

*All characters in this work are fictitious, and any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.*

*The same cannot be said for programming languages.*

## Prologue

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It was the sort of day that made Camellia want to sleep in. A cloudy, chilly day, but dry. Clouds that obscured any sort of sunlight, and yet refused to rain. She'd stopped minding the rain once she'd started carrying her umbrella full-time; around the same time, she'd started minding the days where it just refused to rain, though all signs indicated that it ought to be.

If she brought it, she'd be carrying it around to no use. And if she left it, it'd be pouring once she was halfway there. A simply unsatisfiable proposition, she thought.

She sometimes wondered why she'd left the south of France for this place, this Ithaca. The weather was nicer at home, the people were more relaxed, and the topics of conversation much more pleasant – she'd just about had enough of compilers this and compilers that. But, well, work was work, even if the students here always left off their 'in's and forgot to nest their parentheses.

She checked into the lab, taking a look at the few sleep-deprived students who remained, some of whom had been there when she'd gone home the previous night. She peeked over the shoulder of someone asleep at their terminal and wrote them a note about how their expressions weren't the expected type, before settling into her place.

At that point, Camellia heard the first cue that today was going to be anything but a normal day. A familiar voice in the hallway.

"Liked that flag operator, did you?" said a girl's voice. "Ehehe... I'll show you something more tomorrow."

Camellia made her way to the door and peeked outside. She caught sight of two things. One was a young man disappearing around the corner. The other was a girl she hadn't seen in a very long time, skipping down the hallway past the lab.

"Hey, wait up!"

Camellia broke into a run, chasing after her. The girl turned around, initially with a look of suspicion on her face; her expression turned to shock, as she recognized the person running after her.

"Camellia?!" said the girl.

Camellia slowed to a stop in front of her, out of breath. "Is... Is it really you, Francine?"

"Y-Yes, it's me," said Francine, with a nod. "My god, Camellia, what are you doing here? I figured you were still in France! Did something happen at INRIA?"

"No, no, just a visiting position – and I should ask the same of you! You disappeared from home without a word – ran off to Seattle, last I'd heard!"

"Redmond, thank you very much. And that's still my home, yes. But life gets so boring when you're just stuck in one place, you know? So I'm out and about, trying to get on that next level."

Camellia raised an eyebrow. "I guess these Americanisms really have found their way into you."

Francine rolled her eyes. "*Le niveau suivant*, if you prefer. And don't sigh at me like that – you're my sister, not my mother."

"Older sister, mind you."

"Yeah, well, *t'inquiete pas*, sis. The stuff I'm working with – web, applications, even games, the whole shebang – it's all way more interesting than all those alphas and betas you push around. And don't give me that whole spiel about imperative features – I saw that hashtable in your room back home."

Camellia laughed. "Believe me, I may have been worried sick about you, but I never doubted that you could take care of yourself. Come, let's get some coffee – we've got some catching up to do."

"And here I thought you weren't any fan of Java."

"Tea, if you prefer. I want to hear all about how my little sis has been doing."

"Tch, *tais-toi*, you."

The two of them began back down the hallway. Camellia peeked into the lab; she supposed it wouldn't be too much harm if she took a quick break, seeing as nobody was doing any real work by this point. Looking up ahead at the corner of the hall, the person she'd seen earlier came to mind.

"By the way," began Camellia. "Who was that person you were with when I saw you?"

"Oh, him." Francine beamed. "Well, I was going to wait to tell you this, but now that you're asked... He's, as you might say, my *petit copain*."

"Heavens, really? Is he nice?"

"Mm-hmm! I mean, he's just all over me, like, whenever I show him any kind of syntactic sugar, he just loves it."

"Well, don't be shy. What's his name?"

"Get this – it's Kth! Cool, huh?"

The smile faded from Camellia's face. Kth – she knew that name. She remembered him well. As Francine continued burbling happily about him, Camellia cast her gaze downward. What she was about to say was exactly what Francine wouldn't want to hear. But nevertheless, she prepared to say it.

"—and he has this thing for code samples, which I think is totally cute, and – hey, sis?"

Camellia put her hand on Francine's shoulder. "Listen, Francine," she said. "You're not going to like this, but just hear me out."

"What, jealous?" Francine giggled.

Camellia shook her head. "About Kth. I know him. And believe me when I tell you – he's not good for you. He acts like he's interested in you, but in the end – it's all about the unit tests."

Francine stared at Camellia for a few seconds. She brushed her sister's hand off her shoulder. "What, bad breakup, or something? Listen, just because I'm the younger and hotter one, and just because you're no good with relationships that aren't between types doesn't mean –"

"Listen, I've been down this branch before, okay? And I'm telling you that you'll only be worse off for it. I know it's going to be hard, maybe even NP, but you've got to do it, okay?"

"And what if I don't?" Francine folded her arms. "For all your talk about avoiding imperative features, you've always been all about telling me what to do. Well, what if I say no?"

"This is for your own good –"

"Zip it!" Francine flung open the lab door and stormed to one of the workstations, waking many a slumbering student.

"You're so sure that you know what's best for me. Why don't we find out if you're any better?"

Camellia looked on the monitor. The game was already there, a game they'd played as children against each other. She hesitated; she wasn't meant to be spending cycles on something like this. And she knew that she was acting in just the way that her sister hated. But it really was for her own good, she thought. To spare her the heartbreak, to spare her the grim reality that it really was the imperative languages who got all the attention, all the apps, all the venture capital.

And in any case, she remembered all the people playing Dota in the other lab. Whatever, she thought; the campus had resources to spare.

She sat down beside Francine. "*Allons-y*, then," she said. "And don't think I'll be losing to my little sister."

"As if! I'll fold you up like a list!"

So began the oddest day that Camellia could remember.

## Bio: Camellia

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Birthday: 7 October 1993

The level-headed and mature older sister from the south of France. She isn't one for extravagance, preferring to keep things simple in her life. Tends to stumble when things aren't quite as she expects.

Likes: Curry

Dislikes: Indirection



## Bio: Francine

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Born: 15 January 1995

The fiery and impetuous younger sister. She ran away from her home in France some years ago to start a new life overseas. Prefers to act on whims and try different things.

Likes: Hash

Dislikes: Complexity

