Summary

Jensen spent twenty two years in the military; Jared graduated from college early and hit the ground running as a successful engineer. They meet under dire circumstances when Jared is threatened and almost killed. Jensen saves his life and finds he isn't able to let the stranger go until he finds out who tried to kill him and why.

As he spends more time with Jared, Jensen becomes more protective and enamored with the younger man. Through Jared’s recovery, they both learn more about one another, and fall in love. From there, they are faced with challenges to Jared’s safety and plowing their way through a difficult legal case. Jared will be attacked and hurt, but Jensen's skills will come to the rescue. They will wind up in a loving, affectionate, committed relationship by the end of things.

This story is filled with hurt/comfort, angst, emotional hurts and situations from the past, lots of sexy situations and yes, hot sex between the two men. Jensen will rescue Jared a couple times and there will be some corporate bashing and military situations in order to feed the story.

Notes

REVISED APRIL 2019! This story took me a very long time. I love the characters so much. This is meant to be a work of fiction and is, in no way, a reflection of any of the real life
people, who's names are used in it. I revised this story recently. After a year, some constructive criticism compelled me to clean up the repetitive areas, correct a few things and edit paragraphs to flow more smoothly. Side character’s names were changed, but the concepts of the story was not. If you read it again, you might notice some of the chapters are a bit shorter. Again, it flows more smoothly without the repetitiveness. I long to begin a sequel as soon as possible, so it was important to get the foundation work improved. Again...it's a long one but it is complete. I started and I couldn't stop! I hope you love these characters as much as I do!

Thank you for reading!
Chapter Summary

This entire chapter introduces Jensen, describes his back story and brings the reader up to the point of the present. There is minimal discussion of Jensen’s first sexual encounter at a young age, and some sexual situations during his military career. This chapter has been REVISED as of Dec 2018. :0)

Chapter One

Jensen

At seventeen, Jensen hopped onto a bus in the middle of the night, accompanied by fifty other high school graduates. He jumped two feet first into the unknown, hellbent on proving himself to the outside world. Jensen graduated high school with honors, was good in sports and well liked. He was offered scholarships in wrestling and baseball, but the young man had his sights set on serving his country.

Jensen's family business was an icon in their corporate corner of the world. Ackles Enterprises (A.E.) owned a sizable collection of companies, most of which they had run to the ground and then bailed out to absorb. A.E. was an aggressive superpower. They manipulated the market by sweeping up companies in strategic positions, forcing financially burdened businesses to merge or go bankrupt.

Jensen’s father’s life was about corporate meetings, strategizing, private deals, secret hand shakes, politics, and gatherings with people who pretended to be your friends. Alan Ackles thrived on negotiating and manipulation, especially when he succeeded in some deal that had him bragging for weeks at a time. He craved competition...bragged about his winnings, and fully expected his oldest son to follow in his footsteps.

Jensen began to resent his father's ego when he was very young. He watched and listened...learned, but he couldn’t stomach the dominating behavior. He got a churning pit in his stomach every time his father would take him to business meetings and corporate events. Jensen watched people with families forced into selling, forced into giving up their independence.

As Jensen grew older, he became more and more disapproving of his father's style and refused to go to meetings and gatherings. They fought about the tactics Jensen disapproved of, and the gap between them grew when Jensen emerged himself in sports and extracurricular activities in order to avoid the corporate world. Jensen did not want to be that person that his father wanted.

Jensen's mother indulged herself in the socialite business world. She hung on her husband's arm through thick and thin. Jensen had no ally in her during their arguments. Her eye roll’s and ‘tsk tsk’ comments were a blatant disregard for anything Jensen tried to convey. He tried to reason with her over the years, but it became obvious she would never rock the proverbial boat. A.E. was the meal ticket to her life style.

