

8.

The next day, thoughts of the competing word processor returned to Mike's mind. He felt that if he talked to Hilton or Omar, they would patronize him and nothing would be done. Mike wished he had electronic mail, like Roger had at M.I.T., so he could talk to people without leaving the comfort of his computer. But Mike knew that if he wanted to have an effect on Rosetta's managers, he would have to write a memo. He had never written a memo in his life, but he decided it was time to start.

He began the memo with the words "If you're really interested in the quality of Rosetta's product, how about taking a serious look at the competition?"

Mike sent the memo to every member of the executive staff. When three days went by without a response, he shrugged his shoulders and decided to forget about trying to alert Rosetta's management. Mike smiled wryly to himself when he realized he was beginning to adopt Brad's cynical attitude. But the executive staff was not quite as deaf to Mike's warning as he thought.

Omar was on a business trip when Mike sent his memo, but when he got back he read the memo and took it seriously. Omar invited Mike to the weekly executive staff meeting to discuss its contents.

The prospect of attending the executive staff meeting intimidated Mike. Every week William, Omar, and the other executives disappeared inside Rosetta's boardroom for what appeared to Mike to be a secret and mysterious religious ritual. Now he was about to participate in it. He wished someone would give him a manual so he'd know what to do.

Since Mike arrived at the staff meeting five minutes early, he was the first one there. Being alone in the boardroom, with its leather chairs and large walnut conference table, made Mike feel out of place. The arrival of the other executives reinforced his feeling that he did not belong there. He realized he was the only person sitting at the table who lacked both a title and a suit. But more than anything else, it was the casual way the executives joked with each other that made him feel like a peasant at the king's table.

Omar called the meeting to order and asked Mike to read his memo. To Mike's embarrassment, his voice cracked as he started to read his memo, but by the time he got to the end, the mood of the meeting had changed from jovial to somber. Arnie McManus, Rosetta's Vice President of Sales, was the first person to react.

"Mike's definitely got a point," Arnie said. "The products Mike mentioned are being evaluated in some of my best accounts. My salespeople are grumbling a little. They survive on commissions, not stock options. I'm not worried, but I'm," Arnie paused, "concerned. However, I'm confident that with all the brilliant guys we've got around here, we'll come up with something." Arnie pronounced the last sentence with practiced optimism.

“Arnie,” Hilton said. “The concerns of your people are the top priority in our new design. Competing products are just a sign of a maturing market. We've got the installed base. Our customers will stick with us and come back for more. I wouldn't have left a billion dollar company if I didn't think Rosetta was going to become one. These competitors are just flashes-in-the-pan. Rosetta Software's long-term strategy will pull us through. Mike is a brilliant engineer, but with all due respect, he has absolutely no marketing experience.”

Mike wanted to respond to Hilton, but before he could find the words, William had started to speak.

“What long-term strategy, Ron?” William said. “This market is developing, not maturing. Personal computers have evolved so fast that features that were fantasies only two years ago are now standard equipment. We've got to be flexible if we're going to survive. Since it was Mike who sounded the alarm, I think he's the logical person to suggest a course of action, not the marketing department.”

Leon Pardis, the Vice President of Marketing, looked angrily at William and opened his mouth to respond, but Omar shot a silencing look at him.

“Mike, what do you have to say?” Omar asked gently. Then seeing the look of fear and worry on Mike's face, Omar said, “Don't worry about reprisals, I'll protect you.”

Mike suspected that Omar's promise of protection might not be as solid as he made it sound, but Mike was confident that Omar shared his love for technology and his respect for the technical ability of the competition. Even more, he felt he owed Omar the truth.

“Look, our competitors' products not only have features we don't have,” Mike said, his voice surprisingly steady now. “Some of these products are designed better from the ground up. My conclusion is that if we want to keep our market share, we've got to completely redesign our product.”

“And offend our installed base of existing customers?” Hilton cut him off.

