

Supposed To

People tell me I'm funny. "Damn, Dave. You sure are funny." That's what most of them say. I don't get interesting and I sure don't get exciting.

Funny.

Mostly, I think I'm pretty normal. That's what I like to think at any rate. I get up every morning, shower and shave. I have two slices of toast, dry, for breakfast. I live in a perfectly non-descript house on a perfectly non-descript street. I couldn't describe it to you even if I wanted to. It's beige. That's its defining characteristic. Beige.

I have kids I don't really know, a wife I don't really like, and a job I hate.

You know.... Normal.

I could go into it, but it's not really worth your time. I could tell you how the woman I married and the woman I'm married to aren't quite the same person. I could tell you how my job makes me feel like my soul is dying, drowning in stale air and grey half walls. Honestly though, it's not worth the trouble. It doesn't add anything to the story.

Shower and shave.

Two slice of toast, dry.

Beige.

That's everything you need to know.

Well..... everything except one.

Every morning, after the shower and shave, and before the two slices of toast, dry, I take a gun out of a lockbox in my closet and put it in my briefcase. Back left corner, under the manila folders and next to the post-it notes.

It's a beautiful gun. A Smith & Wesson M&P9, nine millimetre semi-automatic. Seventeen rounds plus one in the chamber. It's a polymer, not metal. Plastic. Matte black, not too shiny. Custom grip for added comfort. Fits my hand like it's supposed to be there. Perfect carry gun, too. Nice and light. Easy to handle. Point and click.

Right there next to the post-it notes.

Part of me wonders why I even carry it. Then again, that's the same part that likes to think I'm normal. Every morning it tells me to leave it in the lockbox in my closet. Just go eat your Goddamn toast it tells me.

It tells me, but it doesn't yell. It doesn't scream at me to leave it there. I'd listen if it screamed. Probably. But it doesn't. That part of me just says it, just like your brain one day told you to forget the socks today. Of course you don't. You put your socks on like you're supposed to. I put the gun in my briefcase and then go eat my Goddamn toast. Right after I put on my socks.

See? Normal.

I get in my car and drive to work. Sometimes, I take the bus if my wife needs the car. Sometimes, I take the subway just because I can.

And there, on the seat next to me in my car or on the bus or on the subway, is my briefcase. There is my gun tucked neatly inside next to the post-it notes. Just an arm length away.

Now, you're probably right about here starting to wonder why I have it, why I bring it with me every day. Either that or you think you already know why.

If it's the second, you're probably wrong. I'd say you're almost definitely wrong. I'd say that because I have no idea why I carry it in the first place. And if I don't know, how could you possibly know?

All I know is that I'm supposed to carry it. I'm supposed to take it with me every day just like I'm supposed to wear socks every day.

I'm just supposed to.

I know that's not a very good answer to a really good goddamned question. I honestly wish I had a better answer to give you. But I don't. It's the only answer I've got because it is the answer. Feel free to like it or lump it.

Maybe I have a plan and I just don't know it. Can a person do that, you think? Can they have a plan without knowing what in the hell that plan is?

That keeps me up at night sometimes. Not a lot, but every now and again I think about it right before I go to sleep and then sleep is a long time coming. It comes eventually, my mind drifting into murky blackness, deep and dreamless. But before it does, I wonder if there might be another me inside my head who knows why even when I don't, another me planning plans, but not bothering to share them with the group.

In the morning, I know that's all bullshit. I know I'm the only one in here even if I don't know why I put a gun in my briefcase every morning. I tell myself I'm supposed to and spend the rest of the day pretending it's not there.

One time, I wondered if I was going to shoot my wife.

“Good morning, honey”, I’d say.

“Yeah, good morning,” she’d say back. Or maybe she’d say nothing, just leave my words hanging there, alone in the empty air. Yeah, that’s more likely. She’d say nothing.

Then, I’d pull out my M&P9 and blow a hole through her face. The echo and the gentle smell of spent powder could keep my words company.

But no. I wouldn’t do that. Couldn’t do that. As much as I dislike her, I still love her. I could never say goodbye to that face that I loved so much, so fiercely. Despite everything, I just couldn’t do that.

She cheated on me, you know. I caught her. ‘Caught’ is a bit of a dramatic word for what happened, but it’s the only word I can think of. They weren’t even doing anything, but I caught them. My wife was with a man who wasn’t me in a room where no man who isn’t me should rightfully be. They were just standing there looking at each other when I walked in. Then, they were looking at me. I remember how her eyes looked. His were full of fear, practically shaking with every hurried heartbeat. But hers.... there was nothing in them, no regret, no apology. They were the most matter of fact eyes I’d ever seen. Every bit of anger and rage that had blazed up inside of me died in those eyes. I turned and left without saying a word.

