FRAGILE - Handle with Care

by cleflink

Summary

Katie didn't freeze so much as slide into a deliberate stillness. "You… walked into a door," she repeated slowly.

Notes

Written for foolsdance for the 2013 round of spn_j2_xmas. I am so sorry for the wait, hon! Between a new job, ice storms, power outages and, well, Christmas, this took far longer to complete than it should have. A thousand thanks for the modly patience while I got my act together. I have so much love for the mistaken abuse trope, so I hope you enjoy the way I ran with it, foolsdance!

Mornings were the devil.

"Ow, fuck!" Jensen swore, as he stubbed his toe against the dresser. He flailed, slapping one hand against the wall until he connected with the light switch. Glaring brightness flooded the room, stabbing ice picks into his brain and making spots swim in front of his eyes.

There was a groan from the bed. "You're a terrible person," Jared mumbled, his words molasses-thick with sleep. "M'sleeping."

Jensen gave him the finger - not that Jared could see it from where he'd buried his face in the covers,
but it was the principle of the thing -, left the light on and staggered over to the closet. Getting dressed was more a case of grabbing the first articles of clothing he touched than an actual attempt at looking like a responsible human being, but that was why Jensen's work wardrobe consisted almost exclusively of black slacks and dress shirts in varying shades of blue.

Hurriedly washed and dressed, Jensen stole a bagel out of the bread box for breakfast and gathered up his work files, briefcase, keys and the ever-vital travel mug full of coffee. Running precariously on time as ever, he nonetheless paused at the bed long enough to give Jared a goodbye kiss.

"Mm bye," Jared mumbled against his mouth. His breath was absolutely disgusting, which was one of the surest signs that Jensen had that he was still head over ass in love with the man: only love would have Jensen willingly initiating that kiss despite the obvious gross-out factor.

Jensen zombied his way through his morning commute, narrowly avoiding wearing his coffee when some jackass on the train decided that he wanted to inhabit the space that Jensen was currently occupying. That was pretty much par for the course as far as mornings in the city were concerned, though, so the collision wasn't worth more than a blip of irritation and a grumbled curse. It did, however, lull him into a false sense of security and so Jensen was woefully unprepared when he survived his entire commute only to have a lady with a baby stroller run over his foot in the elevator of his own goddamn building.

Jensen really fucking hated mornings.

"Is it International Walk Like a Pirate Day again already?" Genevieve asked, when Jensen hobbled into reception a few minutes later, teeth gritted and foot aching like a motherfucker.

"It's International Talk Like a Pirate Day," Aldis offered from where he was fiddling with the back of Genevieve's computer. He glanced up at the pair of them. "And it's in September."

"First of all," Jensen said. "Screw you both. And secondly, why do you even know that, Aldis?"

Aldis looked at him blankly. "Doesn't everyone?"

"Seriously, though," Genevieve said. "What's with the zombie shuffle?"

"Lady with a baby stroller," Jensen answered shortly. "We got any ice?"

Concern edged into the amusement on Genevieve's face. "I'll get some. You go sit down."

"Thanks." Jensen made his limping way into the office proper and towards his own cubicle while Genevieve headed into the kitchen. He knew very well where the ice was - an unfortunate collision with an open cupboard his first week had made sure of it - but Jensen absolutely wasn't above taking advantage of the kindness of others.

He made it to his cubicle without further incident and heaved a sigh of relief as he slumped in his chair. Genevieve returned with the ice in short order and Jensen propped his foot up carefully on his computer tower so that he could get to work while waiting for the swelling to go down.

He'd hardly even got his computer booted up, however, when his phone beeped. Right on schedule, Jensen thought, pulling it out.

Mornin, gorgeous, the text said, just like it did every morning. Anything to report?

Baby stroller related incident, Jensen texted back, sure that Jared would be able to hear the disgruntlement in it.
The next text came almost immediately.

,:) U ok?

Jensen considered how best to answer that. *I've had worse*, he settled for, trying to ignore the chill sting of the ice against his stocking foot.

*Not saying much,* Jared answered, which Jensen had to give him.

_Hurts, but I'll live. Happy?_

"Morning, newbie," a voice said, and Jensen looked up from his phone to see Katie grinning at him over the top of the partition between their cubicles. "What's got you looking so cheery?"

After three months at this office and four years at the branch he'd transferred in from, Jensen didn't really think that he counted as a newbie but Katie, who'd dubbed him that on his first day, refused to listen to anything remotely resembling logic on the matter. Jensen had given up bothering.

"It's just Jared," Jensen said, lifting his phone in her direction. "He's checking to make sure I didn't get myself killed on the way to work."

Katie arched an eyebrow. "He do that often?"

