

# Gold and Gray

## Vignettes from Azuaveria — Episode 4

@dressupgeekout

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“Be good, stay safe,” Suey the wolf proclaimed as he waved to Bisky. She didn’t know him very well, he was only on the job for a few months by then, but he seemed like a good beast. Maybe it was his disarming spectacles, with those thick, black, square rims. Or perhaps it was that adorable chuckle sewn into the end of everything he said so seamlessly. Maybe it was his beautiful latte art. Whatever it was, she owed him one, big time.

Bisky was already one paw out the door. She turned to wave back, but it may have been in vain, since her enormous tail usually blocked the view of anything behind her. And she didn’t even properly fluff it that morning.

The rain had mostly stopped, but that would not be for long. The rain and the clouds had a will of their own in the Azuaverian Archipelago, even on the main island. It was still kinda cold, though. Bisky considered taking the bus back to the Cargo District. There were obvious advantages, such as getting home warmer and quicker and thus more time for sleep. Maybe even more time to make more taskiak. And after all, this was Port Avenue, among the busiest thoroughfares in all of Port Sokuit (vehicle traffic and paw traffic alike), so she’d only need to walk to Laysan Street and wait for a minute or two.

She headed south towards Laysan Street. But that’s right when the clouds in the south began to peel themselves apart, revealing an early afternoon sun that apparently had just been hiding there all day long. Rays of sunlight seeped through the clouds like hot wax trickling down an incline, and painted a startling picture of gold and gray in the sky. It had stopped raining. And the skunk was thoroughly captivated. It wasn’t actually sorcery — she and every other animal knew this was going to happen soon anyway — but Bisky felt like it might have been, and that she was the only one who was paying attention to the spectacle.

She bit her lip and furrowed her brow. It was such a rare thing to behold. So

grand, yet so delicate. So beautiful, yet so... temporary. It clicked in her mind. The situation suddenly became serious. She desperately rummaged through her bag for her cell phone to take a picture, but was swiftly interrupted by a *bump* that nearly made her totter. A fox walked straight into her tail for not paying attention as she stopped in her tracks on the busy sidewalk.

And you know how some beasts are about skunk tails.

The teenage fox *yipped* loudly and made all sorts of faces as he staggered away from Bisky. He spat an emphatic “Blecch!” and wiped his muzzle with his paw. After finally retrieving his pawing, he walked briskly ahead of her, turned his head to reveal his scowling face, and deliberately tugged on the straps of his backpack. It bounced off his back as if to say, “I won’t forget your ugly muzzle, kit.”

The last he saw of her before she blended into the crowd was the snarl, and the bag she clutched so tightly that he nearly wanted her paw to shatter.

What he didn’t see, though, because foxes don’t notice these things, was the Dalebian strength Bisky was exerting to prevent her tail from shooting up into the sky like fireworks, and her paws from stomping into the ground like a jackhammer.

Bisky was trained to listen to her heartbeat, but this exercise never worked for her in situations like this, because her blood boiled like octopus in a pot and her own emotions were starting to burn to the touch. And she had lost her phone.

“*Pakala!?*”

She turned on her paw and sprinted back to the coffeeshop. She shoved the door open with such force that the bell didn’t feel like jingling. Every beast noticed. They definitely heard her curse earlier. Bisky darted behind the counter, Suey in the middle of helping a customer, and stormed into the little room in the back. Joyce was there, a toothpick in her mouth, and a cell phone in her paw.

“Go home,” she told her. Gravelly, monotone, genuine, loving.

Bisky snatched it. And then without a word—less angry, but still under the sort of pressure engines on container ships face—she hurdled over the counter and ran back outside to capture that masterpiece painted into the sky.

But that’s the thing about moments. They last for only one moment. The next moment, they’re gone. Time can be cruel like that. The hot wax was already gone, as if the candle were put out. No beast can arrange the clouds and the sun

and the stars for you, unless you're Dalebius themselves, but if that's the case, then why would you be so concerned with something as meaningless as the afternoon sky? You would be living in an eternal skunk paradise where everything is already perfect all the time, what would be the point of taking pictures?

If Dalebius existed, then they'd be looking down on a twenty-something maybe-Mephitidaeen with a camera in the rain who was just robbed of the only thing that could have been beautiful for her today. If Dalebius cared, then they'd offer her inspiration or encouragement to make the most out of this situation. But Bisky knew they were actually a mystical fishdick who helped you not with an open paw, but with a slap across the muzzle. There you go, inspiration. For free, even. Pray harder, next time.

And so there it was, a novel idea carelessly slapped like a tilted bumper sticker across the face. She pushed the button on her phone and took a selfie instead.