

Sooner Or Later

A play with music

By

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Sooner or Later is written for a single performer.

Jack is not defined by age, class, or profession, but by long habit: a life spent keeping things running. The space, the machine, and the guitar are not symbolic devices, but practical objects shaped by use.

The play does not require virtuosity, musical or technical, only attention. Silence, hesitation, and restraint are part of the language of the piece.

SCENE 1 - THE FIX

LIGHTS UP SLOWLY.

A bare, practical space.

Upstage, slightly off-centre, a machine of some kind, suggested rather than literal.

Not a realistic generator or pump, but an assemblage that behaves like one: solid, functional, imperfect.

It produces sound, vibration, resistance. It can be adjusted, listened to, waited on. It is never explained. It does not represent one specific thing. It belongs to Jack's working life, and outlasts him.

Downstage of the machine, a single chair, positioned slightly to one side, close enough to be useful, not arranged for comfort.

Beside the chair, a work lamp that's practical, directional. It pools light where hands work. The rest of the space falls away.

Leaning against the chair, within easy reach but not centre, is a guitar, worn from use, not carelessness. It has been played often, put down quickly, picked up again. Not displayed. Not hidden. It belongs here.

We hear a voice. It's sharp, controlled.

JACK (OFFSTAGE)

No, don't touch that. I said I've got it.

Lights rise to reveal JACK MERCER, sleeves rolled, hands already dirty.

He tightens something. Tests it.

JACK

I don't need a team. I need five minutes and a steady voltage.

He pauses. Listens to something only he can hear.

JACK

That hum. Hear that? That's not failure. That's air in the line.

A beat.

JACK
I've worked with worse.

He notices the audience for the first time but does not acknowledge them. Not yet.

He moves again. Efficient. Precise.

JACK
(to offstage)
You shut it down now, you'll lose it completely.

Silence.

He exhales through his nose. Controlled irritation.

JACK
Alright. Alright, then.

He picks up a tool. Tests a switch.

Almost casually:

JACK
Funny thing about machines. They don't lie. They tell you exactly where you stand, if you know how to listen.

SOUND: A low, percussive guitar figure begins, barely distinguishable from the machine's hum. Not melody. Not expression. A regulating rhythm.

Jack does not look at the guitar. He works with the sound, not towards it.

CUE SONG - "IF IT'S BROKEN, I CAN FIX IT"

(Spoken-sung.)

IF IT'S BROKEN, I CAN FIX IT

IF IT'S STUCK, I GIVE IT TIME
 YOU DON'T FORCE IT, YOU DON'T RUSH IT
 THAT'S HOW GOOD HANDS LOSE THEIR LINE

I'VE SEEN HANDS LEAN ON WRENCHES
 LIKE THE WORLD OWES THEM A TURN
 BUT PRESSURE CRACKS THE THREADS CLEAN
 THROUGH
 THAT'S A LESSON YOU DON'T LEARN

YOU LISTEN FIRST
 YOU LET IT TALK
 EVERY PROBLEM LEAVES A MARK
 IF IT'S BROKEN, I CAN FIX IT
 IF IT QUILTS, I START AGAIN
 I DON'T NEED IT RUNNING PRETTY
 I JUST NEED IT HOLDING STEADY IN THE END

(The guitar continues underneath. Unshowy. Functional.)

JACK
 Steady's the trick. Always was.

He flips a switch.

Nothing.

He does not react. Just notes it.

JACK
 (to offstage, calm)
 I'm not done yet.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 2 - PROCEDURE

LIGHTS UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF.

The machine hasn't changed. Jack has.

He's standing now, listening. Not fixing yet.

*SOUND: A low, uneven hum from the generator.
 It doesn't fail. It hesitates.*

*Jack tilts his head like someone listening to an animal
 breathe.*

JACK
 There it is. That hitch.

He crouches. Adjusts a dial by a fraction. Habit, not

flourish.

JACK

(to offstage)

You hear that, you think it's dying. It's not.
It's asking a question.

Silence.

He waits. Counts without numbers.

JACK

You rush this part, you learn the hard way.

He checks a gauge. It drops. Slowly.

JACK

Right.

He doesn't panic. He sits.

The chair creaks. It's loud in the space.

This is waiting time.

