

Family Emergency

by Smiley McGrouchpants, Jr-Esq-III

"What would you rather do: lose your mom or fuck a cow?"

"Oh, uh . . . fuck a cow, of course."

"Cow-fucker!"

- one twenty-something post-collegiate male to another, in Noah Baumbach's mid-90's period piece, *Kicking and Screaming* (1995)

I received a desperate phone call from my father, at 2:00 a.m. on a Tuesday night. I had barely gotten to sleep, and I needed to wake up at 5:30 to catch a flight to Minnesota for a job interview that morning. If I missed the interview, I can't imagine my chances of getting the job would be all that great - I was hopeful, but there were a lot of applicants - and if I didn't get the job, it would be hard to find another one that would give me quite as much of a leg up in building a name for myself in my chosen field . . . or, at least, all that *quickly* or *easily* in the foreseeable future.

I rubbed my eyes, bleary-brained from sleep and still-lingering dreams. My interview skills had given me the edge in all three of the decent jobs I had managed to land in my life, though I have no idea why. Somehow when I'd show up at interviews, I'd end up really winning over whoever was interviewing me, and they'd pass along what had proven to be comments decisive in giving me the edge over the other aspirants. Twice I had heard these comments - later on, once I had already started working at these places, and by which point it was a done deal - and eventually I figured out the same must have been true of the other job as well.

The phone screamed again, nearly rattling off the hook, and I winced. Only in the dead of night, silence all around it and with the

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ring so unexpected, did it register as an alarm like this.

I groaned out of bed, and groped for the door to my bedroom. My father knew I had this interview tomorrow, I had told him each of the two Sundays past for my regular, what-felt-like-checking-in-with-my-parole-officer obligatory weekly family call-taking and status update sessions, but I had this weird feeling that nonetheless, it was him.

Like: it couldn't *possibly* be anyone else.

I reached the phone in the kitchen, dropped my hand on the receiver. I prayed for a drunk-dialer, a wrong number. Anyone I could blow off, or hang up on.

I closed my eyes, and raised the receiver to my head.

"*Dave!*"

Emphatic, breathless.

My name.

Said like *that*.

Now.

"Yeah?" I gritted out.

"Don't talk that way to me!" I heard spat back at me. "This is an emergency! Your mother's fucked a cow!"

The phrase, "you mean, she's 'screwed the pooch?'" occurred to me but I sensed it would be irrelevant to mouth it, aloud, to this stimulus.

"What?"

"She fucked a cow! Hard! Everything's over . . . soon, we'll need to do a reset on your entire life and recalibrate the aging process of me, you, your sister, and all our relatives. I booked a flight for you, specifically designed to throw off your circadian rhythms, so you'll arrive in Albany refreshed for our new family cycle."

"Our what?" It was the only question I could think of to ask, considering.

"Our new family cycle," he repeated, as though he were a scientist propounding a newly-discovered theory, and warming to the subject. "We'll all live as one, without the outside world. Of

course, you'll have to move back to Albany, and reject your current life and any and all memories you may have made up until *now*, but in time I think you'll find . . . "

I hung up. For once, I had an indisputably obvious reason to do so.

I rummaged in the drawer by the refrigerator, and eventually found what I was looking for: the 3rd of the 4 pairs of scissors I had gotten for \$3 the other night at Wal-Dope.

I cut the cord, and went back to bed. Regardless of how much sleep I would get that night, tomorrow would certainly be a new day.

*for Neko Case,
who "saved" me,
through her music*

