
FICTION PORTFOLIO / FIVE COMPLETE STORIES

BEYOND THE CUBICLE

AND OTHER STORIES

Office dread, sideways comedy, and the small acts of defiance that survive both.

INSIDE THE SAMPLE

01 DEADLINE AND DETOUR

The Midnight Deadline · The Elevator That Only Goes Sideways

02 HUMAN RESOURCES AND HAUNTINGS

HR Will See You Now · The Ghost in Accounting

03 THE LAST QUESTION

Exit Interview with the Universe

The Midnight Deadline

Thomas Barrett always thought the word “deadline” sounded too casual for how it felt.

It wasn’t just pressure. It wasn’t just urgency. It was a presence — a humid breath on the back of his neck, a weight that slouched across his shoulders the moment everyone else clocked out.

Tonight was no different.

The office of Odyssey Marketing Group was a hollow cathedral at midnight — a dead hum from computers left on sleep mode, a single flickering strip of fluorescent light twitching like it was afraid to be alone, and Thomas in his cubicle, hunched over a stack of papers that felt biblical in thickness and judgment.

His red pen scraped across the final line of the final document, the ink bleeding like a warning. Done.

He leaned back, exhaled, stretched his neck. For a moment — one breath, one heartbeat — he felt proud.

Then his boss appeared like a depression era ghost.

Chivers shuffled into view, hair unbrushed, shirt wrinkled, eyes hollowed out in the middle like someone had scooped the brightness from them with a teaspoon.

Without greeting, he dropped a fresh stack of paperwork onto Thomas’s desk. “New assignment,” Chivers said. “Just ignore the last one.”

Thomas blinked. “I spent all week on that. It’s finished.”

“Yeah, well,” Chivers mumbled, scratching the side of his jaw as if trying to wake memory itself, “this one’s due by morning. Half the time. Someone upstairs said so — I forget who. I need coffee.”

He wandered off, muttering to himself about nothing and everything. Thomas stared at the new stack.

His hand tightened on the pen.

But he stayed. Rolled up his sleeves. Tried to prove himself. Because some part of him believed that if he survived enough nights like this, someone would finally notice.

Hours passed.

The office changed.

At first, it was subtle — the Lego figures on his desk shifting positions, tilting their little plastic heads as if watching him.

Then his computer screen flashed a message in red dripping letters: COMPLETE THE TASKS OR ELSE.

Thomas flinched. “Okay. Very funny.”

Another message appeared:

5 MINUTES PER PAGE. STAY ON TASK.

The strip lights above him buzzed, stuttered, and died. His desk lamp flickered once, like a scared heartbeat.

He swallowed. The office was too quiet — so quiet he could hear the hum under the floor, the kind of hum people pretend isn’t there.

Distant footsteps broke the silence.

Derrick burst past Thomas’s cubicle, wide-eyed. “H.R. in H.R. just had a heart attack. The doctor said he was perfectly healthy. Perfectly. Healthy.”

“He just... collapsed?” Thomas asked.

“It’s like the building picked him,” Derrick whispered, and then sprinted off.

Thomas stared at the red words still dripping down his screen.

The cat poster on his wall — the one clinging to a rope, the one he kept ironically — stared down at him.

JUST HANG IN THERE.

He laughed, a brittle, hopeless sound.

But Thomas didn’t run.

He typed.

He pushed through the dread thickening the air.

When the assignment was finally finished — hands shaking, eyes burning — he submitted it. Rejected.

Errors highlighted in neon yellow.

Minor. Trivial. Meaningless.

His exhaustion curdled into numbness.

He packed his bag. Walked through the shadowed hall. Passed the Lego figures pointed toward the exit now, little plastic hands raised like they were saluting a fallen soldier.

He didn't get recognition. He didn't get praise.

But he did get something else — a truth, bitter but honest:

This place would never stop taking.

Still, outside in the early gray dawn, Thomas felt something loosen in his chest. Not freedom. Not yet.

But the first breath of someone beginning to understand the shape of their cage.

The Elevator That Only Goes Sideways

Evan never trusted the elevators at Odyssey Marketing Group.

They groaned like old gods. They creaked like opening tombs. Sometimes they skipped floors entirely, as if reality was merely a suggestion.

But today, he didn't have the emotional bandwidth for stairs.

He pressed the call button.

The elevator dinged—softly. Too softly. Like it didn't want to wake something sleeping inside its walls.

The doors opened.

And the interior was wrong.

Dark wood panels. Brass fixtures. A faint smell of ozone and lemon cleaner. And a sign:

VERTICAL TRAVEL TEMPORARILY UNAVAILABLE.
PLEASE ENJOY LATERAL TRANSPORT.

Evan sighed. "Of course."

He stepped in.

The doors closed with a content sigh.

A new button pulsed to life:

→ SIDEWAYS

"...Sideways," Evan muttered. "Sure. Why not."

He pressed it.

