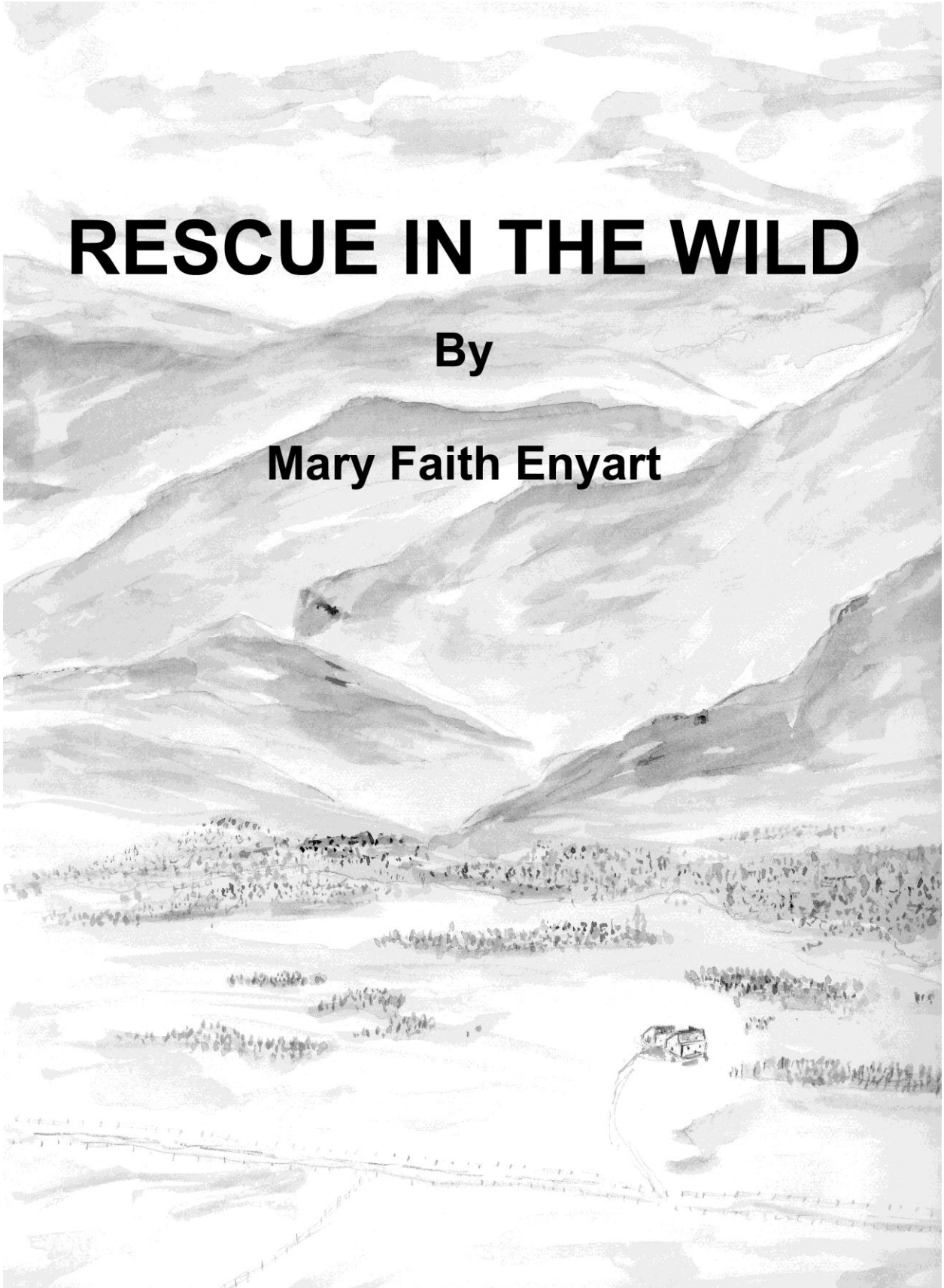


# **RESCUE IN THE WILD**

**By**

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# 1

## School's Out!

Evan gazed out the bus window watching the misty green mountains and valleys pass. Today's journey was the last—at least, the last for a while. He couldn't wait to escape the school schedule and the daily frustration of riding this bus.

He saw his house ahead and started to gather his belongings.

“Oh, pickled rats!” he grumbled. “Where's my jacket?” Evan stuck his head under his seat and searched the floor—nothing but paper scraps, smelly sneakers, and dirt.

“Has anybody seen my wind-breaker?” he asked. No one had.

Mica would have helped him search, if he had been there, but he had to stay after school today. Mica was his neighbor and best friend.

“Hey, kid!” called the bus driver. “Are you getting off here or not?”