*Without thinking, he reaches for the guitar. Not to perform.
To occupy the silence without confronting it.*

He does not centre himself. He does not face us.

*He plays the same two or three chords he always plays.
No introduction.*

SOUND: The guitar settles into a steady figure.

After a few bars, almost absent-mindedly, he speak-sings:

JACK

(quiet, half to himself)

SOONER OR LATER, IT COMES ROUND
SOONER OR LATER, MAKES ITS SOUND

He lets the words land. Keeps playing.

The machine hums underneath, almost in time.

JACK

You don't chase it. That's where people go
wrong.

He glances at the control panel, still playing.

JACK

I've seen people yank cables like they're pulling answers out of the wall. That's not how it works.

The guitar continues unchanged.

He adds the next lines, not leaning into them:

JACK

You can lean your weight against it. Or step back and let it play out.

He stops singing before the thought feels finished.

JACK

Funny thing. You spend long enough around machinery, you start trusting it more than people.

A beat.

He realises what he's said. Does not correct it.

SOUND: The generator coughs. Once.

Jack immediately sets the guitar down but not carefully, decisively.

He moves to the machine. Listens.

JACK

Easy.

He adjusts something small. Almost nothing.

The hum steadies.

Jack exhales. It's not relief, it's confirmation.

JACK

There you go.

He sits again. Slower this time.

JACK

(to offstage, firm but calm)
It'll hold.

Silence.

Jack looks at the machine. Then at his hands.

JACK
For now's usually enough.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 3 - INTERRUPTION

LIGHTS UP.

Same space. Same machine.

The hum is steadier now, but thinner. Like it's holding its breath.

Jack is standing again. He's not relaxed. Not rushed. Just listening harder.

SOUND: A door offstage. Footsteps. Closer than before.

JACK
I said it would hold.

A beat.

JACK
I know what you're going to say.

He moves to the control panel checking something he's already checked.

JACK
You don't pull it now. Not halfway through a cycle.

Silence.

Jack exhales. Slower than before.

JACK
I hear you. I do.

He waits. Nothing changes.

The hum dips just enough to notice.

Instinctively, Jack reaches for the guitar. His hand stops halfway. He leaves it hovering.

This is new.

JACK
(to himself)

Not yet.

He kneels. Opens a panel. Peers inside.

JACK
You see this part? This is where people panic.

He glances offstage.

JACK
Because it looks like it's failing. But it's
not. It's deciding.

Silence presses.

Jack straightens.

JACK
You've got a schedule. I get that.

A pause.

JACK
I've got a process.

SOUND: The generator shudders, deeper this time.

Jack freezes. Listens. Counts.

JACK
Alright.

He moves faster now, not frantic, but sharpened.

Adjust. Reset. Wait.

Nothing.

Jack's jaw tightens. A visible crack.

JACK
Sooner or...

He stops himself.

Looks at the guitar again.

This time, he picks it up but does not play.

Just holds it.

Grounding. Bracing. Almost prayer.

JACK

You don't rush it.

The hum returns, weak, but present.

Jack doesn't relax.

JACK

That's not stable. That's borrowing.

Silence from offstage. Heavier now.

Jack nods, agreeing with something he doesn't like.

JACK

I know.

He sets the guitar down carefully. More carefully than before.

Stands. Takes one last look at the machine.

JACK

Give me one more minute.

A beat.

JACK

Then we'll see.

He steps back from the machine for the first time.

Just a step. But it lands.

LIGHTS HOLD

SCENE 4 - OVERLAP

LIGHTS UP.

The space feels subtly altered. Not brighter. Not darker. Just fuller, as if sound now has weight.

The machine is running, but only just.

Jack stands near it. Not touching.

Waiting again.

This wait is different.

SOUND: A low tone enters beneath the hum, almost imperceptible at first. Not melody. Not rhythm.

Just weight.

(Pit entry: sustained bass note, felt more than heard.)

Jack notices the sound but does not look for its source.

JACK

That's new.

He listens.

JACK

That's not the engine.

A beat.

JACK

That's... something else.

*He moves to the control panel. Checks it.
Everything reads the same.*

JACK

(to offstage)

I'm not changing anything yet.

Silence.

The low tone holds.

Jack shifts his weight, unsettled. Not afraid. Aware.

JACK

This is the part no one likes.

