

H Y P E R I O N

CALIFORNIA YOUNG READERS' MEDAL WINNER

# RESCUE

Josh McGuire



**H**e saved the bear cub. Now who can save him?

*Ben Mikaelson*



# CHAPTER 1

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THE BEAR appeared among the aspen, gliding ghostlike toward the crystalline mountain stream. Her young cub lingered behind, romping about in the underbrush, bounding, spinning, and tumbling. Overhead, chickadees flitted branch to branch, their two-tone songs hushed by the soft wind whispering through the treetops.

Like a thunderclap, a rifle shot split the crisp spring air. Back and forth across the steep ravine the sound echoed and then hung, gradually dissipating and leaving the narrow valley blanketed in uneasy silence.

Down beside the stream, the black bear sow stumbled in midstride—she tried to catch herself but fell headfirst into the shallow cold water. She had come to drink and to rest and to let her only cub splash. Now, failing to recapture life with one last mighty breath, she lay still.

Thirteen-year-old Josh McGuire crouched behind a log forty yards upslope from the water. Wide eyed,

he stole a glance up at his father, Sam, who firmly lowered his rifle.

“Got him!” Sam muttered.

Josh breathed fast, the thunderous rifle shot echoing in his mind. He nodded as his father started toward the bear.

“You stay put,” Sam said over his shoulder. “I’ll go see if he’s down for good.”

“Dad,” Josh asked weakly. “Why don’t you wait in case he’s not dead? That’s what you always—”

“Shut up!” Sam said and kept moving.

Josh puzzled. Dad always told him you should wait before going up to a downed animal—especially a bear. Once they sat for two hours waiting on a downed elk. That time it had been fun, sitting with Dad, joking and telling stories—swapping lies, his dad called it. Glancing down now, Josh stared at the empty whiskey bottle lying in the grass.

His father stumbled toward the stream, muscles rippling and bulging under a faded orange shirt. The shirt, once bright and visible a ridge away, had been stained often by animal blood. Of late, spilled whiskey also made its mark.

Josh waited, staring at the black mound stretched motionless in the narrow mountain stream. The bear had seemed so much bigger when it was still alive and moving through the trees, its head tilted back, drifting warily side to side.

When Sam reached the bear, he tensed, reaching with a stick to poke it. His rifle was in position to fire.



Upstream, a small black animal scampered into some deadfall trees. The movement caught Josh's eye. "Dad, I saw a cub upstream," he shouted. "Did you shoot its mom?"

Sam only turned with an icy stare, deliberately motioning for Josh to come.

Josh ran up. "Did you see him, Dad? Dad, did you?"

Sam grabbed out, his grip biting into Josh's thin arm. Josh grimaced—he hated to show hurt in front of anybody. Sam spun him around. "Boy, you ever holler again when I'm poking a downed critter, I'll whup you till you're black as this here bear. Understand me?" he snapped.

Josh nodded, painfully aware of his mistake.

"Now, get the packs and give me a hand skinning," Sam ordered.

Rubbing his shoulder, Josh was glad he hadn't cried. He hated seeing anyone cry. His brother, Tye, had seldom cried, except after getting a rare licking. And even those lickings seemed to be for things that were funny. Josh remembered Tye's antics.

Once Tye came in the house after helping pull calves during calving season. Without washing his hands, he reached in and sneaked a couple of cookies from the cookie jar. That night Mom got furious. Not so much because Tye stole a couple cookies, but because he left afterbirth on the rest.

Another time, Pastor Woodward from the church paid a visit to their ranch. Right off, Tye took the overweight man down by the stream. Josh couldn't



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H Y P E R I O N

# A DARING RESCUE

—Or a deadly risk?



**E**ver since Josh's older brother died, his father has been drinking too much and taking his anger out on Josh. But when he orphans a bear cub, it's more than Josh can stand. Josh insists on rescuing the bear cub—only to find that he must surrender it to game officials.

Knowing the cub will be sent to a research laboratory, Josh makes a defiant choice. Taking only his brother's motorcycle, the cub, and his dog, Josh runs away to the mountains, vowing to stay until the hunting laws are changed. But the mountains hold unexpected menace, and Josh's bid for justice soon becomes a battle to survive.

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HYPERION PAPERBACKS  
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Cover art © 1993  
by Mike Wimmer  
Cover design by

Stephanie Bart-Horvath

ISBN 156282523-2



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