No, I didn’t go to my closet. Thinking about it later, I realized it never even occurred to me. I went to my TV room and sat in my chair in front of my television. I didn’t even turn it on. It’s weird to sit like that, facing a giant television, and not turn it on. It seemed weird at the time, but I didn’t.

A few minutes later, I heard the bedroom door open and footsteps coming down the stairs. God bless him, I think he was trying to tiptoe. I probably would have laughed if not for the awkwardness of sitting in front of a giant television that wasn’t turned on.

The front door opened and the front door closed. Then she was in the doorway. She didn't lean against the door jamb and she didn't cross her arms. She just stood there staring at me, arms hanging limply at her sides. She stared at me and I stared at the blank screen of my giant television. She didn't say anything and I couldn't think of anything to say. I'm pretty sure I tried to think of something. Pretty sure.

After a wordless eternity, she turned and walked away. There were footsteps on the stairs and the bedroom door closing. She didn't bother to tiptoe.

Not knowing what else to do, I reached for the remote.

We didn't talk for five days. I'm not sure if she wasn't talking to me or I wasn't talking to her. All I know is that we weren't talking to each other.

I hoped the kids didn't notice and knew the whole time that they did. It was kind of hard not to. Our lives had become a giant television that wasn't turned on. You tend to notice these things.

After five days, we were in the kitchen together. Actually, we just happened to be in the kitchen at the same time. There was no together to it. We were in the same room at the same time and I suddenly decided to talk to her.

I opened my mouth, not sure what to expect. I could have cursed on her. Oh, man, could I have cursed on her. When I opened my mouth, a flood of filth could have poured out of me, an obscene tapestry of forbidden nouns and adjectives. With my words, I could have torn her apart.

But I didn't.

I could have cried. Oh, man, could I have cried. Racked with sobs, I could have asked why or how or, even worse, how long. I could have begged her, pleaded with her to tell me it was all a mistake, that she was sorry and would never hurt me again. I could have broken her heart.

But I didn't do that either.

I opened my mouth not sure what I was going to say, not sure what to expect.

"Good morning, honey."

I sure as hell didn't expect that.

She looked at me for a long time. Not five days long but long enough. Honestly, I think she was shocked more than anything.

Then, she said "Good morning."

And that was it. No cursing. No crying. No M&P9. It was just... over. We pretended that nothing happened. That went about as well as you could expect, by the way. We said more than "Good morning", but somehow started saying less and less. All we really have left in common is the pretending.

When I wondered about whether or not I was going to shoot my wife, that's what kept going through my head. Not the cheating or the betrayal. Not her empty eyes or the way he had tiptoed out of my house. The pretending. It seemed to me at least, to be a very effective way to end the pretending.

The whole idea had a very "Oh, by the way...." quality that I liked.

I didn't have to wonder very long about it before I knew that was not why I was supposed to carry the gun. The moment had come and gone, and no, it was over. Her tiptoeer was gone, probably tiptoeing up another man's stairs with another man's wife. I wouldn't even have the satisfaction of

putting a hole in him. All that was left was her and, in the end, it seemed like a waste of a perfectly good bullet.

Did you see what happened there? I told you I wasn't going to bore you or waste your time with pointless details and then I go ahead and do it anyway. I'll try and keep my rambling to a minimum. Scout's honor.

I used to think about it a lot. I mean A LOT. The first time I put the gun in my briefcase, it was on a whim, a freak impulse I couldn't, or didn't bother to, deny. It was crazy. I knew that. I would be in some pretty deep shit if anyone found out. I knew that, too. But I did it anyway. After that, it was all I could think about.

And you would, wouldn't you? I'm walking around with a loaded gun. It'd be crazy not to think about it.

So I did. I thought about why and I thought about when. I thought about poking neat little holes in neat little people. I thought about my wife. I thought and I thought and I thought. Eventually, it was all I thought about.

But for all the thinking, all of those sleepless nights, I never came up with an answer. At least, not a very satisfying one. I was just supposed to carry it. I was supposed to. That's your answer, like it or lump it.

Until this morning.

When I woke up this morning something was different. Everything was different. I felt it as soon as my eyes opened. There was a sort of electrical charge in the air. Or maybe in me. I'm not exactly sure, but it was there. The world was crackling with energy.

