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Visit with Dr. Stone

In two more days, the boys finally reached Dr. Stone's base camp. It was deserted. The ashes around the fire pit were cold. "The camp is empty. Something must have happened," Steve said. "It must have become impossible to continue the expedition. The whole camp is dismantled."

Dan agreed. "We might as well head for home. It should be easier going back. We know the way."

Joey's dogs were the first to greet the boys. They rushed at them with happy yelps, prancing around them.

Joey appeared on the back porch. Behind him stood his ever-curious grandmother.

"Dad! The kids are back!"

"You grow two inch!" Grandma said looking up at Steve. "You grow big this way," she pointed to Steve's height, "and you grow small this way," she sucked her cheeks in, indicating that he had lost weight.

"What about me? Haven't I lost weight too?" Dan teased her.

"You Indian. Indian no lose weight. Indian gets tough!" She shuffled back into the kitchen, eager to feed the boys.

"Before you describe your adventures, I must tell you that

Dr. Stone already knows about the destruction of the lab,” the Chief said leading the boys into the kitchen. “I had to inform him about it after his surgery.” He briefly described Dr. Stone’s misfortune.

“We knew that something very serious must have happened,” Steve said. “Dr. Stone must have been picked up by a helicopter.”

“Yes, he was. He’s in a Seattle hospital, and he wants to see you.”

“How did he take the news about the lab?” Steve guessed the answer.

“Very hard,” Joey said. “He’s terribly depressed. He even cried when Dad told him about the lab.”

The Chief frowned. “Now, Joey, it’s all hearsay.”

“No it isn’t. Lucy told Sandy that he cried and I heard Sandy tell it to Jim.”

“I would cry too,” Grandma said.

“Anyway,” the Chief continued, “apparently Dr. Stone and his men saw some kind of a creature that they thought could have been Sasquatch. Mike and Dave brought along several very good plaster casts of giant footprints, which I admit, don’t look like a bear’s footprints. They also took a lot of pictures, and a video of some fuzzy creature running up the mountain slope. But it’s hard to say what it was. It still could have been a giant bear.”

Joey was impatiently waiting for his father to finish.

“Dr. Stone told Lucy that he was terribly disappointed in this expedition. Not only did he lose all his expensive equipment, thanks to Chickie, but his own search still brought no proof of Sasquatch. He said that there was no more money for his search. This year’s expedition he had paid for out of his own pocket. So, he cried bitterly. He said that it was obviously not meant for him to be the discoverer of Sasquatch. He even said to Lucy that perhaps it was all fantasy, all in his head, and Sasquatch did not exist.”

“Oh, but he does exist,” Steve interrupted him. “Danny

and I saw him. Unfortunately, we, too, had an accident and lost our camera, so we couldn't photograph him. But we saw him clearly, in full sunlight, almost as close as we see you now. Sasquatch is real."

No one spoke. The Chief looked from Dan to Steve, reading their faces.

"Good Lord, the kids *did* see the creature! They're not lying!" he thought.

Cooing Dove turned away from her stove to look at the boys. "Steve Bradley, you make me proud. You one of us!"

Dr. Stone was dozing when the boys tapped at the half-open door of his hospital room.

"Come in," he called out, opening his eyes. "Ah, it's you, my friends. Come in, excuse me for not getting up, but, as you can see, I *can't* get up." He pointed to his leg encased in a plaster cast up to his waist. His head was bandaged also, and was supported by a thick collar, making his beard stick out as if it were not a part of his face, and had a life of his own.

Jim and the boys, feeling ill at ease in the hospital surroundings, crowded awkwardly around his bed.

"We need more chairs," Dr. Stone said. "Grab some from the hall."

"Well, tell me what have you been doing?" Dr. Stone said with artificial heartiness, beaming at them much too brightly. "But before you do, I want to establish certain rules," he reverted to an earnest tone of voice. "First, about my lab. It's gone. Kaput. Nothing can be done about it. Second, no commiseration. I have had enough of it already from my wife and my colleagues. And third, no talk about my future plans. I have none. Until I get out of here, I am making no plans. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Joey said.

"Well, Steve, when are you leaving for home?" Dr. Stone pushed his glasses down his nose and peered at Steve over them.

"A week from Sunday. School is starting the following

week. Dr. Stone, I must tell you something important....” he began, blushing deeply.

“No, no, no!” Dr. Stone interrupted him impatiently. “I don’t want to hear it!” In an exaggerated gesture of refusal to listen, he pressed his hands over his ears hidden under the bandages. “It was *not your fault* that the lab was destroyed. No explanations and no apologies, *ple-ease!* I heard it all from Lucy!”

“But that is not what I was going to tell you,” Steve said, raising his voice.

Dr. Stone lowered his hands. “Well, all right, what did you want to tell me?”

“Dan and I, while searching for your camp, came upon Sasquatch. We *saw* him!”

Dr. Stone blinked. He tried to sit up but his cast would not allow him to. He inhaled deeply and held his breath. Finally, he hissed dramatically, “What did you say? You did what? You *saw* Sasquatch? Don’t play tricks on me, boys!” he shouted, gesticulating wildly, nearly falling out of his bed.

“Take it easy, Dr. Stone, you’ll hurt yourself,” Jim said.

Dr. Stone ignored him. “Tell me, tell me about it!”

Steve and Dan, haltingly at first, began to recount their adventures in the mountains.

When they finished, Dr. Stone, a dejected smile on his lined face, remained silent for a long time. Finally, he said, “You are very fortunate, boys. Hundreds of people would give *anything* to see Sasquatch. I congratulate you. I must confess, I envy you. But obviously it was not meant for me to come up with the proof about Sasquatch.” He chuckled bitterly. For a moment his mask of courage and good cheer slipped, and a face of disillusionment peered at the boys. It was the face of a disappointed man, and it stirred Steve’s sympathy more than anything he had ever known. He felt tears welling up in his eyes.

