

CHAPTER 11



THE MOUSE STRUGGLED, biting at Cole's fingers with razor-sharp teeth, its tiny feet clawing frantically to escape. Cole pitied the scared little mouse, but he held on, gripping with all his strength. This mouse was his quarry, like a gull catching a herring or an owl catching a rabbit. He squeezed the mouse but was too weak to stop the struggling.

Cole felt the mouse squirming free, so quickly he brought his fist to his mouth. He pressed his hand against his lips and forced the struggling rodent between his teeth. It kept struggling, biting at Cole's lips and tongue.

Cole bit down, too, and a tiny bone crunched. The mouse spasmed but kept squirming. Cole bit again but his jaw lacked strength. Still the mouse wiggled and twisted, frantically chewing at Cole's tongue. For a brief second, Cole felt a furry head pass between his back teeth and he willed his jaws together with every ounce

of strength he could gather. The small skull crushed, and then the mouse stiffened and quit squirming.

With the dead mouse bunched in his cheek, Cole rested his jaw. Occasionally the tiny body twitched. Gradually, Cole worked his teeth together, gnawing on the body. Salty fluids filled his mouth, and he forced himself to again imagine a baby sparrow with an opened beak. Food was energy, and energy was life.

Eating the mouse exhausted Cole, and by the time he had chewed up the tiny bones and swallowed the wad of tough furry skin, he lay spent, mouth gaping open. His jaw ached and felt hollow. Mosquitoes landed on his lips and tongue at will. His skin had become swollen and puffy, burning with a fiery itch.

Cole wanted desperately to live, but how? The wretched insects sucked life from him faster than he could replenish it. He closed his eyes to the bloodletting, but that did not stop the torment. In the maddening darkness he sensed another movement. Again he opened his eyes, half expecting to see the Spirit Bear. Instead, he found two seagulls near his head, pecking fish chunks from the vomit he had thrown up in the grass.

My puke, Cole thought. They're eating my puke.

In that moment, Cole realized how badly he wanted to live. The food he had thrown up was still food. Those fish bits still contained energy, and energy was life. No thieving seagull was going to steal life from him. He jerked his arm at the gulls, "Mine," he grunted. "That's mine." Squawking, the gulls hopped beyond his reach.

Cole stretched his arm out, picked a small chunk of fish from the grass, and brought it to his mouth. After swallowing, he reached for more. Bit by bit he ate until the few remaining pieces were too small to pinch between his fingers. Finally he relaxed. Eating had taken his last ounce of energy. He closed his eyes as drizzle fell again. The falling moisture felt like more mosquitoes landing, but as it turned to rain, it cooled Cole's burning skin. He opened his cracked lips and let rain hit his swollen, chalky tongue.

Earlier, Cole had felt hollow and weak, as if all the blood had emptied from his body. Now he felt something difficult to describe. Despite the cold, energy seeped through his body, letting him grasp thoughts and hold them in his mind. He felt satisfaction. He had provided for himself and could feel his body absorbing the food he had eaten. But still his body desperately needed water. He was thirsty. So very thirsty.

As the rain fell again, the ground softened.

Cole dug with his fingers and brought mud up to smear onto his swollen neck and face. He smeared mud over his broken arm and onto his ripped-open chest. Maybe this would help keep the mosquitoes away. The wet dirt soothed Cole's burning skin. When his arm tired, he rested again.

Gradually, rain pooled where he had dug up mud beside him. He stared at the muddy water, then placed his hand into the puddle. Each movement was forced as he cupped his palm and brought the brown murky liquid up to his mouth. Again and again, he reached for more water. Sometimes only a few drops made it past his dried lips, but gradually moisture coated his throat and finally allowed him to swallow.

Cole let his weary arm collapse to the ground. Resting, he gazed out toward the bay at the eagles snatching fish from the surface. Nearer the shore swam a mother seal with her pups, their heads bobbing in the water as they worked the fish schools near the rocks. Cole scanned the ground once more and caught two more worms that surfaced with the new rain. He dropped them into his mouth, and chewed. The animals weren't the only ones who could forage to survive.

