

On A Tuesday

It's a Tuesday. I don't like Tuesdays. I never have. Mondays are usually considered to be the worst day of the week. I don't mind Mondays. They usually go by pretty fast. Time passes cruelly slow on Tuesdays, giving you all the time in the world you didn't want to dwell on the malaise, discontentment, and existential questioning you didn't have time for in the Monday blur. Tuesdays are also the day of my weekly remote meeting with the Memphis branch. The difference between a good Tuesday and a bad Tuesday is whether or not that meeting has been cancelled. Let me rephrase, the difference between an okay Tuesday and a normal Tuesday is whether or not that meeting has been cancelled.

The meeting with the Memphis branch is another one of those unnecessary meetings that could be an email. Yet somehow certain people manage to make it last an hour every week. The first thirty minutes of the very first meeting was the head of the Memphis branch and the VP of Business Affairs taking turns talking about what the meeting was going to be about. The next fifteen minutes was a round robin of introductions, including an answer to an ice breaker question: "If you were a superhero what would your super-power be?" My superpower was being able to fly, which was a lie. Being able to fly has never appealed to me. I just needed something to say so we could skip onto the last fifteen minutes, which was trying to come up with a list of action items to justify the next meeting. It was yet another meeting where the people who knew what they were talking about never spoke up and the people who needed validation never shut up. Business as usual.

This Tuesday meeting promised to be a little different. We were up against a deadline. Hopefully we'd be able to stick to business. Hopefully they'd cut us loose early so that those of us whose nuts were on the chopping block could finish their work so maybe, just maybe, we could send the finished product on to the customer on the original timeline. No such luck. The meeting went on for the full hour. This meant several of us were going to work overtime. Even if we didn't end up claiming it. The bigwigs don't like to pay overtime. They insist that all work should be finished within the normal 40-hour work week. They also consistently take on projects that require more time than that to complete.

Middle management knew that the administration couldn't know that work would be conducted after hours. Therefore, we all met in the men's bathroom in the northwest corner of the building, over by accounting. It's barely ever used. Normally it's the best bathroom to get in some semi-private pooping. We had to wait while Ted finished up at the urinal before the entire Dev and Project Management team filed in. Candice, the lead for Project Management, addressed us all, standing where Ted had stood just moments before, at the middle urinal. She was of course facing the opposite direction that Ted was. Pete, the lead developer, and my boss, stood to her right, nodding approval wherever appropriate. The urinal to Candice's left was broken. It kept flushing. We, her audience, were all afraid it would overflow and ruin her shoes, which we all assumed were very expensive.

She kept her comments brief. Two Developers and two Business Analysts would have to work overtime to make sure the project was finished in time. She and Pete had decided that we were going to draw straws. Dev team went first. I was the first to draw the short straw. Obviously, I was going to be among the four, otherwise I wouldn't be telling this story. Truth be told I didn't really mind. I liked working after hours. I liked coming in early before anyone else was there. It was much more difficult to get any work done when there were people around.

Project Management went next. My eyes searched the crowd for Amy. They found her. She was standing pensively by the Dyson Airblade™. She was the only person I didn't mind being interrupted by. Porcelain skin. Emerald eyes. Deep red hair. I know nothing about makeup, but I know that hers always looks fantastic. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever worked with. She could be a little demanding and her laugh was kind of annoying, but I could overlook these minor flaws. I mentally willed her to pick the short straw. I begged the universe to do me this one favor. Chuck pulled the short straw. That was okay. Chuck was actually my favorite BA from Project Management. He was methodical, had excellent communication skills, and was a nice guy all around. He just wasn't a drop-dead gorgeous red head. One more round to go. I crossed my fingers.

Dev team was up again. I didn't really care who else was picked. Anyone would do. Quan drew the short straw. That was good. Better Quan than the others. It hadn't occurred to me that I would have a preference until he was picked. He muttered a few Vietnamese curses and stalked his way over to the baby changing station to sulk.

Project Management was up again. I tried not to stare at Amy. I was not successful. Then again, I wasn't trying that hard. Thankfully she was too focused on the distribution of the straws to notice the creepy guy staring at her, praying that she was picked. Amy was third in the lineup and pulled a straw far too long to be the shortest. She breathed a sigh of relief. I turned away before she could notice me staring. Sally, the new girl, drew the short straw. I liked Sally. I was part of the committee that hired her. She was a bundle of positivity. Eager to prove herself. Could be worse. Could be Trevor. I glanced up at his terminal scowl and shuddered.

