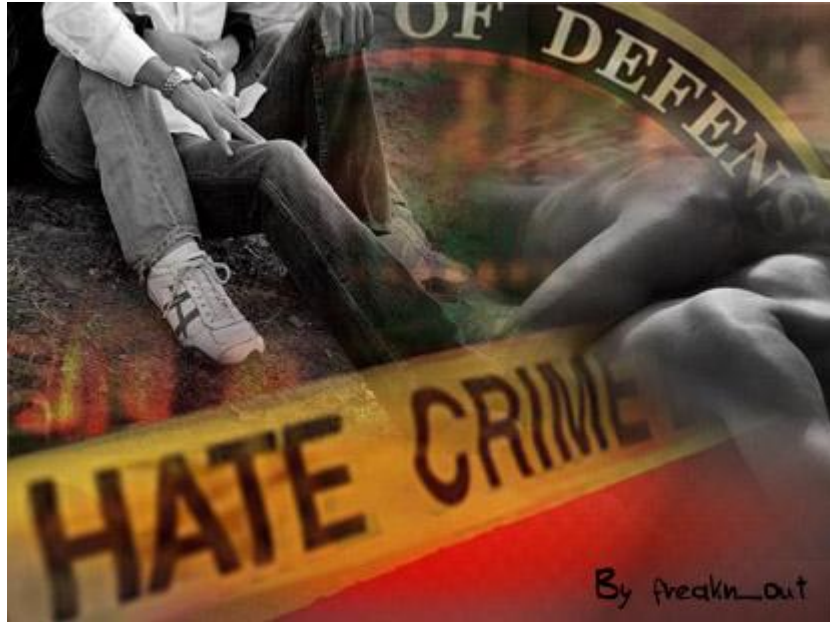


Hate crime:



The boys get a new neighbour: *"What's the matter?" Rolling his head against Jensen shoulder, Jared stares into the fireplace, "I ran into our new next-door neighbour Apparently he's got a problem with gays."* "Yeah?" Jensen's arms tighten, *"At least we can forget the housewarming gift."*

8,000 words, PG-13, hurt/comfort, schmoop, established relationship, hurt!Jensen, AU

Jared's feet pound the ground steadily in a constant, soothing rhythm. The air is crisp, his breaths condensing before him in tiny puffs, and the light's just creeping in. This is his favourite time of the day: streetlamps still on, park still quiet despite the various other early risers and everything smelling so clean and fresh. Harley and Sadie run beside him, both relishing the stretching of their muscles, even though Sadie's not as young as she used to be.

"Nearly there, girl. Nearly there." He pauses at a water fountain, drenching himself and shaking his head wildly. After the dogs have slurped up enough, he sets off again.

By the time they reach his street, Sadie's sending glares in his direction, but he knows she'll be up for another run by the time tomorrow comes. His steps falter a bit when a moving van passes him, and he nearly crashes into Jack.

"Morning, Jared."

“Heya, Jack.” He grins at the older guy, slowing down to pet the gorgeous Labrador that Harley’s been crushing on since he was a pup, “Hey, Jesse.”

He pulls to a halt when they reach his front lawn, leaning backwards, trying to slow his breathing. His shirt is drenched and he probably stinks.

“Hey, Kathleen,” he waves at the little old lady seated on her front porch.

“Morning, hun.”

“New neighbours moving in, huh?”

She nods, taking another bite of her toast, “I reckon.”

“Have you met them?”

“No, not yet. Are we still on for tomorrow morning?”

“Of course.”

“Now, wear gloves this time, no point in gettin’ yer hands mucked up.”

Jared grins, “Okay.”

Across the street, the moving van nearly runs over the signpost and Jared moves forward to help. Once the van’s safely been directed into the parking bay, a good-looking man steps out.

“Hey, man. Thanks so much!”

“No problem, you the new owner?”

The man nods, glancing at the house, “Yeah, I am.”

“Huh, welcome to the neighbourhood. I’m Jared Padalecki, I live just next door.”

The man grasps his hand, “Ted Bourne.”

“Cool, so... you need any help moving in?”

“Oh, no, it’s alright, I got some help.”

“Sure, okay. Well, if you change your mind, you know where to find me.”

“I appreciate it. ‘s nice to meet you.”

“You too,” Jared heads up his front steps.

“God bless.”

*

After pouring the dogs a few galleons of water, Jared downs a litre himself and heads upstairs. As he enters the bedroom, he grins at the dozing figure, “You ever gonna get out of bed?”

Jensen groans, his eyes squeezing shut as Jared pulls open the blinds, “What time is it?”

“Time to get up.”

Sighing like it’s the end of the world, Jensen rolls his legs over the side, the blankets slipping down his naked chest, “Do I have to?”

Pressing a soft kiss to his boyfriend’s nose, Jared grins, “Yes, you have to.”

As he brushes his teeth, he gurgles, “W’ve sgonby nushouswarmnpresheent.”

Jensen nudges him out the way so he can start shaving, “Yes, of course ‘moushmuushounmen’.