“No, make them happy,” William said, taking back the floor. “That's a bunch of crap about our installed base. If our customers see a better product, they'll buy it. Mike's right, we have to do a total redesign of the product, and we don't have time to have endless meetings about it. We need a couple of people to go off on their own to come back with a brand new product.”

“I think you'd better leave product design to qualified professionals, not amateurs,” Hilton responded. “If you really want to know the reason we're in trouble, it's because your team didn't design ThinkWrite II correctly in the first place!”

The meeting was silent as Hilton looked around the room. He thrust his jaw forward, challenging someone to disagree.

Mike was angry, but ambivalent. He wasn't ready to start a fight in the staff meeting. He was composing a diplomatic answer in his mind when William spoke again,

"At least the product we produced sold well when it was first brought out," William said in deep slow voice, meeting Hilton's challenge. "It wasn't until the so-called professionals managed the current release that our products fell behind the competition."

William and Hilton stared at each other in the silence that precedes a fight.

"Gentlemen, that will be all," Omar said in a commanding voice that defused the silence. "Ron, William, I'd like you to each file separate reports to me by the end of the week. Mike, thank you for coming."

Mike gladly left the boardroom. The staff meeting continued without him.

Rumors of the war between Hilton and William spread quickly. As people took sides, Rosetta's engineering department quickly developed the atmosphere of an armed camp. But the dissension in the engineering department was not reflected in the stock market. On the strength of the latest quarter's increased profits and rumors of another stock split, Rosetta's stock reached forty dollars a share three days after Mike presented his memo to the executive staff.

On the Friday after the staff meeting, William's old team had dinner at the Li River to talk about the competition.

"You don't actually expect anybody to be concerned about something as trivial as keeping our product competitive?" Brad asked sarcastically.

"I certainly don't expect your hero to do anything," Jennifer said, making a sarcastic reference to Hilton.

"Stop whining both of you," William said. "This is where we find out if we're really capable of doing it right, or we were just in the right place in the right time. Let's try to come up with some positive ideas."

"We could design a new word processor that would kick everybody's ass," Mike said, spreading a napkin on the table and starting to draw.

The rest of the people craned their heads to see what he was doing.

"There's a bunch of people at a research lab in Palo Alto called Xerox PARC who are working on something called a window system. The key is this thing called a mouse that lets people think they're pointing inside the computer with their fingers. It makes a computer more like a video game than a typewriter. People who hate computers

don't need to remember weird commands or even read the manual. A window system is also better for the power user, because a window system uses a screen made up of lots tiny dots. These tiny dots can display pictures, diagrams, as well as different styles and sizes of type on the screen at the same time. It's called "wizzy-wig" editing, which is an acronym for 'what you see is what you get' because they spell 'wizywig' W-Y-S-I-W-Y-G."

Mike drew furiously on the napkin as he spoke, but when he looked up, he saw that his colleagues were struggling to understand his words. He decided to slow down.

"I guess wysiwig is easier to understand if you're Polish like me," he said half-apologetically. "The important thing about these editors is that they allow people to go beyond computerized typewriters and produce documents that are as pretty as fashion magazines. Since wysiwig editors have the same power as fancy typesetting equipment, they're sometimes called desktop publishing systems. If we could turn ThinkWrite into a desktop publishing system, I think it would really blow the competition away."

"That's all very well and good, but it will take a long time to design, much less implement," Brad said.

"I hate to agree with Brad, but he's probably right," Jennifer sighed. "Maybe we could write a really strong report instead."

Paul laughed, "Hilton's an expert at producing reports. We have to actually create something. That's the only way to fight him."

"We probably could do an initial design and create a demo that serve as a proof of concept," Tommy said.

"I agree with Tommy," Mike said. "If we're right, they'll have to listen and let us finish it. I still have faith in Omar."

"That's what the people in Jonestown said before they drank Jim Jones, cyanide-flavored Kool-Aid," Brad said in his most serious deadpan.

