

The blaring sound of the alarm roused me from sleep. I reached out a hand and began groggily slapping the bedside table until it found its place to shut it off.

I checked my phone, eyes still bleary. 5:00am. Just as it had been every morning I woke up since I got here. I groaned and sat up in bed, and the mattress, which last time I checked was almost as old as me, groaned along in protest. It wasn't the most comfortable place to sleep, but I was usually too tired by the time my head hit the pillow to care.

With my feet shoved into my cow slippers, I shuffled my way down the darkened cabin hallway before emerging into the early morning outside. The sun hadn't quite begun to rise yet, so I was greeted to the sound of a barred owl calling, and a sky full of stars.

I was making my way towards the main cabin of the field site, where I could grab a small breakfast and an oh-so-needed coffee before heading out to work for the day.

Now, before I continue there are two important things to know about my current situation: 1. I had been at the field site for a total of three weeks and had only really talked to the same three coworkers every day. If you have been in this situation, you might understand that after a certain point, your small-talk skills begin to diminish. 2. All three of my coworkers had the uncanny ability to wake up only 10 minutes before we usually left and still be completely ready to go, so I was used to having a whole hour to myself of contemplative silence.

So, what would I find as I approached the breakfast area on what I thought was going to be another quiet morning but another person. Oh god. Oh gosh. I didn't know someone else was going to be here. I did not prepare a script.

I quickly suppressed the wave of mini-panic and approached the counter. The other person gave me a small smile and a wave, before resuming the task of buttering her toast.

Now, I probably didn't NEED to say anything, but despite my anxious-disposition, my upbringing gave me what my friends (lovingly) refer to as "smalltown brain-rot" so I couldn't NOT say anything.

"So..." I began, not entirely sure where I was going with this.

“Are you... a part of the ____ lab?” I managed. In truth, I had only heard the name yesterday and knew nothing about them.

“No” She shook her head. “I’m here with the ____ lab.”

“Oh...” I replied. She had already deviated from where I thought this conversation was going to go, so I began setting up the coffee machine as my brain scrambled for a more substantial response.

“Uh... what will you guys be doing here?” I tried. That seemed to do the trick, and the girl happily began describing to me the anticipated work that her and her team would be doing at QUBS. I nodded along while preparing the coffee grounds and filter. I remember interjecting at one point that I was also here to study birds.

“Oh, that’s so cool! What’s your project then?”

“Well...” I started, sliding the basket into place.

I turned to her to finish this sentence, but then a thought struck me.

Something about that... didn’t feel right...

To my horror, when I whipped back around to face the coffee machine, I was just in time to watch as the basket, now about halfway full of boiling water, clattered into the pot below. Luckily, the last synapse that fired in my brain compelled me to shut off the water.

There were wet coffee grounds *everywhere*. I REALLY wish I was exaggerating. There were coffee grounds all over the floor. There were coffee grounds all over the counter. There were coffee grounds all over the breakfast supplies. There were even coffee grounds all over the racks of dishes kept UNDER the counter. It was a miracle neither of us got burned.

I had **no** idea what to do. I was still too busy trying to process the shift in my usual morning routine to really comprehend what just happened. After standing in silence for about a minute while staring off into the middle distance, I started to attempt to clean up the mess by just grabbing fistfuls of coffee grounds with my bare hands and walking them over to the compost bin.

Luckily, my breakfast companion had a bit of a more unflappable head on her shoulders and did the sensible thing by going to grab the mop. *Ah yes... we are not cavemen. We have technology.* This spurred me out of my cleaning fugue, and I too went to grab something actually useful.

I must have apologized and thanked her for helping me about a thousand times. I was SO embarrassed. I was certainly radiating with self-pity when she broke the tension with a bit of a laugh.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to laugh but... there’s something kinda comical about HOW much of a mess this made”

I grinned. She was right, there kind of was. “God yeah, and SO early in the morning too. I don’t think I’m awake enough yet to process that I’m not having some kind of weird nightmare.”

And honestly? It kind of turned into not that bad of a morning from there. The hilarity of the situation was a great icebreaker, and although we spent the entire hour cleaning (especially once we realized that we’d have to run ALL the dishes through the dishwasher) we ended up having a great conversation and learned that we had a lot in common.

When it was finally over, and I gave her one last HUGE thank you, she turned to the coffee pot that we had left on the burner.

“Well... have fun chewing that.”