

## TERESA

For the first time in her life Teresa felt sad and abandoned and she has no idea how she could handle all alone this situation. Everything that had happened in the last few years had left a rather strong mark on her soul. The woman needed at least one reason to smile again, to fight, but she still hadn't been able to find it. Everyone she once had by her side was now somewhere thousands of miles away or already dead and she was left alone desperately searching for the light at the end of the tunnel. And most of all she was afraid that it would never be like before.

Right now, it was just her alone surrounded by all the amazing technology that people once only saw in sci-fi movies. In these days everything was real but all the artificial intelligence that had appeared all over the world could not and would never replace a human soul. They were just some pieces of material programmed with human behavior, but she knew that all these robots would never be able to be like humans. And what pained her most was the fact that the people had embraced this change with enthusiasm even though the transition had been overwhelming for many of them. It was sad to see how people from all countries of the world were losing their jobs one by one and living only by the mercy of governments, those who were still working were the programmers and software

developers. The government still needed them for artificial intelligence programming that was quite extensive even in less developed states.

Thinking about everything that had happened in the last few months, Teresa, even though she felt a terrible knot in her stomach, got up from the sofa, took out a cigarette from the almost started pack and went out on the terrace. She lit it and drew a very slow smoke. She tried to not think about anything, but Prashant's face kept coming back to her mind every time she tried to do this. Then a tear gently rolled down on her cheek. She could feel his neck muscles tensing more and more and a suffocating heat started to consume her whole body from the inside, but it didn't matter anymore. She continued to smoke as if it was the only thing that mattered now. She felt a strong pain in her soul and that made all the physical pains to disappear, but Prashant's face was still there and all what she felt for him was stronger than ever.

She finally returned to the room and sat down gently on the swivel chair in front of the desk where she went about his daily business. She was a software developer at one of the most important companies in the world. Unlike some of her colleagues, at the time of the "*Big Change*" was produced, she had managed to keep her job. She wasn't paid exceptionally well but she had a somewhat decent living. She had a laptop, two monitors, a pair of LED speakers and that was her world. It was just her, the computer and colleagues

located in every corner of the world, most of them from India. She wasn't very close to all of them, they were too different, and she hadn't been able to make a connection with them yet. The only one who was somewhat close to her was Alexander Dubois, a short French young man with brown hair and round eyes. He was a decent man and he respected her because even though she was a woman she had endured for so many years in the IT industry which was largely male dominated. It had not been easy for her, but she did not accept to give up, especially in front of men. Programming applications was one of her passions, and whenever she completed a task successfully, it gave her a sense of accomplishment.

Teresa Jimenez was a woman past 30 but still beautiful. Although her grandparents came from Russia, she was born in Spain, but for several years she had settled on one of the islands near Spain, in Palma de Mallorca. She was no more than 1.60 meters tall, she had blonde hair cut in a “bob” style. She practiced martial arts and yoga daily and with a lot of patience and hard fighting, the young woman had reached a level that most practitioners aspired to. Although she no longer participated in competitions, the energy balance that she had accumulated for 10 years had helped her go through the “*Big Change*” more easily than the others. It was hard for her to accept everything that had happened, but she had managed to keep relatively calm. She was trying to deal calmly with all the change that humanity was going through in this moment, but she felt how the loneliness destroy her little by little every

day. It was hard and she really wanted to interact with a real person, she wanted to see smiles on people's faces but that hardly ever seemed to happen anymore. As things currently stood, the humans seemed to be on the way of extinction. Maybe those who had survived after the “*Big Change*” event, were the last specimens left alive.

