

# THE QUARRY

## Terminal Silence

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Jack Lewis was not, and had never been, a man to socialize.

Even when he had been a young boy in elementary school, people had often commented on how quiet he was, how he preferred to keep to himself, and interacted with others only when he had to. This habit had stuck with him all the way to adulthood.

Jack had an opinion of himself as a man of routine, the kind of man who had his life together. Each morning, he would be roused by his alarm clock at precisely seven thirty, eat his breakfast of toast and tea, and then catch the eight o'clock 399 bus to work. He would stay there for the day, stamping documents and filling in forms until precisely seven thirty in the evening. At this point of the day, Jack would pay a visit to the diner that was located conveniently underneath his office block and buy himself dinner. Then he would catch the same bus home, unless it was a Friday. On Fridays he would cross the street to the shopping centre near the bus stop and buy the week's groceries. Afterwards, he would arrive back at his home in the suburbs,

eat his dinner and put away the groceries, the alphabetized order of the jars soothing his soul. Then he would go to sleep.

Each day passed in an identical manner, barring the weekends. On his two days off from work, Jack would take the time to do things that he enjoyed, which mainly consisted of admiring his sizeable aquarium of exotic fish or working on his rather extensive collection of model boats and ships. His routine on the weekends did not differ much from the days on which he was expected to show up to work; he still arose seven thirty, only instead of heading off to the bus stop, he would stay indoors with one of the model ship magazines he wanted to read, or take the train to the nearby aquarium and burn a few hours there looking at the exhibits. Afterwards he would treat himself to a simple dinner of microwaved food, and then would go down to his basement workshop and spend exactly two hours working on his model ships, all the while listening to the somewhat ear-grating and wall-shaking *thud thud thud* of his neighbor's music. At least, he assumed it was his neighbor's music. It certainly came from inside the house next door. He had never been inside the neighbor's home to confirm, nor did Jack really feel the inclination to. It wasn't that he did not like his neighbor; Jack really couldn't think of any reason to dislike the man. It was just that aside from a casual wave and nod to each other when they would occasionally set off for work at the same time, Jack simply felt that he didn't know the man well enough to ask about his tastes in music. After all the years living side by side, all Jack knew about his neighbor was maybe his name, which he could not recall at the present moment, and that he had a wife and teenaged son, whom he occasionally caught a glimpse of through their windows.

And so, life went on, every day more or less a repeat of the last, just the way that Jack liked it, until one warm Sunday night. Jack settling down in his workshop with a mug of his favorite

Earl Grey tea, with exactly one tablespoon of cream and two sugar cubes in it. He was adding some finishing details to the conning tower of one of his prized model aircraft carriers, one which he had just finished assembling the night before. Jack rubbed his hands together in anticipation and unscrewed the lid on a jar of cherry red paint, getting his brush ready.

It was in that moment that a pall of unease settled onto Jack like a cold, clammy mist. Jack stared at his tabletop, frowning. He sipped at his tea, hoping it would calm him down. It did not work.

Jack rose from his workbench, screwing the lid back on his jar of paint. Something was definitely wrong. He looked at his cheap digital watch, adjusting his glasses as he did so. It was three minutes past eight, which was just about the usual time he should be in his workshop, so no problems there.

Had he perhaps forgotten to do something? Jack quickly went over everything he had done that day and couldn't find anything that he might have missed. He wasn't wearing anything out of the ordinary: smock, t-shirt, and tracksuit pants. He dressed this way pretty much every time he set to work on his models.

Jack had never been a superstitious man, but right now he could not help but feel as though some hidden sixth sense had sprung in his head, warning him that something was not right. Had someone perhaps broken in without him hearing it?

