

## **“Morning Coffee”**

**By Lauren Rivers**

Plates clinked on the counter as the waitress delivered another mouth watering breakfast to the customers waiting on the stools. Her arrival here always signaled the official start of Lucy's day. Every morning she would rise and take a shower before getting dressed and heading out to her daily destination. It was only a five minute walk from her place but every day she would make the journey to a small little place called Lucky's Diner. No one knew who Lucky was or whether such a person actually existed but it was a popular hole in the wall breakfast spot for the locals who kept it in business.

The sounds of eggs frying and bacon cooking always filled Lucy's ears the moment she opened the door. The efforts of the cooking staff always sounded like music to Lucy, delicious to the senses. Stepping fully inside from the atrium she took a deep breath letting the smells of the food waft into her nose.

Inhaling the aromas, her finely tuned lupine senses could pick up all the various spices and seasonings being used on the various orders. Letting them linger for a moment she enjoyed the short lived Zen before she once again opened her eyes and searched for a seat.

A typical diner, Lucky's had seating along the bar and booths against all of the windows. Lucy's favorite always happened to be the one on the end. While the corner booth was always popular, she had been going here long enough that the owner typically kept it open for her unless it was a full house, which only tended to happen towards the holidays. Seeing it was open, she sat down and held up her paw for a cup of coffee.

Even though she already knew what she wanted she picked up the menu out of habit and held it in front of her. The pictures always looked so appetizing. The sight of her desired meal made her stomach start to rumble.

Impatiently she looked at her phone. Davis was late. She knew he had a busy job but most days he made it to their breakfast appointment on time. He probably had to stop somewhere or ran into traffic. Resisting the urge to text him asking him where he was, she instead set the phone down and kept reading the menu.

A ferret waitress approached with her coffee in paw. The lithe attractive woman seemed to flow like the coffee as she glided over with hardly a tilt in her step. Effortlessly she set the mug down with the saucer and related accoutrements and offered a friendly smile.

“Here's your coffee, hon. Just how you like it,” she said

Lucy wasn't sure if diner waitresses were required to call you 'hon' but she found it comforting. “Thank you.”

“Is your brother joining you this morning?” she asked. The two of them were such frequent regulars the staff knew them both by name.

“Davis will be along shortly, I'm sure.” She smiled and sniffed the coffee. Warm hazelnut and vanilla floated up to her muzzle causing her to involuntarily shiver with delight. Taking a test sip she was not at all surprised that the waitress had gotten her coffee perfect. While this place did not have as many options as some of the fancy coffee houses in the city they nevertheless had an impressive amount of different ways you

could order the basic coffee. Yet despite the fact that Lucy did not always order the same thing they always seemed to anticipate her mood and prepare the perfect cup. As Lucy stared down at the creamer and sweetener packets she wondered if they simply brought them to remind Lucy how good they were at that sort of thing. "Thank you," she said.

"You're welcome. I'll be right back to take your order when you're ready." With that, she scampered off behind the counter.

The majority of the people filling the diner looked to be regulars. There were only a few people she didn't think she'd ever seen before. The staff had been there long enough that she knew almost all of them by name. The woman who had brought her coffee was named Kelly. She was one of the newer ones, having only started about a year ago. The fact that this place didn't have a lot of turnover seemed to speak to the popularity of the place both as an eatery and a place to work.

She was about to check her phone again when Davis strolled in the door wearing his police uniform. Always ready for a snap inspection, she sometimes imagined her brother wore it to bed though she knew that wasn't true. His hat was neatly tucked under his arm as he looked towards her favorite booth, his eyes widening with joy at the sight of her. He strolled over towards the booth with his usual smooth stride, settling into the opposite side in a single fluid motion.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. "I would've been here sooner except I got stuck behind the train. I hope you haven't been waiting long." The older wolf smiled at her.

"Just a few minutes," she replied. "So big brother, are you ready for another day of making the city safe for people like me?"

Davis ran his tongue over his teeth and smirked. "Always, but not until after I've had my breakfast." He took off his hat and placed it beside him. His uniform was always perfectly pressed and his badge shined in the light. Lucy was always impressed with her older brother's apparent ability to always look ready for action. Though she preferred being a woman, she could not deny occasionally being jealous of the way men could get ready much faster simply by benefit of their gender. Ladies were always expected to be perfectly coiffed with their fur in perfect order with their clothes coordinated for color and style, and if one wore shoes they were expected to be in fashion that season. It wasn't fair.

