

Abigail was so nervous that she had to turn the radio up louder in her car, her hoping it would drown out all the negative thoughts swimming in her head. It was David Bowie, singing to her to take her protein pills. The dour tune didn't sit well in her stomach as it was already a mix of feelings she didn't need right now. She thumbed the button on the steering wheel and changed to the next station, taking her to the middle of It's My Life.

A little bit better.

When Mrs. Bridget told her she could have lunch with her this Sunday, Abigail had been so thrilled, but now that she was on her way to Applebee's she was... It wasn't regret that she felt. It felt more like an impending doom! She hadn't felt like this since college, or maybe high school. She remembered getting rejected by a girl before prom, which broke her heart, but she'd survived the pain. She didn't care about those old memories now, since it was so long ago. She could still remember feeling awkward when she first joined her old sorority, too. She was well past all that, or so she thought. She'd been alone for a long time now and had built up a few years' worth of scales that protected her from pain.

She pulled into the parking lot and found an open space in front of the building, pulling in and letting herself sag into the driver's seat while a gentleman began to sing to her through the radio about how he Heard It Through The Grapevine. Checking her face in the mirror she batted her lashes at herself, checking her makeup, puckering her lips to check her lipstick. She looked fine; she was fine.

Opening the door, she grabbed her purse from the passenger seat and exited, wishing she hadn't called to reserve a table for two, since it was just an Applebee's, and the parking lot was half empty. She and Bridget had both agreed to have an early lunch so they could miss the church crowd, and that plan seemed to be working out.

The wait staff was friendly and greeted her with a smile, Abigail's eyes panning the restaurant and seeing no sign of Bridget. The hostess seated her at a small booth next to the window and she sat down on the side that would give her the best view of the parking lot, and her own car. She'd learned to be wary of where you parked.

A few minutes later she saw a yellow Volkswagen pull into the parking lot, and she took in a big breath, because that's the cute little car she always saw Bridget drive. Indeed, it was hers, as the grey furred feline stepped out of the driver's side, adjusting her skirt before retrieving her purse and locking up. Abigail doubted the cat could see her through the tinted window, so she watched the feline walk towards the front entrance, her hips swaying in her skirt in a way that made the lizard's heart want to flutter away. Bridget was such a beautiful young woman.

She wore her biggest smile when Bridget was led by the hostess to her table, Abigail standing up to greet the cat with a gentle hand. They shared the most feminine of little handshakes before they both sat down across from each other.

"I'm glad we got here early." Abigail started by saying, feeling uneasy about how to go about their conversation today. It'd taken her by such a surprise that Bridget had even agreed. The lizard hadn't considered what would happen today, only running on instinct and desire.

"Oh, I know. I bet it's going to be so busy by the time we're ready to leave."

Before Abigail could say anything more their waitress appeared, giving them both a menu and their silverware before taking their drink orders. Both ordered a water with lemon. So long as the waitress was at their table it let the anole avoid the inevitable, but the waitress quickly left them to their menus she didn't know how she wanted this to go.

"I'm sorry for lying to you." Bridget nearly startled her, spitting her apology out quickly and with a note of shame in her voice, leaving her speechless as she'd been so fixated on what she'd say that it didn't occur to her that the young woman would speak first. Abigail opened her mouth to reply, but noticed Bridget had done the same, so she closed it back. A moment of silence passed them by before the cat picked up where she left off.

"After I got laid off from the store, I really needed other work, but I don't have much of anything on my resume. No one was hiring me or asking me in for interviews, so I had to keep looking further and further away from home. So, when I found a restaurant that was willing to take part time help with no experience, I took it without question. I didn't feel like I had a choice, and I had no idea what kind of restaurant it was!" She ended with an embarrassed laugh.

Abigail's experience was similar. She wasn't a stranger to waiting tables, nor stripping, but she initially didn't expect The Wheelhouse to be so on the nose with its adult only atmosphere. Bridget was a lot younger, had been married, and was now a mother. At least Abigail was none of those things, which made it very easy to do risqué work. Even her being a schoolteacher didn't put much of a roadblock in her way so long as not too many people knew what her side hustle was.

"It was a surprise to me, too, when I first started working there. School was letting out soon and I wanted to earn some money part time during the break, so I went in for an interview and they liked me. I tried it out and got used to it, since the tips were really good." She took her own turn to laugh but wasn't about to reveal exactly why those tips were so good. There were an awful lot of men that would tip a girl well if she had a bigger dick than his own.

"I didn't know you already worked there! I... when you said you wanted to visit me where I worked, I just didn't know how to tell you. I felt like I'd told a lie, then had to keep telling lies to hide what kind of job I was doing. I feel even worse now that I know you are going to be one of my coworkers."

