



You can only
**SURPRISE ME
NEXT TIME**

Katka Havlová





Tento vzdělávací materiál je dostupný výhradně na
www.jazykovamentorka.cz, www.languagementor.eu
a přímo ode mě jako součást kurzu.

Pokud jsi tuto knihu získal/a jiným způsobem, budu ráda, když mi dáš vědět. Můžeš
získat přístup k videím, audio, konzultacím a dalším bonusům.

Text i ilustrace jsou chráněny autorským právem a nesmí být šířeny bez souhlasu autorky.

© 2026 Katka Havlová

Katka Havlová

What is inside?

1. Entry Code	1
2. Madam.....	3
3. Critical Overload	7
4. Bizarre Development	13
5. Ethics and Aftermath.....	18
6. Theory of Chaos	24
7. Age Paradox	31
8. Binary Truth.....	36
9. Final Release	39
10. Feedback Loop	41
11. BONUS: Midnight Confession	43
Answer Key.....	49



1. Entry Code

1.1

They waited at the reception on the top floor of the administrative building, a modern coworking hub, and Dustin nervously adjusted the collar of the shirt he had bought last year for his sister's wedding. It was a bit tight in the shoulders and the neck. *That's the gym time*, he thought to himself. Tobias, meanwhile, clutched a leather laptop bag in his hands like a protective shield.

"Hey, once we go in there, don't let her fool you. These rich corporate types will size you up with one look and then **rip you off**. Be tough," Dustin instructed Tobias, even though he didn't feel exactly confident himself.

"Just remember," Tobias whispered back, "no jokes. Speak only when she asks. And don't say 'hey' to her."

"Take it easy, Toby. We're the best, right? So what," Dustin snapped back, but the corner of his mouth twitched.

Few minutes later, the receptionist opened the door and showed them into the office where they were supposed to have the meeting. Instead of cold silence, they were greeted by the scent of jasmine and quiet music. Milla was sitting in a stylish armchair by the window. On the table in front of her, she had their printed portfolio, and on her face, she had... a smile.

"Come in. I'm very glad you found the time," she said, standing up to shake both their hands. She offered them the seat and asked: "Would you like tea or coffee?" She held a small coffee mug in one hand and a large teacup in the other. "Let me guess; you look more like tea drinkers. I've just brewed some."

Learning tip

rip somebody off – někoho natáhnout, oškubat (ve finančním významu)



1.2

They both nodded. Tobias had a professional speech ready about scalability and server redundancy, but now it was clashing in his head with the fact that this elegant woman was personally pouring him tea from a teapot.

A red light started flashing in Dustin's head. Why is she so nice? It's a trap. She definitely wants **to lull us into a false sense of security** so we'll sign some disadvantageous **clause**. No one in this business is just kind for no reason. He sent an invisible signal to his partner: *Watch out, Toby, there is a catch somewhere.*

"Your project is fascinating," Milla said, looking at them with genuine interest. "It has a kind of... youthful courage that I haven't found in other companies. I like how you think about data security. It's almost... poetic."

Dustin swallowed hard. *Poetic?* He felt like a boxer who had swung for a heavy blow and hit a pillow. Her kindness frightened him more than the arrogant superiority he had prepared for. He expected a predator, but here sat someone who was actually praising him. *She's making fun of us*, Dustin thought. *She'll **pet us** now... and then she'll eat us alive. Don't show weakness. Don't trust her just because she smells of jasmine.*

"You know," Milla continued, "I'm looking for someone I can trust. Not just a company, but people. I believe that you two will build this system not just from code, but from **dedication**. Right?"

Tobias looked at Dustin. They were completely overwhelmed. Her gentleness had disarmed them more than any pressure ever could. They were ready to fight, but they had no one to fight against.

Learning tip

to lull us into a false sense of security – ukolébat ve falešném pocitu bezpečí

clause – článek smlouvy

pet us – pohladit, pomazlit

dedication – nasazení, oddanost

overwhelmed – ohromený



2. Madam

2.1

The air was stuffy in their small, rented attic office, which looked more like a warehouse for old electronics than the headquarters of a promising startup. Pizza leftovers sat on the desks, and Dustin slammed his hand down in victory.

"It's done, Toby! The code is running smooth as butter. Madam is going to be impressed tomorrow," Dustin exhaled, running his fingers through his messy hair.

Tobias pushed up his glasses and, without looking away from the screen, muttered: "Don't **jinx** it. If it freezes right when she's watching, we're finished. You know how precise she is. She'll notice even a missing **semicolon** in a comment." Both were silent for a moment, staring at the lines of code that meant everything to them.

In their shared folder, the project was simply named: M_Adam. For Tobias, it was the peak of logic and clean code; for Dustin, it was a source of jokes. "Hey Toby, Madam sent the API documents," Dustin had said back when they started, throwing a crushed **crisp** packet at his partner while his feet were resting on the desk.

Tobias adjusted his glasses without turning around. "Milla Adamová. Call her by her name please. She's our biggest client, not your aunt."

"Sure, M. Adamová," Dustin grinned. "M. Adam for short. Madam. It fits her, doesn't it? She's strict, she's smart, and she looks like she'll see through us before we even make our first commit."

She had hired them when they were basically nobodies – two guys with a good idea and **a lot of nerve**. In the last three months, she had given them more trust than any investor would ever have.

Learning tip

(not) to jinx something – něco (ne)zakříknout

semicolon – středník (interpunkční znaménko)

crisps – brambůrky, čipsy (v UK angličtině, hranolky = chips)

with a lot of nerve = courageous – kuráž/ný (v cz verzi: s drzým čelem)



2.2

"I still don't understand why she chose us," Dustin shook his head, sinking into his creaky chair. "She could have had ten big firms in suits. And our price wasn't even that low. She's not saving much, and the risk..."

"Maybe that's exactly why," Tobias mused. "Maybe she's not looking for savings; she wants something else. Those big firms would sell her a box. We're selling her a brain. But Dusty, seriously... the conference next week is our **trial by fire**. We have to look like **pros**. No jokes about blondes from you, no stuttering from me. We have to prove to Madam she didn't make a mistake signing that contract." He accidentally used the **nickname** Dustin had created.

Dustin laughed and threw a piece of paper at him. When he was excited, his fingers were restless, always crumpling something to throw. "Don't worry, nerd. We'll wear shirts, pretend to know what 'compliance' is, and **have her back**. She'll be the star who found the talent, and we'll be the talent. We just mustn't look like we survive on instant soup."

Tobias smiled for the first time that evening. "I'm really afraid she'll see through us, Dusty. She's such a mystery... you never know what she's thinking. She notices everything. Even how your hands shake of fear when you hand her the tablet."

"That's not fear, that's adrenaline," Dustin defended himself, though he knew Tobias was right. "Madam is strict, but she's fair. Remember her reaction to the error in module C? No screaming. She just looked at us with those mirror-like eyes and said: 'Gentlemen, I pay for solutions, not excuses.' That totally blew me away."

"Me too," Tobias nodded. "She's a real professional. We mustn't fail. We have to impress at that conference, so she signs the next phase. If she drops us, we'll have to sell these machines to a **pawn shop**."



2.3

Dustin stood up, walked over to the dirty window and looked out into the night. Down below, a tram bell **chimed**, but he couldn't see it from the **skylight**.

"Don't worry. We have the best product she could get. We're her dark horses, Toby. Next week we'll prove to her that betting on us was her best business move of the year."

Tobias looked at the name "Milla Adamová" on the contract. He felt the weight of responsibility but also the joy of being taken seriously. At that moment, she was an unreachable icon, a professional from a higher universe.

Neither of them had any idea that in a week, in a hotel hall, these boundaries between them would dissolve, under the pressure no code could ever predict.

Learning tip

trial by fire – křest ohněm

pros = professionals

nickname – přezdívka

to have somebody's back – krýt někomu záda

pawn shop – bazar, zastavárna

to chime – za/cinkat

skylight – střešní okno



True or False? Support your opinion:

1. Dustin's shirt was tight because he bought it specifically for the meeting with Milla.
2. Tobias warned Dustin not to use informal language like "hey" when speaking to Milla.
3. Milla's office smelled like jasmine and had quiet music playing.
4. Dustin and Tobias work in a modern administrative building with a stylish reception.
5. Dustin created the nickname "Madam" by shortening Milla's full name, Milla Adamová.



