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Over the next fifteen months, Rosetta took off and Mike was along for the ride. The company moved from its small offices to a large two-story building of its own near Bowers Avenue in Santa Clara. Mike was amazed at the flimsy way the building was built. The building's concrete sides were simply poured flat into molds on top of the foundation and then tilted up and glued together like a big cardboard box. When Mike commented on the building's construction, Brad looked at him and said, "That's why they call them tiltups," which made Mike feel like an idiot. But when the building was completed it looked anything but insubstantial. It looked modern, solid, expensive, and inviting.

Cubicle farms that were built to accommodate the almost daily increase in new employees soon filled most of the area inside the building. Mike liked the feeling of privacy afforded by the walls of his cubicle. Mike also liked the new vending machine, which often provided dinner when he worked late. When the waistline of his blue jeans told him he was starting to gain weight, he cut down on his visits to the vending machine.

Mike was happy that Rosetta was successful and that it was growing so fast. He liked the new employees, but he was disappointed that for many of the new people Rosetta was just a place to work, not a home. The rapid increase in new faces prompted Omar to send out a memo stating that all employees were now required to wear badges as a way of keeping out intruders who pretended to be new employees. But the badges had more value as status symbols than as a security device.

Each badge had a number, which indicated the person's order of employment. Omar had badge number one. William had badge number two. Mike had badge number fourteen. Rosetta's size, success, and stability meant that new employees received far smaller stock options than the old employees. Therefore, the lower someone's badge number, the more stock options they had and the more they were envied.

The badge numbers also were a sign of how fast Rosetta was growing. The most recent badge number assigned was seventy-nine. Everyone anxiously awaited the day when badge number one hundred would be given out.

William now had twenty people reporting to him and he saw Mike and the other programmers increasingly less often. The regular crowd still had dinner at the Li River, but William usually wasn't there. He was at Omar's impromptu late night staff meetings. William now wore a sports jacket and dress pants to work instead of a T-shirt and blue jeans. Mike never saw Omar more than once a month, but Mike remembered the kindness Omar and William had shown him and he continued to work nights and weekends.

As much as Mike loved Rosetta, he hated Brad. The rivalry between them was becoming more open. Since Mike was friendlier, most people favored Mike, but William still gave the toughest bugs to Brad, which irked Mike. He thought, "Isn't it

me, not Brad, who works to midnight?" But Mike had to admit that Brad was quietly obsessive when it came to finding and fixing bugs. Brad would never show his work to anyone unless he was completely satisfied with its quality, and it was ThinkWrite's high quality that made it sell.

It bothered Mike that he wasn't contributing to Rosetta's success as much as Brad. He remembered Brad's words about being in the right place at the right time and it made Mike angry to think Brad might be right. Mike wanted to do something for Rosetta so he wouldn't feel guilty about sharing in Rosetta's success.

Mike looked at his badge, which had his picture, his name, his number, and the logo of Rosetta Software. He'd always thought that Rosetta was an unusual name for a company. Mike had heard that Omar had named Rosetta Software after the Rosetta Stone.

The Rosetta Stone was a small piece of black rock on which a two thousand year-old diplomatic memo was written. The Rosetta Stone was important because the same memo was written in three languages, Greek, an older form of Greek, and Egyptian hieroglyphics. Before the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, no living person could read Egyptian hieroglyphics. But by translating the memo from Greek to ancient Egyptian, the code was broken. Thousands of previously unreadable hieroglyphic documents, which were translated because of the information contained on the Rosetta Stone, revealed the previously mysterious history of ancient Egypt.

Omar had named his company after the Rosetta Stone because he felt that ThinkWrite would open up the world of personal computers by providing one piece of software running on mainframe computers, minicomputers, and personal computers.

So far this dream had not come true. Most of Rosetta's sales were to minicomputer and mainframe users, not to personal computer users. Even Rosetta's programmers used their personal computers mostly as terminals for talking to larger computers. The version of ThinkWrite that was developed for minicomputers and mainframes was too large to fit on most personal computers. Therefore, Rosetta had developed a severely watered down version of ThinkWrite for the personal computer market. Brad quipped that the personal computer version of ThinkWrite was more like a word processor from the Stone Age than the Rosetta Stone.

