

## Last chance:



Jared announces his engagement to Sandy; Jensen breaks: *But he had brought along his fiancé, small and delicate, and cute and adorable, and feminine and everything that Jensen isn't, smiling and kissing and touching, and just so perfect together that Jensen hates himself for wanting to split them up. Maybe that was what Jared had wanted: to make Jensen hate himself even more for kissing him and for ever dreaming he even had a tiny chance.*

23,000 words, NC-17, hurt/comfort, bottom!Jensen

When the news comes, he tries really hard not to cry. He somehow manages to hold it together, paint on a smile and say in a cheerful voice, "That's great, man!"

He's not quite sure how he survived the hour, but he did. Smiling, laughing, congratulating, and all the while dying inside. His chest was tight with the effort not to start sobbing; his heart suffocating as the walls came crashing down.

It's not like he expected anything different. He knows he has no right to be feeling this heartbroken, but it's not something he can help. Just like when it first started, even back then he had no control over his feelings. If he had even the tiniest ounce of control, he would have vanquished the unwanted thoughts instantly. As it is, the thoughts come and (never) go, as freely as they please.

When he finally manages to come up with an excuse, he makes it all the way back to his place before he lets his façade slide: sliding off his face even as he slides to the floor. The tears start pouring, tears he has no right to be shedding, and the knowledge of that fact only makes him cry harder.

Hating himself for crying over the loss of something that was never his to begin with, he buries his face in his arms, hiding from mocking emptiness of his apartment. The distinct lack of booming laughter accentuates the silence, broken only by the sounds of him gasping for breath and the taunting ticking of the large clock.

A car door slams outside, too near for comfort, causing him to jump. The banging on his door makes him scramble to his feet and back away towards the wall. He can't be seen like this.

Keeping as silent as possible, he creeps towards the bathroom, unnoticed tears still trickling down his cheeks. The banging stops and he allows himself to slump against the wall in relief. But then he hears a key being turned and his heart leaps to his throat in panic.

Before he can move, before he can so much as blink, a tall frame is suddenly before him, he tries to run for the bathroom, his cheeks burning with shame, but a gentle hand catches him by the arm, holding him firmly.

“Jen... what’s the matter?” a soft voice says, he keeps his eyes lowered, knowing he doesn’t deserve the care and worry lacing those words.

“Nothing,” he croaks, wincing at the broken and choked words coming from his own mouth.

A warm hand palms his forehead, and he hears a curse, “Fuck, man, you’re burning up.”

He just stands there numbly, unsure of what to do, what to say. Soft fingers brush over the dampness on his cheeks, and he closes his eyes, unable to stop himself from leaning into the touch.

The hand cups his face, the thumb brushing away the traces of his anguish, and he’s suddenly pulled into a warm embrace. He sinks into it, allowing the arms to engulf him, wrapping him up and pressing him to a strong chest. He clings on tightly, trying to get as close as possible, trying to hide from everything and the world, and wanting to just stay in those safe arms forever.

When the warm body pulls away, reminding him that it’s not his to hold, he hangs his head and whispers hoarsely, “I’m sorry.”

In the same soft, caring voice comes, “For what?”

He shakes his head, pulling away from the arm, and turning to walk down the corridor; the footsteps padding behind him let him know he’s being followed.

Reaching the glass door, he stands motionless, staring unseeingly out into the darkness. A warm hand falls on his shoulder, a comforting weight, and he hates himself for shifting closer.

“Jen, what’s wrong? Did something happen?”

He shakes his head minutely, eyes slipping shut as the hand begins to gently knead his shoulder.

The hand turns him slightly, while another comes up to cup his jaw, firmly forcing his head up, making him lock eyes with the soft hazel ones. The eyes are shining with such warmth and concern, that he feels his own well up with shameful tears once more.

“Hey, man, you know you can tell me anything, hey? Whatever it is, whatever’s happened, I’m here for you,” the voice is so gentle, so alluring, that he finds his mouth opening, about to spill all his deepest, most hidden secrets, but then a ringing sound breaks the spell, snapping him out of it and his mouth shut.

The eyes flash an apologetic glance towards him, and then the hands are gone, and he watches as Jared struggles to get his phone out of his back pocket.

“Oh, hey baby.”

Those three words serve as a bucket of ice down Jensen’s neck, chasing all warmth and comfort away, forcing reality back on him and making him furious at himself for nearly ruining everything.

He watches, his eyes shadowed and chest aching, as the man of his dreams wanders back and forth at the opposite side of the room, smiling into the phone. He can hear odd snippets, bits of a conversation that are too painful to hear, so he slides open the glass door, and steps out into the night.

The cold, wailing wind hits him instantly, mirroring his mood, and lamenting with him. Not knowing where he’s going or what he’ll do when he gets there, he just makes his way down to the bottom gate, slipping out onto the deserted, empty street outside.

The urge to get away, from everything and everyone, fills him. He takes off at a run, pounding the rough surface of the road with his bare feet. He tries to focus on the jolt of pain from each sharp stone he lands on, in an effort to distract himself from his own thoughts.

When he hears a voice calling his name, and the sounds of another pair of feet catching up to him, he nearly bursts out into tears at the unfairness of it all. When a warm hand catches his arm, and tries to get him to slow down, he pulls away angrily.

In a sudden act of defence, he lashes out heatedly, clipping his friend on the nose. Then he freezes, not sure whose eyes are wider. He watches horrified as a trickle of blood begins to flow. All anger seeps out of him, and he reaches out, “Oh, god ...Jay.”

Jared’s hand wipes at his nose. He winces and pulls it away quickly, before staring down at the red smear.

“You...hit me...”

Disgusted at himself, Jensen tentatively reaches out, running his fingers gently over the bruising skin, even as tears trickle down his cheeks.

“Oh, god, I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry,” he murmurs.

The wide eyes don’t leave his, and he can’t bear the lack of accusation in them. All that he sees is confusion and worry. A warm hand covers his, pressing it against the smooth jaw, and gentle voice says, “Hey, hey, man it’s okay, it’s just a bloody nose.”

He lets out a sob, hating himself even more. “I’m sorry. I’m so fucking sorry.”

Strong arms pull him against a chest, and soothing hands run down his back, “It’s okay, it’s no big deal, let’s just go back inside, okay?”

He nods numbly, not letting go, and a rumbled laugh vibrates through his pillow, as gentle hands start to pry him away. “Come on, I need a beer and an ice pack.

Embarrassment stains his cheeks once more, and he lowers his gaze to the ground. A warm hand cups his jaw, raising his head up, “Hey, none of that. It was an accident, a spur of the moment thing, and besides, I’ve gotten worse from Eric’s crazy stunts.”

He cracks a small smile, and allows himself to be led back the way they’d come. He winces with every step he takes, a feat that does not go unnoticed by his companion.

“Shit, you left in a hurry.”

Wondering how to respond to that, he glances at Jared’s sneaker-clad feet longingly.

Before he can blink or even gasp a breath of air, he is suddenly cradled bridal-style in strong arms; he lets out a squawk, and begins struggling. The end result is him getting his legs free, while his upper body is still held firmly, causing him to swing round, and making them come dangerously near to toppling forwards.

The strong arms just manoeuvre him as easily as if he’s a mannequin, and he suddenly finds his legs wrapped around the slim waist, his arms around Jared’s neck dangling over powerful shoulders, warm hands linked beneath his ass, holding him close.

He falls still, too afraid to move, fearful of causing any more contact between them. It takes all his willpower to keep his hands from roaming the toned body around which he is wrapped. But all his strength isn’t enough to keep him from playing with the soft hair, curling his fingers in it and running through it gently. Nor can he keep in the soft sigh of contentment as his eyes slip shut, the feeling of gliding filling him.

He tilts his head slightly, but it is enough for him to feel a warm puff of air against his cheek with every breath Jared lets out.

Way too soon, he finds himself being laid down, his limbs gently being pried away from the strong body. When Jared begins to leave, he reaches out, a pitiful cry of, “No...” escaping his lips.

There is a warm chuckle, and a hand brushes over his brow, “Don’t worry, I’m just grabbing some beers and seeing about finding us some grub.”

Jensen smiles sleepily, glad that Jared isn’t leaving, too emotionally wrenched to care how pathetic he’s being.

A short while later, he hears the clinking of bottles on the table, and then his legs are lifted, a warm body sliding beneath them and replacing them on the being’s lap, warm arms falling over his knees.

He looks up at the gorgeous face, taking in the warm eyes and small smile. He sees the already forming bruise on Jared’s nose and cheek. He reaches out, tears filling his eyes once more as his fingers trace the marks.

“Hey, come here...” the voice is too soft, too caring and Jensen’s eyes fall shut, even as he moves to obey. The arms tug him right around, until his back is cushioned on a warm chest, his head resting on Jared’s shoulder.

The arms wrap around his waist, holding him closely, and he's powerless to resist. All his logical thoughts have long since flown out the window. All his countless reasons why he should pull away, all his control, all of it, has been shot to hell. All his thoughts are focused on is *right here, right now*.

He squirms, and twists around in Jared's arms, his friend chuckles, but loosens the embrace, allowing him to turn around completely, coming face to face with the most stunning thing in the world.

Inhibitions forgotten, everything narrowed down to the image in front of him, open and smiling, and Jensen can't do anything but close the distance, pressing his lips to the smooth ones that have for so long haunted his dreams.

There's a startled gasp, one which he takes full advantage of, sucking Jared's bottom lip gently, finally being able to taste what has tempted him for so long. He pushes the man back to lie fully on the couch, following after him, lying flush on top of him. He attacks the protesting mouth once more, smothering words he doesn't want to hear.

Strong hands firmly push at his shoulders, forcing him away, and he suddenly realises what he's just done.

Angry and confused eyes meet his, and he scrambles backwards in shame.

"What the hell?"

He lowers his gaze to his hands, trembling in his lap, he whispers, "I'm sorry, I'm so damn sorry."

Glancing quickly back at Jared, he realises to his horror, that the bleeding has started again.

Jared just shakes his head, wiping angrily at his nose, "What the fuck is wrong with you? I announce that I'm getting married, and then you fucking go and kiss me? What kind of sick game are you playing?"

Shaking his head furiously, Jensen tries to speak, but before he can get the words out, Jared's already storming away. A few seconds later he hears the door slamming, and he's left once again to the empty silence.

Hating himself more than ever, he buries his head in the couch cushion, silent tears pouring out at the knowledge that now he's truly lost everything, even something that *had* been his.

He's not sure how long he lies there, but suddenly the ringing of the doorbell gets him scrambling to his feet, a bubble of hope forming. Not bothering to wipe his face, he runs to the door, swinging it open to reveal... the pizza-guy.

His face falls faster than anything; and he wonders who he thought would be there, and resists the urge to laugh at his foolish hope. The pizza-guy looks taken aback at his appearance, but just shoves the two large boxes of pizza forwards. Jensen pays quickly, and returns to the silent ticking of his clock.

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*It's been a week.* To everyone else, that might mean a week since he announced his engagement, but to Jared, it's a week since he last saw Jensen. And in that week he's gone through every emotion expected: shock, anger, hurt, confusion... confusion being the main one.

Because firstly, Jensen wouldn't do that kind of thing out of spite or wanting to hurt Jared, the man doesn't have it in him – something Jared realised after the initial anger died down somewhat.

Which brings up the next point: if it hadn't been out of spite, then what was it out of? Because Jensen isn't gay; in the last two and a half years that they've known each other, Jared has only ever seen him with women, and he's never mentioned anything about liking members of the same sex before, something which is sure to have come up in the two years' worth of drunken nights.

Which brings the kiss back up: if Jensen didn't do it out of spite, and he's not gay, then why the hell did he kiss Jared?

*Okay, so let's say that he is gay, or bisexual or whatever.* That would explain the kiss, but why would he do it right after Jared's engagement announcement?

*Maybe it was a last chance thing.* But that would imply that Jensen has feelings for him, which is so utterly ridiculous, seeing as though Jensen could get anyone in the world that he wanted.

Jared rolls over in frustration, finding his nose buried in long black hair. He breathes in deeply, the sweet smell of Sandy's expensive shampoo sharp in his nose. She turns and snuggles closer to his chest, her tiny frame so fragile that he's almost afraid he'll break her if he moves.

He presses a kiss to her forehead and slips out of the bed, confusion still whirling his brain up. The thing is: he misses Jensen, misses him like an amputee misses a limb. And he knows he should be furious at the man for screwing with his head like this, but all he can think about is the soft look on the man's face when Jared had laid him down on the couch: the happy, sleepy smile he had given, and then the desperate look when Jared had pulled away and how he'd relaxed only when Jared promised to be back soon. It was cute.

Furiously shaking such thoughts out of his head, Jared makes his way to the bathroom, stepping into the shower. Today he has to go back to work. His nervousness about seeing Jensen again is overwhelming, as he wonders how they're going to act: whether it will be weird, awkward or stilted, and hoping that it's none of them.

When he returns to the bedroom, Sandy is up and dressed

“What're you doing up?” he asks her.

She grins, “Going to see my fiancé's workplace.”

He bites back the bubble of protest, and plants a kiss on Sandy's forehead, saying, "Awesome, I can show you off to my work buddies."

With a giggle, she wraps her arms around him, murmuring, "Love you."

Smiling, he replies, "You too."

See, he really loves Sandy. She's an awesome girl, and he's really glad he's getting to marry her. His parents are thrilled, and so is everybody else. It's comfortable, it's easy. They've been dating for four years, so marriage just seems the right way to go. Jared can't imagine being with anyone other than her, in fact, there's never really been anyone other than her.

When they arrive on set, Jared's a jittering bundle of nerves. He wants to talk to Jensen alone, he needs to know that they're okay, needs to confront him about what happened.

After managing to convince Sandy to go chat to the make-up girls, he starts his pursuit for his co-worker.

He catches Jensen just as he's exiting Eric's office, and they both freeze. Jensen looks like death warmed over. Jared takes in the dark circles and shadows on the man's face, the hollowness of his cheeks, and the ghostliness of his skin, and any traces of anger leave Jared completely.