The sound of a twig breaking was Cole's only warning. He turned his head to find the Spirit

Bear standing, barely twenty feet away, staring at him, one paw forward as if frozen in midstride. The bear's shiny nose twitched as raindrops beaded into splashed pearls on its shaggy hair. Its eyes glinted and flickered.

Cole's heart raced, and his wounds throbbed. He felt the ripping of his skin all over again and heard once more the breaking of his bones. Too numb with cold and fear to even cry out, he eyed the Spirit Bear standing like a carved statue.

Cole licked at his cracked lips. Had the bear returned to kill him, or was it just toying with him? He found himself trembling with fear, not of death, but of helplessness. He hated being at the mercy of the world around him. Why didn't this monstrous white creature just walk in and finish what it had started? A single bite from its massive jaw, one hard swat from its powerful paw, anything now would tip the balance and end this nightmare.

One way or another, Cole decided to bring this moment to a conclusion. His mouth held little moisture, but deliberately he dredged up spit from deep in his throat, all the while meeting the bear's intense gaze with one of his own.

When not one more drop of moisture would form, Cole painfully lifted his head. He sucked in the deepest breath he dared. He was spitting at

more than the Spirit Bear. He was spitting at his life. The world would take him to the grave with a slimy goober on its face. Cole Matthews would still have the last word.

Preparing for his final act of defiance, Cole drew his chin back, then he spit hard, flinging the saliva with a desperate throw of his head. Pain attacked him from all sides, but he kept his eyes open. He wanted the satisfaction of watching this last moment.

As if in slow motion, the glob of spit arched weakly toward the Spirit Bear but landed in the grass far short of its mark. Cole collapsed. That was it then, he had done all he could. Now the world could do as it pleased with him.

The Spirit Bear raised its head slightly and sniffed the air with a long curious breath, then it started forward. Cole tensed. This was how the first attack should have ended.

CHAPTER 12



THE SPIRIT BEAR approached Cole with a slow lazy stride, its head held low. Cole clenched his fist. Maybe he could hold up his arm. Maybe he had energy for one last swing.

Ten feet away, the bear paused where Cole's spit had hit the grass. It lowered its head and sniffed. Still eyeing Cole, the Spirit Bear casually licked up the spit, raised its head, eyes mild and curious, then turned and sauntered away.

Cole felt a sudden rush of tears and emotion. Death would be okay if it came fast, existence ending in one last violent moment of defiance. Cole could understand that kind of death. But here, he lay exposed, alone, ignored, his life leaking from his body like water from some rusty bucket. Even a bear considered him insignificant, licking up his spit as casually as if it were dew.

The Spirit Bear never once slowed or looked back. Cole fought back his tears until the last trace of white faded into the thick underbrush,

and then he began to sob. He was dying, alone and insignificant, and nobody cared.

Drifting off into a dream world, Cole imagined he was a baby bird in a nest. Around him, a storm raged and the trees swayed violently. Driving rain pelted him like hail.

Frantic, Cole struggled to fly, but he couldn't escape the nest. All he could do was open his beak wide and raise it upward toward the sky, the action a simple admission that he was powerless. There were no conditions, no vices, no lies, no deceit, no manipulation. Only submission and a simple desire to live. He wanted to live, but for that he needed help; otherwise his life would end in the nest.

Suddenly, the violent winds calmed, and the rain stopped. Cole strained upward with his opened beak as his senses drifted back into the real world of pain. Again he was in his wounded body on an island prison. The storm had stopped, and something had awakened him. An overpowering animal smell. His eyes opened.

Looming over Cole, its breath warm and musty, towered the Spirit Bear. Inches away. Its legs rose like pillars beside Cole's arms, and mist glistened on its white hair.

The world stopped.

For Cole there was no wind, no cold, no time,

no pain, no sound. There existed only one object, the Spirit Bear. Its shiny black eyes held eternity. Its intense gaze penetrated, never wavering.

Surprisingly, Cole did not feel the terror he had once known. Maybe the Spirit Bear had come to kill him. Maybe it was only curious. Whatever the reason, Cole gazed calmly back up at the bear. He knew he would fight to the last moment to live. Any animal would do that. Even worms coiled back and forth to escape capture and death. But Cole also knew that if he died, his time had arrived. It would be like the baby birds, or like the worms, or the mouse. It was his turn.

