

ORCA currents



BIGFOOT CROSSING

GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ

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In this high-interest accessible novel for middle readers, a young teen starts to suspect that he and his family are being followed by a bigfoot while on a camping trip.

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KEY SELLING POINTS

- On a camping trip, a young teen starts to suspect his family is being followed by the mythical Bigfoot.
- Themes of self-worth and responsibility are explored.
- Like the Loch Ness Monster and the Abominable Snowman, the appeal of this mythical creature is eternal.
- The author is the international-award-winning author of *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and several other bestselling novels. She also mentors up-and-coming writers.
- The author has also written a number of short novels for striving readers, including *The Ride Home*, which was nominated for the BC and Yukon Book Prize.
- Enhanced features (dyslexia-friendly font, cream paper, larger trim size) to increase reading accessibility for dyslexic and other striving readers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo credit: Mitch Krupp

GAIL ANDERSON-DARGATZ is the award-winning author of over a dozen books, including *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and *A Recipe for Bees*, which were finalists for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. She has also written a number of short novels for striving readers, including the Orca Currents titles *Iggy's World* and *The Ride Home*, which was shortlisted for a BC and Yukon Book Prize. Gail lives in the Shuswap region of British Columbia.

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Orca currents

Orca Currents are short, high-interest novels with contemporary themes written specifically for middle-school students reading below grade level.

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Summary: In this high-interest accessible novel for middle readers, a young teen starts to suspect that he and his family are being followed by a Bigfoot while on a camping trip.

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For Hadarah and Graham

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."

It doesn't.

"Keep hitting the tree," Dad says.

I knock. And knock again. And again. Then shiver as rainwater from the branches above splashes down my neck. "Do I really have to keep doing this?" I ask.

"Let's go a little farther down this deer trail," Dad says.

"Can't we just go back to the camp?" I ask.

Instead of answering, he ducks under a wet branch and keeps going. He's got those night-vision goggles on, so he can see where he's going. All I can see are trees and dark. And more trees and dark.

"Knock!" Dad says.

I knock.

"I think I saw something," Dad says.

"Yeah, *right*," I say under my breath. Every camping trip, Dad is *sure* he sees a Bigfoot. But it turns out to be a deer or a bear. Or a stump.

Dad glances back, turning those cyborg goggles on me. “We *are* about to find one,” Dad says. “I can *feel* it.”

“You always say that. And we never do.”

Dad turns away to trudge down the path. “Now you *really* sound like your mother,” he says.

He’s been saying that a lot lately. I don’t know if he’s mad at me or at Mom. Probably Mom. *I’m* mad at Mom.

“Whatever that was, it isn’t knocking anymore,” I say. I drop the stick and pull out my phone, clicking the flashlight app to shine it at Dad. “Look, my arm is numb from carrying Rose. It’s dark. I’m cold. I’m hungry. Can we *please* go back to camp now?”

Dad takes a long look down the trail. Then he turns back to me and sighs. “All right. I’ll make a Bigfoot call and see if we get a response. If not, we’ll head back to camp.”

I shake my head. “No, Dad. Really? A Bigfoot call?”

While Rose and I are built slim, like Mom, Dad is big. He's not just tall but also beefy, like a weight lifter. And he's hairy. He wears his bushy black hair to his shoulders, except when he's at work at his car-repair shop. Then he ties it up in a man bun.

Even his knuckles have hair on them. Honestly, he looks like one of those creatures himself. If anyone at school gets wind of Dad doing a Bigfoot call, I'll never hear the end of it. And I can count on Rose for that. She'll tell her little preschool friends. Who will tell their middle-school brothers and sisters. Who will follow me around school going—

“Woo-hoo!” Dad shouts.

“Seriously, Dad. You can't—”

“Woo-hoo!” he calls again, all friendly.

“Woo-hoo!”

Rose stirs on my shoulder. “What?” she asks.

For a panicked moment I think she's going to

wake right up. But then, thankfully, she slumps to my shoulder and starts to snore again.

“This is nuts,” I mumble. But then there’s the sound of a stick banging on a tree. And it’s *close*.

“There it is again!” Dad cries.

We both listen. And then, sniffing, I ask, “What is that *smell*?”

It’s sort of like old cheese. Or toe jam. You know, that cheesy stuff you find between your toes after you’ve been camping for a week without a shower or clean socks.

Whoa. Now the smell is way worse. “Is that a skunk?” I ask.

Dad raises his nose to the air. “That may well be Bigfoot,” he says, excited. He waves a hand in front of his face and grins. “Phew. What a smell! That *stinks*.” I’ve never seen him happier.

“Bigfoot *stink*?” I ask, pinching my nose. “You mean they never take a bath?”

“Many apes are afraid of water,” Dad says. “Chimpanzees are, although there is that one interesting group of chimpanzees that likes to splash in jungle pools. The same troop also learned to hunt with spears—”

“Okay, okay,” I say, interrupting Dad. His lectures on primate behavior could last all night.

Dad cups his hands to his mouth and makes the Bigfoot call again. “Woo-hoo!”

And then, from the bush, I hear the weirdest sound *ever*. It’s sort of like Dad’s call, but more like *hoot-hoot*. And way deeper. Whatever’s making this sound is *big*. And the creature is close enough that the hairs on the back of my neck rise up.

“Is that a bear?” I ask.

Dad shakes his head. “Jay, *that* is a Bigfoot. We’ve finally found a Sasquatch!” He makes another call. “Woo-hoo!”

And the creature roars back. “Hoot-hoot!”

Not far away a small tree crashes down as something huge thunders over it. Dad puts his arm out again to protect us and steps back. Whatever he sees through those night-vision goggles scares him.

“Oh no,” he says.

Chapter Three

All I can see is this black shape racing through the trees toward us. But it's big. Really big. The tops of young trees sway against the cloudy night sky as the beast pushes them out of its way. And wow, is the thing smelly.

“That's got to be a bear,” I say. Although I know it isn't. For one thing, bears aren't all that smelly. And—

“Do bears stand up on two feet?” Dad asks.

“Sometimes,” I say. But they don’t *run* on two feet like this thing is now. And it’s running straight for us. Fast. Whether it’s a bear or Bigfoot, this isn’t good.

“Uh, Dad,” I say as I hug Rose. “Shouldn’t we get out of here?” I inch toward him for safety.

But Dad is mesmerized. He can’t take his eyes off the creature. “Wow,” he says. “I knew Sasquatch were big, but seeing one for real—”

“It really *is* a Bigfoot?” I tug his sleeve. “Let me see.”

He hands me the goggles, and I slide them on. Suddenly I can see everything clear as day. Well, not quite clear as day. The night-vision goggles make everything look weird and green. But I can see way more than I could without them.

And there it is. Big, hairy, with long arms and huge shoulders. It looks sort of like a walking orangutan. You know, those apes with

orange-brown hair that like to live alone in trees. But with the goggles on, this Bigfoot looks green.

“Wow,” I say. I get why Dad was spellbound at the sight of the creature. I’m frozen in place too. Dad is right. Watching fuzzy images on YouTube is one thing. But seeing this gigantic creature for real is something else. “Wow,” I say again.

But the Bigfoot is so close I can hear it snorting as it charges toward us.

“Ah, Dad,” I say as I back up. “I think we should—”

“Run!” says Dad.

But I trip backward over a tree root. Rose, still in my arms, wakes a little. “What?” she asks. Then falls right back to sleep.

Dad helps me up. He presses his truck keys into my hand and pushes me to get going. “Run!” he cries again. “Take Rose back to the camp. Lock yourselves in the truck.”

“Why? What are you going to do?”

He heads in the opposite direction. "I'll get the Sasquatch to follow me." He waves the microphone dish around like he's trying to get the creature's attention.

"But Dad—"

"Go!" he cries out again. And then, as he runs away, he calls, "Woo-hoo!"

I run, but I'm carrying Rose, so I can't go fast. I look back with the night-vision goggles to see the creature is almost on us. It stops a moment at the point where Dad and I split up to look at me and then at Dad. It seems to be making up its mind about who to follow.

I don't want it to follow Dad. But I don't want it to follow me either. How would I protect Rose? That thing is way, way bigger than me. It's way bigger than Dad.

Dad waves his microphone dish over his head and calls again, "Woo-hoo!"

He doesn't sound as friendly as before. But the Bigfoot swings his way, following the trail Dad makes through the bush. "Hoot-hoot!" it roars.

As I run with Rose toward the camp, I can hear both Dad and the Sasquatch crashing through the bush away from us. I keep running, leaping over roots and fallen logs, pushing through ferns. It's a bouncy ride for Rose, and she finally wakes up.

"Mom?" she says, her voice sleepy. But of course, Mom isn't here. Then Rose asks me, "Why are you running?"

"We've got to get back to camp," I say.

"You got to go wee-wee real bad?"

"Yeah, sure," I say. "I've got to go wee-wee real bad." What else am I going to tell her? That a giant hairy monster is chasing us or Dad?

We finally reach the edge of a clearing near the logging road where we set up the tent. I quickly unlock the truck, push Rose into the crew cab and scramble in myself.

I slam the door behind us. Then I reach over Dad's seat and lock all the doors with one press of a button.

"Don't you have to go wee-wee?" Rose asks.

"I don't have to go pee anymore."

"Why are you wearing Dad's funny glasses?"

