

Hard Work

By

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FADE IN

1. GLOOMY APARTMENT - INT - EVENING

Raindrops are slowly sliding down the window of an almost empty apartment. A woman's caring voice can be heard through a phone.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

So how's the dinner?

A man, sitting at the table in the middle of the room, answers her plea.

MAN

(In Romanian)

Wonderful as usual.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

So wonderful it could make you sick.

MAN

(In Romanian)

No way. I'm in great shape.

His sunken cheeks and dead tired eyes say otherwise.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

And you better stay in shape.

The man extinguishes his dying cigarette into an ashtray, overflowing with old butts.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

I hope you're not starving yourself over there.

MAN

(In Romanian)

Me? No. You know how I am with food.

On the table there's a modest cup of noodles dinner.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

Great, cause I didn't expect Andreea's birthday to cost that much.

The man glances at a photo he has on his table. It's a family photo of him, his wife and daughter. He looked like a different man, his face full of life.

MAN

(In Romanian)

It's alright. You only turn 18 once.
We can't be stingy.

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

So then work's going well, right?

The man looks over at the eviction notice he left on the table. He averts his gaze shortly, looks down at his hands and starts fiddling with his old, scraped wedding ring.

MAN

(In Romanian)

Pretty good.

He crumples the paper up as he changes the subject.

MAN

(In Romanian)

How's Andreea? Why's she not answering
her phone?

WOMAN

(In Romanian)

She's still on that trip with her
friends. Probably acting fussy 'cause
you missed her birthday. I'll have a
go at her.

As his wife drones on over the phone, the man stops listening and his eyes get caught by the image of his daughter, staring back at him from the old photo. He starts fiddling with his ring again.

BANG! The man almost jumps from his seat. A loud knock on the door of his apartment wakes him from his daze.

He is about to say something to his wife, but he hesitates. He mutes the phone and simply slides it into his pocket, as he gets up, tentatively.

The knocking continues. He turns off the lamp he had near him, leaving only the weak lights of the city to shine into his apartment.

He waits a little and the knocking stops. He silently creeps over to the door.

He puts his eye up to the peephole.

Outside, he sees nothing but an empty hallway, a great relief. But, from a blind spot, a sharp object rapidly approaches his eye, and the man narrowly pulls back.

The peephole shatters as a screwdriver pierces through it, stopping inches away from the man's eye. He managed to launch himself backwards to avoid going blind.

He lands on his ass and he scrambles back in fear as the knocking continues, this time even more aggressive.

Contrasting the angry bashing, a calm, manly voice threatens him from behind the door. It has a hint of an eastern European accent.

CALM MAN

Open the door, Paul.

Paul gets up from the floor.

PAUL

No! Why would I do that?

CALM MAN

Because if you make me open it myself you will lose a lot more than just an eye.

The threat is spoken with the tone of a disappointed parent, not giving the slightest hint that he just tried to gouge someone's eye out.

CALM MAN

Come on, Paul. I just want to talk.

Paul pulls the phone out of his pocket.

PAUL

You can talk to the police after I call them over.

BANG! Another hit to the door. Paul almost drops the phone in surprise.

CALM MAN

I would love to do that Paul. I would love to tell them about the money you owe me.

Paul puts the phone down on the table and he desperately approaches the window.

There's another loud bang at the door. It creaks now, starting to give in.

CALM MAN

I would love to tell them about what you stole. But I was nice enough not to.

Paul looks out the window. Too high to jump. He's trapped.

Another loud knock on the door and the doorknob rattles.

CALM MAN

Have you called them yet? Should I bother breaking the door?

Paul opens a drawer. He takes out a knife.

PAUL

No. I'll open. Let's just talk.

He unlocks and gently opens the door. He points the knife forward, holding it in shaky hands.

In the doorway in front of him stands a lanky, unimposing man and next to him a much bigger brute of a man. The lanky man eyes him down, unimpressed and makes a calm comment.

CALM MAN

OK. Let's talk.

Paul gets kicked in the chest and falls stiffly on his back. The knife falls out of his limp hand and in the blink of an eye, he finds himself held down, with a boot on his face.

At the same time, the lanky man calmly closes the door behind them and starts strolling around the room.

Paul frantically tries to reason with him.

PAUL

Look. I don't have your money. I can't pay you back now, but I will. I swear.

The lanky man doesn't bat an eye. He looks around the room. He notices the eviction notice.

CALM MAN

Gloomy room. Saving up on electricity?

