

The Josiah Chronicles, a Christian science fiction novel by Ricky Herring, follows Josiah Jones and his two friends through an amazing sequence of events. They begin by capturing a being from another world. Before they know it they become actors in an Indian legend which eventually leads them to another world, where they are involved in a world war.

# The Josiah Chronicles

by Ricky Herring

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# THE JOSIAH CHRONICLES



By:  
Ricky Herring

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## CHAPTER 1

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It was a morning not unlike any other morning at the sawmill. Men were sitting in the break area passing away the last few minutes of leisure before the workday began. On this particular November morning the cool, damp south Alabama air was making the hot coffee that some of the men were drinking taste mighty good.

Conversation was plentiful. The subjects ranged from politics to sports to other day-to-day subjects. One elderly gentleman was moaning about the inefficiency of the government. There was another gentleman in his early fifties telling a horror story of how the rabbits had ruined his snap bean patch during the summer. As the clock neared seven in the morning this intellectual exchange went on unabated as if it could go on all day.

Sitting near a soft drink machine were three young men busily discussing the upcoming football game between Alabama and Auburn. They rattled on and on, each trying to out do the other in forecasting how the game would go.

Sitting closest to the soft drink machine was Paul Henry. Paul is twenty-one years old. He has blond hair and blue eyes and is a rather small man. His height is about five-feet four inches and he weighs about one hundred and ten pounds. It could not be said that he is a very intelligent man. When he was in school it was a constant struggle for him to make a barely passing grade. This ruined his mother's desire for him to be a doctor. Paul is not a man that likes to do any heavy-duty thinking. In addition to his mental shortcomings he is also very shallow. It might even be said that Paul could carry shallowness to new depths.

Paul's countenance also suggests dullness. Except when he is laughing or smiling he has a very blank look on his face, much like a bowl of grits without any butter on them. What Paul gets excited about is money. He absolutely loves it. He does not have any of course, but the thought of getting it really makes his feeble mind whirl.

Sitting next to Paul was Lenny Rogers. Lenny is a stocky built, red haired man of below average height. He is twenty-eight years of age but his face shows the wear and tear of a man of far more years. This could be due to Lenny's lifestyle. His hobbies include drinking, gambling, fighting, moon shining, and chasing after equally unvirtuous women. He also likes to pass the late afternoon hours as a novice but enthusiastic hog farmer and a shade-tree mechanic. He seldom bathes and it would appear that he wears the grease and grime of his job and his hobbies as a badge of honor. Lenny is unquestionably a rough character but under that rough, ragged exterior is a very small heart of pure gold.

Sitting across from these two guys was perhaps the most interesting character of all. His name is Josiah Jones. Josiah is a fairly large man. He is about six feet,

three inches tall and around two hundred and thirty pounds. Josiah is also a supremely well-built, very broad shouldered, muscular and quite handsome young man, with brown hair and eyes.

Josiah was not a great academic achiever while he was in high school. This is not because he does not have a brilliant mind, quite the contrary; his mind could be compared to swamp land, which is rich but undeveloped. Josiah has attributed his lack of academic achievement to his feeling that he would probably spend his post high school life in the sawmill. This belief did nothing to inspire the young man to try to expand his mind, and, at twenty-one years of age he has not been proven wrong.

Josiah is very religious and sometimes this can cause conflicts. He has been known to pray and fast for days. He has also been known to lose his Scotch-Irish temper and go on destructive rampages that would make a demolition crew green with envy. On one such occasion after Josiah had tried for two hours to put an escaped hog back into its pen he became so angry that he snatched a fence post out of the ground and gave the poor swine a lesson in human-animal relations, right between the ears. Josiah felt bad because he had lost his temper but he did enjoy the fresh pork that resulted from it.

Josiah is not much for socializing but there is one person that he would gladly socialize with for the rest of his life. This is his girlfriend Becky Flowers. He loves Becky more than he loves life itself. They have been engaged for a while, but they have not set a date for the wedding. It seems that Josiah's salary is not quite enough to get the two started down life's long road. Becky is trying to hasten the date by working at a local clothing store, but her salary is also pitiful. The two seem to content themselves by looking forward to the someday that they will tie the knot.

Seven o'clock quickly came. The hated lonesome whistle blew bringing an end to the morning bull session. Some of the men drank down their final sip of coffee and trudged to their work areas. Blades started humming, sawdust started flying, foremen started giving orders, and the three young men started stacking lumber. The workday had begun.

It was not long after the fellows began stacking lumber that the day's small talk began, small talk that helped to break the monotony of doing the same job over and over, day after day. It might even be the small talk that kept the three fellows and countless other millions of workers from going insane. Whatever its supposed purpose, the young men were about to find out that small talk can lead to big trouble.

"Go slower or you'll work us out of a job," Paul said to his companions.

"An watt if we do?" said Lenny, "I wuz lookin fer a job when I fount this-un."

"I'm shore that this lumber will last us the rest of our lives," said Josiah in a matter of fact way.

"Watt did y'all brang fer dinner today?" asked Lenny.

"You aint gonna git none of it watterver it is!" said Paul in an arrogantly greedy fashion that made everyone around want to kick his fanny with a combat boot.

"I ditten want none of yore ole stankin dinner!" said Lenny defiantly.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Josiah in a calming tone. "Must we be at one another's thoats this mornin?"

"Well, I git tard of that red-headed varmit a-wantin to talk me out of my dinner ever day!" said Paul.

"Stuff it up yore anus," quipped Lenny.

"I'd do that before I'd give it ta yore ole red-headed ugly seff," returned Paul.

"If I might change the subject," said Josiah, "the weather is supposed to be perty an cool fer our Saturday off."

"Good," Paul said, "I can hunt an not worry bout gittin wet."

"Speaking of huntin, did ya hear bout watt Sonny Johnson claimed ta haff seen wile he wuz a-huntin last week?" asked Josiah.

"No, watt?" Lenny asked.

"He claims ta haff seen a bigfoot," Josiah replied.

"Watt in tha worl is that?" asked Paul in his usual mental wastelandish way.

"It's somethin like a goriller with big feet ya idiot!" snorted Lenny.

"Yeah," began Josiah, "he said that him and his cousins wuz a-deer huntin a little before season started in tha river swamp wen they saw this thang about seven-hunderd yards away."

"Now jest how in tha heck did they see anythang seven-hunderd yards away?" Lenny asked incriminatingly and then added, "seven-hunderd yards my foot, yore lucky ta be able ta see ten feet in front of yore nose in that swamp! It's as thick as hairs on a dogs' back!"

"That's right!" added Paul.

"Y'all hold on," begged Josiah. "They claim ta haff seen it in that part whir tha power line crosses tha swamp."

"Yeah," said Lenny sarcastically, and then added, "I bet that they saw this heeya thang whilst lookin thu tha bottom of a bottle."

"Yep," added Paul.

"Y'all don't jump down my thoat. I'm jest tellin y'all watt Sonny told me," Josiah said in an aggravated way.

"I saw a cow perched in top of a pine tree this mornin too," said a giggling Paul.

"Shut-up dummy," snorted Lenny to Paul and then he looked at Josiah and asked, "Watt did this supposed bigfoot supposedly do?"

Josiah placed a board on top of the stack, looked at the ground in a contemplative way and said, "Sonny said that it wuz in a squattin position at first. Then it looked up and saw them, stood up, stared at them fer awile, looked at the edge of the woods a time or two, and then it walked back into tha woods."

"In other words they caught it wile it wuz takin a dump," said Lenny with a smirk.

At this point Paul absolutely got beside himself with the humor of Lenny's statement and began laughing in a bent over, knee slapping fashion.

"He dittin say," said Josiah.

"How did ya come bout this infermation?" asked Lenny.

"I saw Sonny after church an we talked fer a wile," Josiah answered.

"Oh, I see," said Lenny quietly.

The men didn't talk anymore for a few minutes. Each was involved in his own thoughts, except of course for Paul. He wasn't really thinking as much as he was simply flashing little mental images in his mind for very short periods of time. Most of these images dealt with the upcoming football game, or something else of equal shallowness. The bigfoot conversation had temporarily left his weak little mind.

Josiah on the other hand was very much in thought about the conversation. For one thing he was almost embarrassed that he had brought up such a silly and unbelievable subject. But then again, he felt that his friends had been a little severe in disparaging his story. After all, he was just repeating what he had been told. And still another thought kept on nagging at him. Why would Sonny lie to him? They had been the best of friends, both in school and in church for most of their lives. He could not believe that Sonny would try to deceive him, especially on the church grounds. Josiah pondered these thoughts over and over as he continued to stack lumber.

And then there was Lenny, who did not believe the story about the bigfoot. But then again he felt bad because of the way that he had talked to Josiah. He was a little older than Josiah and had always thought of him as a little brother. After all, it had been Josiah who had befriended him through the years when everyone else had thought that he was too nasty, wild, crude, or boisterous to hang around with. It had been Josiah who had visited him on those lonely evenings and Sunday afternoons and had seemed to truly enjoy his company, the company that most other people shunned like the plague. And it was Josiah who would say nice things about him when nobody else would. Lenny thought about this and gradually felt more and more like a heel. But now that he had said the things that he had said, he knew that he could not take it back. So, what could he do? He looked around and saw that nobody was talking and he felt responsible. Lenny continued to think. He wondered how he could knock down the wall that he had erected between himself and his friend. After awhile he decided that he would break the ice at the dinner hour and say or do something that would put everything back to normal.

The men kept working; the machines kept humming and clanging. The sound of lumber hitting lumber over and over again went on until finally that blessed twelve o'clock whistle sounded. At last it was time to fill those empty bellies and break the monotony of work for an hour. At last, it was dinnertime.

The three young men stacked their last piece of lumber and headed out for the break area. There they bought a couple of soft drinks each, grabbed their brown paper bags off the shelf and walked back through the lumber yard to their favorite tree. Then, they sat on the ground and began unpacking their food.



It seemed so good to be able to hear the sounds of nature after a morning of noise. The singing of the birds and the sound of the wind whistling through the treetops on this pleasantly cool day really calmed the spirits of these three country boys.

They said nothing for a while as they unpacked their food. Paul brought one sandwich with one rather skinny looking piece of bologna in it and an apple. Josiah unpacked four pieces of fried chicken, two boiled eggs, four sausage and biscuits, and three large pieces of pecan pie. Lenny pulled out five big beautiful ham sandwiches, each complete with a large piece of ham. Lenny and Josiah were heavy eaters, so heavy in fact that their brown bags were actually grocery sacks.

Paul looked in amazement at Lenny's sandwiches. Lenny looked at him and said, "I'll bet that ya wish that ya had kept yore mouth shut this mornin, don't ya dummy."

"Aw come on Lenny, give me one of them there ham sandwiches," Paul said pitifully.

And to that Lenny replied, "If ya want ham, go bite a hog in tha butt."

Lenny then looked at Josiah and finally figured out a way to apologize. Lenny began his apology, "How bout a couple of these sandwiches fer a piece of that pecan pie."

Josiah accepted the apology by saying: "All right, or better yet, why don't we put all of this food in a pile an we'll both eat til it's all gone."

Lenny replied: "I'll eat ta that."

Josiah and Lenny piled all that they had on one of the bags and began eating. Josiah looked up at Paul and decided that this was as good a time as any to get back at Paul for the disrespect that he had shown earlier, so he said: "I would offer ya some of this pie Paul, but I thank that ya made yore opinion on sharin food quite clear this mornin." With that Lenny and Josiah had a big laugh and dug into the food. Paul meanwhile accepted the fact that all that he was going to get was a skinny sandwich.

The men ate and enjoyed the beautiful day that seemed to envelop them. Small talk abounded, but Lenny had not mentioned the bigfoot again as of yet. In fact, the bigfoot seemed to be far from everyone's mind as the talk centered around sports and hunting. After about thirty minutes the food was almost gone. Josiah looked at Paul who had been through with his dinner before Lenny and Josiah had barely begun. Josiah decided that Paul had suffered long enough. He picked up a piece of the pecan pie, said "catch" to Paul and tossed it to him. Paul caught the pie and wolfed it down immediately.

Now that everybody was reconciled to each other, Lenny decided that it would be a good idea to reintroduce the bigfoot into the three-man, all-day discussion of local, state, national, and world events.

Lenny began, "All jokin aside, do ya put any stock in Sonny's story bout tha thingamajig?"

Josiah sensed that Lenny was trying to patch things up. He graciously played along. "Well," he began, "It sounds jest as wile ta me as it does ta ya'll. Tha only thang is, I haff never known Sonny ta lie or ta pull practical jokes." Josiah paused for a moment and added, "An as fer as I know he don't drank or smoke dope or nothin'."

Lenny thought for a moment and said, "If ya trust this boy so much, why don't tha three of us go an look fer this thang tomar mornin?"

"We haff ta work tomar mornin, an besides, I wouldn't go on such a wile goose chase as that if I dittin," interrupted Paul.

"Tomar is Saturday ya numbskull," Lenny snorted then added sarcastically, "ya remember, one of tha two days a week that we haff off. An besides, watt haff we got ta lose but a little time?"

Josiah was listening to all of this but at the present time he chose not to contribute to the conversation.

"I don't want ta be seen chasin somethin that aint there," Paul said.

"Watt would it take ta git ya ta go alowng?" asked Lenny.

"I aint a-goin, period," replied Paul.

"We'll go by Sonny's house this evenin after work an see if he's still stickin ta his story," said Lenny in reassuring tones.

"No!" replied Paul.

"I'll cook ya a free breakfast," said Lenny.

"No strangs attached?" asked Paul.

"No strangs attached exceptin that ya go with us," assured Lenny.

Paul thought for a moment and said, "No, I don't want ta look like a fool."

Lenny seized this opportunity to deliver a crushing verbal blow. "As fer as ya a-lookin like a fool goes, tha only way that ya could not look like a fool is ta haff a head transplant. Besides, nobody is goin ta be in the swamp tomar but us. The heavy rain early this week made it so muddy that nobody will dare go in it," he said.

Josiah felt that this was the time to start talking, "I'll tell ya watt Paul, we'll go an see if Sonny is stickin ta his story, Lenny will cook us a big, free breakfast, then we'll go cetch that thang an become millionaires."

The last word that Josiah said made Paul swallow the idea hook, line, and sinker. Paul's eyes got big and a large smile ran across his face as he said, "Millionaires?"

"That's right," Josiah replied. "Why, thay aint no tellin how much money a man could make if he had somethin like that."

"I'll go," Paul said excitedly.

"So it's set, tha first step is ta go see Sonny," said Lenny.

Josiah raised his soft drink and said, "Gentlemen, I would like ta propose a toast ta adventure and wealth."

The three men bumped their soda cans together and drank that last couple of sips from them. Along about that time the lonesome whistle blew. It was time once

again to go back to the old grind of lumber stacking. The three men that went back after dinner, however, were a lot more cheerful than the three men of an hour earlier. They seemed to have a new excitement and freshness of life. It can't be said that they really believed that they were about to catch some bizarre creature. The small possibility of doing so however was extremely entertaining. The guys spent the rest of the working day gleefully fantasizing out loud, and oh, what some fantasizing it was.

Paul was proclaiming his greatest material desires that he hoped would be filled. Spending a million dollars would seem to be no problem to this simple minded little man of extremely humble origins. He went on and on and on about the new four-wheel drive truck that he would buy. Once he got it he would drive through the deepest mud and the roughest roads. He would have no concerns about the damage that this poor machine would suffer. When it tore up he would just park it and go buy another one.

Or then again maybe he would play it smart and invest. Perhaps a farm or some other wise investment would be the right thing to do. He could then quit the sawmill and live a responsible, conservative life.

Then again, perhaps he would just put all of his newly found greenbacks into the bank to draw interest. Yes, now there was an idea, he would use his money for the sole purpose of making more money, and then more money on top of that.

Oh yes, what he could do with a million dollars! Why, if he could only catch that thing he could sell it to the highest bidder, be it the government, the circus, the university, or the zoo! Who knows?

It has already been pointed out that the thought of getting money was about the only grease that made Paul's mental cogs move, and as can be seen, the little cogs were moving.

Lenny on the other hand was consumed with ideas that were quite different. In Lenny's point of view, money was to be enjoyed, not used as a tool of success. The first thing that he would do would be to buy a small hog farm. This is not because he was trying to be successful in life. It was because he was a pork fanatic. He loved every part of a hog from its dirty little snout to its curly little tail. He could eat it three times a day, seven days a week and between meals. Evidence of this could be seen with a casual observation of Lenny's stomach, which poked out in front in an odd fashion that looked too big for the rest of his body.

But there was another side of his pork fixation. He loved to have hogs around almost as if they were pets. He is one of the few people that has his hog pen in his front yard. Why, he is such a country boy that he thinks that the smell of a hog pen is something to treasure and to be thankful for. Yes, he loves hogs, dead or alive.

After he set up his farm, he would buy a vintage convertible and have it restored to mint condition. He would then give some of the raunchiest women known to man rides and other thrills in this romantic, but rowdy chariot of love.

Lenny also dreamed of all the wonderful, stupendous amounts of alcohol that awaited his consumption. Oh, how wonderful it would be to be able to get drunk at will without any worry of running out of money before he ran out of belly space.

And oh what gambling a man could do with a million dollars. He would be able to bet on every football game, basketball game, baseball game, horse race, auto race, and tennis match, not to mention cards, dice, and so on and so forth.

And then there was Josiah. Josiah of course would spend his money wisely. First of all he would give ten percent to the church. He felt that he was bound to do this, besides; he would do it even if he didn't feel that this was something that was required of him. Then he would get Becky and himself set up for life. First, he would marry Becky in a wedding the likes of which the community had never seen. Then he would buy a modest farm and grow corn, peanuts and hay and raise cattle and hogs. Somewhere on this farm he would build a house that would embarrass every other house around for miles. He would put away a large sum of money, and he and Becky would live happily ever after. They would never have to kiss anybody's fanny for as long as they lived. They would show the world that rich people could be nice. They would do this by giving to various charities and by helping those who were less fortunate than they.

Josiah thought on and on about how a million dollars would help Becky and himself as well as so many others who were down on their luck, but in the back of his mind he felt that he was talking about something that would never be. This made him even more conscious of his present wretched existence. It would seem that poor Josiah took both he and his life so seriously that at times it caused him much sorrow.

He began to ask himself some questions. He wondered if he was doomed to a life at the sawmill, the bottom of the ladder. He wondered if he was destined to live a life that was without hope or promise. He felt the sense of hopelessness engulfing him every time he fantasized out loud. He knew that he was just talking, and talk was cheap. He then actually began to hope. He actually hoped that maybe he would find this strange creature and get rich because of it. He hoped and yet he did not believe because he realized that his hope was a false hope that was born of hopelessness and desperation. He felt that the most that Saturday morning would bring would be an enjoyable fellowship with his friends and with nature. But yet, in the darkest recesses of his mind, the part that is the sanctuary for the most desperate and least likely hope, he hoped for a miracle.

On and on the afternoon went until finally the joyful whistle blew and it was time to lay down the job for a couple of days. The men quickly threw down the last pieces of lumber and ran to Josiah's pickup truck. There they all crammed into the cab and spun off. Out of the sawmill gate they went, down the road on the way to see Sonny.

The inside of the cab was definately not a place where the Queen of England would enjoy sitting. The floorboard was covered with dirt, sawdust, and soda cans.

The three men that were stuffed into the cab gave off an odor that was somewhat less than rosy. After all, the sawmill was the kind of place that made a man sweat. This odor was amplified by Lenny, who contributed the scent of hog manure and petroleum products to an already harsh environment.

On through the back roads the men went, past beautiful pastures filled with cattle grazing peacefully. They also went by farmhouses and shacks. They crossed streams, creeks, and a river. They were a few miles from Sonny's house when they decided to get their plan together.

"Y'all don't let on that we're a-goin ta look fer that bigfoot," warned Josiah.

"That's right," Lenny added, "You jest let me and Josiah do most of tha talkin'," he said to Paul.

"We'll make out like we're askin bout deer huntin'," Josiah said.

Finally they were at Sonny's house. They stopped, got out, and went up on the front porch. Josiah knocked on the door. Sonny's wife came to answer it. She was a very fat, horrifyingly ugly woman. She had a mouthful of snuff and she had allowed generous amounts of drippings to run out of the corners of her mouth and to fall upon the front of her dress.

She addressed Josiah, "Hello honey, I aint seen you in a lowng time. What could I do fer y'all?"

"We wuz jest a-wantin ta talk ta Sonny fer awile," he replied.

She turned around and yelled, "Sonny, some of yore buddies wants ta talk ta ya." She looked back and said, "He'll be right with y'all."

With that Josiah expressed his thanks and the three friends strolled back to the yard.

"Honey?" Paul asked.

"Kiss tail," replied Josiah.

After awhile Sonny came out of the house and into the yard to see his guests. He had just taken a bath and his wet, uncombed hair only accentuated his already substantial ugliness. He was tall, skinny, and very pale. He was a very polite man, and he was very glad to see his visitors.

"How are y'all doin?" he asked as he shook hands with each of the men.

"We're all fine," replied Josiah.

"Watt are y'all up ta this evenin?" Sonny asked.

"We jest wanted ta come by an check up on ya," said Josiah and then he added, "How's tha deer huntin goin fer ya this year?"

