

Buyout

Ricardo 'Lupe' Juarez reached into his inside suit coat pocket. It was still there. "Just in case." he always told himself, but he never doubted for a moment that it WOULD be the case. He smiled to himself with a little chuckle. They always had to make things difficult. The terms were never unreasonable and they always had the opportunity to get something out of the arrangement. But no, they always had to be greedy and ask for more than they were actually worth.

The wolf sat back in the seat of his limousine, crossing one leg over his knee, idly glancing out the window as the tall skyscrapers zipped past. A quick glance at the watch showed the time as half past 1 o'clock. They would be early, it seems. Perhaps it would work in his favor this time, though he doubted it, as it had never worked before, but still, one could dream.

Lupe took a deep breath as the limo slowed to a stop. He knew it was going to be another messy meeting. Not that he minded, of course. He never had a problem with getting his paws dirty. But even so, it would be nice, once in a while, to complete a simple transaction without unnecessary complications.

It was a mere few seconds after the car had stopped that his car door opened up and he stepped out into the street. Despite his conservative dress - a solid black suit with a red tie, black loafers polished to an almost mirror sheen - he still cut an imposing figure, standing at nearly 6'7", a mix of grey, brown, and black fur creating an almost coffee-like texture about him. As he buttoned his suit coat back up, he nodded to the absolute mountain of a man that still held open his door.

Ortega was his name or, at least, that was the only name he was known by. A light-brown coyote of at least 7 feet tall and three-hundred-fifty pounds, it was a wonder that he was even able to get into the suit that he filled out. It nicely hid the muscles that would normally bulge from his arms and legs. Even with most of his body covered up, he still stood about a head over Lupe. Truly, he had been wasted as a bouncer. It was much more fulfilling - and profitable - to work for Lupe Juarez and was close behind him as the wolf opened the glass doors to YarborCom.

The tall glass windows let whatever sunlight stream into the wide entrance lobby. A few comfortable leather chairs were set up for company guests and clients, a small coffee table with magazines, and a circular desk at the head, where a young feline was situated as a receptionist to guide in guests, take calls, etc. However, judging by the thin layer of dust on the chairs, table, and magazines, to say nothing of the silence of the phones, YarborCom had not been the powerhouse it was built to be for quite some time. It was likely that Lupe Juarez was the first guest to the company for quite some time.

Clearly, the receptionist was used to this, as she was hunched over her desk, not paying a bit of attention to the front door, her iPhone having her complete attention.

Lupe glanced up to Ortega and shook his head with a few clicks of his tongue. Nonplussed, he stepped up to the desk. Sure enough, the receptionist didn't even acknowledge his presence.

"Excuse me." he spoke up finally.

The young lady startled at the sudden baritone voice and looked up at the guest, a smile tinged with embarrassment crossing her lips. "I'm so sorry!" she squeaked, trying to iron out the smile to a genuine welcoming one, "Welcome to YarborCom! How can I help you?"

Lupe's looked over the young lady, eyes settling on the nametag that was pinned to her chest. "Terri, is it?" he said, smiling pleasantly down at her, "I have an appointment with Mr. Yarbor at one-forty-five. Could you please let him know I'm on my way?"

The smile Terri had made it to the forced-genuine variety, "May I have your name, sir?"

"The last name is Juarez."

The young lady blinked and looked down at her desk, apparently searching for the appointment in question. After a moment, she looked back to Lupe and shook her head.

"I'm afraid there isn't any appointment listed for you, Mr. Juarez."

His smile was unwavering, "I'm sure. Nevertheless, please contact him. Tell him I am here and that I am on my way back to him."

Terri's smile turned into a slightly confused grimace, "Sir...?"

Lupe nodded down to the intercom, "Go on."

The receptionist blinked at him, then pushed the button on the intercom, waiting a moment before speaking, "Mr. Yarbor? There's a... Mr. Juarez here to see you?"

There was a long silence. Terri shifted uncomfortably, even as she noticed that Lupe still kept his smile. Never wider, but never smaller. Something about his smile unnerved her and she quickly looked back to her desk.

After what seemed like an eternity, a gruff voice came back over the intercom, "You can send him through. But ONLY him. His bodyguard can wait out there!"

Lupe leaned on the receptionist's desk, still smiling, "You're a charmer as always, Kenneth." Reaching down, he pressed the button again, cutting off the connection. Looking to Terri, he nodded politely, "Thank you."

With a backwards glance and nod to Ortega, who remained standing in front of the glass door leading outside, arms crossed, Lupe headed toward the elevator just past the receptionist's kiosk.

