

No Apologies

Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 10

@dressupgeekout

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Dioxylycin is not for the faint of heart, especially when your “shot” is actually a glass that could hold four or five of them. Which is exactly what Bisky took last evening. The psychoactive compounds and the buzzing from head to tail played a major role in helping Bisky accomplish her goals: to sleep and to forget. And, while at it, maybe have a dream or two as trippy as electric technicolor shark-deer.

It was eight o'clock in the morning when she finally woke—super late, especially for a Friday. Fourteen hours of sleep. She needed it.

Bisky felt refreshed for the first time in what seemed to be ages. Today was going to be a proper vacation. She did not typically have mornings to herself, but she was going to make the most out of this one. She prepared a simple breakfast: an almond muffin from the family bakery, warmed up, sliced, and lightly dressed with anise-honey, with sliced mackerel on the side and a cup of coffee brewed on the stove. Outside her kitchen window, the low hum of cranes and the industrial clatter of shipping containers slowly crescendoed.

After quietly enjoying her meal, she proceeded to the bathroom, carrying her chair with her. She confronted the shower curtain and stood her ground. It showcased a simple design: a single, large, stylized starfish atop a field of white. Bisky put the chair close to the shower and then stood on top of it. And while on her pedestal, she closed her eyes, took a deep breath. She almost said “I’m so sorry, dad,” but she did not.

Bisky bit her lip, squeezed her eyes tight and thrust her arm downward across the shower curtain rod. It fell into the bathtub with a hard and unusually loud, metallic *clank*. She hopped off the chair and unplugged the rubber stop off of one end of the rod. It contained several thinner rods, but which were far heavier and sturdier than the one which contained them. Bisky detached the starfish curtain, too, and at this point she had the mast, boom and sail for her FlounderCraft.

The FlounderCraft was fully disassembled and all of its parts were stowed away in different and unlikely areas of Bisky's apartment. One of the drawers underneath her bed contained the rudder and the keel. The hull was unrecognizable on its own, and enjoyed secrecy just by resting in the corner by the kitchen window. The sail was actually a triangular lateen sail, but it was so large that it only *looked* like a normal shower curtain from the outside, the third point tucked into the bathtub. The only remaining components were the tackle and other rigging gear, but those were inconspicuous in Bisky's utility drawer.

The cover was never blown, but she remembered a time when it got really, really close. Her father, Petrus, had come to visit. He wondered what that weird board was in the corner by the kitchen window.

"It's a, uh, it's going to become a new skateboard deck!" she improvised. It was a plausible explanation, and Petrus did see Bisky's actual skateboard in another corner of the apartment, too.

"It's going to require a *lot* of work," Petrus said. "It's nowhere near the same size or shape as your skateboard."

"Forest is gonna help me out," she lied.

Finally, Petrus dropped the matter altogether. Bisky queued up one sigh of relief, which would she would exhale the instant he left.

Essentially, the FlounderCraft was hidden in plain sight. And it finally was time to take her out.

FlounderCraft were very small, very simple boats — essentially a dinghy with a board-like hull and a lateen sail. She came in a kit, and ostensibly were fun to assemble. But Bisky had never kept the box; her parents would have noticed. So she put all of the parts inside of a duffel bag and flung it over her shoulder, except for the board, which she tucked under her arm. She carried the disassembled little boat the way to the beach. The beach was a half-mile further away from her apartment than going directly to the water's edge, because the shipping docks had already occupied that area.

It was barely ten o'clock and the unnamed beach was already rather crowded, not because it was popular, but because it was laughably small. When most animals thought of beaches in Port Sokuit, they certainly did *not* think of the Cargo District. They thought of the more touristy areas such as the Boardwalk,

which was a pawful of miles west from where Bisky lived. No beast needed to reserve a chair and umbrella in advance at this beach.

This would not be the FlounderCraft's maiden voyage. That happened four or five years ago, when both of Bisky's parents spent a long weekend alone together in the distant resort town of Roselle, not too far from where they were born. They were celebrating their twenty-fifth year of happy marriage. Bisky was supposed to have helped out in the bakery during that time, but instead she assembled her FlounderCraft for the first time and took to the sea. She didn't go very far, never past the outer limits of Sokuit Lagoon, but it was the very first vessel that she had navigated herself. It didn't matter how much of a toy the FlounderCraft was in comparison to *real* boats. The point was Bisky Damiat was *in complete control*.

