

THE LATE, GREAT
THOR McHUGH

A NOVEL

by

William Bryan Smith

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William Bryan Smith

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Chapter 1

Extract from Animal X Magazine, Volume 5, No.3:

Thor McHugh—The Real McCoy

We first met Thor McHugh in 1972 when the then 20-year-old adventurer and self-styled monster hunter had released still photos of a film purported by McHugh to depict a Bigfoot. The images, enhanced color frames (to the best of 1972's technological abilities), showed a lumbering, fur-covered creature—clearly female, as evidenced by its breasts—apparently walking across a clearing in a wooded area in Northern California. The photos graced the front pages of papers and magazines around the world with headlines such as “Bigfoot Caught on Film” (The New York Times), “Monsters Exist!” (The Daily Mirror) and “Bigfoot Nude—An Exclusive Pictorial” (Hustler).

The photos succeeded in generating a buzz and McHugh capitalized on the hysteria by selling exclusive rights to the film to ABC News for a then-unheard of one-hundred-thousand dollars. An instant celebrity, McHugh traveled the world in search of mysterious creatures. For over forty years, he has dedicated his life to the field of

cryptozoology, and we have him here in an exclusive interview with Animal X Magazine.

Animal X Magazine: You're a Bigfoot hunter.

Thor McHugh: I prefer the term researcher. "Hunter" implies sport. This is not sport. I am not a hobbyist. I am a full-time researcher. You wouldn't call Jane Goodall a "monkey hunter" would you?

AXM: No, but you intend to shoot and kill a Bigfoot.

TM: That's right.

AXM: Eyewitnesses fortunate enough to have encountered a Bigfoot describe it as being very human-like and having an unquestionable intelligence. How can you justify killing one?

TM: How else are we going to dissect one and see what makes it tick?

AXM: You are arguably the foremost expert on Bigfoot. Your research organization, the Bigfoot Emergency Response Program—

TM: Burp.

AXM: I'm sorry—

TM: B-E-R-P. We call it Burp for short.

AXM: Okay, BERP—is the largest organization of its kind in North America.

TM: Actually, the world.

AXM: ...Employing a team of twenty-five full-time investigators dedicated to the sole purpose of tracking a Bigfoot, killing it, and presenting it to the greater scientific community.

TM: That's right.

AXM: Can you walk us through a little bit of the day-to-day operations of BERP?

TM: We wake up at five AM—

AXM: *The entire team lives full-time at the facility?*

TM: *The barracks can support upwards of one-hundred people.*

AXM: *Fascinating.*

TM: *My man-servant, Ames, prepares our breakfast. Then we consult our electronic—*

Ames looked up from the article. “Man-servant?” The magazine had come with the morning’s mail. He turned to the man seated in the red wing-back chair, dressed in satin pajamas and matching slippers.

Thor McHugh regarded Ames thoughtfully from behind his pipe. “You’re not going to make a big deal of that, are you?”

“It’s a bit racist, don’t you think?”

His eyes narrowed on Ames. “I meant it in a classical sense,” McHugh said. “It’s Hemingwayesque. You know, like *Mugambo*.”

“Hemingway didn’t write *Mugambo*.”

“It’s Mugamboesque,” McHugh replied.

“That’s not a word.”

“Of course, it is. Anything is a word if you tag on *-esque* at the end of it, like *Kafkaesque* or *Capraesque*. You like *It’s a Wonderful Life*, don’t you?”

“I’m your partner.” Ames rolled up the magazine as if to swat something, thought better of it, and then spread it out on the desk.

“Understudy,” McHugh said.

“Would it hurt you to call me your partner?”

“I’m the Director of BERP, I can’t have a partner. It would upset the public’s image of me as a lone wolf.”

“I’m the Associate Director.”

“And it came with a nice bump in pay,” McHugh said. He re-lit his pipe. “You can be my silent partner. In secret. How's that?”

They were inside the library of the 43 acre complex, complete with full-service cafeteria, home theater, and heated in-door pool. It was Saturday.

Ames pushed the magazine to the side and went back to the mail. There was the usual offering of grainy photos and eyewitness accounts written in a shaky hand—like the letters written by the 'Son of Sam' killer. Among the pile was a letter from an independent film company. They were interested in filming a documentary on McHugh. They had a limited budget, they explained, but were able to offer him \$5,000.00 and six-percent of the box office take.

“I want final script approval,” McHugh said.

“It's a documentary.”

“I want approval over the final cut then,” he said.

“I don't want to look like an asshole again.”

Ames instantly recalled a piece on McHugh for a *Discovery Channel* show titled *Shadow Chaser* that portrayed the legendary Bigfoot hunter as an inept bumbler.

McHugh stood. He paced about the room, puffing on his pipe and scanning the photos and framed articles that adorned the walls. There were black and white photos of large footprints, plaster casts of large footprints, strands of suspicious hair, broken trees, and the silhouettes of shadowy shapes that may—or may not be—humanoid figures. He stopped at a signed photo of himself and a dark-haired man with a long face. *Stay In Search Of...the mystery. All the best, Leonard Nimoy.*

“Dr. Spock,” McHugh said, nodding. “He knew how to treat us with dignity.”

“Mr. Spock,” Ames said. “Dr. Spock was a children’s doctor.”

“The public has lost its fascination with Bigfoot,” McHugh said. “They’ve lost their fascination with the great mysteries of the world. Back in the day, we’d publish a grainy, blobby black-and-white photo of something purporting to be humanoid—never mind that it was a trick of lighting or some amalgamation of shadows—and they would just eat that shit up like it was a Delmonico steak. Now, they’re content with their Internets and iPods and—”

“Internet,” Ames said.