"Jen..."

Suddenly a voice comes from behind him, "Oh, hey, Jensen."

As she slips underneath Jared's arm, she asks, "How was your break?"

Jensen's eyes dart between Jared and Sandy, his lips parted slightly. Jared would do anything to never have to see that hurt look pass over his friend's face again. Pure pain, gone so quickly, and schooled into a smile so convincing, that Sandy didn't notice it, but Jared did.

With a strained smile, Jensen says loudly, "Look everyone, it's the lovebirds."

And as if that's cue for everyone to come out and congratulate the newly engaged pair, they're suddenly surrounded by well-wishers.

Jared loses sight of Jensen, and ducks away from the group, leaving Sandy to get all the congratulations as he searches for his best friend, the look of pain still making his heart clench.

Eventually, after ten minutes of searching, Jared finds him on a hidden section of the roof, where you can sit and no-one can see you from the ground, and where you can talk, and your voice is drowned out by the fan vent right beside it, so unless someone's up there with you, they can't hear your conversation. They'd discovered it their second month of filming.

His back is turned, and his head is pillowed in his hands. When Jared's hand reaches out to touch his shoulder, he jumps, his tear-streaked face spinning around. He swivels back round immediately.

“Jen...” Jared says, sitting down beside his friend and reaching an arm out.

Jensen flinches away, saying in a muffled voice, “What do you want, Jared? You want to laugh at me, humiliate me some more? Why don’t you? Why don’t you?!”

His own chest closes up at the anguish and pain lacing his friend’s words, Jared reaches out again, ignoring how Jensen shuffles away, and just grabbing the other man’s arm, pulling him closer.

“Jen... stop, I would never want to humiliate or hurt you. You know that.”

Jensen just turns his head away, “We have to go back.”

Knowing and hating the fact that that’s true, Jared turns his friend to look at him.

Jensen stands up suddenly, saying again, “We have to get on set.”

Unable to do anything more than follow his friend, Jared does.

Make-up is amazing. They erase all shadows, and paleness, and make them both into Sam and Dean.

They get up on set and Sandy waves, blowing a kiss in their direction. Jensen doesn’t look up until the last second, when someone yells, “Action.”

It’s absolutely terrible. They fumble their lines, they don’t make eye-contact, and they miss their cues. Eventually Eric throws up his arms in frustration and bellows, “Cut!” for the twentieth time, and sends them away telling them to come back tomorrow with their issues sorted out.

Jensen doesn’t glance in Jared’s direction, swerves in the opposite direction when he sees Sandy approaching, and just heads straight for the parking lot. With a quick kiss, Jared says to Sandy, “Sorry, baby, but I got to catch Jen.”

She looks slightly put out, but replies, “Okay, I’ll see you at home later.”

Then Jared walks off after his friend.

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His chest aches with pain, and he feels close to tears. He wants to hate Jared for turning him into a crying girl, but he can’t, and that right there is the problem.

But he can’t believe Jared would be so cruel. Sure, Jensen expected him to be angry, he even expected him to not want to see him again, but to bring Sandy along. To rub what Jensen can’t have in his face is something Jensen never would have thought Jared would do.

But he *had* brought along his fiancé, small and delicate, and cute and adorable, and feminine and everything that Jensen isn’t, smiling and kissing and touching, and just so perfect together that Jensen hates himself for wanting to split them up. Maybe that was what Jared

had wanted: to make Jensen hate himself even more for kissing him, and for ever dreaming he even had a tiny chance.

He slams the car door shut, and fumbles with the keys. He manages to get it started just as he sees Jared rounding the corner. Not wanting to face him, Jensen drives off speedily. Through the rear-view mirror, he can make out Jared standing motionless in the centre of the road.

As though fleeing from his own demons, Jensen keeps up the speed, not slowing down for an instant. He doesn't care where he's going, so long as it's *away*.

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He's opens the door, "Baby, I'm home."

Sandy emerges, smiling at him, "Took you long enough."

His smile dims slightly, "Yeah, sorry 'bout that."

She wraps her arm around his neck, "Baby, what's the matter?"

"I couldn't find Jen."

A frown creases her forehead, and she says, "Oh..."

Jared makes his way towards the back garden, letting the dogs in. They slobber all over him, but cheer him up slightly.

"What do you want for supper?" he asks over his shoulder.

Sandy's cooking is terrible, which means that Jared – who isn't a chef by any means – usually makes their meals. He doesn't really mind, and it's easier just being able to make stuff he likes.

"I don't know; how about some pasta?"

He nods, scratching the back of Harley's ears one last time before standing and turning back inside.

He feels angry at Jensen for making him feel guilty, when he hasn't done anything wrong. In fact, Jared's pretty sure he should be the angry one in this equation, seeing as how Jensen was the one who...well, yeah.

Unable to think about anything else, Jared watches the macaroni bubbling in the large metal pot. The expression on Jensen's face when he'd seen Sandy is one that makes Jared's throat close up. It's something that Jared never, *ever* wants to see again, and he hates that it was his fault, even though he had no control over the situation.

As he stirs the cheese-sauce, he wonders what Jensen's doing, and whether he's thinking of him. When Sandy comes up behind him, and slips her arms around his waist, he gets a flashback of Jensen wrapping his legs there in much the same way. He steps away hastily, giving Sandy an apologetic kiss, "Sorry, babe. You just scared me, 's all."

Scooping up portions, he hands Sandy a plate, and follows her to the dining room table, where the cutlery's already laid out. They sit down and eat in silence, broken by an occasional comment. Jared gets an image of an elderly couple sitting at dinner in much the same way, making small-talk, and he gets a coughing fit.

"Honey, what's the matter with you? You've been distracted all evening."

He smiles at the concern on Sandy's face, "I'm just worried about Jensen."

"I'm sure he's just fine."

The dismissal in her voice sparks a flare of anger inside Jared, and he bites back a retort.

"Yeah..."

She continues, not noticing his strained tone, "Besides, he's probably just put off because you haven't been spending as much time with him, now that *we're* engaged."

He clenches his teeth at the proud way she'd said the last few words, as if she'd won something, and he feels even more confused than ever.

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It's past midnight when he finally pulls up outside his apartment. He feels like shit, he doesn't know how he's ever going to face Eric tomorrow, let alone Jared, and he knows tonight – just like all the other nights this week – he won't be able to sleep more than a few hours at most.

He drags his feet as though a heavy weight is resting on his shoulders, each step an effort, his eyes blurry from exhaustion as he stares at the ground trying to keep from falling face-first.

Just as he's reaching the door to his apartment, a figure unfolds itself, standing before him. He looks up blankly, not registering anything. He's too tired, too sick of everything, too fucked up, to care who it is.

A sharp intake of breath is all the warning he gets before he's engulfed in arms: strong, warm, safe arms that keep him from collapsing, and hold him close to a warm body. He's too weak to do anything other than fall limply into the person's shoulder, sagging bonelessly, and letting himself just be held.

Somehow the being manages to get the apartment door open, and carries him inside. Not caring what he looks like, Jensen just wraps his arms around the person's neck, and buries his face in the dip of their shoulder.

The person sits down on the couch, not letting go of Jensen, just shifting him so his legs are folded on one side and he's basically sitting in the man's lap. Warm, soothing hands are running down his back, and he presses his nose closer to the person's neck.

He *knows* that it's Jared, but he doesn't *want* to know that. Because if he knows that, then he also knows he shouldn't be doing this, and that's just so unfair that it's easier to just not consciously realise that it's Jared.

The warm hands press him closer, one cupping the back of his head and running through his hair. It's so much of what he wants but can't have, that the tears just start flowing. Exhaustion in every sense has stolen his ability to control his emotions, and he tightens his arms around the person's neck, sobbing into their neck, "I'm so sorry, 'm so sorry, so fucking sorry."

The hands continue their gentle motions, and slowly Jensen finds himself succumbing to sleep.

He wakes up a few hours later, the person still holding him closely, the hand still carding through his hair. He doesn't want to move, doesn't want to break the spell, doesn't want to wake up from whatever dream he's in, but it's to no avail.

"Jen... we need to talk."

His breath catches, but he nods, his chin rubbing against the warm neck. He tries to pull away from the embrace, but the arms don't loosen. He gives in, and sags back, shamelessly snuggling his face into the crook of the Jared-scented neck.

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It's not fair. No one over twenty should have the right to be so cute, especially no *male* over twenty. Or at least that's what Jared thinks as he holds Jensen close. The man just fits in Jared's arms, molding to curl even closer. The gentle puff of air with every breath Jensen exhales, tickles Jared's ear, and the loose hold that the arms have around his neck, is so *cuddly*.

Jared hitches his arms beneath Jensen's knees, and pulls him closer. He can't help it, it's just the way the man's so affectionate and – dare he even think it – adorable.

*Why can't it just be like this? Just him and me.*

The moment that thought pops into his mind, he tries to shove it away, but it keeps coming back, especially when he presses his nose into the other man's hair, and breathes in the soft, warm smell of home.

Jiggling the man slightly, he says, "We really do."

"Yeah," comes the muffled response, the words tickling the skin of his bare neck.

Getting right down to the point, he asks, "Jen, why did you kiss me?"

There's a silence, the arms tightening slightly around his neck, before a quiet voice says, "Isn't it obvious?"

Jared shakes his head, his lips brushing over the top of Jensen's head, "No, you'll have to spell it out for me."

As impossible as it might seem, Jensen somehow manages to press himself even closer to Jared. Jared automatically responds by tightening his own hold around his friend's slim form.

In a voice so soft that Jared would have missed it except for the fact that Jensen's lips are right by his ear, Jensen whispers, "I love you."

Jared falls still, his world swirling around him. *Love*. That's bigger than lust; bigger than experimentation; bigger than a crush. *Fuck, that's big*.

Pressing Jensen's head closer to his neck, he murmurs, "Shit, Jen."

The man nods, bumping Jared's shoulder, and whispers brokenly, "I'm sorry.... It wouldn't go away. It just got bigger and bigger... until last week when I couldn't take it anymore and... I'm sorry. I know you don't feel the same way, and I know you're with Sandy: I'd never try to come between you two. I just... it's like this burning thing that I can't stop."

Burying his nose in Jensen's hair, he murmurs, "How long....?"

Jensen gives a soft sigh, before saying softly, "Since that episode where I was tied up, and you cut me down... you just had this... this look on your face, all stubborn like with an, 'I'll always save you' look, and you were glowing with love – I know it was for Dean, but it just... – anyway you cut me down, and I fell into your arms, and you just held me like...like I mattered..."

Letting out a weak chuckle, Jensen says, "And now I sound like a completely dorky, lovesick freak, don't I?"

Jared exhales deeply, ignoring Jensen attempt at playing it off as a joke, "That was when... like--"

"- two years ago, I know."

"Shit," Jared breathes.

"I'm sorry.... If I could make it go away, I would. I never wanted to do this to you.... I wish I hadn't kissed you, wish you'd never found out."

Smoothing his hand down Jensen's back, Jared says, "We'll get through this, Jen... we have to... Besides, according to Eric, the world's more likely to go, 'boom,' than for us to not be best friends."

He feels Jensen's lips pull into a smile against his neck, and he mentally punches the air at the fact that even in such a messed up situation he can still draw a smile from his friend.

Then he says in a more serious voice, “Look, Jen... this, this is fucked up, and I don’t know what to do or what to say, but I *do* know that it’s not your fault... I mean: I *am* sex on legs, after all.”

Jensen lets out a surprised laugh, and unhooks an arm from around Jared’s neck to thump him playfully on his chest, “You wish.”

Chuckling, Jared continues, “All I’m saying is...”

“Shut up,” Jensen mumbles.

Jared leans his head back, looking up at the ceiling, and pulling Jensen back with him. The other man’s hand is still on his chest, warmth soaking through his shirt from where the fingers are splayed out. It feels nice: familiar, like at all those premiers or photo shoots when Jensen’s hand had found its place over his heart just like this.

Jensen’s fingers curl slightly, bunching the material of Jared’s shirt, and fiddling with it. Jared covers the hand with his own, stilling the motion and murmuring, “We should get some sleep. Eric’s going to kill us.”

The arm tightens slightly around his neck, but then loosens, “Yeah,” Jensen says reluctantly.

Jared feels a weird sense of loss when Jensen slides off his lap, but he ignores it, and stands up himself.

His eyes searching Jensen’s weary face, Jared says softly, “When was the last time you slept properly?”

Jensen looks away, before cracking, “Just now.”

“Jen,” Jared says sternly.

Looking down at his feet, he mumbles, “A week.”

“Fuck,” Jared swears under his breath, “but... just now, you were fine...?”

A blush stains Jensen’s cheeks, as he finds the hem of his shirt really fascinating, “You were here.”

Something in his chest gives in: softens, turns to mush, and he stands up, “Let’s get you to bed.”

He gently nudges Jensen to get moving, and follows him to the bedroom. The older man just stands in the centre of the room, confusion clouding his face.

Chuckling, Jared says, “Go on. Get in bed.”

He leaves the room to allow the man privacy to change, and returns a few minutes later, smiling when he spots Jensen’s head peeping out from beneath a pile of puffy duvets. The green, sleep-muffled eyes, the mussed up hair, all of it, is too adorable for words.

“Hey...” he says softly.

A muffled, “Hey,” comes from beneath the blankets.

“You okay to sleep now?”

There’s a pause and then an uncertain voice asks, “Are you going to go?”

He hadn’t planned to stay for so long when he’d decided to come, but there’s no way he’s leaving his friend alone when he’s this vulnerable. Jared shakes his head, “Nah, I’ll camp out on the couch.”

Jensen nods, and just as Jared’s leaving the room, he hears a soft, “Thanks.”

Grabbing a spare blanket, he wanders around the living room, his head still reeling with all the goings on. How Jensen managed to keep that secret for two years is beyond him.

He eventually lies back on the couch, which is fortunately a large one, and crosses his arms behind his head. He watches the shadows of the trees outside dance across the ceiling.