He sits. Not from fatigue but because standing feels wrong now.

The chair creaks.

JACK

You do everything right. You follow it step by step. And still...

He stops. Listens.

The hum and the low tone sit together now. Not fighting. Not aligned. Just overlapping.

JACK

I've heard this before.

He closes his eyes for just a second.

JACK

Not here.

A breath.

JACK

Different room.

He opens his eyes. The present rushes back.

JACK

You wait long enough, sounds start borrowing each other.

He glances at the guitar. Does not touch it.

This is deliberate.

JACK

(to himself)

Later.

The low tone deepens slightly. It's not louder, just wider.

JACK

Funny thing about holding things together. You don't notice how much of it is muscle memory.

He feels his hands unconsciously.

JACK

You stop thinking. You stop asking. You just... do.

The machine dips again but steadier this time. Like a tired breath.

Jack does not move.

That's new.

JACK

I know.

He nods. Not to the machine. To himself.

JACK

I hear it.

The low tone begins to recede. Not gone. It's withdrawing.

The hum steadies.

Jack exhales. Relief but brief.

JACK
That wasn't procedure.

He stands.

Looks in turn at the machine. The chair. The guitar.

JACK
That was memory.

A beat. Jack almost smiles. Almost.

JACK
That's inconvenient.

He moves back to the machine. Slower now. More deliberate.

JACK
Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

He makes a small adjustment. The hum responds.

Jack watches it, carefully. No triumph.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 5 - RECALL

LIGHTS UP.

The machine is running.

Not strong. Not weak. Maintained.

Jack is back at the panel, hands busy. Movements efficient again.

Too efficient. The low tone is gone.

The space feels emptier for it.

JACK
Right.

He checks a gauge. Adjusts. Resets.

JACK
There we are.

He waits.

Nothing dramatic happens.

That bothers him.

JACK
(to offstage)

It's holding.

Silence.

Jack nods, as if receiving confirmation.

JACK

Good.

He turns away from the machine for the first time without looking back.

He picks up the guitar.

This time, it's deliberate.

He sits.

He plays the same steady figure as before.

It does not settle the room.

SOUND: After a few bars, the upright bass enters quietly beneath. Not leading. Following.

Jack notices.

Does not stop playing.

JACK

That's not part of the test.

The bass holds.

Jack exhales through his nose. Keeps playing.

JACK

Alright.

He adjusts the tempo slightly, trying to bring it under control.

It doesn't quite work.

JACK

I remember a room like this.

He stops.

The guitar goes silent.

The bass continues, patient.

Jack looks up.

JACK
Not here.

A beat.

JACK
Smaller.

He glances at the machine, grounding himself.

JACK
Same noise though.

He picks the guitar up again.

Plays more quietly now.

JACK
There was a window you couldn't open. Painted
shut.

He frowns, surprised he said it.

JACK
I kept thinking if the sound stayed steady,
everything else would too.

The bass shifts, barely.

Jack closes his eyes.

JACK
I sat with my back against the wall. Right
where the cables ran.

A pause.

JACK
So I could feel it.

He stops playing.

Silence, except the machine.

Jack opens his eyes.

JACK
That's not helpful.

He stands abruptly. Sets the guitar down.

JACK
That's not now.

He moves back to the machine, faster than before.

Adjusts something unnecessarily.

The hum wavers.

JACK
Easy.

He stills it. Barely.

Jack freezes.

Listens.

JACK
I didn't leave.

A beat.

JACK
I stayed.

He realises what he's said.

Corrects himself too quickly.

JACK
I mean, I stayed with the process.

SOUND: The bass drops out.

The space snaps back to the present.

Jack exhales, sharp.

JACK
(to offstage, firm)
It's stable.

Silence.

Jack waits for agreement. Doesn't get it.

He looks at the guitar. The chair. The machine.

JACK
We're not doing that again.

He returns to the panel.

Hands steady.

But slower now.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 6 - PRESSURE

LIGHTS UP.

The machine is running but audibly strained now.

Not failing. Working harder than it should.

Jack stands too close.

Hands on the casing, feeling vibration rather than listening.

JACK
You don't need to push.

He eases his hands away, like calming an animal.

JACK
That's enough.

The hum does not soften.

An offstage presence again. It's closer. Firmer.

Not a voice.

A boundary.