As a sophomore, Jensen poured himself into constant metes and games, giving him an ‘out’ even on weekends. His parents attended the larger events, mainly to mingle with other parents who were of interest in the corporate world. Jensen knew it was a stretch, but he learned to soak up the few
minutes of approval he got from them, as they cheered for him, even if it was only for their own recognition.

Jensen's younger brother, Daniel, had already joined the masses of employees his father ruled over, more willing than Jensen to mold into his father's wishes. Daniel was only two years younger than Jensen, not athletic nor academically motivated, and much more interested in an easy ride to a high paying salary. Daniel did just enough in school to get by, barely did any chores at home, but totally kissed butt for a free handout. Daniel knew that he had a set career for life, even if he wasn't the boss' original choice. He could skate by just showing up for work and he wouldn't have to go to college or truly apply himself.

Jensen's father believed from their early ages that Jensen would be perfect to succeed him and keep the business going. In his self absorption, he never even considered that Jensen may want different things. Alan simply waited it out, thinking Jensen's temporary fixation with sports and school was going to be over when he graduated and then he would have his undivided attention.

Alan had no idea that Jensen had made the decision to enlist. He also had no idea that Jensen wasn’t attracted to girls. Jensen tried over the years to push himself into girls because he felt that was what he was supposed to do. Since about 11, Jensen had been drooled over by one girl or another, including the most popular girl in the class, cheerleaders, and the girl down the street who pretended to be his brother's girlfriend all the while following Jensen around.

In Junior year, Jensen was part of a leadership squad that greeted and mentored new kids coming into the school. He was assigned a group of five kids that had come from a neighboring school that had been closed. Jensen toured them around and began talking more to one of the boys than the rest of them.

The one boy stayed after to talk more, and Jensen soon realized he felt an interest that he hadn't felt before. The two wound up going to movies and having lunches together. This new kid, Robbie, was fresh and real. He wasn't interested in superficial talk or influencing Jensen to be anything other than himself. He accepted Jensen just the way he was. He made him laugh.

Robbie was soon coming to Jensen's games and wrestling matches to cheer him on. Robbie asked Jensen all about his plans after high school. Jensen told him the plans he had never told anybody before. Robbie listened and did not think twice about supporting Jensen's ideas. There was no judgement, no criticism.

Having someone care about him and support him unconditionally was a totally new feeling for Jensen. He realized his feelings were becoming quite intense and finally took a chance and kissed Robbie one evening. Immediately, Jensen felt the sparks he'd never felt when kissing girls. These were the feelings he'd been waiting for.

As Robbie responded to his kiss, Jensen realized he was getting hard. He finally had confirmation that he was attracted to boys and God, it felt good to finally realize who he really was. As they progressed into intense make out sessions and became hard, hot and heavy, rubbing each other's crotches, Jensen realized he was falling pretty deep.

He knew this was 'not' going to go over well at home, but having someone he cared about this much, and who cared about 'him', was the only thing on his mind. Jensen wanted this. He wanted to touch, to be touched. Their first time of rubbing each other all the way to orgasm felt so incredibly good that they'd blown their loads within the first minute. They'd laughed afterward at their wet crotches and Jensen felt free. He was who he was supposed to be and Robbie had helped him to see that.

Soon after, they fumbled their way through some clumsy hand jobs and very inexperienced blow
jobs. They had become more in tune with each other's bodies and how to bring each other off and enjoy the most out of their time together. They always met in secret, with only a few close friends knowing about their relationship. Jensen never told his parents and especially not his brother.

Jensen wound up seeing Robbie through his whole Junior year. A few months into their senior year, Robbie's family moved away. Apparently, his father had been transferred to another job and Robbie had to go. Losing that connection was horribly painful for Jensen. He walked around in a depression for awhile, even though he realized it would have been like this, anyway, when he finally deployed. Their relationship would have suffered this loss inevitably.

Jensen was lost for awhile, but tried hard to look at the things he had learned about himself. He now knew he was worthy of someone's love. Life did not have to be lived like his parents' and he now had even more affirmation that he had chosen the right path for his future. He was ready to get out.