“What did I say?”

“Internets, indicating that there is more than one.”

“Can you prove there is just one?” McHugh asked.

“As a general rule, we refer to it simply as The Internet, like The Universe—”

“Again,” McHugh said. “Prove to me that there’s just one.”

“I can’t—”

“And their cell phones,” he continued, “and satellite television—five-hundred channels, Ames. Do you know how many channels there were when I was a kid?”

“No.”

“Not five-hundred.”

Ames said, “I thought you wanted a specific number—”

“I’ve become a dinosaur. Look at me. You’re looking at fucking dinosaur, Ames.”

“Maybe we haven’t looked hard enough—”

McHugh turned sharply to him. “Now you’re sounding like them.”

“Who?”

“Haven't looked hard enough? Jesus Christ. No one has looked harder than me.”

“People naturally demand evidence—”

“And we've provided that!”

Ames opened more mail. There were a few more checks. Donations had helped keep the venture going, had kept it going for more than twenty-five years—and food on McHugh's table.

“We're down almost two-hundred and fifty dollars from last month,” Ames said.

Buried beneath the mail was a letter addressed to *Dr. Thor McHugh, PhD* and bearing the familiar crest of the Pacific Northwest Consortium of Colleges, Institute for Anthropological Studies—

Dear Thor:

As you are aware, PNWC has adopted Chancellor Stevenson's bold, new vision for the consortium schools, and so, too, has Anthropological Studies. In so doing, we have been forced to take a long, hard look at the programs and research we have funded, what that has cost us, and what the results of that research have been. PNWC, and particularly Anthropological Studies, has been a key supporter of cryptozoological research in this country—long after such pursuits have fallen out of favor with the general public. When Chancellor Stevenson took over for Miguel Dominguez following his “illness,” she reviewed a number of our programs and found many that have out-lived their purpose, such as the twenty-year study of the effects of folk dancing on Eastern European

peoples conducted by our now-defunct Cultural Studies Department. Unfortunately, BERP has come under the scrutiny of Chancellor Stevenson as well. She has concluded, and rightly so, that thirty-one years is more than ample time to produce a Bigfoot.

It is with much regret that I write this letter. PNWC has enjoined a long relationship with Thor McHugh; however, due to a shift in policy, we will no longer offer funding to BERP and its research. Effective immediately, PNWC will cease financial support of BERP.

We wish you all the best in your future work, and thank you for being a part of the PNWC family for all these years.

Warmest regards,

Michael G. Lewis, Director

PNWC-Institute of Anthropological Studies

P.S. I apologize that you have received this information, via mail, but we were unable to reach you by telephone—since you have none.

Ames read the letter aloud to McHugh. When he had finished, McHugh remained silent for some time. Finally, McHugh took his pipe from his mouth and examined it. “I’ve got some twenty-seven hundred plaster casts of some really big feet.” He re-lit his pipe and looked directly at Ames. “Do they think I’m tramping through the woods making them in snowshoes?”

Ames shrugged. “What are we going to do?”

“We’re not going down like this,” McHugh said. “Looks like it’s time the new chancellor met Thor McHugh.”

“What are you going to say?”

McHugh grinned. “She’s a girl,” he said. “With girl parts...and I’m Thor McHugh. I don’t need to draw you any pictures.”

“What should I tell this film company?” Ames asked.

McHugh took a dynamic stance, legs wide apart, arms crossed—pipe clenched firmly between his teeth. “Tell them Thor McHugh said, ‘Yes.’”

“But what about the *Animal X Magazine* article? We don’t have a crew of twenty-five researchers. We don’t have a crew.”

“We could say they were undone by a spot of flesh-eating bacteria.”

Ames shook his head.

McHugh looked pensive. “Time to consult our archives.”

“Archives?”

“Put a call out to the former members of the Thor McHugh Li'l Feet Researchers...we’ll make a contest of it.”

“What about our dip in donations?” Ames said. “We haven’t put out any new footage in over two years.”

McHugh ran his fingers over the silver-gray stubble of his beard. His eyes were a pale blue and bore the unmistakable look of a man resigned to a very messy task. “Time to put on the suit,” he said.

Ames nodded. He stood from his desk, and walked to the bookcase. Ames removed Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* from the shelf and toggled a switch behind it. The bookshelf sprung free from the wall, revealing a hidden room. Inside, on a hanger covered in clear plastic, hung a large suit made of yak fur.

He took it off of the hanger and reluctantly slipped it on.

Chapter 2

Thor McHugh

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Thor McHugh, (born **Henry Michael Brown** on 3 April 1950),[1] is an American primatologist, ethnologist, anthropologist, and cryptozoologist. Considered to be the world's foremost expert on Bigfoot, McHugh is best known for his October 20, 1970 famous short motion picture of an unidentified subject McHugh purported to be a "Bigfoot" or "Sasquatch".[2] The footage has undergone many attempts to debunk it as well as to authenticate it. The majority of scientists have declared the footage a hoax, dismissing it as nothing more than a man in an ape suit, still some scientists maintain it depicts a cryptid, or, a creature that is "unknown to science". He is the founder of the Bigfoot Emergency Response Program (BERP) and has devoted his lifework to the hunting and killing of a Bigfoot.

