

## ***inverse of lilliput***

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A strange evening begins when lightning strikes the tablet. Octavius learns that he does not like wearing jackets.

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### Act One

"C'mon, McPhee, can't you shut these things before we close?" Larry was standing atop a ladder, trying to close the open skylight in Ahkmenrah's room with a long pole. The forecast called for thunderstorms tonight, and Larry did NOT want to deal with a huge wet spot in Ahkmenrah's room. Water damage would erode the floors over the years, but if some got in his friend's sarcophagus? The mold alone would cause priceless amounts of damage.

"Do be careful up there, Larry!" Ahkmenrah called from below. He and Sacajawea were holding the ladder on each side, securing its position.

With one final poke, Larry unlatched the skylight and let it fall shut.

"There we go, finally." Larry grumbled as he descended from the ladder.

"Thank you, Larry, I shudder to think of what would happen if rain were to get in here."

Ahkmenrah helped Larry get to his feet as he stepped off the ladder. Larry could feel the blush on his cheeks as Ahkmenrah took his hand.

"My tablet has been through far too much already, it does not need mold or rust!"

Sacajawea approached the tablet to take a closer look.

"It's pure gold, so you won't need to worry about rust. Pure gold doesn't corrode."

"Oh. ...The mold, though?"

"Well, that depends on if it can take root on its surface."

Larry folded up the ladder and set it against the wall. He'd move it to the back later that night. For now, he joined the other two in front of the tablet.

There was a screeching of tires as a particular RC hummer swung its way around the corner. It came to a stop in front of Ahkmenrah's guardians. Jedediah and Octavius stepped out of the car, just inside the entryway.

"Hey, Gigantor! Are we gettin' the games out tonight or what?!"

Larry's brow rose in surprise. *Oh, right, game night!* He'd brought Cards Against Humanity and needed to show the group how it works.

Larry turned around to reply, but never got to.

The wind outside picked up, flinging the skylight open.

A flash.

An ear-shattering crack.

Electricity in the air.

Magic follows after.

Silence.

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"...ry! Larry, are you all right?!"

Larry felt a throb on the back of his head. Did he fall?

Ahkmenrah was set beside him, one hand cradling the back of his injured head, the other pressed against his heart.

"Ughhh... ow..."

Ahkmenrah helped the night guard to his feet.

"What happened?"

Sacajawea helped support his other side.

"Lightning struck the tablet. Look."

She pointed upwards, far, far upwards. The tablet's glow wasn't golden, but was white, almost a pale blue. It radiated a dangerous light, full of strange power. A bright set of crackling lines snaked down the tablet's front from where the bolt struck it. Larry's neck hurt as he looked upwards at it. *Wait, why is it up so high?* Larry thought. He took a look around, slowly realizing what had happened.

Ahkmenrah's sarcophagus towered above them, a skyscraper of Egyptian gold.

The skylight was as far up as the stars themselves.

The twin guardians of Ahkmenrah were more gargantuan than ever.

The tablet had shrunk the three of them.

"Uh, Gigantor!?"

Jedediah's panicked voice echoed in the group's ears, much louder than normal. Each of them clapped their ears shut. "Jed! Quieter, please!!" Sacajawea begged.

"Sorry," Jedediah said at a more acceptable level.

He sat before them all, back to the wall next to the entrance, naked as the day he was born, and obviously embarrassed by the situation. He towered over them at around the same height as Larry used to be. He was curled in the fetal position, trying to cover himself the best he could. His clothes laid before the group, unaffected by the tablet's magic. Octavius's armor did the same, the breastplate and limb protectors laid down as though he'd fallen backwards. "Where's Octavius?" Larry asked, looking around the room as he did.

"Here, my leige," Octavius called from behind the other column.

He, too, stood at a height that resembled a human's, though closer to Attila. He rubbed his right temple as he walked over, seemingly unashamed of his sudden nudity. "Pardon my absence, I..." he trailed off as he noticed his armor on the floor. "Is that really how small I am in the day-to-day?" Octavius picked up his helmet from the floor, resting it between two fingers. "Look, Jedediah, my galea is barely a thimble!" He said with a laugh.

"Can you PLEASE find me some clothes?! I don't wanna be seen like this!!"

Octavius rolled his eyes, still smiling.

"Come on, Jedediah, it's just your natural state of being. You were born naked, embrace it!"

"I will embrace nothing! Now get me some goddamn drawers!!"

Ahkmenrah rose a brow.

"Why would you need those? I thought you needed clothes, not furniture."

