

A Cat of One Colour

by

Steve Miles

FADE IN:

INT. GRAHAM'S HIDE - DAY

A slice of damp, rugged moorland lies framed in the viewing portal of a small bird-watching hide.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Me Granddad first brought me here.
He loved to roam these moors.

Gloved hands rub together for warmth.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Sometimes he'd be gone for days.
Nan never seemed to worry mind.

A small kettle BUBBLES over a camp-stove. Beside it a waiting mug and jar of instant coffee rest upon a book entitled: BIG CATS OF THE WORLD: A FIELD GUIDE.

Fingers work the focus on a pair of binoculars.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

'Where's Gramps' we'd say, me an' me sister that was. 'Off on one of his wanders' she'd say. 'He'll turn up somewhere.' Then she'd stuff her apron with ham an' lock herself in the shed.

GRAHAM CHEESESTONE, mid 40s. Pasty, cherubic features set in an open balaclava. Eyes scour some distant unseen spot.

GRAHAM

He always did mind. Turned up in Aberystwyth once, over two hundred miles away. No bus pass. Didn't believe in charity.

He takes a sip of coffee.

GRAHAM

He was part of this landscape. It was him what first seen it.

EXT. ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Amateur footage of the 'BEAST', slinking through a field.
Domestic cat? Hoax? It's hard to tell.

EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

A FARMER, 50s, stoic and hard lived. Arms folded he
addresses the camera, his back to a pasture of sheep.

FARMER

I've noticed a commotion, sheep was
runnin' every which way but wool,
in all my years I've never seen a
flock so riled.

EXT. MOORLAND - DAY

More amateur footage, distant, blurry: The BEAST haunts a
wild landscape before slipping from view.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

JUDY, late 30s, walks around her parked car to indicate a
point in the road ahead:

JUDY

(to camera)

It were right there in the middle
of the lane. Just staring at me
with it's big eyes.

CUT TO BLACK

SUPERIMPOSE CAPTION: Bodmin FM. March 15th, 2007.

NEWSREADER (V.O.)

Police were called to the village
of Pottscrow after a number of
witnesses called to report a large
feline like creature--

EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

The Farmer shakes his head in awe.

FARMER

I thought it were just a big dog.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

Judy continues her story:

JUDY

I said to myself, Judy love
that's a funny looking dog.

EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

FARMER

It were no dog.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

JUDY

I've two of me own.

EXT. FARMLAND - DAY

FARMER

It were a dirty great big--

EXT. BODMIN MOOR - DAY

A familiar rugged landscape beneath a steel gray sky.

Graham hefts his pack along a muddy trail. He pauses to
scan the horizon through binoculars:

GRAHAM (V.O)

Melanistic Leopard. Panthera Pardus.
Commonly known as the Black panther.

(MORE)

GRAHAM (CONT'D)

Not the seventies black power movement. Two hundred pounds of mother natures crowning glory. I'm a fan, I must admit.

EXT. GRAHAM'S CAMP - DAY

Graham pitches his hide. Carefully threads the carbon poles through the flysheet sleeves.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

My name's Graham Cheesestone. I work in the fencing industry. Not the swords. Panel, rail, occasional picket. I've been called an amateur big cat enthusiast. Not sure what I'd have to do to qualify as an expert. A certificate of some kind. I have read a lot of books.

MOMENTS LATER

Graham untangles a guide line.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Suppose I've always had an interest in the unknown. It's stuff like that gets me thinking.

LATER STILL

He hammers a peg into the ground with his boot heel.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

At school teachers would be all 'well this fella here did this', or 'that war there happened then.'

He stops, casts a concerned look around. Removes his sock, places it between the shoe and the peg to dampen the noise.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

I'd just be sittin' there thinkin'. So what aren't they tellin' us?

INT. GRAHAM'S HIDE - DAY

Graham scours the valley through binoculars.

GRAHAM

Local postie saw it about a week ago. He was taking a shortcut across the valley. Dark black coat, maybe six feet in length -- the cat, not the Postie.

He fishes a piece of liquorice from a pocket. Proffers the bag to the cameraman, (O.S.) no takers. Graham shrugs, pops it in his mouth.

