

Happy Thursday

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 2

@dressupgeekout

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“Hey, gang,” Bisky announced perfunctorily as she opened the door to Carmen’s Coffee. The unfamiliar tone of voice alerted Joyce, who was already helping a customer. She didn’t show it, though. Only a barely detectable pause as she pawed through the cash register to give the deer his change. Bisky helped herself behind the counter, went into the room in the back and began to don her brown apron.

“Thank you,” the deer said, sipping his cup.

“Sure thing,” Joyce replied, looking at Bisky. She didn’t show it, but her best friends could tell that she was genuinely worried about Bisky. And that included the skunk herself.

“What?” Bisky furrowed her brow.

“Happy Thursday, Bisky,” Joyce said as gently as she could, despite her gravelly voice. She even managed to crack a barely detectable smile. “Doing okay?”

The furrows on Bisky’s face deepened. What’s wrong with this squirrel? “Yeah, Joyce, I’m okay,” she said unconvincingly. She finished tying the apron—a delicate operation, given how much space her unwieldy tail took up—and proceeded to her station. She lazily punched a few numbers into the computer, keyed herself in. Ready for the next customer. There wasn’t much of a morning rush to speak of this fine morning, and Joyce decided to seize the opportunity.

“You look tired, babe.”

“I am.”

“You need some coffee?” Joyce laughed that monotone “laugh” she always did when she thought she was so funny—more of a toothy, sinister “heh, heh” than anything else. It wasn’t really sinister, though. It just sounded that way. But

she didn't get any response. Bisky usually laughed at her jokes.

"Yeah, I think so."

"Well, then, get in line." Company policy. She gestured to the other side of her cash register.

Bisky sighed. Joyce couldn't tell if she was annoyed or sleepy or, well, anything. She just couldn't *read* her. That wasn't right. Bisky finally managed to drag herself in front of the counter and then proceeded to Joyce's station, taking the shortest route imaginable. It was a miracle she made it to work on time, considering her lethargic gait.

"What can I get ya?" She figured she probably could deduce what state her associate was *really* in based on her choice of beverage. She didn't show it—maybe she didn't show anything—but Joyce always thought she was so clever. She imperceptibly smiled to herself as she watched her plan unfold.

Bisky bit her lip in thought. She looked up at the chalkboard menu behind her shift leader. She hadn't looked at the menu in months. There wasn't any need to. She knew everything on it like the back of her paw, and every seasonal variety of it for the past who knows how many years. And it was Joyce who always updated the menu, anyway. Her pawwriting was actually legible.

Bisky glanced down at Joyce for a moment. Joyce tilted her head slightly. Bisky's eyes snapped back up at the menu again. There were too many words. Or maybe just too many different kinds of coffee. Animals can be so creative. It's just a seed and then you roast it. Such a simple concept. But, praise the Maker, it's responsible for making the world go round. Maybe she was just plain tired from trying to listen to her own heartbeat like a fishdick all night long. Or maybe she didn't like coffee at all.

"Your pawwriting is very pretty," Bisky said absently.

Definitely wasn't expecting that. "...Thanks, babe." She briefly tucked a paw behind her ear. Now it was Bisky's turn to notice Joyce in an unfamiliar state.

But, back to the current ordeal. "We make too many different kinds of coffee," Bisky remarked.

"Well, then, pick the prettiest one."

She bit her lip again. Several of the menu items were accompanied by a little caricature of it, also drawn by Joyce. The sketch of a Carmen Crush was

particularly charming, specially noting the energetic way she depicted whipped cream, but even 2-hours-of-sleep Bisky found it uncouth to have a *blended coffee* for *breakfast*. It suddenly occurred to her that there aren't any other cute pictures like this at other Carmen's locations. She contemplated on that for a moment, and then — switching gears once again — she discovered she was focusing mostly on Joyce's ornate calligraphy for ACORN LATTE.

"Acorn latte. That's the prettiest one."

Again, did not expect that. Very unusual choice. But who cares, what a pleasant surprise, the skunk wasn't entirely dead inside. "My favorite," Joyce beamed in her deadpan way. "Oat milk okay?"

"Yeah."

"Anything else?"

She shook her head. "Nah."

"Company card?"

Bisky produced it from a pocket in her apron. The front door jingled open. Some mutt.

"Can you handle him?" Joyce asked, indicating the new customer.

"Yeah. After I get my coffee."

"I'll make it quick. You'll tell me all about what's going on, though, right? Lunchtime?"

"Yeah."

Joyce deftly twirled the card in her paw several times, processing what the skunk just declared and verifying it for accuracy.

"Happy Thursday, babe," Joyce said as she swiped it through the computer.

"Happy Thursday, boss," Bisky replied, smiling without showing any teeth. Not her usual smile, but at least it was beginning to look like an alright start.