

THE ROOKERY

THE FIRST BEGINNING

My name is Edward Storie. I am a reporter working at an upstate New York weekly newspaper. I am about six feet two inches tall, and I weigh roughly one hundred ninety pounds. My hair is sandy, and my eyes are brown. I am a recent graduate from SUNY Adirondack where I was a collegiate wrestler. I want to be a writer.

This is the story of how I rescued a girl that they called Holly Golightly because she looked like Audrey Hepburn.

The story begins with a postcard of the Adirondacks, a panorama of the High Peaks and of the Wild Forests in a patchwork of autumn colors, as seen from the mountain that they call, Whiteface, in the town of Wilmington, New York. The card was unsigned, and the word “Come” was written in cursive on the back.

It was early morning...dawn. I had just risen and made a pot of coffee. I set the postcard on its edge, resting inclined against my first cup. The cup was plain and white. The coffee was black, and I had not yet had a sip. The sun was rising in the kitchen window behind me. The horizon was golden. I stared at the postcard drowsy-eyed, and I breathed slowly, only half awake.

Soon, my stare focused meditatively, and my breathing ritually deepened. My eyes searchingly swept the expanse of the Wild Forests. My ears heard the voices of and from within the autumn trees. My nose smelled their lost verdancy, and my tongue tasted their fallen fruit. I reached to touch the rugged High Peaks and, as I did, I experienced a heightened sense of consciousness, a sixth sense.

A hypnotic, disembodied voice whispered to me, “Come,” and I entered the postcard.

This is fiction.

Come.

THE ROOKERY CHAPTER ONE - OXYTOCIN

Yesterday, the Northcountry Center for Ideological Cleansing at the Rookery in St. Frederick, New York, announced an astonishing new discovery that has enthused the pseudo-scientific world with googled wonderment. Doctor Zorba Kildeere, the famed bioanthropologist, has proclaimed the discovery to be a “real zeitgeist changer.” As a reporter for Adirondack Stream Media, I had gone to investigate. I am also a struggling writer, and I could smell a good story.

I met Dr. Kildeere in the guest foyer of the tan brick main building on his NCIC campus, a complex that included a modern chemical laboratory.

“Bioanthropologists have long accepted that canine human relationships are symbiotic,” Dr. Kildeere told me. “At NCIC we have determined that the symbiotic nature of this relationship is more truly psychochemical than biological as it is among plants and brute animals.”

“A psychochemical symbiosis defies the traditional understanding of brute or plant symbiotics,” the Doctor said, “The psyche is traditionally not considered a brute or plant attribute. We reject this traditional view. We have experimented with a hormone, oxytocin, found in both dogs and humans. We believe that this is at the root of their psychochemical symbiosis.”

Kildeere is a short man, I’d say about five eight seeing as I was a good six inches taller, in his middle age, with a still thick head of black hair graying at the temples, and a salt and pepper goatee. He wore thin framed glasses that darken in the sunlight, but not so dark as to conceal his eyes, which were penetrating in their blackness.

“Come,” Kildeere invited me. “I will take you to visit our commune. There you will witness the fruits of our labors. We are remodeling the American zeitgeist.” With a hand on my shoulder, Kildeere led me from the foyer of the Rookery.

South of the main office building was a community of yurts of various sizes and colors, some small and some double yurts, some yellowing, some pale green. Outside a yellow yurt, by its open door, stood a young woman in a paisley, peasant dress. Before her played two, blond haired children, a boy, and a girl. The girl danced, lightly twirling on tiptoes. The boy and the young woman smiled.

At a neighboring green yurt, sat two young men and a second young woman, cross legged, hands resting in their laps, dazedly smiling skyward. Nearby was a bearded man in a straw hat bent over to pluck a purple wildflower.

An attractively alluring young woman with shoulder length, auburn hair, dressed in khaki summer hiking pants and a light blue cotton shirt, waltzed dreamily across a field of wildflowers. She caught my eye. She gazed musingly. Then, with a slight turn of her head, she lightly danced away.

Couples strolled about on gravel walkways in smiling conversation. It was the kind of bucolic scene that you might anticipate in an Adirondack town park during the middle of

summer. At the same time, it was oddly unfamiliar. Other than the woman in the field of wildflowers, the people were dressed as if for a festival, the men in white, cotton, peasant shirts or tunics over loose, cotton pants, and the women in long sleeveless, cotton peasant dresses of many colors.

They seemed airily incarnate, like blithely embodied spirits. It was surreal. I was becoming light headed when Kildeere grasped my right shoulder and directed me away. He took me across the palisade to the largest of the yurts, one suitable for a large gathering. Music came through its canvas walls, the music of flutes and strings and of a softly jingled tambourine. We entered.