Jensen knew there was no way his lack of following in his father's footsteps would be favored well in his mother's social circle nor his father's business world. Neither would his sexual preference. If he gave up his desire for military and went for a college, his father would be paying for it and be heavily influential and Jensen would not feel free of that control. He needed to sever himself and build his own way.

Jensen dropped the proverbial bomb on his parents a month before his graduation. He had enlisted and would be getting on the boot camp bus a few days after graduation. His mother and father were shocked, pissed, and hurt. Jensen knew hoping for any fathom of support was a waste of time. His mother was too busy thinking about what the socialite world would think; his father was refusing to admit that Jensen wasn't on some damn fool rebellion that wouldn't last six months.

There was much shouting up until graduation day, but Jensen wasn't going to renege. Alan was still adamant Jensen would be back begging when his first term was over. He refused to attend Jensen’s graduation, but decided to last minute. Jensen had still allowed himself to be pleased when he saw them in the crowd, then dealt with the plummet in his gut when he realized they were there for social grace.

Jensen’s painful reaffirmation of who his parents really were was confirmed as he watched them interact with school staff and other parents. They went through the motions, shook hands, even partially hugged Jensen for photo’s, trying to mask the drawn look of disapproval in their faces. He knew they were not going to get over this.

Four days after graduation, Jensen left the house in the dark hours of the morning and walked to the bus depot. His mother and father had refused to drop him off so Jensen had to walk two miles with his one allowed duffle bag over his shoulder. The bus pick up time was 0400 sharp.

Jensen’s brother, Daniel, surprisingly came into his room the night before to say goodbye. He wished him safety and luck, even hugged him. Jensen had his doubts about the sincerity of it, but he accepted the only goodbye he was going to get. Daniel and he hadn’t been close the last few years. Jensen knew Daniel was most likely overjoyed now that he could easily move into his spot with his father's company.

Jensen’s career took off after boot camp. He came home for two weeks after graduation, then completed special forces training. After ‘that’ graduation, he visited home again for a week, before missions became his life. He had mastered many skills and caught the eye of his superiors. He was promoted, received medals that he tried to speak of while home, but never seemed to gain any minute traces of understanding or support.

Jensen’s fate was being decided far above him. He gained the approval and family acceptance from
the military that he'd never felt from home. He scored so high on his field tactical exercises and academic testing, his superiors singled him out to be sent off to SEAL training. Jensen hadn't requested SEAL's, and wasn't even from the Navy branch, but SEAL training was a prerequisite to where they thought he belonged.

The SEAL unit changed Jensen into a self sufficient survival machine that could defend, attack and kill forty different ways with his hands, and forty more ways with weapons. He could get himself out of any situation with expert martial arts skills and learned how to show no fear, even when scared shitless. He learned more about life, about himself, than he ever thought possible from his career choice. Jensen stopped visiting home.

From SEAL training, Jensen was assigned to Black Ops, an elite team that was off the grid. His detail was often deployed in the middle of the night to undisclosed locations. Their missions usually involved strategically sneaking in and taking out enemies in order to protect or rescue someone of importance.

Jensen was highly skilled in advanced combat, search and rescue, and medical and psychological training. He was awarded medals of honor that were as top secret as the missions. His life had totally changed focus, with the preservation and protection of the innocent being his sole purpose.

Because Jensen's elite group was isolated from others, they learned to take care of each other in all ways. These ways were never spoken of, but relied upon. This meant pent up sexual frustrations had to be dealt with. Some nights, the barracks were filled with grunts, the sounds of pleasure, and relief at completion. The first time Jensen heard them, he became instantly hard, realizing he'd ignored his young body's desires for a long time.

He was embarrassed, but he couldn't will his dick to go down and it was dark. Soon after opening his pants, he realized no one cared. He was part of an elite group of soldiers, 'don't ask/don't tell', and these people trusted each other with their lives. No one was going to give him any shit about getting some relief.

