



Ancient Heat

I TOOK A LONG DRAW FROM MY FROTHY BEER MUG AND rested the glass on the coffee table in front of me, licking the foam off my moustache. “Brian, I’m still not quite sure how the bee behavior we witnessed out there in your pasture has anything to do with my Aunt Lucy. I just don’t get the connection. And if I have too many more of these beers, I’m not gonna understand anything.”

“Ha! Yes, sir, these stouts will do that to ya!” The professor’s cheeks were flushed with color. Judy entered the room carrying a plate full of small, peeled carrots. “Here’s some finger food from our garden to hold you until dinner’s ready, which will be in about a half hour.”

“Thank you very much,” Annie said, taking a few carrots from the tray and passing it over to me. She turned to Professor Gaulton. “Professor, what *do* those bees have to do with Aunt Lucy?”

“It’s quite simple. Your Dr. Boggs was rather brilliant in many ways. When she heard my lectures on how bees abandoned their natural inclinations for order, efficiency, cooperation, and sustainability, and instead robbed honey until a hive was destroyed, she had a flash of insight. If such aberrant behavior can be triggered in *honeybees*, can *other* species also exhibit anything like this?” The professor leaned over and took a carrot from the tray, shrugging his

shoulders. He munched on the carrot as he continued.

“She was horrified to realize that yes, not only can another species be subject to such dreadful behavior, but that species was *us*, for god’s sake. You see, it occurred to her that humans are right now, as we speak, in the midst of a huge robbing frenzy.”

“What?!” we both said in unison.

“It makes complete sense when you think about it. A honeybee robbing frenzy only lasts until the honey is gone, maybe a week or two at the most. Humans, on the other hand, are on a different time scale. That means that a human-species robbing frenzy could last much longer, perhaps centuries. Lucille’s theory is that we’ve been in the midst of such a frenzy for generations, that’s why no one is noticing it. Everyone alive today was born into it and simply takes it for granted as normal behavior.”

“What are we humans robbing? Where is the back door to the hive, so to speak? I don’t get it.” Annie asked.

“We’re robbing the Earth’s resources, particularly the non-renewable ones. The frenzy really took off when oil was discovered. That was in, ah, Pennsylvania, I believe. That’s where you’re from, right? Quite a coincidence.”

“Yeah, oil was discovered at Drake’s well. That’s actually not very far from where we live,” I explained.

“You don’t say? Well, the world changed when Mr. Drake drilled his well and discovered oil. Because, at that time, according to Dr. Boggs, he discovered that there was a back door to the hive, and no one was guarding it. The non-renewable resources that had taken nature millions and millions of years to create, and which had laid in storage in the ground, kind of like honey in a hive, except this had been around for eons, could now be extracted by anyone with the means to do so. People could claim the resources for themselves and thereby get fabulously rich overnight. A colossal robbing frenzy began in earnest in the late 1800s, and continues to this day, unimpeded. No one has a roll of duct tape big enough to plug the holes. It could be done politically, but the politicians have their fin-

gers in the honey pot, too. And there are thousands of these holes, all being sucked dry by people who are now very rich and powerful.”

“So, you’re saying an oil well is like a hole in the back of a bee hive. It makes people crazy?” I asked.

“No, that’s not quite it. When our ancestors first came over to this continent, they found an immense storehouse of natural resources from coast to coast. They also found that the native Americans, the people who already lived here, were incapable of defending those resources. The Europeans could easily take the resources for themselves — land, forests, slaves, game, minerals, gold — and they did just that. So, in effect, a robbing frenzy probably started with the Spaniards and their quest for gold in the late 1400s. The pilfering of resources continued through the 19th century, when oil was discovered. It was the oil that really made people rich. People became millionaires overnight. This added a new and earnest momentum to the robbing frenzy that was already underway. Essentially we still believed, psychologically, that we were stealing from the native Americans. What we didn’t understand was that the country was now ours and we were simply robbing ourselves. According to Dr. Boggs, the robbing frenzy continues to this day, except we’re robbing our own hive, so to speak, and don’t realize it. She said that this was pathological behavior and insisted that something must be done to stop it.”