The elevator lurched—not up, not down, but horizontally, gliding as if on invisible rails. A digital screen blinked:

YOU ARE NOW TRAVELING EASTBOUND.
DESTINATION: UNREGISTERED DEPARTMENT.

"Unregistered?" Evan whispered. "That sounds legally upsetting."

The elevator passed strange floors through horizontal windows:

A room filled with abandoned swivel chairs spinning in perfect formation.

A hallway where papers floated like jellyfish.

A server room broadcasting security footage of employees sleeping at their desks.

A man in a suit typing on a bone keyboard.

The elevator dinged.

ARRIVING: LOST DOCUMENTS DEPARTMENT.

Inside was a vast ballroom of floating paperwork. Employees chased rogue forms with nets.

Someone screamed, "THE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS ESCAPED AGAIN!"

Evan slapped the close button repeatedly.

The elevator obeyed.

Next stop:

LEVEL 0.5

A corridor dripping with flickering exit signs. A janitor mopped the floor without touching it.

"You're not supposed to be here," he said.

"I didn't choose this!" Evan snapped.

"Sideways doesn't care what you choose."

The janitor pointed him back inside.

The elevator carried him deeper.

◆ THE BUREAU OF SIDEWAYS MOTION ◆

A minimalist office. No chairs. No desks. Just shimmering officials in pixelated suits.

"Evan Marlowe," the leader said. "You have disrupted the geometry of the building. It has taken notice."

"I don't want to be noticed," Evan said. "I want to complain about coffee like a normal employee."

"Too late."

The officials lifted their hands. The elevator slammed shut.

◆ SIDEWAYS ASCENT ◆

The elevator shot through planes of unreality—past alternate versions of Evan failing slightly differently each time.

Then the doors opened onto the normal third floor.

Everything looked... fine.

Normal.

Safe.

Except the elevator displayed one last message:

SIDEWAYS TRAVEL COMPLETE.

YOU ARE NOT DONE.

The doors closed.

Evan stared at them.

“Stairs. I’m taking the stairs forever.”

Most people have nightmares about monsters, ghosts, or the end of the world.

Me? My nightmare always started at 9 a.m.

There’s a unique kind of dread that settles in the bones when you wake up every morning knowing you’re walking into a place that drains you in ways you can’t describe. The fluorescent lights. The recycled air. The click-click-click of keyboards that sound like quiet desperation. The meetings that should have been emails. The emails that should have been deleted. The quiet ache of pretending everything is fine.

And yet—life keeps happening between the cracks.

I’ve worked in environments that made me question the fabric of reality. Environments where time felt broken, where the walls hummed too loudly, where the printer seemed possessed, where the corporate jargon sounded like a spell cast to keep everyone obedient. And sometimes I wondered if the building itself was alive... and hungry.

This book is where all of that went.

It’s the merging of the mundane and the monstrous.

Reality stitched together with sci-fi, horror, humor, and everything in between.

A cubicle farm mashed with cosmic dread.

A place where office burnout becomes a battleground, and survival means more than showing up on time.

This book has been a long time coming.

It's not perfect.

But it's mine.

And if you've ever dreaded the 9-5, questioned your sanity at work, or felt like the world behind the office door was just a little too strange to be normal—

Then maybe it's yours too.

Hr Will See You Now

Everyone fears HR for the usual reasons—awkward conversations, mysterious policies, corrective emails phrased like threats disguised as kindness.

But at Odyssey Marketing Group, HR was something else entirely.

Eva Langley knew this. She'd spent nine years avoiding the HR hallway like it contained an ancient curse. She moved fast, kept her head down, and prayed to the gods of corporate anonymity.

But at 6:07 p.m., long after closing, the intercom crackled to life.

"Eva Langley, please report to HR."

The intercom hadn't worked in years.

Amber popped her head over her cubicle wall. "Nope. Don't go. Absolutely not."

The intercom repeated, sharper:

"Eva Langley. This is not a request."

The building fell silent.

She knew running would only make it worse. So she walked.

The HR hallway was darker than the rest of the office, thick with a silence that felt... curated. She pushed open the door.

◆ THE CORRIDOR OF CORRECTIONS ◆

HR had transformed into a cathedral of filing cabinets towering to a ceiling she couldn't see. Papers fluttered like trapped birds. Pens crawled across the floor like metallic insects.

"Eva Langley," a voice echoed. "Please proceed to your evaluation."

A glowing path formed between cabinets.

Floating forms circled her like vultures:

FORM 7-A: CATALOG OF PERSONAL FAILINGS

FORM 12-C: MOMENTS YOU SHOULD HAVE SPOKEN UP

FORM 19-G: ALL THE TIMES YOU SAID 'I'M FINE' AND WEREN'T

Eva swatted them away.

A door appeared at the end of the corridor. She entered.

◆ THE INTERVIEW ROOM ◆

A single desk. A single chair. And an HR Rep with no face—just smooth skin stretched where features should be.

It gestured to the chair.

“Sit.”

Eva sat. Because what else was she supposed to do?

It opened a glowing folder pulsing like a heartbeat.

