

An Excerpt From:

OVERNIGHT LOWS
Written by
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Static loud. And then it fades. Sarah is asleep with her back to us. Chuck is still standing. He looks extremely fatigued now. He holds the clock, its display facing the audience. It reads: "3:55 a.m." He looks beaten down and exhausted like he's been up for days. He talks to Sarah:

CHUCK

(tolling like a bell:)

3:55. 3:55. 3:55.

A pause. He checks on the clock.
Resigned.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

(talking to Sarah:)

Fifty-five, Fifty-six, Fifty-seven ... Just after I took this job, I'd start waking up in the middle of the night because of one thing and one thing only. Not the neighbor's dog. Not police. A *hum*. Never so loud and never so quiet, but a constant thing, a *hum*. It crops up every night and all I can do is look out the window and start counting numbers. Then maybe, I catch a few hours ...

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

If I can't get that all worked out, sometimes I end up on the front steps of my building. Only when nothing's gonna work. I sit out there and feel the cool breeze passing through my shirt, sirens somewhere, a TV down the street, and suddenly I'm following all these sounds. Like they're baiting me to walk. Pretty soon I'm patrolling my neighborhood and the neighborhood beyond in a graveyard shift.

(MORE)

CHUCK (CONT'D)

All the time hearing the hum rise and fall and it almost has me fooled it's coming from the air conditioners or neon sign over Pete's Philly Steaks, but after a whole night of this and my feet falling off, all that's ever left of the night is humming.

Humming.

Humming.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

I like looking inside the houses. Follow lights left on and see what life's like. The living rooms with a TV left on or a kitchen table with empties left on it. I like sneaking into backyards just to feel how still everything felt. Sit on lawn furniture. Walk through dewy grass.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Or I'm inside the houses. I don't know how but I end up there sometimes. Sink into a stranger's leather couch. Stand in the middle of a kitchen and look at what people leave behind on a counter: receipts, movie stubs, a cell phone battery. I joined one old man in his front room when he was sleeping and gingerly sat next to him watching a western he set on mute. I don't know how I end up there, I just stand on the sidewalk looking at the lights poking through the darkness and suddenly it's like I'm in love and I'm inside and a part of their lives.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

I'm in bedrooms. I watch them sleep. I'm in bathrooms. I hang put up towels. I pick up paperback mysteries to see where they read to before they dropped them on the floor. Dogs and cats follow me room to room. I never know where I am. But I am always at home in all the homes.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Once upon a time it was a gift to sleep. Forever sleep. The kind when you wake up, you've crossed the border to a different country.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Except the hum doesn't let that happen. In the houses, I turn on every ceiling fan I find to make it go away. But it never goes away. No one hears the hum at night except people who are awake and that's why the night watchmen and the janitors and toll takers and diner cooks all know something the day people don't.

(A pause, until:)

The hum, drowned out during the day by everyone rising and moving but never goes away. At night, when the world quiets down, it always returns.

A beat. Maybe we hear the hum here. It rises dramatically.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

To suck the sleepwalking out of me, I have to tie myself to bed so I won't wake up.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

That's the only way I end up with the sleep everyone sleeps. The restless kind, maybe with a dream about something that happened at work, if I'm lucky. A sleep with no other purpose but to end whenever the alarm clock commands.

A beat.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

But that's not sleeping. That's just being unconscious.

A beat. Static rises. Sarah turns in her sleep. She is frightened.

SARAH

Charlie?

Chuck turns to her and sits next to her on the bed. He strokes her hair.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(half asleep)

Is it morning? Did it rain? Is it raining? Is the window shut? Can you open it? Can you open the window, Charlie?

Chuck kisses her head gently. She opens her eyes.

CHUCK

I'll get you some water.

He exits.

A pause. A enters holding a glass of water. He sits in the same place Chuck sat. He gives Sarah the glass. Sarah drinks the entire glass. She looks up and sees that it's A.

SARAH

I don't think I want to see you two anymore.

A

We can't help but be with you.

SARAH

There must be a way.

B enters.

B

There isn't.

A

No.

SARAH

I read your letters.

B

We thought so.

SARAH

I don't ever need them--

A

You memorized--

SARAH

I burned them.

B

But you remembered.

A pause.

SARAH

All of it.

A pause.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Your story.

B

Your's too.

When you were young. SARAH

We met. A

At work. B

Small town. SARAH

There was constant sunlight. A

It was summer. B

You were young. SARAH

We were young. A

Yes. B
(laughing)

Everything was new. SARAH

To each other. A

We never let go. B

All summer. SARAH

All year. A

And more after that. B

You moved away. SARAH

Deep in the South. A

No one knew us. B

And there built a life. SARAH

With friends. A

We met. B

So different from your parent's. SARAH

It was a young life. A

Our own. B

Parties and discoveries. SARAH

Our house was open year round. A

To our friends. B

Your new life. SARAH

In the South. A

We were young. B

You were celebrating. SARAH

Our adventure. A

Freedom. B

And in it. SARAH

Because of it. A

You came. B

I did. SARAH

That's right. A

In the town with the French name. B

Slumber sloping off trees. SARAH

Music like dew. A

Fresh every day. B

The River a muddy chocolate. SARAH

You were born in the right time. A

In the thick of it. B

I remember. SARAH

The air hot, heavy, moist. A

We felt so alive. B

You were young. SARAH

So we created you. A

We wanted you. B

I remember. SARAH

Of that time. A

B
A testament of that time.

SARAH
A survivor.

A pause.

SARAH (CONT'D)
I grew up thinking all trees dropped moss that crunched under
our feet.

A
And a parade went on for hours and weeks.

B
We wanted you to.

SARAH
Your letters got shorter.

A
By the time we moved away.

B
The sun burned. It got too hot.

SARAH
I stopped remembering.

A
You missed things.

B
You needn't have known.

SARAH
I read about them.

A
I'm sorry you did.

B
We should have burned all the letters.

SARAH
They weren't from you anyway.

A
Not the ones later.

B
We stopped writing.

SARAH

I learned it from the lawyers. What hate.

A and B disappear.

SARAH (CONT'D)

The language for it isn't blasphemy, it's the kind that twists a perfectly constructed sentence to declare what it deserves. Words so corroded by all that abuse, they're just antiques now. No one remembers how to use them. So more or less they're for show.

Dave shakes a glass and gets Sarah's attention. She crosses to where he stands and accepts the drink. She spends moments there.

Chuck enters. He can't find her.

CHUCK

Snow's melted.

He doesn't find her.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Snow's melted.

Sarah enters, stepping forward.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

It looks like when a long winter suddenly goes. Birds are waking up. Trees are full. And there's bunnies.

SARAH

Bunnies.

CHUCK

The courtyard to the curb. Filled with bunnies. Hippedy-hop and all of that. We should open the windows --

SARAH

You can leave then.

A pause.