

## The Jump



Derek was an orphan. When the plane he was in crashed in the middle of nowhere and he was the only survivor, he was lucky to be found by a community of people living in isolation. The world he came from was oppressive and bleak, but life in the wilderness community was fair and free, and he was grateful to be found. He began to grow close to one particular family, and he wanted to stay with them forever. For the first time in his life he had parents, a brother and a sister.

But the world that Derek came from did not like this isolated community and they would do anything to find and destroy it. And the people in the community lived in fear; they always had to stay out of sight of passing aircraft, but after Derek's crash it seemed like there were helicopters and planes circling overhead every day. Derek didn't want to leave, but he didn't want to endanger the family that he loved. So he made up his mind. He would leave the community. He would allow one of the searching aircraft to find him and take him home. It was the only way he could think of to keep the community safe.

Derek left a note for his new "father", John Brown, and set off at sunset. He felt sad and lonely, but determined. He wished he'd brought along one of the dogs for company. One of them had taken a particular liking to him. But he knew that taking the dog would have been stealing from the community, and he didn't want to steal anything from the people that had saved his life and given him so much.

When John Brown found the note, he read it out loud to his family. Then he set it down with a heavy heart. His daughter, Paula, ran out of the room. She ran directly to the kennel and let out Tracker, the dog that had grown so attached to Derek during his stay. She let Tracker smell a shirt that Derek had worn and left behind. "Tracker! Find Derek!" she said.

Her brother Michael followed her. They set off, the dog pausing every so often to sniff around and to let the panting children catch up. Soon they saw Derek up ahead in the fading light. Then they heard—and saw—the helicopter. Tracker ran, yelping, towards Derek as the helicopter dropped lower. Someone stood in its doorway and Tracker began growling and barking at him. The man had a gun and he lowered it, preparing to shoot the dog. When Derek saw that Tracker was in danger, he ran out and grabbed the legs of the lightweight helicopter and pulled down with all of his might. It rocked enough to send the shot into the trees and miss the dog. Tracker ran up to Derek. Paula, frightened now, hung back.

"The dog won't hurt you. Leave him alone and I'll come with you," Derek called to the man with the gun. "He's a stray."

The man pulled Derek up into the helicopter, which lifted swiftly off the ground, leaving Tracker yelping after them in a storm of dust and leaves.

"You the boy from the plane wreck?" the pilot asked Derek.

"Yes," he said. Derek told them he had been alone in the woods the past month. They asked him if he had run into any people and he told them no. As they took off, he spied Paula and Michael, hiding in the bushes, wide eyed as they watched Derek fly away. He didn't acknowledge them, because he didn't want to call attention to them. As the helicopter lifted up and disappeared over the trees, the dog was howling.



After that, the men ignored him. Derek was heartbroken. He didn't want to go back. The only way he could stay in the community, he knew, was if the people where he came from thought he was dead. He gazed out the window. The helicopter was not flying too high, and Derek realized that they were looking around for the community. Derek's heart began to pound. As they approached the lake, he suddenly had in idea. He remembered that the center of the lake was abnormally deep. They got closer and closer and suddenly there was no more time to contemplate it. Derek thought of Michael and Paula and John Brown, of Tracker, and of the freedom he had had for the past month that was more precious than anything that he had ever known— and he jumped.

The fall was so fast that it sucked the breath right out of him. He made himself into a ball and plunged into the water, still falling, deeper, and deeper, knowing he didn't dare come back up. He plunged down and down and down, and then began to swim. He had to get as far away from the point of impact as he could before he was forced to come up for air.

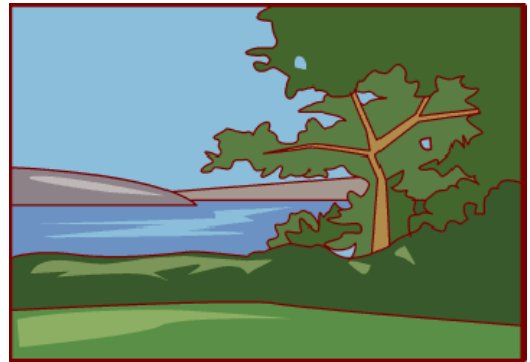
The men in the helicopter looked down after him, and began to circle the lake. Minutes passed, and still they didn't see Derek's body surface.

"Should we go down after him? That's a lot of money that just fell out of here."

"No," the pilot said. He banked the helicopter and they flew away from the lake, over the mountains, and out of sight.

At the far end of the lakeshore, Derek was hiding in the brushes, his heart pounding. When he saw the helicopter turn and disappear, he breathed a sigh of relief. He stood up, and was greeted with a yelp from Tracker and a call from Michael. "Derek!" Paula flew at him from out of the woods and clung to him. "Derek! That was the bravest thing I ever saw!"

"Come on," Michael said. "We'd better get you home."



## QUESTIONS

1. List all the reasons that Derek doesn't want to return to where he came from.

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2. Why does Derek leave the community?

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Name \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Why does Derek agree to go with the men in the helicopter?**

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**4. How does Derek solve his problem?**

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