

CUBICLE JOCKEYS

By

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INT. OFFICE - DAY

Surrounded by cubicles and green lights above them, ALFIE TURNER, 30s, and his co-workers SYLVESTER, 70s, NORMAN, 30s, and BARBARA, 40s, work-worn and mournful, watch as a body is taken out on a stretcher with the head covered.

BARBARA
(puts liquor in coffee)
That's the second one this week.

NORMAN
He was a real go-getter.

SYLVESTER
(squeezes stress ball)
Employee of the Month. Three times.

BARBARA
I told him to try to take it easy.
Offered him anything in the box he
wanted.

NORMAN
Who are they even going to contact,
his wife already left him.

SYLVESTER
Let's not talk about wives, huh?

NORMAN
Sorry.

ALFIE
He's my... *Was* my cousin. He gave
me the recommendation.

SYLVESTER
Condolences, I didn't know. God,
I'm so tired, I could go right to
sleep.

Norman dabs his wrist with something from a small bottle.

NORMAN
(off their looks)
Essential oil. It's supposed to
help.
(closes eyes)
I have control over how I feel, and
I choose to feel at peace--

ALFIE
Maybe we should say a prayer?

They bow their heads, revealing a sign that says, "Always Put the Company First!" MR. MENKEN, 60s, the boss, interrupts before they can even start.

MR. MENKEN

Amen!

(to paramedics)

Get him out of here, will you?

Alfie's eye twitches as he watches the body be moved out.

MR. MENKEN (CONT'D)

Why is everyone standing around?

This is a place of work.

SYLVESTER

He was Alfie's cousin, Mr. Menken.

MR. MENKEN

(mocking)

Oh, really? Well good, you can take the rest of his load.

Alfie eyes Sylvester. Sylvester shrugs regret.

MR. MENKEN (CONT'D)

Hello? What are you waiting for?

Let's get to it. All of you! I want those in-boxes empty before end of day.

Mr. Menken walks off. Everyone goes back to their cubicles as the ASSISTANT, 20s, eager beaver, drops the dead man's work into Alfie's inbox.

ASSISTANT

"Better to be completely exhausted from the hard times on the road to success than well rested from achieving nothing."

He rings a bell before pushing the cart down the aisle.

Sylvester aims a mirror around the corner so they can see each other.

SYLVESTER

(in mirror)

Hey, Alfie--

ALFIE

What'd I tell you about the mirror, Syl?

SYLVESTER

It makes you claustrophobic. Sorry,
I forgot.

He pulls the mirror back. They lean out the cubicle to talk.

SYLVESTER (CONT'D)

(squeezes stress ball)
God, I hate that little worm.

ALFIE

That morbid motivational poster is
going to be our boss one day.

NORMAN

That's so depressing.

ALFIE

I'm having trouble swallowing, what
do you think it is?

BARBARA

Chest feel tight?

ALFIE

Yeah.

BARBARA

Panic attack probably.

Barbara grabs a box out of her desk that says, "stress relief" filled with different prescriptions, small alcohol bottles, and cigarettes.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

It'll get you through.

ALFIE

It's not a panic attack.

BARBARA

So...
(rocks the box)
Yes or no?

ALFIE

No, thanks.

BARBARA

Suit yourself, straight edge.

She takes a pill. Downs it with whiskey.

EXT. ROOFTOP - DAY

The roof is draped in smoke as everyone takes drags off their cigarettes, nervous wrecks.

ALFIE

I'm never going to be able to finish all that work. Not before Office Quotes fills it up again.

SYLVESTER

(squeezes stress ball)
I'm buried, too. Haven't even gotten through my own pile.

NORMAN

(small massager on neck)
I'm still pulling Sanders' weight since he croaked last week.

ALFIE

My arm feels numb. You think it's a heart attack?

SYLVESTER

That's a symptom alright.

A thud comes from the corner. A person on the ground.

CO-WORKER #1

It's Naomi, she's collapsed!

BARBARA

Two in one day. Record breaking.

SYLVESTER

I'll take some of that whiskey if you're still sharing.

She passes the box. Pours one in her coffee for herself.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

At his desk, Alfie finally finishes what's left in his inbox. He gathers his things.

ALFIE

Signing off.

CO-WORKER #2 (O.S.)

Tomorrow, again.

CO-WORKER #3 (O.S.)

Night.

He stands. Pulls a sleeping bag out. Unrolls it.

He looks down the aisle at his co-workers. One lies in their sleeping bag, sucking their thumb, zoned out. One hangs their wet clothes on a makeshift line.

Alfie gets in his bag. Dials on his phone.

ALFIE

Hey. I miss you, too... Soon... hopefully. So, what's for dinner? Oh, potatoes, you know how much I love your potatoes. I haven't had them in so long... Is that the kids? Can I talk to them? Homework, yeah, of course... No, it's fine. Tell them I-- Sweet dreams to you, too. Okay, love you--

He stares at his phone. Call ended. He leans against his desk. Pushes on his left arm in pain as he listens to other co-workers talk to their significant others.

Co-worker #3 cries in the distance.