When Mike joined Rosetta, only having a pared down version of ThinkWrite was not a problem. Most homebrewed personal computers were used by individuals who had no real need for the word processing functions that were left out of the P.C. version of ThinkWrite, but by 1978, personal computers were moving out of the garage.

Personal computer stores were popping up all over the country and these stores were desperate for software. High quality printers, which were now available for less than a thousand dollars, had created a rapidly expanding market for P.C. word processors. Mike decided he was going to do something about realizing Omar's dream. He decided to program a full version of ThinkWrite for personal computers.

Inspired by Brad's comment about the Stone Age, Mike called his project Real Rosetta. He carefully read a printout of the minicomputer version of ThinkWrite's code and thought about how to reprogram ThinkWrite more efficiently for the P.C. After four hours of reading the code, he was convinced that it could be done.

He yawned and stretched. He'd done a good night's work. It was time to go home. As he drove home, he saw the outline of the cherry trees that made up one of Silicon Valley's few remaining orchards. In the almost two years he'd been living in Silicon Valley, Mike had seen many orchards cut down and replaced by office parks. Mike wondered what the Santa Clara Valley natives thought about all this new technology moving in. They'd tended their orchards for years only to see them cut down to make room for a whole industry that hadn't even been conceived of when the trees were planted.

Everyone Mike knew at Rosetta Software was an immigrant from another country or another state. Omar was born in Algeria and raised in Paris, William was from Canada, Brad was from Arkansas, Jennifer was from Texas, and Paul was born and raised in Taiwan. Mike wondered if life was really different in France or Taiwan. "Certainly, life must be better in Silicon Valley or so many people wouldn't move here," he thought. He fell asleep happy and secure.

For the next six weeks, he spent his nights and weekends working on Real Rosetta. He loved hacking code, especially his own. It was like taking a rock and sculpting it into a beautiful statue. At the end of the process, chipping away every little piece of stone created a new effect. Finally, he felt Real Rosetta had been refined and debugged to the point where it was ready to be shown to the world.

He left work feeling happy that Real Rosetta was ready to demonstrate, but by the time he got home, his happiness had turned to doubt. Each time that he pictured demoing his idea to William and Omar, the more anxiety-ridden he became. He thought, "Maybe they won't like it. They'll probably think it's stupid. They'll think how does a dumb guy who never went to college think he can design a product? He's not doing his job. What if they fire me for working on this?" It was five o'clock in the morning before he finally drifted off to sleep.

The next morning he demonstrated Real Rosetta to Omar and William. Mike measured every nuance of Omar's reaction as he demonstrated his creation to his most important critic. Omar watched patiently, looking pleased but not ecstatic. Mike was disappointed. He wanted Omar to be screaming, "Yes! Yes!"

Mike turned the keyboard over to Omar. Omar typed in a few commands and smiled, but after typing one relatively normal sequence of commands, the computer froze for a second and then crashed. Mike dejectedly rebooted the computer. The demo was over.

“Don't worry,” Omar said and smiled toward the screen. “It's managers' demo syndrome. The first time you demo your program to a manager who hasn't seen it before, it'll crash.”

Mike nodded his head in agreement and returned Omar's smile as broadly as his embarrassment allowed.

Omar said, “I have a meeting to go to. We'll talk later.”

Omar saw Mike's look of disappointment and added, “Good job, I always knew you were the perfect person for this team.”

The smile returned to Mike's face.

That afternoon, Omar and William had a private conversation in Omar's office.

“What do you think of the kid's demo, Omar?” William asked.

“Pretty impressive, I see a market for it,” Omar said looking out his window. “It's going to help move a lot of copies of ThinkWrite, but we'll need marketing support, ads, promotional campaigns, the whole kit and caboodle. The investors will want a big hunk of stock for putting up the money to pay for all that. Those idiots on the board never know how much a product's worth, but they damn well know how to make sure they get a piece of it.”

William nodded. He knew Omar was a master practitioner of the art of boardroom politics.