Abigail listened and could tell the young woman genuinely felt awful, and she could sympathize with why. In Bridget's eyes she was on the cusp of doing some kind of sex work, and she thought poorly of it, which now left her feeling like she thought poorly of Abigail, but did she though? Abigail was a stripper, and now the anole had gone and planted that seed in my thoughts of what the cat might have quietly thought of her now.

"It's ok. Not everyone wants to work that kind of job. I didn't even start doing what I do at first, it was something that slowly happened, and I ended up being good at it. It worked out and the pay was really good." Bringing up money again, like that was the only reason she did it. Did that really make her role at The Wheelhouse seem better? And what if she admitted that she enjoyed dancing? What would that make her in Bridget's eyes?

"Do you tell people you work there?" She asked.

"No." Absolutely not! She was still a schoolteacher! It didn't keep her from taking the job, but it'd be less drama and hassle if hardly anyone knew she worked part time dancing in her underwear. She'd done a good job of hiding it, but it did help that no one was around her enough to be nosy, since a lot of her family lived outside of San Fernando and her friend circle knew to keep secrets.

"It's been easy to keep it quiet, and it's just better for me if I don't have to explain to parents why I dance on a stage when I'm not in their child's classroom." She added to that, almost daring herself to say out loud that Bridget's son had a stage whore for a teacher. The thought of that stung harder than she thought it would.

Bridget wore a look of understanding, but Abigail couldn't read the thoughts behind the cat's eyes. The waitress returned, sitting their drinks onto coasters for them before asking if they were ready to order, which honestly neither of them were. Abigail hadn't even opened her menu, and neither had Bridget.

"Oh, I think we'll need a few more minutes." Bridget told their waitress who then departed to check on another table.

Both women took the time to actually look at their menus, their table falling silent for the moment while they eventually decided what they wanted. Abigail wasn't a huge fan of Applebee's, but surely their salads would taste fine.

"I've been so tired of eating out, since all I ever get are salads." The cat laughed.

"I'm the same way." The lizard joined her. "I can wave her down if you're ready to order?"

"Mhm, I know what I want." She hummed in reply, and Abigail waved gently to their waitress to catch her attention. The two women made eye contact and Abigail got a nod in reply, then they just waited for her to return to their table where they each gave their orders.

Once the waitress had left again the two women were quiet for a few moments with the silence only breaking when Bridget breathed a sigh.

"I don't really like working there."

"No one else is hiring? That you've tried?"

"No, or they don't want someone with so little work experience. Ben and I got married as soon as we both graduated high school. I'd already had Blake, so I never had time to get a job, even part time."

She'd already had Blake? And she'd gotten married in her senior year? Would that make Bridget... She had to count the years to guess the young woman's age, but Blake had turned six this year. Was she 24 years old? She'd assumed she'd be older, since most women with a son his age would have been in her mid to late twenties, or even early thirties. It wasn't the 1950's anymore.

"I had no idea you and your husband had been together that long." She replied, then realizing they still hadn't. Just a couple of years with Blake only being six. Married four years maybe before he died?

"We started dating our sophomore year and we weren't being very responsible, so Blake came along during my senior year. I guess you could call our marriage a shotgun one." She said with a sad smile. There wasn't any way for Abigail to discern where exactly that sadness came from, since she'd always felt awkward bringing up the woman's late husband. If they'd gotten a 'shotgun' wedding, were they even happy together?

"I'm sorry."

"It's ok. When he left us, he made sure we were taken good care of. His company's life insurance helped a lot, but I'm just worried that without him it won't be enough. Blake's probably going to go to college one day and I just... I don't know if it'll be enough to last until then. So, I'm working to make sure he can do whatever he wants when he's old enough to decide."

Abigail expected their conversation might turn heavy, but this was heavier than she expected. This poor woman was young, had hardly any work experience, trying to be a single mom with a deceased husband behind her. Her son was then held back a year because he'd lost his father. Now stuck doing borderline sex work she hated.

"I wish things were better for you and Blake, Bridget." She replied, sincerely.

"Thank you. But we just have to keep on keepin' on, you know? It's how it is."

The waitress approached their table with a pitcher of water and topped off both of their drinks, but before leaving again she mentioned that their orders should be out soon. Both women thanked her as she left

before turning their attention back to each other. Around them more people were being seated with the restaurant getting busier by the minute. They were becoming surrounded by more and more people dressed in their Sunday best.

"I'm glad I know where you work now, and that I get to be your coworker. You might not enjoy it, but there are good people who work there. You're in good hands until you find something better, I know it." She tried reassuring the younger woman.

"Thank you. It's not... it's not as bad as I thought it'd be. I don't like all the attention I get from men. I don't think I'm the person for that sort of work."

"You could ask our waitress if Applebee's is hiring." Abigail volunteered, which made the cat laugh.

