

Can a mythical bear help
a boy beyond human
reach?

TOUCHING SPIRIT BEAR

BEN MIKAELSEN



CHAPTER 1



COLE MATTHEWS KNELT defiantly in the bow of the aluminum skiff as he faced forward into a cold September wind. Worn steel handcuffs bit at his wrists each time the small craft slapped into another wave. Overhead, a gray-matted sky hung like a bad omen. Cole strained at the cuffs even though he had agreed to wear them until he was freed on the island to begin his banishment. Agreeing to spend a whole year alone in Southeast Alaska had been his only way of avoiding a jail cell in Minneapolis.

Two men accompanied Cole on this final leg of his journey. In the middle sat Garvey, the gravelly-voiced, wisecracking Indian parole officer from Minneapolis. Garvey said he was a Tlingit Indian, pronouncing *Tlingit* proudly with a clicking of his tongue as if saying "Klingkit." He was built like a bulldog with lazy eyes. Cole didn't trust Garvey. He didn't trust anyone who wasn't

afraid of him. Garvey pretended to be a friend, but Cole knew he was nothing more than a paid baby-sitter. This week his job was escorting a violent juvenile offender first from Minneapolis to Seattle, then to Ketchikan, Alaska, where they boarded a big silver floatplane to the Tlingit village of Drake. Now they were headed for some island in the middle of nowhere.

In the rear of the skiff sat Edwin, a quiet, potbellied Tlingit elder who had helped arrange Cole's banishment. He steered the boat casually, a faded blue T-shirt and baggy jeans his only protection against the wind. Deep-set eyes made it hard to tell what Edwin was thinking. He stared forward with a steely patience, like a wolf waiting. Cole didn't trust him either.

It was Edwin who had built the shelter and made all the preparations on the island where Cole was to stay. When he first met Edwin in Drake, the gruff elder took one look and pointed a finger at him. "Go put your clothes on inside out," he ordered.

"Get real, old man," Cole answered.

"You'll wear them reversed for the first two weeks of your banishment to show humility and shame," Edwin said, his voice hard as stone. Then he turned and shuffled up the dock toward his old rusty pickup.

Cole hesitated, eyeing the departing elder.

"Just do it," Garvey warned.

Still standing on the dock in front of everyone, Cole smirked as he undressed. He refused to turn his back as he slowly pulled each piece inside out—even his underwear.

Villagers watched from the shore until he finished changing.

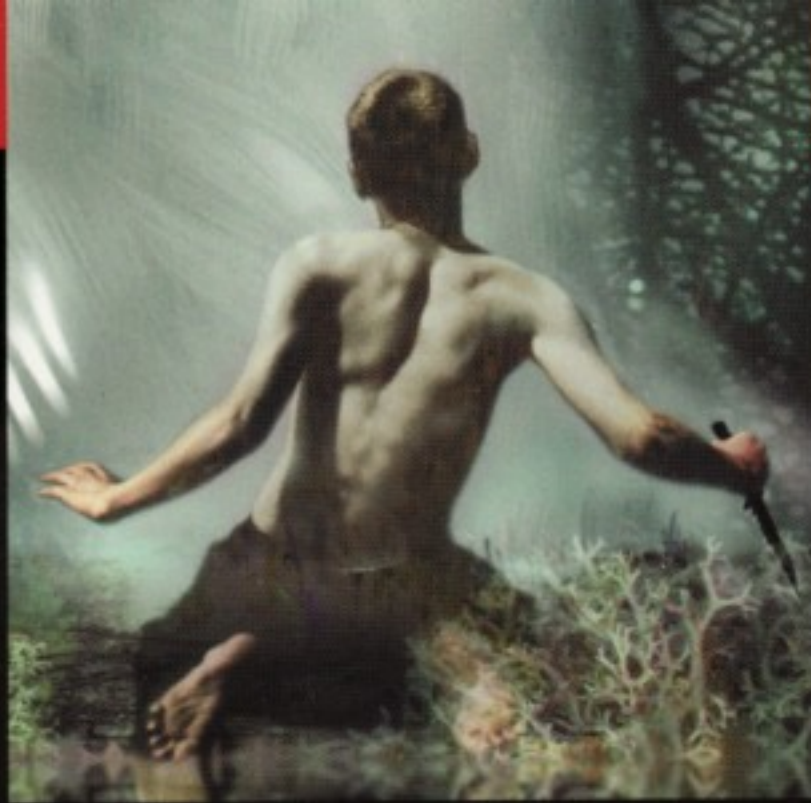
Bracing himself now against the heavy seas, Cole held that same smirk. His blue jeans, heavy wool shirt, and rain jacket chafed his skin, but it didn't matter. He would have worn a cowbell around his neck if it had meant avoiding jail. He wasn't a Tlingit Indian. He was an innocent-looking, baby-faced fifteen-year-old from Minneapolis who had been in trouble with the law half his life. Everyone thought he felt sorry for what he had done, and going to this island was his way of making things right.

Nothing could be further from the truth. To Cole, this was just another big game. With salt air biting at his face, he turned and glanced at Edwin. The elder eyed him back with a dull stare. Anger welled up inside Cole. He hated that stupid stare. Pretending to aim toward the waves, he spit so the wind would catch the thick saliva and carry it back.

The spit caught Edwin squarely and dragged across his faded shirt. Edwin casually lifted an oily rag from the bottom of the skiff and wiped away the slime, then tossed the rag back under his seat and again fixed his eyes on Cole.

Cole feigned surprise as if he had made a horrible mistake, then twisted at the handcuffs again. What was this old guy's problem anyway? The elder acted fearless, but he had to be afraid of something. Everyone in the world was afraid of something.

Cole thought back to all the people at home who had tried to help him over the years. He hated their fake



Whatever you do to the animals, you do to yourself. Remember that.

At fifteen, Cole Matthews has been fighting and stealing for years. The punishment for smashing Peter Driscall's skull into the sidewalk—his most recent crime—is harsh. This time, Cole will have to choose between prison and Native American Circle Justice. He will live either behind bars or in isolation for one year.

Cole chooses Circle Justice. But in the first days of his banishment to a remote Alaskan island, he is mauled by a mysterious white bear and nearly dies. Will the attack of the spirit bear destroy Cole's life or save his soul?

“Cole's journey to self-realization and truth through hardship, confrontation, and ritual will fascinate young and old.” —VOYA


“An excellent companion to Gary Paulsen's HATCHET and Allen Eckert's INCIDENT AT HAWK'S HILL.” —ALA Booklist

US \$5.99 / \$7.50 CAN

ISBN-13: 978-0-380-80560-0

ISBN-10: 0-380-80560-X



 **HarperTrophy®**

An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

Ages 10 up

Cover art © 2001 by Cliff Nielsen

Cover design by Hilary Zarycky

Cover © 2002 by HarperCollins Publishers Inc.