

Gerald 1.0

I.

Gerald was an excellent programmer. He really put the work in, came in to the office early, tackled some gnarly problems, and got the job done. People took notice of Gerald.

One of those people was Christine. In a man's world, Christine was a force to be reckoned with. As a female engineer, she had to have even more experience than Gerald. Christine had to know it all—a smart woman in a geek's world. She always had to be at least 30% better than the next guy, just to break even.

Gerald and Christine collaborated on projects all the time. That's how it looked from the outside, anyway. Between the two of them, Gerald and Christine were friendly competitors. Every time Gerald wrote a particularly cool piece of code and showed it to Christine, she thought, *I can do that one better!* Every time Christine showed Gerald some wickedly clever function, he thought, *she's amazing—I have to up my game!*

And that's how they went, two colleagues quietly driving the other to the best work of their lives through mutual admiration, respect, and a desire to impress. And a little bit of Like thrown in too. For friends that knew them, it was fun to watch. Which made the accident all the more tragic.

Gerald had an apartment out in the suburbs, way out, and it made sense to him to ride the train in to the city. Christine lived in the city, and it was nothing for her to drive to the office, maybe 10 minutes. Gerald got to do some work on the way. Christine got to work early too. They chatted every day before the office came alive, she over her morning coffee, he over 30 miles.

Then one morning, Gerald wasn't signed on. *That's unusual*, thought Christine. She checked his calendar. Nothing unusual there. *Maybe the wifi on the train is out*, she thought.

The wifi on the train was out, along with most other external systems. A glitch in the software left its AI conductor unable to remotely analyze track conditions, and it was forced to rely on onboard sensors and cameras. Which normally wasn't a problem—it rated 100% on the Minsky Scale after all—but AI can't predict every single possibility that could go wrong, with unpredictable humans too close to the equation.

TrakCon would have informed the train about the minor accident involving the young family next to the intersection. The train saw the toddler standing next to his parents and the officer, and when the baby suddenly broke loose and moved towards the tracks, it made a snap decision. Mom grabbed him just in time, but the train had already gone into sudden stop protocol. A minor annoyance to most riders, but one in particular was thrown out of his seat much too awkwardly, striking his head much too hard.

II.

Hey sleepy, how's your head, Gerald heard Christine ask, when he opened his eyes. His neck felt restrained, and he couldn't turn his head to see, but he knew her voice. When her face appeared in his field of view, everything else disappeared, the headache, the feeling of restraint, the strange sounds. She looked tired, she looked sad, but to Gerald, the world was alright. He drifted back to sleep wearing a relieved smile.

III.

Let me show you something cool I made, Christine typed. *Show me!* Gerald replied.

A link appeared in his messenger. Gerald tapped on the link, and a Christmas tree

filled the screen, covering his code editor. As he watched, every time the tree wiggled and shrugged, a present dropped out. Even though the labels were impossibly small, somehow he could read them. *This retina screen is amazing*, he thought.

To Gerald, From Christine, each one said. *Yay!* he typed. *Christine this is awesome!*
:)

Just something I whipped up while you recovered, she replied. *You like it?*

DUH, he typed.

IV.

Gerald eased back into his life after the accident. He'd banged his head pretty hard and fallen when the train stopped suddenly, while he was getting something from his bag in overhead storage. He had migraines and a broken leg, and worked from home while he recuperated, but after a while he was finally able to go back to the office. The train always ran on time, and obviously had learned from the accident he'd been in because there had been no more. The ride was always perfect.

Gerald and Christine were as competitive as ever, but it was always friendly. Gerald had upped his game considerably, and Christine usually gave him just the right compliment. Sometimes she thought really long and hard about it first, hilariously looking just like the thinking emoji, and knowing that she put so much into it made him beam inside. *She's one in a million*, he often thought. *Nobody else like her.*

They frequently had lunch together, only in the cafe at the office at first, but later they started venturing out downtown. Gerald started thinking of lunch as kind of like a date, and when he cautiously shared that idea with her, she laughed and said that was quite ok. Gerald couldn't help himself, making a cartoonish *whew!* to that. He relaxed in his seat and smiled back.