"Every morning," Jensen confirmed, which made Katie's eyebrow go up even further.

"You do realize that that kind of micromanagement's not usually a good thing, right?"

Jensen shrugged. "It's kind of an inside joke," he told her, because the truth was just embarrassing. Jensen's phone beeped again and he glanced down to a spill of letters across the screen.

_K ill xcl funeral. Ill Stl luv u evn if ura gimp._

Jensen rolled his eyes. _Stop typing like that. Go renovate something._

_Sir, yes sir! :)_ Jared answered, and Jensen rolled his eyes one more time for good measure before setting his phone aside.

"You always make faces at your phone when you're texting?" Katie asked.

"Eye rolling is how I show affection," Jensen said breezily. "Jared knows this."

"Right. Your marriage is a very strange thing."

Jensen nodded. "Yeah. It really is."

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Jensen hobbled around for the rest of the day, weathering the pain in his foot with a combination of manly pouting and complaining at Jared via text. Neither made him feel appreciably better, and he was very seriously considering calling a cab to take him home by the time five o'clock rolled around.

He really needn't have worried.

A familiar murmur of shocked, excited voices caught Jensen's attention as he limped with Katie towards reception; it gave him a handful of seconds warning before he turned the corner to see Jared
leaning against the reception desk, hands busy signing a scrap of paper while he chatted easily to a flush-faced Genevieve.

Katie took one look at the tableau and stopped dead in her tracks. "Oh my god, that's-"

"Jared," Jensen supplied.

"Joel McKay from Alchemy," she finished with shocked awe. Then what Jensen had said caught up with her and Jensen saw the exact moment when she made the connection; he leaned back to avoid getting hit in the face with her ponytail when she whipped around to gape at him. "What? As in Jared Jared?"

Jensen nodded. He gestured at Jared. "My husband."

The force of Katie's stare could have melted furniture. "You're married to Jared Padalecki? Why the hell didn't you tell me?!"

"I didn't know I needed to?" Jensen tried, mostly because he was a jackass with a twisted sense of humour. "Padalecki's not exactly a common name."

Katie gaped at him. "I, you-"

"Jensen!" Jared exclaimed, catching sight of them at last. He turned away from Genevieve to offer Jensen a beaming. "Fancy seeing you here."

"Fancy that," Jensen deadpanned. "Remind me what you're doing here, again?"

Jared shrugged. "Got the impression that someone could use a ride home." He glanced at Jensen's off-centre posture, the way he was avoiding putting pressure on his left leg, and a flicker of worry creased his face. He covered it with a cheeky smirk. "Mostly I just want to avoid listening to you whine about the commute all night."

"You're not as funny as you think you are," Jensen said. He hobbled determinedly forwards, unsurprised when Jared strode up to meet him halfway.

"Yes, I am," Jared said, leaning in for a quick kiss. "I also know that you only love me for my ability to drive a car, so I should probably get on that before you get impatient. You good to go?"

A throat cleared pointedly behind Jensen and he glanced back at Katie, who was wearing an expression that was somewhere between pleading and promising bloody murder if Jensen didn't introduce her. Behind Katie, Jensen could see a handful of his other coworkers crowding the doorway and trying not to look equally invested in this situation. Jensen turned back to Jared with a grin. "I think you have some admiring fans to greet first."

"I always knew you enjoyed showing me off. You must be Katie," he said then, stepping forwards with his hand outstretched. He smiled brightly and Katie looked about ready to melt or explode or something equally dramatic. "I've heard all about you."

"Have you?" Katie said, shaking off her star struck shock to throw Jensen an arch look. He blinked innocently back and Katie was grinning as she looked up at Jared. "It's probably all true. Especially the bad stuff."

Jared laughed. "It is? Awesome."

That seemed to be the cue for everyone else to come edging forwards. Figuring that Jared could take
care of himself, Jensen made his slow way over to the receptionist's desk and leaned back against it so that he could take some weight off his foot.

He felt more than saw Genevieve lean forward across the desk towards him. "That's your husband?" she asked in his ear, with an awed envy that Jensen was well acquainted with.

"Last time I checked," Jensen agreed.

"You're married to the star of the biggest action drama on TV."

"Yep."

"And you didn't tell us?"

Jensen shrugged. "Not the sort of thing that comes up in water cooler talk."

Genevieve snorted. "If I was married to Jared Padalecki it would be the only water cooler talk I ever had. I mean, Jesus." She shook her head. "He is totally out of your league."

"Thanks for that," Jensen said, without heat. "But yes, he kind of is."

"How the hell did you even meet?"

"We were neighbours," Jensen said. "And I'm really hot."

That made Genevieve laugh. "I hope the actual how-we met-story is better than that."

