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Lost Key

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Looking around him, he didn't know what to make of it. This had to be a dream. He had to have fallen and hit his head on something. Standing in front of a leaf that was as big as a house. Looking up, bending his head back, and looking way up there was a small spot of blue. Was that the sky? It reminded him of the sky on a clear sunny summer day.

Looking at the big leaf in front of him. How? It was so large, and it didn't look natural. Well of course not, he chided himself at the thought. Normal leaves are not the size of apartment buildings or houses. Tilting his head to the left a bit, he felt drawn to the leaf. Where did it come from? Forget where it came from! Why was it here? Where was here?

"What the hell?" he shook his head, Slowing turning around in a circle, he drank in the world around him. All the leaves were the sizes of houses. Maybe someone slipped something into his drink? Drugs. Yup, he was drugged and having a bad trip. He got roofied, if he was getting molested by aliens or something, or someone else, he was grateful the illusion of the big leaf.

The ground began rumbling beneath his feet. EARTHQUAKE! He started looking for a place to hide. There was nowhere to go! He ran and hugged the leaf stem in front of him. His arms wrapped around the thick sturdy stem. Hanging on for dear life.

Something big and brown stopped in front of him. The world went quiet again. Peeking out from under the leaf it was a big, long bug with many legs. It wasn't an earthquake it was a large bug. What the hell? What was going on?

“Hey,” someone yelled at him.

Looking around him, for the body the voice belonged to. There was no one around.

“I’m up here,” a rope ladder dropped down in front of him.

He took a hesitating step towards it. Looking around him there was nothing but the bottom of the giant bug and the leaves that surrounded him.

“Shake a leg, I don’t have all day,” the disembodied voice yelled at him.

Propelling his body forward he wrapped his fingers around the rope ladder and began climbing up it.

Reaching the top, he straddled the bug and held on to the rope in front of him, the rope ladder was pulled up and tied between himself and the driver. The woman turned and smiled at him. “Well princess, hold on tight” She turned back facing ahead and they were off.

The bug was moving at a fast pace, like a speed train, just zipping along. They pulled into a station of sorts and the driver turned and rolled out the rope ladder. She got off first. He followed.

They were standing in what looked like a subway station. She patted the bug, and it moved forward slowly. Turning to him, she smiled. “Well, I’ll bet you have questions. Follow me for some answers.”

He said nothing but followed her to some concrete stairs. They went down them and came to a large hallway, wide, with dark grey walls that looked like they had seen better days. Trailing behind her, he wondered where they were going. At the end they came to a door that opened into a reception area. She nodded to the young woman behind the desk, who was watching him with a frown.

“This way,” she nodded.

He followed her down a smaller hall into a tiny office. She walked around and sat behind the desk.

Taking a seat across from her, he wasn't sure what to say or do.

"Are you lost?" she asked.

He looked at her and was about to say something, opening his mouth to speak but then didn't know what to say. He closed his mouth and pressed his lips together.

"Yeah, I thought so. Where are you from?"

"Barry, Ontario. Canada, I am Canadian."

She nodded, leaned back and smiled. "Earth, huh."

He nodded. Which made him wonder, if this wasn't Earth where was he?

She laughed. "I'm Nix, yeah you aren't on Earth. Welcome to Plu. It's an alternate Earth."

"I'm Gary. How did I get here?"

"Not aliens," she smirked.

He said nothing.

"You." She smiled.

"Me what?"

"You got yourself here."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"I know from where you sit it doesn't, but I can assure you, you are the key to this, and you are what transported yourself here."

"What about my body, is it back on Earth?"

She laughed. "No, that would be crazy."

“Lady I just saw a bug that was the size of a small town, not only that but I rode on it. So, I really don’t have any context of what is normal and what isn’t.”

She shrugged. “Don’t be a whiny bitch about it. I didn’t bring you here. You brought yourself here. You’re lucky I found you when I did.”

“How do I get back home?”

“Only you know how to do that.”

“But I don’t know how to do that, or I wouldn’t be asking you. I’d be back home if I had a choice.”

“Would you?” she raised an eyebrow and smug smirk.

“I would.”

“Okay, well do you want to hang out with me for a bit until that happens?”

“Not really, I want to go home.”

She smiled at him. “I’m not stopping you.”

“You’re not helping me either.”

“I would suggest you tag along.”

“Fine.”

“Let’s go, I have a few people I need to check in on.” She got up and he followed. The next three hours they went out and she stopped at the local city hall, the library, a machine shop, a school and then they sat in a park and ate a sandwich on a wooden bench.

He chewed on his sandwich and swallowed hard looking around at the park. Looking over at her, he found himself having to ask. “How?”

“How what?” she asked between chewing.

“How are we smaller than the leaves and we rode on a giant bug. Yet here everything looks like it’s normal?”

