

LOUDER THAN WORDS

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CONVERSATIONS OF A DRUNKEN NATURE

Jared had missed his calling in life. Screw the acting, he should have been a party planner, because by all the sparkly lights in the sky, this night rocked. Music blared out of the dozen speaker boxes, and if Jared hadn't already bribed his neighbors with free spa tickets, the cops would have been calling hours ago.

Chris and Steve were on the makeshift stage set up in Jared's yard, belting out something that wasn't quite rock, and wasn't quite country, but sure as hell got people dancing. Chad had three girls hanging from his arm, his charm turned up to the nth, and not a hint of wedding ring in sight. Across the yard, balancing empty beer bottles on their foreheads and wobbling around in circles, Tom and Mike were caught up in valiant attempts to out goof each other, while the guest of honor cheered them on.

Somehow, in all his host-y brilliance, he'd missed the birthday boy's arrival.

"David!" Jared bounded across the yard in a wide loop, avoiding the paddling pool filled with chilling bottles of beer, and clapped his guest on the back. "How's my favorite souled up vamp?"

David Boreanaz flashed him a cheeky smile and returned Jared's rib popping hug with buckets of enthusiasm. "Hey! I'm good! Thanks for pulling this together." He grinned at the gathering, obviously glad to be back in LA.

Jared waved off the thanks. He and David had been friends since high school. They'd planned each other's birthday bashes for seven years now. "How's life treating you up?"

Jared snorted and snagged a beer. "S'good." He grinned. "Man, it's been too fucking long!"

"Four months, dude." David nodded. "And hasn't someone been busy? Jen and I went and saw House of Wax the other week." He sniffed dramatically. "My little boy, all grown up and fucking Paris Hilton."

As if Jared hadn't heard that one before. From his brother. From his neighbors. From his mailman. "No dude, that was Chad."

They both cast a glance over to the man in question in time to see Chad disappear around the side of Jared's house. Jared shuddered. Bastard better not contaminate his living space. "Speaking of fucking, you bring this Jen chick with you? I wanna meet the girl who's got you picking out lace curtains."

For a moment, David looked as if Jared had slapped him. Just before Jared could ask, his mind turning down the route of messy break-ups or surprise pregnancies, David sniggered. Jared watched dumbly as he doubled over, clutching at his ribs and howling.

"Do you need, like, a doctor or something?" Jared asked, bemused as David chuckled and shook. "Dude!"

David held up one hand and shook his head. "Come on, man," He grinned, his shoulders still shaking with mirth. "Let's introduce you two."

Jared obediently followed his buddy across the yard, to a small gathering of highly drunk people playing Twister. Jared made a mental note to fetch a bucket. And some bleach. David grabbed the arm of one of the spectators, a tall man with short, dark blond hair, who turned around, smiled, and knocked Jared right off his metaphysical feet.

"Jared, meet Jensen Ackles." David said wryly. He turned to look at Jensen head on. "Jen, this is Jared."

Somewhere between being beaten senseless by pretty, and hearing David's introduction, Jared figured he must have missed something.

One, David wasn't gay. Two, David wasn't gay for guys. Three, David wasn't gay for guys with such long eyelashes. He forgot to think about four as soon as a hand was held out for him to shake. Right. Handshakes. Polite thing to do, and all.

"Nice to meet you." He said, remembering just in time that he was an actor and thus had no excuse for sounding either dumbstruck or weirded out.

Jensen's beaming smile was as bright as the headlights of the truck Jared had just been hit by. He turned to David and made several quick gestures with his hands. David smiled like a love-struck thirteen year-old and nodded.

"He says that it's nice to meet you, and the party is great." David translated.

David. Who was gay. For a guy. A pretty guy. Who was deaf.

Jesus. Time to break out the hard stuff.

Mike tripped over and fell into the paddling pool at just the right time to provide Jared with a speedy exit.

Three hours, four bottles of Corona, and a bag of pretzels later, and Jared had fully abandoned his role of gracious host. Instead he'd set up camp on the roof of his bathroom, watching over the party below with a lazy air of disinterest.

David wasn't gay. That sort of thing came with warning signs, right? Okay, so the guy wore pink, but then so did Jared, and Jared was straight, thank you very much. Steve wore pink as well, but that was Steve. Steve was in a class of his own.

There hadn't been boyfriends. Jared would have noticed something like that. David wasn't the

sort to fuck a girl...guy...and leave them.

Which meant Jensen was the first.

Too pretty. Never trust the pretty.

Pretty always ended badly. Helen of Troy. Perfect example. David and Jensen were going to result in the downfall of a country. Or LA, at the very least.

One more bottle, and Jared had a plan. They both had some down time. Trip to Texas, bottle of Jose, that strip club 'round the back of Paulies...then it would be Jensen who?

And for that matter, what kind of dude had a name like Jensen, anyway?

A strong hand smacked him around the back of the head. Blindly, Jared snatched at it, "Fuck off, Chad. I ain't in the mood for-" A pad of paper dropped into his lap, and the object of Jared's drunken mental ramblings sunk into a cross-legged slouch on the narrow roof.

"How'd you get out here?" He glared, remembering only at Jensen's eye roll that they weren't going to be sharing any sparkling conversations.

Jensen grinned, either oblivious to Jared's discomfort, or uncaring. He reached into Jared's lap, snagged the pad, and with a dark red brio scribbled a line right across the unblemished paper. Ur being a jerk

Five beers were too many, because when Jared squinted at the words, they looked remarkably like an insult. He blinked, then read them again.

"Dude! What the fuck?" He was being a twat? Jensen elbowed him sharply. Warm fingers gripped Jared's chin and twisted his head so Jensen would see him better. Getting the idea, Jared repeated his exclamation of disbelief.

All it earned him was another eye roll.

He'd still ur BF

Which, okay, hurt. David was the one who had kept stum on the gay part. They were best friends. It wasn't like Jared would abandon him for being straight with it. Pardon the pun.

A dark eyebrow rose expectantly. Jensen was just pretty all over, even in the dim light. And the bastard's fingers were still on Jared's fucking jaw.

Talk 2 him.

Jared shook his head, wondering if there was any facial expression that could add 'fucking way' to his 'no'.
Talk 2 him

Jensen underlined his last sentence.

"Or what?" Jared mocked. Jensen could obviously lip read pretty well, because he grinned and wrote,

I'll put u in pigtails & paint ur nails pink

Okay. Jared's night was starting to consist of one long stream of what the fucks?

Jensen grinned devilishly.

U mad at him, or me?

"I ain't fucking mad!" Christ...Jensen couldn't know he shouted that, could he?

The red pen went back up to the first line on the page and tapped
Ur being a jerk

"Fuck you."

U ain't my type

Okay. And why the fuck not? Jared shook his head. Not the issue here. "He didn't tell me." It was probably a good thing Jensen was deaf. Too many beers and a little friendly confusion, and Jared reverted to whining like a five year old.

Jensen frowned. Adorable. An adorable frown. Jared shook himself and cursed the beer. Again.
Not the issue here.

Did u ask?

Was he supposed to? Was "dude, you like cock?" now a standard question amongst male companions? Hell, this was LA. Maybe it should be.

"Fine." Jared sighed. He knew he'd drunk too much when he's been out argued by a mute guy.
"I'll talk to him. Happy?"

Jensen nodded, beaming.

Ecstatic.

"Bitch."

Jerk

"He's pretty awesome, ain't he?" David slumped down on the grass, two bottles in hand. Jensen had all but dragged Jared from his hiding place, calling him an antisocial fuck. Or rather looking at him as if he were an antisocial fuck.

Given that this was his party, he figured Jensen could have been on the money.

Things were slowly dying down around them. Chris and Steve still strummed at the guitars, but the music was now more jam session than gig, and they occasionally burst into fits of unsurpassable giggles.

"I'm pissed at you, man." Jared felt the need to clear the air, so he threw the comment out into the open. That was what friends did. And Jensen had put the pen right on it. They were BF. BFFeva, and all that girly shit.

David shrugged, the same mannerism that Jared had seen a hundred times or more. "Yeah, well, you're a jerk."

Jared snorted. "So I've heard."

"If they shoe fits..."

Across the yard, Jensen sat on Jared's fence, grinning around a beer bottle as Mike, Tom, Chad and James had wheelbarrow races around the lawn.

"So." Jared said, breaking the silence that had appeared from nowhere.

David nodded. "So."

"He's really deaf?"

"Yep." David almost sounded proud.

"He's kinda...I dunno...pretty. For a guy."

Across the yard, Jensen flipped him the finger.

David grinned and hid a laugh behind his bottle. "And he's real good at lip reading."

"Fuck." Jared sighed, and ran his hand through his hair. He needed a haircut. And a hangover kit.

"Yep."

"You gonna crash here tonight?" Jared's guest room actually had David's name on the door. David's, and Chad's, and the word assmunch, but that was Chris' doing, not his.

"You mind?" David looked at Jensen, and no, Jared did not want to think of the two of them getting smoochy in his spare room.

He shrugged. "What are friends for?"

David's beaming smile was almost as bright as Jensen's. He slapped Jared on the back. "Thanks, man. I'm glad we talked."

Yeah, Jared thought morosely, wondering if any of the bottles in the punctured paddling pool were still full.

Jared was still shower damp when he descended the stairs and made his way to the kitchen. The radio was playing some smooth country rock and Jensen was silent as he beat several eggs into the pancake mix. Jared wondered how he should act. Normally he'd issue a sunny hello, or if it were Chad or Mike, he'd sneak up on them and do a little shit scaring. Jensen wouldn't have heard him if he'd brought a brass band down from the bathroom, and it seemed a little rude to scare the crap out of someone whilst they were fixing breakfast.

He was still pondering the best course of action when David breezed into the kitchen, dark slacks loose and red t-shirt the color of Jared's potted roses. He wrapped an arm around Jensen's waist and pressed a gentle good-morning kiss to the side of his neck.

The small smile that touched Jensen's lips was even more devastating than his full on grin. Jared watched them for several minutes, then turned tail and headed back for another shower, cursing all the way.

IT'S NOT STALKING, IT'S RESEARCH.

So it took Jared a little over three days to dig up the dirt on Jensen. There had been a whole twenty four hours devoted to pondering the merits of hiring a PI to do the actual dirty work, but in the end, Google delivered.

28. Writer. Texas native (like that was fucking fair!) In a relationship. (no shit!) Ménière's sufferer. (Whatever the fuck that was). Lived in a big ass house in Chatsworth (To which, thanks to some rather worrying skills passed on by Chris, Jared now had the address)

It wasn't stalking if Jensen didn't know about it, right? Besides, this was for David's own good. Jensen probably had a basement full of mummified heads. David's. Own. Good. It had absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Jensen had read him quicker than Michael Schumacher drove a qualifier, and freaked him the fuck out. This was purely one of his duties as Concerned Best Friend.

Jensen's house was right in the hills, a sprawling Mediterranean ranch on Hialeah Way. Dude had good, if expensive taste. There was on street parking outside. Thinking ahead, Jared drove one building down, and parked under the shade of a sprawling palm.

Right. So in his research- Yes, it was fucking research- he'd discovered that Jensen had a brother (older) and sister (younger), two cats, a goldfish named Marv, a budgie named Tweety, and a live in housekeeper named Sam.

Jared was less than impressed.

And the dude was a writer! A fucking writer! Everyone knew that writers were always a few wires short of a full fuse. Historical crime novels. Honest to God, if that didn't tell people he took it up the ass...and it wasn't as if Jared had actually gone out and bought all four of them.

And read them all in a week.

And he sure as hell hadn't enjoyed them.

So in short, David, not-gay-before-Ackles, David, was screwing around with a nutcase writer, who had more money than sense, and a crap taste in pet names.

A sharp tap to his left made him jump guiltily, and he quickly wound down his window. A

handsome woman with a wry smile stood crouched down by the door. She passed him a plate covered with blue terrycloth, and left without a word.

Curious, Jared peeled back the top, and inhaled the rich, warming aroma of freshly baked double chocolate cookies.

Don't starve out there

Said the note pinned to the top.

Fuckitall.

Day 2 and David called his cell less than thirty seconds after he turned off the engine.

"You know, people have been arrested for less than what you're doing." Bastard was enjoying this.

"Bite me."

He killed the call to the sound of David's deep laughter.

The woman with the playful eyes was back the next day.

"Boy, you're gonna give yourself an aneurism if you keep frowning like that." She shook her head and let herself into the passenger seat. "I'm Sam, and whilst Jen thinks you're the most adorable thing on two legs, I'm inclined to think you're a bit of an asshole."

Naturally, Jared was used to strange women climbing into the car with him... strange women who spoke straight and didn't want to pinch his cheeks at first sight...

His brain fumbled for either an excuse or an insult, and came up with "He thinks I'm adorable?"

Sam shrugged her shoulders. "Kid has a thing for strays. You parked your ass on his doorstep just like those damn cats of his."

Huh.

"You think I'm an asshole?" That was more of an issue, perhaps. Asshole wasn't the look he was aiming for here. Jerk, maybe. Asshole, not so much.

"I think you're confused."

"Not confused."

Jared didn't pout. He scowled.

"Don't argue with me, boy. I live with the most belligerent man on the planet. You won't win." Again, she looked at him the way one might look at a small animal. If said animal was covered in shit, and stalking his best friend's boy.

"I-"

Sam twisted in her seat. "Now you can come inside and talk to him, maybe behave like a civilized human being, or you can sit outside in the car, and be an asshole. I gotta warn you, you'll go grey and wrinkly long before you find any dirt on him. Kid's as clean as a democrat before election day."

"Democrats are never clean. Especially not before election day." Jared scoffed.

She smiled, years dropping away from her face. "True, but you can never find any dirt on 'em."

"So what, he has his own Secret Service detail?"

"Worse." Sam smiled winsomely. "He's got JD."

Morgan, yeah, that sounded about right. Bastard would adopt anything with a sad story and a pair of pretty eyes. Jensen might have wrestled alligators in his spare time, but he was deaf, and he was pretty, and that was guaranteed to pull the JDM heartstrings.

"So," Sam bumped him out of his musings with an elbow to the ribs. "You coming inside?"

Jared bit his lip.

Sam rolled her eyes. "Jen baked more cookies."

"Five minutes." Jared qualified.

Jensen was pale when he dropped down into the overstuffed armchair, but his smile hadn't dimmed since the last time Jared had seen him.

"Just so you know," Jared said hastily, careful to look at Jensen head on, "this isn't anything personal. I'm sure you're a nice enough dude, it's just..." Jared wasn't entirely sure what the just was, just that it was just.

Jensen couldn't have looked more amused if he had tried, which given the lack of funnies, kinda threw Jared off kilter.

Right. Jared coughed, remembering the book he had brought with him. "I'm armed, yeah. So if you wanna fire at me, just um...do it slowly, okay?"

Jensen's gaze slid from Jared's lips to the Handbook of American Sign Language, then threw his head back and laughed. The sound was so completely unexpected it made Jared stare. Was Jensen supposed to be able to laugh? Jensen saw his look of bemusement and laughed harder. He made a small motion with his hands, and then repeated it.

Jared had been hanging around Chad long enough to know when he was being insulted. Sure enough, when skipping to the Insult section of the book, he was able to translate Jensen's gesture into 'moron'.

Another sharp gesture that Sam, who had silently moved to stand behind Jared's chair, explained for him.

"He says that you're a raving nut job."

"I like to think of it as protecting David from himself." Jared justified.

He didn't need Sam, or the dictionary to understand Jensen's response.

From me?

"Yes."

"Jensen-" Sam took a step forwards, but Jensen shook his head and spoke to Sam with gestures too long and too fast for Jared to understand. She sighed, but left the room, glaring at Jared as she retreated.

Jensen tipped his head, a clear follow me sign if Jared had ever seen one.

Jared followed Jensen through the house. It was huge, beautiful even, full of wide, open spaces but surprisingly lacking in personal touches. The woodwork was pale, and the wall the color of Spanish sand. Black fixtures hung lighting to the walls, and deep red throws softened the sharp edges of the rooms.

Towards the south of the house, Jensen pushed open a pair of heavy wooden doors, and lead Jared into the most beautiful greenhouse he had ever seen. Lush ferns, palms, and bright colors winked under the overhead sun.

"It's...well, wow." Jared couldn't find the right words to express himself. He caught Jensen's face in the corner of his eyes, saw the understanding there, and realized that for once, he didn't need to say anything at all.

Again, Jensen beckoned him forwards, stopping in front of a beautiful mass of entwining roses.

Taking a pair of clippers in hand, Jensen took the base of one stem between his thumb and forefinger, and snipped it at the base. The bud was yellow, the color of pale egg yolks. Without so much as looking at him, Jensen passed Jared the flower. He turned and walked away, the message clear.

On Friday, Jared picked up the phone.

"Hey man," David greeted. "How you doing?"

"I'm good. Listen, you remember our Sunday night salsa parties?"

David laughed. "Dude, I ain't ever going to be able to look at guacamole in the same light."

"Well...now you're back in LA, I figured we should restart the tradition."

"Want me to call the gruesome twosome?"

Jared wondered if Chris and Steve would stick around long enough to make more than one weekend.

"Sure and..." he paused, swallowed, then continued, "invite Jensen."

For the second time in a week, he hung up to the sound of David's laughter.

Twenty minutes later, and a message came through on his cell

Ur still a jerk :D

Jared grinned, and sent a text back,

Shut it, bitch.
bring cookies

IT AIN'T IRONY, IT'S LIFE

It was actually Steve's idea to play Charades, prompted, no doubt, by the copious amounts of weed he had smoked whilst hanging out of Jared's kitchen window. David had taken one look at the conspicuous bag of Kane's home grown stash, glanced pointedly at Jensen-who had been lovingly indulging Harley with a belly rub-and banished the two singers to the far corner of the room.

That wasn't to say that Jared objected to playing, it just brought back memories of his Aunt Muriel's Christmas parties; memories he had been spending ten years trying to bleach from his mind.

Well, that, and the fact that Jensen and David had a clear advantage.

"Man," It was Chris, half-sprawled across Steve, who felt the need to raise the issue. "You can't use sign language."

"It's totally cheating." Jared nodded, talking around a mouthful of M&Ms.

Jensen flashed him the finger and stuck out his tongue simultaneously.

"Bitch." Jared grinned, and then winced when David smacked him around the back of his head.
"Hey!"

"No use, son." Chris drawled. Jensen had perched himself on the arm of the couch, where he and David made gooey eyes at each other.

"Get a fucking room!" Jared groaned and flopped back into the cushions.

Eric Kripke had one hell of a handshake, and Jared felt the bones in his fingers realign themselves under his new boss' enthusiasm. "Congratulations, Jared. Really well done. We're all so excited. You and Marc are just what we've been looking for."

It wasn't as if Jared really needed those fingers, anyway. This was the single most awesome thing to happen to him in years. If Kripke wanted to bust all his fingers for him to play Sam Winchester, then Jared would happily provide the hammer.

Through the multicolored haze of omgwow! and I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming and I never wanna wake up! Jared barely heard himself respond to Kripke's congratulations, or promise to have his agent finalize all the paperwork with the studio.

It wasn't until an hour or so later, hauled up at the bar in a club in central LA with his new co-star that the huh haze finally dissipated, and replaced itself with a cloud of giddiness.

"Dude!" He shouted, even though Marc Blucas was sitting right next to him, "this rocks!"

"Amen to that." Marc grinned, offering his bottle up for a toast. "Here's to a fucking awesome show."

"Fucking awesome indeed." Kripke nodded, sneaking up behind them and placing an order at the bar for enough alcohol to intoxicate China. "You boys want to follow me; I'll introduce you to the Inquisitors." Marc and Jared shred a grin, eager to meet the writers of the show. So far only four had been hired, but if they were anything like Eric fucking Kripke, Jared could see a multitude of painful, backbreaking storylines ahead of them.

Eric led them to the back room of the club. It was a Tuesday, and the crowds were not as dense as they were at the weekends. Jared could actually see the back wall. Inside, the writers were gathered with some of the more light-hearted execs, and laughter was heavy in the air.

"Okay boys, meet your torturers."

One pretty woman with a mass of long dark curls turned in her seat and grinned wickedly at her two stars. "Oh Eric, they're yummy."

"Jared, Marc, Sera Gamble."

Normally, Jared would respond with a 'pleasure to meet you' or even a 'charmed', but then normally he wasn't dealing with a woman who had the look of the devil in her eyes.

"Utterly edible, don't you think, Jen?" She tapped another man on the back and tipped her head towards Jared and Marc.

Jared's stomach hit his toes and bounced all the way back up to his throat. Jensen wore his usual lazy grin as he turned, nursing a glass of orange juice on his knee. He held out a hand for Jared to shake.

Obviously, someone up there hated him.

Jensen was giggling in shotgun, and Jared was trying very hard to remember all the things his old man had mentioned before his driving test. Ten and two. Check your mirror. Eyes on the road, not the hot chick next to you.

Okay, so Jensen wasn't exactly a hot chick, but Jared had labeled him under pretty in the first 0.5 seconds of their friendship, and he was, in reality, perfectly acceptable substitute eye candy.

Eyes. On. Road.

As soon as he's realized that Jensen had taken a cab to the club, Jared stopped drinking, and by the time the party had wound down, he was sober enough to make the drive back to Jensen's

home. He'd been planning to get a cab home himself, and pick up his car the next day, but he'd be damned if he let Jensen take a cab, alone, in that part of town. It had been harder to persuade Jensen to accept his offer. In the end, he'd all but dragged him out by the elbow, flipping a catcalling Marc the finger as they went.

It had been impossible to get a straight answer out of Jensen, and he was still in the dark as to how they had ended up working on the same project, especially as Jensen was a novelist, not a scriptwriter. At least not to his knowledge. Jensen had been too hyperactive to be bothered writing anything out, and had been content to laugh and grin though out the night. Jared had been reminded on more than one occasion that Jensen was a scarily good lip reader, and there were times when he'd gotten the joke before anyone else had heard it over the sound of the club.

So it was with a still giggling-and yes, it was a fucking giggle- Jensen that Jared tried to make the short trip across town. If he hadn't been plastered to Jensen's side all night, he'd have wondered what had been slipped into the dude's OJ. Still, one of the advantages of ridding with a sound-challenged guy had to be the music benefits. Jared loaded in his cheesiest CD, rolled down the windows of his truck, and proceeded to blast the suburbs with his very own Padalecki wake-up call.

The look he got from Jensen was half confused, but more than a little giddy, and before Jared realized it, they were pulling into Jensen's utterly redundant driveway. He popped his belt, the music and the engine dying at the same time as Jensen's smile. The passenger door opened from the outside, and David was suddenly there, dragging Jensen from the truck by his elbow.

Thanks to a Texan upbringing and a handful of moronic friends, Jared's fight-o-meter was highly tuned, swinging from mellow to shitfuck faster than a Ferrari could hit 60mph. Scrambling with the handle, Jared half climbed, half fell from the seat, cursing as he quickly circled the hood.

One probable broken toe plus one obviously pissed friend, and Jared was pretty sure the night's awesome rating was going to hit negative figures. He hopped from foot to foot, not sure whether to play White Knight and save the not-so-damsel in distress, or keep well the fuck out of it, just in case David decided to castrate him.

He'd only looked. Looking wasn't a capital offence. Right?

Unless David got his wires crossed and thought that he and Jensen had been out...doing naughty things. Which no...not gay, and hadn't they already established that part?

"Um...dude?" Fuckit, Padalecki, he thought to himself angrily. What are you, a mouse? Or a man?

David didn't even look at him, but said, "Back off, Jared."

Mouse. Most definitely a mouse.

Which made Jensen a cat. A soggy cat who'd just been woken from a nap, by the looks of things. He had jerked himself from David's grasp, but then instead of putting distance between them, he'd gone and taken a step closer to David.

Either a cat, or a one of those suicidal lemmings.

Watching a silent argument was as weird as fuck. It wouldn't wake the neighbors, but Jared hadn't got a clue what it was about. Jensen's actions were fluid, rapid even, nothing like the steady gestures he made when conversing with Jared. David responded in kind, not as smoothly, but just as fast.

It was over as quickly as it started. Jensen hissed, scowled, and made a gesture even Jared understood. Before he stormed into the house and very nearly took David's nose off when he slammed the door closed.

"Goddamnit Jensen." David yelled, his fist pounding on the door until he, like Jared, remembered that it wouldn't make the blindest bit of difference. "Fuck." David said angrily, his hand running through his hair- a classic vampire in distress signal if there ever was one.

"Um..." Jared repeated. "And that was?"

David looked startled, as if he had forgotten that Jared was there. His eyes darted rapidly to the silent house behind him. "Hey, JT." He said wearily. "What are you doing here?"

Jared blinked. Obviously he'd missed something pretty important. Fall of the Berlin Wall type important. "I dropped your boy off...and I swear we were just at a party, dude. A work party. With people. And stuff." Jared quickly tried to remind his buddy that socializing wasn't a sign of infidelity, just a pulse.

David's face creased into a scowl. "Yeah. I know." He said darkly.

"He works for the project I just...man, what the fuck was that all about?" David was not being David. He was being Neanderthal caveman David, and it had kinda thrown Jared for a spin.

Shrugging in his leather jacket, David slid into Jensen's vacated truck seat. "Can I score a ride? Left me keys inside." He jerked his head towards Jensen's house. "Don't think he's gonna talk to me any time this century."

"Sure." Jared said. He still remembered buying this truck at sixteen, and the hours he and David put in to make her run. "You know I'mma just keep on ask-"

"He's an idiot." David exploded, louder than Jared's techno-pop party a few minutes ago. "I love him, but I swear to god, he's a fucking idiot."

Jared's belly did a funny little back flip at the L word, but he nodded as if he had a clue as to what was going on and began to navigate the drive to David's apartment.

Fortunately for him, once David started something, he tended to ramble on for hours at a time. "All he had to do was ask, man. I'd have gone with him. Or Jeff would have. He didn't have to be so damn reckless."

"Ummmm..." That seemed to be Jared's word of the night. The honor role would be so proud.

"Dude, you lost me."

"He knows he's not supposed to go out alone."

It was a pretty good thing that Jared had just pulled up at a red light, because his foot automatically hit the break peddle. "Whoa, whoa, dude. This isn't the fourteenth century, bro. And last time I checked, Jensen wasn't in need of having his virtue protected by the Knights of the Round Table. Grown men allowed to go party. So says Captain Budweiser. " That seriously had to be the most ridiculous thing he'd ever heard. "Besides, he wasn't alone. I told you, he was with some guys from work...our work." He still got warm fuzzies from just thinking about his new job.

"He might as well have been alone." David said petulantly, and if that didn't piss Jared off, nothing would have. He and Jensen might not be conjoined twins or anything, but that wasn't to say that he'd stand around and watch if the dude had a problem.

David sensed the change in Jared's mood almost instantly. "No, man, that's not what I meant." He said hastily.

Jared's knuckles were white against the wheel. "Yeah? Well maybe you can fill me in, because seriously dude, this whole need to know bullshit is getting a little old."

His friend had the good grace to look shamefaced. "Look, it's not my place to tell, okay?" He said, words as meek as they could be then, in a pretty dismal attempt to change the subject he asked, "what do you mean by our work? You got the role?"

Truly awful deflection. Jared still grinned.

"Yeah, dude. Found out this afternoon...and how the hell did you know did you know about it?"

"Inside information. Can't tell you. I have my sources to protect. And congratufuckinglations!" David smirked.

Jared snorted. "Dude, your sources just put you on a time out."

"Yeah." David sighed wistfully. "He's pretty pissed at me."

Jared looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "I'd say you were the pissed one, man, I've never seen you act like that."

The hand was in the hair again, tugging, frustrated. "I just worry about him. I mean nobody he works with knows about his condition. Hell we fought like mad before he took the job."

It was Jared's turn to look incredulous. "His condition? Bro, I don't think anyone missed the fact that he is deaf."

David's knuckles cracked. "Deafness is a symptom of his condition. That ain't what's wrong with him."

Jared was getting sick and tired of his stomach doing the cha-cha. He pulled onto the forecourt of David's building with a feeling of dread building in the pit of his belly.