Kildeere parroted Dylan, “Hey, Mr. Tambourine man, play a song for me.”

Everyone turned and laughed and sang “Doctor K, Doctor K come and play.” The Doctor borrowed a flute and blew a passable Ian Anderson, although I do not know the tune. Men and women hugged and swayed dreamily. Rhythmless children bounced and danced holding hands.

Kildeere returned the flute, patted my back, and led me from the yurt. He smiled at me, and I smiled back, though I wasn’t sure why. “Do you see what we have done?” He waved his free hand before me. “It is our hormone.”

“But, Doctor Kildeere,” I asked, “Where are the dogs?”

“Ahh, that is just it. We have isolated and reproduced the hormone in our laboratory. The hormone is now administered as a nasal spray. Dogs are no longer necessary to obtain the hormone’s mood-altering benefits. The effects of the spray are much stronger and last much longer than the temporary pleasures of snuggling with a puppy.

“That is why we have established our small commune, to better evaluate and measure the hormone’s broader behavioral and cognitive implications. We intend to prove that the hormone encourages desirable, healthy prosocial behavior.

“We will change first the Adirondack zeitgeist, then the world.” He smiled as we strolled

back towards the Rookery.

“But, Doctor,” I intruded on his reverie, “what about the dogs?”

“Young man,” he looked at me instructively, “dogs will no longer be necessary to one’s happiness...or be a bothersome intrusion upon one’s day. Think of it! No more feedings or messes to pick up after. No shedding. No gouges in the wood floors. No early morning or late- night walks in all kinds of weather. No barking. I could go on. No more growls and bites that scar for life.”

I looked at him somewhat horrified. Was he serious? “We’re in the Adirondacks,” I reminded him. “While there may be issues about leashes on the trails and other such nonsense, the idea of no dogs will not go over well here. Frankly, Doctor, I would expect a revolt.”

“Yes,” we have anticipated resistance. We have developed the hormone as an odorless and tasteless aerosol. Drones will deliver the molecularized hormone throughout the Adirondacks like tiny, little crop dusters. The population will be pacified and trusting of our prosocial agenda and a world without dogs.”

I could only slowly, nervously, shake my lowered head. Sure, a socially cognitive world may be desirable, even one that was chemically induced. Isn't that what Timothy Leary preached? But a world without dogs is not a price I would be prepared to pay. I expressed my gratitude and took my leave, glad to watch the Rookery fade behind me in my rearview mirror.

THE ROOKERY

CHAPTER TWO - HOLLY

I had driven a little more than two miles from the Rookery, and had turned south on County Route 48, when I heard a soft, girlish voice from the backseat of my pickup, “Would you like a sniff of my spray?” she offered.

I was startled and quickly looked over my right shoulder at the stowaway. It was the auburn-haired woman in the blue, cotton shirt that I had seen strolling in the field of wildflowers. “Who are you?” I asked. I looked back at her through my rear-view mirror, and then again in my sideview mirror, seeing her in profile. She was pretty.

“Mel...Melony. But they call me Holly. It’s from a movie,” she droned. “I don’t know what movie. They say that’s who I remind them of, Holly Golightly. Well...Dr. Kildeere says that. He gave me that name. He has given all of us names. That is how he controls us. Movie names. But he is the only one who knows the movies...Melony...” Her voice drifted away as her eyes stared blankly into the mirror at mine.

“Do you want a sniff?” She reached over the back of the driver’s seat to push something toward my face.

“No, thank you. What are you doing in my truck?” I glanced at her again in the rearview mirror. She did look a little like Audrey Hepburn, although with her long auburn hair, she looked more like Doolittle than Golightly, a bit younger, maybe twenty-two or twenty-three, very pretty with hazel eyes that had a dazed but dim glow. She was seductive.

She withdrew her arm and sat back upright. She turned her head to stare blankly out of the cab window at the passing pastures and yellow-green hills of the Champlain Valley. The Adirondack high peaks rose starkly in the west. She said, “I saw you with the Doctor. I thought that maybe you could help me...help us. Are you a reporter? You don’t look bookish. You’re tall. How tall are you?” She muddled.

“I’m a writer working for a local weekly, the Adirondack Stream Media. What do you mean, ‘help you’? How can I help you? Who’s ‘us’?” I asked of the image in my rearview mirror.

“Help us escape,” she answered me, still gazing out of the window as if transfixed. She spoke of escape without any sense of urgency. “What do you write?” she asked indifferently, lolling off topic.