Cole's eyes watered, and he blinked. This was the end, then. Resigned to his fate, he gazed into the bear's eyes but found no aggression—only curiosity. It was as if the bear were waiting. But waiting for what? Instinctively, Cole gathered what little spit he could in his mouth. When the meager fluid bathed his tongue, he stopped, paused, and then swallowed.

Cole did not understand why he had swallowed or what happened next. Hesitantly he raised his left hand off the ground. As if reaching for an electric fence, he cautiously extended his fingers toward the Spirit Bear's shoulder. Inches away, he paused.

Awareness flickered in the bear's eyes.

Cole forced his hand forward until his fingers touched the bear's moist white coat. If he was going to die, he wanted to know what the animal felt like that killed him.

Still the bear remained motionless.

Cole's fingers sank into the bushy white hair until he touched solid body. With his fingertips, he felt warmth. He felt the bear's breath and heartbeat. And he felt one more thing. He felt trust. But why? Already he had tried to kill the bear. He had spit at it. This bear had defied him, and he had hated it with every fiber of his existence. Still touching the bear, Cole paused. Then he drew his hand away.

The Spirit Bear never blinked, never twitched a muscle. Only when Cole's hand again rested on the ground, only then did the towering animal lower its huge head as if nodding. A second time it dipped its head, then stepped back away. With one fluid motion, it swung around and ambled silently down toward the waterline.

Cole watched, forgetting to breathe. He expected the bear to stop when it reached the shoreline, but the great white animal waded into the water and swam with powerful strokes out into the bay toward the open ocean. A thin wake spread like a giant V behind the departing creature until it became a silhouetted speck, finally

disappearing. Cole let his imagination keep the bear visible awhile longer. Finally, even that image faded.

Cole blinked and took a breath, as if he were awakening.

Around him, the land had come alive. A clear horizon showed under a dark blanket of clouds. Reflections of blue and gray swirled on the water as a fresh breeze ruffled the spruce boughs and sent ripples along the shoreline. Seagulls screeched and squawked their way out over the bay, diving and hunting for food. Barely a hundred feet away, the mother seal and her spotted pups appeared, their doglike heads peeking out of the water.

The air still carried the rotten smells of vomit and death, but also the fresh odor of seaweed and moss and cedar and salt. Vivid colors glistened wet in the bright light.

A strange thought occurred to Cole: the world was beautiful. Yes, the world *was* beautiful! Even the wet moss and crushed grass near his hand was beautiful. Staring at the delicate patterns, he wondered why he had never noticed this all before. How much beauty had he missed in his lifetime? How much beauty had he destroyed?

But the past was another time and another life that Cole could never recapture—and didn't want to. He knew only the moment, and this

moment he was alive, the most alive he had ever felt. It struck Cole as odd that he should feel this way at the very moment when his body had reached the point at which it could no longer exist. Even as he stared at the moss, deep inside him the balance was shifting to the other side. Clinging to life was like hanging from a bar on the playground at school. On the playground he could hold on for a long time, but when his grip finally tired, his fingers slipped quickly and he fell.

Now Cole felt himself slipping fast. He had struggled too long to hold on, his energy bleeding away. Now it was his turn to die. This thought made Cole sad, but he accepted it. He felt content. Before the end of life he had seen beauty. He had trusted and been trusted.

That was enough.

Cole's head rested on a patch of spongy moss that acted as a pillow. His pain seemed to float, like a haze, outside his body. He closed his eyes, relaxed, and let the balance shift. And as it shifted, Cole felt himself floating upward into a cloud. Gradually a buzzing sound gathered in his head, growing louder and louder. The sound bothered Cole. He wanted quiet now.

Abruptly the buzzing stopped and squawking seagulls surrounded his body. He could hear them arguing over him. This was what it felt like

to die. He hadn't imagined it being so noisy. The seagulls began pecking at his arms and legs. Cole could not open his eyes, but he jerked his arm. Why couldn't the seagulls leave him alone? Why couldn't they wait just a little longer until he had died? Did they have to pick meat off his bones while he was still breathing?