Omar continued, “The kid's good. I thought he was just going to be a fresh fodder for the deadline, but he's got something else to him. Let's not let him realize it too quickly, it'll spoil him.” Omar smiled as he spoke the last phrase.

“Give him a decent amount of stock as a bonus, Omar.” William said sharply.

“Of course I will, William,” Omar said smoothly. “You've become too uptight lately. You've got to learn to separate your personal feelings from business if you want to grow with the company. It's not like we're just two guys in a garage anymore. You're an executive now. You've got to think of what's good for the company as a whole.”

“You were the one who taught me to take care of my people,” William said. “Maybe I should change Omar, but maybe you shouldn't, or your luck will change too.”

“Thank you for your input,” Omar said. “I'll consider what you've said, however, you'll have to excuse me. I have some phone calls I have to make. It's three hours earlier back East and I want to catch some people before they leave for the day.”

The conversation stayed with William. He felt angry, yet he knew Omar was right. William also knew that Mike would be making far more than most nineteen year olds in America and that Mike, far from feeling ripped off, would be very happy with his compensation. Nevertheless, William could not think of Mike and the rest of the people who reported to him as simply “fodder for the deadline.” He cared about them. They were his team.

The blasting of Mike's brand-new car stereo announced his arrival at William's house. It was the first warm Saturday of the summer and William had organized an outing to the beach in Santa Cruz. William knew that Mike didn't have much of a social life in California. He decided that most immediate contribution he could make to Mike's life was to take him out for some fun. Jennifer was going with them but neither her MG nor William's Datsun 260Z was big enough to comfortably hold three people so they took Mike's car.

Mike was looking forward to spending the kind of day at the beach he'd always dreamed of when he was growing up. Real Rosetta was becoming a success and making a major contribution to Rosetta's growth. It also was making Mike a local celebrity. Mike found himself spending more time with salesmen and giving presentations to customers. At first, Mike felt intimidated by giving presentations to men and women old enough to be his parents, especially since his audiences tended to be better dressed and better paid than he was. But when he began to realize that most of them didn't know the first thing about computers, his anxiety faded.

Mike's newfound celebrity was not without its down side. It made Brad hate him even more. Brad considered Real Rosetta an unimaginative product that had been overly hyped. But on this perfect California Saturday morning, Brad and his contempt were a million miles away.

“Warp factor eight, Mr. Spock,” William said as he climbed into the car. “A bikini-clad alien civilization awaits us in the Santa Cruzian system.”

“Aye aye captain,” Mike said.

They picked up Jennifer at her apartment. They sat three across in the Pontiac's big front seat and got on Highway 17, the road to Santa Cruz.

Highway 17 narrowed from three lanes to two shortly before it started to wind its way through the Santa Cruz Mountains, the barrier separating Silicon Valley from the California Coast. As the old Pontiac left the Valley, the trappings of civilization disappeared and were replaced by redwood trees. It seemed remarkable to Mike that this much peaceful, quiet, empty forest could exist only a few minutes' drive from the dense population and intense activity of Silicon Valley.

Mike had to concentrate on the sharp switchbacks to avoid an accident. He stayed in the slow lane and kept both hands on the wheel as expensive sports cars raced through the narrow space between his left door and the guardrail.

“Why are you in such a rush to get ahead? You already have a Porsche!” Mike yelled at a silver coupe that whisked by at a speed obviously too fast for such a dangerous road.

William and Jennifer both laughed. Mike felt serenely happy. He loved being out with his friends on such a beautiful day. Mike thought, “This sure beats going to Jones Beach with my family.”

They sang along with the songs on the radio. Jennifer liked the new punk rock songs, which Mike normally didn't, but as he listened to the songs with his friends he began to develop a taste for them.

An hour and a half later they reached the beach. Mike ran into the water the moment he saw the beach, but the water was so cold he ran back out two minutes later.

“Brrr!” he said toweling off. “I thought it was supposed to be summer. It feels like Jones Beach in the middle of winter. How do people ever go in the ocean?”

“They wear wet suits,” Jennifer answered curtly.

“But what about the Beach Boys, surfing, endless summer? All that stuff I grew up watching on TV?” Mike asked, still shivering.

