



Job Shadowing

Malcolm Sutton

Review By Stephanie Talbot



Job Shadowing, is the debut novel by Toronto author and resident Malcolm Sutton. Written in 2016, the book takes place in the very near future, 2017, however I do not think I would be stretching it to call it science fiction. The novel follows the experiences of husband and wife, Gil and Etti as they each shadow another individual. Gil is unemployed and while on a walk one morning stumbles upon a group who are on their way to a job shadowing event. Where they are in reality assigned as the actual shadow of the person they are to follow. With Gil he is assigned to a young professional woman named Victoria, he sees and experiences all that she does, however he is unable to communicate with her. Meanwhile across the ocean his wife Etti, is an artist, and after her last project has ended, and with nothing else calling out to her she has taken the job she on whim proposed to the fabulously wealthy Caslon, whose name she found on the wall of gallery donors.

The job is to write his memoir, so she must also shadow him. Hoping the experience will inspire her and help further develop herself as an artist she agrees to his terms, blindfolded to and from the destination, living on his super yacht, always by her side, Nelson, a glorified babysitter. And towards the end, under Caslon's instruction more like her husband's experience, she is not to speak to anyone and stays by his side always, even when he is in the company of a prostitute. Gil now Victoria's shadow, experiences her day to day life, we see that she is mature for her age, and striving for something more outside the defined narrow role at the company she works for. And so she approaches a co-worker with her ideas about a project of combining education and business, and later meets with higher ups at the company. However her plans are set aside as she begins to have a physical negative reaction to Gil being her shadow. Back on Caslon's yacht Etti learns about Caslon's desire for a more fulfilling life, and the lengths he went to be able to experience a "doubly life," this reveal is the second inclusion of science fiction elements in this text. Sutton's book tackles a few interesting subjects, the need to be one with someone, Gil desires this with his wife, and feels a disconnect in their marriage, however we learn he often leaves Etti and their home for extended periods of time. There is also the subject of self, Gil becomes one with Victoria as her shadow, and while she ignores his presence, continuing her day to day, and evening activities as usual, she deliberately throws out his forwarded mail, which was a postcard from Etti, and not allowing him to read it. It is only when she physically reacts to his presence does she acknowledge him, and it is solely with hatred and disdain. Finally the subject of employment. This book in its simplest terms is about people and their jobs.

Gil, who we know is unemployed is attached to the considerably younger and more successful Victoria, and only when he tries to yell at her the question of how much she makes, a question he was always instructed to never ask someone, is their job shadowing partnership ended. Etti is haphazardly self-employed, and while her stay with Caslon is lavish she does not allow it to get to her head, and instead focuses on how she will incorporate his gifts, and obscure items acquired during her time with him into her final project. Much like the parting of Gil and Victoria, Etti ends her own "job shadowing" with Caslon once he begins paying her and after an altercation he had with the outcome of his desire to experience more life. Job Shadowing was a some what enlightening read. There are four different individuals all trying to determine what to do with their careers and self, there is the unemployed, self employed, employed but desiring more, and ridiculously wealthy. This novel explores these themes while scattering throughout entertaining elements of science fiction. While the character's could be fleshed out a bit more, we still learn enough about them to get an idea of who they are, and who they desire to be.

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