He’s not sure how long it is that he lies awake, but his thoughts are suddenly disturbed by the soft padding of bare feet on corridor floor. He sits up to see a bundle of blue duvet, Jensen’s head peeking out the top, waddle into the room.

“Hey, what are you doing up?” he calls softly.

Jensen’s eyes snap over to him, looking very much like a deer caught in the headlights. His cheeks flush, and he mumbles something incoherent.

“You didn’t think I’d stay, did you?” Jared asks; his heart breaking.

The Jensen-bundle shuffles its feet, and he hears, “Couldn’t sleep, and just wanted to see you.”

The cheeks go even redder, and Jensen hangs his head in shame. Jared just smiles warmly, thinking the older man is just the cutest thing ever.

“Come’re,” he says, stretching a hand towards Jensen.

The man blinks hesitantly, before tentatively reaching out.

Jared tugs him closer, pulling the bundle of Jensen towards him, and shifting over on the couch to make room.

Jensen is putty in his hands, and he manoeuvres them so that he is lying with his back against the couch-back, arms wrapped around the bundle, Jensen curled up somewhere inside the blue, his back to Jared’s chest.

Letting out a sigh, Jared tightens his hold, pulling Jensen right back against him, pressing his nose to the other man's hair and shutting his eyes. It takes a few seconds, but eventually Jensen relaxes and leans back slightly.

Ten minutes later, Jared hears the other man's breathing change, and smiles into Jensen's hair, before he too falls asleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

He wakes up feeling happy, which is a very unusual feat for Jensen Ackles the not-so-early-morning-person. Usually he only feels this cheerful after several cups of coffee and the sight of his co-star bouncing around set hyperactively... oh... that's why.

Now the arm wrapped around his waist and the gentle breath in his ear makes sense, actually it doesn't make sense at all, but Jensen's too happy to think deeply about why his co-star – who he happens to be in love with – is curled behind him.

He can feel Jared waking up, and his happy bubble shrinks as the dread grows: dread of the inevitable moment when the man will realise who he's lying beside and leap away. That doesn't happen. What does happen is that the arm around his waist tightens, pulling him back into a hug, as Jared whispers, "Hey, Jen, sleep well?"

The bubble of warmth and happiness grows once more, and he smiles, "Yeah, you?"

Jared lets out a relaxed sigh, and murmurs, "Mmmhmm."

The man sleepily disentangles his arms from around Jensen, and frees his watch-hand, checking the time.

"Shit... man, we got to get up."

Jensen lets out a reluctant groan, but swings his legs down, "Dibs on shower," he hears Jared mumble.

He nods, "Dibs on first coffee."

They head off for their various waking devices, and Jensen's just busy gulping down his third cup of coffee while staring out at the small apartment garden, when he hears footsteps behind him.

He turns and instantly regrets it: Jared is fresh from the shower, wearing a pair of army pants that he'd left at the apartment sometime in the past, and one of Jensen's shirts – a black one, that hugs the tall man in all the right places – his hair is damp, and his face is flushed from the shower-heat. Jensen's eyes get caught on a trickle of water as it slips its way down Jared's neck to curl in the hollow of his collarbone.

Jensen turns away quickly, dragging his eyes away from his friend. In a quiet voice, Jared says, "Hey, you got any coffee left for me?"

Nodding, Jensen replies in a hoarse voice, "Yeah, in the pot. You left any hot water?"

There's a chuckle, and then, "Yeah."

\*\*\*\*\*

While his friend's in the shower, Jared fishes out his phone. He swears softly when he sees that there're eleven missed calls, three text messages, and four voicemails. Not bothering to check the caller ID, he just calls Sandy.

*"Where have you been?"*

"I'm sorry. I should have phoned, but you knew I was going to see Jen."

*"Yeah, but not for the whole night, what did you do? Get drunk and pass out on the couch?"*

*Close.*

"Sandy, I'm sorry, but something came up, and Jen needed me."

*"He needed you? What do you mean he needed you?"*

"He's going through a tough spot, Sandy. The least I can do is be here for him, he's my best friend."

There's a long silence, and then Sandy says in a weird voice, *"Yeah, okay, fine. Anyway, I guess I'll see you tonight?"*

Glancing in the direction of the bathroom, Jared says, "Yeah, maybe."

She hangs up with a click. He sighs, grabs a cup of coffee and settles down on the couch.

\*\*\*\*\*

By the time they make it to set, they're half an hour late. Eric glares at them, but then his eyes land on Jared's hand, which is resting casually on Jensen's shoulder, and he breaks out into a relieved grin.

*"Finally, now we can get some work done.*

\*\*\*\*\*

They finish filming at about eleven thirty that night, thanks to Eric, who decided to make them pay for their lack of acting ability yesterday.

Jared's back aches, bruises already forming, from where he'd been thrown countless times into a tree and he's absolutely spent. He just wants to curl up in the first bed he can find, but he knows that Sandy will kill him if he stays out again.

Jensen's not faring much better, and they barely notice when they are shoved into the back of their not-so-frequently-used driver's car. Exhaustion takes over Jared, and he practically keels over sideways, his head coming to rest on something soft.

He wakes up about half an hour later, and sleepily looks up in time to catch the look on Jensen's face before the other man can glance away. The expression on Jensen's face had been one that Jared himself wore when playing with puppies: a soft, affectionate, *loving* look.

Jensen's cheeks are red, and he mumbles, "Sorry."

*Why should someone feel sorry for loving someone?*

In a soft voice, Jared says, "Don't be."

Green eyes look down at him, and he holds their gaze resolutely. A small smile forms on Jensen's lips, and the hand resumes its motion, carding gently through Jared's hair. He closes his eyes, and allows sleep to take him once more.

It couldn't have been more than a few minutes later, when Jared's pillow jiggles slightly, and he wakes with an eloquent, "Wha...?"

Jensen grins down at him, "You have a wonderful way with words."

Returning the grin easily, Jared says, "Don't I know it."

He sits up, reluctantly leaving his warm pillow, to peer out the window. They're outside his house. A few lights are on inside, and he knows Sandy is awake: waiting for him.

Letting out a sigh, he slides out the car, "You'll be okay?"

Jensen grins, so convincingly Jared nearly misses the flicker of uncertainty, "Yeah."

Frowning, Jared says, "Call me if you're not. Seriously, man, I don't care what time it is."

With a nod, Jensen replies softly, "Okay, see you in the morning, Jay."

Patting the car-roof twice, and waving at the driver, Jared makes his way inside.

He can hear Sadie and Harley barking up a storm from where they're still shut outside. Fishing his keys out, he steels himself and unlocks the door.

Sandy's lounging on the couch, a pile of girly magazines surrounding her.

"Hey, baby."

She stands up, her full height only reaching up to the middle of Jared's chest. She pulls him in for a kiss and replies, "Hey, how was filming?"

He heads over to the door, letting the dogs in, as he says, "Great, we managed to get a lot done."

"That's great."

Her tone is off, so Jared looks up from where he's playing with his babies, "I'm sorry about last night. I never meant to stay over, but Jensen's ...well, I just needed to be there for him."

She nods, "You ready for bed?"

Sighing, he replies, "Yeah, I'm dead."

A few hours later, Sandy's lying curled around his side, and it just feels wrong. There's this constant feeling that if he rolls over, he'll hurt her, break her. Even during the day, it's almost as though he has to tread delicately around her. A constant subconscious feeling that he's only realising now.

*Not at all like.... No, not even going to go there.*

He sighs and rolls over, turning his back to Sandy as he stares out at the garden

\*\*\*\*\*

After many hours of attempting to sleep, Jensen inevitably finds himself heading towards the couch – the couch where Jared had held him. He lies down, pressing his nose into the cushion, inhaling the faint, lingering traces of his friend.

The familiar scent fills him with bittersweet warmth, as he remembers how it felt to be wrapped up in those strong arms, feeling Jared's warm breath against the nape of his neck, and he longs to feel that sense of *fitting* again.

Because that's the thing: right from the first time they met, they fitted. Their differences even them out and their similarities make them get on effortlessly. But it wasn't just that, it was how Jared had swept into his life – much like a whirlwind blowing in and turning everything upside down; the young man had a vibrant energy that engulfed anyone within smiling distance, and Jensen hadn't stood a chance (not that he'd been able to put up any resistance whatsoever).

But still more than that: Jared's arms seemed to have been crafted to fit around Jensen, the easy, comfortable way in which they wrapped around his shoulders at premiers and photo shoots, the way Jared could pick him up, and how naturally Jensen could curl himself up to fit against that broad chest, all of it, made Jensen press his nose further into the cushion, breathing in deeply.

\*\*\*\*\*

He wakes up feeling more exhausted than when he went to bed. He'd spent more than half the night mulling over the events of the past few days and Jared still hasn't made any sense of the confusion churning in his head.

The look of adoration that he'd caught on his friend's face keeps replaying in his head. His skin still tingles where the light fingers had brushed through his hair. The warm feeling still glows in his chest. He still doesn't know what to make of it.

He also doesn't know what the next step is. One: his best friend kisses him. Two: he freaks. Three: he discovers Jensen's in love with him. Four: he tries not to freak. Five: ... yeah, that's about where he is now. He's past the 'trying not to freak' part, but he's not sure what comes after that.

Because he sort of likes the feeling: of knowing he's loved. He's still finding it hard to believe. That *Jensen loves him*. It's something he'd have scoffed only a few weeks ago had someone mentioned it. Sure, they're best friends, closer than brothers, but *love* – more than brotherly love – no way! Or at least that's what Jared would have replied back then.

And another thing: Jared still finding it hard to grasp that Jensen's gay. With everything else going on, there hadn't really been time for it to sink in. *And how is it possible that he fell for me? I mean, with all the guys out there, it just doesn't make sense that it's me. There's nothing special about me, what is it that Jensen loves? What could a guy like him ever see in a guy like me?*

Jared pauses in his act of brushing his teeth and stares up at the mirror, examining his features. His hair is untidy, sticking up in weird directions, and his cheeks still have pillow creases. There's toothpaste around his mouth and a bit on his cheek. His green-brown eyes blink back sleepily. *Nothing here worth falling in love for.*

He sighs, rinses his mouth, and steps into the shower.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jensen climbs into the back of the car after waving to the driver, and finds Jared curled up across the seat. His head cradled in his arms, long legs folded up impossibly to fit in the small space. Smiling slightly at the sight of his friend, Jensen takes the seat opposite him, exchanging fond glances with the driver through the mirror.

Stealing another chance to stare blatantly at the sleeping form, Jensen's eyes slide over the fine features of Jared's face. The young, innocent face contradicting the seductive, smooth, *kissable* lips and crazily long eyelashes – beneath which, lay Jensen's kryptonite: those beautiful eyes that were never the same shade, and which made Jensen feel like doing anything the younger man asked him – the high cheekbones and strong jaw line ensured that despite how *pretty* the man may be, he was in fact a handsome, manly, man.

*God, what's happened to me? 'Manly man.' What the fuck?*

He tears his gaze away from his friend, staring out the window instead, as a memory surfaces.

*Jensen's knee was bouncing uncontrollably, his fingers tapping relentlessly on the table. His stomach was a bundle of nerves, and he was struggling to keep his breathing under control. His mouth felt dry like it had when he'd had to give that speech in tenth grade in front of the entire school.*

*Footsteps came from behind him, and he spun to see Eric and Kim in the doorway. "Jeez, Jensen, the guy doesn't bite."*

*Kim smirked, "Knowing Jared, he probably would. I swear that guy gets more like his dogs every day."*

*"Not helping," Jensen got out through gritted teeth.*

*With a sympathetic look, they once again left him in his anxiety.*

*He hated meeting new people. That's why he sucked at promotion parties and premiers. People thought he was rude and uptight, when actually he was just bad with people, shy, introverted, or whatever the hell it was called when strangers generally freak him out.*

*Acting was fine, when he was acting he didn't have to make nice small talk and smile at lame jokes, it was after the acting was done that terrified him. It hadn't been too bad when he'd acted in Dark Angel and Days of our lives, because in those he'd only had small parts, and he hadn't been expected to get on with any of the other actors.*

*But now...*

*Now it was just going to be him and this Jared guy. They had to get along if the show was to be any good.*

*No pressure, hey?*

*His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the sounds of heavy footfalls coming up the trailer steps. Taking a last gulp of oxygen, he steeled himself, turned around and...*

*"Hey, man! I'm your onscreen bro!"*

*There was a tall, grinning guy coming towards him...really tall...Jensen took a step backwards. He barely had a moment to prepare himself, before his face was squished up against a hard chest, and he was being hugged. But not just hugged, more like squeezed until all oxygen whooshed out of him.*

*Then just as suddenly, he was released, a beaming, handsome, young face before him. He suddenly felt old and stiff. As he was dragged after the bouncing bundle of energy out the room, he realised that everyone was old and stiff compared to Jared.*

*There wasn't time for Jensen to feel awkward or have to make small-talk. Jared filled all silences without even realising it, as he challenged Jensen to play games of playstation, started a soccer game on the field, and introduced Jensen to his 'babies'.*

*A hand waves furiously before his eye. He blinks, snapping back into the world of the living, to see Jared's worried eyes right before him. "Huh?" he got out eloquently.*

*"Dude, you were so in outer space with Han Solo and the clones. What the hell were you thinking about? You had a goofy grin and everything..."*

*Jensen chuckles. So like Jared to bring Star Wars into everything. "Nah, I was just thinking of when we first met."*

The other man bursts out laughing, “Oh, wow, dude, the first time I saw you I was like, ‘whoa, he looks stressed,’ but then afterwards I was like, ‘Meh, not that old after all.’”

Lightly punching his friend’s shoulder, Jensen relaxes back on the couch. Jared keeps talking, “And then when you got my babies each a bone, I was like, ‘Okay, I like this dude.’”

Jensen grins proudly, “Man, I knew the way to a guy’s heart was his pups.”

There is an awkward pause as they both analyze that. Jensen blushes, “I didn’t... I didn’t mean...”

Shifting to sit beside him, Jared’s hand is instantly on his shoulder, “Relax man, I know you didn’t mean anything by it. It’s just... well, it’ll just take a while for it to get, you know... used to it.”