Today was the day.

I was as sure of it as I've ever been sure of anything in my life. There wasn't even a question in my mind. Today I would find out my answer. Today was the answer.

Damn, I was excited. Really excited. Kid on Christmas morning excited. Everything was finally going to make sense. I could stop worrying and wondering. I could stop thinking.

That'd be nice, not thinking.

I practically jumped out of bed. It didn't matter that I didn't know what was going to happen. Just that it was going to happen soon. And dammit, I knew it wasn't going to happen with me laying in bed.

So I got up. I got up just like I did every morning on a morning that wasn't like every other morning. I got up, energy crackling all around me, and started my day.

Shower and shave.

It occurred to me that with that much electricity in the air, this was probably a dangerous thing to do. Turn on the water and ZAP! Fried like an egg. That made me laugh the whole time I was rinsing shampoo out of my hair.

I skipped the two slices of toast, dry. If anything told me that today was the day, that was it. Shower and shave (Zap! Fried egg) and skip the toast. You can't get much clearer than that.

When I was dressed and ready, pressed and polished, I went to my closet. The white door slid to the side with a gentle whoosh. Then I was on my knees reaching in around boxes and shoes. My hands touched cold metal and I pulled the lockbox into my lap.

I opened it gingerly, reverently. As I carefully lifted the lid, the custom-made foam separated and there it was. Onyx. Ebony. Obsidian. Matte black, but you should have seen that baby shine. Smooth and sleek, just waiting for a hand, my hand wrapped around the grip. The gentle curve of the trigger like a tongue ready to taste and eighteen little bullets all ready to run.

I always keep one in the chamber.

I ran my fingers over its surface. The gentle texture along the grip. The smooth lines along the slide. My finger tips traced the M&P9 etched into the side.

Then, it was in my hand. I don't remember pulling it free from the foam, but there it was, cradled, my fingers wrapped around it, my thumb on the safety (safety first, kids) and my index finger on the trigger. It fit like my hand was made for it. It fit like it was supposed to.

Today was going to be a great day.

I slipped the gun into my briefcase. Under the manila folders, next to the post-it notes. Nice. Clean. Smooth. I had to put it in my briefcase because if I didn't, if I held it for even a second long, I don't know if I ever would have let it go. I'd have walked out of my house, my gun in my hand, and I would have greeted the day.

That wasn't it though. That wasn't the answer. I didn't know what the answer was, but I knew what it wasn't. So I put my M&P9 in my briefcase and went to work.

I took the subway today. No premonitions or visions or anything. I just thought it'd be stupid to miss destiny while I'm stuck in traffic somewhere between 3rd and 5th, and listening to Sportstalk on the radio. Why even take that chance?

Wouldn't that be funny? All of that time thinking and wondering, gun in my briefcase, building up to something big, incredible, amazing, and then miss it because I decided to take the car.

Freaking hilarious.

Now, you're probably thinking that I was looking for trouble. Well, I was and I wasn't. I wasn't looking to start trouble. But I knew there was trouble out there and I knew I had to be there when it happened.

I was supposed to.

So I took the subway in case trouble decided to take the subway to work today. Everybody's got to get to work, right?

I sat on the subway, left side, second car from the back. Briefcase right next to me.

Under the manila folders.

Next to the post-it notes.

It's usually not a long ride, not a very long ride at all, but today it seemed long. Seconds dragged into minutes as I waited. And waited. And waited.

I was just starting to wonder if maybe trouble decided to take the bus today when it happened. The doors at the front of the car slid open with a hiss of trapped air and in walked a crowd of teenagers. There were five or six of them. Six, I'm pretty sure. They looked big. They looked tough. And they looked mean.

That was it. My fate, my moment, my answer. Here it was walking into my subway car.

I was suddenly happy I hadn't taken the car.

They walked slow, somewhere between a shuffle and a strut. That was good. It gave me time.

I reached over and pulled my briefcase into my lap. I wanted to look scared, frightened. Don't let the big, bad men take my briefcase. I wanted them to think I was afraid, afraid of all of them. A quiet little man on the subway.

But I wasn't scared. I was excited. Giddy might be a better word. Everything was about to come unraveled. Everything was about to get tied together.

My hands moved slowly, carefully, my thumbs finding the buttons on either side of the briefcase. I almost smiled at the twin pops, the latches coming open, precision springs snapping them wide.

It's a very nice briefcase.