I take off the night-vision goggles. "He lent them to me."

"Where's Dad?" She looks out the window at our makeshift bathroom, a piece of tarp hung around a hole in the ground. "Is *he* going wee-wee?"

I try to catch my breath as I peer through the truck window into the night. Heavy rain falls on the windows, making it hard to see anything. There's our tent, and our camp stove sitting on the folding table. Above it, Dad hung a "Bigfoot Crossing" sign on a tree, as a joke. Our cooler is behind us, in the bed of the truck. Dad had promised us a late supper of pancakes and bacon. My belly growls at the thought.

But then a horrible stink pushes thoughts of food out of my head. That overpowering smell of old cheese and unwashed feet.

The Bigfoot is back.

“What is that smell?” Rose says, sniffing. “Jay, did you fluff?” *Fluff* is the word Mom taught Rose to use instead of *fart*.

“That wasn’t me,” I say.

“Then who was it?”

Before I can answer, a huge, hairy hand slaps the car window right in front of me.

Chapter Four

I pull Rose to the floor of the truck cab as the giant hand slides down the window. It's so dark outside, I can't see the animal that left it. I slip the night-vision goggles back on and look out the windows. I still don't see the Bigfoot, but I can sure smell it.

“Was that Dad?” Rose asks. “Are we playing hide-and-seek with Daddy?”

“Yeah, sure,” I say. “We’re playing hide-and-seek.” Then I add under my breath, “Just not with Dad.”

I pull my two-way radio from my pocket. When we’re out in the bush, Dad carries one in his pocket too. I click the button on the walkie-talkie to talk. “Dad? Dad, are you close to camp? I think—” I stop to glance at Rose. Through the night-vision goggles, she looks like a little green alien with big glowing eyes and pigtails. Will she freak if she knows a Sasquatch is outside our truck? I click the radio button again. “Dad, I think that animal followed us here,” I say.

Rose sits up to peer out the window. “What animal?”

I pull her back down. “Shush,” I say. “We don’t want to let it know we’re here.”

“Is it playing hide-and-seek too?”

I pause. “We don’t want it to find us,” I say.

Rose slides back down to the floor to hide. I join her there, slipping my cold hands into my jacket pockets. Even though I'm still wearing the night-vision goggles, I can't see much from the floor of the truck. From here I just see the tips of the trees.

"You look funny," Rose says. She reaches for the goggles. "Can I wear Dad's glasses?"

"No," I say, batting her hand away. She'd freak if she got a good look at that Bigfoot. At least, I think she would. *I'm* freaking.

We wait.

"When is Dad going to get here?" Rose whines.

"Soon, I hope."

"Do you think that animal will find us?"

I can't think of an answer that won't scare Rose, so I shush her again. The Sasquatch has already found us. And I can still smell it, so the creature is close.

“It’s so dark,” Rose says. “I wish Mommy was here.”

“Well, she’s not,” I say. I sound angrier than I mean to. But Mom *chose* not to come with us. She *should* be here right now.

“Why didn’t she come camping with us?” Rose asks.

I can’t think of a good answer to that one either.

“I miss her,” Rose says.

I pull out my phone and look down at it. Mom used to be the first person I called when I needed help. In fact, she was the one I called the most. Not anymore. But even if I wanted to call her right now, I couldn’t. There are no bars, no way I can make a call for help.

Instead I click to Mom’s last text, which says **I miss you**. A text I didn’t answer. I stare down at it a moment, then slip my phone back into my pocket.

I try calling Dad on the two-way radio again. “Dad, can you come back to the camp? We need help.” As I listen for his reply, heavy rain drums on the truck roof. But even though I try calling Dad again and again, he doesn’t answer.

“What’s taking Dad so long?” Rose asks.

Good question. “I don’t know,” I say. “I’m sure he’ll be here soon.”

“What’s that?” Rose says, listening.

Beyond the rain pelting the roof, there’s a rustling sound, then grunting and snuffling. And the Bigfoot stink gets stronger.

“Is that a bear?” Rose asks.

We’ve seen a few bears out here on our camping trips. Once we surprised a black bear on the trail ahead of us. That bear had sounded something like what is out there now. But I know this is no bear.

Rose looks at me like she’s trying to figure out what’s going on. “Will the bear *hurt* us?”

I don't answer. I honestly don't know if the Bigfoot will hurt us or not. Dad told me stories about Bigfoot attacking humans when they felt threatened. Did this one hurt Dad? I worry it did because Dad isn't answering his walkie-talkie. And he isn't here. If he was okay, he would have come to the truck right away.

"Is that animal still out there?" Rose asks. Her eyes are wide.

I adjust the goggles. "I'll take a look." I peek out the side window. Nothing but trees. Then I look out the front windshield. All I can see are our tent and makeshift outhouse. I look over Rose's head to the other side window. Nothing there either.

But I can still smell the foul odor. The Bigfoot is somewhere close, circling us in the rainy night.

Then the truck jolts and starts bouncing. I drop back down to the floor. Rose slides over to me for a hug, sucking her thumb. She gave up that habit

a year ago but started again this month after Mom—I stop myself. I can't think about that right now. Not with a Sasquatch attacking our truck.

“Earthshake!” Rose says. She means earthquake. We've lived through a few of those too, as we live on the West Coast. Mostly the ceiling lights just shake. Once my dad's office chair shot across the floor as an earthquake shook the house.

But here the trees are standing still. It's the truck that's moving, as if someone or *something* is in the truck bed, jumping up and down.

And now something is banging on the roof of the truck.

I turn slowly, fearing the worst, and look out the back window. The glass is completely covered, as if there's some kind of cloth over it. Then I realize the “cloth” is fur!

“Bear!” Rose says, pointing at the back window.

But that's no bear. The Bigfoot has pressed its huge, hairy stomach against the back of the truck window as it bangs on the roof of our vehicle. Is it trying to get in? Or is it trying to scare us out?

"Is it breaking into our cooler?" Rose asks. Then her voice sounds *really* panicked. "Is it taking our *bacon*?"

Not on my watch. Nothing gets between me and my bacon.

I climb into the driver's seat to turn on the truck and get the wipers going. Then I flick on the headlights. I'm about to set off the car alarm when the bouncing and banging stops. The truck shudders once as the creature jumps down.

For a terrifying moment everything is quiet. The headlights shine two beams through the rain, lighting up the tent ahead of us. I turn the goggles toward the driver-side window, trying to get a better look outside.

And then a huge, ape-like face appears right in front of me. Like, *right* there. I startle and jump back. Suddenly I have to go wee-wee real bad.

Chapter Five

The Sasquatch presses its face against the window. Sort of like Rose does when she tries to get a better look inside the candy shop. This time, though, *we're* the candy.

I scramble into the back seat and to the floor, pulling Rose down with me. But I keep my eye on the Sasquatch. The creature's face is somewhere between a gorilla's and a human's.

No, it looks more like an orangutan, with sad brown eyes.

At first I think it's just curious, trying to get a better look at us. But then it grins, baring a really big set of teeth.

"Don't move," I whisper to Rose. "Don't make a sound."

My knees go weak with fear. The only other time that happened was when I was a "big buddy" in the kindergarten class on "One Hundredth Day." The kindies pinned me down and tried to shove one hundred Cheerios up my nose.

"Is that Dad?" Rose asks, blinking at the Sasquatch. "Is he playing a joke on us?"

Dad is big and hairy, but not *that* big and hairy. But then, Rose can't see the creature as clearly as I can. I'm wearing the goggles. "No," I say. "That's not Dad."

Then I think about it. Dad *does* like to play practical jokes on us. And he once dressed in a

Santa suit and fell off the roof into a pile of snow. On purpose. Just to prove to me that Santa Claus was real. He knows I don't believe in Bigfoot. Is he dressing up as one to convince me Sasquatch *are* real? He wouldn't really do that, would he?

"No," I say. "That's *not* Dad." At least, it better not be.

"If that's not Dad, who *are* we playing hide-and-seek with then?" Rose asks. She points at the Sasquatch's face squished up against the window. "Is that Bigfoot 'it' now?"

"Kind of," I say. It found us, all right.

The creature taps on the window with one big finger and grins again. Man, those teeth are big.

Can the Sasquatch get in here? I wonder. Like, can it break the window? Of course it can. It has broad shoulders and massive arms, bigger than a gorilla's.

"Just stay on the floor," I tell Rose. "Keep very quiet."

“But the Bigfoot found us,” Rose says. “Am I ‘it’ now? Or are you?”

“Dad’s still ‘it,’” I tell her, to get her to do as I ask. “We still have to hide from him.” I crouch down too. Maybe if the Sasquatch can’t see us, it will lose interest and go away.

It finally steps back, leaving boogers on the glass. But then I see it walking around to the front of the truck. I sit up a little to see better.

The Sasquatch stands in front of the lights, and I get my first really good look at it. The animal is huge and has shoulders wider than a football player’s. Reddish-brown hair covers its body from head to foot. Correction. Hair covers its body from head to *really big* foot. Its feet are even bigger than my dad’s.

“I’ve got to get a video of this,” I say, pulling out my phone. This video will go viral in no time.

As I record the Bigfoot with my phone, the creature waves with both hands as if to say,

“Go over there!” Then it runs in place. Yes, *really*.

