

Stacks of Love

by E.A. West

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Marla Kidder looked up from shelving the latest returns, and there he was. Six feet tall, auburn hair, green eyes—he was everything she'd dreamed of and more. The smile he flashed patrons and library employees alike sent sparks shooting through her veins.

Trent Wilcox, the library's newest employee, had been playing havoc with Marla's heart since he first walked through the doors two weeks ago. It had taken her nearly a week to work up the courage to speak to him. That conversation had been anything but fascinating. Two minutes to help him figure out how to issue a library card, and then an old lady needed assistance emailing her grandchildren.

Marla longed for the chance to get to know Trent. He seemed like a nice guy with a generous spirit. Even though he had to be at least thirty, he exuded a boyish charm that drew Marla to him. Just seeing him across the room made her pulse race. She couldn't help hoping he was the Mr. Right she'd been searching for since college. Her thirtieth birthday was drawing closer, and she still hadn't had any luck.

Trent's gaze locked on Marla, and heat crept into her cheeks as she realized he'd caught her staring. She returned her attention to the books on the cart beside her and shoved another one onto the shelf, wishing she could slip between volumes and disappear.

"Hey, Marla."

Her heart stopped at the sound of Trent's deep voice with its rich Southern drawl. Lifting her gaze, she found him standing on the other side of her book cart. She smiled and hoped she could speak without squeaking. "Hi, Trent."

"It's about time for lunch. Why don't I help you with the rest of these books? Then maybe we could go grab something together."

Marla couldn't believe her luck. "That sounds nice, assuming you have lunch break at the same time as me."

He chuckled, turning her knees into water. "I checked the schedule. You and I get lunch at the same time today."

"In that case, I'd be glad of the help."

Working together, they soon had the rest of the books shelved. As soon as the book cart sat behind the circulation desk, Trent led the way out of the library and to the diner across the street. Marla thought of the lunch she'd packed that morning and placed in the refrigerator in the employee lounge. She knew what her dinner would be.

They both ordered the lunch special of chicken and noodles, and Marla had to wonder if Trent was actually interested in her or if he just didn't want to eat lunch alone. She didn't have to wait long to find out.

Trent fidgeted with his water glass then dropped his hand to his lap as he spoke. “Marla, what do you think about romance in the workplace?”

She caught her breath. Could her dreams actually come true? “I think it could work, as long as the romance doesn’t interfere with employee performance.”

“So, you wouldn’t have a problem with dating a coworker?”

“I have no problem with it at all. In fact, it wouldn’t be the first romance our library has seen.”

Trent raised his eyebrows. “Oh?”

“Yes, the head librarian and the director of the board met through working together and fell in love. They’ll celebrate their tenth anniversary soon.”

“That puts a lot of pressure on a man,” Trent said with a wry smile.

Marla’s face flushed. Why had she said that? “I didn’t mean to imply that all library romances lead to marriage. Just that theirs did. There were a couple of other librarians who dated for a while, but nothing ever came of it.”

The waitress saved her from further embarrassment by bringing their order. Marla managed to change the subject to library activities for the remainder of the meal. Anything would do, as long as it was a safe topic. Talking about workplace relationships with a man as gorgeous as Trent was a dangerous thing for someone like Marla, a diehard romantic with a biological clock ticking in the background.

At the end of the meal, Trent insisted on paying the check. When Marla tried to protest out of polite obligation, he flashed a heart-melting smile and said, “Chivalry isn’t dead. When this man invites a beautiful woman to lunch, he pays for her meal.”

As they walked back to the library, Trent asked a question that sent Marla’s heart into overdrive. “Marla, what would you say to starting our own workplace romance?”

“I’d have to say yes.”

Trent grinned. “In that case, would you have dinner with me tonight?”

“I’d love to.” Marla met his emerald gaze with a sparkling smile, and the sandwich in the employee refrigerator became tomorrow’s lunch.