

11.

Mike felt sad and guilty leaving for work the next morning. He turned up the radio and aggressively drove the Ferrari down the twists of upper Moody Street. Driving the Ferrari made him feel confident and happy. It was a reassuring symbol that he was climbing the Silicon Valley ladder. William had moved up to Omar's level. Now, Mike was moving up to William's former level. Mike felt that if were able to climb up one more rung, he could get off the ladder and spend the rest of his life dedicated to Antonia and the children he hoped to have with her. "All I have to do is write one program," he repeated to himself. By the time he'd passed Foothill College five minutes later, he was ready to go to work.

William, Arnie, Derek, and Lloyd were already sitting in the small, undecorated conference room waiting to begin Kube's first executive staff meeting. Mike was glad he'd taken Antonia's advice and had worn a sport jacket instead of the jeans and T-shirt that he'd initially put on. The atmosphere of the staff meeting made him feel like he was a real vice president, instead of a programmer dressing up in his boss's clothes. William began the meeting by going around the table and asking everybody to talk about how they planned to build their departments.

Arnie said, "I can hire salesmen who can sell ice to Eskimos but they need to have something to sell when they get out there. Mike, I know you've got a demo. Do you have a rough idea when we'll have a product ready to ship?"

"I think we need to look a little more deeply at how we're going to define and position this product, before we decide when to ship it," Lloyd said, in a tone of casual wisdom. "I've seen the demo, but I'd really like to review the specifications. Once we've defined what we're going to do, then we can decide how long it's going to take."

"Lloyd's got a good point," Derek said gravely. "Focus is what separates successful companies from failures."

"That's all very well and good," William said, "but it all comes down to the fact that we all need to support Mike. He needs to hire some people so he can produce a well-defined, salable, quality product."

Mike didn't like being in the spotlight. Everybody's words sounded reasonable. In the design reviews and meetings he'd attended as a programmer, people took sides and argued. But here in the executive staff meeting, people seemed to have the peculiar talent of arguing by agreeing with each other.

Mike considered his answer. Although he was a vice president and a founder, he was still unfamiliar with the environment of the staff meeting and he wanted to be careful with his words. He said, "I'll give you a formal schedule in two weeks, but I'd guess it will take approximately six months if I can hire four people to help me."

Everyone murmured their approval and they discussed organization charts and sales forecasts for another half hour, but Mike had stopped listening. He was writing code in his mind. The code was clean, commented, and well-written code. He just needed to find a few dedicated hackers and ace programmers to make it happen and he knew exactly where to find them. When the staff meeting ending, he called his old buddies at Rosetta and invited them to dinner at the Li River. It was the best way he knew to bear the responsibility he felt for making the company succeed. After he hung up, he picked up his keyboard. It was great to be hacking code again.

As he left the parking lot at the end of the day, his heart swelled with a sense of pride that he had never known before. Kube was his company. No matter how wealthy Rosetta had made him, Rosetta was Omar's creation.

Three days later, Brad, Paul, and the rest of William's old team had dinner at the big round table at the back of the Li River. It was the first time they'd all eaten together since they'd planned their battle against Hilton.

“Some things you can always count on,” Mike said as he finished the last drops of the Li River's tasty hot and sour soup. The soup might be the same, but it was obvious to everyone that the mood was different.

“It's good to get together again,” Paul said decisively, in an effort to bring back the easy-going spirit of the old days.

“But that's not why you invited us to dinner, is it Mike?” Brad said.

“No it isn't,” Mike sighed. “I'd like to offer all of you jobs at the new company William and I have started. There's no Hilton and no bullshit. It'll be just like the old days.”

“I'm through with start-ups,” Tommy said. “I'd be happy to work for you as a consultant, but I want to be paid by the hour, not in stock.”

“Thanks for the offer,” Brad said dully, “but I have to think about it.”

“What do you have to think about Brad? You know what Rosetta's become,” Jennifer put in.

“So you still we should work there, even though you're not part of the company?” Brad asked Jennifer.

“Sure, why not?” she said with forced brightness.

“Just asking,” Brad said.