Candice, and Pete, thanked us all. Meeting adjourned. I sidled up next to Quan by the changing station and waited for everyone else to leave. Once we were alone, he shook his head in frustration, looked up at me, and informed me that "this is bullshit." I didn't argue. We made our way back to our cubicles and pretended to get ready to leave.

Bigwigs were out the door first. Followed by middle management. Candice and Pete lingered just for a moment to thank us, the unlucky four, one more time before they left. They were followed by everyone else. I tried to catch Amy's eye as she left, but she was staring at her phone.

And then there were four. We briefly consulted as to the next steps in the project. My biggest concern was that if Quan and I were both making edits to the code at the same time then we could cause other errors to pop up. Once we had finished working out the bugs, Chuck and Amy could test the product to their hearts' content without adversely affecting the other's work. Quan and I decided that we had better just work together. I had worked at the company longer, so Quan wanted to shadow me. However, in recent weeks I had come to accept that Quan was better at coding than I was. So I pulled rank, so to speak, and told him he should drive and I would offer helpful suggestions where appropriate. I could also migrate the code up from the dev environment into the test environment for Chuck and Sally. I knew what the first bugs were that needed to be ironed out before it could be considered anything close to a finished product. I explained the issues to Quan and turned him loose. I asked if he wanted coffee. He said yes. So, I left him alone and headed to the kitchen. Chuck and Amy headed to their respective cubicles, to wait for the go-ahead.

We took our coffee seriously in the office. We had several drip coffee machines with single serving options built into them. We also had a Chemex and few French Presses. The situation called for

some quality coffee, so I started some water boiling while deciding whether Chemex or French Press was the better option.

I left the water on the burner and trotted back to Quan's cubicle. It was empty. Puzzled, I stepped out of the cube and looked around the office. I started to call his name when I spotted him standing at the window, staring out at the city. Watching the sunset presumably. It was a good view, especially at dusk. But now was not the time to admire the city skyline. I shook my head and hurried in his direction. It was strange. Quan wasn't the type to goof off. He had even gotten in trouble for yelling at a couple of co-workers who were talking too loudly next to his cubicle. He couldn't understand why he had nearly been written up when Jerri and Bill had been the ones wasting time. I advised him to get some noise reduction earmuffs and a mirror so he could see when people stepped inside his cubicle. After they arrived, he thanked me almost every day for two weeks. It probably would've been a solid ten business days if one of those days hadn't been a holiday.

About fifteen feet from Quan the lights flickered off. It was only for a second, but when they came back on he was facing my direction. He was smiling strangely at me. His eyes were unnaturally wide, and unblinking. I started to ask him what he was doing when the lights flickered again. This time when they came back on, he had disappeared. If I'm being honest, I was a little freaked out. In the distance I heard the kettle whistling. I chose to distract myself with attending to the coffee, rather than think about what had just happened.

On the way back to the kitchen I passed Quan's cubicle. He was sitting at his desk, wearing his earmuffs, staring into his dark mode display with laser focus. I glanced over my shoulder at the window where I had so recently seen him. I shook my head, now was not the time to worry about going crazy.

Back in the kitchen I shut the burner off then walked to the cabinet and opened it. The first thing I spotted was the Chemex, which meant I would use *it* to make the coffee instead of the French Press. I folded the Chemex filter, placed it in the Chemex, and then began scooping the coffee.

"Hey Gil?"

I jumped, nearly spilling the coffee grounds. I turned to Sally who stood in the doorway, looking concerned.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you."

"No problem."

Sally approached. She turned around and leaned up against the counter.

"Did you uhm... Did you see the lights flicker a little bit ago?"

She asked me this as I picked up the tea kettle. I turned to her. She was worried.

"Yes, I did."

She nodded, then, speaking slowly asked, "Did you see anything... Strange?"

"Yes, I did."

I hesitated for a moment before I decided to tell her exactly what it was.

"I went to check on Quan. He wasn't in his cubicle. I saw him over by the window looking out at the city. When I approached him, the lights flickered. All at once he was facing me. He had this weird look in his eyes. The lights flickered again and he was gone. I heard the kettle. Ran to the kitchen and saw that that he was back in his cubicle. I don't think he ever left his cubicle. I think I was seeing things."

She nodded, "I saw Chuck crawling around on the ceiling. Like a cockroach."

"He looked like a cockroach?"

"No, he looked like himself, just... he was crawling on the ceiling. Like a bug."

"Gotcha. Where's Chuck now?"

"In his cubicle. Talking to his wife."

