

A Lesson For Jamest

Written by: Trendane

To say that the night was still would be a drastic understatement. Comatose would seem lively by comparison. It was as if everything was dead. Beyond the cone of light from the street lamp, there was no sound...no movement...no life.

Even within the boundary of illumination, that which should be animate was retarded. The smoke from the beaver's cigar barely seemed to move after it was released. It spread in lazy billows like milk poured into water in slow motion.

Finally, the sound of footsteps broke through the humid shell. Hooves on cement, then asphalt; coming towards him, crossing the street.

So, they'd sent The Mule.

The beaver swallowed hard, flicking his cigar away into the night even though it wasn't yet half finished. In meetings like this, it was best not to seem too relaxed, or too tense...or to have something in your hands that could easily be seen as a weapon. Especially not when dealing with The Mule. He had a well-deserved reputation for being difficult to get along with. He always took every opportunity to point out confrontation in any conversation. Whether it existed or not.

As the miniature stallion stepped into the pyramid of illumination, he smiled that snide, smug grin he always wore at times like this. Meetings when he knew he'd get to play the tough guy and intimidate people. It's what he loved to do.

"So, Jamest. How you doin' t'night?" he asked, adjusting his lapels and looking around with a light sniff. He'd clearly seen too many gangster films.

"Fine, Koth. How are you?" the beaver replied.

The small stallion chuckled a bit and patted the beaver's shoulder, smiling that smile up at him, "Howzabout you let me do d'askin...'kay paly?" He turned and walked in a slow quarter circle away from Jamest. His strut made clear he was satisfied with that line. Probably something he'd been working on for a while. His path brought him to stand in front of the beaver again, about five feet away.

"So...you met with the prospective client?"

The beaver nodded, "Yes."

"And?"

"He's willing to deal."

The little horse feigned a laugh and said, "Nah nah...dat ain't what I mean. What'd ya tink of him?"

Jamest chuckled back with a shrug, though a bit more convincingly, "I don't know. I was sent to extend a busi-"

There was a beige blur, the sound of two, rapid hoofbeats, and the whole world went white for a moment. When Jamest shook his head to clear it, he realized he was leaning back against the lamp post. His jaw hurt...a lot, but it wasn't broken. As his vision came back into focus, The Mule was standing back where he had been; once again, straightening his lapels with a mobster affectation.

"Okay. Let's try dis agin. Whadya tink of 'im?"

The beaver's words were slurred as he rubbed his jaw and straightened himself, "Seemed nice enough."

Koth chuckled and stepped forward, reaching up and laying his hand on Jamest's shoulder, "Y'seem t'be missing de point. What you're s'possed to be doin' is tellin' me if'n y'tink dis guy's gonna rat on d'Boss."

The beaver tried to hide his discomfort as he looked down into those cold, dark eyes and said, "Koth, I don't kno-" He stopped in mid-sentence when he saw the horse's lips purse. There was another punch coming...he could feel it.

With an almost painfully tight squeeze on his shoulder, the horse said, "You know what I find de most amazin' about people? Diffrences in tolerance. Some guys, ya don't even godda touch and dey're babblin' about whatever. Den der's de ones what ya gotta knock 'em around a little, y'know? A pop in the jaw, maybe one to da gut."

To accentuate his point, he belted Jamest in the breadbasket, knocking the wind out of the beaver for a few moments. Once he'd stopped gasping and coughing, Koth tapped his chest with a black-tipped digit, "And sometimes, if dey're really bein' stubborn..."

There was a flash of cream-colored lightning as The Mule's fist just barely made contact with the crotch of Jamest's clothes. Koth had pulled his punch at just the last moment, but even that slight tap against the beaver's balls carried the full weight of the message he was trying to get across.

Koth let go of Jamest and stepped away, strolling casually back to his place in the circle of light. He turned to face the beaver and put on his patent smirk, "So...whatdya tink of 'im?" Jamest swallowed tightly and pulled himself back up to his full height, "I. Don't. Kno-."

As the stallion charged forward again, Jamest sidestepped and twisted at the waist. Grabbing Koth by the mane, he used his own speed to drive him, face first, into the light pole. There was a loud clang and a grunt from the stallion as he collapsed partway to the ground.

Jamest stepped clear and let out a quiet breath, "Now look, you and I both-" Before he could finish his sentence, the stallion was lunging toward him again.

But he didn't make it very far before he froze in his tracks.

The barrel of the revolver stuck halfway to the back of his throat. The metal was deathly cold against his lips as the horse went cross-eyed looking at the gun in his mouth.

The beaver's voice was as cold as the gun metal as he murmured, "I'm getting a little tired of you

interrupting me. May I please finish what I was saying?"

The horse's teeth chattered little against the steel as he nodded silently, staring up at the beaver with a newfound respect. A respect borne of fear.

"Thank you. Now, as I was saying, I was sent to deliver Mr. Wilkern's offer. Not to act as a fucking psychoanalyst. The Boss knows what my job is and so do you. We both work for Mr. Wilkern. He is my boss. Not you." The beaver's teeth might as well have been razor sharp fangs for all the ferocity in his glare, "If you dare to treat me, ever again, as you have tonight.." His thick, black-clawed thumb cocked the hammer back. The horse's mouth acted like a resonating chamber, amplifying the gut-freezing click of the cylinder rolling into place as Jamest finished his sentence, "...then you and I are going to have some very short-lived problems. I trust we are both clear on this arrangement?"

Blood trickled from Koth's nose, down either side of the gun as he nodded slowly. Even if he had remained frozen, the rapidly spreading stain in the front of his fine, beige pants made it perfectly clear that there was no mistaking the beaver's point.

Jamest nodded, "Good. Because I'd hate to have to--" He squeezed the trigger and gun went *CLICK* in Koth's mouth. The horse flinched and farted loudly, beginning to sob openly as the beaver pulled the barrel from his mouth and walked away, leaving the small horse shivering on his hands and knees.

He strolled out of the light and back into the surrounding shadow, slipping the bloodied gun back into its hiding place. He wouldn't say anything to anyone about the night's happenings. He knew Koth would keep his mouth shut as well. The Napoleonic stallion wouldn't want anyone knowing he'd soiled himself like that. They both knew the score...and it'd be their little secret.