JACK
I know.

He moves to the panel. Checks the readouts.

Everything says fine.

Jack doesn't believe it.

JACK
Numbers don't tell you how it feels.

He makes a small adjustment.

The machine responds, briefly.

Jack nods.

JACK

There.

A beat.

The strain returns.

Jack's jaw tightens.

JACK

You see, this is what happens when you rush a shutdown. You leave it nowhere to go.

He catches himself.

JACK

...not you.

A pause.

JACK

The system.

SOUND: The low tone creeps back in, quicker this time. Upright bass. Quiet. Present.

Jack stiffens.

JACK

That's not...

He stops.

He listens.

JACK

Alright.

He sits sharply.

The chair creaks.

Jack rubs his hands together, grounding, not warming.

JACK

I followed every step.

The bass holds.

JACK

Every time.

He looks at the machine, confused, not accusing.

JACK

I didn't skip anything.

A beat.

JACK

So if it's not the work—

He trails off.

The bass deepens slightly.

Jack reaches for the guitar more quickly now.

Begins to play.

Not the steady figure.

Something tighter. Shorter.

It does not settle.

JACK

No.

He stops playing.

The bass continues.

Jack stares at his hands.

JACK

That's not what this is for.

The offstage presence shifts again, unmistakable now.

JACK

You're asking me to stop.

Silence.

Jack nods once.

JACK

I hear you.

He stands.

Walks to the machine.

Places one hand on it.

Hesitates.

JACK

Sooner or...

He stops. Breathes.

JACK

Later.

The bass fades, but does not disappear entirely.

The machine holds. Just.

Jack steps back.

Then another step.

This is the furthest yet.

JACK

Give me a moment.

He doesn't say it to the machine.

He says it to himself.

LIGHTS HOLD.

The machine continues to run.

The sound holds, strained, unresolved.

BLACKOUT.

END OF ACT I

INTERVAL

SCENE 7 - NEARLY

LIGHTS UP.

The machine is still running, but Jack has stopped touching it.

That absence is felt.

The hum fills the space more than before, as if unobserved.

SOUND: The pit expands for the first time beyond bass. A sustained instrument enters (steel / bowed guitar / harmonium). Not melodic. Just air.

Jack stands centre.

Not at the panel. Not with the guitar. Just standing.

JACK

I'm not shutting it down.

A beat.

JACK

I'm just not holding it either.

He nods, once, as if agreeing with a version of himself that has finally spoken.

The sound widens.

Jack exhales, slow, deliberate.

JACK

That's different.

He looks at the machine.

JACK

You can feel the difference.

He walks to the chair.

Sits. Hands empty.

He stares at his palms, as if noticing them for the first time.

JACK

I used to think if I stayed close enough,
nothing would surprise me.

A pause.

JACK

Turns out that's not how it works.

The sustained instrument bends slightly, memory softening time.

Jack closes his eyes.

JACK

There were nights... when I stayed late.

A beat.

JACK

Not working. Just... around.

He opens his eyes.

JACK

I told myself it was practical.

A beat.

JACK

It wasn't.

He glances at the guitar.

Does not reach for it.

This matters.

JACK

I could've done that.

Silence.

The words hang, unadorned.

Jack does not explain them.

Does not justify.

JACK

Didn't need to.

The pit holds, full now, but restrained.

The machine hums underneath, smaller in the mix.

Jack nods almost imperceptibly.

JACK
That's not regret.

A pause.

JACK
That's just... noticing.

He stands.

Walks toward the machine, then stops short.

Halfway.

JACK
You don't have to use every tool you know.
He turns, finally. And picks up the guitar.
Not to play. Just to hold it.

JACK
Some things are for later.
He sets the guitar back down. Carefully. Intentionally.
The pit sound begins to thin, not gone, but receding.
Jack takes a breath.

JACK
Alright.
He looks offstage, not defensive now.

JACK
I'm ready.
The machine continues to run.
Jack does not move.
The pit sound settles, steadier now, lower.
Jack stands in the stillness.
He speaks, not to the machine, not offstage.

JACK
I kept thinking that counted.
A beat.
He sits.

The guitar is nearby. He picks it up, slower than before.

Plays a single, familiar figure.

Not the regulating pattern. Something looser.

SOUND: The pit enters gently underneath.