3. Critical Overload

3.1

The air in the hall was filled with the smell of ozone from the projectors and **lukewarm** coffee that had lost its aroma long ago. The main lecture had ended, but a complicated diagram of neural architecture was still glowing on the screen. Blue lines moved like nerve endings and cast a pale, flickering light on them.

Milla **leaned** against a somewhat unstable desk. Both colleagues instinctively looked away from her **cleavage**. Her presence was quiet but absolute. Her charcoal-coloured silk blouse tightened over her chest with every breath, and a silver chain on her neck swung gently to the rhythm of her voice.

"The algorithm is too **cautious**," she said in a low, cultivated voice. "It acts as if it is afraid to make a mistake. As if it is afraid... to touch the core".

Tobias, the taller of the two young men, stood so close that he could feel the heat coming from her arms. He held a tablet in his hands, but his fingers did not move. He watched Milla's lips move and how precisely she spoke every word. He tried very hard to keep his eyes on her face so he would not embarrass himself by looking lower.

"Maybe it is just waiting for the right signal," he replied. His voice was an octave deeper than usual. He did not even dare to use her name; it suddenly felt too intimate. "Sometimes a system must feel pressure first to understand what is expected."

Dustin, who deliberately chose to focus on the diagram on the screen, now looked at them. He was the type of guy who rolled up his shirt sleeves, as if he were always ready for action. He leaned over the table toward them, closing that tight, invisible triangle. The hall around them seemed to stop existing. The noise of the other participants at the buffet tables was just a distant hum.

Learning tip

lukewarm – vlažný

to lean – naklonit se

cleavage – výstřih

caution / cautious = careful



3.2

"Pressure is not enough," Dustin argued. His **gaze** moved from Tobias to Milla. In his eyes was a challenge that had nothing to do with computer science. "There must be hunger. The need to connect, even if there is a risk that both systems will overload."

Milla smiled slightly. When she **blinked**, she held her eyes shut for a fraction of a second longer. To any casual observer, this tiny variation would have been invisible. But in that silent moment, a storm of questions raced through her head. The most **pressing** one was: *Do I understand correctly that they are flirting with me?* Then she replied: "Overload is a risk that we do not accept in our project."

Milla looked at them and smiled in her mind. She watched how they both tried to act professional while the air among them was vibrating. At that moment, she admitted it to herself. This was exactly why she had hired them.

She remembered very well how it was twenty years ago. **Back then**, a young person was just a 'kid' in the eyes of the 'experienced' people. They automatically used **informal language** with her and sent her to do the most boring work. People believed that skills only came with age and service, not with talent. Milla had to climb up the hard way, without help, and the old 'bosses' put obstacles in her way just because she was **bold** and saw further than they did.

And then, for that first meeting, these two showed up. She saw the same drive in them that she once had. But there was something more that she didn't want to admit at the time. They weren't just brains in shirts. They were sexy guys with an intellectual level that, in her youth, was only respected in older men. Then she realized that these were exactly the kind of people she wanted to know at twenty-five, to talk with them and be close to them. She chose them because she was attracted to them. Through them, she wanted to be young again for a while.

Learning tip

gaze – upřený pohled

pressing – naléhavý, palčivý

back then – tenkrát

bold – odvážný



3.3

She reached for the tablet that Tobias was holding. Her fingers brushed against the back of his hand. A **spark** went through Milla, and her inner voice shouted: *That was an accident, dammit, I hope he didn't misunderstand!* Tobias did not move, but Dustin noticed how his breath caught. In the silence that followed, you could only hear the beating of three hearts. They beat in a rhythm that was definitely not scientific.

"It depends," Tobias whispered and did not look away from her eyes, "on who controls the system. And how much they are willing to risk."

At that moment, there was more than just data and analysis between them. There was a thick, electrical, invisible net that tied them together more strongly than any work task. Just one more move or one more word, and the sterile conference hall would witness something much wilder than a professional discussion.

Milla looked at them with amusement. She felt like a predator and a helpless victim at the same time. She was over forty, an age that gave her calm confidence, while the two at the table were only twenty-five. Inside, however, she felt more like their student than a powerful client. She was fascinated by how easily they moved in codes that she was only beginning to understand. *What if they only see me as an older woman who buys their time?* she thought. With men her age, she knew where she stood, but here... she was on thin ice. She felt the spark, but she was also filled with uncertainty. *Do all three of us understand this the same way, or am I just being ridiculous?* Four months of working together taught her to value their brains, but now that admiration was mixing with something she could not control rationally.

Tobias felt his palms sweating. In his mind, he repeated like a mantra: *She is a client. She pays your rent. She is twenty years older. Act like a professional.* He saw small wrinkles around her eyes when she smiled. Instead of reminding him of the age difference, it only fascinated him. Beside the two of them, she seemed like expensive, vintage wine next to two pints of beer.

Cultural tip

in/formal language – nahrazuje výraz pro "tykání/vykání", což se v AJ nerozlišuje



3.4

"We should go back to the risk analysis," Tobias said. He tried to sound as professional as possible, even though his voice broke slightly. "The contract clearly defines the boundaries of the project. If we start experimenting with... non-standard methods, we could risk the integrity of the whole system."

Milla looked at him for a long time. "Integrity is important, Tobias. But too much **caution** leads to stagnation. Didn't they teach you at school that the most interesting things happen on the edge of chaos?"

Dustin laughed. Unlike Tobias, he did not plan to defend himself. He was trying to think of how to turn this intellectual **foreplay** into something real without looking like a puppy trying to jump on a sofa.

"Tobias is right that boundaries exist," Dustin said, and humour flashed in his eyes. "But I always thought that in hockey, the boards are there so you can **lean against** them. Or press someone against them."

Milla raised her eyebrows. "Dustin, you go into everything with such passion..."

Tobias stepped between them, as if he wanted to put out that invisible spark.

"Technically, passion in code is just **noise**. We must eliminate the noise so only clean functionality remains".

Milla moved her weight from one leg to the other and turned her head toward him. She was so close now that Tobias could smell her perfume – sandalwood and something sharp, maybe pepper. "Noise, Tobias? Really? Sometimes it is exactly the noise that makes an experience unforgettable. Clean functionality is... boring."

Learning tip

spark – jiskra

ridiculous – směšný

foreplay – předehra

lean against – opřít se o něco

noise – ve spojení s programováním = šum (nikoli hluk)



3.5

She put her hand on the table right next to Tobias's hand, but she did not touch him. That millimetre of empty space between their skin screamed louder than the whole hall full of scientists. *I should have stayed home and finished the manual!* Tobias thought, but it was too late.

Dustin leaned against a **pillar** and watched Tobias's inner struggle with a smile. "You know what, Toby? Maybe we should pull an **ace** from our sleeve – our 'noise' simulation. The one we did that night when you said it was too risky."

Tobias shot Dustin a look that was a mix of panic and a desire to **choke** him. Milla only smiled mysteriously because she was fighting her inner voice: *Are they not only flirting, but fighting over me?*

The last lights in the conference hall went out, which forced them into the foyer.

Dustin had already **vanished** an hour ago with an apologetic look and a glance at his phone. "The server is falling into a loop, I must solve it before our data falls apart," he had declared so convincingly that even Tobias, who was usually alert, only nodded in confusion.

Learning tip

pillar – sloup

ace – eso

choke – u/škrtit, zadusit

to vanish = disappear (zmizet)



True or False? Support your opinion:

6. Milla had a very easy career path because her bosses helped her when she was young.

7. Milla is over forty years old, while Tobias and Dustin are twenty-five.

8. Milla believes that "clean functionality" is the most important and exciting thing in an experience.



4. Bizarre Development

4.1

In the dimly lit hotel hallway, where the carpet muted the sound of footsteps, only Milla and Tobias remained. Tobias felt his throat go dry. Every meter they walked toward their rooms increased the tension.

Milla walked close to him, and her shoulder sometimes brushed against his. Milla felt the rhythm of his steps and fought her uncertainty. *He is so smart. He sees the world in **equations** that I only wish to understand. Age does not matter when you find someone on the same wave.* But then she remembered her new wrinkles which she noticed in the mirror **the very morning**. *Am I misinterpreting his politeness as interest?*

Tobias felt his own inner chaos. Her intellectual superiority erased physical differences for him. *She is beautiful because of how she thinks.* But then doubt hit him. *I am just a 'boy for work' to her. An experienced woman like her must be laughing at me. She definitely knows I am playing a role, so I don't feel like a loser.* Both walked in silence, staring ahead. Between them was a string of desire mixed with deep uncertainty.

