

The Balance Point

A Missing Link in Human Consciousness

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This book is based on actual occurrences, although some characters, chronologies, and details are rearranged and/or fictionalized for literary purposes. Names of the individuals in this book have been changed to protect privacy. All the scientific and environmental data is factual.

The Ego vs. the Eco

Every moment in life marks an invisible boundary between the past and the future. Any of those moments can become a pivotal one that changes your life, veering you off course — sending you into uncharted territory with no hope of ever returning. For me, it occurred on a spring morning at my country home in Pennsylvania.

A brown delivery truck rattled down the long lane, passing blooming pear trees and scattering quacking ducks off my gravel driveway. A barking dog alerted me to the truck's unexpected arrival, and soon the driver stepped out, ignoring the dog, as he had done in the past. The deliveryman always had a smile on his face and a dog biscuit in his hand when he arrived at our door. On this beautiful morning with the sun streaming through billowy clouds, he was in a good mood.

"You'll have to sign for this one," he said, pulling out a pen and handing me his clipboard.

"I don't remember ordering anything," I muttered as I scrawled my signature on the dotted line. The man ignored me as he entered data in his electronic notebook; then he handed me a manila envelope, waved goodbye, and rattled off back down the lane.

"What's this?" I asked myself out loud, stepping back into the house. "Annie, did you order anything by mail?" I yelled to my wife, who was in the kitchen washing breakfast dishes.

"No!"

Well, me neither, I thought to myself, looking closely at the envelope as I walked into the kitchen. "It's from a law firm in Montana," I said. "Ninety-nine percent of lawyers give a bad name to the rest of them."

"I've heard that one. Several times." Annie drained the sink.

"Well, it's true."

"What is it? What's in the package?"

I grabbed a paring knife from the drawer, sliced through the top of the envelope, and pulled out an official-looking legal document, along with a white, letter-size envelope, on which my name and address were neatly hand-written. I momentarily set the envelope aside and read the legal document out loud:

Dear Johnathan,

We regret to inform you of the death of your Great Aunt Lucille Boggs, who passed away suddenly on the 26th of April, in Missoula, Montana. As per the Statement of Wishes stipulated in her Final Will and Testament, we are forwarding to you the enclosed envelope. She left us

with instructions that you are to receive this envelope without delay in the event of her death. She indicated that this was a matter of utmost urgency and instructed us to inform you that you should open the envelope immediately.

Very truly yours,

Stainbrook and Halforth, Attorneys at Law

"Aunt Lucille Boggs? I hardly knew my aunt Lucy!"

"Just open the envelope!" Annie said in frustration.

"Wait a minute. Why would Aunt Lucy send me anything? I've only seen her once in my life, at my grandmother's funeral twenty years ago. And I didn't even talk to her!"

Two decades had passed since I saw my aunt Lucy. At the time, I didn't realize that it would be our first, last, and only encounter. I remembered her having long salt-and-pepper hair and wearing a flowing dress. Her thick hair hung down to her waist, and a garland of fresh flowers crowned her head. She was different from the other family members — tanned, with rosy cheeks, and she had a beguiling smile on her face, in great contrast to her bent, ashen, overweight siblings.

Aunt Harriet, with her thick makeup and flaming red hair resembling a plastic helmet, sat on a chair in the corner of the funeral home scowling at Lucy and muttering something about Lucy being a disgrace to the family, with her flowers and all. Uncle Lou, who sat beside her chomping on a cigar, nodded in agreement. I had just returned from a winter backpacking in Central America, and I attended the funeral in cutoff jeans and sandals. They talked about me behind my back, too.

I remember standing alone at the side of my grandmother's casket, staring at her shriveled face painted with makeup by the undertaker's brush, her wispy white hair so thin you could see her scalp, her eyes looking as if they had been sewn shut. I was thinking about all the years she had blessed my life, the cherry pies she baked, the smell of fresh bread that so often permeated her kitchen, when suddenly Lucy appeared beside me, hands clasped in front of her, head bowed. She casually glanced at me out of the corner of her eye and then suddenly turned her head and stared at me intently, with a bewildered look on her face. I looked back at her and started to smile when I realized that she was looking at me as if she had just seen a ghost. Suddenly, she took one last look at Grandma's corpse, turned on her heels, and whisked out the door of the funeral home. That was the one and only time I ever saw her. Nobody could explain her abrupt departure, and, to the best of my knowledge, none of my relatives ever mentioned her, or even saw her, again.

"Did I ever tell you about the one and only time I met my aunt Lucy?" I asked Annie.

"At the funeral? Yeah, I heard that story. Weird. Open the envelope! I want to see what it is. Maybe she left you some money or something."

"Why would she do that? I was a stranger to her." I ripped open the envelope. Two shiny brass keys spilled out on the floor as I pulled out a handwritten letter. A personal check was stapled to it. The figure on the check jumped out at me. "Damn!! Ten thousand bucks! This is a check for \$10,000, made out to me! Holy shinola!"

"WHAT? Are you kidding?" Annie asked incredulously, craning her neck to get a look at the check. "Thank you, Aunt Lucy!" she yelled, plucking the check from the letter to inspect it for herself. I grabbed the check back and threw it in the air. "We're in the money!" I sang, taking Annie for a quick jig around the kitchen. Then I remembered the letter, which had fallen on the floor in the excitement. "We better see what our dear old generous and wonderful aunt Lucy has to say," I exclaimed, bending over to retrieve the note. Smiling, I read silently:

Dear Johnathan,

A terrible battle is at hand. The forces of the Eco and the Ego have become locked in conflict. No less than the future of our species, in fact the future of our planet, is at stake. I have been engaged in the struggle for years, and now the most critical time is at hand. Unfortunately, I fear the worst for myself — I sense impending doom. If I should die suddenly, I have left instructions with a law firm in Bozeman, Montana, to see that you get this letter. You must take my position in this ordeal. You are not alone — there are many people spanning the planet struggling to avert the upcoming critical time, the "Point of No Return." My role is very important, and I have pledged that if I die before my task is completed, I will choose a successor. You have been chosen. Please take this very seriously. I know I can count on you. It is your destiny.

Your instructions are as follows: Proceed to my home on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana (see map on other side). My cottage will hopefully be locked up and undisturbed, awaiting your arrival. In the study (the room with all the books, located in the southwest corner of the house), look under the desk ...

Lucy explained what she wanted me to do, and ended her instructions with the following warning:

Do not share this information with anyone other than the closest of confidants. Make sure someone knows you are coming here, in case you do not return (so they can come looking for you).

I have included a check in the amount of ten thousand dollars to cover your expenses. Use the money sparingly. You'll need it.

Make haste.

Lucy

The smile froze on my face. I didn't know what to say. It seemed my dear old aunt Lucy had something up her sleeve. My "destiny," no less.

"You'd better read this." I handed the letter to Annie, then looked around on the floor for the two keys. Annie read the letter out loud, quickly at first, then slowly, drawing out each word as she spoke, her voice finally becoming a whisper.

She sat down on a kitchen stool and put the letter on her lap. "Is this crazy or what?"

"I don't know. How should I know?" I had found one of the keys and was crawling around the kitchen floor looking for the other.

"Are you going to do this? I mean, go to an Indian reservation in Montana? You're not, are you? When would you have time to do that?"

I just shook my head. I had no intentions whatsoever of going on some wild goose chase. "Hell, no!" I replied, still on my hands and knees.

And then, out of the corner of my eye, I caught the glint of a golden key lying just under the edge of the kitchen stove.