

DARK SPACES

DRAFT 2

Written by

Kyle Wong

Adapted from "Dark Spaces on the Map", by Anjali Sachdeva

OVER BLACK

A click.

A low-pitched robotic sound gradually turns into a higher pitched, barely audible hum.

This is the hum of the COMM CUFFS, futuristic devices which record the emotions of a person, though we do not know this now, let alone the source of the hum.

The hum starts here, and will remain with us, slightly under the main audio layer, for any scene that has turned-on Cuffs, ie. A majority of this film.

EXT. A FOREST - NIGHT

It's the middle of the night. Slight wind blows through the trees, but other than that, the weather is clear.

We still hear the ever-present hum as the scene is suddenly disturbed by crunching footsteps.

Then, beams of light. Flashlights. Looking all around, looking for a path ahead. We do not see their owners.

The footsteps stop.

Then, sobs. From a young female VICTIM:

THE VICTIM

(OS)

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

One of her male ASSAILANTS gruffly responds:

ASSAILANT

(OS)

Gonna be a lot sorrier pretty soon.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DUSK

A young Middle-Eastern woman wearing a hijab, FATIMA, types on an electronic notepad. She whispers words to herself, invested in her work.

A Comm Cuff, displaying the color BLUE, is clasped over Fatima's hijab, around her neck.

Our protagonist, an elderly WOMAN, studies Fatima. Her hands are clasped on her lap, placed below us - around one of those wrists, a Comm Cuff, also displaying BLUE.

Their age gap, as well as the nature of their interview, places the Woman in a position of privilege, and the Woman's expression reflects that: a faint smile, an indication that though this next generation is heading in the right direction, they could do with some nudging here and there.

Still writing in her notes, not looking at our Woman:

FATIMA

And it was -

THE WOMAN

He was supposed to come. He was.

Now Fatima looks up. An expression of almost self-righteousness comes over her face, like a news anchor who has cornered their victim into their own narrative.

FATIMA

But he didn't.

THE WOMAN

No.

FATIMA

An overturned semi transporting chickens.

The Woman chuckles to herself.

To her, what she's saying to Fatima is nothing more than a story, a myth. Bedtime stories. Fatima forces a polite smile over her face. To Fatima, this interview is everything. This is what puts our Woman in a position over Fatima.

THE WOMAN

My mother was angry when he called to say he wouldn't make it.

FATIMA

Did she say *why* she was angry?

The Woman makes eye contact with Fatima once more. The Woman doesn't smile, but her eyes tell a different story: *Got you.*

Now the Woman smiles. She can drop her facade. Fatima can't.

THE WOMAN

In the evening, my mother brought us all ice cream. She always said the ice cream at the pool was too expensive. But that day we all got our own. And she didn't complain once.

Fatima forces a smile over a face. Another one of those polite ones.

FATIMA

Ah.

The Woman chuckles. An infectious chuckle that spreads, after a moment, to Fatima. But Fatima is simply returning the favor, finding no genuine joy in this moment.

THE WOMAN

Can you believe it? Pool ice cream.

FATIMA

Ah.

And then, Fatima goes back to her notes.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - LATER - NIGHT

Fatima presses the color display on the Woman's Comm Cuff, and as it shuts off, so does the hum.

FATIMA

Does it bother you?

THE WOMAN

The humming or the pressure?

FATIMA

Does it bother you at all?

Fatima takes it off, places it on a nearby table. Her Comm Cuff similarly is shut off.

The Woman rubs the spot where the Comm Cuff formerly was.

THE WOMAN

Does it bother you?

Fatima touches hers.

FATIMA

No, not really.

THE WOMAN

Why are you asking me?

FATIMA

Curiosity. I'm sorry.

Fatima extends her hand.

THE WOMAN

As always.

The Woman accepts the handshake.

FATIMA

Thank you for your time, miss. I'll be back -

THE WOMAN

You don't know when you'll be back.

Fatima laughs.

FATIMA

Yeah, I don't.

THE WOMAN

The nature of your work demands it.

FATIMA

Yes.

THE WOMAN

Same with the cuff.

After a slight pause, realizing what the Woman is saying:

FATIMA

Yes.

The Woman smiles, her point made.

THE WOMAN

I'll see you.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

The Woman looks out her room's window, looking at Fatima walking away from the complex.