“In L.A. people do go to the beach and actually swim,” Jennifer said, “but only at certain times of the year. Even in L.A., the water isn't as warm as in The Gulf of Mexico, which is where I learned to swim. Here in Northern California, people play on the beach or on the boardwalk not in the ocean.” Jennifer said, pointing to an amusement park that rose from the boardwalk behind the beach.

As the sun warmed him and the beer hit his brain, Mike started to get horny. Girls and women in bikinis and halter-tops with shorts populated the beach. Looking at them made Mike wonder why he spent most of his days in front of a computer screen.

“It's nice to be out,” Mike said.

“You know you won't be fired if you don't spend all your time at work,” William said.

“I don't have much else to do,” Mike shrugged defensively.

“You could join a health club,” William suggested.

“I was never really the athletic type,” Mike said, glad for William's interest, but wishing he would come up with another suggestion.

“This is Silicon Valley, not the Olympic Village,” William said. “Exercising is for keeping what you have. Besides, the health club is a good place to meet people.”

“William means to pick up girls,” Jennifer said, “but he's right about getting some exercise. It relieves stress.”

“I don't think I want to go to a health club,” Mike said carefully, “but I would like to get to know some new people. What about getting to know people at work? I'd like to ask Robin, you know, the receptionist, out. Do you think it's O.K.?”

William and Jennifer exchanged glances.

“It depends on how you do it,” Jennifer said. “When I first got to the Valley, I got a job in a clean room, where they actually make the silicon chips. They're called clean rooms because if even a small speck of dust gets on a chip, the chip is ruined. Anyway, you have to wear this special outfit called a bunny suit, so none of the dust from your body gets in the clean room. There was a changing room for the women who worked in the clean room. My male boss would look through a little peephole and watch us change. Then he would come up to us and ask us to go out with him, saying things about how he liked the shapes of our breasts. He was a creep. I don't think you're a creep. Just ask Robin out nicely and if she says no, don't bother her. If you do it that way, it'll be fine.”

He looked to William for confirmation.

“I agree with Jennifer. Just be a gentleman and it'll be fine,” William said.

Mike looked at Jennifer and William thoughtfully. He was glad that they were his friends. They went up to the boardwalk. William and Mike became absorbed in playing Space Invaders, one of the new video games.

“You remind me of my little brother,” Jennifer said. “He's always playing these silly war games.”

“Thanks a lot,” Mike responded sarcastically. He felt that being compared to her “little” brother was vaguely condescending.

“Don't be offended. I love my little brother,” she said and kissed him on the cheek.

The kiss aroused him, but he didn't know how to react. He'd had occasional sexual fantasies about Jennifer. The fantasies were never serious because the attraction was primarily psychological, not physical. But today, Jennifer's blue one-piece Lycra swimsuit made her slim figure look far more appealing than the loose-fitting clothes she normally wore to work. Mike tried to push these thoughts out of his mind. He valued her friendship far more than he wanted her body.

A month later, the three thousandth copy of Real Rosetta was sold. As a bonus, Mike received a check for ten thousand dollars and options for an additional five thousand shares of Rosetta stock. His options now totaled fifteen thousand shares. The ten thousand dollar bonus by itself was more money than any member of Mike's family had ever had in one place at one time.

Mike put most of the money in the bank, but he set aside some of the money to realize his dream of buying his own personal computer. The computer he bought was much more powerful than the one he'd fantasized about when he was reading computer magazines on the subway. But the pleasure of buying the computer was dampened by the knowledge that the inevitable improvements in technology would make it obsolete in two years.

Mike also set aside some of his bonus to take a trip back East to visit his family and Roger. He went to get a vacation form. A year ago all the administration was done verbally. Now there was a form for everything. On the way to get the form, he ran into Omar.

"Mike! What a coincidence," Omar said. "I was just thinking of you. Why don't you walk with me to my office? But you seem to be in a hurry. I don't want to interfere with your work."

"It's O.K.," Mike said. "I was just on my way to get a vacation form. I'm going home to see my family. I haven't seen them for over a year."

Omar made a slight grimace, but then smiled. "I understand. I haven't had time to see mine in years either. Still it's unfortunate that you have to leave now."