GRAHAM

His name's Ted. Worked this valley for years. Always trust a Postie. They see stuff the rest of us don't. Up early I suppose.

Graham tenses, trains the binoculars on a faraway spot--

--he relaxes. Returns to his liquorice.

GRAHAM

Fox.

EXT. WOODLAND - DAY

Distant SNAP and RUSTLE of foliage underfoot.

Graham picks his way through the undergrowth, stopping every so often to inspect tree trunks.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

People are always sayin' to me 'Graham if they're up there, we would've seen 'em' See, thing is they're nocturnal. We've a lot of dark up here, you think about it fifty percent of the day is night, sometimes more. If I only came out at night you'd not know I were about. I do, I have a job. Nobody wants to buy a fence after dark.

He stops to photograph the mid section of a trunk.

GRAHAM

That's a claw mark.

Several lines in the bark. Barely visible. Graham makes a raking gesture with his fingers to indicate a claw.

GRAHAM

They do it to mark territory and sharpen their claws. Serves a very practical purpose. Here get this.

He directs the camera to another point in the trunk, crudely carved into the bark: J.T '98

GRAHAM

J.T '98. He probably did it cause he was bored.

MOMENTS LATER

The undergrowth shakes as something moves beneath it.

GRAHAM (O.S.)

People fret at the idea of a big cat roaming these fair isles. But what is a big cat really? I mean it's all relative when you think about it.

Graham emerges on his hands and knees. He pauses to inspect some 'scat' he's collected. Rolls it in his fingers:

GRAHAM

It begs the question, what do people with no knowledge of small cats use for reference?

He sniffs the scat.

GRAHAM

Badger.

INT. GRAHAM'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Graham drives. Twigs caught in his balaclava.

A small plastic lion figurine tacked to the dash.

GRAHAM

It's not all sitting in fields.
In fact a large part of the job,
if you can call it that, is to
investigate sightings in the area.
On our way to one now. I'm quite
excited.

EXT. GRAHAM'S CAR - REAR BUMPER - CONTINUOUS

A sticker there reads: 'I brake for Cryptoids'.

INT. GRAHAM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

He spots something ahead, suddenly slows the car.

GRAHAM

Better stop.

Pulls into a bus stop.

There surrounded by grocery bags waits VAL CHEESESTONE,
40s, the body language of a long-suffering wife.

GRAHAM

Wife's upset look. Kept her waiting.

Val looks in through the open window as she gathers bags.

VAL

Been sitting in that bloody tent
in some damp field.

GRAHAM

Hide, it's called a hide. And
I'm observing.

She shuffles off towards the boot.

VAL (O.S.)
Try observing the time. It's
called a watch.

INT. GRAHAM'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Graham gives the camera a sheepish glance.

GRAHAM
No good deed.

VAL
(O.S.)
Graham open the boot!

He fumbles around for the switch, CLUNK.

INT. JARVIS' COTTAGE - KITCHEN - DAY

JARVIS BASHE, late 60s. Jovial with a wild beard. He leans back on the countertop, teacup in hand as he lets out a strange gurgling sound -- he cuts it off.

JARVIS
That's not quite it, I need a
little moisture.

He swills his cup disappointedly.

JARVIS
I'm out of tea there Graham.

CLICK. Graham stops his dictaphone. He stands a few feet away from where he's been recording.

GRAHAM
But it was like that? The noise it
made?

JARVIS
Aye. Like the rustling of leaves,
only more feminine.

Graham flicks the camera a withering look.

EXT. JARVIS' DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Val waits in the car. Munches on a bag of crisps.

EXT. JARVIS' BACK GARDEN - DAY

Jarvis foots a ladder against a shed. He looks back, gives the camera a toothy grin.

JARVIS

It was over there by the pond,
pawin' around after me Koi. I
starts bangin' on the window, he's
off like a rocket, made this roof
in one leap.

He pauses to crane his neck at the shed roof.

JARVIS

He's up there looking for prints.
Won't be any, had it re-felted
since.

(to Graham)

Find anything?

Graham's head pops over the side. Hands Jarvis a frisbee.

GRAHAM

You've some felting come loose.

JARVIS

(to camera)

I'll want to get that taken care
of 'fore winter.

