead. Blond Hunter pulled the trigger and something blue shot outwards, instantly expanding into a flying net.





It passed over Zip, flying towards the rest of the pack. I heard yelping as the dogs slammed into the ground, trapped under the mesh net.

Zip turned off to the side, confused but still barking furiously.

‘We have to free them!’ I shouted at Rupert, as I ran towards the net full of dogs.

The jeep squealed to a halt, and Red Hunter raised a tranquilliser gun at Zip, who was sprinting towards a small bush beside the building.

Red Hunter aimed the gun at Zip and then moved it slightly to the left. He thought Zip was going to run around the bush, so was leading his shot. I grinned. He didn’t know Zip.



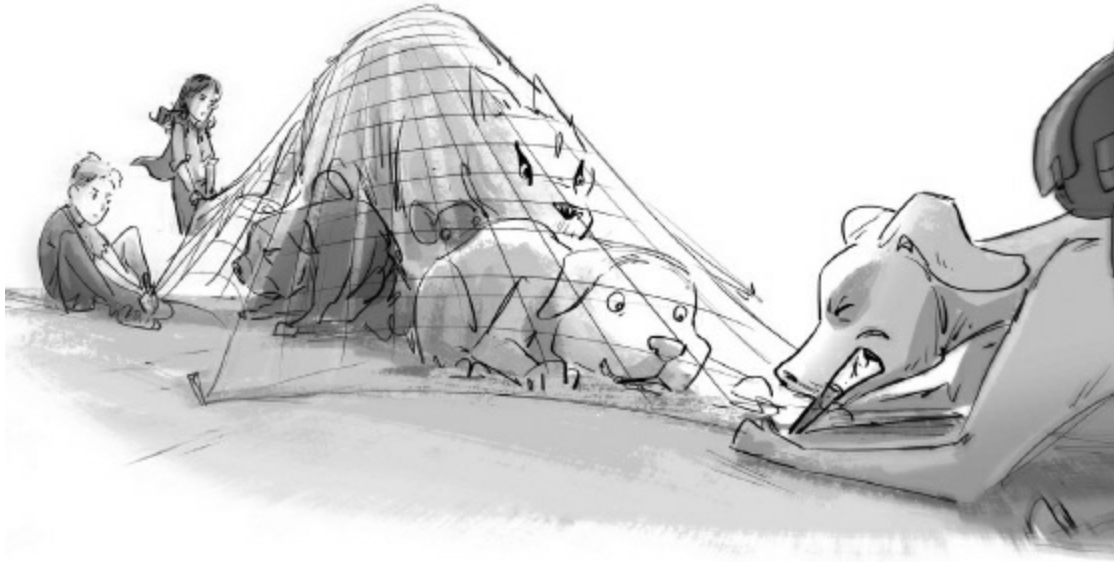


Red Hunter fired, and Zip ran straight into the bush. The dart shot past where Zip should have been and clattered off the building.

Zip rocked back on his haunches, dazed. I was happy his poor eyesight had done him a favour!

I reached the net and glanced back to make sure Rupert was still with me.

‘Rip it up!’ I shouted to Rupert. I reached down to pull out a spike, and Rupert did the same. A moment later Zip was back at my side. He growled as he wrenched a spike clear with his teeth. I noticed one of his eyes was now closed entirely – he was injured. It was going to be even harder for him to see now.



The hunters leapt off the jeep with their tranquilliser guns. I reached into my pocket and pulled out a rock. An overhead swing sent the stone hurtling towards Blond Hunter. It smacked him on the forehead, and he jolted backwards with a stunned look. As he stumbled, Red Hunter raised his gun.



I reached for another stone, but my pocket was empty.

I heard a shriek above. 'Eagle!'

Eagle ripped up the air as she dived straight towards Red Hunter. He flung up the gun to protect his face and she seized it in her talons.

Red Hunter stared open-mouthed as Eagle flew off with his weapon.



Beyond the jeep, I could see other people watching from the garage. They didn't seem to be soldiers, and weren't running towards us, but shouts were going up elsewhere. We had to get out of this yard.

I turned back to the net. Tiny was now free and ripping up spikes. I grabbed another and pulled it up, which raised the net high enough for the other dogs to burst free. They bounced to their feet and we took off.

