



BRIAN'S WINTER

GARY PAULSEN



Chapter

ONE

Fall came on with a softness, so that Brian didn't realize what was in store—a hard-spined north woods winter—until it was nearly too late.

He had never thought he would be here this long. After the plane crash that marooned him in the wilderness he had lived day by day for fifty-four days, until he had found the survival pack in the plane. Then another thirty-five days through the northern summer, somehow living the same day-to-day pattern he had started just after the crash.

To be sure he was very busy. The emergency pack on the plane had given him a gun with fifty shells—a survival .22 rifle—a hunting knife with a compass in the handle, cooking pots and pans, a fork, spoon and knife, matches, two butane lighters, a sleeping bag and foam pad, a first-aid kit with scissors, a cap that said CESSNA, fishing line, lures, hooks and sinkers, and several packets of freeze-dried food. He tried to ration the food out but found it impossible, and within two weeks he had eaten it all, even the package of dried prunes—something he'd hated in his old life. They tasted like candy and were so good he ate the whole package in one sitting. The results were nearly as bad as when he'd gluttoned on the gut cherries when he first landed. His

stomach tied in a knot and he spent more than an hour at his latrine hole.

In truth he felt relieved when the food was gone. It had softened him, made him want more and more, and he could tell that he was moving mentally away from the woods, his situation. He started to think in terms of the city again, of hamburgers and malts, and his dreams changed.

In the days, weeks and months since the plane had crashed he had dreamed many times. At first all the dreams had been of food—food he had eaten, food he wished he had eaten and food he wanted to eat. But as time progressed the food dreams seemed to phase out and he dreamed of other things—of friends, of his parents (always of their worry, how they wanted to see him; sometimes that they were back together) and more and more of girls. As with food he dreamed of girls he knew, girls he wished he had known and girls he wanted to know.

But with the supplies from the plane his dreams changed back to food and when it was gone—in what seemed a very short time—a kind of wanting hunger returned that he had not felt since the first week. For a week or two he was in torment, never satisfied; even when he had plenty of fish and rabbit or foolbird to eat he thought of the things he *didn't* have. It somehow was never enough and he seemed to be angry all the time, so angry that he wasted a whole day just slamming things around and swearing at his luck.

When it finally ended—wore away, was more like it—he felt a great sense of relief. It was as if somebody he didn't

like had been visiting and had finally gone. It was then that he first really noted the cold.

Almost a whiff, something he could smell. He was hunting with the rifle when he sensed the change. He had awakened early, just before first light, and had decided to spend the entire day hunting and get maybe two or three foolbirds. He blew on the coals from the fire the night before until they glowed red, added some bits of dry grass, which burst into flame at once, and heated water in one of the aluminum pots that had come in the plane's survival pack.

"Coffee," he said, sipping the hot water. Not that he'd ever liked coffee, but something about having a hot liquid in the morning made the day easier to start—gave him time to think, plan his morning. As he sipped, the sun came up over the lake and for the hundredth time he noted how beautiful it was—mist rising, the new sun shining like gold.

He banked the fire carefully with dirt to keep the coals hot for later, picked up the rifle and moved into the woods.

He was, instantly, hunting.

All sounds, any movement went into him, filled his eyes, ears, mind so that he became part of it, and it was then that he noted the change.

A new coolness, a touch, a soft kiss on his cheek. It was the same air, the same sun, the same morning, but it was different, so changed that he stopped and raised his hand to his cheek and touched where the coolness had brushed him.



In the Newbery Honor-winning *Hatchet*, thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson learned to survive alone in the Canadian wilderness, armed only with his hatchet. Finally, as millions of readers know, he was rescued at the end of the summer. But what if Brian *hadn't* been rescued? What if he had been left to face his deadliest enemy—winter?

Gary Paulsen raises the stakes for survival in this riveting and inspiring story as one boy confronts the ultimate test and the ultimate adventure.

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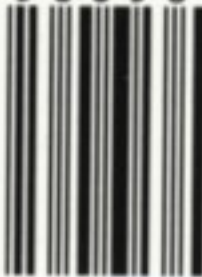
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