

## Puppybug at the headmaster's office



"Hello, Mr. Hansbauer."

"Well, Clare Overlie, in person and in all her glory. Come in and close the door behind you."

"Mr. Hansbauer, our class teacher told me to come here to the principal's office right away."

"She told you absolutely right. Come over here and sit across from me. Do you have your mobile phone? Turn it off. Give it to me. Do you have any more electronics? Just the purple tablet? Is it off? Give me that too. I'm gonna put the stuff in a special drawer in this desk. It's a soundproof drawer."

"But I need my mobile phone, sir."

"Don't worry. I'll give it back to you when we finish this little chat. If I forget, remind me then."

"But, Mr. Hansbauer, I really don't understand why you called me to your office."

"You don't know? Don't explain. It's already over the whole school. What your freshman class has brought up again."

"How so, sir? What do I have to do with it?"

"What have you got to do with it? Aren't you still the classroom representative? Don't you care about anything anymore? Do you remember how the teachers breathed a sigh of relief when you were finally elected to the student council by your classmates? And it was by a few votes. Imagine if they'd elected that fool Pyotr Alexandrovich, who managed to hack the school's computer network twice in his short time here. Or imagine if Abdullah, who beats his sister every day when she won't wear a headscarf was elected in your place. Or the utter horror - that wild African Simba who fought with that Nguyen and chopped up the furniture in the clubroom."

"Just a few chairs. Nguyen thought Simba was scolding him. So Simba got hit with a chair and then there was nothing that could stop it. But Simba was innocent."

„Don't stand up for them. You're always sticking up for them, PuppyBug. I don't get it. You are such a good and smart girl. You represented our school beautifully in the Chemistry Olympiad, the High School Piano Competition, and you were at the Global Cosmological Forum in Da Voss this year. And now you can't tell the difference between what's acceptable and what's over the line. For three years, we counted on you to be the student council president of our entire school. Here in the principal's office, your class professor almost cried and lamented to me how disappointed she was in you."

"I'm sorry..."

"It's too late to regret it now. When the professor appointed you to such a responsible position, she thought you would at least keep an eye on your classmates. You know what they call your class?"

"I know, the cauldron of nations."

"Exactly. That's why it's necessary for the student council spokesperson to work closely with the teachers in such a case. To have some authority in the collective and to deal with the problematic activities of the students appropriately. If he cannot handle the situation on his own, he should report it immediately to the class teacher or directly to the vice-principal."

"No one can ask me to be a guardian of the children. Everyone should be free to express themselves. There is freedom of speech."

„Screw freedom of speech! There's a hell of a difference between freedom of speech and profanity. How was that famous English conversation of yours on Monday afternoon?"

"We had an English conversation and literature lesson in the language classroom with a native speaker."

"With that crazy young American, huh?"

"Please yes, with Mike. He's from Pittsburgh. He's twenty-five. “

"Tell me what you did there."

"Mike and the kids discuss mainly English and American literature for young people. Mike's favourite American Literature Sample is the show The Simpsons, so we play it on the big monitor quite often. Mike giggles a lot. Then he tests us on it. Sometimes I think he's really a bit infantile."

"I'll count it for him here tomorrow, too. He's already in a lot of trouble with me. I heard that he played Beatles songs on guitar for the whole of his English lesson last week."

"It is possible. Mike's cool."

"He definitely won't be anymore. How come he wasn't looking out for you? Why did he let you use the school phone during class? The landline that's in there. That's strictly forbidden."

"A telephone line? Mr. Hansbauer, we didn't use the landline. I already told the class teacher..."

"I don't believe you. Who called from the phone? Then who? Wasn't it Mike himself after all? Does he even speak Czech?"

"He knows Czech quite well. We are teaching him. He teaches us English and we teach him Czech. He's really good."

"So I want to hear the truth. Who thought to call from that phone?"

"But we didn't call from that phone. Mike didn't call either."

"Let me show you something, little girl. See what this paper is? It's a police report. A report about what? A log of the calls made from that phone in the language classroom during the time you were supposed to be there for English class. Listen to it. Here it is in black and white. I'll read it to you.

*School landline: Hello, hello.*

*External mobile receiver: Klinessh, who's calling?*

*School landline: Hello, this is Malesice heating plant. Excuse me, do you have hot water?*

*External mobile receiver: It's leaking. Why?*

*School landline: Then wash your feet and your ass. It stinks all the way up here.*

*Call disconnected.*

So, what do you think? Does it look familiar to you? That's an exact transcript of the landline phone call from the room where only your class was at the time. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"We didn't know that landlines were also tapped. We thought only mobile phones were tapped and maybe something on the internet."

"My God, how could you think that? Everything is bugged, my PuppyBug. Everything and everyone is being recorded. You just slap something on the wires or on the air and they know everything. It's instantly recorded and stored. Didn't your parents explain that to you?"

"But we thought that ever since GDPR..."