INT. OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Alfie and his co-workers sit in the green-lit breakroom, all slurping cheap ramen noodles silently as Norman sits mediation style in the corner.

NORMAN

I have control over how I feel, and I choose to feel at peace. I have control over how I feel, and I choose to feel at peace. I have control over how I feel, and I choose to feel at peace.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Alfie works at his overflowing desk as another cubicle is cleaned out behind him. Sylvester's hand with the mirror comes around the corner.

SYLVESTER

(in mirror)

Hey, Alfie, you okay over there?

(MORE)

SYLVESTER (CONT'D)

(re: mirror)

Sorry.

He pulls the mirror back. They lean out the cubicles to talk.

ALFIE

If people keep dying at this rate,
we're not even going to get home
for Christmas.

BARBARA

(chugs whiskey)

Oh, Christmas. I forgot about the
holidays. I used to love them.

ALFIE

I miss my kids. My wife.

NORMAN

(puts gel mask on)

I miss sex.

SYLVESTER

(squeezes stress ball)

Sitting at the park would be nice.
Maybe with a dog or a woman. That
would be nice, huh?

ALFIE

I'm not even going to be able to go
to his funeral.

SYLVESTER

Condolences. Now all you've got to
do is avoid your own.

BARBARA

Which one was he again?

SYLVESTER

Number five.

ALFIE

Six.

(holds eye)

My eye's been twitching all week
and my arm feels like a log.

NORMAN

I threw up twice this morning.

SYLVESTER

I think I may have an ulcer.

BARBARA
 I've got hemorrhoids.
 (off their looks)
 What? Weren't we... nevermind.

ASSISTANT
 (piles work into in-box)
 "The best insurance policy for
 tomorrow is to make the most
 productive use of today."

He rings the bell. Pushes his cart down the aisle.

ALFIE
 We're all going to die here, aren't
 we?

NORMAN
 What if we just stopped working,
 what's the worst they could do to
 us?

ALFIE
 Like a strike?

SYLVESTER
 I would strike the hell out of this
 place.

NORMAN
 That would really get Menken where
 he lives.

ALFIE
 We could take the whole place down.

NORMAN
 Maybe even make the assistant cry.

ALFIE
 Yeah. And take that damn bell so he
 can never make another cliched,
 obnoxious, overzealous delivery of
 death again.

BARBARA
 Please stop, I can only get so
 erect.

They side-eye her. She takes another gulp of whiskey.

SYLVESTER
 Oh, what a dream, huh?

INT. OFFICE - BATHROOM - DAY

Alfie holds his twitching eye and tries to swallow. He walks past another sign that says, "Always Put the Company First" and another co-worker brushing his teeth in the mirror.

Alfie opens a stall where JERRY, 50s, overweight and underpaid, is perched on the toilet, motionless. He stares at him. Moves towards him cautiously.

ALFIE

Jerry?

No movement.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Oh god, Jerry, not you, too.

He pokes him. Pushes him. A loud noise comes out. A death rattle? No, a fart.

JERRY

(awakens)

Ever heard of privacy?

Jerry slams the door shut. Shaken, Alfie goes to a urinal. Begins to pee.

Mr. Menken enters. Goes to the urinal next to him. Alfie's pee stops. He tries again. Really leans into it. Nothing.

MR. MENKEN

Problem with the ol' water hose?

ALFIE

What?

MR. MENKEN

Your...

(gestures down, looks around)

This place is a fucking mess, isn't it? God damn cleaning ladies. Look, how about you grab some of those wet naps from the front and do a quick wipe-down when you're done, get the mirrors, side of the piss tanks and--

ALFIE

That... that's not my job.

MR. MENKEN

What does that sign say right there? "Always put the company first", right?

ALFIE

Well, yeah, but--

MR. MENKEN

All right, so get those damn wet naps and clean up these damn toilets!

Mr. Menken laughs, slaps him on the shoulder before shaking himself.

MR. MENKEN (CONT'D)

Good boy.

Alfie's eyes widen as he watches Mr. Menken's pee hit his shoe in slow motion.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Alfie vigorously wipes the pee off his shoe with the wet naps in front of the equally downtrodden RECEPTIONIST.

He stands, staring at the wet nap container. Finally, quickly he grabs a bunch of them.

He gets to the bathroom door. Clutches his chest in pain. Watches the assistant drop another load of work at his desk.

ASSISTANT

"Don't be busy, be productive."

He rings the bell. Alfie's eye twitches.

ALFIE

Strike.

RECEPTIONIST

Did you say something?

ALFIE

(turns dramatically)
Strrrrrrike!

Alfie goes down the aisles, hitting the cubicles as he goes.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Everyone up, just like we talked about! We're doing this! Strike! Strike! Strike!

SYLVESTER

Hell yeah. Strike! Strike! Strike!

BARBARA

Finally, some excitement!

MR. MENKEN

What the hell is going on out here?

ALFIE

We're tired of your shit, that's what!

SYLVESTER

The long hours--

NORMAN

The harsh treatment--

BARBARA

The loud noises when I'm just waking up! I mean, guys, seriously, give it a rest, my head is killing me.