Teresa and Alex chatted daily even though they didn't know each other in reality. They worked together day by day, but they also shared the same ideas about the implementing digitization globally and the distribution of the integrated chips to the rest of the population. Although they both worked in the digital field, they were categorically against these regulations. Since the printed banknotes had been abandoned in all over the world, most of the people had accepted payments and transactions in cryptocurrencies, but there was also a large part of the population that had accepted body-integrated chips to make payments and move more easily from one country to another. Without those integrated chips, it was possible to travel outside, but it needed special permits issued by the government. Both Teresa and Alex knew that they could easily get those permits but they were aware that the authorities would be watching their every move. Alex worked for the government but, he had some friends, in France, who were active in various extreme factions against the government. Many times, his best friend Patrick tried to introduce him to one of these factions from Paris, but Alex was afraid. Teresa knew that her colleague was not that strong

and that he was afraid of losing his job, but she still encouraged him to do it. She wasn't afraid of the government, and even though she was alone she wanted to face them once and for all. She hated them with all her heart for all the evil they had done to all humanity.

Besides, Alex was not the only developer who worked with in the project launched by the German company “*IT Technology*”. Along with the two, other two colleagues from India were also involved: Kamala and Prashant.

Kamala was a beautiful, smart girl with ebony black hair and black eyes. She didn't look more than 27 years old. Although she didn't know her, Teresa could feel that she was friendly and tried to help everyone in her available time. But both had different interests and she couldn't establish a connection with her colleague.

The last of the colleagues from India, and the most enigmatic was Prashant. He was a relatively distant, mysterious man, but also, he had a special charm. Since she had started the project with the German company, Teresa felt very strong emotions every time when she was going to connect with the Indian man.

The young woman started the application in which she was going to test the code and before running the last tests, she changes 3 code lines. She wanted to see if she could get some improved reports. It was important to the client who had hired

her to see the test results in as much detail as possible and her role, as well as Alex's, was to deliver the results reports as consistently as possible. Their colleagues from India also worked side by side, but they were less communicative than she expected. Considering the emotions that Prashant produced to her, Teresa had tried to get close to him at first but this was not possible. Alex supported her as much as he could but one day she gave up. She wasn't going to run after the appreciation of a man who would never be able to accept that a woman could be as intelligent as he was. "*Teresa, don't give up yet,*" Alex told her so many times. "*Be patient and finally you will see that Prashant will appreciate your work,*" added the man. But Teresa didn't want to try anymore. Although Prashant had a warm and pleasant voice, the young woman felt him distant with her every time they had a project meeting. She was tired of his cold attitude. With every task she received from him, Teresa proved to him every time that she could solve it professionally and delivered it even before the deadline, but the man was not able to appreciate her. It seemed like her intelligence bothered him somewhat. Sometimes she even had the impression that he appreciated Alex much more even though they worked in the same mode. Teresa tried many times to understand Prashant's way of thinking. Perhaps that being an Indian he was not used to interact with a woman like European people do. Teresa understood that, and she had never asked him to flaunt her in front of her superiors, but she

wanted only to trust her as a professional. But Prashant was not ready to do it yet. Maybe one day he will accept her but not now.

Teresa ran the first part of the code and the script worked for the first time without any error. She archived the code, uploaded it to the server to be tested by Alex, Kamala and Prashant and started working on the second part of the code. But before that she wrote a message to Alex on the company's internal chat: *"Alex, please download the code and test it at your end. It runs without errors for me. But before, please run in commander the script **mvn dependency:tree DVerbose = true.**"*

She had barely sent the message to Alex when she realized she had forgotten to include Prashant in the conversation. She opened the chat window with the thought of sending him the message but at that moment Kamala typed her a short message *"Hi Teresa! Have you time for a short conversation?"*. The young woman accepted the conversation, but she was little bit confused. Usually, Kamala didn't use to communicate with her. She use to do this even if it was necessary or if Prashant wanted to know something work related. The Indian man never asked her directly what he wanted to know, he used to send messages through Alex or Kamala. And this was exhausting for the young woman. She needed to hear his voice, and even if Prashant was at the other end of the world, she wanted to know that he was there for her. Many times, she typed him some work-related messages,

but the Indian man didn't want to answer her, or he answered only short and distant as "OK" or "*It's fine...*".