Tobias put his card to the lock. The green light flashed, and the lock clicked. The door opened into darkness, with only a thin stripe of light from the hallway. Tobias took a step inside, ready for anything. But he was definitely not ready for this.

"Surprise!" a cheerful female voice called from the bed. The night light turned on. A young girl with messy hair and a phone was lying in the bed. "Toby! Dusty said you would be happy. He said you missed me." Tobias froze like a statue. "**Luce**? How... how did you get here?"

Learning tip

equations – rovnice

the very morning – přesně to ráno, ten den ráno

Luce = **Lucy** / **Lucie** = Lucka



4.2

Milla stood in the doorway with an unreadable expression that slowly turned into quiet amusement. Tobias looked at Milla and whispered, "I really had no idea." Milla smiled and suddenly sent Tobias an air kiss because she felt so relieved. She quietly backed out into the hallway so the girl in the room would not notice that Tobias did not come alone.

She walked through the hallway to her room. In her mind, she applauded Dustin. He had actually saved her from a very foolish mistake. She could handle sleeping with a colleague, but Tobias was twenty years younger, for God's sake! Also, Tobias was too earnest, too sensitive. Looking at his smooth, boyish face, she realized she didn't want the weight of responsibility that would come with him. Tobias was exactly the right type for fragile Lucy, and not for a forty-five-year-old woman with strong thighs and a large bust like Milla.

With Tobias, she would feel old and like a protector, but Dustin was different. He did not have a boyish face and he had strong, hairy arms. She wouldn't feel so old and **worn out** with him. He seemed to her free and unshakable. He was the type who would just get up and leave when it was over, without a second thought.

She unlocked her door and went inside. She let her bag drop to the ground and took off her shoes. Then she stopped. In her bed, with his hands behind his head and a winning expression on his face, lay Dustin. He had a blanket over him that showed his naked body from the waist up. A **bolt of lightning** went through her body. His chest was hairy and his arms were strong, exactly as she had imagined just a moment ago. For a second, she wondered if she was just dreaming. But as he spoke, reality **set in**. "I fixed that server loop problem faster than I expected," Dustin said with his **bold** smile.

Learning tip

worn out – opotřebovaný

bolt of lightning – blesk



4.3

Milla stood at the door. She did not show shock or surprise. She only watched him with a calm, analytical look, like she was studying a complex algorithm. She slowly walked to the closet without looking at him again. She was playing for time. She did not know how to act; her brain turned off emotions and acted purely rationally.

"I'm going to take a shower. I need to wash off the conference dust."

Dusty froze for a second. *The dust?* he thought. *Was there a double meaning? Am I just a bit of 'Dusty' conference dirt that she wanted to scrub away?* The idea hurt.

However, he was wrong. There was apparently no double meaning. Milla stopped at the foot of the bed. With total calm and no rush, she lifted her skirt just enough to show the lace of her black stockings. Dustin did not even breathe. Milla slowly and methodically moved her fingers under the lace and started to pull the stocking down. Her eyes never left his. She saw the doubt in his face and smiled and decided not to panic.

When the second stocking was on the chair, she stood up and grabbed a silk robe from the closet. The bathroom door closed and the lock clicked. Dustin remained alone in bed with a beating heart, hearing the sound of water. When she appeared in the room again after a few minutes, Dustin did not know she had been wondering if he would leave. Although she knew he had nowhere to go because he gave his bed to Lucy. But he never thought of leaving; he wanted to be there.

"I hope you are not angry," he said. It seemed to her that he was genuinely concerned if he had offended her by entering her privacy.

"Should I be angry that there is a handsome, smart, young, naked guy in my bed?" she said honestly. She remained standing by the bed because it felt **bold** to lie down.

Learning tip

Dustin = Dusty / dusty = prašný, zaprášený



4.4

"I'm not naked, I wouldn't dare," he said and uncovered the blanket. He was wearing black boxers, but the gesture of uncovering his hairy stomach made Milla's knees feel weak.

"Well," she said. "Your room is occupied anyway, and there is a free bed here, right?" She stopped because she realized she was revealing that she had been in their room, with Tobias.

Dustin realized it too. "Wait... how do you know that Lucy is in our room?"

Milla looked at him. It was a brief, practical look. To hell with dignity! "Well, it was a bit of an awkward moment, really. Poor Toby. Caught with a strange woman in a strange room."

Dustin's smile froze for a second. The image **struck** him like a **bolt of lightning**: Milla and Tobias going to a room together because they thought he had left! He wasn't going to lose this battle, so he said, "Toby is in *his* room with *his* girlfriend. But I'm the one stuck with a strange woman in a strange room now."

"Well played," she said. "And what is going to happen now, my darling? I think I missed that page in my manual." She called him 'my darling' to break the formal barrier between them and slid under the blanket.

Dustin turned on his side to face her. There was no respect for their age difference in his look.

Learning tip

to struck (somebody) like a bolt of lightning – metaforicky udeřit (někoho) jako blesk



True or False? Support your opinion:

9. Milla and Tobias felt very confident and sure of each other's feelings as they walked to their hotel rooms.

10. Dustin arranged for Tobias's girlfriend, Lucy, to surprise Tobias in his room.

11. When Milla found Dustin in her bed, he was completely naked under the blanket.



5. Ethics and Aftermath

5.1

The hotel restaurant was flooded with sun and the smell of fresh pastries in the morning. Tobias sat at a small table in the corner and looked as if he hadn't slept all night. Next to him, Lucy was chatting happily and fishing for cereals in a bowl of milk, while Tobias just **stirred** his coffee and kept looking toward the entrance. The only thing he was truly interested in was the arrival of Milla and Dustin.

Tobias was constantly thinking about the moment when Dustin had to leave immediately 'to solve a server problem'. *That bastard*, Tobias thought, gripping his spoon. *He planned it perfectly. He brought Lucy here so I wouldn't have time to think about what he was doing.* He watched Milla entering the dining room and tried to find even a shadow of what had happened in her face. But he saw nothing, which made him nervous.

Milla looked fresh. She wore a cream suit and was as calm as usual. A few seconds later, Dustin walked in behind her. Milla took only fruit and black tea. Dustin loaded a full plate as if he was starving.

"Good morning," Milla said and gestured to ask if she could join them. Lucy nodded enthusiastically, feeling like at least someone would finally give her some attention.

Milla was cutting a peach and secretly watching Dustin. She had to smile to herself. He seemed to her like someone who had come up with a brilliant prank but was now struggling because he got **tangled** in it himself. *Yesterday he was a great strategist*, she thought while watching him chew carefully, *but today he looks little confused*. She found it **disarming** and human. He wasn't a playboy, just a boy trying to survive the consequences of his own idea.

Learning tip

tangled – zamotaný

disarming – odzbrojující



5.2

Dustin said hello to Tobias and Lucy, but he didn't really look at them. When Tobias asked if he had solved the server loop, Dustin's eye twitched. "Yeah, it's fine," he nodded and then pretended to be busy with his full plate. Luckily, Lucy and Milla kept the conversation going, so Dustin and Tobias didn't have to deal with anything right then.

How does that woman do it? Dustin wondered. Milla sat next to him like a perfectly cut diamond; she responded to Lucy's talk with interest and looked as if that night in the hotel room with a man almost half her age was just a story of her distant cousin. Her **detachment** fascinated and scared him at the same time. He felt that after everything that had happened between them at night... he actually had no idea what she thought of him now. The change – how elegantly she drank tea now compared to how she was a few hours ago – was unbelievable.

Milla then spoke about today's schedule and what to expect at the last lecture. Tobias saw that Dustin was unusually quiet today. And with Milla... he saw nothing at all. She was like a perfectly polished mirror. That made him most nervous. He suspected something had changed, but the mask they both wore was **bulletproof**. He couldn't ask. It would be **inappropriate, embarrassing**. Absurd, almost insane.

"Will you join us for the final lecture on ethics in automation?" Milla asked Lucy with genuine interest in her voice, without a trace of superiority. Lucy's face lit up, but then she looked a bit uncertainly at Tobias. "God, everything sounds so complicated here. I think I'll rather wait upstairs in the room; there's a TV show on. I wouldn't understand anything anyway." She laughed with a clear, carefree laugh.

