



The Everywhere Key

by

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"Hold it!" I said, "Taking over my body wasn't part of the bargain!"

"Sure it was." The voice was decisive, even overbearing. "I gave you the key, didn't I? I have a right to share your mind."

"Aha! Mind doesn't mean body. Get out! I was drunk then. Couldn't help myself."

"Drunk? You were stoned, and zonked, too!"

"OK. So I had a barbiturate. Doesn't mix with alcohol. Didn't mean to do it," I insisted.

"Sure you didn't," it said sarcastically.

"I was sick and you took advantage of me."

"Sure I did." Can a voice smile? This one did.

"Look in your left hand. Isn't that the key?"

I looked in my left hand. At least my left eye looked there. The other eye was looking somewhere else. It was a key alright. An old fashioned skeleton key.

"That was our bargain. You were to get the *everywhere* key and I was to share your brain. I've kept my part, you keep yours."

"Brain! Brain! Brain!" I shouted. "We only agreed to share my brain! Not my mind, my physical body and my emotions!"

"Tsk, tsk," it chided me. "You humans sure make funny categories. Did you really think that mind, brain, emotions, and body are separate entities?"

The voice was smarter than me, I began to think.

"Why did you want the key?" it insidiously persisted.

I willed my body to walk through the bedroom door. My right half refused. The floor slammed my nose.

"Didn't work, did it?" the voice calmly stated.

"What do you want with me?" I grabbed my right hand with my left and pulled it back in line. Having been right-handed, it was stronger.

"Give up?" The voice was all sarcasm again.

I wiped sweat from my left brow and relaxed. There must be another way.

"You dropped the key," it said.

I picked it up again. What had I wanted with an everywhere key? The whole idea of such a key was absurd. If I tried several locks, and failed, maybe the voice would leave. "I'm going to use it on my wife's box," I finally said.

"That ought to be of some interest." Now it was derisive.

The wife's mirrored vanity, with gilt-flecked gold frame, was cheap carnival glitter, but she loved it. On the lower right hand side was a small drawer with hole for a tiny skeleton key, much smaller than the key I held in my left hand. Like a fool, I pushed the *everywhere* key toward the lock.

"Why do you want in there?"

"Always keeps it locked," I calmly replied. "Got some silly feeling over love letters. Won't let anyone see them."

"Well open it! Open it!"

The key visibly shrank as I continued to push toward the lock, and then suddenly, as though by magic, it slid in like on Teflon ball bearings. There was a sharp snick, and I could pass my left hand over the spouse's most guarded possessions.

The bundle was carefully tied with pink ribbon arranged in symmetrical four-looped bows. Using my



teeth and left hand, I pulled the end of one string. The letters fluttered to the floor. "Cooperate," I demanded.

My right side relaxed and I was able to push the stack together. My right hand shook visibly. "How about more cooperation?"

"Sure," it said. "But you're going to have to ask politely."

I strained to reach the bundle, with no success, then said, "Please."

"Pretty please," it ordered.

"Pretty please," I heard myself whine.

For thirty years she'd guarded those notes. Mish-mash love notes from some long-gone lover. Nothing more. Nothing there of interest at all.

After more pleading and cajolery, we tied them and replaced them.

It had been a most tiring day. Usually in bed by nine, I missed by an hour wasted by pleading with the voice. Finally I was prone, and I closed my left eye in wait for blissful sleep.

Nothing happened. "I've got to sleep," I begged.

"But I don't want any."

"Everybody has to sleep."

"I don't," it contemptuously answered.

"How will I work if my body is tired?"

"There you go again. How can your 'I' be different from your body?"

"Don't change the subject!" I strived to rise to a sitting position with my shout.

"I didn't change it, you did."

"I've got to sleep for tomorrow!" I screamed. "That's what the subject was about!"

"Well -- go to sleep," it taunted.

"How can I sleep with one eye open? Close yours, too."

The everywhere key lay on the vanity, shining phosphorescently red, a tempting evil eye that pierced mine through and through the long, quiet night.

"Why don't you use the key again?" it whispered.

"Use it on what?"

"You know."

"What?"

"Well, what did you get the key for?"

"I don't remember," I lied.

"Tsk! Tsk! Even half a brain is too much for you. Here. Let me help."

Something inside moved to control my half and I screamed, "No! No! No! You said a bargain! Get out! Are you a liar and a thief?"

"Liar? Liar? I was about to tell why you wanted the key. Now I've changed my half of your mind. More names like that and I'll never cooperate with you again."

Sunday's light squeezed around the blinds. Sleepless, I rose stumbling on my nose half way to the bathroom.

"Call me a liar, will you!"

"I'm sorry. I was tired last night, and couldn't sleep."

"How sorry?"

"Very sorry!" I lied.

"That doesn't sound true."

"Very, very sorry," I begged.



It helped me shave. We coordinated our eyes and looked back at my wrinkled face. Thirty years with the same shrew, now gone visiting somewhere, I guess -- to the office from eight to five, five days each week -- small pay check -- no children, no savings, no love -- nothing -- drab life -- no meaning. What I needed was a new set of hair, teeth, and experiences. Well, the new experiences were certainly with me.

"Will the key give me health and youth?" I asked.

"We didn't bargain for those things," it hedged.

"A new and beautiful wife?"

"That wasn't in the bargain either."

"Better job?"

"Well -- not exactly."