Mike wished he had a witty comeback to counter Brad, but he didn't.

"As usual, all of you are right," William said. "But even if we do a demo and a report, I have to tell you there's a high probability that Omar won't buy it. Still, I think we owe it ourselves to say we tried. Let's put together a demo and a report. I'd like everybody's help, including yours Brad."

"I'm up for it," Jennifer said, smiling unreservedly at Mike.

"Me too," Paul said.

“Sure,” said Tommy.

“O.K., let's get started,” William said.

Brad was silent. Everybody looked at him.

“If all you idiots are for it, I'll guess I'll go along,” Brad said.

They all clapped and cheered, drawing stares from the other people in the restaurant, which only served to further unite them as a team.

The little team tackled the project with furious determination. Omar made it clear that Hilton was not to interfere with William's team until the project was done. Hilton formed his own team to compete with William's team. Hilton's team worked in meetings. William's team worked alone in their cubes with “do not disturb” signs posted on them. Hilton's people got in before ten in the morning and left before seven. William's people usually came in after ten-thirty in the morning and stayed well into the night.

One night, on his way to get dinner from the vending machine, Mike ran into Omar.

“My wife and I are having a housewarming and get acquainted party Saturday night about seven. Why don't you and your lady love, Antonia, join us?”

Mike's was surprised that Omar knew about Antonia's existence. Mike's face registered his astonishment.

Omar smiled, “See. I'm not as out of touch as you think. I'm having some other people over for tennis at our country club before the party. You're welcome to join us for that as well.”

“No thanks,” Mike said. “I don't know how to play tennis, but I'll definitely be at the party.”

At ten thirty on Saturday morning, Ron Hilton and his wife, Crystal, arrived at the Longacre Ranch Country Club to play tennis. They were not playing tennis for enjoyment. They were playing tennis to survive.

Omar had just joined the country club. Omar's life had changed greatly since Rosetta went public and his net worth climbed to over twelve and a half million dollars in a single day. With the recent climb in Rosetta's stock, his net worth now exceeded ninety million dollars. Shortly after Rosetta went public, he'd gone back to Paris for the first time since coming to the Valley fifteen years ago. He visited the Algerian ghetto where he'd grown up, but his wealth made him uncomfortable. The tough kids on the streets no longer viewed him with respect, but as a target. Distant relatives who demanded money besieged him. He found himself feeling more comfortable

with the upper class Parisians that he grown up hating than with his own people. After two days in Paris, he registered under an assumed name at the Ritz.

He was sipping a Cognac at the bar and considering cutting his vacation short when he saw Nicole for the first time. He knew then that he had wanted her more than any other woman he had ever seen. She was nineteen and the daughter of a textile executive from Lisle. Nicole's father hated Omar because of his Algerian ancestry. Her father's disapproval only increased Nicole's passion for Omar. When she first saw him, she saw nothing but a well-preserved older man. When it was time for Omar to go back to California ten days later, Nicole was convinced that she could not live without him. They were married three weeks later in Omar's house in Silicon Valley. Now she was taming her Berber prince. She was teaching Omar to play tennis.

Although Omar played with all his strength and concentration, he and Nicole lost the first three sets. Ron and Crystal let them win the fourth.

"Pretty good for three weeks, no?" Nicole said kissing him.

"I'd say so," Crystal volunteered cheerily. "You're doing quite well with him Nicole. Isn't she perfectly wonderful, Ron?" Crystal chirped. "I think, I'll just go get a lemonade at the bar. Would you like something, Nicole?"

"I'll go with you," Nicole said not wanting to be in Crystal's debt.

As soon as the two women left, Hilton asked Omar if he had reached a decision on the product's direction.

"Both you and William have interesting proposals," Omar said.

"Mike's concepts may have some merit," Hilton said, "but that team can't turn concepts into products. There's something that I haven't shown you. Brad is the worst bug fixer in the department. I've compiled the statistics to prove it; he only fixes three bugs per week. With Mike generating bugs and Brad fixing them, I don't think you could ask for a worse combination."

