

The Case of the Missing Minerals

by Maven Treecat

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Content Warning: Soft vore, mind control, digestion, disposal, and other greedy villainy

Many private eyes would tell you the city was dying. They'd say the streets were filthy, the spirit was jaded, and every other street lamp was burned out. They'd call the towering buildings a prison, the park trees a mockery, and the bars a sole refuge.

Maven thought all of that was bullshit. Sure, there was crime, but they didn't need to pretend the city was a hellscape to get work. They didn't need the world to be without hope or redemption or to put on the facade of a depressed dick to have legitimacy. (They could be depressed perfectly fine without all that. Thanks, brain chemistry.) And they certainly didn't want to dull their skills with drink over it all.

The squirrel-cat slumped in their seat, right hand sunk into one of their sleek pants' pocket, left hand keeping the newspaper open against their desk. Their seat-perched leg provided a great support for their head, knee tucked beneath their chin. The headline was "Dominion At Large". The story they were looking for, "PI Tip Leads Cops to Preempt Museum Robbery", was on A6. "Figures," they sighed, peeved tail swaying as they tried to look on the bright side of a \$10,000 reward. "Always focusing on the failures and never the successes..."

Maven's office wasn't dour and dark, and they weren't trying to look grizzled. There was an air of gentle aristocratic sensibility from the pretty pictures on the wall to the filled bookshelves, most books lacking the fine layer of dust that distinguished performative trophy tomes from actually read works. Their own dress forewent the trenchcoat and fedora for a frilly shirt and tailored vest. They didn't even bother taking out ads in any of the local rags. In every way, the big-tailed creature spurned the noir atmosphere it seemed every professional dick in the city wanted so badly to exude.

The truth, though, was that few people even knew Maven was a detective...and that was one of their advantages. Their eye fell on their own office door, reading the backwards text—far more readable in the proper direction from the outside—with experience: "Maven Treecat - Cultural Curator." Who would have suspected, despite the overlap in skills, that one of the local museums' curators was investigating high-power crime and reaping the rewards? Maven always supposed it was about being "a threat": the lithe, feminine squirrel-cat and museum professionals rarely were perceived to be such. PIs, however, were seen as well-rounded and dangerous, threats even when underpowered for throwing a wrench in superpowered villainy.

A couple of cops knew. As much as Maven disliked working with them, they at least knew a couple worth their salt enough to get things done when it actually mattered. The one

who'd handed Maven the check once the call of six arrests at a different museum's history wing came over the radio knew. Maybe the rare friend here or there knew, especially if Maven knew they had superpowers of their own and could help where the cops were useless. But what they didn't know...

Maven's eye stopped on B2. Any investigator's eye would've stopped on this story: a fortune in lost gemstones and crystals lost mid-transit, reported by a local auction house. A \$25,000 reward for information. But the squirrel-cat's brown eyes were focused far further above that. "Just up'n vanished," the private security guard had said. "GPS jus'...poofed! Just like dat!"

No, what was written on the paper was "The signal just up and vanished. The GPS just poofed, just like that!" But Maven's eyes glimmered, their ear twitched, and they could tell how the language had been cleaned up by the reporting journalist. They heard the accent of the supposed pri-sec employee. They *heard* it. And they *recognized* it.

"...hm. Time for a visit," they said, stepping out from around their desk. They looked at the faint reflection of themselves in the mirror, studying the shape on the side of their neck. Their body rippled and shifted as they moved closer, opened the window, and slipped out the open window; their tell-tale tail thinned and twitched. By the time they were sliding down the nearby gutter into the spacious alley, Maven wasn't there at all...just a wiry, shifty-looking cat in a loose black hoodie and some everyday jeans walking purposefully away from the pretty garden boxes and landscaping and towards the industrial district.

What nobody knew was that Maven had superpowers of their own. They just didn't really feel the whole "hero" thing. After all, *somebody* needed to know what was going on for the real heroes to know where to be.

Other dicks might've described the alleys around the industrial district's nearby affordable housing apartments as dingy, dark, and full of scum and villainy. But they weren't greyscale and full of depression. There were smiles, sometimes just as many as in better off places, and there were good people. In fact, many times, Maven preferred the dirty alleys and their dumpsters, broken bikes, torn tarps, and youth with nowhere better to be to those uptight museum soirees full of questionably acquired and hoarded wealth.

