

All Over the Place
Part II:
Trollin' the Woods



HP Hanson

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All Over the Place

Part II: Trollin' the Woods

One

LATER ON, after it was all over, Jason decided that it was because of his experience with the pixies that he found the troll. That, and the coleslaw.

It all started out innocently enough. He was walking quietly through the aspen grove, down where the ground was damp and there were a few little pools of water left over from the thunderstorm runoff, watching for dragonflies. Al, the pixie he and Andrew had met by the house in town, the pixie whose real name was Alsendrendelglorienduluciendesanto Green, had said something about the Brown pixie swarm up in the mountains. So Jason thought he might run across a

Brown swarm pixie if he looked around a bit. Even to his keen eyes, pixies looked like dragonflies until he got close, so that's what he was watching for, dragonflies.

Eventually, he reached the lower part of the aspen grove, almost to where it changed to pine trees that had mostly been cut down, and he decided to sit and watch for a while, to see if any dragonflies might show up. He found a big rock on the side of the little, shallow valley, and sat down to warm up in the late afternoon sunlight.

After a little while, a dark gray squirrel started barking, and Jason located it high in the branches of a nearby fir tree. It was staring down at Jason sitting on the rock, yapping angrily as if Jason was some kind of interloper. But Jason thought of this place as his woods, just down the hill from the big, white house, hidden away in the aspen grove.

So he made a face and stuck his tongue out at the stupid squirrel.

And then the coleslaw came into play.

Elaine had fixed coleslaw for lunch – chopped up cabbage, pineapples, some apples, a few raisins, all mixed together with a little mayonnaise. As usual, it was great, but now, a few hours later, Jason discovered it was giving him gas. Probably that cabbage, he thought.

So as he was sitting on the rock, trying to ignore the squirrel and get comfortable, he was feeling a little

bloated. Before he knew it, just as he shifted position, he accidentally let out a little *poot*, followed by a somewhat more vigorous, and noisy, *pootle-plerp*. Embarrassed, he looked around the woods to make sure nobody was there to hear.

Seeing no one, he settled in to wait for dragonflies. Pixies, he had learned, could hear people talk, and could understand them as well, and they talked back in some strange way that you heard inside your head, instead of with your ears. So he was trying to listen with the inside of his head, instead of just his ears, in case there was a pixie around talking to herself, or maybe to another pixie. Their voices, he remembered, were rather high and squeaky, like you'd expect a talking squirrel might sound like, not that barking noise, but talking in a squeaky voice.

That's why the voice that sounded like a talking elephant gave him such a start. It was inside his head, to be sure, but it was low and slow, rolling and just a little rough around the edges.

“Phew! Whoever you are,” it rumbled, “if you're going to do that, could you please do it somewhere else – at least not sitting on my head?”

Now, Jason thought of himself as pretty normal. He could run reasonably fast, and his jumping ability was good enough to make him a better than average soccer

goalie. But until that moment, he didn't know that he had it in himself to fly.

That must have been what happened. He sure couldn't think of any other way to explain how he got across the little valley so fast without touching the ground. The voice, and especially its comment about how Jason was sitting on its head, scared him into flying. At least that seemed like the best explanation.

“Thank you!” The voice was polite, and that made Jason feel better.

And then it stood up.

First, it stretched its arms, arms that Jason had thought were just old logs on the ground by the rock, and waved them around as if trying to fan some fumes away. Oh, yeah, Jason remembered, *those* fumes.

Then the thing – Jason didn't know what else to call it – pushed itself to a sitting position and its body emerged from under the aspen leaves covering the forest floor. They it finally stood up. It was as tall as a good-sized aspen tree, but fatter. The rock that Jason had been sitting on was indeed a head, and now, seeing the face, Jason wondered how he could have missed seeing it before.

“You're welcome.” Jason's own voice reminded him of that squirrely pixie voice, so he cleared his throat. “Ahem, you're welcome, and I'm sorry about that. Um,

I'm Jason. Who are you? And, if you don't mind my asking, what are you, anyway?"

