

FIVE

It seemed as if it were 342 years ago, but actually, it happened for the first time barely more than two years back. Drew managed to find himself right in the middle of something he had no conceivable notion of determining. And of all the things, he had to bring up that brown paper bag, sitting innocently in the refrigerator.

Drew and Matt had just started The Developers. Work and new clients were coming in fast, so fast that Drew had just quit his teaching position at Moxee Tech to devote all his time to bigger and better things, including theorizing about the system that would eventually become .comU. Technically, Matt was his boss, according to the actual business structure, but they always looked at each other as peers. With the increase in work, and the chance that the chores would grow exponentially in the upcoming year, Matt and Drew decided it was time to expand the business further. At first, the two thought bringing on one additional person should do the trick. Instead, they opted to open it up and find the best people for the job, even if that meant hiring more than just one new employee.

Thus began the circus called by some businesses as human resources. Within a week after publishing an ad in the Malorett newspaper, Matt had received 48 resumes. He was initially worried that instead of posting their simple ad:

DEVELOPERS NEEDED:

We are working on new ways to combine computer-based technology with various types of marketing. If you have a strong background in programming, writing, designing or any combination of these things, we need you. Please send resume and references.

The newspaper quite possibly published this ad:

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR SEX EXPERIMENTS:

We are in dire need of individuals who will have sex with various models ages 18-24 from around the globe. No experience needed. Please send resume and references.

Matt remembered the last time he read that in the paper. The models ended up being elephants! Someone at the newspaper had played a joke by leaving out key elements to the ad. Unfortunately, that same person who played the joke accidentally included his address in the ad.

Needless to say, there were still strange specimens showing up in the resumes. One guy said he had never seen a computer before. Another man mentioned he had invented the calculator. A woman said her daughter was “developing” but wasn’t positive that was needed. She even enclosed a fairly large training bra with her resume and references. The problem was, though, that Michigan state law prohibited 11-year-olds from working full time.

After scanning the resumes, Drew and Matt decided they didn’t need a boatload of people who had no clue what they were doing. They also determined that four would be the magical number, but probably one of those employees would be part time only. Kevin was mentioned early in the selection process, mainly because he came with the highest recommendation from Professor Jones.

Sarina was the only person qualified from the stack of resumes. She also was mentioned by various Tech professors as an obvious choice. She had just gone back home to Indianapolis for the summer, but she immediately returned for the job opportunity.

The final piece of the puzzle, however, wasn’t so clear. In fact, if Drew hadn’t gotten out of bingo early that day, he might have been talking to a fast-maturing 11-year-old.

Occasionally Drew called Friday’s 2 p.m. summer bingo down at St. Pius. On this particular August day, as the church prepared for its annual picnic, Drew found himself calling only 15 games. This worked out nicely because he needed to get over to the office to finish a couple of things before the weekend. With no intermission, Drew never had time to get his nachos, so once the bingo ended, Becky brought him a brown paper bag that included two fish sandwiches. Thank God for Becky, Drew thought. Thank God for

bingo, Ethel McMahan thought all day EVERY day.

Drew got to the office, ate one sandwich and threw the other into the refrigerator. Matt was supposed to be back from a meeting around 4, which would give Drew time to finish a few things and plan for the upcoming week. Sarina was on her way to Malorett and was going to start the following Monday; Kevin had already been familiarized with the system and was to start part time on Wednesday.

Drew had just finished reading an email from a maintenance client when he heard a knock at the door. It hadn't quite registered with Drew that it was, indeed, a knock at the office door. He and Matt had just relocated there two weeks beforehand, as they both just worked at home prior to the planned expansion. Up until that point, only three humans knocked on that door: Drew, the day before he had a key; Matt, the day he forgot his key; and Butch, the landlord, to make sure the door worked. Butch claimed a squirrel occasionally ran into the door as well, bringing the total to four knockers.

Matt couldn't have forgotten his key; the door was locked when Drew arrived. Or perhaps Butch was "testing" again, but he usually didn't appear until later. Drew moved down the hall toward the door and saw the silhouette of a young woman, maybe in college, standing impatiently outside. It was possible she just had to use the restroom, but her uneasy movements made Drew approach the door slightly faster. Even from a distance, he had a hunch she was attractive, and he wasn't disappointed when he opened the top of the Dutch-style door.

"Can I help you, young lady?"

"I'm not really that young, but yes you can help me. I have a resume to give to Matt Severson concerning the job opening in the newspaper. Do you think you can give it to him?"

The girl handed Drew a resume. He glanced over it and noticed she actually had qualifications: some programming experience, some writing and a business degree from Tech.

"So, Katy ... you are Katy Terrill, correct?"

"That's correct."

"Do you currently live in town?"

