

FARID

It was around 6 in the morning when Prashant reached the house where he lived with his parents and one of his brothers. After more than 10 hours of driving like a madman on the highway from one place to another he was tired, sad and had lost all hope of ever finding Teresa. He entered in the house, closing the door slowly behind him so as to not wake his family. He just wanted to know that she was okay. Given his distant behavior ever since they started working together, he didn't expect from her to call or write to him personally but disappearing from the “*System*” without a trace was already too much. He went into the kitchen to prepare some tea and he was surprised to see his brother Manish. It was unusual for him to wake up so early. Although he was somewhat saddened by Teresa's disappearance, the man tried to hide any trace of human emotion. Until he will be sure about his feelings for her, he didn't want to reveal this to anyone. It was far too difficult. He takes his cup of tea and when he was about to go out, his brother approaches him:

- Prashant, what the hell is wrong with you?
- In what sense? I don't really know what you mean, said the man indifferently.

- You're not like that, brother. You have never been away from home at night.

Hearing these words, Prashant had to quickly find a logical explanation. He answered Manish avoiding looking him directly in the eye:

- I just rode my motorcycle.
- So many hours? It's about a woman, isn't it? Don't try to deny it because it's obvious.

Prashant was put in a difficult situation. He was still avoiding answering his brother, but he was forgetting one thing: Manish had been like him once and he obviously knew how to handle these emotions better than him. He looked up at Manish and said:

- You're right, brother. It is about a colleague of mine from Spain. I don't know her, but I feel strong emotions every time I come into contact with her.
- I knew it, said Manish laughing out loud. That's happening when you love brother. It's never easy, especially in the beginning. And she? Do you feel the same way?
- This I don't know. I find it hard to talk to her about personal things. We only connect for work related matters.
- You must tell her something, Prashant. If you act like this, the woman will think that she is

indifferent to you. Put your damn pride aside and take the first step yourself like a real man.

The young man knew in his heart that Manish was right, but he was not yet ready. He was afraid that Teresa didn't share his feelings and that he would be disappointed. But how could he contact her if he didn't even know where she was. He nodded that he understood perfectly what his brother told him and he entered in his room. He should have felt better but he didn't. Not until he saw Teresa online. Only then will he know that she is safe and that she is there for him.

Instead of sitting in bed to sleep for at least 3 hours, the Indian man turned on his computer. He wanted to check Teresa's location one last time. After initializing the application, the man entered the young woman's ID in the corresponding field. The app ran for a minute and after seeing the result Prashant breathed a sigh of relief. Teresa was back in the "System". He couldn't know exactly where she was because he didn't know the island but the fact that she was there made him feel more at ease. If she was there the man still had a chance to win her heart.

Teresa opened her eyes, and everything was unknown around her. She still couldn't figure out where she was or why she was there. After the

minimalist decoration of the room and the immaculate white of the walls it could only be in a hospital. She tried to stand up, but she had a pain in her chest area on the right side. She still got up and stood for a few moments on the edge of the bed. At that moment the door opened, and a pretty doctor came in with a sheet of paper in her hand.

- Don't get up yet, she said anticipating Teresa's intentions.
- How the hell I got here and what happened to me? the young woman asked nervously.
- You came with 3 broken ribs. You had an emergency operation and now you must recover, the doctor replied politely.
- Do I have to recover here?
- Not necessarily. I can discharge you on demand if you promise to avoid any physical effort for a month.
- I promise you anything, just let me get out of here. I can't stand in hospitals.
- All right, says the doctor smiling. I think it will help recovery to be in a familiar environment. I'm now signing your discharge sheet and prescribing pain medication.
- Thank you, Teresa said as she tried to get dressed without much effort. Her knee and her arm still hurt from the injuries, but the broken ribs hurt like hell.

She stood up slowly, took the discharge form from the bedside table and walked out. Although she needed to rest, she didn't want to stay there another second. She had a code to finish, and she needed to come up with a plan to cross the borders of Europe without having to accept the chip implant.

She reached to her room and turned on the laptop. She needed to see Prashant online, to know he was there for her. The company's internal chat opened, and Prashant was there. A part of her wanted to write him, to tell him everything that happened, she wanted to tell him that she loved him, but she was afraid that she would be rejected. Prashant was so distant with her and really didn't seem to feel anything for her. But the young woman didn't want to lose her hope. Not yet. For now, she had to make a valid plan to get to India. She had already thought of an alternative, but she also knew that it was quite risky. She sat there, sipping slowly from her coffee mug, and staring absently at the code that was about to finish it. There was nothing difficult to do but at that moment Teresa's thoughts were elsewhere: with Prashant. She just needed a move from the Indian. And he was there, online, and he wasn't going to take a step forward. But he wanted to know everything about Teresa Jimenez. At that moment, she saw a new message from Alex on the screen. Surely Prashant had asked him to find out information about her. He always did that. At first,

she had considered not answering him but after all Alex Dubois was just a messenger. He had no fault for the Indian's distant attitude. However, she answered: "*Alex, I'm OK. I had a small accident on the mountain.... I have an injured knee and arm and about 3 broken ribs.*" The young woman wanted to sit on the bed, but Alex called her directly. She pressed the green button to accept the call.

