

THE QUARRY

You Can See Ghosts?

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Rio Linz was a mostly normal boy who lived a mostly normal life. He attended school and maintained average grades and was able to mostly keep himself out of trouble. He lived with his parents, both of whom worked. Everything about Rio was for the most part completely and utterly unremarkable.

Save for one titbit fact.

Rio could see ghosts.

Rio's first ghost was his former nanny. Her name was Madalyn.

The boy used to look up to see the elderly woman's face, when his head barely reached her waist. Wispy white hair trailed down, splitting into two halves before ending just shy of her chin.

She still looked down at him. Her gaze wandered over his features curiously as she examined him. Her weathered lips formed a thin line as they pressed together. Her eyes blinked once as he stared at her intently.

‘Rio?’

Not trusting himself to speak, Rio nodded his head sharply.

‘You can see me, sweetheart?’

Despite himself, Rio nodded a second time.

Understanding quickly dawned upon her features as her grey eyes locked with his brown ones.

Hesitantly, Rio reached out and held her hand in his grasp.

The next four months saw Madalyn developing a routine. It fit with Rio’s easily enough. She would walk alongside him on his way to school and then waited for him until he came back out after school closed for the day. They would usually discuss mundane things such as the weather and how their respective days carried out.

Sometimes they didn’t speak to each other; they just walked next to each other in silence.

Rio noticed that Madalyn always wore the same clothes; a baby blue blouse and a dark skirt. He recalled that she had worn similar clothes when she was alive. He once asked why she never changed and the ghost replied that she simply couldn’t.

Madalyn would visit Rio several times on the weekend while he was in the backyard doing his homework in the tall grass or just drawing on a piece of paper. One time she offered to help him with his work and he accepted. This continued every weekend that followed. She excelled in story writing and geography, but hated maths even more than he did.

Rio never once thought to ask Madalyn what she did when she wasn’t spending time with him.

‘Madalyn.’ The said woman perked up when Rio said her name. The two were walking next to each other.

‘Yes, angel?’

Rio paused for a moment to consider how to best phrase the question before continuing.

‘Do you know anyone else that has died?’

Madalyn frowned in confusion.

‘What is it. . . leading you to ask such a dark question?’

Rio just shook his head and shrugged.

Madalyn mulled over the question quietly for a moment before replying in a sombre tone.

‘Many hearts as a matter of fact. Colin. I guess you wouldn’t remember him... he was my husband, he fell to lung cancer several years prior to myself. Naturally, my dear parents passed long—’

‘I don’t mean that. I meant if you know any other ghosts,’ Rio cut across her.

Madalyn looked surprised. She was silent before making a noise of understanding in the back of her throat. Rio had tapped into her one sadness and though she tried not to dwell upon her loneliness, she couldn’t help at times but wonder why only she remained on Earth.

‘No, I don’t, unfortunately.’

The boy was unable to completely hide his disappointment. Madalyn easily picked up on it.

‘Rio, are we friends?’

Rio nodded.

‘Then you know that if you need someone to speak to, don’t hesitate to ask me. Some things are best kept secret, but not all things. It’s okay to share your thoughts with people that you trust. Even if we’ve lost people, its best to try and focus on who we still have.’

Rio's primary reason for wanting an authentic camera was because of his invisible companion. He wanted to prove her existence to his parents. It had been the highlight of his eleventh birthday to receive one from them.

However, when he tried to take a picture of her, he came up short—the image of his backyard lacked a ghost. Madalyn had initially been sceptical about the idea, but her facial expression fell slightly when it had failed.

Madalyn suggested that he use his birthday gift for something else. Eventually, he decided to see what he *could* capture outside. Having nothing else to do, his former carer accompanied him.

That was how Rio came to meet Kane.

Their meeting was similar to the first time Rio met Madalyn, yet almost entirely different.

