

12.

Getting Parker-Belmont as a customer improved morale at Kube. The billions of dollars in net worth at the back of the business plan seemed like a realistic goal again. But the pressure to release the product became even more intense than, before.

The engineering team worked hard to finish the product. The complexities of the three component parts, the word processor, spreadsheet, and database were difficult enough, but getting them to work together was harder than any of them had imagined. Paul spent ten to fourteen hours a day in front of the computer. But Jurgen and the programmers he bought with him were often unwilling to work the long hours that characterized Rosetta's early days.

"The important thing is to use your time efficiently," Jurgen would say when Mike would push him to work on Saturday afternoon instead of taking hikes in the mountains.

At first, Mike tried to coax the team into putting long hours, but when the schedule continued to slip, he demanded that they stay late whether they grumbled or not. As Mike went from trying to be one of the boys to being a manager, he felt the weight of command grow heavier.

Since Mike had done the original prototype, everyone came to him with his or her questions. He remembered how he'd longed for such respect when he'd started and working at Rosetta. Now, answering questions was simply one more thing to do.

Arnie and Lloyd added to the stress, by constantly asking for new features. Mike knew his resources were being spread too thin. He wanted to hire more programmers, but the two million dollars that had seemed almost infinite eight months ago had become a finite one and half million. They were still not even in Beta and the monthly expenses were continuing to go up. The Gantt chart on his office wall silently mocked him as he missed milestone after milestone.

Mike tried to follow Antonia's advice to have fun, but after twelve hours of work, having fun was just as much of an effort as working. He wondered if it was possible to have a balanced life and a successful start-up. He decided to consider the question after the product shipped.

A week before the deadline, they barely had three quarters of the items on the bug list crossed off. Worse still, further testing had revealed new bugs, which had to be added to the list. Mike wished Brad were on the team. He wondered if the product would pass Hilton's Q.A. When he took a hard look at the bug list, he knew the answer was no. Hilton was a slimeball, but he was right about Q.A. Mike knew the product wasn't ready for Beta.

Jurgen consoled Mike as he prepared to go into the staff meeting to deliver the bad news.

“Those people don't understand engineers, but you do,” Jurgen said.

Mike smiled. He appreciated Jurgen's support.

Paul looked at the tension on Mike's face as he prepared for the meeting. Paul said, “Don't worry, we'll get something out. We've been late before. We always ship the product out and that's what matters.”

His resolution steeled, Mike went to the staff meeting and delivered the bad news. The other members of the executive staff were silent after Mike made his announcement.

Arnie looked concerned, and then laughed.

“Mike, what are you worried about? A few bugs?” Arnie asked. “We'll call it an early Beta release. Can't we just ship it with a few bugs and fix them later?”

“No,” Mike said. “That's not the right thing to do.”

“There's more to doing it right than engineering,” Lloyd said. “We've got to get something out soon or we'll miss the market window. If that happens, it won't matter how good the product is.”

Mike thought about mentioning how Lloyd's insistence on more features hadn't made the task any easier, but he kept his mouth shut and looked to William for support.

“Mike, I understand about the bugs, but we just don't have the time,” William said. “At Rosetta, I did the first version of ThinkWrite in six months with computers that had only four thousand bytes of memory. You remember the first version of ThinkWrite wouldn't even really run on a P.C., but it put a stake in the ground and Rosetta was able to grow its market from there.”

William knew from the tense look on Mike's face that Mike was close to his breaking point. William changed his approach.

“What's the minimum amount of time you need to put the product in Beta?” William said. His voice was soft and soothing.

“I'm not sure,” Mike said, beginning to feel ashamed.

“I don't think Mike's ready to commit to a deadline,” Derek, the Chief Financial Officer, said. “Quality is the most important for the long term health of the company. I have been through this many times. I think waiting is the right thing to do. Andy Newfarmer will provide more money if it is necessary.”

Derek rarely spoke much at staff meetings so his words carried weight.

Arnie sighed, "I'll call Parker-Belmont and start tap dancing. Can I give them even a tentative deadline?"

Mike sighed and said, "Sixty days."

Three weeks later, Mike finally got his first decent night's sleep since he'd agreed to the new deadline. Antonia looked at Mike's sleeping form. She knew she had to wake him up, but she hated to do it. She appreciated how valiantly he'd been trying to make time for her after working an eighty- or ninety-hour week. She had to shake him hard before he came to consciousness.

