

Free and Fair

Victoria Townsend

Lynn threw the dishtowel into the sink as she wrapped up the trash to haul it out back. Her reptilian tail brushed against the floor as she hefted the bag over her shoulder, opened the door to the dumpster and threw in the today's trash.

Going back inside the Los Animales she washed her hands one final time before getting her cross over bag from the cabinet. She waved to the store manager, a human named Jeffery Saunders, as she went out the backdoor as per usual. Fingering her necklace absentmindedly she reflected on her luck at finding a kind, business running human. Most humans would reject any Monan any job before they even applied.

Lynn stepped through the puddling concrete, headed towards her ramshackle apartment. A lone car in the night drove past, dousing Lynn's entire left side in water. Pulling her hood up, she trudged the rest of the way half soaked and cold.

The minute she opened the door, her little sister, Mia greeted her and asked about her day. Giving the usual response of "Same as always" she slipped into the bathroom and into the shower. Luckily Mia had saved her some hot water. She stared at the drain, watching a few deep red strands of hair swirl round and round until they went down the drain. "Just like my life..." she quietly mumbled. Stepping out of the shower and into some sleepwear, she stared at her green-eyed reflection.

Tired. A good way to describe her. Not just physically. She was tired of being treated like the gum beneath someone else's shoe. Tired of the rumor that Monans were more prone to savagery and stupidity. Tired of seeing her friends suffer the same way.

Kissing her sister goodnight, she crawled into bed and into sleep.

The next day was a Sunday, a day off for both Mia and Lynn. After rolling out of bed and into some day clothes, a simple t-shirt and shorts, she went out of the bedroom to the apartment kitchen.

She'd make something good for breakfast. Something Mia enjoyed. Halfway through the cooking, Mia stumbled into the couch. Never a morning person, Mia worked nights at an auto-mechanic repair shop. Mia seemed to stay in her morning daze until the smell of eggs and pancakes drifted over to the worn, brown couch.

A pair of scaled ears perked above the couch arm and soon enough the rest of her followed. She scratched her disheveled brown hair and sat at the table. Lynn swiftly delivered the goods to her beloved, and bedraggled, sister.

The look of pure bliss on Mia's face was worth the time and money spent preparing breakfast. A normal breakfast was cold cereal or a piece of fruit, but occasionally, when money was running well, Lynn would make pancakes and eggs.

While Lynn had a talent for the arts, Mia had a talent of tinkering and technology. Neither could express their talents beyond the occasional Monan seeking assistance.

Lynn prepared her own plate and sat across from Mia. Both were quiet as they enjoyed their warm meal.

Mia looked up with a puppy-dog look in her blue eyes, "Any extras?"

Lynn held back a smile, "No...But I did make some Pan Fries just for you."

Mia, who had a heartbroken look at the thought of no seconds, leaped out of her seat and into the kitchen at the mention of Lynn's own recipe.

Any extra pancake batter was used to bake small baked batter "fries."

When Mia returned with a mountainous plate-full of Pan Fries, she asked, "We gonna to see everyone tonight at Los Animales?"

Lynn nodded; her mouth full of eggs. Every weekend, their Monan friends would get together and hang out. Recently however, the topic of these get-together's changed. Instead of lighthearted chatter, plans of

escaping Union city were underway. Plans for an encampment where everyone was truly equal and respected. Their main discussion tonight would be whether to allow any willing human allies into their fold.

Lynn swallowed her eggs, “Just this vote and then we are out of here.” Just saying it had her body shivering in anticipation and delight.

Mia popped another pan fry into her mouth, her ears quirked in curiosity, “I wonder how everyone will vote.”

Lynn thought before responding, “Jazz and Dell could vote no, but they also may vote yes for innocent humans. Pitt and Navi will most certainly vote yes. Depending on how we vote and what Miles votes, it could easily go either way.”

Mia shrugged, “I don’t see why we have to let them in. They may have created us but it’s been several generations since then. Even now they won’t let us live in the city fairly, why should we let them live with us fairly?”

Lynn sighed, not wanting to have this discussion again, “Not every human is so biased. How do you think we got our jobs? A place to stay. It also doesn’t change the fact that someone at some point in the past wanted us to live side by side with humans.”

Mia’s ears flattened against her head, “Whatever, I’m going to go tinker.” With that she locked herself in the spare room.

Lynn looked down at the rest of her breakfast. She didn’t feel like eating anymore.