That wasn't to say, though, that the disguised detective was always going to see someone on the up-and-up here. In fact, he was looking for a regular offender, one all too many would call a prime example of the scum of the city, the perfect resident for a oft-neglected passage heavy in dust and twice-dried trash gunk on the concrete below. Perhaps this was why Maven liked joking they themselves were trash; what else would be on a first-name basis with so-called "scum"?

"Hey, Paulie."

The words made the hawk spin on his feet, a half-panicked and half-furious scowl across his face before those sharp eyes landed on the source. "**JEEBUS**, Tom," the bird muttered, grinding his beak, "y'gonna upn' giv' me an attack like dat!"

"Sorry," Maven said without any sorriness in their voice, thin yellow cat tail whisking happily behind to not-so-subtly let Paulie know how happy they were to startle the hawk. "Didn't mean to disturb you counting your money."

Paulie Skeer. One of perhaps a thousand poor folk that all-too-willingly took sketchy jobs to make ends meet. The hawk wasn't half-bad an actor, knew his way around operating technology, and had the good sense not to sign a long-term deal to hench for some supervillain long-term. But two full-time jobs still didn't pay the bills, so he opted for the easy choice: work one full-time, and work lucrative short-term "jobs". For instance, getting a quarter-of-a-thousand for two hours' work pretending to be a security tech for some fake private security firm.

The hawk's feet shifted. "H...how d'you always know when ah'm countin'?"

"Why don't you have more than two spots to do it?" the transformed squirrel-cat countered, not telling the bird just how keenly those super-powered ears perceived, remembered, and parsed every single sound in the dense alley. Two rats in the dumpster behind. Jenny's laundry three floors up flapping in the slight breeze while on the line. Paulie's tell-tale shuffling of dollars in that all too familiar one-two one-two rhythm, wing-tip feathers brushing over fresh bills. "I told you you'd do better with a third place for this sorta stuff."

"Yeah well...ah've my own way of doin' things. 'Swhy you use me."

"More because you need the help and aren't doing anything violent," "Tom" pointed out with full honesty. "And because you've a cute and good daughter who deserves a good school."

Paulie muttered guiltily. "...ah ain't a charity case."

"Didn't say you were. Just that I've good reasons for coming to you." Maven hopped up on a nearby can, the metal clunking as they settled their weight upon it. "Which brings me to my point...why didn't you come to me when planning a gem heist?"

The bird nearly tripped backwards, wings flailing and accidentally scattering their prize as they helped Paulie regain balance. "**Screeee?! How tha FAWK-**"

"You're losing \$250."

Sure enough, the hawk was scrambling, gripping at the five twenties and three fifties flitting through the air. “*Shit! Fawk! Shit!*” He managed to snatch back seven bills, but the eighth flitted just out of reach. Tom’s tail snatched it with practiced ease, gently handing it back to the anxious criminal. “...t-thanks. But...how tha-”

“Come on, Paulie. I know everything around here,” Maven bluffed with a sly smile. “And before you say, I know you weren’t the ringleader. You just got paid for your part, right?”

“...yeah, well, ah...wanted to not cut a payday.”

“Since when have I ever demanded money from you, Paulie?”

“You’re gonna someday, Tom!” he snapped. “Ain’t no way you deal wit’ me outta only th’goodness of yer hart! Half-think yer some sorta pig informant, and ah know what they’s do eventually!”

Tom-Maven laughed as if caught by a private joke. “You really think I could be a pig?” they said, rocking atop the garbage can’s seat. By the definitions currently being used? Maven couldn’t. But if they could be a tomcat... “I’m not into being a bastard. I want things done, but I want them done *right*.”

“...so whatdya want, then?”

Maven grinned. Toothily. Like a cat seconds before swatting a priceless vase from off of a mantelpiece. “I want the real GPS. For twice the money you dropped.”

Paulie’s chest heaved with concern. “...I dunno.”

“What else would you want, Paulie?” Tom-Maven pressed.

The hawk’s golden eyes flicked down and away. “...could you get Penny another gift? Yer good at those. And visit? She likes yer. Says yer a ‘good influence’.”