Staring down at his lap, Jensen says softly, “Yeah.”

The hand squeezes slightly, and Jared murmurs, “I’m sorry, man. I have no fucking clue what I’m doing here. I’m such an idiot, and I just... don’t know what to do or say.

Jensen looks up to see Jared looking dejectedly out the window. *Why the hell does he think any of this is his fault?*

He opens his mouth to ask this, but in a quiet voice, Jared interrupts him, “I hate being the reason you’re sad.... I wish I could give you what you wanted... I wish I knew what to do...”

Big, earnest eyes turn to face him, and Jensen is suddenly overwhelmed by a rush of affection, at just how much his friend means what he says.

He reaches out, hand coming to lightly cupping Jared’s cheek, gently smoothing his thumb over his cheek. He brushes his fingers over Jared’s features, lightly trailing back to gently brush his bangs behind his ears.

Hazel eyes stare quizzically at him, and he smiles softly, his eyes crinkling. “You don’t make me sad,” cradling Jared’s innocent face between both his hands, he continues, “everything I want is right here.”

Before Jared has a chance to reply, Jensen is already pulling back, shifting to sit opposite once more. They sit in silence for a bit staring at the passing scenery, both lost to their own thoughts, until Jared nudges Jensen’s leg with his foot, Jensen looks up, and they smile at each other.

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Just as he’s about to head out for a evening run, the phone starts ringing. He grabs it on his way to the bedroom.

“Hello?”

“Jay.”

“Mom! How are you? How’s everyone?”

There’s silence from the other end, and he grins, “Mom, did you leave the stove on again?”

Then in a weird tone, his mom says, “*Jay... its Jerry.*”

His world goes cold, “What is it? What happened?”

“He was fixing the barn roof. He...he fell... he... he... they’re saying he’s not going to make it...oh God.”

Sliding to the floor, Jared just listens to his mom cry.

He doesn’t cry. He doesn’t feel anything but a cold numbness in his chest.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jensen curses as he pulls into the parking space. He’s late. Eric is going to kill him. *Yet again.*

He sighs and runs a hand through his messy hair. *So is Shannon.* He’s surprised Jared didn’t call him to tell him to, ‘get his lazy ass moving.’ Usually that was all that kept Jensen from oversleeping every single day.

Heading for the hair and make-up tent, he keeps an eye out for the sasquatch. After realising Shannon and Kate aren’t in the tent, he makes for Eric’s make-shift office.

Eric is slumped in the chair, staring at his desk. Kim is beside him, equally subdued. Cold creeping into him, he calls, “Guys?”

They look up, “Jensen...”

Dread filling him, he asks, “Where’s Jay?”

Their eyes dart away. Full on panic starting to set in, he says frantically, “Where the *hell* is Jay?”

“Sandy called in... Jay’s dad...”

*Oh, God...*

Kim goes on, “His dad had an accident: he fell off the barn roof and obtained a serious spinal injury. The doctors are saying that he has about two days to live at most. Jared’s flying home this afternoon. There wasn’t an earlier flight.”

“Fuck,” Jensen sags into a chair beside Eric, and fishes out his phone to check for any messages that he might have missed. There are none.

*He didn't call me.* His chest feels tight, as though he's being crushed by a heavy object.

Without uttering a word, he stands and heads for his car, knowing Eric and Kim understand.

It can't be much, but it feels like hours later that he arrives at Jared's house. He storms up the driveway, and – for courtesy's sake – rings the doorbell.

A few moments later, Sandy emerges, she doesn't look happy to see him at all, "Oh... hi Jensen."

Not caring for dignitaries, he just says, "Where is he?"

She scowls, but nods her head towards the interior.

He passes her, not caring that he's being rude, not caring about anything other than Jared.

"Jay?"

The man is seated on the couch, his head tilted back, staring at the ceiling. He's stock-still, and just that fact innerves Jensen.

Sitting beside him, he repeats softly, "Jay?" as he rests a hand lightly on Jared's shoulder.

The younger man gives a small twitch, as though the touch interrupted his thoughts, but other than that, he doesn't move.

Sandy takes the chair opposite, and says quietly, "He hasn't said a word to me; hasn't even looked at me. I only heard what happened when I answered his phone and spoke to his brother."

Turning once more to his friend, he can't stand the blank look on the usually glowing face, and so does the only thing he can do. He wraps a hand around Jared's arm, ignoring how the man tenses beneath his grip, and pulls the stiff man toward him, not stopping until he has both arms around him, Jared's face pressed into the dip of his shoulder.

Not loosening his hold even slightly when the man rigidly tries to pull away, Jensen glances over the mop of brown hair at Sandy. Her face is stormy, but he couldn't care less.

He's not sure what he's about to say to her, but before he can, she stands up suddenly, loudly saying, "Well, I'll be at my friend's house. Call me *if* you need me."

Silently he watches as she stomps out of the room. He can't bring himself to feel bad. *Why the hell should I feel bad? This isn't about her or me this is about Jay.*

Jared is still taut in his arms, so Jensen begins to gently run his hands up and down the tense back, massaging as best he can from this angle.

Gradually, ever so gradually, the tight muscles begin to relax, and Jared's leaning more into Jensen's shoulder by the minute.

He feels the exact moment when Jared gives in and realises that Jensen's not going to let him up anytime soon. The young man falls limp, his hesitant arms coming to wrap vaguely around Jensen's torso.

Jensen doesn't say anything; neither does Jared. There's nothing to say, that can be said truthfully. Not even, 'It'll be fine,' or 'I'm okay,' can be said.

He holds his friend for hours; merely pulling him closer when he felt his arms going numb; there is a damp patch on his shoulder, but he doesn't mention that. Jared has every right to his grief, and if he can't cry in front of Jensen, who can he cry in front of?

It's about noon when Sandy comes back. She just gives Jensen a death stare and snappishly says, "His flight's in two hours."

He forces himself to smile at her, "Thanks Sandy."

That was definitely the wrong thing to say. Sandy goes completely rigid, her face cold. "What the hell are you thanking me for? I am his *fiancée* after all, you are just his *friend*. If anyone should be taking care of him, it's *me*."

A flare of anger sparking up inside of him, Jensen's arms tighten around Jared, and he says in a quiet, icy voice, "Jesus, Sandy, this isn't some fucking competition."

She seems to sneer, "Yeah... right, so let me guess: I *imagine* the way you gaze at him when he's not looking. I bet you're just waiting to steal him away from me."

In an equally cold voice, Jensen gets out, "The way I feel about him is none of your business. What is your business, and coincidentally mine as well, is that Jay needs us, now if you can't be mature about this then--"

He's cut off by Jared shifting in his arms. A blush stains his cheeks as he realises they were completely talking about Jared with him being right there.

Jared gets to his feet, his eyes lowered, he doesn't speak to either of them; he just heads towards the bathroom.

"Now look what you've done," spits Sandy.

Jensen doesn't even dignify that with a comment, opting instead to bite his tongue and goes after his friend.

He knocks softly, getting no response. Sliding to the floor, sitting with his back to the door, he quietly asks, "Jay, do you want me to come with you?"

There's silence for a few moments, and then the door opens, a wrenched voice answering, "Thanks Jen, but I... I think I should do this alone..."

Clamping a hand lightly over Jared's sock-clad foot, Jensen says without turning around, "Okay, man... just... if you need me, you got my number. Anytime you want to chat or whatever, you just give me a call, and I'll catch the first flight to 'Tonio.'"

A hand rests lightly on the crown of his head, fingers curling slightly in his hair, as a quiet voice answers, “Thanks, Jen.”

Watching Jared walking away at the terminal is one of the hardest things Jensen has ever done. The lack of *bounce* in the man’s walk, the absence of anything bright or cheerful, the way hazel eyes remain lowered, and the blankness on Jared’s face, all of it, makes Jensen just want to bundle the man up and take him away from everything. He’s never been a God-questioning man, but right there and then, he curses God for letting this happen, for stealing that innocent shine out of Jared, and for making Jensen unable to make it better.

And the fact that Sandy is standing beside him, having just smooched an unresponsive Jared, blatantly and wetly, in front of at least forty people, and then proceeded to give Jensen a triumphant glance once she’d stopped eating his mouth, does not improve matters at all. The glance had been a, ‘watch what I can do, that you can’t’ look, and it had made Jensen grind his teeth, not in jealousy, but rather in frustration that Sandy can be so *childish*.

Jensen manages to last three hours – spent pacing around his apartment – before he finally gives in, and books the next flight to San Antonio.

\*\*\*\*\*

His eyes are twitching from the need to sleep, but every time he shuts them, all he can see is his dad: smiling and laughing as he swings a triumphant Jared through the air after his first football game; comforting him after his first break-up by taking him on a father-son camping trip; proudly leading the standing ovation at Jared’s graduation; and then a more recent image, of him and Jared’s mom, both looking deliriously happy as they congratulated their soon-to-be daughter-in-law.

*Sandy.*

He shakes his head to clear his thoughts, and stares out the window, looking down upon the thick layer of clouds that hid the land from view. The air-conditioning is making his skin feel uncomfortable, as though it’s stretched too tightly over his flesh. The artificial air is making his nose sore and throat feel painfully dry – despite how many cups of water he swallows.

It doesn’t help that his head is pounding and it feels like there’s a glob of vomit in his throat.

A passing airhost looks down at him, his eyes flick over his features and concern clouds his face, “Sir, are you okay?”

He forces a smile. This is about the fourth airhost to ask him that. “Yup, just peachy, thank you.”

Knowing just how unconvincing that was, what with his hoarse voice and pained grimace, he takes in the genuine worry currently on the well-meaning man’s face.

Trying again, he says, “No, really, I’m fine.”

The airhost smile faintly, “Okay, then. If there’s anything I can get you, just shout.”

He watches the man making his way down the aisles, before turning to rest his forehead against the horribly warm window. When he pulls away, his skin sticks slightly to the plastic, and he sighs, letting his head fall back against the headrest.

Jared doesn't think he's ever felt more like crying than he does now. Even tiny, little, meaningless things make him have to blink back moisture. He feels like sobbing into his arms like he had when his first dog – Munchie – had died. But he can't. The memory that his dad had been the one whose shoulder he'd cried into, only makes his throat close up even more.

This time there won't be a shoulder to cry on. This time he knows he'll be the one lending shoulders. He has to be strong: for mom and Meg. He knows this. Knows that it should make him stop wanting to bail like a girl. But it doesn't. He just wants to curl up in his dad's arms like he had when he was young, and be held, and know he's safe and loved and that his dad'll always be there to protect him.

Disillusionment is painful.

\*\*\*\*\*

He steps out the terminal, and is immediately blasted by the hot, Texan wind. It billows around him, blowing his hair this way and that, tugging at his clothes and nudging him towards the nearby cabs. He pauses for a moment, taking in the familiar smells: of sun-roasted dust, clean sweat, barbeques, and *home*.

He thinks that smell is what made him and Jensen get along so well: smelling of home.

*Jensen.*

Shaking his head once more, he tightens his grip on his backpack, and makes for the bright yellow taxis.

\*\*\*\*\*

He'd refused to allow his family to come and fetch him, for various reasons, the main one being that he wants some time to get himself under control before he faces them. He knows that sounds terrible, but it's true. He has to get himself steeled.

When he climbs out of the cab, pays the driver and walks through the big, glass doors he feels heavy, as though secretly someone's been adding weights to his bag, so gradually that he didn't notice.

He's follows the directions given by a smiling receptionist, and hesitates for a moment before pushing open the door a crack.

The first thing he sees is Meg, slumped in a chair, face shadowed and streaked with tears. She spots him, and leaps up, running towards him and out into the passage, folding herself into his arms. Her wraps his arms around her slender frame, and holds her tightly to him

“Jay...” she sobs into his chest. Her hands clutch at his back as she repeats, “Jay...”

He smooths a hand over her hair, gently stroking the hazel locks identical to his own in all but length, as he whispers, "I'm here Meg, shh, it's okay. I'm here."

A few minutes later, the door opens once more, and Megan pulls away to let Jared hug their mom.

"I don't want him to go..." she wails into his shoulder.

Pressing her close, he murmurs, "I know, Mom.... I know."

When she pulls away and moves to sit beside Megan in one of the waiting chairs, she nods towards the door, giving him a weak, watery smile, "He'll be glad to see you."

He smiles back painfully, and turns face the sneering door once more.

Quietly pushing it open, he steps inside.

There is a single bed, occupied by his dad, pale against the white sheets, motionless except for his eyes which flick towards him, and crease at the edges as if he's smiling.

Fluidly, Jared finds himself kneeling beside the bed, his hands covering his father's, sharing warmth with the icy cold, fingers that curl slightly around his. "Hey, dad..." he says softly.

Taking a deep, shuddering gasp of breath, the man manages to get out, "Jay..."

Gently squeezing his hand, Jared says, "Shh, don't talk, Dad."

The fingers twitch and eyes crease, and Jared gets the idea that his dad is saying something along the lines of, "Since when did I follow orders?"

Smiling, Jared says with forced cheerfulness, "What were you thinking? Fixing the barn roof alone? Why didn't you call me? I'd have been up here in a jiffy, helping my old man out."

The eyes give him a defiant look, but he just continues: "Now you just have to get better, prove those damn doctors wrong."

The eyes soften, and the fingers curl further around his. Ignoring Jared's protests, his dad gets out, "Not...this... time ...son."

Jared angrily wipes away his tears, "Don't talk like that. Just... don't. We'll get you better. I'll find the best surgeon there is. We'll-"

He's interrupted by another shuddering gasp of breath, followed by, "...know ...proud...am... Love... you."

"Stop it. Dad... don't... don't talk like that... please... please Dad."

"...Look after... your mom, ...Meg ... make sure... you're happy... with ... one you... one you love..."

Tears are pouring down Jared's face, and he wipes them away furiously as the door begins to open.

Meg comes in, closely followed by their mom. They fold themselves into chairs nearby, and begin talking. What they are talking about, Jared has no idea, but it fills the silence; fills the time; fills everything but the hollowness in his chest.

