Like almost every second Monday of the month, I spent a good portion sleeping in while Daniel got ready for work. Like clockwork, he’d be careful not to be too loud dressing himself, getting showered or even making a big breakfast before traversing downstairs to officially open Danny’s Boulevard of Books & Coffee.

If Daniel ever needed an extra paw to help work the register or maybe clean some tables, he wouldn’t hesitate to ask me upstairs for some assistance. This would also be true if I wasn’t working on a case or busy with a client. Hell, he wouldn’t even need to ask if the place got more customer than the rest of his baristas could handle. Whatever helped his teenaged employees keep their sanity after handling impossible customers.

The day prior had been the second Sunday of the month, meaning I had to visit the folks for church, followed by going out to lunch at the same restaurant and ordering the same thing on the menu while dodging questions from them. Did you hear that Mary got a promotion at her job in Emerald? How is your little detective (private investigator!) agency coming along? Did you hear that the neighbor is having another cub? When are you going to marry someone? Are you even dating anymore? Remember Sally in high school?

The lunch date finally ended with me hurrying back to me and Daniel’s apartment above Danny’s Boulevard, letting Mom’s phone calls go to voicemail and snatch a bottle of vodka from the liquor cabinet we shared.

As much as I hated the fact they were still in denial about their youngest and only son hating blind dates, Mom and Dad knew I wasn’t capable of continuing the Leander name. Male calicos like me were sterile. Unlike my father of American Shorthair descent, I could never have any cubs. My older sisters could, but not me. End of story.

Somebody knocked on my bedroom door. “Hey, Zack?”

Head throbbing slightly, I blindly reached for my phone and groaned, “It’s not even ten o’ clock yet, Dan…”

“That’s the thing, dude, there’s a client for you downstairs,” explained the St. Bernard behind the door. “She says it’s an emergency.”

“Ugh, there’s always an emergency…” I slurred, pushing myself off the bed and wobbling to the closet. My whiskers twitched at the horrid smell of spilled beer and sweat on my fur. “Can you do me a favor and ask her to wait for a good fifteen minutes? Please?”

“I’m not your fucking secretary, but sure,” Daniel chuckled deeply, his heavy footsteps receding back downstairs. “And remember to brush your teeth, kid! Don’t need you driving away another potential customer!”

“Yeah, yeah…” I muttered, then breathed onto my paw and winced. “Eesh.”

Danny’s Boulevard of Books & Coffee had a good location to it. Crushed between two brick buildings deep within downtown Crossroads, the café was within walking distance from a popular park. Any resident or tourist in need of a good cup of coffee, desert, indie book to buy or Wi-Fi hotspot likely came here. At least, if the place wasn’t packed beyond capacity.

The top floor held both me and Danny’s apartment, and the bottom floor served as the café, but a small room near the base of the connecting staircase served as my office. Or, more specifically, the base of operations for my agency, Leander Investigations.

“Can I ask how you heard of me, Mrs. Parker?” I asked my prospective client twenty minutes later, sitting behind my desk as I tried my best to ignore the effects of a hangover.

The middle-aged tigress, dressed in a striped t-shirt dress, curled her tail on her lap.

“I heard about you from a church friend,” she said between sips of coffee. On the house, according to Daniel. “Do…Do you remember Alice? Alice Friedman? She’s a coyote.”

I simply nodded, recalling a client by that name from several months prior. Although I often worked freelance for insurance companies or even a few law firms, it wasn’t too hard to recall individual-based cases. In Mrs. Friedman’s case, she needed me to prove that her son and daughter were being whipped with a belt by her former husband. Luckily, the evidence I gathered from neighbors’ testimonies and an old-fashioned nanny cam gave Mrs. Friedman full custody, plus a restraining order against the bastard.

“Well…I-I need you to help me with something…” Mrs. Parker began, awkwardly glancing between me and her paws that gripped the Styrofoam cup. “I think my husband’s seeing another woman.”

My head tilted slightly to the side. A common way to show I was indeed listening and not internally groaning that this was yet another infidelity case. “What makes you think that?”

The tigress provided me various details that were typical in infidelity cases; staying out long after work hours, stonewalling, a sudden interest in personal appearance, a lack of saying ‘I love you’ and especially a lack of steamy intimacy in the bedroom (“Ahem, there’s no need to give me any details, ma’am.”), but that wasn’t all she had to offer. The best evidence Karen Parker could muster about Jimmy’s marital betrayal was the fact she had a name and a location for the Bengal’s next possible affair.

“While Jim was playing with the cubs, I managed to get a look at his phone,” she sniffled, sounding disbelieving of even herself. “Th-There was a text from some number I didn’t recognize, on this…this app. Gave him an address and a time later tonight, at nine. I still remember it.”

When I asked why she didn’t confront her husband about it, Karen explained how she couldn’t raise Jimmy’s suspicions about following him by getting a babysitter for their six-year-old cub the night he planned to have an affair. She wanted proof before accusing him. Mrs. Parker also believed Jimmy already suspected her of snooping around his phone, keeping it close to his person ever since.

After telling me the address and the time she recalled seeing on Jimmy’s phone, I forced an understanding smile on my multi-colored muzzle. “I will gladly help you out, Mrs. Parker. I’ll take the case for you, but I will need a deposit first...”

“Of course, Mr. Leander,” she nodded, pulling out a checkbook.

After leaving me the slip of paper that’d pay my half of the rent, the relieved tigress shook my paw and left me the address and time she recalled seeing in the text message, before leaving downstairs and through the bustling café.

“So,” Daniel asked me minutes later, when we went to check up on me as I held the check in my paw, “do you think you got yourself a standard case, Zack?”