He flips the light switch. The bulbs flicker meekly, barely brightening the room. The apartment looks even worse than it did in the dark.

CALM MAN

Better.

Paul continues reasoning.

PAUL

I can pay you back, I swear. I just needed some extra money. I'll save up. I didn't mean to disrespect you.

While Paul frantically blabbers, the lanky man just casually sits down at the table where Paul sat. He cuts Paul off.

CALM MAN

Where did the money go?

PAUL

I used it.

CALM MAN

Used it on what?

PAUL

On my family. What else would I use it on?

CALM MAN

Well, since you were supposed to pay it back with interest I was hoping you had invested it.

The lanky man sighs and lazily nods to the big man, almost as if to say "What are you waiting for?"

He starts riffling through Paul's desk as Paul gets beaten by the large man.

PAUL

I needed it.

He gets hit.

PAUL
You know this.

He gets hit again.

PAUL
I have a daughter.

And again.

PAUL
I have a wife.

He's about to be hit again, but the big man stops in his tracks. His attention is taken by a loud noise. Paul's phone has started ringing.

The lanky man, who had been admiring Paul's family photo, grabs the phone.

CALM MAN
Is that her? Maybe I should tell her
where her money came from.

PAUL
No! Stop! Don't answer. Don't get her
involved.

CALM MAN
Are you sure? She'll be worried.

PAUL
I'll do anything you want. You can
kill me, just don't talk to her.

The lanky man turns down the call. He puts the phone down.

CALM MAN
I can't let such a good family man
die. In fact I think I'll help you
out. Bogdan!

The lanky man gestures at the large man to get up. He gets off Paul's chest and Paul finally gets a chance to catch his breath. He scoots over and leans on the wall behind him.

CALM MAN
Have a seat!

Paul is still catching his breath. He props himself up. The large man extends a helping hand, like nothing happened.

Paul gets up on his own and sits down at the table in front of the lanky man.

CALM MAN
Since you need money so badly, I
thought I would offer you a job.

Paul glances over to the large man towering behind him.

PAUL
Whatever you have to offer, I don't
think I'm qualified.

CALM MAN
Unqualified men have much greater
opportunities overseas than you'd
think.

The lanky man pushes the eviction notice forward.

CALM MAN
I didn't think an unemployed man would
refuse me so easily.

PAUL
I didn't refuse you.

CALM MAN
That's the spirit. Have you ever done
deliveries before?

PAUL
Not your type of deliveries.

CALM MAN
Your lack of experience won't matter.
Bogdan here will help you.

He gestures towards the large man, who timidly nods in agreement.

CALM MAN
I will send you the details in a
couple of days. I assume you can
drive, yes?

Paul nods.

The lanky man picks up Paul's family photo and takes a final look at it.

He smirks and abruptly gets up.

CALM MAN

Say hello to your family from me.

The man and his lackey leave and Paul is left alone. He fiddles with his ring again, looking at his family photo.

2. CAR - INT - MORNING

Paul is driving. His face is bruised and swollen from the beating he took recently, but it seems to have healed nicely.

Next to him sits Bogdan, the man responsible for the beating. Unlike when he was beating Paul's head in, Bogdan's demeanor is very jovial and jokey. He rambles on like a kid who's just made a new friend. Even the pace of his speech is all over the place. He has a distinctly stronger accent than Paul.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Sorry for hitting you bro, but if the boss says so, you do it. You don't argue with him.

Paul just tries to ignore him. He responds meekly.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

Yeah. It's alri-

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Last time I didn't listen and he got upset and he said next time is gonna really be the last time, you know what I mean?

He giggles and nudges Paul, expecting a reaction, but he gets none. So he continues, undeterred by the lack of shared enthusiasm.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

He kinda scares you but you'll see that you'll like him eventually. He's a good man. Just be on his good side and you'll see, you'll like working for him. A lot of Romanians work for him so you'll fit right in.

He puts his hand on Paul's shoulder, attempting to be friendly, but this only serves to startle Paul and make him flinch. It doesn't help when Bogdan joyfully shakes him a little bit while he's driving.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

We'll go out a bit, we'll have a couple of beers. Pick up some chicks. What do you say, eh?

Paul keeps staring blankly at the road, slightly irritated, but trying hard to ignore his companion. Bogdan expects a response, but doesn't get it. He thinks he knows why. He takes his hand off Paul.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Oh, wait. You're married. Sorry! I forgot. We'll just go out with the boys then. They're all good guys. All fun. You'll like them.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

Good guys that transport prostitutes.

