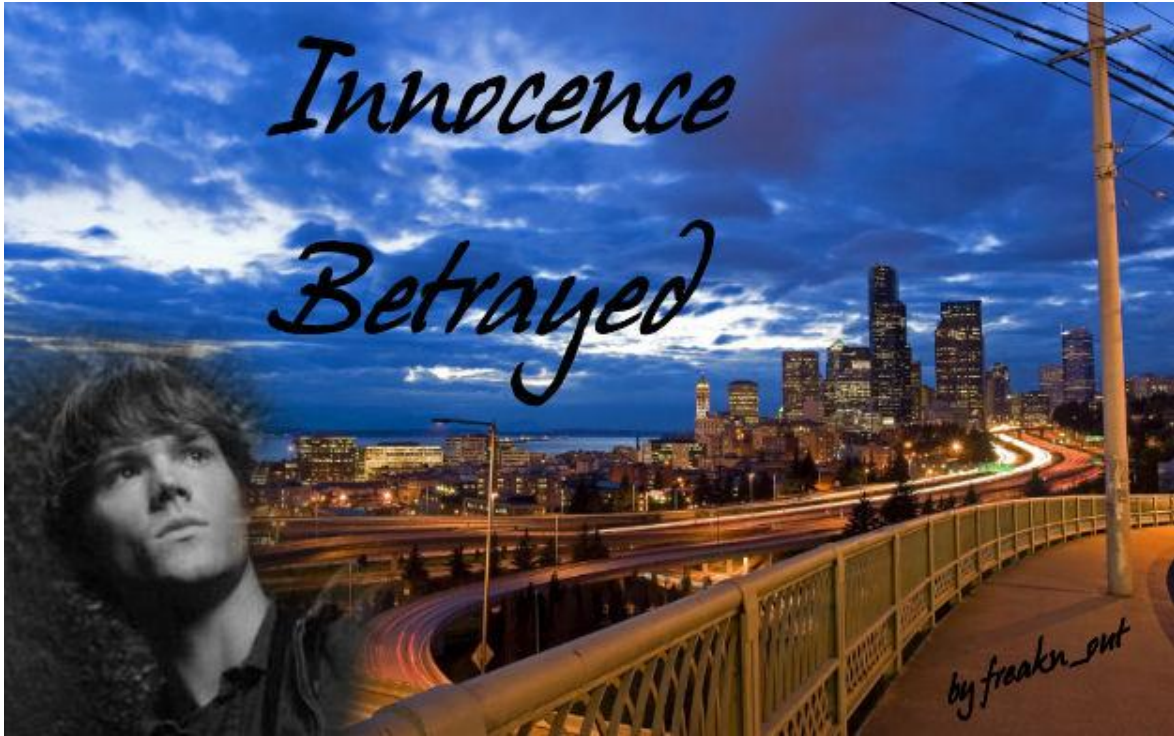


Innocence betrayed:



When Jensen makes the biggest mistake of his life, can Jared forgive him?: *Then Chris moved. The blow was sharp and hard, right across the cheek and glancing off his nose, sending him stumbling sideways. He made no move to defend himself, he welcomed the blow, it was a physical pain, something other than the emotional hell he'd been living in all night.*

5,000 words, NC-17, angst, hurt!Jared

Jared grinned happily at the shop assistant, taking the bag gently from her. "Thanks so much, Lucy. You have no idea how lost I would've been if it weren't for you."

"Oh, nonsense. You're young and in love, I don't think a stupid ring would've stopped you."

"Yeah... well. I hope you're right."

Waving goodbye, he pocketed the tiny package and headed out the shop, a new bounce in his step.

His life was good. No, his life was awesome.

He had everything he could ever want, everything he'd ever dreamed of and more. Much, much more.

Loving family, loyal friends, adoring dogs, a good contract with an amazing show, a comfy house with a pool and a garden, but best of all... he had Jensen.

Jensen, whom he loved more than life itself; Jensen, who was always grumpy before his caffeine shots; Jensen, who had tumbled on top of him that fateful morning and decided to use him as a pillow; Jensen who had then curled around him and murmured – in his sleep daze – how much he loved Jared.

Since then, life had been like a fairytale, except with more PlayStation and manliness.

Tonight was the big night. The night. The night he'd been blabbering non-stop about to his mom, Chad and Meg, even Chris and Steve, for the past month or so. The different reactions had been like this, "Oh, honey! I'm so happy for you! The whole family's here, let me just put you on speaker." Chad's had been, "What the fuck took you so long to grow a pair?" Meg's had been, "Ooooh, that's hot!" Chris had just whooped that Steve owed him twenty bucks.