Biography

Thor McHugh was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1950 to Mortimer Herbert Brown, a businessman, and Margie Lupsky, a novelist who wrote under the name Mina Nouveau.[1] As a child, the young McHugh—on a camping outing with his father in Punderson State Park—had an experience that would alter his life forever. The eight year-old McHugh had strayed away from their campsite, on a mission to gather wood and twigs for their fire. Alone and a considerable distance from camp, McHugh encountered a seven foot-tall humanoid creature, covered in

fur. As he writes in his memoir, *In the Footprints of Giants*: "It looked down at me, eyes blazing red with rage—but not unintelligent. This leviathan had muscles rippling beneath its suit of fur. It gave off a most-malodorous scent—an unpleasant mixture of raw sewage, rotting flesh, and patchouli. It raised its bulging, hulking arms as if to squash me. It was then that I picked up a stone and, sizing up my target, released it with a mighty throw, striking the magnificent beast square between the eyes. It let out a piercing, heart-stopping scream, and fled to the cover of the thick brush, never to be seen again." [3]

In 1974, McHugh enrolled at Guadalajara Universidad de Ciudad where he obtained a Ph.D degree in Cryptozoology. [4][7] His thesis was completed in 1977 under the tutorship of Roberto Carlos Diego Gomez, the foremost expert on the study of the Chupacabra. It was titled "Bigfoot: Monster, Myth, My New Best Friend (Who I'm Going To Shoot & Kill)," and detailed his five years of independent study in the Pacific Northwest. [1][7]

A world traveler, McHugh has hunted mythical creatures in exotic locales ranging from Peru to the Amazon basin; the Scottish Highlands to Mount Everest.

In 1978, at the age of twenty-eight, McHugh traveled to the Himalayas where he took a now-famous photograph of a towering, shadowy figure amid a raging snowstorm, which McHugh proudly declared was the Yeti. [4]

McHugh has been married twice. On 28 March 1984 he married a Dutch wildlife photographer Mary van Wick, at The Little White Wedding Chapel, Las Vegas; however, professional rivalry and rumors of infidelity marred the brief union and the couple divorced in 1985. In 1987 he married Deidre Bryce (a leading expert on the study of the "Raystown Ray"—a Loch Ness Monster-like creature purported to exist in a small, man-made lake in Central Pennsylvania. Citing religious differences

(Bryce is a devout Catholic) the couple had the marriage annulled several days later.[8]

When asked if he believed in God, McHugh said in September 2000: "I don't have any idea who or what God is. But if He made man in His own image, then Bigfoot must represent His ideal." [9]

Chapter 3

*March, 1979. Walla Walla, Washington.
Huey Dingnan and Chet Dingnan, a father
and son hunting near the Mill Creek
drainage, see a tall, hairy biped walking
across a slope...
--From the archives of BERP*

“Sit down,” Rex Tinklepaw said, motioning to the chair in front of his desk.

Lucy Glass did as she was told. She sat, knees touching, hands resting upon the purse on her lap. Using her thumb and forefinger of her right hand, she picked at the cuticle around her left thumb. Tinklepaw pushed a file toward her. Her hands shook as she reached for it.

“I’ve found him,” Tinklepaw said. He smiled when he said this, his carved features remaining hard and stone-like but, despite his harsh looks, a warmth shone from behind his eyes. “This can often be such a dirty business...but it’s cases like this that restore my faith in—”

His monologue was interrupted by the buzz of an intercom.

Tinklepaw winced. “Excuse me for a moment.” He pressed a button.

“Mr. Tinklepaw?”

“What is it, Kitty?”

“Mrs. Muldowney on line one.”

His features darkened, became almost devil-like. “Tell her I’m with a client,” he said, waving his hand toward Lucy.

Lucy found herself holding her breath. She’d waited twenty-nine years to learn the identity of her father; the thought of waiting a few moments more seemed too much to ask. She slipped her thumb inside the folder and started to open it. But Tinklepaw placed his large hand down on the file and stopped her. She noticed his knuckles were hairy; his fingers were thick, plump—the wedding band on his left hand seemed too tight. The ring made her automatically look for a photograph on his desk.

She found one—a framed picture of a smiling waifish sort of woman with horn-rimmed glasses and a slightly upturned nose. Totally not the wife of a private detective.

“She won’t take no for answer,” Kitty said.

Tinklepaw sighed. “Put her on.” He pressed the button on the intercom and said to Lucy, “I’m sorry. This won’t take more than a minute.”

Lucy smiled at him—the polite smile she used when someone cut ahead of her in line at the movies, or the smile reserved for gifts of florescent yellow sweaters or multicolored socks.

“Mrs. Muldowney? It’s Rexford Tinklepaw,” he said into the phone. He turned his back to Lucy. “Yes,” he said. “I see...now, Mrs. Muldowney...you’re not being reasonable...Mrs. Muldowney...Mrs. Muldowney? If you ask me a question...Mrs. Muldowney...you must at least give me a moment to speak...Mrs. Muldowney...Yes...Yes, there are photographs...Mrs. Muldowney, do you really need me to say it? I’m trying to

be discreet here. How should I say it? The photographs show you and your—paramour—in a compromising position. Okay, Mrs. Muldowney...that's your word...not mine. Fine. Yes, *fucking*. The photographs show you *fucking*. That's between you and your husband, Mrs. Muldowney. No...my agency owns the rights to them...again, I defer to Mr. Muldowney. He hired me. You'll have to ask him...No, they're not for sale...No, they won't end up on the Internet, I give you my word...Mrs. Muldowney, you forget I've seen the photos. No one would want to see them—”

He listened for a moment.

“Mrs. Muldowney? Hello?”

He placed the phone back down onto the cradle and turned slowly back to face Lucy. “I'm sorry you had to hear all of that, Ms. Glass. It's one of those icky by-products of being a private detective. Anyhow...” He tapped his fingers on top of the folder. “I bet you're excited to see what's inside.”

“Nervous, too.”

“I'll bet,” he said.

“I've fantasized about who he could be all of my life. A pilot, sea captain, ambassador—”

“Actually, he is somewhat of a celebrity,”

Tinklepaw said.