"Eh, that depends on who's telling it."

"By which he means that he's mostly just a grump about it and I actually tell the awkward details," Jared said, appearing suddenly at Jensen's elbow. He flashed a million watt smile at Genevieve, who looked a little stunned by the attention. Jensen didn't blame her. "Which may or may not include Jensen falling down a flight of stairs and using me to break his fall."

Jensen rolled his eyes. "And this is why I never want to introduce you to anyone."

Jared's eyes sparkled with amusement. "Bitch, you love it. You ready to go?"

Jensen nodded and levered himself away from the desk.

Jared tipped an imaginary hat at Genevieve. "Nice to meet you, Genevieve."

"And you," Genevieve said, still looking like she couldn't quite believe what her eyes were telling her.

"You need a hand?" Jared asked Jensen, waiting for Jensen's approval before reaching for his elbow.

Jensen appreciated his restraint. Time was that Jared would have bulldozed right in without bothering to ask for permission; he and Jensen had more than one argument about it.

"You even try to carry me and we're getting a divorce," Jensen warned, as Jared steered them slowly towards the elevator.

Jared laughed. "Perish the thought. Try not to kill yourself on the way out of the building."

"I hate you so much."
"I know you do. Now shut up and let me get you home in one piece. God knows you might not manage it on your own."

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To say that Jensen was kind of accident-prone was not unlike saying that the sun was kind of hot.

Jensen's mama had worried over him constantly while he was growing up - she still did, to be honest - as Jensen had racked up missing teeth, broken bones, concussions, cuts, bruises and burns from the most innocuous-seeming situations. Which didn't even begin to cover his numerous run-ins with assorted sharp pointy things, or the unfortunate tendency he had towards getting into fights with kitchen appliances. Tasks that required even a modicum of dexterity to be accomplished without personal harm were vetoed right off the bat. There was still a firm embargo at Jensen's parents' house on him attempting absolutely anything involving tools, ladders or power washers.

The worst part for Jensen had always been the way his clumsiness had made everyone else try to coddle him to death. It was embarrassing and, in Jensen's mind, usually unnecessary. A lifetime of tripping over his shoelaces and falling off things had given him a remarkably high pain tolerance and he'd yet to do anything that did him any long term damage besides scars and a couple of pins in his limbs.

So it had just gone to figure that he'd married a man who made even his mama's fussing look like the epitome of calm.

Still, Jensen had to figure that some good had come out of his inability to go any length of time without hurting himself and Jared's inability to leave well enough alone. He really had met Jared by falling down a flight of stairs that Jared had been in the process of climbing. Jared hadn't yet landed his breakout role in *The Agency* so all Jensen had known about him was that he was smoking hot and surprisingly good-natured about being landed on by a complete stranger.

Jared had helped Jensen back to his apartment, got him settled with an ice pack for his head and another for his ribs - Jensen always had a lot of icepacks on hand - and then summarily refused to go away. He'd been nice to look at, though, and Jensen hadn't been in any state to get into a fight about it, so he'd let Jared stay. They'd wound up talking long enough for all of Jensen's ice to melt and for Jared to get both Jensen's number and a promise of a date when Jensen was able to stand upright again without wincing.

After four years married and another three together before that, Jared was more than used to Jensen's tendencies towards self-harm caused by gross stupidity. For some reason - Jensen suspected that stupid love thing again - he still came running any time Jensen started swearing at a high enough volume to indicate actual harm done. He still drove Jensen to the Emergency Room if he'd done himself a proper damage and fussed over his hurts if he hadn't.

He also, to Jensen's distinct displeasure, then usually started laughing at him.

"You can shut up any time now," Jensen groused, irritable about the pain radiating from his face and the way his idiot husband was actually doubled over with the force of his laughter.

"You hit yourself in the face with a *door*, Jensen," Jared managed, literally gasping for air. "A door that has been there since we moved in. How am I not supposed to find that funny?"

"I was carrying a box," Jensen said, defensively. "I couldn't see it."

Jared made an entirely unsuccessful attempt to stifle his snickers. "You're supposed to open the door,
walk through and then close it."

"Oh, fuck off," Jensen smacked him. "You can unpack the rest of the boxes on your own."

"And leave you to handle the home renos? The whole house would probably come down on top of you."

"At least I'd be taking you with me," Jensen said sweetly. He didn't bother protesting the point because, the sad part was, it was probably more true than not. There were reasons why he never wanted to talk about the Shed Incident.

"Come on," Jared said, calming down at last. "Let's go get some ice for your face and have some lunch. I think any more unpacking today might end in bloodshed." He flashed a grin and said, before Jensen could get there, "Mine, probably."

