

quitting Time  
by  
Brian Trepanier

"Good morning." Bill said, giving his standard quick wave as he passed by Jared's office.

"Morning." Jared replied, deliberately leaving out the "Good" part. Jared had never been much of a morning person, was even less of a Monday morning person, and most definitely had never been a "Good morning" Monday morning person. By Friday afternoon, sure, he would cheer up a bit, but until then, he was as automated and removed from his job, and the work week, as humanly possible. It was a technique that worked for the sake of getting his mindless job accomplished every day, but it did nothing for his sanity.

Had anyone ever asked Jared how he felt about his job, he would have said "my job sucks" and "please shoot me". Mind you, when he first started the job years back, Jared enjoyed the work, dealing with the people, making the sales. But as the years wore on and the routines stagnated, he found little passion within himself for the job, until he eventually could find nothing to enjoy about it. And even though he longed for a desperately needed change, he could not afford to walk away from a steady income. Neither his nerves nor debt load would handle it.

However, everything changed that Monday morning when Jared clicked on his computer's clock so he could plan the week's schedule. Just because men's minds, even the dumbest among men, were essentially fantasy factories, Jared had (what he considered) a fanciful idea: What would happen if he switched the time to 5 pm, quitting time?

Jared knew the computers were all on the same system network, and he knew the employee clocks in the shop were set by one of the front office computers, but he did not think for a moment he could change the time on all the computers and clocks remotely via his office's system.

It was only in an act of quiet rebellion, and with his pulse slightly racing, that Jared changed the time on his computer to 5 pm and hit OK.

A mere moment later, Bill was once again passing by Jared's office, waving his hand. Only this time, he said "Good night".

"Bill, where are you going?" Jared asked.

"Home, of course." Bill said. "What are you doing? Are you planning on staying here all night? Yuck."

"You're kidding... right?" Jared asked.

"Some things are not to be joked about, son, and quitting time is one of them. When the clock says five, I say bye bye. I have things to do that don't

involve me hanging around here any longer, so have yourself a good night." With that said, Bill continued down the hallway.

Jared went to the front office, to find it mostly abandoned. All the computers were shut off, most all the staff gone. Only Mylene, who handled the day's financial receivables, sat at her desk, working away.

"Are you out of here?" she asked.

"Okay, what is this joke? I just got here." Jared said.

"Ya, like nine hours ago. Now get your stuff and clear out so I can lock up."

"Are you telling me it is actually 5 in the evening?"

"It better be," Mylene said, "because if it's 5 in the morning, I am going to be some kind of angry, let me tell you! Now, get going. I want to lock up and leave as soon as I finish, and I am almost done."

Jared refused to look the bizarre gift horse in the mouth, so grabbed his coat and left for the night, wondering what on earth had taken place. He knew he would have to wait until the next day to find out. It was the first time in a very long time that Jared actually looked forward to the next work day.

When he was back in the next morning, Jared waited until Bill walked by at his regular 8:03 AM arrival time before he changed the clock .

"Good morning." Bill said, passing by Jared's office.

"Morning." Jared replied. "Growing a beard?" he asked, noticing Bill was quite scruffy that morning, but Bill did not respond.

Jared took a sip of his coffee, double clicked the computer clock and set the time to 5 pm. He decided to change the date ahead a few days, so he set the time to 5 pm that Friday. Obviously, there was no way he could have expected what happened when he pressed OK.

Bill walked by, this time his face riddled with what looked like a real bad case of acne. "Good night and have a good weekend." he said, as he waved a hand that must have had twenty fingers on it.

Jared was too dumbstruck, maybe even a bit frightened, to actually say anything at that moment. When his senses returned, he went to see if Bill really had way too many fingers on his hand, or if he was actually finally going insane, as his mother always said he would. Bill had left the building, but Mylene was still at her desk. Jared had never noticed how incredibly long Mylene's hair was, then the hair parted and spoke.

"What are you staring at?" Mylene's voice said, though she was nowhere to be seen, if she wasn't actually buried beneath the hair.

"Mylene, is that you?" Jared asked.

"Of course, it is." she said. "Are you going crazy or something? You sure have been acting weird lately. Like, what was that thing yesterday at lunch?"

Yesterday at lunch? Jared tried to think of what she meant, but he had no memory of the yesterday she was talking about. He didn't even know what he did after work for the past three days. Any memories between his time changes had completely vanished from his mind.

Or had never been there.

As Jared looked at Mylene's hair-covered face and considered the fingers he had seen on Bill's hand, he knew things got mixed up somewhere. The only possibility was some time warp paradox glitch from changing the time on his computer. How that was a possibility, he did not know, but he did not know many things, and a time warp glitch was the only thing that made sense in his egocentric mind. He messed with time and time messed with everything else.

Jared knew he had to fix things right away. He could not let his friends become freaks because he had wanted to get out of work early. There would truly be a special place in Hell for someone who would do that to people they know. If not, there would surely be such a place built in Hell to accommodate him.

Jared hurried back to his desk, Mylene calling behind him, "Hey, you're going the wrong way. It's time to go, I want to lock up!"

"I won't be long." Jared said, thinking to himself about how much Mylene would hate him if she knew he was setting time back to the start of the work day. Actually, he thought, she would probably hate him much more if she knew why her face was covered in hair to begin with.

Jared set back the time on his computer's clock to that Friday morning. All things considered and hindsight being 20/20, Jared was able to eventually understand how he should have set the time right back to the beginning of the week when things first changed.

But that's not what he did. He set it back to that Friday's morning.

Shortly after changing the time, Bill walked by and said, "Good morning". Jared noticed Bill's face was no longer heavily blemished and the hand he waved with seemed to have a normal amount of fingers.

Jared replied "Morning", and almost breathed a sigh of relief, but gasped instead when Bill turned and allowed a second bulbous half-head growing out the side of his neck to also say "Good morning". That was when Jared set the clock back to the very beginning of the week.

There was no way to know why things turned out the way they did. Maybe the time got set back a few minutes too early and some quantum physics thingie overlapped. Or perhaps the Fates were just feeling mischievous. Or it may have all turned out the same way regardless of Jared's clock clicking. There was no way to know all possibilities.

What was known was that Jared learned good things can only come from what he's been given.

Since that fateful Monday morning, Jared kept his thoughts on doing an honest day's work and kept away from the computer clock.

And when Bill swam by in the mornings, carrying his briefcase in his rubbery tentacles and said, "Good morning", Jared replied, "Good morning".

After all, while his job remained the same, a bit of change always made life more interesting. And that alone, in Jared's opinion, was reason enough to put the "Good" back into his morning.

The End

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