It's not long before Jared is watching the lids of his dad's eyes sliding shut. They carry on talking in subdued voices, until his mom also drops her head back against the headrest. Megan's eyes flicker towards Jared, and she gets up, and slides to sit on the floor between his outstretched legs.

He leans back against the bed, wrapping his arms around her as she curls up against his chest. It's not long before her breathing evens out, and she falls asleep in her brother's arms.

Jared doesn't sleep. He sits in the darkness, listening to the ticking of the clock and beeping of the heart monitor. He's tired, in more ways than one. He's tired of feeling alone; tired of feeling confused; tired of not knowing what to do; he's tired of everything.

All he wants right at that moment is for someone to tell him it's okay: that it's okay to cry; okay to not be big and strong and tough on occasion; that it's okay to fall apart every once in a while; and that it's okay to need someone.

But no voice breaks through his darkness.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jensen hates commercial airplanes. They are so *fucking* unreliable. His flight was three hours ago. Only he's not in San Antonio as he should be, instead he's stuck at the cheesy airport café in the middle of the night, drinking some disgusting brown-coloured water that was called coffee on the menu.

After Jensen spent nearly twenty minutes demanding a flight leave *instantly*, he discovered that there is a pilot's strike going on. That was the reason for all the delays and flight shortages, and apparently, he's extremely lucky to have gotten a seat at all. Unsurprisingly, that didn't make him feel any better.

His flight is delayed indefinitely.

\*\*\*\*\*

He's stirred from his fourth count of the wall bricks by the sudden shrill ringing from one of the machines nearby. He leaps to his feet, pulling a waking Megan up with him just as a bunch of medical personnel barge in through the door.

There's shouting and urgency and loud beeping and then... silence...

Then a quiet voice rings out.

"Time of death: three thirty-four."

Meg turns in his arms and buries her face in his collarbone. He pulls his mom into the embrace as well, holding them both upright and whispering meaningless words in their ears.

After listening to the doctor, but not hearing him, Jared pulls two sobbing females towards the family truck, parked outside.

He drives them home, the car filled with the sounds of loss.

\*\*\*\*\*

He forces his mom and sister to a sleeping pill each, to ensure that they have some rest, but he doesn't take one himself, because he can't afford to lose consciousness like that, not now that he has to watch out for his family.

After tucking his mom and sister in their beds, he heads outside, towards the swing at the foot of the garden. The swing he and his dad had made.

The moon is out, but he doesn't notice that. The smell of jasmine is in the air, but he doesn't notice that. The hooting of a nearby owl fills the silence, but he doesn't notice that either. Jensen is on the swing. That he does notice.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jared blinks numbly at the image before him. He knows he must be hallucinating, seeing as how he'd left Jensen at the airport all the way at the other side of the continent. Despite this, his eyes seem to latch onto Jensen – or the image of Jensen at least.

He's suddenly filled with the desperate and sudden desire to be curled in those strong arms. To be held and protected. He knows Jensen would give him that. Knows it like he knows the sun rises each morning. But the fact that he can't have that: makes his eyes well up slightly.

Then he shakes his head, wondering when he'd become such a girl. He's a six foot four guy, who works out frequently and acts on a TV-show where his character hunts demons, and he's thinking about being *held*? Let alone the fact that it's his co-star and best friend who he wants to hold him. And that said co-star admitted to being in love with him mere days ago.

His head starts pounding as confusion sets in once more. He's too tired to even attempt to sort out his mind, and he just closes his eyes, and continues towards the swing, where his co-star is *not* sitting.

Luckily he knows the way so well that he doesn't even stumble once.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jensen arrived in Texas at about three, thanks to his charm, status, and money. He's never used his career to get favours before, but this was an exception: a *major* exception.

Upon arrival, he had instantly caught a cab, having only brought along a small bag with necessities in it. He shamelessly bribed the driver to cut off twenty minutes of the drive, and by twenty-five past three, he'd arrived at the Padalecki residence.

It was then that he actually stopped to wonder whether this was a good idea or a very, *very* stupid one. The house was empty, and he cursed himself for not realising they'd be at the hospital. *Idiot.*

He knew Jared always left his window open, and that he could easily get inside that way, but he felt too much like an intruder. *I shouldn't even be here. I have no right to be here.*

He'd circled around to the back garden, and had taken up residence on the swing that Jared had boasted about. His pride was well earned: the swing was damn comfortable, with a back rest and everything. After scooting down to lay sideways, his brain began to tell him, 'Hello, early morning here, time to sleep you big jackass,' and he was too tired to disobey.

He wakes when he hears them arrive. He hears Shannon's sobs from here. Hears Jared's soft, soothing voice, and Megan's - seeking reassurances. He hears all of this and feels like he's spying. Sadness douses him, and he silently mourns the death of Gerald Padalecki, but what he mourns even more, is the death of *Jared's* father, because to Jared, his family is *everything*. He'd do anything for them; even fly thousands and thousands of miles just to watch Megan's school play.

Through the window, he can hear Jared talking softly to his sister, comforting her and putting her to bed. How he can even be functioning is beyond Jensen. He must feel like death warmed over.

Jensen hears crunching on the gravel pathway, and looks up, feeling guilty at having observed what he had. He just stops dead; staring at Jensen like *he's* the one looking like a ghost, while in truth Jared's far more likely to get picked for Johnny Depp's Sweeny Todd character than Jensen.

Jensen watches curiously as he sees unreadable emotions skittering over Jared's features. When he closes his eyes and starts to continue towards Jensen, he realises yet again that: *I have no place here, I have no right to see him in pain, no right to want to hold him, no right to love him, no right at all.*

But the thing is: he *is* there. He *has* seen Jared in pain. He *does* love him. *And I'll be damned if I don't hold him right the fuck now.*

Moving as swiftly as possible without falling face-first onto the ground, he strides towards Jared. The man's eyes are still squeezed shut tightly, and he looks so much like a child having nightmares, that any doubt leaves Jensen completely, and he slide his arms around the younger man.

His eyes pop open, wide as saucer's glistening slightly, as his mouth drops open slightly.

"Jen...?" he asks in amazement, as if he hadn't seen me only moments before.

Jensen smile softly at him, and he seems to freeze, his eyes darting towards where my hands are lightly resting on his waist, and then back up at the older man.

With a cold jolt through his system, Jensen realises that he probably thinks Jensen's about to force himself upon him again, Jensen's about to pull away when he's caught completely by surprise by Jared. The man steps forwards, encircling himself in Jensen's arms, his head stooped to rest on the stunned man's shoulder.

He looks so small, which is an attribute Jensen had never called nor dreamed would ever call, Jared Padalecki; and young, which is a given; and *trusting* which is like a warm gulp of coffee to Jensen's chest on a icy day. It burns, but it's also *good*. 'Burns' because yet again he has to remind himself that Jared is not his to have, and of the reason the man's been reduced to this vulnerable being he'd never seen before; 'Good', because it's Jared, and with Jared very little things are *bad* (except his breath after a drinking spree, *oh, god, never again.*), and also good because even after what he'd done, Jared still allows Jensen to hold him. It's stupid, but he feels as though he's been handed the world on a platter.

\*\*\*\*\*

*He's here. He came after me. He's here. He's here.* The words keep replaying in Jared's amazed brain, even as he snuffles closer to the warm chest of his friend. It had been an automatic breaking-down stage, when – in reaction to Jensen's touch – he had given in.

Now, he can't even think of why this was supposedly such a bad idea, although he vaguely remembers there were many reasons. His brain isn't allowing him access to those reasons, and he focuses instead of Jensen's strong, soft, steady, *soothing* voice.

Jensen's practically holding the both up now, seeing as how Jared's too lost in the comforting way Jensen's hands are running along his spine, to bother about *standing upright*. Besides, it's far warmer to be pressed against the firm chest.

He lets out a soft sigh, and sinks further into the arms of his best friend, and Jensen's there. Jensen holds him up. Jensen *always* holds him up. It's like he takes Dean's role far too seriously, and it's only right now, right here, that Jared's realising just how much he loves that about the man.

All his wanting to be held, protected, loved, and shielded from the world, all of that, Jensen gives him; and he never asks a single thing in return besides Jared's friendship. The sudden realisation that Jensen gives him *everything* makes Jared cling even tighter, tears beginning to fill his eyes.

The knowledge that he can let go, that he can let Jensen see how broken up he is inside, and just how much it hurts to lose his dad, and that Jensen will still be there for him, not expecting a single thing as compensation, makes Jared suddenly despise himself for taking so much and giving so little.

But Jensen's warm, soft, firm hand on the back of his head, carding through his hair doesn't allow him to pull back, so he just goes with it, allows Jensen to lead them towards the swing and shuffle around to get comfortable, eventually ending up with Jensen pressed up against his back, arms and legs wrapped around him, engulfing him in warmth and protection and

*love*. It's as though Jensen's whispering: "I'm here now, Jay, it's okay, I'm here. I'll always be here."

When Jensen's gently hands slide up to begin kneading his shoulders, Jared lets his head drop forwards, falling limp in Jensen's hands. Jensen carefully and firmly begins to massage the tight knotted muscles in his back.

Eyes slipping shut, Jared can feel the tears and tension seeping out of him. The droplets stain the wooden bench dark between his legs, but the feeling of Jensen's warmth, soft and reassuring behind and around him, allows him his grief.

When his tears begin to cease, and he's feeling soft, relaxed and worn out, strong arms slide around his waist, and a gentle voice whispers, "Let's get you to bed."

He allows Jensen to manhandle him towards the house, he's so exhausted and pliable, that there's no problem in his mind with being half carried by his co-star.

It's only when Jensen's got him stripped down to boxers and a t-shirt that Jared remembers the feeling of Jensen pressed up against him while he slept. He wants that again. Wants it with the sole-mindedness of a child wanting a teddy at the store, he's so beat that he probably *would* throw a tantrum.

"Stay... please, Jen... don't leave me alone..." he pleads as he tugs on Jensen's shirt hem.

The man seems to freeze, torn between running out the room for the couch, and giving Jared what he wants. Jared wearily tries again, curling his fingers around Jensen's wrist, pulling him softly, "Please, Jen..."

Shoulders slumping in defeat, Jensen hesitantly strips to his own boxers and shirt, and he hovers uncertainly at the foot of the bed. Jared's too tired to even stop to wonder why there's such an issue about them sharing a bed. It's him and Jensen. *Him* and *Jensen*. And the rest of the reasons can go fuck themselves.

He reaches out with fingers shaking with weariness, and waits for Jensen to tentatively slip his own in between. After that, all Jensen's restraint is a lost cause, because Jared promptly pulls him by the hand, sending him sprawling on the bed, and then curls himself around the older man, pressing as close as possible, seeking comfort and protection.

It takes a few minutes before Jensen shifts, his arm sliding around to rest lightly on Jared's back, brushing slightly over the material of his shirt. With a shaky, after-crying, deep breath, Jared buries his face in the dip of Jensen's neck, breathing in the soft smell of everything that is Jensen. And that is all it takes for him to glide into the clutches of sleep.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's agony, yet it's the best thing that's ever happened to me at the same time. The way he's curled around me, seeking my comfort, stealing and sharing my warmth, the way he's clinging to me like I'm all that's keeping him from falling, all of it, is so *trusting*, and so *right* that it will kill me when morning comes and I have to let him go.

But for now, I am allowed to hold him as I like, it's like that night on the couch, but it's *different* because this time *I'm* the one giving comfort, and Jared's the one needing me.

*Needing me.* Those two words are all I've ever wanted. To be *needed*. Not to be just a waste of time, taking up space.

But it's painful, knowing even as I stroke my hand up and down his long, smooth, strong back, even as he fits around me like he's made to be there, even as his nose snuffles beside my neck, that he will never need me as I need him.

It's scary sometimes, just how much I need him. It's like a constant ache that never leaves, and only gets soothed by the sight or presence of him. How just the sight of him gets me to shed half my morning-grouchiness, and one grin from him leaves me ten million times lighter, how one touch from him can soothe my pre-premier nervousness away and how I can get so much comfort just from being allowed to feel his heartbeat, is actually terrifying.

I love him. I've known that since I saw the fire in his eyes when he cut Dean down, but in truth, it's likely since the first time we met. Just imagining there ever being a time when I *didn't* love him, is impossible. It's like a physical *and* emotional impossibility.

He shifts, stirring me from my thoughts and back to the way he's shifting *even* closer, a warm weight on my chest, and one I want there forever. His fingers are inching beneath my t-shirt, seeking my warmth, and I can't help the tremors and fluttering of my stomach muscles.

Luckily, or unluckily, depending on which way you look at it, his fingers stop their unconscious motion, and he sighs, his palm resting flat over my belly-button.

I exhale slowly, skin tingling beneath his touch, and I press my nose to his hair, breathing in deeply, scorching this moment into my memory.

\*\*\*\*\*

I wake to find myself curled up in strong arms, around a warm chest. That's really weird, seeing as though I am a *guy* and I don't usually find myself in another man's arms. It feels nice though: *safe*.

Nearly choking on my tongue at that thought, I'm torn between laughing at myself, and bashing myself on the head. My treacherous mind continues: *It does feel nice, really nice.*

Lifting up slightly, I realise it's Jensen. *Why would Jensen...* Then yesterday's events hit me, and my insides are suddenly ripped out. *Dad.*

*No! No, it's not real! It didn't happen... it didn't happen!*

I cling onto Jensen, pressing my nose to his skin, breathing in deeply as I try to keep from having a panic attack, "No, please, not real..., not real.... Dad..."

Jensen's arms tighten around me; I curl my legs up, trying to fold myself into a ball, "Not real... not real... not real," I begin to scrabble at Jensen's chest, searching for purchase, trying to ground myself.

He shifts, curling around me, encircling me with his arms, pressing his forehead to mine; I look up into sorrowful green eyes, and know that it was real. That my dad is...

I fall limp, eyes clenching shut against the moisture threatening to fall. The warm hands tighten, pulling me against Jensen's chest in a firm hug. I sink into him, wrapping my own arms around his waist, pressing myself so close to him, there's no space between us.

