

# chapter 1

“How long until we get there?”

“It’s just down the road,” Dad says, “and please stop kicking my seat.”

“Sorry.” I put my feet down and try to keep them still. I don’t *mean* to be a seat kicker, but it’s hard when you’ve been in the car for an hour and you are going to see real live chimpanzees. “I’m excited.”

Annie smiles over at me. “I hope they’re out when we get there,” she says.

“They might not be.” Mom looks at us over her shoulder. “Remember, the sanctuary isn’t a zoo. If you don’t see the chimps today, you may have a chance when you come back to pick me up next weekend.”

My stomach gets a little achy when she says that. “I wish you weren’t going to be gone so long.”

“Don’t worry, Marty,” Dad says in the chipper voice he uses when he’s trying to get me to do chores. “We’re going to have a fan-tabulous week.”

“I know.” But my eyes get watery and I hate that, so I look out the window at the farms and fields whooshing past. Mom’s never been gone this long, and even though it’s the coolest thing ever that she got chosen to work with these chimps for a week, I’m going to miss her.

“I wish kids were allowed to volunteer,” I say.

“I know, Marty,” Mom says. “But these are retired lab chimpanzees. They were used for years in experiments while scientists were trying to learn about human diseases and find cures for them. Carol started this sanctuary so the chimps could have a better life now, and that’s wonderful, but they’re still wild animals. They’re powerful and strong, and they can be dangerous. They’ve been through a lot. It’s just not a place for kids.”

“I’m glad we get to see it anyway,” Annie says.

She changes the subject. “Have you decided what to do for the third-grade talent show?”

“Not really.” I don’t have indoor talents. Catching frogs and jumping over streams aren’t the kinds of things you can do on a stage.

“Veronica Grace asked me to be in her group,” Annie says.

“Hmph.” Veronica Grace loves tiaras and fancy dresses and doesn’t like frogs, worms, or me. “What’s she doing? Some frilly-face princess fashion show?”

“Marty, that’s not nice,” Mom says from up front. I hate how moms are always listening even when they look like they’re not.

“It’s a dance thing,” Annie says. “You should be in it, too.”

Before I can tell her no, Dad slows down and says, “Is this where we go?”

Dad turns down a long driveway and pulls the van up to a big building with a fenced-in area on

one side. Annie and I are practically hanging out the windows, looking for chimps. I have my camera all ready, but the only animal around is a boring dog by the doorway.

“Where *are* they?” I ask.

“Maybe inside having lunch,” Mom says as she opens the van door to let us out. “Come on into the reception area, and you can meet Carol.”

We go inside, and Carol is easy to find but she’s nowhere near as exciting as a chimpanzee. She’s a plain old grandma-looking lady wearing hiking boots, jeans, and a sweatshirt. “Welcome! We’re so thankful to have you here this week.” She gives Mom a big hug and smiles at Annie and me. “I see you’ve brought along some future volunteers.”

“This is my daughter, Marty, and her friend Annie,” Mom says. “They were hoping for a quick look at the chimps before they head home.”