



Back to Montana

JUST AS ANNIE WAS STACKING OUR EMPTY DESSERT plates on the table, Michael and Sarah came strolling down the lane, wet towels draped over their necks. They joined us at the table, sharing a small bench that I had fashioned out of some barn wood, and grabbed the last of the strawberry shortcake.

They were thrilled to meet Melissa and Max. The four of them got along famously, and became immediately immersed in more discussions, which carried on late into the afternoon. Both Michael and Sarah were fascinated to explore ecological principles from an economic perspective, something that they hadn't been exposed to in the classroom. That a misguided economy was largely responsible for the environmental problems we were faced with was an idea that hadn't occurred to them. Furthermore, the notion that such an economy could be transformed into a benign and symbiotic one through the actions of consumers was empowering to both of the young adults who had their entire lives ahead of them. It made them feel that it was within their power to make positive changes for a better future.

Before we knew it, dusk was upon us. Fireflies glowed in the dim light, and the stars began to glimmer against the darkened sky. Melissa and Max exchanged looks with each other over the table, and explained regretfully that they had a long drive ahead of them. We loitered around

their car as they packed up and buckled in. Rolling down the driver's side window, Melissa passed me a stack of papers — copies of reports, research materials, and statistical information supporting their view that our “pathogenic” economy could, and should, be transformed into a “symbiotic” one. I assured her I would review the material and return it to her, but she insisted that I keep it.

Sarah and Michael lounged around our house for another week, and then decided that they needed to return to Minnesota and settle in for another year of college life. Shortly after they left, I phoned Cecilia Tomasso in Halifax. She was thrilled to hear about our trip to Peru and our meeting with the Bergers. Coincidentally, she had just received Lucy's death certificate from Montana the day before. She said the cause of death was attributed to heart failure, but admitted that heart failure can be caused by unnatural things such as medications or drugs, or even sudden and unexpected fear. She said that only a thorough investigation could determine if foul play was involved in Lucy's death, an investigation that was beyond her scope, especially if Lucy's corpse had been cremated. Cecilia made me promise that I would let her know as soon as any new developments occurred in the Lucy saga. I promised.

Annie and I spent the next few weeks describing our Peruvian adventure to friends and family. We were no longer reluctant to discuss Lucy's quest and our improbable role in it. We had finally come to realize that there was a solid foundation of reality underneath the façade of fantasy that I had originally referred to as Lucy's Goose Chase. The more we talked about it, the more we processed it, and the more we seemed to understand it. However, we were left with a nagging feeling that we weren't finished with our escapades, and we wondered what to do next.

We visited with Cynthia and her family again, and met with Tom and Lana. Fascinated by our detailed account of Peru, they hung onto every word. Our story of the introduction to the snake had them in stitches, wiping tears of laughter from their faces. But it was Cynthia who once

again steered me in a direction that I would ultimately decide to follow. She gently reminded me that Lucy had expected me to find my point of personal equilibrium — my balance point. After hearing about my experiences with Eduardo, she thought that maybe I *had* found it. If that were the case, Cynthia suggested, I should contact the law firm in Montana and claim Lucy's half million dollar estate. This certainly gave me a lot to think about, and Annie and I bounced the idea back and forth at home for another week or so after that.

"I *do* think I understand what Lucy meant by finding a personal balance point," I told her as we sat in our hickory rockers one evening.

"What did she mean, then?"

"It's like that tree Eduardo showed us in the forest. We only see what's above ground, but we don't see the rest of it — the roots, the great amount of water that's being sucked into those roots and up the trunk, the earth dissolved in solution entering the roots, the microorganisms on the root hairs that help the tree to live, the huge volumes of gases being sucked in through the leaves and transpired out again, the sunlight being absorbed through the massive canopy. When Eduardo explained it to us in this way it became obvious to me that there's much more to a tree than meets the eye. A tree, if we could actually see all of its connections, would look like a spider web with strands extending in all directions, some for great distances. A tree is not a separate, independent entity on this planet; it's inextricably linked to most of the world around it. We humans are exactly the same. We're connected to the world around us in many ways."

"Sure," she agreed. "I can see that too."

"With that in mind, I now realize, for example, that whenever I throw something away, there is, in fact, no such place as 'away.' It just goes out into the world, to somewhere else. For some crazy reason, we've come to believe that we can just throw garbage over our shoulders, so to speak, and walk away from it, as if our actions have no

consequence on the rest of the world. Like no one in the future is going to have to come along and clean up after us. Like there is no future, as the Bergers would say. I know now that anything I do, no matter how inconsequential I may think it to be, has ramifications for the rest of the world. For future generations, including all life, not just humans. The way I view things is different now,” I explained.

“But what about the balance point? Your *personal* balance point?” Annie stressed.

“I’m getting to that. Every move I make tugs on a strand in the web of life, a strand that’s connected to something else. That would be Lucy’s ‘Eco,’ or Eduardo’s ‘Earth mother.’ Then there’s the time element. I think the native North Americans referred to the concept of ‘seven generations,’ didn’t they?”

“You mean they thought we should consider the effect of our actions on the next seven generations?”

“Yes, that’s it. I understand what they were saying now. The native Americans had an economy with a *future*. Anyway, I now have to weigh all of my decisions — my personal choices as a consumer and as a business person — against the ramifications those choices will have on the world around me. Not just today’s world, but the future world. I can refuse to buy stuff that I know pollutes the world, or creates waste, or harms our social fabric, or supports violence. I can no longer pursue my business for the simple goal of making a profit. I have to think about the rest of the world and about posterity when I have any interaction with our ‘economy.’ And I know I won’t be at peace with myself unless I do these things. On the other hand, I want to be happy and comfortable and enjoy life while I have it. That puts me at a place in my consciousness that I would definitely call my personal balance point. If I move toward careless selfishness, I feel out of balance. If I move too far the other way, I’m off-kilter, too. Eduardo’s right, it is a spiritual phenomenon. Something you feel *inside* you. And when you allow that feeling to sur-

face, when you get in touch with it, you just *know* it's right. Remember when he kept telling me that for some things, there are no words? Well, this is one of those things. I can't explain it very well."

"You're doing a pretty good job of it, I think. So you're a changed man, then?" asked Annie, cocking an eyebrow at me. "You're seeing the world with different eyes? Would you say you've turned a corner in your life?"

"Yes, and I hope you have too," I told her.

"What's *that* supposed to mean? How do you know I wasn't already at *my* personal balance point?" she said with a half-smile. "Eduardo said it's different for everyone, and it's the natural state of being, anyway. Maybe I'm a little more evolved than you!"

"Ok, *whatever*. The point I'm making is that we need to do this together. We need to support each other."

"I agree."

"I think you should come with me to Montana to meet with the lawyers up there."

"Okay," she said, after hesitating a moment. "But are you sure that we have to go there? Can't we do it by phone or by mail?"

"I think I have to sign papers in person, in front of their notary. The estate is worth a lot of money. A half million bucks is nothing to sneeze at."

"I was just thinking that we would be wasting energy and fuel to transport our bodies around, that's all," she shrugged. "But if you think it's absolutely necessary, fine, let's make the arrangements. If you're ready, that is."

"I'm ready."

"You're ready to claim a half million dollar estate?" she asked, somewhat incredulously.

"I'm as ready as I'll ever be," I replied unequivocally.

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