*Dad. Dad's dead. Dad's dead. Dad's gone. Dad's gone and he's never coming back.*

A few minutes later, a sound breaks through my grief, and I'm instantly pulling away from Jensen, heading for the door, wiping my face and gaining control over myself: Meg's crying.

By the time I walk into her room, my composure is back, there's no sign of my tears either. Meg's curled up on the bed. She sees me, and instantly scrambles towards me, allowing me to fold her up in my arms, and hold her to me as Jensen did me.

She curls into a ball on my lap, sobbing into my shoulder, clinging to my shirt as I whisper words neither of us hear.

When there's a crash from down the hall, I leave Megan curled beneath her blanket, no longer crying, but still hiccupping.

Following the direction of the noise, I am not at all surprised to find that it's Mom. Her face is pale and furious, and she's busy destroying her room.

"Mom," I whisper.

She spins around, as though ignoring me, and she strides towards the painting about the master bedroom. She yanks it down, yelling, "How could God let this happen? How could he just watch your father die? There is no God! Or if there is then there's no sense praying to him, because he doesn't fucking answer! He abandoned us! He abandoned your father, after all these years we've been good Christians, he goes and leaves us when we need him most! What kind of God is that? What kind of God is that?"

She sags into my arms, all strength and anger seeping out of her. In a tiny voice, she asks, "Why did it have to be him? He was a good man... a good man."

Holding her, I reply quietly, "I know, Mom. I know."

Her tears soak through my t-shirt, as she lets herself go. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she mumbles into my shoulder.

"Shhh, it's okay, Mom. We'll be okay."

Leading her to Megan's room, I leave the two of them together. I return to my room, but Jensen isn't there. A delicious smell reaches me and leads me to the kitchen, where Jensen is quietly making breakfast.

Affection overwhelms me, filling me to the brim at the knowledge that *Jensen is here. He's here for me.*

Wrapping my arms around him from behind – extracting a small, surprised squawk – I pull him back against me tightly, whispering in his ear, “Thank you, Jen. Thank you.”

He swats me with the spatula, and after being released, coughs into his fist, trying and failing to hide his adorable blush, “They’re just pancakes, man.”

Not letting him sell himself short, I lock eyes with his seriously, “No, they’re not, they’re a combination of eggs, milk, and flour, mixed into a batter, and *then* made into pancakes.”

Jensen’s eyes widen at my lunacy, and I smile, my gaze softening, as I take in his appearance: he looks exhausted.

Pulling him into another hug, I whisper, “But I wasn’t talking about the pancakes.”

I don’t let him go immediately, and smile against his neck when his hand rises to lie flat against my back, returning the embrace.

Only when the poor, neglected pancake begins to sizzle, do I release him. He smiles up at me, before turning to recue said pancake. Later on, I make sure to eat that pancake for interrupting the moment.

\*\*\*\*\*

It’s awkward when Jared’s mom and Megan come into the kitchen. They stare at me for a few moments, and I shift uncomfortably, knowing I’m intruding once again. But then Jared’s hand is suddenly on my shoulder, and I automatically relax into the touch, then they merely take their seats at the table.

With a quick squeeze, Jared’s hand is gone, and I sink down into my chair, feeling momentarily lost. Jared begins complementing the pancakes, and it’s not long before the tension seeps out the room.

“Thank you so much for being here, Jensen,” Shannon says, smiling at me.

With a blush, I mumble something incoherent, causing her and everyone else’s smiles to widen.

A short while later, I feel the need to say it, so I do, “I’m sorry. I really am sorry.”

Their gazes drop to the table, sudden silence filling the room. Just when I’m beginning to think I am the biggest idiot on the entire continent, Shannon’s hand covers mine, she squeezes and replies softly, “Thank you.”

Then her hand is gone, and the eating continues. Jared stands to gather the plates, and it’s just when he turns towards the sink, that we all see it: a white handprint low down on his back... my handprint – my floury handprint.

It stands out in bold contrast to his black shirt. It looks possessive, like someone was marking Jared as theirs; like *I* was marking Jared as *mine*. I stare at it, my face heating up furiously. The way the fingers of the handprint are curled around Jared’s side, curled in ownership,

sends tremors up me. I was actually holding him like that. My hand was actually that low down on his back. That was actually *my* hand.

Shannon and Megan are alternating between staring at the print and staring at me. My cheeks are burning, and I drop my gaze to the table, before uncontrollably flicking back to the handprint.

Clearing her throat, Shannon asks, “So Jared; how’s Sandy?”

Jared’s shoulder and back muscles tense up.

He doesn’t turn to face us, merely stares out the window, his hands bracing him against the sink.

In a quiet voice, all he says is: “Not here.”

The tone he uses screams of finality, and without another word, without even turning back to us, he heads out the back door.

My face is burning so badly, I’m surprised I’m not bursting into flames. I desperately want to go after him, but then what...? What could I possibly do that wouldn’t be overstepping my boundaries?

I risk a quick glance up to catch Shannon’s expression. It’s one of confusion, and she’s glancing between me and the open door. Unable to stand it a moment longer, I stand abruptly, sending my chair tumbling. Ignoring it, and the two Padalecki’s seated at the table, I follow after Jared.

There’s no sign of him, but the gate at the foot of the garden, behind the swing, is open. Breaking into a run, I make it to the road just in time to see Jared disappearing amongst the leafy trees of the nearby forest.

Chasing after him, I find myself cursing how long his legs are for the first time. I let out a relieved sigh, when I see him settling on a smooth rock beside a gurgling stream.

I cautiously approach him, not sure what to do.

“Jay...” I call out softly.

“Don’t,” is all he says, he doesn’t turn around, his eyes stare down at the bubbling water.

I know that’s my cue to leave. I know I’ve reached the line. I know with every fibre of my body that I *should* go. And yet, I don’t. My brain seems to have shut down after the knowledge that Jared is hurting caused it to short-circuit. Jared should *never* be hurting.

Silently I settle down beside Jared, dipping my fingers in the cool water and marvelling at the way the light dances off it.

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*What's he doing? Why won't he leave? Just leave damn it! Why can't he see that I need space? Can't he just give me some time to think?*

I'm just so confused. I can't think with him here. It's like he clouds up my thoughts, giving me the illusion that everything's fine, that everything's easy. But it's not.

It's like I'm being torn apart, being yanked in every which way, everyone expecting, everyone wanting. I have no idea what I'm doing, what I'm going to do, or even what *I* want to do.

I wish my dad was here. He always knew how to give me advice. Good advice, not petty Dr Phil advice. Just the thought of him makes my eyes blurry with moisture. *What are you, a five year old? Wanting Daddy to come make it all better? Time to grow up, chum.*

Taking a steadying breath, I search for answers in the surrounding scenery, turning away from where Jensen is sitting quietly.

*Jensen's strong arms, soft, soothing, wrapping around me holding me tightly... firm, warm chest, keeping me safe... quiet words, whispered, soft lips brushing against my ear... firm hands running down my back...*

Kicking a nearby rock, I stir myself with a wince from traitorous memories. The throbbing isn't enough to keep the next one at bay:

*In a voice so soft that I would have missed it except for the fact that Jensen's lips are right by my ear, Jensen whispers, "I love you."*

Losing my grip on the rock, I tumble with a splash into the water. Pain shoots from a point on my forehead. Before I can even begin to regain my bearings, strong arms are encircling beneath my arms, pulling me up to the surface. *...strong arms, soft, soothing, wrapping around me ... Jensen's warm chest is pressed against my back ... firm, warm chest, keeping me safe... "Jay, you okay?" ... quiet words, whispered, soft lips brushing against my ear...*

I shove Jensen away from me, scramble out the river, and break into a run, ignoring the slightly hurt cry of, "Jay?"

There's a 'thump, thump, thump' reverberating through my skull. I'm soaked through, water trickling down my skin, weighing down my clothes, and getting in my eyes. I don't care where I'm going, so long as it's *away*.

\*\*\*\*\*

"No, after that he took off. I tried to catch up, but he disappeared," I wearily scrub a hand over my face. It's been five hours since I lost Jared in the woods. *Why the fuck didn't I run fast enough?* But I'd been momentarily frozen at the way Jared had just shoved me away. Like he had that night...

I'd spent the better part of the afternoon searching for him, but there had been no sign of him. I'd returned back to the Padalecki house, just to check whether he had come back. He hadn't.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Where am I? Why does my head hurt? Wait is that blood?! Why the heck is there blood? What the hell's happening to me?* A root trips me, and I fall to my knees, double over and throw up.

It's dark, I can't see properly. My head hurts, *really* badly. A branch snaps behind me. "Who's there?" I call shakily into the darkness. I hate how my voice trembles.

All that answers me is the haunting silence and the increased pounding in my ears. I spin around, ignoring the protesting pain coming from my knees.

"Who's there?" my voice sounds too shrill in the night.

The wind is blowing cruelly over my damp clothes and skin; it's whipping around me, making me lose my balance.

*Why am I alone? Isn't anyone trying to find me? Why can't I remember?*

I try to grasp something from my memory, anything. All I get is the weird feeling of *gentleness* engulfing me, gentleness and *love*.

There's rustling from nearby, and I spin once more, searching the darkness blindly. Another crunch comes from behind me, causing me to turn rotate yet again. Light caresses blow against my skin, and I shiver, quickly turning back around to find there's no one there.

There's a weird ringing in my ear, it's tiny, but it won't go away. *What the hell is that light for?*

There's a bright, white light overhead, blurred and glinting, I don't know where it came from. It's huge. I can't see a thing besides it.

I stumble for a few more steps, until suddenly the light is gone, leaving me empty, sagging down to the ground, and allowing darkness to overcome me.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Urgh... what the fuck...?"

My head feels like there's a teenager with a drum set clanging away inside. My equilibrium is slightly off, my world swaying. Blinking my eyes open painfully, I have to squeeze them shut against the bright, blinding light.

Gradually my eyes adjust, and I peer around at my surroundings. I'm in a bed. A really, *really* white bed; pristine sheets and all.

Warm arms are suddenly wrapping around me, "Huh?"

Forcing my eyes to focus, I squint. Jensen's beside my bed. *Why is Jensen beside my bed?*

“Dude, you scared us,” he chastises.

Soft arms hug me, my mom comes into view. *Why is my mom in Canada?*

“What is it? Am I late for set or something? Mom, what are you doing here? Where’s Dad?”

They exchange glances. “Mom, why are you crying?”

*Wait, am I in hospital?*

My mom leaves the room. Turning to Jensen, I frown, “What’s going on? Why am I in hospital?”

Kneeling beside my bed, his eyes glisten as he grasps my hand. I’m getting more worried with every passing moment.

“Jay...” he murmurs softly, rubbing my hand between his.

Desperate to know what’s going on, I ask, “Jensen, what the hell happened? Did I have an accident? What’s my mom doing here?”

“Jay... your dad...” Jensen whispers.

“Is he here?” I crane my neck to try see out the door.

Swallowing, Jensen continues, “He’s... Jay, your dad’s dead.”

Staring at him incredulously, I scoff, “Yeah, right. Come on, man, seriously where is he? Back in ‘Tonio?”

Wide, shining eyes locking with mine, Jensen shakes his head, “I’m sorry, Jay, I wish it wasn’t true.”

“Man, this isn’t even funny. What kind of sick joke is this? Where’s my dad?” I repeat, voice getting louder, more hysterical and high-pitched.

He squeezes his eyes shut, pulling me to his chest, I try to pull away. He just holds on tightly.

“No, that’s not true! You’re lying. You’re lying. Let me go! No!”

His only response is to press me even closer to him, my face pressed into his shoulder. I continue faintly, “No... No... Not true.”

“I’m sorry.... I’m sorry,” he murmurs into my ear.

“No!” I cry out, beginning to struggle for earnest, desperately trying to pull away from Jensen. *It can’t be true! It’s not real. Jensen’s just joking.*

I know he’s not. I know he’d never joke about something like this. But that doesn’t stop me from thrashing about against his hold, even as tears seep into his shirt.

“No... no...”

Throughout my breakdown Jensen holds me. I think if he'd have let me go, I probably would have smashed something.

Wearing myself out, I just sag into his shoulder, faintly repeating, “No... no... no...”

Then I begin sobbing, clinging to Jensen instead of trying to shove him away.

\*\*\*\*\*

When I wake, Jensen is still there. His face weary, but his eyes focused on me. Giving me a small, comforting smile, he squeezes my shoulder. “Hey, how you feeling?” he asks softly.

Locking eyes with him, we both know there's no need for me to answer that.

“How's my mom? Meg?”

He gives me another small smile, “They're doing okay, considering.”

Nodding, I instantly regret that, it sends pain shooting to my temples. Raising a hand to my head, I feel the wrappings of a bandage.

“So... I take it I hit my head?”

Looking down at where his hand is still holding mine, he nods, “Yeah, you fell into the river.”

*“Love” ...splashes, blue... cold... pain... running...running*

I shake the indecipherable flashes of memory from my mind, I grasp instead onto the last thing I can remember. “There was a bright light?”

He glances up, “Yeah, we even had a search helicopter out for you.”

That draws out a pathetically small chuckle from me, but Jensen seems to brighten at the sight of it.

Sobering up quickly, I ask, “Why did I ... why did I forget?”

Squeezing my hand, he replies, “The doctor's say you've got retrograde amnesia. They'll want to test for its severity later on.”

*Huh, sounds fancy.*

“Okay.”

\*\*\*\*\*

I'm released the following day; the doctors diagnosing my amnesia as mild.

I've already gotten over the fact that I'm in San Antonio, but I have no clue what I'd do if Jensen weren't here.

He's like a silent support, his shoulder always there when I feel the need to hide my face, his arms always open when I need to feel safe, his words always providing comfort, his touch always gentle.

It's him who holds me as they lower my dad into the ground. Him I turn to when I'm unable to watch any longer. It's his arms I relax into. His neck my tears dampen; his lips that brush over my brow that night as he lays me down; his chest I curl around each night after that; him I turn to after I've comforted my mom and Meg. It's him. It's just him.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sandy's pissed. *Really* pissed.