“Celebrity?” She felt the beginnings of a smile.

“What kind of celebrity?”

“Thor McHugh,” he said.

Lucy maintained her smile. “Who?”

“Thor McHugh.” He said the name like he was someone she should know.

“Who's Thor—”

“Bigfoot hunter.”

“He’s a Bigfoot hunter?”

“He’s *the* Bigfoot hunter,” Tinklepaw said, “... preeminent in his field.”

“A Bigfoot hunter?”

Tinklepaw opened the file. Inside was a black and white 8 x 10 photo of a grizzled man. He had short-cropped gray-white hair, a stubbly beard, and squinting—she thought suffering—eyes. He wore small, round wire frame glasses and a turtleneck sweater. He was looking out in the distance. Behind him was a snow-capped mountain range framed by tall pines. It was an obvious publicity photo.

“That’s your father,” he said. “Thor McHugh.”

“My father,” she said, studying the photo. It was strange to finally match a name and face to the title after all this time. He looked self-assured, wise—never mind that he tramped through woods searching for the Easter Bunny. She liked him. She liked the way he looked.

“Lives in a one-horse town called Carl in Northern California—actually he lives in the woods. The nearest town is Carl.” Beneath the photo was a book. Tinklepaw handed it to her.

In the Footprints of Giants: My Life with Bigfoot. On the cover was a photograph of a large footprint left in the snow. She turned it over. The back cover showed a noticeably younger McHugh, accompanied by a hulking, bald black man. They were jointly holding the edges of a map and pointing into a wooded area with their free hands. The caption read: *Thor McHugh and his manservant, Ames.* The photo was credited to *Mary van Wick, 1984.*

“Wow,” she said.

“Something, huh?”

“Wow.”

“I wish my father was a Bigfoot hunter,”
Tinklepaw said.

Dr. Thursday’s office was situated between a pet store and a frozen yogurt shop.

“I found my father,” she said to the doctor.

She was sitting on a table in the examination room, wearing nothing but a paper gown and tube socks. Dr. Thursday was listening to her breathing, holding his stethoscope against her bare back. It was cold.

“Did you find out if you have siblings?”

“I only found out about my father today,” she said.
“I’m arranging a trip to see him.”

She’d briefly entertained the thought of a phone call: “Hello, Thor...Mr. McHugh, sir. I’m Lucy Glass. You don’t know me, but I believe you’re my father....”

She’d also considered a letter:

Dear Mr. McHugh-

You once had an affair with my mother, Cynthia Stewart-Glass, an acquisitions editor at Turk, Zurich, and Stump—coincidentally, the same house that published your memoir. I believe you are my father. I’m writing to you because I’m gravely ill and in need of a special kind of transplant....

In the end, though, she decided it was best to meet him face-to-face, that a phone call or a letter might prove too easy to reject. Besides, if confronted with her on his doorstep, he might not be able to deny the similar bumps in their noses, or the squintiness of their eyes. He would also know this was no attempt to shake him down or in

some way capitalize on his fame. She needed desperately to find a tissue donor. Without one, she would die.

Dr. Thursday waved a file at her and said, “We’ve gotten back your labs.”

She nodded and mustered her best smile. “I’m not getting any better, am I?”

Thursday pushed his glasses back onto his head. “You’re not getting any worse...and that’s at least encouraging.” He stopped then as if he had reassessed his response and maybe concluded she was too sharp for him to pull that off. “It’s important that you find a match...and that you find that match as soon as possible.”

“Or I’ll die,” she said.

“Or you’ll become very sick, Lucy.” He smiled.

There was comfort in that smile, early on—back when he’d first told her of the irregular cell growth, the malignancy. “We caught it early,” he’d said, rubbing her back. “There’s time to find a match.”

But now time was running out.

Thursday’s visits with her had become shorter, his cheer-leading less frequent. He said, “See you next appointment,” and he was gone—off to tend to matters more curable, more agreeable to the conscience.

She dressed and left.

Outside, she bought herself a frozen yogurt—French vanilla with all the toppings—and watched the puppies play in the pet store window.

Chapter 4

*April, 1983. Shasta County, California
The Lemons, a family of performing
Mormons ("Utah's Answer to The
Partridge Family"), run their Plymouth
station wagon off the road, after swerving
to avoid a hairy biped while driving along
Highway 96 near Yreka...
--From the archives of BERP*

McHugh strode into the office with confidence, if not outright defiance.

"I'm here to see Chancellor Stevenson," he said.

The gray-haired woman who was poring over paperwork at her desk was the chancellor's secretary. The personalized desk clock said her name was Clara. "I'm sorry, sir. She's on a very important call at the moment."

"Tell her Thor McHugh is here," he said, and walked straight past her toward the chancellor's door.

"You can't go in there, sir—"

McHugh ignored her. He pushed open the door and went in.

It was a large office with dark woodwork and a wide window looking out onto a grassy common. The walls were lined with bookshelves. A fortyish woman with short blonde hair sat behind a desk, eating salad from a plastic takeout tray.

She looked briefly stunned by McHugh's unannounced entrance.

"You Stevenson?" he said.

"Yes, I am."

"I'm Thor McHugh."

She nodded. "I recognize you from the jacket cover of your books."

Clara came in behind McHugh. "I've called security," she said.

"What the hell right do you have taking my funding away?"

Chancellor Stevenson smiled as if she'd been anticipating this meeting. "Clara, if you don't mind...Dr. McHugh and I need a moment to discuss this. Close the door behind you, please."

Clara left.

Chancellor Stevenson motioned for McHugh to have a seat. He did.

"About the funding," she said, when McHugh had made himself comfortable.

