

THE rest all go to their homes, after the tower falls and nobody can find an excuse to keep the group together. He has never had a home, and has never felt settled returning to the same bed night after night. She had come to loathe her home, and besides, it has been destroyed now. The lack of mooring is one of many things they have in common, and so they set off together.

He tries to make sure she is ready for life on the road. She assures him that she is familiar with it. Military campaigns back then were long and tedious affairs, with days of travel. But this isn't quite the same. Then, she was accompanied by a whole squadron, who paid as much attention to her needs as they could muster under the circumstances. Now, it's just the two of them, with no magic, and she learns that travelling is a visceral business. Sometimes they must go for days without food; afterwards, they consume a veritable banquet to make up for it, if the right supplies can be had. And peculiarly, everything seems to hurt. This way of life lends itself to frequent injury. New abrasions form on top of old ones; routine aches and twinges begin to make themselves known.

They dress each other's wounds resolutely, and she learns to ignore pain in the same way that he has been used to for years. But it is far more difficult to hide the fact that their minds are not at rest. Most nights, at least one of them will wake suddenly in a terror, remembering a half-nightmare of the ruined world. The other takes their companion in their

arms until sleep eventually returns to them both.

Sometimes they fight. It is strange not to be doing it out of necessity, especially for her; it was her career and her first love. Now, the creatures they encounter in the wild go down after a single blow; nothing will ever require the level of skill that was previously essential to gain. So from time to time, they square up to each other and use their bloodied fists to relieve the tension. Soon enough, bruised and winded, they feel that old exhilaration once again.

They pass by the homes of their friends from time to time. Invariably, they are told how skinny and unwell they look. They feign interest in hearing about settled, monotonous lives, and eat all the food they can while they have the opportunity. They creep outside at night rather than having to stay in proper beds – the rigidity of four stone walls makes them anxious after having grown accustomed to the open sky.

Sometimes the pain is too much to ignore, and they pause their travels, staying in their tent for days at a time. They do little but hold each other, murmuring soothing words as a distraction from their memories. At night, they find themselves sleeping closer together; another breathing body helps to block out the anguish. Holding turns to caressing and kissing, soft moments of intimacy, fingers run carefully through hair and tears shed onto each other's faces. Half-spoken confessions are cut off by tender kisses.

They continue to move on, their bandaged hands now

pressed together more often than not. Before, they would do such a thing only for physical support; now, that connection has become vital. Shared looks and murmured comments help them through each day's travels. They are bound to each other.

Under canvas, they reach out and find what they were seeking. His bony hands slip between her breasts, over her hips, her thighs. She extends her own hand and finds his member, warm and ready, one of the few parts of his body not weakened or scarred. His moans drown her gasps as he enters her and she clings to him tightly, clenching her muscles with each of his thrusts; there is no trace of ice in her now.