Mike knew Omar was going to ask him to postpone his vacation. Mike knew that now was the time to object, but he felt obliged to hear Omar out.

"What's up?" Mike asked.

"Let's go back to my office," Omar said.

Mike followed Omar to his beautifully decorated new office, which was three times bigger than his office in Rosetta's old building.

"You've heard the rumors about us going public?" Omar said after he'd closed the door.

Mike nodded, unsure where Omar was leading.

"To go public," Omar said, "and get the rest of the rewards we've worked for, we need to meet our objectives in the business plan. That means doubling our sales next year. If we can do that, we can go public at twelve dollars a share."



Mike wasn't sure if he exactly understood what Omar meant when he mentioned the business plan, but Mike clearly understood the impact of twelve dollars a share. At that price, his fifteen thousand shares would be worth one hundred and eighty thousand dollars. He moved forward in his chair. He didn't want to miss a single word.

“We need to deliver a new product that will help us make our goal,” Omar continued. “Sales of Real Rosetta are growing, but Real Rosetta isn't enough by itself. We're getting more competition now. I've asked William to form a team of people to develop a new version of ThinkWrite, called ThinkWrite II. I'd like you to be a key member of that team. Mike, you know I've always believed in you. It's too bad you're going away next week.”

Mike felt a pang of regret as he thought about delaying his vacation. But the regret was more than balanced by the honor of being selected by Omar to work on the project that would take the company public.

“If that's what needs to be done, I'll be here,” Mike said. “I'll start tonight and I won't go back to New York until ThinkWrite II is ready to demonstrate.”

Omar's face broke out into a huge smile. He patted Mike on the back. “I knew I could count on you.”

They shook hands and Mike's regret about postponing his vacation was outweighed by the knowledge that he'd made the right decision.

Mike called Roger and told his friend that he would be postponing his visit. Roger was disappointed, but understanding. But Mike's mother was not as sympathetic as Roger. She told Mike that Carl and Suzanne were getting married in six months. Mike knew that Carl probably didn't care much whether he was there or not, but his mother used guilt to make him solemnly promise to attend the wedding.

Mike hung up the phone knowing he owed it to both his natural family and his Rosetta family to make the deadline. Working hard was a cheap price to pay to keep the trust of the people he loved.

Mike looked forward to working on a new project with William's team, but William and Omar were taking out insurance on the deadline by hiring more programmers. William asked Mike to be involved in the hiring process by interviewing candidates for the new programming positions. Although Mike felt very mature conducting job interviews, he also felt unworthy to pass judgment on people who had far more education and experience than he did. Since Rosetta was becoming known as a successful start-up, it was attracting people with advanced degrees, years of experience, or both.

“I value your opinion,” William said when Mike asked to be excused from interview duty. “Besides, It's good training for later.”

Even after William's reassuring words, Mike figured he would eventually be replaced by one of the new programmers because all the candidates seemed to be much better qualified than he was. But the interview process changed Mike's opinion. Many of the candidates with the most impressive resumes seemed to know the least about personal computers. What these candidates did know about were each other. When a candidate mentioned that they used to work with somebody at Rosetta, which most of them did, they would inevitably grin and say, "It's a small valley."

Tommy Johansen was one of the more interesting candidates Mike interviewed. When Tommy appeared for his interview, Mike was initially too awestruck to even ask a question. Most of the candidates wore suits, or at least a coat and tie, but Tommy wore jeans, sandals and a Grateful Dead T-shirt. Tommy's flowing brown hair hung four inches below his collar. Tommy's only concession to the interview process was a corduroy jacket. But Tommy was an honors graduate from Berkeley in electrical engineering who knew more about the internal workings of personal computers than Mike, William, or even Brad. Tommy got a job at Rosetta.

William's new team totally redesigned ThinkWrite. They spent the first three weeks brainstorming, designing, planning, and scheduling. Although Jennifer was not an engineer,

William had invited her because as the head of technical support and documentation departments she had more direct contact with ThinkWrite's users than any of the programmers.

The design meetings were lively sessions. Tommy pushed for new concept. Mike and Jennifer pushed for new features. Paul and Brad tried to slow the others down, challenging them on how difficult certain ideas would be to properly implement. After a week of lively arguments, the team had arrived at a design document and a schedule.