"Damn right," Jensen muttered, allowing himself to be led in the general direction of the kitchen. "You're lucky I put up with you."

Jared's chuckle was familiar and fond. "I am, yeah."

So, yeah. Jensen couldn't really complain too much about being a colossal klutz. It was definitely working out for him in the long run.

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The morning after Jensen's altercation with the door, the bruising around his eye had darkened to an impressive purple-black that made Jensen look like he'd been hit in the face with a baseball and made Jared go into hyper caretaker mode. Jensen spent all of Sunday planted on the couch, alternately appreciating and balking at Jared's hovering.

"It's just a black eye," Jensen tried at one point. "I'm perfectly capable of walking."

"That's nice," Jared said placidly. "You're still going to stay right where I can see you. Now." He held up two DVD cases. "The Fast and the Furious or Star Trek?"

Jensen gave up.

Monday found Jensen getting dropped off at work at an ungodly hour of the morning, since Jared needed to catch a plane but had summarily refused to let him take the train. Jensen couldn't say he objected to skipping the commute, although he wasn't looking forward to trying not to fall asleep at his desk all day. Man should not get up before the sun did. It was unnatural.

"I'll be back in a couple of weeks," Jared said, as they pulled up in front of Jensen's building. As though Jensen didn't know. "Try not to kill yourself while I'm gone."

Jensen rolled his eyes and pulled Jared across the centre console by the front of his shirt. "You don't stop worrying and I'm going to give you a black eye of your own," he threatened. Jared failed to look suitably chastised, and Jensen sighed in exasperation before dragging him into a kiss that was on just the wrong side of appropriate for public.

It was a wet, hungry sort of kiss that went on longer than it should have and they were both kiss-swollen and more than a little flushed by the time Jared pulled reluctantly away. "You're an ass," he said breathlessly. He gestured to his crotch where there was definitely some action going on. "How am I supposed to sit at the airport like this?"
"Something to remember me by," Jensen said, with a sunny smile that was only slightly ruined by the fact that he was panting and partly hard himself. "Serves you right for being so ridiculous all weekend."

Jared pulled on an exaggerated pout. "Aw, baby, don't be like that."

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear you call me that." Jensen popped the door open and paused briefly to offer Jared the softer smile he couldn't seem to curb when it was Jared involved. "Fly safe. Sign some contracts. Pretend you can act long enough to get this show picked up."

Jared's smile was equally tender. "Understood." He ducked in for another quick kiss, gentler this time. "Now get out of my car before I miss my flight."

"Bitch, bitch, bitch," Jensen said, and got out. He stood on the sidewalk and watched until Jared's car disappeared down the street, though he summarily refused to wave. Then he heaved a sigh and went to work.

Three cups of coffee and an hour and a half later, and Jensen was feeling considerably more awake, though not much more charitable towards the world in general. He was in the kitchen getting his fourth cup while the clock ticked over to nine and he wandered out to find Katie and Matt arguing good-naturedly about the merits of sedans versus SUVs.

They broke off as Jensen approached, shock scrawled openly across their faces.

Jensen made a face at them. "I am capable of showing up on time," he said. "No need to look like it's the second coming."

"What happened to you?" Matt demanded.

"Hmm?" Jensen said, taking a huge gulp of coffee.

"Your eye, Jensen!" Katie said, stepping forward to reach out with gentle fingers towards his face.

"Oh," Jensen said. "That. I walked into a door."

Katie didn't freeze so much as slide into a deliberate stillness. "You... walked into a door," she repeated slowly.

Jensen shrugged, a little awkwardly. "I was carrying a box," he said. "I didn't see it."

"Oh," Katie said, in a tone of voice that Jensen couldn't read at all. And then, "You walk into doors a lot?"

"I don't make a habit of it," Jensen said, although it wasn't, strictly speaking, true. It was embarrassing to think just how often he beat himself up on inanimate objects.

"You hurt your ribs a couple of weeks ago," Katie said.

"Tripped on the stairs and crashed into the banister," Jensen admitted, trying and failing not to sound defensive.

"You carrying a box then, too?" Matt asked, in a teasing tone that fell strangely flat.

Jensen wasn't nearly awake enough for this shit. "I'm kind of a klutz," he said shortly. "And I've had enough fussing from Jared this weekend to last me till Christmas. Can we move on from the fact that I'm embarrassingly accident-prone?"
For some reason, Katie looked ready to protest, but Matt cut her off with a wave of his hand.

"Sure, Jensen. So," he said then. "I think you were explaining what part of hell froze over that got you here on time on a Monday."

"Hey, my work ethic is a thing of beauty," Jensen said, relieved to get on a new subject. "Jared dropped me off on his way to the airport. Didn't trust me to get to work in one piece."

