

I Am the Walrus

It was twelve PM in a Denny's and the date wasn't going well. The chubby wolf that Husker was sitting across from was, literally, the absolute worst. There were many reasons, not least that he'd decided, after teasing him all week about not wanting to give the location of the date away to keep it a surprise, to bring him to a random Denny's. He knew it was random because when he'd asked if this particular Denny's had any significance, mostly to break the silence, all he got was a grunted reply about how it was the closest one. There were about six of them on this stretch of road alone, dotted between McDonald's, the only place that could have possibly been less romantic.

Husker liked to think that he was fairly chill. He avoided dinner dates strictly due to the rigid setting and the pressure of sitting across from each other, eating, basically interviewing each other and unable to leave before the bill was awkwardly fought over. He liked his first dates to be loose, casual, like getting ice cream or walking in the park or going for a drink, or all together. If you wouldn't do it with a good friend you shouldn't do it for a first date, he always told himself. However, lunch in a Denny's was no one's idea of romance. It couldn't be, Husker thought. No one hates themselves that much.

There was also the fact that Will, that was his name, had picked him up in a bandy van and steered with his knees as he rolled about five cigarettes (it was a ten minute drive), smoked one, and showed Husker pictures of his sister, at which point he almost drove them off the road. Plus, he didn't want to be shallow but the guy's name wasn't short for William, it was Willard. Fucking WILLARD. Seriously. The only reason Husker hadn't left already was because he had been the one to ask him out first after about half an hour of back-and-forth on Tinder. He cursed his penchant for bigger guys.

"Just because someone's fat doesn't mean I instantly find them hot," he always told friends when he was explaining his strange interest in guys with big bellies (because they always found out eventually; he was terrible for staring). "If there's a 600-pound guy slouched over a Big Mac with ketchup all over his t-shirt which has 'Female Body Inspector' on it about ten years too late then, no, not interested." He grimaced as he watched his stud of a date sloppily devour a prime rib skillet with his fingers, probably one of the only menu items it would be advisable to eat with cutlery. There were definitely karmic forces at work here.

Will looked up at Husker, startling the smaller wolf as he hadn't expected to receive any attention when there was still food in his basket. They had agreed to share this meal, but Husker had given up when he noticed the basket crawling slowly away from him and he decided that he wasn't that hungry anyway. Will must have realised this- better late than never supposedly- because he jabbed his sauce-covered finger at the menu.

"Why don't you get something?" he said with his mouth full because of course. Husker stopped himself from saying that he had actually gotten something before a certain canine garbage disposal claimed it and flicked open the menu. He smiled when he saw the strawberry cheesecake milkshake. It sounded like a totally unnecessary flavour, kind of like cookies and cream-flavoured Oreos, but he loved it. It was the only milkshake he'd come across in the States that came close to the pedestal of nostalgia on which he had placed the strawberry milkshake from Eddie Rockets back in Ireland. When they give you a glass plus the huge metal tumbler full of shake, you know you've found the love of your life.

"Hey," he said, "why don't we get the strawberry cheesecake shake? It's really good." Will burped, not excusing himself, and wiped his brown muzzle in his sleeve before nodding yes.

"Sure," he said, looking down shyly, "whatever ya want. My treat." Husker blinked.

"Oh," he said, taken aback, "thanks." He felt bad for judging the guy so hard. He was actually pretty cute, and Husker had a bit of a weakness for the big gruff softie types, and he had the cutest little belly that poked out from under his t-shirt whenever he stretched.

As Husker got lost in the usual existential thoughts about whether he sometimes values physical appearance at the expense of personality, Will gestured to the waitress. A guy with initiative,

Husker thought, nice. God, my standards are so low they'll probably get swept up at closing time along with my GPA. He smiled as the waitress came over and they exchanged the look of mutual understanding they had been since she saw him walk into the door after Will had let it swing shut behind him.

"What can I get you guys?" she said, knowingly addressing Husker. Husker opened his mouth but Will got there before he could say it.

"Uh yeah, could I get a strawberry cheesecake milkshake with two straws?" The waitress nodded.

"Putting the straw in strawberry, nice choice. Anything else?"

"Nope."

"Okay, it'll be right out!" She gave Husker one more look, which clearly said "two straws? Thrifty".

Husker sat up in his seat and folded his paws, elbows on the table.

"Two straws," he said teasingly, "how romantic." Will looked up at him and instantly looked down.

"Y-yeah." Husker could tell he was uncomfortable so he laid off the romance talk.

"So," he said, "that waitress is pretty nice, right?" Will shrugged.

"It's her job to be nice," he said, absent-mindedly dipping his finger in some ketchup that was on the table. "She's just doing her job." Husker winced. This guy probably gets snotty with servers for not making him an item off the so-called secret menu, he thought, and hoped the waitress bought the right milkshake.

She did, and it looked amazing. It was pale pink and looked frothy and thick in the tall glass with two white straws poking out of the top. Husker looked down to check the time on his phone, and when he looked up Will had both straws in his mouth as he chugged the milkshake.

"Uh, Will?" he said, trying not to sound too annoyed. Will looked up, the straws coming out of the shake and flicking Husker's face with pink droplets.

"Yeth?" The straws pointed straight down from his muzzle and were evenly spaced so they kind of looked like makeshift tusks. Husker would have laughed if he hadn't been so bemused.

"Were you thaying thomething?" Will said. Husker stared at him, wondering how any wolf could have this little self-awareness, any attraction he had previously felt promptly clubbed to death.

"It's just... I thought we were sharing." Will looked confused.