"Huh? What time is it?" Mike said as he slowly emerged from his dreams.

"It's eleven o'clock," she said.

"Eleven o'clock! Oh my god, I slept through the meeting."

"I called work," she said. "I told them that you'd be late. You were working until three last night. You need sleep. You're not looking too good."

"Not looking too good?" he said sharply, as he jumped out of bed. "It's no wonder. Between that job and you, I'm being pulled apart."

"Well, I'm sorry that I care about you and I want to spend time with you. I should be glad when you leave every morning, so I can start partying," she said sarcastically.

"Damn it! This is serious. I have a meeting with Parker Belmont," he said rushing to bathroom to start the shower.

"Oh, I don't know why I care. Go," she said slapping her hands on her thighs.

He didn't know what to do. He was angry. He was sorry. He was late. He showered, shaved, slipped on his clothes, and jumped into his car. He thought about the situation at Kube as he cut corners and ran lights. He pulled into the parking lot at five minutes to twelve. When he got to the conference room, the meeting with Parker-Belmont was just ending. William glared at Mike as he walked into the room.

"Sorry I'm late," Mike said.

"I was just telling the boys from Parker-Belmont here that you were in until three this morning taking care of their account personally," William said in a jovial tone. The meeting resumed, but Mike and William remained diplomatically tense.

After the people from Parker-Belmont left, William and Mike went back into the conference room. William closed the door.

“What the hell do you mean by pulling a stunt like that?” William bellowed.

“Hey, it was a mistake. I'm sorry. I've been stressed out lately,” Mike said excitedly.

“Stressed out, eh? Got problems at home? Why don't you just make it easy on yourself and just let Antonia make you do whatever she wants?” William taunted.

“Leave Antonia out of this,” Mike said in a tightly controlled voice.

“I'm just calling it the way I see it,” William said evenly. “You get one thing, you give up something else. It's up to you whether you're getting is worth what you're giving up. If your wife is more important than your job, that's O.K. I'm your friend. All you have to do is just tell me, but if you're going to accept the responsibility of leadership, then take it seriously.” William's voice was rising now. “People are counting on us. People who need that paycheck to keep themselves alive. Not people who live in Los Altos Hills and do this as a hobby!”

Mike felt the rage boil up inside him, but his normal impulse to check it wasn't there.

“Up yours,” Mike said. “I was here at three o'clock in the morning, where were you? Don't tell me about our friendship. I remember when we fought Hilton together. Now you're giving me the same bullshit he used to give you. You used to be a good boss. I used to like to work for you. You used to care about people, now your girlfriend is pregnant with your child and you don't even give a shit.”

“I can tell you're still sore,” William said. “I guess you've got a right to be, but it's important that we stick together.”

Mike had heard those words from William before. Then he'd believed them, but now he felt they were self-serving lies.

“Stick it somewhere else,” Mike said.

“Give me a break,” William pleaded. “I'm trying to be nice.”

William's attitude made Mike feel that he wasn't being fair so he said, “I'm listening.”

As William considered Mike's words for, the scowl on his face slowly changed to a sardonic smile. “I suppose that there's truth in what you're saying,” William said. “I guess when you move up the ladder, your whole perspective changes. When I was at Rosetta, I used to be able to not take things so seriously because success or failure was always Omar's problem. I always felt I could walk away if things didn't work out. But now things are different. Instead of having the freedom to walk out, I have the responsibility to stay and make this company succeed.”

“I won't lie to you. Part of that responsibility is to myself,” William continued. “I feel like Kube is my last chance. At Rosetta, I knew there would always be another start-up, but now I feel like it's now or never. The Valley's closing up, I can smell it. It's more than just the recession. Computers are becoming big business, and in a few years there just won't be any opportunities for new start-ups.”

“Even more important than the responsibility I have to myself is the responsibility I have to you and everybody else who's involved with the company. Despite what you say, I realize that I also have an obligation to Jennifer. But these responsibilities have put tremendous pressure on me, and pressure is an emotion that can be as strong as love. I admit that the pressure has changed me, but I resent the Comment that I'm just like Hilton. I'm not. Hilton definitely would have interfered with your design process, but I've left you alone.”

Mike was unmoved by William's speech. He felt that William was trying to manipulate him with guilt. Mike didn't buy it, but he decided to let it pass. He didn't want to argue any more. It wasn't going to make the product ship any sooner. He went back to work.

