

four hours until high tide. Already he could see the water level rising. He rolled a big rock over beside the smoky flames to use as a chair. The incessant rain made the fire sputter and send up whiffs of smoke with a sweet burnt smell. Cole wrung water from the atóow and pulled it back over his shoulders. At least the mosquitoes had disappeared.

When Cole looked up again to check the tide level in the bay, he blinked in disbelief. There, where the stream entered the bay, stood the Spirit Bear again. The huge white animal looked frozen on the shoreline, as motionless as the stones under its giant paws. It stared at Cole.

Cole picked up the makeshift spear in one hand, the knife blade in the other. Keeping his eyes on the big creature, he hurried along the shoreline toward it. This time the bear could not pull one of its disappearing acts. It would have to run to escape. But still it remained, rain dripping from its matted coat.

As Cole neared, he slowed. Any second now, the bear would turn and run. Just in case it didn't, Cole raised the spear over his shoulder.

Instead of fleeing, the bear shifted position to face Cole directly. Head hung low, it waited. Cole hesitated, then kept inching forward. It puzzled him that the bear would hold its ground. It must

be bluffing. Surely it would turn and run. If it didn't, it would die. He intended to kill it. Didn't the stupid moron know that?

"Get out of my face," Cole muttered, stopping less than fifty feet away.

The bear breathed in deeply but did not move.

"Go on! Get!" Cole challenged.

Still the rain fell, and the bear remained.

Cole drew the spear back, then hesitated to glance over his shoulder. No one was watching. He could easily back away from this bear and not a single human being on the planet would ever know. Cole gripped the spear so hard his knuckles hurt. A lifetime of hurt, a lifetime of proving himself, a lifetime of anger controlled his muscles now. Again he inched forward.

Scarcely twenty feet from the bear, Cole paused one last time. Vapor from the Spirit Bear's breath puffed in tiny clouds from its wet black nose. Raindrops beaded on its white bushy hair and dripped off in miniature rivulets. The bear waited calmly as if part of the landscape, like a tree or a boulder, not conceding one inch of space.

Cole found courage in the Spirit Bear's stillness. It must be scared. Why else would it just stand there instead of attacking? Cole felt his

smoldering anger ignite. He knew that soon life would be altered forever one way or another, but nothing in any cell of his being allowed him to back away. If the bear did not turn and run, that left only one alternative. "You're dead," Cole whispered.

Even as he spoke, he started forward, gripping the knife and aiming the spear at the Spirit Bear's broad white chest.

CHAPTER 8



WHEN COLE'S ADVANCE brought him within ten feet of the Spirit Bear, he made his move. He flung the spear with all his strength, fully intending to kill.

A blur of white motion deflected the shaft down into the grass as the bear lunged. Cole never even had time to raise the knife before the bear was on him, clubbing him down with a powerful blow. Cole's body folded and collapsed to the ground. Before he could roll away, another crushing paw shoved his face into the dirt. His jaw struck a rock.

Rolling over, then scrambling to his feet, Cole ran toward the trees, but they offered no protection. The bear was on him again, dragging him down, its breath rotten. Cole gripped the knife with his left hand and clawed with his right at some long stalks of Devil's Club—anything to pull himself away from the raking claws of the bear. With each desperate grab, hundreds of tiny