"Guess this is me. Look...thanks bro. For bringing him home." David clarified. "We're good, yeah?"

That was twice David had asked that since Jensen had come into their lives, and it was hard to pretend that Jared didn't see the lines of weariness that had begun to etch themselves around David's eyes.

"Always." Jared promised.

TO WAKE THE DEAD

So it had taken a little longer this time, but thanks to a fair amount of patience and a bucket full of foam strawberries, Jared found what he was looking for.

Jensen Ackles was an acclaimed novel writer. Jason Teague was an award-winning scriptwriter, who had, incidentally, penned the odd script for Buffy and Angel. No prizes for guessing the connection there.

Fucking authors and their goddamn fucking pseudonyms.

Jared was all set for a Monster Movie Marathon-pure on the role research, mind you- when Jensen rang his doorbell.

Then there was about a five-second gap in time, in which Jared's mind tried to compute what he was seeing, and Jensen all but stumbling into his arms like the heroine in some dime store bodice ripper.

His seemingly favorite Jensen-related word was all Jared could utter. "Umm..."

Intelligence kicked in, and he hauled Jensen inside, steering him towards the living room and kicking the door closed behind them.

It wasn't until they were under the lights that Jared got a good look at Jensen's face.

Jesus Christ on the Cross...that was just.... "Did David?" Jared's fingers fluttered over the mottled bruise covering Jensen's right eye. Wrong. So very, very, very wrong. Jensen was obviously on the same page, if not the same paragraph, because he shook his head slowly, then promptly flopped down onto Jared's couch.

Through trial and error, Jared managed to change the settings on his TV, flipping through German, French, Arabic and Italian subtitles until he found the English for the hard of hearing. "Drink?" He asked repeatedly until Jensen shook his head, arms curled around himself and not a hint of giggleness in place.

Jared couldn't put his finger on the cause, not knowing Jensen well enough to know if he was dealing with sick!Jensen, sad!Jensen, postbreakup!Jensen or givemesugar!Jensen. After five minutes, he figured it might have been E, none of the above. Jensen yawned wide enough to pop his jaw, his eyes heavy lidded and dull. Ten minutes later, and he was out of it, sliding down the couch until Jared caught him and guided him horizontal. With a nudge of encouragement, Jensen curled his feet up on Jared's Padalecki sized couch. His head hit Jared's leg, and he snuffled adorably when Jared dragged his jacket over his shoulders.

Right. Movie. Watch.

His thigh twitched involuntarily.

Fuuuuckit.

Jared really, really shouldn't find the sight of Jensen's head pillowed on his thigh such a turn on. It was wrong. Kicking puppies and stealing candy from children type wrong. He had, for all intents and purposes, a sick, sleepy, decidedly vulnerable guy dozing on him. Utterly ignoring the fact that Jensen was David's, and David would skin him alive for even contemplating anything naughty, he had a duty of care to the sleeping hot guy and owed it to Jensen to keep his hands to himself.

Right. Monster movies. Chainsaw murders. Blood. Guts. Gore. Anything icky and nasty enough to distract his mind from the all too painful fact that Jensen was by far the prettiest thing Jared had had near his cock in...well, a while.

The first movie was an Eli Roth flick that barely managed to stay the right side of violent

pornography. Jared was left feeling suitably nauseous enough to ignore the splash of drool soaking into his jeans.

His stomach rolled at the sight of a pretty girl getting her fingers cut off with a bolt cutter, and decided that screw it, he could put his hand on Jensen's shoulder without it equating a marriage proposal.

By the time the credits had rolled, and a ten-hour Hammer Horror session kicked in, Jared's hand was, sadly, no closer to Jensen's shoulder, and his arm was hurting like hell.

Jensen continued to sleep, missing *The House That Bled To Death*, *The Two Faces of Evil* and *Charlie Boy*, only stirring when *Dracula* began, and Jared's legs had fallen asleep. Jared didn't even look down at him, just laid his fingers gently over Jensen's eyes until his breathing once again softened into sleep.

When the phone rang half way through *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*, Jared snatched it up quickly, forgetting for a moment that the ring wouldn't disturb Jensen's slumber.

"Lo?" Jared greeted, only realizing how tired he was when a yawn escaped.

David's voice on the other line was no surprise, but the fear that clung to each of his words was. "Hey, JT. Look, I know it's late, but...I dunno, man...have you heard from Jensen lately?" There was a level of uncertainty there that took Jared by surprise, and his hand automatically tightened against Jensen's arm.

"Yeah, man. Why?" Jensen shuffled slightly, utterly oblivious to their conversation, and Jared's fingers moved up to ghost across the bruise on his forehead.

"You don't know where he is, do you?" It sounded like David was grasping at straws. Which was understandable. Jared wasn't entirely sure what had brought Jensen to his door, of all places, but he wasn't about to question it. Not for more than a second or two, anyway.

"My couch." He responded mildly, hand settling in Jensen's hair.

"Say what?" David spluttered in shock.

"My couch." Jared repeated. "With a big ass bruise on his head. Now, bro, you know I love ya, but if I find you are in anyway responsible..." he let the sentence slide, not willing to risk his friendship on false accusations, and still unable to grasp the concept of David actually hurting anyone. Bastard still felt guilty about breaking one of the stunt guy's fingers while filming. Five years ago.

Instead of guilty, or even defensive, David sounded damn near hysterical. "Oh thank God." He whispered. "He just took off. Sam's been tearing her hair out. Is he okay?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah." Jared replied, thumb sliding over Jensen's cheek, earning him a small snuffling sound of satisfaction. From seeing him with David, Jared knew Jensen was a very tactile person, so he kept his hand moving gently, as if he were stroking a very large, heavy, silky soft kitten. "He's asleep, actually. Has been for...well I don't know how long, but my brain is liquefying from all the TV I've watched."

David's sigh was loud in his ear. "I'll be there in twenty, okay?"

"Bro, he's fine. Honest. He looks set to snooze all night. I'll even make him my Padalecki Pancakes for breakfast. You sound exhausted."

The pause was long, painfully long. Jared could hear the cogs turning in David's head. After a

while, he said, "Has he had anything to drink?"

Jared's brain said huh, but the words that came out of his mouth were thankfully more eloquent. "No. Should he have?"

Obviously, the answer was yes. David launched into a detailed list of instructions, and Jared tried to gather enough brain cells to remember them all. "Mix up some sugar water, about two spoonfuls in a beer mug."

"Like the alien dudes in MIB?"

David ignored the comparison. "Make sure he drinks it all, okay? Don't let the puppy eyes get the better of you. He should have his pills in his jacket pocket, right?"

"Umm," It was awkward trying to reach into Jensen's jacket without molesting the man underneath it. Juggling the phone between his ear and his shoulder, Jared twisted, earning a grunt from Jensen and a sigh of annoyance from David. Then, finally, "Yeah, got em." Jared held up the three small bottles, each printed with a name he couldn't have pronounced at full mental capacity.

"Okay, he needs two of the blue ones, and one each of the pink and white ones. Give him those now. Then give him two white ones when he wakes up in the morning? Okay?"

Two pink and three blue, nine green... Jesus, what was he, a pharmacist?

"Yeah, got it." And then, "Anything else?"

"Yeah, turn the damn heating up." David snorted, some of the serious leaching from his voice. "It's like the North Fucking Pole in that house."

"Bite me, asshole." Jared says, but there was a smile on his face when he hung up. "Right," he muttered to himself. "Babysitting time."

Jensen was like one of those bendy, oversized dolls all the kids wanted, and that had to be the worst comparison in the history of ever, because now he didn't just have sex and Jensen on the mind, but sex and Jensen and dolls. It was so wrong it wasn't even funny. "Sit." He ordered, manhandling a bleary-eyed Jensen into one of the kitchen chairs. "Now I don't know why you're all semi-catatonic, to be honest, I don't really care, but you're boyfriend's given me the drill, and I learned years back when to give him the finger, and when to nod and salute, ya understand?"

It was more than obvious that no, Jensen didn't understand. His eyes were closed, his head propped up on one arm as he sat damn near boneless at the table. Those puppy dog eyes David had warned him about came into full effect when Jared slapped down a glass full of sugar-saturated water. "Drink."

Jensen didn't put his tongue out, but he did pout.

"I invented that look." Jared said calmly. "Now drink up, bitch."

It took close to ten minutes, and a fair amount of tickling before Jensen gave in, glaring at Jared with something that was possibly supposed to be hatred, but made him look more like a drowned kitten trying to be intimidating.

When Jared passed him the required amount of pills, he sighed, defeated, and obediently swallowed the lot.

"Bed?" He asked, repeating himself when Jensen blinked and missed the question.

Jensen shook his head, and Jared bit his lip. His couch really was kick ass comfortable... He could keep an eye on things better... "Movie?"

Jensen nodded. By the time The Legend of the 7 Golden Vampires had rolled the credits, they were back where they had been an hour before. Jensen had curled up on his side, dead to the world, with one arm around Jared's waist, and the other tucked in close to his chest. Jared's hand had once again settled in Jensen's hair.

When the first Frankenstein movie hit the screen, Jared's snores could have woken the dead, but Jensen slept on through.

GLASS AND COTTON WOOL

As promised, Jared made pancakes for breakfast. Hectoring Jensen to take his pills took less effort than expected; Jared only needed to set the little bottle down on the table before Jensen was self-medicating with whateverthefuck.

It was only after he threw a handful of blueberries into the creamy breakfast mix that Jared realized Jensen was staring at him. It was pretty fucking weird. He'd never played pillow for a gay man before. Was there some kind of etiquette involved? Maybe they were supposed to slap each other's asses and be done with it.

All right, best not to think of Jensen's ass at such an early hour. A topic best saved for a post breakfast hand job in the shower.

Pale fingers curled lightly around his wrist, startling his thoughts out of NC-17 to the here and now. Jensen was biting his lip, eyes darting wildly about the kitchen.

"Thanks." He said. The word was so quiet it was barely a whisper, but Jared heard it all the same.

Jared blinked, sighed, and burned their breakfast.

David was waiting when Jared pulled his truck into Jensen's drive. The morning was the same as a hundred others in LA, bright, warm. Bland. Jared killed the ignition as David opened the passenger door. Unlike the last time he had pulled Jensen from Jared's truck, there was infinite care in his touch. He held Jensen's elbow as if he was made of fine glass. Jensen sighed and slid into his embrace.

With his cheek resting against Jensen's hair, David cast a grateful look in Jared's direction. "Thanks, bro."

Without being asked, Jared followed them inside. Sam leant against the hall wall, casual in everything except the look in her eyes.

Jared felt her watching him, but was unable to take his eyes off David and Jensen. He stood transfixed as his best friend guided Jensen to the foot of the stairs, then without thought or question, scooped the sleepy young man up into his arms and carried him towards what Jared could only presume to be their bedroom. It was only after he heard the door close behind them

that Sam's loud and repeated clearing of her throat was acknowledged by his brain.

"Coffee?" She asked politely.

Jared rolled his shoulders, joints shrieking in protest at his unorthodox sleeping positions.

"Whiskey?"

"Irish coffee."

"Perfect."

Jared lasted all of five minutes before he blurted out the question that had been on his mind all night. In all fairness, he'd lasted a whole four minutes longer than expected.

Maybe three and a half minutes longer than Sam had expected. Mug in hand –and Jared was sure the fingers she had used to measure the whiskey must have belonged to giants- she took a long sip. "It's called Mènière's." She explained.

Jared recognized the word, and kicked himself for not looking into things in advance. He'd been so convinced of Jensen's serial killer status that he'd forgotten rule numero uno: know thy enemy. Of course, Jensen was now less an enemy, more a fellow Monster Movie Enthusiast...even if he had slept through the entire marathon.

"And that is...?"

Sam was obviously used to explaining things. Her smile was patient. "It's a disease that affects the ear. Think of it as a giant spirit level. So long as it's on a level surface, the fluid inside is steady, balanced. Tip it up, or fill it too full, and everything gets a little screwy."

"So Jensen's head is screwy?" Like he hadn't known that before...

She snorted and took another sip of medicated coffee. "The mean age of onset is usually around 39 years old, but there are dozens of documented cases in children as young as seven. Jensen was diagnosed with the disease when he was ten."

The bubble of foreboding that had been slowly building in Jared's belly hit boiling point. Seventeen years. Jensen had been dealing with some god-awful sickness for the best part of two decades.

"Jesus." Jared whispered.

Sam nodded. "Mary and Joseph. Yeah, I know. Pretty shitty, huh?" Her lips quirked into a smile that was entirely humorless.

Jared figured that was putting it mildly. He took a long drag of coffee, ignoring the scalding burn as the bitter liquid hit his tongue. "What...what is it?"

Sam's long hair shifted, falling in waves over her shoulder as she shrugged. "It's a bitch, that's what it is. Traditionally, it consists of a combination of symptoms, the most common being violent attacks of vertigo and nausea that can last for hours at a time. Fluctuating hearing loss is another major symptom, as is Tinnitus or pressure in the inner ear." She smiled ruefully. "Imagine strapping an activated police siren to your head for a day, then flying without popping your ears."

"Ouch." Jared grimaced. Nas.ty. He popped his ears unconsciously in sympathy, and cast a fugitive look towards the stairs. "Wait, wait...fluctuating hearing loss? So he's not deaf deaf. Just, what...semi-deaf?"

Silently, Sam refilled both their mugs, something Jared took as a bad sign. It was a good five minutes before she answered, and Jared had begun to twitch nervously. "I started working for Jensen when he was eighteen. I love him as if he were my own boy." She cast a smile towards the stairs...towards Jensen. And David. "I didn't much like your buddy when they first started dating."

Jared blinked, a little dumbstruck. Everyone liked David. It was practically Cosmic Law.

"Now you gotta understand something here, Jared. Ménière's is a bitch of an illness, but it's also very diverse. Not everyone suffers from the same symptoms. Some don't suffer from any of the symptoms at all. Jensen is both unfortunate, and incredibly lucky."

Okay and the prize for best oxymoron of the day goes to... more whiskey, please.

"The guy just had to be carried up his own stairs. You want to tell me how that's lucky?" It was hard to keep the bitterness from his voice, but somehow Jared managed it. This wasn't his sickness, after all. Jensen wasn't his to worry about.

Sam met his gaze head on, unflinching and utterly serious. "He doesn't get drop attacks, for a start."

Jared was getting pretty tired of all the technical terms. He knew he should have done what his brother had done and become a doctor. "What?"

"His grandmother used to get them. Looked like someone just went and pulled a rug out from underneath her. One minute it was all apple pie and candy, the next she was flat on her back, smacking her head off of any hard surface close by."

Okay...ouch. Yeah, maybe Jensen was lucky in that respect. Suddenly all the wide, open spaces in the house made a little more sense.

Floorboards creaked upstairs, Jared's mind wandering of its own volition. Annoyed with himself, he snapped back into the conversation. "So how is he unlucky?"

Sam regarded him intently for a moment, before her shoulders sagged. "He was one hell of a musician when he was younger." She smiled fondly, the affection she felt as clear as stars over a desert sky. "Used to sing, play the guitar, the piano. Was real good at it too. I remember how frustrated he'd be after an attack. He'd not have the energy to crawl, but all he wanted to do was come down here and play a song. After a week or so, he'd get his energy back, and he'd play and play until his fingers bled. "

Jared had seen the grand piano, pushed against the wall in the sitting room. It was still lovingly cared for, dusted, oiled and polished. Jared wondered if it would be tuned. That sick feeling was back in his gut. The Jensen he knew wouldn't have been able to recognize Blues from Pop if it played on the radio.

"I guess that changed." He said darkly.

A small nod from Sam, and then she said, "Ménière's usually starts out in one ear. In Jensen's case, it was his right. In about forty percent of those diagnosed, the disease will spread to the other ear after long periods of ailment."

Jared winced, and wondered if seventeen fucking years constituted as long periods.

"Now the hearing loss associated is degenerative. Low pitch sounds go out the window pretty fast. It gets worse over the years, but between attacks, most sufferers retain an adequate level of hearing." For a moment, she looked terribly sad. Her hands were white around the mug, and without thinking, Jared clutched his own mug tighter. "By the time Jensen was twenty, he had the disease in both ears. He was wearing hearing aids at twenty-one, and at twenty-six, about a month after he and David started dating, he had the worst attack I've ever seen him have. It usually took a few days for his hearing to return. We're still waiting on it."

Twenty-six...and Jensen was what? Twenty-seven...close to twenty-eight? There's infinite fucking patience for you. Or desperation. Jared wasn't sure which.

"Is there a cure?" He asked. Science could fix damn near everything these days. If it could clone a fucking sheep, it could fix Jensen's screwy head.

Sam shook her head. "Not as such. No. It can be controlled to a certain degree. Low sodium diet, medication, that sort of thing."

No cure...yet. Crap.

"These attacks...what causes them? How often does he get them?" Details. With details, he could plan a counter attack.

"All sorts. Stress. Climate. Diet. Hell, the television can trigger an attack. Standing up too fast, temperature, closing your damn eyes. They can happen at any time, with little to no warning. It's pretty much impossible to predict."

Okay...fuck. David's little HeMan routine didn't seem so unjustified any more. Jesus...they might as well wrap Jensen in cotton wool and lock him in a box right now.

He rubbed his eyes, remembering the circles of weariness David wore on his face and sympathizing. "How often?" He repeated the question, aware of Sam's scrutiny, and all the more uncomfortable for it.

"It can vary. Some people have them three or four times a week." A week? Jesus Christ. "Some only get them a few times a decade. Jensen usually can expect an episode four or five times a month. Most are pretty mild. The vertigo will last about half an hour, and he'll be fine after a day in bed."

Jared nodded. He remembered catching Jensen when he stumbled on Jared's front porch, and the feel of him, warm and soft as he slept.

"He had one yesterday, didn't he?"

Sam nodded. "Yeah. Nothing major, but he walked right into a door. It was quite spectacular."

Hence the bruise. Jesus.

"What about surgery? Doctors can fix anything these days." Jared returned to the idea of science. Logic was the best course of action in any situation. If science couldn't cure Jensen, then maybe it could help him.

"Sure." Sam nodded. "Surgery is an option. His ENT's been suggesting a transcanal labyrinthectomy for the past three months now."

A what huh? Jared shook off the question. He was going into info overload. His brain couldn't take much more.

"He's going for it, right? I mean...it's not like he can't afford it." He waved a hand around, taking in the understated elegance of Jensen's home.

"A transcanal labyrinthectomy is a very invasive procedure. It would destroy any chances of him hearing again."

"What, he thinks it's gonna come back? Could that happen?"

"Honestly? No. His surgeon doesn't expect it to, I don't expect it to. But Jensen...he holds onto in like a life raft." Sighing, she moved from the table, rinsing the two mugs in the sink and stacking them up on the wooden draining board.

Jared nodded slowly.

By the end of the week, Jared was ready to keel over and die. Or at the very least, crawl under his covers and not emerge for the next decade or so. Preemptive training had turned out to be Kripke code for roughing it with a group of trigger-happy ex-soldiers in the middle of the fucking desert. His legs hurt. His back hurt. His floating rib hurt.

And that, apparently, was just the beginning. By the time he and Marc checked out of the Kripke School of Being a Tough-Ass, they'd be ready to invade China with just a toothpick and a bottle of Gatorade.

"Sadistic fucker." Jared grumbled, tripping over an errant shoelace as he juggled his mail in one hand, and his backpack 'o crazy shit in the other. He'd gone and signed his soul over to the Devil. A dozen letters spilled over onto his side table when he dropped his bag and evaded a mutt attack. Two were from his mom, a postcard from his sister in...Nice? Nice. Four were from his agent. Insurance forms blah blah blah, contracts- to be signed in the blood of a virgin sacrificed on a full moon- and a long, thin package that had barely fit in his box.

Curious, he dropped the contracts, and slid the twine from around the smooth brown packaging. Inside, without greeting or decoration, was a single rose, deep pink, and almost as soft as Jensen's hair.

SUBTEXT

Jared learned pretty quick that as a writer, Kripke was the Devil, Sera was the Queen of Hell, and Jensen was the innocent, pretty guy they both liked to fuck...who in reality was far more evil than them both put together.

Between them, Marc and he really didn't stand much of a chance.

"I swear my dick's gonna get frostbite."

Jared had stumbled bleary eyed out of his trailer, wrapped up in a huge snow coat that made him look like the Sasquatch Marc accused him of being. His co-star had been waiting, hopping from foot to foot, and instead of a greeting, he'd issued that stunning scientific analysis of what would happen if the chilly Canadian weather had any more of an effect on his anatomy.

"I hear ya, dude." He nodded in reply, accepting a bottle of PowerAde from a perky redhead PA with a grin of thanks.

Marc had both hands stuffed into his pockets, and a blue beanie pulled so low over his eyes it was a miracle he wasn't tripping over his own feet.

"You read the adjustments?"

Jared grunted in response. He'd barely had an hour to look over the changes to the script that had been faxed in last minute. There weren't many occasions when such things happened, but when they did, it was always pandemonium.

"Your boy's an evil fucker." Marc declared vehemently.

Jared wasn't entirely sure when Jensen had become his boy.

Or when he'd stopped protesting the contrary.

Sad thing was, Jensen was an evil fucker. And his boy. Sort of. In the non-sexual not fucking like bunnies way, because, yeah, David...

His boy in the sense that a day didn't go by when Jared didn't think of him, and really, it wasn't his fault. Not in the typical definition of the word, anyway.

Jensen started it. Ish. Jensen had started everything else between them, Jared might as well pin this on him as well.

If you were going to play semantics, then Jared was the one who sent the first email, but if Jensen hadn't replied, then they would never have gotten into the habit of spamming each other's inboxes. So yes. It was Jensen's fault for being such a polite, evil fucker.

From: jrackles@groowy.com
To: jpaddy42@googlemail.com

You're going down, jerk
<http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/games/bloxorz>

From: jpaddy42@googlemail.com
To: jrackles@groowy.com

Bitch. Talk to me when you hit 27 in the big T

Maybe Tetris wasn't the best manly man's game, but he'd been in a four-month battle with Jensen right from his first day on set. Jensen had a number of tools for procrastination, most of them utterly random. His plants, Jared understood, but his love for old computer games stepped across the bounds of cute and landed firmly in geeky. Which was okay. Jensen made geeky sexy. Jared's own descent from cool was just plain painful.

Inbox (2)

Jared wasn't grinning like an idiot when he clicked the first message. It had been a long, dark, emotionally draining day of watching Marc get the crap kicked out of him. He wasn't grinning. It was an exhausted grimace. Really.

From: jrackles@groowy.com
To: jpaddy42@googlemail.com

Sam wants to make sure you are eating right. She says you look too skinny. She said that about Robbie Coltrane as well, so I wouldn't read too much into it. David sends his love. He grunted. I translated. He also wants Nicki Aycox's cell number. *g* Give it to him and I'll make you Dean's bitch.

Sera and I are working on an ep you'll like. Don't want to spoil it...but you've seen Deliverance, right?

From: jpaddy42@googlemail.com
To: jrackles@groowy.com

Nicki'd sooner fuck a goat. A dead goat, even.

And if you tell me to squeal like a piggy, I'll make you squeal, bitch.

From: jrackles@groowy.com
To: jpaddy42@googlemail.com

Promises, promises.

Now get back to work you lazy fucker.

And that was pretty much the level of intelligence that bounced back and forth between them. Occasionally Jensen would attach new parts of his fifth book for Jared to critique- which he did with great glee, printing off each page, doodling like mad in the margins, then mailing it back with an envelope full of silly string and glitter.

It usually guaranteed him an email full of cuss words and crudely drawn PaintPad stick figures.

True Ducky Love, as Marc said.

Marc was an evil fucker, too.

When the script for Faith came through, Jared honest to God cried. Like a baby. A big, hairy baby. It hadn't been pretty. If the make-up girls hadn't fallen for his hayfever excuse, his status as manly man of the set would have been knocked down to the levels usually preserved for Priscilla, Queen of the Desert and pink fingerless gloves.

Trust Jensen to cut out his heart and throw it in Jared's (and the world's) face. Stupid asshole.

Personally, Jared was with Sam. If could find a faith healer to fix Jensen's problem, he'd do it in a heartbeat. Consequences damned.

He put an order through Interflora for as many potted plants as they could easily deliver to LA, and when the phone rang a week later, it was to the sound of Jensen's choked laughter.

Halfway through spying on a shirtless Nicki, Jared was called off set and dragged aside by a grim faced Kripke. For a second, Jared was scared the man was going to pronounce the coming Apocalypse.

It turned out to be pretty damn close.

Jared had a cousin, Mary, a few years younger, and good friends with his baby sister. She liked wild boyfriends, fast cars, and her daddy's credit card almost as much as Jared liked his candy.

Jared was a pretty relaxed kind of guy. As semi-religious as a kid growing up in Texas had any right to be, and pretty convinced that when things happened, there was usually a reason for them.

He was at a loss as to understand what divine rationale could provide an explanation for why his cute as a button cousin was now six feet under. Or how, even if there was a reason, it could possibly be good enough for his family.

Marc had offered to come with him to Texas, an offer Jared had quickly declined. Family was family, and whilst Marc was a damn good friend, he didn't want to mix the two worlds at such a dark time in their lives.

He stayed for three days, the funeral, and the weekend that followed, before the black cloud that had settled became too oppressive to stand. Citing work obligations, he boarded the first flight to Vancouver he could book.

When he touched down, the first call on his cell was from Eric: come into work this week, and I'll fire you.

Eric was another evil fucker. The world was amassing a fair few of them.

It was Marc who stopped him from doing something stupid. Like leaving the oven on overnight, or letting Sadie into his closet, or drowning himself in a vat of tequila. He'd also been a total backstabbing, cock sucking asshole, and called Jensen. Or rather Sam, who'd dutifully passed the message on.

Which was how Jared, after calling for pizza, staring at it for an hour, then binning the lot, found himself on his couch with a numb mind, and Jensen's hand warm on his knee.

Sam, exhibiting her usual air of understated authority, swept through his apartment silently, gathering abandoned takeaway boxes, dirty clothes, and used dishes. Jared didn't so much as acknowledge the fact that Jensen was in the country, let alone his apartment. If he did, he'd have to look at him, and if he looked at him, Jensen would know right then how utterly soothing his presence was.

No need to stroke the bastard's ego.

After ten minutes, Jensen's legs obviously cramped. He shifted sideways, curled up between

Jared's knees, his hands still an anchor for Jared to cling to. "Jay?" His voice was as soft as usual. When Jensen spoke, it was as if he were scared of speaking too loudly, so he whispered the words instead.

Jared shook his head. He couldn't deal with Jensen. Not now. Not when his mind was so full of other crap. Jensen always demanded all of his attention, and Jared simply couldn't spare a single moment of it.

Those long, pianist's fingers clenched in denim, then relaxed, reaching for his hand. Jensen had nice hands, Jared thought distantly. Pretty hands. Hands that fit just right in his. Pale and strong, but without any roughness to signify hard graft. Jared's own hands bore the scars of a childhood spent getting into all sorts of trouble. He wondered if Jensen had ever been allowed that freedom. A soft, insistent tug at his arm drew Jared from the comfort and oblivion of his couch and towards the bedroom.

Bedroom, heh, with Jensen...

The lights were off, and neither made a move to turn them on. Sadie and Harley scampered out from underfoot, attracted by the sound of Sam in the kitchen. Under Jensen's gentle guidance, he lay down on the bed, his back to the window and his favorite view of the bay. As calmly as if he were tending a child, Jensen removed his shoes, placing them neatly together at the foot of the closet, and then carefully easing him out of his thick over shirt.

The temperature in the apartment began to rise. Jared wasn't sure if this was for Jensen, or because of him...didn't really care either way.

The bed dipped, and Jensen climbed up.

If he closed his eyes, Jensen might think he was sleeping and leave him be. He tried it, only to be bopped on the end of the nose by one of Jensen's fingers.

Evil fucker, that's what he was.

Jensen bopped him on the end of the nose again.

Jared snatched at his hand and scowled. "Why are you here?" He snapped, belatedly grateful that Jensen could not hear the bitterness in his voice. He wanted to be left alone, but not at the expense of Jensen's feelings.