I suddenly remembered I was holding a tea kettle full of piping hot water. I started pouring it over the grounds.

I turned back to her, "This is pretty weird isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is. Do you think the others saw anything?"

"I don't know. Should we ask?"

"Maybe. They might think we're crazy though."

"Possibly. You asked me though."

"I felt better about asking you. I thought you'd be understanding if it turned out I was the only crazy one."

"Can two people go crazy in the same way at the same time?"

"Apparently. Seems like it's happening to us anyway."

"You want to know something weird?"

Sally, worried, "Did you just see something else?"

Now I was worried, "No, did you?"

"No, you just asked if I wanted to know something weird so I got worried you had seen something else. Like it was accelerating."

"Gotcha, you were worried we were starting to go nuts even faster."

"Exactly. Anyway, sorry for the interruption. Yes, I would like to know something weird."

"If I had to go crazy with anyone here tonight... I'm glad it's with you."

She was touched, "Awww, that's kinda sweet."

I poured some more water over the coffee.

Sally was worried again, "What if we're not going crazy and something weird is happening?"

"I don't know... For some reason I think I'd rather we were going insane than it be real. I don't like the way Quan was looking at me. Not that it was actually Quan, but... I'd rather it all be in my head."

Just then the lights flickered again. The room was cast in a red light. I heard screaming to my right. I turned and saw Chuck and Quan holding Sally down on the floor while I poured the boiling water on her face. The lights flickered again. Sally stood next me. Eyes wide with fear.

I spoke first, "What did you see?"

"I saw everyone in Accounting nailed to the walls."

"Jeez... That's way worse than what I saw."

"What did you see?"

"Chuck and Quan were holding you down while I was pouring boiling water on your face."

Sally looked down at the tea kettle in my hand. I set it down on the counter.

"I think the coffee's ready. I should bring some to Quan."

She nodded. I pulled a mug from the cabinet, dumped the filter in the trash, and poured Quan a cup.

"Oh crap," I murmured.

"What?"

"I forgot to ask how he liked it."

"I think he drinks it black."

"Okay good."

We stood for a moment in silence, looking at each other, unsure of what to say.

I sighed, "We should probably ask Quan and Chuck if they've seen anything."

She nodded in agreement. We stepped out of the kitchen. She was walking very closely to me. Close enough that we almost tripped each other a few times. I started to ask her to step back a little but stopped myself. She was frightened. If I'm being honest, so was I.

Quan and Chuck were standing in the walkway between the Dev cubes and the BA cubes, conferring in hushed tones. They turned to us. They were afraid. I breathed a sigh of relief. We were all going crazy together.

Chuck spoke first, "Did y'all see anything weird?"

Amy and I both related what we had seen so far. Everyone was appalled at Sally's vision of Accounting on the walls.

Sally, defensively, "Come on guys it's not like I chose to see everyone nailed to the walls with their eyes gouged out."

I turned to her, horrified, "Their eyes were gouged out too?"

Chuck to Sally, "Well, it is in your head so its possible that some latent resentment to the Accounting department manifested itself in a particularly gruesome hallucination."

Sally, protesting, "I don't have any latent resentment towards anyone!"

Before an argument could ensue, I asked Quan and Chuck to tell us what they had seen, starting with Quan.

Quan shook his head darkly, "I saw Gil and Sally disemboweling Chuck. Right where we're standing now."

We all glanced at the floor and shifted uncomfortably.

Sally, murmuring, "I think that's the worst one yet."

I was skeptical, "Really? I think yours is still the worst one."

Chuck didn't appreciate my comment.

Quan to Chuck, "What did you see?"

"I saw everyone, like the entire office standing around my cubicle staring at me. They all had black eyes and teeth like Piranhas."

We stood in silence. No one knew what to say.

Sally broke the silence, "Should we leave?"

"I'm not sure," I murmured, "Would it be better to go crazy together or apart?"

Chuck, quizzically, "What makes you think we're going crazy?"

I turned to him, "How else would you explain it?"

"Seems like something is making us... see things."

"Something? Like what?"

"I don't know what. A ghost or a spirit or something."

I shook my head, "I think it's much more likely that we're all going insane. For that reason, I actually think it's better that we stick together for now. If we go crazy all alone, we might end up hurting ourselves."

Quan, playing Devil's Advocate, "What if we all go crazy and hurt each other?"

"It's possible," I conceded, "But I still think we should be looking out for each other. Like you would a friend who had dropped acid."

Sally looked as though she had an epiphany, "Maybe somebody put LSD in the water cooler!"