“What’s it doing?” Rose asks as she watches it with me. “Is it dancing?”

“I have no idea,” I say.

The Sasquatch grabs its chest with both hands as if it’s having a heart attack. Then—on purpose—it falls on its butt and lies flat, like it’s knocked out or something.

Just as I sit up farther to see if the Sasquatch is okay, it picks itself up and holds out its arms—*ta-da*—like it’s waiting for applause.

Rose claps. “It’s putting on a play,” she says. Rose is forever putting on plays for us in our living room. Before she moved out, Mom tried to make me watch them with her, but a thirteen-year-old guy can only take so much of his four-year-old sister’s take on *Cinderella*.

Watching this Bigfoot’s act isn’t much better. Actually it’s way worse. Rose only pouts when her audience doesn’t appreciate her. When this

Sasquatch doesn't get the attention it wants, it jumps back into the truck bed. Then it starts hitting the roof again, pushing a dent into the ceiling above us.

"It's trying to get in!" Rose cries.

I pull my little sister back down and we both hide on the floor again. "I think it's trying to get us out," I say.

"Mommy!" Rose sobs.

But of course, Mom and Dad aren't here. It's up to me to save us.

"Cover your ears!" I tell Rose. I reach into the front and push the panic button on Dad's keys, setting off the car alarm. It's a high-pitched noise that hurts my ears. But I'm hoping it will scare off the Sasquatch.

The Bigfoot jumps off the truck and yells at us. *Yell* isn't the right word. *Bark* is more like it, but the sound it makes is so loud, it comes out like a roar. I don't just hear the sound. I feel it boom in my chest.

Rose puts her hands over her ears. "Make the noise stop!" she cries.

"I will as soon as the Bigfoot leaves!" I yell back.

Finally the Sasquatch does leave. It runs off through the light of the high beams with its hairy hands over its ears.

When I'm sure the creature is really gone, I turn off the car alarm.

Rose grabs my arm. "I'm scared," she says.

I hug my sister. "It's okay," I say. "The Bigfoot is gone."

"But where is Daddy?" Rose asks, sitting up to look out the window. "When is he going to find us?"

"I don't know," I say.

But I do know that Dad is somewhere out in that forest. And that Sasquatch is out there with him.

Chapter Six

Rose is shivering, and I'm cold too. So I turn on the heat in the truck to warm up. Then I try calling Dad on the radio again.

When I still don't get an answer, I hold up my phone, hoping for bars. Nothing.

Still, I type a text. **Mom, help! Dad's gone. I think he's hurt. What do I do?**

But the text doesn't send. There's no service here.

I stare down at the series of texts Mom sent over the last few days.

Have a good sleep!

Love you!

Then:

Haven't heard from you in a few days.

You okay?

She called several times after that, but I didn't pick up.

Then she sent several more texts.

Jay, please call.

I know you're mad.

Let's talk.

Later, when I didn't answer, she sent another two.

Wish I was going on the camping trip with you.

Miss you!

I didn't answer those texts either. If she really missed me, she would have come camping with us. She wouldn't have left us last month. Now she's living in an apartment on her own, in a different part of town.

"When is Daddy coming back?" Rose asks.

The real question is, *is* he coming back? "I don't know," I say.

"But that Bigfoot is out there," she says. "Will it hurt Daddy?"

Dad says chimpanzees and gorillas do sometimes attack humans. But usually only when they feel threatened or to protect their territory. Then again, we *are* in the Sasquatch's space.

"I'm sure Dad's all right," I say. "He found a place to hide, just like we did." But I don't really believe that. Dad wouldn't leave us alone in the forest like this, especially with a Sasquatch

prowling around. If Dad isn't here with us now, then he *is* likely hurt.

Rose seems to sense I'm lying. "What are we going to do?" she asks.

What *am* I going to do? I could go out and look for Dad by myself. But if I leave Rose in the truck, the Bigfoot might come back. Then Rose would be trapped in the truck all alone. And what if something happened to me out there? Then Rose really would be alone.

If I take Rose with me to look for Dad, we could meet the Sasquatch in the bush. How would I protect Rose?

The smart thing is to stay in the truck with my sister. Wait for help. We will both be safe then.

But Dad is alone in the bush. What if he *is* badly hurt?

I look down at my text to Mom that I can't send. What do I do? I have to do *something*.

I open the truck door just a crack and listen. Even with the night-vision goggles on, I can't see Bigfoot anywhere in the bush around us. I don't hear any crashing in the bush. And the Sasquatch stink is gone. Hopefully the Bigfoot is too.

I turn off the truck and pocket the keys. Then I flip up my jacket hood as I step out into the rain. "Grab our backpacks," I say to Rose.

She pulls both of them out from under the truck seat as I rummage through the cooler in the back of the truck for some food. I throw a couple of chocolate bars and bananas into my bag and jam one granola bar in my mouth as I hand Rose a second.

"Where are we going?" Rose asks as she unwraps hers.

"To find Dad," I say as I chew. Then I refill our water bottles from the jug on the folding table. As I do that, I keep an eye out for the Sasquatch.

Rose slides out of the truck and joins me near the tent. I tuck water into the little pink backpack she's carrying. "Are we still playing hide-and-seek?" she asks.

"Exactly," I say. "Except now we're 'it.' Dad is hiding, and we have to find him."

"In the dark?" Rose looks worried. I think she knows I'm lying about playing hide-and-seek.

I push the goggles up on my forehead to look at her. "Dad needs our help," I say. "We have to find him. You're going to help me, okay?"

She nods.

I check to make sure I have my phone and walkie-talkie. Then I slide Dad's night-vision goggles back in place. Now I can see deep into the dark forest. I take Rose's hand. "Let's go."

We hike through the forest, following the path we took to reach the truck. I keep calling Dad on the radio, but he doesn't answer.

“Are we going the right way?” Rose asks.

“I think so.” Then again, everything here looks pretty much the same. Trees, ferns, more trees. Wet cedar branches slap my face as I push through. “Keep your eyes open,” I say. “We’re looking for anything that belongs to Dad. He might have dropped something that might lead us to him.”

“But it’s so dark!” Rose says.

Right. I forgot that she can’t see in the dark like I can with these goggles.

“We should call for him,” Rose says.

Yeah, we should, but would that bring the Bigfoot rushing to us? I have to find Dad though. It’s worth a shot. “Dad!” I call. “Dad! Can you hear me?”

“Daddy!” Rose echoes. “Daddy!”

“We’ve got to listen for his whistle too,” I say. We all wear whistles around our necks in case we get lost in the forest. If we do get lost, we’re supposed

to stay put and whistle until help comes. I pull out my whistle and blow, then listen. Rose blows her whistle too. But Dad doesn't whistle back.

We have to keep trying. We tromp through the bush, calling and listening. Whistling and listening. And then, finally, I see the path the Sasquatch created as it chased Dad. It took down several small trees as it crashed through the bush after him.

We turn off to follow the new path. It's tough going through the bush, and I have to keep lifting Rose over fallen trees.

And then I see Dad's two-way radio. I bend down to pick it up. "Now I know why Dad isn't answering," I say. "He must have dropped this while he was running away."

I lead Rose farther down the trail. But then the freshly made path just stops. "I don't see a trail heading anywhere from here," I say. "Do you?"

With her thumb in her mouth, Rose shakes her head.

I squat and point out Dad's boot marks in the mud. "You can see he ran up this way and then, poof, he's just gone."

"Like someone picked him up," Rose says. "And carried him away." Like we pick up Rose and carry her. But who is strong enough to carry *Dad* away?

Do I really need to ask? I scan the mud until I find them. Great big footprints.

"Did that Bigfoot carry Daddy away?" Rose asks.

"Maybe." Probably. Coming out here to look for Dad now seems like the worst idea *ever*.

"I'm scared," Rose says. "I want to go back to the truck."

That's exactly what we *should* do. But the truth is, I'm not completely sure how to get back to the truck. I can't tell Rose that. She'll be even more scared.

“We need to find Dad first,” I say. But I don’t know where to look. I scan the forest with the goggles, trying to think what to do.

Finally I try blowing the whistle one more time.

We listen.

And then I hear something whistling back.

“Is that Dad?” Rose asks. “It doesn’t sound like our whistles.”

I shake my head. It’s not Dad. No human makes a whistling sound like that.

Then I glimpse the creature through the trees. A great big, hairy figure is waving us down a deer trail. The Sasquatch. I can smell it from here.

It’s likely a trap, but I know I have to follow the Bigfoot. It’s the only way to find Dad.

Chapter Seven

I push the goggles up to my forehead and squat in front of Rose so I can look her in the eye. She's got to understand this is serious. "I think Bigfoot knows where Dad is," I say. In fact, I think the Sasquatch carried Dad away. "We're going to follow it."

"The Bigfoot is out there now?" Rose points down the dark trail. She can't see the creature

waving to us. But with these night-vision goggles, I can.

“Yes,” I say. “I need you to stay close to me, okay? And no screaming.” That might scare the Bigfoot away. Or make it mad at us.

Rose nods. Her eyes are big.

I adjust my goggles so I can see through them. Then I take Rose’s hand. “Okay, you won’t be able to see, but I will. Just hang on to me.”

I lead Rose down the deer path, picking my way over fallen logs, pushing ferns out of the way. In the time it took to talk to Rose, the Sasquatch has already walked off. I can’t smell it anymore, but it must be down this path. The creature was following it when I saw it waving me on.