"Hmm? Oh. Well, I'm what you call a wood troll. You call me that to distinguish me and my kind from the river trolls. They like water, we like trees." The big creature looked around. "I guess it's coming up to Fall pretty soon, eh? Hmm. I seem to have missed the summer. Oh, and my name. Hmm. Well, let's see. Different folks call me different names. What would you like to call me?"

Jason hesitated. Making up a name for the creature was a great opportunity, but he didn't want to say the wrong thing.

Then he had an idea. "Well, how about 'Rocky'? I thought you were a rock when I sat down."

Rocky's craggy face wrinkled up into what Jason decided must be a smile. "That sounds fine. And it's a lot easier to pronounce than some of the names others have come up with."

"You know, you seem pretty friendly. I've heard that trolls are mean, uh, no offense, sir." Jason thought he should be extra polite, given the troll's size and all.

"Mean? Well, yes, I heard that somewhere, too. And tricky, too, supposedly. Hmm. Don't remember where I heard that, though. And it is true that my aquatic cousins the river trolls tend to be pretty short-tempered. But

mean? Nah.” Rocky swiveled his back around, stretching out. “I think what must have happened is that, somewhere along the line, somebody made that up for a story and it just stuck. Buncha stupid billy goats spreading rumors, or something.”

“OK, well, that’s good to hear. But how could you have missed summer?” Jason was relieved that he didn’t have a mean, nasty, twenty-foot creature to deal with.

“Must have slept right through it. I lay down on the hillside here, round about last Spring, I guess, to take a little nap. Did I miss anything?” Rocky scratched himself in various unlikely spots. “Say, I must have. Lots of dead pine trees this fall. When I went to sleep, they were all alive, all of ’em. Hmm. Must have been a rough summer.”

Jason knew better – it had, in fact, been a great summer, at least from the perspective of the forest. Lots of rain, not too hot. He also knew that the pine trees had been dying off for years, because of an infestation of some kind of bug, the Ips beetle, his father called it.

“Um, well, Rocky, are you sure it was this Spring when you went to sleep? I mean, these trees have been dying off, little by little, for a few years now. Most of the ones that got cut down were before this summer, even.” Jason was not sure how long the die-off had lasted, but he knew about the woodcutters.

“Well, now, you don’t say.” Rocky turned slowly in a circle, scouting out the territory. Eventually he got around to facing up the hill toward the house, which could be seen through the little grove of aspen trees. “Jumpin’ Jehosephat! What’s that thing? Where’d that come from? Is it some new kind of mushroom or something? Strange one if it is, I’ll say that.”

Rocky leaned this way and that, stretching to see the house from as many angles as he could.

Using the date he remembered was carved on an oak beam in the living room of the house, Jason did some math in his head.

“That’s a house, Rocky, a kind of big box that we sleep in. I think it’s been there for at least eight years. You never saw it before now?” That was a long sleep, Jason was thinking.

“No, can’t say as I have. Hmm.” This time Rocky just scratched his head. “Never saw anything like it, anywhere around here. Hmm. Seems like all these trees, the ones left, look different from what I remember, too.”

“What? Why, there are houses all over the place. Well, just a few right close to here, but down in the valley there are lots and lots. Rocky, I think you’ve been asleep for a long, long time.”

Jason didn’t know just how long, but he knew that some of the houses down in the town of Fraser were

quite old, more than a hundred years old. And that meant that Rocky was even older.

Jason decided he was going to have to tell someone about Rocky, just so that he could be sure he wasn't dreaming. But he had the idea that telling the adults wouldn't do at all. For one thing, they probably wouldn't believe him. For another, they might not even be able to see Rocky. They couldn't see pixies or gnomes, after all. Of course, the pixies had said that was because of the adults' poor eyesight, and Rocky was so big that even a blind person would probably be able to see him, Jason thought.

So, he thought, I'll go find Andrew and tell him. "Rocky? Can I go get my brother? I'm sure he'd like to meet you. His name is Andrew."