"I jest aint had no luck at all. I've seen a few but I dittin git a shot at any of them," Sonny replied.

Josiah smiled and asked, "Has Leamon or Clem kilt any?"

"They both got one-a-piece down in tha swamp before we saw that thang, but we won't be goin there any more," replied Sonny.

"Thang?" asked Lenny.

"Yeah," replied Sonny then he added, "Josiah must not haff told y'all bout it."

"He might haff casually mentioned it but he dittin dwell on it," Lenny said innocently.

So then Sonny began, "Well, me and Leamon and Clem wuz a-huntin in tha swamp last weekend. We came ta that part whir tha power line crosses it and that's whir we saw it. It looked like a bigfoot. It wuz bout seven-hunderd yards away wen we saw it. It wuz all squatted down wen we first saw it, and then it looked up an saw us, stood up an looked right at us fer a little wile. Then he looked at tha edge of tha woods a time or two. I reckon it wuz tryin ta figure out watt ta do. After a little bit it walked back into tha woods."

"If it wuz that fer off, how did y'all see it?" asked Lenny.

"Because we saw somethin at first an we dittin know watt it wuz," said Sonny and then added, "We all had scopes on our rifles, so we looked at it through them. That's tha truth."

"Are ya shore that you an yore cousins weren't as drunk as boiled owls?" asked Lenny.

"No," Sonny replied then added, "They had each one of them had two beers a piece tha night before and I don't drank at all."

"Watt did y'all do wen ya saw it?" asked Josiah.

"We high-tailed it back ta tha truck jest as fast as we could go!" replied Sonny.

"Y'all dittin want ta shoot it, I don't reckon?" asked Lenny.

"No," began Sonny, "we dittin figure that that would be tha thang ta do. Ya know we've all been taught ta know watt we are shootin at. It looked like a bigfoot, but I guess wen it gits down ta it I caint tell ya fer shore watt it wuz. I jest don't thank that it wuz a man. I thank that it was somethin like I aint never seen before. But, I caint be a hunderd percent shore bout it."

After Sonny said this he looked very seriously at Josiah and said, "Y'all may not believe all of his, but I swear on my mama's grave that it's true."

"Yore mama ain't dead," said Paul.

"Shut-up dumb-butt, it's jest a figure of speech," snorted Lenny.

"Sonny, if ya told me that a cow could jump over tha moon, I would believe ya" assured Josiah.

"Thanks Josiah I appreciate that," said Sonny and then he added, "I would ruther that y'all kept this ta yoreseffs. Even though it is true, some people might git tha idea that me an my cousins wuz a brick shy of a load."

Josiah laughed and assured his friend, "Yeah, we understand, yore secret is safe with us."

About that time a voice came from inside of the house. It was a voice that could hardly be called feminine but was clearly that of a woman, "Sonny, you had better git yore fanny in heeya if you want ta eat supper," called Sonny's spouse.

"Well boys, I hear my ole battle-ax a-callin me," said Sonny.

"All right," began Josiah. "We jest wanted ta chat with ya fer a spell an see how ya wuz a-doin. We'll see ya later."

With that all of the men exchanged good-bys and the three young adventurers piled back into Josiah's pickup truck. They backed out of Sonny's yard, waved goodbye and started down the road that led to home.

Josiah began the conversation: "Well boys, tha story stays tha same. I take it that y'all are still game fer tomar mornin."

Both men replied, "Yeah."

Josiah continued, "So we'll meet at Lenny's house fer breakfast first thang in tha mornin, say bout four o'clock."

"Sounds good," replied Lenny.

"Yeah," replied Paul.

The truck went on down the road. The men were thinking about the next day. None of them were very confident of success but they knew that they would enjoy a morning in the swamp anyway. The first house that they came to was Paul's. Paul opened the door and stepped out.

"Four o'clock?" asked Josiah.

"Yeah, see y'all then," replied Paul.

Lenny and Josiah drove on. Josiah drove about a quarter of a mile past his own house and turned off on Lenny's long driveway. Finally the truck stopped beside of Lenny's house. Lenny opened the door and stepped outside.

"See you and El Stupo in tha mornin," said Lenny.

"I'll be heeya," replied Josiah.

"Ta adventure," said a chuckling Lenny.

"Ta adventure," said a smiling Josiah.

With that Lenny shut the truck door and walked to his house, waving as he went. Josiah turned his truck around and headed for home. When he got there, he and his parents had supper and Josiah went on to bed. As he made an effort to go to sleep he kept wondering if he was really adventurous, or was he just a foolish young man on some absurd and pathetic wild goose chase. Time would tell.

## CHAPTER 2

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The weather was nice on that Saturday morning. The sky was clear and there was no wind. The sun had not yet risen on Lenny's house, but Lenny was up and wide-awake well before four in the morning. The light from his windows could be seen from the highway. Lenny's house was an old wood frame house that was about fifty years old. It had once been painted white but in recent years had become covered with mildew and cracked and chipped paint. His house was in back of a twenty-acre field. This gave him a great deal of privacy even though, except for Josiah and Paul, he didn't have to worry about company very often anyway. In his front yard there was a hog pen. In this pen were one boar, four sows, and numerous pigs. This accumulation of swine filled the air with the constant smell of feces, urine, and sour feed. Lenny, the country boy that he was, loved it.

Around four o'clock lights swept across the field and down Lenny's driveway. Before long, Paul's pickup truck was beside Lenny's house. About the time that Paul switched his vehicle off Josiah's truck pulled into the driveway and down beside Paul.

Both men stepped out of their vehicles and exchanged greetings. They were almost immediately slapped in the face by the wondrous smell of breakfast. It was a smell so wonderful that it cut right through the stench of the hog pen. The men were drawn like two donkeys being drawn by a carrot dangling before their faces. Up the steps of Lenny's front porch they went. When they got to the door they didn't knock but went right on in.

"Mornin, buzzards," greeted Lenny.

"Mornin," both men replied.

"Y'all wash yore paws an sit down so we can eat. I'm howngry," demanded Lenny. Both men went to a corner of the kitchen that had a shelf nailed to the wall about waist high. On this shelf there was a water bucket with a dipper in it, and beside that was a white enamel washbasin. These items were necessary because although Lenny had electricity, he had no running water. Both men dipped their hands in the basin a time or two and dried them on their clothes. Although the water was filthy and their hands were probably nastier now than they were before they washed them, the demands of custom had been satisfied. They then walked to the table and sat down to a sumptuous meal, and sumptuous it was.

Before them lay a veritable cornucopia-like spread of food that was unparalleled by any breakfast table in Dixie. In the center of the table was the meat platter. On it was ham, both cured and fresh, bacon, sausage, and some peculiar little bite-sized objects that Lenny simply referred to as "land oysters." On another platter there were eggs, both fried and scrambled. Then there was another platter piled high with



Lenny's own homemade biscuits. There were jars filled with jelly and figs. Last but not least was a huge bowl of grits, laden with butter. All of this was washed down with coffee, milk, or in Lenny's case, a combination of the former two beverages and beer.

Josiah gave thanks. The men ate and ate until none of them had any space left for anything else. Josiah had a bad habit of stuffing himself beyond his capacity, and sometime during the meal he was forced to unbutton the side buttons on his overalls. Paul was not usually a heavy eater, but since it was free, he too packed it in. Lenny ate his usual large amount.

It was almost five o'clock when they finished eating. They pushed away from the table, went to the back porch and put the dirty dishes in a washtub. They then took the tub out to the well, drew a few buckets of water, and poured it over the dishes.

There was a wooden enclosure around the well with nails driven in it in various places. On some of the nails there were some rags hanging that had been cut out of an old shirt. Each man grabbed a rag and with six hands in the tub at one time the dishes were washed fairly quickly. They then took the dishes back into the house.

"Well," Josiah began, "Y'all bout ready ta git our equipment ready?"

"Might as well," replied Lenny.

"Watt equipment?" asked Paul.

"Bigfoot cetchin equipment," replied Josiah.

"Yeah, ya holler-headed dummy," began Lenny, "Ya caint jest go out and put salt on that thang's tail and expect him ta walk home with ya. Ya haff to haff a way ta catch it. Watt way did ya haff in mind, Josiah?"

"I figured we'd use ropes," Josiah replied.

"Ropes?" asked Paul.

"Yeah dummy, a long, skinny object that ya tie thangs up with," replied Lenny.

"How are we a-goin ta git tha rope on tha bigfoot?" asked Paul.

"Lasso it," answered Josiah.

"I caint lasso. I aint never done no lassoing," pleaded Paul.

"Did ya hear that Josiah," began Lenny, "This ignoramus aint never done no lassoing, jest like he aint never done no thankin, jest like he never said nothin that dittin sound as stupid as tha day is lowng!"

"Hold on Lenny," calmed Josiah. "Yore desire ta barbecue this friend of ours is understandable, but we don't need ta cook him so lowng that thay aint nothin left of him ta take ta tha swamp."

"I reckon ya got a point there," replied Lenny.

"Now if y'all remember, back wen we all worked fer Mr. Hall, he would occasionally send me and Lenny ta tha pasture ta lasso a new-born calf so he could doctor on it and castrate it and such. You never went, as I remember, Paul, because he always had ya doin somethin else," said Josiah.

"Yeah, because he dittin trust this moron with a rope aroun a calf's neck. He knew that it took at least tha sense of a lady bug ta know wen ta ease up on tha rope a little ta keep from chokin them ta death," said a sarcastic Lenny.

"That aint tha reason!" pleaded Paul.

"Ya know dad-blame well that it is!" snorted Lenny.

"Order, order I say," said Josiah while tapping the table top in judge-like fashion. "Tha point is, we haff ta give Paul a little instruction before we go on this great mission of ours."

"Right ya are again," agreed Lenny.

"Whir are tha ropes?" asked Paul.

"Jest step outside ta my truck, gentlemen, an class will begin," said Josiah.

The men walked outside to Josiah's truck. In the back of the truck was a wide range of bigfoot catching and holding apparatus. There were ropes, chains, locks, and even an anvil.

"Whir did ya git all of this stuff?" asked Lenny.

"Out from under Daddy's work shed," Josiah replied.

Josiah got out three ropes and before long had tied up three lassos.

"I thought that me an you might need a little practice too," Josiah said to Lenny.

"Possible," Lenny replied.

Josiah began the lesson. "All right Paul, watch me one time an do as I do." Josiah got the rope and in a way that would not embarrass any rodeo cowboys, tossed the loop around the corner post of Lenny's hog pen. "See how easy?" said a relieved Josiah.

Paul took his rope, attempted to do what he had seen done, and threw his lasso clean into the hog pen.

"Ha-Ha!" laughed Lenny. "Trying ta teach that dope somethin is bout as easy as teachin a possum how ta fly an airplane."

"Let's try again," said Josiah, "Jest pretend that that there corner post is that thang's head a-pokin up in tha air. Jest imagine that a million dollars is ridin on this one thow. If ya miss, yore million dollars will disappear inta tha swamp."

Paul had a look of concentration on his face that is seldom seen in one so limited. He tossed, and perfect, right around the post the lasso went. Lenny all of a sudden got in one of his rare quiet moods. Paul retrieved his rope and tried again. Once again he was perfect.

"How do ya like that, ya red-eyed, redheaded varmit?" asked a defiant Paul.

"Stuff it up yore anus," replied an embarrassed Lenny.

"Do it better if ya thank ya can," challenged Paul.

Lenny, quite confident in his ability to perform when it counted, grabbed all three ropes and threw them one at a time neatly around the post. Lenny didn't even have to speak this time to let Paul know of his superiority. He just stuck out his

tongue and bugged out his eyes in a most hideous fashion that would have startled even the most stouthearted stranger on a dark night.

Now the preliminaries were over. All that had been done up to now was fun, but it could not be called foolish. What would be foolish would be to get in the truck and go on some wild goose chase after something that might not be there. But the stage had been set, and the actors were ready to perform.

Josiah knew that it was time. It was time to put up or shut up, and he was not about to shut up. He got the lassos off of the post, threw them in the back of his pickup truck and leaned against the body for a while. He just stood there for a minute in a contemplative way and then he spoke. "Well, we aint a-gittin much done heeya. I reckon we need ta go if we're a-goin. Are ya'll ready?"

"Ready," replied Lenny.

"Ready," replied Paul.

"Let's go," said Josiah.

All three men piled into Josiah's pickup. Josiah cranked it up and turned around in Lenny's yard. With a little muscle power applied to his manual steering wheel, Josiah had his truck going up Lenny's driveway. Through first, second, and then to third gear Josiah went until he found himself at the edge of the highway. He took a quick glance in both directions just in case of some rare traffic and out onto the road he went.

As Josiah went through the gears, the men's minds began to wander. All three had a mental prediction pictured in their mind about the upcoming morning. All three believed that they would mess around in the swamp for awhile and then go back to Lenny's house, have some laughs and some food and go home, but still, they had committed, and they would finish what they had started.

On and on they went. The morning was bright, beautiful, and cool. The wind was blowing but only gently. There was a sense of freshness in the air, the kind of freshness that makes one want to inhale as deeply as possible so as to fill one's self with the freshness and purity of the morning. The beauty, smell, and crispness of the air, all combined to make the men glad that they had gotten up so early.

Even the animals around and about seemed to be caught up in the wonder and splendor of this lovely day. With a glance out of the truck window the men saw a little calf running up and down a rye covered, beautifully terraced hillside. On down the road they saw a colt showing how good he felt by jumping up and down, around and around, and kicking his back legs into the air. A little farther on they saw a somewhat amusing sight. A large white rooster was perched on top of a gate. He was poking his chest into the air and flapping his wings boldly. After all this he let out a fabulous crow that must have sounded very sexy to his harem of hens, who were busily scratching and pecking on the ground before him.

Josiah spoke. "I wish that I could buy that rooster fer watt he wuz worth an sell him fer watt he thought he wuz worth. I'd be a rich man."

"You got that right," Lenny affirmed.

On the men went toward the swamp. Finally they neared a dirt road that would take them to their starting point. Josiah turned his truck onto the road and they went down what became an increasingly narrow and muddy road. Then, all of a sudden, they were at a clearing in the woods where the power line ran.

"I caint drive any further or we'll be stuck up ta tha door-hannels," said Josiah.

"We need ta start heeya anyway," replied Lenny.

The men emptied out of the truck. They all reached into the back and picked up their lasso and began walking toward the north, straight up the power line. The ground was still very boggy even though it hadn't rained in a few days.

"Let's spread out a little an see if we can find anythang," said Josiah.

"Yeah," replied Lenny.

Each step that they took required a considerable effort. Their feet were making suction noises every time they took a step. To these hardy country boys this was not a bother, but a pleasure.

The swamp was quiet except for its three visitors and the occasional call of a bird. A covey of quail flew up right under Paul's feet and startled him slightly. Lenny was having such a good time laughing about this that he quit watching where he was going and slipped and fell hard on his seat, muddying up his pants considerably. Now it was Paul's turn to laugh and he did so with gusto. It was not often that he could turn the tables on Lenny.

On and on they went and there was no bigfoot in sight. The day was a bit on the cool side but the men were getting sweaty because of the difficulty of the terrain that they were traversing. They went up and down hills, through patches of thick briars and thorn bushes and they waded through water holes, both shallow and deep. The hardest thing though was the mud, the endless boggy, sticky mud that seemed to penetrate all the way to the bone. The average city dweller would have considered this morning's activity to be a fate worse than death. These three country boys, however, felt very much at home in these rustic surroundings.

They went on and on, the sound of heavy breathing was in the air. All of a sudden Paul spoke up. "Y'all hold up," he said.

"Watt fer?" snapped Lenny.

"I gotta go!" Paul returned.

"Go?" began Josiah. "Go whir?"

"Tha bathroom," replied Paul.

"Thay aint no bathroom in this swamp ya idiot, besides, ya would jest git dirty again if ya took a bath now," said a sarcastic Lenny.

"What I meant wuz that I haff ta take a dump," replied Paul.

"That's jest watt I git fer feedin ya a big breakfast," began Lenny. "Ya spend tha rest of tha mornin messin like a crippled coon."

"Don't let us hinder ya," said Josiah.

"I won't, now ya'll wait fer me," replied Paul.

Josiah looked around; they were about fifty yards from the edge of the woods. Josiah saw something that he thought might help Paul. "Haff ya got any fanny ribbon?" he asked.

"Watts that?" asked Paul.

"Toilet paper ya air-head!" roared Lenny.

"No," replied Paul.

"Well jest go over there an do yore business under that magnolia tree. They aint a finer wipe in tha woods than tha under-side of a magnolia leaf," said Josiah.

Paul took Josiah's advice and walked to the magnolia tree. There he painstakingly rolled down his wet, muddy pants and began to do what he had to do. In about five minutes it was all over. A few magnolia leaves served the purpose that bathroom tissue would normally serve in the civilized world. Then he began to pull up his filthy pants when a sudden glance to the side caused his heart to jump in his throat.

"Y'all come heeya!" yelled Paul frantically.

"Watts tha matter? Are ya so stupid that ya caint even take a dump without somebody a-showin ya how?" yelled Lenny.

"Y'all come heeya, quick!" yelled Paul in an almost terrified tone of voice.

"He sounds serious," said Josiah to Lenny.

"Let's go see watt tha ignorant butt-hole wants," said Lenny in an aggravated way.

Lenny and Josiah waded through the brush, briars, and mud until they came upon Paul. He looked as if he were in a trance.

"Watt's wrowng, Paul?" asked Josiah.

"Look!" replied Paul.

Paul pointed his finger at an impression in the earth. Josiah and Lenny got near it for a closer look. Now it was their turn to be shocked. There in the ground was a huge footprint. The print looked somewhat human but there were some major differences. The print was longer than a normal human footprint but the biggest difference was in the shape. The print was very wide. It was so wide in fact that it was almost square in appearance. The toes seemed a bit stubby for such a big foot and the heel-print was massive.

As the men looked closer their astonishment increased. As they looked they saw more than just a footprint. They could see the path that whoever or whatever had made while it was coming to the spot where they found the print. The tracks that led to the print were just large, undefined impressions in the mud. It was obvious that whatever it was had so much mud on its feet that no clear prints were being made. When it had reached the small clearing where they were they could see where it had raked the mud off of its feet by wiping them across the side of a log.

But then, things got even more interesting. They could clearly see evidence of a shoeprint in the mud where the thing wiped its feet. The thing had then apparently sat on the log because there were a couple of short hairs stuck in the logs' bark.

On the ground below where it sat there were little piles of twigs and pebbles. Whatever it was had apparently sat on the log and cleaned out its shoes. It had apparently stood up and taken a few steps bare footed, making the footprints that the men saw. It had then put its shoes back on and walked away, leaving shoe prints as it went.

All three men were flabbergasted. They just stood there for a moment in complete silence. They hadn't really believed deep down that the bigfoot had existed. But now before them was proof.

"It's really heeya," said Josiah.

Still, Lenny and Paul didn't say anything.

Josiah thought for a while and said, "Gentlemen, if we faller these tracks, an find that thang, this time next month we could be millionaires."

The word "millionaires" woke Paul from his trance. "Millionaires," he said excitedly.

"Yep, hog heaven," said Lenny.

"Let's go," said Josiah.

"I dittin thank that bigfoots wore shoes," said Lenny.

"Me neither," agreed Paul.

"Well, I dittin neither," replied Josiah, then he added, "but I know that wuz no man's footprint that we saw."

"You right about that," agreed Lenny.

"Let's go," Josiah said again.

They hurriedly followed the tracks. The rough country and heavy vegetation was hardly noticed as they searched for their prize. Through hills, hollows, mud, water, briars, brush, vines, groves, and all other obstacles they went in search of what they hoped would make them very wealthy men. It was a couple of hours before noon and still they had not seen the bigfoot. The tracks became more and more confusing as they went. They went in and out of the edge of the woods. Sometimes they would go way out in the power line lane. Sometimes they would go deep in the woods and swamp. Sometimes they would go in water, and it would take a while to find out where they came out.

On and on the men searched. Finally they came to a place where there seemed to be tracks going in every direction.

"Spread out," said Josiah.

"These tracks are very fresh," said Lenny.

"Let's git our lassos ready," said Josiah.

"Yeah," replied Lenny.

All three men got their lassos ready. By this time they were all very tired. This, added to their nervousness, was making their hearts beat wildly. Their stomachs were also making their presence known by knotting up with anxiety.

The men were in a place that was just slightly in the woods, the edge of the power line lane being about ten yards away. There were patches of open ground along with a few trees, brush-heaps and some pockets of dense vegetation. Slowly

they advanced, not knowing what to expect. They strained their eyes and ears, hoping to see or hear something that would help them to find the walking treasure.

Paul came to a slight downhill that led into a thicket of heavy vines that made a kind of canopy in the swamp. He disappeared into the thicket and was lost from the sight of the other two men for a few moments. All of a sudden Josiah and Lenny heard the most frightening, blood-curdling scream imaginable coming from Paul. They looked toward the thicket to see Paul coming out of it with a high jump that could have won Olympic gold. At the same instant they saw something coming out of the other side of the thicket that gave them quite a jolt. They had found their big-foot!

The bigfoot was making a terrifying racket that sounded like a cross between a bull and a lion. It appeared to be as frightened of Paul as Paul had been of it.

