In the intervening three days since the convenience store fired me, Jasper asked for more hours at his workplace, which meant he worked close to forty-five or fifty hours. In the meantime, I spent all my sudden free time cleaning the apartment and searching for decent jobs in the newspaper’s wanted section. When that cropped up no answers, the jobs either already being filled up or not being impressed by my resume, I went for different avenues. I even downloaded a job-searching app on my phone despite knowing it’d drain the battery faster.

By the third day, I’d only had seven phone interviews in total. Three never called back on the position, two called back to inform me I didn’t get the position, one additional interviewer told me outright my qualifications weren’t what they were looking for, and another mentioned that she’d heard from my previous employer how I ‘carried too much personal baggage’.

“That does it,” I growled to myself, “I’m taking Randy off my references…”

By late afternoon, one other call back from an interview turned up zilch. Apparently, even the shady warehouse industry didn’t need a scrawny little dog like me for workers. I’d hung up the phone, threw it onto the bed without giving in to the temptation of tossing it at the nearest wall, then stormed out into the living room. Everything was spotless. The countertops, table flooring, carpeting, cabinets, and front doorknob all sparkled and shined. Meanwhile, the cloudy weather had cleared up enough for everyone to enjoy the beach just outside my window, yet I didn’t dare leave the apartment.

According to Jasper, there’d been more than one instance that he’d actually caught a glimpse of Whiskey panhandling at a street on his way to work. My brother desperately would’ve knocked the junkie squirrel’s teeth out had the clever bastard not been in a public space with too many witnesses.

Besides having to occasionally see Whiskey’s smug mug during the transit to work, Jasper dealt the full blow of being social pariahs. He got nothing but deathly glares and nasty words thrown his way whenever a random tenant was close enough. So far, his favorite comment had to be from this one religious chipmunk who lived a couple floors down, who proclaimed, “Incubi have raped your souls into incestuous sin, and such vile acts will deny you the Kingdom of Heaven! Repent and burn yourselves of sin!”

“What’s the point of repenting if we’re still gonna need to burn ourselves?” Jasper had joked to me once the two of us were out of earshot of her. “I mean, Jesus…”

Most of all, I didn’t want to unintentionally run into those three punks again. A text from Rodney during his shifts informed me that the otter’s name was Reginald ‘Rex’ Lutman and his mongoose called himself Henry, despite being named Harry Bour. Their raccoon lackey was actually a year or so younger than me. Named Jeremy and living next door to my old coworker, the raccoon’s family did everything to keep their youngest cub out of trouble but were a little more than wary of me and my brother due to the rumor mill.

Whatever. Their son was involved in a wannabe-gang, and they were more concerned about what I did in private. It wasn’t like we actively made out in the lobby and performed sex acts on the beach. Unlike what certain other tenants have likely done even before we moved in.

Still, although it did feel great to have at least one friend to talk to, Rodney’s work schedule didn’t make me and Jasper feel less alone in Peninsula City. Speaking of whom though, I practically jumped from the living room couch when I heard the doorknob twist and turn open, and a disheveled, exhausted dalmatian walked in with a bundled-up coverall smelling of sweaty grease under his armpit. In his other paw were three pieces of paper.

“How was work, Jas?” I walked over to hug him.

Kissing my cheek, he kicked the door closed behind him with his heel. “Went really well,” Jasper replied, “but this one car came in at the last minute with two flats and needed an oil change since last season. Now I’m gonna need these cleaned by the day after tomorrow.”

“Don’t they give you multiple pairs?” I promptly tossed his work clothing in our laundry basket in the bathroom. “What’re those things you’re holding anyway?”

“Two are sticky notes from our neighbors and the other is a letter from Virgil.”

The last one certainly grabbed my attention. Ever since Whiskey had the audacity to spill about our relationship and then go hide somewhere from us, one or more of Atlantica’s braver tenants decided to leave hateful notes on our door. Some were imaginative yet most weren’t. They consisted of the standard insults like ‘homos’, ‘twincest equals disgustcest’, ‘faggots’, but my favorite one definitely had to go to today’s second note: brotherfuckers.

“What does it say?” I asked as Jasper tossed them into the trash bin.

Jasper read it over, his eyes widening slightly and then creasing in annoyance.

“Virgil wants us to come down to his office at the earliest convenience tonight, says it’s urgent,” he then skimmed through the letter citing ‘unconfirmed reports’ leading to a ‘concern over the safety of the other tenants, including yourselves’. “He then says his office closes at seven as always but wants us to schedule a meeting if we can’t make it.”