Yeah, everyone was in on it, even Tom, who was currently working up in Nebraska for some reason, had sent him a smiley face that morning for luck. Jensen, of course, was the only one who didn't know.

Jared had it all planned out: they were going out to an awesome restaurant, the place that sold the best steaks in the country. While there, they'd have a normal meal and head home, Jensen not realising anything. But when they got home and into the bedroom, Jared would wait until Jensen was lying down before switching the lights off.

That's where the fun began.

Now, all he needed was to find a ladder that he could somehow lug all the way up the stairs. And some glow-in-the-dark ink, of course.

He knew he'd just made the biggest mistake of his life. He knew it the second he blinked his eyes open, the second he saw the unfamiliar ceiling and smelt the unfamiliar scent of cigarettes.

Jared never smoked.

As he moved, a sharp pain hit him in the temple and he groaned loudly. A male arm slid around him, constricting him in ways Jared never did. Bile rose up in his throat as he pulled away.

“Where you going, baby?”

He didn't even look. He didn't want to. “I'm not your baby.”

The man let out a chuckle. It was unpleasant and sounded forced, so different to Jared's free and happy laughter. “Well, it sure seems like you were last night.”

“That was a mistake... I'm... I'm with someone.”

This time the man laughed cruelly and he caught Jensen's arm, “Well, hell. You could'a fooled me. It doesn't seem like he means very much to you.”

“You shut the hell up! Just... just shut the hell up. He's everything to me.”

“Okay, okay. If you say so,” his voice couldn't be more skeptical if he tried.

Yanking up his pants and fumbling around for his shirt, Jensen picked up his cell phone from the floor. Seventeen missed calls, seven text messages and nine voicemails. Masochistically, he flipped it open and listened to the last one, “Jensen, Jen? Come on, man. Pick up, please?” the younger man's breath hitched, “Jen, please just let me know you're okay. Let me come pick you up. Did something happen? Fuck... you're really scaring me. The cops say I can't report you missing till you been gone forty-eight hours, what kind of fucked up rule is that? Just... please, Jen. Please.”

His head began a mantra of, “Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry,” as he headed for the door, leaving the disgusting scent of sex behind him.

He felt like something that'd just crawled out of the sewers, filthy and unworthy. Unworthy of everything good that'd ever happened to him. Namely, Jared.

The beautiful, gorgeous, sexy, funny, adorable, loyal, smart, loving man that he'd stood up yesterday. They were supposed to have dinner. Jared had been so excited. Jensen had been too busy downing shots, over what – he can't even remember it was so trivial. Maybe it was the scene with Jared and Genevieve; maybe it was the stress of the job, maybe it's because he's a stupid, fucking asshole who doesn't give a shit about anyone else.

Maybe it's just all of the above.

His head hurt, his body felt bruised, unused to the rough handling that he'd gotten the previous night, so different to the reverent care and strength of Jared's touch. He didn't know what possessed him, but he just needed to go home. He knew he didn't deserve to be within ten feet of it, but his brain wasn't functioning.

Rolling out of the car and landing straight in the mud was more like what he deserved, but he hadn't counted on Jared sitting on the porch. The younger man let out a soft cry and darted forwards, hoisting Jensen up into a tight, safe hug.

"No, no," Jensen shook his head, desperately trying to make Jared understand.

"Jen, Jesus Christ. Don't you ever do that again, do you know how worried I was? Shit, man, you're as pale as a ghost, what the hell happened? Come on, let's get you into the shower, you're freezing."

It's because he's so weak, that Jensen allowed himself to be led inside, that he allowed Jared to still love, so he could pretend last night had never happened.

But when Jared's careful fingers peeled off his shirt to reveal bitemarks along his chest and shoulder, the younger man froze, his face paling. "Jen...?"

Jensen turned his head away from the eyes still shining with love.

"I let some stranger fuck me last night." His voice sounded hollow, cold and uncaring.

Jared's sharp intake of breath made his chest constrict.

"He took me to his house and he fucked me into the mattress."

"Jen..." Jared's voice was pleading. And Jensen was so desperate to tell him it was just a joke, that it hadn't happened, that the hickeys were simply well applied costume makeup. But both of them knew they'd never joke about this.

"I'm so fucking sorry." Jensen choked out, turning towards Jared, "I just... I don't know what happened, I just..."

