

HOW THE WHOLE WORLD KNEW THAT MELISSA MÜLLER WAS SINGLE AGAIN

A STORY OF BERLIN BY ANNA ELSE BURISCH

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Berlin anno 2050

Berlin has become one of the smartest cities in the entire world. The government is selling the collected and analyzed data of the citizens to private companies in order to pay for the efficient technology implemented in housing and infrastructure. This is a story about how one phone call and a breakup changes the day of a Berliner...

“Melissa, he just wasn't that good for you.” said Barbara on the phone.

Barbara was in fact one of Melissa's best friends. They had been talking on the phone almost every second day since they met in university. They lived only some five minutes by magnetic train from each other, but they had not seen each other since their graduation party six years ago. Melissa always called if she was about to make tough decisions, and Barbara had good advice for everything. This also was manifested in the two friends' new Smart-watch. If something would happen to one of them, emotionally or physically, the other one would get a notification on their Smart-watch. By measuring body temperature and listening to conversations, the watch was able to predict emotional downers. This gave both girls safety and was a way to comfort each other. Due to the Smart-watch alert Melissa talked to Barbara on the phone right now.

“Yes, maybe he wasn't good for me. I guess he was more interested in my high-tech apartment than in me, but that doesn't prevent me from liking him. Oh, but listen Barbara, I just checked the Date- App, and it already suggested new men in my area! - But I don't want a new guy, I want him. I cared about him”, answered Melissa remembering how she met Thomas last year at the Big New Year Update in Kreuzberg.

Every year the technological systems in Berlin get updated with new and better features beneficial for every citizen. This is the only time of the year when the whole city comes to a virtual standstill. Everything is dark. No one is able to travel, work or use the smart technology. Those 30 minutes without electrical equipment often are spent among friends and family in underground buildings. It is the only time of the year where humans interact as they did at the beginning of the century. Somehow those minutes are important for Berliners, as they remind people of how it was long ago, when Christina Aguilera was in her early twenties. Citizens tend to get very emotional during that day, since technology isn't active to tell them what to do to get cheered up.

But normally the melancholy is fast forgotten, since the Update often contains new and advanced features for the citizens. The thirty minutes of total darkness is followed by a big virtual party where everyone has their technological device in the hand and a big need and urge of finding all the cool new features. The party marks the return to stable conditions, where technology is the most important feature.

Last year Melissa celebrated New Year's Update in an underground room near Mehringdamm and this was where she noticed Thomas and he noticed her. A tall and dark haired man was standing in the corner with his blue and shiny smart phone in his left hand. He was about to talk to someone else face-to-face for the first time in a year, when he noticed a red haired girl, wearing a purple dress and pink shoes, entering the room. But before talking to

the mysterious stranger, he wanted to check his Dating-App in order to see if there was a chance of them starting a promising conversation. The App would analyse living conditions, educational background and interests and tell Thomas if there was a basis for a conversation. Otherwise talking would just be waste of time. Nowadays there was no point in wasting time; efficiency was the key to success. And there is no point in talking to someone that won't be beneficial for you.

While he was opening the App he remembered that, of course, it was New Year's Update and therefore no internet connection was available. This made him uncertain. You simply don't talk to anybody you have not checked by an App. All the same he was about to go over to her and say something when he was interrupted by the fireworks. The Update had been completed and as usual this was followed by two minutes of electrical fireworks on the ceiling and walls. Now it was time to check out the new features on the smart devices. Now it was time to go back to normal virtuality.

“Oh Yeah, the magnetic train is running even faster! And now it is possible to rent a robotic babysitter,” yelled a man with a brown suit in the corner of the room. No one seemed to react, since everybody was looking and interacting with other people through their smart phone.

Thomas was of course also interested in all the new features, but most important he could check his Dating-App about having a conversation with the fascinating red haired woman with the pink shoes. The app told him that there was 90% chance of them having a meaningful conversation going on for more than five minutes. This was in fact longer than at any time during his previous relationship. As he had gathered the courage to go over to her, he noticed how sweet she was staring at her smart phone. This was his chance, so he walked over to her.

“Hello stranger, my name is Thomas. I would like to talk to you. According to my App you live in a high-tech apartment and you had a dog called Günther when you were a child. Do you want to go out for a drink on Monday? I checked that you are free after four pm. when this meeting of yours is over”, said Thomas.

