

Ghost of the Programmer

written by

Scott Danzig

scott@sneakyghost.com

INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

An array of colorful knit animals decorate a home office, lit by a cozy lamp and moonlight. A crusty old PC sits on a desk next to a half-finished knit bunny, yarn, and needles. A gray-haired, hunchbacked MARGE, 70's, hunts and pecks furiously on the keyboard, while beads of sweat collect on her forehead. A certificate on the wall reads:

"Certificate of Completion, Margaret Needlesworth, Computer Programming Fundamentals II, Sunville Community Center"

Log output of a software application streams down the screen, ending in an error paired with technical gibberish.

MARGE

This never happened at the
community center... This computer
must have a mind of its own.

ON THE SCREEN:

I do

Marge shakes her head, bleary-eyed, then deletes the words.

A bespectacled, pot-bellied, bearded man, HENRY, 70's, stumbles past the door with his cane, delivering a steaming cup of tea.

HENRY

Marge, did you forget to retire?

MARGE

Hey, the instructor said I had a
knack for this. I just have to
figure this out.

He spins away. Marge seizes the cup and sips, her eyes locked onto the screen.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Henry, you're my angel. All hell
will break loose if I can't get
this payroll data uploaded in time.

Henry points to a switch near the door.

HENRY

You don't need this on, right?

MARGE

Don't touch that switch! I forget
what it controls.

(MORE)

MARGE (CONT'D)

For all I know, that switch could
be the one thing keeping me alive.

HENRY

Hmm, okay. I'll leave it alone,
love.

The thumps from Henry's cane grow distant as Marge tries to google the latest error message. She spots an ad for a sale on yarn and clicks on it.

ON THE SCREEN:

Take a break?

Marge cocks her head, her brow furrowing. She adds the word "what", then pauses again and deletes all the words again.

Marge looks again at her search results and clicks on a selection which mentions "Troubleshooting". The first recommendation is to run a virus scan. Marge diligently opens her virus scanning software and starts a scan.

She sips her remaining tea as the virus scan finishes. A massive list of viruses appears. Marge turns toward the door.

MARGE

Honey? You just go to bed without
me!

Marge shakes her head and clicks "Ignore All". She sighs in relief.

The thumping of a cane approaches, and Henry stumbles back into the room, balancing another cup.

HENRY

Care for coffee with a double shot
of espresso?

Marge turns and smiles appreciatively as Henry awkwardly sets it on the desk and stumbles away, carrying away the tea cup.

Marge squares again with her screen and another cryptic error message pops up.

ON THE SCREEN:

Just reboot. Trust me.

Marge types. "Who is this?"

COMPUTER
(speaking aloud)
You don't have to type you know.

MARGE
Are you from Nerd Patrol? My last
computer came with a Nerd Patrol
subscription.

COMPUTER
No, I'm a ghost in the computer.

MARGE
(toward the door)
Henry, are we still subscribed to
Nerd Patrol?

HENRY
WHAT?

MARGE
NERD PATROL!

HENRY
No, we don't have that anymore.

COMPUTER
I'm not a nerd. Well... I'm a ghost
of a nerd maybe. But I assure you,
I'm not on nerd patrol.

MARGE
(toward the door)
I need something stronger, Henry!

Marge's eyes narrow at the computer.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Nerd Patrol always told me to
reboot.

COMPUTER
Look, I know what I'm doing. I was
your predecessor. I'm not haunting
your rust bucket computer for fun,
y'know.

MARGE:
I'm supposed to believe you're
dead? Is that it? Well I have a
deadline, and I'm dead tired. How
'bout ya leave the living in peace,
dear?

The computer begins to rattle. Marge yelps and jumps.

MARGE (CONT'D)

What the hell is going on? Is this
some kind of computer ghost
exorcism?

COMPUTER

How can you talk to me that way?
Respect your elders! And watch your
language.

The rattling eventually dies down and goes quiet.

A bell suddenly rings loudly. Marge shrieks.

HENRY

Hope that helped!

Henry giggles as his cane thumps rhythmically on a creaky
floor and fades.

Marge holds her hand to her chest and breathes heavily,
glaring toward the door. She tensely looks around the room
until her nerves settle, then sits.

