

FML

Kevin placed a few more candy bars on the rack, trying to arrange them neatly. Then he leaned back, tossed his head behind him, rolled his shoulders and sighed. Part of it was sincere fatigue, the other was sincere boredom. Not a lot of people came during the night shift, and with the new Flor-Mart just a few blocks over, even less people were coming nowadays. It didn't matter, he got paid regardless. And it paid well enough to cover part of his tuition and let him live off campus, as long as he kept a roommate. Covering his expenses was more important than sleep. He pulled a few more bars from the box and stacked them.

Kevin rubbed his eyes as he heard the door chime and the click of shopping baskets from the front of the store with his fennec's ears. He swiveled them toward the customer as they walked toward the back, but he didn't bother to look before they disappeared in the aisles. He'd see them soon enough, he was the only cashier working right now. He stacked a few more candies before going to his register.

Kevin leaned forward and rested his thin arms on the checkout space, doing his best to appear at least conscious for the customer. He didn't have to wait long, his large ears heard the patron coming back up the aisles to the front. Still, he didn't turn toward them, just followed their footsteps.

All of a sudden, they stopped. Finally looking toward them, Kevin was surprised.

A rounded and very curvy African wild dog in a light jacket stood there, looking with shock and discomfort on her face. The tip of her tail twitched nervously. Her large, expressive brown eyes looked at Kevin, then quickly scanned the other, obviously empty register stations.

Seemed the unpleasant surprise was mutual, but Kevin reached out first.

"Hi Sarah."

"Hey . . . Kevin "

She didn't move. One hand fumbled with her jacket zipper, the fingers of the other flexed around the basket she was holding. Her tail continued to twitch. Her feet shuffled a bit, as if she was about to walk away.

"Is there anyone else here tonight?" she asked.

Kevin was taken aback by the question.

"Just me," the fennec said.

"You don't have, like, a . . . uh . . . self-service checkout?" she scratched behind one brown ear.

Kevin patted the surface before him. "What you see is what you get."

Sarah grimaced, before finally moving up to the register. She looked at Kevin awkwardly, her round ears low on her head.

"How have you been?" Kevin asked, trying to dispel the awkwardness between the two of them.

"Good, good," she replied, looking away, "no complaints." Kevin nodded. "Forgot you worked here," she said, chuckling awkwardly.

"If only it were so easy," Kevin said with a smile. They both grew quiet. Sarah rubbed her forearm anxiously.

"You wanna buy whatever you've got, or are you just gonna wait till dawn?" Kevin asked with a small smile, trying to work in a little humor without being rude and hoping to move things along.

Frowning, Sarah pulled the first item from the basket. Kevin pulled his mouth to one side of his muzzle, his ears going flat on his head and sticking out to either side. Five pack of condoms, ultra thin. Sarah placed it gently on the conveyor belt, but the sound of the cardboard touching the surface reverberated through Kevin's large sensitive ears.

Sarah pulled out the other items slowly. Lube, cherry scented. Whipped cream. Chocolate sauce. Hershey's Kisses. Scented candles, cinnamon. Placing her last item on the surface, Sarah reached to the racks behind her and pulled a Twix from the candy section. Her skin glowed red beneath her multi-colored fur.

Kevin surveyed Sarah's things, mouth still twisted to one side and his ears flat on his skull. Why, oh why couldn't she have waited till dawn?

"Aren't you forgetting the strawberries?" Kevin said, looking back up at Sarah, feeling the chill in his own voice.

She flushed further, her ears going red. "He has an allergy," she said in a small voice.

It didn't make Kevin feel any better. Picking up her items one by one (condoms first), he started scanning. With the 'sleeves' still in his hand, he asked "Paper or plastic?"

"Latex. PLASTIC! Plastic, I meant plastic."

Kevin winced only for a moment before he pulled a plastic bag out and began packing her things in it. Sarah's entire face turned a bright red, her eyes wide as quarters.

"Your total is thirty-two sixty-nine," Kevin read automatically, then frowned. The list of items danced with insidious joy on the screen.

Sarah paid with cash, still blushing as she handed the money and received her change. She mumbled a 'thanks,' then turned to go. Reflexively, Kevin said "Thank you for shopping, have a great

night.” He froze, clamping his eyes shut in embarrassment. Sarah stopped, a shudder shaking her body and her tail giving one last twitch across her large hips, before walking out the building.

Kevin pulled his phone from his pocket and clapped it on the counter. He scrolled for the one picture he hadn’t managed to delete. He looked at the smiling faces, the happy eyes, the entwined hands.

It didn’t make him feel any better either.

After a minute or two, he snapped the phone back to the main menu and checked the time. Two hours and some change left in his shift.

Great.

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Kevin twisted the key in the lock and walked into his apartment a few minutes before three. Classes would suck tomorrow (technically today), but he only had two. Plenty of time for a nap before another night shift. Whatever; get money.

Kevin threw his jacket on the couch, and saw a purse on the floor next to one arm. His roommate had brought his date home. Okay, whatever. Kevin trained his hearing toward the bedroom, and barely heard familiar light snoring. *At least they’re asleep*, he thought. No need going through *that* tonight, of *all* nights.

Kevin stripped to his boxers in his room, then went to the bathroom and began to brush his teeth. His roommate’s door opened softly, carefully; footsteps tiptoed toward the bathroom.

“Kevin?!” a familiar voice said, making Kevin stop his brushing.

Really? *Really?*