'Stay with me!' I ordered the dogs as I grabbed another handful of rocks.



We ran for the building and burst into the doorway. Rupert and the dogs ran inside. Zip was last, having more trouble now he had just one eye. I called his name constantly until he found his way.

I turned back to check that Eagle was okay and saw her rising back up into the sky above the hunters.

‘Don’t mess with my pack,’ I muttered.

I ran into the building and slammed the door.

THE ADULTS

We entered a room full of tables and chairs. There was a fridge in the corner, and plates stacked up near a sink.



‘Where are the adults kept?’ I asked.

‘On the other side of this building,’ said Rupert. ‘I think.’

‘You think?’

‘I’m pretty sure. I saw it once.’

We moved out into a corridor.

‘Soldiers!’ Rupert whispered.

A group of three men appeared around a corner ahead.



There was nowhere for us to run now, so we only had one option left.

‘Get them!’ I shouted.

My dogs didn’t need much encouragement. The soldiers started to draw weapons as my pack raced to close the distance. I reached for my sling and sent a rock whizzing straight down the long corridor, smashing out a light above the soldier’s heads. They cried out as broken glass showered down on them.



Sunrise crashed into a soldier, bringing him down to the ground. Tiny latched onto another's leg, biting him through his trousers. The soldier spun about, trying to shake off the little dog, but Zip careened into his backside and sent him flying. Nosey ran behind the third as Brutus barrelled into him, knocking him backwards.



As Rupert and I ran around the struggling figures, the radios on their belts crackled.

‘They’re in Lower Corridor 3!’ said a voice on one of them.

We turned a corner and came to a long window that looked into a room full of panels and screens. There were three more soldiers inside.

‘That’s the compound’s control centre,’ said Rupert. ‘I’ve got an idea! Do you think your dogs can overpower these three?’



‘Definitely,’ I replied.

We tore into the room as the officers rose wide-eyed from their desks. Brutus and Sunrise stalked forward, baring their fangs. The officers backed up, raising their hands to show they had no weapons.

‘Please,’ said one, as I entered the room behind my pack. ‘Call them off.’

‘Put a message through the radio that we’re heading upstairs,’ said Rupert. The officer swallowed. ‘Well . . . I’m afraid I can’t do that . . .’
‘Brutus!’ I said and gestured towards the officer.
Brutus snarled at the officer.



‘Put the message through!’ said Rupert.
The officer gulped and picked up a radio.
‘The, er . . . the intruders are heading upstairs,’ he said into the handset.
Rupert was at the screens. ‘They run the whole building from here,’ he said.
He began typing. I could hear running footsteps echoing along the corridor – but then they seemed to grow fainter, as if heading away.
‘Got it!’ Rupert said. He pressed a button, and a sort of thrum went through the building. The lights went out, and the screens powered down.



‘Now these guys can’t warn their friends once we leave,’ said Rupert.
‘Everything’s knocked out.’

Rupert, it seemed, was full of surprises.

‘Good job,’ I said. I didn’t know if he could see as well as my dogs and me in the shadowy building, so I helped him towards the door. ‘I’ve got you.’



We had to move more slowly now that everything was dark. We heard feet clumping around overhead but met no more soldiers on the lower level. It seemed the trick had worked.

We made it to the other side of the building and came to a corridor where windows let in sunlight.

‘There!’ said Rupert. Outside, across a short field of grass, was a long, low building. It was like the one where the kids slept, except made of stone.



We raced along until we found a door and spilled out into the daylight. As we headed towards the stone building, the potential joy of seeing my parents again rose up in my chest and took over my heart.



My mind swirled excitedly with thoughts. Would they be just there, inside, waiting? Was I right on the verge of finding them?

Would they look the same? Would they recognise me? Would they be angry with me for leaving them behind that day?

But really, the only question that mattered was whether they were here or not. My heart just about exploded with excitement.

I reached the doorway and ran inside.

There were rows and rows of bunk beds and washbasins, casting strange shadows in the dark. All of them were empty.



I came to a stop. ‘They’re not here.’

I turned my face up to the ceiling, my hands balled into fists. ‘They’re not here!’ I screamed, in a pitch that even I didn’t recognise.