"I always thought Brad was a pretty good bug fixer," Omar retorted with defensive surprise.

"Here are the facts," Hilton said. "My Quality Assurance Department has compiled the number of bugs generated and fixed by each programmer. That's why you need scientific software management. When you were running the company personally, you could adjust the organization to compensate for the deficiencies of individual programmers. With all due respect Omar, you couldn't afford to hire the right people, but now the organization's changed. You've got to look at the facts."

Omar thought for a minute, he felt like he was being manipulated, but if Hilton had facts, they had to be considered.

“Leave that report Ron,” Omar said.

“Certainly Omar,” Hilton said, as if he weren't expecting the question.

“Omar, you have such a wonderful wife,” Crystal said as she bought Nicole back from the bar. Omar smiled lovingly as he looked at Nicole.

Although Omar's house in Woodside was less than thirty miles from Antonia's apartment in San Jose, it took Antonia and Mike well over an hour to get there. The roads off 280 twisted and turned through the mountains. The laws of physics enforced the twenty-five mile per hour speed limit on Antonia's Volkswagen Rabbit. But the late summer afternoon sunlight playing through the branches of the madrone and redwood trees made the slow drive pleasurable.

“This is beautiful. It reminds me of when we met at the telescope,” Antonia mused reverently. She squeezed his hand and they drank in the beauty of the forest in silence.

Mike was initially disappointed by the apparent lack of grandeur of Omar's estate. The estate was made up of a group of ranch buildings nestled in a canyon. There was a stable, a barn, and in back of the barn, a small peach orchard that climbed up the hill. Between the barn and stable there was a building that appeared to be a simple one-story ranch house. The house was decorated with quiet modern European furniture and original art that took Antonia's breath away. But Mike was not impressed by the art. He was impressed by the way the house was designed, particularly the way the floor of the living room seemed to extend through an all glass wall to the panorama outside.

The scene was magnificent and the people were glamorously dressed, but the party was boring. Mike didn't understand why this gathering was called a party when it felt more like a meeting of distant relatives. The guests at the party, particularly the married ones, did not seem to be having a particularly good time. Most of the men clustered together and talked shop. Most of the women talked among themselves about the activities of their children.

The braver men tried to flirt with Antonia. She was uninterested and she quickly excused herself from conversation. She got two glasses of Dom Perignon, found Mike, took him by the hand, and led him outside. They walked off into the field beyond the lights of the house. They lay on their backs and looked at the stars.

“In the Bronx, you can't see more than ten stars on a good night,” Mike said. “I love being here. I love being with you.”

“It's nice to hear you say those things,” she said. “Sometimes when I call you at work, you sound like you don't want to even talk to me.”

He looked at her mouth as she spoke the words, but her eyes twinkled with love, excitement, and anticipation. She had never looked more beautiful. He tried to project how the lines of age would change her face and wondered if he would be happy waking up with her even then. He knew the answer was yes. A wave of blissful peace rolled through him. He knew his mind was made up.

“It's not that I don't want to talk to you,” he said. “It's just that when I get into work mode, I start to think like the computer. I just answer questions 'yes' and 'no', without any emotion. I'll try not to be like that when you call. Besides, now that I've made it, I don't have to work as hard. I want to dedicate my life to making you happy. I want you to marry me Antonia.”

The timing of the question surprised her, but its subject did not startle her. She looked into Mike's eyes and considered the man who had just asked her to be his wife. He was a patient lover and a good friend. More than that, in the two years she had known him, she had grown to deeply love and trust him. She thought, “I'm twenty-five. Do I really want to start over with somebody else? We practically live together anyway. He's kind, extremely bright, and he certainly doesn't lack a sense of direction. Maybe marrying him will give me some direction in my own life. It's certainly worth a try. If things don't work out, we can always get divorced.”

She looked at Mike again and gave him her answer.

