

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

thistles pierced his fingers.

He ignored the thistles as the bear sank its teeth into his thigh, lifting him like a rag doll. Cole's stomach churned, and he swung the knife wildly. Each time he stabbed the bear, its powerful jaws clamped harder. Cole felt his pelvis crack. His body went weak, and the knife slipped from his hand.

The bear dropped him to the ground and pawed at his chest as if raking leaves. Sharp claws ripped flesh with each swipe. Cole raised his right arm to ward off the attack, and teeth clamped onto his forearm. Then everything seemed to happen in slow motion.

He felt his body flop back and forth, the bear swinging him by the arm. Cole pounded the bear's face with his fist, but nothing stopped the savage attack. In desperation, he grabbed the bear's neck to free his arm from the crushing jaws. A handful of white hair pulled loose. Cole heard the loud crack of bones breaking in his forearm. Then the bear dropped him with a grunt.

Cole cowered on the ground, pain piercing his shoulder. All feeling in his right arm had disappeared. As the bear turned toward him again, Cole screamed, "No! No more!" but his words came out as coarse grunts. He collapsed onto his back.

As if finishing its attack, the Spirit Bear placed its huge paws on Cole's chest and gave a single hard shove. Air exploded from Cole's lungs. Ribs snapped.

Mouth wide open, Cole gasped but could not catch his breath. The Spirit Bear towered over him, its rank breath warm. Cole struggled to move his arms, his legs, anything to escape the white monster, but his body refused to move. Waves of nauseating pain flooded through him. Each time he gasped, pain gripped his chest and the thick sweet taste of blood filled his mouth.

For an eternity, the bear remained standing over Cole in the chilling rain. Finally it drew in a deep breath, raised its massive head, and stepped casually to the side. With a lazy shuffle, it turned away and wandered down the shoreline.

For long minutes, the world stood still. Gasping for air, Cole tried to roll to his side, but pain tore at his hip and chest. As air gradually seeped back into his lungs, he strained to raise his right arm, but his arm, like a broken branch in the grass, refused to move. The only movements Cole could make were with his left arm and his head.

The incessant rain tickled his cheeks and mixed with the blood from his mouth, dripping red by the time it hit the ground. Cole closed his eyes. Was he dying? Every movement, every

breath tortured him. The blood seeping into his throat choked him. He coughed, and pain ripped at his chest. His stomach churned, and the world threatened to turn black. Cole resolved never to cough again. He would drown first.

He gazed upward and found himself under the branches of a tree in full view of the bay. The lumpy ground hurt. Barely ten feet away, seagulls strutted around, squawking, flapping their skinny wings, and picking at something in the grass.

Cole stared down at his chest. The bear's claws had raked him open. His shredded shirt exposed gashes with long strips of flesh missing. One of the gulls squawked as it stole a stringy piece of meat and skin from another gull. Cole realized the gulls were fighting over bits of his own torn flesh.

He tried to shout and wave at them, but all he managed was a lame flopping of his left hand. A dull angry grunt caught in his throat. The gulls shied a few feet, then returned to picking through the grass. In a rage, Cole tried to spit at them. The bloody mucus ran down his chin and dripped on his shoulder.

Cole licked his numb lips, but the pain made him stop—he had bitten his tongue when the bear slammed his face into the ground. He watched as one by one the gulls took to the air.

They circled out over the bay in search of better pickings.

Cole glared at them. The gluttonous seagulls had brazenly eaten chunks torn from his chest and were now on to something else—a herring or a clam.

What luck, Cole thought. To end up on an island with a stupid bear that didn't have brains enough to run away. And the seagulls? He hoped they choked to death. What pea brains, eating his ripped flesh as indifferently as they would bits of fish! They treated him like any other animal. Cole wanted to scream, "Hey, look at me! I'm Cole Matthews! I'm better than you." But all he could manage was a grunt. If only he had a gun.

The squawking of the gulls over the bay echoed like hollow laughter. They were laughing at him, Cole thought. He wished he had never come to this island. But he *was* here. Nothing could change that. He was trapped on a godforsaken island, alone, and mauled within an inch of his life by a white monster bear.

Cole tried to gather his wits. The mauling didn't make sense. In the past, everything had always been afraid of him. Why wasn't the bear scared? A bear with half a brain would have turned tail and run. Instead, this dumb animal had attacked. Now it wandered out in the woods