

I awoke in a clearing of a large rainforest. It was daytime, possibly noon.
After looking around the clearing for a few minutes I found a path and decided to walk it.
After several minutes of walking I arrived at another clearing and just as I entered a
Tyrannosaurus Rex also entered.
We stood motionless, staring at each other.
Finally, I spoke.

"Hello."
"Hello," it replied from a dozen yards away.
"You can talk."
"Yes, I can."
"Where are we?"
"That doesn't matter."
"Why not?"
"I need you to follow me."
"Why?"
"Because that is my purpose."
"What if I don't want to follow you?"
"Then I will wait until you do."
"What if I never follow you?"
"Never is a very long time."

I thought about this and the T-Rex stood there, quiet and huge.

"Did I die?"
"Did you die?"
"Yes, am I dead?"
"I don't know."
"Is any of this real?"
"That doesn't matter."
"Is this a dream?"
"That doesn't matter."

Again, I thought about this.

"Where do you want me to follow you to?"

The dinosaur paused before answering.

"To what's next."
"What is next?"
"I don't know."
"Are you sure I'm not dead?"
"I never said you were dead, just that I didn't know."
"How do I go back?"
"Go back where?"
"To where I'm from."

"You can't go back."
"Why not?"
"Because you just can't."
"You're not very helpful."

Again, the dinosaur was silent.

"Is this purgatory?"
"Why do you think this is purgatory?"
"Well, this doesn't make a lot of sense right now."
"What do you remember of where you came from?"
"I remember everything. My family, friends, work, where I lived, etc. All kinds of stuff."
"And what makes you think this is purgatory?"
"You said I couldn't go back to it and you're being very cryptic."

I walked up to the clearing's other occupant and looked up. I was cast into shadow by the enormous creature. Its silhouette filled my view of the sky.

"What's your name?"
"I don't have a name."
"Why not?"
"I don't need one."
"Well what do I call you?"
"What do you want to call me?"
"I want to call you by your name."
"But I don't have a name."
"Am I supposed to give you a name?"
"You're supposed to follow me."
"Should I call you The Leader?"
"If you like."
"What about Bruce?"
"That's fine too."
"What about Marmalade?"
"Is that what you want to call me?"
"Not really. I'm just trying to get a reaction."

The T-Rex smiled, its broad lips curled and I could see teeth bigger than my fist.

"Am I supposed to ride on your back?"
"If you like."
"Will it take long to go where you want me to go?"
"Not long."
"Do I have to be there soon?"
"What?"
"What if I'm late."
"Time is irrelevant."
"Is time always irrelevant or just here?"

“What?”

“Well this certainly sounds like some crazy non-place if time is irrelevant.”

The T-Rex continued smiling.

“What if I never follow you?”

“Never is a very long time.”

“Is there anyone else on this island?”

“What makes you think we’re on an island?”

“I don’t know. I just assumed with the tropical rainforest and all. Are we on an island?”

“Does it matter?”

“Maybe. Are there other people?”

“Other people where?”

“On this island.”

“I never said this was an island.”

“Okay fine, but are there other people where we are?”

“Does it matter?”

“Goddamn, you’re very good at being vague and cryptic.”

I paused briefly.

“What were you doing before you came here?”

“Does it matter?”

“Did you exist?”

“Does it matter?”

“What if I said yes, it does matter?”

“That wouldn’t change the answer.”

“Ha! So you know the answer?”

“Does it matter if I know the answer?”

“Why won’t you give me a straight answer to anything? Are you some kind of computer or robot?”

“Do you want me to be a computer or robot?”

I smirked, “Does it matter?”

The dinosaur shrugged. I had never really thought about what a dinosaur would look like shrugging.

“Why are you a dinosaur?”

“Does it matter?”

“It does to me.”

“Why?”

“Because I freaking love dinosaurs.”

Another toothy grin from overhead.

“Can I give you a hug?”

"If you like."

My heart skipped a beat but without hesitation I stepped forward and plastered myself against the beast's scaly torso. My arms reached out as far as they could and I mashed my cheek into its bulky frame. The dinosaur was silent the whole time. After some time, I leaned back and looked up at the looming chin and jagged teeth above me.