"So we're all agreed?" William said at the final meeting.

"Fine," Jennifer said caustically.

"Sure," Paul said, trying to muster enthusiasm.

"Whatever you want man," Tommy said.

"It's your project," Brad added.

Mike just shrugged. He was no happier with the compromises than anybody else.

"C'mon people," William said. "Nobody got everything they wanted, including me. If you think you're unhappy now, wait until the salespeople insist on adding one more feature the day before the product is ready to ship—"

Jennifer, Paul, and Tommy grinned knowingly, but Mike and Brad were still sullen.

“We’ve come to this decision as a team,” William continued. “It’s like a car. Mike, you’re the engine. Paul, you’re the transmission. Tommy, you’re the steering wheel. Brad, you’re the brakes, and Jennifer you’re the owner’s manual. I’m just the driver. Whether the car is just a pile of junk or a classic sports car depends on how well you work together.”

Jennifer stuck her fingers down her throat in pantomime of throwing up. Brad rolled his eyes. Paul remained motionless, but his stolid expression was just as much as an act of protest as Jennifer’s more obvious gesture. William ignored all their gestures and focused his gaze on Mike.

“Mike, what do you say?” William demanded.

Mike looked at Brad. He felt a rush of pride when William called him the engine, but he felt William was wrong about needing Brad. The brakes only slowed things down. Brad had gotten some of Mike’s favorite features removed, claiming that Mike didn’t “fully think about” them, but Mike respected William’s wisdom.

“O.K. I’m in,” Mike said and offered his hand to Brad.

Brad shook Mike’s hand like it was a dirty dishrag. William saw the gesture and scowled at Brad, “Did you fully think about that move, Brad?”

Mike saw a look of shame on Brad’s face and Brad returned the handshake. The people at the meeting clapped. They had a design. Now they had to turn their design into a working computer program.

Mike reverted to his old working habits of coming in at eleven and going home in the early hours of the morning. He didn’t do much at home except sleep. Sometimes, he played games on his personal computer, but he almost never programmed it. Work consumed all his desire and energy for programming.

As the deadline got closer, Mike felt the pressure build. It was not just his pride on the line this time; it was the company’s future. In the final two months before the deadline, Mike worked harder than he ever had in his life. He averaged four hours of sleep a night. As lack of sleep wore him down his loneliness became more acute. His only social outlet was eating dinner with the other programmers, but conversation alone could not satisfy the deep longings in heart. He wondered if he would sleep alone for the rest of his life.

One morning, he stopped at the receptionist’s desk and asked Robin for a date. Although he knew he looked grubby in his old T-shirt and ragged jeans, he picked that day to ask her because it was the only time he had the courage to go through with it. Robin turned him down.

The incident deeply embarrassed and humiliated Mike. He resented William and Jennifer for encouraging him to ask Robin out and he avoided talking to them for a few days afterward. But when he finally talked to them about the incident, they told him that they were proud of him for having had the courage to ask her. Their support made Mike feel better. After apologizing to Robin for making her feel uncomfortable, he no longer felt like a criminal when he walked past the receptionist's desk. Still, the episode made him resolve to shut the loneliness out of his mind by working even harder.

Nine days before Mike had to leave for New York, ThinkWrite II showed its first signs of life.

“O.K. people, starting tomorrow we have to debug it and test it,” William said like he was starting a cattle drive.

“That should only take a couple of years,” Brad said in his nasal monotone.

“Good job, Mike. You aren't lazy like most Americans,” Paul said to Mike, casting a meaningful look at Brad.

“Don't worry little brother,” Jennifer said to Mike. “What we can't fix, we'll document.”

“At least we'll have something to demo to Omar,” Mike said.

“Yeah we will,” William said, and a genuine smile crossed his face.

But as Mike lay in bed that night, he was seized by anxiety. He had made the first deadline, but he knew it was products not demos that would take Rosetta public. His mind entered a tailspin of doubt. How quickly could the bugs be fixed? What if the bugs weren't fixed before he left? Should he call his family and tell them he couldn't make it?