“Brad, we're offering you a job and you're acting like we're conducting the Spanish Inquisition,” William said in a tone laden with barely restrained anger and impatience.

Mike felt that William was pressuring Brad into joining Kube, regardless of Brad's feelings. Mike wasn't sure that he wanted to be a part of it. Mike was still hurt by Brad's absence at his wedding, but Mike still considered Brad a friend.

“Brad, you do whatever you want. I've got an opening. I just called the best people I knew,” Mike said derailing William's ploy.

“Thanks Mike,” Brad said.

After dinner, Mike walked back to his car and found William waiting there.

“I know you thought you were doing the right thing,” William said, “but you're leading a team now, not just programming. You can't always worry about being popular. You've got to recruit people, that means not taking no for an answer.”

“William, those people are supposed to be our friends, not pieces of meat. If Brad's happy at Rosetta, fine. Leave him alone.”

“You can't afford to be so naive,” William said. “You've got to push people into making decisions. No big company wants a start-up pushing in on their territory. Nobody wants Kube to succeed. Not Hilton, not Omar, and certainly not any other software company. Success is something you grab, not something that's handed to you. You can't be worried about what other people think.”

Mike remembered that Omar said almost exactly the same words about William's demotion. Mike could not help noticing the similarities, but he didn't want to hurt his friend's feelings so he said nothing.

When Mike woke up the next morning, William's words were still ringing in his ears. William was extreme, but he was basically right. It troubled Mike to think that Omar's proverb, “you have to grow as your company grows,” might be a polite way of saying “you have to learn to deceive and manipulate if you want to succeed.”

On the way to work, Mike decided to forget about hiring Brad. “After all, why should I be on William's case when it was Brad who turned me down.” Mike felt deserted by Brad. Brad was one of the best programmers Mike knew, and Mike wanted to build the best engineering team he could. He wished he knew some programmers who didn't work at Rosetta, and then he thought of Roger. He dialed Roger's number immediately.

“I'm hiring people for a new project,” Mike said. “It's a chance to get in on the ground floor of the personal computer industry,” Mike said, trying to make his voice sound as professional as he knew how.

"I'm flattered," Roger said, "but I still have another year and half to finish my master's."

"You realize these opportunities won't be here forever," Mike said.

"You're a pioneer. I'm a stuffy old Easterner. I like ivy and advanced degrees," Roger said.

"C'mon Roger. I've seen more changes out here in two years than in the eighteen years I spent in New York. Look, I'll offer you stock in this company. Whether your getting your master's or working at a start-up you're still vesting for a piece of paper. Think of it as diversification. You've already got a bachelor's degree, why not supplement it with some stock?"

"The same reason you went to another start-up instead of going to school," Roger said. "You've got your way. I've got mine. Look, I'm just a fat geek from the Bronx who's slaving his way through his own little torment that his parents have worked their whole lives to help pay for. If I went to work for you now and I don't make a million bucks, they would never forgive me, and even worse, I would never forgive myself."

Mike was disappointed that Roger turned down his offer. Mike wanted to tell his friend that he was making a mistake by being a slave to the system, but he recalled the previous evening at the Li River and he restrained himself. Nevertheless, Mike couldn't help losing respect for Roger. Mike dropped the subject and brought the conversation to a close.

Mike felt discouraged. It seemed that nobody wanted to work for him. He decided to complete his collection of refusals. He dialed Paul's number. To his surprise, Paul had decided to accept the job.

"I'm really glad you decided to work at Kube," Mike said. "I'll do my best to make sure that you made the right decision."

"I know you will," Paul said. "That's why I accepted the job. If it were just your company, I would have accepted the job right away, but I'm worried about William. He's changed. He's determined to make back the money he lost by not selling his Rosetta stock and he doesn't care what he has to do to get it. I don't blame him, but I can't trust him the way I used to. If I work at Kube, there's one condition, I only report to you."

"You have my word Paul," Mike said.

Paul's words troubled Mike, but Paul's acceptance of the job made Mike feel good about the company's future.