Tears were streaming down the young man's cheeks, his eyes shining with hurt and broken trust, his body shaking as he got to his feet. Jensen reached out for him desperately, "Jay... please..."

"Don't touch me," Jared murmured quietly, walking out the bathroom, leaving Jensen in a crumpled heap on the ground.

When he heard the front door being shut quietly, all that was left for him to do was curl up into a ball and sob. So that's what he did.

Then he crawled beneath the burning streams of water, desperately scrubbing the scent of last night from his skin.

He wanted to call someone, anyone, but he knew he had no right to. He'd tossed away everything. And now he was paying for it.

After foolishly hoping that Jared would come back, Jensen crawled into bed, staring up at the ceiling until darkness crept up.

That's when he saw it. Glowing brilliantly against the white, fingerpainted, was a simple question, outlined by stars. "Will you marry me?"

He rolled over onto his side and cried until his pillow was soaked and then cried some more.

Chris was the one who opened the door.

"Jesus Christ, Jenny. What the hell happened? Steve, get over here!"

Steve came up behind Chris, "What is – Jesus Christ, what the hell happened to you?"

Jensen hung his head, longing more than anything just to be embraced and told everything was okay. He didn't deserve it.

"I cheated on Jared."

Chris laughed, but was quickly cut off, "Seriously?" The two stared at him for what seemed like a millennium.

Then Chris moved. The blow was sharp and hard, right across the cheek and glancing off his nose, sending him stumbling sideways. He made no move to defend himself, hell, he welcomed the blow, it was a physical pain, something other than the emotional hell he'd been living in all night.

Chris pulled back for another blow but stopped at the last minute, looking down at Jensen like he was something he didn't recognise. "What the hell, Jensen?"

Then he stomped inside, leaving Jensen staring at the ground. "Come inside, Jensen." Steve's voice was lacking all its normal warmth, as if he was talking to a stranger.

Once they were inside, Chris began pacing up and down, "So, who the hell was it? Huh? Who the hell made you cheat on your best fucking friend?"

Jensen flinched. "Some random guy at the bar."

If anything, the pair looked even more horrified. Steve sat down opposite him, "Let me get this straight. You had a boyfriend like Jared, who loves you to death, even with all of your whacked out sides. You had someone who'd do absolutely anything for you, and I mean absolutely anything, even cut off his own arm for you. You had someone who loves you. Do you know what that means? Loves you. Someone who'd never let you down,

would always be there for you, would rather die than hurt you, someone who'd... Fuck Jensen. You had Jared. Jared is the best guy I've ever met, someone you only get a chance to meet once in a lifetime if you're lucky. Who's nice in ways people only think exist in movies and romance novels, like puppies and candy. You had him as your boyfriend. Your boyfriend. And you toss all that out the window for some random guy at the bar?" Steve was yelling, his words cutting Jensen like knives.

Chris stopped his pacing long enough to run a soothing hand down Steve's back. Then he looked over at Jensen, "Do you know how many people would die to have someone like him in their life? Do you have any idea?"

"Yes!" Jensen yelled, getting to his feet, "Do you seriously think I haven't been going through this over and over in my head? I was stupid! I was an idiot! I don't deserve to even be in the same room as him, but..." his voice fell to a whisper, "I screwed up... I screwed up bad... but... I need him..." his voice hitched, "I don't know what I'll do without him..."

"Well, you should've thought about that before you decided to take some random dude's dick up your ass!"

That's like a blow to the face. Jensen fell back on the couch and dropped his head into his hand, fresh tears starting.

"I don't know what to do."

"You know, that kid was gonna ask you to marry him. So damn excited, you wouldn't believe." Steve's voice was soft and his affection for Jared was evident. "Was bugging us every half hour or so about how to do it and whether we thought this or that. Chad called us about a week ago to complain about the constant badgering. Said he'd gotten a phone call from Mrs Padalecki, who was just as bad as her son, going on about him proposing over the radio or trying to get ad space during your favourite show. He wanted it to be perfect for you."

Jensen couldn't hate himself more. It wasn't a physical or emotional possibility.

His tears were leaving a damp patch in the carpet and they showed no sign of stopping.

Chris sighed softly, "You're one of my best friends, Jensen. Have been for ages. But I don't know you, the Jensen I knew would never hurt that man-child in any way. And Jared's one of my best friends too, in case you didn't notice. It's only because of our years of friendship that I'm not kicking you out on your ass. You know where the blankets are."

Then he followed Steve out the room, leaving Jensen to his misery.

