

Orientation, by Daniel Orozco

Those are the offices, and these are the cubicles. That's my cubicle there, and this is your cubicle. This is your phone. Never answer your phone. Let the voicemail system answer it. This is your voicemail system manual. There are no personal phone calls allowed. These are your in and out boxes. You must pace your work. What do I mean? I'm glad you asked that. We pace our work according to eight-hour workday. If you have twelve hours of work in your inbox, for example, you must compress that work into an eight-hour day. If you have one hour of work in your inbox, you must expand that to fill the eight-hour day. That was a good question. Feel free to ask questions. Ask too many questions, however, and you may be let go.

Russell Nash, who sits in the cubicle to your left, is in love with Amanda Pierce, who sits in the cubicle to your right. They ride the same bus together after work. For Amanda Pierce, it's just a tedious bus ride made less tedious by the idle nattering of Russell Nash. But for Russell Nash, it's the highlight of his day, It's the highlight of his life. Russell Nash has put on 40 pounds and grows fatter with each passing month, nibbling on chips and cookies while peeking glumly over the partition at Amanda Pierce, engorging himself at home on cold pizza and ice cream while watching adult videos on TV.

Amanda Pierce, in the cubicle to your right, has a six-year-old son named Jamie who's autistic. Her cubicle is plastered from top to bottom with the boy's crayon artwork, sheet after sheet of precisely drawn concentric circles and ellipsis in black and yellow. She rotates them every other Friday. Be sure to comment on them. Amanda Pierce also has a husband who's a lawyer. He subjects her to an escalating array of painful and humiliating sex games to which Amanda Pierce reluctantly submits. But we're not supposed to know any of this. Do not let on. If you let on, you may be let go.

Amanda Pierce, who tolerates Russell Nash, is in love with Albert Bosch, whose office is over there. Albert Bosch, who only dimly registers Amanda Pierce's existence, has eyes for Ellie Tapper, who sits over there. Ellie Tapper, who hates Albert Bosch, would walk through fire for Curtis Lance, but Curtis Lance hates Ellie Tapper. It's the world a funny place? Not in the ha-ha sense of course.

Anika Bloom in that cubicle. Last year, while reviewing quarterly reports in a meeting with Barry Hacker, Anika Bloom's left palm began to bleed. She fell into a trance, stared into her hand, told Barry Hacker when and how his wife would die. We laughed it off. She was, after all, a new employee. But Barry Hacker's wife is dead. So unless you want to know exactly when and how you'll die, never talk to Anika Bloom.

For your information, we have a comprehensive health plan. Any catastrophic illness, any unforeseen tragedy is completely covered. All dependents are completely covered. This is our kitchenette, and this, this is our Mr. Coffee. This is the microwave oven. You are allowed to heat food in the microwave oven. You are not, however, allowed to cook food in the microwave oven. This is the refrigerator. You may put your lunch in it. Barry Hacker, who sits over there, steals food from the refrigerator. His petty theft is an outlet for his grief. Last New Year's Eve while kissing his wife, a blood vessel burst in her brain. Barry Hacker's wife was two months pregnant at the time and lingered in a coma for a half year before dying. It was a tragic loss for Barry Hacker. He hasn't been himself since. Barry Hacker's wife was a beautiful woman. She was also completely covered. Barry Hacker did not have to pay one dime.

But his dead wife haunts him. She haunts all of us. We have seen her reflected in the monitors of our computer moving past our cubicles. We've seen the dim shadow of her face in our photocopies. She pencils herself into the receptionist's appointment book with the notation, "To see Barry Hacker." She left messages in the receptionist's voicemail box, messages garbled by the electronic chirps and buzzes in the phone line, her voice echoing from an immense distance within the ambient hum. But the voice is hers, and beneath her voice, beneath the tidal whoosh of static and hiss, the gurgling and crying of a baby can be heard. In any case, if you bring a lunch, put a little something extra in it for Barry Hacker. We have four Barry's in the office. Isn't that a coincidence?

This is the custodian's closet. You have no business to be in the custodian's closet. Kevin Howard sits in that cubicle over there. He is a serial killer, the one they call the Carpet Cutter, responsible for the mutilations across town. We're not supposed to know that, so do not let on. Don't worry. His compulsion inflicts itself only upon strangers, and the routine established is elaborate and unwavering. The victim must be a white male, a young adult no older than 30, heavysset with dark hair and eyes and the like. The victim must be chosen at random, before sunset, from a public place. The victim is followed home and must put up a struggle, et cetera. Kevin Howard does not let any of this interfere with his work. He is, in fact, our fastest typist. He types as if he were on fire. In any case, when Kevin Howard gets caught, act surprised. Say that he seemed like a nice person, a bit of a loner perhaps, but always quiet and polite.

This is the photocopier room, and this, this is our view. It faces southwest. Enjoy this year while photocopying. If you have any problems with the photocopier, see Russell Nash. If you have any questions, ask your supervisor. If you can't find your supervisor, ask Philip Squires. He sits over there. He'll check with Clarissa Nix. She sits there. If you can't find them, feel free to ask for me. This is my cubicle. I sit in there.