The cat’s smile eased, a far more gentle and caring one. “I’d have done that anyway. Her birthday’s in a couple of weeks, isn’t it?”

“...fawk. Yeah, okay...”

The bird fished out a small device behind him, the little screen pinging a small dot on a map of the local area. Tom was already handing him a stack of bills, and Paulie knew better than needing to count it. He did so anyway. \$500.

Maven studied the device for a moment. Local knowledge put that tracker in one of the oceanfront warehouses, the rentable ones under Faraday Shipping. It'd take them all of ten minutes to find out who rented that one, and it'd take only a day or two to find the mastermind after that. They nodded and handed the device back. "Thanks. You know what they say about cats and curiosity."

"Gonna get y'self killed, Tom," Paulie said with a wry smile, this specific exchange all too familiar since Tom's first visit with him.

"Oh, I don't think *curiosity* will do that to them," a third voice added.

Both heads turned in shock, Tom-Maven's eyes even wider than Paulie's. Sitting on the can directly next to them was a wolf. The casual position of the new arrival was vastly contrasted by his own outfit: flamboyant black and red on a large long-tailed coat, a shirt which exposed his toned, white-furred chest and belly, gauntlets and boots with stylish yet defensive metal bands, and a pair of sleek, angular red-tinted lenses perched upon his muzzle.

Dominion, Master of Minds and Devouring Dominator, was in their presence.

How the heck did my perfect hearing not hear him approach?!

This thought and mystery, however, was quickly interrupted as Paulie's voice croaked a terrified "*D-...Domin—!*"

"SLEEP."

The hawk crumpled to the alleyway floor, snoring even before his body hit concrete. His newly-gotten gains fluttered about his feathery form from the impact and loosened grip, all eventually finding rest across the unconscious minion-for-hire.

Tom-Maven didn't move or budge. He knew better. There was no escaping an auditory super given their own powers of perfect hearing; the street-clothes cat had long since accepted that, and it was part of the reason they, upon realizing their own abilities, knew better than to enter the hero business in this city. Their eyes remained locked on Dominion, staring through those lenses as the at-large wolf snickered from his quick subdual of the bird.

"Never gets old. Now...it's just the two of us~"

For all the hyperbole Maven refused to use as a private eye, calling Dominion "the shadow overlord of the city" wasn't out of their mind. The steady eyes behind those red-colored glasses carried with them a power and the full comprehension of said power. Any fat cat that thought they owned even part of this city—much less the skinny Tom here—would instantly know their place before a gaze like that. It took the full efforts of all the region's best heroics to

hold Dominion's growth of power at bay, and there was the silent understanding among every caped crusader that every victory against him was incomplete. In fact, many agreed: it always seemed the wolf was genuinely entertained when a plan of his was successfully foiled or a timetable of his operations turned upside-down.

The wolf's gaze turned to meet the tomcat's. Maven shivered, partially on purpose to hide how significantly more composed they were than the normal civilian in the presence of one of the greatest villains the city had ever known. "Wh...what could you possibly want from me?" Tom-Maven asked, their least-known power subtly slipping into their voice.

The supervillain grinned, far more toothily than "Tom" had managed before, like the dog already ready to pounce the cat before they even could touch the family vase. It took a lot of sinister success to make a smile that nefarious. "Oh, a lot of things!" he happily answered. "For one, I get to learn where a neat little treasure trove has been hidden away from me. Secondly, I might get some valuable information about some rivals of mine and their current goings-ons. And third, I get to spend time with you! ...Maven~"

The dark, terrified shudder that ran down Maven's spine wasn't simply from shock and fear: Dominion's gaze fell squarely on their mark, and Dominion's will overpowered their own. Their body was shuddering as it adjusted and reshaped. Soon, the form of "Tom" was melting away, and all that thin, nervous tail was fluffing up into the massive person-sized limb of a squirrel-cat once more. "How...how did you know?!" Maven gasp-squeaked.