Poking him in the shoulder with the butt end of his toothbrush, Jared gives him a foamy grin before spitting, “I said, we’re going to have to get another housewarming present.”

“Oh, and why is that?”

Nudging Jensen out the way so he can steal his shaving cream, Jared replies, “New neighbour moved in next door.”

“Oh,” Jensen drags the razor along his jaw, “When was that?”

“Just now, moving van and all.”

“Huh. What’s he like?”

“Ah, he was okay, I guess.”

“Cool. Now get in the shower, you stink!”

“Jerk, you love my musky smell and ya know it.”

Jensen just catches his eye in the mirror and they grin as they continue shaving.

*

When Jensen steps out of the house, he waves at the two men unloading a couch from the van, “Hey, new neighbours, right? I’m Jensen.”

Once Ted’s introduced himself, Jensen slides into his car and is about to pull away when Jared runs down the steps, “Dude, wait, you forgot your phone.”

Winding down the window, Jensen grins, shaking his head, “Thanks, man. Guess I just got a little excited. I’m getting married, ya know?”

A wide grin spreads across Jared’s lips and he nods, “Yeah, I did hear something about that.”

Jensen starts the car, his eyes bright, “So, you still up for lunch?”

Pretending to look uncertain, Jared squints, “HmMMM, I’ll have to check my busy schedule, you know? See if I can fit you in.”

Quickly sliding an arm around Jared’s neck, Jensen pulls him in close, “You better.” Their lips come together easily, both of them smiling into the kiss as Jared gently slides his fingers along the older man’s cheek. A loud thump makes them pull apart and Jared straightens to see their new neighbour staring at them, the forgotten couch lying on the ground. There’s something in the guy’s expression that makes Jared uneasy, but he just bangs his hand lightly on the roof of the car, waving Jensen out.

When he turns back to the neighbour, the couch has been picked up again.

“You guys sure you don’t need an extra hand?”

They just ignore him.

*

“Mom brought up grandkids again today,” Jensen calls as he sits on the bed.

“She is relentless.” Jared chuckles from the bathroom.

“Uhm...” there’s a pause that makes Jared hurry up his drying, “Maybe we should look into it.”

“Seriously?” Jared keeps his voice neutral, coming out with a towel around his waist.

“Well...” Jensen shifts a bit, “Why not? I... I mean, we’re going to be legit and all.”

Jared pulls on a pair of boxers and slides up behind Jensen, wrapping his arms around him and pressing his nose to his shoulder. After a few moments of leaning into each other, Jared murmurs softly, “We can. If you want to, course we can. It’d be amazing.”

*

“You didn’t bring gloves, did you?” Kathleen shakes her head in mock scold at Jared.

Once they’re kneeling in the garden, Jared begins digging the holes for her new geraniums, “Hey, Kathleen. How old were you when you got married?”

She laughs softly, “Barely sixteen summers.”

“Really?” Jared looks up.

“Yeah, I was barely old enough to wipe my ass, but there I was....”

“Huh...” Jared covers up the roots with fertilizer.

“Well, I had to, otherwise Charlie woulda been born a bastard.” She chuckles dryly, “Though he turned out to be a bastard anyway, so...” she hands him the shovel.

“You had a shotgun wedding, didn’t you?”

She looks up in surprise, “Yeah, I guess I did. Didn’t have much of a choice back then...” her eyes look over him fondly, “How come you askin’ me so many personal questions? Don’t tell me you got a girl.” She flicks some dirt at him.

“Ha ha, no...” he pauses for a bit, then decides to tell her. It’s not like he’s ashamed at all, in fact, he’s downright delirious with excitement, “It’s Jensen... We’re having a commitment ceremony. It’s sort of like a wedding but not legal.”

If she’s surprised at the marrying Jensen part, she doesn’t show it, “Well, what’s the point in that?”

“Well...”

“You know, kids these days.... But whatever it is, you must count me in.”

*

The lady at the counter looks like Christmas suddenly declared do-over and decided today was a good day for it. She heads towards them, grinning widely as she asks, “Can I help you two?”

“Yeah,” Jensen grins at her before pulling Jared right up to the counter, “Do you have anything that’s simple, but not too simple, if that makes any sense?”

If anything her grin only widens, “Are you two having a wedding?”

The younger man ducks his head slightly, blushing, “It’s just a small commitment ceremony.”

Jensen nudges him with his elbow, “Yeah, after three years I finally got this guy to commit.”

“Well, I…” Jared turns his gaze to the display.

“That’s so great.” She clasps her hands together, “Two people. Together. In love.”

“Yeah…” Jared scratches his head, “can we have a look at those ones, please?”

*

“Nice one, Alex! Do you see the difference in the follow through?” Jared grins at his laughing nephew and tosses the ball again, “Come on, let’s drag Jenny inside to make us some food before your daddy arrives, how’s that sound?”

“Awesome!”

“Hey! I heard that,” Jensen calls from the stoop, pretending to be offended. But when Jared reaches a hand down, he grasps it easily, and allows the younger man to pull him up. After giving Jared’s shoulder a quick squeeze, he ruffles the kid’s hair and opens the door, “Alright, ya munchkins. Let’s see what we have.”