The nighttime forest looks so weird with the goggles. Sort of green and alien, like it’s another planet. A branch snaps up ahead and I stop to listen, my heart hammering in my chest.

“What?” Rose asks.

I shush her, then scan the forest ahead of us. The trunks of the trees are huge. The Bigfoot could be behind any one of them.

And then I finally see it—the hairy shape of the Sasquatch. It's moving between the trunks up ahead. But it seems way smaller now. And it doesn't stink so bad. Maybe it's too far away. Or maybe the wind has changed direction.

I tug Rose's hand, and we follow the Bigfoot from a distance until I smell woodsmoke. Is there a fire in the forest? But no, I didn't see any flames. Except—

I squint. There is a light up ahead! A few more steps and I see it more clearly. A window, a light in a window. It must be from a lantern. There's no power up here.

There's a house! A house? In the middle of nowhere? Not a house, exactly, more of a shack. It's old and built out of logs, with a stone foundation. Steps lead up to a porch in front.

At the top of the hill behind the shack is a wooden tower with a platform on it. It's so old it looks like it's about to fall down.

"This must be an old fire lookout," I whisper.

"What's that?"

"It's a place where someone would live and keep a lookout for fires," I say. "Dad said there was one around here. But he told me it hasn't been used in a long time."

As we watch through the trees, the Sasquatch strolls up the stairs of the house.

"Does the Bigfoot live in that house?" Rose asks.

I scratch my head. This doesn't make any sense. Dad says Sasquatch weave giant nests to sleep in, like gorillas and chimps do. He's dragged me through this forest to find them, but we never have. All we've ever found are bear dens, dug into hillsides.

"I guess it *does* live in that shack," I say. I whip out my phone to take a photo.

But then, as the Bigfoot reaches the porch, it does something weird. *What?* I take a photo of that too.

"Why is the Bigfoot taking off his head?" Rose asks.

I push the night-vision goggles up on my forehead and squint toward the house. "That's not a Bigfoot," I say. That hairy thing is just a guy wearing a Sasquatch costume. He carries the Bigfoot mask under his arm as he opens the door. "Hey, I know him," I add. "That's—"

"Uncle Hank," Rose says.

Hank isn't really our uncle. He's just one of Dad's friends from the Bigfoot club.

And yes, my dad is a member of a Bigfoot club. They have monthly meetings where they show off their casts of Sasquatch footprints.

They talk about where to find Sasquatch and watch YouTube videos of Sasquatch caught on camera. I wonder now if Hank, in his Bigfoot getup, is the star of some of those videos.

“What’s he doing here?” Rose asks. “Is he camping with us?”

“I think he’s out here chasing Bigfoot.” Like Dad.

“Why is he dressed like that?” Rose asks.

“No clue,” I say. I lead Rose forward by the hand. “But this is good. Hank can help us find Dad. Maybe Dad’s with him.”

That was Hank waving for us to follow him in the forest, right? But why did he look so big then and just like a regular-sized human now? And why did he stink so bad earlier but not now?

I shake my head. It doesn’t matter. I’ve got to find Dad.

As Rose and I jog to the shack, I notice a U-Haul moving truck parked just down the logging road near the shack. Hank must have driven it here.

Why did he drive a moving truck up this road?
Is he moving into the shack?

We rush up the stairs. But just as we reach the porch, we hear a huge rumble coming from the roof.

“Is that thunder?” Rose asks.

I look up just in time to see a boulder roll off the porch roof and bounce down the stairs. “Whoa!” I say, but the sound of the crashing rock drowns me out. The boulder comes to a stop just in front of the outhouse. “What the—”

But before I can finish my sentence, a shower of smaller rocks rains down on the shack. I pull Rose back against the wall of the house. We’re under the porch roof, but the place is really old. A boulder the size of the one now sitting in front of the outhouse could go right through the roof.

Hank rushes out of the house. He is still wearing his Bigfoot outfit, without the head. He now carries what looks sort of like a paintball gun.

But I recognize it. It's a tranquilizer gun for putting big animals to sleep.

Hank scrambles down the stairs without noticing us standing on the porch in the dark. I step forward, about to call out for him. But then I see something through the open door that stops me.

It's Dad, lying on the floor. His hands and feet are tied together, and his mouth is gagged.

"What the heck?" I whisper.

Hank has kidnapped my dad.

Chapter Eight

As Hank runs up the hill behind the house, I take a step toward the door. “Dad?”

But Rose races inside first. “Daddy!” she cries.

With the gag in his mouth, Dad can’t talk. But his eyes are open wide, like he’s panicked. He shakes his head at us, then looks at the door. Watching for Hank, I guess.

But Hank is long gone. He's rushing up the hill toward the tower with that tranquilizer gun.

I quickly pull the rag from Dad's mouth. Above us another rock thunders down on the roof.

"What happened?" I ask Dad. "Did Hank do this to you?"

"He's gone mad," Dad says. "It must have been him chasing after us, in a Bigfoot costume. I tried to lead him away from our camp. But then he shot me with his tranquilizer gun. I conked out. Hank must have carried me back here. When I woke, I was tied up."

"But he's your friend, Daddy," Rose says. "Friends don't hurt friends." Something her preschool teacher says, over and over.

"You're exactly right," Dad says. "He's not my friend anymore."

"I don't understand," I say. "Why would Hank do something like this?"

Dad shakes his head. "I have no idea. I thought he was playing some kind of prank at first. Now... not so much." Dad grunts as he sits up. "Maybe he's trying to scare us off."

"Why? From what?"

"A Sasquatch, maybe?" Dad shrugs. "Hank has always been competitive. In the Bigfoot club, he brags about how he's got the most footprint casts. He's always dreamed of being the first to capture a Bigfoot. Maybe he *has* captured one out here."

"But why would he wear a Bigfoot costume? To scare us off?"

"I don't know," Dad says. "Deer and duck hunters often put out decoys—fake deer or ducks—to lure their prey. Maybe he thought if he wore that costume, he could fool a Sasquatch into coming closer to him."

"That's mean," Rose says. "Fooling a Bigfoot like that."

Yeah, it is.

Dad leans against the wall, his hands and feet still tied. “I’ve never thought it was a good idea either,” Dad says. “I figure a Sasquatch would be smart enough to tell it was a human in a furry suit.”

But not us, I guess. Even I thought Hank was a real Bigfoot when he tried to break into the truck. He certainly smelled like one. I sniff. But this shack doesn’t stink—not like *that* anyway. You’d think it *would* stink because Hank only just left.

“Help me out of these ties,” Dad says. “Quick, before Hank comes back.”

I try untying the rope, but the knots are too tight. I don’t carry a knife. So I look around the shack for something to cut the rope and get Dad’s hands and feet free. But there isn’t much here. Hank’s phone is on the table, along with a few cans of beans. His backpack sits on a folding cot. I start to dig through it.

“What was that noise earlier?” Dad asks. “Was there a rockslide or something?”

“I don’t know,” I say. “But a great big boulder and some rocks fell on the roof.”

“There must have been a rockslide on the hill above us then.” Dad grunts as he struggles to free his hands. “I just hope that old lookout tower doesn’t fall down on us.”

A gunshot booms on the hill. Hank is shooting the tranquilizer gun at something.

“We need to get out of here before he gets back with that gun.” Dad struggles harder to get out of his restraints.

“I can’t find a knife,” I say. “There’s nothing in Hank’s bag but a towel, a toothbrush and a whole lot of bananas.” Way too many bananas, in fact. I mean, seriously, how many bananas can one guy eat?

And then I hear heavy footsteps running toward us from behind the house.

"You've got to leave," Dad says. "Quick, before Hank gets here."

"I've got to untie you!"

"Please, Jay," Dad says. "Get Rose out of here now!"

I pick up Rose and head for the door.

"Daddy!" Rose cries, reaching out for him.

"Run!" Dad calls.

But as I step onto the porch, Hank is there at the base of the stairs. And he's holding the gun that put Dad to sleep. "Jay, Rose," he says. "What are you doing here?"

"We followed you," I say. Like, *duh*. Wasn't that him in the Bigfoot suit waving for us to follow him here? I point a thumb behind me. "Why did you tie up Dad?"

He lifts his chin. "Your dad thinks he can waltz in here and steal my glory. Well, he's not going to."

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

He points the gun at the house. "You both get back in there. I guess I'll have to tie you up too."

"Don't you dare tie up my kids!" Dad shouts from inside the shack.

I put Rose on the porch and slowly step down the stairs toward Hank. "You don't have to do this," I say. "If you just untie Dad, we'll all go back to our camp. We'll pack up our things and clear out. You never have to see us again."

Hank shakes his head. "No, you're trying to trick me. You want the fame and money. But it's mine. All mine."

What fame? What money? But before I have a chance to ask, Rose is tottering down the stairs past me.

"Rose, stop!" I cry.

But she plunks herself in front of Hank and looks up at him. "I don't like you anymore," she says. And she kicks him in the leg.

“Why, you little—” Hank bends down to grab her. But then, before picking her up, he stands straight again and sniffs. “You smell that?” he asks.

I catch a whiff of something stinky. *Really* stinky.

And then a massive black shadow bolts between us. It pushes Hank to the ground and scoops up Rose.

