



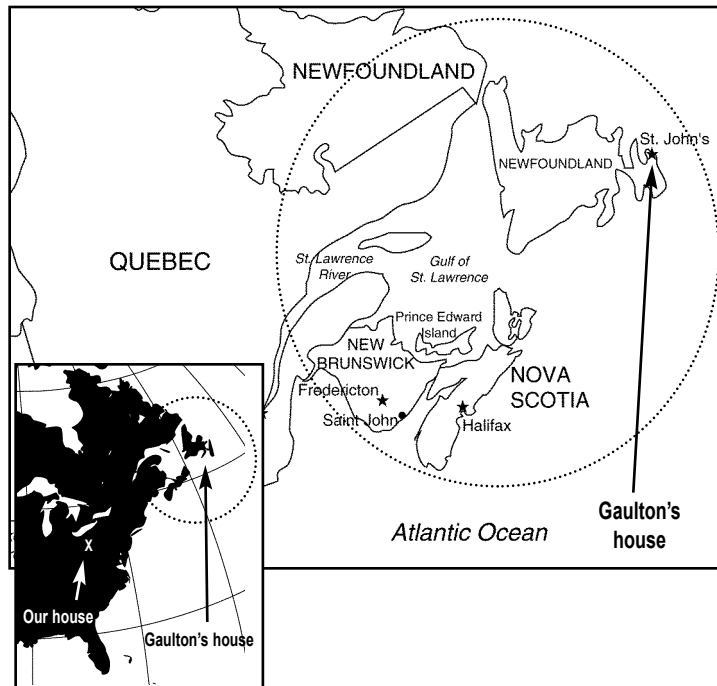
Hive Animals

WE ARRANGED FOR PENELOPE TO STAY AT HER GRANDMOTHER'S house for a few days, faxed our itinerary to Gaulton, and took a Thursday morning flight from Pittsburgh to St. John's. At the St. John's airport, we picked up a small rental car, a cherry red two-door compact — the cheapest car available. My meeting with Professor Gaulton was scheduled for the next day, and we decided to take advantage of our extra time by touring the area.

The day we arrived was blustery and overcast, but by late afternoon the sun had started to poke out from behind the thick clouds. We spent the afternoon driving along the sea coast and enjoying some of the beautiful ocean vistas on this rugged island, soaking up the sea air like sponges.

In St. John's, the local people were amazingly friendly; even the drivers were unbelievably courteous. If we stopped along a curb to cross a street while walking through the city, the traffic in both directions would stop to let us cross. In Pittsburgh, had we tried a stunt like that we would've been flattened like roadkill. We liked Newfoundland immediately, and we found St. John's to be a charming, progressive city with lots of quaint restaurants and pubs. We took advantage of this, and spent the evening strolling from pub to pub, trying out the local brews.

The following day, after getting directions at the hotel, we decided to walk the few short blocks to St. John's College. The grounds were strangely quiet; only a few students milled about the campus. I realized that the college



was probably between terms, and that the summer school student population was small.

We easily located the building that housed Professor Gaulton's office. Like most of the structures on campus, it had a faded brick facade and a green and purple slate roof. Hand in hand, Annie and I climbed the set of stone steps leading to the heavy front doors. After finding our way to room 217 on the second floor, I rapped loudly. The door swung wide, and a short, middle-aged, balding man with a dark ring of hair, impeccably dressed in a black suit and lavender tie, stood before us, wearing a blank expression. When I introduced the two of us, a broad smile flashed across his face. "Ah ha! Yes! Come in! Please do come in and make yourselves at home." Professor Gaulton gestured with a sweep of his arm, ushering us into his office. "Please, have a seat. Here, Mrs. Jenkins, please, sit," he said. "Make yourselves comfortable. Can I get you some

coffee?”

What ensued was a seemingly interminable string of courtesies and hospitable gestures, and we soon had coffee and shortbread cookies in hand. Professor Gaulton’s office was small, dim, and stuffy, reminding me of Lucy’s abandoned cottage on the Indian reservation. Book cases crammed with books and plastic models of insects lined two walls from floor to ceiling. A small window opposite the door afforded only a limited view of the tiny campus. An enormous oak desk cluttered with papers, books, and framed photographs, dominated the middle of the room. Large posters of praying mantis life cycles and insect pests covered the wall around the door. A coffee-maker and a tin of cookies sat within arm’s reach of the desk.

I surveyed the piles of books in every corner of the room. “How long have you been here, at this college, Professor Gaulton?”

“Nearly 30 years, sir. I’m now considering retiring, in fact. But what would I do if I retire? This has been my whole life. Maybe I could get a job flipping hamburgers?” The professor leaned back in his chair, threw his head back, placed his hands on his round belly and began to shake. A booming laugh erupted from his smiling face. After a bit of such jovial chit-chat we soon warmed up to each other enough to get to the meat of things, and at one point, Annie simply asked, “Do you know what we’re doing here, Professor? Because we don’t, and we’ve come a very long way. I sure hope you can help us.”

