

Part V

19.

Mike didn't know whether to laugh or cry when he held the RollTop stock certificate in hands for the first time. Computer stock had affected his life too much to be treated casually. Mike looked at the stock certificate again. The certificate, with its overly ornate script, looked like play money from a child's game. He thought, "Right now, that's about what it was worth." But Mike could not help fantasizing about what the certificate would be worth if each of the nine hundred and fifty thousand shares it represented eventually sold for one, ten, or even a hundred dollars a piece. Mike knew that the eventual value of the stock would depend on the actions he took and the decisions he made.

Hiring Roger had been a good decision. Roger proved to be a good roommate and an excellent employee. He worked hard and got along well with Mike. Mike was respectfully jealous of Roger's academic and professional experience, and Roger respected Mike's practical experience. When they got stuck, they fixed each other's bugs much in the same way as they had when they were boys at St. Luke's. The difference between St. Luke's and RollTop was that Mike was now Roger's boss.

The ghost of Kube still haunted Mike. He still worried that working with Roger would ruin their friendship. The first place where Mike's friendship and his business interests clashed was determining Roger's stock options. Since Mike had hired Roger when RollTop was a sole proprietorship, RollTop stock did not exist when Roger became an employee. Mike converted RollTop from a sole proprietorship to a corporation. A side effect of this change was the creation of RollTop stock.

Stock wasn't part of the original deal he'd made with Roger, but Mike knew that it was William's greed that ruined their friendship as much as anything else. Mike was determined not to make the same mistake. He felt obliged to offer Roger some of RollTop's newly created stock. The question was how much. After days of being unable to come up with a solution that satisfied both his business instincts and his ethics, he decided to talk the matter over with Roger.

"You give me the minimum amount you feel comfortable with," Roger said after Mike explained the situation. "I'm just happy to be three thousand miles away from home and have the chance to be who I want to be. Besides, from what you tell me, start-up stock is either worth nothing or a fortune. If it's worthless, it's certainly not worth getting between us. If it's worth a fortune, then I'll be happy with a small one."

Mike smiled with guilty relief. His friend had made it easy for him. He'd decided to give Roger fifty thousand of RollTop's one million shares to vest over four years. Mike's lawyer wanted a minimum of two thousand dollars to create a stock option plan to make it legal. Mike didn't feel he needed it yet. He gave Roger the fifty thousand shares and they shook hands on a four-year vesting plan. Mike didn't need a written contract to trust Roger.

Since Mike was selling thirty copies of Galadriel a week, ten copies more a week than he'd planned, he felt comfortable considering expansion. Now that Roger working full time on Galadriel, Mike felt free to spend more time with the customers. As a result of a recent sales trip to Southern California, Mike was expecting to sell an additional twenty copies a week. Since Paige was Rolltop's first customer, he always began or ended each sales trip with a visit to Sunflower Computers.

"I should have never told you to charge more," Paige said when Mike gave her the bill for her latest order.

"I'll buy you lunch as consolation," Mike said.

They went to a natural foods restaurant on University Avenue whose patrons looked like extras from a movie about the 1960s. Paige fit right in, but Mike felt out of place.

"How's business?" Mike said.

"I'm keeping my head above water," she said. "Your product's hot, but the Mac isn't selling all that well. I hope Apple doesn't turn out to be one of those utopian visions that comes crashing down around my ears."

"You still seem to believe in utopian visions," Mike said gesturing around the restaurant.

Paige laughed. "I spent most of the last ten years working for battered women's shelters, the anti-nuclear movement, and the homeless. I like to think I helped a lot of people. Now it's time to help myself."

"That's what business is all about," Mike said coldly.

"I guess," Paige said, "but old habits die hard. Speaking of being charitable, I have a present for you. A guy from AppleSeed magazine stopped by the store. He wanted to review Galadriel for their November issue. It's a special issue on Mac software. The deadline is six weeks from now. I told him he'd have to speak to you. I took his card. It's in here somewhere," she said, rummaging through her purse looking for the card.

"Thanks," Mike said when she handed him the card, "but I don't whether I want to submit Galadriel for review yet. Roger is working on a new version, which is the one I'd like them to review, but I don't know if it will be ready on time."

Paige shrugged and focused her gaze on the other diners at the restaurant.

Mike read her silence as contempt. Her body seemed to be saying, "I just dropped a golden opportunity in your lap. If you want to blow it because you can't make deadlines, that's your problem." Mike felt his own body tense as he remembered what the pressure of Kube's deadlines had done to him and his product.

“Predicting innovation is like predicting the weather,” Mike said aloud. “You know there's going to be some rainy days and some sunny days, but you can't say it's definitely going to rain tomorrow. Managers and salesmen always demand that a product ship on schedule, whether it's ready or not. If the product's no good, they blame the engineer. I suppose now you're going to tell me that it's vitally important to the future of my company that I make this deadline.” Mike pronounced the last sentence with a smirk.

