

Workplace Romances

Kevin was destined for greater things. No, those greater things weren't astronaut or politician or "*coffee master*," whatever that was; but greater than the night shift at a crummy grocery store. The fact he hated his job was a coincidence.

With a sigh, the fennec pulled his thin, lanky frame out of his car and into the employee entrance. In the break room, Marvin, the unremarkable-looking boar who started work there a few weeks ago, was tucking in his shirt while Angela, the old saluki who only worked part time, was grabbing her purse and coat. Jordan, a snow leopard about Kevin's age, walked in from the sales floor with a sigh.

To say Jordan was gorgeous was an understatement. When she walked, her hips were like a hypnotist's pendulum; Kevin shivered to think what they'd be like if she ran. When she was talking to someone, they didn't have to fight between looking at her breasts or her face because it was a win-win. Every single male and a fair portion of the females who worked at the store had had *some* kind of fantasy about Jordan. Kevin suspected Marvin, who was just out of high school, had applied for a job specifically because she worked here.

"So, Kevin," Angela said. Kevin hadn't realized he was watching Jordan primp in the mirror. "I heard about Sarah coming in last week. Sorry buddy." His ears lowered but she touched his shoulder gently. Angela was such a sweetheart, a combination grandma and bro. She could be off-color at times, ranting about her love life to her coworkers despite being decades older than them, but her kindness and wisdom shown through when the chips were down.

"What happened?" Marvin asked. Kevin had half a mind not to answer him; the boar hadn't made much of an impression on him in his time at the store. But he saw Jordan pull a bag of chips from her locker and look at the fennec with questions in her eyes.

"Sold her rubbers," Kevin said. He swiped his time card more furiously than he meant to.

The boar blew out a heavy breath. "Exes, man. What can you do?"

Angela shot him a look. "Yungin', what would *you* know about exes?" Kevin was glad the canine had his back.

"I've got my share!"

"Babydoll, I've been *divorced*, trust me, you don't know *jack*."

"Hey, I know more than Lukas." Lukas was their pudgy raccoon shift manager. He was good at his job, a bit of a stickler, but always helped out with a happy smile. He was well-liked but dull, never going out for drinks after work. All the same, Kevin considered him a friend and narrowed his eyes as Marvin disparaged him.

"Oh that's not fair," Jordan said.

"Why, because he's fat?" Marvin asked.

"I don't think he's *fat*," Kevin said, mostly to himself.

"No, because he doesn't *try*," Jordan said.

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure he's still in the closet," Angela said.

Jordan and Kevin looked at her.

"Lukas isn't gay," Jordan said.

"He's not?" Angela asked.

"No. At least I don't think so," Kevin said.

"He's not gay," Jordan said. Her tail tip switched as she put a chip in her mouth.

"I dunno, I've never heard him talk about girls," Marvin replied.

"Well you know how responsible he is," Angela said, "he doesn't talk about that stuff on the floor, gay or straight."

"He's not gay." Jordan said, flatly.

"But like, even in the break room. He *never* talks about who he's with or even what he does outside work," Marvin said.

"He's just private," Kevin replied.

"He's not gay!"

"To be fair, I've never asked –"

"You don't *ask* a person if they're gay!" Marvin yelled.

Angela's jaw dropped. "Well how *else* do you find out?!"

"He is not gay!!"

"You . . . just *know* I guess." Marvin said to Angela, waving his hands.

"My lord, isn't your generation supposed to be better about this kind of thing?"

"Not gay!"

"He and I are pretty close," Kevin said, "and he's *never* told me he's gay."

“Well he and *I* are a lot closer, and I *know* he’s not gay!!”

Jordan had finally caught the attention of the fennec and saluki. Both remarked her with wide eyes. Color filled her ears.

“How?” Angela asked, drawing the syllable out. Marvin looked very confused.

Jordan huffed and dropped her arms, then she pulled into herself and scowled at the group.

“How else?” she said quietly, barely even a whisper.

Kevin and Angela gave each other smarmy looks. Marvin still looked very lost.

“Really?” Angela said, her tail beginning to wag. Jordan turned toward the table and her chips. Her face shone with color, her tail tip switched wildly.

“Yeah. So. He’s not gay.”

All at once, Marvin sucked in a huge, loud gulp of air, his arm shot up to point at the snow leopard. Jordan turned an even deeper shade of red, but didn’t acknowledge Marvin.

“Lu . . . Lu . . . *Lukas* banged *you*?!”

Jordan stuffed three chips in her mouth at once. Angela chuckled. “Guess he knows more than you think.” Her tail was wagging quickly now.

“Lukas?!”

“*Yes Lukas*,” Jordan shouted, ears going flat and turning to the boar. “I like guys who don’t stare at my ass every time I’m in the room, *Marvin*.” His ears fell and he looked away. The snow leopard turned again to her chips.

“I thought you said he didn’t try?” Kevin asked.

“*He*,” Jordan lifter her eyebrows at the word, “didn’t try.”

Angela brought a hand to her muzzle. “No offense, hun, I just didn’t think he was your type.”

“What does that mean?”

Angela shifted left and right. “Oh, I dunno, he just . . . doesn’t seem like he’d catch your eye.”

“Because he’s fat?”

“I didn’t say that,” Angela replied a bit too quickly. Her tail stopped wagging.

“I wouldn’t say he’s *fat*,” Kevin said, much more genuinely. He looked at Angela, who dropped her ears and adjusted the strap of her purse awkwardly.

“How?” Marvin asked. His hands were before him, the heavy hoof-tips splayed as if he were begging for scraps.

Jordan looked at Marvin with only her eyes. Kevin thought she was trying to pierce the boar’s hide. Nonetheless, she spoke, “We’re both big survival-horror, Dead Space-type fans. I’ve never played Resident Evil Zero, so he let me borrow it. One thing led to another.”

