

Test of Courage

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Contents

1	The Search Is On!	1
2	Race Against the Cold	4
3	Lightning	7
4	The Truth	12
5	A Cry in the Night	17
6	A Life to Save	21
7	To the Clearing	25
8	Down the Mountain	30
9	Race Against Time	33
10	Night's End	39

CHAPTER 1

The Search Is On!

“There’s a search! Six-year-old boy. He’s been missing since morning on Mount Asher. A bad storm on the way. Get here as soon as you can. We’ll meet at the main parking lot on Mount Asher at six.”

“Right, David,” Trent said. Then he hung up the phone. It was finally time for his first search! He’d been waiting for this chance. Now it wasn’t practice any more—this was for real.

Trent pulled on a warm jacket. There was no way to tell when he would get home again. It was a big mountain.

He went to get his pack. It hung on the wall, all set to go. *Better check it again*, Trent thought.

Sleeping bag

Pack tent

Mess kit and packs of dried food

Water bottle

Matches in waterproof box
Waterproof clothing bag and extra clothes
Climbing ropes
Handheld GPS
Flashlight and extra batteries
Knife
Rescue horn
First-aid kit
Emergency kit

All the things he'd need. Trent hurried outside with the pack. He had less than an hour until he had to meet his Search and Rescue group on the mountain.

His dark blue truck sat in front of his house. Trent threw his pack into the back. His boots, jacket, and helmet were already there. He started the engine. He was glad he'd filled up on gas on the way home from work. He could see Mount Asher up ahead. It was high, dark, and green. *Huge*, thought Trent. *It must be covered with a million trees! And one little boy up there—somewhere—all alone.*

Trent thought about all the times he had gone camping with his mother and father and his sister, Kayla. He waited for a minute thinking about his sister. It always made him so sad. Then he thought about their camping trips on the mountain. They had always had such a

good time! They had spent many nights on the side of a mountain. *I was only five or six when we first went camping, thought Trent. I would have been scared to death if I had been lost. That poor little kid.*

Trent looked at his watch. There were not many hours of daylight left. He could see dark storm clouds at the top of the mountain. Suddenly he felt it coming—the old feeling. He started to shake. No, he couldn't let it stop him. Not now. He'd trained so hard to be ready for a search. The group was waiting for him. They must not find out his secret. Trent drove faster. He was getting closer to the mountain. And the sky got darker.

CHAPTER 2

Race Against the Cold

Trent drove into the parking lot on Mount Asher. The sky was very dark. The storm would hit any time. Suddenly he heard thunder. For a moment, he felt like turning around. He could go back down the mountain. Away from the storm. Then he saw his friends David and Tara waving at him. They were getting out of their cars and trucks. Trent waved and stopped next to David's truck.

“Hey, Trent, glad you could make it,” Tara said.

“How's it going, man? What a night for your first search!” David said. “Better get your gear ready. We'll be heading out soon.”

“Right,” Trent said. He looked up at the sky. He felt a few drops of rain on his face. He heard more thunder, and quickly started taking what he needed for the rescue out of his truck. If only the storm would move away from the mountain!

“Attention, everybody! Gather around.” A tall man in a dark green jacket was talking through a bullhorn. He stood in the middle of the parking lot. This was Jeremy Wu, the Field Leader. Trent liked Jeremy. He really knew what he was doing and he was a great leader for the team. Other members of Search and Rescue were standing around him. Trent, David, and Tara went to join them.

“Thanks for coming out tonight,” Jeremy said. “I know it’s going to be rough. A night search in a storm is hard. But you’re ready. You’ve shown it in training. I know we can count on you. The police crew searched all day for the boy. No luck. So they called us. It’s too bad they waited till almost dark. With an earlier start, we’d have him by now.”

“The boy’s name is Noah Scott. Black hair, blue eyes. And he’s pretty big for six. First reported missing at nine this morning. Walked away from his parents’ camp right over there.” Jeremy pointed to a group of tall, thin trees.

“Noah has no food with him. No jacket on either. Just pants and a T-shirt. This could be trouble. It’s been getting colder all afternoon. Let’s hope this storm passes. If it doesn’t, things look bad for Noah. Hypothermia could set in fast.”

Hypothermia. Trent shook a little as he

heard the word. He'd learned about hypothermia in his first search training class. It is called the silent killer. The body gets colder and colder—then, death. Hypothermic people usually never know what is happening to them.

Cold, wind, and rain. Deadly when all together. Noah had to be found, and fast. They were all here on this mountain. The team was trained in first-aid for hypothermia—they knew how to get the body's temperature up as fast as possible. If only they could find Noah in time . . .