“Well, the Checoco, the giant bug it lives on another plane of existence, it’s how we travel from one planet to another in this solar system.”

“Wait what? I am totally not following you.”

“The Checoco is how we travel from one planet to another in this solar system.” She said slowly as if she was speaking to a small child. “You do understand what a solar system is, you come from Earth after all. Unless intelligence has been chasing you, your entire life but you’ve been faster?” she laughed and took another bite.

He looked at her, eyes narrowed as he realized she had just insulted him.

“Plu is my planet, here, the Checoco is the size of,” she paused and looked around her. Then held out her hand and pointed to her baby fingernail, “The Checoco is the size of my nail. When we went through the hallway we were traversing the plane of existence from the solar system to my planet.”

He tried to swallow that information. “So, we are bigger than the Checoco.”

“Of course,” she laughed and slapped her knee. “You are slow.” Shaking her head she stuffed the last bite into her mouth. Nodding she got up and gestured for him to follow her.

Walking over to the water fountain she pointed to it. “So, take this fountain, see the fish swimming around?”

He nodded.

“To them, the fountain, is their universe. What they know and see is their world. You and I don’t really exist to them. Plu exists much the same as the fountain water. The container or outside of the fountain, is the where the Checoco dwell and transport us from one planet to

another. Now you are not from Plu or this solar system. You come from another place, another solar system and another planet. You got yourself here. I can't send you back. Only you can do that."

"How?"

"When you are ready you will know. Until then, you are a guest here on Plu, be respectful."

Gary was beside himself. He didn't ask to be here, didn't want to be here. Plu, hell he didn't even know existed until he had woken up under that giant leaf.

Three days later he was starting to get used to this Plu place. Nix had him sleep on her sofa. Plu was very similar to Earth. Sitting at her kitchen table, he sipped the tea she made him. Sitting down across from him she smiled.

"How do you like Plu?"

"It's been interesting."

"Why haven't you left yet?"

"Where? Go where?"

"Your home."

"Nix, I would love to go home. If you know how I can, please let me know."

She had her cup in front of her face, pausing she tilted her head. "You know." Then she took a sip of her tea.

"I don't know, that's the problem Nix."

She set the cup down gentling in front of her. "Gary, you're a nice guy. I can't interrupt the process. I'll tell you this. You are a key."

"Yeah, you've said that. Key to what?"

“No,” she pulled out a wrung of keys from her pocket and set them on the table in front of him.

“You have a key?”

“No, you are like these keys here. You are a key.”

“What do you mean?”

“Seriously Gary, stop running from knowledge. To unlock the door to get to your home, you are the key.” She stood up, swiped the keys up off the table and slipped them in her pocket, shaking her head. Sighing heavily, “Oh Gary.” Taking her cup to the sink, she rinsed it.

He wasn’t sure she knew at this point. The next couple of days were a blur. Sitting in the park under the tree with Nix as they ate lunch, he felt his skin tingle.

“Do you feel that?” he asked her.

She shook her head no, “Feel what?”

He held out his arm in front of him. “My arm, it’s tingling.”

She laughed.

Looking from his arm to her, then back to his arm. “It’s getting stronger.”

“The key is activated, finally! I honestly thought you were going to be stuck here with me until the end of time.” She laughed again.

He stood up and felt Plu rumble around him. Everything was shaking and vibrating. What the hell was this! His whole body felt like it was vibrating and on fire. Then his body felt like it was going to pull apart into a million pieces. Swallowing hard he felt scared. What was this? Then the world around him melted away into a hazy blur and everything went dark.

Blinking, he felt like he had been hit with a car or something big. Reaching for his head, it was throbbing. Blinking hard, he looked around him and found he was sitting on the floor of

his living room in the dark. Touching his floor, letting his fingers caress the cold wood. Then his fingers caressed the coffee table and his sofa that he was leaning against. It was all real, not a dream. Getting up to his feet he walked round his apartment, then went to the window and looked outside. It was his home, he was home. He wasn't sure if any of that or Plu was real. It had to be a dream. Gary felt exhausted, it was due to stress and being overworked. It was the only thing that made sense. It was a dream.

He turned, taking it slow, he crossed over to his sofa. Gently easing into it, he heard himself moan softly. Closing his eyes, he was only going to rest for a minute.

Waking up to the sun streaming in through the window. He must have slept for a few hours. Getting up he stretched. What a crazy dream. He needed to take some time off. Obviously, he hadn't realized how stressed he'd been. Shaking his head he stuffed his hand in his pocket. There was something in his pocket. He pulled it out.

It was a folded piece of paper. A note? He didn't remember putting it there. From whom? How did that get there? What was it? Unfolding the paper, he recognized the handwriting. *"Plu is real. You were there. Come back anytime to visit. You are a key. You can unlock many worlds. Nix"*

"What? No, there's no way that was real," staring at the note with wide eyes. He didn't know what to make of it all.