

THE QUARRY

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Eye Opening

Lexie receives some money at the end of each week—usually an amount carefully calculated by her parents in regards to how much they can spare. She always places each valuable coin and note in a large, glass jar; she isn't the type to store her money in elaborately designed boxes or even in a bank account where most people her age would logically choose to deposit their money. She needs to be able to see the money, needs to see that she is getting closer to her goal. Her family always questions why she never spends any of her pocket money and her brother often teases her with his never ending guesses of what she might be saving for. She never gives in, never gives her family the slightest hint of what she has been planning. She slides another coin through the opening and listens to the familiar clinking sound; then she watches

the colourful notes squish together after she feeds them through the thin hole soon after. The truth is there is no big secret to what she is saving for—no huge elaborate plan to travel the world or book out an entire Taylor Swift concert. All she wants is to pay her way through college so that the financial burden is off her parents. She decided to hide this from them because she knew they would take it hard, always wanting to give her as much as they could—and in a way they had. Technically, the money had been given to her by them; they were paying for college, but she knew they wouldn't see it that way. Well, the money *had* been for college. This suddenly changed the day she met an unlikely friend at the local park.

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'Lexie don't you think it's time for breakfast? You don't want to be late for your class.'

Her mother's voice grabbed her attention at once. She picked up her faded blue backpack off of her bedroom floor and rushed out her door, nearly sending the globe sitting on her desk tumbling to the ground. Realising what she'd knocked, she stopped and turned to inspect the damage she may have caused. Lexie held her breath as she saw the globe balancing on the edge of the desk, scared that even a slight change of oxygen in the room could end in a shattered mess of bits and pieces on her floor. She had spent many nights when she was younger nagging her parents to buy her that globe; from a young age she had a keen interest in exploring the world and venturing out on as many adventures as she could. Quite often her brother would rat her out to her parents, revealing that she had spent another night awake, spinning the delicate round ball of countries, stopping it with her finger and day dreaming about an adventure in the nation it had landed on. She sighed in relief when the object finally stilled.

'Lexie?'

'Coming, Mum.'

Lexie headed down the staircase and into the kitchen. She immediately smelt the familiar scent of her mother's famous zucchini surprise and sat down at the

wooden table that was noticeably worn from constant use. Her mother slid a plate with a slice of zucchini quiche on it across the table. Lexie brought the plate to a halt and quickly stuffed the delicious food into her mouth. Her mother watched her with amusement and laughed.

‘You’re going to make yourself sick!’

Lexie tried to answer, but her reply came out in unrecognisable mumbles. When she finished, she left her dirty plate on the kitchen table. Guiltily, she walked towards the door, throwing a quick sorry over her shoulder as she quickly shut the door behind her. She walked at a much faster pace than usual down the concrete path that led to her college and soon noticed her friend’s recognisable long, auburn coloured hair in the distance. She decided to pick up the pace and finish the rest of her journey in a slow jog. When she finally caught up to Ashley she was so out of breath she clutched her chest in pain.

‘Hi Ash, how ar—’ Lexie’s greeting was cut short when a huge gust of wind brushed past her and knocked her assignment sheet out of her hands. She panicked and raced off after the windswept papers. Ashley followed close behind her. They both turned a corner and then another. Lexie’s lungs felt as though there was a raging fire trapped within from all the running she had endured in the last ten minutes. Soon they both came to a halt as they realised the wind had died down and was no longer carrying her papers on a never ending journey. Lexie was surprised when she noticed a figure hunched over, sitting next to where her assignment lay. He was an older man, huddled in a mass of blankets to shelter himself from the harsh chill winter always brings. Lexie hesitantly walked up to him, half fearful and half curious to know about the man she had incidentally come across. Ashley stayed behind, too uninterested to follow after her. Lexie was so lost in her own thoughts, imagining every possible scenario as to why this seemingly harmless man had to create a home on the streets, when her feet collided with his. Lexie quickly jumped back and blushed in embarrassment.

‘Sorry, I didn’t realise I was so close.’

“That’s okay. Here, I believe these are yours,” the man replied while he picked up the various sheets of paper and gave them to her with unsteady hands.

‘What’s your name?’ Lexie asked.

‘Arthur,’ he replied with a genuine smile.