"I live in Moxee. Well, I did live in Moxee. Or, I still live there, but not in

my house. I mean, my husband and I ...”

“Never mind the question, Katy. I didn’t mean to pry.”

“It’s OK. Honestly, what’s bothering me more is talking through this half door to you. I feel as if I’m at the backdoor of Pee Wee’s Playhouse.”

Partially embarrassed, Drew introduced himself and invited Katy inside. He noticed she was still quivering either from nerves of delivering the resume, or possibly divulging her personal life to a complete stranger.

“Where are you working now?” Drew said.

“I’m a manager at the Lazarus in Moxee,” Katy said. “It’s OK, but I would like a little more out of life than managing teenagers at their first job and 40-something lifers who are never going to move up anywhere. I’ve been trying to find something more worthwhile. That’s when I saw the ad for The Developers.”

“Well, I think we found all that we needed actually. I’m sorry, but ...”

Katy stopped him, much like a school crossing guard stops first-graders immediately after the first bell rings. Drew wasn’t moving, so he shrugged and wondered if she really intended to make him stop, or if it was some new “Vogue” move that Madonna had not yet perfected.

“What is that smell?” Katy said. “Is that fish I smell?”

“Well it’s possible!” Drew said. He led Katy to the breakroom, opened the refrigerator and pointed to the brown paper bag that contained his fish sandwich. Katy grinned and blushed, while Drew entered into deep thought, trying to explain how anyone could grin and blush after being shown a brown paper bag containing a lone fish sandwich.

“How did he know?” Katy asked.

“Huh? How did who know?”

“How did Matt know I would be coming here?”

“I seriously doubt he did. What makes you think he knew you were coming?”

“The fish sandwich, Drew! The fish sandwich!”

“Did I miss something?”

Katy started to answer him, but there was a rattle down the hallway. Matt had returned from his meeting and shouted a “Hello?” down the hallway. Immediately, Katy shot out of the break room and sprinted down toward the

door. She greeted Matt with a huge smile, an oversized hug and the biggest surprise in this building since the day Butch forgot to wear a smiley face T-shirt.

“Katy, what are you doing here?” Matt said, barely able to breathe from the Hulk Hogan-style bear hug being applied.

“I’ve come to work for you,” Katy said. “Just like old times! And I see you were expecting me!”

“How could I have been expecting you?” Matt glanced around Katy at Drew, who shrugged.

“Duh, Matt! The fish sandwich in the refrigerator!”

Matt still didn’t get it. He hadn’t put anything in that refrigerator in three days, yet somehow he was responsible for its contents. Drew must have brought the mysterious sandwich, Matt thought. At this point, Matt decided to just play along.

“Oh yes, I forgot about that,” Matt said. “It is really great to see you again, Katy. Um, let’s go in here and discuss the job opening.”

Drew looked over at Matt, stunned. They still had an opening?

“Uh, Matt, I thought ... “

Matt cut off Drew, took Katy by her arm and started walking toward the LAB.

“Drew, we’ll be right back,” Matt said.

Still trying to determine what was happening, Drew went back to the WAB and continued working. Matt filled in the blanks for him later that evening: Matt had met Katy while he was a teaching assistant at Moxee Tech. They dated briefly following the class, but it didn’t last long. Matt was engulfed in his work, while Katy met a guy named Michael Fletcher, another student at Tech. Katy dropped Matt soon thereafter. At that stage, with Matt theorizing about The Developers’ potential, he just didn’t have time for her.

While they were dating, which lasted about three months, Matt and Katy discovered they shared an adoration for eating fish. Almost weekly, the two visited various fisheries around Malorett, Moxee and other nearby towns. Katy was a salmon girl, while Matt was more a grouper-type guy. That never brought about a discussion, but everyone knows a salmon girl and a grouper guy will eventually lead to some kind of rift.

About an hour later, Matt and Katy walked into the WAB.

“Drew, meet the fifth Developer, Katy Terrill.”

“Actually, we already met, but again, it’s good to meet you,” said Drew, extending his hand.

“Yes, good to meet you again as well,” Katy said.

Drew made it inside his house. It was late, but Jessica was still awake. She usually stayed up until he made it home from bingo, mainly to see if Ethel had finally ended her losing streak. Drew explained the Katy situation, and Jessica rolled her eyes, as usual. She always wondered how Matt and Katy could ever possibly work together, or have some sort of platonic relationship, given their past. Drew was at a loss because he, too, had no idea. But what could he do?

Kevin and Sarina had no problems adjusting to their new jobs, but it was evident early on that Matt still looked to Katy as his right-hand man. Everyone suspected they were sleeping together, but no one had the urge to ask. It didn’t affect their work performance negatively, and on top of that, it may have helped it.

