

Assistant to the Regional Manager



Dwight woke up at 4 o'clock as he did every day, before the first rays of morning light illuminated the 60 acres of Schrute Farms. He reached for his glasses, and was surprised to find them on the hardwood floor, rather than their usual resting spot on his nightstand. They must have fallen during the commotion. He turned to see a shock of blond hair atop the pillow beside his.

Angela had been pleasantly surprised at Dwight's vigor and stamina last night, especially for a Thursday. She had vague notions of something being different about Dwight. He was performing like a much younger and more carefree man, though she couldn't begin to deduce why. Instead, she chose to accept his attention and efforts with great relish. She didn't think of Andy, her fiance, once. Andy was highly educated and hid his longing for social acceptance behind his Ivy League pedigree. Sex with him was often a cringe-inducing affair when she allowed it, a few pained thrusts, followed by excruciating minutes of silence beneath the proudly displayed Cornell Degree, the only hint of any personal accomplishment in his meager downtown apartment. Dwight was completely different. He had learned her body so well, and so quickly. She gave him permissions that she hadn't granted any of her previous lovers, and he did not take her lightly.

Dwight donned a pair of long underwear and his galoshes. He walked down the stairs to his kitchen, and scarfed down a pre-made bowl of oatmeal, stored at room temperature overnight. He wouldn't be hungry again for hours. He would be in a different world by then. Through the

window, his gaze reached for miles. The morning dew was glistening under the first rays of morning light. After the passing of Dwight's final elder, Aunt Shirley, the Schrute homestead had passed to a somewhat unlikely source, Dwight. He was known as the diminutive and somewhat eternally rejected progeny of the Schrute bloodline. His mother and father had both passed in tragic accidents before he had learned to walk, yet a childhood on the farm had made him strong of both mind and body, and he preferred to turn his attention inward, consuming endless stacks of science fiction books from behind comically large aviator eyeglasses, rather than attend one of the local dances thrown by the agricultural cooperative. Dwight was also one of the only members of the Schrute clan to befriend his fellow outcast, his cousin Mose.

Dwight entered the barn to find Mose curled atop a split bale of hay, an empty glass bottle of milk clutched in his hands. Many more identical bottles were spread around him. With his attention turned to Angela, he had forgotten to padlock the milk cooler. The courier would be here soon, and Mose would have nothing to give him. Ultimately, the families across Scranton who paid a premium for Schrute Farms Goat Milk, would be left empty handed. Dwight had attempted to pass responsibility for this revenue stream to Mose, but he proved woefully inadequate as usual. The soil had stopped fostering the beets which once sustained the farm, and the goat milk did not prove to be a profitable alternative. Dwight allowed himself to laugh at this typical display of Mose's absentmindedness. He loved Mose like a brother. Sometimes Dwight wondered if Mose had the capacity to feel the same for him. Dwight had still not made up his mind on how to tie up this loose end. With a final glance, he left the barn. Soon, Schrute Farms would pass to yet another unlikely beneficiary, Mose.

Dwight re-entered his home, walking up the stairs to his bedroom. While Angela lightly snored in the bed, he carefully laid out his daily uniform. He had purchased his earth-toned brown suits slowly, as he accumulated capital from his work in sales. He had enough now to

wear one every day with minimal trips to a dry cleaner. The color made him feel at home, it reminded him of the fertile soil which he pulled beets from day after day as a boy. The mustard colored shirt was practical, he abhorred the artificial heat produced by the appliances in the office, and the short sleeves helped him keep cool. The tie was one of many identical ones he had purchased from an outlet. The final addition he had brought to the office many times, though it was not a part of his daily uniform. It was a full grain leather shoulder holster, bought deadstock from a seller specializing in WWII-era military surplus. Though Dwight appreciated the country whose economic systems had allowed him to make an enviable living and operate a once profitable farm, he was raised in the tradition of his family's homeland. Many of his bloodline had proudly fought to preserve the German customs which echoed across rural Pennsylvania. The symbol on the side, an eagle clutching the symbol of the Nazi party with its talons, gave him a mild feeling of strength, the strength of his ancestors. He slid the Colt Anaconda, purchased at an Allentown gun show, into the hard leather vestibule, and buckled it.

