

Ghost of the Programmer

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INT. HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

The windows of an otherwise cozy home office reveal only darkness. The practically-clothed, stressed JESSICA, 34, types furiously on the keyboard of a dingy, old laptop atop a messy desk. A post it note on the monitor reads "Payroll upload deadline: 12:30AM". Just above it the screen shows "12:01AM"

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

JESSICA

This computer must have a mind of
its own.

ON THE SCREEN:

I do

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

A chubby-faced man with warm eyes, NICHOLAS, 32, glides in and delivers a steaming cup of black coffee.

NICHOLAS

That should keep you awake.

He spins away. Jessica lunges for it and sips.

JESSICA

Oh thank god. All hell will break
loose if I can't get this payroll
data uploaded in time.

Nicholas points to a switch near the door.

NICHOLAS

You don't need this on, right?

JESSICA

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

NICHOLAS

Hmm, okay.

Nicholas's footsteps grow distant as Jessica returns to her screen, trying to google the latest error message. At the advice from a website, she installs an update.

ON THE SCREEN:

Take a break?

Jessica cocks her head, deletes the words, then starts typing in a chat window.

ON THE SCREEN:

To: techsupport

Message: Are you messing with me?

Jessica starts a virus scan.

JESSICA
(toward the door)
Babe, I think I'll need something
stronger.

Jessica copy and pastes a cryptic line of code from another website then tries to run the software again. A progress bar appears on the screen, and just before it finishes, another error appears. She sighs.

Nicholas stealthily delivers an energy drink.

ON THE SCREEN:

Just reboot, trust me.

Jessica types.

ON THE SCREEN:

Who is this?

COMPUTER
(in an echoing voice)
You don't have to type you know.

JESSICA
What! Now my computer speaker is
hacked?

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

JESSICA
Tech support isn't supposed to make
my job harder, dork.

COMPUTER
I'm not tech support. I'm a ghost.

JESSICA
(toward door)
I need something stronger, Nick!

Jessica's eyes narrow at the computer.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Then why did you give me tech
support? When you said to reboot?

COMPUTER
Well, I know what I'm doing. I was
your predecessor.

JESSICA
You're saying you died, is that it?

No response.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
Look, I have an hour left. Leave
the living to do their work,
alright?

The laptop begins to rattle. Jessica yelps and jumps.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
What the hell is going on?

COMPUTER
How can you talk to me that way? So
insensitive!

The rattling eventually dies down and goes quiet.

Nicholas leans in from the doorway and blasts a foghorn.
Jessica shrieks.

NICHOLAS
Hope that helped!

Nicholas disappears. Jessica 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.

JESSICA
Okay, so you're a ghost in the
machine? Like an AI?

COMPUTER
No, an actual ghost. I was real.

JESSICA
Let's pretend you're a ghost then.
What do you want?

COMPUTER
Now you're asking the right
question.

JESSICA
And?

COMPUTER
I honestly don't know. I think I'm
supposed to help you.

JESSICA
Help me how?

COMPUTER
To avoid my fate!

JESSICA
Well then go ahead. But I don't
have time to reboot. This laptop is
slow as fuck and I don't trust it.

COMPUTER
Let me think then.

JESSICA
C'mon, hurry up Casper.

COMPUTER
Okay, okay, let me try something.

The computer shuts down.

Jessica waits. Nothing.

Jessica tries tapping on the keyboard. Nothing.

Jessica presses the power button. Nothing.

JESSICA
Shit!

Nicholas returns, and massages Jessica's shoulders.

NICHOLAS
What's wrong?

JESSICA
I've been working all night on this
damn code and the computer just
shut down and I'm so tired and
hallucinating.

NICHOLAS

Hey, take it easy. You need rest.

JESSICA

No, I need to make this deadline!
Just need to stay awake a bit
longer, don't worry.

NICHOLAS

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

Nicholas slips back out. Jessica stares at the dead computer hard.

(beat)

Her shoulders slump, then she thinks.

JESSICA

I'm sorry, but I could not meet the
deadline. My machine started
malfunctioning and then went dead
and... Yes, maybe I could have done
this sooner, but I've been working
late almost every night and..."

Jessica's knuckles whiten.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

No.

Jessica shakes her head.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

No, I'm not going down like this.

Jessica leans down to the dead computer.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Hey!

No response.

Jessica smacks the computer

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Hey! You in there? Are you going to
help me or not?

No response.

Jessica smacks the computer again.

COMPUTER

Stop that!

The ghost's perspective shows earth-shattering booms with each smack.

Another smack, and another.

COMPUTER (CONT'D)
Okay, okay, STOP!

Jessica taps her foot as the machine boots back up.

Jessica checks for her code. It's all gone.

JESSICA
I knew we shouldn't have rebooted.

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

JESSICA
You remember 50,000 lines of code
and you're not an AI?

COMPUTER
I had an eidetic memory.

Jessica looks skeptical. The computer rattles again.

JESSICA
Okay, okay, lets just get this
done.

Timelapse of text code streaming across the screen, with Jessica monitoring and occasionally correcting.

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

Jessica raises her arms with joy and relief, then quickly checks her watch.

JESSICA (CONT'D)
And not a moment to spare! Shit!

Nicholas swings in wearing a ghost costume and starts flipping the lights on and off.

NICHOLAS
Waaaaakkkeee Uuuuppp
Kaaaaattthyyyyyy!! Ooony noony
nooooo!

Jessica screams!

JESSICA
STOP! STOP!

Nicholas stops. His ghostly head lowers in guilt.

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

Jessica clutches her chest, and collapses over the keyboard, her eyes wide and lifeless.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

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

JESSICA'S VOICE
(echoing)
I hate computers.

The laptop gets dumped in the trash.