It's actually funny: she spent over thirty minutes shouting at me for the fact that Jensen's here. She spent about thirty seconds telling me how sorry she is about my dad. *Now, is it just me, or is there a big difference?* I find I don't really care. And I don't care that I don't care.

\*\*\*\*\*

We have to fly back and start working again. I've offered to pay for my family to come back with us, but my mom insists that it's better for her and Meg to remain where they know all their neighbours and have a wide support system.

After hugging them both goodbye, making them promise to call me if they need a single thing, I follow Jensen towards the terminal.

During the flight I fall asleep on his shoulder. Lifting the armrest up, he lowers me down onto his lap, absent-mindedly carding his fingers through my hair, and letting me skip the whole journey.

\*\*\*\*\*

I don't want to say goodbye. From the tight hug he gives me, he doesn't either.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sandy hasn't let the dogs inside the house once. Nor has she taken them for walks. I'm surprised she remembered to feed them at all.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Fuck, I miss him.* It's like I've been spoiled or something. The past few weeks, my nights were spent with Jared's lithe body curled around me. Now, my bed feels empty. *Lonely.*

*I want him back.*

\*\*\*\*\*

The moment Jensen arrives on set, I yank him in for a hug; squeezing for a beat too long, before releasing him. His face is slightly flushed, and he coughs, “Wow, Jay, it’s only been... a day since I last saw you.”

Flashing him a grin, I reply goofily, “A day too long, buddy.”

His ears pink, he turns, clears his throat, and mutters, “We’d better find Eric.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Jared’s trying, really trying to be cheerful. I can see how much the effort’s killing him. Sandy acts as if nothing happened. On the occasions that I bump into her, she practically turns up her nose and stomps off. It would be funny, except I can see just how much it hurts Jared. For his sake, I’ve tried to be amicable towards her.

He looks tired; like he hasn’t slept in a while. I don’t know how to help him. I wish I did.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Honey,” her sweet tone warns me something’s up.

Glancing up from my script, I hum, “Hmmm?”

Checking her nails, “When’s our big day?”

*‘Our big day’? What big da- oh...*

Letting out a sigh, I murmur, “I don’t know, Sandy. I don’t think I’m ready for another big event...”

She huffs, “Come on, Jay. It’s been what? *At least* two months since your dad... yeah, died, I think it’s time we got a move on.”

*Could she care less?*

*I don’t think so.*

\*\*\*\*\*

I’ve been staring up at my bedroom ceiling for about an hour when my doorbell goes off.

“Jay? What are you doing here?” I ask, standing aside to let him in.

“I broke up with Sandy.”

*Wha... what?*

My eyes must be wide, and shock must be coating my face, because Jared repeats, “I broke up with her.”

Sitting down beside him on the couch, I stammer, “Why? I thought, you know, marriage, kids, all that...”

He nods, looking down at his hands, “Yeah... I figured she doesn’t really care about me. She hates my babies, and she... she hates you.”

Looking up at the last bit, he locks eyes with me, making my face heat up beneath his steady gaze.

Jared smiled, his eyes shimmering slightly, “I remembered what my dad told me... that... that night... he told me to make sure I was happy with the one I love.”

Taking a step closer, Jared murmurs, “I wasn’t happy with Sandy, and she isn’t the one I love.”

I’m frozen. I have no idea what’s happening. I’m not even sure if this is real or not. Either way, I’m not moving.

The distance between us is getting less and less. Suddenly my back’s against the wall. I hadn’t even realised I’d been backing away. Bracing an arm beside my head, Jared crowds closer, pressing into my space. His other arm slides around my waist, sending shivers through me.

Not breaking the eye-contact, Jared lowers his head slightly, pressing soft lips to mine, sending jolts of electricity all the way down to my toes. Tilting his head slightly, he sucks gently at my lips, deepening the kiss in response to my low whimper.

My legs have been turned into jelly, and it’s only Jared’s body, pressing me firmly against the wall, that keeps me from slumping down into a pile of mush.

My shaking hands cling tightly to his hips, making it obvious how fearful I am that he’ll pull away. His only response is to nudge my feet further apart and press closer, sliding his hand behind my head, and humming into my mouth.

I feel like one of those damn *Sims* having their first kiss. I half expect to be lifted up off the ground in a swirl of hearts and stars. Instead, I’m lifted by strong arms, and that is *way* better, thank you very much.

Wrapping my legs around him, I slide my hands up to run through his hair, curling them around his neck, and –

He breaks the kiss, leaving me feeling disorientated, and wondering how the hell I ended up pressed between the wall and the firm chest of my best friend.

Lowering me down, he murmurs, “Wow...”

*Was that wow-good, or wow-what the fuck just happened?*

From the way his hand's caressing my cheek, I think it was 'wow-good'.

"Uh..." is all I can think to murmur, still very much in a dream-like daze.

"It can't believe it's taken me this long to figure out."

I blink stupidly at him, eyes moving between his tender lips and his warm eyes, wondering what I'm missing.

Pressing his lips to my cheek, he whispers, "I love you..."

It's like I've just reached the top of a flight of stairs, thinking there's another step, but there isn't, there's only that awful drop. Coldness creeps down my spine.

"No, you don't."

His eyes widen, "What are you-"

I continue, sliding out from his arms and turning my back to him, "Jay, you've had a bad series of months, and now... breaking up with Sandy... it's natural that you'll want someone to make you feel... more secure; someone who loves you no matter what to comfort you."

Turning back to him, I run my eyes over him fondly, sadly.

It's killing me to say this, but it has to be said. In a soft, slightly trembling voice, I continue, "Jay... you know I'm here for you. You're probably subconsciously recognising me as a 'safe' option... You don't ... you don't love me, Jay. I... I can't let this happen only to lose you. I won't survive it. Please... please don't make me do that."

\*\*\*\*\*

The thumping on the door hasn't stopped. Not since... not since...

I don't even know how long it's been. The seconds, minutes, hours have all blended into a blur, narrated by the *thud, thud, thud* vibrating through the wood.

At first it was accompanied by pleading, then shouting, now it's just a soft sound, blending into the nothingness I've sunken myself into.

My tears are long gone: stolen by the knee of my sweatpants. The cold draft seeping beneath the crack of the door, blows on the exposed skin where my shirt's been rucked up.

I think Jared's seated on the other side, but I can't think about him. If I do, I'll think of everything he was giving, everything he was asking for, everything I could have given him.

Knowing I'm doing the right thing doesn't make this any easier. I feel empty. Hollowed out and spent. Like I'm a hundred years old but still a toddler; lost but holding the map in my hand, only it's not my map, so I can't use it. I'm not even making sense anymore. I'm long past that point.

All I can do now is wait. Wait until morning comes. Dawn will break and this will all be over. But it won't be. Not really. Not for me. Jared will move on, find another girl, get married, maybe have kids - who knows? But me, I'll always be this way. For me there is no dawn coming. I'll always be stuck in this endless cycle. The never ending feeling of burning up inside, while I'll have to smile on the outside. It'll consume me.

Jared can live without me. His life's not orientated around me. He doesn't need me. It's pathetic how much I need him. So pathetic it makes me cringe.

And that's exactly why I'm doing this. Why I'm sitting on my ass at two in the morning, my back pressed against my door. Why my throat's dry and eyes are raw.

Shoving Jared out and sliding the bolt shut was the hardest thing I've ever done. Saying 'no' to something I've wanted, longed for, dreamed of, never dared to think possible, for so long, was like ripping out a vital organ.

I just wish Jared would understand why I have to do this. Why I can't have a taste and watch the meal walk away.

*Did I just call Jared a meal?*

Thinking my head back against the wood, I let out a shaky sigh.

Silence.

The thudding's stopped. Jared's given up. It's over.

I don't even attempt to persuade myself to move. At least not until I've choked down the new wave of tears.

Then my protesting butt tells me it's time to suck it up and be a man. Not in so many words, but the numbness gives me a clue.

Staggering to my feet, I take one long, lasting look at the door before I turn away from it and make for my bedroom, where I know I'll cry myself to sleep, if I sleep at all. *Could I be more pathetic?*

I stumble past the spot where Jared had pressed me to wall, and I determinedly fail to *not* think about him.

Just as I enter my bedroom my nose crashes into a firm, warm... "Jay?"

His hands firmly grasp at my waist, yanking me against him. In a growly voice, he murmurs into my ear, "You *idiot*. You fucking *idiot*."

Having zero idea of what is going on, I stammer, "Huh?"

Pulling back slightly, he releases his hold of my waist, placing his hands on either side of my face instead. Warm, hazel eyes gaze down at me, his lips are pulled into the softest smile and his thumbs are gently smoothing over my cheeks. I am completely lost.

*Dreaming. I must be dreaming.*

He stoops his head slightly, pressing sealed lips to mine, giving me a long chaste kiss. It's so different to our heated kiss earlier, this is a kiss that...

"I love you, you moron."

Blinking at the sudden loss of warm lips, I peer up at him. He smiles, his eyes twinkling as he reaches out to brush a finger over my bottom lip.

My eyes spot the wide window, curtains billowing inwards.

"You broke in?"

In an equally accusing tone, he replies, "You locked me out."

Huffing out a frustrated sigh at the fact that he still doesn't get it, I explain, "Yeah, but that was because-"

He cuts me off, "-Why? Because you think I'd just randomly say I love someone for kicks?"

"No, but-"

"-Or maybe because you think I'd ever do that to you without being sure?"

I fall silent, he continues, "Jen, when you told me how you felt, I wasn't sure. I was confused, what with Sandy and the fact that I've never really been with anyone else but her. But since then, I've been thinking, thinking about what I want from life, where I want to be in fifty years time, *who* I want to be with in fifty years time.

"And don't get me wrong, Sandy's a great girl. But there's nothing there. We've just gotten accustomed to being around each other. So used to everything that it took a while to realise we'd changed, our attitudes, our personalities, everything. We grew up together. I'm nothing like I was back when we got together, and neither is she. We're not the same people who fell in love.

"And it was you that made me realise that; made me notice that there are some things that Sandy has started doing that just don't... just aren't making us work. And I never saw them before because there had never been anything else. I don't think we've actually been in love for a long time. She's more like a sister to me.

Softly running his fingers through my hair, he murmurs, "When my dad died, I really needed someone. I didn't even know it, but you did. Somehow. You kept me together. You always have. I didn't break up with Sandy for you. I broke up with her because we've changed. She saw it as well. She confessed that she actually can't stand my babies to be around her."

Letting out a small chuckle, Jared's slides his hand around to rest on the nape of my neck, massaging softly.

“Imagine that, Jen. We were going to get married and she can’t stand even being in the same room as them. Anyway, it wasn’t an on-the-spot decision, it took me a while to realise all this. But when I did, it was like a freakin’ light bulb going on in my head. It all just seemed to click into place. It was so painfully obvious, I’m amazed I passed fourth grade: I care for you more than a co-star should, more than a friend, best-friend, even more than a brother. Over the years, me and Sandy have fallen out of love, whereas *you’ve* become my world.”

Taking a deep breath, Jared murmurs against my forehead, “You opened my eyes, Jen. It took me a while, but I’m here now... And if you fucking *dare* kick me out again, I will die of pneumonia or something and come haunt your ass for eternity.”

I stare down at his lips. They’re so close, they’re distracting. Internally I’m reeling, internally I’m torn between bursting into tears and dancing around for joy. Of all the things I could say, I blurt, “Did you memorise that speech?”

Letting out a surprised laugh, his breath ghosts against mine as he replies, “You locked me out there for *hours*, man. That was just plain cruel.”

I squeeze my eyes shut, wanting so badly for this to be real.

“Hey, hey, none of that, I just confessed my undying love to you, you could at least try to act cheerful,” he murmurs, gently brushing away the moisture from my cheeks.

I let out a pathetically weepy chuckle, and bury my face in the crook of his neck. I don’t say anything, I don’t have anything to say that he doesn’t know already. Letting out a soft sigh, I breathe out against his neck, lightly resting my hand on his chest, his heartbeat steady beneath fingers.

He tilts his head slightly to lean against mine, and keeps a hand on my neck and another steadily on my waist.

We just breathe.

I’m about to fall asleep, when he lowers his head to whisper, “Bed,” in my ear.

Barely able to keep my eyes open, I nod, allowing him to lead me to the large four-poster. Crawling beneath the cold covers, I flop onto my stomach, burying my face in the mattress.

When Jared slips in a few moments later, clad only in boxers, I suddenly feel extremely warm. He slides closer to me, pulling at my arm until I am curled around his chest, my head tucked beneath his chin, my hand over his heart once more, and his arm wrapped around me, smoothing shivers up and down my spine.

Pressing a gentle kiss to my brow, he sleepily mumbles, “G’night, you ass.”

Shoving his chest lightly, I let out a contented, happy sigh. *God, if this is a dream, let me never wake.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Something brushes over my cheek. “Humpfh,” I get out, batting in its general direction.

The touch is fleeting, soft, pressing slightly firmer each time it alights on my skin. Scrunching my eyes up, I try desperately to ignore it. I was having such a nice dream.

It doesn't stop, but it's only when it brushes over my lips that my eyes fly open. No way am I going to let some weird unidentified thing molest me in my sleep.

I blink.

I blink again.

He's here.

He's in my bed.

He's kissing me.

Those are his lips over mine.

Pulling back, he braces himself on his arm as he peers down at me. His eyes run over my face, from my lips, all the way to my ears which I have no doubt are bright red.

Smiling softly, he leans down, pressing another kiss to my nose as he murmurs, “Morning Sunshine.”

As if waiting for me to say something, he gazes down at me expectantly.

“Aliens,” I squeak.

He blinks. I blink.

His lips pull into a grin. My cheeks catch alight as I realise what my mouth just blurted out.

Slowly it starts, escalating into full-on shaking, as Jared sinks into hysterical peals of laughter.

I think I should be offended. I *would* probably be offended if it weren't for the fact that it's my shoulder he's laughing into. It's a bit distracting. Okay, make that *very* distracting.