They stood in the park, several feet from an ice cream vendor that was selling to a line of children from the street. Rio had finished taking photos of things Madalyn liked and was moving to the skateboard park with her trailing behind him, when he noticed the man. He seemed occupied, harassing nearby pedestrians. Rio noticed that they showed no response to his presence, which was surprising if one considered his physical appearance.

Kane was a big man, easily much taller than Rio and Madalyn. Muscles beneath his skin were practically bulging under an orange jumpsuit. He was covered in tattoos of spiderwebs and foreign kanji that decorated his domed head.

Wanting a photo, Rio looked for a good position. Once in location, he looked through his lens and saw no one there.

Confused, the boy lowered the camera and saw that Kane was still before him.

Once Kane had realised he was in the presence of someone who could actually see him, he was initially quite vocal, letting off a stream of new words.

'Fucking hell, you can see ghosts?'

The brashness caught Rio off guard. To his credit, he quickly recovered.

‘I guess? You’re my second one.’

Kane glanced at Madalyn, who squinted her eyes at him in distaste.

The giant glared.

‘Something you want to say to me, bitch?’

Once the excitement had passed, however, getting words out of him was harder than drawing blood from a stone. Despite Rio’s best efforts, his newest ghost kept his mouth firmly shut.

Eventually, time forced them to leave the park.

Rio and Madalyn went back the very next day after school, to the same spot as last time.

‘Hey...’

‘Yes, Rio.’

‘Do you think you can walk through walls?’ he asked Madalyn

A moment of silence passed.

‘I don’t know about that darling... I’ve never tried it.’

‘Why don’t you try it?’

She paused to consider before chuckling.

‘I’m sure I would have known by now if I could do something as whimsical as that.’

A moment passed and in that beat, Rio’s breathing quickened and he felt hot. He’d always felt unsure of how to approach a particular question and if, indeed, he should.

‘How did you die, exactly?’

Madalyn glanced at him before looking away. She didn’t answer.

Her mannerisms were quite contradictory; her distant and sometimes awkward behaviour clashed with the times that she was exuberant and full of life.

Kane wasn't there when they arrived. Rio tried to wait but was forced to take off after Madalyn when the old woman lost interest.

Rio saw Kane a second time only five days later, hovering outside of a rundown house that had most certainly seen better days.

To his surprise, Madalyn was also there. They were speaking to each other. Standing several feet apart, their appearances were a sharp contrast to each other. His interest getting the better of him, Rio decided to investigate. Thanks to his size, he was easily able to hide his small frame behind a rubbish bin.

He strained to pick up their words.

'Moping won't help you stand straighter, boy.'

Rio was surprised by the tone of Madalyn's voice, possessing a sharp edge that he never before knew existed.

Kane replied angrily, sounding impatient.

'Thanks for your fucking advice. I don't remember asking you to give a shit.'

Madalyn was silent for a moment. Then she spat out, 'Try to make an effort to understand your situation—our situation,' she insisted, urgently. 'You and I are both still here instead of completely passing on. In a way, this second chance has—'

She was interrupted.

'What "we" is there? Let me tell *you* something, you dumb bitch—hospital and fucking prison are as different as ice and cannabis. Needles don't mean squat. Just go and leave me the hell alone.'

Fearing he might be caught, Rio fled.

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One month after meeting Kane, Rio decided to take his interest in photography and art to new heights.

Armed with his trusty camera, Rio went out by himself.

He lived in a rather rundown neighbourhood full of plain colours. His family wasn't poor, but they were very far from well off. More than a few houses showed signs of neglect and old age, a few broken windows here, some rotten wood there. The surrounding neighbourhoods possessed the same atmosphere. There were weeds showing on several front lawns, driving up from beneath the ground like untameable servants.

Frowning at the lack of potential snapshots, Rio's young mind struggled to come up with ideas.

Rio found Madalyn sitting on the stairs of the front porch outside his house.

She was completely unprepared for his request.

'Sorry, I must confess. . . I am not quite sure what it is you mean.'

'Help me find stuff to take photos of.'

'And how would this be of use to you?' Madalyn asked.

