

THREE

Always in the car, always in the car, Kevin thought. Maybe if I weren't always trying to get on every girl back at school, I wouldn't have to always be in the car. But then what fun would it be to live in the middle of nowhere in northern Michigan?

Kevin was headed to his sister Jen's place. She had promised him that Jane would be there. OK, maybe it wasn't a promise per se, but he expected her to be there. He really hadn't gotten very far with Jane in the past, but this was a new day. Kevin figured after dinner, he could try to make his move, which usually consisted of just trying to get her phone number and not spilling his food in the unsuspecting girl's lap. So far, he was 0-for-5 with Jane. Like Jen's other friends, though, he was giving her seven chances. Usually by the seventh, there was another friend to attempt to pick up anyway. Kevin had heard a rumor through some other friends that Jane had broken up with her boyfriend recently after he missed one of her basketball games. Maybe she wasn't off limits anymore after all.

It was about a 20-minute drive from the office to Tech's campus. Jen lived on the west side of campus, in one of the few dorms. She was planning on getting an apartment for her junior year, but her dorm wasn't too bad. And it didn't bother Kevin going to visit ... it was, after all, an all-girls dormitory.

Normally Kevin was fairly focused on seeing how many of Jen's friends he could manage to bump into, but today was different. Friday was the big day, and that was just two days away. Kevin had finished plenty of touching up after the meeting: He talked with Drew about the user authentication problem, he worked with Sarina on a few design things and he talked briefly with Matt about a couple of new advertising ideas that could be used during the presentation.

The group still had all day Thursday to iron out anything, but Katy had a couple meetings with clients for other projects, and if Matt stayed in the same

state, he would have to get some rest. Kevin overheard Matt telling Katy he had an additional meeting at 3 and that's why he couldn't leave. Kevin assumed it was with other potential investors of .comU, to remind them of the impending meeting Friday, but no one knew for sure who these people were exactly. In fact, Matt had had two short meetings Wednesday morning and never gave any indication what transpired out of them. Matt wasn't the kind of person to hide things, but he was the type to make sure things were right before divulging information. Drew figured that was the case, but Katy was a little more suspicious. Then again, Katy was suspicious of everyone.

It was almost 5 p.m., and Kevin figured Jen would be in her room, since her email said she would be back from class after 2. He hoped his email didn't lead her to believe he would call her first. Kevin finally made it to the dorm's parking lot and found a spot almost instantly. Jen lived on the third floor of a five-floor dormitory, while Jane lived on the second floor, but at the other end of the hall. Kevin walked into the guest area to call Jen. He had forgotten once again to just call from his cellphone. Surely after six months of having one he would remember the thing. He called, but there was no answer. That was a bad sign.

While he was trying to determine his next move, Kevin noticed a McDonald's bag sitting in the foyer. Kevin was hungry, so even though he was supposed to meet his sister for dinner, he thought a fry or two wouldn't be bad. He wasn't a huge guy, but he wasn't skinny either. It had been at least 18 hours since Kevin had had a French fry, which was entirely too long. He thought it might even be a record. Kevin had completely abandoned his search for his sister due to his large appetite for McDonald's. He approached the unattended bag and opened it. JACKPOT! A Super-sized fry and two Big Macs. Even if it might ruin his dinner with Jen and Jane, he was too hungry to pass up a snack.

While Kevin was debating with himself in between bites if he should eat all the lost food, he noticed a girl talking on one of the guest phones was holding a McDonald's drink. Thinking the food must be hers, Kevin attempted to quietly step away from the remaining grub. At least he had somewhat quelled his hunger with a few fries and two bites of a Big Mac, but now he had to make a quick getaway.

Kevin sprinted over to the stairs, but before he made it, he heard a loud “KEVIN!” He spun around, praying it wasn’t her. But it was. Crissy Calhoun, perhaps the most annoying and most intelligent slut at Moxee Tech. Drew and Matt had tried to explain this paradox to Kevin. Yes, she was a good student in the computer science department. Yes, she had slept with every professor in the department, which included eight males and two females. Drew and Matt agreed that the strangest person in Moxee was the girl dressed like Captain Ahab; the second-strangest was the guy who always smelled like steamed carrots and cotton candy; and the third was the computer-geek sex-fiend Crissy.

“It is sooooo good to see you, Kevin Cakes!”

Oh my God, Kevin thought. She just said Kevin Cakes.

“Hey, Crissy,” Kevin said. “Have you seen my sis?”

“Now why would you need to go looking for her when you can stand here and see this?” Crissy slid her right hand inside her pants, tugging gently and revealing a black thong.

“That’s nice Crissy, but I’m already late. Where is she?”

Crissy seemed slightly mad but quickly got over it.

“I saw her walking down the second floor. But she might be over ...”

Kevin left quickly to run to the phone book. Wilson, Wilson, Wilson ... Jane ... 63487. He dialed the number as fast as possible.