It all happens so fast that it takes me a second to realize what’s happening. And then I see a huge shaggy brown shape running off in the dark. A Bigfoot. A *real* Bigfoot! And Rose is over its shoulder, waving bye-bye.

“Jay!” Dad calls from the house. “What’s happening? I can’t see from here.”

I look down at Hank as he struggles to get up. He seems winded and dazed. The Sasquatch pushed him pretty hard.

“I’ll be right back!” I call to Dad. I run off after the Sasquatch. “Wait!” I cry. “Stop! Let Rose go!”

But the Bigfoot's stride is so much longer than mine. I can't catch up.

"Whee!" Rose cries. Her arms are out like she's flying.

"Where are you taking her?" I call. "Stop!"

But within moments the Bigfoot and Rose have disappeared into the darkness.

Chapter Nine

I slide the night-vision goggles back in place. Right away I see the Bigfoot again. As I run after it, I put the pieces together and finally figure out what *really* happened earlier.

Back at the truck, the *real* Bigfoot tried to tell us that Hank had kidnapped Dad. That's what it was doing when it put on its "play" in the truck headlights.

Later it waved us down the trail, trying to get us to follow it back to the fire lookout. But then we ran into Hank, dressed in his Bigfoot costume. It was him I followed. And then the Sasquatch threw those boulders and rocks on the roof to get Hank to run outside so we could save Dad.

The Sasquatch is trying to *help* us.

At least, I think it is. But why did it just kidnap Rose?

Then I get it. The Sasquatch thought Hank was going to *hurt* Rose. So it carried her away to safety. Now I have to get Rose back.

But I hear something on the path behind me. I turn to see Hank running after us. And he's got that tranquilizer gun.

What do I do? What do I *do*? I stumble over a root and do a face-plant inches from a banana slug.

And then I hear Mom's words going through my head. *Break it down*, she always says. *If you're*

feeling overwhelmed, break the problem into pieces and focus on one piece at a time.

I push up from the wet ground and start running after the Bigfoot again. Okay, I can do this. I have to do this. For Rose, for Dad, for me. *Break the problem into pieces and focus on one piece at a time.*

The first piece is, I've got to lose Hank. Or he'll put all of us to sleep with that gun.

I look back again. I can see Hank working his way through the forest, following our trail. But he doesn't have night-vision goggles. I do.

That gives me an idea. I start running in the opposite direction of the Sasquatch and my sister. I try making a lot of noise, breaking sticks underfoot and pushing young trees. Just as Dad told me to, I start banging on trees with a stick. I'm hoping Hank will think I'm the Bigfoot and follow me.

And, weirdly, it works. Hank veers off the Bigfoot's path and follows mine. I run, hitting trees.

When I figure I've gone far enough, I grab a few rocks and hide behind a big tree.

With the night-vision goggles, I can see Hank approaching, but he can't see me. In fact, he walks right past me. Good.

But then, a bit farther along the trail, he stops to listen. To keep him moving in that direction, I throw a rock so it lands just up the trail from him. Hopefully he'll think the noise is the Sasquatch and keep chasing it. Then I pitch another rock. It works. Hank takes off, running down the trail away from me. And then he's gone.

I slip out from behind the tree and double back down the trail. Okay, Hank's out of the picture, at least for the moment. But he's likely to return as soon as he figures out he's lost the Bigfoot's trail. I'm hoping he'll just give up.

Now I have to deal with the second piece of my problem—finding Rose. I've got to find the Sasquatch that kidnapped her. Ugh.

I race back to the point the Bigfoot's path split from mine. If I can just stay on the creature's trail, I'll find Rose. I pick my way through the forest, searching for broken branches, twigs, footprints. Anything that tells me the Bigfoot carried Rose in this direction.

There's a busted tree branch hanging from a tree. And just up ahead in that patch of mud, a giant footprint. And then—

The trail stops. No more broken branches. No more footprints.

I stop and look around. Where did the Sasquatch go? It must be around here somewhere. I search the forest with the goggles. But the bush in this rainforest is so dense, it's hard to find anything.

And then I think about it. How do you find a Bigfoot's nest? By its *smell*.

I start sniffing around. Literally. And then I catch a whiff of that stink, like cooked cabbage

and old socks and even older cheese. Nasty. But I force myself to keep sniffing. I *have* to find Rose.

I sniff and sniff, following the smell as it gets stronger until I'm standing at the base of a tree-covered hill.

And then, just up the hill, I finally see it. There's a mound of sticks woven together into a bowl shape. It's built like a bird's nest, only this "nest" is supersized. It's way bigger than an eagle's nest. Tucked at the base of a giant cedar, it's protected from the rain by the branches overhead.

Looking up at it from below, I can't see inside. But I already know what I'll find there. The nest looks exactly like the ones I saw in a video Dad showed me. It's like the big nests orangutans and gorillas weave to sleep in.

I've found the Bigfoot's home.

"Rose?" I call. "Rose, can you hear me?"

My sister peeks over the edge of the nest like a baby bird. "Jay?"

I rush up the hill toward the nest. “Rose, are you all right?”

But at the sound of my voice, the Sasquatch sits up right beside her. It slaps its chest with open hands like an angry gorilla.

I stop in my tracks. The last thing I want is to make the Sasquatch feel threatened. “Rose, don’t move,” I say. This could get ugly quick.

“Stomp and me are playing,” Rose says.

“Stomp?” I ask.

“That’s what I named her. When she walks, she goes, *stomp, stomp*. So I call her Stomp.”

“*Her?*” I say, glancing at the Sasquatch. The creature is scowling back at me.

“She’s a mommy Bigfoot,” Rose says.

“How can you tell?” The Sasquatch is covered in hair and built like a football player with gear on.

“She just is.” My sister holds up a “doll” made out of twigs woven together. It looks like a Bigfoot. “She made this toy for her daughter.”

“Her *daughter*?” I step back. There’s *another* Bigfoot in there? Dad says never get between a bear and its cub. A mother bear is really dangerous. It will do anything to protect its young. I figure a Bigfoot mom will too.

“Her daughter isn’t here right now,” Rose says. “But Stomp let me play with her toys.”

Stomp grabs the doll from Rose.

“Hey!” Rose says.

Stomp points excitedly at the doll, then back to the trail. She makes all kinds of grunting and squealing noises.

“She’s trying to tell us something,” Rose says.

“Yeah, but what?”

Stomp holds up the doll again, pointing at it over and over.

“I’m sorry,” I tell Stomp. “I don’t know what you’re trying to say.”

Frustrated, Stomp jumps up in the nest, bumping her head against a branch. “Poog,” she says, holding

her head. I'm pretty sure *poog* is a swear word in this creature's language.

I step up to the nest cautiously to take Rose's hand. "I think we should go now," I tell her, looking up at the Sasquatch.

Rose pouts. "We haven't finished playing."

But before I have a chance to lift Rose out of the nest, Stomp grabs my sister and jumps out herself. She runs off down the trail with Rose over her shoulder.

"Whee!" Rose yells.

"Stop!" I cry, running after them. "Where are you taking my sister?"

Stomp looks over her shoulder at me. But she just keeps running. It doesn't take long before she's way ahead of me on the trail. And then she and Rose are gone.

Chapter Ten

As I follow Stomp's path, I realize there is something familiar about this trail. I remember that boulder. And that fallen tree. I jump over it. And then it dawns on me—we're heading back to Hank's shack!

Why would Stomp go back *there*?

And then, rounding a bend, I see Stomp waiting for me. She nods her head sideways as if to say

hurry up. And then she's off again, striding down the trail. Rose waves at me from Stomp's shoulder.

"Wait!" I call.

But Stomp just waves me on again. She strides through the forest with me following until we reach the shack. Once there Stomp hides behind a tree, looking around—for Hank, I guess. But I'm not sure if he's made it back to the lookout yet.

There's still the light of the lantern in the window. And I know my dad is in there, tied up. I've got to get to him.

"Let's go, Rose," I say. I try to lift my sister off Stomp's shoulder, but the Sasquatch won't let go. She grunts and nods toward the U-Haul moving truck.

"I don't understand," I say.

As she creeps toward the big box on the back of the truck, she waves me on again. Rose looks back at me, hugging Stomp's hairy neck.

“Please, just give me Rose,” I whisper as I look around for Hank.

But of course, the Bigfoot doesn’t understand. She carries Rose to the truck. It’s one of those trucks with a door on the back that slides up. Stomp tries pulling it open, but it doesn’t budge.

With Rose still holding on to her neck, the Sasquatch taps the door with the doll she made for her daughter and grunts. Then she just stares at the door like our cat does until we open it for him.

“You want me to open the door?” I say. I try the truck door myself. But it’s locked tight. “I don’t have the key,” I tell Stomp. I point at the lock. “No key.”

Stomp puts down Rose and tries again with both hands. And then she slaps the door—hard.

“Getting mad isn’t going to help,” I tell her. “Why is it so important to get in there?”

“I bet her daughter is in there,” Rose says.

“Clever girl.” The man’s voice comes from behind us.

I swing around to find Hank standing right there, aiming that tranquilizer gun at Stomp.

“You can’t—” I start. But Hank fires the gun. A tranquilizer dart hits Stomp in the chest.