"Are you here because of me?"

"I'm here to take you some other place."

"Are there dinosaurs there too?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever been there before?"

"I don't know."

"Have you always been here?"

"I don't know."

"Did I create you?"

"I don't know."

"I'm glad you're here."

Then it was silent for awhile. After a few moments, I hugged the dinosaur again.

"Do you like being hugged?"

"It doesn't matter."

I frowned, "It does to me."

I stepped back and looked into its eyes.

"Do you not like being hugged?"

"That also doesn't matter."

"Why doesn't it matter?"

"It just doesn't."

"Does nothing I do matter?"

"I don't know."

"Would you be offended if I kicked you?"

"It would hurt."

"Would you kick me back?"

"That would hurt you."

"So pain matters."

"Pain is bad."

"Glad we both agree on that! You're not so nihilistic after all. So you're not going to kick, or stomp, or eat me?"

"That is not my purpose."

"What is your purpose?"

"I'm here to take you some other place."

"Me specifically or like, other people?"

"Does it matter?"

"Have you ever escorted anyone else through the forest?"

"Does it matter?"

"Do you not remember?"

"I don't know."

"What do you remember?"

"That's not important."

"Do you have something to hide?"

"Does that matter?"

"Maybe. I don't know. You weren't born yesterday because you're a huge, full grown dinosaur. You obviously did something before I found you. You don't seem to be offended or respond to much."

It was silent once more. I waited for some sort of answer but nothing came. I felt very unsatisfied and walked a few feet away to sit at the base of a tree. I thought could feel the Rex's eyes on my back. When I turned around, it hadn't moved but it was watching me.

"What happens if I die here?"

"I don't know."

"Well you would fail your mission because I'd never get to that other place. What happens if you fail your mission?"

"I don't know."

"Have you ever failed before?"

"I don't know."

"You don't remember or you don't know?"

"I don't know."

"What if I sat right here and did nothing forever?"

"Forever is a very long time."

"Yes, but how do you know that?"

"I just do."

"Okay, whatever Deus Rex Machina. Whatever you say just is."

I looked across the clearing and considered the weather briefly. There was some wind, but no clouds. The tree tops moved a little. No birds, no bugs, no real sounds other than leaves and the wind.

"Are you God?"

"I don't know."

"If you had said 'does it matter?' I would have thought, okay this is certainly God and he's messing with me."

"....."

"But you didn't."

"....."

"Do you have free will?"

"Does it matter?"

"Ha! Spoken like a true angel."

"Do you think I'm an angel?"

"I don't know what the hell to think. Angels, dinosaurs, purgatory. I'm confused."

I thought for a moment.

"But I'm not hungry. Or hot. I should be hot. I'm not sweating... or tired, or cranky, or anything. This is too perfect. This can't be real. Are you hungry?"

"I don't know."

"You're a freakin' dinosaur! I thought they were always hungry. Stomping around, eating tons of meat or whatever. How do you survive?"

"I don't know."

"So... you don't have to eat to survive?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if you suddenly have a craving, please don't eat me."

"I won't."

"Why not?"

"What?"

"Why wouldn't you eat me?"

"That would hurt. Pain is bad."

"Just because I say so?"

"Does it matter?"

"Back to this again, eh? Do you have to do whatever I say? Are you mine to control?"

"I don't know."

"Well if I give you an order, do you have to obey it?"

"I don't know."

"Go knock over the tree!"

"Which one?"

"The... I don't know, the tall one. The one that's shorter than you over there." I gestured to a tree.

The T-Rex turned away and lumbered over to the other side of the clearing and then leaned on to a tree. The leaves rustled and a moment later the trunk toppled over, roots tossing dirt in the air like confetti. The dinosaur stood there, not moving.

"Hey, come back over here!"

The dinosaur walked back over to where I sat, its heavy footfalls like drums.

"Why did you do that?"

"You told me to."

"Will you do anything I say?"

"I don't know."

"What if I test that?"

"What if you test what?"

"What if I test your free will?"

"I don't know."

"Well then we can learn together and it'll be fun."

I stood up.