“Yeah, you wouldn’t believe how we got here,” I added.

“If it had anything to do with Dr. Boggs, I would probably believe it,” he replied.

“Well, at my aunt’s suggestion—”

“And how did she make a suggestion to you while dead, if you don’t mind me asking?” he interrupted, raising an eyebrow.

“She left me a note.”

“Oh. Okay. Whatever works. What kind of note?”

“After Lucy died, her lawyers sent me a letter that

she'd written. Her letter requested for me to go to her house in Montana where she had left some things for me." Professor Gaulton listened intently. "One of those things was a business card that led me to a group of women who call themselves the Sisters of the Sacred Circle."

"Were these women nuns?" he asked, obviously unfamiliar with the Sisters.

"Not by any stretch of the imagination. They're Wiccans."

"Oh yes. I'm familiar with that. Neowitchcraft."

"Well, it was certainly new to me. Anyway, at the meeting I had with these sisters, they suggested that there was a good reason for me to go to Newfoundland. Trouble is, they didn't say what that reason was."

"How did they decide upon Newfoundland, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"They consulted a quartz crystal."

The professor leaned back and let out another of his earthquake laughs. "That sounds just like something Dr. Boggs would do! I fear you've bitten off more than you can chew! Yes sir, Dr. Boggs, she was like that. Ha!"

"Yes, I know it sounds bizarre. It's a long story, but believe me, it's been interesting. Basically, the Sisters used a crystal to point to a place on a map. They said I had a journey to take and the crystal would show me where to go. It pointed exactly to St. John's, Newfoundland. I couldn't figure out any connection until I looked through the address book I'd found in Lucy's house. You were the only contact I could find in Newfoundland, and you were even in St. John's. That's why I called *you*. So here we are, and feeling rather foolish to have come so far on such scant information. I hope we're not wasting our time or yours by being here."

"We don't usually have crystals make our decisions for us, professor. We're not that kind of people," Annie said.

"Under normal circumstances," I added. "But these aren't normal circumstances. You see, my aunt left us some money and asked us to finish a project of hers. Trouble is,

she didn't say what the project was. So we're kind of groping through the dark with this thing, trying to figure it out. We're hoping you can help us."

The professor looked a bit startled. "Incredible. So the crystal sent you to me, did it?" He strummed his thick fingers on the desktop. "Well, I think that maybe I can help you."

Annie and I looked at each other, relieved.

"I believe you are who you say you are. And I think I can give you a piece of Dr. Boggs' puzzle. But only a piece. I don't know what the project is that you speak of, but I may be able to provide some information that could prove useful. You see, your Aunt Lucy, as you call her, was very interested in my entomological work. She was a scientist in every respect, and she had a keen understanding of interrelationships. A couple of years ago, she attended one of my presentations at a conference. She hounded me ever since."

"What sort of presentation was it?"

"Hive insects. I did a honeybee presentation. What I refer to as their 'Robbing Frenzy.' It's a behavioral aberration that has thus far been exhibited only by honeybees, as far as anyone knows. We've been aware of this behavior for quite some time and find it to be very interesting. Perplexing, in fact. Extraordinary."

"Why would Lucy be interested in honeybees?"

"Oh, she wasn't, actually. Her species of interest was *Homo sapiens*."

"What do you mean? You're an entomologist, a specialist in insects, not an anthropologist, aren't you?"

"Precisely. It's quite simple, Mr. Jenkins. Dr. Boggs considered humans to be herd animals in small groups, and hive animals in large groups, such as in cities. An interesting theory, I must say. She thought that the Robbing Frenzy anomaly was possibly not limited to honeybees, after all. It was her belief that this perplexing psychological behavior is also being exhibited by one species of mammal. And that this behavior, if it continues, may lead, in effect, to the demise of our entire planetary ecosys-

tem and destroy the delicate ecological balance of the Earth itself. All indications are that such destruction is already underway.”

“What mammal, Professor Gaulton?” asked Annie.

“Why, *Homo sapiens*, human beings, of course.” The Professor gathered up some papers on his desk, placed them in his briefcase, and snapped the latches shut. He rose from his chair and brushed a piece of lint off his tie. “Look, why don’t you two come with me to my home? I live outside the city on about forty acres, right on the seashore. I have the rest of the day off, and I noticed this morning that the damned bees were up to no good. I need to go deal with that right away. It would provide you with a perfect opportunity to see *exactly* what I’m talking about. Besides, my wife makes the best apple pie you’ve ever eaten, and I would *insist* that you join us for dinner. Just watch out for moose on the road. We don’t see them very often this close to the city anymore, but if you hit one with your car, you may as well drive into a stone wall.”