Lenny and Josiah saw that the beast was slow a-foot so they instantly gathered their guts and made their move. They rushed the beast with their lassos. When they got closer, they realized that the beast was very large. This did not deter the young adventurers from closing in on their prey. They got about five yards from the beast and tossed their lassos. The beast dodged Josiah's lasso but could not evade Lenny's. Lenny's lasso fell neatly around the beast's head and Lenny tightened it around its neck.

The beast then grabbed the rope and gave it a vicious snatch. Lenny maintained his grip on the rope and went headlong into the mud. The beast proceeded to drag Lenny through some most inhospitable places. Over grass, mud, water, sticks, pinecones, briars and logs he went, but the gutsy Lenny refused to release the rope.

By this time, Josiah had recovered his lasso and had run after the beast for another try. He tossed and perfect, right around the neck his lasso went. He too, tried to subdue the beast, but the beast was too strong. Josiah kept his feet but was being jerked around like a rag doll.

Finally Paul, who had recovered from his fear, came and added his lasso onto the neck of the beast. All three men were pulling as hard as they could on the ropes. Lenny had managed to get up and was trying to give the beast some of its own medicine by angrily snatching on the rope with all of his might. Josiah too was pulling and snatching viciously on the rope.

Still, the beast could not be brought down, but it was obvious that it was getting tired. It was confused as to what was the best way to defend against its three attackers. It would try to loosen the rope from around its neck one moment. The next moment it would try to grab and snatch on the ropes. And the next moment it would try to run off. This last method proved to be most unsatisfactory for the beast because in addition to being rather slow, it was difficult to run with three men tied around its neck.

The beast continued to scream and bellow. It knew that it was losing, but it also knew that it had not lost. The ropes were having a choking effect on the beast

thus increasing its fatigue. All during the struggle the beast seemed to be trying to get away without seriously trying to hurt anyone. But now it seemed to be getting desperate. It grabbed Josiah's rope and snatched it with both hands. This quickly brought Josiah close to the beast. When Josiah got within reach of the beast, it gave him an upward backhand into the chest. It was obvious that the beast had not put all that he could put into the blow, but it was still enough to send Josiah sailing through the air. He landed in a mud hole face and chest first.

Josiah just lay there for a moment, desperately trying to regain the wind that the beast had knocked out of him. Finally, his breath back, he looked up and saw his friends vainly trying to subdue the beast. That is when Josiah's temper erupted. He felt what seemed like a gallon of adrenalin dumped into his veins. He had crossed that threshold, the threshold that separated a kind, polite Josiah from a snarling animal with only one intention. Destroy!

He looked at the beast and became beside himself with anger. He thought to himself "We fixin ta see bout this big boy." He rose and got about twenty yards from the beast. Then he sighted in his victim and began to churn his powerful legs and pump his arms in a very rapid, deliberate fashion as he ran toward the beast. Step, inhale, step exhale, he ran as he gained speed. Then, as he was about to make contact he let out with a loud growl that had terrified running backs during his football playing days at the high school, "A-R-R-R-R-R." Wham, he hit the beast in its back, right under the short ribs. The beast fell headlong and hit its head on a stump. It was out cold.

Josiah and the beast were both sprawled out on the ground. The beast was unconscious. Josiah was conscious but in a great deal of pain from both the blow that he had received from the beast and from the blow that he had given back to it.

"You all right?" asked Lenny.

"In pain but not injured," Josiah replied.

As Josiah rose slowly from the ground, Lenny loosened the ropes from around the beast's neck. The three men then looked at the strange life form that lay before them. Now that the excitement of actually catching the beast was over, they began to visually examine it. As they looked the beast up and down, they were stricken with shock and wonderment.

The beast appeared to be over seven feet tall. Its body was covered with short, dark gray hair, which appeared to be of roughly the same length as the hair on a mouse. It had long arms and legs and large broad feet. Its head was large. It had a massive, square jaw but the jaw did not protrude as much as the jaw of an ape or monkey. In fact, the beast's forehead was very tall and broad like that of a man. The face was covered with hair that was shorter than the hair on the body and its nose was very human-like. Its ears were not covered with hair, and they appeared very human-like but a bit small to be on such a large head.

The arms and legs of the beast were very muscular, in addition to being long; in fact, the beast was magnificently built, as well built in fact as a body builder. The



hands were very large and powerful looking. As impressive as the beast was, he appeared to have gone hungry for a while because he gave the appearance of being very lean.

But the biggest surprise of all was that the beast was wearing clothes. On his upper body he wore a dark green tunic. The tunic was short and only extended to the mid-thigh area. The men determined that the beast was a male.

On its feet the beast wore some dark green and very tight-fitting ankle height shoes. On the bottom of the shoes there was a light tread.

Around the beast's neck there was a necklace with a very short chain. The pendant on the front of the necklace was about the size of a silver dollar and appeared to have the image of a fire on it. The fire on the pendant appeared small at the base, but it rose from the base in large flames. Both the chain and the pendant were made out of a silverish metal.

"Boys," said Josiah, "I don't think we got watt we thought we wuz a-gonna git."

"I don't know, but it aint movin'," began Paul. "Ya kilt it, ya kilt my million dollars!" exclaimed Paul.

"He aint dead, he's jest out," said Lenny and then added, "besides, he's worth a lot dead or alive."

"But watt in tha worl is it?" asked Josiah. "I aint never heerd of no bigfoot a-wearin clothes, an look at tha necklace an shoes too. Thay aint no wile animal sup-post ta be wearin such as that."

"Maybe it aint no wile animal," said Paul.

"Yeah, but watt is it?" asked Josiah.

As the men pondered their discovery the beast lay on the ground with barely a sign of life. He was twitching a little bit, and his breathing was short and labored. After awhile the beast was breathing normally, but it was still unconscious. The men watched anxiously and quietly for a little while. When the beast began to breathe normally they all had a sense of relief. That is when the excitement of what they had done began to sink in.

"We did it!" yelled Josiah.

"We're rich!" exclaimed Paul.

The men began to push and shove one another in glee when Lenny suddenly regained his senses.

"Y'all be quiet, somebody will hear us an come down heeya," said Lenny.

"Yeah, we got ta git this thang out of heeya," said Josiah.

The easy part had been done. Now they had to drag this huge beast to a place of safe keeping until they could figure out how to become millionaires with it.

They had been walking for quite awhile and had drifted a long way from Josiah's truck. They looked down the power line and saw that they were indeed a very long way from getting the beast loaded up and taken home. As they looked they saw what appeared to be an endless obstacle course of hills, hollows, logs, sticks,

briars, water, and mud. They could not even see the truck from where they were. This caused the men's hearts to sink a little bit.

"How are we a-goin ta git this heavy thang out of heeya?" asked Paul.

"Blood, sweat, and tears," replied Josiah.

"But watt would be tha best way?" asked Lenny.

"Good question," replied Josiah.

"An we also haff ta be careful that we aint seen," added Lenny.

The men began to exchange views on the best method for carrying out the beast. The opinions were wild and free. Picking it up and toting it was out of the question, it was simply too heavy. Dragging it was the only answer, but how to do it was the problem. For a while it seemed that carrying the beast feet first was the answer. But in a flash of brilliance it was decided that there were only two feet and three men and thus part of the total energy of the group would be wasted. So then, it was decided that headfirst was the only way, but how? The first idea was that a man could grab each arm and the third could grab the beast by the hair of the head and walk backwards the entire two miles back to the truck. This idea was quickly abandoned for several reasons. One was that they wanted the beast's hands and feet tied in the event that he woke up. Another was that it would seem overly difficult to drag anything while walking backwards for two miles. And finally it was noticed that the hair on the beast's head was too short to grab effectively.

The final decision took awhile but was a good one. First of all they cut two short pieces of rope to tie the beast's hands and feet with. With that completed they searched around in the brush piles and found two poles, each pole being about nine feet long. They then removed their coats, and then their shirts, and then they put their coats back on. With the poles, shirts, and pieces of rope they constructed a crude litter. They then fashioned rope harnesses for themselves and put them on their bodies, and they then attached all three ropes onto the litter. All that they had to do now was to drag the gargantuan beast over the horribly rough terrain between them and the truck.

They made a few final adjustments to their harnesses, and then Josiah got them started. "Let's heave boys," he said. And with that all three men began to pull. The beast was incredibly heavy and the men were already tired from the morning's walk and tussle, but on they pulled.

"This thang is healthy," said Lenny.

"You got that right," affirmed Josiah.

Each and every step they took required maximum effort. They tried to synchronize their steps, but the rough terrain made that impossible. There was but one thing to do, and that was to lean forward and heave.

They had traveled a pitifully short distance when Paul looked back and said: "We aint a- gonna make it."

"We'll make it, jest heave," said Josiah.

Lenny would have normally taken this opportunity to deliver some blistering comment to Paul, but right now he was too tired to insult his discouraged friend.

By this time the temperature had risen to the point to where the tremendous strain was causing the men to become very hot and sweaty. They did not dare to remove their coats however, because they knew that if they did the rope harnesses would cut into their very flesh.

Over the rough ground they went. Some places were so bad that they had to roll or partially lift the beast to get it across. The water holes were avoided by going the long way around them. This only compounded the men's already substantial trouble and discomfort.

The men were not even half way to the truck and already they were in pitiful shape. They were wet, muddy, and bleeding from the many briars that they had come in contact with. They were so tired that they were all trembling. The ropes were adding to the bruises that they had received while catching the beast. Still, they heaved on.

By this time the beast was becoming saturated with mud. Mud became mixed with the beast's hair to make it even heavier. The men were experiencing so much pain that they allowed their minds to wander, hoping that the pain could be blocked out by the more pleasant images of the imagination.

Paul was thinking of how nice it would be to get this thing loaded up so that he could finally sit down and get some rest. He wondered if it was all worth it, but the thought of a million dollars quickly settled that.

Lenny was thinking of the last time that he experienced comparable pain. It was when, on a hot summer day, he'd had to flee from his moonshine still to avoid capture by the law. What made it so difficult was that the hot day had encouraged Lenny to clad himself in nothing but cut-offs and a hat. As he ran through the woods his bare body had become a mass of bloody scratches because of the many briars that he swiftly ran through. It had taken Josiah over three hours to dig all of the thorns out of Lenny's feet.

Josiah thought of those long, hot afternoons on the football practice field a few years back. His old coach was a man who prided himself on his ability to inflict pain and suffering on his athletes. But those practices seemed now to be a pleasant memory compared to the struggle that he was going through. He thought about how handy his football shoes would be in his effort to drag this strange being over land that was constantly making his feet slip out from under him. But no matter how much Josiah wanted to give up, he would not, for to do so would not be manly.

Slowly but surely the men inched their way toward the truck. They were going now on pure will. Their physical strength had long since left them. The truck was about fifty yards away now and the men began to see light at the end of the tunnel. All of a sudden their hopeful mood evaporated when their worst fears were realized. They heard the sound of an engine.

They looked at one another in disbelief. It sounded as though whoever it was was about two hundred yards away and driving down the same road that they had

come down. Panic was avoided when Josiah spoke up, "Roll this thang in that little gully over there."

They rolled and pushed the beast into a small gully about five yards to their left.

"They can still see it, git some of them limbs and bushes and thow it on top of it," Josiah said in a hurried way.

The men temporarily forgot about their fatigue and worked at an incredible speed. Before long the gully was filled with one beast, three men, several gallons of mud, and a variety of loose vegetation. The men hid in the gully and waited for the vehicle to appear.

"This thang stanks!" exclaimed Paul.

"Hush, dummy!" returned Lenny.

Finally the vehicle came into sight and stopped behind Josiah's old truck. The unwelcome vehicle was a brand new four-wheel drive. Two men got out. The three men instantly recognized them as the Harding brothers, Bill and Phil. They were two of the biggest and richest farmers in the county.

As Bill and Phil got out and looked around, Josiah, Lenny and Paul remained quiet and still. Then they heard Bill say, "Aint that Josiah Jones's truck?"

"Yeah it is," replied Phil.

"Him an those two buddies of his must be a-huntin back heeya," said Bill.

"Probly," replied Phil.

"We might as well go somewhir else ta hunt then," said Bill.

"Might as well," replied Phil.

"Caint do nothin fer trash like that a-gittin in ya way," said an aggravated Bill.

"Yep," affirmed Phil.

And with that the two brothers got back into their new truck, turned the truck around, and drove off.

The three men sighed in relief. They threw off all of the camouflage from themselves and the beast and heaved the beast out of the gully. This was easier said than done because by now the excitement was over and the fatigue had once again taken over their bodies. But strain and heave they did and before long they were dragging the beast the last few yards to the truck.

Finally they were at the back of the truck. Josiah let down the tailgate and the men began trying to pull the beast into the back of the truck. They could not do it. Again, they tried but could not do it. Their strength was totally drained. No amount of will power could help them now.

"We caint do it," complained Paul.

"Bull!" replied Lenny.

"We can do it, we jest haff ta find tha right way," said a heavily breathing Josiah.

Josiah let the tailgate down as far as it would go. Then they struggled and got the beast in a sitting position with its back leaning against the tailgate. Then Josiah

arranged the ropes so that as he stood in the back of the truck facing the front of it, he could lift the beast entirely with his legs. He instructed Paul and Lenny to each grab a leg and when he gave the signal they would all lift at one time.

Josiah counted off, "One, two, three, lift!"

And with one titanic effort the beast was lifted into the back of the truck. The men then proceeded to turn the beast on its side and curl it up in an almost fetal position. Josiah gave the feet a final push up into the truck and then he closed the tailgate.

"Let's git some brush and hide this thang," said Josiah. And with that the men gathered up some bushes, limbs, and pine straw and covered up the beast.

Finally, it was time to get into the cab of the truck and go home. They all sat down in the truck and felt a wonderful sensation of relief.

"Told ya we'd do it," said Josiah. And with that he switched on his truck and turned it around to drive off.

They went out the same road that they had come in on. As they went out and finally came to the highway their heads were like three beacons looking in every direction at once. Knowing that they had their prize in the back of the truck made them feel very uneasy. They felt as though everyone in the world would come and stop them and look under the brush in the back of Josiah's truck. As they passed cars on the highway they all tried to look as inconspicuous as possible.

As they were driving down the highway an idea popped into Josiah's head that gave a good indication of just how prepared they were. "Now that we've got it, whir are we gonna put it?" he asked.

"Thay aint but one place ta put it and that's at my house," replied Lenny.

So with that Josiah drove on to Lenny's house. They all felt a great sense of relief as Josiah turned into Lenny's long driveway. When Josiah reached the house he backed up to its front porch. They were home at last.

## CHAPTER 3

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They had managed to get the beast to Lenny's house, but now they had to get the beast into it. After Josiah had backed the truck up to the porch, they all just sat in the truck for a few seconds, dreading what they were about to have to do. They had all become very stiff and sore during the drive to Lenny's house. The beast, however, had not become any lighter.

"I caint move," pleaded Paul.

"Yeah ya can," assured Josiah.

"We've all gotta move," said Lenny.

"Let's go," said Josiah.

Slowly they got out of the truck and began taking the cover off the beast. Their muscles were stiff and sore, and they looked as if they were moving in slow motion. Finally they had their prize uncovered.

The sight of the beast seemed to put a sense of urgency in the air as the men quickened their actions somewhat to get the beast unloaded. Lenny opened the front door and rearranged the furniture a bit to accommodate his new guest.

"We need ta git some of that mud off of him," said Josiah. With that Josiah went to the well, drew a couple of buckets of water, put them in a tub and brought it back to the truck.

Lenny and Paul were leaning against the truck body when Josiah returned.

"Watt are ya a-doin with that?" asked Paul.

"I told ya that we needed ta git some of that mud off of him before we take him inta tha house," replied Josiah.

"Watt fer?" asked Paul.

"So all that mud won't git all over tha inside of my house ya scatter brained idiot," roared Lenny.

"Anybody that has a hog pen in his front yard ort not ta worry bout a little dirt in tha floor!" returned Paul defiantly.

Josiah secretly saw that Paul might have a pretty good point, but he decided that calming words were called for on this particular occasion. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, we are losin our team unity aint we? I thank that we should git some of this mud off of this thang an git him inta tha house before any company shows up," he said.

"Right on," said Lenny.

"Watt if he wakes up?" asked Paul.

"Watt do ya mean?" asked Josiah.

"In tha movies wen ya pour water on somebody who is out, they always wake up," returned Paul.

"We aint in no movie, pea brain, an besides, watt is tha differnce between this water and all of that mud and water that we drug him thu on tha way back ta tha truck?" asked Lenny.

Josiah poured some water on the beast and the men began to rub and remove the mud out of the short, dark gray hair. Another two tubs of water later produced a fairly clean but still a somewhat smelly beast. As the last of the muddy water went between the cracks in the bed of Josiah's truck, the men began to grab the long legs and proceeded to drag the beast out of the truck and onto Lenny's front porch.

"Aint lost no weight has it?" commented Josiah.

"Nope," returned Lenny.

"I hope it don't wake up," said Paul.

"It's still tied up if it does," assured Josiah.

The beast was fairly easy to drag on the smooth boards of the front porch. Lenny and Josiah did most of the dragging. It seemed that Paul had lost both his strength and inclination. Everything was going fine until they got to the door.

"Yore gonna haff ta hep, dummy," said Lenny.

"I aint grabbin that head, that thang might wake up an bite me," returned Paul.

"Well, grab an arm or somethin, we gotta make this thang turn tha corner," said Josiah.

Paul grabbed an elbow and gave a half-hearted pull. It was no use. Paul had neither the strength nor the will power to pull the upper body of the beast in line to slide it through the door. Lenny and Josiah each dropped a leg and worked the body of the beast into a straight line so that the drag inside could continue. With several more pulls, grunts, and strains the beast was far enough inside the house so that the door could be shut.

Lenny looked at Paul in such a way as to suggest that he would like to eat him alive were it not for the bad taste that would remain in his mouth. "Would it be too much ta ask fer ya ta shut tha dad-blamed door? You remind me of a little boy who don't want ta pick no blackberries but still wants his share of tha jelly," he said.

"In all fairness ta Paul, I thank that tha bear has jest bout caught up with him," said Josiah.

"Watt bear?" asked Paul.

"He means yore tard, stupid, tard. Do ya know watt tard means?" roared Lenny.

Josiah could see that the events of the day had caused his friends to lose what little patience that they had for one another. It seemed to be time for a pep talk. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," began Josiah, "I grant ya that tha day has been lowng an hard. I know that we haff got more on our hands than we expected ta haff at this time. We're all tard, dirty, howngry, an maybe even a little scared. But we still haff somethin heeya that could brang us a lot of money and fame, or, we haff somethin that can run our friendships if we don't watch out. I thank that we should git a hold

on ourseffs before we lose more than we could ever possibly gain. Remember, we are in this together. We must act as a team. We caint do that if we are tearin out each other's thoat. Let's calm down an git this thang sichiated so that we can relax."

"Right," said Lenny.

"O.K." said Paul.

They cleared out all of the remaining furniture from the middle of the floor. Then they dragged the beast to a spot that seemed to be pretty much in the center of the room.

"How we gonna do this?" asked Josiah.

"Very carefully," began Lenny, "Remember, I haff ta stay with this thang all tha time. I don't want him a gittin loose!"

Josiah thought for a while. "Would ya consider a few small holes in tha floor ta be too severe a price ta pay ta haff this thang secured?" he asked Lenny.

"No, I wouldn't mind, A few holes might look good with all of these cracks that are already heeya," Lenny replied.

"Don't ya haff a hand drill?" asked Josiah.

"Yeah," replied Lenny.

Lenny searched around for a while and found his drill and a large bit. He hurriedly drilled holes in his floor in the locations that he and Josiah decided on.

Josiah went outside and crawled under the house. Lenny and Paul went out to Josiah's truck and got some of the chains and locks and brought them back into the house. Lenny fed some chains down through the holes that they had drilled and Josiah worked them around the huge supporting timbers under the floor. When this was done Josiah crawled back out from under the house. When he got out he found that he had wallowed through generous amounts of chicken and pig manure. But, he was already so nasty that he didn't feel any worse for the wear. Before he went back into the house he picked up the anvil from the truck. He then went back into the house.

"Watt are we a-goin ta do with that?" asked Lenny.

"I don't really know, but it would seem like a shame not ta use it," Josiah replied.

The beast was already very secure. He had chains around his neck and wrists. His ankles were chained together with a very short length of chain so that any foot movement would be much impeded. The beast would be able to stand and sit and lie down and that is about all that it would be able to do. With chains in place and locked, Lenny cut the ropes off.

"Let's git a short piece of chain an fasten this anvil ta tha foot chain," Josiah said.

They attached the anvil to the chain. Now the beast was absolutely, positively secured to the point of not going anywhere or doing anything. Lenny put the keys to all of the locks away and the job was complete.



At last the men could rest. They sat down and stared at their prize for a few moments. None of them had really expected to be in the position that they were now in. It was almost like a dream. But it could not be a dream because no dream could be so long, painful, dirty, wet, tiring, or smell so bad. They had done what nobody had ever done. They had caught a mysterious life form and had it as a prisoner in Lenny's house. They now began to realize that for the first time in their lives, they were special.

"Congratulations boys," said Josiah.

"Is it ever gonna wake up?" asked Paul.

"If it dies we'll put it in tha deep-freeze an sell it later," said Lenny.

"We do need ta try ta wake it up," said Josiah.

"How?" asked Paul.