“Heads up, Dew Drop! Ain't this your mommy's stop?” jeered a familiar voice, from the back of the bus.

“Sure, I'm coming,” Evan said to the bus driver.

Dismissing the jacket as another irritatingly lost item on this daily wretched bus ride, Evan stepped into the aisle. He sensed movement behind him.

Sure enough, at the moment Evan reached the first row of seats, a hard object thumped his back. “Got'cha!” shouted the same husky voice. “Perfect! Score another for the home team!”

Evan heard the taunting laughter, but refused to look back. He wasn't really injured, just totally fed up with that bully's tricks.

The bus driver called, "Have a good summer!"

"I plan to," answered Evan, smiling to himself as he stepped off the bus and walked back along the edge of the road toward his driveway. Ah, he felt more relaxed already.

"Hey, Ranger Boy," called the same tormenter, sticking his head out a back window. "Didn't you forget a few things?" A blue jacket, two mismatched shoes, a crumpled folder, and broken pencil pieces landed in the culvert near his mailbox. The bus pulled away to the sound of, "I'll be seeing you this summer. Something to look forward to!"

"Not if I can help it," muttered Evan, crawling into the ditch to retrieve his property.



Today was the last—the last day of school, and the last day of riding that bus, for over two months. And hopefully, the last day of constantly dealing with that bully.

Actually, Evan liked school and his classmates, but riding the bus with Bruce, “the Moose,” always ruined part of every day. Someday—somehow he’d put a stop to that troublemaker. After all, eventually he had to grow bigger and stronger—maybe even be able to hold his own against the Moose.

As Evan crammed his recovered possessions into his backpack, a black and white dog knelt beside him and licked his ear.

“Boone! Welcome home slurps?” laughed Evan, plopping down to ruffle Boone’s fur and roll in the grass. “You got it right! It’s time for fun! Summer vacation has begun!”

A white pick-up truck tooted its horn and turned into their driveway. His dad was home early after days of searching for a lost college student in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

“Yippee! Dad’s home! Come on Boone!”



## 2

# One Search Ends

Evan and Boone rushed to the garage. “Dad, did you find him?”

“We did,” said his dad, “but it took three long, hard days.”

“Woof!” yapped Boone, wagging and bowing expectantly.

“Good dog,” laughed Mr. Mace, as he leaned over and ruffled Boone’s furry head.

“Have you been taking care of my family?”

“Daddy, you’re home!” cried four-year-old Esther, bursting into the garage, followed by her cat, Persimmon.

“Me and ‘Simmon worried,” she cried, hugging his knees. “We thought you was lost.”

Mr. Mace chuckled and tossed Esther into the air. “Not lost, just hungry,” he said, giving her a hug. “You and Persimmon go tell Mommy that I’m hungry for some good old possum stew.”

“Okey-dokey, Daddy.”

“Mommy!” she hollered, as she ran from the garage into the house, “Daddy needs some good old ‘ossum stew.”

“What happened, Dad?” said Evan.

“A young college student almost died because he left the trail and his friends to try a shortcut. Of course, he got lost.”

As they talked, eleven-year-old Evan watched his dad clean and restock his Search and Rescue Equipment. He knew his dad always prepared immediately for the next rescue mission.



Evan was proud of his dad. Mr. Jonathan Samuel Mace was a Park Ranger in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. One of his responsibilities was to lead Search and Rescue Teams. Mr. Mace was a trained EMT, an Emergency Medical Technician. In addition, he was a

Park Medic—that meant he could administer medications under the direction of a supervising doctor.

“Come on, Son,” said Mr. Mace, putting his arm around Evan. “Let’s go eat.”

Esther met them at the back door, with her hands on her hips.

“Daddy, we have a **BIG** problem!” She reached out and clasped her daddy’s hand between hers. “Mommy says you can’t have good old ‘ossum stew, ‘cause she don’t have a ‘ossom. Are you sad?”

“Not a bit. In fact, I’m happy, happy, **happy!**” said Mr. Mace, swinging Esther up onto his shoulders. He strode over to Mrs. Mace and kissed her with a loud smack.

Esther bent her head down and around to face him, eyeball to eyeball, “Why are you happy, Daddy?”

“Because I’m home with my lovely wife and children.”

“And ‘Simmon and Boone,” Esther added, tapping her daddy’s head.

“And because we found that young man who was lost in the mountains,” said Mr. Mace.

While the family ate, Mr. Mace explained the rescue operation. “We finally located the hiker, but it was almost too late. He was dehydrated and semiconscious.”

“Why was he ‘drated,’ Daddy?” asked Esther.

“Dehydrated means his body didn’t have enough water in it.”

“Why didn’t he get a drink?” she asked. Evan was wondering the same thing.