Rio nodded.

'I figured that if I can't take photos of ghosts, I can use this camera in other ways to help.' He deliberately paused for dramatic effect before continuing. 'If you can take me to where you lived and other places that you liked when you were alive, I can retell your story through pictures of the things that meant the most to you.'

It only took two minutes to convince Madalyn of the idea.

'Of all places, why here?' Rio asked, holding his camera in both hands while looking around in confusion at his surroundings.

Both he and Madalyn were standing in the backyard where they did Rio's homework together.

Madalyn smiled before she explained her reasoning.

'Because this place has meaning to me. Here with you, on this little patch of grass, is where I now spend most of my time.'

Rio couldn't help but blush in embarrassment.

Soon, photographs began to replace the various sport and motorcycle posters that took up the wall space in his small room.

Gradually, over thirty new images appeared.

All of them were places of significance to Madalyn. Rio's latest one was a shot of a creek that Madalyn liked to walk alongside. Another was her favourite café in the shopping centre. They, along with several others, were all titled under Madalyn's name.

As Rio's photographs of Madalyn began to accumulate, the pair approached Kane and tried to rope him into the idea.

They failed.

While walking near a stream surrounded by an assortment of pebbles that lay underneath an overpass, Rio and Madalyn noticed a girl. She was young, sickly and petite, wearing torn jeans and a rainbow sweater with a woollen beanie covering her short brunette hair. She was bright and cheerful despite her pale complexion and somewhat unkempt appearance.

She approached the pair as they were about to move on, a mischievous grin betraying the general nature of her intention. He had seen it before in movies, when a person did something mischievous in exchange for attention. From the corner of Rio's eye, he noticed the yellow armband encircling her wrist.

She began to lean in, past what Rio considered his personal space. This merited asking her what she wanted. Madalyn beat him to it.

'Is there something we can help you with, dear?'

She yelped and jumped back as if she had just received an electric shock. Scrambling back, she nearly tripped over.

‘You can see me?’ the girl asked him, her eyes wide. A look of understanding came over her as she stared at him. ‘You can see ghosts?’

Rio replied with a yes.

‘That’s incredibly cool,’ was her response.

The first place that Natalia, their newest companion, dragged Rio and Madalyn was to a carnival circus that took place once every June. Amongst the cacophony of noises there, including Natalia’s laughter, Rio wasn’t very sure where to point his lens.

Madalyn found herself struggling to keep up as her body ached in protest while pursuing Natalia. Eventually she was forced to stop, leaning against a food stand for support.

Natalia seemed to have the knack of getting ahead of herself.

When Rio decided to ask Natalia about the places that held any sort of significant meaning to her, Natalia had taken Rio to the aquatic centre at night after closing. This led to Rio getting arrested for breaking and entering—only to get photos of himself in the water at night.

While sitting in the chair waiting for his parents to arrive, with Madalyn and a guilty-faced Natalia standing on either side of him, Rio overheard something. According to two officers who were standing outside the office, a teenager had broken into the pool eleven times over a three-year period.

Apparently, the girl ran away from the hospital at night just so that she could swim with no one else in it.

Natalia had the decency to blush as Rio turned to look at her with incredulity. They made eye contact and her skin tone practically went from a mild pink to a rich scarlet as she fiddled with her hands. It took several seconds for Rio to realise that Madalyn was also looking at

Natalia, her soft eyes charged with disdain. Fortunately, the centre kindly decided to drop the charges when they realised Rio wasn't their regular culprit.

Rio approached Kane and asked if he wanted to be a part of the project he was undertaking one last time.

The ghost refused.

After recovering from his grilling at home, the first thing Rio did was head up to his room to return to his work. Once it was done, he hung up his newest picture and stood back to admire it properly. Looking over the photos he had taken for Natalia, he allowed himself a moment to enjoy the pride swelling up in his chest like a balloon fit to burst.

Alongside the collection that he had created for Madalyn, they formed the tales of two people who had already lived out their full lives.