We exhaled together. Whatever casual atmosphere of normality we tried producing disappeared in an instant. Much like our relationship being exposed, I’d already considered with Jasper what our options would be if our landlord discovered the true extent of our tenancy. If the other residents knew, then of course a few would send complaints, so Virgil would know.

“You wanna go down later after dinner?” Jasper suggested.

“Sure,” I stepped down the hallway and examined the official letter. “We might as well get this whole thing over with. And here, I was hoping it wouldn’t come to this…”

“It was only a matter of time for us, Jack,” my twin patted my shoulder and gave a soft, reassuring smile. “Whatever happens, we’re not crawling back out west. This is our home.”

I smiled back, “Our home.”

Jasper then noticed something occurring to me. “You feeling alright, bro?”

I tried but failed at rubbing away the soreness in my neck, shrugging. “Not really,” I admitted a little too tiredly. “I’ve been sitting on my butt all day looking at job openings. What am I saying? I bet you’re more tired than me.”

“Not enough to look like I’ve got a barbell around my throat,” Jasper admitted as he brought me to the couch, then sat down beside me with my back facing his chest. “Let me.”

Believe it or not, Jasper had a talent for more than just fixing cars. He knew how to fix any tied knot or sore muscle in me. Call it a skill or a mental link between twins, but he knew how to give a fucking good massage. Once I raised my arms up and finished letting him pull my t-shirt off me, Jasper’s calloused but firm fingers went to work.

“Oooooh,” I gasped and moaned, then imitated a feline’s purring. “That’s it…”

“Don’t move too much,” Jasper grumbled, “Stay still and I’ll unfasten it…”

Those fingers rubbed, dug, and caressed my neck and shoulders like they were ground beef, loosening my muscles until I felt weightless. I stifled a few moans at first, only to let go of restraint when Jasper succeeded in unkinking that knot. My tail wagged against his shirt-covered chest as my nose caught the whiff of my brother’s masculine scent. It contained grease, literal elbow grease, his musk mixed with perspiration, plus the faint hint of a car’s air freshener. I especially smelled it wash over me as Jasper leaned closer to my back and pulled me into a crouching hug as our legs stretched out the vinyl flooring, toes nearly touching the coffee table.

“Mmm, you’re stressing too much lately,” Jasper murmured into my ear, then nipped it until I let out a bashful whine. “Heh, you’re so pent up too, like me…”

His dalmatian fingers caressed their way up my chest until they stopped at my erect nipples, which he then flicked at before placing a shy kiss on my relaxed right shoulder. He flicked them again, eliciting another whine from me. I began panting once the fingers stopped merely grazing them but pinched one while pulling on the other. He next squeezed on a nipple yet didn’t neglect the previous one, using his thumb to circle around it like feral wolves encircling prey. Over and over, Jasper’s motions made me pant like a dehydrated mutt.

My backside instinctively humped against his raging hardon tenting through his jeans. “Maybe I can help with that?” I asked seconds into his teasing. “I’m a little thirsty.”

Jasper’s relaxed grin curved wider. “S-Sure, but f-first,” he panted back with a lolling tongue, “there’s one more muscle of y-yours, I…I gotta relax.”

It didn’t occur to me he meant my dick until I felt his left paw trail downward. I shuddered and hitched some breaths of air when they snaked down my shorts, past my boxers, and finally groped my scrotum and inner thigh before settling on my neglected shaft.

Melodic whines escaped my lower lip for each dry-humping thrust synchronized with Jasper’s expert strokes. His fangs grazed the skin under my spotted fur as he offered love bites, a bit of specialized nibbling to the side of my jugular, then several licks to them as he jacked me off inside of my athletic shorts. Our backs and stomachs arched in unison with every loving touch, growing faster and faster until we were lost in our little world. I didn’t care if the window blinds were open and facing not just the vast Atlantic Ocean, but slightly towards the other end of the apartment complex, but we never cared. Nobody could see us.

Jasper noticed my hitched breathing grow more strained, stroking faster.

“Cum for me, babe. Cum for me, Jackie…Be a good boy and cum for me.”

“Ngh, ngh, ngh, fuck, fuck fuck!” I huffed and gulped down my drool, groaning next as cum stained the inside of my boxers and shorts, leaving me panting as Jasper continued licking at my neck. A deep breath in and out through my nose did little good as my eyes opened to see Jasper’s paw with cum staining it. “Is this how you treat your boyfriend, sweetie?”

“Consider this a thank you for loosening your back and knot. Both of them, hehe.”