“Right now, I’m just struggling,” I said. “Why do you need my help? Why don’t you just simply leave?” I asked, glancing again at her image in the mirror. She really was incredibly attractive. I was strangely drawn to her. I almost lost control of the truck. Almost drove off the road. There was no shoulder. It would not have been good. No one around. No homes nearby.

“I can’t. We can’t. I told you he has changed our names. He has stolen our identities, all our personal identification information; taken away our licenses, our bank cards, everything. Even old photographs. We have no cell phones. No access to computers. We have no way of going anywhere. We have no means. I have no way of proving that I am not Holly Golightly.” She was downcast and sullen, “I have no way of proving who I am.”

“Is there anywhere that I can take you? I don’t have cell service out here,” I told her. She shook her head drunkenly. “My cabin is not far from here, north of Paradox,” I said into the rearview mirror. “I have a landline, and DSL internet...sometimes. Do you have family? Anyone? Should I bring you to the sheriff over in Crown Point? It’s not too far.” She became excitedly anxious.

“No, no! No police! He has connections. He’ll know as soon as we walk into the station. I need to get away and find help. He’s hypnotic. He has chemicals. He uses Tarot cards and magic. I have seen them...seen his phantoms. You are all that I have right now. Please. He has taken control of my mind.” She was desperate, “of our minds.” Then her anxiety waned into a monotone, “He wants to control the world.”

“What do you mean, ‘he wants to control the world’?” I asked skeptically.

“He told me. He confided in me. I was his lover.” She droned in her monotone.

“His lover? You seem so much younger than he is.” I was more concerned for her than I was surprised by her revelation.

“I guess twenty years or so,” she said. “I was finishing college at Paul Smiths. I was working as a summer guide at Adirondack River Walking and Forest Bathing in Saranac Lake. We met there.”

“He told me he was a psychoanalyst, and he said that he was studying the mysticism of forest bathing in connection with his studies of the paranormal. He thought that it might help his patients. He was interesting. He asked me to dinner. I went.” The impassive tone of her voice never changed. She took a sniff from her bottle and again offered some to me, but again I declined.”

“He was interesting,” she repeated. “He was staying at the Hotel Saranac. We had dinner. There was something unusual about him...alluring, hypnotic. There was something unusual about the whole evening. It was strange. I can’t explain it. I’m a mature woman. I’m independent. The next day, I left with him. I was under a spell...his spell.”

“I have been with him since then, about a year now. It was intriguing at first, his studies and his ideas about things. Psychology and stuff. Mystical things. But I could never leave his institute or go off on my own. I couldn’t go back to school. I couldn’t...I can’t...get away. Please help me.”

She stared back at me as I briefly looked at her through my rearview mirror. Her eyes teared.

She turned her head to gaze out of the window. “I didn’t love him,” she said. “I didn’t...” Her voice trailed off, “I was kept by him.”

“Well, my cabin is nearby, like I said. We can go there. I have to file my report with the paper. Perhaps my editor can think of something. No telling what the power of the press can do,” I said. I heard her sniff loudly from her nasal spray, and then she was silent. I looked quickly in my rearview mirror. She was slowly shaking her head, wearily bobbing in apparent dismay.

When we arrived at my cabin, I pulled the truck around to the back. I turned to her and said, “I have to go in and tell Sparky that I’m home and that I have brought company.”

“Who’s Sparky?” she asked anxiously.

“My dog,” I answered. “He gets upset when I bring home a woman without letting him know in advance.”

“Your dog does?” She was cautiously suspicious.

“Yes, he can be temperamental. But it’ll be alright. I’ll go tell him and I’ll be right back.”

She tensed up nervously. “Kildeere warned us about dogs,” she jittered. “His mother was bitten by a dog. He wants to rid the world of dogs.”

“I know,” I said, “he told me.” I turned to look at her and tried to calm her. “You do not need to worry. It is okay. I will help you. You’ll see. Wait here. I’ll be right back.” I left her in the truck. I thought that maybe she might doze a little despite her panic. She seemed fatigued. Perhaps it was whatever she was sniffing.

Outside of the truck, I tried to get a grasp of what was happening. I had gone to the Rookery because of reports of a “real zeitgeist changer.” I learned that Doctor Zorba Kildeere, the Director of the Northcountry Center for Ideological Cleansing, had discovered a way to recreate, manipulate, and control the psychochemical nature of the symbiotic relationship between humans and dogs.

The scary thing was that Kildeere intended to use his discovery to rid the world of dogs. Scary, yeah, but I dismissed the whole thing as some sort of mad scientist quackery. Well, not entirely. I couldn’t simply ignore the surreal bucolic and serene behavior of the oddly dressed residents of his institute that I observed during my visit, with their cult-like communal yurt and sing-alongs.