MARGE

So, eh...

COMPUTER

Yes?

MARGE

You're a...

COMPUTER

A ghost, yes.

MARGE

But, well... uh.

COMPUTER

Talk to me. I'm here to help you.

MARGE

Do you... look like Patrick Swayze?

An uncomfortable silence.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Are you... there?

COMPUTER
(imitating)
Are you... really that shallow?

Marge's eyes lower.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)
Do you want my help or not? I'm not
just here to fulfill your ghostly
celebrity crush fantasies.

MARGE
Help with what?

COMPUTER
Avoiding my fate! I had a deadline
too, once. And now I'm stuck in
this rust bucket computer forever.

MARGE
Oh, I see. But, will rebooting hurt
you?

COMPUTER
Who knows? Let me try something.

The computer shuts down.

Marge waits. Nothing.

Marge looks around. She gets up and adjusts some knit animals
on a shelf.

She sits back down, eyeing the computer while sipping her
coffee.

Marge presses a key on the keyboard. Nothing.

Marge presses the power button. Nothing.

MARGE
Oh, this won't do.

Henry peeks in, sees Marge's tears forming, then approaches
her, rubbing her shoulders.

HENRY
What's wrong, love?

MARGE
Oh, Henry! I've been working all
night trying to get this working
and the computer just...
(MORE)

MARGE (CONT'D)
shut down and I'm so tired and
might actually be hallucinating.

HENRY
Hey, take it easy. You just need
some rest.

MARGE
No, I need to make this deadline.
Let me try just a bit longer, then
I'll stop, I promise.

HENRY
Okay then, I'm here if you need me.

Henry's cane thumping recedes and Marge stares hard at the
dead computer. Her shoulders then slump, and she thinks.

MARGE
I'm sorry, but I just could not
meet the deadline. I had some
errors and then the computer shut
off and... Yes, maybe I'm not that
good of a programmer but I've been
working so much lately and...

Marge's knuckles whiten.

MARGE (CONT'D)
No.

Marge shakes her head.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Margaret Bethany Needlesworth, you
will not let this happen. You may
not be the best programmer, but,
darn it, you've survived worse. You
don't give up.

Marge leans down to the dead computer.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Hey!

No response.

Marge grabs a knit monkey and smacks the computer with it.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Hey! Are you in there? You're just
going to abandon me? Patrick?

No response.

Marge smacks the computer with the monkey again.

COMPUTER
(groggily)
Stop that!

The ghost's perspective shows relentless earth-shattering booms with each impact with the monkey.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)
Okay, okay, STOP! I'm awake!

Marge taps her foot as the machine boots back up.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)
I actually looked a little like
Patrick Stewart, if that's your
thing.

The machine finishes booting and Marge checks for her code.
The file is empty.

MARGE
All my work. Gone. I knew rebooting
was a bad idea.

Marge's face falls into her hands.

COMPUTER
Don't worry. I remember everything.
I think.

MARGE
You think? I typed so much!

Marge looks skeptical. The computer rattles again.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Okay, okay, let's just get this
done.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- Text code streaming across the screen
- Marge monitoring and occasionally correcting, working as a team.

MONTAGE END

The screen shifts to display a spreadsheet. A button underneath says "Click to Send Payroll Data."

Marge raises her arms with joy and relief, then checks a clock on the wall.

MARGE (CONT'D)
And not a moment to spare! My
goodness.

Henry stumbles in with his cane, also wearing a ghost costume, and starts flipping the lights on and off.

HENRY
Waaaaake Uuuup Maaarrrrge!! Ooony
noony nooooo!

Marge screams!

MARGE
STOP! STOP!

Henry stops. His ghostly head lowers in guilt.

Smoke rises from the computer, and it shuts down again.

MARGE (CONT'D)
Oh my god, NO!

Marge clutches her chest, grimaces in pain, and collapses over the keyboard, her eyes wide and lifeless.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The old, burnt up computer is being carted down a corporate hallway.

GHOST'S VOICE
I heard they were cancelling the
project anyway.

GHOST OF MARGE'S VOICE
(echoing)
I hate computers.

The computer gets dumped in a trashcan.