“You have avoided conflict,” it said.

“Yeah, because conflict sucks.”

“You have sacrificed your well-being for work.”

“Welcome to capitalism.”

“You have apologized for things that were not your fault.”

Eva’s chest tightened. “...Shut up.”

The Rep closed the folder.

“You are here not because you failed,” it said. “But because you forgot yourself.”

It materialized a second folder.

A renewal.

ALL REQUESTS APPROVED

ALL PTO GRANTED

ALL BOUNDARIES VALIDATED

Eva trembled. “I can... leave?”

The Rep nodded.

She stepped through the door behind her and found herself in the lobby—lights warm, coworkers startled, the world suddenly breathable.

Amber ran up. “Oh my god, what happened?!”

Eva smiled—genuine.

"I'm good."

And for the first time, she meant it.

Behind her, the HR door flickered:

HR IS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE.

The Ghost In Accounting

Accounting was always the quietest department at Odyssey Marketing Group.

Too quiet.

Evan avoided it whenever possible. The fluorescent lights buzzed softer there. The carpet absorbed sound like a padded cell. The air felt heavy—like the building exhaled less in that wing.

But payroll was late. Again.

Amber shoved Evan toward Accounting with the force of a small hurricane.

“You’re the only one they won’t ignore,” she said.

“Ignore? Accounting staff are nice.”

Amber leaned in. “Name ONE.”

Evan opened his mouth. Closed it.

Exactly.

◆ THE CUBICLES OF STILLNESS ◆

He stepped into Accounting.

Every cubicle sat perfectly organized.

Every chair perfectly aligned.

Every desk spotless.

No people.

Just papers—stacks of them—arranged in strange spirals.

Evan whispered, “Hello...?”

A printer somewhere in the distance hissed.

Then a voice behind him:

“You’re late.”

Evan nearly swallowed his tongue.

A woman stood two feet away—gray suit, calm posture, eyes hollow like abandoned apartments. Her badge read:

MARIE TRENT – SENIOR ACCOUNTING ANALYST
(Deceased)

“...Uh,” Evan stammered. “Your badge says—”

“I know what it says,” Marie replied. “It’s correct.”

Evan froze. Amber had warned him. “Do not go into Accounting alone. They have ghosts. Plural.”

Marie gestured calmly. “Payroll needs reconciliation.”

Evan followed her to a cubicle where spreadsheets materialized midair—columns correcting themselves, numbers shifting on their own.

Marie typed without touching the keyboard.

“You died?” Evan whispered.

Marie nodded, unfazed. “Three years ago. Heart attack. Very inconvenient. I still had quarterly reports due.”

Evan blinked. “Why are you still... working?”

She sighed. “Someone has to. The living keep making mistakes.”

The overhead lights dimmed.

Other figures appeared—semi-transparent accountants, floating calculators, spectral staplers firing silently. They worked tirelessly, eternally.

Marie turned to him.

“You came because payroll is late.”

“Yes,” Evan squeaked.

“We know.” She handed him a glowing folder. “Your department submitted forms incorrectly. Again.”

Evan winced. “Yeah... that sounds right.”

Marie placed a cold, ghostly hand on his shoulder. “Tell Chivers we expect chocolates. Good chocolates. Not clearance chocolates.”

"I... I can do that."

"And Evan?"

"Yes?"

"If you see someone else walking these halls after hours... and you can't hear their footsteps..."

She leaned closer.

"Do not follow them."

The lights flickered.

Accounting was empty again.

Folder in hand. Heart racing. Sweat forming in theological quantities.

Evan whispered to himself,

"I am NEVER coming back here."

Exit Interview With The Universe

When Evan finally quit Odyssey Marketing Group, he expected tears. Relief. Maybe a panic attack.

He did NOT expect the universe to schedule an exit interview.

A shimmering portal opened in the parking lot.

A cosmic receptionist waved him inside.

“Mr. Marlowe? Right this way.”

He was guided into a nebula-lit office where galaxies drifted like lazy goldfish.

Across the desk sat a celestial being made of starlight and quiet disappointment.

“Evan Marlowe,” it intoned. “We must discuss your time at Odyssey.”

Evan blinked. “Why?”

“The building is alive. It chose you. You rejected it. The universe requires closure.”

A glowing clipboard floated toward him.

QUESTION 1: What prompted you to leave your position?

Evan wrote:

“I like living.”

QUESTION 2: How would you rate your overall experience?

He circled:

WOULD NOT RECOMMEND.

QUESTION 3: What could the building have done differently?

Evan wrote:

“Not try to kill me.”

The universe sighed. Stars dimmed. Planets spun awkwardly.

“Fair.”

It closed the file.

“Very well. You are released.”

The nebula rippled open. A final message echoed:

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE.

PLEASE ENJOY EXISTENCE.

Evan stepped back into the parking lot.

Amber honked from her car. “GET IN! WE’RE CELEBRATING!”

He climbed in beside her.

For the first time, the office behind him was silent.

For the first time, it wasn’t watching.