

STILL LIVES

EPISODE ONE: THE QUIET

[piano music]

[a click and a whirring sound]

Archivist: You hear that? Nothing. Birds are gone, river's quiet. I think it's gonna snow tonight. I can't wait. You know how the first snow feels every year? You wake a little too early, and it's quiet in that particular way, and you just know. And then you walk out and the edge of the forest is sparkling and it's – I mean there's icicles as thick as my fist holding on above the porch and I'm just, every time! Every time, it's like it was just spring, just now. I don't know how time passes so fast, right?

Anyway, the Soldier's been saying this is going to be the longest, coldest winter in years. That's what his joints say, and his joints are surprisingly accurate a lot of the time. So I suppose I, uh, I should enjoy the kind of, um, the early glow as long as I can. Uhh, what else happened this week? Uhh-da-da-da-da-dah - oh! The hens are better. The Scientist worked her magic and one of the sick ones is back to giving again. So the Kid's obviously ecstatic about that. It's lucky, actually, 'cause the Scientist is also starting the Kid on trigonometry and she hates it. Really hates it. So she needed a win this week to, uh, you know, to counterbalances all the, uh, the theorems. As for the Cook, she always seems a little down and out at the start of winter, but of course it's tough to tell with her. So that's where everybody is right --

[thumping sound. Archivist gasps then laughs]

Archivist: Aaand that'll be the Soldier fixing the hen house, which he's been working on for, uh... two weeks now, I guess? Three? Hold on, let me check.

[Click. Rustling. Sound of recorder rewinding]

Archivist Recording: And the rain is finally over, thank god--

[more rewinding noises]

Archivist Recording: the goat's milk is pretty thin, which we're trying not to worry about—

[more rewinding noises]

Archivist Recording: sooo sunburned, I look like I'm covered in cornflakes or something. It is not cute --

[more rewinding noises]

Archivist Recording: 397, where we are eating potatoes for the fourth straight day. And the Soldier appears to be completely disassembling the henhouse. Not sure why. He says it's wobbly and I say he's neurotic.

[a click and the whirring of the recording device]

Archivist: Yeah, two weeks. Two straight weeks of hammering. This actually reminds me though, next week marks the four hundredth week since I started doing these check-ins -- hooray -- and I'm trying to figure out something special to do. Not often you get to do a quatra...uh... qua-quadracentennial? Quadracentennial. I dunno. Um, anyway, that doesn't happen every day. Maybe I'll do interviews with the --

[door opens]

Kid: The fence is loose out by the peas!

Archivist: What? Uh, give me a second. That's it for the day, signing off.

[a click and the whirring of the recording device stops].

Archivist: Okay, uh, start again. What's happening?

Kid: I said the fence is loose by the peas. And between that and the messed up mud by the river and, *and* the goat's been weird too, okay, like jumpy? So I'm pretty sure there's a coyote coming out of the woods at night, or a wolf or something, and I know nobody else is taking this seriously, but I really think –

Archivist: I'm taking you seriously.

Kid: I -- really?

Archivist: Yeah. Let's go take a look. I'll get my boots on, one moment.

Kid: Oh! Okay, um. Thanks! What were you working on?

Archivist: Just my weekly update.

[rustling of papers]

Kid: A compilation of photographic book jackets published 2035 --

[more rustling]

Archivist: Hey! Put that back. Here. If the Scientist sees you reading any of this she'll be on my case.

Kid: Fine. What's the Archive even her for if I can't look at anything?

Archivist: Believe me, I've asked her that a million times. Maybe if you take it up with her she'd listen. Oh, but don't actually do that, though, she'll think I put you up to it. Alright, you gonna show me that fence or what?

[piano music]

[footsteps in the snow. The fence post creaks]

Archivist: Uh, are you sure the goat didn't do this herself?

Kid: Yeah. Why would a goat mess up a fence post?

Archivist: I mean, I'm not suggesting there's some secret goat motive, just that maybe she could have bumped it free by accident. Doesn't look like we hammered it in right.