This morning Lucy wore a white blouse, along with a dark grey jacket and matching skirt. It was similar in color but just different enough to provide a nice accent to her fur. She wore a single bracelet on her left wrist, with blue and clear stones in an alternating pattern. Her only other accessory when she had work was a silver watch on her other paw.

Noticing that they were both in the booth the waitress returned with her order pad and pen ready to go. The ferret smiled one of those smiles wide enough to stretch across her entire face as she stood next to the table. "Good morning again, Miss Lucy, and good morning to you, Officer Davis."

"Just call me Davis," he said. "I've told you before you don't have to call me 'officer'."

"Maybe so, but when you've got that uniform on in here you're 'Officer Davis' to me. Anyway, what'll you have? Would you like to hear the specials?" she asked with an enthusiasm Lucy found infectious.

“No, I think I will have my usual order of blueberry and walnut pancakes with raspberry syrup.” She handed her the menu. “Can I get a piece of toast and a fried egg on the side?”

“Of course. How would you like the egg?” the waitress asked.

“Over easy,” she said. She loved that runny yolk any time she ate an egg. Lucy would always try to eat the whites first and then get the whole yolk in her mouth before it broke. It all started when she was a cub and would eat her eggs this way to avoid having to clean them when they dried on the plate. Removing eggs that had solidified was always a pain in the tail so she tried to remove the problem by making sure none was on there in the first place. It didn’t always work, but it was a quirk she had carried into adulthood.

“Got it,” Kelly replied. “And you?” she asked, turning to Davis.

“I’ll have a steak with a side of potatoes, two eggs, extra runny, and a piece of toast with butter on it,” he said without hesitation.

“A man in uniform, and a guy who knows what he wants? I think I’m in love.” Kelly pretended to swoon though it was clear she was kidding. Nevertheless she gave Davis a playful swat on the back. “I’ll get that put in for you and it’ll be right out.”

Davis took it in good humor though he chose not to respond. Once she was gone he looked up with a weak half smile. “Have you talked to mom lately?” he asked.

“I called her this weekend, but she was pretty busy, or so it seemed.” Lucy shrugged and pulled out her cell phone. Her mother lived alone, as she had since Davis and Lucy had moved out of the house. Despite the fact that her children no longer lived with her Davis and Lucy were nevertheless extremely close to their mother and always made time for dinner every Sunday night at exactly seven o’clock, the only exceptions being holidays and their mother’s birthdays, which would often result in additional dinners, not that anyone minded.

Their mother Sarah was an independent woman, having raised her two pups alone after their father’s death. Her resilience had always been an inspiration to Lucy, who did her best to always be a good daughter to thank her mother for her countless years of unconditional love. Perhaps it was a wolf stereotype but there was a reason they were known for pack loyalty. To Lucy it was one of their finer traits as a species.

“I sometimes worry about her,” Davis admitted. “She must get lonely sometimes.”

“I hope you’re not thinking of fixing her up,” Lucy warned.

Davis shrugged. “Don’t you think maybe she might like to meet someone? Maybe she just needs some encouragement from us.”

Lucy shook her head. “No. A thousand times no. I know you mean well, but one thing I’ve learned is to never get involved in someone else’s relationship. It never ends well. Love is organic. It has to form naturally on its own. If mom asks us to find her someone then we can talk about it but unless she does we just need to keep our distance.”

“I guess you’re right. It’s just that she’s never dated anyone since dad,” Davis pointed out.

“Maybe so, but if she wanted a man in her life she’d be out there looking. It’s entirely possible she’s just happy being her.” Lucy shrugged. “Not every woman needs a man to be complete. At least, not all the time.”

“Speaking of men, how are you and that boyfriend of yours?” he asked.

“Who, John?” Lucy asked.

“Who else?” Davis replied. The waitress returned with their order, setting it down on the table in front of the pair. The food was delicious, with both of their orders cooked to absolute perfection.

Lucy appreciated the momentary distraction. She knew the food would not delay Davis for long, but it would give her a minute to formulate her answer. Pressing her nose right up to the pancake she made a big show of inhaling the aromas of the meal. Lucy took her knife and fork in paw and began to slice the pancake into neat little squares. Though the waitress always brought extra syrup, like most of the things in this place the meals rarely needed adjustment. The red glistening syrup coated the pieces of pancake with just the right amount to flavor each piece without saturating any of them.