I playfully scoffed and let my tongue slurp at each digit. I tasted myself as well as his sweat and the tiny aroma of oil grease he hadn’t been able to wash off before leaving work. I couldn’t stop myself from rubbing my nose into his palm, so Jasper squeezed my snout and turned me around to pull him in a kiss. I gladly returned it, but did part to say, “My turn.”

Minutes later, Jasper keenly cozied himself along the couch, resting his head on a pillow set against the left arm side as Jackson nestled himself between his brother’s own sore limbs. Quite a familiar position for the two, honestly. Upon unzipping his fly, shimmying down his jeans, and fishing out the beautiful member from its fabric prison, I wrapped my hungry lips around the head. Jasper made sure to voice an appreciated moan or two as my tongue joined in. I went on to do the standard tender strokes and ball fondling as I went down on him. I even heard three of my favorite noises when the tongue lapped beneath him; my brother’s breathy moans, my slurping on his dogcock, and additionally, his wagging tail swishing and thrashing against the couch cushions like faint drums.

We knew our positions well. Jasper mostly topped while I mostly bottomed. It didn’t mean we weren’t keen on trying new things, however. During our early years of experimentation, I only gave him blowjobs and he received them, yet didn’t cross over into handjobs and a switching until months later. Neither of us complained about the other, but nothing did make me feel more at peace than feeling protected by my twin’s big paws and strong arms blanketed around me as I let him fuck me. If anything, the positions chosen allowed for my expertise to flourish. With enough routine, research, and oral exercise since our relationship started, I could easily make Jasper cum within minutes of sucking him off.

I practiced a few more bobbing flexes, and my maw became too much for the pent-up dalmatian to handle, leading to him grabbing my ears and shoving me down further on his dogcock as I swallowed each spurt. All without spilling a single drop on our furniture, much to my twin’s delight. Once Jasper let go of my ears and I pulled up off him, I kissed his deflated, spent member and rested my nose alongside it as it lay against his torso. We breathed in and out together until the both of us could form cohesive sentences.

“Let’s get cleaned up,” I proposed.

Jasper snickered down at me, “And this time, we’ll be thorough.”

“So that Virgil won’t smell us so badly?”

“So that Virgil won’t smell us so badly,” he confirmed, “and we won’t be evicted right away.”

As much as I yearned to laugh, I couldn’t. Within the hour, we were going straight into the den of the lion. Er, the harlequin hare.

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Being scared inside the same building you lived in didn’t really bother us as much. Back home in Crossroads City, me and Jasper practically spent our childhoods walking on eggshells around our father. Any moment, he could be interrogating us about our grades, our performance on a pop quiz, the mood of a math final, or what we wore to school. It didn’t stop unless we brought along friends to the house during our father’s ‘family dinners’, a bi-weekly event where we pretended to be a normal family, but danced around certain topics. The old canine knew better than to be angry or neurotic around our classmates. To Jackson Sr. we represented him to younger people and the other spoiled rich kids in our school. We needed to be our best, period.

Those same feelings of wary shame and cautious quiet gripped me as I followed Jasper downstairs. We wore identical t-shirts and jeans recently cleaned from a previous trip to the laundry room. Much like that communal place, the bottom floor seemed vacant. The evening hours meant residents were either still working a late shift or busy eating their dinners. Not us though. We went straight for the main office door, which stood facing the side of the elevator, the latter currently ajar as voices echoed into the empty lobby.

“Didn’t you hear what I said, Mrs. Laurinburg?” Virgil’s voice broke through the shouting. “I’ve already heard your concerns, but I’m not gonna advocate harassing my own paying tenants. Now leave, or so help me, the next time you’ll visit this office is when I’m cancelling your—”

“Those two Dalmatians are carriers of sin, Virgil!” A shrill voice could be heard.

“Oh shit,” Jasper hissed as he grabbed my paw. “It’s Mrs. Laurinburg.”

My twin pulled us away to hide behind the concrete column encasing the elevator, watching as a seventy-something chipmunk in Goodwill clothes angrily stomped—or rather, waddled like a penguin—out of the office as Virgil glared knives into her back. Then, he sighed and still left the office door ajar, likely for us.

“What’re we even doing?” I whispered. “I thought you didn’t care what others think?”

“Not when our landlord will be watching what I say or do,” he replied in an equally soft hush. “That senile bitch has been stalking me since everyone found out.”

“She has?” I asked a little too disbelievingly. “I thought she was only being verbal.”