"I don't know, I might!"

Their waitress returned with their plates, placing each of the women's salads in front of them before asking if everything came out alright, which it had. Between them there was a small silence as they ate, the background noise of the restaurant filling the void until Abigail felt herself growing anxious over the quiet.

"I'm happy we were able to have lunch and talk."

The cat nodded, taking a moment to finish swallowing before offering her reply.

"Me, too! I think it'll be a lot easier going to work now knowing you might be there."

Abigail felt her joy begin to stir within her, excited by what she'd just heard, but she had to douse the feline's hopes a little.

"Right now, I'm just putting in some part time hours. I won't be full time again until school lets out. You could let me know what your hours are, and maybe I can see if I can get some hours in when you're working?" She replied, offering some sweet to go with the sour. It shouldn't be too hard squeezing in some extra hours. It wouldn't hurt to try.

"Oh! I, well, you don't have to work two jobs on my account, Abigail. I'm sure you're stressed enough as it is." Bridget replied.

"It's not any trouble at all, Bridget! I can just see what's available and do what I think I can handle." She replied. It really boosted her spirits hearing the cat actually say she'd be glad to have Abigail there with her. That was such good news!

They continued to eat with the two women trading words back and forth about The Wheelhouse, the cat becoming more open with her opinion of the restaurant and her coworkers. Abigail shared some of her own views, and

as it so happened they both shared a similar opinion about many of the women they worked with.

None of this changed Bridget's dislike for working there, and Abigail was now certain that it didn't suit her any. She'd be better off back at the grocery store where she'd worked, and quietly she was hoping that the cat would find a new job soon. As much as she enjoyed the idea of working with her, Abigail was worried how her stripping would affect her chances at romancing the younger girl.

When they finished, she felt herself feeling a terrible mix of boldness and timidity. She wanted so desperately to ask Bridget if she'd enjoy a real date, but then she was so frightened of being rejected. They each paid for themselves, and as the waitress left their table the final time the restaurant was as busy as they'd both expected it to be. The parking lot outside was chock full of cars, so they'd picked the perfect time to eat here.

"Well, it was nice getting a chance to have lunch with you, Abigail." The cat said, putting her wallet away and collecting her purse prompting Abigail to do the same.

"Of course!"

The closer they got to parting ways the more panic she began to feel. The two of them had already left their table and were making their way out of the restaurant with Bridget taking the lead as they walked single file through the busy Applebee's. The natural sway of the feline's hips left Abigail feeling so many things, both naughty and not. She wanted to hug this woman and hold her tight, but she couldn't just yet, and maybe not ever.

When they made it out and found an empty spot of sidewalk away from the comings and goings of the other patrons Abigail could only smile when Bridget thanked her again for inviting her to lunch.

"You're welcome, Bridget. I really enjoyed getting a chance to talk to you today. I think we cleared the air and I hope we'll get to work together more soon."

"Me, too! It'd be nice having you there."

They were now in that awkward moment where it was time for each of them to leave, but Abigail just couldn't let this moment slip by without at least trying. She gambled, swallowing her fear.

"Um, do you think we could have lunch again sometime? I'd really like to take you to dinner if you'd let me." She said, even going so far as to take on the masculine role, taking the girl out to dinner and all that. The feline flushed lightly, smiling, but her expression was awash with uncertainty.

"I, I don't know." She replied, Abigail pinching her mouth shut to hide her emotions, forcing a smile. The chill of rejection hitting her now

made her regret all her damned boldness, which was now being revealed to her as just desperation.

"We're coworkers, and... You also teach Blake. I just don't know how he will take it after Ben left us. I just don't know, Abigail, I'm sorry. I don't know if I'm right for that right now." She said, her words coming quickly, her own discomfort bubbling to the surface.

"No, no, it's alright, Bridget. I understand! I just thought I'd ask, but it's alright." She said, repeating herself quickly and awkwardly.

Their parting goodbyes were left uncomfortable and stiff with Abigail returning to her car and cranking up without pulling out of her spot. She just let the radio drone on with her taste in music suddenly absent. Nothing sounded good to her as she mashed her finger on the dash button to change stations, eventually landing on some Hispanic radio. The foreign voices speaking words she didn't understand were almost calming. It helped her not to think when she couldn't understand anything she was hearing.

When she finally pulled out, she didn't see Bridget or her car anywhere in the parking lot, so she pulled out of the lot and began driving herself home. When even the Hispanic radio grew on her nerves, she switched the radio off completely and drove in silence.

After a few minutes the quiet car ride became too much for her, the silence leaving her alone to her own thoughts and she started to come undone. Switching on her emergency lights and pulling over onto the gravel curb she stopped the car, and with her hands over her face and her elbows against the steering wheel she began to cry.

Why did she even ask?