“No,” Paige said quietly. “I was just trying to do you a favor. I'm sure there will be other reviews. If you don't think you can make the deadline without compromising the quality of the product, just call the editor and tell him no.”

Mike was taken aback. He had expected a confrontation, but Paige had simply given him a logical, intelligent response. He was behaving like the hysterical artist. She was being the reasonable programmer. He looked at her across the table. Her face showed a mixture of disappointment and hurt. He felt like a jerk.

“I'm sorry,” he said. “Thank you for the opportunity. It'll take me a couple of days to figure out if we can get ready. If you think it would be alright, I'd like to wait to call the editor.”

“Sure,” Paige said distantly. “Do whatever you think is best for your business.”

Mike was inspired to get Galadriel ready for the review. He hadn't felt this good about work since the early days at Rosetta, when he programmed for his pride, not just as a response to pressure.

He and Roger worked long hours, living on pizza and uncounted cans of Diet Coke. When Mike wondered if he were replacing caffeine with alcohol, Roger said, “Don't be so California. Being addicted to things is a normal part of life. Right now you need to stay up, so you're drinking Diet Coke. But there's a reason they have laws against driving a car after drinking alcohol but not caffeine. Now, stop worrying about your precious bodily fluids and get back to programming.”

Roger provided technical as well as emotional balance. When it came to programming, Roger understood the line between excellence and perfection better than anybody that Mike had ever worked with. Roger knew when a particular feature should be debugged and when it should be postponed until the next version.

With the code in Roger's capable hands, Mike began to focus his attention on the rest of the product. Mike knew that if Galadriel were going to get the kind of review he really wanted, he would have to make the manual, help system, and packaging just as good as the code. Mike's experience in these areas was much weaker than it was in software development. He remembered that Jennifer had run customer support and documentation for Rosetta. He called her and offered her the job along with a generous stock option package.

"I appreciate the offer," Jennifer said, "but I can't accept it. Between school and Ian I'm not getting eight hours of sleep a night as it is. I don't think I could handle anything else."

"I'm a believer in flex-time. Just work when you feel you have the time," Mike suggested.

Jennifer laughed. "When I said I was through with start-ups, it was like you saying you were through with scotch. You have to protect your sanity. I have to protect Ian."

Mike felt a twinge of resentment because Jennifer was refusing to help him, but he remembered his ethics and made himself behave.

"I understand completely," he said. "If you ever need babysitting services while you're in class, you can drop off Ian here. Roger will be here all day even if I'm not."

"Thanks Mike," she said. "I'll stop by tomorrow. If you're there, I'll even give you a few tips on the art of preparing a decent manual on a deadline. No charge."

Jennifer gave Mike more than a few tips. She ended up writing half the manual. Jennifer refused to take any money, but she did start to leave Ian at Mike's condo when she went to class.

Roger proved to be a surprisingly excellent baby-sitter. Mike couldn't help smiling as he watched the fat man and the handicapped boy playing a computer game with identical expressions of childish rapture on their faces.

Mike and Roger stayed up for the better part of three days preparing Galadriel for the review. Although he was totally exhausted, but Mike smiled contentedly as he sent the new version of Galadriel to AppleSeed magazine. In some ways, sending out the new version of Galadriel was like being a parent sending a child off to its first day of school. He knew that Galadriel's future was no longer solely in his hands. He would just have to hope that he'd been a good parent.

As the days passed, Mike found small bugs and errors in the documentation and his confidence in the quality of Galadriel steadily eroded. The only communication they'd had from

AppleSeed was when the reviewer called Roger to ask a few minor questions. When Roger asked the reviewer how he liked the product, the reviewer hung up curtly.

While waiting for AppleSeed's review, Mike picked up some new business, but sales had reached a plateau of around thirty-five copies a week. As time passed, Mike had slowly stopped fantasizing about what a good review would do.

Instead, he started worrying that a bad review might destroy RollTop.

Jennifer sat with Mike and Roger as they kept their daily vigil at the condo's kitchen table waiting for the arrival of the mailman. By the fourth afternoon, nobody was saying much.

"The review might be great," Roger said, smiling his most optimistic smile.

Despite Roger's confident words, Mike noticed that Roger was shuffling his feet, which Mike knew to be a sure sign of nervousness. Mike saw that Jennifer was also looking at

Roger. Over the last few days, Mike had noticed something more than camaraderie in her eyes when she looked at him, especially when Roger was playing with Ian.

The sound of the mailman opening the mailbox jolted them all from their private thoughts. They tore downstairs. Mike opened the mailbox and saw the magazine. Mike looked at it and hesitated. Jennifer reached around him and grabbed the magazine.