While Mike waited for Paul to start work, he made himself work on the specification with Lloyd. Mike's initial dislike of Lloyd slowly evaporated as Lloyd demonstrated his knowledge of software, but it bothered Mike that Lloyd used ThinkWrite to write the specification. Mike longed for the day when Kube's own product could be used. He promised himself that day would be as soon as possible.

Mike and Lloyd discussed the things that needed to be done, documentation, packaging, and Beta site testing. Lloyd formatted the schedule in the form of a Gantt chart, a huge diagram that lists all the tasks required to complete a project. By keeping track of the project's details, a Gantt chart allows a manager to determine whether the project as a whole is going to be late or not. As Mike studied the huge chart, the scope of the task started to overwhelm him, but he crushed his anxiety with a determination to prove that he could do anything that Omar and Hilton had done at Rosetta. But the Gantt chart also reminded him that if he were going to ship the product on time, he would have to hire more people, and fast.

Mike placed an employment ad in the local paper, the San Jose Mercury News. Lloyd advised Mike to put the ad in under "software engineers" instead of "programmers." Mike thought "software engineer" sounded silly, but if it made people feel better, what difference did it make?

The ads produced a flood of resumes, many of which were submitted by recruiting firms, who were nicknamed headhunters. The obnoxious persistence of the headhunters' letters and phone calls made Mike dislike them. Yet, he was so desperate to hire people that he felt compelled to at least look at their candidates.

Although Mike was deluged with resumes, only five of the candidates were worth interviewing. He eliminated three of the candidates when he talked to them over the phone. Of the two remaining candidates he interviewed, Jurgen Ganz was the only one who seemed really exceptional.

Jurgen was a short thin man of about forty. Jurgen had a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering. Since graduating, Jurgen had worked in many of the top academic centers for computer research. When Mike asked Jurgen if he would miss the comforts of corporate research, Jurgen smiled and said that after a career of publishing papers, he longed for the satisfaction of developing consumer products.

Still, Jurgen was not the perfect candidate. Mike would have preferred someone with more practical experience. Jurgen also demanded a salary that was higher than Mike's, but that wasn't as important to Mike as getting somebody in to help with the work. Mike had spent so much time writing plans and sorting through resumes that he had no time to do his own work. Paul was the only person at Kube actually working full-time on the product and the deadlines on the Gantt chart posted above Mike's desk were starting to make Mike feel desperate. Mike decided that the difference between the over one million shares that he owned outright and the twenty thousand shares that Jurgen would vest over four years would more than

compensate for any small difference between their salaries. Mike decided to offer Jurgen a job.

Mike was relieved when Jurgen enthusiastically accepted the offer. Jurgen's style of work was slower than Mike's, reminding Mike of Brad. But Mike respected Jurgen, and he was always eager to learn new ways of "doing it right." Mike respected Jurgen's education and experience. While Mike listened to Jurgen's recommendations seriously, he took great pleasure and being able to win a point in a technical argument.

Jurgen quickly filled out the team by recruiting two other programmers who had previously worked with him. Now that the team was complete, Jurgen, Paul, and the rest of the team set to work turning Mike's demo into a product. They worked long and hard. Mike tried to build the same atmosphere that had existed in Rosetta's early days by inviting the team for after work dinners. Although the conversation at these dinners was casual, they lacked the uninhibited intimacy of the after work dinners at Rosetta.

The artificiality of the conversations at these dinners made Mike feel inadequate about his ability to lead the team. William had worn the mantle of leadership at Rosetta with confidence. Mike felt like he was wearing that same mantle like a cheap suit. Mike looked to William for guidance. William advised Mike when he could, but William spent increasingly larger amounts of time preparing for the product announcement with Lloyd and visiting prospective customers with Arnie. William would only drop by to ask Mike if he was sure that the product would be ready on time. Mike would bite his lip and say, "I hope so. We're trying as hard as we can."

Mike tried not to bring the pressure and the resulting anxieties home with him, but he found it impossible to completely hide his emotions from Antonia.

"I've got to deliver a product in seventy-five days," he said as a way of explaining his exhaustion when he arrived home late one night.

"Do you think you can do it?" she asked, not knowing what else to say.

"I don't know," he said testily. "Why does everybody always ask me that?"