The Sasquatch grabs the tranquilizer dart and tosses it to the ground. But she doesn’t fall right to sleep. She lunges at Hank with both hands stretched out, like she’s going to grab him. But before she can take another step, Hank fires a second tranquilizer dart into her chest.

Stomp staggers. “Poog,” she says and falls flat on her face. I feel the earth under my feet shudder as she hits the ground.

I bend over to check her. She’s okay and already snoring. But if we don’t get away from Hank, we could be shot next.

I pick up Rose and dash around Hank. But he grabs the sleeve of my coat and swings me back.

Rose and I tumble to the ground. “You two aren’t going anywhere,” Hank says. Then he tosses me a key. “Open that door,” he says, nodding at the truck.

When I don’t immediately get up, he levels the tranquilizer gun at me. “Or do you want a nap?”

“Okay, okay,” I say, standing. I fumble with the key, trying to get it into the lock, and then finally open the door. I slide it up.

There inside, in the dark, are two large cages made of metal bars. One is empty, but in the second cage there’s what looks like a small bear, a cub. But the creature turns, and I see an ape’s face. It’s a Bigfoot. But much smaller than Stomp.

“Stomp’s little girl!” Rose cries out.

“Yes, exactly,” Hank says. “You really are a clever girl. I caught this one first. Then stuck around as I knew its mother would turn up eventually. Now I have not just one Bigfoot but two!” He waves me over. “Pull down that ramp on the truck. You’re

going to help me drag the adult Sasquatch into the cage.”

“No.”

He points the tranquilizer gun at me again. “Help me or I *will* put you to sleep.”

I hold out both hands. “Okay, okay.”

Hank and I each take one of Stomp’s big hands and pull with everything we’ve got. Now that she’s lying down, Stomp seems even more huge. Still, we manage to slide her up the ramp. But getting her into the cage with her daughter? That’s even harder. Stomp is heavy and stinky, and I quickly work up a sweat.

As we lift and push Stomp through the cage opening, the young Sasquatch shifts to the corner. Stomp’s one eye opens halfway as she looks up at me. Then she starts to snore as she drifts deeper into sleep.

We finally get her all the way inside, and Hank locks the cage. Stomp’s daughter rushes to her

sleeping mother and pats her face. When her mom doesn't wake up, she snuggles up to her. But she also looks at us with big, scared eyes.

Rose is scared too, I can tell. She's standing outside the truck, sucking her thumb.

"Now your turn," Hank says. He points the gun at the second cage.

"I'm not going in there," I say.

"No, you both are." He takes Rose's hand and drags her into the cage first. Staring at his gun, I reluctantly follow. Rose clings to me like the young Sasquatch clings to her mom.

"What are you going to do with us?" I ask as Hank locks the cage.

"As soon as the sun rises, I'll leave you and your dad here while I take these two Bigfoot into town."

"You'll let us go?" I ask.

Hank shakes his head. "No, I'll tie you up."

"You can't leave us tied up," I say. "No one knows we're here." Except Mom. And she thinks we are on

a week-long camping trip. We could be tied up for hours, maybe days, before she sends someone up here to look for us.

“Exactly,” Hank says. “There’s no chance of you stealing my thunder.”

I hold on to the bars of the cage. “What does that even mean?” I ask.

Hank pats his chest with his hands like Stomp did earlier when she was trying to protect her nest. “I’m going to be the first to prove Sasquatch are real,” he says. “I’ll be known as the man who discovered Bigfoot. Not you. Not your dad. I’ll make the world news by evening.”

Then he yawns. “But first I’m going to catch a nap. It’s been a long night.”

He jumps out of the truck and slides the ramp back in place. Then he rolls down the back door, leaving us in our cage in the dark. But he’s left the door open just a crack. At the bottom I can see a thin line of light from the shack. So Hank didn’t

bother locking the door. I guess he figured he didn't need to, as he has us and both of his prize Bigfoot locked away in cages.

I turn on the flashlight app on my phone and shine it around the inside of the truck.

"I'm scared," Rose says. "I wish Mommy was here."

And for the first time since Mom moved out, I feel the same way.

Chapter Eleven

Have you ever been trapped inside a truck with an angry skunk? What a coincidence! Me too! (That was on our last camping trip with Dad.) This is worse. There are two stinky Sasquatch in the cage right next to us. And Rose and I are trapped in a cage too. *And we're all stuck in the back of this U-Haul truck.*

My quick scan with my phone's little flashlight

tells me there's nothing else in here. Just me and Rose, the Bigfoot and the two cages. Hank didn't bother to take my phone away because he knows there's no cell reception here. There's no way I can call for help.

Still, I tap on my conversation with Mom and stare down at her last two texts.

Wish I was going on the camping trip with you.

Miss you.

I wish she was here too. I don't feel as mad at her now. I just feel scared, and I miss her so much. It occurs to me that since she moved out of our house, she must feel the same way. Scared and lonely. I bet, like Stomp, she would do anything to see her kids again.

I wish I'd texted Mom back when I had the chance.

I do that now. I text **Miss you too**. But of course, the text doesn't send.

We're on our own.

“What are we going to do?” Rose whimpers. She looks so scared and cold. She’s shivering. It doesn’t help that our pants are wet from the hike through the forest.

I rub her arms to help her warm up and then hug her. “I’ll get us out of here.”

“How?”

I have no idea. But I’m not going to tell my little sister that. I yank on the cage lock. It’s one of those big ones like the one I use to lock up my bike at school. There’s no way I can unlock it, not without a key.

I pull the bars on the cage. But as hard as I try, I can’t bend them apart. And the bars are too close together to slip through. Even Rose couldn’t get through that small a space.

“What are you going to call the little Bigfoot?” I ask Rose. I figure if I can keep her talking, she won’t be so afraid.

“Her coat’s covered in moss,” Rose says. “So her name is Greenie.”

“*Greenie?*” I guess that’s as good a name as any.

I try bending the bars again. Greenie shifts away from her sleeping mom and scoots to my side of the cage. She watches me for a minute. Then she copies me, pulling on the bars of her own cage.

I stop. She stops. Monkey see, monkey do. And that gives me an idea.

“Rose, pull on the bars like I do.”

“I’m not strong enough,” she says.

“But I think Greenie might be.” She’s bigger than us. And other apes, like gorillas, are way stronger than humans.

“Okay, pull,” I tell Rose and Greenie. Of course, the little Bigfoot doesn’t understand me. But that doesn’t stop her from copying us both.

Greenie pulls and pulls the bars, and they start to creak and bend. “Good girl, Greenie!” I cry. “Keep pulling!”

So that Greenie will copy me, I pull the bars on our cage until I’m red in the face. But they don’t budge. Greenie is making progress though. There is more and more space between the bars. If Rose were in that cage, she could squeeze through.

“That’s right,” I say to Greenie. “Keep at it!”

Rose grunts as she tries to pull the bars apart too.

And *ping!* Something gives, and the bars are now far enough apart that Greenie can fit her head through. Rose and I both clap and cheer. But that scares Greenie. She slinks back into the cage and hugs her mother.

“No, no!” I say, waving my hands. “You did good!”

“I think we scared her,” Rose says.

I've got to find a way to get Greenie to climb out of the cage. I rummage in my backpack. "Here," I say, holding out a banana through the bars. "Try one of these. You'll like it." It occurs to me then that all those bananas in Hank's backpack were for the Bigfoot. Hank likely lured Greenie into the cage with one.

Greenie looks down at her sleeping mom like she's asking if it's okay to take the banana. But of course, Stomp only snores.

"It's good!" I say.

Greenie shifts back to my side of her cage and reaches for the banana. When she does, I pull the banana back to get her to slip through the bars of her cage to get it. At first she pulls back, but then she sniffs the air. The smell of the banana must be too good to resist, because she slips sideways through the bar on her cage and reaches into ours.

She grabs the banana from me and bites off the top without peeling it. She makes a face and spits it out.

“No, no,” I say, pulling another banana from my bag. “Like this.” I peel it and take a bite. “Yum.”

Greenie looks down at her banana for a long moment, then tentatively peels it. She takes a bite. “Ooh!” she says, her eyebrows rising. Then she squats in the space between the two cages and gulps it down.

“Banana,” Rose says, pointing at it. She repeats the word slowly a couple of times. “Ba-na-na.”

“Ba-na-na,” Greenie says.

“She talks!” Rose jumps up and down in excitement, and Greenie, alarmed, shifts back toward her mother’s cage.

“No, no, it’s okay,” I say to calm her. I unwrap a chocolate bar and offer it to Greenie.

She takes a bite, and her eyes light up. “Ba-na-na!” she says.

“No, *chocolate*,” I say. “Choc-o-late.”

Greenie nods. “Ba-na-na!”

“She thinks *banana* means ‘good,’” Rose says.

“Well, it’s a start,” I say. “You called Mom Cheese until you were two.”

“I love cheese,” Rose says.

“Okay, let’s see if Greenie can get us out of here.” I stand a little to the side and try to pull a couple of bars apart.

Greenie licks her finger and eyes me. “Ba-na-na?” she asks, pointing at my backpack.

“She wants more chocolate,” Rose says.

“You can have more banana after you pull the bars apart,” I say. When she doesn’t appear to understand, I pull the second chocolate bar from my bag and hold it up. “Banana. After. Pull.” I pull on the bars to demonstrate.