They sat there and pondered for a minute. They had dragged the beast through mud and water, bumped it around, and bathed it without it waking up. Could it be that the bump on the head had put the beast out for good?

"Do ya haff any ammonia?" asked Josiah.

"No," replied Lenny, "But I haff somethin that might be jest as good or maybe even better."

Lenny dug around in his kitchen for a little while and came back with a plastic jug full of clear liquid. He unscrewed the cap and waved it under Josiah's nose. Josiah's eyes immediately became flooded with tears.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Josiah, "Watt in tarnation is that?"

"Jest a little of my white lightnin. Granpaw's recipe an my skill with a still produced this one of a kind mixture. If this don't wake him up he is beyond our hep," said a proud Lenny.

Lenny held the jug over the beast and poured liberal amounts into the beast's mouth, nostrils, and eyes. The beast jerked to life as if it were awaking from a horrible nightmare. It began to frantically cough, gag, and rub its face with its hands. It made pitiful little whining sounds as it tried to rid itself of whatever it was that was making its face feel as though it had gone to hell. After a little more coughing and gagging the beast sat up and propped its elbows on its knees and held its face in its hands. It was obviously beginning to feel its terrible headache now that its facial feelings were beginning to return to some semblance of normality.

The shock of waking up from its deep sleep had been so severe that the beast had not seemed to notice its captors. It just sat there for a while with its face on its hands as if it were postponing the time when it would have to look up and face the three mighty men of valor who had succeeded in capturing him.

The three men just stood there, speechless, motionless, scared, and not really knowing what to do or say.

"Does it even know we're heeya?" asked Josiah.

"I don't know," replied Lenny.

They stood there for a little while until finally Lenny yelled, "Hey!"

The beast looked up and saw its captors. It had a strange look on its face. It was a look that betrayed emotions and sensibilities that were unlike those of an animal. Its look was of both disgust and wonder. It seemed to be wondering how three so unlikely looking adventurers could have lucked up and managed to do the impossible. Its eyes went from man to man in turn, examining each from head to toe and then back to the face of each man for some lengthy eye-to-eye contact. After thoroughly examining each man with its handsome green eyes the beast looked at the floor for a moment, shook its head from side to side in a slow deliberate manner, and placed its face back into its hands.

The men were astonished by the beast's actions. They knew that they had a lot more on their hands than just some rare, exotic animal.

"Did ya'll see that?" asked Josiah.

"Watt?" asked Paul.

"Tha way that thang looked at us an shook its head," replied Josiah.

"Yeah, I saw it," said Lenny.

"Those aint tha actions of some plain ole wile animal. This thang is smart, how smart I don't know, but smart," said Josiah.

"Yep, we had better keep a close eye on this critter, or it may pull somethin," said Lenny.

"Are we jest goin ta stand heeya? I mean, shouldn't we try ta do somethin?" asked Josiah.

"Like watt?" asked Lenny.

"Well, somethin, anythang, maybe like feedin it fer example. With tha poundin that we have put him thu, he may need somethin ta eat ta git his strength back," said Josiah.

"I don't want him ta git his strength back!" exclaimed Paul. "He's strowng enough already!"

This lack of sensitivity on the part of Paul both appalled and angered Lenny. He launched a severe verbal assault on Paul, "Well why don't we jest chain you up somewhir an let you starve! How would ya like that? I may have done some bad thangs in my day, but I aint never starved no animals, and I aint a'startin now!" roared Lenny.

Josiah saw that calm was needed. "Gentlemen, gentlemen, let's all row in tha same direction, lest we end up goin in a circle. Now, we may haff ta keep this thang aroun fer quite some time until we find somebody with a lot of money ta unload it on. We are goin ta haff ta feed it, so we might as well start now. Now, does either one of y'all have any suggestions as ta watt ta feed it?"

"I always heered an ole expression that if ya tell me watt it is, I'll tell ya watt ta feed it. But at tha present time I aint completely shore bout either one," said Lenny.

"Well, if ya use yore imagination, ya might say that this thang could nearly be tha first or secont cousin ta an ape, I mean, it is hairy an walks on two feet" said Josiah.

"Yep," said Lenny.

"Well, on T.V. they always give apes bananers," said Josiah.

"Ya haff a good point, an I jest happen ta haff a few slightly black bananers," said Lenny.

"Let's start with them," said Josiah.

Lenny went to his kitchen and came back with a half-dozen very mellow bananas. The beast raised his head, apparently knowing that he was about to be fed. Lenny tossed one of the bananas to the floor within reach of the beast. The beast grabbed it and with a couple of bites with its huge teeth downed it peeling and all. Lenny cast down another and another, each meeting the same fate as the first. It was very obvious that the beast was extremely hungry.

"I wonder if it eats meat," said Josiah.

"Let's see," said Lenny.

Lenny went and opened his oven door and came back with a couple of pieces of leftover pork. He tossed this to the beast and sure enough, the beast made short work of that also.

"Oh no," said Paul. "It eats meat, why in tha worl does it haff ta eat meat?"

"Watt's wrowng with it eatin meat?" asked Lenny.

"It might eat us," Paul returned.

"Maybe not," assured Josiah.

"Maybe not?" asked Paul. "This thang could kill an eat us an all ya can say is 'maybe not!'"

Josiah was beginning to lose patience with Paul's nagging. "Well if yore that worried bout it why don't we jest take this thang back ta tha swamp an turn it a-loose an jest fergit about all of them millions of dollars that we wuz a-goin ta git fer it. Paul, ya haff got ta remember that tha price of success is never cheap. Now I admit that we are takin some chainces. But ya must realize that these are necessary if we hope ta reap tha reward. Besides, I thank that we haff it chained so good that thay is little, if any, chaine that it can git a-loose. An another thang, jest look at tha size of this thang. He could haff probly kilt us in tha swamp if he had wanted to," said Josiah.

"Watt are ya worried bout dummy? I'm tha one who has ta stay with it all tha time," said Lenny.

"All right, all right, but if it eats anybody I hope that it's one of ya'll," said Paul.

"Lenny, we need ta find a way ta give it some water," said Josiah.

"Already figured that one out," said Lenny.

Lenny went to his kitchen and got a fairly large bowl out of his cabinet. He dipped it into his water bucket and placed it in front but out of the reach of the beast. He then got his baseball bat and pushed the bowl to within the reach of the beast. The beast, seeming to accept his present situation, calmly reached out, picked up the bowl, drank the water, and placed the bowl back on the floor. When the men saw this they were very unenthusiastic about reaching out to retrieve the bowl. The

way they saw it, if the beast could reach the bowl, then he could reach their hand if they tried to reach the bowl themselves. The beast seemed to sense the men's apprehension. Just as Lenny was going to try to reach the bowl and somehow rake it back with the ball bat, the beast picked up the bowl and began making motions for Lenny to catch it. Lenny, amazed at what was going on, looked at his friends in disbelief. He then put down his bat and stuck his hands out to receive the throw. At this time, the beast gently tossed the bowl into Lenny's arms.

"It is unreal how smart this thang is," said Josiah.

"Yeah, an I reckon ya'll know that a bigfoot or watterver it is has got ta be worth a lot of money. But if it is smart it could be worth a lot more money," said Lenny.

Josiah thought about this for a moment and said, "Jest thank how famous we would be if we were tha very first people ever ta find intelligent life other than human beins. It would be a discovery that could rival the discovery of tha new worl by Christopher Columbus. It would make us so rich an famous, why, we could make asternomical amounts of money. Do y'all realize watt that means? That means never havin ta kiss anybody's butt fer as lowng as we live. It means bein able ta do watterver we desire. Won't that be nice?"

"Yep," replied Paul.

Now it was Lenny's turn to get his friends back down to earth. "Before we git so rich that we fergit bout watt we're doin, don't ya'll thank that we should come up with a plan ta keep this as secret as possible? Because after all, if anybody finds out bout this thang before we haff time ta sell it, we could go back ta working in the sawmill at best, an git kilt at the worst. Fer my part, I don't thank that we should pat ourseffs on tha back until we haff tha money in our hands."

"Yore so right Lenny," said Josiah.

Lenny then added, "We need ta come up with some kind of a plan ta look as innocent as possible an still keep this thang under guard. We don't never need ta leave it heeya without at least one of us heeya with it. Jest leavin it heeya by itself would jest be invitin trouble."

"How is one of us goin ta stay heeya all of tha time?" asked Paul, "We haff ta go ta work."

"Not necessarily, we haff all got some vacation days saved up. We'll jest take turns takin them until we find a way ta git our money out of this thang," said Josiah.

"That's right meat-head, between tha three of us we can take off fer three weeks," said Lenny.

"Watt if somebody asks why we are stayin out so much?" asked Paul.

"It aint nobody's business," said Lenny. "Tha days are ours an we can take them wenever we want to. All we haff ta do is say that we dittin want ta work that day."

"Another thang, wenever we are in public, we haff ta act like thay aint nothin unusual goin on," said Josiah.

"That's right," said Lenny.

"So it's all settled, we will each take a day of vacation one at a time until we unload this thang," said Josiah.

"O.K., sounds good ta me. I'll take Monday," volunteered Lenny.

"An I'll take Tuesday," said Josiah. "So I guess you'll take Wednesday, Paul? We'll each take a day one at a time until it's over. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Lenny.

"Yeah," said Paul.

The three men saw that it was getting fairly late in the afternoon. Soon it would be time to split up for the day. Both Paul and Josiah had made plans for the night and cancellation of those plans might look suspicious. Paul was going to assist his brother-in-law in eating a sack of oysters, and Josiah had a date with Becky. Lenny as usual had planned to get intoxicated. On this Saturday night he decided that he would make do with a mild case of intoxication so that he could keep an eye on the beast.

"Ya know watt?" asked Josiah.

"Watt?" asked Lenny.

"It might be nice ta learn a little somethin bout this thang. It might come in handy," said Josiah.

"How do ya expect ta learn bout somethin that nobody knows bout but us? An we don't even know watt it is," said Lenny.

"I'll go ta tha liberry," answered Josiah.

"But jest how do ya expect ta find anythang bout it in the liberry? As fer as the worl is concerned, thay aint no such thang as this," returned Lenny.

"But thay haff been reports. Over tha years, people haff reported seein thangs that they called bigfoot. Maybe thay is infermation that we could use. It's worth a try," said Josiah.

"Well, I really don't thank that thay is any need in it, but seein as how you've decided ta go anyway, try ta find somethin that might hep us," said Lenny.

"I will," said Josiah.

"I gotta go," said Paul.

"Yeah, me too," said Josiah. "Will ya be O.K. heeya by yoreseff with this thang?"

"Ah, don't worry bout me. It would take a whole lot more than watt we haff heeya ta put this ole boy down fer tha count," replied Lenny.

"Well, jest be careful," said Josiah.

"I will, besides, our big, hairy buddy seems ta feel like it's time fer a rest," said Lenny.

Indeed it seemed as if there was nothing to worry about. The beast that tried so violently to avoid capture now seemed contented, maybe even polite. He just sat on the floor. Occasionally he would look up from the floor to his captors and back down to the floor again. He seemed to know that as far as captors went, he had some pretty good ones.

"Be shore that nobody finds out bout this," Josiah warned everyone.

"Yeah, somebody might decide ta steal it," added Lenny.

Paul and Josiah said their farewells to Lenny and then stepped outside and down off of the porch to their trucks.

"It's been a lowng day," said Josiah.

"Yeah it has," returned Paul.

"See ya roun," said Josiah.

"Yep," said Paul.

And with that both men got into their trucks and drove off. Paul went out of the driveway first, and then Josiah. This was the first time all day that Josiah noticed how nasty both he and his truck were. Both would have to have a thorough cleaning before they went to the library and then to Becky's house.

After a very short drive, Josiah was at home. Now the cleaning process could begin. First, he went to his dad's shop to get some truck washing equipment. He found a bucket, soap, and a couple of rags. Then he took this back and filled his bucket with soapy water. The first step was to get the layers and layers of sticky mud both off of and out from under his truck. He washed and scrubbed until the outside was clean. Then he sprayed the jet of water under his truck to remove some huge hunks of mud that had caked itself very thickly. Several hat-sized globs of mud fell to the ground. He then opened the hood and washed off the mud that had splashed on the engine. After that came the scrubbing of the tires and the outside cleanup was complete.

Now it was time for the inside. He looked at himself and determined that he was too nasty to get inside the cab to clean it. To do so would have been rather counter productive. A good self-hosing was in order. He began hosing himself off with the excruciatingly cold water. He shivered a lot but after a while he had removed much of the morning's grime. He then opened both of the trucks doors, threw out the soda cans and washed out the cab with the water hose. He then wiped the vinyl seat with a wet rag. A little glass cleaner to the speedometer and gauges made the once filthy vehicle fit for a trip to Becky's.

Now it was time to clean himself. He pulled off his boots and gave them a complete inside, outside cleaning. After this he turned them upside down over two nearby fence posts to dry. His straw hat was next. He took it off and wiped and washed all of the morning's mud from it. It too was dropped over a nearby fence post to dry in the late afternoon sun and breeze. Then he walked to the back porch and began to remove all of his soiled clothing, except for his underwear. First the overalls came off, then the shirt and dirty socks. He then went to the bathroom, removed his underwear and gave himself a thorough cleaning. He shaved; he washed his hair and body and removed every trace of grime.

After a good bath it was time to smell good. He looked over his wide assortment of 'good smellin stuff.' Most of his family was so poor that about all he got for Christmas many times was various kinds of after-shave and cologne. He would

make the most of what he had, he thought. A little of this would be nice under the arms. A little of that would smell nice smeared all over his chest, he reckoned. Maybe a dab of this on his face would help. And perhaps some of that on his feet would be good. Now this country boy with little knowledge in the use of toiletries smelled like a crowded flower garden.

Josiah then went to his bedroom to dress. A clean checked shirt and pair of overalls were put on. It seemed that Josiah's humble upbringing had left him with a woefully small imagination as far as clothing was concerned. Although he tried to dress neatly and be clean, most of his clothes looked very much alike.

He picked up a clean pair of socks and walked out to the fence to retrieve his boots and hat. He put on his hat and sat on the truck body to put on his socks and boots. Now that he was clean, smelled good, and was dressed, he got into his sparkling truck and headed for the library.

The library was in a small town nearby. Josiah never really liked town. But there were times, he realized, when it was a necessary evil. Although the town was small and the people had a basically rural nature about them, he still felt out of place, like a lump of feces in a punchbowl. This of course made him a little uneasy, and made him therefore act a little more awkward, making him stick out, more or less, like a sore thumb.

In about twenty minutes Josiah was in town and a few minutes later he was at the library. He parked and gently opened the door of his truck. After all, the last thing that he wanted was some city slicker gnawing on him because he chipped the paint on his car with his truck's door. Josiah stepped out and walked on the sidewalk toward the library door. An old grandmother and her teenaged granddaughter were walking down the sidewalk toward Josiah. When Josiah got close to them he stepped aside, giving them the entire sidewalk. As they walked by he tipped his hat in the sincere way that only an old-fashioned country boy could do. The older woman appreciated the courtesy that had been shown and acknowledged it by giving a big smile and a nod of her majestic grey head. The young girl thought that his gesture was silly for modern times and showed her contempt for tradition by giggling. After the two had passed Josiah stepped back on the sidewalk and continued on to the front door of the library.

When he went in, he scanned the inside of the lobby. He saw that the lobby had a couple of soft chairs along the two sidewalls and a large artificial plant in one corner. After a little more scanning he saw an oil portrait of a middle-aged gentleman holding a pipe in his hand. Under the portrait was a plaque with something written on it. He didn't pause to read it for he felt that the portrait was of a man who had done some great thing in the past. Although he had no personal animosity for this man, he couldn't help but to think that he looked awfully pretentious.

Josiah walked through the big double doors and into the library. When he got inside, he stopped and gazed the entire room in a slow deliberate scan. This was where he really felt out of place. There were several people in the library. There was

everything from school children to retired people. Most seemed to be there to enjoy some reading or finish up a class project. Others, Josiah thought, seemed to be doing little except turning some pages and looking at pictures.

Josiah was not difficult to spot. His straw hat, checked shirt, overalls and boots were so explanatory that he might as well have hung a sign around his neck that said 'Country Boy.' The more uneasy Josiah felt, the more he showed it. He stuck both hands into his overall pockets and just looked around. The old librarian looked at him with a stare of disgust usually reserved for road-kill. The very thought of this hayseed coming into her bastion of intellectualism was enough to send snobbish jolts down her spine.

"May I help you?" she asked. She looked at Josiah over her glasses in such a way that it looked as if she were trying to scare him out of her library with these words.

"Yes ma-am," he said, "Could ya hep me ta find somethin bout bigfoot?"

"Bigfoot who?" she asked.

"Well ma-am, it aint a who, it's a thang," he replied.

"A thing?" she asked.

"Yes ma-am, ya know, that big, tall, goriller-lookin thang with big feet," he replied.

"Oh yes, yes I think I know what you mean," she replied.

She got up and walked out from behind the counter. She seemed irritated at herself for letting this redneck get her temporarily off balance. Without saying a word, she went to the card catalog and thumbed through a couple of cards. She didn't find what she was looking for there so she led Josiah to a shelf full of reference books.

"Have a seat," she said to Josiah in much the same way that one would say it to a five year old.

After Josiah had seated himself, she laid before him two large books. They were already opened to the pages that he needed to see. Apparently she felt that it would be less trouble to find the information herself than it would be to show him how to do it. Besides, the way she saw it, somebody like Josiah didn't have any business in the library in the first place, and hopefully he wouldn't be back.

"There," she said as she simultaneously turned to go back to her counter.

Josiah read through the information on bigfoot that was written in the two books. The information was sketchy at best, and Josiah began to feel that nobody knew that much about bigfoot in the first place. Both books made it clear that the existence of the bigfoot had not been proven, and that the possibility that there were living, breathing, bigfoots was extremely remote. One of the books had something in it that caught Josiah's eye. It was an artist's conception of a bigfoot that was drawn from a supposedly eyewitness account. Josiah looked at the picture and flashed the image of the beast that they had captured through his mind. Josiah thought that the picture and description in the book simply did not match the beast that he had



helped to catch that day. For one thing, the bigfoot in the book had long shaggy hair but the hair on the beast was short. Also, the head and face of the bigfoot in the picture was very ape-like, but the head and the face of the beast was not ape-like to any great extent. The feet in the picture were more long but the feet of the beast were more broad. And there was nothing in the two books about bigfoots wearing any type of clothing, necklaces, or shoes.

Josiah sat there and thought for a while when all of a sudden something distracted him. He looked up and saw a little girl using a copying machine. She looked to be about eight years old, and she was having to stretch to reach the top of the machine. Josiah watched as she made copies of some pictures of ducks, obviously for some special project in school.

Josiah had an idea. He would make a copy of the page with the bigfoot picture on it and take it back to compare it to the beast and to show it to his friends. He got up and went to the copying machine and suddenly realized that he didn't know the first thing about running this apparatus.

"Howdy," he said to the little girl.

"Hi," she returned.

"Could I git ya ta show me how ta work this thang?" he asked shyly.

"Sure, I'll show you. Have you got a dime?" she asked.

Josiah searched his pockets "I reckon not" Josiah sighed.

"Well, if you've got a dollar, I'll go get some change for you," she offered.

Again Josiah searched his pockets and his wallet, but again in vain. "I'm sorry shug, but I reckon we'll haff ta fergit about it. I'm broke," he said.

"Just wait here," she said. She walked over to her chair and took her purse off the back of it. She then walked back to the machine, reached inside of her purse, and took out a dime. "Here we go," she said as she gave a big smile to Josiah. She put her dime into the machine, grabbed Josiah's book and made a copy for him.

"Thanks," said an embarrassed Josiah.

"Sure, any time. Maybe one day you can help me," she said.

Josiah was surprised to see such a young child who was as smart and as polite as this one was. She was mature far beyond her years. He also noticed that for some reason this little girl seemed to like him, but quite frankly he didn't know why. Maybe she was not old enough to know how to show true disrespect. Maybe she never would be.

Josiah thanked the little girl a few more times and made his way out of the library. He did not even take the time to put the books back on the shelf. He figured that the old librarian would be so glad to see him gone that she would not mind putting the books up. Once he was outside the library, he folded up the copy and placed it in his wallet. Now it was time to go home.

He got into his truck and began the ride home. He was a little disappointed that he had not found any more information than he had, and he was intrigued by the fact that what little information that he had found seemed to indicate that what

he and his friends had caught was very rare indeed. And if it was that rare, then it had to be worth a lot. He could almost see the riches coming in now. He might get so rich that he wouldn't know what to do with it. But he felt like he could figure that out later.

After a fairly short drive, he was at home. He got out of his truck and walked up on the front porch of his house. As he opened the front door the smell of delicious food slapped him in the face. It was a little after sundown now, and the pre-sunrise breakfast had long ceased to embrace the lining of his stomach. He looked around the inside of the house and saw his mother putting the finishing touches on supper. And there sat his father with his usual cold stare that he reserved exclusively for his son. It was a stare that seemed to ask, "What are you doing there breathing like that?"

"Howdy folks," said Josiah.

"Whir haff you been?" asked his father in a demanding way.

"Out an about," was Josiah's reply.

"That aint much of an ainswer," said his father.

"Yep," Josiah affirmed.