"Really?" Matt said, sounding speculative, and Jensen couldn't shake the feeling that he was missing something in this conversation. "Where's he headed?"

"L.A. He's filming the pilot for a spin-off series."

"How long is he-"

"Jensen, your eye!" Genevieve's voice exclaimed suddenly, cutting off Matt's question as she bustled in a flurry.

Jensen sighed, resigning himself to having a shit sort of Monday.

Stupid door.

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The rest of the week was… weird.

After spending far too long fretting over his black eye and making the same face Katie had when Jensen told her how she got it, Genevieve seemed suddenly convinced that Jensen was about to hang himself with his telephone cord if she turned away. She took to asking after Jensen's health multiple times a day and her eyes took on a bruised quality whenever Jensen tried to tell her not to worry so much. It was well-meant but unwelcome.

Jensen suspected that Jared had recruited her to take over his crusade to protect Jensen from every dangerous thing in the universe and a goodly number of the things in the universe that shouldn't have been dangerous but Jensen still managed to hurt himself on. He mostly tried to ignore it.

Matt seemed to have become Jared's number one fan overnight. He's been decently interested in the whole 'Jensen's husband is sort of famous' thing beforehand, but now he was constantly asking Jensen questions about him: how much did Jared work out; was Jared a method actor; how long had they known each other before they got married. Jensen, who was used to this sort of secondhand hero worship, answered Matt with as much equanimity as he could manage and made a mental note to make Jared give him an autograph or seven.

Aldis and Jake were suddenly awkward around him in a way they hadn't been before, as though they weren't sure that Jensen wouldn't fall apart at their feet if they said the wrong thing.

Katie was pretty much her normal self, thank God, though she took to stealing Jensen's phone whenever he got a text from Jared and looked several times like she was biting her tongue on something unkind as she handed it back.

"It's just been weird," Jensen told Jared, phone tucked against the side of his head as he settled back against the headboard with his limbs spread wide. The bed always felt stupidly big without Jensen's stupidly big husband in it. "Even my first few weeks weren't this bad."

"Maybe you should spend some time with them outside of work?" Jared suggested, his voice as
warm and present as if he was right there in the room with Jensen instead of in fucking L.A.

"Do you remember what happened the last time you and I did something with your cast and crew?" Jensen said to him. "I think the owner of that paintball place will cry if I go back."

"Then why don't we have a housewarming party?"

Jensen wrinkled his nose. "Why are parties always your solution to problems?"

"Because parties are awesome," Jared said, as though it was obvious. "Come on, it's a great idea! All the fun social stuff with none of the insurance panic. We're about due for a housewarming anyway."

"We haven't finished unpacking," Jensen pointed out.

Jared made a dismissive sound. "We're going to be still unpacking a year from now."

Jensen had to give him that one. "You're really keen on this, aren't you?"

"Sure," Jared said. "It'll be good for you." His tone went a little shy. "And it'll be nice to get a chance to meet your coworkers properly. You know, when they're not startled into shocked adoration by 'surprise TV star!' in their lobby."

"Should have known this was all about you," Jensen said dryly, not meaning a word.

"Come on, Jensen, you know you wanna. And don't even pretend that you aren't looking forward to showing off the house."

Jensen was looking forward to showing off the house. It wasn't disgustingly mansion-big and ruthlessly maintained by a hoard of well-paid staff, but was definitely a prime example of the nice things they could buy with Jared's ridiculous salary.

"No signing autographs," Jensen said, which was totally a surrender and they both knew it. "We get enough of that outside; I don't want it coming into our home."

Jared laughed. It was stupid how much Jensen missed his stupid face. "I'll let you explain that rule to my adoring fans. Don't make that face," he said, anticipating Jensen's instinctive scowl as easily in this moment as he ever did. "It'll be great. I promise."

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Jensen had learned from long experience to be wary of any plan that Jared termed 'great' but, at first glance, the whole housewarming thing seemed to be one of his better ideas.

He and Jared picked a Saturday not long after Jared was due back from filming and Jensen put the word out at work. The response was resoundingly in favour and, on the day of, Jensen found himself playing host to essentially every coworker he had, making use of the big house and garden in a way that he hadn't had the opportunity to before now.

Everyone greeted him brightly as they arrived and made appreciative noises about the house as Jensen led them out to the backyard. Jensen had to admit that it felt different, easier, to interact with them in jeans and a faded t-shirt instead of his pressed shirts and slacks. He had to admit that he was enjoying it.

It didn't take Jensen long to notice something strange, however. Jared was manning the grill - because it made him feel manly - and chatting easily with whomever came close enough to get
drawn into conversation. Unlike Jared's usual interactions with the general public, however, no one seemed to want to approach him. His presence drew attention from all corners of the garden, but it was sidelong and cautious, as though people didn't want to get caught staring. Which wasn't strange, per se, but Jensen didn't think it was embarrassment that was making those eyes skirt away when Jared turned towards them.