Larry huffed as he tried not to focus on Octavius's groin.

"He means undergarments, Ahk."

Octavius carefully scooped the group up into his hands.

"Are there any other clothes at the guard station?"

Larry nodded, his focus much easier now that he wasn't staring up at Octavius's sex. Entering a door off to the right of the tablet's station that said "EMPLOYEES ONLY" in big red letters, Octavius entered the service tunnel that snaked through the walls of the museum. Jedediah stayed behind, trying to shrink back to his miniature state by curling into himself.

Larry sighed.

*Can we have one normal night here? Just one?* He thought as Octavius carried him through the unpainted, empty hallways.

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## Act Two

Attila held the small pharaoh in his hands, in awe of the night's transformation. "Ahky?" He lifted Ahkmenrah to eye level. *"What happened?"* He spoke in Hunnish. Ahkmenrah replied, *"The storm outside, my friend. Lightning came through the skylight and shrank us."*

Attila looked over to Octavius, who held the other two in his hand. Jedediah was right behind him, still getting used to being at this new height. Both men wore the uniform of a night guard, deep blue jacket and all. Octavius did not wear the jacket the way it was meant to be worn - instead opting to tie it around his waist. "Fix?" Attila asked the shrunken guard. Larry shrugged. "Yeah, I think so. Ahk can fix the tablet, but it'll take some time." Ahkmenrah nodded. "Putting our relatively new stature aside for a moment, the power in the tablet needs to be properly channeled in order to revert us to our proper heights. If it is released too early, we could be stuck this way permanently." Larry and Sacajawea looked at one another, a cold feeling in the pit of their stomachs. They did not want to be small forever.

Gently, Attila placed Ahkmenrah in the furred brim of his hat.

*"Oh. Thank you, Attila."*

*"If those two can take a ride, so can you."*

Ahkmenrah laughed a bit and looked back to Octavius.

"Just like Britain!" He said with that wonderful smile on his face that Larry loved.

"I'm... I'm gonna go check on everyone. They're probably missin' me," Jedediah muttered as he began to make his way off to the miniature hall. Octavius gave him a passing kiss on the cheek. "Say hello to Sarah for me." Jedediah nodded, and walked off.

"I may as well update my soldiers on this whole debacle. Shall I leave them with you, Attila?"

Attila nodded. Ahkmenrah translated as he spoke, "You can count on me."

Carefully, Larry and Sacajawea scooted off Octavius's palm and into Attila's.

"His palms are calloused," she said, running her fingers along the creases of his hand. "Most likely from holding his sword."

Gently, Attila placed the two in the brim of his crown, alongside Ahkmenrah.

*"To my chambers, my friend! The night marches on!"* Ahkmenrah called to the Hun.

Attila nodded to Octavius, and began to take the three to Ahkmenrah's room. Octavius, meanwhile, followed Jedediah to the miniature hall.

"What the SHIT, Jed?!"

Javier stood at the edge of the West. Sarah and Qiu stood nearby, and the rest of the Westerners watched in awe. Jedediah laughed a bit, awkward in his delivery. "Yeah... lightning struck the tablet, so Ock and I are stuck like this. Ahkmenrah's fixin' it, allegedly." Qiu called up

to Jedediah, "So how does it feel? Being big?" Jedediah shrugged. "Kinda weird. I can use the computer like it was meant to be used. Uh, the benches are about my size... oh, and I can do this."

He reached into the diorama, and lifted the train with one hand. The crowd let out a low "oooh," impressed by Jedediah's sudden strength. Javier whistled, impressed as well. "That's useful. We might wanna keep you this big." Jedediah snorted and shook his head as he placed the train back on the tracks. "Hell no. I ain't meant to be this big. I keep bumpin' into stuff, and seein' everyone from this perspective... it weirds me out."

Sarah approached him.

"Do you think you could take us for a walk, sugar bean?"

Jedediah held out a hand for her to climb on. Qiu and Javier followed after. Carefully, he placed the two women in one pocket, and let Javier ride on his shoulder.

"Anyone else wanna go?"

The crowd murmured for a moment, ultimately deciding against it. Jedediah shrugged again. "Suit yerselves." His footsteps felt heavy as he walked. The spare flip-flops Larry kept in the back were a bit too big for his feet, and they slapped against his heels like flippers when he took a step.

"This'll be my first time outta the dioramas without the car," Javier spoke as he gripped onto Jedediah's jacket.

