



1. *One Woolly Monster and a Weirde Kid*

Bigfoot.

It's the very first thing I see when we pull into town. A gargantuan wooden statue of the hairy beast, stuck right smack in the middle of the square, like he's the mayor or President Ford or someone really important like that.

'Where are we, anyway?' I ask the social worker who came to get me all the way down in San Francisco.

I've only met her once before this and I can't remember her name. I think it starts with a *W*. Maybe an *M*. There were two of them who came to visit. I can't remember the other lady's name either. This one must have drawn the short straw to have to drive me all the way up to this dead-end place.

'We finally made it, Lemonade.' Her eyes meet mine in the rear-view mirror. 'They say Willow Creek is the Bigfoot capital of the world.'

'You mean like that thing actually lives here?'

She smiles and makes a left turn down Seventh Street. 'We're almost there, should be just up this way a bit.'

This place is nothing like home. And I already know I'm going to hate it.

Tall pines instead of skyscrapers, dirt instead of pavements, and one woolly monster lurking somewhere in the forest. With my luck, his main food source is ten-year-old girls.

'I want to go home,' I mutter under my breath. 'Why couldn't I have just stayed with my teacher?' I call up to the front seat. 'Miss Cotton said she loves having me there. She even told me so.'

'I'm sorry, Lemonade,' she says, keeping her eyes on the road this time. 'I'm afraid that's not an option right now. There would have to be forms completed for that to happen permanently.'

'She would do that,' I tell the lady. 'She always has our homework corrected by the very next day. Just ask her, she'll tell you.'

'I've already spoken to her about it, honey,' she says. 'Believe me, if things change, you'll be the first to know.'

'I'll make sure and remind her. She promised to call me sometimes and write me letters, too. At least until I get to go back.'

This time the lady doesn't say anything.

I lie my head back on the seat and stick my arm out of the window. The warm summer air grabs it, and my hand hangs ten on a wind wave. I breathe in deep.

It smells like grass.

Dirt.

And bugs.

At home, the air smells like ocean mixed with car exhaust fumes and the glorious crispy fried egg rolls from Mr Chin's restaurant on the corner. He makes the best egg rolls in town. The sign in the window even says so.

The sky is a fire orange, even though the sun is just about out of sight behind the trees, leaving long, dark shadows between the pines that line the road.

Which is the reason why I almost miss him.

Some weirdo kid darts through the trees with binoculars hanging from his neck.

He's wearing a floppy brown safari hat folded up in front and held on by a strap under his chin. Across the underside of the brim are some kind of hand-painted letters. I can tell they say something really important too because why else would you have hand-painted letters anywhere?

But he's running so fast I can't read what they say.