

# Attack of Bees from a B-Movie Makes Island Visit Memorable

By MELINDA BLAU

It was only the fifth day of my three-week vacation, but I was already tan, well-rested and utterly content. The weather had been perfect, the food delicious, the setting — an isolated house on Chappaquiddick with a view of the water and the Maxwell-Parrish-blue New England sky — perfect. Long days on remote Chappy beaches gave me an opportunity to lose myself in Kavalier & Clay, taking breaks only to dive into the ocean or tackle one of the New York Times puzzles I'd stockpiled in the preceding weeks, when I'd been too busy writing for a living to read for pleasure or to solve a crossword. It couldn't get better than this.

On this, as on every other night, my trusty canine, Lois, slept happily at the foot of the bed. A little scratching noise overhead, which my housemate and I had heard from the first night, seemed louder tonight. She, born in a small country in Central America, thought it must be a possum, a bat, a rat or some other creature of the night. We turned the TV volume up a bit to drown it out.

A few moments later, it was the television that was drowned out, as well as all other life on the planet as we knew it. Without warning, the source of the scratching sound revealed itself: A swarm of large, angry insects streamed out of a three-inch hole in the ceiling over my head. "Wasps! We have to get out of here!" Apparently, the insects — we didn't know whether they were bees or wasps at first — had gnawed their way through the sheet rock. Screaming obscenities, we grabbed Lois and fled the room.

Panicked and confused, we felt as if we had stepped into a Hitchcockian thriller, *The Bees*, (or, more likely since this was New England, *The Wasps*). Hearing the loud, angry buzzing inside, insects obviously throwing themselves at the door, we stuffed a sheet and several towels under the door, a move reminiscent of the days when one smoked illegal substances and didn't want the odor to seep out. Not good enough. We then taped two large garbage bags around the jamb, sealing the door, we hoped, on all sides.

I then did what I know how to do best: make phone calls. It was 10:30 at night. I knew no one would be there, but I left frantic messages for every pest control company as far as Boston. Meanwhile, my friend walked outside where she could safely view what was happening in her room, filled with hundreds of now easily identifiable yellow jackets.

To my surprise, and in spite of the television, which blared through the paper thin wall adjoining the second

bedroom, I finally fell asleep, visions of bee stings dancing in my head. I awoke at six, startled anew; the dreams were real. I resumed my calling. At seven, a compassionate pest control entrepreneur named Heidi of Vineyard Pest Control told me she was very sorry; she had two technicians out and couldn't make it to Chappaquiddick until next Wednesday (this was Friday). At 8 a.m., a young man with the not particularly reassuring sounding name of Kevin Pigott promised to come "sometime this morning." Usually a diligent consumer, I asked for neither his qualifications nor his fee. He was willing; that was enough.

Two hours later, Kevin and sidekick, a cute guy named Adam, arrived. They had no bee suit, no ladder, and were armed with a lone can. Their first plan was to walk into the bedroom with that small cannister, which I could only hope was bee spray.

"I don't think so," I said, as my friend, summoning her Catholic roots, stood at the door with her arms outstretched, as if on the cross. Wondering whether these two young men would ultimately make a bad situation worse, I reassured myself, at least someone is here.

Cut to the good news: The guys knew what they were doing after all. Two hours later, they had jimmied open the screen, rescued the bedding so that it wouldn't be contaminated with pesticides, and proceeded to annihilate the bees. Apparently, they had been diligently building a huge nest for the past several weeks. (My landlord later informed me that the previous two sets of tenants had heard the scratching as well.) Only one slight casualty occurred when Adam handed me the sheets, unaware that an angry bee was trapped inside. A quick poultice of baking soda paste and ice — Kevin's recipe — minimized the damage.

All is now safe and buzz-free in our Vineyard home. And I'm left only to learn from the event. Was this merely a jarring reminder that sylvan moments can turn in a heartbeat, that harmony is a gift that should be gratefully cherished? Maybe, maybe not. Kevin does two house calls a day, so perhaps there was no great spiritual message here; we just happened to be in the wrong place at the right time. In any case, my friend has finally figured out what she'll do when she leaves the diplomatic corps: an all-night, all-purpose pest control service on the Vineyard, specializing in bees and, so as not to be discriminatory, wasps.

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VINEYARD GAZETTE



VINEYARD, MASS.

VINEYARD GAZETTE