Tobias smiled at her and stroked her hand. "That's fine, Luce."

Learning tip

detachment – odtažitosť

inappropriate – nevhodné

embarrassing – trapné



5.3

When Tobias was busy with Lucy for a moment, Dustin quickly leaned toward Milla until she felt his hot breath on her ear. "She's completely stupid, isn't she?" he whispered quietly so only she could hear. "Tobias likes exactly these kinds of girls."

Milla gave Dustin a warning look, but he just **smirked** into his cup. Dustin knew what he was talking about. He had known Tobias for years, since vocational school, and knew that Lucy was an anchor to reality for him. Tobias was the type of boy who always suffered from his own clever head. The glasses he kept pushing up, even though they stayed firm on his nose, and the ability to solve an equation before the teacher finished writing the assignment, made him a stranger in every group. He felt like a loser, a nerd who never fits in. Lucy, however, didn't ask him any complicated questions. With her, he could just be 'Toby', the boy who helps her with shopping and watches movies where you don't have to think. She returned him to 'normal' people, where he didn't have to be ashamed of being a genius – because it didn't matter at all.

Dustin had it differently. With his wide shoulders, hairy arms, and the look of someone who would rather fix a motorbike than program a neural network, he never suffered from loneliness. His boldness was his shield. People didn't expect intelligence from him, so he could surprise them anytime or just hide it when it suited him. Tobias was imprisoned by his intelligence; Dustin used it as a weapon he **drew** only at the right moment.

Milla took a sip of tea and watched Tobias patiently explain to Lucy where to find the hotel pool if she got bored. She could see that it didn't bother him, that he didn't feel embarrassed by such a trivial explanation; on the contrary. Milla felt that he loved her innocent simplicity because it allowed him to turn off the eternal processor in his head. Again, in her mind, Milla thanked Dustin for the night trick that prevented this kind boy Tobias from cheating on his sweet silly girlfriend.

Learning tip

to smirk – ušklíbnout se, křenit se

to draw a weapon – tasit zbraň



5.4

However, Milla saw his other side too. She saw how Tobias's eyes shone when they talked about the project. She saw the hunger for someone who understands him even in the darkest corners of his algorithm. And that was what scared and fascinated him about Milla at the same time. Even though various doubts ran through each of their heads that evening, this was the only thing where their thoughts hit the mark. Milla was dangerous for Tobias because he couldn't be that 'normal boy' with her. With her, he had to be who he truly was. And for which he often hated himself.

"Shall we go?" Milla stood up and straightened her jacket. "Time is running out, and ethics won't wait."

Tobias got up immediately, Dustin a second later with a slight sigh. As they were leaving, Dustin looked back one more time at Lucy, who had separated from them and was heading for the elevator.

Then he took Milla by her elbow and remarked: "You know, my darling, sometimes it's nice to have someone in your life who knows only the 'cloud' in the sky. It makes you feel less worried about the world's destiny."

Tobias almost **stumbled**. *Darling?* That one single word hit him like a freight train. *He is calling the iceberg Madam... his darling!* Everything began to fit together. Dustin's night disappearance, Lucy in their bed, the strange silence at breakfast. *They were together... and they did it.*

Tobias didn't feel jealousy in the classic sense. He didn't feel betrayed as a man. He felt **pure, raw** horror for the fate of the project. *System collapse*, flashed through his mind. *Disruption of objectivity. Client and developer. Emotional bond equals loss of control.*

Learning tip

to stumble – zakopnout

pure, raw – prostý, pouhý, syrový



5.5

He looked at Dustin's wide back and Milla's elegant walk. Dustin looked satisfied, like someone who had just packed his tools after a job well done. Milla's **impenetrable** mask now had a completely different meaning for Tobias. It wasn't just a professional wall; it was a shield.

How can we continue to work? it terrified him. What if they fight? What if Dustin makes her angry and she stops our funding? What if feelings get involved and the code goes aside? He felt like grabbing Dustin by the neck and screaming at him, asking if he realized what he had risked. Instead, he just straightened his glasses and felt cold sweat on his forehead.

"Is something wrong, Tobias?" Milla turned, as if she felt his unease.

"No," Tobias managed, and his voice sounded strange. "I'm just thinking about ethics in automation. It's... more complicated than I thought. So many unpredictable variables."

Dustin looked back at him with his crooked smile. "Everything can be predicted, Toby. You just need to know which algorithm is running right now."

Tobias looked at him and, for the first time in his life, felt something for Dustin that wasn't just professional **rivalry**. It was the fear that his friend and colleague had just introduced a virus into their perfectly **tuned** world. A virus that cannot be deleted without causing damage.

Learning tip

impenetrable – neproniknutelný

rivalry – rivalita

tuned – vyladěný



True or False? Support your opinion:

12. Tobias felt relaxed and well-rested during breakfast at the hotel restaurant.
13. Lucy decided to skip the final lecture because she found the topics too complicated.
14. Tobias understood Dustin and Milla had spent the night together when Dustin called her "my darling".



6. Theory of Chaos

6.1

A week later, when Milla joined the usual online meeting, only Tobias was sitting on the other side. His face in the monitor frame looked pale; the blue light of the screen highlighted his sharp features and reflected in his glasses so that she couldn't see his eyes.

Milla waited for a moment, watching the empty space in the second window of the application, and then asked: "Are we waiting for Dustin? We are supposed to go through the module revisions today."

Tobias didn't even look at the camera; he was likely watching her image on his monitor. "Dusty won't attend today," he said in a flat, almost mechanical voice. "The server is falling into a loop. He has to solve it before the data completely falls apart."

In the following silence, the sentence remained hanging in the air. The same sentence – **word for word** – that Dustin had used at the conference a week ago just before he disappeared. Tobias now spoke it with such icy precision that there was no doubt – it wasn't a coincidence. It was a challenge.

Milla felt tension tighten in her throat. She suspected this moment would come. Tobias's mind hated **unresolved** variables, and this was a variable that was breaking his entire system. *What did Dustin tell him?* flashed through her head. *Surely he wasn't the type to talk about his sexual experiences. Had Tobias just figured something out on his own?*

"Tobias," Milla began carefully, trying to keep the tone of a client who has the situation under control, "I hope that this... loop on the server... won't affect our program today."

Learning tip

word for word – slovo od slova

unresolved – nevyřešený



6.2

Tobias raised his head and straightened his glasses. "It always affects the program, Milla. As soon as an element that doesn't belong there appears in a system, it starts to affect the stability of the whole thing. Dusty is my partner. We have **collaborated** for five years. Our efficiency was always based on being... transparent."

Tobias felt his heart beating all the way in his throat. *You are doing it right*, it roared in his ears. *You must protect the project. She might be forty-five and she's the client, but Dustin is an idiot who doesn't see further than one night. If this goes wrong, we lose everything.* He felt a strange mix of respect and anger toward Milla. He admired her brain, but now he saw her as a virus that had attacked their safe, logical world.

Milla leaned back in her chair. "I understand. I hope you **untangle** that loop soon. So... shall we go through now?"

Tobias only gave a short nod and started sharing his screen. The following twenty minutes went at a calm **pace**. Tobias was precise as always. Together they went through the code, and Milla let him talk, watching how he calmed down when he moved **in his element**. When they finished, Tobias took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"That is all from my side, Milla. Do you have any questions?"

Milla shifted her position, a gentle, friendly expression on her face. "Actually, my darling, I do have a question. If Lucy hadn't been in your room that night... would you have a reason to feel guilty now for disrupting our professional relationship?"

Tobias froze for a second. But it wasn't the shock of an attack; it was more like someone finally said out loud what he was afraid to admit to himself. He looked into the monitor, and images of that night raced through his head. He saw himself standing at the door, heart pounding, ready to walk into that room with her, and then how she sent him an air kiss. In that moment, it hit him. All his strictness toward Dustin was only meant to cover the fact that he would have gone in bed with Milla **just as willingly**.



6.3

And then he realized something even stronger. *She really would have gone to bed with me.* That news passed over him like a wave of blissful warmth. Back at the hotel, he hadn't been sure; it seemed like a crazy idea, he thought he was just imagining things. But now, from the tone of her voice and the way she looked at him, he believed that the attraction was **mutual**. That she didn't see him as a boy for work or a nerd with glasses, but as a man. That she made no difference between him and Dustin.