Neither did the pack, as they all circled me, looking around to try to spot what was in the room that was hurting me – they couldn’t tell that my pain came from what . . . who . . . was missing from the room.



‘Maybe, uh, they’re at work?’ sputtered Rupert. The look on his face said that I was freaking him out.

A soldier appeared on the other side of the room.

‘**Pin him down!**’ I shouted, making Rupert jump. The dogs surged forward, and though the soldier tried to run, they dragged him down. Sunrise leapt onto his chest and lowered her snarling face to his.



As I approached, he tore his eyes from my wolf's, and stared up at me with terror.

'Where are the prisoners?' I demanded.

'They . . . they've been shipped!'

'What do you mean, shipped?'

'I don't know any more than that!' squeaked the soldier. 'Last I knew, they were being loaded into trucks. In the garage! If you hurry . . .' He seemed hopeful of the notion we might be about to leave. '. . . you might still catch them.'

I looked at Rupert. 'We saw all those big trucks in the garage before.'

'Come on then,' he said, his eyes shining. It seemed his fear had been replaced with something else – maybe courage?



I reminded myself this had all been his idea, and he wanted to see his parents just as badly as I did mine.

We ran back out and around the main building. As we came around a corner, a line of trucks was driving out through the open gate. In the back of the last one I saw adults in chains, staring out in amazement at me and my pack. I searched their faces but did not see my parents.



Still, Mum and Dad could have been in any one of the trucks!
As I ran across the yard, Gate Soldier spotted us. He did a double-take,
then lunged for his control panel. I instinctively reached for my sling and . . .



We ran through the gate in time to see the last truck driving off in a cloud of dust.



‘No!’ I cried, collapsing to my knees. Tears welled in my eyes. ‘Not after all this . . .’

‘Gwen,’ said Rupert softly, his hand on my shoulder, ‘we can’t stay here.’ I heard soldiers closing in.

Rupert helped me to my feet. He was right, we needed to get into the safety of the forest. I fought down my rising despair. If I was ever going to find my parents, we had to keep going.

Together, we fled.

16

ONWARDS



We sped along in the foliage beside the road, easily outpacing the pack of soldiers on our tail. Their voices faded further and further away.

Although we had escaped, I felt an empty sadness mixed with anger.

All of the prisoners – including my parents – had been shipped off to some unknown place. Our efforts had been for nothing.

The trucks left big, easy-to-follow marks in the dirt and I led our pack to higher ground so that I could keep track of the road.

After several hours, I finally felt we had lost the soldiers. I called for the pack to halt.

‘Tiny,’ I said, ‘can you hear the soldiers?’

The little chihuahua swivelled his ears around, concentrating.

Then he wagged his tail, which told me there was no sign of them.



I forced myself to stop and think. We were all starving. It might take days – or weeks – to track the trucks to wherever they were going.

It was time to start looking after my pack again.

I opened one of the backpacks the dogs had brought and emptied out all the dried meat we had left. The dogs watched me with watering mouths.



I nodded to them, and they rushed in, chewing and swallowing furiously. I took out some water bottles and poured them into bowls. I took some meat and tore it in two, handing half to Rupert.



We ate everything. I was usually more careful with the rations, but we needed to nourish our moods as much as our bodies after all the drama at the compound. Besides, we could always find more food now that we were back in the forest.



We set out more slowly than before. We had to pace ourselves and keep an eye out for things to hunt. As we walked, Rupert cleared his throat.

‘Gwen, I umm . . . I . . . have something . . .’

‘What is it?’

Rupert frowned with that worried, thoughtful look of his that was starting to become familiar.

‘I’m really sorry, I don’t know how—’

I put a hand on his shoulder to interrupt him and said, ‘You’re not to blame for them getting my parents away from us. You did some great stuff there . . . and you shut all the power down! I couldn’t have gotten this far without you.’



‘I’m good with computers,’ he said, still looking worried. ‘But there’s . . .’ He hesitated for a moment. ‘There’s something I have to tell you and I don’t know how to say this, but you should know . . .’

Rupert took a deep breath. ‘I really am sorry. I’m . . . I’m not sure if I really saw your parents at the compound.’





‘What?’ I stopped in my tracks, eyes flaring. The dogs echoed my motion, sensing my anger.