“OK now. Get set to move out. Remember to keep close together in your line as you search.” Jeremy's voice sounded funny through the bullhorn. “Keep calling Noah's name. Use your rescue horns too. And talk to each other. It's easy to get lost in that darkness. Noah has been missing nine hours now. So every minute counts. He is in great danger. We don't want him to die up there on the mountain.” Trent started to shake at the thought of the young boy dying. He would do whatever he could to make sure that didn't happen. He had to. For Kayla.

CHAPTER 3

Lightning

Jeremy read the list of names for each search team. Trent listened for his name. He was happy to be on David's team with Tara and Armando. He liked working with them. But he also heard Seth's name. Seth had been trouble all through training. He was a great big man who thought he was the best at everything. He was always saying mean things to people. He liked to make fun of people, too. Trent wished Seth wasn't on his team. Not tonight. Not in this storm.

"OK, everybody, get your packs on," David said. He'd been a team leader for three years. Trent had trained under him all spring. David was fair to everybody. He was older but he wasn't full of himself. He'd taught Trent a lot about mountain rescue.

The team started putting on jackets, packs, and helmets. Tara was the team medic and wore a special first-aid pack. Lightning flashed somewhere above them on the mountain. Trent

felt tight all over. He waited for the crash of thunder. There it was, getting closer now.

“We’ll start right here and move up the creek,” David said. “Noah might have followed it. His mother said he loves to play in the water. That could be bad. He can’t swim.” The thought of Noah’s body in the creek was terrible. He had to be found—alive! Trent was ready to get going.

“Stay fifteen feet apart. Keep your eyes and ears open. Look all around you, up in the trees, and in back of you, too. Call Noah’s name. Let’s go!”

David spread the team out in a line: Seth, Trent, Tara, and Armando. He followed along a few yards behind them. The other search teams moved out, too. They went in other directions on the mountain.

The woods were already dark. The only sounds were the wind in the trees, and the team walking through dead leaves in the forest. Trent heard thunder somewhere high on the mountain. He tried to keep his mind on only the trail ahead. He used his flashlight in a wide circle as he walked. Any minute now, would his light find a small body on the ground?

“Noah! Noah!” the searchers kept calling. Their voices couldn’t be heard far. The wind was blowing hard. They had to use the rescue horn.

They would sound it and wait for an answer.

“Hey, Trent, how’s it going?” Armando called out.

“OK. Just hope the storm holds off,” Trent shouted back.

“You calling me, Trent?” Seth yelled. He was about ten feet to Trent’s left. “Don’t be scared. I won’t leave you!” He laughed.

“Shut up, Seth,” Trent tried to yell above the wind.

Suddenly the woods were filled with bright light. Thunder crashed down around the team. Trent couldn’t move. He wanted to run. But where? Lightning flashed again. Trent could see Seth moving on ahead. The thunder sounded again. Trent still couldn’t move. Suddenly it all seemed like that terrible night of the accident last year. He would never forget the way the lightning had flashed all around the car. He would never forget feeling the car slide over the edge of the road, out of his control. And how scared his sister was when the car started to slide.

He had picked his sister up from a friend’s house that night. His parents had told him to bring her home safely. And she had died.

Trent still stood there on the mountain trail. He still couldn’t move. Rain had begun to fall. It beat down hard on his helmet.



*The thunder sounded again.
Trent still couldn't move.*

“Come on, Trent!” Seth yelled. “You’re holding up the line. Are you scared of a little rain?”

Another huge flash of lightning. *It’s right on top of me*, Trent thought. *Any minute I’ll be hit and that will be the end!* Just the way that tree was the night of the wreck. He’d never forget seeing the lightning tear the tree in two. Right in front of the car as it lay on its side in the mud at the bottom of a hill. He’d known he had to get out of that car. He should have got out and climbed up the hill to the street. He had to get help for Kayla. She had hit her head and passed out.

But he hadn’t gone for help. He hadn’t done anything. He was frozen in fear and shock. He had just sat there while lightning flashed around the car. He and Kayla were found hours later. “Why didn’t you go for help?” the police had asked Trent. “Your sister is really hurt.”

“Trent, come on! What’s wrong with you?” He heard Seth shouting and remembered where he was. On the search on Mount Asher. “Hey, everybody, Trent’s scared of a little lightning!” Seth yelled down the trail.

Trent just stood there. He couldn’t stop shaking. He was scared, but he didn’t want anyone to know it.