

Gregory Dates a Witch

by Steven J. Kolbe

-for Jennifer Michelle

None of us took it too seriously when Gregory from underwriting said he was dating a real-life witch. Being an underwriter is not as interesting as say being a writer. That's why the greatest underwriter in America, Ajit Jain, gets paid per hour what James Patterson gets paid per book. It's also why Gregory was constantly telling tall tales to entertain his fellow underwriters.

There was the woman whose life he saved in the fountain of the Fashion Square Mall. "Look for the story in the Sentinel," he insisted. Or there was the alligator he trapped single-handedly in his backyard using only a pool brush and a large fishing net. "Six o'clock news tonight!" you could hear him holler across the break room. And then there was the time he led an entire Austrian family across the Alps, narrowly evading the Nazi army. (Sometimes he would just describe the plot of whatever he'd watched the night before, and instead of saying "Maria Rainer" or "Han Solo," he would say "I" and "me.") So we didn't always take him at his word, and this witch business was no different.

Then one Monday he didn't come to work. His supervisor called. No answer. Then again after lunch. Still nothing. No email, no text--he was totally incommunicado.

"You don't think--" someone began but then laughed out loud at the absurdity of the thought.

Tuesday came and went the same way. A few of us went by his house that night, but nobody would come to the door. We were going to call in a missing person, but the next morning the light to his office was on. We went almost immediately to check on him.

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But there in front of his computer, wearing his dark-rimmed glasses and staring at the bright monitor, was a white-wooled llama.

"What a prank!" we thought.

"Now that's commitment," someone said, and we all chuckled.

We looked around then for Gregory, but he was no where to be found. Maybe he would stay away all day and come in Thursday, shaking his head and saying, "I can't remember a thing since Friday. Does anyone know how my office got all woolly?"

Then we noticed the llama's paw, how delicately it was placed upon the computer's mouse and also how it was occasionally moving it around on the pad and clicking it. On further inspection, the llama wasn't just staring at the screen, it was reading--moving it's eyes slightly from left to right.

"Gregory?" I asked.

He turned toward me sadly and, for a moment, looked as if he were about to speak. But then, remembering that he lacked the faculty, he shook his head and returned his eyes to the screen.

"What the hell?" came a voice behind us. It was Gregory, coffee mug in hand. At the new commotion, the llama sighed, picked a brown paper sack off the floor with his teeth, and trotted off to the break room.