None of them notice the cold eyes staring through the neighbour’s window.

*

As Jared steps up onto the porch, it’s still dark. Wiping the sweat from his forehead, he squints at what’s gotten the dogs so worked up.

“Oh, hey. Sorry ‘bout the dogs, they’re actually really sweet and -”

“You’re going to hell.” Ted says coldly. “You know that, don’t you?”

Jared blinks at the man.

“Christ didn’t die on the cross so you could go shit all over yer soul with yer sick, perverse lifestyle.”

“Excuse me?” Jared takes a step towards the man, feeling fury bubbling beneath his skin.

“You should watch yer back.”

“Are you threatening me?” Jared almost wishes this guy would do something so that he can knock him out. It would be so satisfying.

“Just read the bible. Go get yerself some God is all I’m sayin’.”

“Oh, that’s all you’re saying?”

The man steps down from the porch, walking just out of range of the dogs, for which he’s fortunate because Jared wouldn’t raise a finger to stop them from attacking this guy.

*

Jensen tosses the game control down with a fake cry, “No!”

Alex grins, waving his hands up and down, “Yes, yes, yes! I win!”

“Oh, you little...” Jensen pulls the kid into a playful noogie and begins tickling him. They both jump up when Jared opens the door.

“Jare!” Alex tackles him and he folds over pretending to be winded for a few seconds before he grabs Alex and tosses him over his shoulder. Jeff comes through from the kitchen and smirks, “Hey, man.” Jared nods at his brother, trying to keep the smile on his lips. Truth is, that stint outside really unnerved him.

After Alex has been ordered to go pack up, Jeff comes over, “So, you guys never told me how shopping went.”

Jensen laughs, “We ordered the rings, if that’s what you mean.”

“Guess you can’t back out now.”

“Yeah,” they grin at each other and wave Jeff and Alex off.

Jensen heads over to the couch, grabbing a couple of beers on the way. When Jared follows him, he shifts to bracket the younger man between his legs. Leaning back against his boyfriend’s chest, Jared lets out a deep breath and tries to calm down.

Jensen, sensing that something’s wrong, doesn’t even complain about him being all sweaty, instead, he slides his hand over the younger man’s chest and rests his palm over Jared’s rapidly beating heart.

“What's the matter?”

Rolling his head against Jensen shoulder, Jared stares into the fireplace, “I ran into our new next-door neighbour.... Apparently he’s got a problem with gays.”

“Yeah?” Jensen’s arms tighten, “At least we can forget the housewarming gift.”

*

That night, Jensen crawls up the bed to where Jared’s reading and just looks at him. Despite his best efforts, Jared can’t keep a straight face and, after reading the same line twenty-seven times, he gives up. With a laugh, he rolls onto his side, “What?”

Reaching out to steal the book, Jensen smiles slightly, “Nothing.”

After the book’s been discarded, Jared pulls his boyfriend closer, skimming his fingers along the dip of Jensen’s side, resting his hand on his waist.

“I’ll make you a deal,” Jared whispers, tugging Jensen right up against him.

“Oh? And what’s that?”

“We’ll look into the baby adoption process and see if we can adopt, but only if we take a few parental classes first.”

Jensen looks like someone just gave him scientific facts that Santa does exist, “Really?”

“Yeah, I mean... We love kids. But I just want to make sure we do it right, you know, so we don’t screw up or anything.”

Jensen laughs against his cheek, “Okay, you big sap. We’ll do it right.” He kisses his way towards Jared’s lips, pressing the younger man down on the mattress. Jared grins up at him, hands holding Jensen by his waist, slowly curling round to pull him flush on top of him.

*

“Oh, shit. Jen, can you take the dogs out quickly? I need to call up Chad, he sent me an S.O.S. so I’ve got no choice. And the dogs are getting all hyped up already.”

Jensen looks up from where he’s been trying to figure out how the brand new juicer works, “Sure, man, Anything serious?”

“Oh, no, no way. It’s only when he uses the double S.O.S that I start getting worried.”

“M’kay. See you soon.”

Jared flips open his phone, “What is it, asshole?”

“Hey, hey, hey. Why the foul language? You might make me think you aren’t glad to hear from me.”

Jared grins into the phone, “The last time you called me, it was to get me to bail you outta jail, so sorry if I ain’t singing songs about you.”

“You wound me, man. You wound me deep.”

Letting out a sigh, Jared tries again, “Okay, spit. What is it?”

“You remember that time, when I said I was in a small space and needed to get out? And you remember that time when I said money just might help me get out faster? And you were an awesome friend and came to get me? That’s where I am.”

Jared lets out a pained groan, “You’re in jail, aren’t you?”

“No... well, yeah.... It wasn’t my fault, really, she looked like she was over eighteen, she said she was over eighteen, and she was fucking hot, man.”

“Arh, shit. Fine, fine, you’re an asswipe, I hope you know that.”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re an awesome friend, Jay. I’d kiss your ass if I didn’t know Jenny’d beat me ten ways to Sunday.”

“That’s if I didn’t beat you ten ways to Sunday myself. I’ll be there in about ten.”