"Don't see why not. I'll just lie down for a little nap, just a short snooze." Rocky yawned. "I guess I'm not completely waked up yet."

"Uh, well, how do I wake you up? Just in case?" Jason wanted to be sure that Andrew talked with Rocky.

"You seem to have found a pretty good way before." Rocky cracked another of those craggy smiles, and Jason blushed. "But there's a better way, more pleasant for me. Get a little branch from one of the pine trees, and tickle me under the nose with it. That'll wake me up."

“OK, well, I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Jason backed up the hill toward the house, so he could watch Rocky carefully, to see where he might lie down.

But all that happened was that Rocky plucked a baby aspen tree out of the ground and started eating it, the way that Jason might eat a stalk of celery, except Rocky ate the tree leaves first

The crunching noise in Jason’s head was quite distracting, but it faded away as he made his way home.

Two

WHEN HE GOT BACK UP TO THE HOUSE, Jason was out of breath, for he'd run up through the aspen grove and then across the big clearing, all uphill. He paused inside the front door to breathe and decide on a strategy.

Andrew was sitting on the couch in the living room, working on a brain-teaser puzzle he hadn't figured out yet. The grown-ups were in the kitchen, so Jason realized he would need to be careful about talking to Andrew.

But before he could do anything, he heard Elaine's voice say, "Oh, good. Glad you're back, Jason. Supper is about ready. How about washing up, please. Andrew? You, too."

Jason's heart sank. No telling where Rocky would wind up if they couldn't get back before supper. And after supper they might not be allowed to go back down there, so it would be morning before he have a chance to talk to Rocky again. Oh, *man!*

And he was right. Supper was one of those times when everyone was supposed to eat slowly, be polite, and talk together. A family thing, he knew. But he made the best of it by asking all sorts of questions about local history, how long houses had been in the Fraser Valley and other things like that.

It took so long that it was pretty dark when they were finished, so there was no going into the woods afterwards. It was disappointing, because he wanted to get back to Rocky.

Jason thought he might just burst, trying to keep his secret inside himself. But somehow he made it through the evening and the night. Breakfast was a real chore, especially because he couldn't get Andrew excited about seeing Rocky. He had found that the whole thing was just too hard to explain.

But eventually, after breakfast, he was able to get Andrew outside, away from the grown-ups, and down the hill into the aspens.

But Andrew really wasn't buying it. "Jaassonnnn! This is stupid. Where are we going, anyway?"

Jason, though, was busy trying to figure out where Rocky had disappeared to. All the big rocks looked like ... well ... big rocks. No faces or anything.

But then he found a clue, a baby aspen stump, cut off just above the roots, lying on top of the ground. He

looked about the area and discovered several more, all in a little pile. Right next to pile was a big rock, a big rock with a couple of dead logs on the ground next to it. Aha! he thought.

Circling the big rock, he finally decided he could make out a protrusion that looked something like a nose. And maybe those were eyebrows. Double aha!

Well, he thought, there's one way to find out. I think I'll let Andrew do the honors.

“OK, Andrew, what I need you to do is to take this branch,” Jason ripped a branch off a little pine tree nearby, “and rub this rock, right about here. Like you're tickling it, OK?”

“Is this some kind of trick?” Andrew was more suspicious than usual. He knew his big brother had a habit of fooling around, and he tried not to get caught.

“It's how to see this troll I've been trying to tell you about. He's asleep, and the tickling will wake him up.” Jason tried to sound as sincere as he could.

Andrew thought about it. There didn't seem to be anyone else around to see them, so he wouldn't get laughed at for rubbing a branch on a rock. And he had to admit to himself, the pixie business had been pretty far-fetched, and Jason would never have believed it unless he had seen it. He looked around again to make sure

there was no one hiding with a camera, ready to take a picture and make him look silly.

“Well, OK. But don’t laugh.” He took the branch from Jason and looked at the big rock. “It just looks like a rock, you know.”