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With a faint *bing!* the elevator doors opened up to a large antechamber, about as big as the entrance lobby, but in a much more refined style. Wooden panels went along the walls from the floor to about midway, giving way to reddish wallpaper that reached up to the high ceiling. The floor was all lush red carpeting into which Lupe's feet sank into with each footstep. Hanging above the oak doors that led to Yarbor's office hung a portrait of Ken Yarbor himself, obviously when times were well. A smile was plastered across the raccoon's face. The nameplate beneath it read, "Our founder, 1999." Yarbor clearly had money to throw around back when his company was thriving. Now, however, Lupe Juarez was paying him a visit.

Yarbor's personal secretary's was not at her desk to inform her boss of Lupe's presence, and nothing could be heard from behind the heavy oak doors beyond which lay Yarbor's office. Without any inclination to knock, Lupe merely opened the doors wide and stepped inside. Ken Yarbor sat behind his desk, eyeing Lupe warily. The smile that was so brilliant in his portrait had long since gone and he had begun to grey out. Slowly he stood as Lupe walked inside, coming around the desk to meet him.

"You're early." he said, "My attorney isn't due to be here for another fifteen minutes."

Lupe shook his head, still smiling, "Come now, Kenneth, we're past the point of attorneys. It would either be me or filing for bankruptcy."

Yarbor chuckled bitterly, "Is that supposed to be a comfort?"

"How many red pens have you gone through, old friend?" came the reply, "When was the last time YarborCom saw a profit?"

Yarbor glared at Lupe, seemingly barely able to control his anger, "Not since you decided to set up shop for yourself."

Lupe shrugged slightly, "To succeed in business, you need to offer something better than your competitors. I can hardly be blamed if my business is growing while yours continues to shrink." "It was a GIFT," Yarbor practically spat, "a gift that I gave you a position at this company! We went through school together! You were brilliant and you needed a place to go! I gave you an opportunity-"

"An opportunity to grow," Lupe interrupted, holding up his hand, "but only as far as you would allow. Most of the technologies that I 'stole' were my ideas to begin with. And so I expanded

them. The courts saw it my way in any case.”

The raccoon growled but turned away, heading back around his desk, “You're an insufferable bastard, Ricardo.”

“I get that at times.” Lupe responded.

Yarbor held the glare on Lupe as he re-took his seat behind the large oak desk, a slow exhalation coming from his nose. There was a moment of silence before the question, “What's your offer?”
“Two-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars.”

Yarbor immediately shot up from his seat again, outrage again darkening his features, “Just a quarter of a million...!? THAT'S your offer!?”

“It's a... gift.” Lupe replied, the smile a bit more tight now, “It's more than what Yarbor Communications is worth, old friend, sorry to say. So consider it a gift.”

“We pioneered-” Yarbor began to protest.

“Despite your company's accomplishments, the offer is not negotiable, Kenneth.” Lupe said firmly, “If you are not prepared to sell for that, I'm certain that the vice president of the company will be.”

“Not while I'm still breathing.” Yarbor replied, leaning forward toward Lupe, hands shakily pressing down on the top of the desk, “Now get out of my sight!”

“Kenneth.” Lupe's voice carried a tone of warning, “This is your last chance.”

“I said to get out!”

Another silence passed between the two. Lupe shrugged, “I suppose I'll have to negotiate with the vice president, then.”

“He's not in a position to make decisions for the company.” Yarbor replied.

“He will be, once you're gone.” Lupe replied matter-of-factly.

Yarbor blinked and stared at Lupe, “...just what are you insinuating, Ricardo?”

Lupe sighed, shaking his head, and reaching into his inside coat pocket, “This could have been so much easier, Kenneth, if you had just not been so stubborn.” Withdrawing his hand from his pocket, he leveled what looked to be a pistol at Yarbor.

Yarbor stepped back, as though he'd touched a hot stove, eyes wide as dinner plates, "Ricardo, what is this!?"

The smile was gone from Lupe's face, replaced by an impassiveness that Yarbor had not seen from him before. "Yarbor Communications is finished." Lupe replied, "It has been fun to toy with, but I'm afraid playtime is over."

With that, he fired.

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When Kenneth Yarbor's sight returned, he stood unsteadily upon an alien sea of red fibers, barely able to keep his footing. Looking around frantically, he tried to get his bearings.

"What... what is...?" he stammered.

He turned sharply as something behind him moved. A wheel. An enormous wheel that was connected to his office chair, completely titanic compared to him. Yarbor's breathing began to increase as it moved further away from him. The ground beneath his feet trembled. In a moment, a pair of titanic, well-polished black loafers rested on either side of him, causing him to fall back on his rear, mouth agape, terrified eyes staring up above him.

