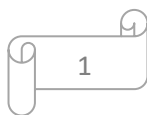


SÓLLER

It was still early when Teresa heard the phone alarm as in a dream. She should have stopped it from the first moment, but she let it ring a few more times to make sure that she didn't fall asleep again. It was a sunny summer morning and the young woman had decided to take a little trip to her favorite meditation place, *Sóller*. She knew that she wouldn't be able to hide there forever, but she needed to stay disconnected from the Network and especially from the company's internal chat for at least a day. She got out of bed, she put in a hurry a T-shirt and some hiking pants, and while she was preparing her coffee, she took a light breakfast. She wasn't hungry yet, but she needed enough energy to get to her destination. She carefully pulled out a floor tile and she pulled out an old wooden box containing various items that the Government must not have known that she was keeping them. She pulled out a very old model phone, a classic compass, and another ID card. If she still wanted to disappear from the landscape one day, she would do it according to her own rules. She inserted a new card into the phone and after a few commands written in backup, she was ready to go.

Due to its location in the *Tramuntana* mountains, *Sóller* was an ideal starting point for



hiking and mountain biking. Four mountains with a height of over 1,000 meters formed the background of the "*Valley of Gold*". There were several mountain villages, the best-known being Bunyola and Deja. In fact, the most famous hiking route on the island, *GR 221*, passed through the municipality of *Sóller*. The main attraction in the "*Golden Valley*" was the *Sóller Train*. The narrow-gauge railway connected the capital of the island of Palma de Mallorca with the small town of *Sóller*. The route consisted of 13 tunnels and the spectacular *Cinc-Ponts* viaduct.

In about 15 minutes Teresa was in the center of Palma, in *Plaza d'Espanya*, where the boarding gate for the train to *Sóller* was located. She had little emotions because she had not used that ID card for a long time, and she was afraid that it might not be validated by the Government people. After easily passing the first check for access to the station, the young woman waited for several minutes in line for access validation in the old, wooden train that led to the mountain town. When she got to the validation machine, she felt beads of sweat covering her forehead hidden under her blue denim sport cap. It was clear that she had emotions. She carefully inserted the ID card into the validator and after a few seconds the green LED lit up as a sign that the access was allowed. She breathed a sigh of relief as she withdrew the card from the machine and boarded the train. She sat somewhere in the back of

the wagon in a more secluded place and covered her face as much as she could with the hood of her sweatshirt. She didn't want to be recognized by absolutely anyone. It was an hour's train ride to *Sóller* station. Then she would cross the mountains on the GR 221 route and descend to the port of *Sóller*. Although she knew she would have no access to the Network, the young woman was not afraid. She just wanted to be alone for a while. Just her and her thoughts. She sat there in the train's wagon with her face pressed against the window, eagerly waiting for the train to speed through the 13 tunnels. She couldn't stand being locked up anymore. She felt herself getting less and less air and after taking a small sip of water, she tried to control her breathing. She closed her eyes for a split second and her mind drifted to Prashant. Even though the Indian man was somewhere far away, Teresa felt the connection with him stronger than ever. Here and now, she was only thinking about him, and no matter how much she wanted to, she couldn't get him out of her mind. He was like a magnet that drew her stronger and stronger to him. She could feel her heartbeat getting stronger. She tried to fight back but she didn't have enough energy yet. She gave in to her emotions for a few moments. She knew that Prashant was there even if she wanted to push him away. The young woman was afraid of her own emotions, but she needed him. Teresa had a strong personality; she also had a

rebel spirit, and she was willing to even lose her life fighting against the Government. Prashant knew this and although he was not willing to make a move for the moment, he still promised himself to always be by her side.

In less than 10 minutes the train would stop at the station in *Sóller*. Teresa took another sip of water; she carefully placed her backpack on her back and prepared for the descent. The thought that she would spend a day in the heat of the sun, among the rocks, olive, and orange trees, made her feel more peaceful. She got off the train and after easily passing the access gate at the station exit, she headed for the nearest taxi. She validated her ID card once more and in less than 5 minutes she was at the foot of the mountains near the GR 221 route. There, in the heart of the mountains away from the urban agglomeration, she felt safe. Just her, without any kind of connection to the Network and away from the drones that flew over the island every quarter of an hour.

