

Caution: Witch Doctors

Judy Sullivan
June 1976



We know several people lately who have been seriously injured -- just 2 nights ago, our next-door neighbor died in a car accident. From what I have heard, the Ivory Coast is #1 in the world for the highest number of accidents per capita, and I have no doubt that this figure is true. Daily, we see an average of three serious accidents. We have seen even whole buses turned over. It's incredible -- even the taxi and bus chauffeurs drive maybe 80 miles an hour in the city! Last year, 5 out of 12 Peace Corps volunteers were seriously injured and sent home due to car accidents. We had wanted to get a bicycle but we have our fears.

I cannot claim to understand why it is so high here, but only relate what I observe -- it might have something to do with a general feeling of superiority when they are in a position. I don't know -- it's a very peculiar thing, but one sees it over and over here. For example, often just as many people have run to catch a bus and even though the bus may be almost empty, the chauffeur will close the doors and drive away as though to prove his position -- that he is in control. If one asks a taxi chauffeur to drive slower, he instead will drive more quickly. If a traffic jam occurs, it takes forever before one will be the first to back up -- they all demand the other, while all create almost a riot yelling and laying on the horn. Policemen are constantly stopping one on the road and demanding money, etc. It seems to be just basically the common courtesy that so often is lacking.

Oh, it must be so difficult for a developing nation faced with so many controversies and paradoxes to always understand the proper way. Just until recently, they were always in a dependent position, hence, maybe often, to many, humility is equated with inferiority promoting them sometimes to exert themselves a bit much. I don't mean to sound like I'm criticizing those in position here, for I realize that their task is great. Bringing this country from mud huts to skyscrapers in a matter of a few years has been a breakthrough that would dazzle any Thomas Jefferson -- it's just a little diplomacy that has to be worked out.... Nothing the ideal world won't take care of!

* * *

Hang on to your seats folks for our next chapter of the exciting times brought to you by the "moon-eyed Moonies."

Last week my friend and I ventured out into the night to visit an astrologist, palm reader, magician, well you name it, he did it. Our desire is always of course to meet the most spiritual people but maybe this time our curiosity got the best of us... and almost killed the cat.

We were greeted by a very devious "Sage" straight from India. His penetrating eyes and deceptive-sort-of-smile, pointed beard and all were enough to make our teeth chatter. Nevertheless we tried to appear happy we had arrived and sat down calmly asking him about his practices. He began with the usual: hypnosis, palm reading, astral-projection, calling of spirits, tarot cards, séances, etc. When we told him we imported ginseng tea his face lit up. He was extremely interested and said he needs the root but refused to tell us why.

After some time of small talk we found the skeleton in the closet; that is, we realized his true nature. He brought out an ancient Hindu book filled with ugly demons and magic symbols. Leafing through the chapters on black magic my eyes caught a chapter on vampirism and a footnote he had written himself, "skull of dead man." He nonchalantly told us that with a skull one can do any of the magic and that they find them in the cemetery. My mind rushed back to what a missionary's wife recently told us. She had read that many graves have been opened and bodies removed not far from here. Our nerves began to squeak a bit but remembering what he had said about those who are afraid or don't believe -- he likes to leave with them an impression they won't forget -- I tried not to show my fear.

About this time another bizarre looking friend came in with some bottles of something (witches' brew, alcohol? I'm not sure). He sat down and began smoking a very long, distinguished ivory-carved cigarette holder, as unique as his strange manners. We asked him his position in this society and he said he takes care of the cobras they keep in their rooms, finding skulls, and human blood -- and that he could really use half a liter of ours. Though he said this with complete seriousness it was so outrageous we could hardly believe it.

At any rate we knew we couldn't show our fear or disbelief but yet we desperately wanted to leave... though gracefully as we didn't want to provoke them into doing anything harsh or quick. We kept mentioning we had another appointment to attend but they insisted they give us an example of their work. A candle was brought out as the one with the pointed beard showed us his palm (that there were no scars, etc.) and then gave his hand to his assistant who suddenly began to bite his wrist, sucking the blood while Dr. Allen repeated a few times in his haunting way, "Vampire, Vampire..." Our grace and manners suddenly gave way to our terror as we instantaneously leaped from our chairs and tore out screaming for our lives. I'm sure we've never run so quickly in all our dying days. Finally, to our relief, we came upon a familiar church, well lit and joyous with singing voices. We took a small retreat, prayed deeply, and proceeded cautiously home.

Upon arriving we blessed ourselves and the bed to assure good dreams but we were very perplexed by the strange smell which permeated the room. I guess because of our extra-sensitivity due to fasting that day, our minds jumped to the possibility of a bad spirit which, we believed, had maybe followed us. We flipped on the light, placed more holy pictures around us, and prayed. We were confident after all this preparation that he had left us but we were still surprised to smell the odor. Finally it was discovered as I climbed into my sleeping bag that I had mistakenly used an old sheet out of the dirty laundry.

Seeing movies such as "Dracula" and "I Was a Teen-age Werewolf" has always been frightening enough, even though, frankly, I never truly believed them, but after seeing such things in real life I can't deny they exist. I have never seen a more hideous thing -- how horrible are Satan's many expressions. As nightmarish as it was, though, we feel fortunate to have witnessed this incident as sort of a warning to others. Hearing so much about fetishes and spiritual phenomena we have been maybe overly anxious to observe these events. We hear fantastic stories, such as a man who can eat for hours and hours and not gain an inch; the girl who regurgitates money; the tribe that removes their interiors by slitting their stomachs and then puts them back again, or turns into panthers and snakes; or then there's the one about two villages in Upper Ivory Coast that are completely stone all the people are petrified. Many people here wear particular rings or charms that they fervently believe have magic powers; it's not uncommon to see a little package filled with special medicine over the door to protect them from evil spirits, thieves, etc. Those medicines are used in everything: as poisons, special brews for succeeding in an exam, or to attract someone special. But the amazing thing is, I believe they really work.

After hearing endless stories of the various healings, protective devices, and spiritual phenomena, one can hardly disbelieve it. Unfortunately, though, as is so often the case, these realms are usually Satan's paradise. Those events stir the imagination and intrigue the curiosity but evoke such a strong fear as well. I hope that the ideal world will arrive quickly to be able to reverse this profound power to God's side, as there is such a reservoir of a knowledge of nature that most of the world has never seen before.

Recently, also, many of the older people are not so willing to pass their discoveries to the young ones, even in their family. Hence, much has "gone to pod" -- the classic example here is of one old man who turned a village into monkeys and then died before transferring the secret of reversal on to anyone. They are still living on bananas....

Really, though, a lot of it doesn't seem to be such monkey business. It's more than just hokum pokum for many and, I believe, if used in a more clinical, open, and God-centered way I believe all of humanity could benefit. Who knows, someday the witch doctor may be our greatest practitioner.

Maybe I can give you some kind of little inspiration by sharing a dream that continues to recur (when I'm not flying or swimming). It's brief but concise: All of the buildings in New York are marching like soldiers or maybe they are Unification Church members as they are clean, neat, and bursting with joy. The windows and sides are just bursting, almost exploding, with vitality. The windows are formed in such a way as to make for a very smiley and bright-eyed building. They are all neatly lined up in order following Reverend Moon, who, of course, is the largest and mightiest building of them all. He towers above them into the clouds. Everything is bright, as the sun is shining and reflecting a pure gold off him. He is a gold or platinum building while all the other soldier buildings are shiny silver. I hope it's a prophetic dream of the victory that you will all soon experience in New York. Even the buildings are rejoicing.