Lupe had taken the seat and was staring him down. That damnable smile was back on his muzzle.

"You were always too stubborn for your own good." Lupe's voice boomed down at him. He reached his massive fingers down, gripping at the heel of his left loafer, and effortlessly removed a bare pawfoot from it. Setting the shoe aside, Lupe set his pawfoot above the prone Kenneth Yarbor, whose mouth still was agape. The natural musk of the massive pawfoot washed over Yarbor, and it only increased as the foot continued to lower over top of him. Yarbor screamed as his sight was filled with nothing but his former friend's solepad.

Lupe pressed the foot down, feeling the frantic squirming from the tiny man beneath his foot, combined with the soft, plush carpeting of the office floor. 'Just in case.' he always told himself. But those cases generally became always the case. This was the most preferred way for him to do business. Slowly, methodically, he rubbed his foot down over Yarbor, feeling the struggle and the utter helplessness from a man who had once been a titan, but had become nothing more than a common insect.

Fit only to be squashed.

He lifted his foot up slightly, toes spread to see Kenneth Yarbor gasping for breath and barely able to lift his head up to him. The smile on Lupe's face tightened again. "Goodbye, Kenneth."

was all he said.

In an instant, he stamped the pawfoot down onto the insect, feeling him flatten and burst to paste beneath his solepad. Lupe slowly twisted and ground his foot about slowly, taking a deep breath as he did so, savoring the feeling of grinding his former friend to nothing beneath his foot. The wolf exhaled and lifted his foot. If there was a stain left of Kenneth Yarbor, it was blending in nicely with the carpeting. He brought his left foot to rest on his knee, inspecting the splotch left on his solepad, almost admiring it. A poor way to end a friendship, for one to end on another's sole. But that was the nature of the business. With an almost apologetic smile, Lupe lowered his foot and slipped it back into his black loafer and sat back in his seat. The niceties and details had yet to be worked out, but this was his company now, another part of the ever-growing Rio Communications empire.

There was just one other small detail that he wanted to address.

Lupe reached over and pressed the button on the intercom. "Ortega," he said, "would you and Miss Terri kindly come up to my office?"

It was time to show some of the lacking employees just how things worked under his administration.

After a few moments, the doors opened up again. The towering Ortega and the petite receptionist from the lobby entered. Terri blinked, surprised, at where Lupe was sitting and looked around. "Where is Mr. Yarbor?"

Lupe smiled at her, "He stepped out." And for just a moment, he could almost see the barest hint of a smile on the usually stoic and stone-faced Ortega. "But that is of no consequence right now, as the day-to-day operations of YarborCom will fall under the jurisdiction of Rio Communications. You're the first to know. Congratulations."

Terri looked flabbergasted, "I... wh-?"

"This brings us to now." Lupe stood from his seat and came around the desk to face her, "If there is one thing that I cannot abide is unprofessionalism in the workplace." He looked sternly at her, "I'm talking about what happened when I arrived."

The young woman shifted uncomfortably, "It's... I meant no disrespect, Mr. Juarez, we just don't get many visitors, and-"

"That is going to change, Miss Terri." he replied, "And I need to know that you are up to the job which you were given."

"I am, Mr. Juarez!" Terri protested.

"I am not so convinced." he shook his head, "I do believe some discipline is in order."

In a swift movement, she found herself looking at the strange-looking gun that he leveled at her. She shrieked and tried to move away, but the gun found its mark.

Lupe's smile returned as he watched the young lady dwindle down before him. Carefully stepping forward, he stood above her, staring her down as he had her boss only a few moments earlier. He could barely hear the tiniest of screams from her far down below.

Lupe reached down to her. A clumsy and futile attempt to run was easily thwarted and he picked her up between two fingers and brought her up to his smiling muzzle, "Now then, your discipline begins." Down below, he propped the toe section of his left loafer against the heel of his right, sliding his right foot out of the shoe. "You will spend the rest of the day as my insole, Terri." He said as he lowered the screaming girl down toward the opening of his shoe, "At the end of the day, I'll decide whether or not you've learned your lesson and if you will be retained in my company."

Lifting his foot and perching his toes just above the opening, his smile turned into a smirk, "It was a pleasure meeting you." With that, he slid his pawfoot into his waiting loafer, pushing poor Terri further into it and firmly pinning her under his toes, where they meet the sole.

Ensuring that she would be safe from his crushing footstep, he headed for the doors, "Mark YarborCom off the list, Ortega. Come along, we've several more businesses that need buying out. Who is next?" His bodyguard came up alongside him, speaking quietly. And Lupe smiled again. His work was never done.

And that's what he loved.

The End