“He had no water,” said Mr. Mace.

“That was dumb,” said Evan.

“Well,” said Mr. Mace, “he started hiking with plenty of food, water, and clothing; but after he got lost, he became disoriented.”

“Dis-Oreoed?” inserted Esther, shaking her head. “I’ve been dis-Oreoed, too. It was sad!”

“What happened?” asked Mr. Mace, fully expecting an amusing tale.

“Well!” declared Esther. “When ‘Simmon and I had a tea party, Boone dis-Oreoed us—he gobbled up every Oreo on our table. We was so dis-Oreoed, we had to scream!”

“That’s terrible, Esther,” said Mr. Mace. “Did you get some more Oreos from Mommy?”

“No, I couldn’t,” said Esther, frowning and pointing at Evan; “‘cause *he* had dis-Oreoed Mommy! ‘Simmon and I moaneded and moaneded.”

“I remember,” said Mrs. Mace, with a wink. “They ‘moaneded’ so much that we had to make a trip to the market to buy more Oreo cookies and restart the tea party.”

“Yes!” said Esther, with satisfaction. “We *re-Oreoed* and *re-started*. The end!”

“Hurrah for happy endings!” declared Mr. Mace. “Well, back to the hiker—‘disoriented’ means he was lost and not thinking clearly. He wandered in circles, and began making poor decisions. We found where he had rested against a log; but when he moved on, he left his backpack and all his gear—including his food and water. Later he dropped his jacket. Over the three days, he became dehydrated and weak. Finally, unable to go on, he crawled under the limbs of a fallen tree.”

“Our nights have been wet and cold—not good for being outside unprotected,” said Mrs. Mace.

“Definitely! By the time we found him, his body temperature had dropped dangerously low. We had to carry him out of the backcountry. A helicopter air-lifted him to the hospital. The last report from his doctor was positive—he should be fine in a few days.”





### 3

## Boone and the Princess

After supper chores, the family relaxed in the den. Mr. Mace leaned back in his recliner and read the newspaper.

Mrs. Mace sat at her art table, sketching a mountain scene. Evan was proud of her, too. She cared for her family, grew a garden, and in her limited spare time, she “dabbled” in watercolors. Actually, she was quite a good artist, and her scenic paintings decorated their home.

Evan and his sister didn’t have to go to daycare because Mrs. Mace chose to work at home, and all his summer plans depended on this fact.

The other family member was Esther. According to Evan, his little sister, Esther Rose Mace, was a four-year-old, nosy, noisy nuisance. However, Esther looked more like an angel

with her big blue eyes and soft, round cheeks—albeit, a strong-willed angel. Every day she and her red pigtails bounced through her make-believe world.

She was generally dirty, from playing outside with her cat, Persimmon—and usually sticky, because a drippy, strawberry jam sandwich was her favorite snack. Esther seldom tended to her own business, and boldly inserted herself into the affairs of others, especially her brother's. If she had a mind to do something, look out—she was a force to be reckoned with. In spite of her four-year-old ways, Evan was extremely proud of his spunky little sister.

Evan sat at the desk staring at a large sheet of drawing paper. It was not homework; today had been the last day of the school year. Hurrah! Fifth grade behind, sixth grade ahead, summer now—it felt fantastic! This project was for fun. He was drawing a map of the areas he and Mica could explore this summer.

In the middle of the room Esther was acting out her favorite princess story. First, she draped herself in raggedy, old clothes from her dress-up collection box. Then, she tied her magic fairy wand to Boone's tail.

“Okay, Boone,” she said. “You're my fairy godmother. Wave your wand.”

Boone's decorated tail lay lifeless on the floor. He rested his head on his paws and looked miserably at Esther.

“Come on, Boone. You has to wave your tail-wand and make me 'bootiful.'”

Boone stared at her.

“Okay, Boone, I'll help,” she said. “First, you gotta stand up.” Esther marched over to Boone, stuck her hands under his stomach, and pushed up. Nothing happened.

“Boone, you're not 'operating. Get up and wag!”

Boone didn't move.

Esther lay belly down, face to face with Boone. Using both hands, she grabbed his ears and stared into his eyes. “Boone, you has to make me a bootiful princess!”

Boone licked Esther’s face.

“Mommy,” she giggled, “can Boone’s slobbers make me bootiful?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Mace.

Esther threw off her rags, pulled her princess dress over her head, and put on her royal crown.

“Okay, ‘Simmon, I’m a princess! Look at me! I am boo—tee—ful! Now we can go to the castle party. Dance around the ball floor like this: one, two—jump; one, two—jump.”

“Dad,” said Evan. “Can we talk?”

“Sure,” said his dad, closing the newspaper.