“Yes, Michael Danzig, I will marry you.”

They embraced squeezing each other tight. When he felt the warmth of her mouth, he knew he had made the right decision.

Mike arrived at work on Monday morning basking in the glow of his engagement to Antonia. The spell was broken when William called a group meeting.

“I'll just spoke to Omar,” William said. “We've only got two weeks to prove this project is worth doing, otherwise the design proposed by Hilton's group will be adopted. That's not much time, but if anyone can pull this off, you can. You're true start-up people. I can't order you to work, but I know that once you decide to do something, you'll do twice the work of Hilton's engineers in half the time.” William looked around the room and saw that everyone's face was locked in solemn determination, even Brad's.

They all worked hard to make the deadline, but Mike made it a strict rule to leave by eight o'clock so he could see Antonia. When he had not finished his work the night before, he dragged himself out of bed at four thirty the next morning. Adhering to this punishing schedule didn't make him unhappy only tired. The image of Antonia's sleeping form sustained him throughout the day.

The tension mounted as the deadline approached, but on the day before the deadline, the demo was ready. They stopped working on the demo at seven the night



before the meeting. They didn't want to risk ruining everything they'd accomplished in a last-minute attempt to put in just one more feature. William suggested dinner at the Li River, but Mike declined because he wanted to eat dinner with Antonia. Brad Paul, and Tommy had also wanted to go home early, so William and Jennifer were the only two members of the usual Li River crowd who went to dinner that night.

"It feels strange to be here without everybody else," Jennifer said. "It's different from going out to lunch, but I can't exactly put my finger on the feeling."

"Sort of like the feeling of being on a date," William said, "with someone that you've wanted to go out with for a long time."

"You're impossible. You'll go after anything in a skirt," she said, using humor to camouflage her anxiety.

"That's not quite true," he said seriously. "Besides, you're special. I waited for the right moment."

"And you don't usually?" she said playfully.

"Not unless it's with the right woman," William said. "I wouldn't be saying this unless I were serious. We've been friends for too long."

Jennifer said nothing, but she searched his face, trying to determine the sincerity of his words.

He extended his hand to her. She wrapped her fingers around his. Her hands were warm with the chemical energy of a love long dreamed of, which was now on the verge of being fulfilled.

They sat and talked, bathing in the miracle of deep friendship turning into something more. Their food remained in front of them practically untouched.

"I could skip the rest of dinner. How about you?" William said.

She gulped and nodded. William called for the bill and they spent the rest of the evening satisfying a deeper hunger.

The following day, both William's and Hilton's development teams filed into a conference room to present their designs to the executive staff. Omar got up and made a small speech like a referee starting a boxing match. Omar signaled the beginning of the contest by turning on the overhead projector and asking William to begin. William stood up, went to the overhead projector, and turned it off.

"Instead of just transparencies and charts, we would like to demonstrate the type of revolutionary product that will keep Rosetta an industry leader. By using concepts developed at the most advanced research labs in the country, we've developed a

product that will allow us to regain the edge on our competition. The best feature of our proposal is that Ron's improvements can be included in our solution, but the reverse isn't true. Since Mike was the chief designer and implementer, I'll let him show it off."

Mike completed the demo without a crash, but it was obvious that many of the system's key features weren't implemented.

"Nice demo," Hilton said, "but you're a year away from a product. Besides, competing with those advanced labs is just pissing in the wind. I know I've been there," Hilton said with an air of self-satisfied disgust.

"Ron, this is a start-up. This isn't I.B.M.," William shot back.

"That's right. This isn't I.B.M. We aren't making a billion dollars in profits every quarter," Hilton countered smugly.

"I think we have a right to be proud of what we've done here," Omar said.

"I'm not saying that we don't have a right to be proud," Ron said and smiled at Omar. "ThinkWrite II proved that the great team at Rosetta Software would write the history of word processing. Our team is even stronger now, but we can't afford to let unprofessional methods of software development damage the future of this company." Hilton turned from Omar to give William a condescending look as he uttered this last phrase.