- Teresa are you okay? asked the Frenchman without say "*Hello*".
- As much as possible. It hurts like hell, but it will pass. But don't worry I will finish the code for scenario 2 today.
- That's not why I looked for you, he replied, dryly raising an eyebrow. Prashant was mad yesterday that he couldn't find you in the "*System*". And you know it wasn't work related.
- I don't know anything, Alex, said the young woman shortly. I've been online since I got back from the hospital, and he hasn't bothered to text me. So, spare me with your assumptions.
- Teresa, these are not just assumptions. That man really likes you. Only it takes some time before he takes the first step.
- I imagine. Please do me a favor. Don't tell him anything about the accident. I don't want him to know about it.

- That would be missing, answered Alex. I think he would be out of his mind. But please, girl, consider that Prashant has a soul.
- I'm sure of it, Alex, but sometimes he is so cold that I don't know what to believe.
- Be patient and you will see that everything will be fine in the end, the man told her.
- OK. Then we have a deal: you don't tell Prashant anything about the accident and I'll take your assumptions into consideration. Now I have a few more calls to make before I start writing the code.
- Ok girl. Take care of yourself and take it easy with your mountain experiences.

After finishing the conversation with Alex, Teresa added a few more lines of code and then took out the secret phone from her backpack. For the next conversation he needed a secure line and only the card from that Nokia 105 could provide it. She dialed a number from memory and wait a few seconds until someone answers on the other end of the line.

- Hello! the young woman heard a puzzled voice on the loudspeaker.
- Hello Francisco! I'm Teresa Jimenez.

Upon hearing the name, the man reacts without thinking too much:

- Hi TJ! Only you could call from private numbers. It's been a while since we heard from each other.
- Yes, about 6 years, answered the young woman dryly.

In order not to prolong the discussion by delving into memories from adolescence, the young woman added:

- I need a small favor from you.
- I thought so. Anyway, I owed you for saving my ass then. How can I help you?
- I want you to get me a plane with stealth technology, with uncoded software and the latest parachuting equipment.
- Wow. What do you need all this for?
- It is not relevant, Teresa answered.
- You mean you ask me to buy you equipment worth millions of Ethereum and you don't tell me why? Francisco asked indignantly.
- It's personal, okay? I don't want to detonate any bombs if that's what you're interested in. I just want to leave Europe without implanting that damn Chip. Can you help me or not?

Hearing Teresa's words, the man smiled slightly. Even though so many years had passed he was still fascinated by her courage. Even if what she was asking for was extremely difficult to obtain, he had to help her. With years ago, she had thrown herself into

the flames to save his mother too. He answered without any hesitation:

- Yes, Teresa, I'll help you. But give me two weeks.
- Perfect. If you need some cryptocurrencies, I can transfer you to an offshore account.
- No, there is no need. After everything is ready, I will let you know.
- Thank you, Francisco. Leave me any messages only on this number.

It was at that point that Teresa ended the conversation and went to work on the code. She wanted to finish it and deliver it to Prashant as soon as possible. On the one hand, she wanted to prove to him that she could finish the code without Alex's support, but most of all she wanted to be appreciated as a woman by Prashant.

Farid Al-Salah still roamed for hours on the busy streets of Cairo. He was a solid man with green eyes, white skin, and a sharp gaze. After everything that had happened since the "*Great Change*" had taken place and the new Government had been installed, he still had the strength to believe in a better future. He had seen his mother imprisoned and killed by the Government's men, and he had seen his daughter

kidnapped by the same villains simply because she was born of a mixed-religion marriage. He had nothing left but an immense hatred for a government that had been forcibly established by those who ruled the world. All he wanted was to destroy the “*System*”, but he didn't have enough strength alone. In these moments he needed his younger sister, Teresa. He knew where she was but the only way to leave Africa now was to implant his chip developed and imposed by the Government. He knew that it was a painful and irreversible procedure, but he didn't know what to expect. But he was determined to do it. Without thinking about it, he entered the nearest center for location technology implantation. At the reception, he was greeted by a young woman who did not seem to be more than 20 years old, who addressed him politely:

- How can I help you?
- I want to ... to make the implant, said Farid stuttering. It was obvious that he was afraid of what was to come.