After Mike tore out of the house that morning, Antonia sat at the kitchen table in the breakfast nook sketching with a piece of charcoal. Despite Mike's hysterics, she was feeling good. Her body was satiated from her morning work out. The Blue Mountain coffee smelled wonderful. But an hour after she finished her workout, she felt the familiar boredom and malaise start to sneak up on her. She decided to cheer herself up by going shopping.

She drove to Stanford Shopping Center in the brand new Mazda RX-7 coupe that Mike had given her for her last birthday. Antonia's spirits brightened as soon as she parked her car at the mall. She went into her favorite store, I. Magnin's. When she'd been single, the store was far too expensive for anything except window-shopping. She saw a wonderful black sequin evening dress and decided to try it on just for fun. She was just leaving the fitting room when a woman's voice with a thick Irish brogue said,

“Oh that's a nice one. It's a pity you saw it first.”

She turned around to see a strikingly attractive woman in her mid-twenties with perfectly straight platinum blonde hair.

“You can have it,” Antonia offered. “I wasn't going to buy it.”

“That's O.K.,” the woman said. “It would spoil my day. If I find something then I have to go home early.”

Antonia laughed involuntarily.

The woman smiled broadly and extended her hand to Antonia. "Shevaun Hart," the woman said. "Glad to make your acquaintance."

"Antonia Danzig," she said, automatically returning the greeting. The warmth of the woman's smile inspired Antonia to be friendly. "Maybe I should let you have it, then I won't have to go home either."

They both agreed to leave the dress and have an espresso and a piece of pastry at an outdoor cafe in the mall. Conversation and laughter flowed easily between them. Shevaun told Antonia that she'd been born in Ireland and that she'd met her husband, a successful California real estate developer, while she was working as a stewardess. He'd asked her for a date and married her three weeks later.

"That sounds very romantic," Antonia said.

"It was at the beginning," Shevaun said, "but I think he wanted something to show off at parties and screw him four times a week."

Antonia was shocked, "You sound like you don't love him anymore."

"Love is a word with many meanings," Shevaun said. "I take it you're still in love, with your husband."

Antonia felt an involuntary smile come to her face as she remembered cuddling with Mike. "Yeah, I guess I am. We still have a good time together, especially when we go out dancing."

Shevaun talked about how the club scene in Europe, particularly in London, was much more raucous and exciting than the club scene in the United States. As Shevaun talked, her recollections became more personal. Antonia sensed that while Shevaun was probably a person who got along easily with almost everyone, she was not somebody who often revealed her true feelings, especially to strangers. Antonia felt a kinship with Shevaun because they were both rich, attractive, newly married women who found themselves isolated by the very characteristics that made most people envy them. The more Antonia and Shevaun talked, the more their intimacy grew. Antonia had not realized just how much she had missed the company of a friend until now.

Mike sat in his office looking out the window. His argument with William had left him too upset to work. He felt proud of himself for standing up, but his pride was tempered with uneasiness. The two people who he cared about most in the world had just told him he was letting them down. Mike walked back to his office trying to synthesize what had happened to him in the last few hours. He'd made a promise to Antonia not to let work consume him and he'd done his best to keep it. He'd also made an implicit promise to William and the rest of the people at Kube to make the company successful. How was he going to keep both promises? Which was more important? He wanted to say that his promise to Antonia was more important, but

there was too much internal conflict. He tried to put the conflict aside, but it stayed with him all day.

Paul came into his office with a question around dinnertime. After Mike answered Paul's question, they drifted into casual conversation. As the only married programmer Mike knew who worked a full start-up day, Paul had a natural understanding of the conflicting pressures that ruled Mike's daily life. Mike was glad Paul was working at Kube. He suggested that they grab a bite at the Li River before continuing their work. Paul readily accepted. As they got ready to leave they ran into William.

"Do you mind if Jennifer and I join you guys for dinner?" William asked.

Mike was still angry with William, but he said yes for Jennifer's sake.

"I have some news," William announced in a deep voice as they sat down to dinner.

"Please, no more announcements about business," Mike said.

"It's not about business. It's personal," William said looking at Mike with mock condescension. "I've asked Jennifer to marry me, and she's accepted. I'd like to give special thanks to my partner and friend, Mike Danzig for pointing out certain priorities in this matter."