I sighed on contentment, “Not exactly. This is much more complicated than a standard affair.”

“How do you know that?” the St. Bernard tilted his head in confusion.

“It's not ESP,” I explained to my canine roommate, “it's a matter of paying attention to the very tiny details.”

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I’d used dating apps before. Rather than offer intelligent an intelligent conversation from one adult fur to another, everyone else preferred to flood my inbox with dick pics. Sometimes, a simple ‘hey’ or ‘hello there’ never sufficed for those perverts, even when I specifically asked in my profile to get to know them first. Then again, it didn’t surprise me given how most of the messages probably came sexually repressed men tired of the family guy routine. They all wanted a piece of ass on a handsome, twenty-nine-year-old male calico with heterochromia eyes—one blue on my right and sunset orange on my left.

What pursed my suspicions about what Jimmy really got himself up to came down to the address Karen Parker provided me: 3208 Edgefield Lane, a seemingly innocuous pawn shop wedged in the seedier part of downtown. Where the poorer or less-than-reputable denizens of Crossroads City went to either get drunk inside a smokey bar, purchase some drugs or sometimes to experience the thrill of danger in any corner. Truth be told though, crime infrequently happened in those parts of Crossroads unless you REALLY wanted to find trouble.

In the case of 3208 Edgefield Lane, or rather the basement leased underneath the Quick n’ EZ Pawn shop, it was a special hotspot for gay furs interested in the BDSM scene, leather, exhibition, orgies or what have you. Frequent goers and indiscreet perverts called it ‘The Edge’.

Yeah, cheesy. I knew that. However, I knew all about The Edge not just because it felt best for me to know about the gay scene in Crossroads City, but because some of the local gay furs on the apps often invited me to try going to The Edge.

Anyway, I casually sat in a window booth outside a convenient café opposite where I suspected Jimmy to appear. If this were all for nothing, at least I found the pleasure of enjoying a good meal.

The entrance to get inside lay by a descending stone staircase in a narrow alleyway to the left of the pawn shop. A bouncer behind the locked door would open up an eye slot, demand any form of I.D. or membership card, look at it and then unlock the door before letting the customer inside.

Of course, since the club wasn’t illegal by any means but lavished in its inner-city discretion, most of the club goers in line wore casual clothes that reflected the late summer heat of Utah. One or two of the club goers decided to wear obvious trench coats that did little to make them seem blasé, but otherwise, I didn’t spot any tigers by the time 9:00 PM rolled by.

9:30 rolled by, still nothing. A college-aged wolf and a slightly older coyote with a beer belly did start making out in the alleyway, even openly fondle each other to the cheer of a few bored furs waiting in line.

10:00 came and went, leaving me with nowhere casual to wait as the café closed for the night. Checking my phone and putting my long coat back on, I almost gave up when suddenly…I spotted a large, middle-aged Bengal tiger at the end of the line. He wore a black coat that matched Mrs. Parker’s description of what he left wearing when he left (we were texting infrequently), and sported a medical mask as well as a brown baseball cap. However, he matched the photograph the tigress sent me regarding what he looked like.

*Bingo*, I grinned to myself with an early sense of accomplishment. *I wondered when you would show up, Jim. So…you’re just another closet case for the books, huh? Typical…*

Taking three snaps on my smartphone, I discreetly maintained a good amount of distance between me and Jimmy Parker, making sure we did not make eye contact as I walked away.

The client would be satisfied with the evidence. Of course, she’d be devastated to know that her husband preferred handcuffs and a male touch, but I would still get paid for my services. It wasn’t like Jimmy could deny what he’d likely been doing inside of an underground gay sex club on a weeknight; nobody went to The Edge in order to get drunk or talk about their feelings.

Seeing the Bengal anxiously wait in line while also having a married life with cubs, made me feel sick. Not for how he been unfaithful to Karen Parker, a soft-spoken but seemingly kind lady who loved her cubs and her husband, but mostly because it almost reminded me of my life before my parents ruined it for me. At least, to an extent.

Getting inside of my car and driving back to the apartment, I started to wonder where I’d exactly be had I not come out to my parents a month into college? Had I let the fear of permanent disownment and Mom’s year-long silent treatment afterward crack my morale? What if I didn’t find the bravery to date guys my age on campus or online? Would I have slipped back into the closet and remained there like the few souls out there who claimed to be straight? Then, would have I been tempted enough to cheat on my wife, knowing that it was wrong?

I once read an online article that described how spouses that committed infidelity often has a mass collection of reasons why they did it. They could always be a mixture of fear towards confronting the problems of a relationship, the amount of change to be made in order to find real happiness in their personal, or even spiting society itself due to the fact they believed they got themselves a crappy deal.

Whatever the case, I could only give Jimmy Parker my sympathies towards the divorce hearings, and the best of luck afterward. Hopefully, he could learn from it (and not get revenge on the private eye that his soon-to-be-ex-wife had hired).

Fortunately for me, my night didn’t end with just potentially finishing an unhappy marriage. Daniel stayed up to congratulate me on another closed case the only way he knew how: a two-hour-long binging session of a good comedy show mixed with some popcorn and a plate of leftover scones he’d baked in the café downstairs, but didn’t sell that day. The St. Bernard definitely knew how to cook.

“What’s the catch?” I asked as soon as I bit into one of them.

“Martha’s going to be a couple hours late to work tomorrow,” he chuckled with a mouthful of chocolate chip scone in his fluffy cheeks, “so I need another helping paw.”

“Fair enough,” I shrugged inanely, enjoying the baked good while wagging my calico tail at the action happening onscreen. “Need to start getting up early again anyway…”