

Nation-X

Best Roommate Ever

Story by William Lee

The following is an excerpt taken from Best Roommate Ever, a short story written for EduDesign as part of their Nation-X project. Nation-X is a fictional setting created by EduDesign that mirrors the real world except that human beings are replaced with anthropomorphic animals. These characters behave just like humans (they wear clothes, have jobs, drive cars, etc) and face many of the same challenges humans do in real life.

--Begin Sample--

CHAPTER 1: Class Reunion

Monica stood beside the cash register at her bar, grogginess pulling at her eyelids as she counted through an unwieldy mass of NXD bills. She stopped. Was that forty-five or forty-six? Darn it...

She shoved the bills back into a single pile and was about to start over when she heard footsteps approaching the bar. It was Andy, his long snout dangling over a massive black speaker that he held precariously in both hands.

"Hey, Monica," he said, his voice tight as he struggled with the weight of it. "We got an extra outlet anywhere?"

Monica blinked twice before registering the question, then she quickly pointed to a corner near the stage.

"Oh! Um, yes, right over there," she said. "What is that thing?"

"New sub-woofer," Andy called over his shoulder as he waddled to the spot Monica had pointed to.

“Geez, how much did that cost?”

“Too much,” Andy said, gingerly setting the speaker down. “I think my credit card almost burst into flames when I bought it.”

He walked back over to Monica, shaking his wrists out before leaning on the bar.

“It’ll really make the bass pop on the happy hour set, though.”

Monica stifled a yawn.

“I’m not sure I’m going to make it to happy hour.”

“New neighbors at it again?” Andy asked, smiling sympathetically.

“All they do is party!” Monica answered, throwing her hands up. “This was the third time this week. Third, Andy! Their music was so loud that I could hear it through my earplugs. Having students for neighbors is... ugh!”

Andy laughed.

“I wish I could have afforded Central University,” he remarked. “If only for the better parties.”

“I’ll tell them to invite you,” Monica grumbled.

The front door creaked open hesitantly. Monica looked over to see a tall shape standing in the doorway, silhouetted against the glare of the afternoon sun.

“Hello?” Monica said to the unknown figure, squinting against the light. “Happy hour doesn’t start for another twenty minutes, but I can get you something if you’d like.”

“Monica?” the silhouette asked. “Monica Leap?”

The figure stepped into the bar, revealing a female llama in a bright blue blazer and matching pencil skirt. The tuft of white hair on her head was combed to one side with dyed streaks of yellow, blue and green running through it. Monica’s jaw dropped.

“Lisa Llamaki?” she said. “Oh my goodness!”

Monica practically sprinted out from behind the bar, and the two collided into a hug.

“I haven’t seen you since graduation! How are you? What are you doing here?” Monica asked, the questions tumbling out of her.

Lisa laughed as they separated.

“I got a job teaching in Peace City! I heard you owned a bar around here, so I had to come check it out, of course.”

“Of course!” Monica said in adamant agreement. She turned Lisa to face Andy, who was still leaning against the bar.

“Andy, this is Lisa. We shared an apartment in graduate school. Best roommate ever, by the way.”

“Nice to meet you,” Andy said, then pointed to the streaks of color on Lisa’s head. “Love the hair!”

“Thanks!”

“Lisa’s the artistically talented one,” Monica explained. “You should see her paintings. They’re incredible!”

She turned back to Lisa.

“We have to catch up. Can you stay for a drink?”

Lisa’s eyes darted to the clock on the wall, then back to Monica. She forced a smile.

“Sure! I can stay for a bit.”

“Great!” Monica said. “I’ll whip us up something. You have to tell me about your new job!”

Two appletinis later, Monica and Lisa sat across from each other in a booth tucked away from the densely packed happy hour crowd. The steady thump of pop music echoed through the bar as Andy DJed on stage. He was right, Monica thought; the bass did sound better.

“I still can’t believe I landed an art teaching job,” Lisa said, continuing the story she had been telling Monica. “It’s an entry-level position, so the pay’s a little low, but the kids in my class are so, so sweet. I’ve only been there for a week, and one of them already told me that I’m her favorite teacher.”

“That’s amazing, Lisa. I’m absolutely thrilled for you,” Monica said. She lifted her martini glass. “To your new job!”

Lisa obliged her with an enthusiastic clink, then quickly downed the last sip of green alcohol left in her glass.

“Thanks, Monica,” she said, standing up. “It was great seeing you! I should get going, though. I’ve got a long ride home.”

“Oh, OK! What neighborhood are you in now?”

Lisa averted her eyes before answering.

“That’s the thing, I’m actually still living with my parents. They’re out past the western grasslands, outside the city.”

“The grasslands?” Monica said, putting her glass down. “How long is your commute?”

Lisa frowned.

“Two hours? Sometimes more if the trains are delayed.”

Monica’s eyes widened.

“Each way? Lisa, that’s insane! There has to be a better option.”

“I’ve looked at apartments,” Lisa said, shrugging. “But there’s nothing I can afford on my own, especially on an entry-level salary.”

Monica pursed her lips, trying to remember which neighborhoods were the most affordable in Peace City. Then an idea bloomed in her head.

“I’ve got it! We should rent a place together!”

“What, like back in grad school?” Lisa asked. “Don’t you want your own space?”

“I’ve been looking for a change anyway,” Monica said. “And you were a great roommate!”

Lisa looked at the clock on the wall, considering.

“It would be nice not to spend four hours on a train every day...”

“Why don’t we at least look around?” Monica said. “Who knows, maybe we’ll find something that works for both of us.”

Lisa thought for a moment longer, then she turned back to Monica and smiled.

“Sure! I suppose it couldn’t hurt to look, right?”

--End Sample--

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