Mike beamed, "Congratulations." He got up and shook William's hand. He hugged Jennifer and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm really happy for both of you," he said.

Paul got up and hugged both William and Jennifer in a rare display of physical affection.

When the check arrived, Mike realized he'd not called Antonia to tell her he would be late. Rather than call, he paid the check and rushed home. When he walked into the house, he realized that he'd picked the wrong night to be late. In the dining room, there was a beautifully prepared candlelight dinner for two. The candles were burned down halfway. Antonia stood in the living room wearing a Halston strapless black dress looking extremely sexy and extremely angry.

"Where were you?" she snapped. "I tried calling you at work, but they told me you'd already left. That was two hours ago!"

"I'm sorry I didn't call," Mike said. "I had dinner at the Li River. It was a last minute thing."

"You had dinner too! That's great. Just great," she nodded her head in fury as she spoke. "What about my dinner? Not only did I make it for you, but also I let it get cold waiting for you. My first thought when I heard your car was to warm it up for you. Just like my mother used to do every night for my father."

Mike didn't know what to do. He felt ashamed, but he also felt that her anger was unjustified. He wanted to tell her that she was being unfair, and that he had obligations to other people that were just as important.

Mike was overcome by a combination of exhaustion, confusion, and defeat. He'd never felt so frazzled. He tried to please everyone, but he ended up feeling like he'd betrayed everybody, most of all himself.

"I'm sorry I missed dinner," he said. "I didn't know you made dinner or I would have come home earlier. I didn't go to the Li River primarily to eat. I went there to be with William and Jennifer as my friends. It's something I don't get to do much anymore. We went through a lot together and they're getting married. I just wanted to savor the moment."

"Savor the moment," she repeated with sarcastic malice. "Why didn't both of you go to the men's room of that filthy restaurant and give each other blow jobs, or should I say have a ménage a trois, if you wanted to savor the moment?"

His guilt turned into resentment. He'd made an honest mistake. He hadn't gone to the Li River to hurt her, and certainly not to cheat on her. He tried to find something conciliatory to say, but his mind only thought of self-justifying comebacks. He wanted peace and love. He'd had enough anger for one day.

He stared at her trying to find the words. What she interpreted to be his "silent treatment" enraged her further. She waited for him to answer.

He knew he should say something, but he also knew that if he said what was on his mind that things would only get worse.

When a few more seconds had passed and he still hadn't said anything, she said, "If that's the way you want it, fine." She stormed out of the living room, marched to the bedroom, and slammed the door behind her.

Mike stayed up long after Antonia had shut off the light and gone to bed. He was too upset to sleep. It was their first real fight since they'd gotten married. He was so shaken that he couldn't think of anything else. He wanted to play Adventure, but he didn't want to damage the relationship further by breaking his promise, not yet anyhow. A little after five o'clock in the morning, Antonia found him sleeping in front of the TV. They instantly apologized to each other and made love. When they were finished, they lay in bed feeling completely drained of both anger and passion.

"I really am sorry," Mike said.

"It's not the coming home late or even the dinner," she said in a calm, flat voice. "You promised me when you started this company that you wouldn't let it consume you. You've kept to the letter of that promise, but not to its spirit. I sit around here and ask



myself, Antonia, what are you doing with your life? Nothing. Just sitting around waiting for some guy to show up. My mother spent her whole life doing that and where did it get her? To be a lonely, bitter old woman. I'm sorry I keep talking about my mother, but for women of my generation our mothers were significant in a way that I think it's difficult for a man to appreciate. For a man, the American Dream means having more money than his father, but for a woman, it means having more freedom than her mother."

Mike felt genuine empathy with Antonia. He said, "I know. I try not to work any harder than I have to, but just hold on a little while longer. The product will be done soon and then I'll be free to spend all my time with you. Your happiness is very important to me. I try very hard to make you happy. I may not succeed very often, but I do try."

"You make me very happy," she said as she snuggled up on his shoulder. "You've given me so much. I want to give you something. I want to show that there's so much more to life than working at computer companies." She yawned and smiled. "Just thinking about computers makes me sleepy."

The warmth of her sleepy body made him feel whole. He thought about his day and about how he'd felt pulled apart. Was work worth risking the love of a beautiful woman? His hand on the back of her nightgown told him no. In the last moments before drifting into sleep, he decided to take her for a vacation in Paris. It would give him time to shut out the world and rebuild his relationship with her.

