

Julita Wójcicka stared at the letters on her computer screen. They stubbornly continued to glow green. Not good.

‘C’mon, come on...’ she whispered, twirling a heavily gnawed pencil in her fingers.

‘Told you,’ Piotrek said from the seat next to her. He took another sip of his tea, wiping his fashionably trimmed moustache afterwards. ‘Even our followers won’t fall for such brazen clickbait.’

‘Ha!’ Julita pumped her fist in triumph. ‘Read ‘em and weep!’

Her headline’s background had turned red. That meant in the last minute at least one thousand people had been lured in by Julita’s article, tantalizingly entitled “ILONA ZAJĄC FLASHES BIKINI PICS ON HER GRAM: I’M NOT GONNA JUST SIT AND LET HATERS CALL ME FAT [GALLERY].” As a result, the text would be promoted to their portal’s homepage, leaving behind the dusty recesses of the “Culture” section.

Piotrek said nothing. Instead, he let out a dramatic sigh and turned back to his MacBook. Julita understood his frustration. He hadn’t had an article go red for a week. His most recent attempts – “THE STARS OF ‘THE CLAN’, THEN AND NOW”, “A MUSHROOM HUNTER’S GRISLY HARVEST”, “KOALA BEARS ON SLEDS – CUTEST THING YOU’LL WATCH TODAY” – were all green or, horror of horrors, blue, the mark of the Internet’s complete indifference. Worse still, Piotrek spent hours polishing each article, endlessly swapping sentences around, racking his brain for synonyms and unique turns of phrase. Julita, meanwhile, had prepped her piece about Ilona Zajac in about fifteen minutes, smoke break included.

Julita stood up from her desk, stretched and plodded over to the kitchen nook. With a red article in the bank, she had fulfilled her quota and could take the rest of the day easy. The water burbled in their cheap, calcified kettle and she poured it over her instant coffee, filling the air with its pleasant, familiar aroma. Julita lifted her furiously red MEGANEWS.PL mug, took a small sip and cast her eyes over the office.

At a dozen-odd white desks, computers hummed, mice clicked and a soft, blueish light glowed, reflecting off the users’ glasses. There were two gigantic, wall-mounted TVs, one showing the homepage superimposed with a heatmap to chart the popularity of featured articles, the second tuned to a 24-hour news channel. Opposite them, glass partitions separated off three rooms (management, HR, and IT); in the corner stood printers and a scanner; out of the windows, the wide asphalt of Cybernetics Street and a cloudy sky latticed with construction cranes.


This is not how Julita had imagined her career in journalism. She had dreamed of working for a prestigious paper like *Wyborcza* or a serious weekly like *Polityka* or *Newsweek*. Heated discussions during morning editorial meetings, finishing copy at three in the morning, meeting politicians in smoke-filled restaurants, anonymous informers in trench coats

sliding binders of receipts across sticky bar tables – that sort of thing. Julita had even snagged an (unpaid, of course) internship at such a publication. For three months, she had sorted papers, organized archives and moderated Internet forums, hoping someone would notice her and take her under their wing. Thing is, big papers have stacks of interns, including the golden youth of Warsaw, with influential parents watching over them in the wings. Next to them, Julita, fresh off the bus from the provincial town of Żuków, in a wardrobe fished out of rummage bins, had a hard time catching anyone’s eye.

But then she happened across a listing for a job at MEGANEWS.PL. They were looking for a journalist to join their news division, promising a young team, competitive pay and business trips. Their shiny new office building had made a strong first impression; their editor-in-chief had switched right away to the informal “you” and laughed at her jokes. *Whatever*, she’d thought. *YOLO*.

Excerpt translated by Travis Currit

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