"Hey, I only asked you because I'm trying to figure out how to help you. I'm on your side, remember?"

He realized that she was right, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be sharp with you. It's just a sensitive point, that's all. Let's not talk about it anymore, O.K.?"

Antonia nodded and accepted his apology, but the stress of Mike's job was affecting her life too. Mike had kept his promise about playing Adventure. He dutifully made time and energy for Antonia, taking her dancing at least two nights a week, usually in San Francisco, which Antonia vastly preferred to San Jose. Although San Francisco

was the same size as San Jose, San Jose had the personality and therefore the nightlife of a small town. When Antonia danced in the clubs of San Francisco, she felt like she was throwing off the chains of the middle class suburban mediocrity that her parents had labored so hard to attain, but had never bothered to ask her if she wanted.

While Antonia loved the nights, the days were long. Her wealth and retirement isolated her from her friends. The last few times that she'd seen Tina, Antonia had been unable to say what was really on her mind. If she told Tina how happy she was with either Mike or the house, Tina treated it as bragging. If Antonia expressed unhappiness, Tina delivered a self-righteous sermon about the perils of wealth and materialism. Mike didn't get along with her extended family, and her mother only had criticism for her "decadent" lifestyle.

She'd tried to make friends with the neighbors, but they were mostly older, and even if they were nice, she had nothing in common with them. The wives all used "well" instead of "I" and seemed to depend on their husband's identity to define their own. Antonia did not want to become known primarily as the "wife of Mike Danzig." Yet, that was precisely what she saw was beginning to happen.

She would lay awake at night thinking about her future. The next day she would be so tired that she would have to take a nap in the afternoon. At night, the cycle would start all over again. She found that sleeping pills cured her insomnia, but when she found herself starting to take sleeping pills every night, she threw them out and suffered through a week of anxiety filled hell. She told herself if stopping were this hard now, it would be that much worse later. She knew that the real problem was that her days had no structure. She signed up for art classes at Foothill College. While she enjoyed the discipline of painting and sketching every day, it still wasn't enough. She wanted the company of the man she loved, but he had a mistress, and her name was Kube.

Three months after Antonia enrolled in art class, Mike demonstrated the preliminary version of Kube Complete. He was exhausted and happy as he put the demo through its paces.

"That's great!" Arnie said after the demo. Arnie shook his large gray head with respect. "It's just amazing how you guys can make computers do all this stuff."

Arnie played with the demo for another few seconds and then turned to Mike who was smiling with Arnie's infectious enthusiasm.

"Mike," Arnie said in a voice that indicated that he was about to reveal a piece of confidential information. "Since you gave me a present. I'm going to give you one. I've signed up Parker-Belmont as our first customer. They're one of the biggest firms on Wall Street. They're not famous, but they're old, quiet, and they have tons of money. They've got three hundred P.C.s that are perfect for this. If Parker-Belmont buys Kube Complete, it'll become a standard on Wall Street." Arnie's smile broadened even

wider as said. "But the best part is that they're the perfect company to help us go public."

William was beaming. Mike was ecstatic. The air was thick with dollar signs.

"So, when can we ship the product?" Arnie asked.

Mike went through the bug list in his mind, estimating how long it would take to fix each bug. When he arrived at a total, he added another twenty-five percent. The programmer's rule of thumb told him to add a hundred percent to any schedule, but compressing time was the strength of the start-up, especially when making a tight schedule was critical to the future of the company.

"Four months," Mike said firmly.

"That's a month too late. Isn't there some way that you could make it sooner?" Arnie supplicated.

"No," Mike said summoning up his resolve. He was going to do it right, and that meant holding the product until it was ready.

Mike drove home that night feeling good. He had stood for himself and better yet he'd reached his first milestone. Kube now had a demonstrable product. The company was really going to make it! It felt like an orgasm, only longer. Although it was only three o'clock, he decided to leave work and spend the rest of the day with Antonia. As he was leaving the building, he met Jennifer sitting in the lobby waiting for William. He stopped and tried to make small talk, but Jennifer's normally outgoing spirit seemed unusually subdued. He felt that there was something wrong, but he didn't want to ask her about it in the lobby. He asked her if she wanted to take a walk and she immediately said yes. They walked silently to the back of the parking lot. When Mike was sure that they nobody else could hear their conversation, Mike broke the silence.