INT. CHEESESTONE BUNGALOW - LOUNGE - DAY

Modest. The uncluttered, coaster and doily glow of everything in its rightful, scuff-free place.

A framed B/W picture on a wall. It shows an old man looking wistfully out across the moors.

GRAHAM (O.S.)

That was Gramps. Mack Cheesestone.
No longer with us, on account of
his dying. We scattered his ashes
on that very spot.

Graham plucks down the picture, points out the spot.

GRAHAM

He wanted a viking burial truth be
known. Fiery arrow to a floating
funeral pyre. You try getting
council approval for that.

A study desk. A number of books and jars on a shelf above.

A handwritten label on one jar: Scat. Pottscrow, March '07.

Graham shows the camera a plaster cast of a paw print.

GRAHAM

Took this from a sighting a few
weeks back. You see the lack of
claw marks at the head of the toe
pads? Very puma-like. That or a
lightly trodden dog.

A selection of Disney movies stand out on a bookcase.

GRAHAM

They're Val's. For when the
nieces and nephews come over.
Me sisters' kids. Val's an only
child.

French doors look out over a tidy, well kept lawn. A bare
rotary line leans to one side.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Never had time for kids. Not sure
we ever really will...

Graham, a different sort of distance in his eyes now.

BRRING! Graham snaps out of it. Reaches for a house phone.

GRAHAM

That'll be Tarney, got to arrange
tomorrows meeting. Excuse me.

(on phone)

Tarney!

He exits into the back garden.

KITCHEN

Val kneels before an open cupboard, transfers a stack of
tinned vegetables from the counter above.

VAL

(to camera)

I worry, I know it's silly, can't
help myself. I tell him, 'Graham
luv' I know you want to find
what's out there, but what if it
finds you? You'll end up eaten
that's what.

Through kitchen window: Graham drapes the flysheet of his
hide to air over the line.

VAL (O.S.)

I've nothing against hobbies. I've
a friend, John, he bird-watches.
He ticks them off on a list.

Val, still storing away the tins.

VAL

Sees a Warbler, done. Bunting,
done, tick 'em off go home. His
friend calls: 'John there's a
Bunting'. 'What kind?' 'Lark...'
Checks his list, Lark Bunting
-- seen it. No thanks pal gonna
stay home with the wife...
You can't insure against getting
eaten. Partially or otherwise. I
checked.

She shakes her head. And still the tins keep coming.

INT. GRAHAM'S CAR - MOVING - DAY

Val drives. Graham in the passenger seat, camera and binoculars at the ready. The engine STRAINS in low gear.

GRAHAM

We're off to the flea market.
Always take the back-roads. It's
the long way round, but there's
more sightings out here than
anywhere else.

(to Val)

You can put it in fourth Val love,
it's after third for a reason.

VAL

It's in fourth.

GRAHAM

Val's one for the market. Loves
her trinkets don't you dear. Those
little statues of kids with big
heads urinating in ponds.

VAL

Cherubs.

(to camera)

I collect ceramics.

GRAHAM

Dozens of the things.
It's in third.

Val irked, re-directs his attention to a passing field.

VAL

What's that out there?

Graham's on it with the binoculars.

GRAHAM

Cyclist.

VAL

Out there?

GRAHAM

Got a helmet on.

VAL

What's he doing in a field?

GRAHAM

He's on a mountain bike.

VAL

Waste of good money round here.

INT. FLEA MARKET - DAY

Rows of trestle tables set out with sellers' wares. The air alive with the hum and bustle of the crowd.

Val scans a table laden with ceramic miniatures.

TEA CART

Around a table sit Graham and two MEN. All practically dressed, like they've just stepped from a Millets ad.

GRAHAM

Right then, this is Tarney, club secretary and local big cat expert.
--No formal qualification.

TARNEY PAIL (60s), well groomed, officious, nods to camera.

GRAHAM

And that there is Roger, media.

ROGER EAVES (40s), bookish, gives a bashful little wave.

GRAHAM

And along with Paul, public relations, he's at a wedding, and myself we form the Bodmin Cryptozoological Association. Or the BCA, not to be confused with the British Caving Association.

TARNEY
Nor the British Cheerleading
Association...

They turn to their teas in hushed unison, as if at the
memory of some never to be mentioned event.

