

# A COLLEAGUE FROM THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Marie Veselá



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“An alien is about to join you in the office!” Renata puts her head inside the office.

Anna stops running her fingers over the keyboard and turns to the door, frowning.

“Well, really. She has come back from somewhere in the middle of nowhere where she was living with a savage. She might start jumping on your table as a monkey,” she sniggers. But she is not going to get her colleague on her side.

“Well, you will see for yourself,” she says in an aggrieved tone and closes the door abruptly.

“Yes, I will see for myself.”

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That’s how a planet director introduced me before starting a new job. If I knew that right away and not after a while, I’d rather go to work as a cleaner where my colleagues would treat me as their equal.

Luckily, my supervisor Anča is nice. She let me settle in, then walked me through the building and now she’s willingly introducing me to the job. Until the stomachs of both of us start rumbling.

“Shall we go out to have lunch? I will take you out to the canteen, it is a little out of the way.”

We are setting off into the cold. It is freezing hard, I exhale vapour out of my mouth because of the frost and remark casually: “Jesus, what a cold, fortunately I am wearing my mother’s coat.”

Anča is staring at me. “God’s name should not be taken in vain.”

What? I mean, that's a normal thing to say. Now I am the one who is staring.

"I am a Christian," she explains. "I honour Jesus as my Lord."

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I need to finish my schooling. Otherwise, I will not meet the education requirements and I will get a pay cut. I will at least come across other thoughts and maybe I will be able to reduce a little medication for my nerves. Or, I will rather have to in order to get the study material into my head. I am watching the school from the opposite street and I cannot help but thinking it is like ending up in a clink. Or, worse than that, I would be given food and drink in the can and I could walk somewhere in the prison compound, too. Instead of this, to make matters worse since autumn I will be sitting up here late after. Why did I only have to fall in love when I was eighteen?

I almost stretch myself on the huge door of the old building in order to be able to open it. There is a commotion in the hallway outside the gatehouse, the students are dashing around and shouting at each other.

"Good morning, I have come to an informational meeting on distance education."

"And do you know where?"

I nod in agreement, I hope that I know where I am going. I am looking for the elevator, there is no place to move on the stairs.

“You are not looking for the elevator, are you?” the porter is smiling at me. “You won’t find any. There are only stairs here. And it’s a right-hand walk.”

I look up in amazement. It is like on Petřín Hill.

“Upstairs is another staircase, even more spiral and narrower, so that it works.”

I hope I will not get dizzy and will not slide down on the left side, then they would probably go for me.

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“How did you enjoy at school? What about your classmates?” this is how Anča greets me first thing in the morning. I throw my bag on the table and pull a wry face.

“I guess the classmates are o.k. but wouldn’t you like to tutor me in math, English, Russian, accounting or perhaps economics?”

She laughs. “You will manage it. If others have managed it.”

“Perhaps they weren’t as stupid as me.”

“We can manage everything with God’s help.”

“Yeah, with God’s help,” I peep. Here we go again. “What makes you think so?”

“Me and my brothers and sisters, too. He is helping us because we ask Him for help in our prayers.” I open my eyes wide and almost open my mouth in astonishment as well. “For God’s sake – I mean – I beg your pardon, how many brothers and sisters have you got?”

“I speak about the spiritual family. In our church, you know?”

Brothers and sisters instead of comrades. Prayers in a kind of a church instead of chanting constructive slogans in a crowd. Interesting. I like something about it though.

“So, if I open my textbook and pray above it, it will just pop into my head? You definitely have to teach me that!”

Anča withers me with a look that I almost get embarrassed. I do not think that this is going to work.

“If you just sit above a textbook and meditate, like a yogi, you will only open yourself to the spirit of wickedness, which is of demonic origin. You need to start learning and asking Jesus Christ for help. He will help you. If your prayers are sincere and respectful.”

No half-heartedness, by the look of it. You do not want to beg, you will be left to your own resources. It would be easier to be the yogi.

“Hem. And how do you pray? Do you kneel down and say a memorized prayer?”

“Come to our Sunday group and see.”

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