

me. You saw me that time; you knew who I was. Your whole face relaxed as you focused.

‘Gemma,’ you said.

I nodded.

‘Thank you.’

‘You were dreaming, I just woke you up.’

‘Thank you.’

\* \* \*

After a while you let go. You sat cross-legged on the mattress and stared down at the floor. You were twisting your thumbs over each other, embarrassed I think.

‘What were you dreaming about?’ I asked.

You shook your head, dismissing me. I stayed there, waiting. The wood creaked around us, and the wind battered the metal roof. You glanced towards the window as if checking it was still there.

‘The children’s home,’ you said, quietly. ‘The journey in the van, leaving the land.’ You glanced out at the night sky and the stars. I looked out at them too. I thought I could maybe make out the straight line of the horizon, separating the black land from the greying sky. You sighed, running a hand over your face. ‘You probably think I’m a looney now, right?’

I looked down at you, huddled into yourself. ‘We all have dreams.’

Your big eyes were shining in the darkness like a nocturnal creature; a creature that needed picking up. ‘What are yours about?’ you whispered.

‘Home, mostly.’

‘London?’ You thought about the word, working out what it meant to you. ‘How can you dream about that place?’ you said. Again, your eyes went back to the window. ‘How do you love it so much?’

‘People love what they’re used to, I guess.’

‘No.’ You shook your head. ‘People should love what needs loving. That way they can save it.’ You were quiet for a long time then, staring out of your window, just thinking. I walked softly to the door.

‘I’m sorry,’ you whispered.

\* \* \*

Your bedroom was empty when I got up. I fed the chickens. On the way back the camel lumbered up to me. I scratched her ears, pulling at the soft hairs inside them in the way you had shown me she liked. She rested her nose on my arm.

‘He’ll keep you, you know,’ I murmured to her. ‘When I go, in a few months time, he won’t let you go too.’ I stroked the fur on her cheek, soft as a teddy bear’s. She chewed in a circle, her rubber lips brushing the back of my hand. ‘How come you’re so gentle?’ I said. ‘You should be wild, worse than him.’ I touched her long, lovely eyelashes with my fingertips. She blinked.

I took a couple of steps away from her, but she came with me, following behind. I walked around in a circle, the gentle thud of her hooves staying with me. I stopped and turned to her, wanting to try something.

‘Whoosh down,’ I said.

I lifted my arm the way you did, and, after a bit of a moan,

she tipped forward, her legs buckling underneath her. As her body hit the ground, she sent up a puff of dust.

‘Good girl,’ I said.

I knelt down to her. Like that we were about the same height, her nose was huge and her teeth rotten. Her sharp, slightly stale smell was strong in my nostrils. She turned her head towards the outbuildings, closing her eyes against the sun. I shifted towards her and put my arm over her wide muscled shoulder. She rested her neck against my side. I could slip onto her back like this, roll onto her hump and ride her. We could gallop off towards the sun.

I rested my head against her fur, and shut my eyes too. Balls of fire danced behind my eyelids. Right then, for that moment, it was enough just to sit there.

\* \* \*

You spent the entire day in your painting shed. It was mid afternoon before I plucked up the courage to go and see you. You’d been so different the night before, almost vulnerable . . . I wanted to see how you would react to me today.

The door of the shed was open, a little. I pushed it.

It was bright in that room, and hot, it took me a moment to adjust. The curtains that had been hanging from the window were torn down and bundled in a pile underneath. Sunlight was streaming in and I saw that the previously fading walls had been repainted with vividly coloured dots and swirls; streaks of reds and blacks and browns dashed across it. Leaves, sand and branches were stuck to some of these colours, giving the walls a texture. If I stepped back and looked at it all as a whole, I