"Yes. About the funding."

"It's gone."

McHugh clasped his hands behind his head.

"That's a bit of a problem for me."

The Chancellor laughed.

"You have a lovely laugh," he said.

"Thank you," she replied. "But the funding is still gone."

"I'm sure we can find some money somewhere," McHugh said, "...if we look hard enough."

"This college has supported you for a very long time, Dr. McHugh. Over one-hundred-thousand dollars a year went to your research, thanks in large part to monies

left to the school at the bequest of our alumnus Albert Lord—”

“Filmmaker Albert Lord,” McHugh said.

“Crack pot Albert Lord,” Stevenson said.

“Crack pot? The man was nominated for three Academy Awards—”

“Crack pot. Crack pot with a capital C. The man was convinced he’d been abducted by aliens and fitted with a transmitter implanted in his penis.”

“So who’s to say he wasn’t?” McHugh replied.

“Dr. McHugh—”

“Have you ever seen his penis?”

“He was a crack pot—a very rich crack pot. When he died, he left the college a lot of money—”

“With the sole request that it be used to advance the study of cryptozoology—specifically Bigfoot research,” he said.

“You’re correct...,” she said.

McHugh smiled.

“Except for one condition.”

McHugh’s smile faded. “What condition?”

“A stipulation.” She shuffled some papers around on her desk. “Ah. Here it is. Page seventy-three...third paragraph down...starting with ‘Should no proof of a Bigfoot be found after a reasonable amount of time has passed—”

“Let me see that,” McHugh said, leaning forward over the desk. He snatched the page from the Chancellor’s grasp. “Reasonable...reasonable? Thirty-one years isn’t reasonable when you consider this animal has evaded detection since the dawn of Man.”

“Thirty-one years is long enough for any folly.”

“Folly? I don’t like the sound of that word...”

“It's more than reasonable,” she said. “In fact, it's far too long. The facade on the McKay Theatre is crumbling. The roof on Broderbund Fieldhouse leaks. The color guard need warmer uniforms. You of all people understand how cold it can get in the Pacific Northwest.”

“Bullshit,” McHugh said. “You're defining reasonable to serve the selfish and petty needs of the school over science, progress, and discovery.”

Stevenson picked up the bequest and waved it at McHugh. “This document,” she said, “signed in Mr. Lord's own grotesque handwriting, grants us the authority to define reasonable—if you leaf to the last section, under Definitions, you'll find Reasonable. It's defined as 'Up to the discretion of the Consortium'. As the agent for the university, I am hereby deeming thirty-one years as reasonable.”

“You can't get rid of me. I've got tenure...I think.”

She bridged her hands in front of her face. “Do you even know what tenure is, Dr. McHugh?”

“It means you can't fire me—”

“There's a publishing requirement to remain affiliated with this school—”

“I've been published. A lot. Recently, too.”

“Where?”

“My research has just been published in the *Weekly World Bulletin*, I've got an op-ed piece in this month's *Hairy Biped Illustrated*, and I had a letter to the editor published in last week's *Carl Gazette*. It was about the potholes on Route 6. I really let them have it.”

“I don't believe you,” she said.

“It's online,” McHugh said. “If you go to www.carlgazette.com you can read it. It's received twenty-seven likes—”

“Are you for real?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” he asked.

“I understand this must come as quite a shock to you, especially someone of your advanced age—”

McHugh leaned forward, resting his hands on Stevenson’s desk. “Chancellor Dominguez and I had an understanding.”

“Chancellor Dominguez is no longer with the college.”

“He had an understanding—an appreciation—for what we were trying to do.”

“To catch a Bigfoot?”

He caught the snarky tone. “Not to *just* catch a Bigfoot,” he said. “Do you know what kind of news it will make when one of these creatures is finally caught? Can you even imagine the windfall for the college or university that is backing the guy who does it?”

“No, I can’t,” she said.

“I’m talking the biggest discovery in modern anthropological history.”

“Dr. McHugh,” she said. “Can I be frank with you?”

McHugh paused, as if his reset button had been pressed. “Please do.”

“Don’t you think you’ve had enough time? Do you know how much woodlands are lost to development every day? Your Bigfoot—and you—are running out of room, McHugh.”

“Which only increases my likelihood of finding it. It’s out there.”

“With all the technology we have now—sonar, radar, infrared thermal imaging—don’t you think one of them would have turned up by now? Don’t you think

we—or some sportsman—would have stumbled upon the carcass of a dead Bigfoot somewhere?”

“They bury their dead,” he said.

She smiled a condescending smile. “Do you really believe that? How would you even know?”

“Now you listen here,” McHugh said.

“No,” she said. “You listen to me. You’ve bilked this college out of enough money over the years. You’ve had your run. Be glad you’ve gotten to live off of the fat of this institution for as long as you have. But it’s over now. From now on, we’re focusing our attention and available monies on legitimate research.”

“Legitimate?”

“Look at you, McHugh. What are you, seventy?”

“Sixty-four.”

“And this is what you’ve got to show for it.

Chasing windmills....”

McHugh winced at the Don Quixote metaphor.

Her voice softer now, she said, “Can you really say with any certainty that Bigfoot even exists? We’ve become somewhat of a joke in the academic community with our support of esoteric research. But no more. No longer will NWPC be a haven for—and I do apologize if this offends you, but—crack pot theorists and their half-baked ideas concerning Bigfoot, Elvis, UFOS, and the Bermuda Triangle.”

“Elvis? UFOS? The Bermuda Triangle? How dare you lump me in with those pseudo-pursuits.”