He hangs up and calls his boyfriend.

“Hey,” Jensen answers on the third ring, “You okay?”

“Yeah, just Chad. Anyway, I have to go bail him again, I’ll see you at home in about an hour, okay?”

“Sure, tell him he’s a complete douche and I’m going to kick his ass the next time he shows up.”

“Will do. Hey...”

“What is it?”

“I love you.” He doesn’t think he’ll ever stop getting the wave of emotion that bubbles up each time he says those words.

But it’s nothing compared to the feeling he gets when Jensen laughs, slightly breathlessly, and replies, “Yeah, love you too. Now get over there and do some Chad-whumping.”

*

After dumping Chad at his crappy hotel room, Jared heads back home, his eyes itchy with exhaustion. Jensen's not back yet, which is a bit weird, but Jared heads to the fridge for some orange juice.

That's when he hears the scratching and soft whining sound coming from the backdoor. He kneels down to pet at his pups, looking around for Jensen to appear, but something wet is matted in Sadie's hair and both the animals are scared. Jared pulls his hand back to see red streaks.

"Jensen? Jensen!"

He keeps ringing Jensen's number but it just rings and rings, eventually going through to voicemail. The pavement blurs beneath him as he runs the route towards the park, searching for any signs of... he doesn't even want to think about it.

Just as he passes the pond, something catches his eye in the reflection, and he races around the water, his heart skipping a beat at the sight before him.

Jensen's motionless, curled up on his side. Beside him, lies a bloody baseball bat. Jared's knees scrape as he falls beside the older man, pulling his head up onto his lap, "No, God. Jensen, Jen. Please, Jen, wake up."

A faint moan escapes Jensen's bloodied lips and Jared chokes on his relief, "Fuck, Jensen. What happened?"

Jensen's fingers curl up in Jared's shirt, leaving red patches against the pale material. "Jare...." his head lolls to the side as he falls unconscious.

"No, no," Jared cups the older man's face, pleading with him to wake up, then he spots the discarded phone lying beside his boyfriend and calls for an ambulance.

*

"And there was no one in your house when you arrived?" the officer looks sympathetic.

"No."

"And can you think of anyone who might have done this?"

His first thought is, 'do I know of anyone who would want to take a bat and beat Jensen half to death? Who the fuck do you think we are?' but then he remembers that things have changed, "Yes.... Our neighbour. He moved in a few weeks ago."

"Okay, thank you."

Jared still has the blood-stained handprints on his shirt, still has blood-smears down his cheek, his hands, his pants. But he doesn't even notice.

The waiting room is the worst kind of torture Jared can imagine. Just not knowing is like hell in his mind.

He thinks his mom and dad are here. Or maybe it's Jensen's mom and dad. He doesn't know. He doesn't care. All he can see is the pain in Jensen's eyes as he looked up.

"Jensen Ackles' family?"

Jared begins to stand up, but she ushers him down, taking a seat opposite, "He's very critical. He's in a coma. Now, there's a possibility his back may be broken. But we won't know for sure until we've finished with these x-rays. What concerns us most right now, are the head injuries that he's received. He has a large fracture at the back of his skull, that's causing fluid to build up in his brain. Now, we're optimistic that the pressure from his brain will subside soon, but until then we'll just have to wait and see."

Jared nods, taking it all in, "I want to see him."

"Of course."

*

Jensen's barely recognisable beneath the mouthpiece they have on him. White bandages wrap around his torso and arms. One banding around his head. There's also a neck brace and various tubes run through into his arm, one containing blood, the other containing yellowish fluid.

It hurts to see him like this, hurts so bad that Jared's not sure if he can take it. "Jen," he murmurs softly reaching for his hand.

"Mr Padalecki?"

He turns towards approaching woman, "Yes?"

She flashes her badge, "I'm Detective Fischer. How's he doing?"

He doesn't reply, but he follows her out into the passage, "Is my neighbour in jail?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"We don't have enough evidence to arrest anybody yet."

Jared breathes out through his nose, “Look, I’m telling you, he did it.”

“He has an alibi.”

“An alibi?” Jared stares at her.

“His parents.”

“And you believe them?”

She follows him to an empty room, “We really don’t have a choice at this point... You told the responding officer that he had threatened you? Did he specifically threaten you with any bodily harm?”

Jared tries to keep the prickling tears down, but he can’t stop his voice from shaking, “Not specifically, no.”

“What did he say?”

“Spouted off a bunch of crap about Jesus and God. Said I was going to hell. He’s a goddamn homophobe.”

“I know.”

“What?”

She gives him a confused look.

“I said he was a homophobe and you said you knew, how would you know?”

“We found an arrest on his record. A few years ago, he and a friend of his were caught vandalising a man’s home.”

“A gay man.”

“Yes... said that he’d been harassing them for weeks.”

“What happened?”

“Charges were dropped.”

Jared huffs an empty laugh, “Yeah, that figures.”

“Look, he’s a suspect...”

“Yeah...” he stares out the window blankly, “Well, the doctors say Jensen probably didn’t see his attacker coming, they got him from behind....”