Genevieve came up to Jensen while he was frowning in Jared's direction, wondering what the hell was going on.

"Worried he's going to embarrass you?" she asked.

"Nah," Jensen said, pulling his eyes away. He offered her a cheeky grin. "He's just nice to look at."

Genevieve laughed, a little thinly. "Nice to know you have such high standards when it comes to marriage."

Her attempted levity wasn't convincing in the slightest, but Jensen decided to roll with it regardless. "Hey, there's got to be some perks to being stuck with him. Beside the personality and the money and the big dick, obviously."

Out of the corner of his eye, Jensen saw Katie approaching Jared like a woman on a mission. He watched with amusement as Jared's expression flicked from welcoming to surprised to faintly alarmed. Jared darted a glance Jensen's way and Jensen offered him a little wave.

"Looks like Katie's being her usual charming self," Jensen said. He turned back to Genevieve and was surprised to see a tight-lipped, worried expression on her face. "Genevieve? Everything okay?"

She blinked at him, expression melting away so quickly that Jensen almost doubted he'd seen it. "Hmm? Of course, yeah." Something over Jensen's shoulder seemed to draw her attention and she pasted on a conciliatory smile. "Only I just remembered that I need to call my brother. I'll be right back, okay?"

"Okay," Jensen said, bemused. Genevieve headed for the house and Jensen watched her for a handful of moments, wondering if he'd be a bad host if he gave up on the whole thing and went back to bed.

Sighing a little, Jensen started to head over to the buffet tables they'd set out across the lawn, only to get nearly bowled over by Jared who was coming towards him.

"I see Katie was being her usual charming self," Jensen said, grinning. "Please don't tell me she's trying to tempt you over to the straight side. Because I called dibs."

"Jensen," Jared said, in an oddly strangled sort of voice that caught Jensen's attention immediately. "Did you tell everyone that you got that black eye by walking into a door?"

"…yes?" Jensen said slowly. "Because I did."

"And that you hurt your ribs when you fell down the stairs?"

Jensen frowned. "What else would I tell them, Jared?"

Jared made a sound that was closer to a groan than a laugh. "Oh god, your coworkers are going to kill me."

"What the hell are you talking about?"
"They thin-" Jared cut himself off abruptly and Jensen followed his gaze across the lawn towards where Matt and Jake were watching them, frowning faintly. A glance around showed similar expressions on most faces.

Jensen was so confused.

"Never mind," Jared said. "I'll explain later. But I want you to know that if I get shivved with the barbeque tongs, it's your fault."

"What? Jared-"

"Oh gee," Jared said, in what had to be the worst excuse for a surprised tone ever attempted by man. "We forgot to get a platter for the hamburgers. Would be a dear and get one, Jensen?"

"I've got no idea why anybody thinks you can act," Jensen muttered at him. "Fine, I'll get your goddamn platter. But when I get back, I expect you tell me what's going on."

Jared blinked and then smiled at him like Jensen was the sun coming up. "Never change, Jensen," he said, with a helpless fondness that was almost embarrassing in its honesty. The corner of Jared's grin twitched. "Even if you are incredibly dense."

"Hey!" Jensen protested, but Jared was already giving some badly-delivered excuse about needing to check on the food and haring off under what Jensen realized, somewhat belatedly, were the eyes of nearly every person in the garden.

Colouring for no reason that he wanted to examine, Jensen stopped staring at Jared's retreating back and went inside to get a platter.

The kitchen was empty when Jensen got there and he rooted around in a couple of cupboards, trying to remember where the hell they even kept the platters.

"Somewhere we don't need to get to often," Jensen mused aloud, and his eyes lit on the pair of long cupboards above the cupboards above the fridge, high enough that even Jared had trouble reaching them. "Oh, goodie."

Not keen on climbing on the countertops when they had company, Jensen dragged over a kitchen chair and hauled himself up.

"Jensen?" a voice asked while he was arched over the top of the fridge and rooting through the first cupboard.

Jensen startled, wobbling on his chair for a heart-stopping before regaining his balance. He twisted around to look over his shoulder. "Hey Genevieve," he said, catching sight of her on the other side of their long kitchen island. "Did you manage to get in touch with your brother?"

"Yeah," Genevieve said, after a beat. "I did, thanks. Sorry to run off on you like that."

Jensen shrugged. "No worries," he said, turning back to the task at hand.

Genevieve cocked her head. "What are you looking for? Can I help?"

