

“Not a Big Deal!”

CHARACTERS

DANIKA (Eager to report wrongdoing, but not aware of nuance. New to the group)

HEATHER (Reporting the incident will ruin their chance at career. Hesitant and wants to minimize the comments. Any reporting might cause conflict with the advisor.)

JADE (Reflects the oppressive mood of the laboratory and has had prior negative interactions in the lab. Does not think anything can really change.)

EVAN (Had not previously noticed conduct. Has an arc in understanding and supports the idea of not ignoring behavior)

PROF. Sally JONES (engaged in research; does not pay attention to issues within group)

SAM (Researcher who was previously in the group; changed research groups because of bad group vibe; able to offer ways to look for possible solutions)

SCRIPT

Professor Jones Office

Professor Jones and Heather are huddled over Heather’s research paper, wrapping up a conversation about edits. Other piles of research papers sit on Professor Jones’ desk.

PROFESSOR JONES: This looks good. Let’s touch base again next week.

HEATHER: Great. I can definitely have a draft completed by then. *Stands to leave.*
PROFESSOR JONES turns to work on the next paper. HEATHER lingers by the desk.....Um, Professor, there was one more thing. Could I talk with you about Xander?

PROFESSOR JONES: Oh no..was it something he said? He’s often misunderstood.

HEATHER: Well, yes and I’ve noticed that he’s always staring at me in lab and it’s making me a little uncomfortable.

PROFESSOR JONES: I’m sure he’s just trying to make sure that you’re using the equipment properly. Is there anything else?

HEATHER: Well...it doesn’t feel like that’s what’s happening.

PROFESSOR JONES: Listen, I don’t want you to get behind on your paper...I’ll address it soon. I’m buried under these papers right now.

HEATHER: Oh.. okay... Thanks Professor.

LOCATION: Conference room after meeting

TIME OF DAY: Late afternoon

After the majority of their research group leaves the room, four stay behind to clean up...

DANIKA: Hey, I really liked your presentation -- your nanofab techniques are part of the reason I joined this lab.

HEATHER: Oh... [surprised, taken aback] Thanks! You're the new post doc, Danika, right? I've been working on this for the past 3 years. If you want, I'd be happy to show you what I've got.

DANIKA: Sounds good!

EVAN [to HEATHER]: Heather, I have a couple of questions, if you have a few minutes.

Heather walks to the table and takes the seat nearest Evan. Danika follows behind, unsure.

HEATHER: Yea no problem.

EVAN: Just give me a few seconds and let me pull up some of my calculations - seems like I have an error.

JADE: Story of my life.

Evan focuses on his computer with Heather.

Danika stands awkwardly behind them.

DANIKA to HEATHER: Also, I wanted to ask, who was that guy in the corner? I don't think I've met him yet.

Heather multi-tasks her conversation with Danika and checking Evan's work.

HEATHER: That's Xander, he's our staff scientist.

DANIKA: Yeah, he made that weird comment about your dress. I wasn't sure if you even heard it -- actually I wasn't sure if anyone heard it -- the talk kept going like nothing happened.

HEATHER: I heard it. Xander says things like that all the time. I usually just try to ignore it.

JADE: Ugh, he's always making those kind of comments. The longer that you're in this lab the more irritating comments that you'll hear from him. I'm sure Sally heard Xander's comment; but she didn't look up from her notes.

HEATHER: I even brought it up to her--

CUT TO: Prof Jones taking notes**

HEATHER: I tell myself that it's not a big deal. He is in charge of all our instruments, and I don't want him to give me any trouble.

DANIKA: But, his comment was really inappropriate. [concerned pause] Why has no one confronted him about this?

JADE: There is nothing that we can do. This is the way this lab is run.

HEATHER: I should have worn something else.

DANIKA: ...yikes.

RONALD, a post doc strolls into the room to retrieve his notebook and overhears them.

JADE: This is typical Xander behavior. He once even made a joke to prospective students about needing more women in the group to clean glassware in the lab. And Sally was THERE for that. [to EVAN:] Evan, remember?

EVAN: Oh yeah, I guess.

RONALD: Oh my God. That was pretty classic. Almost as good as when Jade took all the notes for the symposium and Xander took credit for it himself.