“So what are you saying, that our hive’s going to run out of honey and we’re all going to die?” I asked in disbelief.

“Well, yes, and no. You may be missing the point. Honeybees are, by nature, very productive and rather sane creatures. They have a way of living that has evolved not only to perfection, but in complete harmony with their surrounding natural world. They can sustain themselves indefinitely, efficiently, and happily, while living in balance, cooperation, and mutual benefit with nature. Unless, that is, their behavior is triggered by some unknown patho-

logical influence, call it greed, perhaps, which sparks a disastrous robbing frenzy. They don't have the means to stop the frenzy themselves, so it has to either be stopped by a higher power, which is perhaps an egotistical way to refer to a beekeeper, or it has to run itself out, continuing until the honey is gone and a hive has been destroyed."

"And humans?"

"The human species is essentially in an identical situation. For all we know, we're also by nature efficient, cooperative, and sustainable creatures. We humans can also live in harmony with the planet, and perhaps play a mutually beneficial role in the web of life, just like bees do as pollinators. In fact, we might very well do so naturally and effortlessly, like honeybees, if we weren't caught up in a robbing frenzy, which is totally distorting our view of reality, and draining the hive, so to speak. Perhaps humans, like honeybees, suffer from a psychological weakness called avarice, triggered by the availability of unguarded resources. Like alcoholics, we can't control this illness. According to Dr. Boggs, this is leading to world wide disaster. And we can't see it because our awareness and understanding is clouded by our culture's collective pathological behavior. We're taught from a young age that the excessive accumulation of material wealth is a good thing. Therefore, according to Dr. Boggs, we can't gain a proper perspective on our behavior."

"What do you mean, disaster? You mean we're going to run out of oil? That doesn't sound like a disaster. It's not like we need oil to survive; we don't eat it, for chrissakes. As the supplies drop, our use of it will drop, too, don't you think? It seems to me that it's simply a self-regulating process."

"I wish it were that simple, Joe. There are a few problems, however, with that argument. You're right, we don't *eat* oil, but we've developed global agricultural systems which are totally dependent on oil to synthesize fertilizers, power the tractors, ship the goods around the world." I nodded, suddenly beginning to understand what he was

saying. “We’re increasing our population exponentially, a population now dependent on the availability of oil for food production. As our population increases, our species becomes top-heavy in numbers, so to speak, while the non-renewable resource base supporting it is slowly being whittled away. Eventually our entire support system could topple. That’s an impending disaster scenario, like the bees finding they don’t have enough honey to survive the winter. By the time they’ve figured this out, it’s too late. Humans are setting themselves up for a similar fate. And that’s not the worst of it. Not by a long shot.”

“What do you mean?”

“According to your aunt, we’ve become so blinded by our robbing frenzy mentality, a behavior that we’ve learned to take completely for granted, that we’ve lost touch with the natural balance of the Earth. A balance that we, in our blind race for more ‘honey,’ are pushing farther and farther off kilter. As a species, we’re now burning up so much oil, gas, and coal and releasing so much ancient heat into the atmosphere, that we’ve begun a shift in the Earth’s climate that appears to be making the planet sick, if you will, and is quite likely to yield deleterious effects of untold proportions, for all of life, for centuries to come.”

“Ancient heat?” asked Annie.

“Plants collected energy from the sun for many millions of years,” the professor explained. “That energy became stored in the Earth in the form of fossil fuels. We release ancient heat when we burn those fuels. So the heat energy that’s taken plants eons to collect on this planet is being released back into the atmosphere in a split-second of Earth time, by humans. We’re also releasing an incredible amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere when we do this, and the carbon dioxide helps to hold heat near the surface of the planet. Our robbing frenzy is heating the planet unnaturally, creating a rapidly descending spiral toward planetary imbalance.”