Instead of stopping, the pecking grew worse. Now the gulls were pulling at his legs and shoulders with giant beaks, trying to lift him. Bizarre sensations bombarded Cole as his body was dragged and bumped across the rocks. Sharp pain stabbed through his wounds. Then the loud cry of the seagulls turned into garbled gibberish as they tugged at his shirt and shoes. What were they doing to him?

Gradually, soft and warm sensations enveloped Cole, like being wrapped in a blanket. His head was tilted forward, and warm liquid filled his mouth. It didn't make sense. How could rain be warm? His head must be in a puddle with muddy water running past his lips. Or maybe it was blood. He spit out the liquid, and felt it warm on his neck. He didn't want to drown in blood or muddy water. But again warm liquid flowed past his lips, and Cole gave in. It didn't matter anymore how he died. He could drown, freeze, or be pecked apart by seagulls. All that mattered was

that the balance had changed, and now he was drifting over the edge.

"Hang in there, Champ! Hang in there!" a voice sounded.

The buzzing sounded again, louder, deafening, like a swarm of giant bees preparing to attack. Then the world tilted and bounced. With each bounce, pain throbbed in Cole's chest. Something cradled his neck and steadied his head when the jarring grew too intense. He kept trying to push himself over the edge, but again his head was lifted and more warm fluid flowed past his lips.

"Hang with me, Champ!"

Cole spit out another mouthful. The sweet fluid was keeping his pain alive, allowing all the bouncing and the noise to continue. But nothing could stop it from leaking past his teeth and swollen parched tongue. The warm fluid flowed down into his throat and brought back the cold. Chills wracked his body in uncontrolled spasms. He moaned. When would this horrible nightmare ever end?

Then, suddenly, he awoke.

His eyes opened.

And nothing made sense.

Gone were the bay and the fallen tree. A dark and restless sky still moved overhead, but where

was the hard ground, the wet, the mud, the dead birds? A thick blanket held both of his arms in close to his chest. The blanket was brown and not the colorful at.óow. Where was the at.óow?

Cole's vision was blurred, but he understood that he was lying in the bottom of a shallow aluminum skiff. Kneeling on one knee, steering, was Edwin, the Tlingit elder who had helped bring him out to the island. Instead of his normal detached faraway look, Edwin's eyebrows furrowed with concern.

Cole blinked hard to focus. His head rested on someone's lap. Then he recognized Garvey, leaning over him, his face haggard with worry. "We'll be home soon!" Garvey shouted above the roar of the engine.

Too weak to answer, Cole let his eyes close again. He struggled to recall what had happened but couldn't.

Garvey shouted something to Edwin, and the engine revved louder. Spray whipped across the bow as the boat surged into the waves. Cole held his breath and tensed to lessen the pain in his ribs. It was as if somebody were beating on his chest with a bat. He felt Garvey's strong grip tighten each time they hit a big wave.

The hard bucking lasted forever, and Cole was drunk with pain by the time the boat finally

slowed. The screaming of the engine grew muted, replaced by anxious voices shouting to them. Garvey and Edwin shouted back. Then the boat bumped against something.

Cole opened his eyes. They had pulled alongside a dock. A cluster of people crowded next to the boat, staring down at him. People were moving, reaching, shouting. Cole cried out in pain as he was lifted from the boat. His ribs and leg felt as if they were being ripped from his body. Someone slipped, and Cole's leg scraped against the edge of the dock. He heard himself cry out. More footsteps pounded and voices shouted. The dock swayed, and Cole grabbed blindly at the air to stop the world from moving. He couldn't take any more of this torture. It had become violent.

The commotion continued. Tilting dangerously back and forth, Cole felt himself lifted onto a stretcher and carried up the dock to a waiting van. Doors slammed, a motor revved, and there was more bouncing as the van raced down the road. Cole's pain faded into delirium.

The next sensation was of entering a room and being lifted onto a soft warm bed. Careful hands dried him and worked his pants off. He dreamed that the Spirit Bear was ripping at his leg. But instead of a growl, a woman's soft voice said, "Easy, easy—you'll be okay. Just relax." Cole's

uncontrollable shivers were replaced by hot sweating as a towel patted his forehead.