"I know a lot of things about you," Dominion rumbled, leaning into his alleyway neighbor, gaze never leaving Maven's big, scared brown eyes. "I can recognize that neck mark of yours instantly. I know all the sweet little hints you pass along to the police, the supers, the social workers, the non-profits...your alibis and aliases when you investigate...your powers: the hearing, the self-transformation, the way you can't ever be stopped from using your senses...even your truth-coaxing questions! I know because **you know me.**"

Those words, laden with Dominion's power, slammed into Maven's mind like a treasured key triumphantly slammed into a secret vault's keyhole and turned. The result was a flood of memories and realizations, every memory of Dominion unlocked. They remembered meeting Dominion's alter-ego. They remembered nights cuddled at the wuff's apartment. They remembered the date where the wolf had divulged his true artistry, how they tittered at what they thought was an awkward joke, how their jaw dropped as Dominion had slyly put up an iconic pair of red-tinted glasses to his face. How, torn between good and their love, Dominion had happily let Maven continue with their good...even occasionally letting the investigator foil a plan or two in exchange for their unwitting aid. They remembered more...and worse...and above all else? They remembered Dominion's *uses* for them.

“D-...Dominion!” they stammered, looking away from the proud-looking villain with a potent blush. They knew maintaining eye contact for their truth-telling was pointless. The squirrel-cat knew...because Dominion never lied to them.

“Hi, honey~” the wolf teased, leaning in further, arm reaching around to rest a hand on the off-guard investigator’s opposite shoulder. “Did you like the new trick? I found a way of foiling those perfect senses of yours, didn’t I?”

Maven chewed on a lip. *Of course*. Telling them to no longer pay attention to the specific footfalls of a certain villainous wolf didn’t stop them from *hearing* it...just from associating any importance to what they were hearing. And Dominion had gotten *very* good about being sneaky over countless years of greed.

“*Hee!* Told you it’d work,” he bragged proudly. “So, let’s get business out of the way.” A finger turned the squirrel-cat’s flushed face towards his, the supervillain tilting his head such that Maven couldn’t help but see their own reflection in those trademark glasses. “Where’s all those jewels you were looking into?”

Caught in eye-contact with themselves, they couldn’t lie if they wanted to. The squirrel-cat would’ve told the truth even without, but Dominion knew just how embarrassed and flustered Maven got when the choice *wasn’t theirs*. “One of the oceanfront warehouses...Faraday Shipping, Warehouse D I believe, back left corner,” they answered with a helpless quiver.

“Mhm! Any other villains planning to interfere with my work and fun?” Dominion pressed.

“...according to a grunt, Dr. Spots is likely planning to intercept one of your orders of focusing lenses,” Maven obediently continued. “He’s either going to try and cause a backfire of one of your projects, or he’s trying to get material for an improved shrink ray.”

“...and what about my preferred heroes to enjoy?” came the inevitable rumble. “You only need to tell me one; I’ll not get you to spoil the side of good *entirely*. Just enough for me to have fun with~”

Maven gulped, knowing exactly what sort of ‘fun’ Dominion had in mind and feeling a wash of shame for what they were to enable. And they knew the sole reason Dominion was asking was to cause that very shame...to cause the squirrel-cat to *squirm*. “Arci...is planning to sneak into your headquarters soon. With sound-modulating earplugs...does that even work?”

The wolf tapped his chin in thought as his private investigator anxiously shifted next to him. “Changing my voice before it reaches his ears? ...I suppose we’ll find out! Either way, easy enough to disable when I know when he’s coming. Thanks, squirrel-cat~”

“Is...is that all?”

It was the wrong question. While much of the day's events could not be blamed on the curious curator and secret snoop, this was their first and biggest mistake. They knew it, too, feeling every last ounce of situational control dissipate into the cool alley air from that teasingly disappointed expression upon the wolf's face. Dominion's head turned, gazing straight into Maven's big brown eyes once more. "Oh? Maven, Maven, Maven," he happily growled, "since *when* is *Dominion* ever **satisfied?** Go on, tell me. **What does Dominion want?**"

The breath fled the squirrel-cat's lungs with a flustered whimper. "...e-...everything."

Dominion's hackles rose, thick fur on end with excitement at hearing that response from their favorite PI. "You know what my favorite thing is about your little suite of powers, squirrel-cat?" He pressed his nose into his utterly enchanted unofficial assistant, taking a deep breath of the subtle scent beneath those well-kept curator clothes. "When I take *everything* of yours, you can't help but **feel it all**. And you *love it*."

"I..."