Four or five years later, Bisky finally had the opportunity to set sail again. The water by the little municipal beach in the Cargo District was far deeper than Sokuit Lagoon, and considerably rougher and colder. Basically, this beach had no redeeming qualities. But she knew that the FlounderCraft could handle it, and the winds were agreeable this morning. She could go *fast* if she wanted.

There was virtually zero room left on the beach, since it was so small and crowded, but that hardly mattered to Bisky because once the dinghy was assembled, she would not be setting paw back onto the shore for the rest of the day. The other animals and their pups were inconvenienced by Bisky's construction project and her unwieldy tail — they cast some really nasty faces in her direction — but she tried to reassure them that she'd be done quickly. She was not kidding. Bisky, always the capable engineer, assembled the boat in half the time it required most animals. Within minutes, she had a little boat with the lateen sail properly rigged. The stylized starfish on the field of white clearly looked prouder and more at home in this arrangement. *Much* better than pretending to be some excuse for a shower curtain.

And Bisky, whose heart pumped blood downriver towards the sea, who knew *exactly* what she was doing, who knowingly caused her parents and every other skunk ancestor to roll in their graves, embarked.

On the shore, Dalebius was angrily breathing down her shoulder. But now she was rid of him.

The choppiness of the waves were no match for the skunk's dexterous manipulation of the sail. She wielded the ropes as if in a chariot driven by a team of seahorses. The wind was somewhat erratic, intruding in brief gusts whenever it desired, but Bisky seemingly had already struck a deal with some other god — she could feel the wind before it came.

The FlounderCraft could really fit only one animal, or maybe one animal and their kit, thus even the slightest movement of the sail seemed amplified. It was rather easy to oversteer, especially if one were going as fast as Bisky was. But Bisky's valiant mastery of the ropes and clever utilization of her big, fluffy tail made for smooth sailing.

She was the only one sailing at this beach. It did not occur to her if any of the animals still on the shore thought it was just plain weird a *skunk* would be out in the water at all, let alone running downwind directly into the wild blue. Skunks never belonged in the water. It was not a skunk's place. Dalebius even said so. Well, Bisky thought, maybe it wasn't *their* place to judge her so.

She went as far as the first line of buoys, which were situated two hundred yards away from the shore. With a small paddle, she rotated the boat into the opposite direction and tied off the sail so that the craft remained stationary. The trek was already somewhat taxing for the little skunk, having tamed waves that she should not have been able to tame. But a torrent of adrenaline and sheer joy sneakily kicked in and nearly threw her overboard. Suddenly unsure of what exactly was going on, she decided let her body and her brain do whatever it wanted. And her body and brain wanted Bisky to stand up, face the distant city, and sing the song only skunks exhilarated beyond recognition sing.

Aaaaaaaaiiiiiieeee!!!

The cry immediately depleted Bisky's fuel tank, and she lost her pawing, but she instinctively grabbed onto the closet line and saved herself from falling overboard yet again. She laughed boisterously at nothing, at herself, at everything. After a moment to re-energize, she stood up and faced the city again.

“Listen up, you fishdicks!! I'm a woman, I'm a skunk, I'm probably bisexual, and I'm gonna sail in circles around all of you one day! Oh, and fuck Dalebius! Fuck 'em! They need to get a *grip* already! I'm captain. I'm fucking *skipper*. I don't *care* what they have to say about patience and shit. I'm *impatient*! This is

what I want! I will not apologize for my passion!!”

She turned around to face the open ocean, heaved a sigh of relief, then resumed her confession to the city.

“Hey, dad...! Dad, look—I really do love you!! I’m just not a Mephitidae! I wanna sail! Is that not okay??!” A beat. “I’m a shipwreck, I’m desperate, I don’t want to have anything to do with the bakery, and I’m not gonna lie that I’m kinda scared scentless.” The bitterness of that last statement did not taste good mixed with the salty air of the sea.

She let herself drop to the deck, but didn’t have plans to get back up anytime soon. She sat there, hundreds of yards away from the shore, swaying gently, and meditated as tears fell from her face and dropped into the ocean. It was a beautiful, sunny day, with clouds of majestic white and sky of perfect blue. A good day to be reinvented. A good day for a skunk to receive the gift of navigation: the ability to chart a course through the muddy, temperamental and vastly unknowable waters of one’s own destiny.

Behold, the skunk who wasn’t a Mephitidae. Surely, she was not the first?