Dwight practiced extensively at the shooting range. The Colt would never jam. You could cover it in mud and leave it at the bottom of a river for days, and it would still retain its accuracy and firepower. Gun safety and responsible handling were hobbies in their own right. As for eye protection, his glasses were fitted with industrial strength glass, the salesman had sold him on them with a display showing a shotgun pellet being blocked by the material. Even as a fellow salesman, Dwight was impressed at the tactic.

Dwight took a final moment to indulge. He bent down, careful to not disturb Angela, and inhaled deeply. It was funny, Dwight had never seen the value or necessity for cats. They had no place on the farm, unless it was to impotently chase away rats. The only felines he had come across were feral, and he had found great delight in using them for target practice with his .22 gauge rifle. Yet now, as he inhaled the scent of department store perfume and dander, he had a

Pavlovian response to the scent. It had been easy enough sabotaging Angela's birth control. The cheap plastic container separated easily, and he had carefully shaved Zinc supplements to fit into the cylindrical slots. He knew that due to her conservative religious beliefs, which he respected despite his own secularism, she would keep the child growing inside her. He pocketed her car keys.

The Pontiac Trans Am, or Firebird, was introduced in 1981 alongside the Camaro, yet quickly established its own cult following. On Schrute Farms, television might as well have been a luxury only afforded to the upper crust of society. Dwight and Mose often spent the long summer months exploring the woods, finding all manner of artifacts from the modern world just a few miles beyond. They had learned about the female body watching Aunt Shirley bathe in the outdoor bathtub, but she hardly resembled the women who populated the dry, hardened magazines left discarded in the woods. Playboy Magazine, September 1982 left an indelible impression. NBC had purchased a full, back page ad to promote the premier of the most exciting addition to their Sunday PrimeTime line-up, Knight Rider. Dwight felt an unmistakable send of longing for the sleek, black vehicle. The man beside it had permed hair, a black leather jacket, and black aviator sunglasses. He looked nothing like the farm hands and indiscriminate males which populated his small world. Even the banker, the all powerful figure who served as a constant existential threat to the farm would arrive sweating profusely, with his pot belly hanging over the waist of his pleated pants. Dwight turned the key in the ignition.

Dwight barreled down PA 487 South, the longest stretch of his hour-plus commute to Dunder Mifflin Scranton. Despite the distance, Dwight appreciated the ride, which gave him time to reflect and anticipate the day's needs. He was often the first to arrive, and last to leave at the end of the day. Dwight almost caught himself creating a list of tasks for the day, but stopped himself and found a state of mind which he could almost describe as peaceful. As a child,

Dwight could hardly contain his excitement on the rare occasion that a farm hand or distant family member would drive him into Scranton in the back of the farm's aging and unreliable Ford Truck. What were once homes and dense forest, were replaced by strips of neglected big-box stores and C-level fast food chains. The steel industry had declined sharply, and when the customer base lost their incomes and homes, many retail investors opted to abandon their assets, rather than attempt to stave off decay.

"I hear, the secrets that you keep,"

Dwight kept the radio tuned to GEM 104. The format was classic hits.

"When you're talking in your sleep."

Dwight deviated from his usual route. PA 309 S took him on a detour to Wilkes-Barre, and the Wyoming Valley Mall. He pulled into the barren parking lot, few vehicles dotted the terrain. Most likely the cleaning staff, still working from the night before. Six o'clock. He dialed one on his speed dial.

The paint was still drying on the walls of the Scranton Business Park when Dwight took his first steps into the building. It was once a union headquarters for USW 5652, the steelworkers' union whose membership included over 90% of Scranton's laborers. With the decline of the industry, the union relocated, and the building sat empty for many years until the NEPA Real Estate Group, including an industrial appliance salesman named Bob Vance, purchased the building at auction and converted it into office units. Dwight barely filled out his oversized secondhand suit. As he sat awaiting his job interview, another applicant sat beside him. His shaggy haircut and boyish face betrayed his obvious athleticism and strength. Dwight felt the man's gaze, and shrunk under it. With a scoff, the man-child turned away.