Jason watched nervously as Andrew bent down and began tickling the rock with the branch. His nervousness increased when nothing happened, and Andrew stood up in disgust.

“This is stupid. Nothing’s happening.” But at least, Andrew thought, Jason isn’t laughing.

“Well, try some more. Harder, maybe. Please?” Jason was wringing his hands now.

Andrew was thinking that this whole episode would be a good way to get Jason to owe him a big favor, so he bent down and began slapping at the rock with the branch.

He stopped when there was a sort of whuffing noise, right in the middle of his head. Jason was standing stiff, alert for any more such noises.

“What was that?” Andrew felt a little thrill run through himself.

“Keep going, keep going. I think he’s waking up.” Jason’s voice was shaking with excitement.

So Andrew resumed his work on the rock, slapping, brushing, tickling it with the pine branch. As he flailed away, he could hear more noises in his head.

Just as he was starting to get tired, there was something more definite inside his head. “Wha... wha... wha...ka-CHOOO!” And the rock let loose with a huge sneeze.

It was fortunate for Andrew that the sneeze was in the direction of the soft part of the forest floor, where there were no rocks or stumps, for that’s where he landed. He, too, had learned to fly, although, unlike Jason, he had help.

“Ooof!” said Andrew.

“Hi, Rocky!” said Jason.

“Hmm.” said Rocky. “This must be the brother you mentioned. Pleased to meet you, Andrew.”

“Wow,” said Andrew, completely amazed and astounded. “Wow, a talking rock. Uh, yes, hello and pleased to meet you, too.”

And Andrew was even more amazed as he watched Rocky get to his feet, large feet at that, about the size of the dining room table. Suddenly Rocky didn’t look like a rock any more.

And he looked even less like a rock when he plucked another little aspen tree out of the ground and

began munching away. Andrew put his hands over his ears – it didn't help at all – and Jason just waited for it to be over.

When he had finished eating most of the tree, Rocky took the rest of the trunk and broke it off, making a sharp end that he used for a toothpick. As he worked on his teeth, he looked back up the hillside at the house.

“Hmm. So, Jason, you say those house things are all over the place? I'd like to see that. Shall we take a walk?” Rocky looked back and forth between the boys.

“Uh, well, we're not supposed to go very far. And it's too far to walk to town even if we were allowed to. But we can show you another house, the one up the hill next to ours.” Jason looked hopeful.

“Sounds like a good start. Which way?”

“Andrew, didn't Dad say he was going to be working on trees above the driveway?” Jason pointed over his shoulder in a vague way up the little valley, and Andrew nodded.

“OK, well, let's go around the back, over to the old logging road and up that way.” Jason and Andrew led the way down the hill and then turned toward the old road.

“What's this 'working on trees' business, anyway?” With his long legs, Rocky was strolling along at, for

him, a leisurely pace. Jason and Andrew, meanwhile, were scurrying ahead, already out of breath.

“Well ... see ... the trees are dead because of this beetle that’s eating them.” Jason was panting from trying to talk and scurry at the same time. “And our Dad is cutting down the dead ones ... because there could be a fire.”

“Hmm. Well, now, I may not know anything about those things you call ‘houses,’ but fire is something I do know about. I know a lot about it. And I don’t like it.” Rocky’s voice sounded grim. “So he’s trying to help prevent it, hmm? Good plan. I approve.”

They scurried and strolled along the old logging road, up the hill toward the neighbor’s house. Rocky seemed to be in a philosophical mood.

“And I remember seeing something like this before, a long time ago. Lots of dead trees, and then bad fires. Hmm. No, sir, I don’t like fire one bit.” Rocky reached out and – poink! – plucked out a baby aspen tree that was growing by the road and began munching. “But, I have to be fair. It changes things for the better, in the long run.”

The crunching noises in their heads made it hard for the boys to understand Rocky’s musings, but they managed to get the sense of it.

“What ... uh ... what do you mean by ‘long run’?”
Jason was almost gasping.

“Hmm. Oh, well, hmm, many, many years. Dozens of years, dozens of dozens even.” Rocky had begun picking his teeth with the tree trunk again.