Come nightfall, both Lynn and Mia walked side by side toward Los Animales. They hadn’t spoken a word to each other. Lynn’s tail whisked to and fro in anxiety. ‘If the vote went yes, would the nay sayers leave? What about if the vote went no?’ Hooking her arm around Mia’s she forced the thoughts out of her head and focused on the night around her. Street lamps dimly lit up the cracked cement path. Recent heavy downpours left ponds in the dimples of the road. Cicadas chirruped their summer song. Beside her, Mia was quiet yet confident.

Mia pushed through the door to Los Animales earned a cheer from a group of Monans seated at a large round table. Pitt had tumbled black hair and a pale, round face. His cat-like tail and ears were covered in the softest fur around. Navi had bright blue hair that fell in straight lines around her sharp face. Being part avian, she had blue feathers for a tail, and feathery arms, like that of distant bird ancestors. Dell kept his dark brown hair close cropped and his face schooled into serious features, despite being a fun guy when around his friends. His monan features looked like that of a large feline predator, a lion perhaps. Jazz had ginger hair and ran against Mia for being the most outgoing of the group. Jazz was part canine, her soft floppy ears and long-furred tail made her more approachable to humans than the others. Mia, who had sat between Dell and Jazz, was laughing loudly, her ears flat from laughing. She and Lynn were double DNA crosses, both reptilian and feline, hence how Mia had scaled ears and Lynn had excellent balance and eyesight.

Sitting down between Pitt and Navi, Lynn looked around for the absent Miles. Despite being the, "leader," he was horrible at keeping time. The group passed the time by telling jokes and exchanging happenings during their absence from each-other's lives.

About half an hour after Lynn and Mia arrived, a knock was heard at the entrance. Strange, no one ever knocks, it's a restaurant! The group glanced at each other, unease in their eyes. The owner, Jeffery, came around from the bar and opened it up, blocking whoever was there from their view. Each Monan began listening in, a tense curiosity perking each of their ears.

"We are hear on a report of suspicious plans. We are looking for a group of six Monans. We already have one in custody," a deep, rough voice said.

"W-we don't serve Monans here m-mister." Jeffery's smaller and obviously terrified voice somehow managed to reply.

"We have reports of a Monan working for you, and of several meeting here once a week."

Jeffery, bless his heart, was shaking so badly Lynn could've sworn she felt the vibrations through the floor.

"You are not in trouble mister Saunders. We would like a look around at the cliental."

Before the group could scam, large humans in black fitted police uniforms barged past poor Jeffery.

The lead officer, the one with the gravelly voice, took one look at Lynn's group and bellowed, "Hands, and tails where I can see them!"

Complying to the man's demands, each raised their hands and wrapped their tails around their legs. Navi was shaking by her side, and in an effort to comfort her friend, Lynn edged closer to her. Hoping her presence would bring comfort.

As several officers began bringing out handcuffs, a distant scuffle was heard from the open door. Not letting his targets out of his sight, he motioned for a few of the weapon-wielding men to investigate.

A few moments later, shouts were heard and a gunshot was fired. This got the chiefs attention. With the human's distraction, Lynn enacted her plan. Using her prehensile tail, wrapped it around the leg of a chair.

Kicking the large wooden table over, the group instinctively hid behind it as one. Whipping her tail around, she threw the chair over their defense into the offense. After hearing a cry of pain, she slightly congratulated herself, Jazz gave her a smile and a thumbs up as well.

The scuffle outside suddenly became inside, as an unidentified individual burst through the restaurant's door. The gunfire rang in Lynn's ears, she could only imagine what it was like for her friends more sensitive ears. Cries of pain and shouts of orders were muffled, and even fainter steps faded away into the ringing in her ears.

Dell's head peaked out first over the table, then the rest of him as he hopped over the table entirely.

"Miles! Late as always to the party!" Dell joked, dissolving the tension and fear that had built up in the room.

The rest of the group followed suit, sounds of relief and happiness in their voices. Lynn stood up with them as they all dog-piled around Miles. His platinum blonde hair stuck up above the Monan mass along with a pair of white wolf ears.

After the moment passed, Miles spoke up, his own tail swaying with anticipation, " We need to leave, tonight. No more planning, no more bickering over votes. This place moved from dislikable to unlivable." Pitt chimed in with his usual enthusiasm, "Yay! Free and fair at last!" Lynn noted that she liked that as a motto. Free and fair at last.