“We’re doing the best we can.”

*

“Hey,” Jared reaches out, his hand shaking slightly as he skims it down the one bit of bare skin on Jensen’s shoulder. “Uhm...I just... I... I need you to wake up, Jen. I need you back. We’re going to start a family, Jen. We’re going to get married. It was your idea in the first place, you can’t bail on me now that you’ve got me all excited...” his breath catches, “Don’t you do that to me, man.”

*

The faces come and go, Alex, Jeff, Donna, Chad, Sherry, Alan, Gerald, Mackenzie... they all blur into one. Sometimes they try to get him to eat, sometimes they shove coffee beneath his nose. He can’t stray far from Jensen, he sleeps in the chair beside the bed and he just watches and waits.

It’s three days later that Jensen suddenly has some kind of seizure and begins shaking like crazy. Jared tries to hold him, but he can barely keep him in the bed. Nurses and doctors surround him and he finds himself being pushed out of the room.

Once he’s been told that Jensen’s stabilized, but the doctors need to do a few more tests on him, Jared leaves the hospital for the first time, heading to Ted’s.

*

“What are you doing here?” the man backs away, hosepipe still in his hand.

“Why’d you do it? Huh? Did it make you feel powerful? Did God tell you to do it?”

“What are you talking about?” Ted backs away, his face turning paler.

When the man’s back hits the wall, Jared slams him back into it, leaning right into his space. “What’s the matter, Ted? Are my gay vibes making you uncomfortable? Are you going to bash my head in with another bat?”

Ted’s eyes drop to Jared’s neck, “I don’t know what you’re talkin’ about.”

Slamming his hands into the wall beside Ted’s head, Jared leans in even further, speaking through gritted teeth into Ted’s ear, “You better pray to God that Jensen makes it through okay. ‘Cause if he’s not here to restrain me, you might just find your choices limited to burial or cremation.”

Just as he's about to pull away, Jared feels something hard pressing into his leg, but before he can glance down, Ted's pulling away and running into his house.

*

"Mr Padalecki, did you and your boyfriend ever fight?"

Jared shakes his head, his eyes prickling, "Never anything big. I... I mean, occasionally I screw up the laundry or something, and that one time he locked me out the house in the rain," he smiles up at the officer, "No, we didn't really fight."

"Mr Padalecki, according to Mr Bourne, he saw you hitting Mr Ackles about a week ago, is that so?"

"What?" he squints up at her, "Are you out of your mind? Me? Hitting Jen?" he snorts, "Officer, I'm not sure if you've seen Jensen, but that dude could probably take me on any day... not that I'd tell him that of course."

"So there was no spousal abuse?"

Jared clenches his hands into fists, "I don't know what the hell kind of lies Ted's been telling you, but I would never... never hurt Jensen. I'd rather cut off my own arm."

She nods, writing something down, "Okay, then."

"Look, officer, you can't honestly think I'm a suspect? Ted's a known gay basher, don't you think it's a bit of a coincidence that there was an attack on a gay man barely weeks after he moved in?"

"Sir, as of yet, we have no solid proof, only a load of circumstantial evidence. We are doing the best we can."

"Well obviously that's not good enough! Jensen is in there," Jared points to the hospital ward, "The man I love is in there right now fighting for his life. So don't you give me all this crap about circumstantial evidence! How much more do you need?"

"I am very sorry, Mr Padalecki, I understand how difficult this must be for you. But you must realise that Mr Bourne accused you of intimidation and threatening him before his own home, do you care to explain that?"

"Intimid- oh, yeah. Well, sorry if I don't have any friendly words for the man."

"He's getting a restraining order against you."

"Against me? Yeah, that's right, 'cause I'm the one who goes around bashing people's heads in."

“Are you?”

“What?” he stares at her, “It was a sarcastic comment.”

“As you say, Mr Padalecki.”

*

With the cops sitting on their asses and the doctors keeping him from seeing Jensen, Jared decides to do some investigative work of his own.

The third window of Ted’s house slides open and he slips in easily, managing not to trip over the numerous boxes and bits of furniture. Not sure what he’s even looking for, Jared glances over at some of the picture frames, noticing that in one of them, Ted’s standing with the pastor of the Evangelistic Church. Jared’s never been to one of his services because him and Jensen usually prefer the smaller Anglican one that’s closer to their neighbourhood.

Frowning, Jared makes his way towards the computer, quickly powering it up and browsing through files. A file catches his eye, and an image pops up of a protest. An anti-gay protest. One of the people, waving the ‘Go to Hell’ sign, is Ted.”

Shutting the file, Jared opens up the web browser, scrolling through the visited sites. Stopping when he comes across something labelled, ‘P’, he nearly falls over backwards when the page loads.

Extremely graphic images of guys kissing, giving blowjobs and being fucked flitter across the page. A gay porn site, complete with a BDSM link with a guy dressed only in a leather thong.

“Jesus Christ,” Jared curses silently, wondering how Ted manages to live with himself, being a homophobic gay.

Now he realises what was pressing into his leg that time. He turns Ted on. Just the thought makes him want to hurl.