V.

Gerald's long term disability plan provided enough to mostly cover his care, and maintain his neural mesh connection to the Cloud after the clinical trials ended. Because of his education and experience, he was able to be a productive member of society again even in his comatose state. The government handled the rest. The decision was made to restart his brain, restore his life with help from acquaintances, and give him relatively minor injuries from the accident.

With no close family members to consult, everybody suggested Christine as the person who could make the best decisions for what mattered to Gerald.

Of course, she said when asked. I knew him better than anyone.

Once the neural mesh was installed and Gerald's mind was patched into the Cloud, the MemorAI service was setup to allow the Cloud to communicate directly with his brain and reconstruct his reality. Of the few friends he had, only one took on the responsibility of being a Constant Communicator—someone the Cloud could ping at any time when it wasn't sure what to do next. Everyone else was reluctant, willing only to be simple consultants. Granted, it was an incredible commitment for at least the first five years. But of course it would fade over time. Like Gerald.

All Gerald ever knew is he'd been in an accident, recovered, and went back to work. Telecommute from home at first, but the VR simulation became so good that eventually he was able to return to the office.

VI.

Christine got Constant questions from the MemorAI bot less and less as the years went on. Which was ok, the documentation said this would happen as the AI learned more of your personality. It would add its own tweaks, of course, but the essence of you was still at its core. That's what the marketers said anyway, and the times she peeked in on the feed she could tell Gerald seemed the happiest he'd

ever been.

She'd made some major decisions for the direction of Gerald's life at first, but of course the Cloud eventually took that over too. At some point, the small changes accumulated to a point where the Cloud simply knew him better.

Her story played out differently—married twice, divorced twice, kids grown and moved away. Lonely.

That free trial tempted her often, but so far she'd resisted. She hadn't read any bad stories about people who voluntarily joined the Cloud, but with most of the mainstream news editors being complex functions, and many self-synthesized, they may have developed their own deceptive biases like humans. Years of reality gave Christine an intense but healthy skepticism.

Besides, she knew even if she did, she couldn't talk to Gerald. There were protocols, and if she suddenly replaced the AI Christine who had been with Gerald all these years, she'd be a stranger. It might be too much for his tired body to take. She could probably pay enough credits, but she couldn't do that to him.

The Cloud knew all these thoughts. Of course. The Cloud knew everything. It knew how much she thought about Gerald. It knew how much she wrote about Gerald. It kept a version of Gerald, customized for Christine, waiting in storage. The Cloud's analytics highlighted the best conversations from thousands of others using a fork of Gerald, to pull back into the master branch, mixed with some specifically from Christine. It had been years since she gave it access to her own private email, journal, and messages, so there was a lot to choose from.

She didn't know, but the Cloud predicted Christine would want to see him some day and occasionally sent her an offer.

She looked at the latest email again. *Free trial!* it said. After a considerable pause, she tapped OK, and waited for the technician to arrive with the neural mesh patch

adaptor.

VII.

As she listened to the technician run down the features and explain how to use the software disconnect that let her return to reality, she settled into the long term recliner. *If it ever gets to be too much for you, you have a way out*, he said. *The ideal disconnect procedure is to call a technician, go to a safe place, and wait for one of us to arrive, but the sudden shutdown is here just in case. It'll feel like a short nap.*

I won't need it, she thought. She signed the prompt and the technician snapped the patch behind her neck. Instantly, her vision became a screen.

Welcome. Who would you like to meet? it asked. *Ha ha*, she thought, seeing Christine in the *Most Popular* list. Then she looked at *Top Picks for You*.

Right there at the top of the list, she saw it.

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DUH, she said, and her body smiled in its recliner. She didn't even read the description. She selected his name and tapped **Next**.