When the commotion finally stopped, Cole lay completely spent, drifting in and out of consciousness. He felt a warm blanket being tucked in around his neck, and he opened his eyes. Where was the at.óow?

Seeing Cole's eyes open, Edwin and Garvey stepped forward, one on each side of his bed. Edwin studied Cole. "Sure busted yourself up," he said plainly.

Garvey nodded agreement. "Lightning knocked down a big tree. The branches must have hit you."

Cole tried to speak, but no words came to his throat.

A short round-faced Tlingit woman crowded in beside the bed. "His wounds aren't from any tree," she said, pulling back the blanket. "Look."

Edwin glanced down at the bloody red gashes surrounded by puffy ashen skin and whistled low. "Those are bite and claw wounds."

The woman nodded. "He's been attacked by a bear."

Cole nodded.

Fear flashed in Garvey's eyes.

"I'm okay," Cole succeeded in grunting weakly.

A thin smile failed to hide Garvey's concern. "Half your bones are busted, your body is swollen like one huge mosquito bite, and you're nearly starved to death. Believe me, Champ, you're not okay."

Cole forced a nod. "I *am* okay," he grunted again.

CHAPTER 13



A SHORT, SQUAT man poked his head inside Cole's room. "Ketchikan can't send a med-vac plane until morning," he called out. "It's getting dark and weather has set in."

The nurse felt Cole's forehead. "Looks like you'll be spending the night at Rosey's one-star hotel."

Edwin nodded at Cole. "If you hadn't guessed, this is Rosey." A rare smile creased his lips. "She's the best nurse in Drake."

"The only nurse," Rosey added.

"If you live through Rosey," Edwin said, "you'll live through anything."

Cole shuddered with another spasm of chills as Rosey gave Edwin a light shove, "You and Garvey go make yourselves useful," she said. "Get another blanket."

Garvey handed Rosey the at.óow blanket off a chair beside the bed. "Here, we brought this in from the island."

"It's damp," she said. "Grab a fresh one from the closet."

When Cole spotted the colorful blanket beside him, he felt a sudden warmth. He reached out and grabbed its edge.

Garvey studied Cole, letting him clutch the wet at.óow as Edwin brought another blanket. He squeezed Cole's shoulder. "We'll talk more later. Get some rest now."

Cole let go of the at.óow and gripped Garvey's arm.

"I'm not going anywhere," Garvey reassured him. "Rosey and I will be here all night with you."

"Thanks," Cole whispered.

Rosey pushed in beside the bed. "This might sting a little." She poked a needle into Cole's left arm. "I'm starting an IV drip to get some fluids and antibiotics into you." Finishing, she tilted Cole's head up and put some pills gently inside his mouth. "Now, take these tablets. They should help the pain."

Cole sipped water from the glass she held to his lips and struggled to swallow the pills. When they finally went down, Rosey began working on Cole's wounds. The door opened, and another Tlingit woman brought in a Thermos of hot soup and set it next to the bed. Rosey turned to

Garvey. "Maybe you can get some food into this guy."

Edwin remained standing along the wall, watching intently as Garvey placed a big pillow under Cole's head and ladled spoonfuls of chicken broth between his cracked lips.

Cole's pain dulled as the medication took effect. Sipping soup, he watched Rosey. She worked cheerfully, as if there were nothing in the world she would rather be doing. When she left the room for more dressings, Garvey turned to Cole. "That bear used you for a chew toy." He pursed his lips with concern. "I'm sorry for getting you into this."

Cole had many things he wanted to explain but he was too weak and tired now. He shook his head. "My fault!" he whispered.

Garvey glanced at Edwin, who kept his focused gaze. Rosey returned to the bed, her hands filled with rolls of gauze and a brown plastic bottle. Garvey moved away from the bed to give her room. "You get some rest while Rosey finishes patching you up," he said to Cole.

"Can't do much patching," Rosey said. "He has broken bones. I wish we had him in a hospital tonight."

Cole closed his eyes while Rosey cleaned and bandaged his open wounds. The medicine made him sleepy.