He was fucking whipped. Might as well cut off his balls and be done with it.

Experience had still not eased him into the way Jensen's eyes always lingered on his lips and months of physical absence had erased his ability to look on Jensen with familiarity. There were new lines around his eyes, fine patterns in the skin that could have been painted there by pleasure or pain. His freckles were dark against his cheeks, and Jared was close enough to count each one...he didn't, and almost missed Jensen's whispered reply.

"Knew you'd be upset." Each word was slow, measured carefully. David had once said that Jensen's reluctance to speak was more a case of deafness providing a cover for his painful shyness than any medical reason. Jared knew him well enough by now to treasure each word whispered to him. "Sides, Sam likes trains."

Trains....they took the train. Several trains. The idea of Jensen getting on a train for a long distance journey when he could have had an attack at any minute made Jared's stomach clench nauseously. He reached out, grabbed Jensen in a tight bear hug, and squeezed until the other man made a sound like a squeaker toy.

Then fell promptly asleep.

Waking up was like trying to swim backwards through cotton wool. His head as fuzzy. Tear fuzzy, tight under the eyes and weighting a hundred pounds. He couldn't have moved if he'd have wanted to.

Given his position, moving wasn't really an issue right then.

Jensen was paying him back for all his hard work as pillow!Jay extraordinaire. Jared couldn't quite remember how they'd made it to the bed, or how he'd made it onto Jensen, but reality was pretty damn obvious, even with a hangover, and he was plastered closer to Jensen than should have been scientifically possible.

His head was pillowed between Jensen's arm and shoulder, warm fingers having curled around and tangled in his hair. Jensen's hip was right under Jared's palm, separated only by the thin fabric of his blood red t-shirt, and Jared had thrown one leg so far over Jensen's that he might as well have stapled the poor man to the bed.

Not that Jensen seemed to have any issues with their position. He was still fast asleep, peacefully oblivious to Jared's scrutiny, his light breathing gently ghosting against Jared's hair.

They were still clothed, both exhausted, and the embrace Jared found himself in was more innocent than it had any right to be. Surrounded by soft, warm skin, and wrapped up in the arms of a man who obviously cared enough about him to travel several hundred miles at the drop of a hat, Jared felt more satisfied than after a weekend of mind-blowing sex.

And just like that, the pieces in Jared's mind fell into place.

He was in love with Jensen.

Crap.

ON THE EDGE OF THE BATTLEFIELD

So they might not get a season two.

The world sucked out loud. They had to be picked up. Jensen had promised to write an entire monologue dedicated to Sam's abysmal driving skills, and it was worth the extra season just to watch Marc try to keep a straight face whilst delivering it.

Still, hiatus/unemployment was not something to be looked in the face. Kripke had damn near killed them filming the season finale...quite literally. The blame was entirely Eric's, but given the practically pornographic scene that had been played out between Marc and Jeff, Jared would have been surprised if Jensen hadn't had a teeny tiny bit of influence over some of the banter.

He and Marc had parted ways back in Vancouver, both favoring a little road trip to relax themselves on their way home. Marc was heading across Canada to stay with relatives before catching a flight to his girlfriend's house in NY. Jared was driving down the coast, bunking at Jeff's place in Seattle for a few nights, whilst his dogs dozed serenely in the back of his truck.

If they did lose the contract, and the Winchester boys were forever doomed to spend eternity unconscious in the shell of a classic car, then it would be Marc Jared missed the most. Marc, and the free candy.

The endearingly annoying bastard had sort of wormed himself into Jared's little bubble of awesome people, which now consisted of his family, David, Chad (that was one bubble that wouldn't pop-even when blasted with a tomahawk) and *cough* Jensen.

Speaking of...

No. Not speaking of. Jensen was a topic not to be touched upon with words. Or thoughts.

Which went absolutely nowhere towards explaining how, after only a day back in LA, he found himself on Jensen's doorstep, finger on the buzzer.

Sam appeared at the door long enough to open it before making a brisk retreat back inside.

Jensen lay sprawled across the bathroom floor, a blanket kicked around his ankles. He was settled amongst a small pile of pillows, one tugged tight against his chest in the way a child might cling to a teddy bear. The room stank of sweat and vomit, Jensen's misery so sharp that a part of Jared could feel it in his bones. Fine tremors of exhaustion shook Jensen's shoulders, and his face was damp with sweat and tears.

Despite every instinct in him demanding he rush to Jensen's side, Jared couldn't actually make his feet cross the threshold.

Sam brushed past him with a plastic cup of ice chips. Crouching by Jensen's side, she pressed a small chip against his chapped lips and he moaned miserably.

That sound was enough to kick Jared into motion. He strode forwards, only to be stopped by Sam's hand on his ankle. "Don't touch him if you can help it." She instructed.

"Why?" Jared meant the question to be curious. Instead it was snapped, short and full of fear.

Sam ignored his tone entirely and pressed a second chip to Jensen's lips. "His brain is on a stimulation overdrive right now." She explained. "Moving will make him feel sicker, and touching him excessively will just force him to compute extra, unnecessary, sensations. You can't bring him any comfort right now."

Jensen twisted to lay more on his back, his eyes wide and fixed on the lampshade above. The lights were off, but Jared could clearly see the whites of Jensen's eyes, and the way his chest heaved with each shuddering breath.

"If you are going to stay," Sam continued, swapping the cup for a damp cloth, "then just sit."

Jared nodded mutely, sliding down the wall and watching as she cleaned away the perspiration dripping into Jensen's eyes.

Sit. He could sit.

By the time the four-hour mark loomed, Jared had bitten his nails bloody and was pretty close to vomiting himself. Every time Jensen attempted to throw up a lung he flinched, muscled cramping from the effort not to wrap Jensen in a big mystical bubble and fight the disease off with a sharp

sword. Or rock salt. Jensen's weak shuddering and pained whimpers weren't all that dissimilar from the effects of an exorcism. They needed Jeff to go all Papa Winchester on this things ass.

Of course Jeff had already seen this before. He'd been just as helpless.

When it reached the point that Jensen was no longer strong enough to hold onto the rim of the toilet, Jared threw Sam's words of caution out the window. It was a tight squeeze, the three of them on the small bathroom, but Jared was well practiced in being able to make his lanky frame fit into awkward spaces. Sam didn't stop him, but her eyes were as sharp as a mother fox's as Jared hesitantly laid his hand on the center of Jensen's back.

The thin long sleeved t-shirt Jensen was wearing was soaking with sweat, and the pale skin beneath it felt cold and clammy under Jared's hand. "Easy, Jen." It felt a little ridiculous to whisper soothing words in Jensen's ear, but they served a dual purpose and actually took the edge off Jared's frantic fear.

Jensen whimpered and curled in on himself when Jared tried to maneuver him into a more comfortable position. "Please," he whispered brokenly, "no."

"Don't move him, kid." Sam warned when Jared turned to look beseechingly at her. "You'll make it worse for him."

Hearing that he couldn't even attempt to sooth Jensen without causing him more pain was a wound Jared couldn't bear. He gently let Jensen settle back down amongst his make shift bedding before stumbling from the bathroom, his eyes burning.

"Damnit, Jared." Sam hissed, following him to the point where she could keep both men in her line of vision.

Jared wasn't crying when he spun on his heels to face her, but he was close. "He can't hear us, we can't touch him, can't comfort him. We're just what, supposed to watch him suffer?"

"Yes, Jared. That is exactly what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to watch him fight a battle with his own body that we can't even comprehend. We're supposed to comfort and care for him when it is over. Then we're supposed to treat him like a damn human being again when he's well, and if you can't handle any of that, then you best leave right this damn minute. He's not one of your buddies, kid. You can't slap him on the back and fix his problems with a six pack and a basketball game."

That was where the problem was, wasn't it? There really was nothing Jared could do. He couldn't wave a magic wand and fix things, and he wanted to. He wanted to so badly it hurt.

"I can't-" Can't do this. Can't stand it. Can't see him in pain.

Sam's face set into a hard mask. "Like I said, if you can't handle it, then leave. You're no good to me if you are a nervous wreck, and it would break his heart if you went coco on us." Her arms crossed over her chest. If she had been a foot taller with red hair, Jared could have seen her as Boudicca squaring off against an army of Romans. Her hair was actually a mousey brown, and she stood as tall as Jared's bicep, but the effect of her frown was no less intimidating.

Jared sniffed noisily and rubbed his nose on the back of his short sleeve. "It's been five hours, Sam." He whispered almost as quiet as the few words Jensen spoke.

Sam nodded. "And it could go on for another five minutes, or another ten hours." Jared winced, looking behind her to where Jensen was huddled.

"What do I have to do?"

Under Sam's orders, Jared had taken a shower and obediently eaten a small meal whilst she manned the fort in the bathroom. He was no good to Jensen at that point, she had rationalized, and if he passed out from starvation then he'd be no good when Jensen did need him. The logic was there, though Jared resented every inch of it, and he'd managed half a bowl of pasta salad before his thoughts turned back to Jensen and his stomach rebelled.

It was nice to be in clothes that didn't stink of sickness, even if they were David's and a touch too tight across the shoulders. He'd never have fitted into Jensen's clothes.

Things were still in full swing by the time he'd washed the dishes. After dragging a hand-over-heart promise from Sam to call him the second there was a change, Jared slipped his cell into his pocket and went for a run. An hour later and his legs were aching with the effort he had put forth. The sun had begun to paint the sky a beautiful blood red, and his cell played the Top Gun theme tune when it rang.

He made the trip back to Jensen's house in double time, crashing inelegantly through the front door with red cheeks and his heart pounding a mile a minute.

"Jen?" Jared walked into a two doorframes and a coffee table in hi haste to make it to Jensen's side. As soon as he stepped into the bathroom a grin broke out on his face, so bright and wide that it hurt. "Hey you." He smiled, crossing the small space and crouching down.

Jensen was no longer sprawled across the floor, but slumped against the side of the shower. His eyes were half lidded with exhaustion and his smile was pained, but when he reached for Jared's hands there was co-ordination in his limbs. Nothing to write home about, but his fingers actually found Jared's skin.

Sam had helped him out of his t-shirt and jeans and wrapped him in a fluffy dressing gown, even going so far as to pull the hood up over his head. Jensen looked like St Nick's hot younger brother after a night on the tiles.

"Alright Gigantor," Sam smiled, "time to earn your keep. Help me get him upstairs."

Jared nodded. A part of him was surprised by the lack of shame written on Jensen's face. He supposed that if this was how every attack left him, shame would have been put to touch years ago.

Shaking off Sam's move to assist them, Jared pulled Jensen close to his chest and lifted. Jensen was practically asleep when Sam wound his arms loosely around Jared's neck and settled his head at a more comfortable angle.

He was asleep when Jared settled him in the bathtub in the en-suit bathroom and Sam went about washing away the layers of perspiration and sickness from his skin. Jared silently assisted her, supporting Jensen's head and shoulders as she worked efficiently, her steady stream of conversation entirely for his benefit.

"Normally I'd just give him a wash down in bed," she explained, swiping a wet cloth across Jensen's chest. "Figured I'd make good use of all those rippling muscles of yours." She cast a playful leer at him and chuckled when Jared blushed.

If Jensen had been as malleable as a doll that night in Jared's home, then he was roughly the consistency of a melting Mars Bar under Jared's hands. Occasionally his lips would part, soft gushes of air puffing against Jared's ear, but for the most it was as if they were caring for an infant: fragile, helpless, his limbs with a mind of their own.

Sam let the water out of the tub and gathered an armful of fluffy dove grey towels. Jared had rolled his sleeves up past his elbows, but still got his sweater wet when he lifted Jensen from the draining water and held him for Sam to wrap him in towels. He could honestly say it was the first time he had ever touched a naked adult and there been nothing remotely sexual involved.

It was...nice. Not nice that Jensen was sick...just nice.

"How long will he be like this?" Jared asked, helping Sam dry Jensen off.

She shrugged. "A few days, maybe more. Depends how easy he takes it. We'll get him to drink some water in a little while, then tomorrow we'll start him on the soup and crackers." Jared nodded and rested his cheek against Jensen's hair. It was no wonder Jensen was so damn skinny if he was surviving on soup for days at a time, then purging his system so often.

Jensen stirred long enough to poke Jared in the eye when he and Sam tried to wrestle a sweater over his head. A bleary blink, a "Jay?" and he was once again out for the count.

"Well you're a cheap date, that's for sure." Jared said wryly, rolling on a pair of Jensen's socks and manhandling him under the covers Sam pulled back.

Sam snorted darkly. "You're soft in the head, kid." She grinned. "You going to come downstairs? Or do I have to get a crowbar to pry you two apart?"

"I'mma hang here for a bit." Jared said, more asking permission than making a statement. "Read some, keep an eye on him..." He trailed off, looking down at Jensen's sleeping form and sighing tiredly.

Sam nodded in understanding and her voice was gentle. "He's fine, you know. Couple of days rest, he'll be back to his usual chatty self."

"I know, it's just..."

"Scary?" She asked. Jared nodded. "Seeing someone you care about suffering always is." She gathered up the damn towels and turned to leave the room.

"Still think I'm an asshole?" Jared asked as he climbed up next to Jensen, just the way Jensen had done for him.

"I'll bring you some cookies and milk." She said, dryly evading the question.

One bright flash of the dimples had her muttering under her breath as she descended the stairs.

"Chicks dig the dimples." He confided in Jensen, earning himself a snore of agreement. "You're pretty cute for a sick guy, you know that right?" He asked, brushing aside a damp lock of hair and placing a gentle kiss on Jensen's brow. "So...you being deaf has its advantages." Jared continued thoughtfully, settling more comfortably against the cushions. "If I tell you I love you, you can't hear me, can you?" Jensen snuffled tiredly and turned his face towards the heat of Jared's hand. "Cool." Jared smiled. "That's cool."

COOKIE CRUMBS AND CHEESECAKE

Being found wrapped around another man's boyfriend with a t-shirt covered in cookie crumbs was not on Jared's list of fun things to do before death. Of course life was a bitch, and if there was a God, the dude had a pretty twisted sense of humor. He woke up next to Jensen with Stereophonics playing through the headphones of his iPod, a book strewn across his lap, and David sitting quietly at the foot of the bed.

"Jesus Christ, D!" Because that wasn't creepy at all...

"Didn't wanna wake you." David shrugged one shoulder artlessly, his hands resting lightly in his lap. "Sam told me you've been busy."

Jared looked across at Jensen, then up to David, and wondered if busy was maybe a polite way of saying, well....busy. Jensen did look as if he'd been fucked six ways to Sunday...or maybe Jared was just paranoid. It wasn't like he had 'I Heart Jensen' tattooed on his forehead. David didn't know. David couldn't know.

"Jared?" It was only then that Jared realized he had been spacing. And hyperventilating.

"Wha? Oh, yeah. He sick. He got sick, I mean. Gave him a bath. Sam. Sam and I gave him a bath. Put him to bed. Straight to bed. Thought I'd keep him company, in case...you know."

Fuck, Padalecki. It was a damned good thing he was an actor, because he couldn't bullshit his way out of a soggy paper bag.

In which case David was the most gullible man on the plant. He simply nodded and said "Thanks. Again. You're starting to be a real knight in shining armor, Jay, we'd better be careful or you'll get a complex."

Jared's answering laugh was the shrill kind, usually heard from a vapid Hollywood bimbo over a political debate of famine in West Africa.

"Yeah, well, I figured someone needed to be there." He left Sam's presence an unnoted fact, his own guilt making the words leaving his mouth more accusing than they had any right to be. David picked up on it instantly.

"I had an audition." He offered by way of explanation. Jared's eyebrows rose. Not the explanation he'd expected. Jensen had been sick for hours, and David had been at a fucking audition?

"You think I'm a bastard for not ditching it." David stated mildly.

"Man, it's nothing to do with-"

"Jen gets like this a couple of times a month. He's had this condition longer than I've known him, and he'll continue to have it long after I get job offers. So yes, I did think about standing them up and coming home. And I knew that if I did, he'd never let me hear the end of it."

Jared shuffled forwards in earnest. "Hey man, I get it. You're two people, you don't have to be glued at the hip. After today...after watching that, man, I don't know how you and Sam can do it."

He didn't know if he could stand to see Jensen suffer like that over and over and know that there was nothing he could do but cling onto the precious days in between.

"When we first met, man..." David's smile was wistful, "it was like getting hit by a truck. I wasn't gay, you know that, but he was smart and funny and so damn gorgeous. Like a drug. The more I found out about him, the more I needed to know." Jared could sympathize there a hundred

percent. He wondered if David had spent three days parked outside Jensen's house. "You know he turned me down when I asked him out."

Jared blinked. He could count on no fingers the number of people who'd outright said no to a date with David. Trust Jensen to be the first. "You're kidding."

David grinned and laid a hand on Jensen's head. "Nope. A sensible man would have packed it in...I didn't even know if he was gay, and it was right at a time when it could have ruined my career. I kept on bugging him. I think he went out with me just to get me off his case." David admitted reluctantly, a fond smile on his face as he began to stroke Jensen's forehead.

"I dunno man, you're such a tragic dresser, no surprise he didn't fall head over heels at first sight of you." Jared teased, pleased when it earned him an exasperated eye-roll. "So what changed?"

Jensen lit up like a room full of Christmas trees when he was in David's presence...however reluctant he might have initially been, it was obvious that David emerged from their courtship victorious.

Again, David smiled. "Sam, actually." He said with a roughish smirk. "I went to pick him up for our date, kissed him on the cheek, and he chose just that minute to have an attack. Freaked me the fuck out, man. I thought I'd killed him."

"The Boreanaz Kiss. Known to kill on contact." Jared intoned dryly.

"Asshole."

"Douchebag."

"I think you're confusing me with Murray." David sniffed. "Anyway, she kinda glared at me, told me to stop being...I think the words she used were 'pansy ass son of a bitch' and to either be useful, or to get out of her way."

"She's one of a kind." Jared admitted, privately a little in awe of the tiny woman. Besides, she brought him cookies, and Jensen baked the world's greatest cookies. That gave her major gold star appeal. "So you decided to be useful."

David nodded. "I just kinda clung to him, and I haven't been able to let go since."

Jensen stirred, almost as if he could sense the combined love Jared and David shared for him. You and me both, bro, Jared thought. You and me both.

David's audition, it turned out, was for a new crime show called *Bones*, and Jensen was even more excited about it than David was. First thing he asked when he woke up and saw David's face; did you get it? Right then, Jared figured that even if he'd failed miserably, David would have said yes just to keep Jensen smiling a second longer.

Jared had snuck quietly from the room, forgoing his chance to say goodbye to Sam in order to get as far away from Jensen as physically possible without leaving the greater LA area. Sadly, it wasn't far.

He got home, climbed in the shower, and stayed there until the water grew cold enough to make him shiver as hard as Jensen had.

When he was dry he checked his phone, and there was already a message from Jensen, and

one from David.

Dinner. Thursday. Bring dessert. 5.

Then

Thanks bro. Come 2 dinner. Bring food. Chocolatey food.

One word. No. Two letters. Not hard. He texted back.

Cheesecake?

"Where's David?" Jared asked as he walked into Jensen's kitchen on Thursday evening, brown paper box in hand.

Jensen wouldn't meet his eye.

"He got called out to meet his agent and some guys from the production studio." Sam explained for him, her voice oddly flat.

Jared's spider sense began to tingle. He blamed it on an empty stomach.

Two hours later, he and Jensen were on the couch, a game the TV, volume turned low as subtitles scrawled across the bottom of the screen. Neither of them knew the score. Jared could barely recall who was playing. Sam had cooked again, though Jared was immensely proud of the kickass salad he had whipped up. She'd then left them unsupervised to watch *Lost* on the TV in her room. Between bites of fajitas, Jensen had playfully taunted Jared with all the nasty things the writers were planning to inflict on Sam and Dean.

Jared had a feeling that Season Two was going to kick ass. His, in particular.

They both washed the dishes before Jared cracked open the cheesecake he'd picked up at Morgan Montana's.

Today's special, Chocolate Fudge Cheesecake. The three greatest words in the English language, all combined into one orgasm inducing dessert.

They balanced the dish between them on the couch, forks battling in the hunt for chocolate pieces. Jensen captured the last one, holding teasingly on his fork out of Jared's reach, tongue between his lips and smirking. This was a treat for him.

Jared pouted and poked him in the ribs.

A fond, long-suffering sigh left Jensen's lips. He bit half the chocolate and let Jared claim the second half.

The man even shared his chocolate.

Right then, the synapses in Jared's mind crashed. Jensen's lips were chocolate sticky and just there. With his brain cells gone AWOL, there was nothing left to reign in the desperate need to know if Jensen tasted as sweet as he looked.

Jared let his fork clatter into the dish, one hand gently capturing Jensen's cheek, fingers curled under his jaw. It might just have been the light in the room, or the reflection of the television, but Jensen's eyes had never looked brighter.

Jared kissed him. Gently. Chastely. Such a barely there kiss that it almost remained in the realm of acceptable friendly gestures.

Except that this was Jensen, his best friend's lover, and one touch wasn't close to being enough.

His tongue brushed lightly across the full lips against his, and he waited for the moment when Jensen would push him away, and reality would crash back into focus.

Then Jensen had to spoil it all by pulling him closer. The bowl of cheesecake clattered messily to the floor as Jensen twisted himself closer, his lips parting just enough for Jared to slip his tongue between them.

Without even realizing it, Jared had wrapped Jensen even tighter in his arms, pulling him closer and closer, until Jensen, always the more practical of them, slid awkwardly onto Jared's lap.

Chocolate sticky fingers left messy prints on Jensen's white pullover, and the fingers tangled in Jared's hair held on so tight it was almost painful. If there was any chance of Jared pretending this was all just a twisted little delusion cooked up by his mind, it was destroyed when his hands slid under Jensen's sweater, and he moaned sweetly into Jared's mouth.

Jensen's skin felt warmer than the last time Jared had touched it. Not the cold damp chill of sickness, but the soft clean warmth of a healthy, inviting body.

Jared? Not gay. Not at all. Men didn't turn him on. There was nothing at all attractive about the idea of someone putting a...well, anything up his ass, thank you very much. So it stood to reason that having his hands on a man's ass, and his tongue in their mouth would be a little on the freaky side of normal.

Apparently Jared and normal were like star players on opposing teams. They knew of each other's existence, but went out of the way to pretend they didn't.

Then Jensen was squirming, pushing at the circle of his arms and right....David. Bad. This totally sucked.

His mom had taken him to see the ballet of The Little Mermaid when he was a shy and geeky kid. He'd left more than a little traumatized, and ready to sue Walt Disney's ass. Now he understood a little more. Loving someone who would never love you back...a total and utter fucking bitch.

Fuckity fuck. He opened his eyes and saw Jensen barely an inch away. His eyes were greener than Jared had realized, wide, utterly...

Fuckity fuck fuck fuck. He'd promised himself that he wouldn't do anything stupid. Molesting Jensen in his own damn living room qualified as stupid. And then some.

And if Jensen had been a willing participant? It didn't matter. He wasn't thinking straight. He was on drugs. He was a writer, and writers always did stupid emo things like repaying a man who'd taken care of him with hardcore, pornographic sex on the couch.

"Jared?" Jensen whispered.

"David." Jared choked.

Sam cleared her throat loudly, and Jared all but threw Jensen off his lap in startled guilt. "Jared?"

Sam asked, eyebrows at her hairline.

"Sam." Jared groaned.

Jensen summed everything else up with one sheepish word. "Cheesecake?" He offered, holding out the bowl of partially munched dessert.

Jared must have been Hitler in a past life. Or Attila the Hun. Nothing else could explain the bad karma that was intent on kicking him repeatedly in the ass.

"I'll get my keys." He muttered, and didn't look back when Jensen called after him.

BLANK. PUPPY. BLANK. TEQUILA. BLANK.

Chris always said that Jared had a PhD in Puppy and a Masters in Moron, and whilst that was more than a little insulting, after the fifth shot of tequila, he was ready to concede the point.

"You know there is a simple solution to this." Chris announced, deadly serious in a way that only the very drunk or the very boring could ever be. Steve sat beside him, swaying slightly in his seat, but nodding just as solemnly.

The meaning of life lay at the bottom of that bottle of tequila, and Jared was convinced it wasn't 42. He poured another shot, missing the glass entirely on his first two attempts. "There is?" He hummed absently, brow furrowed in concentration. How many muscles did it take to down a shot?

"Fuck her." Chris said with a melodramatic flourish of his arms. Fucking musicians.

"We talking figuratively here? Cos I think I covered that with the unavailable part." The fact that Chris assumed he was talking about a woman made little to no difference at all.

Steve shrugged for Chris, who was too busy trying to light a joint to be bothered with the gesture. "Seriously dude. Get blind drunk and go fuck her. The sex will be awesome, you'll have scratched an itch, and we'll get Chad to fix you up with some bimbo at a wrap party."

Jared blinked. No part of that sentence made sense. Sex and Jensen were not to subjects to be mixed. Oil and water. Or pickles and ice cream. "You realize your logic has more floors than the Empire State Building?"

"Floors?" Chris blinked, confused.

"Flaws." Jared shook his head. "I know what I'm talking about and no. No sex. Sex bad."

Steve shook his head, long hair flying about his shoulders. "Sex is never bad."

"There is a first time for everything."

"Like fucking a married chick." Chris nodded.

Jared ignored them. The meaning of life? Life sucked.

Jared had a plan. A good plan. A plan guaranteed to work. He'd drawn a stick figure plan of action on a napkin and everything.

Phase One: Sneak into Jensen's house.

Sneak, because Sam would be there. She would frown; maybe even hit him with Jensen's rolling pin. He wasn't afraid of her...but this mission called for ninja like stealth. No witnesses.

Phase Two: Climb up drainpipe to Jensen's bedroom window.

Seriously, who built houses that way anymore? Hadn't Romeo and Juliet taught people that horny young men will climb into pretty girls/Jensen's bedrooms, and putting a drainpipe there was practically issuing an invitation?

Phase Three: Wake Jensen without coming across as evil stalker/rapist/axe murderer.

He'd ditched the ski mask for that very reason.

Phase Four: Proceed to have hot/steamy/awesome/earth shattering sex.

He'd downloaded gay porn. Again, research. Five minutes in he'd realized that porn stars? So not hot. And apparently it really was possible to fuck not-so pretty boy's ass and suck his dick at the same time. Who'd have thought?

Phase Five: Was lost in the details.

Jared sort of imagined them collapsing on the bed in a sweaty tangle of limbs, agree that yes, they could out fuck Hugh Hefner, and proceed to live the rest of their lives in amicable friendship. Like a male/male Will and Grace.

Phases Six, Seven and Eight: Keep hot/steamy/awesome/earth shattering sex from David.

He'd left the Polaroid at home for said reason.

So armed with a plan, a good plan, and stick-figure napkin diagram in hand, Jared proceeded with Operation: Title To Be Announced.

Jared was pretty sure he splinted bone when he fell through Jensen's window. It had looked so much easier on The Fresh Prince. Really, deaf or not, it was a miracle Jensen didn't feel the shockwaves.

Obviously he slept like the dead, a fact which Jared's drunken mind appreciated immensely. He had plans of a dramatic entrance culminating in hot/steamy/awesome/earth-shattering sex that would put him off Jensen for life. Jensen seeing him in a graceless heap at the foot of the bed was not part of that plan.

The sheets were rumpled on the right side of the bed. Jared circled it, but it was cool. David had been there, but not for some time.

Jensen always slept on the left...Jared had never understood why. He was also one of the few people Jared knew of that could sleep comfortably on his back for any great length of time. He was sprawled that way now, head tilted towards the window, one arm laid out in an artless right angle across the pillow. He wore one of those pale-colored shirts with the sleeves too long. Jared liked Jensen in long sleeves, he liked the way the fabric always bunched up at his wrists. This one was blue...no, grey, and mottled with white like a bird egg. He'd be wearing those stupid

baggy pants that made his ass totally shapeless and a million pairs of socks.

Jared knew all of this. He'd stalked the guy after all. Intimate knowledge of sleep garments was part of the Stalkers Handbook.