“No, Dr. Stone! Don’t say it!” he exclaimed hastily. “Dan and I know that if it hadn’t been for your accident you would still be in the mountains right now. You would have found Sasquatch!

It looked as if he were on *your* trail as much as you were on *his*!”

Dr. Stone smiled thinly. “Thank you, my boy. Perhaps you’re right. We had a feeling that Sasquatch was constantly watching us. We had plenty of signs of his presence. And then, when we pursued and almost cornered him, he slipped away from us. Our films are worthless. They’re hazy, out of focus, and they prove absolutely nothing...anyway, under the circumstances, the best we can do now is to write down what we have seen. Can you describe every detail of your encounter with Sasquatch?”

“Sure we can,” Steve said.

“Bring your notes to me as soon as possible. Make sure you keep copies. Perhaps we have enough material to write a book about our search for Sasquatch!”

“A book!”

“Why not? We’ve all had enough adventure to fill a three-hundred-page best seller! It will be considered fiction, of course, since we failed to come up with a proof, but it will still be a good read.” Dr. Stone paused and smiled. “Start writing. Steve has only a few more days before he returns to California. I want your notes before he leaves. Shoo!” he clapped his hands.

Sheepishly, Jim and the boys left.

“Gee, a book? And I’ll be one of the authors?” Dan shook his head in disbelief. “Cool!”

There were five postcards waiting for Steve when they returned to the village. His parents had written short notes from various places along the Greek coast where they were vacationing. They wrote that they missed him, worried whether his summer had been as good as theirs. He read the cards, smiling to himself. “Boy, if they only knew what a fantastic summer it has been!” he thought, arranging the cards in chronological order. Apparently they had been stuck in some dusty post office for weeks; they were all delivered at the same time.

He thought of the forthcoming Sunday when he would re-join his family. He had never thought that he would miss his parents, yet here he was looking forward to going home; even though

he was having such an exciting time among his new friends. In his mind's eye, he saw his youthful mother in her tennis dress with a green visor over her face to shade it from the sun. He saw his father, as always, at his computer, chewing the ends of his moustache in frustration when the story line failed to run smoothly.

"I never thought that I would miss my folks," he confessed to Joey as he showed him the postcards.

"I'm so glad that our dads were friends when they were young," Joey said. "Now you and I are friends. Let's *never* lose track of one another. And let's bring our dads together again!"

Dr. Stone phoned the next day. "I have been thinking all night about the book," he said. "If we are lucky and the book sells, it will provide us with enough money for a new expedition. In your report, boys, I want you to give me every detail, even the most minute."

"I remember when Sasquatch ran away, there was a tremendous stink in the air," Steve said.

"Describe it to me."

"Well," Steve hesitated, "It was...it sort of smelled of swamps. You know, it smelled like sulfur."

"Like rotten eggs," Dan prompted loudly.

"Yes. Yes, I know exactly what you mean. We smelled it too, when he came near our camp attracted by music." Dr. Stone's voice grew excited.

"But we did not smell it until he started running away," Dan was listening on the extension in the kitchen. "He must have been scared off by Steve's shout."

"Why did you shout?" Dr. Stone demanded angrily, as if Steve had betrayed him.

"Don't blame Steve. It was because of me," Dan hurried to explain. "I almost shot at him, and would have if Steve hadn't stopped me." Feeling miserable, Dan described how he had grabbed for his bow and arrows and how Steve's shout had saved Sasquatch and brought Dan back to his senses.

"Well, I'm mighty glad that you didn't release that arrow,"

Dr. Stone said, his voice becoming calmer. "Of course, there are many who would have liked to have Sasquatch's dead body as proof of his existence, but I am not one of them. Besides, you might have been accused of murder."

"Murder?"

"Yessir! In Scamania County there is an ordinance imposing a ten-thousand dollar fine for killing Bigfoot, in addition to the charge of murder. Did you know that?"

"No, sir."

"Well, my boy, it's lucky that you did not shoot him. Continue."

"Sasquatch showed no fear of us. I had a feeling that he was almost a timid creature," Steve said.

"Not me. I expected him to charge at us! It was like meeting with a great bear. One never knows what to expect of him," Dan explained.

"I tend to agree with you," Dr. Stone said. "Any wild creature met in his natural habitat may be quite dangerous. Anyway, write it all down. Describe *everything* that you saw. I'm sure we will have interesting material for a good adventure yarn!"

Two days later the Chief took the boys to Seattle to see Dr. Stone again and to deliver their notes.

Dr. Stone was not in his room. He was taken to the x-ray department and the floor nurse could not tell how long he would be gone.

"We'll call him later," the Chief said. "We'll leave these papers for him." They left their notes sealed in a manila envelope propped against Dr. Stone's pillow.

At the elevator they collided with Lucy. "I'm on my way upstairs to take dictation from Dr. Stone," she said. "Isn't it terrific? I mean, if it hadn't been for Chickie ransacking the lab you wouldn't have gone to the mountains and seen Sasquatch! If it were not for Chickie, Dr. Stone would not have come up with the idea of writing an *adventure* story!"

They laughed. "Some logic," Joey said sarcastically, but his father shot him a warning glance and Joey said no more.

"Well, say hello to Dr. Stone for us."

"Bye-bye." Lucy stepped into the elevator.

"I'll be leaving next week," Steve said

"I'll send you the invitation to my wedding," Lucy smiled as the elevator door closed.