"Our extra platters." They weren't in this cupboard. Jensen eyed the second cupboard for a moment and decided that it was close enough that he didn't need to bother getting down and moving the chair. "Jared's decided that we need another one, though God knows why." He grinned, stretching to reach. "Probably trying to keep me out of sight before I start telling embarrassing stories."
Jensen had expected at least a chuckle for that and was met with uneasy silence instead. He paused mid-stretch, glancing at her over his shoulder. "Genevieve?"

"Jensen," she said. "About Jared…"

"Aha! Here we go." Jensen reached for the largest platter, bracing his other hand against the rest of the stack to keep it from sliding as he pulled. "What about him? Before you complain, the no autographs thing is one of my rules."

"No, that's not what I-" Genevieve took a deep, uneven breath. "Oh god, this is so hard to say."

She sounded genuinely upset and Jensen frowned, half-twisting towards her. "Are you-" okay he was going to ask, but the platter chose that moment to slide free from the stack and he suddenly had much more important things to be thinking about.

Like gravity.

"Oh f-" he had time for before the sudden loss of resistance sent both him and the chair tilting towards the floor; Jensen's hands grabbed automatically for something to steady himself on, which, naturally, sent a whole cascade of platters and dishes tumbling through the air after him.

Glass shattered explosively across the tiled floor and Jensen landed right in the middle of it, body twisted awkwardly and that damn platter still in his hand. His breath punched out of him in a rush and he heard the sickening crack of breaking bone several seconds before the pain hit him.

"Ow," he managed, only vaguely aware of the flutter of Genevieve's panic as he lay panting in the middle of the floor, trying to catch his breath. The buzz of voices grew louder, but Jensen ignored them in favour of easing himself up into a careful recline, wrist cradled protectively in his lap.

"Jensen?" Jared was suddenly at his side, kneeling amidst the mess of broken glasses and holding Jensen's shoulders. His face was frantic. "Speak to me, babe."

"Ow," Jensen told him, hazy with the pain.

"I know," Jared said soothingly. "Just keep breathing, okay?" He shifted closer, making worried noises about something or other, and the crunch of glass as he moved pulled Jensen out of his distraction in a hurry.

"The fuck are you doing on the floor?" he demanded. "Christ, Jared, there's glass everywhere!"

"Don't worry about it. I'm fine."

Jensen leveled a seriously unimpressed frown at him. "Bullshit. You're gonna be picking glass out of your knees for hours."

The worry in Jared's eyes eased a little. "I'm more worried about you right now, love. What have you done to yourself this time?"

"Wrist." Jensen held out his arm, and winced as Jared probed carefully at the joint. It was already starting to swell. "Tell me I didn't break it again."

"Fractured, I think," Jared said apologetically.

Jensen groaned. "I do not have time for this shit." He glanced at the cluster of concerned friends and coworkers they'd attracted and felt himself flush. "Sorry guys," he said, beyond mortified. "Didn't
mean to ruin the party."

"It's not your fault," Genevieve said, a little faintly. She and a few of the others were looking at Jared with a strange sort of chagrined realization that Jensen had no idea what to do with.

Come on," Jared said to Jensen. "Let's get you off the floor."

"You, uh, need a hand, Jared?" Matt asked, as Jared helped Jensen gently to his feet.

"M'fine," Jensen tried.

"That'd be great, thanks," Jared said, "Ignore him," he said, as Jensen tried to glare. "He's always like this when he gets hurt."

Matt nodded, strangely subdued.

"You fuss too much," Jensen told Jared, just in case he'd forgotten. "I'm not bleeding to death or anything."

For some reason, Jared was grinning and, while amused concern wasn't an unusual reaction from him when Jensen hurt himself, Jensen couldn't fathom why Jared's smile looked more relieved than anything else.

"You wait on the couch while we clean up this mess and then we'll go to the hospital, okay?" Jared said, steering Jensen towards the den.

"I've broken my wrist, not my leg," Jensen groused, tugging half-heartedly against Jared's hold before giving it up as a bad job when it made pain spark in his head. "I can walk on my own."

"The rules are that you're not allowed to complain when I fuss over any injury that results in blood or broken bones," Jared reminded him cheerfully. He sat Jensen down on the couch and pressed a quick kiss to his forehead before straightening. "Stay there. I'll get you some ice."

Jensen rolled his eyes. "Yes mom."

Jared flashed him another smile and vanished into the kitchen while Jensen sat on the couch and felt like a loser.

Genevieve appeared in the doorway a few moments later, ice pack in one hand and the sling from the last time Jensen had hurt an arm in the other. "Jared asked me to bring you these," she said. Her expression was strangely tentative as she crossed the room and sat on the couch next to him.