It's late. A lone car is parked in the lot, beside it stands another woman smoking a cigarette.

Fatima calls out, the woman throws away her cigarette. Fatima passes her without emotion, gets in the car, and they drive away.

The Woman gets in her bed. Looks at the ceiling. In thought.

Then, she gets out, places the Comm Cuff around her neck, and gets back into bed.

She presses on the Comm Cuff, and a holographic menu pops up, displaying a myriad of biological data: her heart rate, adrenaline level, etc.

She shuts the menu off. Takes a note of the Cuff's color: blue. She stares at the ceiling. Her eyes start to close as she dozes off.

PHONE

(VO)

You have a call from Bryan.

INT. THE WOMAN'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

A younger version of the Woman, the YOUNG WOMAN, stuffs things into a backpack. A phone lies on a table nearby.

She's distressed. Been crying.

YOUNG WOMAN

Turn off.

Her voice sounds similar to the VICTIM from earlier.

PHONE

I'm sorry, I didn't understand that.

YOUNG WOMAN

Turn off.

PHONE

Connecting now.

YOUNG WOMAN

No-!

Ring. Ring. The Woman stops packing and rushes to the phone, but not before -

BRYAN

(OS)

Babe, where are you?

YOUNG WOMAN

I don't know.

BRYAN

(OS)

What do you mean? Your heart's through the roof! Do you need me to call the cops?

YOUNG WOMAN
 I don't know. No. No, you don't.
 I'm at home. Don't call the cops.

BRYAN
 (OS)
 Is everything okay?

A pause.

YOUNG WOMAN
 I'll talk to you tomorrow. I just
 need a bit.

BRYAN
 (OS)
 Babe-

A pause.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
 (OS)
 Okay.

YOUNG WOMAN
 I'll talk to you tomorrow.

BRYAN
 (OS)
 Okay. Can I send the car to me,
 then, if you're not driving?

YOUNG WOMAN
 Yeah. I'm sorry.

BRYAN
 (OS)
 Okay.

A pause.

BRYAN (CONT'D)
 (OS)
 Bye.

Bryan doesn't hang up immediately, almost as if expecting a response. But none comes. He hangs up.

The Woman sits, distressed, thinking for a moment.

She looks at a device clamped around her wrist - a more archaic version of the Comm Cuff. It's PINK. She taps it, and a menu comes up, displaying her current, very high, heart rate.

She forces herself to take a few deep breaths. Looks back at the monitor, which displays her heart rate going down. BLUE.

She taps a few more buttons, stopping at a menu that shows the face of Bryan. A green word is displayed next to him: LINK.

When she's satisfied with her current heart rate, she takes the Cuff off and places it on the table.

Looking at the Cuff, she feels another onset of tears coming, but she pushes them away. She takes the backpack and exits the house.

We linger on the screen of the Cuff: the green link with Bryan has been replaced with a red "DISC."

The phone on the table starts vibrating.

PHONE

You have a call from Bryan.

But she's already out the door.

EXT. THE WOMAN'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The trees of a nearby forest sway with the wind.

A robotic BEEP, then an unseen car turns around in a driveway and drives off.

The Woman looks at the car driving off, then looks up and around her: where to go?

Looking at the forest, she starts to head in that direction.

EXT. A FOREST - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

The scene from the start. Actually, the exact same scene. Though, this time, we're at a slightly different angle.

First, the footsteps.

Then, the flashlights.

Now we see their sources: three burly MEN, who drag an unwitting female VICTIM whose face remains unseen along with theirs.

The light from the archaic Comm Cuffs shine through the darkness. This gives away the fact that this scene is a flashback from the past.

In order, from left to right: GREEN, GREEN, RED, GREEN.

Three assailants, one victim.

The footsteps stop.

Now, the sobs.

VICTIM

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Now, we are with the group. We stare right up into the face of a maniacally smiling man, the ASSAILANT.

ASSAILANT

Gonna be a lot sorrier pretty soon.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DAY

The Woman WAKES with a start.

Gasping for breath, she sits upright. Takes off the Comm Cuff. Displays the holographic menu.

Heightened heart rate through the night. Fight-or-flight levels of adrenaline.

The color is RED.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

The Woman looks out the window as the day shift arrives. Nurses, doctors - all female - say hi as they pass each other on the pathways outside. Their Cuffs display a varied mixture of BLUE and GREEN.