Kid: So I'm just making things up?

Archivist: Hey, I didn't say that. It could be any number of things, I just -- I just don't know that it's a threat, huh? We don't wanna get all worked up over nothing. You know how the Soldier gets.

Kid: Yeah, I know. So what else could it be?

Archivist: I don't know. A strong wind? ...a weak bear? Ghosts, maybe? Really bored ghost?

Kid: Or aliens.

Archivist: You know what? Yes. It's probably aliens. The fence aliens.

Kid: We are the fence aliens, from Jupiter! We come to steal your fences!

Archivist: Oh no! Too bad I've contacted the wire aliens from Mercury to foil your plot!

Kid: Or it could be.... What if it's a person?

[sound of the wind]

Archivist: Listen, point is it's nothing to worry about, 'kay? But it's getting dark and I think the Cook's already making dinner. So, I'm gonna go, yeah... help her with, uh, with that. Would you mind hunting the patch and making sure we didn't miss any pea pods? I think it's going to snow tonight, so, last chance.

Kid: Okay. Um, I didn't mean--

Archivist: I'll see you in there.

[footsteps in the snow. Piano music.]

[footsteps on a wood floor. A door opens]

Archivist: Knock knock. Cook! Culinary goddess, how's it going?

[clinking of cutlery]

Archivist: Oh, come one, I'm sure it's great.

[the crackling of fire]

Archivist: Definitely. Did you put mushrooms in, though? I don't tell you often enough that you are the best. Hey, listen, I have a question. It's about the kid.

[crackling of fire]

Archivist: No, nothing like that. It's just - you know how she's been talking about thinking there's something in the woods? Yeah, well, we were just out near the peas and she asked if it could be another person.

[crackling of fire]

Archivist: I mean, what do you think I said? I stammered like an idiot and made up an excuse to leave. I don't know. I feel... weird? Guilty maybe? -- that we haven't told her more. She's thirteen, I think she's old enough. I mean, I was only sixteen when it happened. I think it's... questionable that we treat her like an adult in basically every single way around the farm except this. We're as good as her parents, you know? Isn't that part of a parent's job, telling your kid about the world?

[bubbling soup and crackling fire]

Archivist: I know. I should. But they'll be a nightmare about it.

[clicking of tongs]

Archivist: Sorry, but you know it's true. They're both gonna fight me on this. I can't even get the Scientist to tell *me* about what she did before.

[crackling fire and a sigh]

Archivist: You're right. Okay, when they come in, then, but I'm not looking forward to it. Will you back me up?

[bubbling soup]

Archivist: Someday you'll get tired of being Switzerland. Also, can I try some of that? I'm starving.

[piano music]

[hammering]

Scientist: Careful you don't break any eggs--

Soldier: Dah! Jesus Christ, Doc. What have I told you about sneaking up on me?

Scientist: Sorry, I'm just looking out for the safety of the eggs among us.

Soldier: Well, we're gonna steal 'em no matter what, so, looks like you need to do a better job of that. ... God, my thumb. I swear, I think you do this on purpose.

Scientist: Me? scare you on purpose? Would I ever?

Soldier: Yeah, you and the Kid both. Have you seen her by the way? I think she's been fooling around in the woods all day. I told her to coil up the fence wire for the season. Once it snows we're gonna have a real time of digging it out. I told the Archivist – you know I can feel it, you know. Snow's coming. Feel it in my hands. Probably five inches, maybe more.

Scientist: Your hands must be freezing. Don't you have gloves?

Soldier: Ah, I wore 'em through last winter, remember? It's fine, I'll make do.

Scientist: Or you could wear these.

Soldier: Hey, doc, where - where did you get - did you make these?

Scientist: You know that coat Kid grew out of? Voila. They've a layer of foil for insulation too. Try them on!

Soldier: They're - they're warm. Now this isn't some sort of passive aggressive hint, is it?

Scientist: What hint?