In the last moment, Teresa decided to start a conversation with her colleague, Kamala. She typed in the chat window "*Hi Kamala! I'm available now. Call me*". After a few seconds she heard in the loudspeaker the Kamala's voice:

- Hi Teresa! How are you? Am I disturbing you?
- Hi! Not really. I just finished the code for the first scenario. I wanted to start with the second one.
- That's great, reacted Kamala. I discussed earlier with Prashant, and he wanted to know if you need some help.
- Help from him? asked the young woman even though she was very surprised.
- No, I can help you with typing the code if you want, said her colleague shortly.
- Thanks Kamala but it's not necessary. The first part of the code is already on the server. You can clone it and test it, answered Teresa with a trace of sadness in her voice.

She was expecting to work for the first time with Prashant, but the Indian man was too proud to do this. Teresa would have wanted to know more about Prashant, about his life but everything related to him was in a mysterious cloud. She realized that she really had no idea who is he and why he is keeping her to distance from him. She wanted to put a lot of



questions to Kamala regarding Prashant, but she had not enough courage for the moment. Maybe it was better to use Alex for this. He was a man, and it was easier for him to connect with the Indian.

- It's everything ok? heard the young woman the Kamala's voice. You look very quiet today.
- It's fine, Kamala. I was just thinking at something, reacted she quickly. She doesn't want that Kamala to find out about her feelings for Prashant.
- In this case, if you need my help, please ping me on the chat window.
- Sure, Kamala, said Teresa and after a few moments added:
- I will update the status here after I will finish with code for the second scenario.
- Ok, thank you. Bye! she added and then pressed the red button to signal that the call was over.

After the call ended, the young woman while quickly preparing some food was thinking about what she was going to do. She had really gotten almost everything she wanted: money, a job she really liked, all that she wanted now was the appreciation of Prashant. What more could she want? But she had no idea that this was just the beginning.

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Prashant had finished his work schedule half an hour ago. It was the 8 hours standard imposed by the

government all over the world. But he wanted to stay a while longer. At least until Teresa will be disconnected. Although he knew that the young woman was able to write the code for the second script on her own, Prashant wanted to be there for her, even if he was connected in invisible mode.

He didn't love her, he didn't even know her, but there was something about her that attracted him in a mysterious way. He would have wanted to meet her, but this was not possible for the moment. Although he knew that her and Alex's friendship was only platonic, he was still envious of the French young man. Alex was in daily contact with Teresa, and he communicated very easily with her what was relatively difficult for the Indian man. Teresa eclipsed him and he simply felt lost himself in her presence.

Prashant was the eldest son of the Desai family, one of the most famous families in the Indian city of Pune. His father was a prominent member of the local political system, and his mother, a lawyer by profession, had given up practicing after the birth to raise Prashant and his siblings. He was a man neither too short nor too tall, somewhat handsome but he was far from a photo model. He had spent both his high school and college years studying every possible programming language, teaching himself to create various applications. Prashant was passionate about programming, he liked coding and he had no desire to go into the clubs or chase after girls. His brothers tried numerous times to take him to parties with them but without success. The young man was not interested in such things. He didn't

drink alcohol; he didn't smoke and for about two years he had also given up to drink coffee. When he wasn't coding, he practiced yoga and meditation and after years of practice had learned to balance his own energy in each chakra. Teresa was also passionate about yoga, but she still had years to reach Prashant's level. The connection between the two was quite intense both intellectually and chemical level and the man was feeling that all the time it was an intense psychological game between them. Prashant had the feeling that Teresa felt something for him but sometimes she sent him different signals that it confused him. He wanted many times to type to the Spanish woman, but he didn't know how to approach her. It was enough difficult for him to make this step. It was easier to ask Kamala to speak with her, but he knew that he couldn't do this forever. One day he had to face his fears, his demons and to contact her directly.

