



Witch Doctor

THE CAR RIDE HOME FROM TOM AND LANA'S SEEMED interminable; Annie and I were both in an introspective mood, and hardly spoke two words to each other the whole way back. This Lucy business was becoming depressing; neither of us liked what we were hearing. Although the doomsday scenarios we were being exposed to seemed unrealistic, I had to admit that the arguments supporting them were becoming more and more compelling. Even if there was some kernel of truth to all this, I wondered what we could do about it. Not a damned thing, as far as I was concerned. If 1600 senior scientists couldn't create a unified voice loud enough to be heard over the commercial hoopla, over the din of commerce that we were inundated with each and every day, then what the hell could a small-time, self-employed roofer and housewife do? Not very damned much. That was my opinion.

After our talk with Tom and Lana, it seemed apparent that there was now a time element to consider. Twenty to forty years to ecocide added an enormous sense of urgency to Lucy's affair, especially when we took into consideration the momentum that was building behind the ecological problems. If what the scientists were saying was true and things needed to change significantly, it was obvious they weren't going to change overnight. It could take decades

with everyone working together to turn things around; to steer us away from the precipice. That much time appeared to be an unrealistic luxury as days disappeared into the past like lemmings slipping over the edge of a cliff. Furthermore, it seemed that the average American still had no idea what was going on. I wasn't the only clueless one — I had lots of company. Or if people *did* know what was going on, for some strange reason they didn't seem to care.

Although I still remained somewhat skeptical, I was becoming affected enough by now that I dropped the "Lucy's Goose Chase" moniker and started to take things more seriously. Annie and I were both a little shaken up after our discussion with Tom and Lana. Things seemed to be snowballing. A couple months ago, we were minding our own business, planning our spring garden and worrying about little more than paying the bills on time. Now, suddenly, we were faced with the thought of the extinction of the human race in our lifetimes. Or in our children's lifetimes. Well, maybe not the extinction of the entire species, but ecocide? This whole thing was like some B-grade sci-fi movie, and Annie and I were the dupes who were accidentally caught in an intergalactic battle.

I had to review Lucy's first letter again. Sure enough, she did mention a point of no return. But she had also said, "You are not alone — there are many of us spanning the entire planet struggling to avert the upcoming critical time." Her circuitous directions had led me to some of the people engaged in the struggle she was obviously referring to. To Tom and Lana, for example — the tree-climbing lemmings. And Tom and Lana had introduced me, so to speak, to a worldwide group of scientists embroiled in the same battle.

It was not hard to locate the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity on the internet. I simply logged onto Altavista.com, an internet search engine, typed in "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity," parentheses and all, being careful to keep the apostrophe on the word "scien-

tists” in the correct place (outside the “s”), and 519 web pages were soon listed. I scrolled down to about the tenth page on the list and found the warning in its entirety, without any additional fluff. I printed out a copy for myself.

The warning, released on November 18, 1992, was sponsored by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Amazingly, both the Washington Post and the New York Times had rejected this worldwide edict as “not newsworthy.” The front page of the New York Times on November 19th, the day that should have headlined the scientists’ warning, instead featured articles about the Catholic Church rejecting the role of women, police officers shooting each other, and rock music, among other things all apparently more newsworthy than the impending destruction of the planet. It was becoming evident to me that we humans were in a sorry state of affairs, and that there was no obvious way out of the woods that I could see. In fact, it all seemed totally overwhelming, if not hopeless.

But what happened next was remarkable, to say the least. I don’t usually believe in fate, but sometimes coincidences occur that defy all logic and explanation. First, there was a message on the telephone answering machine when we got home. It quickly diverted our attention from the defeatist mindset that I, at least, had sunk into, and forced us both to think in a different direction.

I pressed the playback button on the machine and immediately recognized the distinctive accent at the other end of the line. “Hello, Annie and Joe? This is Dr. Tomasso calling from Halifax. Are you in? If so, please pick up the phone. [pause] Hello? Anyone home? Well, I’m just getting back to you about that conversation we had a few weeks ago. I’ve requested some documents from the appropriate sources, and am still waiting for them. When I get something, I’ll let you know. That’s not why I’m calling, though. I remembered something about Lucy that I thought you should know. She used to do some traveling out of the United States. I don’t want to discuss it on your answering machine, but maybe you could call me back. Hope to hear

from you soon.”

It was still early, only nine in the evening when we listened to the message, so I picked up the phone and called Dr. Tomasso right back. Luckily, she was in.

“Hello, Cecilia? This is Joe Jenkins. I’m returning your call.”

“Yes, hi Joe. Nice to hear from you. I called you earlier because I have more information about your aunt. I remembered something the other day that I thought could be of some use to you. It could be a lead. Did you know that Lucy regularly visited a shaman in Peru?”

“A what?”

“A shaman.” Cecilia answered. “You know, a person in an indigenous culture who’s usually considered the healer of the community. Sometimes they’re called medicine men or women.”

“Like a doctor?”

“Yes and no. A shaman would probably be my equivalent in a native culture, but they often resort to the use of alchemy, parapsychology, and sometimes mind-altering plants as part of their healing regimen. They can be very accomplished in the use of herbs of all sorts. Nevertheless, they’re often looked down upon and discredited by most allopathic doctors, which are standard American or Canadian doctors. Shamans are sometimes referred to as witch doctors, usually in a derogatory manner. I don’t know a whole lot about them, but I remember your aunt being thrilled to be able to spend some time with a man called Eduardo. She said she was getting some training from him; she went down there, I think it was to Peru, several times. I started hearing about him maybe five years ago. Boggs never said much, though. So I don’t have much to report. I think this fellow was a big influence on her, though. He may be someone to talk to.”