He had promised to attend his brother's wedding and he had promised Omar to have the demo ready before he left. He would keep both promises no matter what. He set the alarm for seven-thirty. Three hours of sleep were enough.

“How's it going?” William said as he knocked on the side of Mike's cube at ten o'clock the next evening.

“Not so good,” Mike answered.

“I know how you feel,” William said. “I remember doing the first version of ThinkWrite. For the first couple of months, it was just Omar and me. We worked in Omar's garage. I averaged about four hours of sleep a night. Omar kept encouraging me with that smile of his. It kept me going somehow. I guess I'd always wanted my father to smile at me like that. When Brad joined the company I was so relieved to have somebody to share the load with that I almost kissed him.”

“Did Brad work long hours back then?” Mike asked.

“No,” William laughed. “Brad went home at six-thirty, just like now. I complained to Omar, but Omar wanted Brad's experience to balance my youthful exuberance.”

“Who got hired after Brad?”

“Omar hired Arnie McManus as our first salesman. Only a month after shipping the first version, we were selling a hundred copies of ThinkWrite a week. Sales just went straight through the roof from there. Things got a little easier then. We hired a receptionist and some more people in sales and accounting. Customers starting calling in with questions and bug reports so we hired Jennifer to do the customer support and improve the documentation. Then we hired Paul and you to make sure that there was someone to fix the bugs that Jennifer recorded. You've been here since then.”

Mike loved listening to William's stories about Rosetta's early days. It was Mike's personal mythology.

“It's incredible how you deal with the pressure,” Mike said. “You never seem to show the strain.”

William smiled, “I have my outlets-“

“Like picking up girls,” Mike said. As soon as the words left his mouth, he remembered that he was speaking to his boss. “I'm sorry,” he said apologetically. “I'm just repeating the rumors.”

William laughed softly, “It's O.K., there's some truth in them. I don't want to live like a monk, and I don't want to settle down.”

Mike thought about what William was saying. He sounded like Carl.

“I know I've heard it before,” Mike said, raising one side of his mouth in a sardonic smile. “Women are all the same. Stay free for as long as you can. Right?”

“No,” William said with genuine indignation. “It's not like that at all. If my experience has taught me anything, it's that women are anything but all the same. It's not settling down that I'm opposed to. It's settling for a bad marriage that scares me.

Bad marriages are extremely easy to fall into. It happens like this. A person goes out on a date with somebody they're not really attracted to because he or she is lonely. They don't really have that much in common with their date, but they flirt a bit and it makes them feel good. They go out on the next date because it's better than sitting home feeling lonely. The person they're dating feels the same way about them. Pretty soon, these two people end up in a relationship neither of them ever really wanted.

After a while, they feel like they've invested so much that they have no choice but to get married. If I don't think a woman is right for me, I think it's easier to cut things off at the very beginning.”

William realized that he might be sounding too preachy. He stopped himself and looked at Mike.

“Speaking of marriage,” William said. “Don't you have a wedding to go to?”

“Yes, but I don't want to go. I don't want to saddle other people with these bugs,” Mike said. He pounded the desk and an angry tear of frustration formed in the corner of his eye.

“The whole team worked on the project. Those bugs are ours, not just yours,” William said.

“Omar will be mad if it's not done,” Mike said.

“Yeah, he will,” William said, “but that's my problem. You've done what you can. Go home, take a shower, and get on that plane. I don't usually give orders, but I'm giving one now. Don't miss your brother's wedding, not for this. I'll get Tommy to come in on Saturday and work on the bugs. Maybe he'll get really high at the concert he's going to tonight and the solutions to all our bugs will come to him in a vision.”

They both laughed. The knotted look of pain on Mike's face eased a little.

“That's the ticket,” William said. “Now you get your butt out of here and try to get some rest so you'll have some energy to enjoy the wedding. We'll take care of things on this end.”

Mike nodded reluctantly, “If you need any help. I'll be back in a week. Call me.”

“I will,” William said. “Now get out of here.”

William smiled as he watched Mike bolt out the door and listened to Mike's car screech out of the parking lot. When William was sure Mike was gone, he dropped himself into Mike's chair, took the keyboard, and sighed.