Three weeks later, Antonia and Mike drove to San Francisco to attend William and Jennifer's wedding. The wedding was held in a small Episcopalian church in San Francisco. Mike and Jennifer looked genuinely happy as they exchanged vows. Jennifer was an unconventional bride in her maternity bridal wedding dress, but her pregnancy added to her looks by filling out her slim figure and rounding the angles of her face. William cut a dashing figure. His black tux and white tie was well-tailored to his health club body.

The reception was held at the St. Francis Hotel. The reception had an atmosphere of warmth. Antonia and Mike sat at the head table with the bride and groom.

"Thanks for the wedding present, old buddy," William said to Mike.

"I'm glad you liked the painting," Mike said.

"I'm not talking about the painting. I'm talking about shipping Kube Complete to Parker-Belmont," William said warmly. "I'm proud of you partner. You've renewed my faith in the miracle of the start-up."

"I'm glad you're happy," Mike said, but his voice lacked enthusiasm. He was worried that he'd shipped the product too early, but he felt that there had been no other alternative. Arnie said they would lose the customer. William said they that if they waited too much longer they would run out of money. Jurgen refused to give his

opinion, saying that it was not his decision. Derek had also backed away from the decision, claiming he was non-technical. In the end, Mike had decided to ship Kube Complete to Parker-Belmont, but the decision made him uneasy and he watched the customer support line like a nervous cat.

Jennifer asked Mike to dance. Mike was conscious of Antonia's eyes on him as he danced with Jennifer. The way Antonia looked in her low cut blue evening gown, he longed to tell her that she didn't need to be worried about competition. Mike was happy for Jennifer, not hot for her. Mike knew how much she loved William. He was glad to see that William was giving Jennifer the affection and attention she'd wanted for so long.

“Good luck, big sister,” Mike said as they danced.

She reached out and hugged him close, “Thanks, little brother. Thanks for everything. Most of all, thank you for being a friend. Whatever may happen in our lives, I want you to know you'll always have that.”

“Thank you,” Mike said gently. Unlike the gratitude he'd received from William, Mike had no mixed feelings about accepting Jennifer's thanks.

Mike returned to his seat. He saw that Brad danced the next dance with Jennifer. He'd seen Brad at the church, but Mike didn't know if he wanted to speak to Brad or not. Mike decided to see how Brad behaved toward him. When toasts were made to the newlyweds, to everyone's surprise, Brad stood up.

“Most of us in this room have experience with new ventures, both successful and unsuccessful. I have worked with my share of people in this Valley. Most of them are scumbags,” Brad said. Mike remembered his ex-wife jokes and he wished Brad hadn't stood up in the first place. Mike inhaled deeply as Brad continued, “But Jennifer Muller is the most honest and humane person I have ever worked with. It fills me with hope for the Valley and the world that her genes and her love will be passed on to the next generation. Please join me in raising a glass to the union of Jennifer Muller and William Shoemith.”

The room was silent and then someone cried out, “To Jennifer and William,” and the room broke out in tearful applause. Mike went up and shook Brad's hand. For the first time since Mike had known Brad, Brad smiled at him.

Ten days after William and Jennifer's wedding, Antonia and Mike were on their way to Paris. Overcoming his last minute doubts about going had not been easy for Mike. After a few days of no communication, Parker-Belmont began to report a steady stream of bugs.

Some bugs were easy to fix, but many others were hard because they revealed basic design problems. Mike and the rest of the programming team were angry because many of the bugs that Parker-Belmont reported had been identified before the

product was released for Beta test. Arnie had promised to prepare Parker-Belmont for the presence of these bugs, but he obviously hadn't.

The engineers were annoyed because Parker-Belmont had been properly warned about the bugs and Arnie was annoyed because the bugs were there. As usual, Mike was caught in the crossfire. When Mike was working with his programmers, he tried to explain William and Arnie's motivations. When he was at the executive staff meetings, he tried to explain the programmers' point of view. He didn't make much progress with either side. He was afraid to leave with the situation so volatile, but Antonia was his wife and she came first.

Jurgen had eased his mind by saying he would watch the fort, but Paul had made Mike doubt Jurgen's intentions.

"You'd better watch Jurgen," Paul said. "He's got an elbow with your name on it."

