

Chapter 1

"Come on, Parker," I complained. "You've kept us waiting long enough!"

"Yeah, man, the suspense is killing us," Mason added. "Did you kill a bear or not?"

It was mid-October, which meant archery season for deer was about to open here in Alabama. That also meant it was time for The Hunt Club Kids to meet and talk about our plans for the upcoming season. And so, we gathered as we normally do this time each year, in Wyatt's treehouse, which had been our official meeting place since we first started our club way back in the third grade.

But as excited as we all were about deer season, we were even more excited to hear about the bear hunt Parker had just returned from with his dad. They had spent all of fall break on a mountain in Georgia, trying their best to get a bear with Parker's bow. They had been back for a week now, but Parker had refused to give us even a single detail about the trip. He had insisted that we wait until the meeting that was scheduled for tonight.

"Did you even see one?" Wyatt asked, jumping into the conversation.

"No," Parker answered, shaking his head and frowning as he did. "We didn't see one."

"Ugh!" I moaned loudly in response.

"We didn't see *one*," Parker continued, with a sly smile in my direction. "We saw five," he added after a brief pause, his smile growing larger.

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"I knew it!" Mason shouted. "I knew it! I knew it! I knew it!" he shouted again and again.

"Five!?!?" I screamed, joining in on Mason's excitement.

"Yes, Jet," Parker responded. "We saw five bears last week," he continued, his grin growing even larger with each word.

"Did you get a shot?" Wyatt asked, jumping into the conversation again.

"On one of them," Parker answered. "The last bear, at the last minute, on the last day," he added, getting a bit more serious as he proceeded.

"Well?" I asked. "Did you get him?"

"Hang on. Let me tell you the whole story," Parker answered. "Because you simply aren't going to believe it. It has to be one of the craziest things that's ever happened in the woods."

Parker went on to tell us all about the place they had seen the five bears the week

before. It was a place called Lonesome Mountain, and it definitely sounded like an amazing place for a hunting adventure.

The first three bears Parker and his dad saw turned out to be a sow and her two cubs. He told us how that when the sow eventually smelled them, she made a loud huffing noise, sending her cubs climbing high up into a tree while she tore off into the woods, making a horrible ruckus as she went.

He then told us about their second encounter, which took place the very next day, not too far from where they had seen the sow and her cubs. Parker said that he and his dad had heard what they thought was a bear popping acorns between its teeth, just down the hill from them and barely out of sight. And he told us how they stalked up within thirty yards of that bear before he smelled them too and quickly bolted out of sight.

“But,” Parker added, “as disappointing as it was for that bear to get away, that stalk

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led us to something way more important than the bear. It led us to something that ended up being the most important discovery of the whole trip.”