A car door slams outside, and he quickly closes everything and shuts down. He’s just managed to slide the window shut when he hears Ted entering the room.

*

After calling up the hospital to check on how Jen’s doing, and being told no visitors are allowed for the next few hours, Jared drives towards the Evangelical church, sneaking in to take a seat at the back, spotting Ted right up front.

“It is a terrible thing, sin. It breeds among us, waiting, always waiting for us to let our guard down. And when we do... it pounces, spreading through us and tainting our souls.... God hates sinners. His hand will smite down on all those who walk in the darkness! That is why we must lead the armies of the heavens and strike down those who disobey him! This is the word of God!”

“Amen,” the crowd calls.

“God’s anger is terrible, his will is strong! We must stop those sinners from tainting our lives, we must take God’s word into our hearts. Or we will be smite down in his fury!”

The rest of the service goes much the same way and by the time it’s over, Jared’s feeling queasy. He watches as the Pastor steps down from the microphone and walks over to Ted, giving the younger man a nod and they both begin walking. Jared follows behind them hidden in the masses of people.

They enter a room, one of the activity rooms, and Jared stands outside, straining his ears to hear.

“It was you, Dad. Wasn’t it?” Ted’s voice asks.

There’s a long pause before the Pastor replies, “It was God’s will. That man’s body was a gift, but he befouled it and turned his back on his maker. I had to stop him from spreading the plague. If somebody doesn’t do something, this country will be overrun by those sinners. It’s a disease, Ted. It latches on to you and before you know it, you’re cursed and going to hell.”

This time, his voice sounds choked, “Dad, you nearly killed someone.”

“I wish I had. Rid the world of one more faggot.”

“How... how could you do something like that?”

“Because they were too close to you, I saw them when I came to visit you, kissing and touching. And laughing. I knew then that I had to do, but it was too late.”

“Too late for what?”

“To save you.”

“What?”

“You’re becoming like them, aren’t you? I saw that magazine under your bed, boy. It makes me sick.”

“Dad...please...”

“No son of mine would defy God in such a way, get out.”

As soon as he hears chairs squeaking, Jared dashes around the corner, stumbling back into the mop closet.

*

He tails Ted back to his house and leaps out, “Ted, wait. Please.”

The man just hurries up his steps and Jared has to grab his arm to pull him back, “Ted, I know you didn’t do it. And I know you know your father did it.”

Ted freezes and tenses up, “I don’t know what the hell you’re talking about, but I have a restraining order out. I’m going to call the cops.”

“No, wait.” Jared follows in behind the man, shutting the door behind him, “I’m sorry about your father.”

Ted looks up from where he’s about to pick up the phone, “What?”

“I’m sorry that your father hates gays so much. I’m sorry that you had to hide who you are from him. I’m sorry that you think you’re wrong inside.” He takes a step forward, trying to work his ‘trust me’ eyes. “But you have to do something. You have to testify to the police about what you know.”

Ted’s eyes flicker between Jared and the phone, “Why would I do that?”

Going out on a limb, Jared replies softly, “Because I don’t think you’re a bad person. And because you know that Jensen didn’t deserve what happened, you know that what your father did was wrong.”

The hand falters slightly, “I don’t owe you anything.”

Something flashes in Jared’s eyes and he takes a step forward, pulling himself up to his full height, “My boyfriend is in hospital because of your father. Jensen, who I love more than anything else in the world, is hurt because of the twisted mind your father has. Sure, it wasn’t you, but you can sure as hell make sure he gets punished for it.”

Ted collapses on the couch, gaze lowered. After a few long moments of silence, he asks quietly, “What’s it like?”

“What’s what like?”

“What’s it like being loved by someone that much?” Ted rubs his eyes furiously.

Some of his anger seeping out, Jared sits down beside the man, “It... it’s... there’s nothing like it...” he smiles at Ted, getting a watery one in return, “Just... just waking up with his arms around me, just belonging, you know. Knowing he loves me as much as I love him, trusting him with everything.” Jared laughs softly, “The bastard thinks he managed to trick me into saying I’ll marry him, but I would’ve agreed anyway.”

Ted smiles wistfully, “You’re both... really lucky.... I... I wish I could just... but then my dad... he.”

“You spent your whole life trying to make him proud and you feel like you’ve let him down, don’t you?”

“Yeah... how did you....?”

“Ted, listen to me, being gay is not a curse. It’s... it’s more of a gift if anything. You don’t have to hang around with whiney girls who listen to Spice Girls and wear blood-coloured lipstick and spend all your money, so that’s a bonus.... Seriously though, your father is the one who’s let you down, what kind of a father doesn’t accept his own son? And don’t forget that he broke the law and nearly killed my boyfriend.”

Ted winces, looking lost, “What should I do?”

“Testify against your father. You know what he did was wrong and only you can help me get him the punishment he deserves.”

Jared holds his breath as he waits for Ted’s answer.

“Okay... I’ll... I’ll do it,” Ted murmurs, looking shocked at his own words.

“That’s... God, that’s great, Ted. That’s... yeah, thank you.”

