

I woke up at night. Before midnight, to be precise. And it's not like I had a nightmare that caused this to happen - I'd write about it. It's not because of some noise that I could hear from neighborhood either. This just happened, that's all.

I wasn't doing anything extraordinary when I got back home. Just the usuals - getting a fine meal prepared, eating said meal, watching news that weren't that interesting to me and continuing to go through a book. I also trained with a sword, but that's it.

My phone was next to my bed. I grabbed it and checked if there were any messages. To my surprise, I got one. Some guy asked if I could help him with documents he found, claiming that he can't decipher it. At least he's in normal location rather than in dark alley.

I was about to put my phone back to where it was lying, but then, it started ringing. At first, I thought it was that dude, but I already said that I prefer text communication, but after seeing who was calling me, I immediately replied.

"Hi, Ren." - I started the conversation.

"Hello." - Zharena replied with slightly drowsy sleep. - "Did I wake you up?"

"No, no... I was already on my hooves."

"Bad dreams?"

"No, it's not that. I don't have dreams that often. Last one I had was..."

"When?"

"When you were in my house."

"Was it bad?"

"Eh... I should say this earlier, to your face. Zharena... we were fighting. Fighting because of a thing I supposedly did that made you upset."

A silence came as an answer to that confession.

"Are you there, Ren?"

"Yes, it's just... looks like our dreams are related."

"Sort of, yes. Even though our conflict was finished years ago, it looks like we still can't get over it."

"You're right. Tell me... how your dream ended?"

"After an intense sword fight, I disarmed you and made you leave. The park we were fighting in was destroyed, with trees in flames. I was wondering about what I just did..."

"I was expecting... worse outcome."

"Glad that it didn't come true."

"Yeah..."

"Let's change topic. May I ask why did you call me?"

"Oh, right. I'd like to ask you for the advice."

"But before that, I'll ask you something."

"What is it?"

"Do you have any other friends? I'm just curious."

"I have a few, but - ironically - you're the one I trust the most."

""Ironically"?"

"Ehm... sorry, that came out wrong."

"Don't worry - I'm just messing with you."

"Ha, okay..."

"So what's the thing you want to ask me about?"

"It's somehow related to yours."

"Really?"

"Yes. You see, I took your earlier advice and Calisi was more than happy to help me with socializing..."

"I'm sorry... who?"

"My roommate."

"Oh, I understand. I didn't know her name. You can continue."

"So she took me for couple of meetings and found few people that I like to talk to. She even said that some were... interested in me."

"I see. So what's the problem?"

"You're a man. I assume you know what I should expect."

"I don't know if I'm the right person to ask such thing. I was never in a relationship."

"Oh..."

"Still, I won't leave you empty-handed. First thing is you shouldn't act like you're desperate. So don't try too hard. Behave naturally. Think of it just like a normal meeting with someone you know."

"Okay."

"But also be careful. If there's something that you don't like in other person, a "red flag", if you will, then end the meeting in cultural manner. Some will understand, some not, so remember to defend yourself. Those are the basics."

"I think I understand. Thank you, Ruvim."

"My pleasure, podruga. You want to ask me something else?"

"I... no, that's all for now. Bye."

"Good night, Ren."

I ended the call. This was... interesting, to say the least. Good that Zharena went properly on the road of self-development. And great that she has someone who was eager to help her with that. I can understand that it can be hard for her, given her past.

But... why me? It's not like I can perfectly understand life mechanisms either. I'm not bad at it, but there are others better than me in this. And I had to teach my siblings about it, even if I had limited knowledge at the time, before our separation. But I know they are out there, somewhere, so I think they figured it out.

Eh... I shouldn't think about this now. I began to dress up. I'll quickly check what that "client" wants and come back to sleep - I still have to work. Perhaps I could just take a few free days, but now, I don't feel like I'd need them.

I left my house and started my walk. He said that I should meet him in corner bar on Bridge Street. The same street that many people don't like due to its surface. But hey, it's a bar, so I can ask about something to drink.

When I was going through the crossroads, I noticed something strange. One of the street lamps was flickering. I looked up and noticed that something got inside of it. Unfortunately, I couldn't identify the problem. Street workers will have a task to solve.

After getting to the mentioned street, I started looking around. Most of the businesses on it was understandably closed. Not that they were abandoned - some had special floors that doubled as living apartments. I even noticed that on second floor of certain building, they were women practicing pole dancing. I was looking there for a longer moment, but after that, I went straight towards my destination.