Tobias took a deep breath and, for the first time over the monitor, gave Milla a sincere, informal smile. "I probably would," he answered quietly and peacefully. "I mean, definitely. I would absolutely have a reason to feel guilty."

The tension that had stretched between them for a week dissolved in that second. By calling him 'my darling', she signalled something significant. Even though it never actually happened, it had come so close. It had been real in his mind, and now she admitted it had been real in hers, too.

"Thanks, Milla," Tobias said, and this time he didn't sound just professional.

"Alright then, see you again in a week," Milla smiled and disconnected from the call.

"I promise there will be no more loops on the server," she added only to herself.

Before the start of the call, Milla had been curious about how Dustin would talk to her. The regular Tuesday call had just finished – and Dustin didn't attend. *Did he back out? Did he run away? What does it mean? Tobias always had the main word, but could Dustin really not look at me even through a camera now?*

Learning tip

to untangle – rozmotat

pace – tempo

in his element – ve svém živlu

just as willingly – stejně (tak) ochotně

mutual – vzájemný



6.4

The entire week leading up to it passed in a spirit of a strange, quiet **lull**. Like a breath after a Big Bang, waiting for the dust to settle and see what was left **intact**.

Dustin acted unexpectedly reserved, sent only necessary messages about work. Not because he regretted. Rather, for the first time in his life, he felt a certain kind of respect that forced him to keep his distance. He, who was used to taking things by storm, suddenly didn't want to ruin anything. All week, he watched his phone out of the corner of his eye. Every beep pulled him out of concentration. *Should I write to her?* he thought a hundred times. *Or is it too much? Doesn't she want peace after all that?* He didn't want to look like a lovesick boy, even though exactly those feelings were pushing into his consciousness.

He remembered the moment when she came out of the bathroom in the morning. She wasn't wearing that silk robe like in the evening, but his T-shirt. It was the most unprofessional image of her he had ever seen. She sat next to him on the bed, and instead of some passionate declarations, they started laughing.

"You're such a fool," she told him and ran her fingers through his messy hair. "Do you know what would have happened if I had kicked you out in the evening? You would have had to sleep in the hallway."

"No risk, no gain, Milla," he answered and pulled her to him. He remembered the weight of her body, the softness and at the same time the strength with which she embraced him.

Learning tip

lull – utišení, zklidnění, (přeneseně tako: bezvětrí, příměří) **lullaby** = ukolébavka

intact – neporušené, vcelku



6.5

Milla wasn't feeling much different all week. Every day was as usual, but she often caught herself losing focus and smiling at nothing. She felt... light. That **encounter** woke up something in her that she had long considered a closed chapter. A femininity that doesn't need to hide strong thighs or age, because for that man on the other side of the bed, it was just another part of her beauty.

Why do I call it an 'encounter'? she wondered in her mind. Why don't I call it by its real name? No encounter did anything to me. That wasn't an encounter. It was real deep passion. Oh god!

She waited to see if Dustin would call. *He's a young guy, surely he has many other things*, she told herself, but deep down she hoped he would reach out. She didn't want to pressure him; she didn't want to call him as a 'client who wants more'. She wanted it to stay as it was between them – natural, voluntary, and without binding obligations.

She recalled a detail: how she woke up in the night and saw him sleeping on his stomach, with one hand under the pillow. He looked so harmless, completely different from that bold hairy man who had surprised her in her bed in the evening. She lightly stroked him, and he just **snuggled** closer in his sleep. There was something incredibly human and simple about it.

That was why she had put on his T-shirt in the morning – to feel him on her body for a little longer. She was surprised that the T-shirt wasn't tight across her chest and realized that he is strong and muscular. No boy, but a **hell of a man**.

They both were fine, and at the same time slightly unsure in that vacuum. Neither of them wanted to be the first to step through that bubble, so they wouldn't accidentally break it. Dustin was afraid he would be a nuisance; Milla was afraid she would seem desperate.



6.6

When the regular Tuesday meeting was over, Tobias sent Dustin a short message: "We talked. It's cool. I guess. No more loops on the server please." A stone fell from Dustin's heart. He took his phone and, for the first time that week, wrote Milla a message that wasn't about revisions: "Tobias said you missed me today. I hope you didn't tell him everything about my secret reserves..."

The display lit up on Milla's desk. She read it, exhaled, and felt her calm, confident smile returning. It wasn't a message from a lovesick boy, but from a partner who knows what happened. She tried to write back to him just as lightly, but she wasn't able to express herself at all. Everything immediately seemed stupid to her. She rewrote that message about fifty times. In the end, only this was left: "I can keep a secret. So next Tuesday, the three of us again?"

The answer came immediately: "I should have known that only a **threesome** would satisfy you. See you on Tuesday."

Milla laughed out loud. It was it. No drama, no complicated declarations. Just the right amount of **boldness**, double meanings, and understanding.

Learning tip

encounter – setkání

to snuggle – přitulit se

hell of a man – pořádný chlap

threesome – švédská trojka

boldness – odvaha, až drzost



True or False? Support your opinion:

15. Tobias used the 'server loop' excuse to force Milla to talk about what happened between her and Dustin.

16. Milla suggested that Tobias would have gone to bed with her if Lucy hadn't been in his room.

17. During the week after the conference, Dustin sent Milla many romantic messages.



7. Age Paradox

7.1

Dustin and Tobias were now commuting to Prague every day because Milla had created a workspace for them in her office. The project was finishing, and weekly online meetings were no longer enough for her.

Fortunately, the journey only took about half an hour in the morning because they were both used to waking up early and by seven, they were turning on their computers in Milla's office. This way, they avoided the morning rush hour, left the car in a parking lot at the metro terminal, and were in the centre in a few minutes.

Milla had a completely different regime; she arrived at nine, didn't go out for lunch and stayed much longer in the office.

The return home at the **rush hour** was worse; Tobias and Dustin **took turns** driving because being stuck in traffic on the highway was very tiring and boring. They didn't even talk much after the long day. They no longer spent their evenings together, even though they previously didn't mind staying at each other's places or in their attic office overnight. They now needed a break from work and from each other.

They used to go to the gym together, but now Tobias spent all his free time with Lucy. Dustin was actually quite relieved; he didn't want to explain why he'd started avoiding the gym. The truth was that he often ran into his '**friends with benefits**' there. Somehow, he couldn't **shake off** his attachment to Milla, and he would have been embarrassed to refuse sex with his usual **flings**.

Learning tip

rush hour – dopravní špička

to take turns – střídát se

friends with benefits – "kamarád taky rád"

to shake (something) off – setřást

flings – krátký nezávazný románek nebo pletka



7.2

Getting up at six, having no breakfast – by noon, Tobias and Dustin were hungry. They were thrilled they **no longer** had to live on boxed pizza and instant soup, so they enjoyed their lunches, each time in a different restaurant. One day, as they were returning to the office rested and full, they **spotted** Milla through a cafe window. Sitting opposite her was a young man about their age, maybe a bit younger. He was **lean** with smooth **longish** hair, wearing a **hoodie** with a technical university logo. He seemed restless, with aggressive energy that Dustin knew so well.

Tobias shook his head when he saw Dustin stop to watch them. *That's not anything like him*, Tobias thought and kept walking. Dustin watched how Milla laughed – not with her professional smile, but happily, almost like a girl. Then she leaned in and placed her hand on the guy's forearm. He caught her fingers and whispered something to her. As they were leaving, he leaned over and gave her a long kiss on the cheek. Milla then adjusted the collar of his jacket with complete ease.

So that's how it is. Young brains are her weakness. I'm just another one in line. Another upgrade for her system, he sighed and walked back a bit so he wouldn't run into Milla. Then he bought two **pointless** cups of espresso, which neither of them drank anyway, and arrived at the office a few minutes after Milla with the **expression** of someone who had just found a critical error in the code.

Milla was already sitting at her desk, headphones on, with that mild, focused **expression** that had kept him awake for several weeks. She didn't hesitate to exchange bold, double-meaning texts with him, but physically, she hadn't let him near her again.

Learning tip

no longer – už ne...

to spot – zahlédnout

lean – šlachovitý (štíhlý)

longish – trochu, ne tak docela dlouhé

hoodie – mikina (s kapucou = hood)

pointless – zbytečný, bezúčelný

expression – výraz (ve tváři)



7.3

"I brought some doping," Dustin announced, placing the coffee in front of her.

"Though I saw you already got a nice **dose** of energy today. In that cafe near the passage. Was that some new 'module' for our team? He looked... very active. I'd almost say you were tuning your synchronization in real-time."