A knock from behind.

THE WOMAN

Yes.

A NURSE pokes her head in.

NURSE

Morning. Oh, you're up early.
Croissant or cereal?

THE WOMAN

You know I don't care.

NURSE

I'm sorry, I have to ask. Cereal it is.

The Nurse gets to checking the equipment surrounding the Woman's bed.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Oh, your heart was racing in the night. Something happened?

THE WOMAN

Just a nightmare.

NURSE

Ah. Do you want any mixture?

THE WOMAN

I'm good. She's in early today.

We follow the Nurse's gaze to where the Woman is looking:

Her patterned hijab sticking out like a sore thumb, Fatima makes her way through the crowd towards the entrance of the hospital.

NURSE

Oh, the student. What's she want with you, anyway?

The Woman shrugs.

THE WOMAN

Same as they want with the other old farts.

Among the crowd, now they stand out: other young female researchers, peppered around Fatima, of varied ethnicities and of varied outfits, all sharing one thing in common: they're not hospital staff.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

But *she* stays the longest.

We focus on Fatima.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

Fatima sits across from the woman. Her scarf ruffled, her Cuff PINK.

The Woman notices, sneaks a glance down to her own Cuff: GREEN.

Fatima looks to where the Woman's looking. Smiles. This one is genuine.

FATIMA
You're happy today.

THE WOMAN
Looking forward to getting work done. Important work.

FATIMA
Important indeed.

The Woman points to Fatima's Cuff.

THE WOMAN
Everything all right?

Fatima nods.

FATIMA
I'm sorry. It's just the... grant.
We need better results to qualify.

Fatima suddenly gets up, catching the Woman off-guard.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
It's okay.

Fatima sits down next to the Woman. Swipes on the cuff.

A wave of emotion courses through the Woman's body. She shudders.

Fatima lets out a small laugh.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
Not used to it?

THE WOMAN
Takes some getting used to in the first place. Lots of things, huh?
Is there anything I can do to help?

FATIMA
Yes.

The Woman leans in, prepared to talk Fatima through her little crisis.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
Tell me what you want to tell me today.

The Woman's expression drops. Just slightly.

THE WOMAN
Okay. You had lunch yet?

INT. THE HOSPITAL - KITCHEN - DAY

A knife SLAPS onto a slice of white bread. Then, awkwardly, it attempts to spread some butter around.

The Woman sits in a nearby chair, looking onwards at Fatima trying to make a sandwich.

THE WOMAN
You don't have them often?

FATIMA
No. Me and Beth usually just get takeout most of these days. Crunch time for our theses.

Fatima looks to the confused Woman. Realizes she hasn't mentioned something.

FATIMA (CONT'D)
My girlfriend.

THE WOMAN
(joking)
Not like there's many boyfriends around.

They share a laugh. But Fatima's eyes remain trained on the Woman.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)
Takeout was too expensive for us growing up. My dad, he'd - he used to make me sandwiches in the middle of the night.

FATIMA
Oh?

THE WOMAN
He'd sneak downstairs to make one for himself. But I'd always find him. He said everything tastes better after midnight.

Under her breath, Fatima mutters "dad".

FATIMA

Did he cook?

THE WOMAN

He did. He was a good cook. My mother cooked too, but she didn't really enjoy it.

Fatima finishes making the sandwich. She takes two of them and hands one to the Woman. She sits across from her.

As the Woman tries to find a comfortable eating position, Fatima hurriedly cleans her hands and takes out her notepad, jotting down some things quickly.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

So, what is going on with your research?

Fatima sighs.

FATIMA

This field... it's very new. Biochemistry and cultural anthropology combined - some say it's a waste of time. Some - like me, like us - say we need to know exactly what happened. Even if we know how bad it was.

The Woman gulps down the rest of her sandwich, finishing it. She looks up - Fatima isn't even touching hers. She's talking, deep in her own tangent.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

The technology's developing so quickly, but we don't have the funding to keep up. We're finding that we can access things the Memory Holder doesn't remember consciously.

THE WOMAN

Through the Cuff?

FATIMA

Through the brain. And Cuff. Conversations you heard as a newborn, as a baby, that you'd never have understood or even comprehended at the time. Action in the background. Stuff we forget. Or choose to forget.

The Woman nods.

THE WOMAN

You're recording everything.