There was no light in the room, just the little illumination from outside, and Jared couldn't see if Jensen's hair was blond or brown. It was a topic of debate hours in more extreme boredom, and even after several months of study, he'd not quite settled on an answer.

Right that very second, it looked dark. Dark and soft.

And this really wasn't helping The Plan.

"Jen?"

Obviously. No response.

"Jen?" He poked Jensen in the chest until he stirred. "Good, you're awake." He said brightly.

Jensen blinked sleepily, one hand rubbing tiredly at his eyes. Jensen was adorable when he was sleepy. He made Jared want to snuggle.

Again, not helping.

"Jay?"

Jared ignored the sleepy question and the gruff voice in which it was asked. Instead, he seized Jensen by the shoulders, hauled him half out of bed, and kissed him.

As kisses went, it was pretty damn terrible. Jensen made a squeaky sound in surprise, his palms flat against Jared's chest. Lips and teeth clashed, and Jensen's eyes were bright and confused.

A PhD in Puppy, a Masters in Moron, and a big fat F in Genius Ideas.

He let Jensen push back, big eyes and bigger frown. "Are you drunk?" He asked in the same soft voice that had called after him when he walked out.

"No." Jared said petulantly, even though he started nodding at the same time.

Jensen didn't have to say anything in response. The look he gave Jared was so 'the fuck you aren't' that even a mind saturated in spirits could easily interpret it. "Okay," he admitted. "Maybe a little."

Jensen arched a dark eyebrow expectantly.

Jared shuffled. Twitched. Someone had dumped a farm of fire eating ants in his pants and it made him want to run around the room screaming. Or get naked.

"Ithinkweshouldhavehotsex." He said, muttering the words and spitting them out without pause. Jensen frowned, obviously unable to understand. Jared cursed, and from the sharp pinch to the inside of his elbow, it seemed Jensen could understand that. Figures.

Summoning his basic knowledge of sign language, Jared pointed at himself, then to Jensen, before making a crude gesture with his hands.

Disbelief colored Jensen's face before he doubled over, his shoulders shaking with silent

laughter. Every time he tried to look at Jared, he failed, curling back in on himself and giggling madly.

Jared was way too drunk for this shit. "Oh shut up." He grumbled, smacking Jensen's shoulder and rolling over to curl up in David's vacated spot. Jensen continued to laugh, propping himself up on one elbow, lips curled into the biggest smile Jared had ever seen.

There comes that fucking truck again, he thought morosely. "We're supposed to be having awesome sex now." He pointed out, pouting as Jensen continued to grin. Again, the eyebrow arched, and suddenly Jensen was moving, leg swinging across Jared's thighs as he straddled him, nose to nose, grin faded to a look of absolute seriousness.

"Jen?" Jared squeaked.

Jensen grinned quickly, pressed a light kiss to the tip of Jared's nose, and rolled back onto his side of the bed. "Go to sleep." Jensen yawned as he snuggled back under the covers.

"I hate you." Jared said flatly. Jensen couldn't hear him, but he was giggling anyway.

Still, neither of them complained when Jared slung an arm over Jensen's waist and proceeded to turn him into a cuddly toy. Drunk or not, a known side effect of Jensen was induced snuggling. There was no cure. It was best just to let it run its course.

LOCK UP MY HEART, THROW AWAY THE KEY

Jared wanted to die.

Jensen was an evil, evil bastard.

That was all.

Waking up the second time wasn't quite as dramatic. There was a bottle of spring water and a packet of Advil waiting for him on the dresser, and Jensen was mercifully elsewhere. He'd left a note, or rather a doodle. Art, it seemed, was not Jensen's forte.

Now he wasn't a hundred percent certain, but the little hangover monster of hell was whispering naughty words in his ear, and he hadn't actually slept with Jensen now had he? That would be...pretty fucking awesome, actually. No. Bad. It would be bad.

They hadn't actually, had they?

Right?

Right.

Moaning miserably, he pressed the heel of his palm against his eyes, just as his cell began to

ring, kicking his headache from annoying to owwfuck.

"Did you fuck her?" Chris asked cheerfully.

Jared hung up.

He needed new friends.

"Morning Romeo." Sam wasn't smiling when Jared stumbled down into the kitchen some five...forty minutes later. A plate of Jensen's special cookies had been set out at the wooden table, the plate clean, white, and decorated with delicate blue flowers that Jared really should know the name of.

"Milk?"

"Is it laced with cyanide?" The steely stare Sam levelled in his direction could quite easily be considered a weapon of mass destruction. He never should have trusted The Plan. Stupid stick figure drawing.

"Turpentine." She shrugged.

"Yeah, go on then." Turps might actually de-clog his brain. Sam set the glass down in front of him, the glass ringing against the wood, and the milk sloshing the rim. "You're mad."

Apparently, he was pretty good at stating the obvious.

"Too fucking right I am." She snapped, startling Jared out of his hangover haze. He had never heard her speak that way before. "There is more to life than you satisfying your dick. I thought better of you than that." She sounded so much like his mother that his spine inadvertently straightened before he remembered that A) not his momma, and B)

"Wait, Jensen and I...we didn't. Not, you know, like sex or anything."

"Or anything?" Sam's stare was so deadly that Jared didn't even dare to reach across the table for a second cookie. "I know exactly what I walked in on, Jared. You boys are a little old to get caught making out on the couch like horny teenagers."

Jared blushed. Okay, that was embarrassing. He'd never look at cheesecake the same way again.

"Look, Sam...I know you have Jensen's best interests at heart, but surely who he chooses to sleep with has nothing to do with you. Not that we slept together." He added hastily. "Cos we didn't. Well we did, but not, you know...naked or anything."

"You saw him when he was sick." She said flatly. Once he had nodded, reluctant to remember the details of that horrible day. "That was nothing." She said ruthlessly. "I've known him to be like that for sixteen, seventeen hours at a stretch. I've already told you that we don't know when or where he'll get an attack, but we do know some of the symptoms...and stress? Is the big fucking one. Now I might be wrong here, but fucking around with your boyfriend's best friend might just be a little stressful."

"I'd never do anything to risk hurting him." Jared said quietly. It was true. He'd rather jump up and

down on his still beating heart, or something else suitably morbid and self-sacrificing. He'd not pushed things last night. Not even when his brain had been firmly in fuck, fuck now mode, and Jensen had been there, warm and inviting and so fucking pretty it had hurt. Sure, he'd made a pillow of the man, but that was it. Drunk or not, he had four inches and close to fifty pounds on Jensen. If he'd have wanted more, it wouldn't have been difficult to just take it.

But he hadn't. Still beating heart and all. He'd sooner sacrifice a puppy.

"Neither would I." Sam said, very voice eerily calm. "He's in the greenhouse, if you want him."

Want him? Want?

"Right." Jared squeaked around a mouthful of milk. Brushing the cookie crumbs off his lap, he helped Sam load the dishwasher and bounced towards the greenhouse, and hundred different thoughts in mind.

They needed to talk about this...thing they had, whatever it....Jesus fuck!

Thinking back on it, Jared really should have seen this coming. It wasn't as if Sam hadn't all but spelt it out for him in shiny neon lights. This was Jensen's s house after all. And David was his boyfriend. Jared shouldn't have bitten his lip bloody just because he walked on the two of them doing the dirty in the greenhouse.

Fuck. Just fuck. And aww hell.

They really were gorgeous together, Jensen's head thrown back in bliss as David nipped softly at his jaw; a mockery of the vampire he used to play on television. David's arms, still wrapped in his back pullover, made Jensen's skin look pale in comparison, smooth in a way Jared knew it to be. They were lost in their own world, both oblivious to Jared's presence as Jensen rode David's cock slowly.

He should move. He should go. Staying was bad. Bad for him. Bad for them. Rude, and stalkerish and in no way acceptable best friend behavior...

Then David put his hands on Jensen's ass, fucking covered it with his long fingers, and Jared's feet forgot how to work.

Ironically enough, it was Jensen who spotted him first, some psychic deaf thing perhaps. David just thrust hard enough to arch Jensen back. He must have seen Jared out of the corner of his eye, because the next minute he was all but falling off David's lap.

Then David saw him, and everything descended quickly into oh fuck mode.

"I'mma..." Jared didn't finish his sentence. He simply ran, past Sam, who looked strangely satisfied, and kept on running until he realized he didn't have his truck parked anywhere near Jensen's house.

By the time he was home, his knees hurt, his chest burned, and his hangover had been replaced by the stress headache of the century. When he climbed into the shower, he turned the heat on full blast.

They weren't tears, damnit.

THERE IS NO PAIN, YOU ARE RECEDING

After three days of watching cartoons in his underwear, the only real conclusion Jared had reached was that Jerry the mouse was an evil little fucker, and that Acme products were to be avoided like the plague.

Fifty hours of watching kids TV, and Jared was ready to accept Ben and Jerry as his personal saviors, and he was no closer to bleaching out the image of Jensen and David than he was when he switched over to Cartoon Network in the first place.

It was probably Chris who called Sandy. He was sneaky that way. Or hell, maybe David had. Beyond a rather embarrassed apology via text, he'd not heard anything from either him or Jensen. It would totally be his way to send a girl in to do the hard work.

All he knew was that after three quarters of an hour listening to someone ring his doorbell, he'd hauled his ass to the door, answered it in his boxers, and found himself face to face with an irate Sandy.

"Oh baby." She sighed, stepping into the hall, heel neatly avoiding one of Jared's socks. "Shower, go."

"But-"

Small hands settled on her slender hips, thumbs hooking into the loops of her jeans. "Sweetie, I am not being your shoulder to cry on until you shower, shave, and brush your teeth."

"But-"

"Now, Jared." She said patiently, nose crinkling in disapproval as she looked around his kitchen.

Sandy was a doll. Really and truly. He'd marry her in a heartbeat if she could only accept his love for pink shirts and dump that skank of a girlfriend she insisted on dating. She and Sam would get on like a house on fire. Sandy was the ultimate sweet and sour candy treat. Cute as hell, adorable 98% of the time, but blessed with a tongue that could cut a man to pieces at hundred yards.

It didn't matter that Jared could pick her up with one hand. In that stance, with that glare, there really was only one reply he could give:

"Yes ma'am." He said meekly, and trudged off to the shower, tripping over the edges of his socks as he went.

"Okay sugar, give me details." Jared had emerged from the bathroom twenty minutes later to find his sitting room clear of three days worth of trash, and a pot of coffee waiting for him on the table. Sandy curled herself in the corner of his couch, feet tucked under her legs. Her pale pink sweater was long in the arm, and she fiddled with the sleeves exactly the way Jensen did.

Jared had never noticed that before.

"I'm in love." He said flatly. Unlike Chris, or Steve, or, God forbid, Chad, he could usually trust Sandy to wait until he was finished explaining something before launching the Inquisition.

She simply nodded for him to continue, one small hand nestling against his own.

"You know Dave's boyfriend?" He wasn't even sure if Sandy knew about Jensen, let alone met him.

She frowned, but nodded slowly. "Jensen?"

It was Jared's turn to frown. Was he the last person to be let in the loop? "You ever met him?"

"No." She shook her head. "I saw a picture. He's a cutie."

Understatement of the fucking century. Jared shuffled. Maybe if he stayed quiet enough Sandy would put two and two together and land at four.

Sandy was the MENSA chick of the team after all, and she came through for him once again. "Oh Jay. Tell me you haven't..." Jared suddenly found his toenails fascinating. "Idiot." She smiled affectionately, her hand squeezing his to take the bite out of the words.

"Love sucks." Jared said vehemently.

A Sandy hug had medicinal properties. She crawled across the couch and wound her arms around his chest. Her hair smelled of strawberries, and it was totally acceptable to put his cheek on her head and let her work her magic.

Five minutes of therapy, and she gave him a brief squeeze before shuffling back a little. "So," she began hesitantly. "You're in love with Dave's boyfriend."

"I'm a terrible friend." Jared moaned. Really, when she put it like that...how awful did he sound? "I kissed him...he kissed me back." And what a kiss...

"But you're not gay, are you?" There was a hint of hurt laced in her voice. Only tiny, but Jared caught it just the same. He had been by her side right the way through her little lesbian epic, as they called it. By keep things to himself, however sensible, he'd hurt her feelings. If that didn't make him feel a hundred times worse...

"No." He whispered. He wasn't. Not really. Being in love with someone didn't make him gay, just because they were a guy, right? Not that he really cared about the whole 'gay' thing... but adding a label just confused matters. And he was confused enough, thank you very much. "It's just him, Sandy. I can't get him out of my head." The last time had felt this miserable, he had eaten his body weight in cookie-dough-fudge ice cream.

Cookies made him think of Jensen.

Bastard had even ruined his comfort food for him.

Sandy patted him on the arm. "Okay, so...does he know?" Jared thought of Jensen's sweet smile, of the way he spent hours on a train just to comfort him, of the taste of his lips and the feel of his skin. He hadn't freaked out on Jared after the disastrous Plan. He'd taken it all in his stride.

"I'd say yes." Jared said dryly. Jensen was deaf, not blind. No way had he missed the sparkly pink hearts that had been following Jared around for the last month.

Sandy nodded again, seeming to understand the gravity of the situation better than any of his male friends would have. "Does David know?" She broached the subject with a gentle hand, but Jared still winced.

"Maybe, I don't know."

God, he hoped not.

"You know there is a solution to this." Sandy said quietly, her hand once again squeezing his.

"There is?" God, could he sound any more desperate if he tried? No. Probably not. The only solution he could think of involved printing off Team Padalecki T-shirts and mounting an Aniston/Jolie/Pitt type war. That, or moving to Thailand and changing his name to Brother Li.

"Sure there is," she smiled. "You trust me?"

Now normally Jared would say yes before she could finish asking. This thing with Jensen had left him a little battered around the edges. Still her eyes were sweet and earnest, and there wasn't a chance in hell Jared might accidentally end up kissing her over dessert. "Sure." He said.

Famous last words.

"You're insane!" Jared shouted across the crowd, mouth full of cotton candy and his fingers sticky with every sugary concoction known to man.

Apparently Sandy's cure for a broken heart was to take him to the carnival and make him win every stuffed toy going. They had a small menagerie by now, and Jared had been covertly handing them out to random kids when she wasn't looking.

With her candy pink lips and dark pigtails, Sandy fitted in perfectly with the dozens of giddy girls bouncing around from Big Top to Spinning Cups. "Come on Jay," she giggled, plucking at a lump of his cotton candy. "There is no better cure for a broken heart than the Whirly Gig.

Of that, Jared wasn't convinced. After the fifth time around, his stomach was so churned up with hotdogs and candy that any depressing lovesick notions were pushed behind a more pressing need to find a bathroom to throw up in.

"I hate you." He moaned, miserable, then obediently won a giant stuffed rabbit on the Test Your Strength Mallet Game.

"God boy." Sandy giggled, stuffing the rabbit under one arm and bending one of its ears to grin at him. It wasn't so difficult to grin back.

Like he said: Sandy had medicinal properties.

"Oh, hey, look." She pointed at a row of wooden boards with brightly colored scenes painted on them. Ovals had been cut away so people could look through them and get their pictures taken with the body of a mermaid or spaceman. Sandy pointed to one of a muscular man and a bikini-clad babe. Just as Jared resigned himself to have photos of himself in a pink polka dot bikini plastered all over the web, his cell phone rang.

"Saved by the bell." He grinned in response to Sandy's pout. "Hello?"

"Hey, is he okay?"

Jared blinked, his mind taking a few seconds to supply a name as it stumbled over the question. "Marc?"

"Yeah." His co-star sighed impatiently. "Is Jensen okay?"

...wait...what?

"What?" He stopped so suddenly that Sandy walked right into him.

"I was talking to Jeff. He got a call on his landline, said something about Jensen and hospital, and I've not heard from him since...I figured you'd be a good person to hit for answers. So is he okay?" Marc had a remarkable ability to spring things out of nowhere and leave him floundering in a mist of huh?

Jensen and hospital. Two words that should never ever, ever be in the same sentence. Entirely of its own accord his mind turned down the path of worst-case scenarios. What if he'd had a fall and hit his head? Or had an attack in the bath and drowned? Or passed out whilst pruning his damned roses and fallen on an upright pair of sheers. Or...

"Jared!" Sandy snapped her fingers in front of his face, his cell phone in her hand. She looked as confused as he might have felt, if he could summon the energy to feel anything but numbing fear.

Leaving the phone with Sandy, Jared spun on his heels and stormed back to the strength test game. He snatched the mallet from a father waiting with two kids, and completely ignored the carnie when he broke the whole game.

Like he said.

Love sucked.

ALL'S FAIR

Hannibal? Robert the Bruce? Napoleon? All brilliant tacticians. All of whom would have turned tail and ran for the hills at the sight of Sandy on the warpath. Which was probably what Doctor Bedside Manner hoped to do as soon as her back was turned.

It was comical really, here was a doctor who made Jared look small, practically cowering under the wrath of a scowling pint-sized princess, and all Jared could really do was look around the hall and hope Jensen would just materialize out of thin air.

Instead it was Sam who suddenly appeared, rescuing the trembling medic from Sandy's ire, and earning what Jared could in good conscience only call a pout from himself.

"Wondered how long it would take you to get here." Sam said mildly. Sandy hissed, sensing animosity and snapping straight into mother hen mode. Jared hastily took hold of her arm and used the puppy eyes to convince her of the immediate need for caffeine.

With a look that promised doom, gloom, and possible evisceration should Sam even think of upsetting him, Sandy obediently went in search of coffee.

"She's a pistol." Sam grinned wryly, something close to admiration in her eyes.

Jared ignored it. "My momma taught me never to call a lady the 'b' word, so I'mma call you a cold hearted 'itch' and be done with it."

She tipped her head and directed him towards a row of red plush chairs. It had taken Jared over an hour to get in touch with Jeff and find out where Jensen was being seen. Traffic had been a

bitch, and worry for Jensen had once again resulted in the total gnawing of Jared's nails. "Still mad about that, huh?"

"I'd say huh." Jared agreed waspishly.

Sam sighed wearily. "He asked me to." She admitted, unable to look Jared in the eye.

The bottom dropped out of Jared's stomach at her words. "What?" He choked, voice catching as he tried to get his head around the fact that Jensen had set him up...for that...

"He didn't do it to hurt you." She said quietly. "That was the last thing he wanted."

Jared laughed, bitter and quiet. "Yeah, well he did." God...Jensen had...no. No.

Sam nodded. "I know."

"What?" Was that it? Was an 'I know' all he deserved? "No justifications? No defending poor, sick Jensen and his twisted fucking mind games?" How could he have misjudged things so badly? He'd let a pretty smile and Jensen's injured kitten like adorableness blind him to the fact that he had been played like a fucking cello.

"Look, he's not perfect." Sam shook her head. "In fact he's a bit of an ass. I live with him, I know. But he is terrified of losing you, of losing David."

Jared lurched to his feet. "He could have just kicked me in the balls. Would have hurt less." He ranted, sneakers squeaking against the linoleum as he kicked at the legs of the plastic chairs.

"He's not good at expressing himself, especially not with people who don't sign." Sam tried to explain, her usually dark eyes brightening with an earnest desire to make Jared understand. "Like it or not, he is still with David, and things between you weren't exactly short on sexual tension. He couldn't handle it, and he couldn't handle pushing you away himself, so he sent you a subtle reminder."

Subtle? "I've seen rampaging rhinos with more subtlety." Jared said bluntly.

One of Sam's hands closed around his and guided him back to the chairs. "The only time he has spent more than twenty minutes travelling anywhere was when he moved from Texas to LA...and yet he jumps on a train at the drop of a hat, just because he is worried about you. Now I'm not saying what he did was right, or fair, but he loves you. You go in that room and tell me different."

Jared nodded slowly. "He loves me." He agreed. "But he's not in love with me."

Sam rolled her eyes. "Sweetie, he ain't in love with Dave, either."

JD was like the big brother Jared already had, and desperately tried to out prank. He, Jared and Marc were like the three stooges on set, or the three musketeers, or the three something. The fact was, Jared had counted on him for a little support, only to have that bond trumped by the cuteness that was Jensen fucking Ackles.

Apparently Jeff had known Jensen for years, longer than Sam. Jensen was to blame for getting him into acting. Jensen was to blame for making him audition for the role of John Winchester. Jensen was to blame for a lot of things it seemed...the most recent of which was Jeff's sudden desire to make a pancake out of Jared's head.

"I mean it kid, I see even a hint of distress from him, and Sam Winchester will be talking in a significantly higher voice." Jeff said mildly as he fanned out his fingers and glared at Jared over the top of his newspaper.

"Whatever you say, Daddy." Jared snorted, privately plotting a way to kill Jensen before his two White Knights could stop him.

"Don't make me take you over my knee, boy."

"Pervert."

Jared dodged a blow and darted inside Jensen's room. One of the advantages of having the cash to pay for private healthcare was undoubtedly the perks, including the en-suite room and fully stocked coffee machine outside it.

As expected, David was inside, his large frame curled up into the chair besides Jensen's bed.

Jared took one look at Jensen, and any thoughts of GBH went out the window. Evil, sneaky, manipulative, gorgeous bastard.

Jensen wasn't a small man, despite Jared's ability to carry him around like a teddy bear. Pale against the sheets, with bags under his eyes large enough to house Paris Hilton's wardrobe, and his cheeks in sharp relief, Jensen looked hollow, fragile, even, and Jared had to stamp down ruthlessly on the urge to cuddle him close and hide him away from the world.

Jensen was hooked up to a monitor, his heartbeat rhythmically beeping, soothing away the residual fear that Jared had pushed to the back of his mind. The only other equipment he could see that Jensen was attached to was an IV line. That should have been encouraging, but with Jensen looking so ill, Jared wanted to demand someone produce some magic cure and fix things.

David didn't so much as glance up when Jared entered to room. His fingers were tangled with Jensen's, his thumb stroking a gentle pattern on the back of Jensen's white palm. Instead he said, "I'm not stupid, you know."

"Never thought you were." Jared agreed quietly taking a seat on Jensen's other side.

David nodded sharply. "I know how you feel about him."

"Do you?" Of every nightmare confrontation Jared had ever dreamed up, this quiet altercation had not even entered the realm of consideration.

David shrugged, still not looking at Jared. "Can't say I blame you."

Oh...again...not what he expected. Where was the caveman head butting? Maybe David didn't know about The Plan...

"Just so you know," David continued. "I'm not giving him up without a fight."

"I know." Jared said quietly, and reached for Jensen's other hand.

A fight was what he expected.

He was okay with that.

Jensen went through bags of Saline the same way Jared could pop candy. His last attack had dragged on close to twenty-three hours. Faced with a dehydrated, delirious Jensen, Sam had done the only thing she could, and called in the big guns. The EMT crew had been unable to give him any anti-nausea medication stronger than the Ephedrine/Promethazine cocktail Sam had him on, but they were able to kick start the backlash against the dangerous level of dehydration that fueled the vicious cycle of the attack.

By the time Jared had made it to the hospital, he was in day three of the recovery period, and Jared had realized with something akin to horror that Jensen must have had the attack shortly after Jared had walked in on him and David.

Jensen's ability to execute A Plan was as bad as Jared's. Obviously his not-so-subtle attempt to force Jared into making the first move and calling things off had backfired quite spectacularly.

He couldn't help it. As soon as Jensen's eyes were fluttering open, Jared couldn't find it in himself to be angry.

The owlsh blink Jared got in response to his "Hey," made his heart catch, but after only a second of hesitation on Jensen's part, he was tugging his hand weakly from Jared's grasp. And from David's.

"Leave." He croaked, his voice barely carrying over the increasingly erratic beep of the monitor.

"Jen." David leaned forwards. Jensen's eyes slid closed.

"Please." He whispered again. "Leave. Leave. Leave."

There was a little voice in Jared's head screaming at him in canon with Jensen's weak whispers. Leave...couldn't be any clearer than that now, could it?

Jensen wanted him gone.

Then David reached for Jensen's hand as it tugged at his IV. Bloodshot green eyes snapped open, and Jensen practically screamed.

"GET OUT!"

David flinched as if burned, and Jeff appeared as if summoned from the Genie's Lamp. "Out." He barked, practically propelling Jared from the room before throwing David out on top of him.

"Damnit Jeff." David yelled angrily, attracting wide-eyed stares from Sandy and Sam, who had come running onto the scene.

"You knew this might happen." Jeff said compassionately, holding out an arm that David shrugged away.

Sam's earlier words came back to haunt Jared.

"Sweetie, he ain't in love with Dave, either."

And now they had both lost him.

UNLUCKY FOR SOME

"You have a strange idea of closure, kid." Jeff said mildly from his position on Jared's couch.

"It's progressive." Jared argued, not looking up from his doodle pad.

Two days after being unceremoniously dumped from Jensen's hospital room, Jared had seen it fit to call a crisis meeting. Somehow said meeting had turned into a pizza party, and the Sandy-Jeff-Jared guest list had expanded to include Chad, Chris, Steve - and thanks to the wonders of modern technology and a stupidly expensive phone system - Marc via loudspeaker.

"Dude." Chad shook his head, half sprawled across the couch arm and Steve. "I can't believe you're batting for the home team." If it wasn't for the shit-eating grin, Jared might have popped him on principle. "I'm so adding this shit to your imdb."

"How's your wife, Chad?" Sandy asked, her cyanide sweet voice bringing a hint of a smile to Jared lips. God, he loved his friends.

"Hussy." Chad hissed, but he accepted the beer Sandy passed him with a nod of thanks.

"Not helping." Said Jared in a singsong voice.

Chris frowned and leaned under Steve's arm to get a better look at Jared's pad of paper. "What exactly are we supposed to be doing here?"

"Progressive therapy." Jeff replied dryly, ducking a pillow Jared lobbed in his direction.

"Making a list." Jared stressed, underlining the words BIG LIST at the top of the page. "Of all the reasons why I hate Jensen Ackles, and never want to see him again."

"Did you, like, grow a vagina or something?" No one was fast enough to follow the movement of Sandy's arm, but from Chad's wince of pain, she had obviously landed on target.

"There's no stick figures, right sweetie?" Sandy asked hesitantly. Chris sniggered from the sofa.

Mildly affronted, Jared sniffed. "There is nothing wrong with my stick figures." He drew a pair of line stars in the corner of the page and scribbled them in color. "So, list."

"One. He's a bigger douche than Chad." Sandy said instantly.

Chad's upper lip curled. "Bitch."

"Douche."

"Would you two just fuck already." Jeff grumbled. The look on Sandy's face belonged in a MasterCard advert. Paper \$2. Marker Pen. \$1.50. Gas for hospital trip. \$7. Sandy's Look of Horror. Priceless.

Steve, always the peacemaker, cleared his throat. "Two. He cheated on his boyfriend. Never a good thing."

Jared added it to the list as Chris asked, "Is one kiss considered 'cheating?'"

"Yes." Sandy said.

Over the speakerphone, Marc said, "No."

Whilst Chad ran a hand over his face and muttered, "Fuck, I hope not."

"Don't get me wrong, dude, I'm still gonna kick your ass for that-" Chris said mildly, making Jared wince. He often failed to realize just how much of a mess this drama was making of their circle of friends. Chris was as much David's friend as he was Jared's, Jeff had known Jensen since his early teens, and the both of them would probably be holding the same conversation with Jensen and David at some point. "I'm just a touch confused. Did Jensen actually cheat on Dave with you?"

"Aside from the kiss?" Jared asked.

Chris nodded. "Aside."

Well, um..."Not exactly, no."

It was Marc's turn to jump on the bandwagon. "And did he ever give you any impression he wanted to have steamy hot sex with you?"

Jared ignored Chad's gagging sound. "Aside from the kiss?" He asked, a little desperate.

"Aside from the damn kiss." Jeff grunted.

"We slept together." Jared said, only realizing once he had that, oops, possibly not the best way of putting it.

He got a "What the fu-" From just about everyone. Except Sandy, who simply rolled her eyes.

Hastily he amended, "In the same bed. Several times."

"Horny bastard." Marc said affectionately. "Any groping?"

"Oh blow me." Jared glared at the speakerphone and considered throwing the whole set at Chad, who was smirking behind Sandy's back.

"Did he?" Chad asked cheekily.