I've forgotten what he's even laughing at. My brain's been Pada-washed. I can't even remember my own name.

“Oh, my God, Jen,” he chuckles, gasping for breath.

*Ah, that's my name.*

Raising his head from the crook of my shoulder, he gazes at me with awestruck wonder. I can't quite make out whether it's, ‘He's such an idiot,’ or, ‘He's awesome,’ wonder.

Still suffering from the aftershocks of his laughing fit, he wheezes, “Oh, man, I am *never* going to let you forget that.”

Despite my valiant efforts to stay focused, I find myself drifting away at the way his hand is cradling the curve of my neck.

*Huh, wait, what? He’s coming closer! He’s, he’s...*

His voice light with mirth, he murmurs, “I’m going to kiss you now.”

*Shit, I said that out loud. Wait? He’s going to what?!*

His lips press against mine, soft, firm, warm pressure that wakes me up in more ways than one.

At my lack of movement, Jared pulls back to peer into my eyes, “Jen? I’m not an alien I swear.”

Ignoring his jibe, I just whisper, “What’s going on?”

Letting out a long, exasperated sigh, he stoops to nip at my jaw.

Then he pulls back, and away: right away.

*Wait... come back.*

Standing beside my bed, he smiles softly, “Okay, we’ll do this properly. We’ll start from scratch, do it right: take it slow. Okay? Will you stop freaking out then?”

“Huh?” Completely lost, I flail around until I’m sitting up.

Taking a deep he begins, “Okay, I, Jared Padalecki,” he points to his chest, “like you, Jensen Ackles,” he points to me, “Would you like to go out sometime?”

“....”

There’s silence in the room as I try to decipher the Greek he was spouting.

Then I get it. Looking up at him, he nods.

Rolling the words around in my head, I finally come to a conclusion. I can be stubborn, but Jared is worse. And when Jared wants something, he usually carries on trying until he gets it. And with this... when it’s something I want so badly as well, and he seems determined to get it, I won’t stand a chance. Finally I decide.

“Oh; hell yeah!”

He grins, a wide, dazzling smile that leaves me dazed and makes me miss how Jared gets from the side of the bed to right in fucking from of me.

Running his fingers along my jaw line, smoothing the tips over my lips and over my cheek, he murmurs, his face inches from mine, “Kiss me.”

As if those two words undid a body-freezing spell, I can suddenly move. I *am* moving. Lunging forwards, I flip us over, my body pressing Jared down on the mattress, my limbs entwined with his, my hands cupping his face, and my lips moving against his.

“Fucking finally,” he grumbles into my lips. And I couldn’t agree more.

Finally being allowed to taste as much as I want, I lick at the corners of his lips until he allows entrance, opening up for me; our moans mingling as our tongues battle for domination.

Pulling away from his lips, I move down, mouthing at his smooth, unmarked skin, sucking and biting at his shoulder, leaving my own marks there, making sure this is remembered.

Sliding my fingers over his bare chest, I can feel the rippling motion of the hard panes and muscles as they twitch and quiver beneath my touch.

Jared’s just gazing at me, his arms at my sides, holding me to him, pressing me closer. His fingers tug at the hem of my shirt, I pull back, quickly ridding myself of it, before lying flush on Jared and devouring his mouth once more.

The slide of his warm skin against mine makes me shiver with want; with need; with everything that I am. It’s all narrowed down to this: my skin against his, his body fitting perfectly beneath mine, the kiss deepening naturally as his arms come around me. We’re in a soft cocoon, bursting with scorching heat and soothing murmurs; I’m melting and going up into flames at the same time.

“Oh, Jay,” I breathe.

In a single move, I’m suddenly straddled beneath his body. His hands push my arms up over my head, pressing them into the mattress and pinning them there as he whispers sexily into my ear, “What do you want, Jen? Tell me what you want.”

Arching up against him, desperate for more touch, I whimper, “God, Jay, just you; just you.”

Humming as he sucks the side of my neck, he rolls his hips slightly, producing a needy groan from me. His lips brush my ear as he murmurs, “You want me to fill you, fill you up so much you’ll feel empty with anyone else? You want me to fuck you slow and deep, driving you crazy as I don’t let you touch yourself, don’t let you come until you’re begging for it? You’d like that wouldn’t you?”

My eyes head thunks back, as my body vibrates with arousal, “Fuck, Jay, yeah, god, yeah.”

Smiling against my neck, he begins to roll his hips into me, keeping his head tucked over my shoulder as he grinds our erections together.

“Nrggh, fuck, Jay! More, please, Jay, more,” I sob, writhing beneath him, desperately wanting to run my hands over him, unable to do so due to them being pinned down above my head.

Softly kissing beneath my ear, he soothes, “Shhh, it’s alright, baby, I got ya. I’ll take care of you.”

Holding both my hands in one of his, he slides the other down over my flaming skin, teasing my nipples, making me jerk and arch up for more. Then torturously slowly, he slips his hand beneath our rutting bodies, tracing circles into my sensitive skin as the hand moves lower.

When his hand suddenly slips beneath my sweatpants, circling around my dick, I gasp and squirm, thrusting up against him.

His lips brush over my jaw, making me search for more, lifting up to kiss him, even as I try to lift my hips off the bed for more friction.

It’s an overload. My brain’s unable to take it all in, so it’s switched off, reducing me to this begging and pleading mess, falling apart beneath Jared.

With one final stroke from his hand, he has me exploding into a world of stars and happy faces. Shooting my load up into his fist with a loud groan of, “Jay,” I fall limp beneath him. A few seconds later, he lets out a low growl, thrusting one last time against me, before slumping down, releasing my arms as he does so.

Finally able move, I slide my hands down his sides, feeling him shiver beneath my touch, and slip my hands beneath his sweatpants, cupping his ass and pressing him closer.

Letting out a soft groan in my ear, Jared murmurs, “Anything you like?”

Squeezing softly, I roll so Jared’s beside me rather than on top. “Mmm hmmm.”

“Good, ‘cause I ain’t no alien.”

*Huh?*

When I brush his hair from his face, he smiles at me.

We’re sticky and disgusting, and we need a shower, but I don’t care. I’ve got Jared. What else matters?

\*\*\*\*\*

He’s taken over my kitchen. Completely and utterly: in the process of making something he claims will be cheese and bacon scones, but I seriously have doubts. The only cool part of having a totally wrecked kitchen is that it reminds me of the handprint. Of *my* secret handprint that Jared still doesn’t even know he wore.

My mission is to re-create that masterpiece just as we head out for the diner, which I have no doubt we *will* be eating from. No offence to Jared’s cooking talents. And this time the handprint will be for real. This time he *is* mine.

Just the thought makes me feel like I'm floating. Drifting high above mere mortals and relishing in the golden touch of the sunlight and Jared's smile.

Letting out a chuckle, I shake my head. It's obvious that it's *way* too early in the morning for me to be awake. But who can blame me when my alarm clock turned out to be a trail of kisses along my jaw, provided by a certain gorgeous hunk who wouldn't let me freak out until I started to return his kiss, stinky morning breath and all. And by then I was so lost to his lips, his touch, his body, his everything, that I completely forgot that I was supposed to be freaking out at all. And I'm just fine with that thank you very much.

It's actually pretty funny to watch him chucking random things in a mixing bowl, stirring furiously like a kid making play-dough, and scowling when it doesn't look anything like the recipe book said it would. He's only wearing dark jeans, riding low on his hips and the sunlight is caressing his firm, muscular torso, making it nearly impossible for me to sit still.

It's when he slumps into the chair, looking utterly defeated and staring sadly down at the bowl of hideous gunk, that I step in. I slide off the counter and slip behind him, gently laying my hands on his shoulders.

Squeezing slightly, I stoop to whisper in his ear, "Why don't we go grab something from the diner? We can bag it and head somewhere cool. We can make scones some other time."

Twisting around to peer at me, Jared quirks his lips, "What, like a romantic breakfast or something?"

Grinning, I plant a kiss softly on his nose, holding the contact for moments too long and sliding my eyes shut. When I pull back, I murmur, "Yeah, we can totally make out on the park bench in front of a little girl's birthday party."

He smirks, "Never knew you had a PDA kink."

"Mmm, maybe there's a lot you don't know about me, Mr Padalecki," I tease, pulling him back in for another sleepy, slow kiss.

Grinning against my lips, he chuckles, "Give me a few days, Mr Ackles, and I'll know all your deepest, darkest secrets."

Running a hand down his jaw, along his neck, coming to a rest over his collarbone, I murmur into the corner of his mouth, "Careful... you might find yourself in more than one of them."

Wrapping an arm around my waist, he tugs me towards him, sending me tumbling into his lap. Growling into my ear, he gets out, "I better be in *all* of them, Mr Ackles.

In response, I merely close my mouth over the bruised skin of his shoulder. He hitches me closer, running his hands along my back, sliding them up to curl by my nape, pressing me closer, allowing me to mark him afresh.

When I release my vampirish hold, I slide my mouth up to meet his in a furious struggle for domination.

It's only when his stomach lets out an unruly rumble that we pull apart. Flushing adorably, he mumbles, "Sorry."

Grinning, I pat his stomach, "Time to feed the beast."

He turns to go get dressed, and I seize my chance: quickly dipping my hands into the spilt flour, I call out softly, "Jay..."

Turning, he frowns slightly, "Yeah, Jen?" He takes a step closer. I resist the urge to start laughing, and instead look down at the floor. Coming even closer, he reaches out to cup my cheek. I feel slightly bad about using his protective streak like this. But before I can back out, his arms are sliding around me.

Quickly setting my plan into motion, I press him close to me, my hands on his ass, holding him to me. "I love you," I whisper into his ear.

I can feel him relax into me. Nuzzling my neck, he murmurs, "Love you too."

When we pull apart and I follow him to grab a shirt myself, I can't help grinning at the two perfect handprints cupping Jared's ass. *Mine*.

A few moments later, we're heading out the door of my apartment. I stop, momentarily lost to the wave of emotion at all that's happened in the past twenty-four hours; all that's changed; all I never thought possible. It's amazing how far we've come. I can only hope we haven't lost too much in the process.

"Jen?"

Jared's turned around to wait for me, his eyes soft as if he knows exactly what I'm feeling.

When I catch up to him, and reply, "I'm okay," he slides his fingers between mine, and whispers in my ear, "We will be."

Smiling up at him, I know it's true. Despite everything else, what we have is right; is good; is all I could ever have hoped to dream for.

We don't let go of each other's hand, not even when we get spotted by a group of fangirls. Jared merely squeezes my fingers, as if questioning how I feel about being publicly outed. I just grip his hand even tighter, and grin as I note that they definitely take a photo of us from the back.

At the diner, I watch with satisfaction as the waitress, who started off by flirting with Jay while he was ordering, shuts up after he turns around to ask me something. Her eyes dart between him, me, and his ass. I can't stop grinning.

It's a bit disappointing when we sit down to wait for our meals, and the flour wipes off, but I've had my fun. At least now I'll never have to watch this waitress flirt with Jay ever again. And maybe tomorrow... well, we'll see about that when it comes.

After grabbing our food bags, we head towards the park. I can't resist rubbing my hands together and saying, "Right, so let's find that kid's party and get to it."

Letting out a snort of laughter, Jared shakes his head, places the food down on the bench and mutters in a disbelieving tone, "My boyfriend's a loon."

*Boyfriend...* That single word has me wanting to leap out of buildings, so sure I can fly am I.

I play it off, "Yup, but you still love me, don't you?" Pouting my lips, I make kissy noises.

He slides both hands around my face to cup my cheeks, holding me still, pressing his own lips down over my slightly stunned ones.

"Yeah, yeah, I really do. Now can we please eat? I'm starving."

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The next morning, on the front page of every single magazine is a large image: of me and Jensen; from the back; with a zoomed in image of our clasped hands and white possessive marks on my ass. *Gay lovers revealed. Co-stars in love. Secrets behind the scenes. New couple revealed. Fans go crazy over star love. Jensen marks Jared's ass. Possession in the crudest of forms.* And more.

I take one look at the pile of magazines on my doorstep and burst out laughing. I promptly call Jensen. We'd decided not to spend the night together, due to my need to clean up some space for all his stuff, and him needing time to pack up his apartment. We'd decided to move into my place until we find a better place we'd like to buy together. Or rather *I'd* insisted that he move in, and completely ignored his self-consciousness about not wanting to intrude.

"Hello" he answers.

I chuckle at his sleep muffled tone, "Jensen, you fucker. You totally branded my ass. Possessive bastard."

I'm amazed at how I can *hear* his proud smirk from here. "*Wait, how'd you find out?*"

"Have you checked the magazines? I got sent about a hundred of them from god knows how many people."

There's a thud and I grin, pretty sure he's just fallen out of bed. Then I hear him plodding softly and the door opening.

"*Shiit.*"

"Man, we are so outed. I don't know if your parents knew you were gay, but this is going to be a smack in the face for my mom. Meg'll be fine. She loves you."

Jensen groans, "*Actually there was a similar handprint on your back when we were in San Antonio. I don't think she'll be that surprised.*"

I'm totally lost, but I can't take my eyes off the image of Jensen's handprints cupping my ass so possessively, so easily.

"Dude. You know the fangirls are never going to get enough of this."

*"Yeah... you don't regret it do you?"* Jensen's voice sounds uncertain. I want to smack him. And then kiss it better.

"Regret what? Owning the most widely spoken about ass in the history of Hollywood, or being outed as in love with you? Because neither seems all that awful."

He takes a breath, "So, you wouldn't change it, you wouldn't take it back?"

Rolling my eyes, I mumble, "Idiot. Course I don't. Why the hell would I get you to move in if I even had the slightest of doubts? You packed yet?"

*"Yeah."*

"Great, I'll be there in ten."

*"Cool. Thanks... and Jay?"*

"Yeah?"

*"I love you."*

I grin into the phone. I will never grow tired of hearing those three words coming from his lips. And for the first time in my life I'm certain of something: certain that we both need each other as much; certain of us.

"Yeah, I love you too, man. See you soon." And then I hang up with a smile on my face that doesn't leave my face the whole drive.

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