Jack does not look surprised.

JACK

I was there.

The guitar continues.

CUE SONG - "I WAS THERE (BUT NOT ENOUGH)"

(Jack may stop playing during the bridge as the pit carries the emotional weight. He resumes only near the end, or not at all.)

I WAS THERE WHEN THE LIGHTS STAYED ON
 WHEN THE NOISE DIDN'T FALL APART
 I WAS THERE WHEN IT MATTERED MOST
 AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT I TOLD MY HEART
 I SHOWED UP. I STAYED LATE.
 I KNEW WHICH WIRE TO HOLD
 I KEPT THINGS MOVING, KEPT THINGS CLEAN
 DID WHAT I WAS TOLD

I WAS THERE, BUT NOT ENOUGH
 I WAS CLOSE, BUT NOT INSIDE
 I KEPT THE WORLD FROM TIPPING OVER
 BUT I NEVER CROSSED THAT LINE
 I WAS STEADY. I WAS STRONG.
 I WAS USEFUL ALL THE WAY THROUGH
 I WAS THERE, BUT NOT ENOUGH
 TO BE KNOWN, NOT BY YOU

I WAS THERE IN THE QUIET HOURS
 WHEN THE ROOM FORGOT ITS NAME
 WHEN EVERYTHING WAS WAITING
 FOR SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE THE BLAME
 I FIXED WHAT BROKE. I HELD IT UP.
 I KEPT THE RHYTHM TRUE
 I THOUGHT IF NOTHING FELL APART
 THAT MEANT I'D DONE IT RIGHT TOO

I WAS THERE, BUT NOT ENOUGH
 I WAS NEAR, BUT NOT IN REACH
 I KNEW HOW EVERY SYSTEM WORKED
 I JUST DIDN'T LEARN THAT SPEECH
 I WAS READY. I WAS ABLE.

I WAS EVERYTHING I KNEW
 I WAS THERE, BUT NOT ENOUGH
 TO STAY, THE WAY YOU DO

I THOUGHT SHOWING UP WAS ALL IT TOOK
 I THOUGHT HOLDING ON WAS PROOF
 I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY
 TO TELL THE TRUTH

(Pit carries the emotion. Jack may stop playing.)

I WAS THERE, BUT NOT ENOUGH
 THAT'S NOT FAILURE, JUST A FACT
 SOME THINGS DON'T BREAK, THEY JUST MOVE ON
 AND DON'T COME BACK
 I WAS THERE.
 I WAS CLOSE.
 I DID WHAT I COULD DO.

I WAS THERE
 BUT NOT ENOUGH
 TO LET MYSELF BE SEEN BY YOU

The pit holds the final harmony.

Jack lowers the guitar.

Does not move.

The sound thins, but does not vanish.

SCENE 8 - AFTER

LIGHTS SHIFT.

Not time passing, perspective changing.

The machine is still on.

That matters.

Jack is seated.

The guitar rests against the chair.

He does not reach for it.

JACK

That's not what I thought it would feel like.

Silence.

SOUND: The pit fades almost completely, leaving just air.

JACK
I expected... something louder.

He stands.

Looks at the machine. Really looks this time.

JACK
You keep waiting for a moment that announces
itself.

A beat.

JACK
Turns out it doesn't.

He moves to the panel.

Not to fix.

Just to stand near it.

JACK
(to offstage)
I haven't shut it down.

Silence.

Jack nods.

JACK
I know.

He glances at the guitar again.

Then away.

JACK
I don't need to fill the space.

This is new.

He takes a deeper breath than before.

JACK
Sooner or later...

He stops.

Almost smiles.

JACK
...later.

He rests one hand on the machine.

Not possessive.

Acknowledging.

JACK
It's still running.

A beat.

JACK
So am I.

He steps back.

This time, he doesn't check behind him.

The machine hums. It's steady, smaller in the room now.

Jack stands centre.

Hands empty.

JACK
Let's see what happens next.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 9 - LETTING GO

LIGHTS UP.

The space feels larger now, not because anything has moved, but because Jack is no longer filling it.

The machine hums. Steady. Unremarkable.

Jack stands off to one side. Not guarding it.

He checks the time, not on a watch, but by listening.

JACK
It'll tell you when it's ready.

A beat.

JACK
Everything does.