"Am I keeping you from your mission?"

"Yes."

"Will you get in trouble?"

"I don't know."

"Do you have a boss?"

"A what?"

"A boss. If you get in trouble, who will yell at you?"

"I don't know."

I frowned.

"Do you think you'll get in trouble?"

"I don't know."

"Do you think I'll get in trouble?"

"I don't know that either."

"And you don't remember ever escorting others through here ...or failing to escort them through here, so who knows if anyone ever got in trouble."

The dinosaur sat down. I jumped.

"What was that?"

"I sat down."

"Yeah, no shit. But why did you sit down?"

"I felt like it."

"But I didn't tell you to."

"No."

"You just did it."

"Yes."

"So you have free will."

"I don't know."

"Well, I didn't tell you to do it and I don't see anyone else around, so I assume you thought to sit down on your own."

"I don't know."

"Were you tired?"

"I did just push over a tree."

I blinked. "Yeah, you did."

I sat down again.

"Why did you sit down?"

"Because I felt like it."

I looked at the dinosaur and the dinosaur looked back.

I scooted a little closer to it.

"Can I live here?"

"Where?"

"Here."

"Like right here?"

"Yeah. I'm pretty sure none of this is real or I'm dreaming or something. There don't seem to be any real consequences to what I do or say. I don't know if I'm dead or immortal or whatever, but I don't seem to feel hungry or tired or aches and pains. This could be heaven or hell or something. Dinosaurs have been extinct for millions of years and I'm pretty sure they don't talk, yet here I am and here you are."

I was lost in thought. I looked up and the dinosaur was looking at the ground.

"Hey."

It looked up.

"What're you thinking about?"

"Nothing."

"You were just looking over there. It seemed like you were contemplating something."

The dinosaur was silent.

I scooted closer yet, setting myself right next to a scaly haunch bigger than I was twice over.

"What happens when I go to the next place?"

"I don't know."

"What happens to you?"

"I don't know."

"Are you scared?"

"Does it matter?"

"It matters to me."

"I don't know."

I leaned against my dinosaur in the clearing in the rainforest with no bugs or sweat.

"Do you want me to go?"

"It is my purpose to take you there."

"Can it wait?"

"I don't know."

"I think it can wait."

We sat there for a very long time. I remember feeling it when it breathed, inhaling and exhaling. I thought about that scene in Jurassic Park where Dr. Grant laid on top of the triceratops. I felt happy. I smiled to myself and nuzzled against the talking dinosaur's side. I traced the edges of individual scales, first with my eyes and then with my finger. I looked up to see if it was watching me. It wasn't.

"Are you male or female?"

"Neither."

"What?"

"I'm neither male nor female."

"Are you something else?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know, like both or something."

"No."

"Should I call you he or she or something?"

"I thought you wanted to call me Marmalade."

"I might still do that. You don't eat and you don't have sex."

I thought for a moment.

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

The dinosaur peered over at me.

"Can you read my mind?"

"I don't know."

"What am I thinking about right now?"

"I don't know."

"Guess a number."

"5."

"8."

"Hmm."

"Did you say 5 just so I wouldn't think you can read my mind?"

"No."

"Why'd you say 5?"

"I felt like it."

"Just like sitting down?"

Another shrug. It was still as new and odd to watch as the first time.

"Can I sit on your back?"

The dinosaur leaned forward, its huge neck stretching out as it laid on its belly in the clearing. I scrambled, trying to keep clear of the shifting bulk and massive legs. As soon as the Rex was settled, I scrambled over the olive green wall of calf muscle, on to the base of the tail, and then crawled up to the narrow shoulders where I laid rather than sat. I stretched my arms out wide and hugged the thick, leathery neck of the big lizard. I closed my eyes and sighed happily.

"Are you comfortable?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well I don't want to sit on you if it's uncomfortable."

"I'm fine."

"You are fine."

The dinosaur chuckled.

“Was that funny?”

“A little.”

“I don’t think I’m ever going to leave.”

“No?”

“No.”

“What about what’s next?”

“Whatever it is,” I leaned forward and whispered to Marmalade, “It won’t be better than this.”