

the  
**KUDZU MONSTER**  
TRILOGY.

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# 1

## The Bear



**T**en-year-old Calvin juggled a small log, flipping it from his bottom arm tentacles to his upper ones. Then he spun the log and caught it again with his lower tentacles.

“Kalvin,” said his mother, Kitty, “I want you to go look for your father. He should have returned last night from his visit with Karl and Karen. I’m afraid something bad has happened to him.”

“Dad said to stay with you, Mom, until he returned,” Calvin replied.

“Well, the situation has changed. I think you should go find your father.”

Kalvin looked at his mom, who was standing perfectly still. Joined to her was his new baby sister, Kandi. She looked like a small version of his mother, but her eyes were still closed. She was not yet ready to break free from her mom.

“Okay, Mom, I’ll find Dad,” Calvin responded, and he started off.

Kalvin’s eight root-like feet raised his tree-trunk body off the ground. His back feet bowed up like inchworms, and his

front feet stretched out. They pushed and pulled him down the kudzu-covered hill. Kudzu vines and leaves wrapped his body. The lower vines dragged on the ground behind him, making a rustling sound.

Hearing something, he bent his arm tentacles down and he froze, blending in with the trees around him. He waited for the sound of the car to fade away before he slipped into the forest. Eventually, he came to a river. *There's the Etowah River*, he thought. *I'll have to cross the river using the railroad bridge.*

As Calvin approached the bridge, his round, black eyes looked for any movement in the woods or on the dark-green river. He touched a railroad track with a foot tentacle. *Ah, no train vibrations*, he thought as he pulled up onto the bridge. He felt a small tug as one of his kudzu vines caught on the bridge and broke loose. *Oh well, a new one will grow there soon.*

He was glad that he was only ten feet tall. He could still cross the bridge without hitting his head on the top steel girders. *Poor Dad*, Calvin thought. *He's too tall, and when he crosses, he has to hang on the outside of the bridge structure and pull himself along. I hope that he didn't fall in when crossing the bridge. If so, the current might have taken him miles downstream before he could get out of the river.*

After crossing the bridge, Calvin continued along the trail, enjoying the peace of the forest, until he neared a small hill. *The squirrels in that oak tree are chattering and racing along the limbs*, he observed.

Suddenly, a bear roared! Dust and leaves swirled just over the rise of the hill. A large arm tentacle rose into the air, clutched a bush, and swung it downward. Calvin swallowed. *That's Dad's arm and the top of his head. Dad is fighting a bear!*

The squirrels scurried along the tree limbs, dropping acorns



on the combatants below them. As Calvin hurried up the hill, he could see his dad, Kleatus, pulling up bushes and throwing them at the raging beast. Calvin turned toward a movement on his right. Two black bear cubs ran to a sweetgum tree and started climbing.

Kalvin turned again to see his father push the mother bear



away with an old tree limb. The bear clamped her teeth on the branch and bit it in half.

Looking around wildly, Calvin grasped a sturdy log in his lower arms. He moved toward the battle as the bear swung a paw and ripped a patch of kudzu from his dad's chest. The large beast stood on her hind legs, roared, and raked her claws down one of his arm tentacles.

"Oh!" His father's booming howl froze the bear for a moment. He quickly slammed his other twelve-foot arm into the bear's chest. Groaning, she staggered backward and fell to the ground.

"Dad, catch this log," yelled Calvin, as he tossed the heavy piece of wood. Kleatus caught the log, but not before it struck a small tree. A frightened squirrel raced toward the safety of a different hickory tree. Once up the tree, the squirrel chattered and flipped its bushy tail back and forth.

An acorn flew past Calvin's eyes, and another bounced off his head. "Sorry, it was an accident," Calvin yelled, as he pushed away from the tree. The squirrel ignored the apology and continued to pelt him with nuts.

Husky, bellowing sounds came from the bear cubs near the top of the sweetgum tree. The mother bear looked up at them, gave a final grunt at the monsters, and lumbered toward her cubs.

Kalvin moved over to his dad, who was examining his arm and chest.

"Did the bear hurt you?" Calvin asked.

"I'm fine, Son," answered Kleatus. "The bear just tore a

little kudzu off, and I have a few scratches. I heard the squirrels chattering as I started up the hill, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. I guess they were trying to warn me about the bear and her cubs. The mother bear probably saw me as a threat and attacked."

Kalvin saw that the scratches had barely penetrated his father's thick, bark-like hide. "I'm glad the bear didn't hurt you, and that you didn't have to hurt her."

"But why are you here? Did Kandi start walking?" asked Kleatus.

"No, she's still attached to Mom."

"Why did you leave your mom?" scolded Kleatus. "She won't move as long as Kandi is still attached to her!"

"Mom is fine, Dad. She insisted I go find you. I think she was tired of me hanging around the hill. Why didn't you come home last night?"

"There were campers near the trail with their dogs. I had to make a new path through the forest."

Kleatus turned and started down the hill. Calvin followed him as they pushed along the path toward the railroad bridge. When they neared the bridge, Calvin saw that a train had stopped on the tracks. Railroad workers were examining the underside of a train car. A log had slipped loose from the car, caught in the bridge structure, and caused a wheel to jump off the track.

"It looks like the train won't be going anywhere for a while," said Kleatus.

“Do you think we should just float across the river?” Calvin asked.

“No, the bank is too steep here. We would have to float a long way downstream before we could find a spot to climb out,” answered Kleatus. “We’ll have to use the highway bridge upstream to cross the river.”

They followed a path upriver toward the highway bridge. The trail to the highway was narrow. Although Kleatus tried to move carefully, his massive body flattened some of the bushes in his path. Kleatus had to bend back branches from half of the trees they passed. About three hours after noon, they finally saw the highway bridge.

“Maybe we should wait until dark to cross,” suggested Calvin. “I’ve never been across the bridge in the daylight.”

“It won’t be dark for four or five hours. Even then, it will be risky until late at night,” answered Kleatus. “If we wait that long, Kitty will be very worried. We’ll have to chance a daylight crossing.”