With Drew and Matt, the work was too thick to even comprehend. Matt had worked on his fair share of hosting and development contracts with clients for a few years, and Drew maintained some website development customers plus a few who contracted for IT support. They assumed the first six months would be pretty meager money-wise, considering the .comU project would be taking off shortly. During the initial months, Sarina and Drew took care of the existing clients, while Matt, Katy and Kevin focused on finding new business and outlining .comU. Things progressed far better than anyone had expected: The Developers picked up enough new clients to allow the group to spend time working on the community project. Matt had said in the beginning he expected a launch of 3-5 years. But after six months, that was

trimmed to three years maximum.

In fact, Matt and Katy spent many a night theorizing the moment when the project would launch, how it would be presented and what type of slogan they could use to promote it. Of course, most of this time was spent under the sheets.

“Here’s the best one yet, Matt,” Katy said while tugging at Matt’s muscular arms. “.comU — You’re not a number ... you’re not a name ... you’re a username and password.”

“Not bad Katy, but what about this one?” Matt said, gently massaging Katy’s shoulders. “.comU — There’s an ‘I’ in community, but there’s also a ‘U.’”

Katy was in the midst of breaking up with Michael, who she had been seeing since Matt could remember. Michael and Katy always got along just fine. In fact, they had many similar interests, including their computer science majors, and agreed on music, movies, sports, that sort of thing. But Katy sensed that Michael had an intolerance toward her working as much as she did. He worked for an IBM sector located in Moxee, putting in 45-50 hours a week himself. Katy never realized anything like this until they started living together. Michael expected her to take care of many of the household duties, which was difficult, considering the hours she was putting in as a Developer.

Matt wondered if Katy really didn’t realize this because once she started working at the LAB, she wanted to be there more and more and more. Finally, Katy moved out for a brief period of time, only going back to grab more clothes and important belongings. Most of the stuff ended up at Matt’s, and he didn’t mind. They could get even more work accomplished, without even leaving the house!

Even though she was happy with The Developers, and Matt, it became too overwhelming to live at work all the time. She began to miss Michael, and he, in turn, became aware of Katy’s work ethic and came to appreciate it. The couple were engaged not too long thereafter, and things seemed better for awhile. Matt and Katy never had trouble working together, but their time spent outside of the office was obsolete. A few months down the road, however, Michael was up to his old tricks, and again, Katy came running to Matt.

But Michael always made amends quickly, and Matt was quickly forgotten, at least, outside of work.

I can't even remember the rest of the details of Matt and Katy's relationship, Drew thought. After everything Matt had told me about them, and after he "accidentally" read a few email threads between the two, all he could come up with was a basic outline of how they met, when they got together and when Michael came into the picture. Oh, and there was the time they broadcast themselves from Matt's home webcam. Matt was just testing it for .comU when Katy made a special appearance at his house wearing very little.

Drew called Katy to briefly continue their conversation, even though it was now 11:30 p.m.

"Hello, Drew?"

"Yeah Katy, it's me. How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling a little better. But I still don't know what to do about Matt."

"What did you tell him when he asked you if you wanted to have a fish sandwich?"

"You mean after I almost fell out of my chair? I told him he was crazy. He is you know. He's CRAZY! Tomorrow, we should probably just act like nothing happened, and we didn't have this conversation. Is that OK?"

"Yep, that sounds good. Good night, Katy."

One full day from the launch, Drew thought as he reviewed his new email. One day while there's a snowstorm heading this way, Matt thinks it's mating season and Kevin STILL hasn't asked for the burrito I owe him. Maybe this really does signal the apocalypse.

"Drew, do you have time to work on The Profiler now?" Sarina said, entering the WAB. Drew looked at his watch. It was already 10 a.m. Shit. He had hoped to get there a little earlier, to finish some other things, but it was

a long night.

“Yeah, Sarina, let’s fix the stuff that needs to be fixed. We should be OK for tomorrow anyway, with the demo, but this needs to be fixed soon.”

“What are you going to show them in the demo?”

Drew typed in the URL for the testing area of .comU. He clicked on the The Profiler link, which brought up boxes for Drew to type his username and password. It worked, which was a stark difference from yesterday, when everything seemed to bomb every other time. Sarina’s idea about the session variable helped with this problem, too.

Drew and Sarina needed to complete the demonstration of the member listings. When users come to The Profiler to do lookups, they will enter as much search criteria they have — most likely a name, or possibly even an address. The search would return a list of potential matches, and users could find out more information or even find a map to their address. And with The Developers’ advanced mapping system, users could zoom in so far to not only see who they found in their search, but they could also see their next-door neighbor or anyone around the block, if that information is available.

Sarina rolled her chair back to her computer. She grabbed her water bottle from a bag on the floor, took a sip and typed something on her machine.

“Where is everyone this morning?” Sarina said. “I thought they were supposed to be here?”

