

DISTANT VOICES

Written by

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INT. DARKNESS

All is shrouded in darkness. Yet in that inky blackness, movement can be seen, like the tendrils of an octopus or the slither of snakes. MULTIPLE VOICES overlap one another.

WESTBROOK 1 (V.O.)

I will be with you --

WESTBROOK 2 (V.O.)

You all your life. From --

WESTBROOK 3 (V.O.)

From the moment you were born
'til --

ALL WESTBROOKS (V.O.)

'Til the day we die.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

WILBUR WESTBROOK (20s), a sunken-eyed young man with unkempt hair and a wrinkled shirt, awakes with a start in a small cubicle, hyperventilating until he takes in his surroundings and calms down.

He's sitting in a simple chair and, on a wall-connected desk, there's a CRT monitor. Chunky wires extend from the monitor to a corner of the cubicle, to some unseen main computer. Behind him is a small bookshelf filled with instructional books. A tear-away calendar reads "January 13th." Above him buzz old FLUORESCENT LIGHTS. After a moment, Wilbur relaxes.

As he sets up to begin his work, the voice of a MALE COWORKER (20s), can be heard in the next cubicle over. There's an air of confidence in the voice.

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

You all right over there?

WILBUR

Uh, yeah. I'm sorry. life's just
been... it's been, you know?

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

Oh, I hear you! My father blew a
fuse over dinner other day. Family,

am I right?

WILBUR

Yeah... Oh, I nearly forgot, I need to get some ingredients for dinner tonight. Thanks.

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

Don't mention it.

Wilbur turns and grabs an instructional book from his shelf. As he's about to set to work, he pauses.

WILBUR

If you don't mind me asking, what's the rest of your family like?

As the coworker speaks, the lights above the cubicle begin to flicker. Wilbur tenses up at this development.

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

Oh, my family? (Beat) They're all right. Kind of standoffish and traditional, but nothing outside the normal household.

Wilbur's breathing becomes heavy as the gaps in the flicker grow longer, and Wilbur is submerged repeatedly in darkness.

MALE COWORKER (CONT.) (O.S.)

We disagree sometimes, but deep down, I love my family. What about you?

Wilbur closes his eyes as the light turns off completely.

WILBUR

They're fine. Nothing too special. I take care of them, but they take care of me too, so I can't ask for much else. (Beat) They're real big Mets fans.

Silence. And then...

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

Really, the Mets? To each their own, I guess.

Wilbur opens his eyes, and the office is once again bathed in the candid glow of the fluorescent lights.

WILBUR

Yeah. To each their own.

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP - LATER

Wilbur is at the counter of an old-fashion butchers' shop with a wooden counter and tiled walls and floor. There's a back room from which the sound of CHOPPING FLESH emanates rhythmically. Wilbur is inspecting the meats.

WILBUR

Hey, you wouldn't happen to have any offal, would you? In particular I'm looking for goat, if you have it.

The sound continues, but a voice, raspy in tone, joins the chorus. For our purposes, he's the BUTCHER.

BUTCHER (O.S.)

Can I ask what it's for?

WILBUR

A pâté. I found they're best for... important conversations.

The rhythm pauses, but only for a moment, as though the butcher remembered something, before it drifts away again, and his work continues.

BUTCHER (O.S.)

Third down from the left.

Sure enough, there is the OFFAL Wilbur needs.

BUTCHER (CONT.) (O.S.)

Just take what you need. I trust you know how to pay for things.

Wilbur bags the offal and leaves a hand full of dollars on the counter.

INT. WESTBROOK HOUSE - LATER

Wilbur stands in the foyer of an ornate house, with plenty of dust and cobwebs lining the walls. All the windows are pitch black, save the one built into the interior door ahead, from which a warm glow emanates.

Wilbur stands for a moment then walks to the door. He opens it to see a table with a single roasted turkey, a light shining above it. The rest of the room is shrouded in darkness.

As Wilbur takes a step into the room and--

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Wilbur wakes up back in his cubicle, jumping back with heavy breaths. He notices his surroundings and calms himself. The calendar now reads "January 14th." He relaxes and begins to work.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP

Wilbur buys the offal.

INT. WESTBROOK HOUSE

Wilbur reaches for the door but hesitates. He steels his nerves before opening the door.

INT. OFFICE

Wilbur repeatedly beats his head with an open palm. The calendar reads "February 18th."

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP

Wilbur buys the offal, slamming the money on the counter.

INT. WESTBROOK HOUSE

Wilbur paces the foyer before entering the door.

INT. OFFICE

Wilbur, now with a bandaged nose and bruised face, lifts his chair, but drops it in defeat, having nothing worth destroying. The fluorescent lights flicker like laughter. The calendar reads "June 4th."

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP

Wilbur buys the offal.

INT. WESTBROOK HOUSE

Wilbur sits on the floor, his back pressed against the door. A BANGING can be heard from the other side.

INT. OFFICE

Wilbur sits at his chair with a blank expression. The calendar reads "November 28th" with a cartoon turkey next to the date.

END MONTAGE:

INT. BUTCHER'S SHOP - NIGHT

Wilbur is holding the bag of offal and is about to leave the shop when he turns back to the counter.

WILBUR

Hey... Can I talk to you about something?

BUTCHER (O.S.)

Of course. What's troubling you?

WILBUR

Well, I've been meaning to talk to my family. I guess that's a little vague. I mean to say, I want to find my own place.

The slice of the butcher's blade ceases, but Wilbur doesn't seem to notice.