Tobias, who had been silently typing away, smirked with amusement. Dustin's jealousy was so transparent that it was unbearably **cute**. Milla took off her headphones, took the cup from Dustin, and looked at him with a spark in her eyes.

"You saw us? Well, I must admit, this 'module' is my best work. He really turned out well, even if he's hard to control sometimes."

Dustin leaned against the desk and gave her his bold–intellectual look. "Didn't seem like it. It looked like you understood each other without words. The 'physical layer' seemed to work quite well there. I was just wondering if he isn't too... progressive."

Milla burst out laughing. It was a sincere, warm laugh with no trace of anger.

"Actually, you're right, Dusty. He is incredibly progressive. Lucas is finishing his Master's at Faculty of Mathematics and Physics (MATFYZ) and is starting an **internship** at CERN next month. Unfortunately, he's moving to Geneva."

"CERN? So, another **brainiac**," Dustin remarked, with an unwanted respect in his voice that he tried to hide with irony. "Well, I hope he won't drag you there with him. That would really ruin our project."

"Well, I think he can handle it abroad without his mommy. He's my son."

Learning tip

dose – dávka

cute – roztomilý

internship – praxe (studentská, pracovní)

brainiac – označení pro chytrého člověka: mozkovna, bedna



7.4

Dustin's jaw dropped in that second. The world stopped spinning for a moment.

Son. Master's. CERN. All those images from the hotel night – the way he touched her, how she laughed with him, how she slept with him – suddenly collided with the reality of a woman who has a grown son his age. The age difference, which seemed like just a spicy detail in the hotel, suddenly made him feel that they were **worlds apart**. Dustin felt like a boy playing an adult, who had just been caught by his mom.

"Son?" he managed to say. Time stood still in the office.

"Yeah, I know." Milla said quietly, looking him straight in the eyes with that incredible smile. "It's his birthday today. Twenty-five. He is exactly one month older than you." Finally, it was out. *I'm a crazy old woman **dating** a guy the same age as my son. No! There's no dating, is there? It just happened once...*

He turned pale. She understood him. She also still lived with that erotic echo; but she had gone through this 'cold shower' in her head some time ago. The erotic charge that Dusty wanted to maintain and develop, she had washed away by simply admitting to herself: *Damn, he is younger than my son.*

"**Bloody hell,**" Dustin exhaled and sank into his chair. In that moment, it felt embarrassing that he had texted her so **boldly**. Suddenly it all seemed obscene and inappropriate.

Tobias began to laugh quietly into his monitor. Dustin just sat there, staring at his shoes, slowly realizing that the night in the hotel wasn't the start of a romance, but simply... a night. That Milla's distance wasn't just a game or foreplay for something more. Just that one night, with a very clear expiration date that Milla had understood much earlier than he did.

Learning tip

worlds apart – každý v jiném světě

to date somebody – s někým randit

bloody hell – doprčic, dop*dele

boldly – odvázně, drze



True or False? Support your opinion:

18. Dustin and Tobias arrive at the office at the same time as Milla.
19. Dustin has been avoiding the gym because he is afraid of seeing his ex-girlfriends.
20. Milla's son, Lucas, is exactly one month younger than Dustin.



8. Binary Truth

8.1

Lucy had **spilled the beans** on Tuesday evening. Straight out. She said that it was not a long **affair**. Just once, a weakness, a mistake. When Tobias, with furious eyes, asked her who it was, she refused to answer. And in Tobias's head, in that second, only one name lit up: Dusty.

From that moment on, he thought of nothing but that betrayal. Every morning, he picked him up for the drive to work, but just today, **as luck would have it**, Dustin had the day off. *I would have loved to punch his daring, smug face*, but he had no opportunity. He wanted to hurt everyone he thought had hurt him.

He had been staring at the blinking cursor for an hour now. Suddenly, he turned to Milla. She was writing something in her notebook, completely unaware of his internal hell.

"Milla, next time there's a conference, I'm going to bed with you, Luce be damned!" Tobias fired off. His voice cracked; it sounded almost like a threat.

Milla stopped writing. She slowly took off her glasses and looked at him. "Fine, then Toby." She nodded. "I've already had Dusty in bed, so now it's your turn. Let's see what you can do."

Tobias was shocked. That sentence hit him like a **floe**. All his dark posturing shattered in an instant by her calm response. He realized how pathetic it sounded.

"Dammit," he exhaled, and the white plastic spoon he had been fiddling with in his hand snapped with a quiet crack. "God, I'm such an idiot. Sorry, Milla. I didn't mean it. I'm just going nuts."

"I see that," Milla said, putting down her pen. "What's going on?"

Learning tip

to spill the beans – vyklopit něco (ve smyslu prozradit, přiznat se)

affair = fling

as luck would have it – jako na potvoru

smug – samolibý

floe – ledová kra



8.2

Tobias took a breath, but his voice was shaking. "Lucy. She cheated on me. Once, she said. And I... I just know it was him. Dustin. I just wanted to hurt him. And her. I'm a total idiot for snapping at you like that."

"Cheating right? That really **sucks**," Milla said simply and leaned over her notebook again. She had been divorced for two years and knew all about it. "Go home, Tobias. Sleep it off. Tomorrow, you both come in on time, and most importantly, don't kill Dustin on the way; I have work for him."

Tobias packed up his laptop, mumbled a 'bye', grabbed his backpack, and walked out. Milla froze. *What did he say? He was nasty to me, talking about taking me to bed because he wanted to hurt Dustin... what does this have to do with me? Oh no, no, no! It was supposed to be over!*

The next day, the office was buzzing with tension more than servers under a heavy load. On the way to work, Tobias pretended to be focused on driving so he wouldn't have to talk to Dustin. He was **controlling himself**. But he's had enough. Dustin was finishing some code when Milla left the office, and Tobias suddenly jumped from his chair. He couldn't keep it inside anymore. The image of Dusty with Luce....

"How could you do this to me?" Tobias burst out, his voice shaking with anger. "To sleep with her and then sit here and act like my best friend? How could you be such a bastard?"

Dustin froze. His hands stayed above the keyboard. "Toby... I..." he stammered. "It wasn't planned. Really. But I just couldn't resist. She is so incredibly intelligent, she has that calm and depth; in that moment, I just didn't think about the consequences at all. It just overwhelmed me. But it's long gone now, anyway, you know it."

Tobias looked at him as if he had grown a second head. "Lucy? You think Lucy is intelligent and has depth?"

Learning tip

it sucks – to je na h*vno

controlling oneself – ovládat se



8.3

Dustin's eyes widened. "Lucy? Lucy is completely stupid. I'm talking about Milla."

The silence that followed you could cut with a **chainsaw**.

"Lucy told you that I had something with her?" Dustin blurted out after a moment, with genuine horror in his voice. "**Bro**, I **swear** on every line of code we've written that I never touched your girl. You know she's not my type. She drives me crazy after five minutes."

Tobias slowly sank back into his chair. "She didn't say a name. She only said it was once. And I... I just automatically assumed it was you. Because of the way you left the conference and then brought Lucy back..."

"I brought her for you, not for me." Dustin exhaled and ran a hand through his hair. "I brought her in to keep you away from Milla, bro."

They looked at each other. The truth lay between them, naked and strange. Tobias was relieved that Lucy hadn't been involved with his best mate, but at the same time, the reminder of Milla exploded in his head again. However, Dusty was right. That 'code' was now '**invalid**'.

A few days later, Dustin came to the office in a short-sleeved T-shirt. On the inside of his forearm, he had a fresh tattoo. It wasn't a complex image. It was just one thick, perfectly straight black line. About five centimetres long.

"What is that supposed to be?" Tobias asked, nodding at his arm.

Dustin looked at the line. "That is the symbol of binary truth, Toby. Zero or one. Nothing in between. It's a reminder that in this team, we don't lie to each other. Even if the truth is total shit."

Learning tip

chainsaw – motorová pila

bro – kámo, brácho (zkrácenina z "brother")

to swear – přísahat

invalid – neplatný



9. Final Release

9.1

Milla closed the folder with the contract. Tobias threw his backpack over his shoulder, and Dustin leaned against the edge of her desk with a sigh. All three stood there in the silence that follows a battle – the moment when there is nothing left to solve, nothing to code, and nothing to explain.

