

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 now, that's a sight for sore eyes.

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 shepherding this old Mac like a stubborn sheep!

BRITTANY

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

MARGE

But, hear me out...

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 nonsense... let's give this a whirl.

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's got a mind of its own, so it seems.

"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 don't sort this tonight, I'll be rememberin'!

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

MARGE (CONT'D)

Henry, you're a saint.

Henry points to a switch near the door.

HENRY

You don't need this on, right?

MARGE

Don't flick that switch! Might be linked to me pacemaker, for all I know! You wouldn't be trying to stop my heart, now would ya?

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, go on to bed without me!

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

HENRY

What was that?

MARGE

I told you, go on to bed. I'll be up a while yet.

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  
Trust me Henry, I know me  
cybersecurity.

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 look like I  
need it?

Henry lowers his head in shame.

HENRY  
Sorry.

MARGE  
Henry, I've got the knack for  
computers, not you. Clear?

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  
Is it Nerd Patrol on the line? My  
last computer had their  
subscription, you know.

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

MARGE  
(toward the door)  
Henry, have we kept up with our  
Nerd Patrol subscription?

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)  
Fetch me something stronger than  
coffee, Henry!

Marge's eyes narrow at the computer.

MARGE (CONT'D)  
Nerd Patrol was always keen on  
rebootin'.

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:  
Are ya telling me you're dead?  
That's rich! Well I've got a  
deadline, and I'm dead tired. So,  
why don't you let the living get on  
with it, eh?

The computer begins to rattle.

MARGE (CONT'D)  
What in the name of...? We'll be  
needing a proper computer séance  
now, will we?

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 bejesus out of me,  
Henry. And that software is as old  
as the hills.

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 no help. This just isn't  
your thing, love.

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, then...

COMPUTER  
Yes?

MARGE  
You're a...

COMPUTER  
A ghost, yes.

MARGE  
But, like... uh.

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

MARGE  
Do you... maybe have a bit of a  
Patrick Swayze look to ya?

An uncomfortable silence.

MARGE (CONT'D)  
Hello? Are you... still 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, exactly?

COMPUTER

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

MARGE

Right, I get ya. But will rebooting do you any harm?

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 just won't cut it.

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

HENRY

What's wrong, love?

MARGE

Ah, Henry! I'm absolutely spent. I've been chained to this old beast since dusk, and now it's given up the ghost...

(considers)

Quite literally.

HENRY

Hmmm, let me take a look.

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

MARGE

Stop that now, Henry. STOP!

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 the deadline's  
beyond me reach. Ran into a sea of  
errors, then the blasted computer  
shut down on me... Perhaps I'm not  
the programmer I once was, but,  
heavens, I've been burning the  
midnight oil.

Marge's knuckles whiten.

MARGE (CONT'D)

No.

Marge shakes her head.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Margaret Bethany Needlesworth, this  
won't be your undoing. You're top-  
notch and you've weathered bigger  
storms. Giving up just isn't in yer  
nature.

Marge leans down to the dead computer.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Hey!

No response.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Maybe Henry wasn't far off the mark...

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

MARGE (CONT'D)

Oi! Are you still in there, or have you left me high and dry, 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

Every stitch of code. Gone.  
Rebooting seemed like a risky bet.

Marge's face falls into her hands.

COMPUTER

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

MARGE

You think? Do you have any idea how much I've put into this?

Marge looks skeptical. The computer rattles again.

MARGE (CONT'D)

Fine, fine, 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)  
Barely a minute to spare! My word.

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, sweet mercy, 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