



Halifax

DR. TOMASSO WAS A MEDICAL DOCTOR WHO WORKED IN Halifax, Nova Scotia. After dinner that evening, Professor Gaulton had telephoned her and made arrangements for us to meet her on Monday.

We caught a flight into Halifax on Sunday afternoon and checked into a hotel near the airport. We had to pay an extra \$50 per plane ticket in order to alter our flight schedule and extend our layover for a day, but it seemed like a small price to pay under the circumstances, and besides, Lucy was covering it. We were to meet with Dr. Tomasso at noon the next day.

We spent that Sunday afternoon and evening walking about downtown Halifax, trying the microbrewed beers and doing a little shopping, mostly for souvenirs for the kids back home. Like St. John's, the people were extremely congenial and the city, the capital seat of this eastern Canadian province, had a homey, small town atmosphere, especially in the city center. Although the weather was a bit drier than in Newfoundland, the sea, as in St. John's, was everpresent. Halifax Harbor was having some water pollution problems at the time, however, and the issue seemed to be popular on the local news media. Apparently, sewage was collecting in the harbor and ruining the water

quality; no one quite seemed to know what to do about it.

We made our way to an old pub in the city center. Its darkened wood interior was decorated with antique harpoons, while fishing nets and a wooden row boat hung from the ceiling. The place, reeking of briny marine memories, was filled with crusty-looking patrons, many of whom probably made their livings from the sea. Annie managed to strike up a conversation with a gentleman sitting beside her at the bar. After critiquing the pub's selection of lagers and ales, their discussion quickly turned to homebrewing, one of Annie's favorite topics of conversation, since she's the "brewmistress" of our household. I was left to pick at the popcorn in the basket in front of me. I listened to their chitchat with little interest, until, quite unexpectedly, the subject shifted to Newfoundland.

"So you just came from Newfoundland?" I heard the bearded man say. "Lots of unemployment up there, ay?"

"What do you mean?" asked Annie.

"Everyone's out of work up there, don't you know? The fisheries collapsed."

"What fisheries?"

"So you weren't there long, huh? Tourists, no doubt."

"No, actually, we were there on business," I heard Annie explain.

"Oh? What business is that? Not the fishing business, I'd say."

"No, just some research. It's hard to explain. My husband's doing some research on, ah, honeybees. That's why we went up there."

"Well, if he'd been doing research on fish, he'd know that the Newfies fished the hell out of the Atlantic cod. Depleted the entire stock. Used to be so many cod up there you could practically walk across the ocean on their backs! Now you're lucky to find two to rub together." He shook his head in dismay and took a long swig from his mug. "The government had to step in and ban cod fishing after the collapse of the fishery. Too bad they didn't do it sooner. Yep, used to have the biggest cod schools in the world. All

gone now. Everyone made their income from the cod. Now they're all out of work. The world's just going to hell in a handbasket."

It was the first I had heard of any collapsing fisheries, and, remembering the news about Halifax Harbor's pollution problems, I leaned over the bar in front of Annie and asked, "What did you say killed the cod off Newfoundland? Pollution?"

"Nah. Overfishing. People just don't know when to stop, ay? They see a good thing and then the buggers exploit the hell out of it, like they don't have a brain in'r head. Like there's no tomorrow. Like their grandkids won't want fish to eat. Bloody hell!" The man shook his head and took another long draw on his draught. "My grandfather was a fisherman," he continued, wiping his beard with his shirt sleeve. "My father fished for a while, too. I got fishing in me blood. We'd all be eating fresh Atlantic cod today if the Newfies had protected their fisheries. I don't know what gets into people. I think the Japs took a lot of the fish. And the Russkies too. Goddam..."

Our new-found friend began grumbling under his breath; he'd worked himself into quite a mood. Annie and I downed the last few drops of our beer and decided it was a good time for us to exit.

Back in our hotel room, we felt like vegetating in front of the television for a while, a novelty, since we didn't, by choice, have a TV back home. We ordered room service, and found ourselves sitting on the bed, side by side, eating pizza, the flickering blue light of the TV dancing on our faces. I held the TV's remote control in my hand and was flipping from channel to channel, which was driving Annie crazy.

"Why don't you just put it on *one* channel and *leave* it there!?"

"I do," I said, clicking a button.

"You just changed it again!" she protested. "You're giving me a headache!"

"I leave it on one channel until there's a commercial.

Then I look for something else. I'm not watching any goddam commercials."

"Just *mute* it when there's a commercial, dammit! Give me that remote control!"

"Like hell!" I fought Annie back with one arm and kept surfing through the channels, finally hitting a public broadcasting station. Then I stopped. "There. No commercials."

