

# The Sound of Darkness, the Sound of Light

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**M**y bus seat was a mess. Packets of printed precalculus problems, a calculator, and pencils cluttered my lap, while I played a balancing act with my laptop. The monotonous school bus bounce shook the past couple hours' eraser shavings until suddenly, the buzzing ceased. Startled by the abrupt stop, I dropped my pencil and lifted my head and glimpsed the red light above the highway exit. As I watched the teachers at the front of the bus talking, I lowered my noise-canceling headphones to my neck. The world that had been drowned out by music drew color through sound. The students' banter battered my ears—their breathing heckles, their raucous chants—bringing me out of the reverie I'd swaddled myself in.

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"Y'all, get your stuff ready. We'll be at the cave in five minutes," Mrs. Jackson, our teacher, announced. Mixed cheers and groans coupled with the rummaging of bags rounded out the remainder of the road trip. After frantically slotting sheets of paper into my binder and stuffing everything into my overfilled backpack, I sat quietly in the decelerating bus. We finally parked, and the creak of the doors beckoned the fleshy flood that bounded through the aisle and out of the yellow giant. I inched out of my seat, down the aisle, and into the open

air. The parking lot stood on a hill above the cave. And I peered down the gradient, into the stone's shade.

Students lined into the cave as ants to their colony. Forced to their knees by the cavity's ceiling, they crawled along the muddied ground. Orbs of light from atop their heads lit the path. I lowered myself to the ground and clambered along: listening to the cloth and crag resonate. The crawling ceased as we reached a raised roof chamber. We moved quietly as our headlamps lit a cavern slathered with graffiti. We then sat comfortably. "Turn off your headlamps," said Mrs. Jackson. "The cave will be completely dark—it's a fun experience." After the headlamps shut off, the cave was dark—so dark that I could not see the ceiling, nor the walls, nor the very floor that I sat upon. My eyes pulsed in the darkness—heavily like two hearts harbored in my eyelids. I waved my hands in front of my face, but could only feel where they were. The darkness became suffocating, stealing my serenity and sight. Despite the initial panic, my head eased and I grew used to my loss of vision. My ears opened once more. I heard the breath of the students and the cave, a cacophony of rasps and a soft hum. And a whisper. It leaked through the opaque world—from one shoulder to another. And another whisper. It susurrated in the ebony expanse—from one shoulder to another. And a third whisper. Then a fourth. Each whisper birthed two more. But none dared break the sanctity of the cavern with any sound louder. The whispers burrowed through my ears and into my thoughts. The next moment I inched closer to another student and opened my mouth.



Light bore into the stone once more. Illuminated headlamps shone fresh discs of light. New to the eyes, but not troublesome. Returning from the Earth's orifice, however, was different. Despite how much I watched the rays beyond the tunnel, entering the sun's land scalded my eyes to a squint. Yet only for a short minute. My eyes had begun to open once more as the dirt below, the rubble around, and the thicket ahead painted into form in front of me. I heard the birds' trill, the leaves' sway, the acorns' plummet. The cars' race, the leaves' crunch, and the students' breath. My tra-

vail had ended, and the world bore new displays. Peering up at the sun once more relit my kindled vision. But the sight was alarming: the sun had only nudged afoot, further in the sky. As if leaving a movie theater, time had moved on—leaving but me. I, who was captured in the secluded lifetime. I, who had dreamt cradle to grave. I, who had lost not. The outside world had observed my delivery and welcomed me. In accordance, I welcomed the world. Nature's current and the students' chatter hummed in—all the way until I fell again to the darkness of sleep later that night. ■

