

PIONEERS

Written by

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INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

MICHAEL D'SOUZA bites his fingernails nervously.

He rapidly shakes his leg up and down.

He looks up at the clock. He's been here for hours.

He looks out the window and sees an HR Rep guiding another dejected engineer holding a box of his things towards the elevator.

Michael tries to make eye contact with the HR rep. She stops and sticks her head through the door, speaking in a kind but empty tone.

HR REP

Just a little longer, Mr. D'Souza.
Thanks for your patience. We will
be conducting your exit interview
shortly.

Michael sighs and slumps back in his seat.

At this point, Michael is alone. Everyone on his team has been fired.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Loud footsteps echo through the hallway.

Michael tries to get a look at who is approaching. Before he can see who it is, the door swings open.

In walks VISHAL SURI: CEO. Visionary. Pioneer of Industry.

VISHAL

Hey...!

HR REP

Michael, Mr. Suri.

VISHAL

Michael! Nice to meet you.

Michael jolts up. He half gets up, not sure if he should stand or stay seated.

Vishal extends a hand and gives Michael a firmer shake than he was expecting.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

I've heard great things about you!

MICHAEL

Thanks Mr. Suri. What are you...

The HR Rep slips through the door and stands in the corner of the room. Vishal continues, not acknowledging her presence.

VISHAL

Please, it's Vishal. Thanks for waiting for so long. I know they scare you guys with the whole exit interview and severance eligibility thing. I came here as fast as I could, straight from the boxing gym.

The HR Rep silently raises an eyebrow.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

Anyways, big shock today, right? Take a seat, please.

Michael sits back down. Vishal leans over the table, almost looming over Michael.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I guess so.

VISHAL

The markets are changing. We gotta work towards where they're going. Not what's hot right now. This whole AI thing is just a fad. But I think we made one mistake.

MICHAEL

With what?

VISHAL

You shouldn't have been let go. We've seen you go above and beyond in all your work and want you to stay with us.

Michael furls his eyebrows, thinking.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

I want you to come to work with us at Lab X.

Michael widens his eyes.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

I've seen that tool you created. We think it could be revolutionary.

MICHAEL
You... you've seen that?

VISHAL
(Shrugging)
We scan through the company git
every now and then for promising
employee side projects.

MICHAEL
It's just a network maintenance
tool.

Vishal's expression slowly drops.

VISHAL
It's... more than that Michael.
It's more than that.

Vishal pauses and thinks to himself. He doesn't press
further.

Unsure if he has upset Vishal, and also because he can't take
the awkward silence, Michael continues further.

MICHAEL
It was just something I hacked
together. We were trying to make
the cloud processing more
efficient.

The HR Rep silently jots down notes in the corner.

VISHAL
Michael, Do you know what we're
working on at X Labs? Any rumors
float around the office here?

MICHAEL
No clue.

VISHAL
I can't tell you until you take the
job. Consider this a formal offer
of promotion. You in?

MICHAEL
Uh. Yeah. Is that even a question?

The HR Rep intervenes before they can continue.

HR REP
Can you sign this for official
purposes?

She hands Michael a contract. He quickly initials it and hands it back.

Vishal flashes a smile at him.

VISHAL

You're going to be at the forefront of Quantum Computing.

MICHAEL

Holy shit. How long have you been working on that?

VISHAL

7 years. And we think the algorithm within your networking tool that could help us speed things up.

Vishal spreads his arms out wide, presenting his utopian view of the future.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

We can bring the future to the world in just two short years.

He snaps and points at Michael.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

And we're ready to pay you for it, just, name your price. How does 2 million dollars in stock sound?

Michael smiles and lets out a laugh. He can't believe it.

MICHAEL

When do I start?

VISHAL

(Smiling)

That's what I like to hear.

Vishal gives Michael a handshake and walks towards the door.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

We're gonna do big things my man! Stephanie here is gonna figure out some stuff for your transfer.

Stephanie nods at Michael.

As Vishal is about to step out, Michael speaks up.

MICHAEL

Hey Mr. Suri?

Caught off guard, Vishal turns around. Michael speaks with a new confidence he hasn't had before.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Just curious, what about the network tool would help with your quantum computing efforts?

VISHAL

Our networks aren't fast enough to keep up with the computing power. We're getting bottlenecked.

MICHAEL

Hmmm.

(beat)

Is illegally collecting user data slowing things down too?

Vishal makes eye contact with Stephanie.

VISHAL

Huh?

MICHAEL

Don't talk generic bullshit with me. The network usage by our devices was unusually high. That's when I realized.

Michael glances at Stephanie

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

They're all listening. The phones. The speakers. The goddamn doorbells.

He points accusingly at Vishal

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

This is the real top secret bullshit you're working on at Lab X, isn't it?

STEPHANIE

Mr. Suri, we shouldn't speak more till we our lawyers are here.

Michael raises his eyebrows. That seemed like an admission of guilt.

MICHAEL

What's in it for you? Why are you trying to hard to defend him?

Stephanie is caught off guard by the question.

STEPHANIE

I'm... just doing my job.

Vishal brushes her off.

VISHAL

Does anyone else know?

MICHAEL

No. I was the only one who used that tool. Hidden in plain sight, I guess.

Stephanie gives at Vishal a look of disbelief. This can't be real.

VISHAL

You could have taken that to the DOJ. You could have destroyed this company. Why didn't you?

MICHAEL

It wouldn't have mattered. Because every one of these "Unicorns" backed by Y-Combinator or Sequoia, is doing the same shady shit.

Michael stands up and looks Vishal straight on at eye level for the first time.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

My name gets out there as a whistleblower? I'm done. But I know this is still worth something, and a lot more than 2 million dollars.

Stephanie speaks up after a silence.

STEPHANIE

Mr. Suri. Please just consider...

MICHAEL

That being said, I'd be doing the world a whole lot of good by shutting you down.

As Vishal begrudgingly speaks up, Stephanie pulls out her phone and sends a message to the legal team.

VISHAL

Fine. 10 million.

Michael smiles briefly at Vishal and sits back down. His expression drops as he closes his eyes to think.

A bead of sweat rolls down Vishal's forehead as he waits for Michael to respond.

Stephanie speaks with additional desperation as she shows her phone to Vishal.

STEPHANIE

Mr. Suri, they're calling an emergency board meeting.

Michael snaps out of his silence.

MICHAEL

Stephanie, what would you do?

Vishal speaks up before she can respond.

VISHAL

The fuck? What are you asking her for? I just said name your price. Just blurt out any number that comes to your mind.

Michael's focus is still on Stephanie.

MICHAEL

Forget him. I want to know, would you take the money?

VISHAL

Stephanie, if you say the wrong answer you're fired. And I'll make sure no one hires you ever again.

Stephanie looks at both of them. They both stand up straight, trying to overpower one another.

Unable to wait, Vishal blurts out his next offer.

VISHAL (CONT'D)

70 million dollars. In stock. To shut up and stay with us. Plus a big raise.

Michael smiles and nods at Vishal. Before anyone can respond, Stephanie clears her throat and speaks as well.

STEPHANIE

I stand with Mr. Suri and this company.

Michael looks at her and shakes his head.

MICHAEL

I quit. I'll go pack up my things.

Vishal blurts out one last threat as Michael exits the conference room.

VISHAL

We've got an NDA with you! I'll sue
you to the ground.

Michael flips him off and lets the door shut behind him.

Vishal leans against the wall in silence. He glances over at Stephanie. She doesn't acknowledge him.

Instead, Stephanie looks down, ashamed of herself.

THE END