

ARE YOU IN A RELATIONSHIP? COULD I SEE IT?

CHAPTER 3: THE SCAM

MÁTE VZTAH? A MOHLA BYCH HO VIDĚT?

KAPITOLA 3: PODVOD

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Czech Radio

00:00

MUSIC Forest (underlines text)

TEGA (studio) What would you be willing to do in the name of love? What are we entitled to do in the name of such a strong emotion? And what do we expect from a relationship?

People used to meet at work or at parties. They still do, but now there is a new way – the internet. Matyas and I did not use this way:

MATYAS I have nothing against people meeting through some app but what's important to me are facial expressions, grimaces and such things. If there's a person on the phone, you can't see what their face looks like and all that... Of course, unless you're having a video call. I'm not interested in that video call stuff, internet telephony and crap like that. I'm happy to sit down with a person and have a chat.

TEGA (studio) There are people who use the internet as their primary way of communication. They meet people, date online and sometimes they have a long distance relationship thanks to it. The internet has many advantages. You can meet anybody there. Unfortunately, this means both good and bad. Everyone tries to show themselves in the best possible light on the internet or mobile dating apps. And then you may be surprised by seeing reality or even by seeing your internet catch's bad traits. Or, God forbid, their bad intentions...

MUSIC Forest (continues)

LUDMILA He introduces himself as a high ranking officer in the US army.

KAPR You're beautiful, we will have a life together.

LUDMILA He didn't want anything from me at the start.

KAPR I'll take care of your kids, I'll be a father to your children.

LUDMILA You're the air I breathe, the water I drink, the food I eat.

KAPR Everyone should stop and think if they ever did something stupid under the influence of love and infatuation.

LUDMILA I love you.

He got me.

MUSIC Forest (continues)

02:14

TEGA (studio) Chapter 3: The Scam

MUSIC Forest (fades out)

LUDMILA My name is Ludmila, I'm 49 years old. I'm still married. I'm about to get divorced from my husband.

It wasn't exactly a dating app, I got a text on Messenger saying that someone would like to chat with me. At first I didn't really react. I just wrote that it was a

bad time, I was at work or watching a movie with my husband, things like that... But the man was very persistent. He kept trying to send me messages for two weeks, so one day I replied.

He asked me how many children I have, how long I've been married. And when I asked him why he just said he wanted to get to know me better.

TEGA Didn't you find it strange that an unknown man was trying to contact you?

LUDMILA I didn't really think about it at the time.

03:11

TEGA (studio) The mystery man from the internet kept praising Ludmila, even though they did not know each other at all.

TEGA How did you feel?

LUDMILA Like a woman after 33 years in a relationship. Nice, right? You don't realise you don't hear things like those at home and then you think: no one's told me that for a long time. I've been called Mum by everyone my whole marriage. And now he gave me a nickname – Sunshine – and then he started calling me Ludi, short for Ludmila. And when you don't hear that this whole time, you think: Wow, I actually have a name.

KAPR I am Lieutenant Colonel Ondřej Kapr and I work for the Police of the Czech Republic in the office of the Criminal Police and Investigation Service, which is a unit that deals with coordination, methodology and preventive activities in the field of criminal proceedings.

LUDMILA Sometimes you even get goosebumps or tears in your eyes, because you think: wow, a stranger talks to me this nicely and my husband doesn't even bother, you know?

KAPR In general, the public probably thinks that anyone who gets lured into this kind of scam is just stupid, but we know that is not true. It is just that the perpetrators are excellent at targeting a lonely person who is emotionally parched.

TEGA You probably deleted those chats, didn't you?

LUDMILA I was just thinking I could try to look if I still have them archived...

Light of my life, you're one of a kind, one of the best women in the world, I can't imagine my life without you because you mean so much to me, you are the air I breathe, the water I drink, the food I eat, the lady of my dreams, my queen, the best of the best, I'll always love you, honey.

05:06

TEGA (studio) The man introduced himself to Ludmila as an officer in the US army Michael Moore.

LUDMILA You could tell that he was writing through a online translator, but he wrote in Czech. I replied in English through a translator and when he started writing in Czech, I wrote in Czech too. It was obvious he couldn't speak Czech, you know.

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (underlines text)

KAPR The Czech Republic was for a long time protected by the language barrier from these love based scams, they are not only a Czech problem, but a worldwide trend. The perpetrators are usually English speakers and that is why they use the written form of communication, simply because they can use online translators. Of course, if he would call you and you did not speak English, he could not scam you because you would not know what he wants from you, you do not know where to send money.