“Wow, Rocky, you’ve ... you’ve been around a long time, haven’t you?” Andrew was gasping, too.

“Hmm, well, I guess so, if you say so. Say, what’s this I see?” Rocky was staring at the neighbor’s house. “A log box, I remember these. Only this one is huge, much bigger than the ones I saw last spring. Is this a house, too?”

THREE

“ROCKY, I don’t know how to tell you this, but what you think was last spring was really a hundred years ago or so, I’m pretty sure.” Jason had taken advantage of standing still to get his breath back. “See, we people build these houses to live in, and a hundred years ago lots of them were made out of logs. And they were smaller. Now, they’re made out of all kinds of things, like our white house down the hill, there. And they’re bigger.”

“Hmm. So, you people have been getting bigger and bigger, then? That’s why you need bigger houses?” What sounded like a perfectly reasonable question set Andrew to giggling.

“Huh? Well, no, I don’t think so.” Jason considered this. “Maybe some, but I think we need bigger houses for our stuff. A long time ago, people didn’t have much stuff. Not like all the stuff we have now. I think.”

“Hmm. Well, I’d sure like to see some more of these houses you say are all over the place. And maybe you can tell me about all this stuff you need them for, these

big houses.” Rocky had resumed walking slowly around the big log house to view it from other angles.

“Jason? We could go up that long curvy driveway. You can see lots from up there.” Andrew pointed the way, through a grove of stunted lodge-pole pine trees and toward the hillside.

“Yeah, good idea. Come on, Rocky, let’s go this way.” Jason led them into the trees.

As they worked their way through the thick stand of trees – it was especially difficult for Rocky, who was as tall as many of the trees, but he managed gracefully and, to the boys’ surprise, very quietly – Jason tried to explain about the stuff people kept in their houses.

“We have clothes to wear, like these.” He pulled at his sweatshirt and jeans. “And we have furniture, a big house needs lots of furniture. Chairs to sit on and tables to eat off of and beds to sleep in.”

“Hmm. Let me see if I understand. You have lots of this stuff, so you need a big house to keep it in? And you have a big house, so you need lots of stuff like furniture to fill it up?” They were now walking through a little aspen grove, so Rocky plucked himself another snack.

Jason couldn’t tell if it was the crunching in his head or the confusing nature of Rocky’s question, but he didn’t quite know what to say.

So he said, “Well ...”

Andrew decided to help out. “That’s right, Rocky. What’s wrong with that?”

“Hmm. Sounds to me as if, well, if you didn’t have stuff, you wouldn’t need a house, and if you didn’t have a house, you wouldn’t need stuff to fill it up with.” Rocky’s smile was as craggy as ever. “Like me. I don’t have a house or stuff, and I’m perfectly happy. Except when there are fires. Not then.”

“But you sleep outside, and it sounds like you sleep all winter outside. We’re not as, well, as tough as you are. We’d freeze. We’d die.” Jason suddenly realized that there was something else. “Besides, I like stuff. Or some of it at least.”

“Yeah,” Andrew chimed in. “Yeah. Some stuff is fun. And some is useful, like tools.”

As if on cue, a chain saw started up in the woods down the hill.

“Hmm. Houses have gotten bigger. And it sounds like mosquitoes have gotten lots bigger.” Rocky didn’t know about chain saws, of course.

“No, that’s my Dad, using a chain saw to cut up the dead trees. A saw that has a motor. It makes the work easier.” Jason saw the opportunity. “And there are lots of other tools. Cars and trucks, like, um, motorized wagons.

And lawnmowers and ... well, and all sorts of things that are tools to make work easier. That's part of all the stuff, Rocky."

All this time, they had been working their way up the hillside through the forest, and soon they came to a big clearing near the top. It gave them an expansive view of the valley below as well as of the large patches of dead trees in the forest on both sides of the big valley.