After awhile, Jensen became accustomed to the sounds of the night when they were safe to de-stress. He became horny enough to allow someone else to assist him by rubbing or sucking his cock. He couldn’t see them, not really wanting to identify them, so it seemed less personal. When another soldier touched his dick for the first time, he let out a groan because it felt so goddamn good. 'Jesus Christ,' he'd almost hyperventilated, then he felt himself approaching orgasm fast.

Jensen and the others never discussed what they did together. Their bodily needs were taken care of and nothing on the outside mattered. They performed mission after mission, completely focused and on task, trying to keep themselves and each other alive.

Jensen retired at 38 years old, deemed an accomplished hero by the four branches of the military. He had done his time and even though still young, felt the mileage on his body and mind from everything he'd done and seen. He was in impeccable shape, with a rock solid muscular build, but his body and mind were in need of some normalcy and peace.

Two years before retiring, Jensen had been pulled from the field to run training classes. He supervised and instructed new special forces candidates. This allowed him to stay in shape but stay away from combat and slowly decompress. During that period, Jensen went through decommissioning psychotherapy transition classes that special operatives were required to take.

Jensen’s team had so much reactionary skill, the military had to ensure they were conditioned before releasing them into the outside world. They couldn’t be trusted to fight traffic every day, argue with a bill collector or face normal every day life struggles without snapping a nerve and reacting out of
muscle memory, if they weren’t closely scrutinized and deemed safe before discharged.

Jensen felt peace with his decision to finally retire, and was now looking for some kind of private job, maybe something low key, doing background checks or consultations, or maybe some interest he hadn't discovered yet. He was situated in Cedar Hollow, a small town near Denver. He loved the quiet relaxed feel of the place, yet was close to Denver for medical and business needs, supplies or anything else he might need.

Jensen’s home was an older three bedroom two bath house on a huge wooded lot. He was handy with repair work and currently enjoying fixing up the house, a piece at a time. Having personal projects was slowly giving him a sense of permanence. He took on line cooking courses, surprising the hell out of himself when took a liking to it.

Jensen hadn’t met anyone he wanted to date. There had been women, surefire advances, but as far as any available gay men around, Jensen wasn't even sure where to look. Jensen hadn't been sure he was relationship material when he first arrived in town, but after taking several months to acclimate to his surroundings, he finally felt grounded enough to make a few local friends and start considering it.

Jensen had two other Black Ops buddies living within ten miles from him. The three retirees kept a close eye on each other, as they got used to a normal life. They recently discussed starting a business with each other, but hadn't quite landed on a solid idea yet. The ex-ops soldier’s skills were not recognized by civilian standards. They had performed field surgeries, psychological interrogations, yet could not be recognized for any of that training on the outside without going through years of courses and certificates to satisfy the state and federal laws.

Jensen slept well now and that was a plus. He dealt with flashbacks and nightmares of combat during his decompression before retirement, then for months after he bought the house. Now that almost a year had passed, the vividness of pictures his mind had become more detached.

Jensen enjoyed frequenting a restaurant off the main highway. He had befriended the owners, Dani and Steve, and considered them his first real friends in Cedar Grove. They took an incredible liking to Jensen and were the first ones to make him feel accepted and welcome on the outside.

Locals and visitors loved the restaurant because the food was simple, old fashioned and tasty, and the atmosphere was warm and relaxing. Jensen couldn’t break all his habits, preferring to see everyone who entered and exited the place while he sipped his beer and waited for his Rib Eye on a regular basis. He sat in the back, but when it got busy, he helped his friends clean tables and do dishes.

One evening, Jensen surprised himself by telling the couple some of his life history. The parts that weren’t confidential, anyway. Steve was very understanding of the gaps, as he’d been military too. Jensen was quite proud of himself for establishing a bond and sharing some of himself with the two. They’d taken an incredible liking to him, and were the first ones to make him feel accepted and welcome on the outside.

