



Felix reached the slope beneath the bridge in less than a minute. In the cadets he'd always been the best at mountaineering, but this was by far the fastest he'd ever descended a rope. A well-worn track ran along the bottom of the slope, following the path of the river. He scrambled down to it, his feet slipping on the wet grass. He was surprised at how deafening the sound of the water was as it surged between the rocks, erupting in foam before turning into rapids. He found his eyes drawn to the point where the girl and the drone had vanished. He shivered and turned away, pushing the image of her face out of his mind.

He risked a glance up at the bridge and was relieved to see that no one was following. Clutching his bag of seeds close to him, Felix ran away from civilisation and into the wilderness. He ran until his body was exhausted, until his mind was too tired to think. It didn't take long for his legs to go from under him and he collapsed. He curled his aching body close to the trunk of a large oak tree and closed his eyes.

Leaning back against the bark, Felix heard his father's voice asking, "Is it safe?" After a few moments, he struggled up and stretched his arms as high as he could, closing his hands around a low branch. Bouncing on the balls of his feet he swung himself up onto the branch. Perching carefully, he searched for a new foothold to carry him higher. Within moments, he was high in the tree, hidden from view by the criss-crossing branches covered with spring growth. Satisfied that he was safely hidden, he snuggled up between the trunk and a strong bough. He closed his eyes and allowed exhaustion to wash over him.

Felix awoke to a warming morning sun filtering through the canopy of leaves. It took a moment for his eyes to focus and for the memories of the previous day to come flooding back. He wriggled his toes inside his trainers and flexed his back; lying still in the tree for so many hours had taken its toll.

Beneath the tree, something rustled. Felix tensed and quickly glanced down to a pile of leaves close to the bottom of the tree. As quietly as possible, he sat up and watched. A tiny hedgehog peeped out of the leaves. He smiled to himself. If only Clara could see him now - fearless Felix spooked by a hedgehog!

He realised with a start that it was hunger that had woken him. He had not eaten since school and his stomach growled in protest. He sniffed, moving his head up and down as he searched the air for scents. A wonderful smell of bacon and eggs hung tantalisingly in the gently swaying branches. But Felix realised, with a sinking heart, that cooking smells meant people.

Dropping from the tree, Felix stood and listened, feeling the breeze on his face. He shouldered off his pack and placed it carefully at the base of the tree before covering it with damp leaves. The seeds would be safe there. Without intending to, Felix found himself heading north, towards the smell of food, and closer to the unknown people. He picked his way carefully between the trees, frowning with impatience whenever his jacket snagged on a branch. He was glad it had rained during the night; dry crackling leaves would have revealed his presence instantly.

The sound of voices stopped Felix in his tracks. He ducked behind a holly bush and tried to tune into what they were saying. High above, a wood pigeon cooed and every now and then a cuckoo joined in. But it was the warning cry of the blackbird that set his heart racing. He had heard it often enough in Clara's garden when her cat went out looking for prey.

Suddenly, an arm grabbed Felix round the neck. He cried out in pain as his legs were kicked out from under him. Instantly, his cadet training kicked in; he forced his body to go limp, which enabled him to feel for his assailant's head. He jabbed his fingers into their eyes. The arm lock loosened suddenly, and Felix seized the opportunity, twisting his body and swinging back his elbows in a hard jabbing motion. There was a sharp intake of breath. Felix wanted to shout out, to scream at the attacker to let him go but every breath was needed. He heard himself panting hard as both he and the assailant swung round, locked together, before tumbling, still attached, to the ground.

Spluttering into the wet leaves, Felix found himself face down with his nose pressed against the soggy mass of decaying leaves. He gasped as his arm was wrenched back. He struggled for a moment longer before lying motionless. Something cold and wet was pulled over his head and he was plunged into darkness.

Though disabled, his cadet training stayed with him: focus, listen, note what happens. Never surrender. There was more than one person he was sure; the shuffling of feet gave it away. And although their voices were muffled, sentences would occasionally reach him as voices were raised in disagreement.

“Has he got the seeds?”

As if in answer, a rough hand flipped Felix onto his back. He felt fingers checking his pockets and pulling his jacket open. He kicked his legs in objection. He was lifted, hands under his arms, and pulled into a sitting position. The bag over his face was yanked off.

Felix gasped.

It was the girl from the bridge!

“Where are the seeds?” she demanded with a scowl.

She was alive. This was not a Corporation camp. He had found the Resistance!

“I’ve buried them under a pile of leaves.” He gestured in the direction he had come from. “By a large oak tree in a clearing over by...”

Immediately, three men jumped up and sprinted away.

The girl’s face relaxed into an almost smile. “You’ve brought the seeds just in time. Tonight, we attack the Corporation seed store and you will join us.”