

Proper Planning

"Hey, Kevin," Lukas, a slightly stocky raccoon in his late twenties, said, "would you mind helping me out and stocking bread?"

Kevin, a scrawny fennec some years younger than Lukas, turned away from the vending machine and his half-hearted search for sweets. "Sure."

"Thanks. Any customers?"

Kevin shook his head, large ears giving him a wide arc. "Rarely get any this late anyway, never mind the cold."

"Bummer," said the raccoon. "You can usually count on some weird ones needing half the bananas in the store."

"They'd be banana popsicles by the time he'd get to his car."

Lukas snorted in amusement. "Oh well," he said, walking out. "Thanks again!"

"No problem boss." Kevin pocketed his change and went to the back, got some boxes of bread, and went out to the floor.

Kevin hated the night shift. Sometimes he got an interesting story, but usually barely anyone came in, making his position as cashier mostly useless. It also didn't help the store was rapidly losing business to Flor-Mart, which had greater selection and better prices.

As he reached up to scratch one of his large fennec's ears, Kevin noticed a customer out the corner of his eye. He put down the box of bread, stretched his thin, tired limbs, and walked over.

The customer was either a rat or a possum. The pink, round ears were a give-away, but a balaclava obscured the rest of his face. Kevin had to assume it was a male, as a black trench coat obscured all bodily details. Sure, it was strange, but that was the night shift.

Kevin stopped in his tracks. Balaclava *and* a trench coat? This was *too* weird. And too late; the customer saw Kevin and walked toward him. Kevin's tail stiffened, he tried to remember everything the employee handbook said about dealing with shady characters. He could feel his knees knocking. When the masked customer finally got to him, all Kevin could manage was a weak "May I help you?"

The customer looked at Kevin with steel grey eyes for a moment before opening his coat. Several red tubes were taped to his waist, *TNT* written on each in black. Spiraling wires led from the tops of the tubes to a keypad on top of them. Sweet, fancy, Moses.

So much for blaming his clothes on the weather.

Kevin felt his heart beat quicken and his tail worm between his legs. The color drained from his cheeks and ears. The last vestiges of optimism flew out of him as his jaw dropped from his muzzle. His hands instinctively went up in the surrender gesture.

"I don't wanna hurt you," Trench Coat said, "so just take me to the safe and give me all the money and I won't blow up this bomb."

Kevin began to stammer; trying to tell Trench Coat he didn't have the keys to the safe while simultaneously thinking through employee handbook bomb situations, all the good moments in his life, things he never said to his grandmother, and the topic of his last exam, the Ummayyad Caliphate in Egypt. Then, suddenly, a more logical thought popped into his head.

"Wait, what?"

Trench Coat's eyes narrowed and his feet shuffled. "Give. Me. The money, or I'll blow this place to Kingdom Come!"

Kevin put his arms and tail down. One eyebrow cocked and he gave Trench Coat a sideways look. "I don't think you will."

Trench Coat pulled his head back in surprise, then pushed himself in Kevin's face and held his arms wide. "Do you think I'm playing with you?!"

"Yeah, actually." Trench Coat's eyes went wide. "That's not a gun or a knife, that's a *bomb*. If I don't bring you the money, you'd not only kill me, but *you too*." Trench Coat turned his head slightly, and Kevin could see the outline of his mouth trying to form words. "Kind of a no-win situation."

Trench Coat pulled back, his arms falling and the tip of his pink tail twitching. "Well . . . "

"And now I see it," Kevin pulled the keypad off Trench Coat's stomach, "this is a *calculator*."

The masked bomber's wide eyes flicked to one side before he straightened back up. "That doesn't mean it's not a real bomb!"

Kevin crossed his arms, his ears swiping back. "Really?"

"Really!"

"Yeah?"

"Yeah!!" The word was only half out his mouth when Trench Coat turned and ran. Kevin took off after him, jumping to close the final few feet. Although Kevin was thin and lanky, the momentum allowed him to tackle the "bomber" to the floor.

"Oh, no you don't jackass!" Kevin yelled, hoisting his chest off the perpetrator. Thinking quickly, he grabbed a loaf of bread in a bag and started beating Trench Coat's head and shoulders.

“Why – would you rob – a store – *with a bomb?!?*” Kevin stopped the beating to add “You’d blow up all the money, moron!”

Taking advantage, Trench Coat scrambled up. Kevin wrapped himself around his back, one arm choking the offender while the other resumed the beating in a violent piggy-back-ride.

As Trench Coat struggled to run, Lukas came running over. “Kevin!! What the Hell is going on?!”

“He’s got a fake bomb!”

Lukas jumped back. “*A bomb?!?*”

“*A fake bomb!*”

“A fake bomb?” Lukas raised an eyebrow.

“*Tackle! Him!!*” the fennec hissed.

Lukas snapped to attention and leapt at the criminal. With a yell all three fell to the floor. Lukas weighed more than Kevin, so the fennec left the raccoon to subdue Trenchcoat while he went to grab a phone and call the police.

“Wait, Kevin!” Lukas yelled. Kevin stopped, ears alert. “Did you have to use merchandise?” Kevin groaned and ran to a phone.

The police were at the store in less than ten minutes. They took Trenchcoat, revealed to be a possum, away in handcuffs; another officer approached the very disheveled Kevin and Lukas.

“That was very brave of you two.”

“Not really . . .” Kevin mumbled, smoothing some of his tan fur.

“What I wanna know,” the officer said, “is why didn’t he try the Flor-Mart? They’d’ve had more money.”

Kevin rolled his eyes. Lukas nodded. The officer shrugged. “Oh well, that’s the night shift.”