While Davis sliced his steak he kept his eyes on her. It was clear he wasn't going to move on until he got some sort of answer. Lucy knew it was just casual interest but he was also asking as a big brother. Were she to provide any negative answer Davis would have no issues with setting the man straight. In truth she didn't know what exactly she and John were at the moment. They were in a strange place where they were living together but they hadn't gotten engaged or anything of the sort. Shacking up was the term. Lucy knew it was generally frowned upon by some of the older minded folks but it had made economic sense, at least that's what she had told herself. Most modern sentient beings didn't care what you did as long as it wasn't hurting anyone else. Still, the relationship currently lacked a clear definition, and while that was okay for a while she hoped he would soon move it to the next level.

“We're fine,” Lucy said, providing her best non answer. She knew that anytime anyone said they were fine it was usually the opposite, but she lacked a better way to frame the situation. “He's working a lot and so am I so we haven't seen a whole lot of each other lately but we keep in touch.”

“You guys share an apartment and you don't see each other a lot?” he asked.

“We work on opposite sides of town. We have dinner plenty of times and he usually spends some time with me afterwards.” Lucy ate a few forkfuls of her pancakes.

Davis pointed at her with his fork. “Doesn't he have work the same time you do?”

“Yeah, why?” Lucy tilted her head.

“So how come he's never come to breakfast with us?” he asked.

Lucy shrugged. “I suppose it's because he's not ready to meet my family. He knows you're a cop and is probably intimidated by you. You can be very scary when you want to be.”

“I'm not scary,” he protested. “Unless someone's mistreating my sister. Now you'd tell me if he wasn't being good to you, right?”

“Of course,” Lucy said, eating some more pancake. “Trust me, I wouldn't keep something like that from you.”

“I hope not,” he said. “If he puts a paw on you in a way you don't like I've got a shovel and a magazine full of bullets that'll take care of it, you just say the word.”

Lucy took a bite of her toast holding the piece in front of her muzzle. “I do hope you're kidding.”

“Sort of,” he said. “But I mean it, I won't tolerate anyone mistreating my sister. We McKane's stick together.”

“I know,” Lucy said. “I’ve read the book, seen the movie. But really, we’re fine.”

“There’s that word again,” he replied.

The wolfess brushed her blonde hair out of her face and sighed. “I don’t know how else to describe it right now. We’re healthy, happy, and working. We just don’t know exactly where we are right now, that’s all. There’s nothing worth worrying about.”

“If you say so,” Davis replied. He ate a few more cubes of steak.

Lucy crossed her legs under the table. “I think John just thinks that breakfast is a family thing.”

“I can see that,” the wolf answered in between bites of potato.

Waiting until he was drinking his coffee, she posed her next question. “When are you going to get a girlfriend?”

Clearly not expecting the question, Davis snorted into his coffee and coughed as the liquid tried to make its way into the wrong pipe. Putting the mug back down on the saucer he shot Lucy a nasty look in response. “I’ve been too busy with work to go on a date.”

“So what about one of your fellow officers?” Lucy asked. “There are lots of women on the force.”

Davis shook his head. “Not a good idea, mixing work and relationships.”

“Well, you should make the effort. I doubt you’d have to try very hard. I know there are a lot of ladies out there who would love a guy like you,” Lucy said.

He paused before eating another bite of steak. “You mean that?”

“Of course I do,” Lucy replied. “You think I’d falsely inflate your ego?”

Davis shook his head. “I suppose not. So what kind of guy am I, exactly?” Popping the next bite of meat into his mouth he waited for her response.

Placed on the spot, Lucy attempted to buy herself a few additional seconds by eating another forkful of pancakes. She rolled the food around in her muzzle trying to extract every bit of flavor from her breakfast. The look from her brother told her he already knew it was a bit of a stall tactic, but he chose not to say anything, simply continuing to eat his breakfast. “Well, you’re handsome, sweet, loyal, not to mention you look really good in a uniform.”

“You think I’m handsome?” he asked.

“I don’t, not personally, but I’m your sister. I have it on fairly good authority that other women, not me, think that you’re a beefcake,” she replied.

“Like who?” he asked.

“I plead the fifth,” she said. “Besides, I don’t believe I’m required to tell you who thinks you’re cute. It’s part of the sibling code.”

Davis flagged down a waitress with a gesture of his paw. “Oh really? I might have to look that one up.”