FATIMA

Not... quite. The quality's not great, but the amount of data is much more than we'd anticipated. But we're getting there.

The Woman thinks.

THE WOMAN

Why would you want to do that?

Fatima looks up at the Woman. She's almost offended - *have you been living under a rock?*

FATIMA

Think of the possibilities! It's a whole other generation back. Information about your parents, grandparents. Great-grandparents. Etcetera. Don't you want to know? Isn't there something inside of you that just... needs to know?

The Woman places her plate on the table between her and Fatima as Fatima begins eating her sandwich.

THE WOMAN

"Memory Holder". Is that what you call me, in your reports?

FATIMA

It's what we call all the subjects.

THE WOMAN

Some treasure I hold.

FATIMA

You were 28 when the Common Era ended. Everyone else - everyone that came before that, everyone else who remembers - is gone. You're not.

THE WOMAN

I'm your only source.

Fatima shrugs.

FATIMA

Well, not "only", there are others. But, you're one of them. One of a precious few left.

THE WOMAN

And you do this to find out what happened. Before... everything.

FATIMA

"What" is an easy question to answer. Take the four colors of the Cuff - from best to worst, Green is a state of complete bliss and happiness.

THE WOMAN

I know what the colors mean.

FATIMA

I'm making a point. Then, going along the spectrum, Blue is calm, serene. What most people's Cuffs say right before they fall to sleep. Pink is distress - heightened heart rate due to excitement, heatedness, what have you. Just know that it's usually a temporary state. And, Red is our panic mode. We're running. Or fighting.

Fatima finishes her sandwich.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

But there are only four colors. And an endless range of human emotion. Red simply signifies that this person is experiencing a certain set of conditions in their body. Why, or how, well...

Fatima places her plate down.

THE WOMAN

Well, I'm not much of a historian myself. Living or practicing. Even if you took all our testimonies at face value, best you can hope for is to color in the parts you know. The missing, dark spaces on the map: that's what they are. Dark spaces.

FATIMA

And that's what we're doing. Are
you done with yours?

The Woman nods, and Fatima takes both their plates to the sink.

As Fatima places the plate in the sink and robotic arms reach forth to clean them, she gets a text on her Cuff. She reads it, stands in silence and shock.

Fatima's Cuff turns RED.

EXT. A FOREST - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

The young Woman paces through the labyrinthine forest. She cries to no one in particular. Emotion has gotten the best of her. She looks up:

The trees sway with the wind. They sway, and they sway, and then we hear it:

A hum. A myriad of hums stacked on top of one another, actually. And then, a more familiar sound:

Crunching footsteps.

The Woman's eyes dart to her left:

Darkness.

Then, to her right, towards the sound of the footsteps:

Three BEAMS of light scour the forest floor, searching for a path onward. Male, masculine grunts.

The Woman crashes to the ground, trying to hide. She pushes aside her tears the best she can.

As the footsteps get closer, we see them, the four lights of the Comm Cuffs.

GREEN, GREEN, RED, GREEN.

And the red is flailing wildly. Its owner, the Victim, stumbles and falls.

A masculine grunt, and a feminine grunt as an assailant pulls up the Victim.

The Woman crouches behind a bush. They won't find her here. She looks on in horror.

Now she can see them. See the outlines of their bodies: three male, one female. See one face, the face of the assailant that would be forever burned into our Woman's mind. The Victim's face is hidden from this angle, as are the others'.

The Woman is helpless. She looks around for a weapon, a tool - anything that she could use to fight the assailants, save the Victim.

Then, she spots it: A rock.

She picks it up, aims it best she can, throws it at one of the assailants.

It misses, yet it causes a momentary auditory distraction. One of the assailants turns his head towards the sound, and raises his hand, causing the others to stop.

A few seconds pass.

The Woman looks around some more. Certainly, obviously, there should be something around here. Something that can help.

She spots it: A large, solid stick. If it swung and struck, it could do some damage. She picks it up, feels it in her hands, but then her attention is brought back to the group as the Victim starts sobbing.

VICTIM

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

The Woman practices swinging the stick. She *could* cause some damage. Then she does a head count. There were three, right? One, two, three tall, muscular, male assailants. Could she take on three? She debates with herself, breathing quickly to hype herself up.

Then one of the assailants, the one that speaks, punches the one who stopped the group in the shoulder. That one shrugs, but the one that speaks does not see the shrug, as he is now looking at the Victim.

