

After waiting for boss to leave, I said goodbye to my friends here and left towards the locker room. I changed up and took my stuff. Good that security guards don't ask why people leave so early. They briefly checked what I have and let me through.

Because of work here, sentries check possessions for any items that belongs to the factory. If they catch you having even one cig, you get fired instantly. And for the smokers, they must list how many of what type of cigarettes they have. Entering with eight, smoking the local ones and leaving with eight is not a problem, if you keep quiet about it. But if you instead want to leave with nine cigs, when you started with eight, you're in trouble.

Fortunately, the bus was arriving at the stop. However, it wasn't the one that bring employees to work, so I had to pay for a ticket. At least there was only two passengers beside me, sitting in separate places, so I could continue reading the book in peace.

It's a nice city - you can still see some big grey residential blocky flats here and there, but modernization is still going, where new, more beautiful building get constructed. It may look strange for tourists, but I can say it has its own charm.

And this book... quite good. "Freedom Is A Two-Edged Sword of which one edge is liberty and the other responsibility, on which both edges are exceedingly sharp". People often forget about the latter, so they basically throw away the essential part.

After reading more of it, I got to another bus stop - one near my house. It's like five minutes away from it if I go on foot. Better than going one hour from factory without a bus. Maybe I should buy a car, but problem would with amount of cash I'd have to spend on it.

I saw a leopard guy, moving by roller skates. He almost crashed on me, but shouted "Sorry". It's better than if he indeed crashed on me, but he looked like he has quite a lot of fun.

My house wasn't the biggest - not counting the attic and basement, it has ground and first floors, in contrast to my neighbors, having one additional floor each, but their houses look much taller. Not that I'm complaining - I just said the truth.

I entered my house. It was clean - no loose clothes lying around. I remember my friend, which I haven't seen in two years will come here, but I don't know when exactly. I'm looking forward to this - I must know if it'll go great or terrible.

I took off my coat and sat on a couch. Didn't feel like turning on the TV. I only use it for watching news or movies, not sitcoms. But watching movies alone... being in company while doing this feels so much better. But it's not easy to find good companion for me, considering who I am.

I swang my head backwards and closed my eyes. I started to think about my work. It wasn't a joke when I said that this company is going downhill. There are a lot of terrible decisions made, but - like with most of bureaucratic debils - they will be approved nonetheless. It really makes you think how it goes on for more than a half of century.

But I shouldn't think about work in my free time. It will only make matters worse - in my head. Silan - if he will learn to stand up for himself - will manage to work greatly there, but I think he'll left the factory swiftly - maybe after several months.

And now... I should just rest. Even if for someone, this job doesn't look like it would make people tired, I can say that's not true. Sure, being in factory

itself makes people more tired physically, but sanity is also an important thing to keep in check. And that's what I'm doing... keeping it in check...

The doorbell rang. I opened my eyes and looked on a clock. I was asleep for two hours? Seems like I needed it. I went to the door and looked through the hole. My friend was standing behind them, with some kind of bottle.

I opened the door and saw her. She was a bird, shorter than me, but still slim. Her feathers were of fiery colors. Her head was topped with smaller feathers, imitating a haircut of short length. She had golden eyes and small beak, as well as quite long tail. Dressed in red zipper blouse and grey trousers, she stood with bottle of rakija. Probably from apricot or peach, judging by the color.

"Zharena?" - I said, confused, but quickly regained the composure. - "Zdravo."

"Hello, Ruvim." - she replied with her soft voice. - "Can I enter?"

"Of course. Come in."

Bird was looking around my house. It wasn't anything spectacular - you could still see old things, like most of the furniture, but rest is more modern and bright, unlike things like wooden chairs. It can look strange, but I don't mind it. She was surely impressed.

"Wow... it looks great."

"Thank you."

"How did you buy it?"

"One guy was in need to improve his situation, so I helped him and didn't see him again."

"Sounds... mysterious. Good that you didn't change throughout these years."

"It was just two years."

"Thought it was longer..."

"Come, sit down. I'll get the glasses. It would be a shame to not open this bottle now. I'll understand if you can't do that now, though."

"No, it's not a problem."

"Splendid. Wait for a bit."

I got the whisky glasses and returned to my friend, that already opened the bottle. She looked happy, but couldn't get rid of a feeling that it's just a mask. But I know mentioning this outright wouldn't be good, so I'll play along for now. She poured the liquid and we took the glasses.

"Huh..." - Zharena sighed. - "I don't know what we should drink for."

"Let's drink for this meeting."

We've emptied the glasses. We don't need anything to drink or eat for eliminating the bitterness - we aren't rookies in this matter. That I remember when we saw each other the last time.

"You know..." - I paused for a moment - "It's good to see you, Ren."

"I missed your company, Ruvim." - she replied, while smiling. - "Even though we haven't spent much time together, it was time well spent."

"Glad to hear it. But... what happened to you?"

"It's quite a long story..."

"Still want to know it. I thought that you came back to others and decided that letting me continue my work wasn't the greatest option."

"It's... more complicated than this. After our meeting at the bridge, where we treated ourselves as enemies... and also fighting off hala..."

"It almost got you."