That corner bar was standing just for a few months. It isn't that popular, but I've heard that it has a group of regular customers. Yes, I've never been inside this building - I have my options when we talk about businesses like this, established long before that bar started to exist here.

On the outside, it mostly utilized glass as stylistic choice. I'd understand if it was at least slightly dimmed, but no. It didn't even feature logos of this bar or any kind text and graphic, for that matter. Just a plain and simple glass.

Inside of it was looking much better, in my opinion. It was maintained in modern style, so one could hardly find any trace of wood. Mostly plastic and metal. Main color present here was green, or rather different shades of it. But of course, hues of grey were also popular.

I saw a ringtail that was doing something in backrooms, so most likely it had to be a bartender. I wasn't announcing my arrival and opted for locating that "client" instead. Didn't take me to find him - brown dog with standing ears in white old-fashioned shirt, clearly hiding something.

"Can I sit here?" - I asked politely.

"You're the one I'm looking for?" - he clearly was disturbed.

"If it involves a certain paper - yes."

"Have a seat."

I grabbed the chair and took my place on the opposite side of that table. He was studying me thoroughly with his gaze. I didn't make a comment about it - I guessed why he was doing such inspection.

"Maybe you want something to drink?" - client asked. - "I'll pay, don't worry."

"Huh... in that case, I'll ask for a mug of beer - I have to go to work in several hours."

"Barkeep!" - he shouted and ringtail quickly appeared near us. - "Get this man a mug of beer."

"Of course."

I was patiently waiting for my drink. We didn't speak to each other in that period. I didn't have to wait for it for long, since we were the only customers here at that moment. I took a few sips from that glass and placed it on a table.

"Thank you." - I said to brown dog.

"That's the least I can do. I'll be honest - I didn't think you'll arrive here."

"You could choose a better time for such meeting."

"My wife is very curious, so I prefer to do that when she's asleep. Besides, there aren't many people hanging around buildings like this at night."

"Fair."

"Also, good that you got here. Even better, if it's someone like you."

"Like me? If that's the case then I suspect what you want to ask me."

"Really?"

"Yes - your appearance, a sickle on your belt, papers to decipher... But I still want to hear the whole story."

"Of course. So - as you already guessed - I'm a farmer. It's quite big, but it's overshadowed by one of my neighbors. I'm not gonna lie - I was always envy that he had much bigger success. So I got contact with people that could help me with getting some of his wealth."

"This already sounds shady."

"I know, but I didn't pay enough attention to that. They gave me the means to grab majority of his grain, high-quality one I'll point out, and got it stashed in my barn. But when it came to pay for their services, they tricked me and kidnapped my children."

"That's why you don't want to involve the police in this. But what can I help you with?"

"You must be experienced in such transactions."

"I've never kidnapped children."

"No, not that, but rather... a nature of such exchanges."

"I know what you mean. Does it involves the papers you've mentioned?"

"Yes. Take a look at it."

"Where did you get that?"

"I've spend a lot of money that I got from stolen grain for solutions. I managed to get the paper, which supposedly can help with my problem."

"Let me check..."

"So you can translate it?"

"Yes, that's no issue for me."

I've studied that document thoroughly. I'm a bit shocked that he could actually manage to get them, but he's desperate, so I can understand considering all options available. I checked it couple more times to be sure that it's clear to me.

"Do you have a pen or pencil?" - I asked.

"Yes, I have a pencil. Here."

"I'll write translated fragment of this on back side. I think it won't be a big problem - you can use eraser after you've finished."

I started writing my translation. I don't think he'll have problems with understanding what I wrote - I don't mean only the meaning, but also my handwriting. After I finished, I passed him the items.

""Means of ending contract on your favor."" - brown dog started reading. -  
""Winning with such trickster is no easy thing. You must understand that he only cares for himself, but also wants others to suffer. Such individual is interested in very valuable things, so first step is finding him and making a new offer - he will not reject it. But also make it a deal - if he losses, you will get your lost items. However, you must remember to give him semblance that he can win. If you have problems to figure out the best outcome, ask those who tricked the trickster. Not many achieved that, but all are willing to help you with some answers.""

"Is it enough?" - I asked.

"It's more that I could wish for. I even know who I should ask for help. Thank you."

"No problem, really."

"Here, the payment." - he said when he passed me small bundle of banknotes.

"Okay. That means we can part our ways."

"Indeed. Thanks again for your help."

I finished that mug of beer and left the corner bar. I'm surprised that there are still people out there willing to make shady contracts, just to improve their situation. Looks like they'll never learn. But that's not my problem. My problem would be not getting enough sleep, so I should be going.