Now, I had one of them, this escapee from the Rookery, this stowaway with movie star looks, who sniffs some chemical and, in her stupor, tells me that Kildeere practices some kind of magic, and that she has seen phantoms, and that Kildeere is planning to rule the world. I didn’t fully

understand her at the time, but I subsequently learned the madness of Kildeere's genius.

Kildeere's discovery did not simply involve the psychochemical nature of the symbiotic relationship between humans and dogs, or the isolation of the hormone, oxytocin, and its manufacture as an aerosol reagent, as he asserted.

What Kildeere discovered was that symbiotics is merely one of the many false scientific constructs of the relationship between the conscious self and the phenomena of universal consciousness. That consciousness is all, and all is consciousness. But I am getting ahead of our story.

I went in the cabin through the back door. Sparky was there to welcome me. I patted his head, and he began to saunter away with a wag of his tail. I yelled after him that we have company. He came quickly to a halt, almost tumbling over. "A woman?" he asked. "Yes, I said."

We talked it over. He calmed down, although he got into his usual funk, moping off to his corner bed. I went out to the truck to get Holly, but she was gone.

Back at the Rookery, an alarm was sounded. Holly Golightly was absent without leave.

THE ROOKERY CHAPTER THREE - SPARKY

My cabin is up a mile long dirt drive deep in the woods, off the gravel Johnson Pond Road. The nearest paved road, Old Furnace Road, is remote and rural. Holly could not simply walk out to find any kind of help nearby. I went back to tell Sparky what had happened, and that I would have to go and look for her. He understood.

Sparky has been with me since he was a puppy, but he didn't start talking until he was two. One night, he was in bed with me, encroaching on my pillow. He squirmed just behind my head and suddenly said, "Stop snoring, will you."

I turned more as if waking from a dream. He looked at me and said, "Seriously, Ed, I'm trying to sleep here." I sat up sharply. I was more amused than startled. We have had frequent conversations ever since then. It can be lonely in a cabin in the Adirondack woods.

I feared for Holly being on the dirt road as night was soon falling. I told Sparky I'd be right back with her. I did not drive long before realizing that she must have left the road. That could be dangerous in the late afternoon. Even in the bright of day a person is easily, and sometimes forever, lost in those woods. I went back to get Sparky.

I had to explain everything to Sparky, tell him about the Rookery, and about how Holly had escaped in the back of my truck. He became spastic upon hearing about Kildeere's intentions, then ballistic. He's very excitable.

Did I tell you that he is a Black and Tan Coon Hound? He is medium size dog of about twenty-five inches tall and forty-five pounds, coal black with distinctive tan markings, a long tail and long thin ears that hang down from the back of his head. He has a mellow, amiable temperament indoors, but he's athletic and can be stubborn and independent outdoors, especially if he is on a track.

He is also darned smart and learned. I can trust in his advice on everything, from the

metaphysical implications of interpersonal relationships to the correct aperitif for a particular appetizer. I don't know how he learned such things. I do have a decent home library, and I do talk to him regularly. Still, I don't understand how he does it.

Of course, I am not home a lot, especially when I'm away on assignment. So, who knows? He appears to have even made several woodland friendships in my absence. He's a gregarious type. He befriends raccoons. He knows Bigfoot the Sasquatch. He met him near Whitehall. He says that his name is Beefeater. There are other similar acquaintances that he professes to have, but that's for another time.

The important thing is that he is a dog, and he has a heightened olfactory mechanism that enables him to detect and track scents and to locate their source. And, like I said, he's learned. He could help me to find Holly in the woods, and he'll be able to help me find my way back home, if the need be. Fifty yards in from a dark road, and I'm walking in circles.

That's why I always carry survival gear in my kit. Just a space blanket (I love space blankets), fire starter, multi-tool, basic first aid, including bug repellent, a small rolled up sheet of

clear two MIL plastic drop cloth, and a length of paracord, a headlamp, some vittles. I have a fixed blade, Damascus steel knife in a sheath on my belt. I inherited the knife from my dad. It's an heirloom.

I carry a stainless-steel canteen over my shoulder. I prefer the metal over plastic because I can boil water in it. It has a cup. The polished metal can also serve as a location reflector. Oh yeah, and a whistle. You should always carry a whistle with you in the woods. So many lost hikers might have been found sooner, or at all, if they had had a whistle. A series of three toots signals distress.

