

Senior Software Engineer

written by

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INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

A home office is a mix between technology and rustic charm. Multiple work desks showcase high-end computer equipment amidst scattered colorful knit animals. A certificate on the wall reads:

"Legacy Award of Achievement: Margaret 'Marge' Needlesworth for Outstanding Contributions in Freelance Software Engineering"

In the corner sits Marge, 70, hunched in concern, fixated on an old iMac. The screen reflects her image, with the addition of rainbow hair, clown-like makeup and huge hoop earrings.

MARGE

Well, that's...a look.

The shrill ring of the smartphone startles Marge.

INT. MODERN INFLUENCER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

BRITTANY, a social media influencer in her 20's, strikes a pose on a faux fur beanbag, her trendy office awash in pastel hues and the glamor of a ring light. With one eye on her phone's camera and another on her follower count, she initiates a call.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION:

Brittany's perfectly glossed lips break into a pout as she launches into her predicament.

BRITTANY

Marge, sweetie, the virtual makeover tool isn't working! My followers can't look like clowns!

MARGE

Brittany, I'm pushing this old Mac harder than a donkey on a steep hill.

BRITTANY

Marge, I literally can't even. This digital disaster is gonna get me hashtag cancelled.

MARGE

But...

BRITTANY

If I lose this campaign, I'm out of sponsors. And I don't need to tell you what that means for your job, slay queen.

Brittany disconnects. Marge sighs deeply, with determination on her face.

MARGE

Hashtags and hooey... this should work.

Marge clicks "Enter" to run her app and sees cryptic errors. A moment later, a question mark appears on the next line.

MARGE (CONT'D)

This computer must have a mind of its own.

"I do" appears on the next line. Marge squints with fatigued eyes. She shakes her head and reruns the app. Errors again.

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

HENRY

Marge, did you forget to retire?

MARGE

If I can't figure this out tonight, I won't have a choice.

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

MARGE (CONT'D)

Henry, you're a lifesaver.

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. For all I know, that switch could turn my pacemaker off. Do you want to turn my pacemaker off?

HENRY

Oh c'mon love, it has nothing to do with your pacemaker.

MARGE

Henry...

HENRY

Okay, okay! I'll leave it alone.

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 coffee 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!

The thumping of a cane approaches, and Henry shuffles back into the room.

HENRY

What was that?

MARGE

I said you can just go to bed without me.

Marge's eyes survey the computer screen in annoyance. Henry cranes his neck over Marge's shoulder.

HENRY

Hey, it's saying you got some viruses. You gotta take care of that.

Marge nods perfunctorily, her eyes locked forward.

HENRY (CONT'D)
Marge, did ya hear me? I read those
viruses can get into our bank
accounts.

MARGE
Henry, I know how to keep my
computer secure.

As she says this, Henry reaches over and clicks "Ignore All".
Marge glances at Henry in silent disbelief, then back at the
screen.

HENRY
I was just...

MARGE
(swiveling)
Mansplaining me? Do I really
deserve that?

Henry lowers his head in shame.

HENRY
Sorry.

MARGE
Henry, I do computers. You don't.
Got it?

Henry nods weakly and stumbles away.

Marge swivels back to her computer, sighs, and then clicks to
close the window and another cryptic error message pops up.

ON THE SCREEN:

Just reboot. Trust me.

Marge types. "Who is this?"

COMPUTER
(speaking aloud in a
echoey voice)
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 (O.S.)
WHAT?

MARGE
NERD PATROL!

HENRY (O.S.)
WHAT'S TURD PATROL?

MARGE
NERD, HENRY! NERD PATROL!

HENRY (O.S.)
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 than
coffee, Henry!

Marge's eyes narrow at the computer.

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

COMPUTER
I know what I'm doing. I was your
predecessor, who died trying to
meet that glamour girl's deadlines.
I'm not haunting your rust bucket
iMac 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 (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?
With that coffee breath? I'm just
trying to help!

The rattling gets violent and Marge yelps in nervous terror.
The computer eventually settles.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)

Wait, is that your spit on my
screen? I can't do this.

Silence.