Hilton continued, "Contrary to popular belief among some engineers, marketing surveys have shown the features suggested by our task force are exactly the features that Rosetta's customers want. Our customers have shown a preference for function keys, making a mouse-based user interface, such as the one proposed by William's team, irrelevant," Hilton said with finality. "Consequently, a redesign of the product is not necessary. Now, I will present the details of our plan."

Hilton smiled and turned the overhead projector on again with a flourish.

Hilton continued his presentation, but to Mike's mind, Hilton's proposal was just a jumble of ideas and buzzwords that were simply calculated to win him points with the marketing and sales departments, and most of all Omar. After the presentation, Arnie McManus and Omar nodded their heads in solemn agreement. As Mike listened, he wished that they would stop talking and let him program. As the presentation continued, boredom and lack of sleep finally caught up with Mike. Hilton's droning voice acted like a lullaby. Mike found himself nodding off to sleep.

When Mike got to work the next day, he found Brad, Paul, and Jennifer in William's office with the door closed.

"Read this," William said, hand Mike a sheet of paper.

Mike took the paper from William's hand. It was a memo from Omar announcing his decision. The memo thanked both teams for their effort, but the meat was in the last paragraph, "I was originally going to let both efforts go forward in parallel, but after a careful review of the situation, I believe that Ron's team has a better design. The members of William's team will assist Ron's team in implementing their design."

"Well I guess we lost," Tommy said.

Everyone glared at Tommy, but Tommy only shrugged his shoulders and said, "Don't get mad at me. I'm only saying what we all know is true."

Brad nodded in agreement. "Well, it just goes to show if you do the right thing you get screwed," he said absently.

"Screw you. Screw all of you lame assholes," Jennifer said pounding the table as she erupted into angry tears.

William put his arms around her and whispered, "Jen, Jen, it's O.K."

The other members of the team exchanged glances of surprise as they realized what had developed between William and Jennifer.

Brad and Paul exchanged looks of disgust and despair. Mike felt that it was incumbent on him to act. Without saying a word to anyone, Mike left William's office, and with his lanky, determined stride, walked straight past Omar's secretary and into Omar's office.

"Mike! What the hell do you mean by barging in like this?" Omar demanded. "I expected more from you."

"Number one, the day I started you said your door was always open. Number two, I expected more from you. I love this company. You think it's just our egos, but I know the window system approach is the right way to go. I feel it in my bones."

Omar looked sternly at Mike and then his face softened. He was just a naive kid, but they'd come a long way together.

"Mike, I know you love this company," Omar said gently. "Most people here are just picking up their check, but there are still a small group of us who really care. That's why I want your input on every major engineering decision made in this company. I'm assigning you to Hilton's immediate staff as adviser for technology."

"I don't care about my position," Mike said with intense agitation. "I care about the product. The new product design is wrong! We're spending all this money creating a product that nobody's going to want to buy! Don't you see that Omar?"

“Mike, Mike,” Omar responded silkily. “If you and your little group want to work on the project on your own time during nights and weekends, I think that would be a top drawer idea. O.K.?”

He stopped arguing, not because Omar had convinced him, but because he knew Omar wasn't listening and just lying to get him out of his office.

That night, Mike lay in bed and told Antonia what had happened.

“Until this afternoon, I'd always had faith in Omar. I'd always believed that Brad's cynicism was just an excuse for not wanting to take the chance of giving Rosetta his best. Now, I find myself agreeing with Brad. It feels really awful.” “It's terrible, but what can you do?” she said. “It's the way of the world.”

“It may be the way of the world, but I'm going to do something,” Mike said.

Antonia had never seen this expression on his face before. His eyes were alive with the quickness of a football player finding a way through the tangle of potential tacklers.

