

“Whaaaat, really??” Elias slumped down on the table, defeated. “Are you sure it wasn't some other guy?”

The deer sighed and added sugar to her coffee. She hated having to be the one to break it to him, but better her than Ashley, especially given how the panther was looking at him.

“Yeah, I'm sure, sorry Eli.”

The okapi planted his face on the table. He grumbled something but didn't say anything beyond that.

“Look at it this way.” The deer turned her attention to the panther, terrified of what she might say. Unfortunately no amount of stepping on her foot under the table could stop her. “If he's dating other guys a few weeks after you broke up then never really cared about you in the first place, so why should you?”

There was a wave of embarrassment pulling her to do the exact same thing the okapi was doing, but she held her composure. She turned over to look at Kim in the hopes that he could salvage the situation. From the looks of it the horse had his eyes firmly set on his plain black coffee, trying his best to remain unnoticed.

Things could be better, to say the least.

Elias put both of his hands on his head and sighed. “You sound like my therapist.” In his defense, he couldn't afford a very good therapist. “Maybe I should just stop caring, and like, you know, date other guys too,” he lifted himself back up with a sudden spike of adrenaline from his, less than ideal, solution, “that'll show him, right?”

“That sounds like you're doing it just to mess with him.” Kim spoke up, only slightly looking up from his coffee, as if he couldn't bear to look at the okapi right now, understandable really.

“I mean, he's doing it to mess with me, right?” He looked at the horse with a worrying amount of ferocity, which only served to make things even more awkward for him.

“That would mean he cared enough about you to try to make you jealous.” Ashley said with a shrug. “But he doesn't, so.”

“You're not helping!” And with that, half of his body was, once again, slumped on the table with an audible thud, along with the rattling of everything on the table (some of Kim's coffee even spilled out of the cup, he looked devastated).

Delilah had to make a conscious effort to avoid glancing behind them, because she could feel all of the cafe looking at them after that.

She placed a hand on the okapi's back, to reassure him and to make sure he wouldn't take this as poorly. “While I usually don't agree with her, I don't think she's all that wrong.”

He lifted his chin lightly to give her a pleading look. "You too D?" He then turned to the horse in search of solace. "What about you Kim, you also think he hates me?"

The horse wasn't built to deal with something like this, you could see it in his eyes and how they danced around the table, waiting for any of them to pick up and save him from whatever he had gotten himself into.

Luckily for him the deer understood her responsibility and decided to take the blow for him. In a way, she owed it to him, after all she forgot to tell Kim why they needed to cheer Elias up in the first place, and how bad things could get...

"We never said he hated you." She started patting him on the back. "We all deal with break-ups differently, his way isn't healthy but I don't think he's actively trying to hurt you. But if he was, you really shouldn't let him get to you."

"This sucks." He groaned, but he did get up again, which was a good sign all things considered, hopefully he wouldn't drop on the table again. "What do I do then?"

"Enjoying your time with your friends sounds like a good place to start." Ashley huffed. "If you want to keep sulking then sure, but I'll eat your muffin, maybe give half of it to Kim. He's been giving it a weird look for a while now."

The horse's ears perked up. "I wasn't looking at it."

"Then I'll just take it home with me." She said looking at the horse expectantly.

Their eyes locked for a second before Kim looked back at the muffin and sighed. "Ok maybe I do want a little..."

Elias rolled his eyes and split his muffin in two, sweet chocolate fudge slowly dripping from the middle, handing Kim one of the sides. "Just share it."

With a nod the horse split the already split muffin and gave a piece to Ashley who seemed satisfied enough.

"I still want to date, though..." he said, fidgeting with his side of the muffin. "I mean, you know what I mean, right?"

"Were you listening to me when I said your ex going out and messing with other guys wasn't healthy?"

"I'm different though." His eyes told a completely different story, "I'm not doing it to cope, I just want someone to spend time with, you know?"

"Good way to say we're not enough."

She made sure to give the panther a pretty strong stomp for that one. "I know, but jumping into a new relationship without even processing what happened with this one isn't a good idea."