Finishing her work, Rosey whispered to Garvey, "That bear had quite a time with him. He has broken ribs and maybe a broken pelvis. Add to that hypothermia and a broken leg and arm. I'm surprised he's even talking. Must be a tough kid."

"Not as tough as he thinks," Garvey whispered back.

Edwin murmured, "He'll be okay if he ever finds a reason to live."

Cole heard everyone's words as he drifted off. He slept troubled, dreaming of people he knew coming toward him out of a misty haze. Each person helped him. Garvey fed him. Rosey fixed his wounds. His father gave him money. Edwin offered him advice. His mother cleaned him and handed him new clothes.

Cole liked being helped. He liked using people. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck, and all the people turned into monsters. Everything they had done for Cole faded, and they laughed at him. "You fool!" they called. "Why should we do anything for you? You're nothing! You're a baby-faced con!"

Cole awoke in a sweat. It was night. He searched the darkness frantically. He heard regular breaths near him in the dark. "Garvey," he called, realizing he could talk. "Garvey."

Garvey's hoarse voice answered, "You okay, Cole?"

Cole heard someone getting up to snap the lights on. Garvey, still wearing his rumpled jeans and faded wool shirt, hurried to his bedside. A door opened from the next room, and Rosey rushed in. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Cole looked at the two of them, his nightmare still haunting him. "I had a dream," he said, his voice raspy. "People helped me, then they turned into monsters and laughed at me."

"It was just a dream," Garvey said, resting his hand on Cole's arm.

"But you two were there."

Rosey took Cole's hand in hers. "Well, I'm not a monster." She smiled. "Maybe Garvey is."

Cole didn't smile. "Why do you guys help me?"

Rosey looked at her watch. "It sure isn't for the pay and good hours." Then she shrugged. "Why live if you can't help others and make the world a better place?"

Cole looked up at Garvey. "Why do *you* help me?"

"Because we're friends."

Cole let his frustration show. "No. You didn't even know me when you first started helping me in Minneapolis."

Garvey studied Cole before answering. "You're right. I did it for myself."

Cole nodded. "That's what I figured—you didn't care about me. You were—"

"You're wrong," Garvey said. "I did care about you. But helping others is how I help myself."

"You need help?" Cole asked, surprised.

Garvey nodded. "I see a lot of myself in you. When I was your age, I spent five long years in prison for things I'll go to my grave regretting. I lived my early years here in Drake, but no one cared enough to take me through Circle Justice. If they had, maybe things would have been different." He shook his head with a sad smile. "Take my word for it, jail scars the soul. And I was never able to help those I hurt."

"Cole," Rosey said, touching his bandaged arm. "In a few months your body will heal, but time won't heal your mind as easily. Helping others can help heal your wounds of the spirit."

Still troubled by his dream, Cole said, "There are people who want to hurt me."

Rosey squeezed Cole's hand. "Those are the people who need your help. I'll bet you weren't a bundle of fun when Garvey first met you."

Cole shook his head.

"How is your pain?" Rosey asked.

"I hurt," Cole said.

The Tlingit nurse unwrapped a packet and prepared a syringe and needle. "Let's give you something to help you sleep."

"Give me something to take away the monsters," Cole said.

"Only you can do that," she answered.

Cole slept hard, his first real sleep in many days. When he awoke, a small lamp glowed in the dark near his bed. Rosey was already up, working quietly around the room. When she heard him stir, she snapped on the lights and came over beside the bed. "Did you sleep well?" she asked.

Cole nodded.

"Let's clean your dressings this morning," she said. "The people in Ketchikan think we're witch doctors out here in the sticks."

Cole grimaced. The pain had returned with a vengeance. Rosey saw him wince and gave him another shot. "Things will hurt worse before they're better," she said. "Just warning you so you'll know what to expect." Then she added, "But they really will get better."

While Cole waited for the medication to dull the pain, Garvey sat upright on his cot and stretched the kinks out of his back. He ran a hand through his tousled hair. "How about if I

get some breakfast?" he said.

Rosey nodded approval as she hung a fresh IV. Again she took Cole's temperature and pulse. Then she brought over a paper bag containing his clothes. "Here," she said, placing the bag beside the bed. "There wasn't much left of your clothes, but I had them washed up anyway to take with you."