"STRIP."

The supervillain casually slid himself off his metal can alleyway seat as the deceived detective followed his command with alacrity, baring every inch for the one that employed them most frequently down to even those subtle orangish spots on their chest. Possessively, as the last garment dropped to the small heap of hastily discarded clothes, he gripped around the cutie's shoulders, leaning in to slurp long and firm along the side of Maven's neck, triggering that all-too-appetizing squirm.

"Nnnnnrrfff..." He licked over his muzzle, slowly and lazily for the trapped preything to watch and to glimpse the dark, squishy depths deeper in. "If you say it, you're *definitely* not leaving this alleyway," the wolf said, guiding one of those nervous hands to press against his exposed belly and feel the readied *rumbling* and *grumbling* from inside. "So if you don't want to be *ruined*, all you have to do is resist!"

Maven steeled all of their remaining will. Every ounce of inner strength was mustered behind those firm, goody-two-shoes eyes. Even if the squirrel-cat refused the role of a hero, there was no doubt in that look a heroic spirit. Dominion loved that look, an expression of true pure-heartedness and a willingness to fight, an unshakable spirit of selflessness and—

"So, will you **say it?**"

Those perfect, superpowered ears let that quiet growl in, and all of the willpower melted away like ice cream in direct summer sunlight. The resulting groan of shame, humiliation, and desperation was music to the wolf's ears. "I'm *yours*."

No one was around and aware enough to see how the villain's tail wagged, a delighted wag of wuff tail that only otherwise was seen when triumphing over the strongest hero or pulling through the grandest heist for a long-coveted prize. "That's right, Treecat. **Mine~**. Rrrf...time to make a nosy detective disappear~"

Then, the villain's maw opened wide above the fiercely squirming morsel, lowered before that utterly overwhelmed expression, engulfed it, and began to send it down where it belonged with a firm, smug **gL-GLUCK!** It wasn't the struggles of a fighter, and it wasn't the easiness of a fully mind-controlled victim; no, what Dominion felt was the unique squirm of a thoroughly conflicted squirrel-cat. That, coupled with the honeyed meat flavor filling his mouth, made him all the hungrier.

With Dominion's grip, both of his voice around their mind and his throat around their body, Maven knew there was no stopping their descent. Nude body slathered in drool and slime, fleshy squeezes packing them deeper and deeper, and already feeling the dizzying hot air of an impatient gut below, the squirrel-cat couldn't help but squeak and moan. Their keen listening only served to let them know every detail of their doom: how high the acids were already pooled, how precisely the villainous gut rolled and churned as meat was sent down towards it, every increasingly impatient and possessive roll of Dominion's gullet from top to bottom, and just how *pleased* the wolf sounded even from the outside.

The overwhelming greed conquered all reason, Dominion only wanting to seal this one entirely away in his guts as quickly as possible. There was no shame in the villainy either, **OURLKs** and **SHLORPs** and **SHLUCKs** and **GLURPs** sounding out all for Maven's benefit, and each one was rewarded with another embarrassed wriggle from within...all until a long **guuuulp** reduced the last of the big-tailed, big-brained thing into a meaty bulge writhing inside his belly. "Mmmph, good~" he rumbled, smiling evilly down at that tight shape and kneading over it with both hands. "Time to feel all of that meat melt."

The superpowered senses of the squirrel-cat heard every word. They felt every squeeze. They could distinguish the subtle muffled noise of another pleased slurp across wolf lips, and they could distinguish the steady motion of a waving tail. But most of all, Maven was keenly aware of the fact they were **digesting**. Parts were squishing in, stomach juices were soaking them, belly squeezes were compacting them. Long noisy **gurgles**, sharp and close **cracks** and **crunches**, lurid and bold **squelches**, and deep and bassy **gworgles** echoed all around, overpowering their own gasps and yelps. And there was no ignoring the teases from outside as the nefarious mastermind stole them away and made them vanish.

"Mhrrrrf, so easy to **melt~**"

"You feel so good all **soft** and **mushy...**"

"Everything you are...all **mine** to dispose of. Rrrf!"

"Chugging down into my guts...where you **belong**. I know you can still hear me~"

"I wonder who might discover the *evidence* you'll make...since you won't be around."