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (fades out)

LUDMILA I couldn't wait until it was finally 10 PM and we could chat. Yeah, for me even that one hour in the evening meant... Sometimes, he would make an exception and he had time until 1 or half past 1 in the morning... He usually ended the chat at 11, because he said he had to turn the monitors on, to guard the camp.

TEGA And did you ever want to call him?

LUDMILA Well, he would always say something like: I'll risk it for you, I'll call you. But he knew that if he'd say that, I'd say: No, it's not worth you taking a risk and calling me. I didn't feel the need to call him.

06:42

TEGA (studio) Michael claimed he was currently stationed in Aden, a city in Yemen. But Ludmila is an inquisitive woman and she found out that at that time there was no ongoing fighting in Aden. Michael however stood by the claim that he and his unit were there for "peacekeeping missions". Yet, even those seemed to be unbearable for him.

LUDMILA He begged me to help him get out of the war. He said he'd come and we'd live together. He told me to find a place where we could buy or build a house. I haven't mentioned this yet, but he had a fourteen year old son Perry. I was supposed to be a mother to his son. And somewhere in that chat he swore on his life that I'm the greatest love of his life and that he's never done this before.

KAPR A common tactic the perpetrators use is a child. A man, the American soldier, starts writing to some woman and then all of a sudden a child appears. And the child immediately starts calling the woman Mommy. The woman might not be able to imagine that it might be just one person behind it and again some feelings arise. And the child, too, is trying to get money off of their so called mommy. They want money for some treatment, some school expenses, birthdays, they can even lure out some gifts they want delivered directly to some place in Africa.

MUSIC Forest (underlines text)

08:09

LUDMILA We wrote and chatted for about a week or two and he told me about where he was stationed and I'm meticulous like that, so I wanted to find out more about it, so I started to search for information about the American army. But I found many articles like: Woman scammed by such and such, right? And I read the article but was more interested in the comments below. And a young girl wrote that it shouldn't be hard to put the person through Google lens and find them.

MUSIC Forest (fades out)

TEGA (studio) **Mrs Ludmila put Michael Moore's photo through the search and she found out that the person in the photo is actually Colonel Bryan Denny. Just in the year 2019, his photographs were used for more than three thousand love scams. The number might have doubled since then.**

LUDMILA And so I thought, that person must be on Facebook. So I found the real Colonel and I wrote to him, I sent him the pictures I got from the scammer. He only replied this: Who scammed you with my photos?

TEGA What did you feel when you found out that this many women had been "in love" with the same man?

LUDMILA I don't actually know, I didn't really let it get to me. Like, I knew he'd promised marriage to many women.

TEGA And it wasn't even him.

LUDMILA Exactly, I was just going to say. It wasn't him and it probably wasn't the same person who wrote to me.

KAPR Perpetrators often use some fictional identity – they download a picture of some interesting person, an interesting man or woman from the internet, and they impersonate them. It is often various company directors or influencers. It is those American soldiers, oil rig workers. A sign of such a scam is when the perpetrator is trying not to communicate with you through video calls. That is, they will communicate either through chat, which is the easiest option because of an online translator, or even communicate through a call, but only in a way so you cannot see their true identity. Do not trust videos they send you. They can take a photo of some famous person and the system can move the mouth in such a way that you might not be able to tell that it is actually not that person talking. That it is a scam.

LUDMILA My husband knew I was chatting with him and I said: See? I had some suspicions because I somehow always felt there was something wrong. And I said: Well, now it's my turn to play. I'll get back to him now, I said.

MUSIC Orion's Belt (underlines text)

LUDMILA It was the 17 April and on the 25 April my husband and I had our anniversary. Thirtieth or thirty first. And my husband instead of coming home was celebrating somewhere else. And the scammer felt that I was writing differently, not very interested in chatting, nervous and he started to ask what was wrong. And I blabbed about

everything, of course. And he started telling me: A man must not treat a woman like that, especially a precious flower like you, right? And I, angry as I was, sad, started chatting with him. And at that moment he felt that I took the bait. So, I wanted to pull his leg and it turned out in a completely opposite way. He got me.

MUSIC Orion's Belt (continues)

11:57

LUDMILA We got intimate, we wrote about sex, what we like, we sent a few photos. Not of the face, obviously. I asked about that and he said that they couldn't do that because of security, right? And it really got that far that I hadn't had sex like that in a long time. Even though it was just virtual, it was something new. I'd only been with my husband since I was 16, so this was something completely different.