"And my first time out, period!" Qiu called up to him from the pocket. Sarah giggled a bit at her wife's excitement to leave the West. Ever since she'd met her, Sarah knew Qiu had a desire to explore. She took a trip with Javier to the front desk once, and that was it. She'd got the bug, so to speak.

"BIG!!"

Septimius and Trajan pointed up at Octavius with both hands. Stars glittered in their eyes as they beheld their gargantuan general. Octavius chuckled at his excited soldiers. "Now, now, you two, it's nothing too serious. A side effect of some magic, that's all."

Trajan ran to the edge of Rome, and leaped off, grasping Octavius's jacket with both hands as he scurried up towards his general's face.

"Trajan!! What on Earth do you think you're-!!" He didn't get to finish as Trajan grasped his lower lip to hoist himself up onto Octavius's nose.

"Make me big too!!"

Septimius hopped in place, agreeing with Trajan. "We wanna run around in the guard uniform!! And play with the dinosaur!!"

"Yeah! Yeah!!" Trajan shook in sync with Septimius, positioning himself in just the right spot to where Octavius was forced to cross his eyes to look at his black-clad munifex. With a sigh, he picked Trajan up and let him dangle from his fingers, not unlike Larry used to do.

"You two are going to be the death of me." He said without malice as he placed Trajan next to Septimius.

"Aw, c'mon, *Imperator*!! We never get to do anything!!"

"Yeah, we're stuck in here all day!!"

Octavius put a hand on his hip. "So I suppose that whole superglue fiasco just never happened."

Trajan felt dizzy as he remembered getting stuck upside down. All the blood rushing to his head... the feeling still haunted him.

"We were attempting to ascend the walls, *Imperator!* Imagine its usefulness to our legion!!"

Octavius shook his head with a knowing smile. "Septimius, I can only imagine Trajan stuck to the wall of the restoration room by his feet. Besides, we already have something that will let us climb up walls."

The two soldiers gasped and leaned in to listen.

"Is it some sort of enhanced sandal?!"

"Or a beast that scales walls?! Did we tame spiders?!"

"No, it's much better than that."

"WHAT IS IT?!" They asked in sync.

"A rope."

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### Act 3

In Ahkmenrah's chambers, the three shrunken people stood atop the tablet.

"All right. I'll put in the soft reset combination, and that should return everything to normal," Ahkmenrah said, one hand on his chin. "Sacajawea, you should stand on the center tile. That's the last one we need to press."

"So, I'll be the one to send us back?" She asked.

"Indeed! It shall be a group effort!" Ahkmenrah said, gently clapping his hands.

Sacajawea smiled at her friend's joy, and made her way to the center tile. "Just tell me when."

Larry watched from his side of the tablet as Ahkmenrah hopped from design to design. Every once in a while, Ahkmenrah told him to jump on a tile of his own, orders which Larry followed diligently. The determination on the pharaoh's face made the night guard's heart flutter. With a sigh, he knew he couldn't hold it in any longer.

"Ahk, can I tell you something?"

Ahkmenrah landed on a certain tile with a small "oof."

"Of course! Does something ail you? Go to the one on your left."

Larry's face matched the shade of a pink carnation. He jumped to the design Ahkmenrah pointed out.

"I... I think I'm in love. W-, with... with you."

Ahkmenrah stood still as a stone.

"And I think... I think I'm... bisexual? I think that's the correct term? I just... I knew I loved Erica, and now, I love you, and... it's just really confusing."

Silence, for a moment.

"Ah. I see."

Larry didn't look Ahkmenrah in the eye.

"...I appreciate the sentiment, Guardian of Brooklyn."

Ahkmenrah flipped over one of the tablet's designs.

"I cannot say I feel the same."

Larry sighed a bit. What luck.

"...Or at all, come to think of it."

A brow rose.

"I've never felt romantic feelings, to anyone. Not even when I was meant to pick my wives."

A moment. Ahk jumped to a different design.

"I never looked for someone to share a bed with. I was looking for... I don't know. Someone with whom I could study the calendar, the sea, the way words changed and grew. A friend, perhaps."

He landed on a design near Larry, and stopped.

"...but then I was..."

Larry put an arm around Ahkmenrah's shoulders. Remembering his death always hurt, no matter how many thousands of years passed by. Ahkmenrah could almost feel the serrated blades dragging out from between his ribs.

"Hey, it's all right. It's... it's probably best if I find someone outside of here."

Ahkmenrah met his gaze.

"I mean, you'll still be waking up and walking around in a hundred years. I'll be dead."

Ahkmenrah's eyes widened.

"I think I now understand what 'too dark' is."