Josiah and his father had a relationship that was very cool indeed. It couldn't be said that they hated each other; it was just that they had lost the ability to get along.

It seemed that the harder Josiah tried to get along with his father, the more his father demanded of him. As of late, Josiah had just about decided that he was just as good as his father, and if they couldn't get along, then that was just the way that it was going to be. He didn't really care anymore.

Through it all, Josiah and his father still loved each other. Their relationship could almost be compared to two men standing on opposite sides of a river. Both men wanted to get across the river to embrace the other, but neither man knew how to swim.

Having exchanged greetings with his father, Josiah went to wash his hands. Then he went and flopped down on his bed and stared at the ceiling for a bit. He decided that this was preferable to sitting in the same room with his dad to await the start of supper. Josiah had not lain on the bed for very long when he heard the clink of ice cubes hitting the bottom of glasses. By this he knew that it was time to eat.

He wandered into the kitchen and took the ice-filled glasses and a pitcher of tea to the table. After a few more trips he and his mother had brought all of the food from the kitchen to the table. Josiah and his mother sat down and waited for Mr. Jones to rise from his chair and drag himself to the table. They sat, and sat, and sat, and there was still no movement from Mr. Jones. Mrs. Jones looked at Josiah sitting across the table and then rolled her eyes into her head to show her impatience.

"Been a lowng time since breakfast," said Josiah.

"You haven't eaten since breakfast?" she asked.

"Naw," he replied.

They waited a little longer. It was tradition in the Jones residence that nothing was eaten until thanks was given for the food, and thanks was not given until everybody had been seated at the table. Mrs. Jones looked at her hungry son seated before her. Her heart went out to him. She decided to make an attempt to get Mr. Jones to the table.

"It's ready," she said to Mr. Jones in the sweetest voice that she could muster.

"Well excuse me fer even breathin!" he said angrily. "I dittin know that we wuz a-punchin a dad-blamed time clock aroun heeya. Let me git ta tha table before one of y'all has a screamin hissie-fit. It's bad when a man caint even sit in his chair an rest anymore."

It seemed that Mr. Jones did all that was within his ability to ruin any trace of a pleasant atmosphere that might exist before or during any meal. It would almost appear as if he thought that an enjoyable meal was a luxury that neither his wife nor his son deserved. He grudgingly got up, washed his hands, and walked to the table. When he got there, he flopped down in his chair in such a way as to convey his anger.

"Josiah," said Mrs. Jones.

This was the signal for Josiah to give thanks. He and his mother bowed their heads and Josiah offered a short prayer of thanks for the food. Mr. Jones didn't bow. He must have thought that it would not be right to pray in such an angered state. Or maybe he refused to bow his head as a sign of protest because of the terrible way that he was being treated.

After Josiah had given thanks he raised his head to see his mother with a small tear running down her cheek. This always happened whenever Mr. Jones showed his superb talent of being a killer of happiness. This was a talent that he displayed often. Josiah looked at his mother for a while but said nothing. Since this happened so often he knew that it was better to say nothing. As it was, his mother would dry up and be fine in a few minutes, but if anything was made of it Mr. Jones would just rant and rave a little more, thus making things much worse.

Josiah and his mother began to fix their plates. Mr. Jones just sat there staring into space for a while, but in time he too dipped some food onto his plate. So after a brief delay the family was eating.

Conversation was sparse. What little talking there was occurred between Josiah and his mother. It was nothing major, just a few comments about the weather. It was always a good idea to keep conversation down to a minimum while at the table. Anything more than this could prompt Mr. Jones to give a lecture on how bad everybody treated him or on how sorry his son was. As usual though, Mr. Jones was not going to stay quiet forever.

"How are thangs at tha sawmill?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Steady," was Josiah's reply.

"Still payin ya'll tha same thang?" Mr. Jones asked.

"Yep, and I don't foresee gittin a raise any time quick," replied Josiah.

"How lowng ya reckon it will be before they make ya a foreman?" asked Mr. Jones.

This seemed to be one of those conversations where Mr. Jones was trying to back his son up in a corner, and Josiah knew it.

"Bout a hunderd years," was Josiah's reply.

"Why do ya say that?" asked Mr. Jones.

"Daddy, ya ort ta know better than ta even ask a question like that. Tha very thought of me bein a foreman is ridiculous," said an exasperated Josiah.

"Why?" asked his father.

"Daddy, you are old enough, or ya should be, ta know how it goes. I aint kin ta nobody important, I don't know nobody important. An besides, tha foremen that we haff now are fairly young, probly not even out of their forties. I don't see them a'leavin no time quick. Thay jest aint no chaine of me a-bein a foreman in tha fore-seeable future," Josiah said.

"Or, maybe they know watt I know," said Mr. Jones in a sly way.

"An watt is that?" asked Josiah.

"Maybe they know that you are as sorry as gulley-dirt," said Mr. Jones.

"Papa!" begged Mrs. Jones.

"Shut up! Jest shut yore mouth right now!" Mr. Jones shouted at Mrs. Jones with his finger pointed straight at her face. "I don't need fer you ta tell me nothing! You know that I'm a-tellin tha truth!"

Josiah stopped eating. He looked down at his food for a while. After that he looked up to see his mother holding her face in her hands. The tears were streaming down her face. He had seen this sight so many times, so many, many times. Then he looked at his father, who was still staring at his mother with rage all over his face. Josiah could not understand how his father could put his loved ones through so much pain without showing so much as a trace of compassion.

Reluctantly, Josiah spoke. "Daddy, why caint we jest sit down together an enjoy our supper like most other folks?"

"Oh, so now yore sayin that I started all of this," said Mr. Jones.

"Well, that's tha way that it would appear ta me," said Josiah.

Mr. Jones got close to his son's face. "Well jest let me tell ya somethin boy, it don't make a rat's-behind's worth of diffrence how thangs appear ta you. You got that boy? Say, have you got that?" yelled Mr. Jones.

"Looks like I might as well," said an exasperated Josiah.

"Now, quit tryin ta change tha subject," began Mr. Jones. "You aint never tried ta be anythang more than a bum, jest a bum."

"Bums don't work Daddy, I do," returned a very sad lookin Josiah.

"But ya don't try ta do no better!" yelled Mr. Jones.

"Well, jest watt would you suggest?" asked Josiah in a sarcastic fashion.

"You could learn a trade, then ya might amount ta somethin," said Mr. Jones.

"Oh, O.K. then I could be like you, right Dad? I could be like you an live in a dinky little house, work all of tha time jest ta git by, an be mad at tha whole worl," said an animated Josiah.

By now Mr. Jones was boiling with anger. He hit the table with his fist and stuck his finger in Josiah's face. "Don't you talk ta me that way boy!" he yelled.

"Well Daddy, it seems ta me that you are great at givin advice but not so great at the art of life yoreseff. You haff not amounted ta a hill of beans, that's right, a hill of beans. How can ya grumble at me fer not bein a success wen you aint a success yoreseff? An as fer as my goin ta school is concerned, you are tha one who insisted that I git a job in tha saw mill as soon as I graduated from high school so that I could pay some of tha bills aroun heeya!" Josiah said with the enthusiasm of an evangelist.

"Why don't ya join the army?" asked Mr. Jones.

"Thank ya very much Dad, but tha army aint fer me. I aint knockin the army, but it aint fer me. I'm too shy ta go off an live with a bunch of strangers, and me an Becky want to git married, settle down, an haff a home. It's hard ta put down roots in tha army," Josiah said.

"Becky, Becky, Becky, that's all I hear. That's probly tha main problem right there. Yore so hung up on that girl that ya caint thank of nothin else," said Mr. Jones.

"We're in love Daddy. I realize that love is somethin that ya don't know much about. But that's tha way it is. We're in love," said Josiah.

"Love? Love don't put groceries on tha table and clothes on ya butt! Now ya can take it or leave it, but that is tha way that it is," said Mr. Jones.

"I'm shore we'll git by, you an Maw haff fer all these years," said Josiah.

"Git by? You? Well ya can fergit that boy. We got by because I wuz tough enough ta hold this family together. I came up hard. I came up plowin mules and splittin rails. I came up when ya went ta bed howngry sometimes. We had no runnin water, electricity, or T.V., an ya can bet that my daddy wuz not as nice as I am. He would bust tha bark on ya tail bout anythang. Yore soft, you couldn't handle a life like that. Why, before I wuz as ole as you are, I had been on Okinawa killin Japs!" ranted Mr. Jones.

Josiah thought that this was a most ridiculous and inconclusive argument, but reluctantly he carried it on some more. Josiah asked, "Well Dad, would ya accept tha fact that I am a man if I went out tanight an kilt some little yeller people?"

"Yore a real smarty-pants, aint ya boy?" growled Mr. Jones.

"Yore so right Dad," returned a sarcastic Josiah. "An so that ya can sleep well tonight, I jest want ya ta know that as soon as I save up enough money I will be movin out of this house permanently."

"Ya won't never be able ta look after yoreseff," said Mr. Jones.

"Well Daddy, I reckon that I am ole enough ta be tha judge of that, an before I will live with you much lownger I will go aroun cetchin cow patties before they hit

tha ground an make my stomach learn ta like them!” said Josiah. And with that Josiah got up from the table and quickly walked outside.

He got outside and stood in the front yard for a while. He looked up into the heavens. The night was clear and cool and the stars were shining bright. Josiah, though, was in one of his rare moods when even he could not enjoy the beauty of creation. He could not tell whether he was mad or hurt. There was just the sick feeling in his insides. The huge view of the sky and the bad feelings from the argument made him feel so tiny, so insignificant. He lowered his head to the ground and stared at it for a while when it occurred to him that he had a date that night.

He stepped back into the house. His father was once again sitting in his chair; the icy stare turned up to full power. Josiah said nothing. He picked up his hat, put it on, and went back outside. He walked to his truck and got in it. A short time later he was cranked up and on the highway. Finally, he was on his way to Becky’s house.

The way to Becky’s house was very familiar to Josiah. He had been going with her for years. Along the way Josiah began to think. With all of the things that had happened during the day, food for thought was plentiful. When he had gotten up before sunrise, he had no idea that so much could possibly happen in one day. He and his friends had caught a bizarre creature and they now held it captive. How could this have happened? Was there a purpose in it? Of all of the people, in all of the places in the world, why did three country boys from South Alabama do what nobody else had ever done?

Most of all though, he kept thinking about how bad it was to be a poor country boy that nobody respected. Try as he did to keep from feeling sorry for himself, he could not prevent the negative thoughts from intruding into his mind. He thought about the Harding brothers and how they used the term ‘trash’ in describing him and his friends. Why? Why do people look at other people and think poorly of them because they have no riches, or no possessions, or because their hands are bruised and tarnished with the toil of honest work?

He thought about the old librarian, and how she looked at him as if he were committing a crime for having dared to set foot in her sanctuary of knowledge. And then he thought about his father, who was always putting him down for not being more than he was. All of his life it had been the same old story. No matter how hard he tried to live an exemplary life, it never seemed to make people respect him for what he was.

All the while that Josiah was thinking these thoughts; he could feel an anger boiling up inside of him. Not only was he angry at the world for the disrespect that he felt, he was also angry with himself. For all of his anger, Josiah was, at heart, an humble man. He knew that he had faults. He knew that he had numerous and profound faults, and through all the anger he wondered if the world was indeed justified in considering him the nobody that he seemed to sense that the world saw him as.

He was also angry with himself for feeling these feelings, because above all else Josiah valued his toughness and his pride as a man. He therefore considered self-pity

to be a most weak and unmanly vice. Nevertheless, the thoughts and feelings still dug into his soul.

As he thought and rethought these things in his mind, he seemed to sink into a pitch-black mood. But in the back of his mind he saw the faint glimmer of a rising sun. And this sun was in the form of the strange being that he had helped to catch that morning.

This could change his whole life. No longer would he be a nobody. He would be rich and famous, and all of the people who had shown him disrespect and impoliteness in the past would have to stand up and take notice. Instead of him having to kiss their rear in order to survive, they just might end up kissing his. He and Becky could get married, have lots of kids, and live happily ever after.

He felt that nobody had ever had a chance like this. It was almost like a miracle. He felt that if he did not take advantage of this opportunity, he would be doomed to live out the rest of his natural life as a virtual slave. He must act and he must act now. That was all that there was to it.

Meanwhile, as Josiah was driving to pick up his date, the atmosphere at Becky's house was anything but pleasant. Becky was sitting in front of her dresser putting the last touches on her hair before her white knight in blue overalls showed up. Her mind was rambling to and fro, thinking about the upcoming date with the man that she loved so much.

All of a sudden, her mother walked into her room and walked over to where she was sitting. Mrs. Flowers began to speak. "Well Rebecca, it looks like you're just about ready to go," she said with her slow and majestic southern drawl.

"Yes Mother," replied Becky.

"Where are y'all going tonight?" asked Mrs. Flowers.

"I don't know, I guess that we will decide when Josiah gets here," replied Becky.

Mrs. Flowers paused for a moment. She had a hesitant look on her face. It was obvious that she wanted to say something. "Rebecca, aren't you and Josiah going a bit too fast?" she asked.

"Fast, how can you say that Mother? We've been going with one another for years," replied Becky.

"Yes dear, I know that, but y'all are constantly talking about marriage. Your father and I simply don't think that you're ready," said Mrs. Flowers.

"Well Mother, you know that we're not just jumping into it. We plan to wait awhile until things get a little better," said Becky.

Mrs. Flowers was a very polite lady, but her upbringing and life experiences caused her to fear that her daughter's involvement with Josiah was not in anybody's best interest. Besides, it might make the family look bad for her daughter to marry one who was so far down on the social ladder. She spoke bluntly. "Darling, it just seems to your father and I that things can only get so much better, as far as Josiah goes."

"What do you mean by that, Mother?" asked Becky.

"Well dear," Mrs. Flowers seemed to be searching for the right words, "It's just that, well, you know."

"No Mother, I guess I don't know!" Becky said with an irritated voice.

Mrs. Flowers continued. "Becky, I think that you know deep down in your heart what I am trying to tell you. Josiah may be a nice young man, but if you look at him realistically, I think that you can see that he is not the kind of man that you want to share your life with. He works at a sawmill. He has not attended college. His family is not held in high regard. He stands very little chance of ever being any more than he is right now, and to be completely honest, that isn't very much."

Becky had respectfully listened to her mother. Now she felt that it was her turn to do the lecturing. "Mother, you shouldn't judge a man by his possessions. Josiah is only twenty-one years old. Who knows what he will turn out to be? I love Josiah, and we will be married someday. You may not believe this, but I know that Josiah will amount to something special someday. He has an inner goodness about him that is hard for me to explain, but I know that he is too good a man to keep down."

"Rebecca, sweetheart, those are lovely thoughts, but they will not put so much as one crumb on the table. Now, I've been trying to be nice, but I love you so much that I feel that you need to hear the absolute truth. Josiah simply isn't capable, now or ever, of supporting you in the style that you are accustomed to. He's been poor all of his life, and he has accepted that as the way that it will always be. He doesn't have any desire to move up in the world, and your father and I believe that he never will. Also, he has nothing but white trash for friends and relatives. How are you going to fit in with them? Just answer me that," said Mrs. Flowers.

"I can't believe I'm hearing this!" exclaimed Becky.

Her mother continued, "And that's not all Rebecca. You have been around Josiah for so long that you don't have any ambition either. You seem to be satisfied to work in that store forever. You have no desire to better yourself or advance in the world."

"Mother, I don't know how you can say that. I have been to college for two years and may go back when I've decided what I'm going to do. And I'm not going to work in the store forever. But, right now I'm happy with my situation," said Becky.

"Rebecca, you can't make a life of being Mrs. Josiah Jones," said Mrs. Flowers.

"You made a life of being Mrs. Dale Flowers. You don't seem to have any regrets," returned Becky.

"That's right, but your father was a young man with promise. And besides, what will our friends and family think about you marrying the grandson of a moonshiner?" asked Mrs. Flowers.

Becky was quickly becoming enraged. "That's not fair. Josiah can't help it if his grandfather was a moonshiner. You just don't want to give him a chance, and as far



as Daddy being a young man with promise is concerned, I know for a fact that when you first met him he was working in a warehouse!”

“I just don’t want to see you get old before your time. Life with Josiah would be very hard. He simply does not have what it takes to succeed in a competitive society,” said Mrs. Flowers.

“That’s not true!” exclaimed Becky. “He’s a good man, a very good man!”

“Why can’t I make you see that you’re making a mistake?” asked Mrs. Flowers.

“I’ll be the judge of that. I’m going to marry Josiah one of these days, and you might as well accept it. If you can’t accept it, just stay away from us!” said an angry Becky.

With that Becky got up and walked out of her bedroom. As she entered the living area, she saw her father sitting in his chair, reading a newspaper. Her father was not a wealthy man by any means but neither was he poor. He held a minor position in a small bank and tended to take himself very seriously indeed.

“Hayseed Hank coming tonight?” he asked his daughter.

“Daddy, don’t you be talking about Josiah that way,” said Becky.

“Well it’s true. I’ll tell you one thing. You always said that you wanted a simple country boy. Boy howdy, did you ever more get one,” he said sarcastically.

“I’m very glad that I got one too,” said Becky.

“Well, ya’ll can keep this up if you want to, but don’t think that I’m going to keep y’all up after you get married. You’ll be on your own,” Mr. Flowers said.

“We don’t expect or want any help, Daddy. We want to be on our own,” returned Becky.

“O.K. baby, but it aint as easy as you think. Don’t say that I didn’t warn you,” said Mr. Flowers.

“Daddy, you may not see it this way, but it would be wrong for me to marry a man that I didn’t love, just because he had money. That would not be fair to him or to myself,” said Becky.

“I am not suggesting that you marry a man you don’t love. What I am suggesting is that you get rid of this redneck before you get into something that would be embarrassing to get out of. Why don’t you shop around? Play the field. There’s probably some good looking successful young fellow out there who would give his right arm for a young lady like you. After all, there is nothing wrong with loving a man who just happens to have money,” said Mr. Flowers.

“Thank you for the advice, Daddy, but I already have the only man that I will ever want, for richer or poorer,” Becky said.

About that time Becky saw the lights of Josiah’s truck flash on the windows. She said nothing to her parents, but went outside to the front porch. She didn’t want Josiah to have to come into the house for fear that they all might get into one big argument in which neither side would compromise.

Josiah brought his pickup to a halt, switched off the lights, and then the engine, and stepped out. He walked up onto the porch and embraced Becky.

"Hey sweetheart," said Josiah.

"Hi," replied Becky.

"It's so good ta see ya. Watt ya been up to?" he asked.

"Not much, and you?" she asked.

"Well, a little, but not really all that much either," he returned.

"Want to sit in the swing?" she asked.

"Yeah, sounds good," he replied.

They walked over and sat in the swing and began to go gently back and forth. The air was cool but not uncomfortable. They said nothing at first. It was obvious to both of them that the other had something eating at them.

Becky was the first to speak. "Is something bothering you?"

"Yeah, I reckon ya could say that," answered Josiah.

"What?" she asked.

"Oh, same ole thang I reckon," he said.

"What thing is that?" she asked.

"Oh, jest dear ole Dad a-tellin me bout how sorry I am, an almost makin me believe it," he said.

"You are not sorry," Becky said with determination.

"Really?" he asked.

"Really!" she returned.

They just sat there for a little while longer. This time it was Josiah who broke the ice. "Watts yore trouble?" he asked.

"Daddy and Mother," she returned.

"Are they still trying ta talk ya inta quittin me?" he asked.

"Yes, but you know I'm not" she returned.

They got silent once again. Both of them were pondering their situation. Why was everybody so hard on them? Both of them were adults, and yet people treated them like children. They both felt like there were a lot of feelings inside that they wanted to release.

"It aint nice bein dumped on all of tha time," said Josiah.

"No, it certainly isn't. Anything in particular?" she asked.

"I guess Daddy, an everbody else," he answered.

"Your dad giving you the same old lectures?" she asked.

"Yeah," he replied.

"What about everybody else?" she asked.

"Well, it jest seems ta me that nobody gives me a chaince. Maybe it's my fault. I don't know, but they all seem ta thank that I am too poor, or stupid or whatever ta amount ta anythang. I don't know watt I'm doin wrowng, but I jest don't thank that I am that bad. Why caint folks look at me fer watt kind of man I am, instead of lookin fer fault. I guess that I am doomed ta live life at tha bottom," he said.

"No you're not either! I did not fall in love with a piece of trash! I fell in love with a fine young man, a man who could be great some day. That doesn't mean that you have to have a big pile of money. Greatness is within a person. It isn't measured by how much material junk he has stacked around him. You may never be rich, but you can be great. You can't let what people say bother you. What they think does not make a bit of difference. They are not even in the same class with you," she said.

"Maybe ya haff a point," he said quietly.

"I know I do!" she said. "Now tell me, would you like to be like those people who are so rude to you?" she asked.

"No!" he replied.

"See there," she said. "You are above that. You are on a higher level than they are."

"Ya reckon?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "All of those people are just stuffed shirts or windbags. All that matters to them is money."

"Yeah, I agree with ya," he said, "but wouldn't it be nice ta put some of these rude folks in their place. I always like ta dream bout some of these people havin ta say "Sir" ta me. I would like ta haff some money so that I would never haff ta kiss a big shot's tail fer as lowng as I live. Wouldn't that be nice?"

