When the fire was robust he pushed two stones into the flames and after a while he removed them with a stick and spread them with the oat paste Narris had brought. He smelled the oatcakes cooking and again he felt that sense of achievement.

He had cooked a meal for himself.

It wasn't much, but it had begun.

Robin was sitting in his shelter, arranging sticks on a fire he had built at its entrance. He heard footsteps through the wet leaves. Narris had returned. Robin felt him slide into the shelter. They sat in silence. Rain dripping through the roof.

'Why aren't you saying anything?' Robin said. 'What's wrong? Have you brought the axe again? You don't need it.'

No answer. Narris's slow, steady breathing.

'I'm learning to survive,' Robin said. 'You don't need to kill me.'

A hand reached to touch his shoulder. Robin listened to the *churr* and *chack* of a nightingale, and from somewhere far off the hooting of an owl.

'It's after dark, isn't it? You don't normally come here this late.'

Still no answer. Robin turned his head. There was a smell like freshly skinned rabbits. A musky aroma like a dog with wet fur.

You're not Narris. Who are you?

Whoever it was took their hand from Robin's shoulder. They edged out of the shelter and got to their feet. They stood there for what felt like a long time.

Finally, a woman's voice said: 'Kill you?' She laughed softly, then said: 'After waiting so long?'

She laughed again, then turned, and her footsteps faded through the leaves.

Shadow of the Wolf.indd 207 29/4/14 12:46:53