Melissa looked at the tall and dark haired man and was already crazy about him. He wanted to go out with her? This was fantastic. She did not even need to consult her App.

The conversation went well, and they turned out to be a good match. It was logical that they moved in together after four months. Everything seemed good until the sensors in the apartment felt that something was wrong. Studies had shown that sensors were able to predict the trouble in a relationship by measuring CO2-levels and analyzing conversations. Thomas choose to break up with Melissa last Tuesday night. He had found a new girl.

Melissa said bye to Barbara. She turned to the other side in her bed, and looked at her Smart-watch. It was 10:00 am and she had another two hours before she had to go to work. Every citizen of Berlin had been screened and tested in order to make sure, that they were efficient at work. Melissa was an average human without any special skills. Thus, she got to work in the time-slot between 12 am. and 6 pm. During this period of time the society would benefit the most of her work as a graphic designer. And only a certain number of people could work and interact with each other during the day. By this, roads never were congested and the transport system was running smoothly.

After the telephone conversation Melissa's stereo automatically played music. By analyzing the content of the conversation with Barbara it turned on a playlist of only happy-go-lucky songs performed by Melissa's favourite acts. First song was "You are Beautiful" performed by Christina Aguilera. Since the last Update the stereo was able to make new music customised for the listener. By mixing up her latest song choices, new lyrics would be created and music composed. All would happen in only a couple of seconds.

Even though it had been only a week since Thomas left her and moved out of their apartment the systems integrated in the housing already started readjusting everything. Already before the breakup actually happened Melissa's file in the housing company system had been marked red and backup plans were about to be prepared. When Melissa and Thomas officially broke up, Melissa's file changed from "being in relationship" to "single". The integrated control system was able to adjust the walls in the apartment after the breakup, but due to experience people tend to be angry if it happens right away. The system was programmed to adjust after 3 days of good night sleep which was registered through Melissa's Smart-watch.

The only time when the workers at WeWatchU had contact with their boss was when they were started in the morning. The boss would push the big red button in the control room and it would only take 10 seconds to wake everyone up, a company record that was improved during the last couple of years.

Among the workers was a robot called Bo as he had been created in Struer in Denmark. The most efficient technology was implemented in Bo and his colleagues and working with them was pure joy. Every day they solved important tasks for the company which included managing a crucial method to investigate, in fact: to massage the personal lives of Berliners.

After stretching all the cables Bo at WeWatchU rolled down the ramp from the 30th floor to the control system on ground level, where the system was ready with their daily update containing the assignments for the day. Automatically Bo left the building in Wedding to start his work of the day. Bo was one of the best employees the company has had for centuries, he was dedicated and dutiful. According to his schedule, his first task was to deliver a bag to a customer in person.

Due to the tight schedule Bo didn't have time to roll all the way from the WeWatchU Headquarter in Seestraße to Charlottenburg where the employees at AllYouNeedisSnacks were waiting for him. He rolled to the nearest traffic hub by using the colourful pavement to lead his way. Berlin was covered by new pavement with colours according to the citizen's health level. No one ever got lost, since color and light would lead the way. Bo reached the Metro stop and went by escalator down to the platform. No one noticed him, since everyone was occupied by looking either into their own screens or the ones mounted in the walls, floors and doors of the electrical metro. Commercials were everywhere in Berlin. Data collected by the government about every single citizen was sold to companies and now they could be used to give everyone personalized commercials. Everyone seemed very satisfied while going by Metro. Bo could therefore roll into the metro wagon and enjoy the commercials music from every screen.

Melissa was still in bed when the walls started moving. She had had seen this once before, when her parents got divorced and her father moved out of their apartment. But this time it was different. She suddenly realised that this was the end of her relationship with Thomas. He would never come back.

She finally got up and watched how the bedroom and the living room became smaller and smaller. The walls moved slowly and when they were set she was wondering. "What will I do all the furniture now?" On her Smart-watch there was immediately a notification of a company that would collect her excess furniture. A new single-person bed was offered and a smaller couch for less than 100 Euros. They could be delivered at her place in only five minutes. All she had to do was to accept the offer.