And, in a creepy, crazy smile that will haunt our Woman's dreams:

ASSAILANT

Gonna be a lot sorrier pretty soon.

He waves his comrades on, and they push the Victim up and continue on their journey.

We see the Woman's face as she looks to the departing group. Despair. It's despair.

But she can't do anything, or rather, that window has long since passed, as the lights are in the far distance now, and we remain on them until they disappear out of sight.

EXT. THE WOMAN'S HOUSE - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

BRYAN, the Woman's boyfriend, frantically talks on his phone outside the house. He is interrupted by the Woman running out of the forest, tears on her face, leaves in her hair, her backpack missing.

Bryan drops the call and rushes to embrace her. Though she previously viewed him in a different light, now all she wants is his embrace. She lets it all out, crying violently into his shoulder.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

INT. THE WOMAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - FLASHBACK - NIGHT

Lying on her side on her bed, the Woman blankly looks at us. Emotionless. Bryan's beefy arm hugs her to his body. His cuff is BLUE. Her's is PINK.

We remain like this for 20 or so seconds. An uncomfortably long time. Slowly pushing into the Woman's face, until it fills our screen.

Then:

YOUNG WOMAN

I think we should break up.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DAY

A monitor displays the Woman's heartrate through the night. It's been high. The Nurse's finger traces it.

NURSE

What's happening here? I think you need mixture.

The Woman sits by her window, looking outside.

Fatima's early today. She's alone. Crying. Her cuff PINK.

Her car, without a driver, drives off to find itself a spot in the lot.

INT. THE HOSPITAL - THE WOMAN'S ROOM - DAY - LATER

The Woman and Fatima sit across from each other.

Fatima's clearly not in a position to make any work today. She's crying, and though she already holds a tissue to her face, the Woman offers another, which Fatima gladly accepts.

FATIMA

I'm sorry.

THE WOMAN

Tough day?

FATIMA

I broke up with my girlfriend.

THE WOMAN

I'm sorry.

Fatima brushes away her tears, tries to talk business.

She points to the Woman's heart rate record of the night, displayed rather proudly on the wall.

FATIMA

You had a nightmare?

THE WOMAN

Of sorts.

FATIMA

It was the same yesterday. It's recurring?

The Woman thinks before answering. Studies Fatima's face. Her pose, her posture. She really is thinking, running a question over and over again in your mind, considering, reconsidering it -

FATIMA (CONT'D)

Do you want to talk about it?

The Woman's brought back. She locks eyes with Fatima.

THE WOMAN

Come with me.

She gets up, and as Fatima walks forward to help her, the Woman brushes her off.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

And leave your cuff here.

Fatima laughs. More out of shock than pleasure.

FATIMA

What now?

The Woman unclasps her Comm Cuff and places it on a table. She then looks at Fatima and taps an empty space beside it.

FATIMA (CONT'D)

I'm not supposed to. I need it to record our conversation.

THE WOMAN

I insist. I want to tell you something. Something I've always wanted to tell someone. In private.

Fatima looks at the Woman incredulously. Then, curiosity overtakes her, and her face breaks into a sly smile.

Fatima unclasps the Cuff and places it beside the Woman's.

The hums stop.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

Now you can help me.

Fatima's hands clasp around the Woman's arms as they take steps towards the door.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

There's a story I've been wanting to tell you. About back then. About men.

Fatima's face lights up. She attempts to speak but the Woman continues, cutting her off.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

I haven't told it to anyone. Not even when it happened. But I don't want it included in the report. In anywhere. This is entirely off the record.

Fatima frowns. Thinking.

Fatima's barriers are down. The Woman just has to say one more thing to have her accept her offer. She thinks, trying to find the right words to say.

She finds them.

THE WOMAN (CONT'D)

Fatima.

Fatima looks to the Woman.

FATIMA

Yes?

THE WOMAN

Do you want to know?

A second passes.

Then, a smile, that same bright, alert woman we've introduced ourselves to in the beginning of this story, returns.

FATIMA

Yes.

The Woman smiles, and she opens the door.

The two step out of the room, and the door closes, leaving just us in the room.

We pan over past the bed, the cornucopia of medical recording devices surrounding it, then finally stopping at the table where the two Cuffs of the two women lie side by side, dormant and shut off.

In the silence, their black screens look at us.