"Thanks," Jensen said. He reached out with his good hand, trying not to wince when even that motion made his wrist throb. Genevieve was quick to help and had his arm tucked up safely with the ice in a matter of moments. A handful of guests made their way into the room, all wearing expressions that were somewhere between concerned and strangely abashed.

Jensen wanted to sink right into the couch.

"How you doing, Jensen?" Aldis asked eventually.

"Been better," Jensen said, with a pained grin. "Not as bad the time I fell off the front step and busted my ankle."

"You're awfully calm," Jake said.
"Yeah, well." Jensen hunched one shoulder in an awkward shrug. "Once you start getting up into the double digits, it's mostly just embarrassing."

"You get hurt like this a lot?" Katie asked, and a ghost of a previous conversation flitted through Jensen's head.

He frowned at her. "Yeah, I told you, remember? After I walked into the bedroom door." He paused, his brain still muzzy with the ache in his wrist. "Or was it after I tripped over my own feet and face-planted on the deck? I can't remember."

"Right," Katie said. There was something discomfited about the way she said it.

"Jared keeps threatening to baby-proof the house," Jensen said, because no one else seemed keen to keep up the conversation. "Apparently I'm shortening his lifespan with all the worrying. Don't know how he puts up with it, sometimes."

"True love," Jared's voice said, and Jensen glanced over to find him standing in the doorway. "Also, I'm a glutton for punishment."

Jensen was about to answer with something appropriately snarky when he took in the state of Jared's jeans.

"I told you you'd cut yourself," he said. Only the sure knowledge that he had a room full of people who'd forcibly stop him if he tried to get up kept Jensen seated on the couch. He compensated with a furious glare. "Christ, Jared, you're not allowed to ignore it when you hurt yourself either."

Jared glanced down at the blood on his jeans with a look of mild surprise, as though he hadn't noticed it. "It's only a flesh wound."

Jensen growled at him, not even remotely in the mood. "I'm not going anywhere until you get yourself cleaned up."

"Yes, mom," Jared parroted back at him. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

"I can't believed I married a man who says jiffy. Get out of here, already. I love that man," Jensen added to the room at large, "but he worries far too much."

"I worry exactly the right amount!" Jared's voice called from the vicinity of the bathroom.

Jensen turned a piteous look at Genevieve. "You see what I have to put up with?"

"Yes," she said. Her smile was pleased, relieved. "Yes, I think do."

"I have no idea what's going on with you people," Jensen told her honestly, earning several fond chuckles.

"Don't worry about it," Matt advised. "Everything's good."

And really, Jensen wasn't in the mood to pursue it, so he let the matter drop. Whatever it was, it could wait until after the hospital had patched him up.

Jared appeared in the doorway again, in a fresh pair of jeans and with a scattering of Band-Aids on his fingers. "Ready?"

"Fuck yes."
Several people levered Jensen to his feet, despite his protests.

"We'll take care of things here," Katie was saying to Jared as Jensen was frog-marched forwards. "And for what it's worth… I'm sorry."

"Don't mention it," Jared said. He smiled, gentle and sincere. "It's nice to know that you're all looking out for him."

"You can talk about me like I'm not here later," Jensen told them. "Hospital."

Jared's grin turned his way. "Sorry, Jensen. Let's go."

Everyone saw them out - which was the strangest thing in his own house - and Jensen gave in to the urge to lean heavily against Jared's broad chest. High pain tolerance or no, he was really starting to hurt.

"So," Jensen said under his breath as Jared led him carefully down the front steps towards the driveway and his coworkers watched from the doorway. "You going to tell me what's going on now?"

"They thought I was abusing you," Jared answered, so calmly that it took Jensen a second to register what he'd said.

"They what? Why?"

"So many reasons. You don't even know. But hey," Jared added, as he pulled open the car door and Jensen gaped at him. "Good job breaking your wrist. I have no idea how we'd have convinced them not to call the police for domestic abuse after what you told them."

"What I- Jared!" Jensen protested as Jared muscled him - carefully - into the car and buckled his seatbelt for him.

Jared went round to the driver's side and flashed Jensen an impish grin as he climbed in. "How much do you wanna bet that they're going to bubble-wrap your desk to keep you from hurting yourself on it?"

Jensen groaned. "How is this my life?"

"Incredibly good luck and a world with a funny sense of humour," Jared answered immediately.

"…I really wish I could disagree with you."

Jared patted him comfortingly on his shoulder. "Don't worry about it, Jensen. We still love you. Even if you do give lemmings a run for their money in the self-preservation category."

Jensen gave him a disgusted glare. "Just take me to the hospital already."

And Jared laughed. "Your wish is my command."

So Jensen smacked him. Because that was how his life worked.

Really, it could have been worse.

~fin
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