"No!" He yelped, then added, "You are not helping."

Chris made a noise that obviously meant, 'yeah, so?' and Jared turned desperate eyes on Steve for some support. "Anything else that might indicate intentions with a rating higher than PG-13?" Steve asked, looking apologetic.

"He came all the way to Vancouver after-" He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't have to.

"Yeah...about that.." Marc said hesitantly. Jared could almost see him scratching the back of his neck nervously. "I kinda asked him to. Well, I asked Sam to ask him."

"What?" Jared squeaked, his marker pen drawing a messy line across his unblemished list.

"Well he wasn't first on my list!" Marc said defensively.

"He called us." Steve spoke up, indicating himself and Chris with a jerk of his thumb. They had turned up a week after Jensen had left, and forever ruined his liver for Russian imported Vodka. "Sorry we couldn't get there any earlier." They had already apologized, and Jared had never seen

the need to forgive them. They'd still made it. They'd still travelled all the way from-

"You were in England." He justified. "Not like you could just teleport to Canada."

"Looks like we beat Pretty Boy Ackles by a few thousand miles." Chris pointed out. "And no offence, but I have no desire to get in your pants."

Right...fine. So Jensen hoping on a train wasn't a declaration of love, it was a natural response to a friend in need...

"He sent me freaking flowers!" Jared flailed. This conversation was not helping. At. All. Instead of compounding the reasons why Jared should avoid Jensen like the plague and hook up with a Playboy Bunny, he was starting to wonder if maybe, just maybe, he was going completely crazy and imagining everything.

"He sends everyone flowers." Jeff said with a roll of his eyes. "What colors did he send you?"

Jared frowned. What did that have to do with things? "Um...yellow and pink."

"Sounds like a pussy." Chad snorted.

"Sandy?" Jeff prompted. Sandy nodded and smacked Chad across the head. "Thank you." He said. "Well I'm not seeing any declarations of undying love there."

"No?" Jared asked meekly. Crap.

"Nope. Yellow for friendship, pink for gratitude...any red?"

"Um..." Jared twitched.

"Lilac?" Jeff asked, brow creasing in disbelief.

"I suck, don't I?" Jared said meekly.

Chad snorted. "Yeah, well. I still think he's a pussy."

"David?" Jared blinked the sleep from his eyes and looked at the digital clock on his DVD player. His living room looked like a battlefield, bodies strewn out where they fell, pizza boxes scattered around them like shrapnel. "S'up?"

Chris, Steve and Jeff had left in the early hours of the morning, leaving Jared with a bickering Sandy and Chad. Waking up to the buzz of his cell and seeing David's name flashing on screen was quite possibly the last thing he expected.

"Dave?"

Silence stretched down the line. For a minute, Jared thought that David might have called him by accident. He was surprised his number still lived on David's phone after all that had happened.

"Looks like it is an open fight now." Jared didn't reply. Jared couldn't reply. He'd never come between a relationship before. And now...

Neither of them hung up for a long time after that.

TO THE VICTOR GO THE SPOILS

"Oh. My. Gawd." Sandy shrieked in a high-pitched impression of the latest girl to throw herself at Marc and Jared. "You're like, those guys who hunts ghosts and stuff." With a bright grin, she jumped the final distance between herself and Jared and tangled her arms around his neck.

"Hey Princess." Jared grinned, catching her and spinning them both around in a circle. "How's my girl."

"Horny." Sandy giggled. "I've not had sex in months." She lamented, prompting an inner cheer from Jared. Skankerella was history.

"You know I'll-"

"Finish that sentence, Murray, and I'll castrate you on principle." Sandy said sweetly, not turning to greet the incoming whirlwind that was Chad. Instead she brushed the skirt of her glittery back dress and twirled on her heels in Jared's arms. "Okay, votes out of ten for the chica in red at the bar."

Jared obediently peered over her shoulder at the pretty blond waving her hand airily at the bartender. "Shank." Jared dismissed.

"You say that about every girl I fancy." Sandy pouted, smacking him in the arm with her purse. "It's Christmas, have a heart."

Scooping her up, Jared made kissy lips at her neck, glaring at the blond when she turned and saw them. "There ain't no one good enough for my girl." He announced. "Christmas or not."

"Oh god," Sandy moaned dramatically, squirming until Jared set her down. She looked at Marc with something akin to desperation. "Tell me he's gotten laid since summer."

"Three whole times." Marc said proudly, throwing a brotherly arm around Jared's shoulders. Filming over the last months had done nothing but throw them even closer together. Jared thought season one had been rough. This season had just liked to kick them in the balls for shits and giggles, and then throw monsters at them. "With three different people." He added with a conspiratorial wink for Chad's benefit.

The thing about Marc? He couldn't hold his liquor.

At all.

He was worse than Jared, and by God, if that wasn't saying something...

"That's my boy!" Chad cheered, his attention flashing over to a scantily clad dancer for only a heartbeat before he was slapping Jared on the shoulder. "Nice to see you've put that writer dude out of your head."

Jared didn't mention that those people had all been men (and wow, hadn't that been awkward to get to grips with?), all been blond (because in the right light, 'that writer dude' had hair that looked golden), all been pretty (not as pretty as 'that writer dude', but then really, who was?), and all had

left him exhausted and sleepy, with sticky sheets, and a horrible craving for chocolate chip cookies.

So it wasn't like he still had Jensen on the mind or anything...

"Oh my god!" This time, Sandy's shriek was real and wholly justified. Turning to follow her line of vision, Jared dropped his Corona, used a word his momma would have spanked him for, and felt his jaw drop down somewhere close to his knees.

"David?"

He'd not seen David since that day in the hospital, close to four months ago. He'd not spoken to him since he'd returned David's late night call and told him he was flying back to Vancouver.

He'd not seen Jensen either, but that was more than half the point.

But sure as hell, there he was, and huh...Jared really hadn't expected that. Of all the clubs in LA, he had to walk into this one.

David looked as good as ever, still wearing that god-awful leather jacket Jared had bought him for his twenty-first. He was clean shaved, smiling, and had his hand up the back of some chick's shirt.

A chick who was in no way shape or form anything close to resembling Jensen.

Jesus, what was with the women of LA? They were all...not Sandy, obviously, but- "Dude!" Jared yelled across the club, pushing his way through dancing drunks until he had a pathway that resembled the parting of the Red Sea.

By the time he reached David's side, his friend (ex?) had untangled himself from Hollywood Barbie, megawatt smile cutting Jared to the quick. "Jay!" he yelled enthusiastically, and pulled a startled Jared in for a quick bear hug.

Jared tensed, half expecting a switchblade between the ribs. David backed off without incident. Maybe he'd pinned a 'kick me' sign to Jared's back. He wondered if he could look without coming off as a dork.

Then he wondered if he had maybe just imagined the last eight months. It was entirely possible. That shit was in the rags all the time, right? Dude lives life as successful multi-billionaire until one day he wakes up from a comma and realizes he's on the dole, and his kids still hate him.

Not that Jared had any kids, but the point still stood. David was supposed to be grinding an axe with his name on it.

"Hey, dude." Jared said hesitantly, still waiting for the hidden assassin to jump him from behind the plastic palm tree. "How you doing?"

"I'm good!" David said, more than a little enthusiastic, and, Jared realized, completely off his head. "You met Cindy?"

So Hollywood Barbie's archrival. Close enough.

Jared shook his head, and endured a minute of simpering affection from David new pick up. When Cindy put her hand on his ass, his head snapped up and he came straight out with it. "Jensen not with you?"

David's face crumpled into a drunken frown. "Ain't seen him since the summer." He shrugged. If Jared hadn't known him so well, he'd not have seen the shadow that lurked in the depths of David's eyes, nor noticed the way his lips thinned out with anger.

Jared nodded mutely.

Looks like Jensen had managed to rid himself of them both.

Son of a bitch.

Sam answered the door in a bleached out patchwork apron, and tried to close it again as soon as she saw Jared's face.

Sometimes being the Jolly Green Giant had its advantages. Case point: one grunt and a hard shove, and Sam's pink slippered feet slid backwards across the smooth wooden floor. "Not now, Sam. I'm on a mission." Jared said firmly, purposely skirting over the last mission reports that bounced annoyingly around his head, training words like abort, abort, and danger Will Robinson behind them.

David's drunken confession had his head spinning.

David was a moron.

And Jared was a bigger moron for thinking otherwise.

The whole point of his self-inflicted Jensen-free time was so David could swoop in and make Jensen forget that Jared ever existed. That's what best friends did after monumentally fucking up their buddy's relationship. They stepped back.

Way back.

Then David had to go be an idiot and take Jensen's fuck off at face value. True love was supposed to conquer all, yes, but generally there had to be some battles involved. Two years in a relationship should mean something, surely? If Jared had been in David's palace, he would have fought tooth and nail...and well, he'd already proved he was willing to climb into the guy's bedroom for Christ's sake...

But no. David was an idiot, as they had established, and Jared hadn't been able to eat cheesecake in nearly half a year.

He didn't give a fuck what Jeff said, that kiss meant something, goddamnit.

If David wasn't willing to kick/screw some sense into Jensen, then there was no way Jared was going to sit on his ass and let someone else make a move.

"Jensen!" He bellowed, completely ignorant of the time. Smart move, Padalecki. Yell for the deaf guy.

Jared skidded to a halt outside the greenhouse. He knew that there was nothing inside that could hurt him, not really, but the memory of David and Jensen together made him irrationally afraid of what lay behind that door. Steadying himself, he took a breath, twisting the handle and pushing, only to stumble back when the door remained locked.

"He doesn't go in there anymore." Sam said, appearing from behind him with a look of weary annoyance.

A blackboard eraser swiped across Jared's mind. Jensen didn't go into his greenhouse...it had been fucking impossible to drag the bastard out of there!

"Wha- why?" Jared stumbled over the words and playing dot to dot with the images forming in his head. Jensen hadn't spoken to Jared, or David, in nearly four months. Jensen didn't do his Allan Titchmarsh thing with the plants... no one had seen him...

Jared was freaked out. Officially.

The look Sam shot him wasn't all that pleasant. "You know why." She said flatly, and then tipped her head towards the hall, and the wide sweeping staircase within.

Jensen's house was the kind of place that you needed a ball of twine and a trail of breadcrumbs to follow in order to find your way around. It was stunning, and more than a little exciting. Jared used to play a game with Jensen's two cats, chasing them across the smooth floor and batting balls of wool for them to pounce on.

For all that he usually needed a map to find his way from kitchen to patio, there was one room he could find on autopilot.

Jared had never been able to decide if it was an office, or a study, or something out of Harry Potter. Three of the walls were lined with bookshelves. The fourth looked out onto the mountains. Jensen's computer...computers sat on a wide oak desk in the middle of the room. It might have been an author thing, but three wide screens framed the keyboard. Behind them, utterly oblivious to Jared's sudden appearance, Jensen tapped away quietly, probably wrapping up the last of his fifth book, or some new torture to throw at Sam and Dean.

To get Jensen's attention, Jared flipped the overhead light off, then back on again.

Surely there was some unwritten law that prohibited pretty from getting prettier. There must be, for the good of humanity, if not Jared's sanity. Every minute he had tried to forget about Jensen over the past quarter of a year felt like a waste of effort when Jared was fixed with his smile.

It was hesitant, skittish, but utterly Jensen, and Jared needed no invitation. He stepped across the threshold and back into Jensen's life.

Jensen's smile dipped into a frown of confusion, and suddenly those months apart meant nothing. Jared was still as adept as ever at reading Jensen's emotive face.

Confusion. Shy, tentative confusion.

"I missed you." Jared said, both explaining to Jensen and admitting it to himself.

And he had. So much it had hurt. Even now he checked his email a dozen times a day, hoping to find jackles@goowy.com and an email full of insults, innuendo and procrastination aides. Instead he'd been inundated with SermUmore, Fuclongr and ViagRon. Which really hadn't helped much.

Jensen had managed to drive a wedge between Jared and his best friend. He'd dug his claws into Jared's heart and clung on with the unfailing tenacity of a pre-schooler and his favorite toy. He'd done a hundred other things to fuck with Jared's mind, the least of which was to be so fucking adorable that Jared couldn't get within a hundred paces without wanting to tuck him under one arm and snuggle.

Sadly, the cuddle effect was still operating at full force, even after all these months.

Absence didn't just make the heart grow fonder, it apparently made the heart crave cookies and major smoochie time.

Slowly, almost shyly, Jensen padded over to Jared, his feet wrapped in the most hideous fluffy socks Jared had ever seen. Jensen's eyes slowly focused, brightening in the dim light. It was obviously one of his better days.

Time to pull out the big guns.

Drawing on his-admittedly slowly- expanding knowledge of sign language, Jared signed, 'do you want me to leave?' remembering all too well Jensen's last words to him, and wondering if they still applied.

Jensen's smile kicked up a few watts. Signing back, he asked, 'do you want to go?'.

Jared shook his head.

Slowly, Jensen nodded. "You came back." He said, his voice the same, gruff hiss of a whisper that Jared remembered.

Jared could only shrug. "I'm a moron, apparently."

And if he'd known admitting that out loud would have earned him a kiss, Jared would have tried that trick years ago. Taken a little by surprise, Jared caught him by the elbows and pushed back, holding Jensen at arm's length and peering intently at the lamplight flickering in his bright eyes.

"Just so we're clear," Jared hastily said, trying to ignore the feel of Jensen's fingers as they brushed across his lips, "I'm taking that as an official invitation to get touchy feely." An eyebrow arched, and Jensen grinned in response. Jared nodded. "Good. And if you ever fuck me over like that again, sick or not, I'mma kick your skinny ass."

That, oddly enough, earned him another kiss.

He'd always said Jensen was a strange one.

THE FIRST DAY OF MY LIFE

Snuggling was officially the single best thing in the history of ever. Jared would have given up sex for premium Jensen snuggles. Maybe not sex with Jensen, but still.

Jensen had a couch worthy of Jared's appreciation, and after deciding that the middle of the night was no time to be standing, they'd made their way downstairs and curled up between the soft cushions. Jared let his head rest against the high winged arm and Jensen let his head rest against Jared, almost as if he were trying to listen to Jared's heartbeat. In its absence, he'd curled his fingers over Jared's wrist, the pulse strong below the skin.

As they'd left the office/study/Hogwarts library, Jared had snagged one of the notebooks Jensen used to scribble ideas in, and a pair of pens. It rested between them, propped up by Jensen's arm, their handwriting scrawled across the pages, mindless of the lines.

Didn't expect u 2 b back. Jensen scribbled his scrawl wide and surprisingly boisterous.

Jared's left hand slowly caressed through Jensen's short hair, tracing patterns across his scalp and smiling when Jensen sighed in satisfaction. You told me to stay away, he wrote, his own handwriting small, neat, and utterly at contrast with Jensen's loopy scribbles.

Was trying to give u an out.

Jared's hand slid down and traced the shell of Jensen's ear. Jensen had nice ears, he mused. It felt strange to think of them as the source of all Jensen's suffering. He almost thought they should be bright red, or deformed, or somehow obvious. They weren't, obviously, and Jensen looked perfect from the outside. It made Jared painfully aware of the fragility of his own health, and he spared a quick prayer for his friends and family. He didn't plan to take his good fortune for advantage. There was no telling when his body might betray him.

A quick kiss to the crown of Jensen's head, and he wrote Like you did in the greenhouse?

It was Jensen's turn to offer comfort, his head twisting until he could press his lips to Jared's chest, over his heart. Didn't expect it 2 hurt u. Jensen wrote, his wrist tipped at an awkward angle. Didn't think u cared enough.

Jared's eyes closed and he pulled Jensen closer, his thumb dipping slightly and brushing across Jensen's cheek.

Now? He wrote.

Well u haven't tried 2 fuck me yet.

Jared stumbled over Jensen's use of the word fuck. Jensen wasn't the type of person who swore. It didn't matter that the words were two dimensional, the bitterness and confusion was palatable.

Was never about sex.

He didn't need to see Jensen's face to know what kind of look would be on it.

Aside from the window thing. He added hesitantly, and felt Jensen snort against his chest.

Know that now! Jensen wrote, underlining the now for emphasis. Didn't think it would hurt u, he wrote again, when it did-

You knew I did care, Jared finished the sentence for him. Jensen nodded against his chest.

Which was why he told both Jared and David to leave, to give them both a chance to go before things got any further out of hand.

It made sense in a twisted, Jensen-logic kind of way.

Ain't worth you getting sick over. Jared pointed out, lifting Jensen's palm and pressing a gentle kiss to the ends of his fingers.

I hurt u. Jensen wrote, as if that justified everything. But u came back.

That was Jared for you. He was a giant homing pigeon. He always found a way back.

And be done out of cookies???? Jared scribbled, damn right I did!

Jensen twisted against him, pressing his weight up on Jared's chest until he could make eye

contact. "Cookies?" He grunted.

Jared nodded enthusiastically.

After a long, nonplussed pause, Jensen nodded and rolled over onto his feet, tugging Jared by the neck of his shirt. Laughing, Jared followed and obligingly let Jensen lead him through the house. When they arrived in the kitchen Jensen thrust a horrible floral apron under Jared's nose.

Jared blinked. "You're kidding, right?" He said, holding the apron with two fingers, afraid it might bite him. "Jen, it's four am!"

Jensen responded by handing him the mixing bowl.

Which is how Jared ended up standing between Jensen's legs and licking a glob of cookie dough off Jensen's nose. Jensen flavored cookies = mmmmmm.

The kitchen was, well, no cookies had been made. Sam was likely to have a fit in the morning. Jensen had produced a tin of chocolate pieces to throw into the mix Jared was obediently stirring. Then Jared had decided the chocolate probably tasted better on Jensen than in a cookie and things had gone downhill from there.

Jared had made show of nibbling on Jensen's ear, only to discover a spot right under his ribs that would make him-

"Stop!"

Giggling Jensen was funny, and loud, and well...exactly the reason no baking had been done.

"I'm serious!" Jensen sniggered around a fit of giggles, not even trying to maintain the over-compensating whisper he usually spoke with. Jared shrugged, and swung Jensen around to get a better grip. The one thing he'd noticed about Jensen, aside from the pretty, was that his hand-eye coordination was abysmal, and he could barely walk in a straight line for more than a few paces. With Jared's arm around his waist, he half stumbled, half slid around and yelped loudly as the tickling continued.

As soon as Jared's hand accidentally found its way to skin, he decided that tickling, whilst fun, was less entertaining than smooching, and smooching required a more comfortable position.

Jensen yelped again when Jared lifted him up and dumped him on the island, careful to avoid the pans that hung on either side.

Somewhere between Jensen glaring, and him shrugging and tugging Jared's t-shirt off, it became painfully clear that yes, he could kiss Jensen, and not be breaking any cosmic laws.

In fact not kissing Jensen might be considered illegal. In Mexico, at least.

"Admit it," He teased, looping an arm around Jensen's hips and tugging him closer to the edge of the counter. "You just wanted to get my shirt off."

Jensen looked thoughtful, then grinned and nodded. His fingers slid across Jared's shoulders, thumbs following the line of his collarbone until they reached his neck and tangled in his hair

"Last chance." Jensen whispered, his eyes dark and guarded. If you are going to leave, leave

now, were the words unspoken.

Tipping his head, Jared kissed the thought from Jensen's mind. Jensen kissed the way he always had, slowly, sweetly, always waiting for Jared to take the lead. He moaned under Jared's hands, each sound only serving to make Jared want hold tighter, to kiss deeper. The longer they kissed, the more confident Jensen became, until his lips were sliding from Jared's, trailing across cheek and jaw until they were pressed over the rapid pulse at Jared's throat.

With his ankles locked behind Jared's back, and his arms tangled around Jared's shoulder, Jensen clung tightly, for a moment utterly tense in Jared's arms. "Don't leave," he whispered in Jared's ear.

Not gonna happen, Jared thought.

Instead of answering, he pulled back and pressed two feather light kisses to each corner of Jensen's lips.

Actions were louder than words, anyway.

LAUGH TOO LOUD AT THE REST OF THE WORLD

The first guy Jared had ever picked up had been a tall Scandinavian named Leo. They'd tripped over each other in a bar, mutually agreed on the hotness of the other, and within five minutes realized that their senses of humor pretty much ran on a parallel. It had been a one night thing, neither wanting anything more than a good fuck (or first fuck, in Jared's case) and good company.

Leo had been a good teacher, finding Jared's ignorance in the matters of all things gay rather endearing. Jared had been aiming for sexy, but if cute got him a How to Fuck Ass for Dummies class, then yeah, it was nothing his ego couldn't handle.

Lesson number two as Leo had said, was lube. (Lesson number one being condom, condom, condom) Lube was the key. You could never use too much. Ever. At the time, Jared had agreed with him, but grapeseed oil wasn't quite as Jared friendly as AstroGlide, and things were never as easy as they looked in porn.

Jensen wasn't helping.

Nothing surprising there. The bastard was difficult enough to hang on to when his thighs weren't covered in oil. "I swear, you are enjoying this for all the wrong reasons." Jared grumbled, hands smearing slick oil across his wallet as he fished around for the condom his brother had always insisted he keep there. It really wasn't fair. Jensen had no right to look so damn smug with cookie dough in his hair, his legs splayed apart like some virgin sacrifice, and only his socks and sweater to protect his modesty.

On that note, Jared was pretty sure that oil, semen and chocolate were high on the list of things that never washed out of cashmere. Meh, maybe if he ruined all Jensen's clothes he'd have to walk around naked...

Then again, kitchen sex was supposed to be messy. That was half the fun.

Finally, after several minutes of his fingers slipping on the evil wrapper of doom, Jensen took pity on him. He even went so far as to roll the condom over Jared's dick.

Jared was officially in love with Jensen's hands.

So maybe this wasn't the first time Jared had envisioned for them, but it sure beat the hell out of drunken stick figure sex.

Satisfied, Jensen grinned. He nipped Jared's lip with his teeth, and ran a teasing finger along the underside of his dick.

Mean, utterly mean. Jared retaliated by pressing a slippery finger into Jensen's ass.

Ha, not so smug now, was he!

Jensen groaned wordlessly, arching against Jared's hand, his fingers curling against the hard floor. For Jared, sex had always been about sensations. Touch, taste, sound. He had a habit of talking. Whether the words he said were whispers of devotion or an exercise in crude compliments, it didn't matter, he just needed to say them. With Jensen he could only press his lips to skin and whisper. He had no hope of Jensen hearing them, but not to say them seemed so much worse somehow.

Jensen's head banged back on the floor once before Jared wormed a hand under his skull. That brain was screwy enough without adding a sex-induced concussion to the mix. Leaning forwards, Jared used his other hand to push Jensen's sweater up, baring more skin for him to explore.

Jared did a pretty good job of keeping a hold of his mental facilities, at least until he pushed past the tight ring of his ass. His fingers drew bruises as they struggled to anchor themselves against one of Jensen's thighs, and after that, Jared's brain took a bit of a vacation.

He was having sex with Jensen. He was making love to Jensen. He was balls deep in Jensen's ass.

If he'd had the time, he'd have spared a few more minutes on just computing those basic facts. Jensen's fingers dug into the muscle of his shoulder, and he got the message pretty quickly.

The floor was slippery with spilt oil, and after a few languid thrusts of his hips Jared changed strategy. Hooking Jensen's knees over his shoulders, he used the hand that wasn't playing pillow to pull Jensen down for every slow thrust. Jared's own weight drove him deeper and Jensen clung to his hold on Jared's hair as if it was the only thing keeping him grounded. Jared kissed him until his lips were the same dusky pink as the rose he'd been gifted with.

Their skin tasted of caramel and chocolate, and whatever else Jensen liked to use when cooking, and when Jensen came, the name on his lips was Jared's.

When Jared awoke, it was to the smell of fresh cotton sheets and a pillow shoved under his arm where Jensen was supposed to be. As squishy as the pillow was, it failed to prove a worthy substitute for the real thing, and still operating on Sleep-zombie mode; Jared rolled out of bed and went hunting.

He found Jensen in the shower and that sight of him naked under a cascade of water more than made up for the solitary wake up.

Neither of them had managed to find clothes after restoring the kitchen to some form of cleanliness and stumbling up the stairs to bed. Jensen's natural need for warmth had been tempered by Jared's status as a human radiator, and he had seemed happy enough to let Jared be his thermal blanket for the night.

It meant that Jared could just push open the curved shower door and step right in. Jensen had his back to him, eyes closed with his head tipped back and the heavy spray warm on his face. Jared stepped close, pressed a light kiss to the side of his neck, and wound an arm around his waist to keep him steady.

He had expected to make Jensen jump, and been ready to catch him. Instead, Jensen just took a step back, relaxing in Jared's embrace. The fall of water and the feel of a naked wet ass flush against his dick woke Jared up better than a whole pot of coffee.

Pressing kisses along Jensen's jaw, Jared loosened his hold enough to bring them face to face, lips together and tongues entwining in a perfect lazy morning kiss.

He'd though kissing Jensen was the best feeling in the world. Instead, it had been trumped by the warm, innocuous comfort of being able to wrap his arms around Jensen's waist and simply hold him.

Jensen's long, pianist's fingers carefully carded through Jared's hair, untangling knots where he found them as they kissed languidly. Jared's hands moved lower, tracing across the curve of spine and ribs, and Jensen's lips went slack against his.

The fingers that had been so gentle suddenly clasped tight, and Jared stumbled against the unexpected weight as Jensen sagged against him.

"Jen?" Jared whispered, trying to hoist Jensen higher in his arms only to be thwarted by the shower slick skin that had enchanted him only seconds ago. Jensen couldn't hear him, couldn't see him. His eyes were screwed tightly shut, his chest heaving as he sucked in a lungful of air.

He started to shake, and Jared's brain kicked into action.

"Oh fuck." He muttered, trying to help Jensen stay upright as he struggled with the shower controls. "SAM!" Of course Sam was on the other side of the damn building...

Fuckfuckfuck! Calm. Level headed. Calm.

Jensen whimpered miserably against his arm. Aw Christ.

Caught in a panic, he nearly fell flat on his ass when Jensen reached out blindly for the side of the shower.

Then he saw what Jensen was looking for.

The long white cord hung almost to the basin of the shower, and Jared almost ripped it from the ceiling in his attempt to turn on the panic alarm.

Okay, good. Cavalry on the way. Shower. They needed to be out of the shower.

He didn't care if moving Jensen during an attack was a bad idea. The damn thing had come out of nowhere and blindsided the both of them. For all Jared knew, Jensen faced another seventeen-hour epic, and there was no way in hell he was doing it cold and naked in a fucking shower.

"Okay, okay. I got ya." He said to himself, reaching down and lifting Jensen into his arms as carefully as he could. The shift in balance wrenched a sob from Jensen's throat, and something in Jared's chest burned at the desperate hold Jensen had around his neck.

Awkwardly, they left the shower. Each step Jared took was slow and cautious, the last thing Jensen needed was for Jared to slip and drop him.

The cold air of the bathroom was a slap to the face. Sam appeared in the doorway, clutching the small black bag that carried Jensen anti-nausea medication. She didn't look so much as surprised at their identical state of undress, but dragged a small mountain of fluffy towels out of the dresser and helped wrap Jensen in them.

"Go get dressed." Sam suggested, loading a syringe from a small silver colored vial.

"What are you giving him?" Jared asked, his fingers going numb from Jensen's death grip.

"Meclizine." Sam said calmly. "It's an antiemetic."

Jared watched her finish the prep and winced when the needle pierced Jensen's skin. "I thought he was on Dramamine." He said, biting his lip. Chemistry had never been his thing at school, and Jensen's little pharmacy often went over his head.

"New and improved formula." Sam said, shooting him a tight grin. "Now I'm more than happy to let you sit here with your tackle hanging out," she said dryly, "but this isn't going to finish before you find yourself some clothes."

She was right, of course. Jared dressed in record time, but it was close to forty minutes by the time the tension seeped from Jensen's body. As soon as the attack showed signs of ending, Sam nodded, and Jared wasted no time in pulling Jensen close and wrapping him safely in his arms.

A kiss to the tip of each ear, and then to Jensen's forehead, Jared held him tight, his heart beating rapidly under Jensen's cheek. "Don't leave." Jensen choked. "Please don't leave."