“Hello?”

“Jane! What’s going on! How have you been?”

“Kevin, is that you?”

Whoa, Kevin thought. He was getting really excited. She knew it was him, and he didn’t even say his name!

“Yes, it’s me! Have you been waiting for me to call?”

“Kevin! It’s me, Jen. Are you crazy?”

“Sorry Jen, it’s hard to hear on these dorm phones. Are you and Jane ready for dinner? It’s on me!”

“Yeah, we’ll be up in a sec.”

Kevin was hyped again. After he took a seat in the lobby, he peered over to the left and noticed Crissy showing another helpless victim her underwear. Finally, Jen and Jane appeared at the main double doors, both looking like

they were ready for a night on the town. Kevin hurriedly rose to meet the two at the exit door.

“Glad you could make it,” Jen said tapping her brother on the arm.

“I’m glad to see you too!” Kevin said, glancing at Jen then peering at Jane. “That is, ‘too’ as in ‘also,’ but also ‘two’ as in ‘greater than one.’” Jane smiled at Kevin’s attempt of homonym play. “So girls, where are we going to eat?”

“Well, Jane and I were just talking, and we want Italian. So we thought about the Olive Garden. Is that OK?”

“All the salad and bread you want?” Kevin said. “That sounds great!”

Kevin, still starving even after his earlier Big Mac sample, wondered if this was the first time in history that three 20-somethings agreed on a restaurant without any debate.

“So am I going to be able to use the system?”

“Yes and no. It’s for Malorett, but anyone anywhere will be able to use it.”

“So you will have stuff for school on there, right? Like our basketball schedule?”

“Yes, definitely. And hopefully the school will buy into the system and add other stuff in there too.”

“Yeah Jane, maybe you’ll be able to meet a new boyfriend on there!”

Kevin and Jane both blushed after Jen’s comment in between bites of pasta. Jane had always been aware of Kevin’s love for females, especially her. The two first met last year when Jen moved into the dorm her freshman year. Kevin had graduated and just started working on a project for The Developers with the school. Jane lived two doors down from Jen. Kevin knew about Jane from the basketball team — she was a highly regarded recruit from Texas who played every game as the first sub off the bench. She was slightly shorter than Kevin — she stood 5’10”, while Kevin was right at 6’. Kevin loved tall girls, especially ones as cute as she was.

“Actually Jane, there will be a personals section,” Kevin said, almost

whispering into Jane's ear while clutching her right arm. "Maybe I will see you on there."

Jen had had enough of this flirting game.

"OK, Kevin that's enough," Jen said. "I'd rather not tell Jane the story about Crissy and the squirrel."

"Huh?" Kevin and Jane said in unison.

"Never mind," Jen said. "So what do you think will be the best feature of the system?"

"Man, there are so many, it's hard to pull out just one." Kevin paused to ask the waiter for more salad. "The idea itself will revolutionize the way community websites are handled in the future. The biggest difference is the community model people are used to seeing. Sites like Yahoo, Geocities, Friendster, whatever, urge people from all over the world to get closer together, like they live down the street or something. But .comU urges people already near each other to just get closer, so you really get to know them. Just think how many people you walk past on a daily basis, in the store, on the street. Think if you knew the person, or knew you had something in common with them, the chances of you approaching this person and having a friendly conversation would be greater."

Jane and Jen looked mostly interested, taking short pauses to nod as they gnawed on breadsticks and nibbled on linguine.

"Some of the research we did was by interviewing people from really, really small towns — places with population fewer than 1,000," Kevin continued. "We wanted to know why they lived in such small places, what benefits they had, what they knew about others. Those are the kinds of things we want to bring to Malorett. We anticipate almost immediately this should have a great impact in driving people to the town ... at least as tourists, and hopefully as a new home for people."

"Don't you think people will be turned off by the lack of privacy?" Jen said.

"People don't have to put every ounce of information on the site," Kevin said. "They can put as much or as little as they want. The key, though, is public record. Records available to the public will be searchable in a multitude of ways, and should work as fast as Google. Maybe we can get different people

to update it, sort of like the Wikipedia. If you wanted to find the property value of a specific piece of land in Malorett right now, you have to go to city hall, to the basement, and flip through a couple of books. With this system, you can do one quick search and whoomp, there it is.”

Jane’s eyes brightened.

“Wait a minute, couldn’t this alienate them even more?” Jane said. “If you didn’t have to leave your house to do anything, everyone will just be sitting at home, in front of their computer, instead of being out and about.”

Kevin took a drink of his iced tea and nearly finished it in one gulp.

“No, no, no,” he said. “That’s the whole thing. You will still have to go out to check the land you want to buy. You’ll still probably go to the grocery, the mall, etc. But this system gives you options — so if you’re sick, or you want to stay in, you don’t have to go out. Plus, when you do venture to other parts of town, you won’t have to waste time finding things. You’ve already found it on .comU.”