“Listen to yourself, McHugh. You had a promising career once. Primatology—now there’s a study to wrap your mind around. Why don’t you go out, invest a year in some sound, plausible research—maybe the sexual

behavior of bonobos—and then come back here. We'll find some funding for you then.”

“Go fuck yourself.”

“I'm sorry you feel that way.”

“I'll get a Bigfoot,” he said, laughing. “I'll get a Bigfoot...and then you'll be sorry—”

“I'm sure we will.”

“Don't patronize me.”

Security came in—two paunchy, middle-aged guards with doughy faces. The one had a bit of jelly at the corner of his mouth.

“You two want my autograph?” McHugh asked.

“Let's go,” the one who did not have jelly on his face said. He grasped McHugh by the arm.

“You're throwing me out?” McHugh said to the Chancellor.

Jellyface said, “We don't want no trouble.”

“You're fucking throwing me out?” McHugh asked her in apparent disbelief.

“Be gentle with Dr. McHugh,” Stevenson said. “He's been affiliated with our school for a long time.”

“Let's go,” the other guard said again.

“This isn't going to end pretty,” McHugh said.

“Good day, Dr. McHugh,” Stevenson said.

“Get your hands off of me,” McHugh said to the guards. “Do you even know who I am?”

“Don't really care,” the guard said, and led him away.

Chapter 5

*November, 1999. Clackamas County,
Oregon*

*Jenny Kinder and Tommy Green, platonic
friends, and seated in the car in their
respective seats and not touching at all—
just listening to the radio and talking and
stuff—hear vocalizations of an unknown
origin that were like scary and all, while
parked in a remote area near Skookum
Lake...*

--From the archives of BERP

Lucy Glass boarded the plane in Pittsburgh. Lucy Glass. Romance novelist. Author of seven titles. Never married. No children. Lucy Glass—dying at the age of twenty-eight.

She'd never been to San Francisco before—had never been to California. She could not recall ever having even the faintest interest in Bigfoot—now she was flying off to confront the foremost *expert* in the *field* of *Bigfootology*. And he was also her father. Jesus Christ.

My father is a Bigfoot hunter.

She pressed her nose to the airplane window. She held McHugh's memoir on her lap. She was unable to hold back the giggle. Bigfoot—ha ha—hunter.

The old woman seated next to her just stared.

Lucy said, “Sorry,” and giggled some more. It was the first time she’d laughed in nearly a year.

Lucy stayed the first night in the city—in a Japanese-themed hotel in Little Tokyo. She washed in a Japanese bath, rinsed off next to the bath and fretted the water might run into the room. It didn’t.

She ate dinner in a restaurant that reminded her of an Edward Hopper painting. She strolled along the street and browsed the storefront windows. When it became dark, she returned to her room.

She dressed in her pajamas, found an old movie on television that she’d seen before, crawled under the covers, and felt very alone.

Lucy had a few acquaintances—an editor who she was friendly with—a beta fish. There was no one to call to say, “I made it safely,” or “You should see how beautiful the city is,” or “I wish you were here.”

There was no one. The only one rooting on her survival was her.

Lucy started to cry then thought better of it. She fell asleep, but did not dream. When she awoke, the sun was already leaking through the corner of the blinds. She felt better. Not healthy; just better.

She had breakfast in the hotel restaurant, checked out, and rented a car.

By 10:00 AM, Lucy was driving north on the three-and-a-half hour ride to Carl, California.

Chapter 6

*November, 1988. Allegheny County,
Pennsylvania*

*Derwin Lindell, a seasoned deer hunter
and veteran of WWII and the Korean War,
witnesses a chestnut colored hairy biped
while hunting within 2 miles of the
boundary of Pittsburgh International
Airport, "...and it wasn't no fucking bear."
--From the archives of BERP*

Letter titled 'Call to Action'. Mailed to all 737
members of the Thor McHugh L'il Feet Researchers
Society:

FROM THE DESK OF THOR McHUGH

Dear L'il Feet Members (or "Big Tootsies"):

How have you been? It's been a long time since we've
chatted. I trust your expeditions into the wilds have been
fruitful and productive. Over the years, I have enjoyed your
photographs, your plaster casts (I've kept them all), and the

tales of your exploits. But above all, I have enjoyed your enthusiasm for Bigfoot. It is your excitement and undying belief in the existence of Bigfoot that has helped me and the dedicated staff here at BERP get through some lean and trying times. Well, my little friends, the time has come that I, Thor McHugh, repay YOU, my loyal and trusting followers—my Big Tootsies. That's right, L'il Feet Members, the time has come. Thor McHugh is calling you up to the big leagues. I want you to join my team. This is a special invitation, from Thor McHugh himself—the “Biggest” Tootsie, this side of the Big Hairy Man himself (of course, I mean Bigfoot here, friends). Now, this invitation is an exclusive one. Not every member of the Thor McHugh L'il Feet Researchers Society (formerly the Thor McHugh L'il Feet Corps) will be called (and even fewer will be chosen...my apologies to Jesus). You have been selected because you are a charter member of L'il Feet, because you have exhibited exceptional tracking and research skills, and because you have shown a willingness over the years to financially support our organization. Just imagine, you

(insert your name here), working side-by-side with famed Bigfoot Researcher and Professional Adventurer, Thor McHugh, as you scout and track—and possibly *kill*—the world's first Bigfoot. Be the envy of all the children (and ladies) on your block. But you must act fast! This is a limited time offer. Thor McHugh is currently assembling his new staff for this bold, new chapter in the story of Thor McHugh and BERP. Don't be left out of this monumental effort to bag a Bigfoot. For just \$49.95*, your space will be reserved on the upcoming expedition with the one-and-only Thor McHugh.