‘I just . . . I really wanted to rescue my mum and dad. I thought that if you thought yours were there too – and, I mean, they might have been – that you’d help me.’

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing.

‘I promise to help in whatever way I can,’ said Rupert. ‘I’ll make it up to you, I swear. And I’ll never lie to you again.’

I wanted to leave him there to fend for himself, the liar! I think he saw that in my face.

‘Wouldn’t you do anything to rescue your parents?’ he asked. ‘I’m so sorry.’

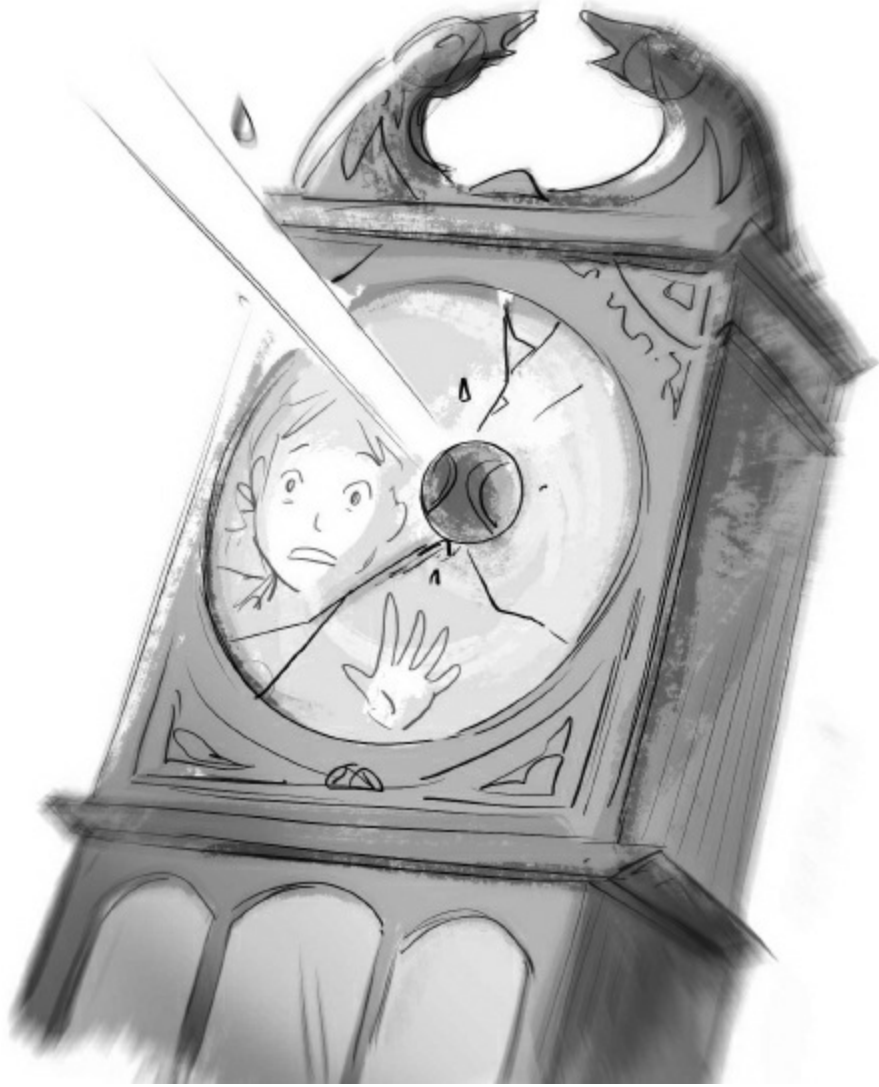
I growled at him, deep in my throat, and my dogs watched attentively, to see what I would do next. I looked back at the road.

I remembered one of my own lies. Before trucks and soldiers and dogs and eagles.



My parents had always told me not to throw things in the house, but I had a new ball that needed testing out, and it was raining outside. I stood in our hallway and threw it as hard as I could, watching it ricochet off the walls and ceiling and into the living room.

Straight into Dad's antique grandfather clock.





It made a huge crack in the glass.

My sister Kate used to get told off for dropping her schoolbag near the clock, because Dad was worried the glass would crack. So, when Dad saw the crack, I said that Kate must have done it with her bag.