"Yes, it probably would be, but you know that will probably never happen," she said.

Josiah thought for a bit. He wanted so badly to tell Becky his secret. But how could he do that? He and his friends had agreed that nobody else should know. Still, everything that had happened that day made him eager to show Becky that things could get better for them.

He could not quite make up his mind. Should he tell her? Should he be silent? After some more thought he came up with an answer to his dilemma. He and Becky were engaged. They would someday be man and wife. Surely his future wife had the right to know about something as important as this. This would be his justification for telling her.

"Watt ya want ta do tonight?" he asked.

"I don't know. What would you like to do?" she asked in return.

"Well, I don't haff very much money this week, so I guess that we should keep it kind of simple," he said.

"Sounds fine to me. What did you have in mind?" she asked.

"Let's go fer a ride. I got somethin ta show ya," he said.

"All right," she said.

And with that they got up and walked out to Josiah's truck. He opened his door, and she got in and slid over to the middle section of the seat. Josiah got in and started up his truck and made his way back onto the highway. Just getting away from Mr. and Mrs. Flowers made him feel a lot more comfortable.

"What are you going to show me?" she asked.

"I aint a-gonna tell ya," he replied.

"Oh come on," she said with a big smile.

"Nope, I want it ta be a surprise," he said.

"Well, where is it?" she asked.

"I want that ta be a surprise too," he replied.

Becky wondered what in the world Josiah was up to. What kind of secret or surprise could he possibly have? She decided to play along with it.

"O.K., but it had better not be anything bad," she said.

"Baby, watt I am bout ta show ya could very easily change tha rest of our lives," he said.

Now Becky was really beside herself with curiosity. She could not imagine what he had up his sleeve. "How could it change our lives?" she asked.

"Jest wait an see," he said.

Becky saw that she was not going to get anything out of Josiah. She decided to wait and see. She really didn't expect much in the first place. "All right, we'll do it your way. I'll wait," she said.

For a while they said little as they drove along the road. After a few miles Josiah turned in at Lenny's long driveway.

"The surpise is at Lenny's?" she asked in amazement.

"Yep," he replied.

This was too much. How could there be anything at Lenny Rogers's house that could change the rest of their lives? Her expectations had by this time reached an all time low.

The truck came to a halt beside of Lenny's house. Josiah switched off his vehicle and placed his arm around Becky's shoulders.

"Becky, you haff got ta promise me that ya won't tell nobody bout watt ya see," he said.

Becky looked at Josiah in an almost startled way. She had never seen him look so serious. She could not get over how deeply he stared into her eyes.

"O.K.," she said.

"Another thang, I want ya ta brace yoreseff before we git inside. Watt ya are bout ta see may scare ya," he said.

"All right," she said.

She didn't know what to think. This would all be silly, were it not for the expression on Josiah's face.

They got out of the truck and walked up the steps and onto Lenny's front porch. They could hear Lenny's little black and white portable television blaring away. Finally, they were at the front door.

"Ready?" asked Josiah.

Becky looked at him in a puzzled way. "Ready," she returned.

Josiah knocked on the door. Nobody came. Josiah waited for a moment and again he knocked on the door. Josiah was beginning to worry about Lenny when he heard him slur out a couple of words. "Who's there?" Lenny asked.

"Josiah," said Josiah.

"Comin, comin," said Lenny.

Lenny opened the door and looked at his guests. It was obvious that Lenny was very much under the influence of intoxicating beverages. He had apparently forgotten about their agreement to maintain secrecy, or else he was too drunk to worry about it, because he showed absolutely no alarm at Becky's presence.

"How y'all doin?" Lenny asked.

"Fine, I jest thought that I would show Becky our secret, if it's all right with ya," said Josiah.

Lenny laughed in such a way that it seemed to accentuate his drunkenness. "Ha-Haaaa. You bet, but do ya thank she's ready fer somethin like this?" Lenny asked.

"I've told her ta brace herseff," returned Josiah.

"O.K.," said Lenny as he backed away from the door.

"Becky, it's time," said Josiah.

Becky didn't have any idea what she was in store for, but she felt sure that she could handle any surprise that Josiah and Lenny might have. She followed Josiah as he went into the house. As soon as she got inside she was greeted by the sight of the bizarre creature holding a can of beer in its hand.

"A-a-a-a-a!" she screamed. She immediately turned and began to run. Josiah at once tried to catch her. She flew off of the front porch and across the front yard. When she got to Lenny's hog pen, she quickly scaled the fence and began running through the mud and manure. Josiah caught her about half way across the pen, and they both slid down into the bog. Little pigs were running all around as Josiah hastily tried to calm his frightened sweetheart.

"Woe heeya!" he said.

"Let go!" she said.

"It's all right!" he said.

"No it's not!" she said as she squirmed to break free so that she could run away.

"It aint a-gonna ta hurt ya!" he said as he struggled to maintain his grip on her mud and manure slickened body.

Slowly Becky ceased to struggle, but she was still very excited. "What was that?" she asked.

"A bigfoot, we thank," he said.

"Where did you get something like that?" she asked in a way that was both excited and distressed.

"We caught it. Ya don't haff ta worry about it a-hurtin ya. We chained it ta tha floor," he said.

Slowly they stood up. They both were very nasty. This of course was nothing new to Josiah, but to Becky it was a very rare experience indeed.

"Oooh, what a mess," she said.

"Yeah it is" replied Josiah.

"Are you sure that thing won't hurt us?" she asked.

"Positive, an if it's all right with ya, I'd be willin ta git out of this hog pen," he replied.

"O.K." said Becky as she giggled.

And with that they walked to the fence and climbed out of the hog pen.

"Let's clean up a little," said Josiah.

"How?" asked Becky.

"This way," replied Josiah.

They walked out behind the house to the well. Josiah drew a few buckets of very cold water and poured them into a tub. They both struggled to get a little cleaner under these most primitive conditions. Finally they gave up on getting clean and settled for being a little less dirty.

"I wonder how I will explain this," said Becky.

"We'll jest be late in gittin ya home tonight. Ya can wash yore clothes an put them away before ya go ta bed," said Josiah.

They began walking back to the front of the house. They had already decided that Lenny might be so drunk that it would be a shame to ask him to stagger to the back door and unlock it. As they got close to the light coming out of one of the windows, it was obvious that they were still very nasty. They felt, however, that they were as clean as they could get without disrobing. Being clean would just have to wait for a few more hours.

As they got back to the front porch Josiah gave Becky another warning. "Git yoreseff together now. I don't want ta haff ta run ya down again."

"I'm O.K.," she said.

"Let's try it again," he said as he motioned for the door.

They walked through the open door to one of the strangest sights ever seen by anyone. The beast was still sitting, chained to the floor. It was watching television. Apparently, the few hours that the beast had spent alone with Lenny had corrupted it somewhat. It sat there with a beer can in its hand. Occasionally, it would raise the can to take a sip. Beside the beast was a chamber pot, apparently placed there for the beast's use by Lenny. Lenny was feeling very good but was not as drunk as they had at first feared.

"Did y'all enjoy ya'lls' waller?" Lenny asked.

"As much as a waller can be enjoyed," replied Josiah.

"How do ya like my buddy?" Lenny asked as he motioned toward the beast.

"Buddy?" asked Josiah.

"Yeah, buddy," said Lenny. "After you an stupid left, me an this thang become real good friends."

"How?" asked Josiah?

"Well, I wuz tryin ta find out watt it would eat an drank, an I fount out that it liked beer, jest like me. Ha-Ha," said Lenny.

"An tha pot?" asked Josiah as he pointed to the chamber pot.

"Well, ya jest caint put away suds tha way me an him does an not let a little out ever now an then," said Lenny.

"Aw, come on Lenny, that thang don't know nothing bout usin a pot," said Josiah.

"I showed him. Ha-Ha," said Lenny.

"Will someone please tell me what is going on!" pleaded Becky.

"Oh yeah, we went ta tha swamp an caught this heeya thang," said Josiah.

"Shore did," affirmed Lenny.

"Just like that? What did it do just walk out and give itself up?" she asked.

"Ha, not hardly," said Lenny.

"Will someone please start at the beginning?" she begged.

Josiah responded. "Yeah, O.K., we heered a rumor that this heeya thang wuz in tha swamp, so we went an fount it, lassoed it, knocked it out, an drug it out of tha swamp. Then we commenced ta load it up on tha truck an we brung it heeya. After we got it in tha house we chained it so it couldn't run off, an then Lenny waked it up by pourin whiskey in its face."

Becky was having a hard time swallowing all of this. "Oh mercy, I think that I am going to faint," she said.

"Thay aint no use in that," said Lenny. "He's jest as harmless as a kitten."

"Watt?" yelled Josiah. "Did ya happen ta notice tha way he knocked tha mess out of me down in tha swamp?"

"Well, you knocked tha mess out of him too, but it wuzn't nothin personal, wuz it?" asked Lenny.

"Well, I reckon ya got a point," said Josiah.

Lenny went further. "Jest look at tha size of this thang, an look at them there hands. He could haff kilt all of us if he had wanted to. In fact, his bein so nice an considerate is probly tha reason that he is enjoyin tha cumpferts of my house tanight, instead of tha swamp," he said.

"Now that ya'll have it, what on Earth do you plan to do with it?" asked Becky.

"Git rich," said Josiah.

"You can say that again," said a jubilant Lenny.

"Git rich, rich, rich, ha-ha," laughed Josiah.

"How?" asked Becky.

"Why Becky, this thang is rare, an rare thangs brang a lot of money," explained Josiah.

"Oh, I see," said a skeptical Becky.

"Jest wait an see," said Josiah.

"Yep, we gonna be livin high on tha hog," added Lenny.

"Walkin in tall cotton," added Josiah.

Becky saw that both gentlemen were convinced of their future wealth. She decided not to try to disillusion them. After all, they could be right. Maybe this creature was worth a bundle.

All of a sudden Lenny had a thought. "By tha way, how did ya do at tha liberry?"

"Oh yeah, I got a picture," said Josiah.

Josiah reached into the bib of his overalls and pulled out his wallet. He took the picture out of his wallet and returned the wallet to his bib. He then unfolded the picture so that all those present could see.

"Thay wuzn't all that much infermation bout bigfoot. Nobody even knows whether or not they really exist. Most folks that say that they haff seen one come from out west," said Josiah.

"Well we know fer shore that at least one does exist," said Lenny.

"I aint so shore. Take a very close look at this picture. It wuz drawn by an artist after lettin an eyewitness tell bout watt a bigfoot looked like," said Josiah.

Lenny's eyes scanned the picture carefully. He would look at the picture and then he would look at the beast.

"Well, it don't look exacly like tha picture, but then again, it looks a little like it. Maybe tha person who saw it dittin git a good look at it. Or maybe tha artist dittin draw it up jest like tha person described it," said Lenny.

"Or maybe watt we got aint a bigfoot," said Josiah.

"Well, watt is it then?" asked Lenny.

"Let me see that picture," said Becky.

Becky looked at both the picture and the beast. "I see what ya'll mean. There are some similarities, but there are also some big differences," she said.

"Tha head aint jest right," said Lenny. "Tha build of it aint jest right either. Tha hair on our buddy aint as lowng as tha picture, an that thang in tha picture shore aint wearin no clothes, shoes, or jewelry."

"Well, it don't matter whether it is or whether it aint a bigfoot. It's still rare an it's still worth a lot of money," said Josiah.

All this time the beast was sitting quietly, sipping beer and watching television. He seemed to be very much at home in Lenny's house. He had apparently accepted his captivity and had decided to make the best of it.

The small television was still blaring away. There was a comedy on the network airwaves on this night and the beast watched the little tube very closely. In one scene a very overweight gentleman slipped and rolled down a hill and into a pond. At that time the beast began to make a sound that he had not previously made during his captivity. It sounded like a cross between a grunt and a snort. He was also making gestures with his hand. He was apparently laughing at what he had seen on the television.

"Look at that!" said Becky.

"He must be very smart," said Josiah.

"Y'all aint seen nothin yet. Jest watch this," said Lenny.

Lenny picked up a farming magazine and sat down close to the beast. This caused his two guests to become almost hysterical.



"Lenny!" yelled Josiah.

"Get back!" cried Becky.

"Y'all hold yore hosses. Like I said, me an this heeya varmit became buddies," said Lenny.

"He might hurt ya!" said Josiah.

"No he won't. Wen I wuz a bit drunker, earlier, I tried thangs that I would never haff tried wile I wuz sober," said Lenny.

"Like what?" asked Becky.

"Well, like gittin close ta this thang. I fount out that he's a perty nice ole feller," explained Lenny.

"I hope yore right," said Josiah.

"I am. Now, y'all watch," said Lenny.

Lenny began to thumb through the pages of the magazine. When he got to a page with a picture on it, he showed it to the beast. Every time the beast saw a picture he would make a sound or a combination of sounds. He seemed to be talking about the pictures in a language understandable to no one but himself. After a while, Lenny patted the beast on the shoulder and stood up. The beast had an odd look on its face. It seemed to have enjoyed the chance to talk to Lenny, even though Lenny did not quite understand what he had heard.

"That's amazing," said Becky.

"Yep, I told y'all that we wuz buddies," said Lenny.

"He was talking. He was actually talking," said an amazed Becky.

"Jest thank of how valuable this thang is if it's intelligent. We might end up with so much money that we couldn't haul it," said Josiah.

"You got that right," said Lenny.

"I just can't believe how smart he is. It's obvious that he is much more than a wild animal. How do we know that he isn't something from another planet, or maybe from under the ocean, or maybe from the polar ice gap or something? How do we know that humanity is ready for something like this? Maybe y'all shouldn't have caught him. What if some of his friends come looking for him?" rambled Becky.

"Hold on. Nothin is gonna happen, except fer us a-gittin rich an all," assured Josiah.

"Well, I hope not," said Becky.

"Ah, don't worry bout nothin Becky. Me an ole Josiah can take care of ourseffs. Right, Josiah?" asked Lenny.

"You better know it," said Josiah.

Josiah did not let on, but Becky had made him think a little bit about the possible implications of what they were doing. He wandered about the morality of selling an apparently intelligent being, but he felt that these feelings were the result of a long hard day. He would be able to see things much more clearly when he got up in the morning.

Lenny once again put the wealth bug in Josiah's ear. "Yep, with tha money that we git fer this thang, you an Becky can git married an settled down, an not haff ta worry bout workin another day fer tha rest of yore life."

This was a very tempting prospect indeed, and it made Josiah's conscience become very relaxed. This was the break that he had been looking for, and he was not going to blow it. The beast would be sold and the money enjoyed. Nobody on Earth could blame them.

The rest of the evening was spent with Lenny, Becky, and Josiah sitting around talking, laughing and planning out loud about what they would do when they were rich. The beast was of course the center of attention and Lenny and Josiah explained in minute detail all of the day's activities. They had an especially big laugh when they talked about Paul's first reaction when he found the beast.

Lenny embarrassed Josiah when he brought it up about how Sonny's wife was so sweet to him. Becky was not the least bit jealous, but she liked to kid Josiah about the possibility of her losing Josiah to the snuff-chewing temptress, whose beauty, grace, and sophistication were in such short supply.

As the night grew longer, Becky became increasingly interested in the beast. While all of the humans were talking, the beast continued to watch television and would occasionally laugh or make a gesture, sound, or group of sounds to show that he had found something on the television either amusing or interesting. Except for its looks, the beast seemed very much like a person, perhaps a person who didn't speak English, but still a person. Becky began to sense that the beast had feelings and emotions that set it apart from the animal kingdom. It had already shown that its intelligence far exceeded that of an animal.

The long day of activity and excitement was beginning to take its toll on Lenny and Josiah. Both were very tired and sleepy. When it was late enough so that Becky was confident that her parents were in bed, she and Josiah prepared to leave. As they got up, Lenny picked up a pillow and handed it to the beast. Then he walked his guests to the door.

"Y'all come back," said Lenny.

"We will," said Josiah.

"Becky, ya need ta keep all of this under ya hat," said Lenny.

"Don't worry," said Becky.

"See ya tomar," said Josiah to Lenny.

"Be expectin ya," said Lenny.

And with that, Becky and Josiah got into the truck and began the trip back to Becky's house. On the way home, Becky shared her feelings with Josiah.

"You can't sell him. You need to turn him loose," she said.

"Watt?" asked a stunned Josiah.

"You heard me," she said.

"I can't believe I'm hearin this! Ya know that it's come too fer fer that! Watt about our bein rich? Don't that matter ta ya? Besides, Lenny an Paul would never go alongn with it," he said.

"They might. You could ask them. They would listen to you," she said.

"I don't want ta ask. I want ta be rich," he said.

"For who?" she asked.

"Why fer us of course," he said.

"Do you want to be rich for us, or do you want to be rich to show everybody that you can?" she asked.

"Well, fer both reasons, I reckon, I don't know. Why, what difference does it make?" he asked.

"Josiah, what does a man profit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" she asked.

"I don't want tha worl. I jest want me an you ta haff plenny," he replied.

"Josiah, you know what I mean," she said.

"Watt do ya mean? Yore gittin a little dramatic, aint ya?" said Josiah.

"As I've said, you know perfectly well what I mean. Whatever that thing is back there is not human, but it definitely is not a wild animal either. It has feelings. It's intelligent. It even wears clothes. We don't know what it is or where it came from, but you know as well as I do that you can't sell an intelligent being, especially one that acts so human. Why, who knows, he might even have a wife and kids back home, wherever that is. It just wouldn't be right. I'm proud to be from the South just as much as anybody, but selling intelligent beings went out of style a long time ago," she lectured.

"Becky, darlin, we aint never gonna git another chaine like this fer as lowng as we live. Don't try ta confuse me," he said.

"Just think about it. That's all that I will ask of you. I know that you will make the right decision, and I'll go along with that decision one-hundred percent, whatever you decide to do," she said.

Now the monkey was placed squarely on Josiah's back. He had to struggle between his desire for wealth and his sense of right and wrong. He began to wish that he had done as they agreed and had not shown the beast to Becky. He could have just driven up one day with a couple million dollars in his bank account, and he and Becky could have lived happily ever after. Now things were more complicated. What was he to do? He would have to think about it. He was too tired and sleepy to make such an important decision now.

He and Becky talked little for the rest of the way to her house. Both of them were tired and both were in deep thought. After a while they were at Becky's house. They got out of the truck slowly and walked up on the front porch. The lights were off in the house. Becky's parents had retired for the evening, just as the young couple had hoped.

"Remember, whatever you decide," said Becky.

"O.K., I'll give it some thought," Josiah replied.

"The next time you have a surprise, don't let it be so surprising," she said.

"I'll try," Josiah said laughingly.

“See you next week?” she asked.

“Why of course my dear, wouldn’t haff it any other way,” he said.

“I’m looking forward to it,” she said with a big smile.

They embraced, said some final farewells, and Josiah got back into his truck and began the trip home. On the way he couldn’t help but to think about what he had to do. He knew as well as Becky did that the beast was more than just an animal. He did not know what it was or where it was from, but he knew that it was something special.

After a while he was at home. He got out of his truck and walked up on the front porch of his dark house. His parents had also gone to bed, and he was glad of it. He quietly took a bath and crawled into his bed. Sleep tonight would be difficult. His thoughts were nagging at him as he lay there with his eyes looking straight up into the darkness. Maybe if he slept on it, the decision would come. Just maybe it would come.

## CHAPTER 4

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Josiah lay in the bed for what seemed like hours. He had too much on his mind to sleep. How could any decision be so difficult? Why couldn't he just let his conscience take the back seat for the time being, so that he could get rich and live happily ever after?

He thought about how nice it would be not to struggle. He thought of the wonderful things that he could buy. He imagined a big house, a farm, good food, nice cars and trucks, and a big red barn. It would be so nice to be able to quit the sawmill. It would be so nice to have the respect and admiration of all. He would love so much to prove to his father that he was worth something. All of these thoughts were nice, very nice indeed. They were very nice thoughts that made him more miserable with each passing moment. He had told Becky that he would give it some thought, but now it seemed that the only thing that he could think of was being rich.

But then, he thought of the beast, and what might be going through its mind. Josiah wondered if the beast missed his home. He wondered if it had a family, and if it did, was it thinking about them.

Josiah almost got mad at himself. Here he was wondering if an animal was worried about ever seeing its wife and kids again. The whole idea was stupid, or was it? Josiah thought about how intelligent and human-acting the beast was, and he was sure that they had seen only the tip of the iceberg, as far as the beast's intellect and human-like behavior were concerned.

Josiah knew that he could not use any prior experience to solve the dilemma that faced him. His decision would have to come from a part of his mind that was as of yet uncultivated. Or would it? Maybe his moral training and instinct would be enough. He just did not know.

However he made his decision, he knew that the beast was special and his decision must be well thought out and correct. To mess up on this could mean disaster, guilt, poverty, or maybe even worse.

The thoughts in Josiah's mind were being tossed back and forth, back and forth. Why would the decision not come? What was he going to do? How long did he have to decide? But slowly, ever so slowly, Josiah was drifting off to sleep, and with that, he stepped into dream world, and dream world would not be a pleasant place at all on this night for Josiah Jones.

In his dream, Josiah saw himself in a very strange place. He looked around at a treeless plain that stretched for as far as his eyes could see. Here and there he saw large yellow flowers, the blooms of which were as big as a washtub. The sky had a purple tint to it and was dotted with small clouds. The place that he saw was so

much different from his beloved South Alabama. He felt out of place and very alone. He did not know where he was or why he was there. He only longed to go home.