Keeping as quiet as possible so as not to alert a possible intruder, Jack mounted the steps to the basement, keeping to the sides of the steps to avoid making any creaking noises on the wooden stairs. Once he reached the top, he slowly reached behind the umbrella stand and brought out a wooden cricket bat. Jack had won it in an office raffle, but had always meant to sell or give it away, since he didn't play cricket. He hefted the bat, feeling its comforting weight

in his hands as he tiptoed around, checking all the windows and doors, making sure they were all locked and unbroken.

After a thorough check around the house, establishing it intruder-free, Jack replaced the bat and sat down on the couch, scratching the stubble on his chin and letting the thoughts in his head grind. Something was still off, and he knew that unless he figured it out, he would be up all night bothered by it. In a way, it irritated him that he was feeling this way. Didn't he have as much right as the next man to a peaceful weekend? He had done everything right, and if it weren't for the neighbor's music...

Jack's hand paused mid-scratch. He jerked his head to the wall that blocked his neighbor's house from view. Quiet as a grave.

Jack rushed to his front door, throwing on a jacket over his painting smock. He stormed out of his house and onto the sidewalk, making tracks for his neighbor's own front door. It was past dusk, and therefore a little chilly, but Jack was adamant. He would let nothing stand in his way of finding out just why someone had the nerve to throw a wrench into his well-oiled machine of weekly routine. Jack's ears grew hot; he was partially infuriated and partially concerned, though mostly for himself.

Jack arrived at his neighbor's house and raised his hand to knock. What was his neighbor's name again? Jules? Julien? He decided to risk the former. Jack knocked once, twice, thrice on the wooden door then took a step back, just to be polite.

He heard footsteps within the house, and after a few seconds, Jack's neighbor was peering at him as though he couldn't believe his eyes.

'Jake?'

Jack inhaled, his brow furrowing. There was definitely something wrong here. He could see it in his neighbor's bloodshot eyes and his unshaven face.

'It's Jack, actually,' Jack corrected. 'Listen, Jules,' His neighbor didn't say anything, so Jack assumed he had been right in guessing the man's name. 'I can't help but, ah, notice, that something's been off lately,' Jack said almost accusingly. 'I don't suppose you know what?'

Jules' eyes grew mournful, and Jack began to have second thoughts about whether this venture had been a good idea. Oh well. It was too late to turn back now.

'I... well... you'd better come in,' Jules said, stepping into his house and opening the door wide for Jack to enter.

Jack followed Jules into the house, taking note of all the pictures on the walls of Jules and his family, as well as a sizeable collection of strangers whom Jack assumed were friends. Most of the lights were on, and upon passing the kitchen, Jack saw Jules' wife, a shorter woman with blonde hair, sitting at the table and staring numbly at a collection of papers.

'It's nice of you to come by, Jack,' Jules said absent mindedly. Even Jack, who did not consider himself very good at reading body language, could tell that his neighbor's thoughts were a million miles away at the moment. 'We haven't told any of our family friends yet...'

'Yeahhh...' Jack said slowly. 'Look. I just came by because, well, things have been, er, quiet. I wanted to know why.'

'Quiet?' Jules gave Jack a questioning look before understanding dawned on his face. 'Oh, you must be talking about Calvin, I mean, our son's music?'

'Is that his na-' Jack caught himself. 'I mean, yes. The music. Of course. I was wondering where it went.'

Jules sat in silence for a whole minute. Eventually his wife came over with two cups of tea, setting them onto the living room coffee table. Jack took the tea, hoping for something to moisten his dry mouth. This was more human interaction than he'd had at his job for years. He sipped at the tea, which was definitely not Earl Grey, and steeled himself so as to not make a face at the bitter drink. Jules took a fortifying gulp of the hot liquid before continuing.

'Jack,' Jules said at last. 'Calvin's been sick. He has been for a very long time, ever since he was nine.'

Jack stared at Jules, who was gazing into his cup of tea as if it contained the secrets of the universe. Remembering that it was rude to stare, Jack looked back to his own beverage and took another sip of the horrible tea. His lip twitched as he forced it down.

