

It was like I was in cement. I remember thinking I was going to die.”

“Well, you didn’t, Bro, not yet,” Sebastian said with a smile.

“Now we’re even,” said James. “I saved your life and you saved mine.”

James pulled his hands out from the sleeping bag and studied them, wiggling his fingers and balling his fists.

“They’re okay,” said Sebastian, understanding his brother’s concern. “I got you back here in the nick of time.”

James put his hands back inside the warm sleeping bag. “So, what do we do now?”

“I don’t know,” replied Sebastian, looking at his wrist-watch. “You’re in no shape to climb right now, and, besides, it’s too late to make another summit attempt today. Besides, we need to decide if we even want to keep on going.”

“Because of me?” asked James.

Sebastian nodded but added, “That too.”

“I feel okay. A bit tired still.”

“But why should we go on at all?” Sebastian asked, while he poured a cup of hot tea and handed it to his brother. “I mean, what are we risking our lives for? We both could have died. Maybe next time we won’t be so lucky. We could just head back down and go home.”

James took a long drink of tea before responding.

“Because of Dad,” he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. “Because we *need* to.”

Neither brother spoke for a minute. Outside, the wind was raging. Sebastian worried the pitons might come loose or the guy-lines snap, sending the tent right off the mountain.

“Just for once, I wish he’d be proud of us, you know what I mean?” Sebastian said, loud enough to be heard above the machine-gun rattle of the tent walls flapping in the barbarous wind. “I’ve done everything to make him proud of me, and I don’t even know why. He’s a jerk. Why should I care? Why am I risking my life to prove something to him?”

“Because he’s our father,” replied James.

“Yeah,” Sebastian said softly, looking down at the tent floor strewn with packs and clothes and gear.

“So, what are we gonna do?” asked James, trying to rally his brother. “Let the bastard win, or show him what we’re made of? We’re more men than that bastard any day.”

Sebastian was impressed by his brother’s enthusiasm, especially after surviving the avalanche. “I say we keep going. Let’s eat, hydrate, get a good night’s sleep, and boogie up this mother in the morning—that is, if this wind lets up,” he said, listening to the tempest outside. “What do you want for dinner: dehydrated Chili Mac or Top Ramen?” Sebastian asked, holding up two packets.

“I vote for noodles,” said James, remembering what happened after eating chili the last time.

## ALLEN FORREST

*Big Sur Landscape #3, 2014*

Ink and watercolor, 9 x 12 in



*Savage Mountain* is **John Smelcer**'s fiftieth book. His other award-winning novels include *The Trap*, *The Great Death*, *Lone Wolves*, and *Edge of Nowhere*. The 25th Anniversary Edition of *The Raven & the Totem* is also forthcoming in summer 2015.

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