"Hmm. My, my. That is certainly different from what I remember. Hmm. So, what's 'motorized' mean, anyway? I guess it means 'has a motor', except I don't have any idea what a motor is." Rocky was scanning the valley, getting used to its new appearance.

"A motor? I guess you wouldn't know, would you? Well ..." Jason thought about it, but he couldn't figure out how to explain what a motor was without using other words that Rocky wouldn't know, like "electricity" or "gasoline."

"A motor is a machine that does work for you." Andrew piped up.

That seemed good enough for Rocky. "And makes funny noises, I guess. Anyway, I see what you meant about lots of houses, Jason. There are lots of them down there, in the trees on the other side of the valley, and all over the place. Hmm."

Rocky took a few steps over to one of the few remaining live pine trees, one that was covered with pinecones. With an expert's touch, he ran a big hand over the crown of the tree and came away with a handful of cones, then began popping them into his mouth like popcorn.

"How come there are stripes in the trees over there on that hill?" Rocky was pointing toward the south.

"Oh, that's the ski area, where they have cut trees so people can slide down the hill when there's snow. For fun." Jason hoped he wouldn't have to explain about skis, or, especially, ski lifts.

"What did it look like down there when you saw it before, Rocky?" Andrew probably didn't know how glad Jason was that he changed the subject.

"Hmm? Oh, well, not so many of your big houses, for one thing, just a few little log ones. And not so many trees, either. I'm glad to see that the trees grew back, even if lots of them have died. That means they'll grow back again." Rocky squinted, shaded his eyes with a massive hand. "Whoa! What in the ... What's that thing? Looks like a giant beetle down there! No, wait, there's a whole bunch of 'em!"

Jason followed Rocky's gaze and decided he must be looking at the highway, far down in the valley. The cars looked like, well, like bugs from up where they

were on the hill. Oh, no, he thought. Something else to try to explain.

“You’ve got good eyes, Rocky. I think those must be some of the motorized wagons I mentioned, cars.” Jason crossed his fingers, hoping that would be good enough.

“Hmm. So do they make giant mosquito noises, too? Bzzzzzzz.” Rocky did a pretty fair imitation of the chain saw.

“Cars make all sorts of different noises, depending on the car. Some are real quiet. And trucks make deeper noises, like vroom, vroom. Right Andrew?” Jason looked at his brother.

But Andrew wasn’t listening – or, rather, he was listening for something else. Something he didn’t hear.

“I wonder why he stopped. He said he had lots of trees to cut up.” And Andrew cocked his head sideways, listening for what wasn’t there.

Indeed, Jason didn’t hear the chain saw any more, either. But he thought he heard something else, someone calling. It was too distant to make out, though.

“Someone is calling your names, you two.” Rocky’s hearing was better, apparently. “He’s saying, ‘Jason, Andrew, are you out here? Help! I need some help! I’m stuck!’”

FOUR

“THAT MUST BE POPPA!” Andrew looked scared. “And he needs help!”

And Andrew dashed off down the hillside.

“Andrew! Wait!” But Jason couldn’t stop him. “Well, Rocky, I guess I’d better go see what’s going on down there, too.”

“Want a lift?” Rocky held a gnarled hand down to the ground. It was the size of the big lounge chair in the living room, although it didn’t look to Jason to be quite so comfortable. But he hopped on anyway and sat down.

And they were off.

Jason found himself about twelve feet in the air, held securely in Rocky’s big right hand by a thumb the size of a king-sized bed pillow – but not so soft. Still, the giant thumb was surprisingly gentle, sitting on Jason’s lap holding him firmly in place.

But he didn’t have much time to wonder about the thumb, because almost instantly he was busy watching the trees zip by as Rocky made his way through the

woods in pursuit of Andrew. It was a little like a roller-coaster ride, up, down, around; yet it was amazingly smooth. Rocky moved almost silently, like a bit cat through the forest, dodging trees, slipping through spaces barely big enough, gliding over deadfalls and under branches.