„The GDPR is a restriction that only applies to normal people and normal companies, but there are institutions that I'd rather not even talk about. It doesn't apply to them, of course. I hold the proof of that in my hand right now. It's all there. Like this. Listen to it.

*School landline: Hello, hello, what happened?*

*External mobile receiver: Hello. I can't hear you.*

*School landline: Is it better yet?*

*External mobile receiver: Yeah, I can hear you fine now. What do you need?*

*School landline: We're from the National Statistical Agency. We want to ask you who did you vote for in the election?*

*External mobile receiver: What's it to you?*

*School landline: Please don't make trouble. Tell me who you voted for, I'll draw a line under you, and you're done. Don't make it difficult for me.*

*External Mobile Receiver: Communist, you moron.*

*School landline: Bullshit.*

*External mobile receiver: I'm not kidding.*

*School landline: Bullshit. I write you to the pirates.*

*External mobile receiver: call drop*

So, apparently, you're not satisfied with just plain filth in your class. You're into politically engaged smut. What are you doing? You know what a bad light it can cast on our entire prestigious high school. You've threatened its very existence. You know very well that until recently I was involved in politics. Some people are not willing to forget that. You endanger everyone around you with your villainy. How can I explain this to anyone?"

"That will be difficult to explain, sir."

"Hey, save your attendance and your contorted face for some funeral in your family. I expect you to tell me the main culprits. Who among you had the stupid idea to call people such nonsense? How did you even get their numbers? "

"Those could have been random numbers."

"So, random numbers. So who invented the random number call?"

"But we didn't make that phone call, Mr. Hansbauer. Neither did Mike."

„Hey, PuppyBug, don't lie. You better try to help me. What about Mike? If it was him, he's a foreign national. Even a citizen of a friendly country. Even a citizen of a friendly superpower. The superpower that gave birth to our little country. Maybe the matter wouldn't be judged so harshly. You know, in the context of good and even better relations with America. Perhaps

there might have been some intervention from the American embassy. It would just be like a youthful indiscretion. Do you understand?"

"Youthful indiscretion of a teacher? Principal, you can't be serious."

"It's a precarious situation. You know, a drowning man grasps at straws. What about the Russian? That Pyotr. He's such a restless boy. Personally, I'd guess it was him. And most importantly, our political and economic relations with Russia are at an all-time low. The Vrbetice explosion, the spies, and so on. Is there any point in making these relations worse with some kid stuff? I don't think so. Nobody wants the Russians to point missiles at us. We get the Russian embassy involved and this thing get only a little affect on grading of Pyotr's behavior. I'll give him some praise later and it'll be deleted. Maybe you could talk to this Pyotr guy. Make it easier for us. I don't think the kids here like him much anyway."

"We don't mind Pyotr at all. He's really smart with computers and he's fun. Most of the kids think so. Pierre is cool. I'm sorry. Pyotr is cool."

"Or maybe that Simba. He's an African. Dark skin. He's actually an immigrant. Maybe he hasn't acclimatised here yet. He's probably having trouble with it. He could have had the idea to make the phone call. He's so wild and untamed. He'd be perfect for this unpleasant business. Who dares to punish him more severely? We get some refugee NGO involved and it'll be a director's reprimand at most. Tell him to come to the principal's office in the morning and confess. I guarantee I'll get him out of this trouble."

"He just won't understand why he should confess if he didn't. And I also think he's long since acclimatised and we're used to him. He's cool."

„With you, PuppyBug, everyone is cool. You're standing up for everyone. But someone had to do it. Someone has to take responsibility. It's a serious matter. The police are investigating. Believe me, it's better for everyone if it's someone from the social or ethnic minorities."

"Maybe it could be the Thi Thoi one?"

"The Vietnamese girl? The Vietnamese community is very popular in our country. And she's so small and quiet. Who would want to punish her so much? It's just that it's not credible enough. No one would believe it. She's very good."

„I see, sir, you don't know her. Her older brother sometimes sells weed outside the school. She can be a pretty bad girl. Abdullah's sister could tell you about it. But otherwise, Thoi is cool."

"What about this Abdullah? He would be the best. I met him the other day. He had his Koran under his arm, and he didn't even say hello to me. That kind of mischief with the phone would really suit him. And we can rely on religious tolerance. We can turn to the Muslim community in Prague. Of course, Abdullah is our man. You have to convince him. He's frustrated, confused, and religiously zealous. Isn't he also schizophrenic?"

"I don't think it is. Abdullah is cool."

PuppyBug, you don't seem to realize how serious the situation is. I can't believe you don't know what's really going on here. Some people will be quite happy if our high school loses its license or even a portion of its funding. It probably wouldn't be so bad if you didn't happen to call a very, very inconvenient number. Listen to what I'm about to read to you:

*School landline: Hello. Is anyone there?*

*External landline: This is the Government Office. This is Helena Novak speaking.*

*School landline: Hello. This is your telephone operator. How long is your phone cable?*

*External landline: What, please? What do you want to know?*

*School landline: We need to know how long your phone cord is, there at your place.*

*External landline: Why do you need to know?*

*School landline: Because we're looking for a malfunction. Measure it for us now. Otherwise, we'll disconnect you.*

*External landline: Just a moment .... The cable is exactly two and a half meters long.*

*School landline: That's enough to hang you! Bye-bye.*

*Call disconnected."*

"I guess the Prime Minister will have us all arrested. What do you think, sir?"