Mike said, "You're being paranoid, Paul. The other people on the executive staff feel more comfortable socializing with Jurgen because he's got more in common with them than I do. Jurgen's over thirty and he went to college. If Jurgen does a little brown-nosing, as long he gets the product right, I'm not going to worry about it."

An inner voice told Mike that he should be worried, but another voice told him he had a plane to catch.

Mike squeezed Antonia's hand as the Concorde's powerful engines lifted them off American soil and sent them on their way from New York to Paris. They had stopped in New York so Antonia could finally fulfill her dream of seeing Manhattan and its art museums. At Mike's insistence, they had limited their interaction with his family to a one evening visit.

She had loved the stopover in New York, but for Mike it was one last duty he had to perform before his real vacation could start.

As Mike watched the coast of the United States drop away, he told himself to forget about his anxieties, but he couldn't quite do it.

"I'm a fraud," an inner voice said. "My software's no good and my company's going to fail. Here I am frittering away my money. I might as well enjoy it because I'm not going to have it for very much longer."

Mike ordered a scotch and soda from the stewardess. He took a long gulp. He didn't want to listen to that voice today.

Antonia and Mike explored Paris with the delight of small children. They saw the tourist attractions, the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and the Left Bank. They loved them all, but the place that moved Mike the most was the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Mike had not given much thought to religion since leaving St. Luke's, but from the moment he entered the huge cathedral, he was overcome by its spirituality. The cathedral's heavy stone walls shut out the bustle of the city outside. The ethereal sunlight coming through the stained glass windows, and the quiet reverence of the people praying inside gave Notre Dame a sense of genuine holiness that he'd never felt at St. Luke's or in any church he'd attended in the United States. He could feel that the people who built Notre Dame believed deeply in what they were doing. He thought about the engineers of Silicon Valley. Would they leave a Notre Dame? Technically, developing software was more complicated than constructing a cathedral, but software development seemed to be increasingly devoid of divine inspiration. He compared the spirit of Notre Dame with the empty rhetoric of St. Luke's. He felt the computer revolution was losing its soul in the same way, but like everything else about computers it happened faster.

Paris was fun as well as serious. Mike took Antonia to a haute-couture fashion show at Worth's and bought her a hand-beaded dress for a ridiculous price. It was her Ferrari. Mike was surprised that almost all the other people at the fashion show were women from Kuwait and other small countries on the Persian Gulf. At night, Antonia and Mike went out to splendid restaurants and got deliciously drunk on wine that always seemed especially made for whatever they were eating. Antonia, who had studied French for only three weeks, picked it up easily from her Spanish and Mike found that he had remembered most of the four years of high school French that he thought he'd forgotten.

On their last night in Paris, they went to a nightclub. The staff let them stay and dance for a half-hour after the club closed. As dawn broke over the city, they walked back to their hotel happily drunk. The background smell of uniquely Parisian pollution was slowly overcome by the smell of baking bread.

"This has been the best vacation of my life," she said. "Thank you for taking me."

"It was my pleasure," he smiled. "I've had a great time too. The only dark spot is the thought of going home tomorrow. I'm sure nothing's changed at work while we were here."

"Maybe nothing will change for you, but it will for me. I've made a decision," she said. "Paris has shown me what I really want to be."

"What's that?" he said, temporarily sobered by the seriousness of her words.

"I'm going to be an artist," she said. "When I get back I'm going to sign up for courses in the San Francisco Art Institute. Paris has inspired me to spend my life making beautiful things."

"That's a great idea," he said. "Your paintings could hang in the Louvre one day."

"I'll be happy if I'm ever good enough to be shown in a local gallery, much less the Louvre," she said, "but enough serious stuff. Kiss me you fool."

Twenty-eight hours after leaving their Paris hotel, they arrived at their house in Los Altos Hills. They were exhausted but completely happy. They'd had the perfect vacation and now they were glad to be home. Mike yawned and pushed the message button on the answering machine.

There was a message from Shevaun, impishly demanding that Antonia call her the moment that she walked in the door. The next messages were from people at Kube.

Jurgen's message said that Parker-Belmont was experiencing so many problems that they'd stopped using the product. William left a curt message informing Mike that the staff meetings had been moved to Monday mornings at nine sharp. Paul just said "call me when you get a chance."

Antonia walked into the kitchen, still bright from the pleasure of the trip, but when she saw the look on Mike's face, she knew all was not well,

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Is someone hurt?"

"Kube," Mike said.