'The only thing that kept him going was his music,' Jules said suddenly. Jack went back to staring at Jules. 'He always was a snappy little musician. Magic on the turntables, is what his music teachers said about him. Calvin loved making music, and once he got sick, he threw himself into it, always said it made him forget about the pain,'

Jules sighed heavily, his shoulders slumped as though they held the weight of the world on them like Atlas of myth. 'He made dozens of songs to help pay for his treatment, since he couldn't bear to let us pay for all of it.'

Jack sat silently, feeling more than a touch irritated, but giving away nothing. He yearned to be back in his workshop painting his aircraft carrier, but no, he just had to find out why the music stopped and now he was in the metaphorical frying pan. Surreptitiously, Jack angled his left arm toward himself and sneaked a peek at his watch.

Jules didn't seem to notice.

‘But on Saturday night, Calvin-‘ Jules broke off, stifling a sob. ‘Calvin got worse, and had to be taken to the hospital. The doctors are saying they can’t do anything, and that if Calvin gets worse, he could, he could...’

‘Die?’ Jack completed slowly. Obviously that was what Jules had meant to say, but Jack was shocked when Jules covered his face with his hands and let out a tearful moan. He almost dropped the cup of tea he had been holding as Jules leaned against him and sobbed into his jacket. Jack awkwardly patted his neighbor on the arm as his eyes darted all around, hoping to find anything to alleviate the situation, whether it be an exit or another topic. He found neither.

By the count of Jack’s watch, they sat like that for ten minutes and thirty-three seconds. At which point Jules’ sobbing had deteriorated into sniffles, and finally into heaving gasps.

‘I’m sorry, Jack,’ Jules sniffled. ‘I don’t mean to break down like this, but Calvin means so much to me and Sarah and I’m just not ready to let him go. No father should have to bury his son.’

Jack nodded slowly as if in agreement. ‘It... it’ll be alright,’ Jack said, remembering from a book that it was the typical thing to say to someone who was sad. He hoped the book hadn’t exaggerated its effectiveness.

Jules gave a rattling sigh and wiped the last of the tears from the corners of his eyes. ‘I hope so, Jack. I really do. Thanks for stopping by, but I need to help Sarah with the hospital forms. I don’t mean to kick you out or anything, but...’

‘Oh, no, it’s fine, it’s fine!’ Jack cajoled. ‘You’ve got a lot on your mind, I get it. I’ll just see myself out.’

Jack was just turning the doorknob on the front door when the patter of footsteps made itself known behind him.

‘Jack, wait!’

Jack inhaled, feeling indignation flare up inside him. What was it now? Jules was at his side, holding up a small silver disc in a transparent case.

‘Jack, I want you to have this. It’s one of Calvin’s albums, and I know it would mean the world to him if he knew someone was still listening to his work, even if he might not make it.’

Jack blankly accepted the disc and tucked it into his jacket pocket. With a final wave, Jack bid Jules goodbye, and he hurried back into his own house and locked the door, glad to finally be alone again.

He checked his watch again. He had wasted at least twenty-five minutes on his little field trip, but perhaps it was worth it. Jack took the disc out of his pocket, staring long and hard at it. He went back down to his basement and put the disc into his CD player. Immediately, loud bass pulses and heavy beats filled the room.

‘Ah, no!’ Jack shouted, slapping the “stop” button on the CD player’s remote control. He would never be able to concentrate on painting with that kind of ruckus. He rubbed his chin and thought. Then he unplugged the boom box and hauled it up the basement steps and into the guest room.

It was a sparsely furnished space, with a single bed, a dresser, and a wardrobe, all empty. Jack lowered the CD player into the bottom drawer of the dresser and closed it, plugging in the wire. Then he pressed “play”.

It worked; the music was now muffled, and would barely register back in his workshop, but its wall-shaking beats and bass drops still made Jack feel at ease. Just like it used to before Calvin had been moved to the hospital.

Now he could, at last, get back to his life in peace.



All was right with the world.