The door opened. An unmistakable warmth preceded the loving gaze of the man before Dwight. Who was he? Like Dwight, he seemed a little uncomfortable in the trappings of

business. They talked for what felt like minutes, but must have been over half an hour. It was like no job interview Dwight had ever had, full of laughter and, surprisingly, impressions of celebrities and higher ups in the company, memorably, David Wallace. He was hired on the spot.

Michael was the newly minted Regional Manager of Dunder Mifflin's Scranton Branch. Despite technological advances on the horizon that could affect the long term profits of the company overall, the corporate office had an optimistic view of northern Pennsylvania, with recent branch openings in tech and manufacturing, as well as a growing middle class population with schools and hospitals to service them. These were the circumstances which led to Michael's initiative, to hire two new additions to their sales team.

Things had changed since that first meeting. The fact was that people used less paper than ever before. Michael refused to capitalize on cost cutting measures or time management. More and more often, the staff meetings and distractions that Dwight had looked forward to and enjoyed, devolved into arguments and petty squabbling. He had even tried to wrestle the position of regional manager away from Michael-by the end of the day, he was on his hands and knees begging for his job back. Michael had no family and no real friends outside of the office. He was still a decade out from retirement, more if he had his way. Dwight would be fifty by then, and his opportunity at advancement would be slim to none with the direction the paper business was heading.

"Dwight...do you have any idea what time it is? My alarm doesn't go off for five more minutes."

"I'm sorry, Michael, there is an emergency situation which requires your immediate attention, which I, as office fire marshall, have a responsibility to inform you of," replied Dwight.

"Well? I'm listening!" said Michael.

“Due to a gas leak which has spread from Vance Refrigeration to the Dunder Mifflin Warehouse, the Scranton Business Park has been deemed unsafe for habitation by the fire department. I came as soon as I heard, and there is no reason for you to come in today.”

“Well where’s the actual firemen?” asked Michael.

“There’s no reason to involve the fire department on this personal phone call, in which I have the title and responsibility to inform you of this situation,” said Dwight.

“Why didn’t they call me? I’m the Manager, I would hear about this before the fire marshal, which is more of a title that you made up,” said Michael.

“Michael...don’t come in today,” stated Dwight.

Michael began to speak, but Dwight hung up the phone. In another life, tears might have followed this call, but Dwight felt nothing. He dropped his phone out the window, and turned his key in the ignition. He headed for the highway. Would the gas leak be enough to keep Michael away? Michael had no home. His home was Dunder Mifflin. It was where he felt he belonged, and he would never find peace anywhere else, not with Jan, or with Holly, who his masters had pulled away from him, his one chance at a life. A real life.

It felt like no time had elapsed, yet Dwight was no longer looking at the Wyoming Valley Mall. Now it was the Scranton Business Park.

“Ooh my little pretty one, my pretty one”

How had he made the complicated, rush hour drive from Wilkes-Barre without even noticing? Dwight had been having more and more moments like this. Angela would be stirring.

“When you gonna give me some time, Sharona?”

Movement! His cohorts had begun to arrive. First was Andy. Wearing a sweater vest despite the rising heat of the day. He was leaving a voicemail. For Angela? One could assume. Next was Phyllis. Dwight was always fascinated that despite their vast difference in appearance,

Phyllis was almost the exact age as Michael. She might not have much to offer society, but on the farm she would serve her purpose, repairing clothes and performing household tasks.

Oscar. Dwight had no personal qualms with homosexuality, but due to a brief encounter with his uncle Fritz, he never felt completely at ease around Oscar. He did appreciate the competitive advantage he had in seducing Angela, she was sandwiched between Oscar and Kevin. The trio of denizens from the Annex followed. Ryan (the temp, an inexplicable target of Michael's affections) and Kelly, the two Dwight would gleefully describe as hopeless cases for farm work. They were followed by Toby, the corporate stooge. Creed, the aging libertine and charlatan. Meredith, the wayward mother. Stanley, the dead man walking. Counting the days until the pension which bought him a round trip to the Bahamas once a year, barring an economic crisis.