The man quickly made himself a Masala tea and began working on the presentation for the project meeting with Oliver. If the government had already accepted the start of the "*Matrix2Alpha*" project, Oliver had to agree to the transfer of all classified information to his colleague, Teresa Jimenez. Prashant had in plan to work with Teresa for a new project but the thought of being connected with her every day made him feel uncomfortable. He knew that she was a very open-minded person, but he still had some problems when he had to speak with her. Teresa had captivated him in a way that even he didn't understand yet. He was afraid to

reveal his feelings for her to his office colleagues but Alex even though he was thousands of kilometers away had realized that. He could hear the emotion in his voice every time when Teresa spoke in meetings and the way how he defended her every time in front of Oliver and the company board betrayed his true feelings. Even Teresa felt this but was always upset by his cold and cutting attitude. But Prashant wasn't harsh, it was only his way of hiding his true emotions. As he sipped the last drop of tea from his glass, he ran the code that Teresa uploaded to the server one more time. It was fully functional, but he was in no way surprised. He carefully extracted the reports one by one and attached them to the presentation that he would give the next day in front of the client. It was just a preliminary meeting, there was still work to be done before the application was finished. But the man counted on the help of all his colleagues to deliver the project on the deadline set with those from "*MKT Systems*".

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It was almost 1:00 AM when Alexander arrived in front of the building where he had lived for more than 10 years. He had been on a little overnight getaway to the sea on his childhood friend Patrick' yacht. It was still summer in Nice, and he needed to recharge

his batteries. The project he was working on with the team of programmers from India had consumed every drop of his energy. Even though it seemed easy to write code for hours it was not at all. He did not understand how Teresa managed to cope with all the tasks within the project and she still had enough energy to practice sports. The project was hard, the client was difficult and on top of that he had some minor health problems. Teresa knew this and she tried to help him as much as possible even if it meant working a lot more. That didn't matter to her. She had enough energy and if Alex felt good, she was feeling good too.

The relationship between Alex and Teresa was strong but somewhat incomprehensible to many people. Even though he didn't know her, he felt attached to the young woman in a quite inexplicable way. He liked to communicate with her, he felt at ease, but whenever he looked at her through the webcam, he saw her as a younger sister. He wanted to protect her from all those who wanted to harm her, but he knew that she didn't need protection from anyone. Teresa was protected by an energy that no one would be able to interact with. At least that's how he felt.

As he climbed the stairs that led to the 2nd floor where his apartment was located, Patrick followed him with firm steps. It was Saturday night so they could even spend the whole night without

having any implications on the work they were doing. Alex could ask to Patrick to leave but he didn't want to. He felt good in his company and although he had known him since childhood, he felt that now it was something different. Knowing him since a lifetime he started to consider him like a brother. The way they looked at each other and interacted whenever they had the chance to see each other was no longer the same. For a long time, he thought that the fact that they had matured was to blame, but it was not only that. In childhood, everything was simple, they played together, did their homework together and later as teenagers they would hit all the bars at night and during the day they would sleep lying in the sun on Patrick's parents' yacht.

Until recently everything had been somewhat normal, but one night, after they had had a drink or two more than they should have instead of going to his apartment, Alex stayed the night on the yacht. He was too groggy to drive anymore, and his friend wasn't in any better shape either. It was a clear summer night, and they were sitting on the deck watching the sea waves in all their beauty. Alex looked lost in the whey hoping that the next day would feel better. At one point Patrick spotted a strange blue light in the distance between the calm waves of the sea. The man stared at that point for a few seconds and had the feeling that the light was approaching them at an unimaginable speed. Filled

with a thrill of fear, he shouted to his friend “*Alex, look over there! We must get out of here*”. The other man didn't understand for a moment what it was about but turned his look to the direction that Patrick indicated and was speechless. He could feel his heart beating faster and faster almost out of his chest. He no longer knew where he was and why all this was happening. He reached out and gently grabbed Patrick' arm. Suddenly, the blue light became more and more intense, and Alex had the feeling that something strange will happen. He was not able to move anymore. He was standing frozen on the deck looking fixedly in the direction from which the beam of light was approaching. Alex just heard the Patrick's voice somewhere around, but he knew that in that moment nobody can do anything. The blue light beam had reached its most intense level and seemed to come from somewhere in the sky. It was a surreal scenery and Alex was still there letting himself be completely enveloped in a blue aura.

A few hours later, Alexander opened his eyes and stared wildly around him. He was alone, lying on the hot sand under the burning sun. He had no idea what had happened during the night, let alone how he had ended up on the beach.