JADE: Thanks Ronald.

RONALD: Oh come on, we all backed you up with Professor Jones and told her you took the notes.

As RONALD is walking out of the space, JADE: I'm glad you were amused.

DANIKA: But, hasn't anyone in the group complained to her?

HEATHER: Wait a second, Danika. That won't do anything. I've already tried. And I don't want her to think he's distracting me from my research.

JADE: I agree with Heather; it doesn't seem like a good idea. I even tried to talk with Sally once about Xander's jokes. She just brushed it off and said I should focus on my research.

HEATHER: Nothing good will come out of me complaining. Xander helped me start this project in the first place. I'd just rather stay on his good side.

JADE to DANIKA: And, realistically, he runs the lab. She travels all the time.

DANIKA: Well if you don't want to talk with Professor Jones or Xander, maybe there are other people on campus who you can go to? Have you thought of--

JADE: It's not going to change. As I said, I raised the issue before and it didn't help.

DANIKA: We should at least try. When I was in grad school, we had a faculty member who apologized for his sexist behavior.

JADE: That wouldn't happen here.

DANIKA: Who else can we talk to?

(Pause)

EVAN: Hmm, maybe Sam..?

EVAN to DANIKA: They used to be in this lab and then left and now works in the optical materials group.

HEATHER: I don't know. I don't want to bother anyone. Plus, I'm getting results and I don't want to stay in grad school any longer than I have to.

JADE: Besides Sam left the lab; they knew nothing would change. (JADE gets up to leave) Look, I really should get back to work, I'll see you later.

EVAN: For the record, Jade doesn't know the whole story. That's not exactly what happened.

****FLASHBACK: Campus Coffee Shop**

SAM: Hey Evan. thanks for coming to my concert.

EVAN: I didn't even know what a French horn was until I saw you playing it on stage.

SAM: It's a great outlet after hours in the basement trying to get my experiment to work.

EVAN: Yeah, we all really miss you in the lab...You know, you never told me why you left the lab.

SAM: I know. I've wanted to tell you, but it's a little awkward...Working in the lab was really toxic for me. I dreaded going. I was actually pretty scared to tell anyone.

EVAN: I'm sorry to hear that.

SAM: It worked out okay. I ended up talking with the Title IX Office about how Xander was targeting me with his comments and how uncomfortable he made me feel.

EVAN : Wow. I know he's a jerk but I can't believe he made you feel that way.

SAM: Yeah, I had to get out of there.

EVAN: But, his comments didn't relate to Title IX? Right? I mean it wasn't...sexual assault.

SAM: No, no, no, it wasn't sexual assault. Honestly, I wasn't sure if it was serious enough. But Title IX covers any kind of gender-based harassment and that kind of stuff. The people I talked with were really helpful.

EVAN: And they investigated him?

SAM: Nah, that wasn't something I was really looking for. I thought after I left the lab Xander would chill out.

EVAN: Well that didn't happen. How did you end up at your new lab?

SAM: They respected my decision and handled it informally. They connected me with the folks at the grad office and they helped relocate me to another lab that does really cool research.

EVAN: I'm glad it worked out for you.

SAM: I'm so much happier now. Even when I'm in the basement for weeks at a time designing nanohole waveguides.

Back to Present

EVAN: Sam didn't just give up and quit. Moving was actually the best choice for them. Actually, I think they were really just glad to know they had options and could choose what was best for them.

HEATHER: Wow. I didn't know that happened to Sam. I'm happy it worked out for them.

DANIKA: What do you want to do, Heather?

HEATHER: I don't want to leave the group. I love the research I'm doing....I just wish that there was a more subtle way to solve this problem.

DANIKA: Maybe you should talk to someone in Title IX office.

HEATHER: I don't know...

EVAN: If you don't feel comfortable yet, I know Sam would talk to you about their experiences first-hand.

HEATHER: Maybe I could try that...

EVAN: I'm actually about to have coffee with Sam, would you want to come?

HEATHER: (Wait for it) Yeah, okay (pause) I'll take you up on that offer. *EVAN and HEATHER stand to leave. As HEATHER is walking out...*I didn't realize how much this was bothering me.

EVAN: See you later Danika. *HEATHER smiles and waves.*

END SCENE

