

Then, another voice, pulling her back from Jasmine's cruel words.

“Come on, Holly,” said Amy. “You can do this.”

Holly turned back to look at Amy. Good, reassuring Amy — on the other side of the stream.

“Think of all the other scary stuff we've got through on this trip. Stuff you've aced. And this is the last bit — okay? Here on in, it's just woodland trails, couple of hills ...”

“And one more night in the sodding tent,” said Jasmine.

“One more night of your cooking too,” Amy shouted back.

“Ooh, nasty, Amy — no chocolate or biscuits for you tonight,” said Jasmine.

“Keep your chocolate,” said Amy. “Do I care?”

“Got other treats hidden away, hmm?” said Jasmine.

“Me to know, you to cry over,” said Amy. Holly looked from one girl to the other, trying to keep up with this little exchange, feeling that there was stuff between the two that she didn’t know about.

But also, with the distraction, now feeling her panic subsiding, as the focus switched away from her onto Amy.

*It was always so hard to have people looking at her.*

*Imagining what they thought; what they whispered.*

*And knowing most of it, all in her head.*

She took a deep breath, checked the straps on her backpack — though they certainly didn’t need a re-check.

And then, excuses for any hesitation gone, she stepped forward onto the wobbly bridge.

That first brave step.

“Hey! Way to go!” said Amy. “Go Holly! Go Holly!”

One step. Then another. Eyes locked on Amy.

Hands gripping the guide ropes tight.

The bridge now really swaying with every step, below her water rushing over rocks.

The panic back ... full-on ... rising again.

*Oh God, I'm going to fall, I'm going to fall and die.*

“Just two more steps and you're home, Holly. Look at me. Look at me,” said Amy.

Holly forced her eyes back up from the rushing stream and focused on Amy again — so solid, so confident, like a real explorer, one hand locked onto a tree trunk, the other hand reaching out to her now.

Mechanically, Holly shuffled her feet once more, moving her hands along the rope guides, nearly there, just one more step ...

Releasing the rope guide. Reaching out.

And then her hand locking onto Amy's hand, as she stepped forward onto the rock,

feeling Amy's arms wrap around her, Amy's cheek pressed against hers. Amy's beautiful long hair across her face.

“Go girl!” said Amy, pulling back.

Holly looked into her grinning face — those eyes so dark and deep and trusting — and smiled back.

“About bloody time,” said Jasmine, hurrying behind her.

Holly turned to see Jasmine already across.

“Oh, sorry. Just kidding,” she said. “Um, nice one, Holly. Now then, get the bloody map out. And how about we figure out where the hell we go now?”

Holly unzipped the map from the plastic sleeve she had on a loop round her neck. They all had roles, and one of hers was map keeper.

She unfolded it, placed it on a flat section of rock, took her compass from a pocket, and crouched down to work out her bearings.

Aware of the other two girls standing at her side, waiting.

Knowing that this was one skill neither of them had.

She stood up, looking back at the bridge and the stream — then at the woods that stretched away from them into a grey sky.

“Okay. We go that way,” she said, pointing at a rough track that disappeared into dense undergrowth.

Then she picked up her backpack, swung it back onto her shoulders, and headed off up the track.

She had passed the rope challenge and now *she* was the leader.

“Better be right,” said Jasmine behind her.

“Maps? Navigation? Holly’s *always* right,” said Amy.

Holly, hearing, smiled to herself as she pushed her way through the bushes that had grown over the path.