Down and down, through and through, hearing and feeling every single bit of Dominion utterly work over them and treat themselves to squirrel-cat slurry, Maven slowly lost themselves to a haze of squirmy bliss. Their senses persisted, superpower flooding their mind long after most would have been gone with shameful stimulation and delightful destruction. Dominion...they were all **his**. Utterly...entirely...**HIS**.

"Grrrf~ Come on out...!"

Paulie blinked the sleep from his eyes, groaning as he leaned upright. Midday naps weren't usually his thing, but he'd felt as if there had been nothing more important than having one at the time. The hawk slowly focused, eyes scanning the scene before him.

Tom was gone. There were bills scattered about. And there was the infamous Dominion seated on the edge of a dumpster, pants down, squeezing out heavy logs of shit into an open garbage bag.

...wait, what?

Staring in disbelief, it was all Paulie could do to stay quiet and watch in astonishment as the supervillain dumped the remains of some poor do-gooder into a disgraceful state. And the supervillain was *loving it*. Tail high, panting, and smiling ear to ear as the last few masses of waste thudded down to join the rest and a somewhat feline skull in the trash.

"**Hffff!** Hahh...there we go. All *done*, squirrel-cat," the wolf groaned, cleaning up, re-dressing, and tying the bag off. "Now you just sit there while I go and claim more, all for me."

Then Dominion caught Paulie's gaze. He grinned. "Hey, I'm always hiring," he said to the fearstruck bird, "...if you're ever looking to *belong to something bigger*."

With that, the city's number one villain walked off. And, despite what *must* have been Tom sitting in the alley garbage, all Paulie could think was how good a consistent job sounded right now. Better than going through constant *job churn*.

...

...many private eyes would tell you the city was dying. They'd say the streets were filthy, the spirit was jaded, and every other street lamp was burned out. They'd call the towering buildings a prison, the park trees a mockery, and the bars a sole refuge.

Maven thought all of that was bullshit. The squirrel-cat private eye actually thought their city was quite peaceful and enjoyable, all things considered. And when it wasn't...well, their investigations made a difference.

"Anonymous Info Returns Jewels" was the headline today. A \$25,000 check sat on the squirrel-cat's desk. The museum curator in their peaceful office was smiling as one of the few who knew the connection between those two things. Another successful case.

Still, there was something bothering Maven. "The shipped gemstones and crystals were all returned unharmed and in pristine condition," the lead story read in the continuation on A2, "all except one: a cut diamond over 250 carats, estimated to be worth around \$50 million USD, is still missing. It is thought the item was lost during movement of the stolen goods." Maven didn't believe that the most secure item of the lot would be simply dropped. But the auction house seemed to be looking on the bright side, given the total value returned and their insurance on the prime item.

As they checked their accounts, Maven found another thing bothering them: an unidentified deposit to their bank account. Their eyes widened in shock. \$25 million USD. "What the *heck?!'*"

The detective hastily looked to the pile of mail addressed to their office. They rifled through the letters, magazines, bills, and spam until they eventually found an unmarked envelope. Tearing through the seal, they shuffled out the contents and looked at the paper.

"Thanks for the lovely gift! Half is fair, right, honey?"

Their superpower put a voice to the handwriting they read, and the result instinctively ran a shiver down their spine, tail floofed up in flustered alarm. Then they spotted the paperclip and photograph.

The third thing to bother them would stay with them for weeks, judging from the near-permanent blush the curator and secret investigator bore.

"Sir, shall I bring it to our development team?"

The professional bunny secretary stood patiently in the dark room, standing in one of the few stray beams of red light that wasn't highlighting trophies, news clippings, monuments of

villainous triumph, and the proud symbols of the secret base's owner. As one of the few allowed into the personal office-throne of her boss, she knew better than to rush the Master of Minds.

Dominion smirked from his seat, slouched lazily behind his desk in perfect, guiltless contentment and highlighted in the sole white light of the cool chamber. "Hmm. Give me a few more minutes," he rumbled.

"Yessir."

As his privileged underling withdrew, the wolf twisted the diamond in between his fingers, appreciating how the low lair light caught in its flawless facets. Sure, it was pretty, but it was always the story behind an item which made it special. And this one reminded him of someone.

"...*mine*~"