

# Chapter One

Hunting Bigfoot is my dad's idea of a good time, not mine. I mean, I like camping. But Dad promised Rose and me a *real* camping trip this time. A campfire, marshmallows, roasted wieners, swimming. You know, *camping*.

Instead we're stomping through the bush in the dark. And the rain. Looking for a creature that doesn't exist.

And I'm stuck carrying Rose, my little sister. She's asleep over my shoulder. Lucky her.

"Come on," Dad says. "Most thirteen-year-olds would jump at the chance to do this. We're looking for *Bigfoot*. You've got to admit this is fun."

*Fun?* Dad gets a fancy microphone and headphones, and goggles that let him see in the dark. Me? I get a stick. My job is to bang on the side of a tree every so often. Dad says when you hit trees with a stick, Bigfoot will rap back. It's kind of their thing, like they're all drummers or something.

I hit a tree with a stick now. "This *might* be fun," I say, "if I get a turn with the cool toys."

"You can use the goggles and headphones on our way back," Dad says. "But I need them right now. Jay, I heard something *growling*."

We both stop to listen as he directs the microphone dish, trying to capture the sound.

"Can I hear?" I ask. "I mean, with the headphones?" I hold out Rose, hoping Dad will take a turn carrying her. But he doesn't. Instead he fits the headphones over my ears, but just for a minute.

I listen. And yeah, I hear a growl. But it's more like the rumbles your belly makes. Does this Bigfoot have an upset tummy? No, wait.

"It's just my stomach," I say, handing Dad the headphones. "I'm hungry."

"Darn it," he says. "I was sure I heard an animal growling."

Dad is always hearing and seeing things he thinks might be Bigfoot. Wishful thinking, I guess.

"Can we head back to the camp now?" I ask.

He puts the headphones back on. "In a minute."

I sigh and shift Rose to my other arm as I follow Dad through the bush. "Why do you keep looking for Bigfoot, anyway?" I ask him. "I mean,

no one has ever found proof that Sasquatch are out here.”

Sasquatch, taken from the Salish word for “wild men,” is another name for Bigfoot. The Indigenous people who first lived on this coast tell stories about huge hairy men. In fact, people from all over the world tell stories about half-man, half-ape creatures. Dad tends to use both terms.

“Scientists thought gorillas were a myth too,” Dad says. “Until someone captured one.”

“But you’d think there would be bones,” I say. “Like those deer bones we saw by the side of the road.”

“Bones decompose quickly in the forest,” Dad says.

He’s right. It’s so wet, things rot fast here.

“And maybe they bury their dead,” he adds. “Just like we do. Like Neanderthals did.”

Neanderthals were a species of hominid, an early kind of human who lived a long time ago.

Scientists think they were just as smart as us. Maybe smarter. Their brains were bigger. They died out, sort of. A lot of humans carry Neanderthal DNA. In other words, we’re part Neanderthal.

“Even if we don’t find Bigfoot bones,” I say, “you’d think we’d at least find Bigfoot poop. I mean, we see bear scat all the time.” Especially after they eat the plums in our backyard. Then we find great big mounds of bear crap on our lawn, full of plum pits. *Ew.* “Bigfoot poop would be easier to find,” I say. “Because, you know, it’s *bigger.*”

“We think the Bigfoot dig holes and bury their poop,” Dad says.

“Like us,” I say, thinking of the “bathroom” Dad set up at our camp. Instead of flushing, we shovel dirt into a hole.

“More like cats,” Dad says.

And there’s an image I don’t want in my head. A Bigfoot squatting in a kitty-litter box. I’d hate to be the one in charge of cleaning up after *that* pet.

Dad lifts a wet branch out of our way. "In any case, people have taken casts of plenty of footprints," he says. "That's proof. I've found prints myself. Right in this forest."

Our basement is full of plaster-of-Paris footprints, supposedly Bigfoot's.

"But most of your casts look like bear prints," I say. "Or cougar prints." Or stone pancakes that don't look like footprints at all. Dad sees giant humanlike footprints in the mud everywhere. Mostly I just see mud.

"Jay, you sound just like your mom," he says, annoyed.

Mom doesn't believe in Bigfoot any more than I do. She teaches science at the high school. Come to think of it, I don't know why Mom used to tag along on Dad's hunting trips. She always complained about them.

And then it occurs to me that Mom won't ever go on one of these trips with us again. Suddenly

I feel sick about that, really sad. But why? I never want to go on another one of these stupid trips myself.

"We know there was an animal that looked exactly like a Bigfoot," Dad says.

Yeah, Mom told me about that. "*Gigantopithecus*," I say. Which is a mouthful. *Gigantopithecus* was a huge ape. Like, ten feet tall. We know they really existed because there are fossils of them. But Mom says they died out a long, long time ago.

Dad looks back at me with those googly goggles. "Is it so hard to imagine that this giant ape survived and evolved?" he asks. "Scientists have found other animals that they thought were extinct."

I scratch my chin. "Okay, say Bigfoot *are* real. How are we going to capture one if we ever do find it? I mean, it's not like we can put one on a leash and walk it home."

"Once we know for sure there's one out here," Dad says, "we'll set a live trap for it."

“Like a bear trap?” I ask.

“It would have to be bigger,” Dad says. “We’ll bait the trap with bacon.”

My mouth waters at the sound of that word.

“Bacon?”

“You can catch anything with bacon,” Dad says.

“Who doesn’t like bacon?”

He has a point. All this talk of bacon makes my stomach rumble again. “Can we go back to camp now?” I ask again. “Seriously, I’m starving.” It’s already well past suppertime. Well past bedtime, in fact.

But just then Dad puts out an arm like he’s protecting Rose and me. “Jay, did you hear *that*?”

“What?”

Then I hear it too. Someone is knocking a stick against a tree trunk. *Knock, knock.*

And there is no one out here but us.

## Chapter Two

Dad and I both stand still and listen. And there it is again. Someone or *something* really *is* banging a stick against a tree. *Knock, knock.*

“Hit that tree, Jay,” Dad tells me.

I do exactly that. *Knock, knock.* Then again. *Knock, knock.* In the near distance there’s a *knock, knock* in response.

“Is it an echo?” I ask.

"That was no echo," Dad says. "*That is a Bigfoot.*"

"Somebody's playing a trick on us," I say. But I take a step back and hold Rose a little closer.

"Nope," Dad says. "They talk to each other that way over distances. Think about it, Jay. You're talking to a Bigfoot right now."

I hit another tree. *Knock, knock.* "That's talking?" I ask him. When my little sister knocks on my door, I tell her to get lost. *That's communicating.*

"It's something like Morse code," Dad says.

I bang out the Morse code for SOS. A call for help that Dad taught me. "You really think they would rap out a message like that?"

"Totally."

"Even if they really exist, they aren't *that* smart," I say.

"Actually, I'm betting Sasquatch are about as smart as an average middle-school kid," Dad says. "Put him in your class and he could learn algebra."

Unlike my dad.

I knock again. But the forest has gone quiet. Too quiet. It's like all the nighttime animals are also listening.

Or have gone into hiding.

I try knocking again. But there's still no reply. We wait, listening.

Dad moves the microphone dish as he presses his fingers to the headphones. "You hear anything?" he asks.

I shake my head. "The knocking stopped."

"Bang on that tree again, will you?"

I shift Rose to my other shoulder and hammer a tree again with my stick. But I still don't hear any more knocks.

"It was just some animal," I say. "Or maybe a raven." Ravens sometimes make a knocking sound.

Dad puts a finger to his lips. "Jay, be quiet," he says. "See if the Bigfoot responds."