

"And that oughta do it" said Jason, adding one more touch of thick teal acrylic to the frozen surface. Most of the lake now had the illusion that the ice was about to crack.

"See? Now we have it all to ourselves."

Yet as he skated with confidence, his friend, Marcus, looked at another side of the same seemingly hazardous ice.

"I dont remember painting THOSE cracks" he said with slight urgency.

"Relax, Marcus" said Jason. Yet before he could add anything else the cracks turned out to be very much real.

And they were very much approaching them to verify Marcus's doubt.

"Jason?" Said Marcus.

Jason didnt have time to ask: he watched as the floor around Marcus gave way as he fell halfway into the water.

"AAAA!" Jason yelled, running towards Marcus.

"HELP!" Marcus yelled, grasping onto the surface that only continued cracking. His movements fast and electric as his weight gave way and sank him

"Shit! No no no no no!" Yelled Jason, looking around. Following his gut he removed all his sweaters and his shoes. He realized he was in this situation and could only make up solutions, convenient or not.

"I'M COMING, MARCUS!"

With a swift jump he splashed into the water. He made it down enough to see his friend in the indigo dark. He held on to him and began swimming up again. As he saw the same openings caused by the crack he calculated which bit of ice was denser from the distance he was formerly in.

He took a leap and punched the ice a yard and a half away, fearing the worst nonetheless as he slowly yet miraculously broke it.

"HUUUUUUUH!" He gasped, desperately as he dragged Marcus with him towards more solid ground and out of both the risky waters and thin ice.

They were on a flat brownish surface as

Jason lay an inanimate Marcus on the ground.

"Marcus! Wake up" he said, shaking him yet with no sign of life "Marcus please!"

Jason had forgotten the cold completely and tried the hemlich manoeuvre (despite not being familiar enough).

"Marcus.. You have to wake up!" yelled Jason, intense sadness and angry desperation entering his tone before trying CPR.

"MARCUS!... YOU'RE SUPPOSED... TO WAKE... Up.."

Jason's voice grew weaker with each push on Marcus's chest, his teeth chattering uncontrollably. The stark reality of the

situation washed over him like the icy lake water. Marcus's eyes remained closed, his face a disturbing shade of blue. For a moment, Jason felt the weight of the world on his shoulders, the freezing air around them seemingly colder than ever. The silence was deafening, only pierced by the occasional distant sound of a branch snapping under the weight of the winter snow.

He paused, his breath hitching as he waited for a sign, any sign, that his friend was still with him. The world outside their immediate bubble felt eerily still, as if holding its breath alongside him. And then, it came - a faint gasp, a wheeze of air pushing its way through Marcus's frozen lungs.

Marcus's eyes fluttered open, revealing the

barest hint of life. His breaths grew stronger, more steady, and color began to seep back into his cheeks. Relief flooded Jason's chest, a warmth that seemed to melt the ice around them.

"I'm sorry," Jason said, his voice cracking. "I'm so sorry about all of it - the painting, the ice, everything. I never meant for it to go like this."

Marcus managed a weak smile, his teeth chattering. "Don't... don't worry, man," he croaked. "It's okay."

They lay there for a moment, catching their breath, the cold pressing against their wet clothes like a heavy blanket. Then, with trembling arms, Jason pulled Marcus into a tight embrace, the warmth of their bodies mingling. They held onto each

other, the sound of their breathing the only proof of their survival.

"Thanks," Marcus murmured against Jason's shoulder. "For not giving up on me."

"Never," Jason replied, his voice firm.

"You're my best friend. I'd do it all over again."

The moment was short-lived as the cold seeped through their clothes, reminding them of the urgency of their situation.

They had to get back home, to warmth and safety. With renewed strength, Jason helped Marcus to his feet, and together, they stumbled away from the treacherous ice, each step a victory over the frozen death that had almost claimed them.

Their friendship had been tested, and in

the face of such a harrowing experience, it had grown stronger. They knew they could rely on each other, that together, they could overcome anything.

The journey back was slow and painful, but with every step, they talked about the future, their laughter echoing through the stillness of the woods. They promised to be more careful with their adventures, to appreciate the warmth of home and the people in their lives.

As they stumbled through the door of Jason's house, their parents rushed to their sides, their expressions a mix of anger and relief. But Jason and Marcus only had eyes for each other, sharing a knowing glance that said more than words ever could.

They had cheated death today, and in that



moment, they realized that their friendship was something worth fighting for. They were brothers, bound by more than just shared experiences - they were bound by the unbreakable thread of trust and love that had just been tested and emerged stronger than ever.