Then, I reached inside. I didn't have to look. My hands knew the way.

Under the manila folders.

Next to the post-it notes.

My fingertips were just grazing the texture of the grip when I noticed something. One of the teenagers was wearing a Che Guevara shirt from Hot Topic or another one of those goddamned pop culture chop shops. A revolutionary icon printed on a 100% cotton crew-neck tee. \$14.95. And he was wearing it with absolutely no sense of irony.

That did it. The moment was ruined. There was no way in hell my fate was to take out a handful of brain dead thugs on the subway. I pulled my hand out of my briefcase and gently closed the latches. Two soft snaps.

They walked right past me and I took that time to very carefully study my shoes. Never know when somebody might catch you eyeballing his 100% cotton crew-neck and decide you were worth the trouble of killing. So I looked at my shoes until I heard the soft whoosh of trapped air, heard them moving into the last car.

Man, was my heart beating, hard and fast. I didn't like it. Hated it in fact. I hated it for ruining my day, my moment. I hated my heart for beating fast. I hated my stupid goddamned shoes.

On an impulse, I popped my briefcase open again. I reached inside and again my hands found my gun without having to be told. As soon as my fingers touched it, textured polymer, plastic against my skin, I felt better. My heart slowed enough that I couldn't hear it pulsing through my temples. That was a relief. For a second there, it was so loud that I worried Hot Topic and his friends might come back to see what all the noise was.

By the time I stepped through the subway doors and onto the platform, everything was as right as rain. My moment wasn't gone, I was sure of it. It hadn't even come yet. More importantly I hadn't wasted it.

My stomach rumbled. I shouldn't have skipped the toast.

I walked into work like I did every morning. Through the lobby, nod to Jerry at the security desk, hop on the elevator and push 27. Sometimes it's already pressed. I press it again anyway.

Doors open on 27 and then I'm in my office. Technically, it's THE office. My "office" is a small grey cubicle with small grey walls. Not even a nice corner one. Walk to the far wall, turn left, sixth one down.

A lot of people have pictures put up. Family or friends. Dilbert comics. Not me though. I did for a while, Dilbert comic and everything, but after a while it got more depressing than amusing. I'd look at

the same pictures and the same comic and rather than making me feel more at home, they made me feel... closed in. It felt like the pictures and the used-to-be funny comic made the little grey walls, my little grey cube, smaller.

So, I took them down. Round filed them, pictures and everything. Right in the waste basket. Someone walking by saw them and asked me why I would throw away pictures of my family.

It never occurred to me not to.

When I was done, the walls, little grey half-walls, were nice and neat and clean. The walls seemed farther away. Not very far, but far enough.

Today, I walked into my cubicle, my "office", and laid my briefcase carefully on my desk. There was a spot for it under my desk, right next to my left leg. Sometimes, I'd bump my knee on it.

Not today, though. Top of my desk, front and center. Right where I could reach it if I needed it.

When I needed it.

A woman came up to me and asked if I wanted to chip in on a birthday cake for someone. The name didn't sound familiar, but, then again, neither did the woman in my cubicle asking me for money. I gave her five dollars and she seemed happy enough when she left.

I did not shoot her.

I went about my usual business, filing files and noting notes. A few people called to ask questions, but they were always one or two sentence conversations. That was fine by me. I wasn't exactly in the conversation kind of mood. Sue me.

All in all, it was a regular old day. Quiet. Easy.

Boring.

Around eleven o'clock, I got a message that my supervisor wanted to see me. Not my boss, mind you. My supervisor. Modern company compartmentalization in action.

I stood up and almost left my briefcase sitting on my desk. Right there, by itself. I probably wouldn't need it, but I picked it up anyway. Better safe than sorry. You never know when that moment might pop up. Gotta be prepared.

I really hoped I wouldn't need it now. I actually kind of like my supervisor.

A minute later, I stepped into his office. An actual office, walls and everything. Big ones, all the way to the ceiling. Not even grey wall grey.

He was on the phone and gestured for me to wait. I waited. He gestured toward a chair and I sat in it. My briefcase was in my lap.

He exchanged goodbyes with whoever was on the other line and then, started asking me questions about a Walker file. Apparently, I was working on something called the Walker file. I was as surprised as you are. The Walker file was past due. Well past due. Since I was working on the Walker file, this was now on me.

I'll be honest with you. I had no idea what he was talking about. The name wasn't even familiar. When I thought about it, I couldn't tell you anything I'd worked on recently. They all sort of blurred together.