It took only a couple of minutes to catch up with Andrew, who was running out of gas as he was running downhill. He was slowing down, panting for breath when Rocky reached down with his other hand and picked him up by the back of his jacket like you might pick up a mouse. Andrew squealed, but then figured out what was happening and just went limp. Soon, he was sitting in Rocky's big left hand, held up next to where Jason was enjoying the ride, trying to catch his breath.

"Wow!" was all he could say.

"Pretty cool, huh? And he's so quiet, like ... like a ghost or something. I would have thought he'd be crashing around, he's so big." Jason's eyes were glittering with the fun of it.

"Crashing around, hmm? You must think I'm a big clumsy oaf, I guess. Well, the joke's on you, Jason. I live in this forest, and I know my way around, hmm?" Rocky chuckled.

It took only about three more minutes for them to reach the area where the voice was coming from, still

calling for help now and then. It didn't sound afraid, or too concerned, but it definitely was asking for help.

“Rocky? How about putting us down, and maybe you wait here?” Jason didn't want to confuse the situation with Rocky's presence.

So Rocky lowered them to the ground and looked around for an aspen tree to pluck and eat. Pretty soon, as the boys were calling out to the voice, they heard the crunching noise in their heads.

“Here I am, over here! Hey, glad you guys showed up.” He was lying on his back on the ground, one leg covered by the trunk of a large lodge-pole pine tree.

“What happened? Are you OK?” Andrew sounded especially worried.

“I'm fine, really, just stuck. See, I cut this tree down, then it landed on a big limb, bounced a little, and started to roll toward me, but I tripped when I tried to jump back out of the way.” He was wriggling around, but his leg was quite stuck. “The ground is soft, so nothing hurts, and I can wiggle my toes. So I'm fine, just stuck. Andrew? How about getting Elaine, and she can help us figure out how to move this tree.”

Andrew dashed off toward the house in a panic.

“Gee, Dad, it’s pretty big. How are we going to move it?” Jason was trying to analyze the problem at hand.

“Well, maybe one of the car jacks. If we can jack the tree up a little, you know, like when I change a tire on the car, maybe I can pull my leg out.” He continued to wriggle his leg, but it was stuck fast.

“Hmm.” Jason looked thoughtful. Then he raised his voice. “Well, just to be sure, I’ll try to roll the log uphill a little bit. Maybe I can move it just enough. Here goes. Why don’t you push with your other leg? Together, maybe we can do it.”

And he reached down and began trying to lift and turn the tree trunk.

“Oof, it’s ... pretty ... heavy.” Jason raised his voice a little more. “But ... maybe ... it will ... move ... just ... a little.”

He leaned into it even more, lifting, pushing, trying to roll the big tree. And he talked louder yet. “Uuh ... I think ... I feel ... it ...moving. C’mon ... Push. Oof!”

And it moved. The tree trunk rolled just enough, up onto the broken limb, to lift the trunk slightly.

Although taken completely by surprise, Dad still had the presence of mind to skootch backwards, dragging his trapped leg free from the tree.

“Holy cow, Jason! How did you manage that? I tried hard to move that thing, but it wouldn’t budge.” He stood up, testing his leg.

“Are you OK?” Jason was trying not to laugh.

“Well, a little stiff. And damp. The ground’s wet and my jeans are all sticky. And cold. Ick.” He stood on his stiff leg, shifted around, did a little dance. “But the leg’s fine. Thanks, Jason!”

And he held out his hand for a Jason-height high five.

“Tell you what, Jason, I think I’ll quit for the day. Want to help carry this stuff back to the house? There’s a gas can and the rope, up that way toward the top of this stupid tree.” He picked up the chain saw and his noise-suppressing earphones and looked around.

Jason headed back up the hill, toward the top of the stupid tree, to get the rope. Soon he saw a large boulder on the ground, with two old logs and a nipped-off baby aspen stump lying nearby.

“Thanks, Rocky. Couldn’t have done it without you!” He whispered.

“My pleasure, Jason. Come back and see me again sometime,” and the boulder winked, Jason was sure. “We’ll go talk with my friend Bigfoot.”

HMM?