Marge dares to breathe, looking tensely around the room. She
gathers the courage to wipe a spot on the screen with her
sleeve. A large pile of discs and books fall from flailing
arms through the doorway, crashing to the floor. She shrieks.

HENRY

Crap, sorry!

Marge holds her hand to her chest and breathes heavily,
glaring toward Henry in disbelief. Henry shakily props his
cane against the wall and, after some additional strain
getting to his knees, starts collecting what he dropped.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I went looking for the stuff Nerd
Patrol left us, like the virus
checking stuff.

MARGE

You scared the daylights out of me,
Henry. And that software is
obsolete.

Henry, on all fours, leans over to offer her a thin book.
Marge walks over and looks down at him, shaking her head.

HENRY

Here's the manual for the computer.

MARGE

That's not going to help. This just
isn't your thing, Henry.

Henry goes quiet, and finishes collecting his everything.
Marge starts helping him up.

HENRY
I just figured...

MARGE
(patting his back)
That's okay, boomer. There, there.

Henry is again at a loss. Marge hands him his cane and he thumps away, a little less chipper. Marge returns to her seat.

MARGE (CONT'D)
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)
I do look a little Patrick Stewart,
if that works for ya?

Marge looks to the side, her lips pursed.

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

MARGE

Help with what?

COMPUTER

Avoiding my fate! Brittany gave me a deadline too, once. And now I'm stuck in this rust bucket iMac 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 crocheted animals on a shelf.

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

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 at it all night trying to get this working and the computer just... shut down and I'm so tired and might actually be hallucinating.

HENRY

Hmmm, let me take a look.

Henry leans over and starts experimentally tapping the buttons on the computer and keyboard.

MARGE

Cut that out Henry...

HENRY

Back in the day, ya just had to hit
the right spot.

Henry persists and hits the computer in different spots,
still tapping the buttons.

Marge reaches down and brandishes a riding crop, whipping
Henry with it twice on his rear. Henry spins around, shocked.

MARGE

When I say stop, you stop, Henry.
Got it?

Henry nods cautiously.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Now go and get me something...
anything... that'll keep me awake.

Henry obediently makes his exit, his cane thumping soon
receding. Marge stows the crop and grimaces, then turns her
attention back to the dead computer and stares hard. Her
shoulders then slump, and she thinks.

MARGE (CONT'D)

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're a
gosh darn good programmer, and,
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 (CONT'D)
Henry may have been on to
something...

Marge grabs a crocheted monkey, adorned with the word "CODE",
and smacks the computer with it.

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

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

COMPUTER
Okay, okay, ENOUGH! I'm awake!

Marge taps her foot as the machine boots back up. 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, Patrick. Let's code.

BEGIN MONTAGE:

- Text code streaming across the screen
- Marge clicks and appears on the screen with an afro,
glittering blue eyeshadow, and earrings bigger than her head.
As she sees her reflection.
- Marge wide-eyed, now with neon pink hair, exaggerated cat-
eye makeup, and layers of pearl necklaces, grimaces and dives
back into coding.

MONTAGE END

Marge slumps in her chair, exhaustion clear on her face. On the screen, she activates the "Update Virtual Makeover Tool". A "Loading" animation starts up.

MARGE (CONT'D)
It has to work this time.

Marge 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
NO! DON'T!

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. GLAMOROUS STARTUP OFFICE - DAY

Brittany, in her on-brand pastel athleisure, struts past an IT worker. Her oversized sunglasses barely mask the interest when she spots Marge's cheerfully adorned iMac.

BRITTANY
Hey, isn't that Marge's retro tech?

IT WORKER
Yep, just got it working again so I can wipe it before recycling.

BRITTANY
Wait, let me check something...

She activates the virtual makeover tool and her image appears
- flawlessly stunning.

BRITTANY (CONT'D)
(rolls eyes)
Took her long enough...

Brittany flounces off, leaving the IT worker and Marge's iMac
in her glittery wake.

The echoey voices of the two ghosts can be heard from the
iMac.

GHOST'S VOICE
I'm so sorry, Marge.

GHOST OF MARGE'S VOICE
She couldn't code her way out of
her designer handbag. Hmph!

FADE OUT