All of a sudden, he saw a huge net fall on him from out of nowhere. He struggled and fought, but there was no escaping the strong bonds. And then, three beasts, just like the one that he and his friends had caught, grabbed the net and started talking about what a great prize they had. The beasts were all speaking fluent English with southern drawls.

The beasts could not decide whether they needed to sell Josiah or use him as a slave. They talked back and forth. They laughed as they talked, and it was apparent that they had no concern whatsoever for the feelings of their captive human.

As Josiah was being taken away in the net, his mind, heart, and soul seemed to be melting. He was in a hopeless situation. His mind was racing away with questions. Why was he being treated like this? He had meant no harm. Would he ever see Becky again? Would he ever again see Lenny and Paul? Would he ever see his parents again? Would he live? Would he die?

And then he woke up. He was breathing hard and for a while all he could think about was that he was glad that it was only a dream. Then he thought about what he had dreamed. He thought about how helpless and afraid he had felt, and he wondered if the beast felt the same way. It would be a terrible thing to sell something if it was feeling the same emotions that he had felt while he was dreaming. But then again, it would not be wise for him to make his decision based on some crazy dream. He would think it through and make his decision based on rational thought. He would decide later.

He lay there in bed for a while. He was afraid to go back to sleep immediately for fear that he might pick up on the same dream at the same spot where he had left it only a few moments before. He may not have wanted to go back to sleep, but the day had been too long and too hard for him to remain awake for very long. In a few minutes he was asleep once again, and this time his dream would make his first dream seem very pleasant indeed by comparison.

He dreamed of walking on a beautiful road. The road was very broad and it ran downhill. At the end of the road he could see a figure, as of yet unrecognizable. He kept walking and after a while he was startled to discover that the lone figure was none other than the Devil himself! When he saw this, he tried desperately to turn and go the other way, but it was no use. He had no control of his body. His legs kept walking even though he wanted to stop. Finally, he was face to face with the Devil. Josiah's fear was indescribable. He stood there for a moment, motionless. The Devil said not a word for a little while, but simply looked at Josiah with a big smile on his face. He seemed to want Josiah to suffer for a bit before he said anything.

Finally, the Devil spoke. "It's payday Josiah," the Devil said.

"Payday?" Josiah asked.

"Yes, my fine man. For a while there I thought that you might elude me, but I usually find a way to catch my prey," said an elated Devil.

"Watt do ya mean?" asked Josiah.

"Well boy, it's like this. You were once a man who was dedicated to Christian morals and principles. Your God was first in your life. Nothing else was important. I didn't think that I had much of a chance with you, but then I came up with this wonderful idea. You see, the way I figured it, you were a good man, but a poor man, and nothing tempts a poor man more than good old fame and fortune. So, when you found that beast, I was elated. I said to myself, 'now there is a way that I might get him.' You and your friends knew that you could be rich and famous if you sold it. That's all that you could think about. You had found yourself a new god. I, of course, almost went giddy with joy, but then you gave me a scare. You almost let your girlfriend talk you into the notion of forgetting about money and doing the right thing by letting the beast go. Boy, did I have one more sleepless night about that. I was so glad when you ignored your conscience and sold the beast, even though you knew that you shouldn't do it. You knew that the beast was intelligent and had human emotions and feelings but you sold him anyway. That was only the beginning. You had ignored your conscience once, and then you started doing it with some regularity. Finally, you were morally bankrupt and doomed," said a jubilant Devil.

"An now?" asked a frightened Josiah.

"Payday, Josiah. Yes boy, some men sell their souls for women. Some sell it for power. Some sell it simply for the sake of rebellion, but I got you with fame and fortune. Ah yes, those two things have worked so well over the ages. Now, my pitiful little wretch, you will receive your reward," said the Devil.

Josiah was looking into the face of the Devil. The Devil looked pretty much like the standard devil that one would see on so many walls and decorations around the time of Halloween. But when he got finished saying his last words he began to change. He turned from red to smut black. His skin began to hideously bulge and wrinkle. His eyes became small and glowing red as he let out a terrible roar and grabbed Josiah and tossed him into a room that had appeared out of nowhere.

When Josiah looked around the room he saw several men sobbing uncontrollably. They were moaning about a wasted life and a terrible eternity. If only they had stayed on the straight and narrow way.

Josiah was apparently in some kind of waiting room. At the far end of the room were two large double doors, and beside the doors there was a pale, ghoulis looking individual with a scroll in his hand.

"Josiah Jones," called out the ghoul.

And at that moment the two large doors began to slowly open. The sight that Josiah saw was so frightening that he wanted to jump out of his skin. All he could see was an endless array of hills and valleys, all composed entirely of fire coals and

flames, and standing just inside of the entrance was a grinning demon with a flesh hook in its hand.

Josiah woke himself up with a scream of fear. He lay in bed for a few moments. He was breathing hard, and his heart was pounding. Once again he was thankful that it was only a dream. He raised himself up and sat on the edge of the bed with his face in his hands.

As he sat there, he thought of what he had just dreamed. Josiah was certain of his salvation, and he knew that he would never lose it. But still, why was his conscience bothering him so profoundly that he had two such horrible dreams in one night.

He was not going to take a chance on going back to sleep again. He got up and walked over to his window. He saw that the sky was beginning to lighten up just slightly. He stood there for a moment and thought. How could he find the answer to that which was pressing so hard against his soul? He decided to take a walk. He thought that a walk might help to clear his mind and help him to think.

He found his clothes and quietly slipped them on. He then carefully walked through the dark house and out into the yard. The morning was cool, and he could smell the smoke from the fireplace of someone in the community. He walked very carefully to a small hill that was across the road from his house. It was still very dark so Josiah walked very slowly.

When he finally got to the top of the hill, the sun was just about to break over the edge of the horizon. It was a beautiful sight. The rays of the sun were beginning to pierce the early morning mist in such a way as to suggest that Heaven itself was lending some of its beauty to this early morning scene. The beauty of the sunrise made Josiah all the more aware of the greatness and splendor of his Creator.

For a few minutes, Josiah humbly asked his Creator to give him the strength that he needed to make the decision that he had to make. He then looked at the beautiful scene and slowly thought everything over. After awhile he made his decision. It was the only decision that Josiah felt that he could make. It was the only decision that would always be the best decision, both now and in the future. He decided that the only thing that he could do was the right thing, and the right thing was to help his intelligent and very human-like being to return to the life that was natural for him, whatever and wherever that was.

Josiah had finally realized what had at first been unclear to him. He had known that something was wrong, but he could not put his finger on it at first. His breakthrough came when he realized that as a Christian he believed that although man was an animal, he was the supreme animal on this Earth because God willed it so. Because of this, man was favored. As he thought about the beast he could not help but to think that there was a place where the beast was the one most favored and therefore entitled to the same considerations that any human would enjoy.

Josiah also saw some things about himself that he had not thought of before. He realized that he had been indulging in self-pity and blaming others for his



problems. He also realized that in dreaming about the money that he would get for the beast he had imagined himself in a position in which he would be able to exert control over and avenge himself on others. He realized that he was dreaming of turning himself into what he disliked.

He decided that there would be no more of that. He knew that it was time to mature as a Christian and to grow up as a man, starting now.

It was Sunday morning, and that usually meant that he would attend church, but today he decided that his new mission was so important that he would have to skip church so that he could go to see Lenny and Paul and try to convince them of both the wisdom and the morality of his decision. He knew that it would not be easy, but he knew that he had to try. To do any less would be a betrayal to his soul.

The sun was up now. It turned the world into a beautiful, dreamlike place. The beauty of his surroundings and the burden lifted off his soul made Josiah feel very peaceful as he slowly walked back toward his house. Josiah's inner peace and the knowledge that he had made the right decision made him almost confident that someday, somehow, he could make his friends see what he had seen, and that was that the mind and body could not be at peace if the soul was in misery.

Josiah got back to the yard of his house and went directly to his truck. He got in it and cranked it up and backed onto the highway. After a very short drive he was at Lenny's house.

Everything was quiet at Lenny's. Josiah got out of his truck and walked up onto the front porch. He heard nothing. He tapped on the door a few times, and still nothing. Josiah was very fond of Lenny, and he feared that he and the beast might have had a confrontation after he and Becky had left. This thought got Josiah a little anxious so he again knocked on the door, but much harder than before.

After this he finally heard the sound of Lenny's feet struggling toward the door. Lenny opened the door and Josiah was treated to one of the most humorous sights that he had ever seen. This was the sight of Lenny Rogers with his early on Sunday morning hangover. The expression on Lenny's face was one of agony and disorientation. His eyes were very red, and he was squinting hard because of the early morning sun.

"Josiah, watt in tarnation do ya thank that yore a-doin heeya at this time of tha day?" asked an irritated Lenny.

"Jest wanted ta see ya" was Josiah's reply.

"Well come on in an let me make some coffee. I feel rough," said Lenny.

And with that Josiah walked into the house and Lenny shut the door behind him. When Josiah got into the house, he looked at the beast. Lenny had made the beast very comfortable. He had made it a pallet of blankets and had given it a pillow. The chains were just loose enough for the beast to lie down at the foot of the chair that Lenny had given him. The beast was still sound asleep, unaware that Josiah had arrived.

"Looks like ya are really lookin after this thang," said Josiah.

"Well, I thought that I might as well make it as cumpterble as I could. After all, I wuz raised ta believe that ya wuz suppost ta treat a guest with courtesy," said Lenny.

"He really looks peaceful," said Josiah.

"Yeah, I really hate ta keep him chained, but it's probly best fer his sake as well as ours right now," said Lenny.

"Yeah, probly," said Josiah. "Need some hep with tha coffee?"

"Naw, I can git it. It jest takes me a little wile ta git cranked up on Sundi mornin," Lenny replied.

Lenny laboriously made a pot of coffee, and he and Josiah sat down at the table. Lenny poured each of them a cupful of the rich, black, and strong brew, and they began to sip. They talked sparingly at first but at last Josiah found the guts to say what he had come to say.

"Lenny," Josiah began, "we've got ta turn it a-loose."

"Watt?" asked Lenny, apparently not understanding what Josiah meant.

"This thang, Lenny, we've got ta turn it a-loose," Josiah repeated.

"I beg yore pardon?" asked Lenny in disbelief.

"We haff got ta turn this thang a-loose. It's tha only right thang ta do," said Josiah.

"Either I'm still asleep, or I'm drunker than I thought that I could ever git, or you've become as crazy as a bed-bug," said a disbelieving Lenny.

"Ya aint asleep. Ya aint drunk, bad hungover maybe, but not drunk, an I hope that I aint crazy," said Josiah.

"You must be!" said an emphatic Lenny.

"No I aint. I hope. It's jest that I've thought about it, an turning this heeya thang a-loose is tha only right thang ta do," said Josiah.

"Why?" asked an exasperated Lenny.

"Well, because," said Josiah.

"Because why?" asked Lenny.

"Lenny, you've seen how smart this thang is. You've seen how human it acts. It jest aint right ta sell somethin that has that much sense. I mean, it's nearly like sellin somebody. We don't know watt it is. We don't know whir it come from. All we know is that it aint somethin that ya normally see around heeya," said Josiah.

"Well, it aint nobody. I don't care watt it is. I don't care whir it's from, an tha fact that it is not somethin that ya see ever day is tha very reason that we caught it. If ya remember correctly we figured that somethin as rare as this thang is might make us rich. Now, we all went an caught it, we brung it back ta my house, an now we're gonna sell it an git ourseffs a big pile of money!" said an aggravated Lenny.

"No we aint!" said Josiah.

"Yes we are!" said Lenny.

"But we caint!" said Josiah.

"Yeah we can too!" said Lenny.

"But Lenny, we don't know but watt he aint got a wife an kids waitin on him back whir he come from, or maybe even friends an other family members. Wouldn't it be a shame ta make them suffer because of our greed?" pleaded Josiah.

"Yore crazy, boy. That thang ain't got no ole lady an younguns. He's an animal. He's big an hairy an he stanks. He aint nobody. Tha only shame bout this whole deal would be fer all of us ta come out of it pore men like we wuz in tha first place," said Lenny.

"Lenny, ya know jest as good as I do that this thang aint jest a plain ole animal. Except fer him not bein able ta speak English, an not looking like we do, I caint tell no differnce in him an somebody, an as fer as him a-stankin, he don't smell much worse than we do after a day at work. He's been in tha swamp fer no telling how lowng. Me an you would stank too if we wuz ta stay in tha swamp fer several days, an besides, how many plain ole animals do ya know of that wear clothes? Lenny, ya know that this thang is differnt. He may not be a human but he aint jest an animal. He's special an ya know it. He is jest like somebody. I don't know watt he is or whir he's from, but I know that he is too close ta bein human to sell. If humans are made in God's image then this thang must be close ta God's image. Thay jest aint no way that we can justify our sellin him," said Josiah.

"Ah Josiah, yore argument jest don't make no sense," said Lenny.

"You know it does," said Josiah.

"Naw, we're gonna sell it an make a big wad of money," said Lenny.

Josiah knew Lenny very well, and he could tell that his argument was beginning to reach him. He looked at Lenny staring down at his coffee cup and knew that now was the time to deliver the final blow that would knock down his resistance.

"Lenny, me an you haff been knowin one another all of my life. You haff always seemed like a big brother ta me. Since I dittin haff any brothers or sisters, you seemed ta make a very special effort ta let me know that I wuz not alone in this worl. You wanted ta be my big brother an I will always appreciate that.

You always looked after me. You drunk a lot, but ya explained ta me why I should not. You gambled, but ya told me not to. You seldom went ta church, but ya encouraged me ta go. A lot of people would say that ya should practice watt ya preach, but I know that ya jest dittin want me ta make some of tha same mistakes in life that you made.

Whenever dad made me cry, ya always cheered me up. Wen nobody wuz there ta throw tha football with me, you did it, even though ya had been working an would much ruther haff been restin.

I guess watt I am tryin ta say is that I need fer ya ta trust me on this. Yes, I know that I wuz all in fer cetchin this thang an makin a killin on it, but I haff thought about it some, an I thank that we may haff started out innocently, but now that we know watt we know, we haff no choice but ta set tha thang free," said Josiah.

Lenny said nothing. He just looked down at his coffee cup. The expression on his face revealed to Josiah's trained eyes that he was in deep thought. Somehow,

Josiah had pierced a tiny hole in Lenny's small, but golden heart, and the warmth and compassion that oozed from that tiny hole was having a profound effect on Lenny's thinking. Slowly, but surely, Josiah was winning him over.

Josiah continued. "You are probly thankin watt I wuz a-thankin jest a few hours ago. Yore thankin that we will never git another chaine like this. Yore thankin that we must haff been selected fer some wonderful blessin, but ya know as good as I do that we could never enjoy tha money if we knew that we caused an intelligent bein ta lose its freedom. Who knows? Maybe we were tha ones who fount this thang because of all tha people aroun, only we would do tha right thang concernin him."

Lenny looked at his cup for a while, and then he sighed and wiped his face with one hand.

"Well," he said. "Dad-blame-it, yore right. Ta be perfectly honest I had been thankin alowng tha same lines fer quite a wile. I mean, me an this thang haff a better relationship than me an niney-nine percent of all humans do. He's polite, friendly an although I caint tell watt he's sayin, he's nice ta talk to. I believe that I could unchain him an we could be good roommates. Tha only thang is he stanks too bad, an I guess if he wuz unchained he could bathe."

"Then ya agree?" asked Josiah.

"Yeah, I wouldn't know watt ta do if I wuz a rich man in tha first place. I've been pore all of my life. I've kinda got used to it," said Lenny.

"Are ya mad?" asked Josiah.

"At who?" asked Lenny.

"At me," said Josiah.

"Fer watt?" asked Lenny.

"Well, fer talking ya out of becoming a millionaire," said Josiah.

"Mad? Ha, I'm relieved. I'm glad that ya talked me back into my senses. If it wuzn't fer you I would be a mess," said Lenny.

"Watt are little brothers fer?" asked Josiah.

"I guess they do haff their uses," said Lenny.

"I reckon so. Ya know watt?" asked Josiah.

"Watt?" asked Lenny.

"We still haff a slight problem," said Josiah.

"Watt's that?" asked Lenny.

"Paul," said Josiah.

"Watt about him?" asked Lenny.

"Well, he may not go alowng with us a-settin this thang free," said Josiah.

"He might as well," said Lenny.

"Why do ya say that?" asked Josiah.

"Well, me an you is tha majority. He's been outvoted. Wattever we want ta do, that's tha way it's gonna be," said Lenny.

"He might make trouble. As ya well know, Paul is not easily given over ta attacks of conscience," said Josiah.

"He ain't got no conscience," said Lenny.

"That's watt I mean. Watt are we gonna do?" asked Josiah.

"I still say that watterver we want ta do, that is watt we will do," said Lenny.

"Well, I guess we could, but it would be nice if we could do watterver we did together. After all, we got into this together. We should git out of it together. After this thang is gone, we will still be heeya. We will probly haff ta live tha rest of our lives together. It would be better if we wuz all on good terms," said Josiah.

"Well, as fer as I am concerned, Paul can be on watterver terms he wants ta be with me. I really don't give a rat's rear. But then again, like ya say, it would be nice," said Lenny.

"I wonder watt I could say that would change his mind," said Josiah.

Lenny sat there for a moment. He seemed to be pondering a certain idea. He scratched his chin a bit and then he spoke. "Leave Paul ta me."

Josiah was a bit taken back. He knew that although Lenny and Paul were friends in a manner of speaking, he also knew that Lenny had a great deal of contempt for Paul. Josiah wondered why, of all people, Lenny thought that he could be the one to make Paul see the virtue of their reasoning.

"Watt?" asked a surprised Josiah.

"Jest leave him ta me," said Lenny.

"Why do ya thank that you can talk him into our way of thankin?" asked Josiah.

"Well, we've already agreed ta tha fact that Paul aint got no conscience. If you go over there ta his house an start tryin ta reach his conscience, he'll laugh in yore face. I on tha other hand, haff ways of talking ta that imbecile that aint got nothin ta do with conscience," said Lenny.

"Like watt?" asked Josiah.

"Don't worry bout it," said Lenny.

"Ya aint gonna hurt him, are ya?" asked Josiah.

Lenny thought for a second. "Not if ya don't want me to," he said.

"Don't hurt him, if it's within ya not ta that is. Jest make him see our point," said Josiah.

"All right, anythang ya say," said Lenny.

Lenny rose from the table.

"Goin now?" asked Josiah.

"Yep," replied Lenny.

"He may not be out of bed yet," said Josiah.

"I aint' worried bout that idiot a-loosin a few minutes of his beauty nap," said Lenny in a delightfully cranky way.

"Well, O.K., ya shore ya don't need no hep?" asked Josiah.

"Positive. If I caint' bend an twist tha mind of that little jerk ta suit my fancy, I'll send myself back ta tha factory fer an overhaul," said a confident Lenny.

"Good Luck," said Josiah.

"Thanks," replied Lenny. "Ya want ta stay heeya an look after my buddy wile I'm gone?" asked Lenny.

"You bet," said Josiah.

Lenny put on the rest of his clothes and walked out. In a few minutes Lenny had fired up his old ragged pickup. His truck was a lot like himself, and that was loud, dirty, and rough looking. After awhile, Lenny was on the road and was going through the gears. Lenny got intense pleasure out of slamming his clutch and flooring his accelerator while he was going through his gears, and the loudness temporarily shattered the early morning peace and quiet.

Josiah listened as Lenny drove off. He looked over and saw that the beast was still sound asleep. The early morning's debate and decision had done nothing to stir him. Josiah walked over to the beast and gazed at him. The beast was so peaceful-looking. Josiah pulled a chair up close to the beast and sat in it. The bumping around of the chair by Josiah finally disturbed the beast's sleep.

Slowly, the beast began to show signs of life. He opened his large sleepy eyes and saw Josiah sitting there. He looked at Josiah for a moment, and then he continued his waking up procedure by giving himself a big stretch. After that he sat up, wiped his face a time or two and relaxed. He looked up at the face of Josiah with eyes that were full of expression. He seemed to be quietly asking Josiah to set him free.

As Josiah looked into the emotional, green eyes of the beast, the real guilt of the situation set in. He felt sorry for the poor creature and was more determined now than ever before to set it free.

As Josiah continued to look into the eyes of the beast, and the beast continued to look into the eyes of Josiah, a strange kind of bond seemed to be engulfing them both. Josiah saw the beast differently than he had seen him before. Now, Josiah looked at the beast as truly more of a somebody rather than as a something.

The beast began making sounds at Josiah in such a way that Josiah knew that he was being spoken to. He of course could not understand what the beast was saying, but he could somehow tell that what was being said to him was not being said out of anger, hatred, or fear.

Although Josiah felt a bit odd in doing so, he felt the need to talk back. Josiah spoke. "I jest want ya ta know that I'm sorry fer tha inconvenience that we haff caused ya. I promise that I am goin ta do everthang in my power ta see ta it that ya are restored ta yore former freedom. Please understand that it wuz my temporary lust fer wealth, an my ignorance of watt I wuz dealin with, that caused me ta deprive ya of yore freedom," said Josiah.