Jennifer quickly leafed through the magazine until she found the review. She bit her lip and passed the magazine to Roger. Roger read it quickly, too quickly, and handed it to Mike. Mike's eyes moved quickly through the first paragraphs of the review, which were just a summary of Galadriel's features, but his eyes slowed down as he reached the last paragraph. The comments in the review were largely positive, but he was almost too scared to read the conclusion.

He summoned his courage and quickly scanned the final paragraph, which read,

"With its innovative features and excellent quality, Galadriel sets new standards in word processing and desktop publishing. AppleSeed is proud to do something that we have never done for an initial release of a product, give it our highest rating of four stars."

They all hugged each other. It was the first time Mike and Roger had ever hugged. Mike wasn't sure if he liked it. When Jennifer hugged him, he tried not to like it.

Mike went to Sunflower Computers to show Paige the review. He was extremely grateful to her. Paige waived his thanks aside, but she advised him to take out an ad in AppleSeed to keep Galadriel in the minds of the magazine's management and its readers. Then she hugged him. He didn't want her to hug him and it made him feel uncomfortable. He said goodbye and went back to work, glad to be away from physical contact and its complications.

The phone rang so much after the review that Mike had to get another line installed. Many of RollTop's existing customers doubled or tripled their orders. New customers came from all over the country and he even got inquiries from Europe and Japan. In the first week after the review appeared, he sold eighty copies of Galadriel. In the

second week, he sold one hundred and ten copies, showing a net profit of over thirty thousand dollars in that week alone.

Mike's euphoria was balanced by stress. RollTop was so swamped by volume of orders that Mike and Roger spent most of their days on the phone talking to customers, potential customers, and suppliers. Spending all day on the phone meant that filling orders, developing the product, and keeping the accounts had to be done after normal business hours.

Roger enjoyed the work. Even after the long days, Roger became wide-eyed when Mike told stories about the early days of Rosetta's success. Mike showed Roger that with RollTop's current order rate, the company would make a profit of over three hundred thousand dollars a year. Mike explained that RollTop's value could be estimated by multiplying its annual profits by ten. Roger understood that the million shares of RollTop stock that was only play money only four months ago could now be justifiably valued at three dollars per share. Roger stared at the numbers in open-mouthed disbelief. But Mike had trained himself to keep his eyes on the road, not the speedometer.

He looked around the condo's large living room, which was a messier now than at the height of his drinking. The mess scared him. He tried cleaning things up, but he knew he was losing his siege with exhaustion. He'd only gotten two good nights of sleep since Paige had told him about the review.

He hated to take on the responsibility and expense of hiring new people without being sure that Galadriel's success would continue. But when he caught himself making stupid mistakes that were the sure symptoms of extreme fatigue he knew he needed to hire people to help him. He placed ads in the local newspaper for people to handle the phones, fill orders, and do other nontechnical jobs. He gave jobs to two of the first candidates who seemed reasonable, but neither person was up to the fast pace of the work. Mike fired one and the other quit. The experience reminded him of the dangers of hiring people he didn't know personally. He called Paige and asked if she knew anyone who could help.

"I need somebody competent and I'm willing to pay. I feel money slipping through my fingers," he said.

"I'm good at keeping books and organizing things," she said brightly.

"Are you asking me for a job?" he asked. "What about Sunflower?"

"Sunflower isn't making a profit," she sighed. "The Macintosh is too expensive and I have to give big discounts to move my inventory. I'm keeping the business alive by not paying myself anything."

Paige's words stunned him. Paige was definitely well qualified. She was knowledgeable about business. He had known her for six months and she had always been honest, but he had reservations about hiring her.

"I don't know Paige," he said.

"If you have questions, just ask them," she said.

"O.K. Why should I trust you with my business if Sunflower is barely breaking even?" he asked.

"Fair enough," she said. Mike heard the sound of Paige lighting a cigarette. She exhaled and continued, "I'm not making a profit because with the exception of your product, all the other Macintosh products are almost dead in the water. But even with slow sales, I'm still breaking even. I think that's evidence that I know how to run a business efficiently."

Her answer sounded good, but he still wasn't sure.

"I didn't know you smoked," Mike said, buying time.

"I don't normally smoke, but the tension at work is getting to me," she said. "I'm sure you know how that is."

He laughed, "I certainly do. I guess if you work for me, the money will help a bit. Like you said, if I'm successful, you'll be successful."

Hiring Paige was a good decision. Paige set up a proper order tracking and accounting system, which helped a great deal. She established forms and procedures. Once Paige had established a system, it was easy for Mike to clean up the mess. Mike was a little embarrassed. The system seemed so simple, yet it had eluded his computer programmer's mind. He spent the evening reading books on accounting. RollTop meant too much to him to make stupid mistakes.