

Practical Goldberg (A Love Story in 3 Parts)

Part 1 - David, a computer science major in college, was completing the setup of his new bird feeding system. Instead of the usual tree house, painted with bright colors, he had designed a more elegant solution. Altruism aside, he wanted to do more than just provide food for birds in the bad weather; he wanted to see the birds enjoy their treat while keeping squirrels from squandering the seeds.

So, he set up a trough with three lids, mechanically operated based on a computer program. The first container had birdseeds and suet, the second fruit and nuts and the third meat scraps and insects. In front of the trough was a bar that activated a 13" LCD screen when the bird landed on it. On the screen was a picture of the three food types, corresponding to the placement of the trays. The bird would peck at the screen and a touch sensor would open the appropriate food tray. If the bird didn't peck, a camera would snap a picture of him and open the tray that species of bird prefers. To complete the environment, video with the sounds of like birds would play from the LCD.

But what about the bane of bird feeders, squirrels? The locked trays prevented them from eating. If a squirrel pressed the landing bar, the camera would snap a picture of the offender, then play a 3D video, complete with sounds of foxes, coyotes, hawks, owls and snakes eating squirrels. The longer the squirrel stayed there, the more graphic the video progressed. Last but not least, a small spray of that predator's scent would shoot onto the squirrel's leg (don't worry, it washed away in the next rain). Needless to say, most squirrels never returned to the bird feeder.

No matter where David was, he could enjoy the feeder. A second, wireless camera sent a signal to the Internet so he could watch from any computer. He even wrote an app so he could watch the action from his cell phone. Why all the work to feed birds? David discovered that this was 100% effective in meeting women, especially when showing it off at a coffee house or party.

Rube would have been proud!

Part 2 - David was talking to a particularly cute young woman at his favorite franchise coffee bar. But let me digress a moment. As you know, David is that computer science major who used his engineering skills to design an automatic bird feeder that not only recognized the bird, but also provided their preferred food and kept squirrels out with a diabolical program that guaranteed a squirrel would never return. To be fair, David posted a warning in 300-point font “No squirrels allowed” with an accompanying 500 hundred-word disclaimer to avoid any lawsuits that may occur.

Not that David needed any help getting dates. He had the casual good looks of a surfer, perfect teeth and a well-proportioned six-foot frame. Although he was technically a geek, no one would have guessed; he looked more like a graduate student in literature. But being the precise, analytical person that he was, the bird feeder more or less guaranteed a subtle and inoffensive way to have a conversation with the opposite sex. Coeds would sidle up to him, looking over his shoulder to the laptop screen with pictures and sounds of blue jays, robins and nuthatches. Inevitably, they would start the conversation with a sound usually reserved when seeing puppies.

“Oh, that’s so cute. Is that a movie clip?” said the 5’9” brunette with jeans, ugh boots and crème colored sweater.

David turned and smiled. “No, it’s a live feed from my place.” Well, I won’t bore you with the details, but suffice it to say that after about a half hour, the woman was convinced she had found that all too rare quality in a man, genuine innocence. David never divulged his methodology to any friends or even family; that might put an end to his understated masterpiece.

Ninety-four times out of a hundred (we saw the statistics), the woman would want to visit the apartment and see for herself, partly to confirm David’s claim that he designed and built the best bird feeder, but also to learn more about her new love interest. Since birds feed mostly at dawn and dusk, David had woman asking to spend time at his home during sunrises and sunsets, enhancing the romance. But you can’t just stand next to the feeder; birds won’t come close. No, you have to view from the second floor of his bedroom, meticulously cleaned and fresh. New age music and scented candles (unlit for the moment) completed the ambiance.

“Is that a blue jay?” said Karen.

“Yes, you see most of them in April, their mating season” replied David.

“Look, two more birds. What are they?”

David looked closely. “Red breasted nuthatches. They travel in small groups, sometimes in pairs. See how the male preens the female while she’s eating.” As the sun disappeared over the hilltop, Karen put her arms around David and kissed him.

Part 3 - Karen put her arms around David and kissed him. “David, I hear the birds” and she hopped out of bed and went to the window. David, still waking up, rubbed the sleepers out of his eyes. In panties and a college t-shirt, her lovely figure silhouetted in the window frame. Karen was

different; she was genuinely happy with him as he was with her; no games here.

It wasn't love at first sight, but it was contentment. "Hi" as he rubbed her shoulders and kissed her on the neck.

Karen squeezed his hand. "I think that's a robin."

David looked down at the feeder. "No, it's a Stonechat, but they look the same."

David's days of short affairs were over. Even though he had manipulated Karen into his arms, he had found an honest and wonderful relationship. Over the next few weeks, he realized that Karen was perfect for him. It seemed like whenever he needed anything, Karen was there. She knew when he needed to work and when he needed to relax, what stressed him out and all of his interests. She understood him completely. Their lives had become complementary, like puzzle pieces fitting just so. "This must be love," David thought. "I guess I won't be needing the bird-feeding program anymore."

Anna was looking through Karen's social networking program when she came in.

"Hey Anna, you'll never guess what. David and I are going to a bed and breakfast up the coast this weekend!"

Anna looked up smiling. "I knew you two would hit it off. I had a feeling as soon as I started entering the data."

Karen looked over her shoulder. "So, who are you looking for?"

Anna replied, "It says Jeff Olsen would be a good match for me. It's printing out his schedule, interests, love history and life goals now. I can't believe how well this program of yours works."

Karen gave her a little hug. “Well it worked for me.”

Rube would have been proud!