Jared bit his lip until it bled, dug his fingers into Jensen's skin, and let his tears lose themselves in the damp hair beneath his chin.

LOVE TRUTH, PARDON ERROR

And on the eighth day, God made subtitles, and he saw that they were good. Jensen seemed to agree with the big guy, and watched The Simpsons with the type of sleepy smile that made Jared go all squishy inside.

Personally Jared found subtitles rather distracting.

Or rather he found Jensen distracting, and was merely looking for something else to blame.

Seven hours after Jensen's latest attack, and Jared had moved them from the bed to the snug. Leaving Jensen curled up in the armchair, tucked tightly into himself like a shy cat, Jared had embarked on a mission to find every soft, squishy, warm and snuggly thing in Jensen's house. After several trips and a scolding from Sam, Jared had gathered the cushions of three couches, five blankets, twelve pillows, two cats and a large stuffed Penguin named Roland.

Making a mountain of squishiness on the floor had been easy. Jared moved the coffee table and two recliners, plus the chair Jensen dozed in to make space, and by the time Jensen's oldest cat Cliché -black cat, go figure- had dug her claws into her master's thigh and startled him from his sleep, Jared had built a fabric raft in the middle of the floor, and loaded the first Simpson's disk into the player.

What had followed could only have been called the most indolent day Jared had ever had. He'd probably give himself back problems with all the sprawling they'd done, but Jensen was snuggled up against his chest so yeah, no complaints there. Sam had even brought cookies and milk, plus chicken broth (for Jensen) and nachos (for Jared). They'd watched more cartoons than Jared thought was strictly healthy and snuggled for so long that it was going to feel weird not to have Jensen in his arms.

They'd cuddled before of course, but that had been strictly platonic, I-don't-know-what-you-look-like-when-you-come snuggling, which, in Jared's book, didn't count. Sadly the change in their circumstances didn't promote after-attack snuggling to after-attack snuggling with a side of groping.

For one, Jensen was in no condition for Jared's hands to do anything more than pet, stroke, or soothe.

For another, Jared was fairly convinced that Cliché and her partner in crime Sooty (who was as white as the drive snow, of course) were secret military attack cats, and had strict instructions to maul anything that interrupted Jensen's recovery process.

Both conspired to leave Jared nursing a strong case of twitchy fingers. Jensen was wearing the warmest, fluffiest, most adorkably hot sweater Jared had been able to dig out of his wardrobe and was a soft, comfortable, decidedly fucking gorgeous temptation. Every so often he would drift off to sleep, make a cute little snuffly noise, and snuggle closer, whether for warmth, comfort or protection, Jared didn't know, but would gladly continue to give every day for the rest of forever.

Unfortunately, that in itself raised a whole new and difficult problem. In eight days he would be heading back up to Vancouver and be stuck north of the border for four months. Obviously he could fly home at weekends...but the desperate way Jensen had begged him to stay –twice now– still rung in his ears, clear as a bell.

Jensen traveling up to see him was out of the question. The attack in the shower had hit in seconds. No way, no fucking way was Jared letting Jensen take another train ride like that again, and he'd happily chain Jensen to the bed before he changed his stand on the matter.

Jensen shuffled and sighed in his sleep, lips close to Jared's chest and freckles dark against his pale skin.

Jared pressed a kiss to his head and soothed him with slow, tender caresses before dropkicking his own mind out of the gutter.

Back to the problem at hand, mind.

He could catch a flight to LA and back every weekend. Yeah, he'd be a zombie by April, but the other alternative was to leave Jensen without the contact he (aw hell, fine, they both) needed.

Option two was to push Jensen back at David...and Jared already had plans to kick his buddy's ass. He'd backed off so David could sticky-tape things back together with Jensen...yeah, stellar effort his boy had obviously put in. Not.

Plan three –and he hated this one almost as much as the last one– was to quit. Marc would kill him, and Eric would probably damn him to an eternity in Hell...then there was the legal side of the contract he would be breaking...

"You think too much." Jensen muttered sleepily, his long lashes merely dark smudges against his cheeks.

Jared lightly flicked his nose and stroked his thumb across Jensen's neck until he fell back asleep again.

Plan A still looking like his best bet. Damn, he needed a graph or a chart or something.

Then of course there was always plan z, or Plan Padalecki, as Chad called it. PP required a little effort on both their parts and most certainly some kind of detailed stick-figure diagram, but it was doable. Hesitantly, Jared tried to slide himself out from under Jensen.

Long, elegant fingers twined around his and clung on for dear life. Jared shrugged, settled back into the cushions, and started to watch the disk again. PP could wait.

PP involved a little Canadian assistance, provided dutifully by his Vancouver agent, who was so close to crying with relief at Jared's lack of retirement plans that he agreed to everything with only a token complaint or two.

Eric had sniggered down the phone as if he had known his Sammy wanted to fuck the hot writer right from day one (even though it had been something like day -30) and promised to sort something out.

Marc had squealed. Marc was a girl. Jared had hung up pretty quickly.

Jeff...the less said about Jeff, the better. There had been a threat or two about baseball bats and the venom from a thousand fire-ants accidentally making contact with certain parts of his anatomy. "Is that a yes, or a no, dude?" Jared had sighed.

Jeff had responded with a muffled "meh, I can be there in a few days."

Sam had looked at him as if he had professed to being the antichrist. "You were dropped on your head as a kid, weren't you?" She asked flatly, dishcloth in one hand, saucepan in the other.

By that point, Jared had been far too excited to be put off by anyone or anything, even the ire of Jensen's nurse. "Does Jensen even know you are doing this?" She asked, and Jared must have been dropped on his head as a kid, because he was hallucinating; Sam would never smile that way if he hadn't been imagining it in his head.

"It's a surprise." Jared enthused, clutching at the letter in his hand, and brushing his thumb over the sweat smudged Plan of Attack he had doodled on the inside of his palm. "Is that a yes?"

"You're nuts." She said with a shake of her head. "Yeah, sure I'm in."

"Ha! Yay!" Jared yelled, and swung the feisty woman around in a circle. "Awesome awesome awesome."

Flustered, Sam set down her cleaning equipment and straightened her shirt with a flush. "Maybe you should put this case before the judge before you start celebrating a victory?"

Oh, yes, letter...Jensen....kinda important. "You know where he--"

"Patio." Sam supplied, jerking her thumb in the right direction.

Jared tripped over Cliché and a rug in his haste. "Fucking cat." He grumbled...Sadie was gonna have a fit.

Jensen weathered hurricane Jared with the seasoned ease of a veteran. He'd not had an attack in close to a week, and Jared had fully enjoyed all the benefits that had come hand in hand with a healthy(er) Jensen. Which made this a hundred times more important.

In the red sweater Jared had bought him to replace the cookie-dough covered one, a pair of distressed, baggy jeans, and his geek-boy glasses- and oh had Jared had enjoyed learning about those- he looked like an average hot guy living in LA.

He grinned as Jared bounced over to him, that smile dipping to a frown of confusion once a well-fingered white envelope was thrust under his nose.

Me? Jensen asked with a quick hand signal. Jared nodded enthusiastically.

Cautiously, Jensen took the envelope and ripped it open. A single silver key fell out onto his palm.

"Okay, huh?" Jensen asked.

Still bouncing from excitement...okay nerves, they were nerves...Jared dropped to his knees and shuffled between Jensen's legs, his arms resting on Jensen's thighs. "Come back with me." He said slowly, his heart thundering at the intense look Jensen always got in his eyes when he was lip reading. "To Vancouver." He qualified.

Jensen looked blankly back at him, and Jared felt his enthusiasm stutter a little. Okay, this wasn't part of PP. Fuuuuuck.

"I checked with Sam," He said, struggling to keep his words slow, and not just blurt everything out in his haste to explain. "She says if we drive, take it slow, then it shouldn't be a problem, and I had my agent find a bigger place to rent, and Sam would obviously live there too, and the cats...and the budgie, and the goldfish...and fuck, it's gonna be a zoo." He shook his head. They'd worry about the animals later. "Then after I finish filming we can come back, but-" he took a breath, remembering the way Jensen had clung desperately to him after the attack, "we'd be together."

Jensen still looked blank, and Jared's hopes sank.

Then somehow he ended up flat on his back with a lap full of Jensen, and a tongue in his mouth.

Okay nice, very nice, and ow. His arms responded automatically, wrapping around Jensen's back and pulling him closer.

It seemed there were a few memos Jared had missed whilst living in the arctic circle.

Pink was the new black, and apparently a blow job was the new yes.

Who'd have figured?

CONTEXT

Jensen was an anal retentive bastard, and Jared, it seemed, was completely pussy whipped. Or cocked whipped. Or something.

His status as tallest dude in the house sure as hell didn't mean he got to wear the trousers when it came to being domesticated.

That was an honor reserved entirely for Sam.

"What?" He exclaimed, juggling three boxes full of Jensen's clothes. "I didn't say anything." He protested, sticking his tongue out at Jensen when he sniggered.

Sam huffed. "Boy, you didn't have to." She had an armful of various little bottles, all full of Jensen's medication, and spared only a second to chastise Jared with a glare.

Sooty the cat darted between Jared's feet, almost tripping him up. Jensen sniggered again. "Fucking conspiracy, that's what it is." Jared grumbled to himself, insanely gratified by the meow of agreement he received from the small feline.

Jensen's second cat was curled up around her master's neck like a real live fluffy boa. Cliché's bright eyes followed Jensen's hand obsessively as he fed Tweety the bird sesame seeds through the bars of his cage. Between feeding the menagerie and mocking Jared, both human and cat seemed quite content to remain curled up on the couch, toes –stripy socks and all- peeking out from under the edge of the afghan throw.

Nineteen hours ago Jared had found him curled up between his desk and the wall, hands clutching at his head in misery. The attack had passed after twenty minutes, but Jared made it perfectly clear that Jensen's timing was nothing if not convenient. Jensen had looked stunned for a moment before he collapsed into giggles.

"Asshole." His grin was so bright it momentarily distracted Jared from the paleness of his skin. Hoisting a box onto his hip, he paused long enough to steal a kiss.

"Oh get a room." Jeff sighed, sweater crumpled and his hair a wild, untrimmed mess around his sunny face. Jensen tried to turn away, but Jared held him still long enough to kiss him twice, before flipping Jeff the finger. Insults were one aspect of sign language he had picked up pretty quick.

Jensen waved cheerfully at Jeff and Jared watched his friend's expression soften. Jensen had that effect on people. It had never failed to amuse Jared when grumpy Papa Jeff was reduced to the consistency of warm butter after being hit by one of Jensen's smiles. For all that Jeff played the John Winchester card, he was nothing more than a fluffy kitten buried under a rather stubbly exterior. Why else would he have traveled all the way down to LA to help them drive all the way to Vancouver?

Jared had promised a batch of Jensen's cookies, but Jeff had a lifetime supply with his name on it already.

And Marc- Marc had already driven up with Jared's things, and with the dogs. It was a multi-person operation of awesomeness that Jared happily took blame/credit for.

He was going to live with Jensen.

He giggled gratuitously, dropped a box on his toe, and tripped over the coffee table.

"My big sister went and married a Texas boy." Jeff explained as he navigated the lanes. They'd

set out early on the Sunday morning and avoided the worst of the traffic. Jared had crawled into the back of his truck, long legs stretched out across the seat with Jensen, loopy from the sedatives Sam had slipped him, dozing lightly against his chest. Their plan of attack had them crashing for the night at Jeff's place in Washington before hitting the last stint of their thirteen hundred mile trip up north.

They were all frigging nuts. The things Jensen had them doing...

Dean's rule of driver picking the music was an unprecedented disaster. Jeff had the lousiest taste in tunes. His country selection featured numbers even Chris wouldn't touch, not with a ten foot pole and full body radiation suit.

Sam, bless her, had threatened their taxi driver with GBH, and in the silence that had followed, Jared had taken the opportunity to grill Jeff on his relationship with Jensen.

"Ha! Proof that Texas rules. We are slowly integrating ourselves into every family, every daytime soap, and every cheesy commercial. We're like Starbucks." Jared crowed, finding Jeff's connection to his home state amusing if not a little bizarre. He was meeting Texans everywhere these days.

"What a horrible thought." Sam shuddered in shotgun, her long hair tangled at the nape of her neck, the AC toying with the few strands hanging loose.

"My old man wasn't all that impressed." Jeff chuckled, obviously making something of an understatement. "She moved to Dallas to be with him, took up a job as Jensen's nurse when he was a kid. I met him a couple of years later."

Jared tried to imagine Jensen as a teenager, all long, coltish limbs and sunny freckles. Too freaking cute.

His Jensen snored and drooled on Jared's shirt.

God, he was so whipped.

"Yeah? What was he like?" Jared was so used to the feel of Jensen, in his arms, against him, beneath him, that even the cramped condition of the truck couldn't erase the sense of peace it brought him. He imagined that would change after the first three hundred miles, but still.

Jeff's eyes met his in the rear-view mirror. "You know that film with Jake Gyllenhaal trying to get to Niagara in a bubble?" he asked.

Jared blinked, nonplussed. "Bubble Boy?"

Jeff nodded. "That was Jensen."

"Jensen had a bubble?" Jared clutched Jensen tighter, paranoid that a giant bubble would appear out of nowhere and steal his snuggle space.

"Jensen was a bubble." Jeff said, frowning once he began to elaborate. "Asides from me and Mel, the only people he ever spent any time with was his family. Home schooled, no sleep-overs, no playing with the other kids, no dating. Bubble Boy." Jared listened, his hearts growing ever heavier, his mind turning to Jensen's hands, his long, pianist's fingers, and his unblemished palms. A sign of a childhood spent watching the world, not joining it.

"That sucks." He said flatly, angry with Jensen's parents for stealing what little childhood the disease had left him.

"His father and his grandmother have Mènière's." Sam put in calmly, twisting to look over her shoulder. "They didn't know how to cope with the fact that Jensen got it so young."

"Still sucks." Jared muttered. "So how'd he end up in LA?" He asked, suddenly wondering how Jensen had managed to find himself in Los Angeles of all places. Jared had never met any of Jensen's family, Sam aside, and he could only assume they were still in Dallas.

"Because he is an idiot." Jeff responded affectionately. "Kid decided at seventeen that it would be a good idea to catch a Greyhound up to Seattle."

"From Dallas?" Jared shrieked. He considered waking Jensen up just to throttle him for sheer stupidity but decided against it. "Pretty idiot." Jensen stirred at the tension that flared through Jared's body but quickly settled again.

"He's a stubborn little bastard, I'll give him that."

Jared shook his head and whispered, "Idiot." The thought of any seventeen year old taking a fucking Greyhound from Texas to Washington was enough to set him on edge. He'd had the whole Greyhound experience as a teen, his father and brother had been with him, but he'd still been freaked out.

But Jensen was sick, he was vulnerable. Jesus Christ, was there no end to the depths of his stupidity?

"Yeah, well, he was intent on moving to LA, whether I helped him or not. Obviously I wasn't about to let him go to a place like LA by himself, it was bad enough that he'd made it all the way up north. I helped him move down a few months later. He'd already scored a book deal by that point, some internet thing I think."

"And that is where I come in." Sam put in, casting an affectionate smile over her shoulder. "Mel called me before they moved him down and managed to blackmail him into hiring me."

Jared snorted. "What, a hire you or get dragged home deal?"

"Oh his folks tried it alright." Jeff nodded, slamming his fist against the horn after some prick in a Chevy cut them up. "His big brother Josh is worse than a momma bear with cubs when it comes to Jensen. Jeff gave him a black eye once."

"No, that was all Jensen. I just got the blame." Jeff sounded suspiciously like he was pouting.

"They weren't happy with him being so far away from home." Sam elaborated with a small shrug.

"Wasn't like he was by himself." Jared was thankful for small mercies. Sam and Jeff both looked after him, kept him from doing something stupid. "He had you guys."

"Of course he did." Sam said, sounding motherly for the first time Jared had heard.

Then there was the forbidden topic. The exes. Jared wasn't curious...okay, lie, he was really curious, but there were some topics not to be discussed when your boyfriend snoozed against you, deaf or not. "What about, you know...boyfriends? Or girlfriend?"

"Wanna know how many people that kid has dated?" Jeff asked calmly. His fingers twitched and reached for the stereo.

"Um?" Yes. No. He'd take the Fifth, thank you.

"You'd be the second."

"I...wait...what?"

Huh? Double huh. Second...which made David the first...which made Jensen single for the first twenty six years of his life. Weird, even by Jared's standards.

"LA wasn't all he hoped it would be." Sam explained quietly. "Time was when I could count the number of times he left the house in a year on one hand."

Jesus. Giggling at parties! Jensen suddenly made a horrifying sense.

Jensen chose that moment to blink and open his eyes. "We there yet?" he asked, less than an hour into the trip.

Marc was waiting with fucking gift baskets. The dogs hung at his heels as if he were a long lost brother, and he hugged Jensen on first sight.

"No hug for me?" Jared pouted playfully, looping an arm around Jensen's waist in case the second dose of drugs decided to kick back in. He regretted opening his mouth when Marc cracked one of his ribs in greeting.

You are so gay. Jensen signed sleepily, a wide, dokey grin stretching his lips as Jared steered him through the front door of their new apartment building. Marc ambled over to help Sam and Jeff unload the truck, and Jared gleefully led Jensen into their new home.

They'd signed the lease on a penthouse —a freaking penthouse! - apartment on West Georgia Street. He'd said it before, and he'd say it again, Jensen had seriously expensive taste. the expense was worth it though. Both Jared and Marc had received a rather substantial pay rise for season three and Jensen's pockets seemed to be bottomless from where Jared was standing. The view out the window was breathtaking, and there was enough space to hope that Cliché and Sooty wouldn't feel the need to bully Sadie and Harley excessively.

Then there was the balcony sex.

They had to have balcony sex. It was written in stone, right up there with the Declaration of Independence and the Magna Carta in importance.

So was the law that said he had to carry Jensen over the threshold, whether the he liked it or not. Fixed with a glare that promised pain, and lots of it, Jared opted for the only defense he could, and quickly located the bedroom. Still swimming under the lingering effects of the sedatives, Jensen was asleep as soon as his head hit the overly indulgent pillows.

It was growing to be habit with them, and Jared didn't care in the slightest. He liked taking care of people, he liked taking care of Jensen.

He liked that Jensen trusted him enough to allow it.

Quickly working to unfasten the laces of Jensen horrendously battered Converse sneakers, Jared let his mind wander. It wasn't going to be easy living with Jensen, he had no delusions about that. There would be days when they wanted to strangle each other, and there would be days when

Jared would just want to hold Jensen close and cry.

He was looking forward to it, gross, knee high in sweat and vomit parts an all. If that made him less of a man, then just call him Sappy McSaperson, because he loved Jensen, figurative warts and all, to hell with the world, and to hell with anyone who said otherwise.

And Jensen loved him, Jared had the cookies to prove it.

SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

Whatever remaining delusions Jared may have harbored for the enduring innocence and cuteness that was Jensen Ackles lasted all of three days before the Cookie Nazi stepped in. Or Jensen was possessed by some malicious demonic force, Jared hadn't decided. His sweet, fluffy, downright adorable lover had a (not so) endearing habit of allowing his cats free range of the apartment, and if that wasn't a recipe for disaster, nothing was. It would be all right if Sadie and Harley weren't completely petrified by the two pint-sized fur-balls, but the fact that his pets were getting bitch-slapped by two freaking cats was an insult to his manhood, damn it.

"It's not funny, Jen." Jared growled, trying to look both authoritarian and understanding when his two babies were practically pouting up at him, big, soulful eyes almost as destructive as Jensen's.

Jensen continued to chuckle, absently scratching Cliché's ears whilst the damn cat purred, far too smug for a lump of fluff smaller than Jared's hand. For once Jared took advantage of Jensen's deafness. He waited until his back was turned, then glared down at the cat. "Minute Jen's not in the room, it's straight to the violin factory for you, ya hear?" He threatened, finger pointed and everything.

Jensen turned, bemused smile light in his eyes, and Jared quickly forced a bright grin. He scratched the cat's head, and only grimaced a little when sharp white teeth sunk into his knuckle.

A small ceramic dish was placed on the table, and the antichrist of cats bounced over, smugly lapping up the cream Jensen had set down. When Jensen sweetly but firmly turned down Jared's attempt at nookie (not now, Jay, I can't bake cookies and suck you off at the same time-Jared so totally bet he could) the cat purred louder than a B52 at take off.

Sadie and Harley cowered under the table. "War." Jared hissed at the cat, sidestepping enough to allow Jensen access to the baking cupboard. "This means war, kitty."

Now in all wars there were casualties. Jared accepted this as fact. If he had to fuck information from the enemy, it was one sacrifice he was willing to make. He'd take one for the team, as it were.

If the enemy happened to be a scantily clad, freckle faced, tight assed beauty, well there was no rule against enjoying one's work. Jared was a big boy. He'd accept victory when it came.

So Jensen wasn't the type of guy who screamed 'fuck me, fuck me, yeah, harder baby fuck my ass,' but he wasn't exactly a shrinking violet, either, and when it came to the intricacies of cock-ass acrobatics, he could run rings around Jared. Added to what Jared considered the totally

unfair advantage Jensen's pretty face gave him, it usually meant that sex resulted in a fair few casualties of war. This battle's collateral was set to be a cushion, Jensen's slacks, and Jared's knees.

With his head thrown back, his mouth open wide, and practically every inch of his body trembling beneath Jared, it was possible that Jensen was already dead, in which case yay, battle won. Then his long fingers pressed bruises bone deep into Jared's shoulders and his hips lifted off the bed. Really, Jared was beginning to think that the only safe way for them to have sex was for one of them to be tied down to a sturdy surface. On the one hand, yes, fun, but not really Health and Safety approved.

The problem usually arose when Jensen decided to exercise his ability to make Jared beg (in all forms). One week, two week...Jared would have his sweet, caring Jensen in bed with him. They'd snuggle and pet and make love slowly beneath the covers...

And then out of the blue, bam, Jensen jumped him in the hallway/shower/kitchen/car park/trailer/between takes on a set visit- and if anything could be hotter than Sam freaking Winchester pushing Jensen down onto the couch and fucking him raw, Jared had yet to see it. It was mildly concerning, or would be, if Jared could gather enough brain cells to formulate an idea beyond sex good. Most of the time it was simply a case of hanging on to something solid and hoping his dick was still attached by the time Jensen was done with him.

That wasn't a complaint, mind you. He was perfectly capable of turning the tables.

Jensen whined when Jared caught his wrists and pinned them down to the bedding. He wriggled and squirmed until Jared pushed himself balls deep into his ass, then settled back with a whimper and a sigh. Somewhere between foreplay and fucking, they had managed to remove all items of clothing except for one of Jensen's blue angora socks, and the huge red sweater Jensen had pulled on that morning. The sweater was Jared's and if it was two sizes too big for him, it threatened to drown Jensen in fabric. Jared grabbed and handful and tugged it over Jensen's head, leaving his arms tangled in the folds of fabric.

With his own hands free to wander, Jared hitched on of Jensen's long legs over his shoulder and pressed the other smooth thigh down to the mattress.

They fucked so hard they probably needed a new bed, and Jensen screamed Jared's name so fucking prettily in the end.

None of that mattered, because the minute Jared's pulled his dick from Jensen's ass, the damn cat was there, sitting in the doorway, complete with the expression of a scolding parent.

Jensen went off to sleep like a light. Jared spent the evening contemplating the merits of buying a mouse, just to keep the fucking cats occupied.

The first incriminating photo arrived the following morning. Jared always got up later than Jensen, and was used to waking to an empty bed. The Polaroid sat on Jensen's pillow, and was decidedly (and disappointingly) devoid of porn.

There he was, zonked out on the bed, with Sooty the snow-white cat curled over his neck like some fluffy bondage collar, whilst Cliché had curled herself into a ball on his belly. Sadie and Harley were dozing contentedly at his feet.

Fucking conspiracy, that's what it was!

They had fallen into a regime pretty quickly. Jensen cooked, Sam cleaned, Jared worked, and somewhere in between, they all met in the middle. It had been a while since Jared had shared a house with anyone, and he had been surprised how easily everything had panned out. Even when Jensen was at his worst, Jared felt less conflicted than he once had. He knew exactly where Jensen was and better, every morning he would be home and he could wrap himself around the man he loved and be reassured that Jensen was okay.

So it should really have been no surprise when his perfect little world came crashing down around him.

Saturday, and Jared had been content to spend all morning in bed with Jensen. They had cuddled and made love, and watched kid's cartoons on the TV over a muffin and juice breakfast. Sometime around noon, Jensen had dragged him to their shower, and a little under an hour later, he sat down to answer a week's worth of emails.

Jensen had a date.

"You know my number if anything happens?" Jared bit his lip and glared at Marc.

Marc rolled his eyes and stuffed his hands into the pockets of his beat up kaki jacket. "No, dude, I just guessed what number to text you on this morning."

"Sorry." Jared muttered, shamefaced as Jensen bustled around the room, throwing keys and wallet and phone into various pockets of his jackets and jeans. There was a considerable spring in his step, and Jared couldn't help but smile....and be really fucking curious. He wasn't allowed on Jensen's little shopping trip, and for once, Marc was being remarkably tightlipped.

"I'll have you know that thanks to Sam I am now a fully qualified First Aid type person." Marc said proudly. "I'm even qualified to give CPR to any hit and run rabbits that Chad might injure on any future road trips."

"That is gross." Jared grimaced, but nodded in agreement. Sam had given them both a crash course in dealing with any and every medical complication or malady Jensen's illness might try and throw at them. It had helped.

"Bye!" Jensen grinned brightly, kissing him on the lips. "I'll bring back candy."

Jared didn't care if Marc was in the room - the bastard was family anyway- he wrapped an arm around Jensen's lean hips, holding him close for a deeper embrace. "Love you." He whispered into Jensen ear, pretending as he did every time that Jensen could hear the words.

With a final peck on the cheek, Jensen pulled back and bounded down the stairs, Marc on his tail. A quick, meaningful glance from Marc promised Jared that his buddy would bring Jensen back in one piece, hopefully with gifts, and then they were gone.

Emails. Jared answered emails. All three hundred and twelve of them, minus the two hundred and ninety eight that were spam. The whole thing took half an hour, and then Jared started to get

board.

"Stop twitching." Sam warned him as she dusted the bookshelf across the room.

"M'not." Jared muttered. His cell phone rang, and he snatched it up, flipping open the screen before he even looked at the caller ID. "Hello?"

"I've done something really stupid."

It took almost a full minute to recognize the sound of the caller. Jared's brain tripped over names until a red light started to flash.

"Dave?" He'd not spoken to David in months. Not since the club in LA. Not since he and Jensen had....aw hell....

"I was just so fucking angry, I didn't...I shouldn't have...I'm sorry, okay?"

Before Jared could issue so much as a 'huh?' he was met with dial tone.

Okay...and Weird Moment of the Month Award goes to...

He didn't have to wait long. Five minutes later, his cell rang again, Marc this time, sounding as angry as Jared had ever heard him. "We have a serious fucking problem."

This time Jared did get chance to respond. "What's wrong?" he asked, instantly thinking of Jensen and automatically assuming the worst.

His landline rang. Sam answered it. 'It's Henry,' she mouthed. His agent. Fuck. Fuck.

"The press is what happened, man. They're fucking everywhere." Marc snapped coldly, and Jared's heart sank. He held out his hand for the phone Sam was holding, picking up Henry's calm and steady stream of advice halfway through.

"Jen okay?" he asked, knowing how painfully shy Jensen was at the best of times. Jared could count on the one hand how many times Jensen had ventured out of the apartment since they had moved in. Even with Jared's gentle coaxing it was difficult to persuade him to leave the safety of his own home.

Why the fuck he hadn't let Jared go with him this one time he did....

Marc's voice rapidly dropped from angry to worried. "I don't know. They mobbed us, we got separated. I'm sorry Jay, I'll find him." Jared knew Marc well enough to know his word was his bond. He also knew him well enough to recognize the guilt in his voice.

"Jesus." Jared whispered. "Oh God."