Because he wanted to rub salt into his wounds, Jensen began replaying all of Jared's voicemails from that night, clinging to the concern and love in his once-boyfriend's voice.

He got a phone call from Chad, who told him to never come within twenty miles of him unless he had a death wish. Then the blonde proceeded to tell him what a bastard he was and that Jared deserved so much more than him and that Jared was better off now anyway.

Jensen never said a word in his defence.

He had nightmares. Flashes of that night, the hurt shining in Jared's eyes while Jensen's own laughter echoed cruelly in his head. His days were spent wandering about, cursing himself and pleading with whichever entity that cared to listen, for them to erase the past week. He'd do anything. Absolutely anything, just to erase Jared's pain.

He didn't care about his own pain. He deserved it.

"Why?" was all Jensen's tearful mother asked.

"I don't know, Momma," he whispered, tears threatening to fall. "I don't know."

"That boy was the best thing that ever happened to you."

"I know, Momma. I know."

It seemed he spent half his waking hours crying.

Finally he came up with the solution. The solution for everything.

He drove towards the bridge at the edge of town. He knew the bridge was about 245 feet above the water and that even if he did survive the fall, the rocks, icy water or hypothermia would kill him.

What he didn't count on was for Steve to follow him and call Chris for backup.

He'd never wanted this to be a big deal. He just wanted to go out quietly. To slip away into the night.

Now he had two of his best friends begging him to get down from the ledge, pleading with him not to be so stupid.

He hadn't wanted this.

The water rushed beneath him, beckoning him on. It would be so easy.

Time ticked by, both Chris and Steve's attempts to get him down proved fruitless. He wanted so badly for this all to be over, for this nightmare to disappear. Everyone would be so much better off without him. They'd all move on. He wouldn't be able to hurt anyone ever again.

"How could you be so fucking selfish?" a quiet voice demanded from behind him.

He knew that voice, knew it so well. Had longed for it every day for the past few weeks. He wanted to hear it so badly that he knew he had to be hallucinating. Even still, he turned around.

Jared stood before him, his face pale and thin, shadowed darkly beneath his eyes. He looked so exhausted, so worn out, so empty, that Jensen felt his throat close up at the knowledge that this was his fault.

"Jared..." he croaked. He wanted the younger man to see how sorry he was, that he was doing this for him to move on, for him to forget that Jensen had even existed, like the memory of a bad dream.

"No, Jensen. You don't get to do this. You don't get the easy way out. What the hell gives you the right to just leave like that? You really want to hurt me even more?"

"I..." Jensen shook his head, desperately needing Jared to understand.

"Well, well done with that, it worked." Jared turned away, his back tense and shoulders hunched.

"Jared..." Jensen scrambled down from the ledge, tripping and falling to his knees, "Jared, please..."

His face was damp and disgusting, he could barely see, but he reached out for the man he'd hurt so badly.

Jared turned around slowly, which gave Jensen enough time to throw his arms around the younger man and anchor him in place, sobbing and clutching at his shirt. "I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry. Please... please tell me what I have to do. Please, Jay. I'll... I'll do anything. Anything."

Slowly, Jared knelt down, bringing their faces level. He reached out a gentle hand and brushed it across Jensen's cheek and jaw, back into his hair. "I was going to ask you to marry me."

More tears started streaming as he choked out, "I know."

"I want to hate you."

Jensen swallowed thickly and hung his head, "You should. I do."

His hand slid down to rest on Jensen's shoulder, his voice soft, laced with pain and confusion, "How could you do that to me? Were you so desperate to break up with me? Did you hear about my plans to propose and decide that you hated the idea of spending the rest of your life with me? What, Jensen?"

"No," Jensen shook his head furiously, "God, no, Jay. I... you... I love you more than anything."

"But I'm not enough?"

"You..." Jensen allowed himself to slide a hand along the smooth length of Jared's jaw, back to brush the bangs from his eyes, "You're more than anyone could ever dream of having, you're everything. Everything."

"Then why?"

"Because... because I don't deserve you. I don't deserve to be anywhere near you. I don't deserve to call you a friend, let alone best friend and lover. You could have anyone, absolutely anyone, but you chose me. It couldn't last. I guess I just had to prove myself right."

Jared turned to dangle his legs over the edge, peering down at the dark rapids.

Jensen joined him. "I want to jump," he murmured quietly. "I want you to be free of me, free to be with people who deserve your love. Tell me to, and I will."