I shook my head, "I would think one of us at least would have a good trip. I'm not sure what that says about us that we all immediately started having gruesome visions of monsters and torture."

“This building is haunted,” Quan spoke grimly. “I heard Ashley in HR talking to David about a murder suicide that happened on the floor right above us. Many years ago.”

Everyone but me looked up at the ceiling, pensively.

I scoffed, “If something like that had happened, I would have heard about it. I’ve been here longer than Ashley.”

Sally had another epiphany, “You know... This would be the thirteenth floor, if it didn’t skip from twelve to fourteen. It’s not as though naming it something different means it’s not the thirteenth floor.”

The lights flickered. The cubicles were all on the ceiling. It was the middle of the day. Everyone was hard at work. I stood on the floor staring up at them. All at once everyone froze. They looked up, or down, at me. Someone started screaming. Then they all started screaming. They began to melt before my eyes, dripping down, or up, on me. Everyone suddenly fell to the floor exploding in a deluge of blood and guts. The lights flickered again. We all stood staring at each other.

I cleared my throat, “I don’t want to know what everyone saw. But now I agree with Sally’s original idea. We should leave. But we should also stick together. I’m curious to see if we all go insane outside the office.”

I glanced down at the mug in my hand. I held it up to Quan.

“Here’s your coffee.”

Each of us had to return to our respective cubicles to gather our keys and the various odds and ends we wanted to take home. No one wanted to go alone though. My cubicle was the farthest away so we went there first. Then we walked to Chuck’s and then to Amy’s. We ended up back at Quan’s where we had started. I think all of us, including Quan, wondered why he hadn’t grabbed his keys while we were all standing around his cube. But none of us said anything.

We all walked in a group towards the elevator. The lights flickered again, but this time it was different. We were all sharing the same vision. We huddled closer together. We heard distant screaming from every corner of the floor. There was a strange squelching sound coming from a nearby cubicle. We saw myriad eyes light up all around us with shadowy figures coalescing around them. Ten feet behind us the floor opened up into an enormous mouth with rows and rows of teeth. We broke into a run. The screaming grew louder and louder. The mouth grew wider and wider. Each of us pressed the elevator button a half dozen times.

Sally screamed, “Why is this happening!?”

Chuck sobbed, “I want my family! I don’t want to die with these losers!”

Even in the midst of this truly bizarre situation Chuck’s comments stung. I had always thought he was such a nice guy too. Quan, being Catholic, was crossing himself and praying the rosary. I tried to calm everyone down.

“Everyone stay calm! All of this is literally impossible. So, it can’t actually happen.”

Sally, yelling, “But it is happening!”

“But it can’t. So, we have nothing to worry about.”

I looked up at the numbers above the elevator. Three floors away now. Chuck and Sally had joined Quan in praying. Out of the corner of my eyes I could see the shadows moving closer. If I’m being honest, I was less worried about the shadows than the enormous mouth in the floor. Even though I knew none of it was real.

The screaming was truly deafening. I stuck my fingers in my ears, though it did nothing to mute all the noise. A wind somehow began to pick up in the room. I could smell the rancid breath of the ever-encroaching mouth. Blood began dripping from the ceiling.

The lights flickered. Everything was normal again. The elevator bell dinged. We all breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The elevator opened and a tidal wave of blood rushed out knocking us all to the floor. The red deluge pushed us all the way back to Quan’s cubicle, where the madness had begun. At least for me. We struggled to our feet, slipping, falling, helping each other back up. Except for all the blood, everything was back to normal. We hurried towards the elevator and all climbed in. In a panic Chuck pressed “1,” which earned a tongue lashing from the rest of us. I leaned forward and hit the button labeled “G.”

We made our unnecessary stop on the first floor. The doors opened to an empty reception desk and a dimly lit waiting room.

“What’s on the first floor?” I asked no one in particular.

“I think it’s a doctor’s office,” Sally replied.

“Oh yeah, that sounds right.”

The elevator doors closed, and we continued on to the ground floor. The elevator doors opened. Quan took off in a sprint. We followed suit. We reconvened in the parking lot. In the heat of the moment, we had followed Quan to his car. We stood, staring at each other. I looked back up at the building at the fourteenth, or rather thirteenth floor, as Sally had noted.

The lights were still flickering off and on. I saw monstrous shadows and shapes roaming the cubes. I can’t be certain, but I think I could hear screaming all the way out in the parking lot. An enormous tentacle crashed through the window. Demonic howling descended onto the plaza below. I shook my head.

“This *would* happen on a Tuesday.”