Shortly afterwards her Smart-watch buzzed again; another company would pick up her furniture for 75 Euros and she would even get a 3D figure of herself as a present if she accepted the offer. The offers kept showing on her watch, but the operating system had already chosen the right company for Melissa. Based on her previous choices and her preferences the system generated different offers, but all the offers came from the same company. All

Melissa's data had been sold to WeWatchU, one of the biggest companies operating in Berlin. By this, the company controlled and provided her Smart-watch with ads and offers. She was in fact being controlled by the company.

Melissa wasn't aware of all this, she just choose the cheapest deal from her point of view. By this, the robots from WeCollectYoureFurniture (of course a subsidiary of WeWatchU), would be in her apartment in less than five minutes. Letting the robots into the apartment would also mean generating new pictures of her home to her personal file. By having photos stored in her file, the company knew exactly what the apartment looked like and details about the interior design.

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After paying the shipment by using her finger print, (the bank would deal with the transfer of the money), the robots began replacing the furniture. The new bed and couch matched the color of the wall, based on information from when Melissa moved into the apartment.

Melissa felt an urge to turn on the television to keep her mind off the break-up and the ongoing relocation of her furniture.

“Do you feel lonely now? You should try the new app, where you meet and interact with other lonely people in Berlin. You will have an opportunity to send each other gifts and napkins...”

She switched to another channel.

“Are you unsatisfied with how you look? Do you want bigger lips? Shorter fingers? This new clinic placed in Lübeck offers everything. There is no waiting list. They will be waiting for you, Melissa, if you decide to change your body. Remember Melissa only 190 km away from your apartment, with the magnetic train this will take you less than 1 hour...”

Melissa switched again.

“Melissa! Hey look at our offer in the Supermarket. You get a 15% discount on chocolate and a very special offer on ice cream. One big box of triple chocolate with a big spoon will be delivered to you if you want to. You only need to....”

Switched again.

“Do you want to do exercise in order to get in good shape? This will improve your mood and it will make you more attractive to men and women. There is scientific proof of this. This great offer is only for you, a 20% discount on a membership in Fitness World. We miss you, and we want to see you again! Melissa, you deserve to look great. We really want you...”

Melissa turned off the television.

The robots were almost done moving the double bed out of the apartment and then they only needed to carry in the new bed. Meanwhile Melissa could check out her new neighbour on her Smart- watch. In order to provide housing for everyone, there was a control of apartments in order to make sure that there was room for everyone in Berlin. Moving walls was an improvement compared to the last centuries and a smart way to create flexible apartments as married couples separated or divorced, or when two people wanted to move in together.

On her watch Melissa saw the presentation video of her new neighbour, Wolfgang Meyer, a young student from the western part of Germany. He was walking down the street with black curly hair and tiny glasses. According to the GetToKnowYourNeighbour app, there was a 28% chance of meeting him in real life. There was also a 40% chance of talking to him and having a conversation for longer than five minutes. Melissa closed the app again. Wolfgang Meyer wasn't for her.

She thought about Thomas again. How perfect everything had been when he was living in the apartment. How romantic it was when they both were sitting in the couch with their smart phones and the television going. His sweet messages and cute videos he sent while sitting next to her. How sad that all of this was over now.

“Nächste Station: Mehringdamm” announced the sweet female voice in the metro. This was the metro stop where Bo had to leave the wagon. He rolled out on the grey platform and went by elevator to street level. It was quiet in the street even though a very great number of Pod cars were driving fast all around him. People were driving their electrical skateboards and scooters with their eyes focused on a screen in front of them.

No one took notice of Bo. In approximately 5 minutes and 4 seconds he would arrive at his destination.

Rolling down Mehringdamm Bo was following the green line to the building where he had to collect the products for his first assignment. He was greeted by one of the other robots at AllYouNeedisSnacks who helped him load his goods into his trailer. A pink bag full of helpful things for a customer that was about to have an emotional downer. Bo was on his way out of the huge building that he realised that he was running late. Melissa already had hung up with Barbara. From now on he had to hurry in order to accomplish his task.

Opening the door and watching the robot at her front door Melissa realised what was happening. In a pink bag (her favourite color) there was a chocolate bar (Marabou, her favourite), a playlist with only Christina Aguilera songs (her favourite artist) and a pink pyjamas (in her size). Without Melissa having expressed a wish to receive these goods, Bo had delivered all she needed to brighten up her life. She took the pink and slightly heavy bag from Bo's trailer and closed the door. She accepted the invasion of her private life, she indeed didn't need any privacy anymore and she was happy that the whole world knew: she was single and free again.