"I was confused when you stood in my defence. I couldn't find a reason for that."

"Like I said to you: hala was my target, but also was doing really nasty things. So I had to stop her."

"But she's..."

"...like me? We had one thing in similar. That's it."

"Still, after what you did... I began to think about my worldview. I returned to others, thinking they could help me, but they didn't - repeating those soulless quotes over and over again. So I decided to go here. Still have contact with them, we exchange help, but I try to focus on normal life."

"So we should drink for peace."

We drank another shot.

"Do you have a job?" - I asked, curious.

"Yes." - Ren nodded, while moving her tail to the other side. - "I'm policewoman."

"Old habits die hard, it seems. You have big sense of right..."

"Please, don't go with "right, actuality and probability" now. I want to take a break from this."

"And yet, you visited me."

"That's why it's complicated. I know I can't avoid this completely, but it's hard to find someone who'll understand me."

"I know this feeling. But the problem is you can't tell everything about yourself."

"Yes, you're right - having someone like you to talk to is great, even though we used to be on opposite sides of the wall."

"Past is the past, Zharena. And I prefer to think of the future. For the future, then."

We emptied glasses again.

"And what's your job?" - Ren asked.

"You know about cigarette factory here?" - I responded with question, while leaning forward.

"You sit near conveyor belts?"

"No. I work in laboratory."

"Yeah, this work suits you better."

"We have a new employee. Good guy."

"I think there would be more women than men inside."

"Proportions are almost equal. But with each day, things are getting worse."

"How so?"

"Terrible decisions that higher-ups make are the reason for more stupid things we have to acknowledge. Even me and my colleagues can feel them."

"So you think about changing it?"

"Not yet. I'm waiting for more shit to happen."

"I hope you'll find a better job."

We drank another shot.

"Where do you live, Ren?" - I asked, when I reclined on the couch.

"In an apartment with roommate." - Zharena replied, when she turned towards me.  
- "She's a fox, active one."

"So you two should be good friends."

"I like her, but still don't believe that I can pass her my more intimate things."

"Better not to say about that thing..."

"I know."

"And I hope you'll find someone close that you can trust."

I emptied my glass. Zharena did the same, but after a moment. She's not used to these kind of things - those that are more... common. She still lives in the past, at least partially. Some things are better when they stay buried, like our former conflict.

"You know..." - Ren paused for a moment. - "I almost forgot how do you look like."

"Really?"

"Yes. I intend to change that."

"So you want the picture of me?"

"I thought about it, but I decided that I'll draw you."

"You can draw?"

"I learned how to do it, because it was needed, so we can see visualize descriptions of suspects."

"This will take a while..."

"Is that a problem?" - she asked, while smiling.

"No, it's a fact." - I replied after a brief chuckle.

"Sure. Now please, don't move."

"Should I take off the shirt or something?"

"No, no... Just... hold still."

"Okay."

"So... tall, athletic goat, possessing a small goat tail, legs ending with hooves and arms ending with hands. Fur is mostly brown, but patches of brighter brown tints are present here and there, with most visible one being near the middle of the face. Dark goatee hanging from the chin. Your right eye is in colors of my feathers and your left eye is in colors of the moon, but other than that - typical goat eyes. Ears are of normal size, but are partially hidden by long, thick and curly horns in dark tint. Some of the fur on the top of the head are making a short haircut. Dressed in blue checkered shirt and black trousers."

She began to draw me with help of her pencil and small notebook. I saw that she wrote down things she said about my appearance. I was waiting for minutes for her to say that she finished. And it looked like she was working really hard. But eventually, she concluded her work.

"What do you think?" - Zharena asked, while she showed me the drawing.

"Incredible work, Ren. Even if it's just a sketch."

"You really like it?"

"I wouldn't lie about this."

"I can't color it now, though."

"So it looks like picture will be necessary."

"Yeah. Wait a bit..." - she said, as she was taking her phone. - "Done."

"Perhaps you want a pic with you and me?"

"Sure, why not."

"Come closer."

We were sitting close to each other. I grabbed her from the side, near waist and she put her arm behind my neck, on my shoulder. We both smiled for this photo. Good that she turned off the flash - I'm not a fan of it.

"You look great in here." - I stated.

"You too, Ruvim."

"So... what will you do now?"

"Actually... I wanted to ask you something."

"What's the matter?"

"Can I sleep here tonight? My friend is organizing a party today and I don't feel like joining them."

"Of course. I'll get you a pillow and blanket."

I went up the stairs and then, to my bedroom. From the wardrobe drawers, I took out necessary items and instantly returned to Zharena. In my absence, it seemed

like she took care of our little mess.

"Here you go." - I said, as I was passing her the items. - "I hope you don't snort."

"Ha, screw you!"

"Will you go to sleep now?"

"Yes - that's what I need the most for this moment."

"I won't stop you, then."

"Thanks again for letting me sleep here."

"No problem, really. Good night, Ren."

"Good night, Ruvim."

I came back to my bedroom and took off my clothes. After that, I lied on a bed, covering myself with the sheets. So... Ren came back, but still has her contacts... I'm a bit suspicious - that's why I locked my door. But I'm confident enough to have a good sleep.