Jared's eyes smouldered when he turned them on Jensen, "You just don't fucking get it, do you? I want to hate you. I want to tell you to go ahead and jump. I want to be able to forget you and move on. I want all these things, but I can't have them. Not when I can't even manage the first one."

“You mean... you mean you don't hate me?”

Sighing softly, Jared leaned backwards, eyes turned up to the stars, “What do you think I'm doing here, Jensen? Why do you think I came when Chris called?”

“I don't know... 'cause you're awesome?”

“No, Jensen. 'Cause I don't want you to die. The pain I've been in all week, the anger, the longing to hate, all of it was nothing compared to the fear I felt when I thought of you jumping. I don't think I would survive it.”

Swallowing thickly, Jensen realised just how selfish he'd been, yet again. “I'm sorry. God, Jay.... I'm so fucking sorry and I have no idea how to fix it, how to make it easier for you, how to make it so you can smile again. If there was anything I could do or say to fix it, I'd do it. I'd do it a thousand times over and then again just for luck.”

Jared's voice was small, soft and vulnerable as he rolled onto his side, facing Jensen. “Just... just hold me again... I just want to pretend this never happened. Just... just hold me.”

His heart was pounding in his chest as he shifted to sit with his back against an iron wall, tentatively reaching out for his... he wasn't sure anymore. Jared wasn't his anymore.

Jared seemed so fragile in his arms, allowing Jensen to pull him back against his chest, resting his head back on the older man's shoulder while Jensen's hands slipped around his chest. Snug against one another, they gazed up at the puffs of cloud in the sky, acting as curtains to the twinkling dots.

Letting out a sigh he'd been gathering all week, Jensen squeezed his eyes tightly shut, pressing his nose to the back of Jared's neck and inhaling the soft, comforting scent of home. He wondered if he would ever know home again.

It took him a while to realise that he'd been crying silent tears into the back of Jared's shirt, soaking the soft cotton through. When he did, he attempted to pull away but Jared leaned further into him, a soft whisper escaping his lips. “Will you marry me?”

Jensen gasped, choking on his tears, wondering how Jared could be so cruel as to mock him with what he'd never have. “What?”

Without turning around, Jared murmured again, “This is where you get to walk away from me again, this time for good. Or you can stay and we can try and fix what we once had.”

Afraid to hope, but unable to constrain it, Jensen didn't even realise how tightly he was holding Jared to him, “You know my answer.”

Jared's voice was light, but Jensen could sense the vulnerability and insecurity lacing the words, "I also thought you'd never hurt me, forgive me if I'm a bit shaky on what I know about you now."

He flinched, "I deserved that. I deserve a hell of a lot more than that too."

Jared fumbled around in his back pocket and pulled out a small velvet box, holding it over the edge, "What's your answer?"

"Jay... how can you possibly want to marry me after everything?"

Jared turned his head slightly, a weak smile on his lips, "My momma always said my heart was going to get itself broken for being too damn loving. Guess she was right. But I can't just switch it on and off. Once someone's been given it, they've damn well got it for life." As an afterthought, he added, "Even if they trample it to the ground and spit on it."

His voice was hoarse, "Please, Jay... please... I'd love more than anything else to marry you. I..."

Jared flipped the box open and took out a beautiful ring, handing it over to Jensen. On the inside was engraved, "Non-refundable!" A bubble of laughter rose up inside of him and he couldn't help himself, he slid a hand around Jared's neck, leaning forwards to press their lips together.

A soft gasp escaped the younger man, but he didn't pull away. Slowly his lips began to respond, even as Jensen felt the dampness of the man's tears against his own. Their kiss broke and Jared fell forwards into his arms, exhaustion taking hold of him as he rested his head on Jensen's shoulder.

"Please..." Jared begged quietly, "Don't ever..." his breath hitched and his arms tightened.

Burying his face against the smooth, firm skin of Jared's neck, Jensen murmured in a muffled voice, "Never. Never again." His embrace became impossibly tight as he continued mumbling, "I love you so goddamn much."

Jared relaxed in his arms and it was a few moments later that Jensen realised he was asleep. Smiling softly down at the youthful face tilted towards him, Jensen felt another wave of disgust swell over him at the fact that he had hurt such an innocent, young man. Then Jared gave a soft snuffle and Jensen's self-loathing dissipated into love, pure and simple love that made him feel like he was about to burst.

As gently as possible, he slid his arms lower and hoisted Jared up into his arms. Jared was light, too light, and Jensen knew that the weeks had taken their toll.