“That too,” Jasper groaned, “She’s been trying to stalk me too though. Just this morning, she tried chasing me with her cane, and now I’ll be a little tempted to hit back…”

Probably unwisely, I ignored his comment. Instead, I silently waited with him until the hunched chipmunk waddled her way to the elevator. Once it opened and closed shut, we decided to emerge from behind the column to make our way to the main office.

Virgil Smith’s workplace seemed more like a small apartment than where a landlord operated from. In fact, it gave me small flashbacks to when I first went to visit Zack during my final days on the run in Crossroads. It possessed a large desk with a desktop computer, a series of filing cabinets behind him, a tiny corner kitchen with a refrigerator, some chairs in front of the desk, plus some posters about achieving success and not being defined by your past. As we stepped in to see another desk in the corner of room, with Beatrice doing something on her phone, Virgil cleared his throat.

“Hey Bea?” The middle-aged hare asked, “Mind serving Johnson that eviction notice? I warned him once, I’m not gonna deal with him anymore.”

“Thank Christ,” Jasper mouthed to me, and I managed to hide my relieved laughter.

“Sure thing,” Beatrice stood up and grabbed her clipboard. As she hurried out of the landlord’s office, the lynx exchanged looks with us. They resembled a rare breed we’d seen from only a sliver of people in the past week: curiosity. She said nothing to us but did awkwardly clear her through before swiftly closing the door shut. We were all alone now with our landlord.

“Jackson, Jasper, may you have a seat please?” Virgil gestured to the chairs facing the desk, which he then sat behind. “There’s an elephant in the room we really need to discuss. I heard that one of you was fired from your job at the convenience store this week. Is it true?”

“Yeah, it’s true,” I exhaled, “but it wasn’t my fault.”

“Yeah! If anyone should’ve gotten fired, it was that Randy bastard,” Jasper growled.

“Randy happens to be a drinking buddy of mine,” Virgil mentioned, which instantly quieted my blockheaded brother well enough. “I’m not gonna dance around it, so I’ll just ask right now: have you two committed incestuous acts inside this building?”

“Yes,” Jasper was the first to immediately speak. “We have.”

Virgil Smith visibly did his best to remain stoic as he stared at us. He didn’t show enough disgust to have me worried about going for his phone or informing us we had a week to move our belongings from our apartment. Rather than that, the harlequin hare straightened in his seat as me and Jasper braced ourselves for the worst.

“Has it been consensual since you two…well, started this?”

A startled noise emitted from the backs of our throats. Confused at first, we immediately exchanged nods with him.

Virgil looked at me, “Jackson, does Jasper ever abuse for force you to do—”

“No!” I leaned forward in disgust at him and at the idea that Jasper of all people would ever do such horrible things to me, and that I’d go along with it. “No, we’re not abusing each other, Virgil. We’re never abusive to anyone or each other.”

“Good, good,” he sighed before glancing between us. “Is this the reason then that you moved all the way from Utah then? Your family didn’t approve, and you wanted to get as far away from them as you could?” He didn’t wait for our responses, which was evident in our faces. “I know the feeling. I’ve had some…family troubles myself, but that was then and this is now.”

“Are you gonna evict us or tell us your entire soap opera life story?”

I frowned at my brother but didn’t say anything while Virgil stifled a deep chuckle.

“Let me be a little honest here,” Virgil told us frankly, his ears partly splayed as he held a stoic gaze that reminded me once again of Zack. “I’ve been hearing some nasty things about you two since the start of this week. None of them are good. In fact, I was planning to inform the police what was going on inside one of my own apartments…”

Jasper held my paw in a death grip out of view from the rabbit. In these crucial moments, I felt like the safe haven we worked so hard to find for ourselves was crumbling down. Whatever was in store for us, however, we knew it wouldn’t be the end. If it meant being evicted so we wouldn’t be forced to return out West, so be it.

“…then I reconsidered it, and talked to my lawyer,” he continued. “New Jersey statutes say that incest is legal between two consenting adults. You’re adults, you’re consenting, definitely not be making babies with birth defects anytime soon,” he sighed, “and you haven’t given me any reason to think you’re a danger to anyone in the Atlantica so far.”

“Can’t say the same for our neighbors,” Jasper mentioned.

“I’ve already seen it on the cameras, by the way,” Virgil clasped his paws on the desk, “so if you want to press any charges on those brats, I’ll be more than happy to turn it over as evidence too. Then again, I don’t think you’re interested in giving the police a peek into your personal lives either, right?”