Cole eyed the colorful atóow blanket folded on top of the bag.

As Garvey returned with juice and warm oatmeal, Edwin appeared at the door and announced, "The plane is in the air. Should be landing in about thirty minutes." He turned to Rosey. "After Cole eats, let's get him down to the dock. I've got help coming."

By the time Cole finished eating, two boys from the village had arrived to help lift him. The boys, both Cole's age, eyed him curiously as they carried him on a stretcher out to a waiting van. Rosey rode beside Cole in the van, holding his IV bag. When they reached the marina, the boys again helped Garvey and Edwin carry the stretcher to the end of the dock.

Rosey hung Cole's IV from a dock post. "I'll be right back," she said. "I need your medical records from the van." The boys followed Rosey, leaving Edwin and Garvey alone with Cole.

Edwin looked out at the horizon glowing red with early dawn. "Tell me what happened out there," he said.

"I didn't think anybody cared about me anymore," Cole said, struggling to speak. "That's why I burned the shelter." Hesitantly, he explained how he had tried to escape the island and how he was mauled trying to kill the Spirit Bear. "I wanted to kill it because it wasn't scared of me," he admitted.

As Garvey and Edwin listened, he continued, telling next about the storm. When Cole had finished, Garvey said, "You may never have use of that arm again. Life is made up of consequences, and you've sure made some bad choices."

Cole nodded. "My arm isn't important."

Garvey gave Cole a puzzled look. "Why do you say that?"

"If I like the cake, maybe the ingredients are okay, too." Cole smiled weakly. "A famous parole officer told me that once."

Garvey raised an eyebrow. "A famous parole officer let you get mauled by a bear. Now you'll end up in a hospital. When you're released, you'll still have your parents to deal with and you'll still be facing a jail term. I doubt the Hearing Circle will consider returning you to the island after what's happened. You realize all that, don't you?"

Cole nodded. "I do, but it's okay. Whatever happens now, I'm done being mad."

Edwin shook his head. "A person is never done being mad. Anger is a memory never forgotten. You only tame it." He pointed out toward the islands. "Tell me more about this Spirit Bear."

"The bear was pure white," Cole said. "The last time it came, it stood right over me." He spoke in a whisper. "I reached up and touched it."

Edwin studied Cole. "Spirit Bears live hundreds of miles south of here off the coast of British Columbia, not here in these islands." He shook his head. "We've hunted here since I was young, and so have my parents and their parents. There are no Spirit Bears around here except maybe in your mind."

Cole started to argue, then remembered the handful of white hair he had pulled off the bear. "Want to bet," he said, reaching for his pants in the bag beside him. Suddenly he paused. His life had become filled with lies, and the more he lied the more he always tried to prove he was right. Never had he been strong enough to simply tell the truth.

Cole put down the bag. Today things would change. From now on he would speak the truth, even if it meant going to jail. He spoke softly. "I

don't need to prove anything. I'm telling the truth."

Edwin narrowed his eyes at Cole. Then he turned and walked up the dock.

"Looks like I'm going to Ketchikan with you," Garvey said. "I need to go get my things. I'll be right back." As he turned to leave, he winked. "Don't go anywhere."

Cole watched Garvey leave. Finding himself alone, he looked out at the mirrored water. Maybe he had never really seen the Spirit Bear. He strained his neck to make sure nobody was watching, then reached into the paper bag and pulled out his jeans. Carefully he poked his hand into the front pocket and wrapped his fingers around something matted and fuzzy. He pulled his hand from the bag and opened his fist.

There in the palm of his hand was a wad of hair. Cole stared. The hair was white. All white. "It's true," he whispered, "I wasn't lying." Deliberately he raised his hand and tossed the hair into the water. Beginning today, he would tell the truth. His words would become his only proof.

As loud voices approached the dock and a plane droned overhead circling to land, Cole watched the white patch of hair. It floated on the water, and the breeze tugged it out away from the dock. The little clump bobbed about, drifting

with the tide, then finally blinked from sight.

Smiling, Cole rested his head on the stretcher. Edwin had said that anger was a memory never forgotten. That might be true. But the Spirit Bear was also a memory that would never disappear from his mind or heart.