"He's a grown man," Marc encouraged. "He'll be fine."

'Jared, Jared, are you listening?' Henry demanded, his voice quiet from the other line.

"Find him." Jared demanded of Marc. Sam had already thrown her coat and shoes on, her bright yes almost ferociously cold. To Henry, he said, "I'll call you back." He hung up before Henry could say anything further. "Sam, call Mike and Tom, tell them...I dunno, just get them over here. Tom might be out, so speak to Jamie." Sam nodded and started working her way through the phone's digital address book.

Damnit, but Jensen shouldn't be able to make Jared so damned scared...

Jared jammed his feet into the battered sneakers by the door, Eric on speed dial for damage control.

First he had to find Jensen. Anything else could be dealt with, and once Jared had him safely home and buried under a small mountain of blankets, he was going to rip David apart with his bare hands.

THE SMILE WHEN YOU TORE ME APART

Jared wasn't sure if it was divine intervention, immense good luck, or the favor of his own lovable leprechaun, but finding Jensen was less a matter of tracking him down, and more a case of nearly running him over with the jeep.

"Jesus!" Jared yelled, slamming his foot on the break. Sam's language put Jared's to shame, and they both stumbled out of the vehicle and on to the quiet side street. Executing a very Starsky-esque slide over the hood, Jared made it to Jensen's side in seconds, grabbing at his shoulders in fear, and getting a punch to the jaw for his trouble.

"Fuck! Ow, what the hell?"

"Don't take it personally!" Marc panted as he skidded up alongside them. "You ain't the first dude he's put the smack down on today." The look Marc was wearing was, in Jared's opinion, far to fucking amused for the fucked up situation they were all in.

He'd call the bastard on it when he wasn't wrestling an armful of wriggling Jensen. Taking a fair few bruises for his trouble, Jared finally got Jensen's attention long enough to read the dozen or so emotions warring for dominance in his eyes.

He blinked.

Jensen wasn't scared. He wasn't in the grips of a panic attack –or any attack for that matter- and he wasn't the trembling figure Jared had been anticipating.

He was pissed.

That was a good thing, right?

Or not, as it turned out. Even Sam had been thrown off kilter, staring into the rear-view mirror as Marc drove them back to his own apartment. Jared had sat in an awkward huddle behind Sam, watching Jensen the way Nobel must have eyed the first prototypes for dynamite. Jensen had ignored all three, steam practically pouring from his ears as he hissed an endless stream of adjective peppered expletives. Jared didn't think he was even aware that anyone else could hear them, and the unexpected look into Jensen's subconscious was both unwelcome, and somewhat scary.

Note to self, Jared thought meekly never ever piss off Jensen. Pissing off was to be avoided at all costs.

"Kale Roberts?" Jared echoed Marc's words with a shudder of disbelief. "Jensen KO'd Kale fucking Roberts?"

"Hmm." Marc said as he flicked the ignition off. "You can expect the court summons in the morning. Dude, it was so fucking sweet. Jen's probably just landed himself on the Christmas card list of half of LA."

Assault....his Jensen...his sweet, cuddly, stray kitten rescuing, cookie baking, fluffy sock wearing Jensen...

Jensen stormed out of the car the minute the engine died, snarling at the curious passer-by who had stopped to greet Marc. Jared shook his head. Alien abduction, it had to be.

Jesus Christ, he had a headache. Sam Winchester's psychic death visions of doom had nothing on Jared's Jensen Stress Headaches. Fucking pussy hunter. "I'll get Henry to hire a lawyer." He muttered. Or ten.

Sam snorted, pausing halfway between sidewalk and seat. "Somehow I think a deaf guy with a life threatening illness might get away with smacking some sleazy photographer who has more restraining orders than Imelda Marcos had shoes."

"I guess..."

Jensen was waiting in the foyer of the building. As soon as Jared was inside, he rounded, ready to attack. Bunching his fists in Jared's shirt, he snarled, "What the fuck?"

Which was about the time Jared realized that the shit already on the fan was almost laughable in comparison to the mess that would follow.

"Can I take the fifth?" He signed.

Jensen snarled.

"I'mma....I...coffee," Marc muttered to himself, abandoning his wait for the elevator and sprinting for the stairs, leaving Jared with an apoplectic Jensen and a wide-eyed Sam.

Jared managed the comic Wile E. Coyote type panic-swallow and held his hands up in surrender. "David-" Jensen didn't even wait to see what else Jared said. He went white, then a little green, before settling on a rather startling shade of crimson. Jared jumped back in surprise as Jensen shoved one of his hands into the back pocket of his jeans. Normally there was no issue with anything of Jensen's ending up in his jeans but right then he would probably have been safer sucking on a live grenade.

With an overly loud shout of triumph, Jensen held Jared's phone aloft and started to flick through the contact list.

Jared saw him hit 'D Mob', took a step back, and watched nervously as Jensen hit dial, then waited for the screen to flash to connected. When Jared heard David's voice on loudspeaker, he gave a little, rather reluctant nod.

Jensen nodded as well, raised the phone to his lips, and in a voice that would have deafened zombies in New Zealand he screamed, "YOU'RE A FUCKING CUNT," down the line.

If there hadn't been a young mother and a flock of giggling kiddies crossing the foyer at the time, Jared might have laughed.

Then before either he or Sam could stop him, Jensen threw Jared's cell down onto the stone floor, dropped to his knees, and started to shake.

"I take it you heard that." Jared asked mildly an hour later when he called David back. Anger was banging on the metaphorical doors of his mind, ready to pounce, charge town the phone and throttle David with the cable of his own landline. And if the phone was cordless, it would drown him in the toilet. Jared wasn't all that bothered which.

Some sadistic part of him had broken loose and cackled gleefully at the horse, broken voice David spoke with when he responded. "Yeah." Jared might have felt guilty, then he remembered Jensen and the way he was that very minute curled up in Marc's bathroom as he alternated between sobbing and trying to vomit up his intestines. Nope, sadistic was good.

"Why?" That was the fucking question, wasn't it? Or one fucking question, anyway. Others might have been 'how good can you hide?' and 'how long does it take a dude to bleed to death after cutting off his dick?'

David sighed heavily. "I was jealous." He said.

Not the answer he was looking for. Not even close. "You gave up any right to feel jealous when you decided to just walk away." Jared snarled.

That got a reaction, thank god. "I did what he wanted!" David hissed back at him.

"He gave you a choice. Just like he did me. Only difference is that I made the right decision."

"What the fuck was I supposed to do, Jay? Hang around and fight for a guy who was in love with my best friend? A guy who never loved me in the first place? Or what? Was I supposed to hang around and make us both miserable because he was too fucking chicken to tell me to fuck off, and you were too busy thinking with your dick to realize what you were getting into?"

Funny, when David put it like that..."You were supposed to behave like a fucking adult!" Jared yelled right back, well aware that a shouting match over the phone was anything but mature. "Not run to the press and fuck up both our lives because you were jealous. Do you know what happened? What could have happened? Nothing Sam is giving him is helping. How could you do that to him? How could you be so selfish?"

David snorted. "You're the one that landed him in hospital." He spat back nastily.

Jared recoiled from the phone. Low fucking blow!

To hell with maturity.

"Fuck you." He finished, and hung up the phone. It rang a second later. "What?"

It was Kripke. "Ah, afternoon Jay. Hoped I'd find you here." Eric said, sunny voice as bright and cheerful as ever. "I have the press outside, and the studio on hold; they're all asking about you and Jensen. Anything you would like me to say?"

Oh for the love of...Jesus Christ on the cross. Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off! Fuck the show, and fuck the world. He and Jensen could run away to Hawaii or something...

"What have you said?" He asked tiredly, massaging his brow with the tips of his fingers.

"Other than 'get the fuck off my property?'" Eric asked, "not much. Obviously this is going to

cause a few...waves, but I figured it would be best if I spoke to Jensen and you before I go admitting our Sammy is waving the rainbow flag." God love Eric, as politically correct as a Golliwog. "What does your agent say?"

"I've not deciphered the screaming yet." Jared said dryly, trying not to think about the horrendous battering his ear drums had taken after Henry finally got him on the phone.

"What about your folks?"

Jared blinked. His mama, his pop...his brother and sister and opps....

"Aw fucking hell."

INTRINSIC VALUE

Do. Not. Laugh.

If Jared could just remember that mantra and repeat it to himself a zillion times a minute for the next twenty four hours, he might just be able to convince Jensen not to take a kitchen cleaver to his nuts. Easier said than done. Jensen was scowling, glaring even, trying to look intimidating, and failing miserably. He looked like Cliché might look like if Jared ever got his way and drowned the evil feline in the toilet. His shower damp hair hung dark across his pale forehead and he leaned into the protective circle of Marc's arm tiredly. Glaring. At Jared.

Jared hadn't known Jensen was capable of looking so utterly pissed.

Adorably pissed.

Cute, kitten-like-pissed.

Hence the none laughter point.

Yes, alright, maybe he deserved it. Maybe pissy Jensen was better than sad, hurt looking Jensen, but that didn't change the fact that for once, Jared was right, and Jensen was a stubborn ass.

'I just think you should go back to LA with Sam, just until things blow over.' He signed, trying to make his face portray the pleading his voice couldn't. 'Please, Jensen.'

Jensen, in his usual fashion, cut straight through the bullshit and threw what he presumed to be a deceitful decision back in Jared's face. 'You want me out of the way.' The movements of his hands were short, sharp and jerky. He hadn't said a word since his rather violent outburst over the phone.

'Not true!' He protested.

Liar, Liar, pants on fire! Wasn't that what he used to say when he caught his brother out on a lie? Ruthlessly stomping down on his inner six-year-old, he strode over to the couch, silently grateful when Marc took the cue and made a hasty exit for the kitchen.

Jensen slumped into the cushions of the couch, boneless once his support had been removed. The fairytale prince in Jared wanted to wrap him up warm and take him some place safe. The realist in him was beginning to think that protecting Jensen was a virtually impossible task.

'I want to meet your family, Jay.' Jensen looked so painfully desperate that Jared wasn't sure he could keep on denying him. Sliding sideways onto the sofa, he pulled Jensen into his arms. The surge of adrenaline that had pumped through his blood had long since faded, replaced by a bone deep ache and a fear that their not so uncomplicated lives were about to get a whole lot worse.

He knew at once when Jensen gave in. The fight and the tension that stiffened his frame melted away in Jared's arms. He turned closer, buried himself against Jared's chest, and trusted in a strength that was being spread thinner and thinner every day.

"What makes you more ashamed of me?" Jensen whispered the question into the warmth of Jared's skin. "That I'm sick, that I'm deaf, or that I made you a fag?"

Aw fuck, Jared thought miserably, and the waterworks sprung a leak.

In the end it was a moot point. Sam nursed Jensen through a string of attacks, finally pumping him full of sedatives and praying for the best. Jared used the time wisely.

That is to say he played Mister Hot-Shot Hollywood and threatened to sue every member of the press in town, plus a few who weren't. He had Kale Roberts' \$700 an hour lawyer on the phone within an hour and made it perfectly clear that if Roberts wanted to press charges, Jensen would hit back with his own. Henry had even sent over a smiling pair of cops (both Supernatural fans, oddly enough). The pair had looked on Jensen with poorly disguised pity when he tried and failed to give a coherent statement, and if it hadn't been a point in Jensen's favor, Jared would have smacked it off the both of them.

Ironically enough, the angle they were now facing was not the world questioning Jared's sexuality, but them all wanting to know the big secret of Jensen's mystery illness. Half of Hollywood had rallied around them in support, and without quite realizing how, Jared had seen Jensen get propelled to the head of the latest anti-paparazzi campaign to strike the industry.

As for Sam- Jared had never seen her so stressed. Her usual no-nonsense attitude had dissolved to barely suppressed tears and pale, quiet mutterings. Even the pets had noticed the tension in their home, dog, cat, budgie and fish alike uniting in their attempts to cheer up their humans, or maim anything threatened to bring them harm.

His parents were arriving in...fuck, two hours.

"Calm down." Sam said as she breezed past him, soiled bed sheets in hand.

Jared felt his teeth grind together. "I am perfectly calm."

"Of course you are."

He checked on Jensen once more, and settled down to kill something on the Xbox.

His mom smelled like honeysuckle and roses from the garden, and his dad's hands were still bigger than his own. He introduced Sam, who having been through exactly the same process with Jensen's parents, was an old hat at smoothing over awkward introductions.

Sadie and Harley attacked his old man, and the cats, oddly enough, only meowed sweetly at his

mom. Everyone was on their best behavior, and it made Jared hope for the best.

"So," his mom whispered, "do we get to meet this Jensen boy?"

Jared shuffled. Jensen was still out cold, huddled under the covers of their bed and shaking out the spike of fever that had settled in when his immune system was vulnerable. He'd not be much company.

"He's through here." He said reluctantly, leading his parents through the hallway of the apartment.

"Nice place you have here." His dad commented, nodding appreciatively at the clean, smooth décor and the simple but stylish lines of the suite. He saw an opening for some pre-meeting prep work and dove right on in.

"Jensen's domesticated me." He grinned ruefully. "I even pair my socks up now." He added that for his mom's benefit, and cheered a little inside when her eyes brightened with amusement. As a kid, he'd been majorly disorganized, and could never find a matching pair of socks.

The bedroom was dark when he pushed open the door, and his was immensely relieved that Sam had changed the bedclothes whilst Jared had manhandled Jensen into the shower that morning. The room didn't smell of sickness, but it lacked the warm, homely scent Jared had become accustomed to.

Jensen was laid out on his side, wrapped up as usual in his dozen and one layers, his face relaxed and pale in sleep. Jared felt his parents shuffle behind him, undoubtedly uncomfortable with the intimate setting. Jared ignored them both and settled his palm on Jensen's sharp shoulder. The thick wool sweater was one of Sam's handmade ones, knitted in the pale green of spring meadows and flowers. It took close to a minute of Jared's gentle shaking to prompt a flutter of dark eyelashes.

"Mmm?" Jensen blinked blearily, no doubt still feeling the lingering effects of Sam's happy drug cocktail. "Jay?"

Leaning down close and carefully angling his face so Jensen could read his lips, Jared whispered, "My parents are here."

Jensen responded immediately, and Jared could see the struggle behind his eyes as he fought to gain a better grasp on consciousness. He turned as best he could under Jared's hands and fixed an owlish gaze on Jared's mom.

As predicted, his mom had just to glimpse Jensen at his most vulnerable for her heart to melt to the consistency of warm butter. She took a step closer to the bed as Jared helped prop Jensen up against the cushions and smiled.

"Hello Jensen." She said quietly, her words a whisper as though anything louder would hurt her son's sickly boyfriend.

Jensen turned the charm on to full flow, which in his condition constituted a pale version of his bright smile and a crinkle of smile lines around his eyes. "Pleasure to meet you, ma'am." He said politely, voice rough and sleepy.

And just like that, another of the Padalecki clan fell head-over-heels in love with Jensen Ross Ackles. It was quite remarkable, really. Maybe it was a genetic thing?

"Sam'll have you if you try to get up." Jared warned darkly when Jensen made a move for the covers. Or she'd have Jared, whichever of them was an easier target. As always, Jensen ignored

him and forged on, only nearly falling flat on his face twice which was an improvement on yesterday.

Jared understood why he was so stubborn a moment later when Jensen stood tall and held out a hand for Jared's father to shake.

His mom muttered something about men and pride, whilst Jared simply sat back and grinned at the two men he loved most in the world.

The tension in the room broken, Jensen turned a dry smile on Jared and raised his eyebrow questioningly. 'Tell me you have offered them a drink, Jay.'

"I was gonna do that next." Jared protested meekly. When his father frowned, confused, Jared explained, "Apparently I am a sucky host." He pointed back to the bed. Jensen pointed to the kitchen.

The internal doorbell rang. It was probably Marc. Only he and Eric were known by the concierge, and no-one else they knew had keys to the building.

Jared sighed. 'Fine, you answer the door, I'll go make coffee.'

Jensen grinned triumphantly, and only wobbled a little on his way out of the room.

"So-" Jared poked carefully, aware that as first meetings went, that had to have been a little surreal.

His mom hid a smile behind her hand. "I can see why you like him." She giggled.

Jared smiled, then blinked, then horror set in. "Mom! You cannot think my boyfriend is hot!" He yelped, shuffling quickly towards the door whilst she laughed.

"I'm not blind, JT." She teased.

He wasn't sure if he had ever loved her more. Or ever been so embarrassed.

"But he is deaf." Jared's father pointed out quietly. "And a he."

Jared flinched, recoiling from his father's touch. "I'm gay, dad. Not a leper."

His father shook his head. "That's not the- I don't care about that, your mom and I don't care, but you've never before shown any interest in men."

"Jensen's special." Jared whispered, knowing he'd somehow reverted to the same tone of voice he had used as a little boy and hating himself for it.

"Jared-" his mom hugged him from behind.

"We just worry you're in over your head." Jared nodded a little at his father's whispered concerns and tried to smile.

"I know things are a little weird, and I know this isn't the life you saw me leading, but it isn't the life I saw me leading, but I'm happy."

And he was. He was more stressed than he had ever been in his life, weighed down by concerns for another human being, but happy. Deliriously so. "You wait till you've had his chocolate chip cookies," Jared grinned, reluctant to leave his mother's warm embrace. "You'll wanna put him in

your pocket and take him home.”

His father snorted and smacked him on the shoulder. “The way to your heart always was through your stomach.”

“Ain’t that the God’s honest truth.” Jared grinned. “So...are we good?” His smile dropped into a worried frown.

His mom smiled and nodded, her small hand settling into his as they left the bedroom and headed for the kitchen. “We’ll let your brother talk to you about keeping us in the dark all this time.”

Jared swallowed and smiled weakly. His big brother was one of the few men on the planet who could kick his ass without even trying. Him and Jet Li.

He nodded, and silently repeated Jensen’s ‘yes ma’am’.

Talking of...

Leaving his parents with Sam in the kitchen, he jogged past Sadie and Harley who had curled up together under the coffee table. Perfect guard dogs, his babies were.

The front door was open still. Jared reached for it, half prepared for Marc to jump at him with a water pistol.

Nope. No Marc.

No Jensen for that matter.

“Sam?” He shouted louder than he intended, worry settling cold and bitter in his stomach. “You seen Jen?”

“No.” Jared jumped; she was closer than he had realized. His parents appeared in the doorway. His mom looked worried.

Still no Jensen.

Worry turned rapidly to fear, and fear to anger.

“I’mma fucking kill him.” He growled.

CLOSE TO DAWN

Jared had this aunt that no one in the family liked to mention. She was into the whole new age shit, crystals hanging from the windows, tea that tasted of cat-piss and friends that called themselves The Great Mister Mozomba, that sort of thing. Jared had only met her once that he could remember, back when he was nine, and young enough to find the prospect of hanging out with the family coot entertaining, if not exciting. She spent hours explaining the concepts of life after death and astral projection. The feeling of floating outside of one’s body, of seeing the world from another point of view.

Jared had never really got what that meant until now.

There he was, pale, tall, Texan accent shot to shit and, if he did say so himself, looking pretty

fucking scary. His mom hovered in the background; confused and concerned. His dad was reaching for the phone. 911.

“Jared!” Sam snapped his name out like a curse, and bam, he was back home, staring at the door as if it held all the answers of the Universe. Oddly enough, it did. “Jared!” Sam shouted after him again, but Jared was already into the hallway.

A part of him prayed to god that there was a third party involved, that Jensen hadn’t left of his own accord, because he wanted blood goddamnit, and Jensen would never be an acceptable target for those kind of emotions.

Then of course the rational side of his brain kicked in and reminded him that third parties implied bad things.

He sprinted to the elevator. The thing was hovering on the third floor, and made no sign of moving anywhere quickly. He did the math, pulled all the logic classes he had snoozed through out of the dusty attic in his head. It took over three minutes for the elevator to go from their floor to the basement. Then maybe another three minutes for it to get up to the ground floor, pick up passengers and head on up to the third level.

Had Jensen been missing for that long?

Acting on an instinct that was more Sam Winchester’s than his own, he skidded around and crashed through the service door at the end of the hall. The stairs stretched on down forever. Maybe all the way down to Hell.

Jared took them four at a time, the shockwaves going straight to his knees with each bound.

Panting heavily from panic and exertion, Jared hit the basement level running, rounding the thick concrete walls that partitioned the underground garage from the service rooms and boilers. He stopped, skidded to a halt, and nearly stepped on Jensen’s foot.

His stupid, sweet, naïve, idiot of a boyfriend was curled up between two bright yellow pillars, curled over protectively as he stroked the hair of the man who had buried his head in his lap.

David was the last person he wanted to see.

So naturally, there the fucker was, his shoulders shaking in Jensen’s embrace. Neither of them had looked up at Jared’s arrival. Of course, Jensen wouldn’t have heard him, and David probably couldn’t have cared less.

He slunk back into the shadows, a part of him curious, and a part of him insanely jealous. Both were silent by sheer willpower alone. From his place in the darkness, he could hear them, see them, and the jealous part of him hated that Jensen was strong for David in a way he had never been for Jared.

So much for vows of hatred and anger, he thought bitterly. Jensen was doing his adopting strays routine again. Once, just once it would be nice if he picked an emotion and stuck with it for more than five fucking minutes.

“You need to go.” Jensen said in his usual deep voice. “Jared’s will be looking for me.”

No. shit.

Jared saw David nod his head against Jensen’s chest before straightening up, his hand cupping Jensen’s cheek gently. A low growl reverberated in Jared’s chest. Red lights flashed and sirens

wailed, and if David didn't move his hand right the fuck now, Jared was going to break every fucking bone between his wrist and his pinky.

Jensen's eyes were fixed on David's lips, innocent in their intent, but intimate, sensual, private.

"I guess he owes me a beating, huh?" David choked on the words, his thumb stroking the corner of Jensen's lips. Jared saw the streak of crimson staining Jensen's cheek, and felt the skin around his knuckles split when he rammed his fist into the wall with a silent growl. "I never meant to scare you, Jen. I never meant to hurt you."

"What about Jared?" Jensen protested. "Did you mean to hurt him?"

Jared was surprised by the ache that followed those whispered words. He and David had been friends, brothers, for so long that it hurt to think of what they had been reduced to. Once he had compared Jensen to Helen of Troy. He'd not been far off the mark. Whether he had intended to or not, Jensen had set in motion events that had irrevocably altered their lives. He, like Paris, had whisked Jensen far away to start a new life. David, like Menelaus, had retaliated the only way he knew how.

"I wanted to...I don't know what I wanted." David sighed and kissed Jensen's cheek. "It's hard to stop wanting to protect you. All those years, and it was you and me against the world. Then Jared came along and I told myself I could back off if that was what made you happy. You just...forgot about me Jen. You just pushed me aside like a toy you didn't want anymore." Jared couldn't see Jensen's face. He was glad of it. "Aw, hell. No Jen, don't cry baby."

That was his cue.

"You need to leave." He said, stepping out from the darkness cautiously. The last time he had interrupted a scene so intimate between the two it hadn't ended well. David stiffened, and nodded, but made no move to untangle himself from Jensen.

They both took advantage of the fact that Jensen's cheek had fallen to rest on David's chest, and he could not see either one of them to lip read.

"I needed to talk to him." David qualified. The anger that had been so deeply embedded in his voice the last time they had spoken had dwindled away. "I didn't mean to scare him." He paused and looked over his shoulder, gave Jared the once over and sighed. "Either of you."

Jared stomped down on the righteous anger that demanded he paint the floor with David's blood. "Well ya did." David looked back down at Jensen, finally untangling himself when Jensen made an attempt to rise. Jared was there to pull him upright, his arm circling around Jensen's waist, thumb pressed against his ribs. They both of them didn't look at their best, stress and fear finally taking its toll. Jensen swayed in Jared's arms like a wind battered reed. He felt fragile and brittle against Jared. He looked as sickly as Jared felt. They couldn't go on like this. Not if they wanted to come out the other end with anything more than a shell of what they once had.

Jared felt the growl rise in his chest as he looked at the man he had once called brother. Quickly, desperately, Jensen pressed a hand over Jared's heart. "I'm sorry, David." He said quietly. "I really am. I think we've both hurt each other more than either of us can forgive."

Maybe Jensen was right. Maybe David could never forgive Jared for taking what was his, or Jensen, for willingly leaving him. Jared sure as hell knew he would never forgive David for risking Jensen's life, for taking away any hopes they had of living peacefully, unmolested by the rabid and curious vultures of the world.

David's face crumpled, but he nodded. "Did you ever love me?" He asked desperately.

And Jensen, acting only as he knew how, answered honestly, "I could have." Jared had never heard anything so cruel before in his life.

As for him...there was nothing he could say. They'd had their screaming match down the phone, said all there was to say without really saying much at all.

"I can't get the press off your back." David said, looking apologetic.

Jared bristled. "It's not your job to protect us."

"It was bro."

Jared shifted his feet, took more of Jensen's weight. "Not anymore."

Now there really was nothing left to say. David left, and Jared didn't hang around to watch. He hauled Jensen into the elevator and back to their apartment. His mom fussed worse than Sam, and now there were two women in the house, Jensen would never know a moment of peace again.

His dad clapped him on the back, strong and silent, passed him a whiskey and spilled enough material on his brother's new kid to keep the blackmail going for years.

By the end of the week, Jared and Jensen's faces no longer covered the rags. Some unheard of wannabe had spilled the beans on her romantic trysts with the star of Angel, full details on page 3.

Marc pinned the picture to the dart board in his trailer, and Jensen presented Eric with the final script for the Sam and Dean do Hollywood piss take he had been threatening Jared with for over a year. He read through Dean's lines with Jared, and ten minutes later, they got caught necking on the couch by Sam and Jared's mom.

"Don't let us stop you." His mom teased, her arms laden with purchases.

"Mom!" Jared wailed, utterly mortified.

"Your mom rocks." Jensen giggled, ignoring Jared's discomfort.

"Two words." Jared grumbled. "Time. Out."

Jensen rolled his eyes, and then in sign language, so as not to alert the hawk-eyed parents, he offered Jared a far more exciting two words of his own. 'Fuck. Me.'

As always, Jensen got his own way.

NOW I NEAR THE EDGE

Jared liked to think of himself as an on the ball guy. He paid his taxes on time; he always learned his lines and never once forgot to turn the gas off once he was done cooking. So yeah, he was pretty sharp when it came to the everyday things. Which is why it came as a bit of a surprise when, right in the middle of changing a light bulb, he went from the second rung of the ladder to a hospital room faster than his car could hit 60mph.

Until Doctor Krippin explained that he'd been unconscious for a week, and would Jared kindly

stop tugging at that IV line, or he'll drug him into next Tuesday.

That bit threw Jared a little off kilter, but not half as much as Jensen did when shook off Jeff, Sam, Marc and an orderly before throwing himself at Jared, IV line be damned. For a minute, Jared had thoughts of the classic Bart/Homer throttling sessions and figured that Jensen had finally decided to kill him and convinced Kripke to write The Dean Show. But the hands on his neck were more clingy than homicidal, and through Jensen had the look of the Devil about him, His Unholiness was obviously having a day off.

"As I was saying," The doctor, who looked like a balding George Clooney, continued, ignoring Jensen completely. "You are a very lucky man."

"I am?" Jared blinked.

"You are." Doc Spock nodded. "Another day or so and that aneurism could have done real damage."

Okay, wait. Back up. What huh? He'd obviously missed something, because Jensen was the one with the wacky health issues. Jared was as healthy as any corn-fed Texan boy on the market, and under decidedly tighter scrutiny than most. Supernatural was a hands on, head first into walls kind of gig. Both he and Mark were on first name basis with their doc. Hell, Jared saw him more than he saw his own momma.

It was then that he realized that Jensen seemed to be having something close to an emotional breakdown, and he should probably get with the hugging before something got broken. Absently he smoothed Jensen decidedly tangled hair, and wondered when his lover had last seen the inside of a shower. Or a toothbrush for that matter. He let the dude with letters after his name rattle on about blood clots in the brain and near misses, his mind wandering down candy strewn paths whilst Jensen's fingernails dug so hard into his arm the skin broke.