Soldier: That I should've made a scavenger trip to the city before it got properly cold?

Scientist: Sarge, I'm not that cryptic.

Soldier: Mm. Sure you're not. Well look thanks - thanks for these. I owe you one.

Scientist: You done for the day? Let's get inside.

Soldier: Well I guess I am now. Here, help me up.

[piano music]

Archivist: So, I used the edge - get this - the edge of an old penny to get it started, and --

[click and whir of recorder]

Archivist: Recording anywhere! The great thing is --

[door opens. Footsteps]

Soldier: Evening to you two. Everything good?

Archivist: Good, yeah, definitely.

Scientist: What are you holding?

Archivist: Oh, this -- nothing -- I-I was just showing the Cook, I got a tape recorder to work.

Scientist: Mm. Cook, she's not trying to drag you into her time wasting, is she?

Archivist: It's not a waste of time.

Scientist: Oh really? Can we eat your recordings? Do they keep us warm at night?

Archivist: Why do you always say stuff like that? Just because you can't eat something doesn't mean it's -- these are going to be a part of history, okay? Everything I'm scrapbooking and putting together is invaluable.

Scientist: To whom, exactly?

Archivist: To -- anyone, okay? Anyone who might find it.

Scientist: Find it? Hang on, you're doing all this to benefit hypothetical people fifty, seventy, a hundred years from now? We've got a winter coming up right now. Could be nobody ever winds up listening to what you're doing.

Archivist: Ah. Great. More of this depressing nihilistic--

Scientist: I'm not depressing, I'm being realistic. This takes up too much time being what it is. A vanity project.

Soldier: Come on now, Doc. That's --

Scientist: Sorry. I didn't mean that. I just meant -- I thought we had an agreement, right? When we talked before we agreed you could do all this *if* you kept it in the shed away from where it will distract everybody else.

Archivist: Well, that's already unfair because, you know, the weatherproofing isn't great out there and some of those pages are delicate.

Scientist: And now she's sulking! Okay.

Soldier: Well you don't have to be so hard on her. Listen, just keep that recorder with the rest of your things, okay?

Archivist: Why?

Soldier: Well, the Scientist is right. We gotta set an example for the Kid. Personal projects should come second. That goes for all of us, and yours keep coming first.

[fire crackling and footsteps. A chair creaks]

Archivist: I wanted to talk to you two about the Kid, actually.

Soldier: What about her?

Scientist: Is she alright?

Archivist: Yeah, she's okay. I'm just -- I've been thinking, isn't it time we let her sit down with us and ask us some questions about... you know... everything?

Scientist: What?

Soldier: Where is this coming from?

Archivist: She brought up other people again today and --

Scientist: And I bet you didn't discourage her at all.

Archivist: This isn't about me, this is about her.

Soldier: I don't see why we need to have some sort of big talk. She's smart, she's probably figured more than we give her credit for.

Archivist: Maybe, but are you willing to test that by giving her the chance to ask anything?

Soldier: I just don't think there's a reason to break open the subject. What good does it do a kid, knowing things like that?

Archivist: Knowing who she is, for a start. Where she came from, what she's growing up in, what she's missing.

Soldier: But that's what I'm saying. You want to tell her what she's missing? Risk having her pining after something she'll never have?

Archivist: I don't know. I - I just think she deserves the chance to pick for herself. She's not that much of a kid anymore and I, honestly, I'm tired of stepping so carefully around it and snatching my log books and records out of her hands whenever she gets curious, and - and talking in code all the time just *because*, just *in case*--

Scientist: So what you're saying is it all comes back to you again. Your comfort, your wants. Maybe if you focus on something more pragmatic than compiling these - these scraps of an irrelevant world, you wouldn't have to worry about hiding anything.

Archivist: So I'm selfish? Are you kidding? Don't pretend you're thinking about the Kid here and not your own issues! You're so hung up on what happened you can't even look at it in the eye. And you're letting that shape her whole world! If--

[door opens]

Kid: Um, I got like six pea pods?