I hope you can join me, Thor McHugh, celebrated adventurer, documentary filmmaker, and lecturer. Let's *kill* a Bigfoot—*together!***

Yours truly,

Thor

(Dictated to Ames, personal assistant to Thor McHugh)

----- Cut Here and Return to
BERP -----

() Yes! I want to join Thor McHugh and kill a Bigfoot!***

Please reserve my space in the expedition. Payment of \$49.95 is enclosed. Make check/money order payable to B.E.R.P.

*Does not include monthly room and board of \$999.95/month

**By signing the enclosed consent form, participant assumes all liability for accidental death or dismemberment by Bigfoot (real or imagined) or by the hand of Thor McHugh or other tenured member of BERP

***Thor McHugh does not guarantee the participant will kill—or even see—a Bigfoot. Thor McHugh and BERP does not make any claims to the existence of Bigfoot

A bedraggled and much-maligned McHugh returned home. Ames didn't ask him how it went. McHugh's body language told the story. He went to the refrigerator, removed a beer, and collapsed into the wing back chair.

McHugh drank his beer in silence. Ames reviewed the data from the center's official website—mainly first-hand accounts of sightings posted to the site via the *I Saw a Bigfoot* tool. There was nothing concrete. A Bigfoot crossed a country road in Idaho; the “strangled” call of

one was heard in Montana; a man in Helena claimed to have been raped by one.

“Did I ever tell you I was once a good ballplayer?” McHugh asked.

“Yes,” Ames said. It didn’t stop McHugh from recounting his days of playing shortstop for Chester A. Arthur High.

“Could’ve been something, Ames,” he said. “But, no. I had to see a Bigfoot—a big, old, hairy biped with humanoid features and a five-foot gait. Sunk my baseball career. And do you know why?”

“No one believed you,” Ames said.

“No one believed me, Ames. And so it became my lifelong quest—my mission in life, if you will—to prove that these furry fuckers exist.”

Ames had once had dreams of his own too. A little house in the country, a wife, a family—maybe a dog in the yard. But a visit in 1979 by Thor McHugh to the campus of Florida State University changed all that. What started off as a lark, a goof—to work with a Bigfoot hunter—turned into an unexpected career, albeit an unfulfilling one.

He had never seen a Bigfoot; only the plaster casts of footprints. In fact, he wasn't completely convinced they even existed, had never seen compelling enough evidence to suggest that they ever did.

He stayed all these years in spite of the lack of evidence, in spite of the nagging doubts that what they were really chasing were legends, myths—fantastic tales told by native Americans around the campfire. He stayed because of his platonic union with McHugh, their symbiotic existence—the nonsexual marriage of two men whose codependency had run as deep as any old couple.

“Well,” McHugh said. “We need a Bigfoot now, I guess.”

He said it as though it would be easy to do now since they’ve put their mind to it, that the last thirty years they were somehow not really trying.

“I’ve become a joke,” he said, sitting forward in his chair. “Do you think all those times I was on Carson, on *Donahue*, they were actually just making fun of me?”

“Yes.”

“Really?” McHugh looked hurt.

“Probably,” Ames said, and then revised his answer to, “No.”

“How did you make out with the L’il Feet Researchers?”

“Good,” Ames replied.

“How good?”

Ames had received one response from the 737 letters that he’d mailed. Many had been returned “Moved—Left No Forwarding Address,” “Addressee Unknown”, or in some cases—sadly—“Deceased.” The one, sole response was from Douglas “Dougie” Mendelbaum, a thirty-seven-year-old man who lived—not surprisingly—in the basement of his mother’s house. “I’ve got a hotplate, a dorm room refrigerator, and my own private entrance,” he explained in his letter, asserting his independence. “I have proudly displayed my Thor McHugh pin all these years, wearing it on the lapel of my prom night tuxedo, the dark suit at my father’s funeral (RIP, Dad), and my brown suit that I wear for job interviews. As a side note, I am currently unemployed, but I have found the pin to be, nonetheless, a great conversation starter.” He went on to provide an account of his life from the time he had paid his first annual

membership dues (at age 11), until the present (he was, as of this writing, the longest active paid member). He'd been briefly engaged to a manic pixie dream girl who looked like Zooey Deschanel but Asian—and blonde—whom he'd met at Comic-Con, but ultimately the engagement was doomed due to theological differences, namely, that she was a strict Klingon; he a Jedi. “We were from two different universes,” he explained—meaning it quite literally. He worked a string of dead-end jobs in customer service and the custodial/janitorial fields, but his work prospects dried up after a “scrape” with the law. He viewed this opportunity to join the research team as his chance to “finally make something” of himself. “One final question: the BERP facility wouldn't happen to be within a one-hundred feet of a school, would it?”

Ames mailed out the welcome letter that same morning.

“We've got some *interesting* prospects,” Ames said.

A bell sounded to signal a visitor at the gate. Relieved, Ames leapt to his feet and said, “I'll get it.”

He left the library/study, walked through the commissary, down a flight of steps and past the doors to the fitness room, men's locker room, and swimming pool, respectively. He went through the glass corridor—which had always reminded Ames of a giant hamster tube—and pushed through the double doors that led into the laboratory where a thick coating of dust had gathered on the glass beakers and electronic microscopes and other once-advanced research equipment that was now starting to look antiquated. He walked past the dual holding cells, fortified with six-inch thick steel walls, that had never held a Bigfoot, much less two, and into the reception area

where—for a brief time in 1986—a full-time receptionist once manned the front desk.

They weren't expecting a visitor. There was an occasional overzealous amateur Bigfoot hunter—though not as many as there once were—who would show up at their doorstep unannounced and who could usually be dispatched rather painlessly with an autographed 8 x 10 headshot of McHugh that was signed, "Keep following in my footsteps... Yours, T."