“In Peru?”

“Well, it’s just an idea.”

“Do you have a phone number for him?”

“I don’t think he has a phone.”

“What about a mailing address?”

“I don’t think he has one of those either. I think he lives in the jungle.”

“I see. Yes, Cecilia. I appreciate the message, I really do. If you remember anything *else*, please do pass it along to me, too. At this point, I need all the information about Lucy I can get. I’ll get back to you if we find out any more.” I rolled my eyes in my head, thinking that this “lead” of Cecilia’s was absurd, at best.

“One more thing, Joe,” she added.

“What’s that?”

“Lucy used to go to Peru with a woman I know of. She lives in Montana. I can give you her name and phone number. I got the number from directory assistance.”

“Well, OK, why not? Shoot.” I grabbed a pencil from the desk drawer, scratched the name and number on a piece of scrap paper, and bid Cecilia goodbye.

“Well, what did she say?” asked Annie, who was standing beside me, waiting for me to hang up.

“Not much, really. Just some hare-brained idea about a witch doctor in Peru. Nothing we can use,” I assured her.

“Hare-brained? Dr. Tomasso is *hare-brained* now? What did she say?”

“Nothing, really. All she said was that Lucy used to go to Peru to visit some guy named Eduardo. He was supposed to be a shaman, which is a witch doctor.”

“I know what a shaman is. It’s a healer and a mystic.”

“How do you know what a shaman is?”

“Didn’t you read the Don Juan books back in the seventies? Don Juan was a shaman who could fly through the air and stuff like that. At least that’s what Carlos Casteneda said.”

“Well, what’s that have to do with *us*? I am *not* going to fall for that sort of thing now. I don’t believe in flying people. This is absurd.”

“I didn’t say I believed it, either. I’m just telling you where I heard about shamans. They can use hallucinogenic substances to escape the limitations of space and time.

That's how they find out things that you normally couldn't know. Like what's happening somewhere else at any given moment: past, present or future. Or in another country. Like with your mother, or a sick friend. They can tell you what's causing an illness that way. What else did Dr. Tomasso say?" she pressed.

"Not much."

"I saw you write something down. Why are you being such a pain in the ass?"

"Look. We need to maintain some vestige of reason with this Lucy stuff. It's hard enough to swallow what Tom and Lana told us. I don't even want to *think* about witch doctors."

"*What did you write down?*" she asked insistently.

"Here." I handed Annie the piece of paper with the name and phone number on it.

"Who's this?"

"The woman who, according to Cecilia, used to go to visit the witch doctor with Lucy."

"In Peru?"

"Yes. No. She lives in Montana, I guess. They *went* to Peru together."

"Well, call her," Annie insisted.

"No way."

"Why not?"

"Why should I?"

"Because you may find out something, that's why. What's one phone call?" she asked.

"It's a red herring," I replied defiantly.

"What do you mean, it's a *red herring*?"

"It's just one more thing that will take us off course. I think we're finally getting somewhere with this Lucy stuff. Tom and Lana have indicated to me what Lucy was all about. Ecocide. It's *scientific*. She was a scientist, Tom and Lana are scientists, the warning to humanity was issued by scientists. They have some *credibility*. Witch doctors don't. I simply don't want to be side-tracked on another wild goose chase."

“Another wild goose chase? When have we been on a wild goose chase? You’ve always *thought* we were on a wild goose chase, but you were wrong all along. I’ll call her myself, dammit.”

“Go ahead. You’re just wasting your time. She’s probably just another fat hippy lady with beads waiting for a UFO to pick her up.”

“You’re a jerk.”

Annie picked up the phone and began dialing. “You’ll never get anywhere with a closed mind,” she said to me as she listened to the phone ring at the other end.

“Hello? Is this Melissa Berger?” I heard her ask. And the ensuing conversation as she later described it to me went something like this:

“Yes. Who is this?”

“Oh, you don’t know me. My name is Annie Jenkins. I’m calling from Pennsylvania. Your name and number were given to me by Dr. Cecilia Tomasso, a pathologist in Halifax. In Canada.”

“Yes? What do you want?”

“I’m calling in behalf of my aunt, Lucille Boggs.”

[Silence]

“My husband, Joe, and I have been trying to complete a project for our Aunt Lucy since she died almost three months ago. I was wondering if you could help us.”

“In what way?”

“Were you a friend of Lucy’s?”

“I don’t know who you are. Why should I answer any of your questions?”

“Dr. Tomasso said that you and Lucy made trips to Peru to visit a shaman named Eduardo. Can you tell me anything about that?”

[Click]

“Damn! She hung up on me!”

“Ha! See, I told you! Her UFO probably arrived.”

“That is so irritating. Should I call her back?”

“I wouldn’t. What’s the use?”

“I know *you* wouldn’t. Maybe I should write her a letter

instead. You can't hang up on a letter."

"That's true," I agreed, smugly. "But what's her address?"

"You've got a point there — Wait! The address book! Did you see a Melissa Berger in it?"

Once again, I went off to retrieve the trusty address book, which I kept in the top drawer of my desk. I handed it to Annie, who was soon paging to the B's. Sure enough, Berger, Melissa, was listed at the bottom of the page, with the same phone number Cecilia had given me. Earlier in this Lucy escapade, I had tried to call her, but no one had answered; I never tried again. Her mailing address and email were also listed in the little black book. "Here's her email address," Annie announced. "I'll try sending her a message. She can't hang up on an email, and she's not worth the price of a stamp."