ALFIE

Right. And we're not doing anything else until we're shown a little respect around here or we at least stop dying!

BARBARA

Sing it, sister!

ALFIE

(chants)

Just say no to having to die,
defend our right to organize! Hey
hey, ho ho! Work overload has got
to go!

The workers stand beside their cubicles. Stomp their feet.

WORKERS

(chant)

Hey hey, ho ho! Work overload has
got to go! Hey hey, ho ho! Work
overload has got to go!

MR. MENKEN

Oh, this is really cute. So, I guess your families don't like to eat, huh?

(strolls to each one)

Mr. Adams, if I remember correctly, your kid's mentally retarded, right? That costs money, I'm sure. You don't get paid on strike.

Sylvester stops chanting. A few other voices drop out.

WORKERS

(chants)

Hey hey, ho ho! Work overload has got to go! Hey hey, ho ho! Work overload has got to go!

MR. MENKEN

And what about you, Mrs. Collins, you have your grandma to take care of. How do you think she'll feel about you contributing to this nonsense when you're feeding her rolled-up bread balls because that's all you can afford?

Barbara stops chanting. Voices drop out.

MR. MENKEN (CONT'D)

The fact is, none of you can afford this. I don't see any great potential here. No geniuses! I can guarantee no one's knocking down your door for your expertise. What are you going to do, vlog? No, no, no, this is as good as it gets for you people. In fact, it's the only real thing standing between you and living in a box on the streets. And that's just where you're headed if you don't get into your cubicles and get back to work!

Alfie is the only one left chanting as workers walk away.

ALFIE

Hey hey, ho-- Hey, are you serious right now? Where are you all going? We haven't seen our families in months. We eat five-cent ramen for lunch and dinner. We sleep in our cubicles, for god's sake! Little four-by-four cells.

(MORE)

ALFIE (CONT'D)

(looks at arm)

We're green and I'm not entirely sure it's from the lights! Now, he wants me to clean toilets! He called my penis a "water hose" and pissed on my shoe! When is enough going to be enough?

SYLVESTER

Sorry, Alfie. My son.

Sylvester walks away, squeezing his stress ball. Norman stays silent as he dabs essential oil on his wrists. Barbara throws back another pill and downs it with liquor.

BARBARA

At least we've still got our health, huh?

Mr. Menken takes some of the work off each of their desks and throws it into Alfie's inbox.

MR. MENKEN

No bedtime tonight until it's all done, Sweet Pea. "Hey hey, ho ho."

The assistant smirks. Alfie's eye begins to twitch as Mr. Menken walks away.

ALFIE

No.

MR. MENKEN

(turns around)

What was that?

ALFIE

I won't do it.

MR. MENKEN

Well, you don't make the rules, the boss does and the boss says, "get back to work!"

Alfie struggles to swallow. Dumps his in-box on the ground.

MR. MENKEN (CONT'D)

I know you don't think you're getting unemployment. I'll make sure that you don't.

ALFIE

Guess I'll have to live--
 (grabs chest in pain)
 Ow! Live with that.

MR. MENKEN

Adorable. I'll write the most
 scathing letter of non-
 recommendation you've ever seen and
 post it everywhere. You'll be
 completely unhirable anywhere else.
 What do you think about that?

Alfie's eye twitches uncontrollably. He holds it open.

ALFIE

Eat... shit.

MR. MENKEN

You'll never work in this industry
 again! This town again! I'm a
 legend in insurance, I will fucking
 ruin you!

ALFIE

Fuck...
 (doubles over in pain)
 Agh! You!

BARBARA (O.S.)

You're going to kill him!

MR. MENKEN

Mr. Turner, is that true? Are you
 in some kind of mortal pain, it
 does look like you're terribly
 uncomfortable. Should I call an
 ambulance?

Alfie struggles to catch to his breath, red and frothing at
 the mouth as he holds his heart. He gasps, his eyes wide.

SYLVESTER

Mr. Menken, I think he's really
 having a heart attack.

MR. MENKEN

Or a stroke! Who wants to take a
 bet?

NORMAN

I'm calling nine nine one--

MR. MENKEN

Another one going down. Anyone else
want a piece of me? Huh? You're
nothing! You're all nothing!
Strike, ha! I can squash you all
like a chin full of blackheads.
You're nothing, you hear me?
Nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

On the co-workers' terrified faces. Then, a loud thud.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Alfie snaps his briefcase shut. Takes as deep, cleansing
breath as he puts his jacket on.

He steps over the body of Mr. Menken whose face is still
frozen in an angry, shocked expression.

Passes the paramedics who are just getting off the elevator.

ALFIE

All the way at the end. Heart
attack, I'm betting. "Get him out
of here, will you?"

Alfie walks past his co-workers. Stops at the Assistant.
Snatches the bell off his cart. Stomps it into the ground.

He pushes the down button. Gets into the elevator for the
last time.

SYLVESTER

Hey, hold the door, will you?

NORMAN

Yeah, wait up!

Everyone gathers their things to leave.

THE END