MUSIC Orion's Belt (fades out)

LUDMILA Some time later he didn't write for a whole day and I had my head turned so much that I was nervous, what if something happened. That night I had a bad dream about some military operation. My brain just started working on its own, subconsciously. And he didn't write. I was hanging on by a thread, I just wanted to cry. And that's when he wrote. He said they were sent on a mission and his group was attacked by rebels, 4 of his men were killed and one was badly wounded. He even sent me a photo of him in a helicopter, right, how they were bandaging him. He said he has to be at the wounded soldier's side all day, that he can't leave him, he's like family, he doesn't really have anyone else and things like that.

MUSIC Forest (underlines text)

LUDMILA He kept saying he had wounded soldiers, that they died and now the commanders said that officers have to replace the dead soldiers on the front lines. The first thing that came out of me was: No, that's not possible, they can't! And he said: Well, there is another option. And I said: What? That he could retire. That he could retire early, but he would have to buy himself out. And I knew I didn't have any money and that would be a problem. And he said that it has to go through the UN and we just have to buy him out of the army.

So, that's how he started asking for money.

MUSIC Forest (continues)

LUDMILA When I told him I didn't have any money, he stopped communicating.

MUSIC Forest (continues)

14:20

TEGA (studio) It has been proven that people responsible for a large part of these cases are from west Africa. That is why scams like these are called Nigerian scams. They are nothing new, however, they originated in the 16th century, when a so-called "spanish prisoner" asked for financial help. He would write from prison about his treasure which he hid "somewhere out there" and would promise to share it, if the addressee would help him. Hundreds of years ago the perpetrators wrote and sent letters by hand. In our modern time of the internet, it is possible

to reach thousands of people at once with only a few clicks. Modern Nigerian letter writers additionally focus on the romance part of the whole story – they wait until the victim falls in love with them and then they strike.

MUSIC Forest (fades out)

LUDMILA I think I was most addicted to those words that I needed to hear. I wasn't deterred, I kept writing to him and he didn't reply. You know what it does to you when you're in love and they don't respond.

My husband caught me once crying like crazy. He was looking at me and saying: You're not normal, are you? You could see it in his eyes. Then, another time, he asked me: If he showed up today, would you leave with him? And I was really in love, I don't know how I could've fallen in love with someone I've never seen. Just those words. So I told him, yes, I would leave.

And then he asked: And what if he was black, you wouldn't mind? I said: No, I wouldn't. At that point, I didn't care what he looked like.

16:10

KAPR Love has a reason for existing, it is about driving us to find partners, to birth children, I am sure there is a rational reason. Because it is such a strong emotion and it can control us. Who has felt it knows, we all know that under the influence of love we are able to do anything. If people are capable of committing suicide, then they are capable of other extremes such as sending millions to somewhere in Africa. It is an incredibly strong emotion and everyone should stop and think if they ever did something stupid under the influence of love and infatuation.

LUDMILA And then we needed to consolidate our loans so I just covered the information he could use and I let him see that our loan was approved and that I had the 50 000 he needed. And the moment I sent it to him he did a 180 turn and started praising and flattering me again. We started chatting again and so I let him think that I was going to send the money. He wrote that it was just a misunderstanding between us and everything would be okay now, we'd be together soon and so on. I didn't believe we would ever be together, I just wanted him to write to me. I just wanted to hear those nice words.

LUDMILA I want us to enjoy a life together. Sunshine, when I come to you I don't ever want you to be sad and think about suicide. I don't ever want that, all right? Because, when he dumped me, I really did think about those things, you know... It hit me hard.

MUSIC Family (underlines text)

17:50

TEGA (studio) **Even though Ludmila claimed the money was on the way, it was not.**

LUDMILA So he let me pull his leg for a while. After two weeks I asked a friend who works at the post office to write me a receipt as if I had sent the money. If it was found out, it was actually a fraud. But as I said, there was no stamp or anything on it.

MUSIC Family (fades out)

18:13

TEGA (studio) *At that point, Ludmila and Michael were trying to scam each other. Though they had different motivations. Michael even sent a simple form to fill out to Ludmila. It was a request for retirement, the text of which is:*

I request an urgent retirement leave from the military for my fiancé Michael Moore and I ask him to come home, because he has left home too long. We need him back home to take care of our family. We and our children miss him very much, we are afraid for him. I am so tired of trying to sleep, when my fiancé is leaving for a dangerous mission.