"But you didn't order one," he said, looking at Husker like he was stupid. Okay, Husker thought, that's it. This is going nowhere. He reached for his coat and started sliding across the leather seat to exit the booth. This guy was unbelievable. Gross, rude, and didn't even know when he was being rude. Or weird. He looked ridiculous with the straws sticking out of his mouth, kind of like a...

Husker stopped dead and stared at Will. No, it couldn't be. As soon as the thought had entered his head, he thought Will had started to look a bit like what he was thinking. He looked closer and realised he wasn't imagining anything; Will was changing as he sat there, brow furrowed.

"What?" he said. Husker couldn't answer, he could only stare at the wolf's lengthening and stiffening whiskers.

"U-uh..." Will grew visibly concerned.

"What is it? What's wrong?" he said loudly. "Is there something on my face?" He reached up and frantically rubbed both of his cheeks before looking at his bubbling paws and frowning. There wasn't food in his paws as they came away from his face, but fur. His eyes widened and his paws shot back up to feel his head- which seemed to be growing broader by the second, Husker had to blink a few times to make sure he wasn't seeing things- and he rubbed, growing more panicked as a waterfall of brown fur cascaded from his head and his arms as he moved them to reveal skin that was deep brown.

"Wh-what's happening to me?" he said, his voice audibly deeper. Husker couldn't reply, his muzzle just hung open. This did nothing to calm Will down as he groaned with the dull pain of his bones shifting and skin thickening into a rubbery texture. He was also rapidly gaining weight; his belly surged forward, his t-shirt tightening around the new mass and his arms and moobs growing thick and flabby. Meanwhile the straws rippled, their make-up changing to a solid off-white before shooting down and thickening. Will yelped when they hit the tabletop, his head jerking backwards and sending jiggles through his massive, blubbery frame. His snout flattened and hung down over his mouth, working with the tusks to restrict his speech to a mess of whistle sounds.

The transformation came to a halt as Will's body rippled and settled. Husker could finally close his muzzle, but he couldn't stop staring. Will was looking down at himself, careful not to stab himself with his long new tusks, and it dawned on him what Husker already knew; he had turned into a walrus.

"O-Oh," he said, quietly, over and over, as he slowly felt his fat head and hefted his huge gut. Husker noticed that his shirt had ridden up to above his navel and gulped; not the time, Husker, not the damn time.

"Aw, dude!" Will said, moaning, "not again!" Husker frowned.

"Wait, what?" he said, "this has happened to you before?"

"Yeah, it only happens when I go to Denny's! Ugh, I hate this place! Last time I was a crocodile cos I was in Florida so it kinda made sense but why the hell am I a seal?" Husker coughed.

"Walrus. I think it was uh.. because of the, uh..." he gestured at his face. Watching him, Will raised his own meaty flipper hand to his face, yelping as it caught the tip of his tusk.

"The straws?" he said, plaintive. Husker nodded, trying to ignore how he said his 's' sounds.

"Yeah, I think it was the straws." Will slumped in his seat and whined.

"I don't wanna be a walrus!" he said, close to tears. "They're so ugly!"

"Well, I guess it's handy that you have a thicker skin, then." Husker looked up at the waitress standing beside the table, smirking but also staring at Will in barely-contained wonder.

"You did this?" said Husker. She grinned.

"Yeah."

"...How?"

"Magic or whatever. I dunno. It's a Denny's thing."

"Oh, neat. Where does that come from?"

"It's just part of our brand, man. Kinda like the Twitter account."

"Nice-" Will interrupted them, waving his flippers around in front of them, his whole bloated body shaking.

"Hello?? Still a walrus, here!"

"Calm down, big guy, you look like you're gonna... blubber." Husker tried not to laugh because he saw how legitimately upset Will was getting.

"B-but why?" The waitress drew herself to her full height and smirked, preparing to deliver her triumphant speech.

"Because you're a terrible date, my dude. You're rude, gross and inconsiderate. This is just one of the many ways in which the universe, in all its infinite wisdom, can punish you for not having the right values or-"

"GINA!" a voice called from the kitchen. "More coffee at table 12!" Gina grumbled.

"If they have any more caffeine they'll have a heart attack but okay, the customer is always right so I guess it's fine. Anyway, this has been fun but I need to get back to work."

She helped Will to his feet with Husker and Will started waddling to the door.

"I'm so fat," he said quietly, sniffing.

"You're lucky," Gina said, "walruses are usually two thousand pounds at least. At least you can ease in gently before you grow into it." Husker looked at her, concerned.

"He's not actually gonna reach two thousand pounds, is he?" She laughed.

"Of course not," she said. Besides, a really healthy male is at least four thousand-"

"Okay, I'll stop you there. Listen," he said, serious, "he's really not a bad guy. He's gross and rude but I think it's cos he never learned any manners. He's actually kinda sweet." The waitress looked at him shrewdly, trying to gauge if he was joking, before her expression softened.

"Oh. I didn't know you actually liked the guy." She paused. "But... he brought you to a Denny's! On a date!" Husker laughed, and sighed.

"Yeah, I know. Not ideal."

"Your standards are wicked low, man."

"I know."

"I hope you like fat walruses."

"I like at least one of those two things."

"Cool. Walruses? Walri? Anyway. You oughta hold the door open for him."

“Because I can be the polite and normal one in our relationship and accept him for how he is, flaws and tusks and all?”

“No, cos he’s fat as hell. You might wanna hold both doors. Good luck!” As the odd couple walked away across the car park, Gina watched as they talked, both of them blushing, before Husker took Will’s hand. She smiled. Works every time.