Kate heard me and looked at me, glowering like thunder. Dad saw the look on my face and wasn't fooled for a second. I immediately burst into tears.

Kate stormed out and didn't talk to me for three days. Dad gave me a big hug as my apology came out broken by my sobbing.



‘As long as we’re true to ourselves, and each other, we can fix just about anything,’ Dad whispered.

‘Kate huh-huh-hates me now,’ I gasped.

‘She’s mad at you now, but it will pass. We’re family.’

I wanted that hug back. I wanted my sister back, talking to me or not.

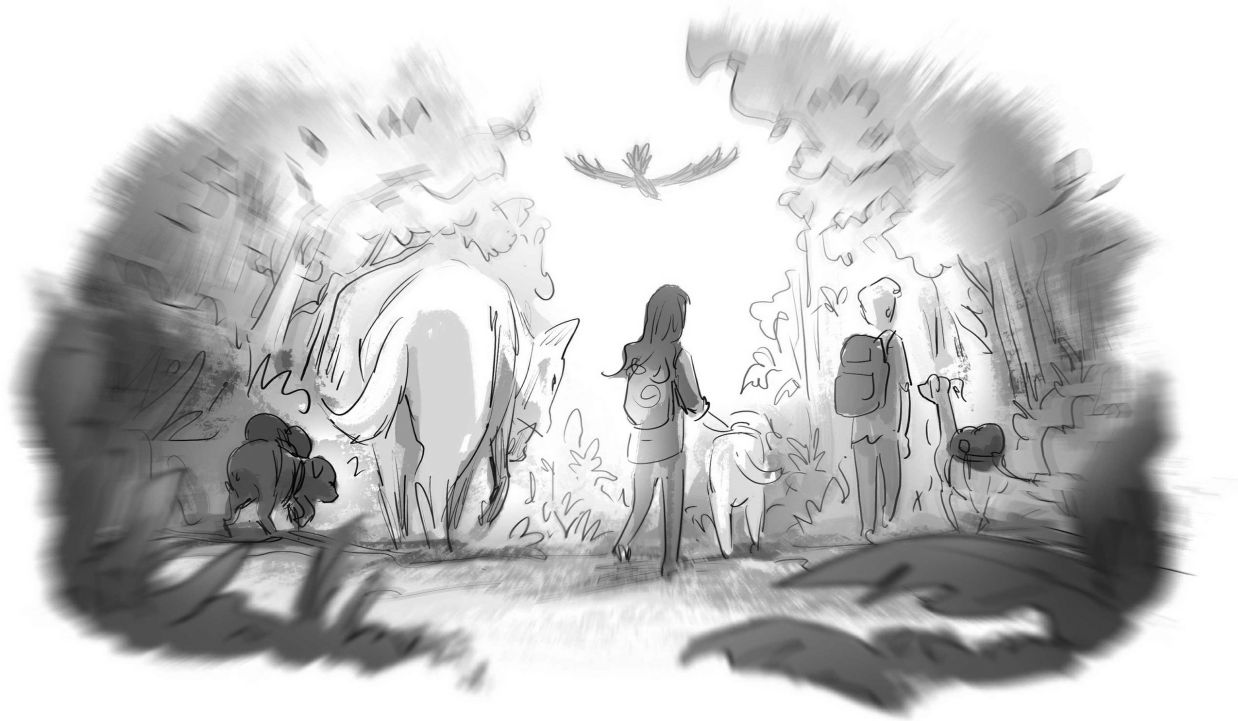
I wanted my family back, and I was going to get them.



Maybe my parents had been in those trucks and maybe they hadn't. The thing was, I didn't have much else to go on.

'Come on,' I said to my dogs, nodding ahead. We turned away from Rupert and began to move off.

Then I looked back at him and saw the growing fear in his eyes as he wondered whether we were going to leave him there alone.



‘You too,’ I muttered.
A pack was a pack, it seemed.
Together we went into the forest, as unsure of the path ahead as ever.

TO BE CONTINUED . . .

The adventure continues!

WOLF GIRL³



**COMING
SOON!**

**When disaster separates Gwen from
her family, she must fend for herself,
all alone in the wilderness...**



Some heroes are legends.
Some legends are real.