“You can’t force me to talk, its ironclad.” She hid her face behind the coffee cup for a moment as the waitress walked up. This waitress was a different one than the woman who had initially served the pair. She was a gray tabby cat with a striped coat and long dark hair. Her eyes were blue and sparkled with a hint of mischief. Lucy noted she seemed especially friendly towards her brother.

“Can I help you?” she asked.

“Yes, you can. Can I get a cup of coffee to go with my breakfast?” he asked.

“Sure, what would you like?” She whipped out an order pad.

Davis tilted his head for a moment. “Well, now, it’s been a while since I’ve had to think about that. Usually they just seem to know what you want here with the coffee orders.”

“I’m new. I could guess if you like, but you might end up with a quadruple espresso full of Irish crème.” She shrugged.

“Okay then, just bring me a vanilla latte, if you please,” he said.

“Coming right up.” She wrote his order down and then paused. “I think I know how to work the machine.” Walking back behind the counter she set out a cup and began to prepare Davis’s order. From their booth Lucy stole a couple of glances as she worked. It was clear she did not have a great deal of experience in making fancy coffees, but after a bit of mumbling of what she strongly suspected were profanities, the cat returned a few moments later with a light brown cup of liquid that kind of resembled dirty water.

“Sorry.”

Davis cautiously took the cup and regarded it with some suspicion as he took a gentle sniff of the mysterious liquid. Taking a sip he grimaced before throwing on a false smile and setting it down. “It’s good,” he lied.

Lucy smirked as the feline waitress touched her chest in relief. “Oh, thank goodness. The last few haven’t been all that great and if I don’t start shaping up a little they’re probably going to get rid of me.”

“Well, in that case this is the best coffee I ever tasted. Thank you.” Davis took another large sip, and once she walked away he let the liquid drain quickly back into the cup.

“Disgusting huh?” Lucy asked.

“Worse than motor oil.” The male wolf poured five packets of sugar and some creamer into the offending beverage in an effort to make it palatable.

“You’re a good wolf, Davis McKane,” Lucy said, offering her brother a toast with her cup. “

Davis tasted the coffee again with a wry expression on his face. “Since when did gallantry involve terrible coffee?”

Lucy chuckled into her own beverage. “If it helps I think she likes you.”

“Excuse me?” He fixed her with a disbelieving stare.

“You didn’t pick up on the vibes?” she asked.

“Vibes? What vibes? There were no vibes.” He took another sip of the offending drink.

Lucy lifted another forkful of pancakes into the air. “There were vibes.”

“Oh yeah? Prove it.” He poked a claw in her direction.

Without looking up from her bite of food she simply gestured towards him.

“You’re still drinking that coffee.”

Looking down he glanced at the brown liquid and then his sister. “It’s not so bad when you put some sugar into it.”

“Uh huh,” Lucy replied.

“Hey, unless you want to walk to work I’d button that muzzle.” He pointed his fork in her direction.

Lucy stuck out her tongue in her best pouty face before continuing to eat her breakfast. “We’d better get going.”

Davis looked at his phone and raised his paw to signal the waitress. "Right you are," he said. "Got a big day today?"

"Just a few meetings on the schedule, nothing big." Lucy shrugged.

"Yeah, sure. You nervous?" he asked.

"A little," she admitted.

Kelly returned with their ticket which she placed face down on the table. "I comped your vanilla latte. I promise your next coffee will be a lot better. She's pretty inexperienced but she's learning quickly. In a few weeks you won't even recognize her. It'll be like she's been here for years."

"Hopefully she won't be too unrecognizable," Davis said, fishing a few bills out of his wallet. "What's her name?"

"Alex."

"Alex," Davis repeated.

Lucy snapped her fingers in front of his face. "You in there? We need to go."

"Right," he said. "Here you go. Give her a little of that, would you?" he asked, handing her the money.

The ferret nodded and shrugged. "Okay, see you two same time tomorrow?"

"Count on it," Lucy replied.

She followed her brother outside to the parking lot, stopping on the passenger side of his patrol car. "You do realize you gave her a twenty dollar tip, right?"

"Did I?" Davis shrugged. "They're pretty good to us, they deserve it."

Lucy smirked. "You got it bad, bro," she said as she got into the car. Even though her comment earned her another look from Davis, it was well worth it. She buckled herself in and stared out the window as Davis started the car, smiling as they pulled away to start their days in earnest.