“Do you really have to make everything sound so serious?” His tone was a lot less hopeless and a lot more annoyed now. “I just want to do things my way.”

In any other occasion she would've tried to retort, but she also knew exactly how Elias could get when he was annoyed, and she didn't want to have to go through the restaurant scene again, plus the fact that she was also frustrated wouldn't help. So she just took a deep breath and exhaled calmly, taking a chance to sip her coffee, a really nice chocolate latte, one of the better options The Laughing Weasel had. All this while the okapi frowned at her, of course.

As much as she loved Eli, sometimes being his friend could be a little hard. She sort of wished she could handle things the same way Ashley did, but every part of her wanted to try and reason with him. Maybe that wasn't what he needed right now though...

“What kind of guys do you like anyway?” They both turned to look at Kim completely taken aback by his sudden question.

He was the last animal Delilah would imagine asking something like that, especially given how flustered the horse got when she asked him if he was seeing someone (he still owed her an answer to that question, she was currently waiting for the next time they went to a bar).

Elias cleared his throat. “Excuse me?”

“You know, what kind of guys you like.” He scratched his neck. “Preferences or whatever.”

“Uh, I mean, there's a bunch of stuff I guess.” He rested his elbows on the table. “Why does it matter though?”

“I'm just curious. I mean, the others already know that since you've been hanging out for a while now, but I don't even know what your ex-boyfriend was like.” In all honesty he was right about that, he never really got to meet Kaden, which was probably for the best.

“Ugh... ok, fine.” He blushed a little. “I'm into intellectual guys, you know?”

Kim raised an eyebrow, and so did the other two, but for completely different reasons.

“Why are you looking at me like that!”

“It's nothing,” the horse returned to his neutral expression, somehow, “go on, tell me what you mean by that.”

“I mean like... like they just know stuff so we can have interesting conversations and stuff.”

Kim crossed his arms. “You don't need to be *intellectual* to hold an interesting conversation.”

“Yeah, you're pretty good at holding one for example.” Ashley chuckled.

“Ok if you're going to make fun of me then I'm not telling you anything.” He pouted and looked to the other side.

“That was Ashley, not me.” He shot her a pleading look, he was really trying to get somewhere here. “Like I was saying, it's not about being intellectual, it's about knowing what to talk about and what you guys have in common.”

Elias joined in on the arm crossing. “I know, but I didn't mean it like that.” Somehow he was more flustered than usual, “I want a smart guy that's like a little nerdy or whatever.”

“He's trying to say he wants someone that'll listen to him when he talks about all his geek stuff.”

“Hey!”

While those two went at each other's throats, like usual, Kim pondered to himself for a minute. At this point Delilah was just curious as to what the horse would come up with.

“What about Samuel?”

The okapi turned to him, his mouth wide open. “What?!”

“You know, Mark's friend, the lizard.” Elias turned to look away from Kim, unfortunately for him Delilah had a pretty clear look of his blush. “It looked like you guys had fun talking about the movie we watched the other day. You were *really* into it.”

Kim wasn't lying, they both looked like complete dorks, gushing over the film and discussing the meaning of everything in it.

“Oh, please!” He said, still looking away from him, which gave Ashley the opportunity to grab his still untouched part of the muffin. “I was just being friendly, he's not my type.” He huffed.

Delilah couldn't help but to chuckle at his reaction, he was terrible at this. “I mean he also plays RPGs, and you keep raving about how much you want to play them too.” She shrugged. “Who knows, maybe you could ask him to teach you.”

“You too?!” The look on his face said everything she needed to know.

“You should wait though.” Kim added.

The deer nodded. “Yeah, maybe try to process everything else before you move to that.”

“I'M NOT GOING OUT WITH SAMUEL.” They all looked at him, he really was terrible at this. “You guys are the worst...” He sighed, trying to calm himself down a little, even taking this moment of self reflection to finally try the muffin he got, only to realize it was gone.

Instinctively he turned to Ashley with a frown.

She raised an eyebrow at his accusatory look, “What?”

“Ugh, forget about it.”