Ted looks a bit brighter as Jared turns his grin on him, then he ducks his head, a deep blush spreading across his cheeks, “Jared... I...”

“Yeah, what is it?”

“I...” Ted fidgets slightly, “Could I just... could I just get one... one kiss from you... I...” he buries his head in his hands, looking mortified.

Jared blinks down at the other man for a few seconds, before he smiles softly, “Yeah, okay. One kiss.” Ted jumps as he slides his hand along the man’s smooth cheek and back into his hair, pulling him closer.

As Jared’s lips come into contact with his, Ted lets out a soft, desperate whimper, his mouth parting to allow Jared’s tongue to lick it’s way inside. Jared is gentle, knowing just

how weak in the knees his kisses make Jensen, and wanting to help Ted realise just how great being with a guy is.

When he pulls back, Ted lets out a tiny moan, his eyes tightly shut and his lips slick.

“Ted, you okay, man?”

Ted blinks his eyes open, “Ye... yeah...” he clears his throat, cheeks flushed, “Jensen’s very lucky you’re his.”

Shaking his head and laughing, Jared replies, “No way, I don’t know what he sees in me, but I sure as hell know I’m the lucky one.”

“So... I guess we’re off to the police station, then?”

*

“Hey, Lazybones. You still not deciding to grace us with your presence, hey?” Jared smiles down at his boyfriend, eyes roaming the nearly faded bruises and lingering over Jensen’s slightly parted lips.

“Well, the lawyer called today, said we have a solid case, they’re just waiting for you to wake up in case you remember anything. And the doctor’s say the pressure in your skull is decreasing, which means your brain is shrinking.” He grins, “And now that they’ve determined that your skull’s not broken, it means that you’re going to wake up soon, Jen. You’re going to fine.”

He threads his fingers through Jensen’s spiky hair and slides his hand down to rest on the older man's cheek. “You always did take forever to get out of bed.”

His joke sounds empty and hollow, but when he lays his head down lightly over Jensen’s strongly pounding heart, he feels himself relaxing and his eyes drooping shut.

*

“You look like crap, you know that?”

Jared jerks awake, eyes widening as he takes in the smile on his boyfriend’s lips. “Jen, fuck... oh, God, Jensen.” At a loss for words, Jared just lurches forward, tucking his face firmly into Jensen’s neck, holding him as if he’s afraid someone will take him away. He lets out a small sob when Jensen’s hands slide around him and hug him back.

“Shhhh, it’s okay, baby. It’s okay.”

Jared presses his nose to his boyfriend’s pulse, breathing in his scent deeply, “Fuck, Jen. Don’t you ever do that to me again.”

Letting out a low murmur of complaint when Jared pulls away, Jensen brushes a hand over his eyes, "What the hell happened? I feel like I've been used as a punching bag."

"Batting bag, actually," Jared mutters, thumbing Jensen's cheek, "The pastor of the Evangelical church took a bat to your head."

"Shit, really?"

"Do you remember anything?"

Jensen stares up at the younger man, "Chad....? Chad had called or something, you were going to pick him up?"

"Yeah."

"And the dogs were barking at something. And then... pain? Nothing else... then... then I saw you crying, there was blood?"

"Yeah," Jared leans forwards to press his lips to Jensen's forehead, "I found you."

"You always do," Jensen replies, grinning lamely.

*

"You kissed him?" Jensen sounds scandalous.

"Well... I..." Jared ducks his head, feeling guilty.

With a growl, Jensen snakes his arm around the younger man's neck, yanking him down for a brutal kiss. Biting Jared's bottom lip, he pulls Jared flush on top of him. "Mine, you hear me? No one else, not even insecure guys in denial, you get that?"

Jared grins into the kiss, "Guess you'll have to make an honest man out of me and marry me quickly."

"Oh, you have no idea," Jensen pinches his ass and smirks at the yelp, "As soon as I'm out of this pit hole, you and me are going to get something straight."

"Oh, yeah? And what's that?"

"That you," Jensen mouths along the younger man's jaw, "are out of bounds."

"So not even my Momma can kiss me?" Jared grins cheekily.

"That's right. Well... maybe I should sell your kisses. How much do you think I'd get? Two cents?"

“Ass.”

*

“How’d it go?” Jensen looks up eagerly as Jared enters the room, reaching up for a kiss.

“Really good, the jury sentenced him to twenty years in the state prison.”

“Wow, that much, huh?” Jensen slides his hand under Jared’s shirt and up his chest, feeling the warm muscles fluttering beneath his touch.

“Yeah, bastard deserves more, but what can you do? And hey, I got even better news...”

“Hmmm, what’s that?” Jensen looks up at him through his eyelashes, tugging him even closer.

“Somebody gets to go home today.”

His whole face lights up, “Really? Oh, that’s awesome ’cause you seriously stink. When was the last time you were at home?”

“Ha ha. And now Chad has even more leverage over us for feeding the dogs all this time.”

“Shit, he’s going to be impossible.”

“Yeah... come on, you ready to get out of here? Jeff got you some clothes from the house, said they looked like midget pants so he thinks they’re yours.”