MOMENTS LATER

Tarney proudly displays a notebook to the camera:

GRAHAM (V.O.)
It was Tarney here who came up
with what we call the Mystery Big
Cat Numerical Verification System.

TARNEY
I classify and record each
sighting according to a strict
set of factors.

GRAHAM
Bloody genius.

Tarney picks a random page from the notebook.

TARNEY
A two-B for instance would be an
unsubstantiated, rural sighting in
the rain, by a credible witness.
Say a judge or a bus driver.

GRAHAM
A two-B can get quite competitive.

EXT. MOORLAND - DAY

Three hides, side by side.

INT. FLEA MARKET - TEA CART - DAY

Graham looks into the camera. Level. Serious.

GRAHAM

Unlike your four-B.

Tarney flips a page.

TARNEY

See now your four-B is essentially the same thing, though it slips a grade when the witness is deemed unreliable, like a child, or a heroin addict.

Tarney closes the notebook. Slips it into his coat.

GRAHAM

Bloody genius.

MOMENTS LATER

GRAHAM

(to camera)

We try to educate people, raise awareness, it was ignorance what did it for the dodo. Roger made a flyer.

FLEA MARKET - ENTRANCE - DAY

Roger hands fliers to indifferent passersby.

TEA CART

Graham counts on his fingers.

GRAHAM

We've done all kinds, radio, TV and newspaper interviews. Used to do school visits--

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

A dozen terrified KIDS (5-6) pour from a classroom amid screams of panic. A figure in a homemade BLACK PANTHER costume emerges, throws up his hands in defeat.

INT. FLEA MARKET - TEA CART - DAY

Graham faces the camera, guilty as charged.

FLEA MARKET - DAY

People wander the stalls. Among them, Val.

MOMENTS LATER

Val and Graham wander slowly. She shows off her new cherub.

GRAHAM

Oh that's nice. That really is,
you've done well there Val.

VAL

Had to choose.

GRAHAM

There was more than one?

VAL

There always is.

Graham stops, senses the longing in her voice.

GRAHAM

You should go get it.

VAL

Oh, no it's okay.

GRAHAM

No really, go on. Treat yourself.

Graham reaches for his wallet.

VAL

It's five pounds.

He quickly replaces it before she's had time to notice.

GRAHAM

Five pounds?

VAL

It was a nice piece though.

Their eyes fall back to the cherub in her hand.

VAL

Still, a fiver.

GRAHAM

Yeah. Fun of collecting you know?

VAL

Yeah.

GRAHAM

Can take years.

EXT. FLEA MARKET - CAR PARK - DAY

Graham's car reverses from a space and pulls away.

EXT. BODMIN MOOR - GRAHAM'S HIDE - DAY

A lonely, anomalous shape against the horizon.

A HIKER, face unseen, approaches the hide.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

I don't feel the cold. I've this
coat, Val gave it me for Christmas.

INT. GRAHAM'S HIDE - CONTINUOUS

Graham, alert at the binoculars as always.

GRAHAM

I don't need it, but she was all
'you're not coming home giving me a
cold, making me all sick--'

--The Hiker briefly covers the lens, Graham flails off his
camp stool, flicks his coffee everywhere.

HIKER

Find yer tiger yet?

Graham brushes himself off. A hint of panic in his voice:

GRAHAM

No not yet.

He watches after the Hiker. A little wounded.

GRAHAM

(to camera)

It'll not likely be a tiger. Very unlikely that. Any luck whatever it is, it eats dickheads. Probably not, all that gortex.

EXT. BODMIN MOOR - DAY

Graham traverses a hillside. The valley spread out below.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

It's heartening to me. To think there's things we've yet to see. Things that's such a part of this land they've become practically invisible.

Pauses to take in the view. Eyes soaking up that perennial distance.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

I like to think that was what kept me Grandad on the roam. That's what keeps me warm.

He tenses, eyes lock--

--relaxes. Takes a sip of coffee.

GRAHAM

Cow.

INT. GRAHAM'S HIDE - DAY

GRAHAM

People ask me 'what would you do
if you saw it?'

He pops a piece of liquorice in his mouth, chews it over
thoughtfully a moment...

GRAHAM

I'd probably just go home.

FADE OUT