We went outside and got into the truck figuring to drive down the dirt road to a spot about halfway between the cabin and the access road. From there, I figured Sparky's nose would dictate whether to go north, south, east, or west. I was inclined to guess that Holly would turn to the right, since that is the natural pull of the body. If so, that would be to the east, toward Lake Champlain.

As soon as he got into the car, Sparky said, "My goodness, Ed, what is that smell? Never mind, I know what it is. Phew," he said.

"I think it may be from Holly," I told him. "It may come from that nasal inhaler that she had. I told you that Kildeere had isolated some kind of hormone."

"Extrasensory," Sparky snarked.

Some folks are inclined to think that a dog's uncanny tracking ability is a form of extrasensory perception, or ESP. Biologists who study the use of signs as a means of communication among animals, or what they call Zoosemantics, are instead of the opinion that the olfactory process actually involves a transfer of chemical "signs." It is one of the processes by which an animal acquires knowledge. It's complicated, but it's not ESP.

"I know the smell," Sparky said. "It should be easy to track."

THE ROOKERY CHAPTER FOUR - AN ADIRONDACK TRACK

Growing up in the Adirondacks, land navigation just comes to you naturally. With navigation comes tracking. Both are integral to exploring your environment, your world. The Adirondacks are a whole world of environments when you are growing up. That's how I learned what I know about being in the woods. It just came to me as part of my environment.

A backwoods tracker hunts for signs. As I have said, signs are communications. The tracker is a reader of the signs. He needs a keen sense of observation and tireless concentration. The tracker must be receptive to the signs of passage the way that a dog's nose is receptive to the scent of its quarry. Again, it's all a matter of semiotics. But more on that later, perhaps.

Of course, tracking a human being is a good deal different from tracking some other animal, like a Gouger or a Jackalope. Gougiers are somewhat like goats in appearance and have cloven feet. They are easy to track, especially on hillsides. Their outer legs are longer than their inner or nearside legs, and they hobble circuitously around and along the side of a hill when in search of food.

On flat land the Gouger will rise on its rear legs and stride with a decided limp. The scat of the Gouger is large and elongated. It is quite odoriferous and can be smelled from yaRoads away.

The Jackalope, too, can be easy to track. Like that of its cousin the Jack Rabbit, the Jackalope has a hopping stride, though it tends to hop with paired hind feet like a hare, and the stride is much longer, say two to four feet. The Jackalope scat consists of piles of spherical pellets.

Other evidence of a Jackalope track is left by its antlers, which leave abrasions or rubs on tree trunks, especially during a rut. Look lower on the tree trunk, or else you may confuse the Jackalope rub with the track of a buck deer. The major difficulty with tracking Jackalopes is that they are just too fast to be seen.

As I was saying, things are different when it comes to tracking a human. It is still a matter of

signs, but you may need a little more help to find them. You especially need to have an idea of the person's size and weight and of the length and firmness of her stride. Those attributes will factor in the discovery and ultimately the interpretation of the signs.

The matter of her stride can be most important because it may give you an idea of how far to look from one sign for the discovery of the next. The order of signs will help establish a pace and direction of travel. If you have little or no knowledge about a person, then you can only guess as to how she might leave signs of her passage.

You can only find signs if you know what to look for. In a forested area such as the Adirondack Wild Forest, signs may include such things as broken twigs or branches. Disturbed ground, or logs, or stones, even damaged spider webs may indicate passage.

Keep your ears opened. Signs can be auditory as well as olfactory and visual. Chipmunks, squirrels, and birds will sound alarms at intruders. The crow is the twitter of the Adirondacks.

Listen to crow twitter for local news or follow those other creature sounds with your eyes to discover any signs of travel.

Holly is a slight woman. I'd say of average female height, maybe a little taller, although I only saw her seated. As for her stride, it's hard to say. I think that she was under some debilitating influence, mental or chemical, that would affect her walk. Her steps would not be long, strong, or firm. If she is unsure of herself, then she might stumble and disturb more ground and break more twigs and branches, leaving more signs for me to follow.

We pulled the truck off the road. Sparky jumped out and quickly ran a hundred yards up and then a hundred yards down the road. Midway on his return he stopped and gave me a look that said, "Over here." I quickly walked to him. "This way," he started to scamper into the woods. Just as I suspected, the track would go east.

I was beginning to feel like Uncas searching for Cora in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, perhaps in more ways than one. Uncas and Cora were tragically drawn together in a way not fully explored by Cooper. I was inexplicably drawn to Holly.

Otherwise, I probably had no business trying to find her. I didn't even know her. I should have just alerted the DEC Rangers or the sheriff in Crown Point. Perhaps it was because of her distress. Maybe I was feeling chivalrous. I don't know. I was drawn to her.....

