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by Sabina Piersol

It's the 1970s. We're in a professor's office where there's a desk, a chair, a ficus, and a spray bottle filled with water. The ficus is hooked up by wires to a polygraph machine on the desk.

Characters:

Professor Fox (Andre), plant biology professor. Buttoned up, nerdy, intellectual, doesn't realize he's cute; corduroy blazer, glasses.

Jasmine (Anne), pretty and demure secretary, hair pinned up. Secretly loves Prof Fox, is afraid to show it.

Dr. Barbara Mann, (Laura Jane), high-powered plant biology dept. chair who's looking to profit from her research, was hoping Fox would be her business partner.

Professor Fox sitting at his desk in his office, smoking a cigarette and looking intently at his ficus, which is connected by wires to a machine. Puts out cigarette, walks over to plant and greets/looks affectionately at it, starts singing a Billy Joel song to it. Then tiptoes over and looks at what machine has recorded, starts scribbling notes on a legal yellow pad with contained excitement. Goes back and (in a pained way because it hurts him to do so) begins telling the plant he doesn't love it anymore and is going to tear off all its leaves when Jasmine enters.

Jasmine

(enters with a small potted lettuce and pack of cigs) Here's the baby lettuce you wanted, Dr. Fox. And a pack of Kool Milds. *(beat)* Were you just talking to someone?

Professor Fox

Yeah...no. Thank you, Jasmine.

Jasmine

(lighting up) I've switched to menthol too. I hear it's better for the environment -- you know, mintier. *(picks up lettuce container and inspects it while blowing smoke on it)* How's the article coming? Can I start typing it yet?

Professor Fox

No...yeah. I'm just putting on the finishing touches --

Jasmine

You know Barbara wants to read it today.

Professor Fox

Shh -- don't say her name too loud in here. *(beat)* Jasmine, there's something I need to tell you.

Barbara enters smoking and in a hurry.

Barbara

Let's see it, Doug, I've got genes to splice.

Dr. Fox

May I have just a bit more time, Dr. Mann?

Barbara

Yeah...no. What I need NOW is an article that validates our research on genetically modified tomatoes. It's always a race to the patent, Doug. I even have a tagline for our product: Flav'r-Savr Tomatoes: They'll Explode In Your Mouth.

Jasmine

(*surprised*) Professor Fox -- you've been playing god with fruit?

Professor Fox

Yeah...no.

Barbara

No? I thought we had a deal, Doug. So what HAVE you been working on, then? I hope it's not what I think it is.

Professor Fox

Let me explain. I have proof. You see, when I'm happy, she's happy. We even have the same taste in music!

Jasmine

It's true, but -- what do I have to do with this?

Professor Fox

Not you -- her. (*looking at plant*)

Jasmine

Oh, right -- how silly of me to think.

Barbara

What, Doug. Out with it. Your dissertation defense begins NOW. Oh, am I speaking too loud for your girlfriend here?

Professor Fox

She's not my girlfriend. But what I've found using the polygraph is that plants THINK. They FEEL. The machine captures everything. (*letting his excitement out a bit*) It's a whole new field! Barbara, we could be...pioneers!

Barbara

Pioneers of crack science! I told you to drop it. (*mocking tone*) Play your plant Mozart and watch it soar.

Professor Fox

Actually, I play her Coltrane.

Barbara

Yell at it and watch it cower. Load of crap. *(beat)* And it if it's even true, so what? How does this make us any money? Never mind that our department will be the laughing stock of the entire field of plant biology. No pun intended.

Jasmine

You do that? You play Coltrane for her?

Professor Fox

Yeah...well no, not exactly. I was just listening to A Love Supreme in the office one day, and it seemed like the ficus was almost...reaching for the record player. I swear. Look, I didn't go searching for any of this. Then on a hunch I hooked up some electrodes, and voila! *(making his big announcement)* -- Plant Parapsychology was born.

Barbara

Plant Parapsychology. *(laughing)* Remember the first time we cross-pollinated, Doug, back in '71? And made an almost criminally beautiful hybrid of our petunias? And how we knew that with our combined smarts, we could turn that experiment into a hugely profitable food corporation and leave academia for good?

Jasmine

I'd like to know her name. And how long this has been going on. *(trying to contain her hurt)* All those tomatoes I bought you..what ever happened to them?

Professor Fox

It's Helen. Maybe six months now? *(beat)* I made marinara sauce.

Barbara

Well, you can kiss any hope of tenure goodbye. As for the tomato business -- you're out. *(putting cigarette out in Helen's pot)* You know, Doug, humans and plants use each other just like people use each other -- it's not like it's a bad thing. Just how nature works. *(exits)*

Professor Fox

I just didn't feel right invading plants' privacy in that way, you know? I mean, once you get to know a plant, you realize they all deserve love and respect just like everyone else.

Jasmine

(still hurt but curious) What else has Helen taught you?

Professor Fox

It's funny. I've had the polygraph switched on all the time lately, and it's picked up some interesting information. Like when Barbara comes into the room, she exhibits a "fight or flight" response.

Jasmine

Wow, she must be really sensitive.

Professor Fox

She is. I don't think she's even capable of lying. *(shyly)* Want to see the graphs of when we're in the room together? You know, you and I?

They go over and look at some graph data.

Jasmine

They're beautiful, but you know I don't know how to interpret any of this, Professor Fox...

Professor Fox

At first the lines were erratic -- lots of spikes and valleys -- looked at lot to me like a difficult emotion. Say, jealousy.

Jasmine

Well, I'd better go get your egg salad sandwich at the deli before the line gets too long --

Professor Fox

And then the pattern evens out. See how the lines almost dance together on the page?

Jasmine

I guess. I don't think I understand what you're saying, Professor Fox.

Professor Fox

Call me Doug. (*beat; nervous but working up courage*) Jasmine, she helped me see. Helen thinks that no matter how scared we are, we should give it a try. And I completely trust her judgement. Would you walk with me in the botanical gardens?

Jasmine

Wow. Okay. (*picks up a spritzer bottle and spritzes plant, mouthing a "thank you" at it*) Let me just get my cigarettes.

Finis