"Are you O.K. Jen?" Mike asked. He looked deep into her eyes to emphasize the seriousness of his question.

"Yes. Yes and no," she in a slow distant voice. She paused and looked in his eyes. Then she said, "I'm pregnant."

Mike was surprised, but he said nothing. He was unsure how to react to Jennifer's news. He felt a surge of protectiveness toward Jennifer, but he did not know how to help her. He knew Antonia feared having a child before she was ready, but he did not know if Jennifer wanted a child or not. He was sure the child was William's, but he knew William and Jennifer had not been getting along too well, which made pregnancy a dubious blessing.

"What are you going to do?" Mike asked tentatively.



"I'm not automatically going to have a fucking abortion if that's what you mean," she screamed.

"Easy Jen," Mike soothed. "It was just a question. I didn't mean that you should. I just meant," he stopped for a moment to choose his words.

"I know," she interrupted him apologetically. "You meant that since we aren't married, you didn't know if I wanted to keep it."

"You could always bring the baby up by yourself. Lots of women are doing that these days," he said, trying to be supportive.

"Yeah, but it isn't easy. Oh, Mike," she said, starting to cry. "I don't know what to do. Maybe I should go back to Texas and forget about William, but I love him even though I know he doesn't love me. He's obsessed with that damn company of yours. I'm just something he uses to keep himself going so he can work harder."

"I'm sure he's not that shallow," Mike said, but in his own mind he wasn't so sure. Mike talked to Jennifer for another forty-five minutes. He managed to make Jennifer feel better, but during the conversation he made two promises to himself. First, he would confront William. Second, he would treasure his own wife and let her know how much he loved her. He was going to make sure he showed appropriate gratitude for the quadruple blessing of being rich, young, in love, and living in California.

The feeling lasted as he drove home in the Ferrari. The golden evening light bathed the trees and houses in a warm glow. He took a shower and they ate a light dinner on the deck. Looking at Antonia's face across the table made him feel wonderfully peaceful. He loved the way her hair framed her face. He loved her voluptuous body, but most of all, he loved to watch her face move when she talked. He watched her lips make the sounds of the words. He knew every mole and defect of her face, but the defects made him love her even more. He was sad when she was sad. He was happy when she was happy. He wanted so much to see the same closed eyed, smiling face he saw when they were making love. He kissed her lightly, but with as much love as in the height of passion. To make the mood last, they decided to go dancing at the Jet-Age, their favorite club in San Francisco.

He wound the Ferrari up to a hundred and thirty on the deserted portions of 280 as he drove to the City. When they got inside the club, they heard the first notes of their favorite song. Mike and Antonia joined the other couples on the dance floor who were sweating away in syncopated erotic movement. They danced until their sides hurt, had a drink, and danced some more. After two hours, they were both pleasantly tired and they decided to leave.

"That was fun," Mike said as they left the club. He felt the tingle of the sweat cooling his body as he hit the cold San Francisco night air.

“Yeah,” she said exhaling clouds of cold steam, “It's important to have fun.”

Mike shrugged and opened the door of the Ferrari. He agreed that fun was important, but the anxiety and guilt caused by slipping the schedule had left him less enthusiastic than he'd been when he'd left the office.

“You think you know everything, don't you?” she said mockingly.

“Not really. You're the one who thinks it's important to have fun. How can you prove that?” he said, returning the challenge.

“In terms that you'll understand,” she said, picking up the game.

“Yeah. In terms that I'll understand,” he said.

“Well, look at the history of this town and this state. In the 1840s, a bunch of guys, probably at least as greedy and crazy you are, crossed the country, and went into the Sierras and found gold. What did they do with money from the gold mines? Save it. No way! They went to San Francisco in search of liquor, women, and a good time. That's why the money is here in San Francisco, not up in the Sierras. Is that an answer in terms you understand?”

“O.K., but if you understand this so well, why don't you make money out of this new gold rush?”

“Because I'm too busy having fun,” she said and turned up the car's radio.