“That’s correct,” I spoke up warily. “Why? Do you have a brother—”

“No, no, I’m a single cub,” Virgil waves his paws dismissively, “Let’s just say I’ve been around this world long enough to know the law doesn’t protect everyone. Long as you two keep your noses clean, don’t cause trouble, and keep your sinning against nature to yourselves, I’m not gonna judge you. Just pay your rent on time and don’t wreck the place, okay?”

He offered us each a paw. After seeing Jasper hesitantly shake it, I did the same.

“Thank you, Virgil.”

“Yeah, thanks, Virgil.”

“No problem,” the older hare crossed his black-and-white arms. “You’re both good kids, so stay out of trouble. Oh, and Jackson? If you want, I can give you a few names and numbers for some people I know with job openings. No promises though, so don’t slack off.”

“Sure!” I excitedly wagged my tail as he handed me some business cards. “Thank you!”

He smiled faintly. “Anytime, kid.”

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We journeyed up the elevator to our apartment floor feeling lighter than air. It was nice while it lasted. Jasper wouldn’t quit holding my paw and smiling ear-to-ear as our tails wagged in tandem. Between me losing my job, our neighbors finding out about us, the harassment campaign, and not being hired for multiple job positions, this felt like an eye in the storm. Like I said though, it felt nice while it lasted.

No sooner did we exit onto our floor did a creeping feeling fill my gut. A resident we recognized as our noisy next-door neighbor Johnson—or rather, our soon-to-be-ex neighbor—stormed past us while gripping his eviction notice in his paws. He muttered angrily at himself, but not before shoulder-striking Jasper and flipping us the bird.

“Fuck you too, asshole!” He snarled at the peeved leopard, who ignored us for the elevator. Jasper turned to me as I let go of him. “Seriously, I hope his next landlord tosses that guitar and those fuckin’ speakers into the Atlantic. He’s been nothing but annoying since—”

“Hey, Jasper?” I interrupted him as my eyes fell on someone in front of our door.

“What?” He turned to see none other than Mrs. Laurinburg herself. “Fuck me…”

We immediately caught her attention. “You!” She pointed a wrinkled, half-furry finger in our direction in the hallway. “Repent, boys! You need penance for being perversions of God!”

“Go suck the Lord’s dick,” Jasper snapped. The horrified gasp from the elderly chipmunk almost mirrored mine, minus the visible dentures and my wrinkles being nonexistent yet. We stepped forward and yet she refused to budge in the narrow hallway, instead blocking us from leaving her sight. “Look, we’ve been having a stressful night. We’re going into our home, so get out of the way, ya senile, bitchy old cu—”

I quickly clamped my brother’s muzzle shut. Mrs. Laurinburg didn’t move aside. A different thought came to mind as I said, “One call, and Virgil will end your lease, ma’am.”

That single threat did the trick. She didn’t stop us from storming past her and hastily unlocking her door. When the chipmunk did start shouting at us again, we’d already clamped our door shut in her face.

We waited until she left before I asked the obvious: “Why did you have to threaten her like that there? Virgil told us he’s on our side and won’t tolerate—”

“Relax, I ain’t getting into fights,” Jasper rubbed his snout from when I’d been gripping it a little too close. He frowned at me, or rather the world at large outside. “I’m just showing them that we’re not gonna keep letting these fuckers keep us down. If they want war, we can—”

“—straight to Virgil, like he told us,” I disrupted his train of thought. “Jasper, I get what you’re going for, I do. But there’s a difference between standing up for us and calling old ladies insulting slurs like that!”

“She deserves it for making our lives Hell,” he argued. “What we’re doing ain’t legal here, so why should she and everyone else in this building give a fuck anyhow?”

“The last thing we need is to keep antagonizing them though,” I further argued to the other dalmatian. “This isn’t like Dad, bro. These people are our neighbors. They’re looking for any reason to call the cops. We don’t want that and find out what happens, do we?”

“…ugh, no,” Jasper shook his muzzle, then sighed before looking me earnestly in the eye. “Whatever. If she keeps this up, I’ll go straight to Virgil.” His two beautiful orbs then narrowed into a glare that turned to the door. “Touch us though or go after you or me like those punks did the other day, and I’ll give them a real reason to call the cops on us.”

“Only if we need to defend ourselves, okay?” I gingerly pulled him into a hug, which he gladly returned while rubbing circles into the shoulder blades along my back. He numbly nodded, so I kissed his cheek. “You wanna go watch some reruns on the TV? Evening news might be on in an hour…”

“Sure, sure,” Jasper murmured boredly, but did still smile at me. “Can we take our clothes off first? I really wanna be naked right now…”

I smirked at the other dog. “Only if you promise to cuddle me under the blanket.”

“Deal,” he smirked back.