“Okay, Brian. Now hold on a second. We’re just country people from small town America. We should be home

feeding our animals right now. I have firewood to split, and a garden to tend. By the time we get home it'll be a 4,000 mile round trip for us. You're saying that we've traveled all this way just to find out that my Aunt Lucy thought that the human race is like a bunch of psychotic bees? That information's about as useful to me as tits on a chicken," I said sarcastically.

"Joe!" Annie scolded. "Maybe if you pay attention, you might learn something!"

Professor Gaulton looked at the floor and shook his head ruefully. "*Neurotic* honeybees would be a more appropriate way of stating it. Dr. Boggs had concluded that certain subcultures of the human species, including ours, by the way, are indeed like neurotic bees. But she also was forced to speculate on the theory that humans, like honeybees, are also perhaps quite sane under normal conditions, and could perhaps be a thing of beauty on this planet, rather than the plague we seem to be becoming. She thought that if we could cure our alcoholism, so to speak, our avarice, we'd do just fine on this planet. That may be her greater discovery, her more profound theory. In any case, I think that your aunt's bee theory is just one piece to a puzzle. She never revealed the other pieces or the entire picture to me, because she was still finding and putting the parts together herself the last time I saw her, a year ago. Apparently, she was well on her way toward piecing together a puzzle of a profound nature. Why else would she have made preparations to have someone carry on in her footsteps in the event of an untimely death?"

"So what're we supposed to do now, Professor? Joe's aunt had an epiphany somehow linked to the behavior of honeybees. Where does that leave us? If we're to pick up where she left off, she did a lousy job of preparing us. We are, to be honest, quite clueless about all of this. My husband's a roofer, not a researcher. I'm a housewife and a mother. Is it really worth it for us to be running around on what may be nothing more than a wild goose chase?"

"I assume Joe's aunt gave you some kind of instruc-

tions, Annie. If so, did she say anything about the end of the world?”

“Well, she said that a terrible battle is upon us —”

“At hand, those were her words. A battle is at hand,” I interjected.

“Whatever. Please don’t interrupt me,” Annie said with obvious irritation. “And Lucy said the future of the planet is in question.”

“Can I talk now?” I asked impatiently. “She said the future of our species and the world is *at stake*. Believe me, I’ve read her letter fifty times.”

“Then I must pose the obvious question to both of you,” the professor interjected. “Is the future of our planet, our world, and our species, worth what may appear to you to be a wild goose chase? Does the end of the world mean anything to you? What if your aunt is correct in her assumptions? Maybe she was on to something. Maybe you’d be abandoning an opportunity of a lifetime by going home and forgetting about all this. Or maybe going home and tending to your garden is the right thing to do. I don’t know. I just can’t tell you what the answer is. You have to feel it in your own hearts.”

“What’s with the long faces, here?” asked Judy, walking into the room untying her apron. “Whatever Brian told you, I really am an okay cook! And it’s time to eat!”

“You’re a wonderful cook, dear. We’ll be right there.”

Judy wiped her hands on her apron and shook a finger at the professor as she left the room, “You have five minutes!”

“One final thing, Joe. Did Lucille ever talk to you about a Dr. Tomasso? Cecilia Tomasso? She’s a pathologist in Nova Scotia.”

“I never talked to Lucille about anything, actually. I didn’t even know her personally.”

“That’s odd. Why would she have entrusted you to take on a project of hers, then? Quite strange. In any case, Dr. Tomasso was a friend of Dr. Boggs. She may have some further insight into Lucille’s theories. My guess is that

you'll be stopping in Halifax on your flight back. Is that so?"

"Yes," Annie said. "Our plane does stop over in Halifax. But only for a couple hours."

"It may be worth your while to extend your stop-over for a day and look up this Dr. Tomasso. It's just a suggestion. Obviously, you can do what you want to do. But, I have her phone number and can give her a call for you. It's up to you."

I looked at Annie. She just shrugged her shoulders. I shrugged mine back and concentrated on draining the rest of my beer.

"C'mon, everyone," a voice impatiently called from the kitchen. "What do you want, a handwritten invitation? Dinner's getting cold!"

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