"The Prime Minister has no time for this. After all, he is used to such things and does not deal with it much. But you have fallen into the hands of some agile clerk, which is far worse. A woman like that doesn't just give up and forgive. She immediately called the police. She said it was a threatening phone call, an act of terrorism, slander. They want to press charges against the unknown perpetrator. Anyway, this Mike guy is in a lot of trouble. He's actually responsible for everything. By the way, do you know why his mobile phone is off? "

"I don't know. But it's not Mike's fault. He wasn't there."

"What? He wasn't there? Were you there alone? Just the kids?"

"Yes, the last twenty minutes. Mike said he had a date and had to leave early. He left us and Kamil there."

"So he left during class time. Well, that's a highlight. I'll fire him. Or I'd better replace him with someone else. Let another principal have his way with him too. That's the only culprit in this matter. And he'll leave you with some irresponsible Kamil. Who is this Kamil, anyway?"

"Kamil is a robot. He's still in the language classroom now."

"Oh, you mean the humanoid we have on loan from the Technical University. You call him Kamil?"

"That's his name. It was originally supposed to be called Emil, but there were problems with some copyright issues, so they renamed it Kamil."

"The robot speaks English, so logically it is in the language classroom. It's supposed to be a bit of a diversion for you. The robot's not supposed to watch you. Most likely, it can't even do that."

"Kamil happens to be very smart, sir. You can tell him: How do you do? And he'll tell you: I'm well. What can I do for you? He also knows every language in the world. For example, he speaks Chinese, and he speaks Vietnamese to Thoi. And he knows everything. He can find everything on the Internet in a flash. Anything you ask, he knows. Like when Columbus discovered America or the formula for acylpyrine. Kamil would get straight A's on his report card, even from you. He's connected to the Internet through the landline. They just recently upgraded his software remotely. He's learning new things perfectly now. He's learning from us, too. Some of the boys are teaching him swear words. Kamil even laughs at simple jokes. When Mike and our kids watch The Simpsons, he laughs about it sometimes too."

"Don't tell me, PuppyBug. How does he do it?"

"He says, ha, ha, ha' and his lights flash. Mike likes him very much. He calls him my colleague Number Five. But I don't know why. Kamil can also be programmed by computer. Somehow the boys know how to do it, and then they play computer games with Kamil. But Kamil always wins. Chess, strategy, shooters, cards - you can't play with him anymore. He knows everything, he's so fast, and you don't stand a chance. The boys used to play car races with him and only won by cheating when they took a shortcut through the grass. But Kamil learned from them and started cheating too. But Pyotr can reprogram him to loop some modules, and it slows him down terribly. So then you can win against him too. "

"You're digging into that robot like that? You're messing up his modules?"

"When we reset its active area, it goes back to its original state. But everything he's learned, he continues to remember."

"Wait a minute, PuppyBug. Is this Kamil connected to the landline?"

"It's a data line. It originally led to one of the computers in the classroom. But it was used for Kamil. The phone is still connected to that line. The phone is digital, but no one uses it."

„So, you didn't have to call directly with the next phone. You used the robot to do it."

"I told you, sir, we didn't make any phone calls."

"Not by phone. You made a phone out of Kamil. That must have been Pyotr's idea. And you all laughed about it, didn't you? That robot can closely imitate any human voice. I remember that from the technical opening."

"He can do that. The other day the boys from one of the senior classes were trying to see how Kamil could imitate your voice, sir. I mean, I wouldn't know it wasn't you."

"Don't even tell me ... But wait. Actually, that explains why the phone calls seemed so plausible. People would recognize 12-year-olds on the phone. But when a robot generates the speech, no one would know anything. That's why the speech analysis didn't work for the cops. Can a robot just make a phone call by itself? Just like that, to a random number?"

"If Kamil is connected to the phone line, he can of course call wherever he wants. But such a robot won't call random numbers, because it has all the phone books in the world at its disposal. He'll always know who he's calling."

"Don't tell me, PuppyBug, that the scoundrel Kamil called the Government Office on purpose. Or did one of you program him there?"

"It seems to me that Kamil has a strange sense of humour lately."

"PuppyBug, are you trying to tell me that Kamil ... just ... by himself? "

"Sir, I don't want to give you advice. You would have to find that out for yourself. I would simply blame it on a technical fault."

"Then I'll think it over carefully. Anyway, thank you. This conversation was quite constructive. I'll have to make a few more phone calls and emails. So here's your purple mobile phone and tablet back. Run home so your mom doesn't come looking for you."

"Goodbye, sir. And say hello to Mike. "