My supervisor said Walker again (and he didn't sound very happy when he said it) and something clicked into place.

Walker.

One of the manila folders in my briefcase had Walker printed on it. I saw it every morning and every night. I'd already run my hand over it twice today.

I hadn't opened that folder in a month or more.

My supervisor's voice began to slow and I realized I hadn't even been listening. He seemed to be wrapping up the yelling portion of the conversation which meant we were about to start the questions portion. That didn't bother me. It was the answers section that I wasn't looking forward to.

I opened my briefcase for the third time since leaving my house that morning. Not really sure why. I could have reached in and handed him the Walker file. Let him figure it out for himself. I could have reached in, pulled out my M&P9, and shot him three times. Twice in the chest and once in the head. More than three seemed excessive.

But I didn't do either. I decided (I think I decided) to just close the briefcase again. I don't even know why I opened it in the first place. I'm pretty sure I wasn't going to do anything.

Pretty sure.

Instead, I apologized profusely and promised to have it done by the end of the day. Told him it'd never happen again. Told him I was having trouble at home. I even did my best to sound nervous, scared of losing my job. That wasn't very easy, though, since I knew I wouldn't be here tomorrow anyway.

I must have done a better job than I thought. His voice evened out and his face softened. He told me he kind of understood what I was going through.

I managed not to laugh.

He looked me in the eye and exhaled deeply. I swear there must be some sort of manual they give supervisors (with a title that included the words "For Dummies" perhaps) that told them that kind

of thing bothers employees. It didn't. Either he was going to say yes or I would have had to shoot him. He could exhale just as much as he liked.

A few exhales later (not to mention a very poignant arm crossing), he told me to get to work. Have it done by five. I thanked him repeatedly and slouched my way out of his office.

I wish I could tell you something exciting happened. Maybe I would have said "screw it" and started putting bullets in random people. That'd be pretty exciting, right?

But I didn't. I went to my desk and got to work on the Walker file.

Nothing happened the entire afternoon. Nothing. I don't think anyone even talked to me. I sat at my desk and worked on the Walker file until there wasn't anything left to work on. Other than to get the file, my briefcase stayed peacefully closed.

I handed in the file with five minutes to spare. Another exhale. I promised again that I'd do better. Exhale. Then I left.

Took the bus home. Nothing. Not so much as a Che Guevara shirt to speak of. It was me, the bus driver, and a little old woman singing softly to herself.

Nothing.

When I stepped into my house, everything was normal again. The electricity, the energy, was gone. Not so much as a crackle. Everything was quiet. Everything was ordinary.

The house was empty. No wife. No kids. Empty. Not so much as a note left for me. I might have liked a note.

I poured myself a drink. Scotch, no ice. Neat. I took a deep swallow and then replaced what was gone.

My briefcase was still in my hand. I didn't want to put it down. I carried it (and my drink) upstairs to my bedroom. Didn't bother to tiptoe.

I went to my bedroom and sat on the corner of my bed. I drank. Slow and deep.

I'm not exactly sure when, but at some point, I discarded the briefcase, an empty, useless husk. I was sat on my bed, drink in one hand, M&P9 in the other. Cool black obsidian in my hand.

When my drink was gone, I walked to my closet. Kneeling down, I pulled out the lockbox with my empty hand.

I opened it, but didn't put the gun in. My gun. I couldn't. I wasn't supposed to.

I looked at it. I looked at it for a long time, eyes tracing every line, every curve.

On an impulse, I put the barrel in my mouth. Cool black obsidian. One squeeze and it'd all be gone. All of it. Wives. Work. Walker files. Gone.

Cool black obsidian.

I took the gun out of my mouth and giggled. I laughed at the silliness of the whole thing. All that work and wonder, all of that waiting, just to blow my own head off.

It was crazy.

I wiped the barrel off on my sleeve. No way of knowing what spit and scotch could do to the barrel. I wiped it off and put it back in the lockbox.

For a moment, just a moment, I considered leaving it home tomorrow. Just leave it in the box.

And then I thought about not wearing socks tomorrow either. I laughed again. I had to take it.

Tomorrow might be the day.

I was supposed to.

3 Injured, 2 Dead in Bus Shooting

A morning commute turned deadly when a man opened fire on a public bus, today. The man, identified as David Freeman, shot four people, killing one, before turning the gun on himself.

Police have been unable to find any rationale for the shooting. Freeman had no history of violence or mental instability.

Friends and co-workers described him as “funny”