Soldier: Get in here, it's cold out there. I'll take those.

Kid: What were you yelling about?

Archivist: Sit down, okay?

Kid: Am I in trouble?

Soldier & Archivist: No

Archivist: We were just talking about, um... well, you're birthday is coming and you're going to be fourteen. That's big, huh? I, uh... Look, what I'm saying is, when you were really young we used to tell you there were some things we'd tell you when you're older and--

Kid: I don't remember that.

Scientist: See? She doesn't want to--

Archivist: Would you just let her talk?

Scientist: If you---

[Clanging of a ladle]

Archivist: Sorry Cook.

Scientist: Sorry.

Soldier: Is there something you want to know, Kid?

Kid: Is... um... is this because I said it was a person in the woods earlier? Because, if that's the reason, you should know I wasn't really being serious. I know there's nobody else out there. It was joke. I mean, I also said it was aliens.

Archivist: Right. I -- right. But, uh...

Scientist: Do you want to know how we found you?

Kid: Yeah. I mean, if you want to tell me.

Soldier: Well, it's the Cook's story. Cook do you want to...?

[crackling fire]

Soldier: 'Course I can. Ah, okay. Well, this was thirteen years ago now. Twelve and a half? Something like that. Not long After, but long enough so the cities were... well, the illness spread fast. It's tough to describe how fast, the scope of the thing was.... These cities used to have millions of people and this was, how long Cook? A few weeks? And most everybody was delirious or worse already. So the Cook had quarantined herself those weeks, but now that things were settling, getting less violent, she decided to head out of the city. It was raining that day.

[clanging of ladle]

Soldier: Sorry, not raining, overcast. So the Cook was picking through the outskirts on her way out. Even there it was dead silent, not even rats left, because there was a strain that hit them too by then. And in all that quiet, the Cook heard a sound. She thought it was a dog, at first. Some stray. Then she came around the side of the house and saw you sitting in an open garage. And she just knew, after that moment, everything was going to be different. She couldn't leave you. Way she tells it, just as she saw you, the sun came through the clouds and lit you right up.

Scientist: Mm, sounds like artistic license to me.

Kid: I like it. Did you... Cook, you didn't see my parents, did you?

[crackling fire]

Kid: Right, yeah. Of course they were. Sorry.

Scientist: You okay, kiddo?

Kid: Fine! Um, let's eat, I'm starving.

Soldier: Cook's right. We still gotta update that chore chart, Kid. For now, can you set the table?

Kid: Got it.

[footsteps. Silverware and dishes clinking]

Kid: Where'd you get the gloves, Sarge?

Soldier: Oh, Doc made them. There's foil in here.

Archivist: They're nice.

Scientist: Thanks.

Archivist: I didn't know you could sew.

Scientist: I'll, um, I'll show you sometime.

Archivist: Sounds good. Yeah.

Kid: Do I get new gloves?

Scientist: Yeah, they're upstairs.

Soldier: Ah nuts, did I ruin the surprise?

Kid: You hate surprises.

Scientist: Kid's got a point. Mm, this is delicious by the way.

Soldier: You outdid yourself again, Cook. What is this?

[clinking of silverware]

Soldier: Well, I - I hope we have plenty more.

[knocking]

Archivist: Do you hear something?

Scientist: Gotta be that branch again.

Soldier: Yeah, the wind was getting pretty bad out there. I'll trim that tree tomorrow.

Archivist: Right.... It - it just sort of sounded like--

[louder knocking]

Kid: Um, what is that?

Soldier: Nobody move.

Kid: But--

Soldier: I said, stay here.

Archivist: Sarge.

Soldier: I'll get it.

[knocking. Door opens. Wind]

Traveler: Hello! Um, wow, uh... I just saw that the light on in and I - I just can't believe... oh, sorry, let me start over. Hello, it's snowing and this smells amazing. Do you think, um, is there any chance I could trouble for a - a bite to eat?

[piano music]