She decided to ignore the annoying voice in her head pressuring her to ask Arthur all the questions that were bouncing off the walls inside her brain. It isn’t her fault that she is so curious; it’s her dream to become a journalist, it will be her job one day to find out people’s unique stories and question them for information. At least that’s what she continually tells herself when her friends decide to call a sudden intervention, pointing out her need to question and investigate even the simplest things in life.

‘It was nice meeting you,’ Lexie said with a frown forming on her forehead.

‘Is something wrong?’ Arthur asked.

‘It’s just...’ Lexie turned around and noticed Ashley rolling her eyes and motioning for her to hurry up. ‘Never mind, maybe another time’ Lexie added, smiling at Arthur and making her way back to Ashley. The pair made it back to class in silence, Lexie too consumed with her own thoughts.

Every day she had classes to attend at college. After that, she made sure to leave ten minutes earlier so she had the chance to speak to Arthur again. Each day she started to find out more about him. Piece by piece, she started to put together the puzzle of his story. She learnt that he used to work as an ambulance officer. He used to save lives every day, but the one life he was unable to save was that of his wife. His wife fell ill and there was nothing the doctors or he could do to save her. He had sat by her beside every day that she was there. That cost him his job, but he didn’t care. She had limited time left on this Earth and he was determined to spend every last moment with her. He had to sell his house to pay for all the numerous and highly expensive medical bills to keep her comfortable and pain free for as long as possible. This is how he ended up here, on the street that Lexie stumbled upon.

Lexie had also made another sad discovery. One day she visited Arthur to discuss the book she had given him. She had allowed him to keep her favourite book *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* by Jules Verne. She hoped he would find it interesting and engaging rather than childish. She loved the book when she was younger and it is still a story she holds close to her heart today. Lexie loved to read and she was hoping that he would share this same passion.

‘Did you start reading the book I gave you?’ she asked.

‘I can’t say that I did,’ Arthur replied with a grim face.

After a few more curious questions from Lexie were answered she learnt the disheartening truth: Arthur had poor vision and was losing his eyesight at a rapid rate. Every time he tried to read the words would start to blur, creating a sea of black ink. After wracking her brain for ideas on how she can make the situation better, she ran back home later that day with an idea.

When Lexie returned home, she was greeted by her father, ‘Hey, Lexie. I have something for you.’

‘What is it, Dad?’

‘Here’s your pocket money, don’t spend it all at once,’ her father joked.

Lexie took the money that her father gave her and ran up the stairs with a purpose. She closed her door and dropped to the ground, rummaging through the items under her bed until she found the one she was looking for. She weaved the glass jar out from underneath the rest of the items and popped the lid open. She placed the coins inside and put the jar on top of her desk next to her globe and her copy of *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, which she had retrieved from Arthur when she realised he wouldn’t be able to read it.

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That was how her collection started. This is what she has done every week for the past two years, placing each coin and note she gets into the shiny glass jar. She picks up the glass jar and places it into her backpack, not needing to count the money as she already knows the exact amount from constant, careful calculations. She knew exactly how long she would need to save in order to reach her desired amount. She swings her backpack around her shoulders and walks down the stairs to go talk to Arthur about the idea she has.

When Lexie arrives at Arthur’s usual spot, she is finally able to tell somebody the plans she has for the money. She explains her detailed plan to gather enough money to be able to pay for the eye operation that he desperately needs. She knows he has been through a lot over the last decade and she wants to be able to provide him

with an escape. Books have always been a tool she has used to feel as though she is going on an adventure and to be transported to another time and place. She wants him to be able to read so that he has something other than the negatives to focus on while he spends his days on the streets. She also knows how important vision is and would be heartbroken if he lost his when she could have done something about it. What she didn't count on was Arthur's reluctance to accept her help.

'No Lexie, you keep your money.'

'You gave up everything to pay for your wife's medical bills, let someone do the same for you.'

'You still have college to pay off; I'm not worth wasting your money on.'

'I will still be able to pay for college it just might take a little longer.'

'Lexie, I can't take your money.'

'You can and you will, you need this operation.'

After a few weeks of convincing him, Arthur was finally checked into the hospital for his eye operation. While Lexie waits for his operation to finish, she places *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* on the table next to the bed he will be recovering in. Her mother walks up beside her and places a hand on her shoulder.

'I thought you were saving up for an adventure,' she says.

'I was saving for an adventure, just not my own,' Lexie replies.