Jim. Pam at home with their spawn. They had never felt the sweat of a day in the beet field upon their brows. Jim was the same person that sat beside Dwight in line for a job interview, years ago. Disheveled. Aloof. Eternally mocking Dwight for the crime of being the top salesman, his passion and drive, a testament to Jim's apathy. Yet he had won Pam. He won Michael's eternal respect and favor. One day, Jim had come into the office wearing Dwight's carefully chosen work uniform. He had belittled him. A vaudeville act. Jim loathed the system, yet succumbed quietly to it. Dwight understood the system, and loved it. He let it guide him until his feet wore down to the bone and his mind became a wet, smooth ball of grey matter. Jim looked tired.

Pam. Precocious, youth soccer, cheerleader, virginity lost in a desperate shot at eternity. She had fed on Roy like an insect, and satisfied her lust for importance with Jim. Eventually, it came to a head and she found a new mate. It hadn't eluded Dwight that had Pam been open to a new partner, and neglected him. He owned 60 acres of land and was well-read, knowledgeable in self defense and an active member of the community. Dwight often thought that despite her

self-centeredness, she could have learned to make her way on the farm. Maybe they could have had something resembling “love.” Dwight exited his car.

The Dunder Mifflin office floor plan had three exits. First, the main entrance. This would have to remain open for Dwight to enter through. He would lock it behind him. Next, the fire exit next to accounting, and the exit to the south stairwell through the Annex. Dwight climbed both stairways, inserting wooden slats behind the doors. They would be impossible to open.

Dwight felt like a boy in the field again. Digging through the dirt, searching for the vegetable that would not only sustain his body, but the livelihood of his extended family. He would pick beets, hunched over from dawn to dusk, enduring the other workers’ comments on his glasses or dog-eared HG Wells paperback. He entered the lobby. Hank. The greying security guard didn’t even look up from the first of many games of Solitaire he would impotently click through. Dwight went to the ground floor bathroom. He barely made it to the cramped toilet stall before vomiting. He washed his face in the sink, and cleaned his glasses. He blinked, and the elevator was in front of him. A pudgy knob pounded the up arrow. He turned to his right. Kevin.

“Good mor...ning D...wight,” began Kevin. “How are you to...day?”

“Wonderful Kevin,” said Dwight, loudly enough for Hank to look up. “And yourself?”

“Fine, thanks. I spilled my cer...eal. Things have been hard after Sta...cy left,” Kevin replied.

Dwight observed the sad, confused creature in front of him. Things hadn’t been easy for Kevin. He was destined for ten to twelve years between Angela and Oscar, the two most likely to deride him for his mental and physical shortcomings. Kevin had loved his wife. He loved music, Dwight had even stood in the back of a depressing Steamtown dive bar and watched Kevin’s Police cover band Scrantoncity play. It was 80’s night.

“Kevin,” began Dwight, “I have an entire bag of Peanut M&M’s in my car, but I couldn’t possibly eat them. Why don’t you go get them, and you return my keys in the office.”

Kevin illuminated.

“WOW. THANK YOU DWIGHT,” he took the keys. “I will NOT for...get this.”

Kevin hustled out the front door. Hank let out a light chuckle. The elevator doors closed behind Dwight. A quick reach into his pocket-earplugs.

The doors opened to a familiar scent of coffee and industrial plastic. Dwight had tolerated this scent for years. Today it made him wretch. The elevator doors closed behind him. The sound was deafening. Misguided drones making desperate calls to push paper, the product of environmental destruction, into the hands of the public. Desperate work to fuel a desperate beast.

In an instant, he was there! Beside reception. He had begun his day gazing over Schrute Farms, and now, he was limited to 30 square feet of industrial office space, populated by a cast of characters crafted from his waking nightmare. Today was...different. Dwight felt the tantalizing sensation that he was somewhere totally new, not the office. A new, free-er place. His eyesight was focused, and he could sense the energy guiding and manipulating the matter around him.

“Can we help you, Dwight?” remarked Jim. Phyllis gave a light chuckle. Erin’s hand predictably moved to cover her mouth. Dwight had to laugh at himself.