Ames fingered in the security code on the pad mounted near the door and waited for the LED light to transition to a flashing green from its usual unblinking red.

He opened the door. A golf cart—one of two—sat waiting just outside of the building. Ames climbed into it and pulled away. The gate to the facility was seven-tenths of a mile from the barracks. The sun was warm on his face.

As the gate came into view, Ames could see a figure standing there and a car idling nearby. As he got nearer, it became unmistakably clear that the figure was a woman.

Chapter 7

*June, 2007. Park County, Wyoming
Aquanetta Harris and her man, Isiah
Carter, witness a 'motherfucking hominid—
all hairy and shit'—about 3 miles east of
Yellowstone Park's East Gate, and then
promptly turn their Lexus around and haul
their asses all the way back to Los Angeles
without stopping...
--From the archives of BERP*

Lucy stood nervously outside of the gate as she watched the golf cart approach. Her instincts told her to run—to hell with living.

As the golf cart neared, she was relieved to see it was a large black man driving it. His head was completely bald and gleaming in the midday sun. He stopped just short of the gate and got out. He wore tan Dickies pants and matching shirt, and looked very much like he was on safari. She recognized him as the Ames from the back of McHugh's book.

"May I help you?" he asked in a soft, but even-toned, voice.

She forced her best smile. "I'm here to see Thor McHugh," she said.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but Mr. McHugh is unavailable. Would you like a signed eight-by-ten?"

"I'm not...a groupie," she said. "In fact, I don't even believe in Bigfoot."

"I see."

"Thor McHugh is my father," she said.

Ames nodded. "I suppose you better come in then." He punched in a code on his side of the fence and the gate slid open. "You can ride up with me."

"What about my rental car?"

"It'll be fine right there," he said.

She climbed onto the golf cart and they drove away.

Lucy followed Ames inside the barracks. They walked through several rooms and corridors and climbed several flights of steps until they reached a library. It was comprised of all rich mahogany, with lacquered wooden floors, and tall, wing back chairs.

She took a seat at a long table illuminated by a row of green-shaded banker's lamps while Ames called for McHugh.

Ames asked, "Would you like a drink, Miss—"

"Call me Lucy," she said, "and, no...no thank you."

He stood beside her, arms at his side. Lucy glanced at Ames as she fidgeted in her chair and smiled somewhat anxiously.

"It's nice here," she said.

"Yes, it is."

Lucy tapped her fingernails on the table, realized it was probably annoying, and stopped. "Is Bigfoot real?" she asked.

Ames smiled. "Mr. McHugh likes to think so."

She nodded. "Of, course."

A door opened on the far side of the room. McHugh strode in. He looked the same as in his photo, though Lucy had imagined him taller. He walked slowly, confidently toward her with a bit of a swagger.

"Who do we have here?" McHugh said. Lucy could have sworn there was a sparkle in his eyes.

Ames replied. "Sir, she says she's—"

McHugh grabbed her hand and leaned forward to kiss it. "Thor McHugh," he said. "*The* Thor McHugh."

"Lucy Glass," she said. Her hand was trembling. It was an awkward moment made even worse by the fact her father was hitting on her.

"What's a lovely thing like you doing out here in the wilderness like this—"

"I'm your daughter," Lucy said.

"Oh." He didn't blink. He kept the silly, bemused look locked on Lucy's eyes. "Remind me, Ames. Did we know about this one?"

"No."

McHugh said, "Oh," again and giggled. "This is embarrassing."

"My mother was Cynthia Stewart-Glass, a one-time acquisitions editor at Turk, Zurich, and Stump."

His expression was blank. "Cynthia Stewart—"
"Glass."

"Right. I'm going to need more."

"She bought your memoir," Lucy said.

"Cynthia? My editor? *That* Cynthia?" McHugh laughed. "Of, course. Cynthia Stewart—"

"Glass," she said.

"You're Cynthia's daughter?" he asked.

"And apparently yours, too," Ames said.

“Thank you, Ames,” McHugh said. He stood smiling at her.

“You don’t have the faintest idea who my mother is, do you?”

“Not a clue.”

Lucy felt the tears coming on; she was powerless to stop them. “I’ve...made a...mistake...coming here.”

“Tissues, Ames,” McHugh ordered. He grasped Lucy by the arm. “Let’s have a seat in the big, comfy chair,” he said, and gently guided her to relocate.

Ames was at her side with a box of Kleenex. She withdrew several from the box and blew her nose. “Thank you,” she said, sniffing.

Ames backed away.

McHugh grabbed a chair and pulled it close to her. He sat. “Tell me some more about your mother.”

“You don’t have to humor me, Mr. McHugh,” she said.

“Please,” he said. “Call me Da—er, Thor.” He smiled. “Da-Thor.”

She felt ridiculous. Lost in the frantic search to find her birth father was the very real possibility that he would not only *not* remember her mother—but that he would turn out to be a total asshole, too.

“So,” McHugh said in an obvious attempt to make conversation. “How is old what’s her face—”

“Cynthia,” Ames said.

“Right.”

“She’s dead,” Lucy replied.

“Oh, Christ...I’m sorry,” McHugh said. “Did she suffer?”

“She was struck by a city bus.”

“Well, that’s a relief... at least it was quick,” he said, patting Lucy's hand.

They were quiet for a moment, sitting in chairs, facing each other—McHugh stroking her hand—Ames presiding over them. They were both staring at her, studying her. It was quite uncomfortable.

Finally, McHugh said, “Don’t take this the wrong way, but you look too pale to be my daughter.”

“I’m dying,” Lucy said.

“Well,” McHugh replied. “That explains it.”