WILBUR (CONT.)

For a long while now they've had it hard and needed me to help keep them together and leaving would mean... but I don't think I'm happy where I am right now and I... nothing I'm doing is getting any better. I just want to...start over. And I've been trying to tell them, but every time, my mind goes fuzzy, and my throat tightens and I... I'm sorry. I'm just being stupid. I'm sorry to have troubled you.

Wilbur turns back to the door to leave.

BUTCHER (O.S.)

Nothing of the sort. My mom always told me I was a good listener.

Wilbur stops in his tracks.

WILBUR

Funny... mine says the same thing.

BUTCHER (O.S.)

Anyhow, if you're looking for advice, I'd tell you to trust in yourself. If it's the right thing to do, you'll know. Never for a second let someone convince you otherwise.

Wilbur turns and leaves the shop. After he has left, the light inside the back room flickers off, and something heavy hits the wall with a sharp THUD, and the butcher GROANS.

INT. WESTBROOK HOUSE - LATER

The foyer has a suffocating presence, as though the building is warping around Wilbur. He grabs hold of the metal doorknob but hesitates. As was the case before, a lone light shines above a table and a roasted turkey.

As Wilbur takes his first step into the room, the shadows part to reveal a kitchen. Five CARDBOARD CUTOUTS, each

illustrated to resemble a traditional family member (think 1950's propaganda) stand around the table: mother, a father, a sister, an older brother, and a grandfather at the head of the table. Wilbur proceeds forward.

WILBUR

I got some stuff to make that pâté
you like.

Silence.

The sound of metal clanking on metal echoes through the room as a trashcan seems to open by itself.

WILBUR (CONT.)

(Beat) I understand.

Wilbur goes to the trashcan and drops the bag of offal inside. In the can, several bags from the same butcher's shop can be seen, along with plenty of rotten offal.

WILBUR (CONT.)

No, it's okay... we can do it
tomorrow.

He walks to the table, sitting at the far end from the grandfather. Silence fills the room, so much that the quiet ringing of tinnitus begins to build.

WILBUR (CONT.)

So, work went well today. I think I
might be getting how the computer
works.

Silence.

WILBUR (CONT.)

I talked to the butcher today. He
seemed nice.

Silence.

WILBUR (CONT.)

Could... could you please at least
pretend like my life is interesting
to you?

Wilbur stands up.

WILBUR (CONT.)

You know, I was thinking I should
get my own place.

A SMALL CREAK is heard from beyond the table as an obsidian
tendrill creeps behind the cutouts.

WILBUR (CONT.)

I-I've got the money for it, and I
already found a place close to
work. All I have to do is leave.

The heads of the four cutouts along the table snap to look
at him; the grandfather stares across the table with the
empty holes that are his eyes. The ringing stops.

The room begins to shake as the light above begins to
flicker. While Wilbur tries to stand tall, his voice carries
a crack of fear.

WILBUR (CONT.)

Please, at least let me explain
myself. Try to understand where I'm
coming from.

Pots and pans fly off the walls and tiles crack under the
ever-increasing darkness.

WILBUR (CONT.)

Look, I'm sorry. I just wanted
to... I just wanted to...

Wilbur curls up on the ground as he begins to mumble his
apologies. The light in the kitchen is snuffed out.

WILBUR (CONT.)

(Hyperventilating)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
I'm sorry. I'm sorry...

From the darkness, an obsidian hand reaches out and caresses
Wilbur's cheek.

WESBROOK 3 (V.O)

It's okay, Wilbur. You don't have
to cry.

Another black hand begins to rub his head.

WESTBROOK 1 (V.O)

You know we love you, right?

As Wilbur continues to cry, more and more hands wrap themselves around him, like a mix between a hug and a vise.

WESTBROOK 2 (V.O)

We need you Wilbur, so please,
don't leave us.

WESTBROOK 4 (V.O)

Could you do that for us, Wilbur?

More and more voices speak words of affirmation and pleas to stay as more hands cover Wilbur until he is consumed by the darkness.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

Wilbur is once again at his cubical, instructional book in hand, typing some string of random letters and numbers. His hair is more shaped, and his shirt is ironed. The calendar reads "January 13th."

As he's working, a GASP, along with panting is heard from the cubicle behind him.

WILBUR

You alright over there?

MALE COWORKER (O.S.)

Uh, yeah. I'm sorry, life's just
been... it's been, you know?

In the cubicle behind this Wilbur is the PAST WILBUR, the one with unkempt hair and wrinkled clothes.

WILBUR

Oh, I hear you! my father blew a
fuse over dinner other day. Family,
am I right?

PAST WILBUR

Yeah... Oh, I nearly forgot, I need
to get some ingredients for dinner
tonight. Thanks.

WILBUR

Don't mention it.

Wilbur turns back to his computer and stretches his arms. The young Wilbur hesitates, before speaking again.

PAST WILBUR

If you don't mind me asking, what is the rest of your family like?

Wilbur's hands hover above the keyboard. The light flickers above.

WILBUR

Oh, my family? (Beat) They're alright. Kind off standoffish and traditional, but nothing outside the normal household. We disagree sometimes, but deep down, I...

But as he's about to say the familiar words, his voice catches in his throat. As he speaks, a black tear rolls down his cheek.

WILBUR (CONT.)

But deep-down I... deep down I...
I...

The flickers gain in length as a black hand creeps over and grasps Wilbur's shoulder. In the distance the flick of a light switch can be heard as the world turns black.