With one last jump onto a design, the tablet rumbled beneath the two. The glittering scar of lightning receded to the impact point.

"That's it! We can switch back!"

The two men smiled wide as they stepped off the tablet. As they got to their feet, Ahkmenrah snuck a kiss onto Larry's cheek. The night guard's face flushed red for a moment. "I thought you didn't like anyone, Ahk." The pharaoh only smiled. "I can't show my friend my appreciation?" Larry touched the spot on his face where Ahkmenrah kissed him. *I think I can live with this*, he thought.

Sacajawea was ready atop the Life design at the center. Ahkmenrah gave her a thumbs-up, and she jumped once to activate the magic again.

A flash.

Electricity in the air.

Magic follows after.

Silence.

Octavius and Jedediah walked through the Deep Ocean exhibit, situated beneath the giant whale.

"It looks much bigger, usually."

"Course it does, Ock, usually we're about this size."

Jedediah punctuated his sentence by lifting the shoulder where Javier sat.

"Are we sure that's to scale? Blue whales are up to one hundred feet long. That does not seem like one hundred feet."

"Eh, can't tell without goin' and measurin' ourselves."

"There's a few things I'd like to measure."

Jedediah's neutral confidence shattered in an instant as he understood Octavius's innuendo. His face flushed a shade of red as the three miniatures let out a gossipy "ooooh!" Octavius couldn't help but laugh.

"Ock, we've got company with us!!"

"Let them watch."

Octavius planted a gentle kiss on Jedediah's rosy cheek. Javier used his better judgment and slid down Jed's chest and into the pocket where Sarah and Qiu were situated.

"Room for one more?" He whispered as he fully got in.

"Um."

Javier's eyes adjusted to the darkness of the pocket, realizing what had occurred while he was up on Jedediah's shoulder. The two women were entwined around one another. Sarah's hand was up Qiu's blouse, hand grasping her left breast. Javier felt his face get hot as he turned away. "S-sorry!!" The women met eyes for a moment. Qiu smiled and motioned slightly towards him. Sarah looked to Javier, then back to her wife. They both nodded.

"You can watch, if you want." Qiu offered.

"Atmosphere's hot enough as is, Javier. Not like you'd escape the canoodlin' whether you're out there or in here."

Carefully, Javier turned back to the women, as they resumed their session, lips locked and hands going where they may. Strangely, no clothes came off. That was, oddly enough, all the more tantalizing to see. Javier felt his face get hot again, as well as some other parts of him. *Why do I feel better watching, than participating...?* Javier's thoughts swam as he watched the women explore one another.

Octavius held Jedediah's face in his hands, his palms feeling the gentle scruff of Jedediah's beard. "You look lovely in this light, *carissime*." Jedediah's eyes darted to the side, a contented smile spreading across his face. "Aw... shucks." Jedediah let Octavius sit him down on one of the benches, the general resting in his lap. "May I kiss you?" Octavius asked, moving his hands to Jedediah's shoulders, wrapping around them in an embrace. Jedediah nodded.

Carefully, gently, Octavius pressed his lips to Jedediah's.

The two men stayed this way, for a moment.

A flash.

Electricity in the air.

Magic follows after.

"GOD DAMN IT!"

Jedediah and Octavius remained on the bench, entirely naked beneath a pile of spare guard uniforms. Octavius still sat in Jedediah's lap. The other three miniatures peeked from the pocket of Jedediah's former jacket.

"Whoo! Someone's gettin' busy!" Sarah taunted from behind her wife, both hands occupied on her breasts. Javier was too busy being flustered to comment on anything.

"We're never gonna live this down..."

"At least we're normal again...?"

It took a while, but Larry finally found them. "Here's your stuff, you two." He said, presenting the smaller two with their clothing. Jedediah took it quicker than Octavius did, frantically dressing himself. "Thanks, Gigantor," he said, adjusting his hat to its proper position. "Thank you for keeping this safe, my liege," Octavius thanked as he slipped on his galea. "We'll

have to wait til tomorrow for game night, guys. It's already ten til sunrise," Larry said as he put the two in his left pocket.

Jedediah turned to the three Westerners occupying Larry's other pocket.

"Don't say a word about none of this," he said with a hiss.

The ladies giggled a bit. "We won't~." Qiu sang. Javier couldn't meet anyone's gaze, but he did hold up his right thumb.

After returning the miniatures to their dioramas, Larry went back to the Deep Ocean exhibit to pick up the spare uniforms. As he folded a jacket over his arm, he happened to look up.

"...I don't think that whale's to scale."