Kevin couldn’t tell if Jen and Jane were completely in awe or bored out of their freakin’ minds. Jen already had heard his .comU spiel plenty of times, and Jane never seemed very impressed about anything Kevin did. But maybe it was just a front. Maybe she was just playing hard to get. She did manage to find her way to be around more often lately when Kevin visited. And she almost always wore a tight shirt, like the red and black striped one she was wearing today, or some article of clothing that made her stand out like a Girl Scout at a biker bar. But the last time I checked, Kevin thought, Girl Scouts don’t wear tight shirts. But it was wild how much bikers enjoyed Girl Scout cookies, especially Thin Mints.

The trio had come to an ease in eating. Kevin appeared to be eating the final breadstick, only because it was there. Jen was debating on whether or not to take the remainder of her linguine dish, which was about three-fourths complete, back to her dorm fridge. Jane appeared to be staring into space or possibly at the two kids standing outside the restaurant, apparently calling a three-legged dog toward them.

“Uh-oh ... I gotta get to study table,” said Jane, looking at her watch. The basketball team had an hour each night for mandatory studying. Once a week they would also have an evening practice, but this week, that happened to be

on Thursday. “We’d better get going, I have to be there by 7 or else.”

“Or else what?” Kevin said.

“Or else I have to run an extra mile tomorrow before practice.”

“Can I run with you?”

“I don’t think coach would like that.”

“Why, would she be jealous?”

As they were leaving, Kevin figured now was the time to pour it on heavy. Starting Friday, when .comU was going to be revealed, there wouldn’t be much time for a social life. If he could somehow talk Jane into a date on Saturday, at least he would have an excuse to leave work for a few hours. And if all went well, then maybe it would be for more than a few hours.

Kevin picked up the tab — as promised — and followed Jane and Jen to the front of the restaurant. Jen walked out the entrance first and hurriedly made her way back to Kevin’s car. Jane leisurely strolled behind, giving Kevin the opportunity to make his final descent.

“So Jane, is there any way I could interest you in dinner on Saturday?” Kevin said.

“Are you being serious? You just bought me dinner tonight?”

“Well, I was hoping it would be just the two of us,” said Kevin, nodded at Jen, who appeared to have trouble finding Kevin’s car.

“Let me think about it. I’ll check my schedule. No wait, let’s do it.”

Kevin’s eyes perked up as Jane realized what she had said. Before she could knock the vision Kevin had of herself undressing in front of him, he had already affixed his attention elsewhere. Matt and another gentleman stood three car lengths away and appeared to be in deep conversation. While Kevin and Jane were still a row from the car, and Jen stood at the car as if she had been there since just before the Civil War, Kevin made a move over toward his boss. He made it quickly between a parked car and van headed for the road.

“Dude, what are you doing here?” Kevin said.

Immediately, the conversation between Matt and the man came to a halt. The other man, wearing a three-piece suit with a thin red tie, even turned slightly away from Kevin.

“Hey Kevin, what are you doing here?” Matt said.

“I’m just eating with Jen and her friend.”

“Are you getting some action?”

“Well ... not yet. So seriously, what are you doing over here?”

The other man still gazed in the opposite direction and had not acknowledged Kevin’s existence.

“Oh. I came over here for a late meeting with another potential client,” Matt said. “Kevin, this is Doug Morris.”

The other man nodded and shook Kevin’s hand.

“Client ... for .comU?” Kevin said.

“Possibly,” Doug said, with a firm handshake. Doug and Matt gave wry smiles to each other.

That answer didn’t relax Kevin, but Doug and Matt sure appeared to be at ease. Kevin heard talking behind him. It was Jen and Jane, practically yelping to each other. This was most definitely a sign for Kevin to get the hell out of there. Oh yeah! He was in the process of asking out Jane.

“All right, I need to get out of here,” Kevin said. “I’ll catch up with you in the morning, Matt. Nice to meet you, Doug.”

Kevin turned around and quickly made it back to his vehicle. Matt had mentioned a meeting with a new client, but The Developers figured it was in the initial stages, like giving the potential client broad background on .comU. But this was no intro ... they were at freaking Olive Garden! Something was just strange. The only time Matt is ever this smug is when he is questioned about his relationship with Katy. This was something completely different.

“Come on, Kevin. I need to get to study table!” Jane said.

Kevin found the right key and opened the passenger door for Jane.

“If I get you to practice on time, then can we have dinner Saturday?”

“Let me think about it one more time.”

Jen, standing next to the driver passenger door, threw her arms in the air.

“Jane just say ‘yes’ or he will never stop!”

“OK then, yes. You can pick me up at 8.”

Kevin all of the sudden felt as if his legs were going to jiggle completely off. Here is the future Mrs. Gentry, he thought. Thoughts of Matt and the mysterious Doug dressed for a big business deal quickly dissolved and were replaced with images of Jane wearing, well, nothing.