Bogdan is unfazed by this comment, seemingly unaware of it's bad connotations.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Yup. But we don't just transport them. That's just what we're doing now. First you convince them, then you forge their documents, then you transport them. You ensure their good working conditions, you teach them their job. It's harder than it seems. We do all the hard work and the girls just make money.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

I doubt it.

Bogdan smirks like he just made a great joke. He keeps up his usual high pace as he explains.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

I'm exaggerating, of course, but at the end of the day it's their choice. At first we butter them up, we treat them nice. We even pay their travel expenses, whatever country they're in. We hire them as masseuses or something, we do the whole "You wanna make a little extra?"

He pauses.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

And if they don't want to they can leave. But this time we don't pay their travel fees. Take a left here, we're almost there.

Bogdan seems unaware of his own cruelty and seems interested in just getting to their destination now, more so than talking.

The two don't exchange any words for a few seconds, but this time, Paul is the one who breaks the silence.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

You seem to know your stuff. Why did you need my help?

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Well it's safer in two. Boss said we need a driver just in case and apparently I'm here just to supervise 'cause it's your first time. Plus the girl is Romanian, so it's an easy job for you. Stop. We're there.

Paul breaks and the car comes to a stop. Bogdan gets out of the car, but just before he walks, he pauses with the door open and leaves with a final remark.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Oh, and he said we need a scapegoat, but don't tell him I said that.

PAUL
(In Romanian)
What?

Bogdan closes the door and leaves before Paul can do anything about it.

Paul hits the steering wheel in frustration and furiously gets out of the car.

PAUL
(In Romanian)
The fuck is that supposed to mean?

Bogdan just ignores him and keeps walking.

Paul gives up. He leans against the car, back towards Bogdan, and mumbles profanities to himself.

He lights up a cigarette. He puffs it and lets out the first cloud of smoke with a deep sigh.

He sucks down the cigarette as fast as he can. He goes ahead and lights another.

By the time he takes a drag of another one, Bogdan is back with the girl.

Paul doesn't bother turning around to see them. He just hears Bogdan's boisterous voice.

BOGDAN
(In Romanian)
This is the guy I was telling you
about. He's a great guy. You'll like
him.

Paul turns around to face the two. His face drops in complete disbelief.

BOGDAN
(In Romanian)
Andreea, Paul. Paul, Andreea.

He gestures from one to the other in order to introduce them to each other.

The girl's face drops too. The same face that was in Paul's family photo, back in his apartment. The face of his daughter.

The two take a moment to just stare at each other, in denial of the reality that has been put in front of them. Until Bogdan breaks the silence, oblivious to what the two are going through.

He stares back and forth between them.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Do you know each other?

Paul starts walking to the other side of the car, where Bogdan and Andreea are standing. He steps forward slowly and confidently, almost as if in a trance, never breaking eye contact with the girl.

In contrast, from Paul's very first step, Andreea's eyes already dropped to her feet in fear.

When Paul reaches the other side of the car, he stops and, as if exiting his trance, he responds casually.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

No. Pleased to meet you.

He opens up the car door for the girl and just waits for her to go in.

She remains silent, avoiding his gaze. She sees no other choice and hesitantly goes into the car, holding back a grimace on her face. She now sits in the passenger seat, where Bogdan used to be.

Paul closes the door gently behind her and starts making his way to the driver's seat.

Bogdan is unfazed by this. He simply goes over to another door. He's about to go in, but Paul interrupts him.

PAUL

(In Romanian)

Wait! Bogdan!

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

What?

PAUL

(In Romanian)

How long until we get there?

While asking, Paul leans over to the ground to extinguish his cigarette. He does so in a pile of sand. With his other hand, he pulls the car keys out of his pocket.

Bogdan isn't paying attention to him.

BOGDAN

(In Romanian)

Well, not too much. Didn't the boss send you the location? I'll show you in the car. You gotta take a piss or wh-

Paul locks the car and he throws a handful of sand into Bogdan's eyes. He rushes the much larger man and knocks him over to the ground.

Inside the car, his daughter yells helplessly.

3. CAR - INT - NOON

Andreea is sitting in the passenger seat of the car. She is in obvious distress. She's trying to distract herself by staring out through the window. She holds back her tears, in between hiccups and heavy breaths.

On the steering wheel rests a bloody pair of hands. They're cut and scraped all over.

It's hard to see under the dried blood, but the left hand seems to have an old, scraped ring on it.

The right hand adjusts it slightly.

FADE OUT