"So... it's in the cloud," Tobias remarked and adjusted his glasses. He did this gesture less and less often now; he had almost stopped noticing his glasses. "It's running. It's really running."

He looked at Dustin, who was shaking his head while staring at the dark monitor.

"Bro, that was wild," Dustin said. "When I remember that debugging marathon a month ago... **I thought my eyes were going to pop out.**"

Tobias chuckled. "Yeah, bro. After you accidentally deleted that library that night, I really wanted to kill you. I didn't believe we would fix it by morning."

Milla looked at them both, took a sip of her hot jasmine tea, and said with total calm: "Yeah, bro, seriously. At one point, I thought I must have been mad to hire you two – amateurs. I was going **to go nuts.**"

Tobias looked at her with surprise because he had never heard her speak like that before. But Dustin had heard her that night, so a sincere smirk spread across his face. "But you didn't, right?"

"I survived," Milla **shrugged** and put her cup back on the desk.

Learning tip

I thought my eyes were going to pop out – že mi oči vypadnou z důlku

to go nuts – zbláznit se

to shrug – pokrčit rameny



9.2

There was no big speech. Milla didn't say "thank you for your work", and the boys didn't say "thank you for the opportunity". Everyone knew what it was about. Milla shook their hands – the way people who have survived something together shake hands.

"Take care, guys. And don't break the internet on the first day," she said, already reaching for her phone as her next meeting was starting.

"Sure. Bye, Milla," Dustin waved from the door.

"See ya," Tobias added.

As the door closed behind them, Dustin stretched his back in the hallway by the elevator. "So, what now, bro? Are you hungry?"

"Yeah, bro, I'd really like a proper boxed pizza for once," Tobias laughed.

The elevator went down, the doors opened into a rainy afternoon, and they simply disappeared into the crowd.

True or False?

21. Tobias was angry because Lucy confessed that she had cheated on him with Dustin.
22. Milla reacted with shock and started shouting at Tobias as he threatened to go to bed with her next time.
23. Dustin's new tattoo of a straight black line symbolizes honesty within the team.



10. Feedback Loop

Upstairs in the office, Milla looked out the window for a second, but she could **no longer** recognize those two familiar figures among the flood of colourful umbrellas. It felt like a symbol of her lost youth. She probably would never experience anything like this... Then again, who knows?

She opened the bottom drawer of her desk and took out an old notebook. Tucked between the scribbled pages was a folded piece of paper. It was the feedback form from that **fateful** conference.

Under the question "What surprised you the most?" she had written, without hesitation and almost without fantasy: *"I was surprised that you don't drink alcohol at all. And by the **scent** of **wild thyme** in your hair. And that in bed with you, I felt like a **fairy**."* And she had handed it to Dusty.

He had given her back his own – the one she had just taken out of the notebook, where it was hidden away like her most precious treasure.

In Dusty's broad handwriting, it said: *"Nothing surprised me, because I feel like I've known you forever, and my fantasies were so insanely perverse that you can only surprise me next time."*

Learning tip

fateful – osudový

scent – vůně

wild thyme – mateřídouška

fairy – víla



Elaborate on the story:

24. Why does Milla feel that the two men disappearing in the crowd is a symbol of her lost youth?

25. Why do you think Milla keeps Dustin's note hidden in her notebook like a "precious treasure"?

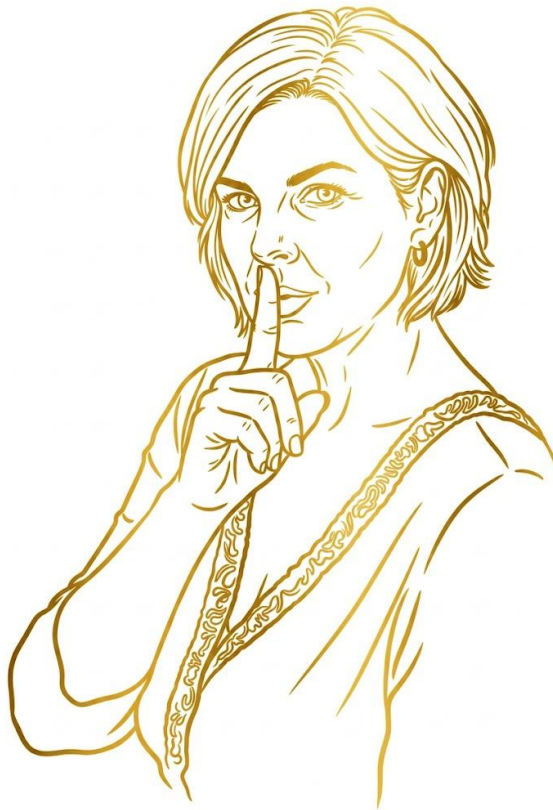
26. What do the messages on the feedback forms reveal about the difference between Milla's and Dustin's personalities?



BONUS

SPICY ENGLISH

FILTERS OFF





11. Midnight Confession

11.1

"Well played," she said. "And what is going to happen now, my darling? I think I missed that page in my manual." She called him 'my darling' to break the formal barrier between them and slid under the blanket. Dustin turned on his side to face her. There was no respect for their age difference in his look.

"I don't read manuals," he said. "I live instead."

In the few seconds of silence that followed, Milla's whole adult life flashed before her eyes. She remembered the moment two years ago when she finally got her divorce papers. She knew it was good that it was over, but she had no idea what was ahead. She didn't want to get attached; she didn't want to be responsible for anyone else's feelings anymore.

For years, she had been a student with a child, and everyone made her feel like she should stay at home making **mud pies**, instead of bothering 'serious scientists'. She **longed for** someone equal, someone wonderful... And he was right here now. But she was twenty years older and, unfortunately, she was **worlds apart**. She was in a different world than her young, wild self, and worlds apart from Dusty – the twenty-five-year-old guy who had brilliantly **tricked** his mate just to get into her bed.

Dustin hesitated. He understood code and algorithms, but he didn't know much about feelings. That was also why he didn't have any serious relationships. He flirted with young women and ladies at the gym, and when they were on the same **wavelength**, he slipped a **fiver** to the receptionist. The guy then opened a private relaxation room for them. They had about an hour, and that was enough for him. Whether he would ever meet the same woman again – he didn't really care.

Learning tip

mud pies – bábovičky

to long for – po něčem toužit

to trick somebody – někoho oblafnout

wavelength – vlnová délka

fiver – "pětka", malý obnos peněz



11.2

Now he was almost naked in bed with a woman from whom he had been receiving signals all day long. And the signals suggested that ending up in bed with him was exactly what she wanted today. But now, he hesitated.

The fact that she hadn't kicked him out, that she had played along... should he take that as a 'yes'? As an invitation? Or had he miscalculated? After all, she had just admitted that she had almost gone to bed with Toby. Who were the signals really for?

He tried to find the right words so he wouldn't spoil the magic or look like an idiot, but Milla spoke first:

"So live, and please take me with you. I haven't really *lived* for long, and I don't know how to do it anymore."

It wasn't the firm, confident voice he knew. He interpreted that **trembling** voice as **consent**, as an invitation; as her confirmation that he had understood her correctly – and that she wanted it, too.

He rolled toward her, his breath hot on her face. Then he rolled back onto his bed. He had a **mischievous** smile on his face. She couldn't see it, but she knew it was there from the tone of his voice when he said:

"So Madam doesn't know what to do with a... how did you put it? A young, handsome, smart, naked guy in bed?"

"You're not naked, you wouldn't dare," she corrected him, as he had said before.

Learning tip

trembling – chvějící

consent – souhlas

mischievous – šibalský



11.3

"Would it help **if I dared**?"

"If you think it wouldn't, **what on earth** are you doing here?" she asked, relieved she could still joke with him even at this moment.

"Come here," he answered and lifted his blanket. He put his arm around her, and she rested her head on his shoulder. She started running her hand over his **hairy chest**. If she had missed something all those years, it was this. That **snuggly fuzz** that made her feel like the man was her support. Even though he often wasn't, the feeling of her fingers wandering through that **velvety forest** was unbeatable.

He gave her time to recover, to settle and calm down.

"So, what are you waiting for?" he asked playfully.

"Does it look like I'm waiting?" she answered with a question.

"I should warn you that I **snore** when I sleep."

"Do you want me to kick you out into the hallway?"

"That's an option," he agreed. "Or..." he added quietly, "you could just not let me fall asleep."