“Hilarious, you and your family of long-legged freaks.”

“You love this long-legged freak, don’t you?” Jared makes kissy faces at him and smooches him wetly on the cheek, “Come on, ya midget, let’s get you out of here.”

*

“Jay...”

“Hmmm?” Jared blinks his eyes open, feeling Jensen’s arms wrapped tightly around him, “What is it, Jen?” He strokes his hand down the quivering back, “Jen, you okay?”

Jensen presses his nose firmly into Jared’s neck, his voice a mere whisper, “Jay, can we move? I... I mean, I know how long you’ve lived here and all, but I...”

Curling into his boyfriend, Jared presses a soft kiss to his lips, “Jen, we can move to Alaska if you want.”

“Really?” Jensen pulls back in surprise.

“Yes, really. What, you think I’d mind?”

“Well...” Jensen’s cheeks turn pink so Jared just folds him against his chest again.

Then he remembers something. Pulling away from Jensen, he throws his legs over the edge, running a soothing hand through Jensen’s spikes, “Just wait a second.”

A box had arrived while Jensen was still in the hospital and Jared had been too worried to take any notice, but he knows exactly what’s inside. Peeling away the cardboard, he pulls out two tiny, silk boxes and heads back to the bedroom.

Kneeling down before a confused Jensen, he flicks the one open, “Jensen Ross Ackles, I know we’ve both said yes, but I want to do this right. Will you marry me?”

Jensen’s grinning so widely, his cheeks feel like splitting open. Lunging forward off the bed he knocks Jared over and presses him down against the carpet, holding himself up with a hand on either side of the brunette’s head. Lowering himself so his lips brush over Jared’s with every word, he murmurs, “Does this make me the girl?”

Jared laughs as he flips them over, thighs straddling the older man’s hips, pressing Jensen down beneath him, “Is that a ‘yes’?”

“Yes, you sentimental bastard. Now get a move on and kiss me.”

“Only if you put on the ring first.”

“Only if you put yours on as well.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

They grin at each other and slip on the rings.

*

“So, wait, let me get this straight, is this a wedding or a small commitment ceremony?” Kathleen looks genuinely confused, “I’d hate to see what you call a large commitment ceremony.”

Jared grins over at Jensen, “Well, let’s not label it as anything. It just is.”

Chad heads over, slapping Jensen on the back, "Gotta hand it to you, Jenny-boy. I didn't think there was anyone who could get Jay to settle down. Dude's got a heart bigger than Texas and you shoulda seen him sharing it in college."

Blushing to his toes, Jared hisses, "Dude!"

Jensen grins as he tugs him to his side, wrapping a strong arm around his lover, "Well, too bad for them."

A voice comes from behind, "Too bad indeed. My, my. Just look at you boys, I always said you'd be perfect together."

"Mom," Jensen groans, "You said that about all my boyfriends."

She fiddles with his hair, "Well, this time I was right."

Just as she's about to mess with Jared's hair, Alan comes over, winking at them over her head as he pulls her towards the dance floor.

"Hey, guys!" they turn to see Ted coming over in a suit. Jensen tenses slightly and tightens his arm around Jared. "Congratulations, this is awesome! Oh, this is Larry, he... uhm..." Ted glances over at Jared, blushing, "He's my boyfriend."

Jensen relaxes and shakes Larry's hand firmly, still keeping a firm hold of Jared, though.

That's when the priest comes over, "We'd like to start the ceremony, if that's okay?"

"Sure, great! Guess we're up."

Jensen squeezes Jared's arm reassuringly, "Relax, they're all here for us, they just happy for us, 'sall."

"Yeah... you're right." Jared relaxes with a sheepish grin.

*

"I now pronounce you husband and husband. Bound in holy unity, to have and to hold, through sickness and through health, till death do you part."

Jared grins as their lips come together, laughing as Jensen growls, "And if you dare try to flip me backwards, I will toss you into the pool."

"You wouldn't," Jared murmurs, sucking Jensen's bottom lip into his mouth.

"Oh, wouldn't I?"

“Nope, cause you love me.”

“Humpf.”

*

“So Jensen...”

“Hmmm?”

“Now that we’ve moved into our new house and all, what do you say we go check out the parental classes?”

His husband looks up, eyes shining brightly, “You serious? Now?”

“Well, why not?”

*

“Jay?”

“Hmmm?”

“I love you.”

“Shhhh, you’re waking Bradley up.”

“You sure you don’t have a uterus, Jay?”

Jared grins, “Well, if I did, don’t you think you would have noticed?”

“I’m sure you were a mother bear in your previous life. ‘s the only thing that makes sense.”

“Ha ha.”

Jensen presses a kiss to the baby’s forehead, then presses a kiss to his big baby’s forehead, grinning as Jared huffs.

Shifting his legs so Jensen can lie down in between and then laying Bradley down on the older man’s chest, Jared pulls them both in close, encircled in his arms.

“Jen...?”

“Hmmm?”

“I do love you, you know that?”

“Course I do, now sshhhhhh, you’re waking Bradley up.”
