

MARION DANE BAUER



On My Honor



CHAPTER ONE

"CLIMB THE STARVED ROCK BLUFFS? YOU'VE gotta be kidding!" Joel's spine tingled at the mere thought of trying to scale the sheer river bluffs in the state park. He looked Tony square in the eye. **"Somebody got killed last year trying to do that! Don't you remember?"**

Tony shrugged, popped a wheelie on his battered BMX, spun in place. **"Nobody knows if that guy was really trying to climb the bluffs. He might have fallen off the top . . . or even jumped."**

Joel bent over his Schwinn ten-speed and brushed imaginary dust off the fender. **"Well, I'm not going to ride out there with you if that's what you're going to do. It's dumb."** He tried to sound tough,

sure of himself. Maybe, for once, he would be able to talk Tony out of one of his crazy ideas.

"You don't have to climb if you're scared, Bates," Tony said.

"Who's scared?" Joel licked his lips, which seemed to have gone dry. "I'd just rather go swimming, that's all. It's going to be a scorcher today. Or we could work on our tree house. My dad got us some more wood."

"We can do the tree house later," Tony said, "after we get back. And I don't feel like swimming."

"You never feel like swimming," Joel muttered, seeing in his mind the shining blue water of the municipal pool. The truth was, Tony rarely felt like doing anything that Joel wanted to do. Joel wondered, sometimes, why they stayed friends. There had to be something more than their having been born across the street from each other twelve years ago, their birthdays less than a week apart.

Mrs. Zabrinsky, Tony's mother, started babysitting Joel after his mother went back to work when he was six months old, so he and Tony had spent their baby years drooling on the same toys. Now Joel just checked in with her during the day, let her know where he was going, things like that. But he didn't know what kept him and Tony

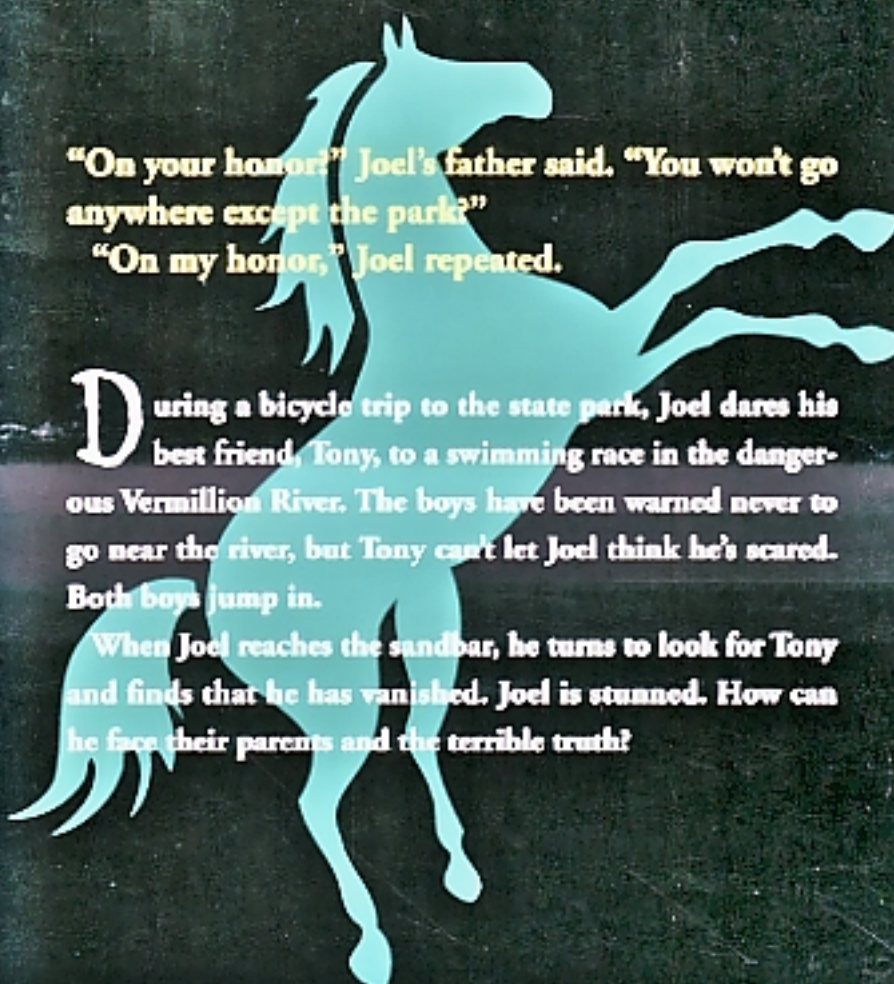
together except that, after Tony, other kids seemed boring.

"Come on, Joel," Tony said. "Ride out to the park with me today, and tomorrow I'll go swimming with you."

Joel thought of the long, curving, watery slide at the pool. He sighed. Tomorrow it would probably rain. Or Tony would have some other plan . . . as crazy as this one. He would pretend he had forgotten he promised to go to the pool. Joel resettled his lunch in the saddlebag behind his bicycle seat. It wasn't much fun to go swimming alone, but still it would be better than getting killed on the park bluffs. There were signs all over warning people to stay on the paths, and Tony wanted to climb from the river side, no less.

The front door of Joel's house opened and his father came out with Bobby, Joel's four-year-old brother. Mrs. Zabrinky was Bobby's baby-sitter now, and their father was always the one to give Bobby his breakfast and take him to the Zabrinkys' house because their mother had to leave for work earlier than he.

Seeing his father and the firm grip he maintained on Bobby's hand gave Joel an idea. He would ask for permission to ride his bike out to Starved Rock.



"On your honor!" Joel's father said. "You won't go anywhere except the park!"

"On my honor," Joel repeated.

During a bicycle trip to the state park, Joel dares his best friend, Tony, to a swimming race in the dangerous Vermillion River. The boys have been warned never to go near the river, but Tony can't let Joel think he's scared. Both boys jump in.

When Joel reaches the sandbar, he turns to look for Tony and finds that he has vanished. Joel is stunned. How can he face their parents and the terrible truth?

www.randomhouse.com/kids

US \$6.99 / \$8.99 CAN

ISBN 0780440466538



5 0699



YEARLING

A Yearling Book

New York

RL: 5.3

010 & up

COVER PRINTED IN THE USA