But Greenie shakes her head and holds out her hand. “Ba-na-na,” she says, pointing at the chocolate. She’s not going to pull the bars on

our cage until she gets her treat.

“She learns fast,” Rose says.

“No,” I say, pointing at the chocolate. “No banana until pull.” I pull on the bars.

Greenie sighs out her nose. Then she grabs two bars on our cage and pulls them apart. I slip through the gap and help Rose out. “Good Greenie!” I say.

“She’s not a dog,” says Rose. My sister takes the chocolate bar from me and hands it to Greenie. “She’s my friend.”

Greenie sits back and unwraps the chocolate like it’s a banana. Then she stuffs the candy into her mouth whole. “Ba-na-na!” she says.

I slowly back us away from Greenie. She seems nice. But she’s still nearly twice my size. And I’m out of chocolate.

“What do we do now?” Rose asks.

Time to take care of the last piece of my problem. “Now,” I say, “we find a way to free Dad.”

Chapter Twelve

I stoop down to peek through the gap between the rolling door and the truck floor. No sign of Hank. It's still dark outside, but I can see a bit of light over the hills. The sun will be up soon, and so will Hank.

But if I open this truck door now, I risk waking Hank. And if I go into the shack, I will definitely wake him. It will take too long to untie Dad, and

I'm not sure how to do that quietly. Hank will just capture us all over again. I have to find a way to trap Hank first. But how?

And just then I hear Stomp. "Poog," she says, holding her head. She rubs her eyes. Then she sees Greenie and jumps to her feet, banging her head against the top of the cage. "Poog!" she cries again. That's *definitely* a swear word.

But then Greenie climbs into her mom's cage, and Stomp grabs her daughter in her arms and swings her around. They both make all kinds of hooting and chattering noises. I'd chatter like that too if Mom turned up about now.

Greenie tries to lead her mother out of the cage, squeezing through the hole she made in the bars, but the space isn't big enough for Stomp.

"Ba-na-na," Greenie says, pointing at my backpack.

"I think she wants you to give her mom a treat," Rose says.

“I’m sorry,” I say. “I don’t have any more chocolate.”

“Ba-na-na,” Greenie says, holding out her hand.

“Really,” I say. “I’m all out.”

Greenie stands to her full height and slaps her chest with her open hands, mad now. “BA-NA-NA!”

And that seems to get Stomp all worked up. She starts, well, stomping. And slapping the cage. And rocking the truck.

Rose and I both put a hand to the wall to stay upright.

“Stomp, calm down,” I say. “You need to be quiet. You don’t want to wake up Hank. Just—”

But she pulls two bars of the cage apart without effort, as if they’re swimming noodles. And then she slides out between them. And *then*, free of the cage, she starts slapping her chest.

“Uh-oh,” Rose says, looking up at the Bigfoot.

Uh-oh is right. See what I mean? Being trapped in a truck with two angry Sasquatch is way worse

than being trapped in a truck with one angry skunk.

“We’ve got to get out of here,” I tell Rose. *Before they squash us under those great big feet.* I look under the rolling door to make sure Hank isn’t out there. Then Rose helps me slide the truck door up. But before we can jump to the ground, Stomp takes Greenie by the hand and leaps out of the truck with her. Their big feet hit the ground with a thump, and they both lope off into the bush.

Rose waves. “Bye, Stomp. Bye, Greenie.”

“Shush!” I say. We both listen for Hank. But it seems he’s still asleep.

My sister looks at me as if to say, *Now what?*

I jump from the truck and help my sister down too. “Now we find a way to rescue Dad.”

“How do we do that?”

I roll the door on the truck back down as quietly as I can, to make it seem like we’re still in the truck. Then I search the yard for some way to trap Hank

so I can free Dad. But there isn't much to work with. There's a shovel leaning against the house. I could dig a hole, and maybe Hank would fall into it. But then what?

My eyes land on the outhouse. The boulder Stomp threw at the shack landed right in front of the outhouse door. If I could move it just a bit more...

"How are we going to save Daddy?" Rose asks.

"What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning?"

Rose thinks for a moment. "I polish my toenails with my electric toothbrush."

"Really?" I shake my head. "No, before that."

"I go wee-wee."

"Exactly."

"Do you have to go?" Rose asks.

"No, but Hank will. He said he was going to wake at dawn and drive the Bigfoot down the mountain." I look at the sky. "The sun's almost up now."

“So?”

“So he’ll want to use that outhouse first. All we have to do now is wait.”

I hide Rose in the bush beside the house. Then I slip behind the outhouse. As soon as Hank comes out to do his business, I’ll shove that boulder in front of the outhouse door, trapping him inside. Then I can rush into the shack and free Dad.

At least, that’s the plan.

I wait. The sun comes up. I wait some more. It seems Hank is sleeping in.

Then, finally, I see Hank through the window, moving around in the shack. He opens the door and wanders out in a pair of long underwear. You know, those full-body underwear with a flap on the butt.

He yawns and shuffles into the outhouse, closing the door behind him.

I quickly race around to the front of the outhouse and push the boulder toward the door.

I push and push...but it goes nowhere. "Poog," I say.

"Is someone out there?" Hank asks.

"No," Rose says.

I shush her and push the rock harder, but it won't budge.

"Who is that?" Hank says. "When I'm done here I'm going to—"

There is an awful smell. Like, the worst. Hank must have eaten a lot of beans last night.

But then I recognize that smell. It's not bean farts, it's—

"Stomp!" Rose cries out, running toward me.

I turn, and there, towering over me, is the Bigfoot. Past her I see her daughter, Greenie, waiting in the bush.

"Quick," I tell Stomp. "Help me move this boulder."

I push on the rock and point to the outhouse door to make her understand and then step back.

Stomp picks up the boulder and plunks it down right in front of the door like it weighs nothing.

“Hey!” Hank hollers. “What’s going on out there?” When he tries to open the door, it won’t budge. The rock is holding it in place.

Hank’s eye peeks through a knothole in the door. “What are you *doing?*” he cries.

“Making sure you don’t run off before the police arrive.”

“And stopping you from stealing Stomp and Greenie!” Rose puts her hands on her hips and stands there like a superhero.

“You let them go?” Hank asks through the knothole.

Stomp hoots and slaps a hairy fist on the top of the outhouse.

“I’ve spent so many years hunting for them!” Hank cries. “You can’t let them go!”

“Watch me,” I say.

“Does your dad know?” Hank asks.

I squat in front of Rose. “No, and we can’t tell him,” I say to her. “Do you understand?”

Rose shakes her head.

“If we tell Dad that Hank caught a Bigfoot, all kinds of Bigfoot hunters will come here. Not just Dad. They’ll find Stomp and Greenie and put them in a cage at a zoo.”

“No!” Rose cries. “Stomp and Greenie would hate that!”

Just like we did.

“That’s why we can’t tell anyone,” I say. “Not even Dad.”

“How about Mom?”

“Not even Mom,” I say. Though I doubt she would believe us if we did.

“Well, I’m going to tell everyone that I captured them,” Hank says from inside the outhouse. “And I’ve got photos.”

“Photos can be deleted,” I say. “And I saw you left your phone on the kitchen table last night. I bet it’s still there.”

“You don’t know my password.”

“I’m guessing its Bigfoot?” I say. “Or is it Sasquatch?”

“You, you—” Angry, Hank bangs on the bathroom door. *Bang, bang.*

I take that as a yes. And then Stomp knocks back on the outhouse. *Knock, knock.* She tilts her head, listening for more knocks.

I pull out my phone and click on the photo I took earlier of Hank wearing the Bigfoot costume. “Besides, I’ve got a photo of you dressed up like a Sasquatch. You try to tell anyone you captured Bigfoot up here, I’ll throw *that* up on social media. Everyone will think you’re faking your story. No one will ever believe you again.”

Hank peers at me through the knothole. “You *wouldn’t.*”

I look up at Stomp. *Way up.* “To stop you from kidnapping our friends?” I say. “You bet I would.”

Stomp grins down at me, baring her teeth. But she doesn't look scary now. She just looks happy.

Chapter Thirteen

“You should go,” I tell Stomp. When she doesn’t understand, I run in place like she did in our truck headlights the night before and then point to the forest. She gets it.

Then she hugs me. Ever been hugged by a Sasquatch? It’s like being hugged by a stinky old shag carpet. But I know she’s saying thanks for helping her free her daughter.

She steps back and turns to leave, but I take her big hand to stop her. “Stomp, wait. Let me get a selfie with you. I promise no one will ever see it.”

Stomp makes a sound like “Huh?”

I hold out my phone to show her the picture of Hank in the Sasquatch outfit. She hoots and taps my screen, leaving a huge fingerprint there. I wipe it off on my sleeve. Then I hold up my phone to take a photo with Stomp. “Say cheese!”

“Oog?” she says.

“Now go,” I say, waving her off. “Leave before Dad sees you.”

As Stomp leads Greenie away, she copies me, waving back.

Rose joins me in front of the house to watch them. “Will they be okay?” she asks me.

I know what she means. Will they escape other Bigfoot hunters?

“I hope so.” I take my little sister’s hand. “Now let’s go see if *Dad* is okay.”

We race into the house. Dad is still lying on the floor, his feet and hands tied together. Hank had put the rag back in his mouth so he couldn't yell for help. Not that there *is* anyone around to help other than me and Rose and the Bigfoot.

