

Etola's Keeper

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In the Middle of the Night

Mac headed to his bedroom very agitated and exhausted that evening. His mind was inundated with thoughts of the visitation and the mysterious individual who stopped him at Rosh's Grocer. He could not forget the tattered clothing, striking blue eyes, and stares that literally pierced through his soul. He heard the croaking, crackling voice over and over again: *When you lay down tonight in your bed, you will be awoken by a startling sound. The noise will not stop until you are led to it, and then you will discover you are going on an inconceivable quest to a mysterious place.*

The soles of Mac's feet burned from utter exhaustion, and the corneas of his eyes felt like they were being incinerated. The bed with its fleece, plaid comforter was more welcoming than usual. Within minutes, he entered the mystical world of his subconscious.

His mind led him to a complicated maze of tunnels. He was obviously in a deep, nearly pitch-black, underground place, and he felt as if he was racing against time. This dream had a threatening, pulsating aura- he heard a discomfoting *tick-tick-tick* in the background. Looking down, he saw dodging feet to his right, yet he was unable to turn his head either way. He was never able to turn around. Suddenly, he approached a rounded, thick set of stone doors with intricate carvings. On the doors, he noticed a carving that was extremely familiar to him, yet his mind was not

able to identify what it exactly was. It was as if this dream was limiting his abilities to actually... *think*. He felt as if he had been... brainwashed.

Suddenly something terrifying woke him up, and he felt as if his body were being impaled with thousands of pins and needles. He almost had this feeling he was being watched and he was still dwelling somewhere within his subconscious, that he was not completely awake.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! He heard deafening noises from the basement. Sometimes, the washer and dryer made extremely loud sounds when they were on, but his parents would never put in a load of laundry in the middle of the night. He checked his clock: 2:00. Something about that time sent even more discomforting chills up his spine.

He gumshoed down the stairs to the basement, one at a time. Every time he thought he heard the tiniest bit of creaking, he paused and prayed he would not be heard. The basement had always been known as his father's "man cave", where he did his extensive locksmith work and kept his incredible array of keys. Mac had asked time and time again about checking out his father's key collection, but he always limited him from heading down there.

It seemed like it took millenniums to head down the stairs to the basement, but it had only taken about five minutes. When he finally approached the bottom, he glanced around to discover the basement was indeed a "treasure trove". He felt like a prospector from the Gold Rush coming across glistening deposits of gold that would give him so much money he would never have to work a day in his life.

The resounding booms got louder and louder until he noticed a glistening box. Blinded by the piercing light, he completely tripped over

the box. Keys of all different shapes, sizes, and configurations scattered all over the place.

Great, Mac thought to himself. What if his father heard the clanking from the keys scattering all over the floor? Yet after about thirty seconds, he felt certain his father had not heard anything at all. Kneeling, he counted about 30 keys. There were ordinary keys as well as narrow keys with antique, curlicue tops that seemed to be about four inches long. He held onto one that was particularly fascinating. When the resounding booms began to intensify again, he happened to look in the direction of the slate gray wall to his right. Letting his nerves get the better of him, his hand let go of the one fascinating key. The key flung towards the bottom part of the wall, which suddenly crumbled.

Revealed behind the wall was a two-foot tall door with a small keyhole. He headed over to the door and stared at the configuration of the keyhole. He then wanted to head back in the other direction to grab the box of keys to attempt to open the door, yet the box hovered towards him instead.

I would say what just happened was magic, but that thought is absolute bogus, Mac thought to himself. Magic only occurred in incredible places like Etola. He pinched himself to determine whether he was still asleep, but he wasn't. Of course it was a telltale sign you were dreaming if you could get in a successful pinch.

Piercing cold air eluded him as he began trying out keys. Starting with the most ancient-looking key, he attempted to unlock this door that may have held incredible secrets behind it. Or at least it could become an ideal hiding place if he ever felt deceived by his family. He analyzed the jagged

bottoms of the keys, the curved bottoms, the squared-off, straighter looking bottoms.

After trying half the keys, he felt incredibly discouraged. He had used most of the unusual, beautiful keys that he absolutely thought would fit in the keyhole. Finally, he was down to one ordinary key, the most ordinary of keys he had ever seen. It was a dull silver color, and Mac was hoping, praying this was the one that would open the door.

As soon as he was going to attempt the key, the key machine mysteriously turned on. The four-inch long curlicue key then began glowing. Heading over with the ordinary key in one hand, he reached over to snag the fancy one. The two then magnetized together, which he had never noticed with keys before.

It was 2:22. Dazed, he stuck the magnetized keys in the machine. The gears turning, the machine whirred with delight for about three minutes. Then as if on cue, this key, half silver, half copper, half ordinary, half extraordinary popped out. The machine turned off, and the hybrid key began gleaming on its own. The resounding booms also came to an end.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to predict what happened next...