"What do you mean? 'not exactly'?"

"Money -- yes. You said you wanted a key to everywhere -- so that you could help yourself to anything. That's what you've got. An *everywhere key*."

"Will this get me money on Sunday?"

"There's the bank." His tone was hushed, even sepulchre.

"This key can't affect combination locks and time locks."

"You said you wanted an *everywhere key*, and that's just what you've got," it seemed to shout almost hysterically. "Are you calling me a liar again?"

"No! No!" I interjected hastily, placing my left hand over my left ear. "I didn't mean to infer that you lied. It's just that this skeleton key doesn't look like it could open combination and time locks."

"It's an *everywhere key*," it shouted even more loudly.

"What should I do with it?" I asked most propitiatively.

The voice calmed. "No one will suspect that you can just walk in and help yourself."

It was most easy. Not even the alarm rang, which I expected throughout the escapade. The front door, the iron gate next, another iron gate -- but the massive bank vault humbled me. Imposing. No key hole.

"Well use it! Use it!" it's loud voice seemed to echo from Roman pillars to tellers' cages.

Frightened but determined, I pushed the key toward the massive steel, and it slid inward just as easily as at the keyhole of my wife's little drawer. The bank vault door swung ponderously outward. One more steel grid door, and we were in.

"There," the voice said, satisfied.

During my spouse's over-long absence I learned to cooperate with the other half, especially after cracking open my head in a tumble down the basement stairwell. That was the first time I'd seen the locked door below.

"Open it," the voice demanded.

"No," I haven't the key."

"You've got the *everywhere key*," you dimwit.

A cold chill passed down my spine, and I changed the subject.

Money was no problem after the bank job. We lacked for nothing. As months passed, the voice began chiding me about my wife's whereabouts, asking, "When will our wife be back?"

"What do you mean by 'our wife'?" I'd ask.

"Did you kill her?" it would wheedle again.

Disgusting. I refused to talk or cooperate then.

In time both of my sides became fat. Once my whole left side became paralyzed. I always suspected



that the voice had insinuated itself into my side, but what could I do about it? It's response: "I don't want your side? Do you now call me a bargain breaker? First you call me a liar, and now a cheat!"

I kept my peace between these attacks, though they recurred more frequently.

One morning -- a rather peaceful one between us for a change -- a door knock sounded loudly, and the strange, new voice shouted, "This is the police. Open up! We have a search warrant."

"Now what have you done? Steal a little money?" my brain partner said with usual sarcasm tinging its voice.

"I haven't done anything you haven't. Shall we let them in, or let them tear down the door?"

"That's your problem. I only bargained for half your brain, not your etiquette."

I reflected briefly, then bluffed through the door, "Sorry, you must have the wrong house. Go try next door."

They chopped through the wooden paneling, and I said, "We've got to go. Don't fight it."

"You're leading." Even during emergencies the voice taunted me.

My *everywhere key*, now dangling from my left arm, quickly unlocked the basement doorway. Together we walked swiftly, easily downward. "Thanks," I said.

"What for?"

"You didn't make me tumble."

The door upstairs crashed inward and now we could hear their feet pounding across the floor. There was nowhere else for us to go. We were trapped. But what left to do?

"Use the key!" it whispered almost insidiously.

My left eye looked downward where I could see the shimmery key. Before me was that locked door. Clumping sounds came closer from overhead. In panic, now, I reached and unlocked the door.

"Pretty sight, isn't it?" the voice hissed.

They were at the steps overhead. The key shed a red glow over the withered skeleton before me. Rats had gnawed, leaving streaks in exposed bones. The powdery stench was stifling. Only her nightgown seemed whole, covering a grisly skeleton.

"Use your key!" my brain partner urged.

"I did use it," I stated rather dumbly.

"Not that way. It's an *everywhere key*, you dope. Remember?"

"So?"

"Heaven! The gates of heaven!"

Then I understood. Of course. It was an *everywhere key*! Heaven was a place. Steps creaked -- halfway down now. My half of my mind whirled. My left side began to shiver with red fires of pain. I'd use the key, and be free of the voice at last, I thought.

"Hurry! Hurry!" the voice thundered.

A rough hand reached my shoulder just as I pushed the key upward, unlocking heaven's gate.

At last the terrible inner voice was gone, as was the police and the grisly remains of my spouse. Peace. Genuine, peaceful life without pain, agony and conflict.

I gloried in the snow-white clouds, and the deep blue sky with its gentle, cool breezes; but then thunder shook, the sky darkened, and red permeated everything as a hot, dry wind turned my skin to parchment as fragile as that of my dead wife's.

"Liar!" I shouted, fist raised in the air as knuckles crackled and intolerable arthritic pain shot up my arms and shoulders. "Liar!" You bargained for an *everywhere key*. You said it would open the very gates of heaven!"

My face shriveled under the intense blast of hot air. My teeth swelled, and dropped from their sockets.



"This isn't heaven!" I screamed, now hardly able to enunciate the words. "You lied! You're nothing but a cheap cheat and a liar! This is the other place!" -- and long, shadowy echoes carried my words around and back again.

"Yes!" the voice said softly, contemptuously.

"Sure, it is!"

"And so you'll always know -- forevermore -- you could have entered your own mind with the *everywhere key*, and become whole, at any time. It was an *everywhere key*, remember? Remember?" -
- and the laughter swelled to fill everywhere that now was.