“If I'm right about Rosetta's competitors,” he continued, “I can make several million dollars in the next three months. I was reading about 'put options' today. I never knew what any kind of stock option was until five years ago. Hell, I'm the first member of family ever to own a share of stock. Making thirty-five thousand a year was new financial territory for a Danzig.”

“What are put options?” Antonia prodded gently.

“It's a piece of paper that lets you make money when a stock goes down. The value of a put option based is on the difference between the 'strike price, of the option and the actual price of the stock.”

Antonia looked at him quizzically. He could tell she didn't quite understand.

“Let's say you buy a put option at a forty dollar strike price and one month later the stock goes down to thirty. The put option is now worth ten dollars. You've turned one dollar into ten in just one month.”

“So why doesn't everybody buy put options?” Antonia said.

“Because most of the time people lose money on put options,” Mike said. “If the stock doesn't go down in a short period of time, typically thirty days, the options become worthless.”

“Do you really think the stock will crash soon?” she said.

"I think so," Mike said simply. "If one of Rosetta's competitors becomes the new darling of the market, then Rosetta's stock will deflate. Right now, because of all the newspaper hype, everybody is sure Rosetta's stock can go nowhere but up so put options are really cheap."

Antonia nodded encouragingly, sensing that Mike needed to talk.

"It's a hell of a way to make money," Mike exhaled, talking to himself as much as to Antonia, "but I'm going to sell my stock and buy puts. If those people at Rosetta are too stupid to see the future, it's sad, but I certainly did my best to talk them out of it. If Hilton's right, and I lose money because Rosetta's stock continues to go up, well, I guess I deserve that too."

The next day, Mike sold his Rosetta stock for eight hundred and forty thousand dollars. He took fifty thousand dollars, and bought put options on Rosetta Software the next day. Two weeks later, an influential computer magazine reported that Rosetta had lost twelve percent of its market share to the competition, and Rosetta's stock dropped four points. A week later, Rosetta's stock lost another five points. By the end of the following week after that it had lost another three points. Each of Mike's put options, which he'd bought for an average of twelve and half cents each, were now worth over ten dollars apiece. Mike made four million dollars on paper in less than six weeks.

He was in a state of blissful shock, but he was calm enough to sell his options. Mike deposited the check and set money aside for his quarterly tax payment. He decided to spend some of the money on a house so that he and Antonia would have a decent place to start their life together. When Antonia and Mike looked at the real estate sections of the San Francisco Chronicle and the San Jose Mercury News to get an idea of the market, they found that they could afford neighborhoods they only used to dream about.

Antonia and Mike spent their lunches and weekends with their real estate agent touring the mansions and chateaus of Saratoga, Los Altos Hills, Woodside, and Atherton. At first, the real estate agent had thought Antonia and Mike were two kids playing a practical joke. But once she realized they were serious and solvent, they became her favorite clients.

When Omar noticed that Mike was the only one at the office who was not depressed during the stock's sudden slide, he asked Hilton to look into it. Omar was furious when he found out about Mike's purchase of the put options. Omar summoned Mike into his office. To Mike's disappointment, Hilton was also present.

"Mike, we're very disappointed in you," Hilton said.

"Ron, as a stockholder, I'm very disappointed in you for being more concerned with your own ego than the welfare of the company," Mike said.

Hilton's face contorted in ugly hate, but before Hilton could say anything, Omar banged his fist on the desk.

“What the hell gives you the right to buy put options in the stock of this company?” Omar demanded.

“The Constitution of the United States,” Mike replied.

“No it doesn't. It's called insider trading,” Omar said threateningly.

“No it isn't. My decision was based on my personal market assessment of the competitor's product, not Rosetta's official position,” Mike replied.

Omar's face was scarlet with rage.

“I said I'd make you rich and I did,” Omar said with a voice that had gone beyond anger into hate. “And this is how you show your gratitude. You're just an uneducated punk. Get out of my office. You're fired!”

Mike looked at Hilton who was smiling sadistically. Mike locked eyes with Omar and left Rosetta Software forever.