



Lucy's Gift

I HAD THREE WEEKS TO WAVER, WHICH SEEMED LIKE endless days for doubt to creep back in, like bees sneaking in the back door of a beehive and stealing my resolve, bit by bit. The attorneys were tied up in court, consumed with an auto accident lawsuit, and I was not their top priority. In the meantime, I wrestled with my conscience about greed, about honesty, wondering what I would do with a half million dollars, knowing that a sudden influx of money could skew my sense of judgement and tilt me spiritually toward selfishness. Self-importance, as Eduardo called it. I couldn't just claim a half million dollars for myself, then run out and buy a yacht or something, now aware of the effects of mindless consumerism and the impending threat of ecocide. I no longer saw the inheritance as a bonus that would enable me and my family to gain new luxuries in life; instead, I viewed it as a burden of responsibility. The things we valued most in our life couldn't be bought. I had a healthy, loving family, a cozy home that was already paid for, and we were comfortable with

the middle class income of a roofing contractor. Annie refused to make suggestions about what to do with the money. “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch,” she’d say to me, or, “It’s your money, not mine. You inherited it. You decide what to do with it.”

So it was with this degree of uncertainty that we traveled to Bozeman, Montana, to settle Lucy’s estate. The law office of Stainbrook and Halforth was richly appointed: thick leather-bound books lined oak floor-to-ceiling shelves; the carpets were deep and plush. Everything was done to excess — the place reeked of money. When we arrived, we were immediately whisked into a large windowless side room where two starchy lawyers and a young female secretary sat with us at a huge rosewood conference table. They checked my photo identification, my birth certificate, and my passport, all of which they had asked me to bring. One of the lawyers, a grey-haired gentleman in a blue pin-striped suit, opened a large briefcase and removed some papers.

“Mr. Jenkins, Dr. Lucille Boggs, whose estate we represent, has named you the beneficiary of the estate, under certain specific conditions. Do you understand that?” he asked me in an official manner.

“Yes, I do.”

“The estate is worth approximately one half million US dollars, and includes some real estate, namely her personal home. Here is the copy of her will.” He pushed the document across the table to me.

I quickly scanned it, noting that it simply stated that I would be the beneficiary of the estate under conditions set forth by an accompanying letter. “So, where’s the letter?” I asked.

“The letter is here.” The lawyer waved it in his hand, but didn’t offer it to me.

“May I see it?”

“I’m afraid you may not at this time, Mr. Jenkins.” He opened the letter and began to read from it. “Mr. Jenkins, I am bound by legal duty to ask you for the following

information in front of witnesses before we can proceed with this transfer. Sir, please state your full name for the record.”

“Joseph Jenkins.”

“Please state your full address, for the record.” I did so.

“Mr. Jenkins, was Dr. Lucille Boggs your great aunt by blood, your father’s aunt?”

“Yes, she was.”

“Finally, Mr. Jenkins, have you found your personal balance point?” The look the attorneys gave each other indicated that they found this whole thing rather bewildering, to say the least.

I took a deep breath and said, “Yes.”

“In that case, Mr. Jenkins, please sign these papers at the place indicated by the ‘x.’ They are simply the transferal papers. The secretary will notarize them for you.”

I scratched my signature on the indicated lines.

“Mr. Jenkins, allow me to congratulate you on your inheritance,” he said congenially. “I have to admit that this is certainly one of the most unique inheritance settlements I’ve been witness to in all of my years practicing law. Dr. Boggs instructed us to simply ask you the questions we just asked, and to simply and finally ask if you had found a thing she referred to as a balance point. She seemed to believe that you would answer honestly and that we didn’t need to know what a balance point actually *was*. As such, we have fulfilled our obligations and so have you. It is always sad to see a loved one go, but nice when they leave a little something behind.”

He handed me a sealed manila envelope. “That’s all. We’re finished. Take your time and look over the contents of this envelope, which Dr. Boggs asked we give to you at the time of the estate transfer. We’ll leave you two alone now.” He neatly stacked the papers together and passed them to the secretary, who was waiting by the opened office door. “Ah, but one more thing, Mr. Jenkins,” he asked me, hesitating at the entrance. “What exactly is a ‘balance point’? We were just curious. Is that something that, say, a

juggler or acrobat would look for?”

“No,” I replied, suppressing a slight smile while shaking my head. “A personal balance point is a place within oneself where one is spiritually balanced. That’s about the closest definition I can come up with.”

“Aha! That makes sense. So you found your religion, then, at your Aunt’s behest?”

“No, not at all. It has nothing to do with religion,” I answered. The lawyers just stared at me with incomprehension. I didn’t offer any more information. It just seemed too difficult to sum up the concept of the balance point into a few words that a lawyer would understand.

At that, the two lawyers and the secretary left the room and closed the door behind them. Annie and I just looked at each other, not knowing whether to believe that a transfer of a half million dollars into our names had just transpired. We didn’t know whether to jump up and yell, dance around the room, do cartwheels, scream, pinch ourselves, or what. I looked at her, she looked at me, neither of us spoke, then we looked at the manila envelope.

“Open that,” Annie said, with a strange urgency. “It’s from Lucy. God knows what the hell’s in there.”