Prashant woke up that morning earlier than usual. Considering there was a time zone difference between his location and Teresa's, he knew there was no way for the young woman to be connected that quickly. He prepared in a hurry his breakfast and

a Masala tea. He ate quietly, then he took his cup of tea and settled comfortably in front of the computer. After the system finished running the initialization sequence, it started the "*ConApp*" application where all the company's employees were logged in. For a period of two hours the man finished writing some codes that were to be integrated into the main application as soon as Teresa will deliver the part of the code for the second scenario. He was running locally the test code and extracted the reports before uploading a new code version to server. He saw Kamala online on the internal chat application and he connected with her for a short time to test together the first script that Teresa provided, and the one he had just completed earlier. After finishing the conversation with his colleague, he checked Teresa's status in the internal chat application one more time. She was offline. At that moment Prashant felt that something was wrong. Usually, the young woman was already connected at 12 PM IST. But not this time. The Indian man didn't have any idea what had happened, but with all his heart he started the "*IdAppLocator*" application to check the location of her ID on the Network. "*IdAppLocator*" was an application developed by the Government and implemented in all the companies with which it had ongoing projects. Prashant was not in the habit of checking the location of any colleague, it really bothered him to invade others' privacy in this way, but Teresa gave him no other choice. And this time

he wasn't thinking of her like a boss, he was worrying about her. Just the thought that something bad could happen to her produced a knot in his stomach. The man checked the Teresa's ID in the internal database and entered it into the field displayed on the screen. The application ran for about two minutes and to Prashant's surprise it didn't return any results. Basically, Teresa was not connected to the Network and could not be located anywhere. *"No, it can't be true, dammit!"* the man thought to himself. At that moment he wanted to scream and destroy everything around him. He was angry but not at Teresa, he was angrier at himself. Because he had let her run away without letting her know what he felt for her. He had no idea how to proceed next. He had to find her with any price, and he didn't know how. The only solution was to call Alex even if it meant revealing his feelings for her to the Frenchman. Prashant checked him in internal chat application and at least he was online. It didn't matter if he was busy or not, he called him directly. If there was anyone who knew where Teresa was, it was Alex Dubois. To his surprise, Alex answered him relatively quickly:

- Hello Prashant, the Indian heard the sharp voice of the French colleague.
- Hi Alex, he said. I'm sorry to bother you like this, but I wanted to get in touch with Teresa

and I see she's offline. Do you know anything about her?

- Not really. I spoke with her two days ago.

Hearing this the Indian man felt himself tremble. If Alex didn't know anything either, then he had no hope of finding her. However, he added:

- Alex, Teresa is missing. She cannot be located on the Network.
- Prashant are you crazy? said the Frenchman, bursting into a roar of laughter. We are all connected all the time to the Network. Even if you turn off your phone, you remain connected through your identity card. You have no way to disappear from the System.
- But she couldn't be found, Alex. I ran the "*IdAppLocator*" app twice and it returns nothing.

At Prashant's reply, Alex raised an eyebrow dryly. As he knew her, he thought that she could do something to stop being followed by the System. He wanted to do some investigations on his own but first he needed to put the Indian at ease. The fact that he couldn't find Teresa had almost driven him out of his mind.

- Keep calm, Prashant, he told him. I'm sure Teresa will show up. Maybe it's an app bug. I'll let her know you're looking for her when I locate her.

Prashant wanted to stop him, but it was not the right moment. He just wanted to find the young woman and then he would decide what to tell her and what not to tell her. In order not to prolong the discussion unnecessarily, he added:

- Thanks, Alex, for the support. Talk to you later.
- Of course, brother, the Frenchman answered.

After the conversation ended, the Indian man felt worse than before. The thought of never finding Teresa again scared him. She couldn't disappear from his life like that. Not now when the connection between them was so strong. He wanted to see her, to hold her in his arms and tell her that everything was going to be okay. He had never seen her, the only photo that he had was the one from the company's databases. There was nothing else about Teresa, not even on social media. The Spanish young woman was a real mystery to him. He tried for a few moments to not think about her, but Teresa's face was always present in his thoughts. He knew that if he will accept these emotions there was no escape, he will probably fall in love with her. That was exactly what he wanted to avoid. But no matter how much he tried to get away from her, he felt as if there was an intense magnetic energy that always drew him towards her. He ran the ID locator app again, but the result was the same. He couldn't bear to stay in the room. He grabbed his black leather

jacket, his motorcycle helmet and went out. Arriving in front of the house, he got on his motorcycle and sped off through the streets of Pune.