The beast could not understand Josiah any more than Josiah could understand the beast, but when Josiah finished speaking the beast nodded in acknowledgement. The expression and gestures of the beast made Josiah feel that at some level it knew that Josiah meant it no harm.

The beast slowly stood up. He looked Josiah in the eye with those handsome green eyes. Then the beast placed both of his hands in the center of his chest and bowed to Josiah in a way that was exceedingly respectful. Josiah, who was very touched by the beast's gesture, reciprocated and performed the same gesture back at the beast; he felt that he owed it at least this much.

"Friends," said Josiah.

The beast nodded in approval. Josiah indeed felt that he had a new and very special friend.

While Josiah and the beast were becoming friends, Lenny was on his way to Paul's. Lenny felt little for Paul except for sheer and total contempt, and he had no idea as to why he counted him among his friends. Lenny felt that the only way to reach somebody like Paul was to beat him with an ax handle until he came around to thinking in such a way that was compatible with the way that he thought. Josiah, however, with a heart that Lenny thought was entirely too soft in regard to the poor excuse of a man named Paul, had insisted that Lenny not hurt Paul, and Lenny would do his best to refrain from doing so.

Before long, Lenny came within sight of Paul's house. With a massive onslaught of thinking, Lenny formulated his final plan before he turned his rolling junkyard into Paul's driveway. Lenny pulled into Paul's front yard and switched off his vehicle.

Lenny saw no signs of life, so he pressed down his horn so that it issued out a very long blast. There still seemed to be no movement in the house, so Lenny blasted his horn again, and again, and again. Finally, a half dressed, very sleepy-looking Paul emerged from the front door of his house.

Paul's mood was not one of warmth, friendliness, and enthusiasm as he looked down at Lenny from his front porch. Lenny, seeing that his host had emerged from hibernation, stepped outside of his truck and leaned against the fender so that he could look at Paul. As Lenny leaned against his truck and looked up at Paul on the porch, he thought that it should be Paul who should begin greetings and invite him inside, but this was not to be the case. Paul just looked down at Lenny in an expressionless and profoundly stupid-looking manner. Lenny, at last, ran out of patience.

"Git down heeya dummy, I want ta talk ta ya," said Lenny.

And with that, Paul slowly stepped down his doorsteps and into the yard. He went and leaned on the other side of Lenny's truck so that the two were facing one another.

"Watt do ya want?" asked Paul.

"It aint watt I want, it's watt I'm gonna git," said a gruff Lenny.

"Watts that?" asked Paul.

"Me an Josiah has decided that we're gonna turn that beast a-loose," said Lenny.

"Watt?" asked a stunned Paul.

"You heered me, ya numb-skull, we're gonna set that thang free," said Lenny.

"No you aint!" exclaimed Paul.

"Well I reckon you'll see!" roared Lenny.

"I don't reckon I will neither!" yelled Paul.

Lenny saw that his first plan of attack was failing miserably. It was now time for plan number two.

"Look, dummy, me an Josiah haff thought about it, an we haff talked about it. Tha thang has a lot more sense than we knew at first. We also thank that it has human-like feelins. Tha way we see it, it jest aint right ta sell somethin that is like somebody. We feel like tha only right thang fer us ta do is ta set it free," said Lenny.

"I aint worried bout doin tha right thang. All I'm worried bout is gittin rich. Y'all aint keepin me from gittin rich!" exclaimed Paul.

"Even if it means doin somethin wrong?" asked Lenny.

"Yep, that's right," affirmed Paul.

"It wouldn't make no diffrence to ya if ya knew that it had a family?" asked Lenny.

"Nope, shore wouldn't," said Paul.

"Well, yore jest a butt-hole, aint ya?" asked Lenny.

"I may be a butt-hole, but I'm gonna be a rich butt-hole," said Paul.

"Ya aint if me an Josiah say ya aint!" roared Lenny.

"Hide an watch!" said Paul definitely.

"Why caint ya see that it aint right ta sell somethin if it's that much like somebody?" asked Lenny.

"I told ya awile ago, I don't care bout that thang's feelins. I don't care bout Josiah's feelins, an I bloomin shore don't care bout yore feelins!" yelled Paul.

"Is that right?" asked Lenny.

"Yeah, that's right!" exclaimed Paul.

"Idiot!" yelled Lenny.

"I may be an idiot bout some thangs, but I aint a big enough idiot ta miss a chaine ta git rich jest because thay is somethin bout it that aint right. I'll tell ya another thang, me an my cousins will go ta yore house an steal that thang an sell it ourseffs, then we'll keep all tha money!" exclaimed Paul.

"We'll turn it a-loose before ya'll can git together ta steal it," said Lenny.

"If ya do that, we'll jest go cetch it again an sell it. How do ya like that?" asked Paul.

Lenny became silent for a moment. Paul was more stubborn and greedy than even Lenny had thought. Reluctantly, Lenny decided to try his third and final plan of attack. If this did not work, he would disregard what Josiah said, and beat Paul until he agreed to his terms. If Paul wanted to play dirty, then dirty is how Lenny would play.

"Ya know," began Lenny. "It would be mighty hard fer a man ta enjoy his money if he wuz a-starin thu bars."



Now it was Paul's turn for a moment of silence. He looked at Lenny in a puzzled way for a while and then spoke, "Watt do ya mean?" he asked.

"Ha, I bet ya would really like ta know, wouldn't ya dummy?" asked a grinning Lenny.

"Ya aint scarin me," said Paul.

"Oh, is that so?" asked a sarcastic Lenny.

"Tell me watt yore talkin bout!" demanded Paul.

"Ya don't know?" asked a grinning, sarcastic Lenny.

"No, why should I?" asked Paul.

"Because, it has a lot ta do with yore future," said Lenny.

"My future?" asked Paul.

"Yep," replied Lenny.

Paul was absolutely beside himself with curiosity. He hated it when Lenny toyed with him in this way. With his voice a mixture of fear and anger, Paul spoke. "Let me tell you one thang, you red-headed sap-sucker. You aint a-scarin me, an if you haff somethin ta say, ya bloomin well better say it now!"

"Now?" asked Lenny.

Lenny was deliberately building up a frenzy of suspenseful anger in Paul, so that when he cut him down it would hurt extra bad. His plan seemed to be working rather well.

"Watt do ya mean? Dad-burn-it. Tell me watt yore talking bout you red-headed varmit! Tell me!" demanded Paul.

Lenny looked at the shelter that Paul had recently built beside of his house.

"Nice shelter," said Lenny.

"Watt's that got ta do with anythang?" asked Paul.

"Yep, real nice shelter," said Lenny.

"Watt about it?" asked Paul.

"Looks like it has some perty good lumber in it. I wonder whir a man like you got such fine lumber. Thay aint no way that ya could haff bought it, an as fer as I know, nobody jest gives it away. Maybe ya sawed it yoreseff. Naw, that couldn't be, ya aint got no saw. Whir did ya git tha lumber Paul?" asked Lenny.

Paul became very quiet indeed. He knew that Lenny was about to say some things that he did not want to hear.

Lenny continued. "Ya see dummy, me an Josiah, an a couple more fellas, know all bout you a-goin one night an heppin yoreseff ta some of tha boss' lumber, an if that wuz not bad enough, ya decided that yore greedy little seff wuz deserving of a box of nails out of tha shed. Watt I am tryin to say, anus, is that if ya don't go alowng with watt me an Josiah want to do, I am goin ta tell tha law bout you an yore stealin!"

Paul was still very quiet. His feeble mind was silently running amuck trying to figure a way out of his predicament. Finally, a flicker of thought flashed through his head.

"I'll tell on you an yore whiskey still!" said Paul.

"Yore proof?" asked a confident Lenny.

"Well, tha still," said Paul.

"Don't assume that everybody is as stupid as you are. I aint run off no whiskey in quite a wile an tha still has been took apart fer quite some time," said Lenny.

"I'll show them tha moonshine at yore house," said Paul.

"Sorry, dummy, me an tha bigfoot drunk it all," said Lenny.

Paul was by now getting desperate. He was torn between his greed for wealth and his knowledge of the fact that Lenny had him between a rock and a hard place. In despair, Paul cried out. "Aw come on Lenny, don't git me in no trouble bout that lumber an them nails," pleaded Paul.

"I've done told ya my conditions. You are gonna go alowng with me an Josiah, or you are gonna rot in jail!" said Lenny firmly.

Paul sadly turned around and walked to his doorsteps. He sat down on the bottom step and put his face in his hands. When Lenny saw this, he felt a strange bit of compassion gripping him. This was very odd indeed, seeing as how it was directed at Paul. He walked over to the steps and sat down close to Paul. Lenny looked all around as if to make sure that nobody was watching him. He would hate for people to think that he was being compassionate toward Paul.

That would endanger an image that he had been cultivating for a lifetime.

Lenny saw that it was time to speak, but the words were having a difficult time escaping his mouth. Finally, Lenny broke down and spoke to Paul in as compassionate a way as he could manage.

"Dummy," began Lenny. "How many times in yore life haff ya done somethin jest because it wuz right?"

"None," was Paul's sad reply. His head was still in his hands as he spoke.

Lenny explored the reaches of his little used sympathy for his next words. "Why don't ya, jest this once, try ta do somethin, not ta line yore pockets, or ta make yoreseff happy fer a little wile, but jest because it's tha right thang ta do," said Lenny.

Paul sat there for a moment. He was tossing Lenny's suggestion around in his feeble mind. At last he spoke. "O.K. I'll try it," he said.

Lenny was flabbergasted. He did not see how Paul could have given in so soon, unless, of course, somewhere under all of that greed and stupidity, Paul too had a guilty conscience.

"You'll be glad ya did," said a surprised Lenny.

The two men sat there for a moment. They both felt extremely awkward about the civil way in which they were acting toward one another. It seemed apparent that they were indeed friends, no matter how hostile and disrespectful they were to one another.

"Want ta go ta my house? That's whir Josiah is," said Lenny.

"Yeah, jest let me finish gittin dressed," replied Paul.

“Shore Thang,” said Lenny.

With that, Paul got up and walked into his house. Lenny remained outside. After a few minutes had passed, Paul emerged from his house, fully clothed. He and Lenny walked out into the yard.

Both men sensed that the atmosphere around them was still entirely too friendly to be comfortable to either of them. Paul, in a rare display of wit, came up with just the right words to break the tension.

“Ya know watt?” asked Paul.

“Watt?” asked Lenny.

“Yore eyeballs look jest like two fried eggs with red-eyed gravy poured all over them,” said a chuckling Paul.

Lenny was glad that Paul had found a way to break the tension of politeness that had hung so heavy in the air. He gave Paul a slap on the back and a reply. “Aw git out of heeya ya dummy,” he said.

And with that, both men went to their respective trucks for the trip back to Lenny’s house. Lenny was the first to get back on the highway, and he was followed closely by Paul.

The mood inside of Lenny’s truck cab was one of quiet jubilation. He could not have been happier about the fact that he had convinced Paul to go along with himself and Josiah and their decision to set the beast free. This jubilation was made even better by the feeling that Lenny had that nobody in the world, not even Josiah, could have convinced Paul in the way that he had. Lenny’s head was indeed very much swelled with pride.

The mood inside of Paul’s truck cab was one of quiet satisfaction. He was very pleased with himself for having turned over a new leaf in his life. For once in his life, greed would take a back seat. For once, he would do something just because it was right. He would do the right thing and he would enjoy it. Never in his entire life had Paul been so pleased and satisfied with himself.

After a few minutes of driving, the men were turning into Lenny’s long driveway. Both trucks came to a stop beside of Lenny’s house. When they had switched off their trucks, both men stepped out of their cabs and walked up on the porch.

“It’s jest us, Josiah,” yelled Lenny before he came into the house.

Lenny and Paul walked in and saw Josiah and the beast peacefully watching the Sunday morning religious programs. Josiah looked up in surprise at Paul.

“Mornin Paul,” greeted Josiah.

“Howdy” returned Paul.

Josiah looked at Lenny in such a way that seemed to be begging for some kind of explanation. Lenny looked at Josiah and transformed his face into one large glowing smile.

“Well?” asked Josiah.

“Well watt?” teased Lenny.

“Ya know watt I’m talkin bout,” said Josiah.

"Watt did I set out ta do?" asked a bold Lenny.

"Ya did it?" asked an amazed Josiah.

"Yep," replied Lenny.

"Paul, is that so?" asked Josiah.

"I'm with y'all all tha way, jest because it's right," said a beaming Paul.

"All right!" said a jubilant Josiah.

It was a time of celebration. All three friends were on the same track and were once again working toward a common goal, just as they should be. There was a lot of hand shaking and backslapping and a general friendly shoving around of one another. Their faces were all lit up with the joy of relief and comradeship that was engulfing them all.

After a little while, the celebration died down a bit, and the task of making a plan of action began. Josiah opened the discussion. "Well, how are we gonna do this?" he asked.

"Watt else is thay ta do but ta turn tha thang a-loose an go home," said Paul.

"We need ta at least take it back ta tha swamp first," said Lenny.

"That might not be tha best thang ta do," said Josiah.

"Watt do ya mean?" asked Lenny.

"Well, Sonny an his bunch saw it. He told us bout it, an we went an caught it. How do we know that somebody else wouldn't cetch him, or even kill him, if we took it back ta tha same place?" said Josiah.

"We caint worry bout that," began Paul. "We jest haff ta take it back an turn it a-loose. Wattever happens ta it after that is not our problem."

"Naw, that aint tha way," began Lenny. "Personally, I don't want nobody else a-makin tha million dollars that I decided not ta make, not ta mention tha fact that I haff took a likin ta that thang, an I don't want ta see him sold or kilt."

"I feel tha same way," began Josiah. "Tha problem is, if we aint gonna take him back ta tha same place that we got him from, an we aint gonna jest kick him out tha front door so that he's on his own, watt are we gonna do?"

It seemed that doing a good deed was not as simple as it had appeared at first. Could it be that getting rid of the beast was more difficult than finding, catching, dragging, and holding it was? It certainly required more imagination, and the imagination was what the three young men were searching. The answer to their problem had to be somewhere, but where?

During the time that the men were trying to decide what to do, the beast was becoming very interested in their conversation. He felt that they were talking about him and even though he could not understand what they were saying, he was naturally quite curious. If the beast could only speak English, it could probably have lended a helpful suggestion to the three-man think tank. But, unfortunately the beast could only watch, make its unintelligible sounds and hope for the best.

After awhile, Josiah sought to bring some order to the chaotic planning. "O.K. y'all, lets git organized heeya," he began. "I thank that watt we ort ta do is ta talk

bout each idea, an go over its good an bad points. Maybe, after we do that, we can come up with somethin that will work. Let's talk about Paul's idea first. Paul, you thought that we should jest open tha door an let it go. Personally, I don't thank that that will work."

"Me neither," began Lenny. "If we do that, he'll be walkin around heeya whir thay are a good many houses. Somebody would more than likely kill him or cetch him, an I don't want neither one of them two thangs ta happen. It wouldn't do fer somebody else ta git rich because of my niceness, an it dad-blame shore wouldn't do if somebody kilt him. I've kinda took a likin fer him."

"Yeah, I reckon ya'll are right. Thay jest aint no way we can let him go on his own. It would be too dangerous fer him," said Paul in such a way that betrayed an inner goodness.

"Well," began Josiah. "It looks like that plan is scrapped. I reckon that the next thang that wuz brought up wuz that we take him back ta tha swamp an turn him loose. As I've already told ya'll, I don't thank that that is a good idea because one, Sonny an his cousins haff done an seen it, an thay aint no telling how many folks they haff told by now, an two, it's jest too dangerous. I mean, look at it this way, it's huntin season, an thay's gonna be lots of folks in tha swamp. They will more than likely find footprints or maybe even tha thang itself if we take it back.

We haff ta remember that jest about everbody that goes ta tha swamp this time of tha year is huntin, an everbody that hunts is gonna haff a rifle or a shotgun with him. I mean, jest thank, tha Harding brothers almost caught us as we wuz comin out a-draggin this thang. If we hadn't got there first, they might haff seen an kilt our buddy over there. It's jest a miracle that Sonny or one of his cousins didn't shoot at him."

"Yore right as usual, Josiah," said Lenny.

"Yep, thay aint no way that anythang that we haff talked about will work," said Paul.

"So, watt are we gonna do?" asked a perplexed Josiah.

Everybody grew quiet all of a sudden. They had eliminated all previous plans and were now squarely back to where they had started, and that was nowhere. They knew that there had to be a way, and they had to find it. This was one of those occasions in which all previous experiences were of little or no value because they had never been in a predicament like this. A new plan was needed. Somewhere in one of those three minds was the answer to their problem, hopefully. Or, then again, perhaps there was no answer.

Josiah restarted the conversation. "If y'all remember, I said that tha book in tha liberry said that most bigfoots that wuz sighted wuz sighted out west. Do y'all reckon that we need ta take this thang out west an turn it loose?" he asked.

Lenny replied. "If ya remember correctly, Josiah, we couldn't tell by that picture that ya had whether or not this watterver-it-is is a bigfoot in tha first place. Personally, I don't thank it is. It's too smart an it really don't look like tha picture, an thay aint never been a bigfoot spotted that had clothes on that I know anythang about."

"But we don't know how smart a bigfoot is," said Paul.

Lenny responded. "Yeah, but watt if we took this heeya thang out there an it turned out not ta be tha right thang ta do. He still might git caught. He still might git kilt, or if he aint from out that way in tha first place, he might freeze ta death, or somethin. Besides, how are we gonna hide this thang all tha way on a trip ta tha west coast. I might as well also mention tha fact that it would take all three of us ta pull a stunt like that off, it would take several days ta do it, and tha boss might not want ta let us all off at one time."

"Are ya saying that ya don't approve of tha plan?" asked a sarcastic Josiah.

"That's right, also, ya must be fergittin that it would take money fer a trip like that, an money is one thang that we aint got," said Lenny.

"You got that right!" affirmed Paul.

"Well, do y'all haff any ideas? I'm fresh out," said Josiah.

"Nope," said Paul.

"Naw, not a thang," said Lenny.

Once again, the room was very quiet. The beast sat quietly with his head in his hands. Apparently, when the men got quiet he lost interest in the conversation. If he could only talk, he might be able to tell them what to do. He could that is, if he knew himself.

The three men sat and stared into space. Lenny and Josiah wore the face of deep concentration. Paul's expression was a complete blank.

Josiah had another idea. "Well," he began. "If we caint turn him a-loose heeya, an we caint turn him a-loose in tha swamp, an we caint turn him a-loose out west, I guess that leaves only one thang fer us ta do."

"Watts that?" asked Lenny.

"We don't turn him a-loose," replied Josiah.

"I beg yore pardon," said a shocked Lenny.

"We don't turn him a-loose," repeated Josiah.

"An jest how in tarnation do ya suppose that will work?" asked Lenny.

"I don't know exactly," said Josiah.

"Ya know that we caint do that," said Lenny.

"Why" asked Josiah.

"Well, fer one thang, whir do ya plan ta keep him?" asked Lenny,

"Hadn't really thought about it," said Josiah.

"I reckon not," began Lenny. "I volunteered ta keep him at my house fer a litte wile, but yore talkin bout permanent. That jest won't do. Ya wouldn't haff me ta keep him from now on, would ya?" asked Lenny.

"Of course not," replied Josiah.

"Well, whir would we keep him?" asked Lenny.

"Well, I don't know, maybe we could keep him in a ole barn somewhir," said Josiah.

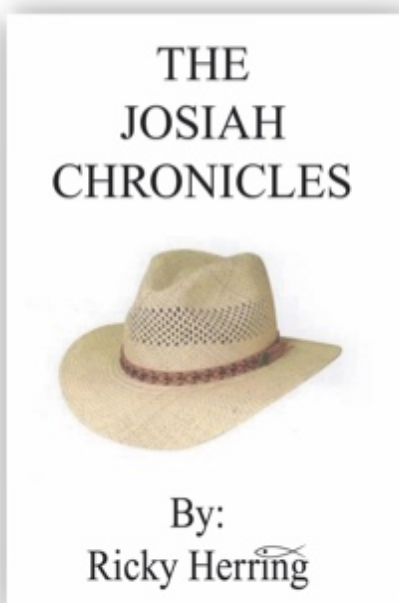
Lenny responded. “Ya know that wouldn’t work. Somebody would find him. We couldn’t be there ta watch him ever day fer tha rest of our lives. You are also fer-gittin bout another thang. When we brought this thang inta tha house, I had enough food ta last me fer two weeks. Now, I’m jest bout out. Thay jest aint no way that us three country boys can afford ta feed that thang. He eats too much. Besides, he still wouldn’t be free. We still won’t be solved our problem. That whole idea jest won’t work,” said Lenny.

Josiah knew that he was grasping for straws. He was a little embarrassed for having brought up such a ridiculous idea, but he felt that since it was an idea, it needed to be aired.

The men were no closer to solving their problem than they were at the beginning. It seemed more and more like their problem had no solution. There was one thing, however, that they had not counted on.

“Knock-Knock.”

Someone was knocking on the front door!



The Josiah Chronicles, a Christian science fiction novel by Ricky Herring, follows Josiah Jones and his two friends through an amazing sequence of events. They begin by capturing a being from another world. Before they know it they become actors in an Indian legend which eventually leads them to another world, where they are involved in a world war.

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