I pull out the gag first.

"Jay!" Dad says. "Rose! You need to get out of here. Hank just went to the bathroom. He'll be right back!"

"No he won't," I say. "I locked him in the outhouse."

"You did *what*?"

I hesitate before asking my question. How much does Dad know about the Bigfoot? "Did Hank say why he tied you up?"

"No," Dad says. "He refused to tell me anything. Like I said earlier, I wondered if he'd found a Sasquatch and wanted to keep the find to himself. I saw a moving truck out there. Did he have a Bigfoot caged inside?"

“Nope. I looked. No Bigfoot.” It’s a lie, of course. As I turn away, I glance at Rose and shake my head a little, warning her again not to say anything about Stomp or Greenie.

I find Hank’s phone on the table and, beside an empty can of beans, a can opener. It has a sharp round blade on it. The blade is small, and it will take a while, but I can use it to cut the rope around Dad’s hands.

“Listen, Dad,” I say as I start to cut the rope. “Do you think we can give up this Bigfoot-hunting stuff and just go camping next time? Like at a real campsite near a lake, maybe?”

Dad nods. “Yeah, I think this is our last Bigfoot-hunting trip,” he says. “Your mom is right. I’ve never seen a Sasquatch and likely never will. I think my hunt for them has cost me too much already.”

I feel bad about lying to Dad. But if he knew about Greenie and Stomp, he’d hunt until he

found them. Or he'd tell the other members of his Bigfoot club. There's no way I'm going to let a Bigfoot hunter separate Stomp and Greenie again.

I cut deeper into the rope. "I've been thinking," I say. "When we get back, maybe Rose and I should spend some time at Mom's new place. I think moving out and being away from us has been hard on Mom."

Dad looks up at me. "Maybe it's been hard on you too?"

"Yeah, maybe."

"I miss Mommy," Rose says.

I cut all the way through the rope, and Dad pulls his hands apart. "I'm glad you've decided to patch things up with your mother," he says. He unwinds the rope and lets it drop to the floor. "I know you were feeling angry with her because she moved out."

I shrug.

“It’s okay to be angry,” he says. Then he holds my gaze. “But your mom left *me*, Jay. She didn’t leave you and Rose. She would never, ever leave you. Do you understand?”

I nod. After seeing how Stomp risked her freedom to get to Greenie, I’m starting to.

As Dad unties the rope holding his ankles together, I grab Hank’s phone. Then, with my back to Dad, I try two passwords, Bigfoot and Sasquatch. Sasquatch does the trick.

I quickly delete all of Hank’s photos of Stomp and Greenie. Then I glance over at Dad to make sure he hasn’t noticed before I slip the phone back on the table.

Dad tries to stand, but his legs are asleep from being tied up all this time. I help him get to his feet. Then he pats his pockets, looking for his phone. “I guess we better call the police about Hank,” he says. “Before he finds a way out of that outhouse.”

“No bars, remember?” I say. “We can’t make a call from here.”

“Right. We’ll hike back to camp and drive down the logging road until we get reception. Got my truck keys?”

I hand them to him.

“Is Hank going to jail?” I ask.

“Given he shot me with a tranquilizer dart and tied me up,” Dad says, “I think that’s very likely.”

“Will he get locked in a cage?” Rose asks.

“In a manner of speaking.”

“I didn’t like being locked in a cage,” Rose says.

Dad frowns at her. “What do you mean, honey?”

“Hank locked us up,” I say.

“He did *what*?”

“But we got out,” I say.

“How?”

“Greenie—” Rose starts. But then she slaps a hand over her mouth so she won’t say anything more.

“We broke out,” I say. “I’m stronger than I look.”

Dad nods. “Yes, you sure are.”

Dad carries Rose as we hike through the woods to our camp and truck. As my sister hugs his neck, she looks at me over his shoulder. Then her eyes open wide, and she points behind me. I look back into the gloomy, wet woods and there on the trail I see Stomp and Greenie. I check to make sure Dad doesn’t see them before waving them off. The Bigfoot both wave back, and then Stomp takes Greenie’s hand, and together they disappear into the forest.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

As I was walking in my local park one day, I came across a sign tacked to an outhouse. It was titled "BC Forest Service Bulletin. Sasquatch Alert."

It went on to say, "Attention, visitors: Sasquatch have been sighted coming down from the mountains to feed on fish, freshwater clams and vegetation. DO NOT BE ALARMED IF YOU HAVE AN ENCOUNTER."

And then the poster offered tips on what to do should you run into a Sasquatch. "Remain Calm. Do Not Run. Do Not Separate from Your Group. Do Not Chase Sasquatch. Do Not Feed Sasquatch. Do Take Photos."

There was a sketch of a Sasquatch and a last bit of text: "Sasquatch are not aggressive, nor will they harm you."

Was this poster real? No. I am not sure who created it, but it was a joke, a take on common

notices about what to do when encountering wildlife in the area.

But it made me laugh, and I knew I had the start of a Bigfoot story, the book you now have in your hands.

Are Sasquatch real? Living in rural British Columbia, I've been asking myself that question my whole life. I grew up hearing stories from my parents and others about their own Sasquatch encounters. My parents, who were sheep ranchers, spent a lot of time in the mountains. There, they told me, they sometimes heard strange apelike calls and hoots. My dad was a real mountain man and knew almost everything about the animals in the region. These calls, he said, weren't like any animal he knew of. He felt it might well be Sasquatch.

There *were* huge apes that have gone extinct. One of them was a giant ten-foot-tall ape called *Gigantopithecus* that might have been related to the orangutan. We have fossil evidence that

it existed, and it looked pretty much like how we picture Bigfoot. If you'd like to know more about that, check out the *Smithsonian Magazine* article titled "Did Bigfoot Really Exist? How *Gigantopithecus* Became Extinct" (published online January 9, 2012).

There have been other animals we thought had died out but were later found alive. Maybe Sasquatch is one of them. I like to think so.

If Bigfoot do really exist, was anything on that poster I saw at the park useful? Most of it is good advice. You never want to feed wildlife. It's dangerous to do so. (And Jay shouldn't have done that in this story.) And it can be very dangerous to approach a wild animal, much less chase it. (Hank shouldn't have done that in this story.)

How about that last bit of text on the poster that says Sasquatch are not aggressive? Well, no one knows for sure, but other apes, like chimpanzees and gorillas (and us), can be very aggressive.

(For more on that, see the article “Ten Things You Probably Didn’t Know About Chimpanzees” by Daksha Rangan, on the Jane Goodall Institute Canada site.) So my guess is that Sasquatch could attack a human, if provoked.

In fact, there have been many reports of Sasquatch throwing rocks at humans. I got the idea that Stomp throws rocks at the shack from a story about a Bigfoot attack at Ape Canyon, near Mount St. Helen’s, in 1924. You’ll find this story all over the internet, but it was originally reported in a newspaper called *The Oregonian* on July 16, 1924. In the story, miners said they were attacked by “gorilla men” who walked upright and were covered in hair. But later a ranger claimed the rocks were thrown by kids camping nearby.

So who knows? Some people believe Bigfoot exist. Some, not so much.

But here’s the thing. Giant, carefully woven nests like the one Jay finds in this story have been

found in Washington State. They are very much like the beds built by gorillas, orangutans and chimpanzees. It looks like a giant ape built them—but in the Pacific Northwest. You can see them for yourself in the Daily Planet video called *Discovering Bigfoot's Nest* on the Discovery Canada YouTube channel (posted March 9, 2017).

Do I believe in Bigfoot? Let's just say I make a point of carrying my phone on my walks so if I do see one, I can take a picture. But would I share that photo on social media? Nope, I don't think I would. Just like Jay in my story, I'd rather leave the Bigfoot alone to live out their lives undisturbed in the forest.

Want to know more? Check out the article titled "What's the Difference Between Sasquatch and Bigfoot" on the *HowStuffWorks* science website, published online April 9, 2020.



Gail Anderson-Dargatz is the award-winning author of over a dozen books, including *The Cure for Death by Lightning* and *A Recipe for Bees*, which were finalists for the Scotiabank Giller Prize. She has also written a number of short novels for striving readers, including the Orca Currents titles *Iggy's World* and *The Ride Home*, which was shortlisted for a BC and Yukon Book Prize. Gail lives in the Shuswap region of British Columbia.

The logo for Orca Currents features the words "Orca Currents" in a white, cursive-style font. The text is centered within a thick, black, horizontal brushstroke that has a rough, textured edge, resembling a paint stroke or a piece of charcoal.

For more information on all the books
in the Orca Currents line, please visit

orcabook.com

IF BIGFOOT IS A MYTH, THEN WHO KIDNAPPED JAY'S DAD?

Jay's dad loves hunting for Bigfoot, but searching for a mythical creature in the dark isn't exactly Jay's idea of fun. Especially since they're totally not real. Plus, Jay always gets stuck looking out for his little sister. But on one of these trips in the bush, something starts hunting the three of them. Then Jay's father goes missing. Somehow Jay has to figure out what happened to his dad while still keeping his sister safe. It's not long before Jay learns that mythical creatures are not the only threat in these woods.

This is an advance reading copy of the uncorrected proofs and is not for sale. Changes may be made to the text before publication, so **all quotations for review must be checked against the final bound book.**

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