“Do we have another meeting?” Drew said. “I think bingo fried my B-5, I mean, my brain last night.”

Just as Drew finished, Katy walked in the LAB. She looked as if she hadn’t slept more than 14 minutes the night before. Drew turned and nodded, while Sarina just stared.

“Girlfriend, what’s wrong with you?” Sarina said.

“I’m OK,” Katy said, moving toward her desk. “I just didn’t get much sleep. Did anyone call this morning?”

“Nope,” Drew said. “It’s been pretty calm. Almost ... too calm.”

Katy was content with that answer. She booted up her computer and began her daily ritual of checking email and scanning her task list. Then she spun around, as if she just remembered she left her car running.

“Are we supposed to have a meeting this morning?” Katy said.

“I don’t think so,” Drew answered. “But I couldn’t remember either.”

“I mean, we practically have meetings EVERY morning,” Sarina said. “Maybe the three of us should have a meeting.”

“About what?” said Drew.

“About what the hell Matt was thinking last night,” Sarina said. “What was that all about, just brushing you off the way he did?”

At first, Drew and Sarina didn’t think Katy was going to answer, but finally, she faced them.

“Sarina, he’s crazy,” Katy said. “But it’s OK. Everything will be OK.”

“You aren’t falling for him again, are you?” Sarina said.

“What the hell?” Katy said. “No, it’s not like that. It’s ... I just want to move on with this project. That should be more important than any personal issues.”

Sarina, not content to let the conversation end, changed subjects slightly.

“So Michael called you again?” Sarina said. “What is he doing, spying on you?”

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!” Katy screamed and ran out the door. Evidently, that was the wrong thing to say this morning.

Sarina and Drew walked out of the LAB, down the hall and caught up with Katy in the kitchen. She appeared to be fine, pouring herself a mug of coffee.

“Um, you just ran out like you were possessed by the devil or Charlie Brown or something,” Drew said.

“I’m OK, guys,” Katy said. “I really am. Thanks for your help though. We just need to focus on .comU, not past boyfriends or stalking ex-husbands.”

“So he IS calling you!” Sarina said.

“Yeah, he called twice last night,” Katy said. “I think he wants his Hall & Oates CD back or something. First off, I gave that back to him when we separated. Secondly, I had it by accident. Thirdly, why would anyone want that CD?”

“Uh, I have that CD,” Drew said. “Maybe he wanted it so next time he called you, he could play ‘Maneater’ in the background.”

Katy had put up with this on a monthly basis ever since they were divorced. Michael would call for some ridiculous reason and try to coerce her

into meeting him in some dark part of town. Katy finally decided to get caller ID and stop answering his calls. Then he started calling from pay phones, so Katy decided not to pick up the phone until someone tried to leave a message. When she first instituted this policy, she pissed off a lot of people because she set her phone to pick up on the 26th ring. Luckily, her mother cussed her out when the answering machine finally kicked on.

Katy had more suitors than Matt and Michael, and others didn't even have names that started with 'M.' Katy was always sought after heavily but tried to focus as much as she could in moving up in life without having to sleep her way to the top. She just blamed it on Malorett, the Nothing Going On Here capital of the universe. The Developers decided Malorett just barely beat out the strip joint in the Vatican for that title.

The reason everyone fell for Katy was not just her looks, but her style, or her flair, and her ambition. She had the ability to stand up to even the most confident guys, look them in the eyes and say "You're wrong, dumbass." She had light brown hair, deep brown eyes and a tiny mouth, except when she cracked a smile, which turned her freckled face into a pristine painting.

Katy, Drew and Sarina made their way back down the hallway to the LAB. Kevin and Matt had apparently arrived recently, as they both were still wearing their coats.

"Hey guys," Matt said, removing his gloves. "If it's OK with everyone, I think we should have a dinner meeting this evening. Is everyone in?"

Everyone nodded.

"Then it's settled," Matt said. "Is six o'clock OK? That will give us time to review all that we've done today. I need to make some calls and see if all invited are coming tomorrow. Katy, have you received any cancellations?"

"No Matt, everyone should be here, as far as I know," Katy said. "It probably wouldn't hurt to again check with the Chamber. I'm not positive they know the media will not be attending."

"We don't want the media covering the meeting?" Kevin asked.

"We will send a press release out after the meeting is finished," Matt said. "That will protect the integrity of our potential clients. The media will know about it, don't worry about that."

Kevin hit himself in the head a few times to try to wake up. Sarina and

Drew continued to finish their work on The Profiler. Katy sat down at her seat, hoping Matt had not noticed she looked like a wreck. It was useless for her to think he wasn't thinking about her, but he was thinking about her. It made Katy dizzy thinking about her last thought, so she decided to just make more items on her task list and accomplish them.