He moves to the control panel.

This time, he doesn't touch anything.

Just reads.

JACK
(to offstage)
I'm not going to keep adjusting it.

Silence.

Jack nods.

JACK
That's not the same as walking away.

He steps back.

SOUND: The pit re-enters gently, not bass-led. A soft, sustained wash. No melody yet.

Jack closes his eyes.

JACK
I used to think stopping meant losing the thread.

A pause.

JACK
Turns out you can set it down and it doesn't disappear.

He opens his eyes.

Looks at his hands again.

JACK
He still knows what to do.

He flexes his fingers slowly.

JACK
He just doesn't need to do it all the time.

The guitar catches his eye.

Jack hesitates.

Then picks it up.

Not to play.

Just to feel its weight.

JACK

I don't have to prove anything to you.

He sets the guitar down again.

Gently.

JACK

Or to me.

The machine hums on.

Jack listens, not anxiously now.

JACK

Sooner or later...

He lets the phrase trail off.

No need to finish it.

The pit holds, breathing with the space.

JACK

This is later.

A beat.

Jack steps fully away from the machine.

Centre stage. Hands empty.

Still.

LIGHTS HOLD.

SCENE 10 - THE CHOICE

LIGHTS UP.

The space is quiet but not empty.

The machine is still running.

Jack stands at the control panel.

He's not tense. Not ready. Just present.

He reads the indicators.

Not checking for faults, checking for permission.

JACK
(to offstage)
I'm not going to keep it running forever.

Silence.

Jack nods.

JACK
I know.

He reaches toward the panel.

Stops.

His hand hovers.

(This is the moment the whole play has been circling.)

Jack lowers his hand.

Steps back instead.

JACK
It doesn't need me like that.

He looks at the machine, almost fondly now.

JACK
You're doing what you're meant to do.

A breath.

He reaches for the guitar.

This time, there is no hesitation.

He sits.

*Plays a simple figure. Not the old regulating pattern. Not
Sooner or Later.*

Something new. Something open.

*SOUND: The pit enters gently and not all at once. This is not
a cue. It's a response.*

Jack sings and plays.

The machine hums beneath.

CUE SONG - "TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL"

I'VE BEEN WATCHING THE LINE
 TRYING NOT TO DRIFT
 EVERY MILE I LEARNED
 WHERE TO TIGHTEN MY GRIP
 I'VE BEEN COUNTING THE TURNS
 BEFORE THEY ARRIVE
 STAYING READY FOR TROUBLE
 JUST TO FEEL ALIVE

THEY TOLD ME IF I LET GO
 IT WOULD ALL COME APART
 BUT I DON'T HEAR THAT NOW
 I HEAR SOMETHING START

(The pit expands. Jack keeps playing, but more lightly now.)

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 LET IT FIND ITS WAY THROUGH
 YOU DON'T HAVE TO STEER EVERYTHING
 JUST TO MAKE IT HOME TO YOU
 TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 YOU'VE DONE ALL YOU CAN DO
 SOME ROADS KNOW WHERE THEY'RE GOING
 BEFORE YOU DO

(Jack's attention drifts from the guitar to the room. The sound carries without effort.)

I'VE BEEN HOLDING THE WEIGHT
 LIKE IT WAS MY NAME
 EVERY FAULT IN THE SYSTEM
 EVERY SPARK, EVERY FLAME
 I THOUGHT STOPPING MEANT FAILING
 I THOUGHT REST WAS A LIE
 BUT THE GROUND'S STILL BENEATH ME
 AND THE SKY DIDN'T FALL FROM THE SKY

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 LET THE MOTION BE TRUE
 YOU DON'T HAVE TO FIX THE FUTURE
 FOR IT TO CARRY YOU
 TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 YOU DON'T NEED TO BE STRONG
 SOME THINGS KEEP MOVING
 WHETHER YOU'RE HOLDING ON

*(Music expands. Jack may stop playing.
 The pit carries the sound. Jack listens, like it's proof.)*

IF IT BREAKS, IT BREAKS
 IF IT RUNS, IT RUNS
 I DON'T HAVE TO CHASE
 WHAT I'VE ALREADY DONE
 I'VE BEEN HERE
 I'VE BEEN THROUGH
 I DON'T NEED TO PROVE
 WHAT I ALREADY KNEW

(Jack may sing quieter, or simply stand inside the sound.)

TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 LET THE MOMENT DECIDE
 YOU DON'T HAVE TO STAY BRACED
 TO STAY INSIDE
 TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF THE WHEEL
 THIS ISN'T GIVING IN
 IT'S JUST LETTING THE WORLD
 TURN THE WAY IT'S BEEN

I'M STILL HERE.
 I'M STILL MOVING.
 THAT'S ENOUGH.

(The music thins but does not end abruptly. It should feel like it continues without him.)

Jack does not rush to fill the silence.

He stands.

Sets the guitar down carefully.

Jack walks to the control panel.

One final action. He flips the switch.

Not dramatic. Not violent. Just deliberate.

The machine powers down cleanly.

The hum fades to silence.

It holds.

Nothing collapses.

Jack stands in the quiet. Breath steady.

JACK

There.

He looks around the space. Really looks.

JACK

That's enough.

A beat.

Jack turns toward the exit.

He stops.

He looks back once. Not to check.

To acknowledge.

JACK

Sooner or later.

He doesn't explain it. He doesn't finish it.

He exits.

LIGHTS HOLD on the empty space.

The silence remains alive, not dead.

LIGHTS OUT.

SCENE 11 - AFTER THE STOP

LIGHTS UP SOFTLY.

The space is still. The machine is off.

It's not broken. It's finished.

The silence is different now; not empty, not tense.

Jack stands where he left it.

Hands at his sides.

Breathing steady.

He waits, instinctively, for something to happen.

Nothing does.

Jack nods once.

JACK

That's alright.

He moves the chair slightly.

Not centre. Just out of the way.

The work lamp remains on.

Jack picks up the guitar. This time, there is no hesitation.

He sits and lets the room settle.

Then he plays one gentle chord.

CUE SONG - "SOONER OR LATER"

(FULL REPRISE / CODA)

SOONER OR LATER, IT COMES AROUND
 SOONER OR LATER, MAKES ITS SOUND
 YOU CAN BRACE YOURSELF AGAINST IT
 OR LET IT PASS YOU BY
 YOU CAN KEEP YOUR HANDS BUSY
 KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN LOW
 TELL YOURSELF THERE'S TIME ENOUGH
 FOR THE THINGS YOU DON'T YET KNOW

SOONER OR LATER, YOU UNDERSTAND
 SOONER OR LATER, WHAT YOU CAN HOLD
 AND WHAT YOU CAN'T COMMAND
 SOME THINGS DON'T NEED FIXING
 THEY JUST MOVE THROUGH
 SOONER OR LATER

I KEPT THINKING IT WAS WAITING
 SOMEWHERE FURTHER DOWN THE LINE
 THAT I'D FEEL IT WHEN THE MOMENT CAME
 LIKE A SIGNAL, LIKE A SIGN
 BUT IT WAS IN THE QUIET PAUSES
 IN THE THINGS I DIDN'T SAY
 IN THE TIME I SPENT HOLDING ON
 INSTEAD OF LETTING STAY

SOONER OR LATER, YOU UNDERSTAND
 SOONER OR LATER, WHAT YOU CAN HOLD
 AND WHAT YOU CAN'T COMMAND
 SOME THINGS DON'T NEED FIXING
 THEY JUST MOVE THROUGH
 SOONER OR LATER

(almost spoken, barely sung)

IT WASN'T LOST
 IT WASN'T WRONG
 IT WAS JUST WAITING
 FOR ME TO STOP

(no lift, no push. Simply settled)

SOONER OR LATER, YOU UNDERSTAND
SOONER OR LATER, WHAT YOU CAN HOLD
AND WHAT YOU CAN'T COMMAND
SOME THINGS DON'T NEED FIXING
THEY JUST MOVE THROUGH
SOONER OR LATER

(The guitar continues for a few bars. Then Jack lets the final chord ring.)

He does not rush the silence.

He lets it arrive.

FINAL MOMENT

Jack stands.

Puts the guitar back where it belongs.

Not hidden. Not presented. Just placed.

He looks once more at the machine.

Not with pride. Not with regret.

With recognition.

JACK

That'll do.

Jack switches off the work lamp.

The space falls into soft darkness.

After a breath...

BLACKOUT.

THE END.