Late November rolled in fast. A little too fast for us, to be frank.

September and October flew by in the blink of an eye, rapidly turning New Jersey into a colder place than Jasper and I remembered moving to. Just the mere act of getting out of bed together made our toes chilly one morning, leaving my brother and I debating how high we could turn up the thermostat. As the weeks rolled by, whenever we weren’t keeping warm under the covers by rutting like horny schoolboys, we wore pajama bottoms more often at night. Or cuddled more closely than we used to be before our big fight. We were inseparable.

Seabreeze drops on the apartment windows turned into tiny ice. Outside our new home, the Jersey Shore no longer echoed with music or partying laughter. Tourists were replaced by mammals in autumn and winter coats along the Peninsula City Boardwalk, while discount Halloween decorations got swallowed up by Christmas trees and Black Friday signs. Not that many shops or stores minded skipping Thanksgiving décor.

Speaking of which, it surprised me to learn that the Atlantica’s convenience store remained open on Thanksgivings.

“That’ll be eleven dollars and thirty-three cents,” my ex-manager said with a hunched back and rapidly blinking eyes, trying to hide his bored expression. “Cash or card?”

“I have three fives and a couple ones.” Forcing a friendly smile onto my spotted muzzle, I handed the money to him. “How’s your Thanksgiving so far, and where’s Rodney at?”

The black-furred, potbellied timber wolf wore a smiling mask mirroring mine, and he said, “That punk didn’t bother showing up today. Insisted on meeting his girlfriend’s family for dinner tonight, instead of doing his job.”

“Dang, sorry to hear that,” I lied through my teeth, watching him bag my three items—a gallon of milk, roll of aluminum foil, and a root beer soda. “Jasper’s helping me make some turkey casserole, but we forgot the aluminum foil. Heh.”

“How’s that new job of yours going?” The wolf changed the subject, handing me the change while forcing a smile back onto his graying muzzle. “I’m open to rehiring, if—”

“Thanks, but you can keep the change.” I snatched my bag from the countertop, then walked out of the shop into the apartment complex lobby. When out of sight and earshot, I sighed with a smirk. “Serves you right.”

I also saw the weird gaze he shot me whenever me or Jasper, or us both, entered the store for last-minute shopping. Like the rest of the apartment tenants, they still had a vile fascination with our ‘taboo romance’. A few mammals would stare or point fingers, but none would outright ask us about it. Not with the end of summer, beginning of fall, and approach of winter keeping everyone else busy with their own lives.

In all honesty, a part of me pitied Store Manager Randy. He didn’t seem like a bad person, but he did fire me to save face for his store. Besides, I didn’t need to be rehired. My new position at Horizon Communications very much helped pay the bills. Even if it didn’t, there was no way in Hell I’d consider returning to retail.

Jasper and I still regularly hung out with Rodney and his friends. They were hitting it off with us the more we visited their places or bantered in public. Rodney, Luke, Vanessa, Valerie, and Yancy—I still hesitated to call him Y-Dog, no matter what—became more than acquaintances, but a group of buddies willing to tolerate what we had. Sure, the two girls still tried making ‘subtle’ suggestions of what a threesome would be like, but only in rare jokes. Otherwise, they would hardly have treated us any differently than if Jasper had been my adopted, unrelated doppelgänger.

A familiar gray squirrel strolled out from the elevators. He wore a thick jacket to compete with the cold, grasping a used slushie cup already full of spare change. The rank odor of puke and alcohol were enough to convince me rent didn’t come first. His glazed eyes tried not to lock on me, but when they did, I held back a low growl. Wisely, Whiskey didn’t say a single word when I took his place, and he briskly walked to the Atlantica’s entrance.

*Are there that many thanksgivers out there on Thanksgiving Day?* I wondered to myself.

The last time I spoke to Whiskey, it’d been around Halloween, when he came in to buy a pack of cigarettes from Rodney when I’d visited the coywolf at work during a lunch break. He still stank and dressed like he didn’t own anything else. The squirrel muttered something along the lines of ‘incestuous sickos’ when my former coworker told him to leave. He did, but not before I thanked the addicted squirrel.

“For what, brat?”

“For helping me be myself.” I wagged my tail. “For trying to blackmail me and my brother, then telling everyone. We’re happier than ever now, thanks to you.”

He gave me a weird look, scoffed, then returned to his full-time job out on the street.

By the time I returned to the apartment, Jasper was about to place our casserole into the oven. He wore a grunge band t-shirt we often traded, along with a pair of red-stripped cotton pajama bottoms that outlines the curvatures of his ass. Grinning as I closed the door behind me, I leered at said ass as the identical dalmatian bent over to the fridge’s bottom drawer. His cute tail wagged after pulling out a juice carton.

“Pervert,” Jasper tsked.

Setting the bag on the countertop beside the uncooked casserole, I patted his right cheek. He shivered as my body hugged his from behind, and I let out a giggle when his tail tickled my stomach.

“You know it.” I leaned close to kiss the back of his spotted neck. He chuckled at the attention. “I got the tinfoil. Now we can put it in the oven, already.”

“Or use it to block the aliens from reading our thoughts,” Jasper quipped.

“The tinfoil or the turkey casserole?” I quipped back, causing him to laugh and turn around to playfully smack my shoulder. “What? You worded that weirdly, bro.”

“Whatever, bro,” he emphasized the last word, pecking my snout.

“Let’s put it in the oven now, bro,” I also emphasized the specific word, giggling. “I wanna stuff the—”

“If you make a sex joke about stuffing something, I swear to fuckin’ God—”

Laughter bubbled naturally from our lips, which connected again into another kiss. It didn’t last long, since we still needed to get our Thanksgiving dinner cooked. So, I blanketed the turkey casserole in two layers of shiny tinfoil while Jasper placed the milk inside the refrigerator, deciding in the end to take the root beer soda I’d bought.

He opened it while my back was turned, placing the covered pan in the lit oven, and set the timer. Jasper then handed it to me for a quick sip. It tasted so sweet.

Tails wagging together, Jasper and I exited the kitchen straight into the living room. He sat down on the farthest side, turning on the TV as I lounged closely into his chest. We didn’t say a single word, instead finding ourselves engrossed in each other and a Thanksgiving special the two of us used to watch as cubs, before things started to go wrong.

During commercials, I thought back to Zack Leander. The same snarky, dry-humored P.I who not only found my brother and lover, but also wished us luck on our journey. It couldn’t hurt to message him. Tell him how we were doing.

Outside the window overlooking an empty beachfront, gathering clouds transformed midday into twilight, despite sunset still not arriving just yet. The glowing lights of other Atlantica apartments and Peninsula City in general resembled UFOs. A few snowflakes clung to the glass, indicating a dark winter was coming. Even so, the future for us never seemed so bright. We were saving money. Jasper often joked about getting a used car, but why not? It couldn’t hurt to expand our reach around New Jersey once we earned enough cash. Or got a massive bonus.

I hugged my form closer to Jasper, who hugged me back. Nuzzling my nose into his warm chest, my smile never disappeared for the rest of the night.

We did it. We found that happiness of ours.