

# Unkilled Jeff

by Smiley McGrouchpants Jr.

For a while, in the Portland canvassing office, it was just Kristen (Yale, early 20's, C.D.) and me (Univ. of Chicago, 34, doing that "long 2nd arc" Gen X thing).

Then along came Jeff.

"I *played* at Dartmouth like it was my *job* . . ." he related, fascinated, to a field manager who wasn't really listening ("Oh, *really?*") while I'm in the back of the car.

Something about the note in his voice struck me, like *Whatever that means, it probably doesn't bode too well.*

So.

Three words:

Saturday — 5:33 pm.

By now I've gone through something akin to the Kübler-Ross stages of adjustment, a la Death (Denial / Bargaining / Anger / Acceptance) in terms of the chunks of time (5:03 . . . 5:11 . . . 5:17? . . . 5:24 . . . ) which play out before I'm finally picked up.

I feel like I'm on the moon. Like I should yell out "Hello? Hello?" (I'd gotten no response from the office number on my cell phone), and, as it happens, I'm in North Portland location in the vicinity of the MAX, which I see pull up . . . and leave, pull up . . . and *leave* . . .

I wonder all sorts of useless things: *Should I take the MAX? What would I do, go home with my clipboard and checks and stuff?* I feel

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so irrelevant to the world, pinned there and unable to leave.

Everything's going by without me, and I don't have a decision to make.

(Dartmouth's a bit isolated. Cornell's in a nice place — they've got plenty of grad schools and stuff "ahead" of them there — and Brown and Columbia are in hip places, Providence RI and NYC, Todd Haynes and Jim Jarmusch went to each, respectively. But Dartmouth's a bit isolated up there in New Hampshire — w/few grad schools to "humble" or "curb" the undergrads — Dinesh D'Souza and other sketchy right-wing stuff took root. Plus, if you get into Tufts and Penn and Dartmouth, you *choose* which one you go to, right?)

I might as well smoke another cigarette. I might as well smoke the whole pack — what good does it do me?

I guess he never learned (since "playing" was his "job") that, when the bartenders say "closing time — you don't have to go home, but you can't stay *here!*" they mean to leave. Maybe that would have helped him understand.

Seriously: if it was fuckin' 9:33 pm on a Friday or Tuesday it'd be an arbitrarily ridiculous pain in the ass, but somehow, having comitted to the workweek, it'd be endurable.

But fucking Saturday?

I discover all these things, by sorting through them mentally — and it's less a horrible experience than just truly weird. That the MAX is in plain sight just so I can see it come and go, come and go just seems the strangest, most fitting happenstance, since if I was deep in any residential area, city or suburbs or *not*, there wouldn't be a fucking MAX right there, no matter what, it just wouldn't fucking happen, it wouldn't fucking be the case.

Lucky me.

(Know what 5:11 is like? It registers different than 5:07. *Now I'm getting worried* isn't what you think, you don't think anything. You just sit there. What conclusion could you reach? You could be mistaken in a minute. So you just sit there.)

5:14.

5:17.

5:21.

5:23. MAX comes and goes.

5:27.

Then at fucking 5:33 pm (let's just say it wasn't 5:40 but it wasn't *before* 5:30 either, okay? I don't really remember — but it was *effectively* 5:33) the car pulls up and Jeff, the A.D., bounds out —

"Oh hey man — *sorry!*"

"[grit teeth, smile nod]"

"We took the wrong turn [points with his arm] and had to go the long way around [points with his arm in a sweep]." *Like that doesn't account for maybe 4 or 5 full minutes, like Portland's not a grid-layout city in terms of its streets, one of its virtues as a model of city planning.*

"[Um . . .] *Oh!*"

He nods, grins, glad I understand. Takes out the clipboard. "So how'd you do?"

"115." *At least I'd done alright.*

Then I have to say "Um . . . *fine.*" Which gets a "click-crossing-his-face" look and "Oh — *okay!*" response. (He had just asked me — since I had just taken a couple of days off, and just returned — "How

does it FEEL?" with an upturned hand like he's a butcher weighing a piece of meat, but he's coming across like a frat guy mimicking grabbing a piece of ass who's at Dartmouth and just read Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*.)

"Oh — what is this *work* thing the philosophers speak of" sort of thing.

He's honestly curious, from his point of view.

It would take him much, much longer to realize what he's actually done today, and "adjust" down from whatever it was he'd been thinking.

Since he can't even tell there's something sacrosanct about *wanting to go home* — since that escapes him entirely — I have to, *what else can I do?*, work around that entirely.

Which I discover while I'm doing it, not that I have any choice — this isn't a conscious decision, or anything. *Cut him a break, he's oblivious, he's your Assistant Director, he's from Dartmouth, give him a little leeway, they think the world's unreal, it's all Plato's "Shadows in the Cave" to them, you gotta adjust for that.*

And, of course, he's my *boss* — except at the canvassing job, it's much more like they're supposed to be there for *you* than it sounds, because only 1 in 30 people can make quote and have a job, we're always fucking grateful to have *anyone* who can get dropped off to knock on doors.

That's it!

None of us are Laura Etherton or Jeremiah — who are awesome — it's just gratifying to work there.

Period.

(On top of that — and it's something I'm resentful for feeling, along with everything else — I'm still, despite myself, *GRATEFUL HE SHOWED UP AT ALL TO COME GET ME!*)

It's not that I want to kill him — it's that I'd have the *right* to, really, but I'd have to actually *do* it.

So I don't.

I get in the back of the car, Jeff remains unkilld, and I get to cash out at the office and go home.

Finally!