"Are you paying any attention?" Sam snapped irritably, looking more anxious than Jared had ever seen her.

"No, not really." He admitted. "You were saying?"

"Bed rest." Doctor Clooney said firmly. Jared nodded rapidly, and then winced as pain exploded behind his eyes. Okay, ow. Moving bad. "Lots of fluids." Jensen took to scowling, thoughts of chicken broth and Gatorade probably circling through that pretty head of his. He was paying fierce attention to the doctor rattling off instructions and shot Jared a look that would freeze Etna mid eruption when made another move for the IV.

"It itches!" Jared wailed miserably.

"Suck it up." Sam snapped.

Oh this was fair. "Stop picking on the sick guy!" He pouted, only to be widely ignored.

Plotting revenge, he settled back into the pancake flat pillows and before the minute was up, he was down for the count.

Jensen, for the first time in his life, took the doctor's orders as divine instructions from On High. Doc said Jared had to clock up some serious bed rest, and so Jensen bullied, pouted, threatened

and blackmailed him into submission. For the first three days Jared was allowed out of bed for a shit and a shower and if he even thought about escaping for any other reason, he was faced with the surreal prospect of being manhandled back under the covers.

Not that he really entertained such ideas. Thinking hurt.

"Nothing new there then." Marc said cheekily. There seemed to be a standing rotation of visitors on call to keep Jared from sinking into the depths of boredom. In the course of a week he entertained Rossey and Tom- the double act from Hell, Chad- the less said about that, the better, Steve, Chris, Sandy- she was on Team Jensen when it came to the strap Jared to the bed school of thought, and more than half his extended family.

"Blow me." Jared huffed tartly. He nibbled at the plate of sticky oatmeal cookies Jensen had brought him and wondered when his appetite would return. If nothing else, that made him feel as if he were sick. Which he wasn't. Not really.

Marc grinned and flipped closed the Maxim he had plucked from the monster pile of glossy magazines Jared had amassed. "I shall leave that little pleasure to Jen." He declined with a gallant wave of his hand.

"I'll be waiting a long time for any nookie then." Jared sighed miserably, adjusting his pillows and casting aside the half eaten cookie.

Marc frowned. "Trouble in paradise?"

"Tropical storm in paradise." Jared answered morosely. "He's barely looked at me since I got back from the hospital."

He hadn't even realized how much that hurt until tears burned at the back of his eyes. Damn his screwy head to Hell and back. The bed dipped, and he looked up, Marc having moved to sit beside him on the mattress. "Easy little brother." He soothed in a bizarre blend of Dean in mother hen mode and his own rarely exhibited squishy center. "It ain't what you're thinking."

It was childish, but Jared was feeling crap enough not to give a good damn. He huffed and crossed his arms. "Well it ain't not what I ain't thinkin either." He muttered.

"S'no fucking wonder your head exploded." Marc said, elbowing him in the arm gently. "Your logic defies logic."

And sometime Marc was full of shit. Sometimes, that was what made Jared love the bastard so much.

"Look at it from his point of view." Marc continued, blissfully ignorant to the rather mushy emotions swirling around Jared's scrambled brain. "You scared the crap outta him, Jay."

"Cos he is so good for my sanity." He shot back acidly, well aware that his counterattack was unfair and more than a little cruel.

Marc froze him with a glare and Jared backed down, chastised. "Bit fucking excessive if you wanted to even the playing field, don't you think?"

Jared sighed. "I didn't-"

"I know. But from what I can tell he ain't never been faced with something like that before. Don't think Sam or Assmunch got sick much." Marc pointed out; using his own pet name for David that he felt was his by divine best friendly right. "So if you're the first dude he ever loved enough to get

emo about if you kicked the bucket, then it makes sense that he's all torn up and angsty inside. You nearly died, Jay."

"You are spending too much time in Dean's head." Jared declared, though he begrudgingly admitted that Marc might be right. In a roundabout sort of way. "And I didn't mean to nearly die."

"Just like Jen doesn't mean to get seasick every time he stands up the wrong way. Looks to me like he got a taste of what you've been going through and it's messing with that pretty head of his."

"You need to leave." Jared groaned, closing his eyes against the nonexistent brightness. He wasn't up to rationalizing the wonder that was Jensen. He wasn't even up to watching anything as taxing as The Simpsons. "Leave me to rot here."

"Pussy." Marc sniggered, but he squeezed Jared's shoulder affectionately.

"Cocksucker."

"Tittysucker."

When Jared couldn't think up a suitable comeback, he figured that that in itself was a sign that sleep was the best course of action. He'd snore at the bastard instead. Fucking genius.

Opening one's eyes to the sight of Jensen's lips a mere inch or so away was up there on Jared's list of best ways to start the morning. He just hadn't been expecting it, and so his ever so manly yelp had been entirely justified. Jensen petted his hair with feather light caresses, his big eyes awash with tears that were entirely at odds to the stubborn 'oh fuck' set to his jaw.

Within minutes, he was dozing again. Or the thought he was, because Jensen leaned down against him and whispered those three elusive words into Jared's ear like a prayer. So yes. Must be dozing, because Jensen had never said those words, and Jared's head still resembled the inside of a Cream Egg.

He blinked, pinched himself, and ow, not dreaming, but Jensen was gone. A letter waiting of Jared on his envelope had replaced his boyfriend, and Jared pouted. Dream or no dream, he was due some serious snuggling.

Making his eyes focus was a task of Spartacus like proportions, but he managed, zeroing in on the words surgery, hospital and appointment, annoyance uncurling in his stomach as he read. No more hospitals. He was putting his foot down. Cliché meowed her agreement from the window sill.

He scanned the letter again, and wondered what in the merry hell kind of hospital was cheap enough to print a letter from the neurologist on ENT letter headed paper, and wait, hang on, unless his dozing daydreams had included a wedding and awesome honeymoon sex, Jared was pretty certain he wasn't a Mr. J. Ackles.

-Hey, if they ever did do the wedding thing, it would make sorting the mail a nightmare-

Jared flipped the paper over, hoping for some Dan Brown-esque clue, and found the wide loopy writing that was Jensen's scrawl.

Guess it shouldn't have taken me this long to figure things out, but you're the smart one of the

team so I think I can be forgiven for getting lazy and waiting for you to come up with the answer.

I know this hasn't been easy for you. The number of times I wake up in a morning and expect you to be gone must be in the hundreds by now. I've given you every reason to leave and then some. If I were normal then maybe we'd be able to talk about this properly. Or maybe not. Maybe we'd both be too stubborn and manly to actually come out with it, and at least now I have an excuse.

If it would be better or worse I don't know, but this is the way we are, and I should be thankful that we even have that.

God, Jay. I've never been so scared before in all my life and I think you know how scared I get sometimes. I swear to god, if I weren't so worried I'd hurt you I'd strangle you for not taking care of yourself. But then how could you? You're always too busy taking care of me.

Is this how you feel when I get sick? Like you want to scream at the top of your lungs and then kick the crap out of something until you feel better? Cautiously optimistic, the doctors were, but you were so sick, so fragile. You weren't my Jay, and I thought I had already lost you.

But you're still here. Safe and sleeping, and Sam says you are snoring, so I guess that means you're on the mend. You're certainly drooling again.

I love you, you know that right?

If you don't then it is okay. Not your fault.

When Sam and I were waiting for the ambulance, I held you in my arms. Everyone says that when they are afraid of losing someone they love they think of all the things they wished they had said, or not said.

I've not told you I love you, and I was so scared I'd not get the chance. I want to say it, I do. But the words won't come out right, I know they won't, and signing them doesn't seem to be good enough. So I've not done either. Pretty sucky, huh?

If your head is hurting then you had better stop reading now. I mean it. Go back to sleep, love. It will still be here when you wake up.

(I am going to assume you have ignored my suggestion.)

I want to tell you that I love you. I want to hear you say the words to me. I know you have already.

But I can't. I will never be able to hear you speak, Jay. I'll never know if you sound like a Texas boy should, or if LA got you too young. I can't give you that gift, but I can give you this.

If everything goes as planned, this time next week you won't ever have to worry about me getting sick again. It's not quite normal, and it's not quite I love you, but it's all I have left to give.

Seriously, go back to sleep.

Jensen.

BUT THE TIGERS COME AT NIGHT

If Monty Python was right, and life really was one huge joke, then Jared's was something out of a 2 dollar Christmas cracker. One that came with a novelty jigsaw puzzle that was missing half the

pieces.

"It's not fair." Jared damn near snarled, one hand nursing his delicate head, the other entwining Jensen's limp fingers. Jensen had already been under by the time Jared had blackmailed Marc into driving him to the hospital.

That was nearly five days ago.

"Life never is." Sam said kindly from her perch on the end of Jensen's bed.

Carefully, Jared raised Jensen's pale hand to his lips, fever flushed skin bone dry against his. "This is going to kill him." Jared finally voiced the fear that had been harboring in his belly for days now. "You know how much he wants to get better. He wants to be normal."

Sam laughed quietly, her face oddly gentle. "No, sweetie, he doesn't. He's put up with this damn illness for more than half his life. He wants to give you normal."

Jared bit his lip, "How could they let him do this?" He demanded, clinging on to Jensen's hand tightly. His eyes couldn't help but drift to Jensen's hair, shaved short above his ear. The incision behind his ear was smaller than Jared expected, and if he hadn't known about the big fucking drill some asshole doctor had take to Jensen's head, then he might not have been so worried.

"His surgeon wouldn't have done it if he thought Jensen was going to be in any real danger." Sam reassured him gently.

"And how often as he treated someone like Jensen? Someone as bad as Jensen?" Jared snarled angrily. "Not only has he lost any chance of ever hearing again, for all we know he might never be able to get out of this bed." There was the hitch. The catch 22. The severity of Jensen's condition meant that both ears were heavily affected by the disease, but only the worst, his right, had been subject to surgery. The Labyrinthectomy had resulted in the removal of the inner ear bone on his right side. They had then done something with nerve stems, his spine, and abdominal fat that had made Jared entirely queasy. His left ear, they hoped, would respond better to aggressive chemical treatment once he recovered from the operation.

Jensen had been in an out of consciousness all week. When he was awake, he couldn't move his fingers or toes. Or his face. He'd fixed Jared a look so full of terror it had cost him everything he had not to charge down to the nurse's station and demand blood. The paralysis was temporary, he had been reassured, but all Jared could see was Jensen, unable to hear and now unable to even smile at him.

"The menagerie sends their love," Jared whispered. It didn't matter to him that Jensen couldn't hear him. The steady, unconscious stream of talk was all that was keeping Jared from breaking down and crying. "The dogs have taken over our bed. Sadie likes your pillow; I think it is softer than mine."

He didn't look up when Sam squeezed his shoulder, vanishing into the ward in search of coffee. Or valium.

The bed was a regular size, but it made Jensen look small. He had always felt smaller in Jared's arms, frailer, weaker than he did when there was space between them both. More often than not it was Jensen's never ending enthusiasm that made him seem larger than he actually was his inner strength more than making up for what the illness robbed him of. Laid out on the white sheets, his skin not much darker, every part of the Jensen Jared loved had been stolen. There was no spirit there to love, and the shell of the man left behind barely even looked like his Jensen. They'd cut his hair and taken his glasses. His lips were dry and cracked, his cheekbones sharp.

Mindful of the IV, Jared eased himself down onto the bed and gently lifted Jensen into his arms. He might feel even more fragile there, but at least Jared would be able to catch all the pieces if he shattered.

BE THE CHANGE

On a good day, Sam was enough to scare even the bravest man. Jared had never held any delusions about his courage in the field, and today was not a good day. A year ago and he'd had bunkered down in his room and hid until the hurricane had passed. Something must have mellowed though, because instead of being afraid, Jared was having a hard time stifling the giggles.

Jensen wasn't even trying.

Crashed out on the couch with Cliché on his shoulder, Jensen against his chest, and Sadie warming both their feet, it was all Jared could do not to squeal in girlish glee. Harley and Sooty batted around a tennis ball, and Sam, much to their delight, was entering something close to a state of panic.

It wasn't that Jared was taking advantage of the situation...not really, but he had three years worth of yes ma'am no ma'am to contend with, and any chance to get his own back was gladly received. "Why Samantha Ferris, I do believe you are blushing." He teased as the woman tore around the living room in search of the red shoes Jensen had hidden behind the laundry basket.

Sam used a word that would have made Jared's momma blush and flipped him the finger, lifting pillows and cushions in the search for her shoes. She looked up, saw Jensen's none too innocent grin and rounded on him with a snarl. "Goddamnit boy, don't make me hurt you." She growled, sending Jensen into a fit of laughter that had Jared wrapping his legs over Jensen's just to keep them both seated on the couch.

The doorbell rung, and Sam squeaked. Jared nudged Jensen gently in the ribs and shot him a pointed glare. Taking pity on his friend, Jensen pointed to the bathroom. She was off like a shot, and Jared snuggled Jensen closer, his chin resting on Jensen's shoulder. Jensen settled back comfortably and sighed as Sam bounced back into the sitting room, toes now firmly planted in her red shoes.

She looked...nice. Somehow Jared had always missed the fact that Sam was a woman, and a pretty hot one to boot. Aside from the fact that she bitched at him for leaving the toilet seat up, ensuite or not, and her unyielding love for Days of Our Lives, Jared had always seen her as one of the guys. So dressed in a LBD and red accessories, he was more than a little stunned to noticed what he'd missed.

"You look beautiful." Jensen insisted as she ran a hand over her hair. "You had better bring lover boy in before you leave or we'll have Marc tail you across town."

She flushed right up to the tips of her ears, but dutifully went to the door, returning a few moments later. "Jim, this is Jensen," Jared heard her say, "I think you and Jared already know each other." She added dryly.

Jared's jaw hit Jensen's shoulder as Jim Beaver, their Jim Beaver, followed Sam into the living room. Jensen waved cheerfully as Jared stumbled over his brain cells. Finally all he could say was "Bobby, you sly dog." Marc was never going to let them live this one down. Vancouver really was incestuous.

Jensen signed, and Jared translated. "You had both better be back before ten." He winked. "And no necking on the porch."

Sam signed back silently and Jensen raised his hand to his mouth in mock horror.

"Samantha!" Jared grinned. "Such language from a lady."

"You ready?" Jim asked, grinning across at the boys. Sam huffed and glared, but nodded.

"Be good." Jared said in a sing-song voice as they left the apartment. The door slammed on "don't do anything we wouldn't do."

Jensen, still giggling, settled back down into Jared's arms.

So, alone at last, as it were. Jared sank back into the squishy cushions as Jensen fiddled with the remote, finally settling on a hockey re-run. Cliché meowed in Jared's ear. Right, yes. Reminded, Jared continued where they had left off before the entertainment Sam provided had distracted them.

In the two weeks since Jensen had been released from the hospital, he had not had one single attack, and whilst he couldn't walk in a straight line, or stand unaided for more than a second or two, Jared was seeing their current situation as an improvement. He plucked a chocolate dipped strawberry off the bowl sitting on the arm of the couch and ran it over Jensen's lips until they obediently parted. Jared, Sam, and nearly a half dozen medically licensed professionals had made it their job to see Jensen put on some weight. With hiatus rolling on, Jared was taking advantage of Jensen's steadily strengthening stomach to hand feed him everything from strawberries to his Jensen's own cookies.

After three strawberries, Jensen swatted his hand away, one sharp elbow digging in Jared's ribs as he shuffled around, displacing Harley, until he and Jared were pressed chest to chest. He leaned up and stole a gentle kiss from Jared's lips. One more, and then another, until Jared had an arm around his back and was turning them both to pin Jensen between his body and the back of the couch. He shivered as Jensen's hand found its way under his sweater, long fingers tiptoeing across flesh until they found one of Jared's nipples. Jensen grinned wickedly and took Jared's lip lightly between his teeth.

Fair was fair, and Jared retaliated by slipping his hand beneath the waistband of Jensen's track pants. Leaning in, he found the place where Jensen's surgery scar had begun to turn pink, and pressed gentle kisses to the skin. He'd lost count of the times he had thought he might lose Jensen. It was impossible to take for granted what gifts they now had, that which made their lives harder now precious for their mere existence.

Gently, Jensen pushed his lips away from the scar on his skin, his fingers resting over Jared's chest as if he could feel the guilt that lived inside his heart.

"It's over." He whispered, voice soft and sweet. "It's over. It's done." And then the kicker, the three words that went right for the jugular and hung on for dear life, "I love you."

Jared opened his mouth, but couldn't find the right words. Cliché jumped on his chest, her tail smacking Jared right in the nose. Jensen laughed, bright and happy, and suddenly the words Jared couldn't find weren't really needed anymore anyway.

AFFIRMATION

It wasn't that Jared was panicking -panics required more flailing of the arms- but there was a major level of adrenaline pumping through his system, and there was only really one thing it could be blamed on.

"Damnit Jensen!" Jared yelled from the kitchen. "How long does it take to climb into a suit?" It was a rhetorical question, naturally, but Jared was just freaked out enough to voice his inner grump. Sam rolled her eyes and flicked a speck of lint off the navy shoulder of Jared's suit. "Why's he taking so long, Sam?" Jared whined at her, tempted to wave his arms about and settle into full on stress out mode.

"Because he is a man." Sam said flatly, absently twirling the gold band on her finger, "and men can't stick to a timetable for shit."

"She has a point." Marc said casually as he strolled into the kitchen and stole the OJ from the refrigerator. He didn't bother with a glass and drank straight from the carton.

Jared shot him a glare. "Don't you have a home to go to?" He grumbled, too nervous to try and be nice.

"Yours is shinier." Marc shrugged. Barely a day had passed in the last four years where he and Jared hadn't spent time in each other's company. Marc knew him almost as well as Jensen did. Jared wasn't sure of that was a good thing or not. "And has food."

Jared frowned. There really wasn't anything he could say to that. Their apartment was shiny. He blamed Jensen and his magpie mentality. Speaking of...."JENSEN!"

"You know he can't-" Marc started.

Jared silenced him with a raised eyebrow and a threatening step forward. "Okay, okay," he grinned, retreating to the doorway between the kitchen and the sitting room. "Jesus, you get kicked off the wrong side of the bed this morning?"

"He's nervous." Sam betrayed him with an uncharacteristically girlish giggle.

"Am not!"

Marc started to laugh. "Are too."

"Don't pout."

Pout? "I'm frowning." Jared huffed. "A facial expression that is far manlier than a pout. You should try it."

"You're still doing it." Marc pointed out.

"Oh fuck off." Jared huffed, deflating against the cupboard in distress, his finger working at the stress headache building behind his eyes.

"I still can't see why you are making such a big deal about this." Jared shot his best friend a glare that was only partly irate. He knew he was being a little...okay, a lot, irrational, but really. There was no need to rub his face in it.

"It will go fine." Sam gruffly reassured him. "You smile and look dim, and you'll have them eating outta the palm of your hand."

"Shouldn't be too hard." Marc teased. Jensen finally made an appearance, and just as Jared

opened his mouth to cuss Marc out, the words became a casualty of the unexpected short-circuit in his brain. It was funny, but despite staring every morning for two weeks at the suit Jensen had bought, he had never really been able to picture Jensen actually wearing it.

"Flies." Marc grinned as he reached over, finger snapping Jared's jaw closed, his teeth clunking painfully. Jensen, fiddling uncomfortably with his cufflinks, looked up and frowned.

"What?" He asked. Self consciously he ran a hand over his scalp, messing up the dark strands of hair that couldn't be tamed by John Frieda and a truck full of styling products. Jared was still having problems forming words by the time Sam had been able to smack Jensen's hand away from his hair.

Marc threw an arm around Jensen's shoulders, hugging him playfully. 'You clean up good.' He signed. Jensen blushed bright beneath his glasses.

Fuck the premier. Unless they had time to have sex in the limo, he didn't want to go. It was going to be a nightmare keeping his hands off Jensen for an entire night. Formal wear was a lesson in torture. They made yummy people even more edible, and then forced their partners to resist mauling for hours on end.

He blinked and Jensen's face swam into view, bottom lip clamped between his teeth in concern. "This okay?" He asked nervously.

Still having issues with the sentence structure of the English language, Jared settled for grabbing him by the shoulders and diving in for a kiss that made Marc clear his throat loudly. Jared flipped him the finger but kept his hand on the warm fabric under Jensen's dark jacket.

Jared was becoming more and more convinced that one day it would take a crowbar to pry him and Jensen apart. Weren't couples supposed to get less smoochie and touchy feely after a few years? Surely the desire to fuck Jensen through the closest stable surface should have dimmed to something a little less vigorous by now?

He blamed Jensen. In the year that followed his surgery he'd packed on the weight both Jared and Sam had been desperate to see him gain, an extra twenty pounds of muscle settling in his upper body. He filled out nicely, and though he'd had a couple of attacks in the past twelve months, the recovery times between stretched on for months at a time. His immune system was stronger, still damaged, but resilient, and without the pallor of sickness that he had worn like a cloak, Jensen had slowly transformed from the fragile beauty Jared had met to, well, pretty fucking hot.

Which went a long way to explaining Jared's wandering hands.

"I take it that is a yes." Jensen said, his voice gruff with amusement.

Jared nodded and wondered if he'd get in much trouble with the studio if he pulled a caveman and carried Jensen back into the bedroom and put that tie to better use... "Clothes good." He said, feeling a little dizzy with nerves.

"So eloquent." Sam sighed.

"So retarded." Marc scoffed.

"Both of you can go-" Jensen poked him in the belly, hard, and glared. "What? I wasn't gonna..." Jensen arched an eyebrow. "I wasn't!" Whilst it was good to know that some things never changed, he wished that just once Jensen would fail to predict his vocabulary before it left his mouth. A hint of a smile curled at Jensen's lips. Jared had been played. Again. "Ass." He grinned

fondly, looping an arm around Jensen's waist and kissing him on the side of his neck. Jensen pushed him back, laughing, and Jared kinda, sorta, totally loved that he was strong enough to.

Standing in the doorway, Sam sighed. "And thus the circle is complete. How are you two going to last six hours under a thousand cameras and not get arrested for public indecency?"

Jensen shrugged, his cheek warm against Jared's arm. 'Pray?' He signed lazily.

"To hell with that!" Marc laughed. "You two groping each other is going to guarantee a box office smash. I can see the headlines now: Hotshot Star gives author blowjob at Premiere."

"Bite your tongue." Jared rolled his eyes and tried to pretend he wasn't stroking the incredibly soft fabric of Jensen's suit. "We are professionals." Not to mention he would never fuck Jensen over that way by embarrassing him at the world premiere of his first movie. He knew better than most how much Jensen had invested in turning his novel into a screenplay. Jared was too damn proud to screw that up.

He had told Jensen that last night. Kisses pressed into his skin with promises and words Jared had seared on Jensen's soul. He pulled Jensen in closer and pressed a kiss to the top of his head. Someone had managed to tame his wild hair, and it was soft against Jared's skin.

The buzzer rang. "Limo's here." Sam smiled. Jensen fidgeted on the spot, apparently still enamored with his cufflinks. When he looked up, his eyes were dark with nerves. Jared took his hand and kissed his knuckles.

"Ready to face the hoards?" He whispered.

The smile that spread across Jensen's face was slow and bright. "So long as you let me go first."

Jared grinned back. He was okay with that.

He got the best view that way.

BONUS FIC: OF SMALL THINGS AND NEW DAYS

Valentines Day. Otherwise known as Hallmark Day, or The Day of the Sucker. Yes, fine, Jared was bitter. What of it?

It would have helped if Jensen didn't have some kind of manic holiday obsessive-compulsive disorder. He had to celebrate everything, from Valentines to Thanksgiving, throwing in Hanukah, Halloween, July 4th and Groundhog Day for extra party value. Jared had only just stopped finding little glittery dragons and rats about the apartment left over from Chinese New Year, so when the 14th of February rounded, and Jensen let the morning pass without a word, Jared was, needless to say, just a tad suspicious.

He came in though the service entrance, finding the apartment quiet. He figured Jensen would be in the balcony room, pouring over books on 17th century trade routes he had bought in research for his new book. The dogs were out with Sam, causing mayhem and disruption in the park on Victoria Avenue.

He left a note on the fridge for Jensen, knowing that if he disrupted he would be liable for study aide, or worse, cut off for the rest of the day whilst Jensen regained his focus. A quick shower, then The Simpson's Marathon until dinner.

He dumped his keys on the side table, his gym bag underneath it for laundry the next day, then circled the hallway, stepping onto the landing outside the bedroom, and narrowly avoided stepping on a pink heart shaped chocolate.

"What the hell?" he ducked low, knees popping, and lifted the candy from its red foil case. So he spoke too soon. Way too soon. Still, candy was candy was candy, and these looked to be extra special homemade Jensen candy, which was twice as awesome as everyday store bought candy. He looked up, a grin stretching across his lips, and yep, there was another one right between the pillars of the bedroom door. His own little candy trail of naughty promises.

Inside the curtains were drawn, the lights low, dim and flickering. Fucking candles- which was against the terms of their lease, he thought absently- and those little scented oil bowl things. He got the briefest flash of skin, of Jensen moving swift and smooth, wearing -Christ, Jared's best dress shirt- and, no, absolutely nothing else, before soft fabric settled over his eyes and the room fell into a faded darkness.

He moved up to test the blindfold, and Jensen playfully smacked his hands. Jared grinned. Okay, he could play if that was the way Jensen wanted it.

"Kinky, Jen." He whispered, unsure if Jensen was watching him, and finding the lack of sense a strange sensation to handle. "Has Marc been linking you to those porn sites again?"

"Hush." Jensen scolded, fingers soft and warm against Jared's lips. Jared shrugged. Okay, yeah, he could do that. He stepped out of his track pants when Jensen slid them down his hips, shivering as the warm air brushed against his naked skin. Small, butterfly kisses danced across his thighs. Jensen's lips brushed the very tip of Jared's cock before his hands curled in the edge of Jared's t-shirt and tugged it overhead. The blindfold was knocked askew, and Jared tried not to snigger at Jensen's quiet cursing as he refastened it. He obviously didn't manage it quite as well as he had intended, as a moment later, Jensen planted a hand firmly on his chest and pushed.

With a yelp, Jared fell backwards, landing on cushions, the bed linen fresh and smelling like lemons and lavender. Jensen's weight settled across his thighs, warm and steady. He brushed his lips across Jared's slowly, drawing back before they could deepen the contact, only to repeat the process all over again. Once. Twice. Three times, and Jared was expecting it. He opened his mouth as soon as he felt Jensen move, only to have the warm, bitter smooth taste of melted chocolate dribble across his tongue.

"Hmm."

"Like that?" Jensen's soft, whispered words seemed thunderous in the darkness of Jared's world. He nodded, and more chocolate was dribbled across his lips, Jensen's eager tongue lapping up the sweet sauce. The path trailed downward, Jensen following when Jared could not, throat, collar, chest, belly, each spot lovingly worshiped by Jensen's tongue.

By the time Jensen was lapping teasingly at Jared's cock, Jared was ready to throw him down and hump embarrassingly against his thigh. It had been a long time-too long- since they had done anything more than snuggle under the covers and neck like horny teenagers. When Jensen was sick, Jared was too afraid a touch heavier than a feather might break him completely, and when Jensen was well, Jared was afraid that anything too vigorous might trigger an attack.

He gave up, one hand tugging off the blindfold, the other reaching for Jensen. He needed to look at him. Needed to kiss him. Then...then he could go back to doing that thing with his tongue that-

"Jay?" There was that little line between his brows. Jared immediately tried to kiss it away. "Is this, I mean-" He flushed pink, tiny spots of color on his pale cheeks. Jared kissed those too.

"Happy Valentines." Jared whispered, his heart blooming with the beatific smile on Jensen's face.

"Happy Valentines." Jensen echoed. Jared kissed him, light, quick and teasing, before tugging the blindfold back down over his eyes.

"As you were." He grinned.

Jensen snorted, and a moment later, his lips wrapped around the head of Jared's dick.

Propping his arms behind his head, Jared moaned and gently lifted his hips, sinking down into the warm sheets and the softness of Jensen's mouth.

Maybe Valentines wasn't so bad after all.

Or, you know, maybe Jared was just a another sucker.