The girl handed him a form and said:

- First, you will need to sign this declaration on your own responsibility. Please read it carefully, sign it and then I will take you to the doctor to explain the procedure.

Farid didn't want to waste any more time. All he wanted was to implant the chip and go to Europe, on

the island to meet his sister whom he had not seen for more than 10 years. He quickly signs the form on both sides and hands it to the nurse. She motioned for him to follow her and ushered him into the office of the doctor who would perform the implant. Once inside the room, Farid felt his heart racing. The doctor was a middle-aged man, neither too fat nor too thin but with an unforgettable figure. He showed him a chair and began to describe in detail the procedure he was about to perform. Hearing all this, the man wanted to get out of there and run away as far as possible, but the thought that he would soon see his sister again kept him in place. Like the rest of the world, he thought that the chip was an integrated circuit board that would be inserted somewhere under his skin. But it wasn't like that at all. All the technology was far more advanced than he had imagined. But nothing could change his mind now. He will do it here and now. He fixed his eyes on the doctor and asked him:

- When do you start?
- When you are ready, young man, answered the doctor in a gentle tone.
- Well, let's do it now. What must do?

The doctor motioned for her to follow him into the next room. There was a bed, a set of instruments and monitoring devices, and a computer. Farid sat on the bed and lay on his back.

- I suggest you take off your shirt and lie face down. I will be inserting the implant in the cervical area and need full access.

Farid followed the doctor's orders and waited to see what will happen next. The doctor had already prepared a medium syringe and extracted some serum from a vial. He approached Farid, applied two sensors to his temples and two sensors to his neck, and after connecting him to the monitoring devices with the needle inserted, he empties the entire amount of serum into the man's body and withdraws the syringe. Then he went to the computer and began typing some codes in a programming routine while watching the man's vital sign values on the machine monitors.

Farid was still conscious when the doctor injected the serum into his body. At first, he didn't feel anything, but then he suddenly felt his head spinning as if someone had inserted a drill straight into his brain. He felt an almost unbearable heat that started at his spine and spread throughout his body. He clenched his fists in pain and wanted to get up but he couldn't. The pain inside his head was getting more and more intense as if all his neurons were dissipating into millions of pieces and then putting themselves back together and the process started all over again. He felt his whole body begin to shake and his heartbeat had reached a critical level. He could hardly see anything around him, only colorful

lights that periodically rotated around him. At one point he manages to raise a hand and gets scared. Instead of fingers he saw only tentacles that reflected with every movement like black shadows on the immaculate white walls and he started to scream. Then the doctor came back from the computer with a tiny syringe and injected a very small amount of serum into her right shoulder and said:

- Done, the procedure was completed successfully. Now the chip is already in your genetic code and in 10 days it will be active.

Farid had already calmed down and all he wanted was to get out of there. He was tired and felt that he had no strength left. He stood up and with all the strength he had left the building.

More than two weeks had passed, and Teresa had still not heard from Francisco. She hoped he could get her the flight equipment as soon as possible. Once she got possession of the plane, she also had something to modify in its software to ensure that she would not be detected by the “System” upon takeoff or during the flight. She already had a good plan but still needed some small improvements. The thought of seeing Prashant for the first time gave her indescribable excitement. She sat daily when she was logged into the company's

internal chat and looked at his picture attached to his profile. She wanted to see him every day, to be there by her side but most of all she wanted to hear his voice. Whenever she heard him speak in the project meetings, she felt much calmer. Because she knew that he was there. And as time passed the young woman felt this connection between them much more intense. She wanted him to hug her, kiss her lightly on the forehead and hold her like that forever. In a way she loved Prashant and what was more interesting was that it was all happening at an energetic level that was hard for most people to understand it. Teresa was always thinking about him, and in every decision that she made she put him first and sometimes she felt him there beside her looking at her with his mysterious black eyes. She closed her eyes and quickly entered in a meditative state. She tries to imagine a different reality where people are truly free. No Government, no System, just her and Prashant in the same continent and the same country. After a few minutes, while the young woman was still thinking about the Indian man who had conquered her heart, she heard as if in a dream the doorbell from the entrance to the building. She picked up her phone to check the image from one of the cameras and was speechless. It was her brother whom she hadn't seen for years, Farid Al-Salah. More than 10 years ago, after his grandmother who lived in Spain had died, he had gone to Egypt to live with his mother. And now he was back in Europe. "It

means he has the chip", said the girl in her mind. She took the remote control, pressed a button to allow him access to the building, and headed for the front door. Before opening it, he held his thumb up to a fingerprint reader embedded in the wall and a screen appeared. The girl types two lines of code, then moves her finger closer to make the screen disappear. When she pressed the door handle, Farid was already at the door. He had put on a little weight, but he still had that gentle look as before. She motioned for him to enter in the house. Her brother pointed to the cervical area so that the girl would understand that she had the chip inside and not say anything she shouldn't have said. But Teresa had anticipated the move and said with a smile:

- Keep calm brother. No one can locate you here. And not to monitor you. My home is secure.
- Wow. How the hell did you do that? he asked with a hint of curiosity in his voice. Then he adds:
- I don't want to know. It's programming stuff I'll never understand.
- Something like that, said Teresa. I can't believe you're here. I know that after the death of your mother and your wife, you were left alone there.
- Yes sis. All I want is to destroy the Government, but I can't do it alone.

Hearing her brother's words, Teresa showed a smile at the corner of her mouth. And she wanted the same thing, but not now. First, she needed Prashant to be with her. She decided to tell Farid the truth:

- I will help you, brother, but not yet. I still have something on the list, and it can't be put off.
- What it is? the Egyptian man asked, curtlly raising an eyebrow.
- I must get to India first.

Her brother was more and more puzzled. He did not understand what her going to India had to do with the destruction of the Government. And he didn't have the faintest idea how Teresa wanted to leave Europe without accepting the chip implant.

- I do not understand what you mean.
- Okay, Farid. On the project I was contracted now I am working with a team from India. And I think I fell in love with my boss. In fact, I'm sure of it, the young woman replied.
- Now I understand sis. And what does he say? Does he know you want to get there?
- He doesn't know anything. I have a plan but it's risky. And if he knew for sure he would do anything to stop me.

Farid sipped another mouthful of coffee and wanted to go out on the terrace to smoke a cigarette, but the young woman stopped him and signaled that he could smoke in the room. It was not the best thing

but unfortunately the terrace was not secured. At that moment Teresa heard a sound from somewhere on the floor. She carefully removed the fake protective tile and pulled out the old wooden box. She took out her phone and read the text from Francisco. She had received confirmation of the delivery of the flight equipment and including the geographical coordinates of the location. She wrote down the information and hid the phone back. Farid looked at his sister in disbelief. It was as if he no longer recognized her. He didn't know how to react but still told her:

- I can't believe what you've turned into. You weren't like that.
- Sorry brother, but when you left Europe, I was a teenager. After I was left alone, I had to survive. So, I learned from the best.
- Well, how do you want to get to India?
- I will fly a plane with stealth technology and after crossing the border with Nepal I will parachute somewhere in the forest.

The man couldn't believe what he was hearing. He didn't know whether to ask anything else or not. With every answer from Teresa, she got more and more scared.

- It's risky, sister. Do you think the plane will not be detected by the System?
- It won't be after I modify its software.

- And what will happen to the plane after you parachute?
- Stay calm, Farid, the young woman tried to calm her brother. Everything is calculated to the smallest detail. Less the part after the parachute. I will put it on autopilot and program it to land at some coordinates close to the parachute area and after landing to automatically camouflage itself so as not to be detected by either the Indians or the Nepalese.

Farid realized that his sister would put her life in danger and even though it was dangerous he knew that he had to follow her in this adventure.

- I'm coming with you, he told her.
- It can't be, Farid. Not as long as you have the chip in your body.
- But I can't get it out. I was informed that the process is irreversible, he replied to his sister.
- It is not like that. It can be extracted by a programming routine executed three times in a loop, but I don't know what the damage would be. I've never tried anything like this.
- You mean you can write the code yourself? Farid asked hopefully.
- I already wrote it a long time ago, but I haven't tested it. Basically, I would have to connect you through a device to a computer, run the routine 3 times to separate the chip code from

your genetic code, and then extract the chip code. It might be a painful procedure.

- Then I will do it. I trust you, Teresa.

Hearing her brother's words, Teresa already regretted telling him about the reversal of the implantation process. She wasn't ready to test the code yet, and she didn't want to use her brother as a lab rat. It was the last thing she would do. If something happened to him, she could never forgive herself.

- No Farid. It's dangerous. I don't know what consequences it could have.
- It's a risk I take, said her brother. I'd rather let you do it than to live the rest of my life monitored by the Government.

She knew Farid was right. She wouldn't want to live like that either.

- Okay Farid. I will extract the chip. But only when I feel ready and according to my own rules.

Her brother then smiled for the first time in many years. He held his little sister for a few moments. It was unbelievable how much inner strength could exist in such a small body. He too was looking forward to meeting Prashant Desai. If his sister loved him then it meant he was a special man and worth all the sacrifices that Teresa will do for him.