Not bothering to lock the office door behind me, I tiredly limped up the stairs to the apartment. If a burglar with half the mind of Joey Hawkins—my recent subject of investigation as of late—decided to suddenly break into the café below, I doubted their first target would be the office. It wouldn’t help either that Daniel definitely could hear the commotion downstairs, considering he was a self-proclaimed night owl who slept lightly.

Speaking of whom, I discovered the Saint Bernard manspreading on the brown couch in the living room, watching a very old rerun of *Law & Order*. He wore a pair of black pajama bottoms that clashed with the white fur above his torso, but no shirt. A small blush crept up my cheeks at how manly he looked sitting there, fully shirtless and probably sweaty after a long day downstairs. Even though I was open to any species and focused on their personality and decency, a small part of me couldn’t deny I had a bit of a thing for canines. Especially beefy canines.

I mused, *If only he wasn’t straight…*

“Hey Zack,” he waved blindly, not parting his eyes from the TV. “Been wondering when you’d come up. Did that paperwork take a long time?”

“Yep,” I sighed, reaching into the refrigerator to snatch a bottle of daquiri. The night’s flavor was strawberry. Sweet. “So, what’s going on here?”

I drank a swig as Daniel explained the premise, “The team’s trying to figure out how this one guy murdered his wife without him even being in the same room.”

“Cool.”

I sat down on the opposite end of the couch and zoned off.

“I knew you’d crack the case in less than a week, kiddo.”

“Please, you give me too much credit,” I drank another swig from the daquiri bottle, sending sweet waves across my taste buds. “The case didn’t even give me a headache. At least, until the end.”

“How is that?” he asked, curiously. “Was he a real idiot? Your uh…what’s the word you use again? It ain’t ‘client’…”

“Subject,” I answered Daniel, smirking at the old dog. “I can’t exactly tell you—”

“C’mon, you know I won’t brag about it,” the Saint Bernard shook his muzzle and craned his neck from the TV to me, offering a smile. “I’m not asking for any names or details that’ll get you in trouble.

“Fine. Short story: the subject was a desperate guy trying to scam his way outta work and committed fraud. The long story is this.”

I drank the rest of my daquiri and set the bottle aside on the coffee table between us and the television (on a coaster, otherwise Daniel would chastise me that it’d leave a ring) as a cheesy commercial for Arctic-themed deodorant illuminated the living room in bright blue.

“An insurance company that works for Buy-Mart needed me to look into a claim they’re dealing with,” I explained to him. As promised in the contract I signed, I did not divulge anything about the subject’s name or any other personal details that would likely complicate thing. It didn’t make the story any less amusing though. “The subject they wanted me to investigate and perform surveillance on is an otter in his mid-thirties. Lives in a studio apartment on the other side of town and works at the Buy-Mart on St. Elm…Well, to be fair, I doubt he’ll still be working there after the crazy fucking stunt he tried to pull. Allegedly, the otter was in the middle of a shift when a sprinkler was dislodged and hit him in the cranium. Nasty cut, but it

“Unfortunately for corporate office, the Buy-Mart he worked at had a vandal who went around spray painting before the cops were called. Somehow, he got the camera that was in the very section our otter was injured. And they couldn’t get a replacement until the following month, so they didn’t have any video evidence…”

“So, they hired you to watch over him?” Daniel surmised for me. “They needed you to prove that he did get injured?”

“Oh, no, no, the injury was definitely real. He got a few stitches in his forehead and there was definitely blood on the floor, but some of it seemed off,” I clarified for him, then continued, “The insurance company needed me to make sure this wasn’t some case of fraud, and if not, make sure the otter was following Buy-Mart’s health provider’s instructions while he recovered at home. Low and behold, just a few hours after I started camping outside his house this morning, I saw the otter driving.”

When Daniel tilted his head in confusion, I couldn’t help from sighing.

“He wasn’t told to do much manual labor, let alone drive without someone accompanying him,” I chuckled slightly, “but then I tailed him to a bar where a) he wasn’t allowed to drink alcohol without taking his medications, and b) I overheard him bragging to the bartender how he scammed the ‘corporate drones’ at Buy-Mart. That he was, and I quote, ‘Motherfucking retired from that shithole’. And yes, I had to quote that in the report I filed downstairs…”

“Holy shit…” the Saint Bernard cackled in amusement, as did I across from him on the couch. My tail even smacked my ankles a couple times as I recollected the experience. “Haha, are you serious, Zack? God, I wish I was there to see that…I mean, Jesus Christ…”

“Yep,” I wheezed deeply, then cleared my throat before drinking another of the daquiri. “I take it the otter got tired of retail and thought he could take advantage of the vandalized security camera and a fallen sprinkler to retire a bit on worker’s compensation.”

“I can’t believe that a moron would do something like that…”

“He got too cocky,” I agreed with the dog, drinking the last of the daquiri before lamenting at the fact it had been the last bottle in the refrigerator. “Though I gotta give him credit for not making it difficult for me. Paperwork though, it’s always a fucking nightmare…”