Ludmila was supposed to put her personal information, including her address, date of birth and phone number on the form.

LUDMILA And all I did was copy and send it through email to the UN.

TEGA How do you send an email to the UN?

LUDMILA They just give you an email address and then the UN replies that the request has been accepted, all the formalities are “sorted” and now I just have to wait to find out where to send the money. Of course, it was a scam. Have you ever seen the UN write to someone they don’t know?

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (underlines text)

LUDMILA Like this: Honey, I have to go, okay? I’ll write tonight and let me know when the UN replies, okay? I love you.

TEGA Did you say I love you to each other?

LUDMILA Yes. Yes, we did.

TEGA How did it feel the first time?

LUDMILA It was strange, at that moment I thought: You have a husband and now you’re saying I love you to someone else. I think at that time I was getting what was going on a little, that it’s just... but I was in love, you know.

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (fades out)

20:13

KAPR We see dozens of these cases a year. Sometimes the damage is in the thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands, but there are even millions of crowns. Often in these cases the millions are not even from the victim’s money, but they “borrow” it somewhere, like their workplace. But in the end they embezzle it and then we have to prosecute these people for embezzlement.

LUDMILA Then he found out I wasn’t going to send him money so he started to write messages, that I’m an evil person, that I had been just playing with him the whole time. I couldn’t help myself, so I wrote this sort of confession to him. Well, he wasn’t responding to that and then he just wrote: You are the destroyer

of life and the killer of dreams, your life is full of deceit and suffering. I regret the day I met you. I hate you with my life.

That hurt me a lot because he was the scammer, he was deceiving and scamming me this whole time. But when I used the same method but only because I was really in love, he said that my feelings are fake, that I'm lying and all that... I didn't want to send him money that belongs to my children, to my family, there's nothing wrong with that.

MUSIC Orion's Belt (underlines text)

LUDMILA I fell apart. I needed to find a substitute so I wrote to, well, I just searched for those scammers in my messenger. But it didn't give me the same thing as with Michael.

MUSIC Orion's Belt (continues)

21:50

TEGA (studio) Ludmila also found out that Colonel Bryan Denny, whose photos the scammer used as bait, founded a charity organisation in America, helping women who fell victim to romantic scams. From Bryan's colleague Ludmila learned that:

LUDMILA The FBI is investigating exactly these scams with Bryan's profile. So I sent them the accounts he gave me and she said that I have to fill a form and send it directly to the FBI.

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (underlines text)

TEGA But it wasn't a scam this time, was it?

LUDMILA No, this was real.

LUDMILA When I sent it to the FBI I got a threat on my WhatsApp. Let me try this...

MUSIC Cyclic Dream (continues)

RECORDINGS IN AN AFRICAN DIALECT

TEGA (studio) The recordings Ludmila received are curses in the language of the Yoruba tribe in Africa.

LUDMILA Well, sometimes I had a strange feeling but I'm not afraid of them finding me or anything like that...

TEGA (studio) Chatting with Michael changed Ludmila's life. Now she is going through divorce proceedings and she underwent a visual and mental transformation.

23:25

TEGA Do you regret it?

LUDMILA Sometimes I think I shouldn't have written to anyone, but no, I don't. It was a really big disappointment and pain, I felt really bad, but on the other hand he showed me that you can live differently. You don't have to just take care of your family, stay home and not go anywhere, be a little grey mouse who doesn't need to look like anything.

23:50

MUSIC Forest (underlines text)

LUDMILA I wrote to him and I thanked him. Because he pushed me into a completely new direction, I started living my own life how I liked it. If I wanted to go somewhere, I went. I used to go and ask, what do you think? Should I go? And all of a sudden I started deciding for myself.

TEGA So a new life is starting for you now...

LUDMILA Yeah, I think it will now.

MUSIC Forest (continues)

TEGA (studio) The relationship between Ludmila and Michael did not work out. We will find out how the other relationships we saw in previous episodes end up next time.

24:26

EVA It was love at first sight.

JJ Two create more than one and can solve more than one.

GRANNY I said: Screw all men.

JULIE It's emotions, you have to spew out emotions so it has to be authentic.

MAREK Being alone is comfortable in many ways.

JULIE The week has seven days so I just rammed a guy in there from Monday to Sunday.

JJ Every one is a bit crazy, I guess.

MAREK Relationships have a lifespan, each is a bit different.

LUDMILA You'll stay the last love of my life, goodbye, Mr. Moore.

MUSIC Forest (fades to the end)