“Is that a video game?”

“You played *video games* together?!”

Kevin tilted his head to one side. “Didn’t take you for a gamer.”

“Guess you’re learning a lot about me today.” Jordan’s voice was more or less normal, though her face was still bright enough to see by.

“So,” Angela said, “how long have you two been a couple?” Her tail started wagging again.

Jordan leaned over the table. “I wouldn’t really call us a couple.” Kevin raised an eyebrow. “I mean, he’s nice enough but I don’t really want anything. So we just play video games and hook up.”

“I see,” Angela said.

“Yeah. It’s kinda nice, actually. No pressure, n’ all.”

“He gets to bang you and doesn’t even have to *date you*?!” The boar’s eyes looked like they were going to explode.

Jordan slammed a fist on the table but Angela turned and spoke first. “Marvin if you utter another word I’m going to clean your teeth with your own tusks.” Kevin had never seen a more sincere expression on anyone’s face.

Marvin’s eyes fell but his jaw worked and tensed. “I have to talk to Lukas,” he said, scurrying off.

“He’s gonna say something stupid,” Angela said and followed him out the door.

Kevin pulled his phone out to put it on silent and headed for the door.

“Gonna gawk some more?”

Kevin looked at Jordan, who had straightened up and looked pointedly at him. He hadn’t noticed before, but her eyes had grown wet. She wasn’t crying, but . . . maybe she wanted to.

“I have to hit the floor.”

She looked down. There was a brief pause between them. “Hey, that sucks about Sarah. I wouldn’t have been able to do it.”

Kevin's ears lowered. "Thanks." He left the breakroom.

Kevin followed Angela and Marvin onto the floor as he made his way to the registers. They found Lukas doubled over some boxes in Pets. Marvin's face tightened as he saw the raccoon's generous bottom shake slightly with the beat of the store's bland pop music.

"Lukas!" The raccoon turned as the boar barred down on him. "You're banging Jordan?!" Kevin had to stop at Marvin's insane lack of discretion.

Lukas looked as though someone handed him a dead baby. "Marvin, *we are on the floor.*"

"Well *are* you?"

"This is a highly inappropriate conversation for work, if you *must* talk about this stuff, go to the break room."

"Oh, c'mon fuddy-duddy," Angela said, "yes or no is all you need to say."

"And *she* says you are!" Marvin screeched. Angela rolled her eyes.

Lukas frowned at Angela, then Marvin, and crossed his arms. "We are in a relationship, yes."

All three raised their eyebrows. Kevin stepped a little closer. "Relationship?"

"Yes. An, uh, *intimate* relationship."

"Like," Angela said, leaning toward Lukas, "*relationship* relationship?" The three were now crowding Lukas.

"Well, it's still pretty new," Lukas unfolded his arms and looked off to the side. A smile began to dance on his muzzle, making him seem younger than he already was. "But I think we've got a strong start. Y'know, figuring each other out."

"Relationship?" Marvin repeated, his face filled with the question.

The raccoon's smile faded. "Yes, Marvin. Maybe if you stopped staring at women like they were naked all they time, you'd find your way into one."

The boar frowned. Lukas finally seemed to notice how close the others were. He stepped back from the group crushing against him. "Why are all of you so concerned with my personal life?"

All three looked away. Angela scratched a fluffy ear. "We're just . . . curious," Angela replied.

"It's because I'm fat, isn't it?"

"Oh for the love of! *Fat* is . . ." Kevin didn't mean to screech. ". . . not the word I'd use."

Marvin's eyes brightened with evil delight and he smiled ear to ear. Kevin's face fell, knowing what was coming but without a way to stop it. Lukas didn't know how Jordan felt about him – them. But Marvin did. Good Lord, the boar was *evil*.

"Well, *she* said –"

Angela strategically readjusted her purse, winging it right into the boar's crotch. The next words came out as a burp as he folded down. Angela to the rescue.

"That's so great to hear, Lukas. Y'know, we *never* know what you're doing outside of work, it's a relief to know –"

"*You're just a hookup,*" Marvin wheezed. Lukas' eyes went wide.

"—that you're not . . . sleeping on a cot . . . in . . . receiving . . ." her voice died and her head, tail, and shoulders fell. Lukas turned to Marvin. The boar was cradling his groin.

"What did she say?" His tone told them he heard the words very well.

"Oh, I'm sure we just heard wrong . . ." Angela looked to Kevin in desperation.

"Yeah," Kevin said. There was nothing but uncertainty in his voice. "Y'know . . . uh . . ."

"Slang!"

"Slang!" They pointed at each other frantically.

Lukas wasn't paying any attention to them. "Just hooking up?" His eyes scanned the ground in front of him for a moment. Then, he looked at them like they had just approached him, hadn't been standing in front of him for five minutes. "Are you su-- . . ." He looked down again, then scratched the back of his head. "Excuse me," he mumbled, slipping between Marvin and Angela, brushing them both with his girth.

Kevin watched as the raccoon moved away in the direction of the break room with purpose. He turned and glowered at Marvin, who had begun to right himself. Angela took the boar's other side and stared daggers at him. His eyes switched between the two.

"So . . . Jordan is single . . ." He attempted a smile.

Angela shook her head and readjusted her purse. "Young man, you have a lot to learn." And she walked away.

"What?" There was an ever-so-slight chuckle, as if he had done nothing wrong. "What?!"

Kevin flattened his ears to the back of his skull. "You're a dick, Marvin." He walked away, leaving the boar perplexed in the aisle. If the fennec didn't like him before, he hated Marvin now. He may not be capable of astronaut or coffee master, but Kevin was greater than *this*.

Unbidden, thoughts of Sarah danced through his head.