"Finally!" She rolled her eyes at me and sank back into the pillows we'd propped up behind us. "Thank god. I was going blind!"

"Shocking developments in the world's climate are now unfolding before our eyes around the world," the TV announcer intoned. *"Scientists are attributing the developments to global warming. Over a thousand square miles of Antarctic ice shelves collapsed into the sea from March 1998 to March 1999. Glaciers are also melting at unprecedented rates in Peru, Russia, and India. The resulting rising seas are killing coastal mangrove forests in Bermuda, destroying beaches in Hawaii, and inundating shorelines in Fiji."*

"Listen to this," I said to Annie.

"The warmest June on record in Lhasa, Tibet, occurred in 1998, the warmest August in Cairo occurred in 1998, the warmest July in New York City occurred in 1999." The voice-overs were spoken in dramatic tones as deep drums boomed in the background. *"Malaria is spreading in Kenya and Indonesia to elevations where it has never existed before. Mosquito-borne dengue and yellow fever are climbing to record elevations in Colombia."*

"Look. This is really happening," I said incredulously. "These aren't predictions, they're *reports*. This is the *news*. I didn't see any of this on the other channels. Just a lot of hair spray commercials and crap that women buy," I said.

"Like hell. How would you know? You skipped over the commercials!" Annie said indignantly. "Besides, they were car commercials, mostly gas-hog pickup trucks for macho men."

"Trucks, hell. They were selling fur coats," I replied.

“Men don’t wear fur coats.”

“What about those viagra commercials?” she snapped back.

“I saw feminine hygiene spray commercials,” I countered.

“They were selling crap to get rid of baldness,” she said.

“They were selling panty hose.”

“In England, migratory birds are now laying their eggs almost nine days earlier than in 1971. An unheard of 22 inches of rain fell on Santa Barbara, California, in February, 1998, the highest ever recorded. In a three-day period in 1998, over a foot of rain fell on Sydney, Australia, equivalent to an incredible three months rainfall. 1998 was the hottest year ever recorded, perhaps the hottest year in the last millennium, and exhibited the largest annual increase by a wide margin, according to alarmed NASA scientists.”

“Shaving cream.”

“Lipstick.”

“Snowless days in Barrow, Alaska, have increased by more than 20% since the 1950s. Arctic sea ice has receded by six percent just since 1978. Severe widespread droughts and forest fires occurred in Spain in 1994, Mexico in 1998, and Indonesia in 1998.”

“Look at this stuff,” I exclaimed. “Didn’t Professor Gaulton say something about global warming? The bees were robbing honey so fast that they were heating up, or something?”

“You *are* dense, aren’t you? Don’t you *ever* pay attention? Jeez!” she sighed, exasperated. “Humans are burning so many *fossil fuels* that the Earth’s climate is heating up. Haven’t you ever heard of the Greenhouse Effect? It’s causing severe weather conditions around the world. Listen to what they’re saying. It’s the *result* of Lucy’s robbing frenzy!”

“Global warming may disrupt the North Atlantic Current to such an extent that it actually drops the average temperature in Europe by 9 to 18 degrees Fahrenheit due to a stalled Gulf

Stream, creating a disastrous mini Ice Age there. Record-breaking 240 mile-per-hour winds were recorded in Guam in 1997. In 1998, at least 56 countries suffered severe floods, while another 45 cooked under the heat of severe droughts. Global warming, with all of its associated weather extremes, is now a scientific reality, and there is no end in sight. Scientists have no idea how hot things will get, or how long they will stay that way.”

“Good pizza, huh?” I said, ignoring the TV. “Let’s see what’s on another channel. Maybe there’s some sci-fi.”

“You’re hopeless!”

“Why? What did I say now?”

“How and why your aunt ever picked *you* to do her research is a mystery to me. I don’t think she knew that your skull was solid clear through. Here’s a program that’s really worthwhile and perfectly suited to the research you’re supposed to be doing. And you want to flip through the channels!?”

“I don’t know what research I’m *supposed* to be doing. Okay, okay, I can see that maybe there is some global warming occurring. But what the hell am *I* supposed to do about it? What can one person do about something that’s changing the entire world? What do you want me to do? Huh? Just tell me!”

“I don’t know!” she said, punching down the pillows. “Let’s just get some sleep and worry about it tomorrow. Maybe Dr. Tomato or whatever her name is will have some answers.”

“Fine with me. Good night.” And good riddance, I thought, biting my tongue. I flipped through the channels some more while Annie rolled over and pulled the blanket over her head. “Look! Star Trek!”

“Gimme a break. I’m trying to sleep,” Annie murmured, burying her head in the pillow. I dimmed the lights and watched Captain Kirk battle aliens until my eyelids got too heavy to hold open.