Jared's arms slid automatically around Jensen's neck and his warm weight was so real in Jensen's arms that he couldn't help taking a moment to relinquish the feeling. That, right there, was everything Jensen had ever wanted and somehow, Jared had decided to trust him enough to have it again.

He carefully climbed down to the road keeping the younger man's head from bumping into anything. That's when he was met with three pairs of accusing eyes.

Chad must have arrived with Jared. And he didn't look happy. In fact, it would be more accurate to say, murderous.

His mouth opened to begin an obvious tirade, but Jensen managed to cut him off with a meaningful glance at the sleeping form. Chad's eyes immediately softened and he moved out of the way, allowing Jensen to lay Jared in the backseat of his car. When Jared was safely inside, Chad yanked Jensen to the side, while Chris and Steve hung back.

"He let you off that easily, huh?" Chad hissed. "Well, I'm not stupidly in love with you like he is, so I'm not that forgiving."

Jensen stood still, welcoming anything Chad wanted to do. Nothing could hurt him now, he was marrying Jared, nothing could hurt him.

Well, the punch to the jaw sure did smart like hell, though. Especially since it was right over the bruise Chris had given him.

"Listen here, Ackles. Right now, I would love nothing more than to toss your sorry ass overboard. The only thing that's stopping me, and I mean the only thing, is that Jared loves you, even though you're a selfish asshole. But I swear on Jared's life, and hell, you know how much I love the kid, that if you ever hurt him in any way, I will end you! Is that clear?"

Jensen nodded, "I'd probably end me first, but, okay."

"Let's get my boy on a bed, he hasn't slept properly in weeks," Chad glared at Jensen, but turned towards the cars.

It was an unspoken agreement that passed between them when Chad tossed the keys to his car to Steve and slid into the driver's seat of Jensen's. With Chris driving the third car, they set off in a convoy; Jensen sitting in the back with Jared curled up on his lap. His fingers kept returning to the gold band on his finger, spinning it round and round. He loved the feeling of the cool metal against his skin, a constant reminder of the best thing in his life, a constant reminder of the warm form cradled to his chest. He smiled and brushed his hand along Jared's cheek, loving the way Jared leant into his touch and smiled in his sleep.

Chad led the group to his house, which Jensen wasn't entirely comfortable with, but knew he had no say in the matter.

Jensen carried him upstairs to Chad's spare bedroom and laid him down, carefully removing his shoes and jeans, leaving him in t-shirt and boxers, and tucking him in. Then he laid down beside him, head propped up on his hand as he just watched the gorgeous man sleep. He could hear Chad and the other two speaking quietly downstairs, but felt absolutely no inclination to join them.

He stripped down to his own boxers and t-shirt and carefully crawled under the covers, inching as close as he could without fear of waking Jared. Eventually he couldn't hold back any longer and had to pull Jared into his arms, loving the solid weight on top of him as he cradled Jared's head to his chest.

He didn't know how long he lay there, but he knew there was nowhere else he'd rather be.

Steve stuck his head in a couple of hours later and smiled slightly at what must have been a lovesick expression on his face.

Jensen couldn't even bring himself to feel embarrassed.

They both knew that it'd be a while before things could go back to how they used to be and that it'd take time for Jared to trust him again, but the older man was willing to do anything to speed up that process, even going so far as to announce their upcoming wedding to the media (to hell with Kripke's threats to skin them alive) and visiting Jared's family with him.

That was one experience he did not want to have again. But it ended with Mrs Padalecki sobbing and kissing them both damply on the cheeks.

But the best thing of all, was their wedding.

Jared's face was alight with happiness, his skin tanned against his black suit and his eyes shining excitedly as he hugged Jensen, "We're getting married!"

Spinning the younger man around once, Jensen held him tightly, "I know." There was a long pause as they just breathed, and then Jensen choked out a whisper. He needed to say it, "I'm sorry."

Jared pulled back, his fingers sliding along Jensen's neck to fix his collar. When he looked up, his clear eyes met Jensen's and he pressed a soft kiss to the older man's lips. "I know you are..." he sighed softly and buried his nose in Jensen's shoulder. "Let's..."

let's go away, somewhere we can leave..." his breath hitched, "leave the nightmare behind us."

"Name the place."

They eloped to Zanzibar, where they got married on the beach just as the sun was setting, with only the priest and ocean as witness.

Even on their sun-lit honeymoon days, Jensen still sometimes caught the shadows and pain in his husband's eyes, but when Jared noticed he was being watched, a smile would take over.

Things weren't perfect. But they'd get there. Eventually.

They had to.