"Go ahead and sleep, I don't need you awake. I'm already having a great time." She slowly moved her hand down his stomach.

"You selfish **brat**!" he laughed and pulled her onto him as lightly as if she were a fairy.

Learning tip

if I dared – kdybych se odvážil

what on earth – co tady proboha děláš, co tady vůbec děláš, co tady teda děláš?

to snore – chrápat

brat – rozmazlené dítě, spratek (v CZ verzi "potvora" bez negativního smyslu)

hairy chest, snuggly fuzz, velvety forest – chlupatý hrudník, mazlivý kožíšek, sametový prales...



11.4

Her face was now right above his. She looked into his eyes and saw her hair was **tickling** him, but he didn't brush it away. He stroked her back and kissed her carefully.

Because they were colleagues, the kiss felt more intimate than lying under one blanket. Tomorrow they would be dressed again, but their lips – they would see each other's lips every day, and that would remind them of what happened. That was the biggest line to cross, and they finally did it smoothly and without hesitation.

Milla felt the 20-year gap disappearing.

Just when she was sure their bodies would join any second now, he stopped and said: "I put a condom in the drawer."

She found it refreshing how easily he could switch from romantic to pragmatic in an instant – without ruining the **vibe**.

He reached for the drawer handle. After a moment, she stretched her hand out alongside his, as if she wanted to help, but then she put her fingers between his, stopping him.

She said, "If..." but didn't finish. Thoughts raced through her head – should she ruin the moment by talking about the absence of fear regarding **STDs** and unwanted pregnancy?

She looked into his eyes and saw that he was reading her, that he understood, so she just said: "You don't have to."

It seemed to her that he hesitated for a moment longer. As if he were rearranging things in his head. His palm slid down her arm, and he gently rolled over with her. Now he was above her. Forehead almost against forehead. Their breath mingled.

Learning tip

to tickle – šimrat

vibe – atmosféra

STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) – pohlavně přenosné nemoci



11.5

She didn't even notice how he shed his last piece of clothing, and then she felt him pressing gently against her.

For a fraction of a second, everything stopped moving. His hands beside her head. Her palms on his back. Their breathing was fast, but their bodies seemed to be held in a tense silence. It was that strange kind of immobility, as if there were still a chance to take it all back. To get up. To look away. To say something light and **dismiss** everything. One move back, and they could pretend nothing had happened. But one move forward was just as easy. And now they had to decide which way to go. She felt a gentle pressure right against her sensitive spot. A heat that could no longer be ignored.

She opened her eyes, and it seemed like he had been waiting for that moment. In his gaze was a quiet question, and at the same time, the understanding that the answer had already been given.

"I've been watching you all day, you were **on fire**," he said, as if to explain. "Tobi's glasses were **fogging up** just from looking at you. At one point, I thought you were going to jump on someone and you wouldn't even care who it was. So I just had to come up with something to make sure it was me."

"To **rescue** me?" she asked, amused and pleased.

He leaned his head closer to her and whispered: "To **shag** you." One last second where everything could be undone. But their very next move closed that possibility for good.

Learning tip

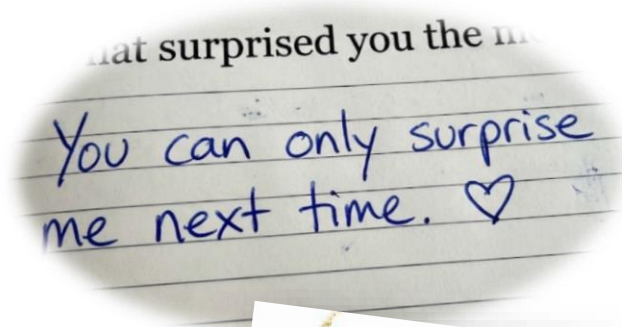
on fire – nažhavená

dismiss – zamítnout, dělat jako že nic

to fog up – zamlžit se

rescue – zachránit

to shag somebody – #@*!% (have sex with somebody)



Answer Key

Chapter 1 + 2

1. Dustin's shirt was tight because he bought it specifically for the meeting with Milla.
false
2. Tobias warned Dustin not to use informal language like "hey" when speaking to Milla.
true
3. Milla's office smelled like jasmine and had quiet music playing.
true
4. Dustin and Tobias work in a modern administrative building with a stylish reception.
false
5. Dustin created the nickname "Madam" by shortening Milla's full name.
true

Chapter 3

6. Milla had a very easy career path because her bosses helped her when she was young.
false



7. Milla is over forty years old, while Tobias and Dustin are twenty-five.
true
8. Milla believes that 'clean functionality' is the most important and exciting thing in an experience.
false

Chapter 4

9. Milla and Tobias felt very confident and sure of each other's feelings as they walked to their hotel rooms.
false
10. Dustin arranged for Tobias's girlfriend, Lucy, to surprise Tobias in his room.
true
11. When Milla found Dustin in her bed, he was completely naked under the blanket.
false

Chapter 5

12. Tobias felt relaxed and well-rested during breakfast at the hotel restaurant.
false
13. Lucy decided to skip the final lecture because she found the topics too complicated.
true
14. Tobias understood Dustin and Milla had spent the night together when Dustin called her 'my darling'.
true

Chapter 6

15. Tobias used the 'server loop' excuse to force Milla to talk about what happened between her and Dustin.
true
16. Milla suggested that Tobias would have gone to bed with her if Lucy hadn't been in his room.
true
17. During the week after the conference, Dustin sent Milla many romantic messages.
false



Chapter 7

18. Dustin and Tobias arrive at the office at the same time as Milla.

false

19. Dustin has been avoiding the gym because he is afraid of seeing his ex-girlfriends.

true and false (záleží, zda považuješ slovo 'girlfriend' za slušné vyjádření pro 'úlet')

20. Milla's son, Lucas, is exactly one month younger than Dustin.

false

Chapter 8 + 9

21. Tobias was angry because Lucy confessed that she had cheated on him with Dustin.

false

22. Milla reacted with shock and started shouting at Tobias as he threatened to go to bed with her next time.

false

23. Dustin's new tattoo of a straight black line symbolizes honesty within the team.

true

Chapter 10

24. Why does Milla feel that the two men disappearing in the crowd is a symbol of her lost youth?

Because Dustin and Tobias represent energy and a new generation. When she watches them walk away, she realizes that she is at a different stage of her life now. The crowd swallows them up, just like time swallowed her younger years.

25. Why do you think Milla keeps Dustin's note hidden in her notebook like a "precious treasure"?

The note is a reminder of the spark and the attraction she felt. It makes her feel desirable and alive again. Keeping it hidden makes it feel more intimate and special—it's a secret memory that belongs only to her.

26. What do the messages on the feedback forms reveal about the difference between Milla's and Dustin's personalities?

Milla's messages are professional and careful. She wants to be polite and organized. On the other hand, Dustin's messages are bold and 'cheeky.' He is not afraid to be direct and playful, even in a professional setting. It shows he is more relaxed and confident.



ABOUT ME

My name is Katka, and I've been writing stories ever since I was 14.

I only wrote for my close friends at that time.

Some of my short stories in Czech were published as entries in writing competitions.

How many stories in English have I written? In 2025, I stopped counting...

Spoustu povídek jsem rozepsala, mezitím dokončila jiné, mezitím dva romány, na kterých jsem postavila dlouhodobé programy pro zlepšování angličtiny dospělých samouků.

Název tohoto příběhu jsem postavila na poslední větu, protože otevírá další možnosti – nejen pro pokračování tohoto příběhu, ale hlavně pro pokračování tvého zlepšování v angličtině.

Protože tvůj dospělý mozek nepotřebuje seznamy slovíček, potřebuje zápletku, děj a pulzující příběh, který prostě chceš dočíst.

Nejsem jen autorka, jsem taky lektorka angličtiny a pokud máš jakékoli potíže se čtením této nebo jakékoli jiné knížky, přestože tvůj level je zhruba B1, tak to znamená, že ti k tvým teoretickým znalostem chybí praktické dovednosti.

Ráda ti pomůžu k přemýšlení v angličtině.

Stačí se připojit k mému "GENIÁLNÍMU PŘÍBĚHU" – informace máš v mailu.

Katka Havlová





Thanks for reading my story!

I hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it for you.
I wrote this story also in Czech, so you can use it as a cross-check reference
for understanding.

With love 🍷❤️

Kateřina Havlová

© 2026 Katka Havlová