In about two hours Teresa had almost reached on the tops of the *Tramuntana* mountains. The road had been quite difficult but not impossible. She basically climbed a serpentine among olive trees, orange trees and other local shrubs. Until the first fork, the route was smooth, without difficulties, but then it became more difficult to climb. In some places, due to the strong solar storms that had occurred in the recent years, there was almost no vegetation left, only rocks covered with stones. Once at the top, Teresa took a well-deserved break. She needed to stop, to rest for a while before starting the descent to the *Sóller* harbor. She sat down as comfortably as possible on a rock, closed her eyes, and almost instantly entered a state of deep meditation. For a few fractions of a second, she had even managed to stop thinking about anything. It was just her alone and the soft rustle of the trees in the distance. At some point her thought returned to Prashant. She knew he was out there, thinking of her. Now she was no longer afraid of him or what she felt for him. She hadn't wanted to run away from him, but she needed to retreat to the heart of the

mountains at least for a day. Here she was truly free, away from the System and all that it represented to humanity. A big part of her wanted to go to India, to meet Prashant, but for that she had to accept the Government gorillas inserting the integrated chip into her body. But Teresa didn't want that. All she wanted was that Earth to become a free planet where she and Prashant could live out their love story.

At one point she opened her eyes and she realized that she had been on the top of the mountain longer than necessary. She got up, she took a sip of water and set off. She had about two hours to go down the serpentine and then about another hour and a half by speedboat from the port of Sóller to the port of Palma. On the way down the route seemed to be relatively easy. Teresa quickened her pace a little because she didn't want to catch her on the road in the evening. Normally on marked trails the possibility of encountering dangerous animals was minimal but during the night the eagles or other local species of birds or animals could appear. Teresa had already covered more than half of the route when she decided to take a short break. She had come to a fork and, being on this route for the first time, she had no idea where she should go down. She expected the trail to be marked but she saw no mark on the surrounding trees. She analyzed the situation for a split second

and realized that both routes led somewhere at the foot of the mountains. Once there it would have been easy to find the way to the port. The young woman randomly chose one of the two routes and continued her way. She wasn't sure that she had chosen the right route, but she just hoped she wouldn't get stuck in the forest. Out here in the middle of the forest she had no chance of getting a phone signal without being connected to the Network. She continued for a good part of the route and at one point she suddenly stopped, and she tried to find a way through. Practically on a 30-meter piece of road, the ground seemed to be broken, which made the road inclined or almost non-existent. She looked around her for trees or plant roots she could hold on to but there was nothing. For 30 meters around it there was no vegetation, only earth and boulders. For the first time in her life, she was truly scared. It was a real challenge to get through that part of trail, but she couldn't stay there. She took a few deep breaths and took the first step. She made another one. After a few steps Teresa thought that crossing that area would not be as difficult as it seemed at first. At the next step, a moment of inattention was enough, and she stepped on a stone. At that moment she felt how she loses his balance, how the ground escapes from under her feet and she slides. For a few moments she rolled on earth and stones for about 50 meters. Although she was afraid, she tried to dig her fingers deep into the ground to somehow stop the fall, but

she couldn't. She slid a little further and then stopped next to a tree. She tried to stand up but her whole body ached. She laid on the ground for a few seconds, then she gathered all her strength and barely managed to stand up. She could feel her whole body shaking, and she leaned her hand on the tree. As she tried to recover as much as she could, Teresa looked for a place where she could sit down to assess her injuries. She saw a bigger boulder a little further and she headed towards it. She sat down and drank the last drop of water from the bottle. She quickly examined her injuries, and they didn't seem to be anything too serious. The right arm was furrowed with deep scratches due the sliding on the stones and the left knee was full of blood. She still couldn't figure out how bad the wound was. She took the first aid kit out of his backpack and then she realized that she had no item to disinfect the wound with. She had nothing to do for the moment, so she took off her T-shirt and with the knife that was in the pocket of her backpack she cut it into strips, and she bandaged both her knee wound and the one on her arm. Although the sun was still burning, the young woman put on the sweater directly over the bra and with her knee covered in blood she limped on her way.

Towards evening Teresa arrived near the port of *Sóller*. Since it was too late to find an open pharmacy, before going to the boarding gate, the

young woman went into a bar nearby. She bought a bottle of water, and a 250ml bottle of whiskey and she headed to the toilet. She hoped that no one was there because she wanted to disinfect her wounds and she didn't need spectators. She entered and to her surprise she was alone for the moment. She washed her two wounds carefully, first with soap and water and then she disinfecting them with whiskey. Both wounds hurt her like hell, but it didn't matter anymore. Then she bandaged them with clean pieces of T-shirt that she had kept in her backpack and went out. She went to the boarding gate at the port and scanned the ID card. After the green LED turned on, she headed for the first boat to Palma. She couldn't wait to get to her apartment. She wanted to take a hot shower and call Prashant. It didn't matter if it was day or night at his end, she just wanted to hear his voice. Being on the verge of death, she realized that life is too short, and she wanted to continue it with the man she loved.

After almost two hours Teresa was already in her apartment. It was around 10 o'clock at night. She was tired, hungry but at least she had a well-defined target: to find a way to reach in India at Prashant.