Jensen had to finally explain he was gay. Dani kept trying to introduce him to women who came to the restaurant and it became ridiculously annoying to keep avoiding it. His military buddies had always known, but telling Dani was a priceless moment. Her face transformed between shock, panic, humor, then landed on guilt. Jensen laughed as she assured Jensen this was not going to thwart her efforts.

Jensen stopped in one late October morning to grab breakfast. He planted himself at the bar instead of his regular table. As a steaming cup of coffee slid down the bar toward him, his regular order of bacon and eggs was yelled out to the cooks in back. Dani half smiled a greeting, then went about
helping other customers.

Jensen watched the ball game for a few minutes until he noticed some shuffling paper sounds that were not the usual white noise from the restaurant crowd. He casually turned his head and laid eyes on a young man who was currently using his normal table as an office. Jensen did a double take, then raised an eyebrow because the kid had papers all spread out and a laptop open in front of him.

The kid was deeply engrossed in his project, mumbling to himself and simultaneously using the computer screen and paperwork to make notes or changes to something. He was absolutely gorgeous, with shoulder length brown hair, incredible cheek bones and gorgeous facial features. 'Wow,' Jensen thought to himself. The five o’clock shadow the kid sported wasn’t hurting the view, either.

Jensen watched him brush the hair back from his face each time it absently fell forward. His long fingers and his mannerism’s were mesmerizing. Jensen could see the paper he was working with was a graph or legal size, maybe larger. The young man licked his lips and it was quite difficult to concentrate while watching him.

Jensen hadn’t realized he’d been looking that long. He felt a whisk of air as Dani sailed by him, looking back with a knowing grin, as she headed for the cute stranger’s table. She was treated to a stunning sweet smile from the young man when she sat his lunch down. As they exchanged a few words, Jensen suddenly realized he’d been smiling too, and quickly corrected himself. ‘Jesus, he’s fucking gorgeous,’ he thought.

Jensen glanced back again, as Dani pointed to the plate before she returned to the bar. She obviously indicated the visitor needed to stop working and eat. As Jensen watched the young man pull his club sandwich closer to him, he noticed the full chastised pout. Jensen smiled at that pout. Dani nodded in approval and smiled at the younger man, then returned back toward Jensen.

The soldier raised an eyebrow as she approached and whispered knowingly, "Easy on the eyes, isn't he?" Jensen smirked, nodded toward the young man and asked, "Who is he?" Dani looked back and the visitor and then at Jensen, "He's some kind of engineer or something...there's measurements and formulas all over the papers and he's moving these lines and graphs around on his computer. Too damn smart for me to ask him stupid questions."

Jensen remained quiet, glancing at the younger man, as he worked. Dani interrupted his thoughts, "He's adorable, Jensen, and he's a sweetheart. You should go sit with him. Maybe he'll listen to you. He's obviously forgetting to eat again." Dani sounded like a mother, pissy because her kid wouldn't finish his lunch.

Jensen looked back at the kid, noticing she was right, he had definitely forgotten to eat past his first few bites. "Well, he's definitely hot, that's for sure." He turned to Dani, “Nice?” Dani brightened, "Oh, yes, he's overly nice, Jensen. This isn't the first he's been in here, either." Jensen immediately looked disbelieving, "What? How did I miss that?"

Dani laughed, "You didn’t. He got here late last night, spent the night in the motel down the way and showed up early this morning with all kinds of measuring devices and all that paper and stuff. I think he must have gone out to the new bridge super early today because he asked for directions to it last night. Now look at him, he's starving because he didn't eat breakfast...and he’s ‘still’ not eating like he should."

Dani looked forlornly at her surrogate charge at the corner table. Jensen smirked at her natural concern, but found himself also looking back to watch the cute kid nibble on his sandwich, in between becoming distracted with his work. Jensen ate his eggs and bacon, while sneaking further
glances. He watched the young man realize something that startled him, look at his papers and then punch the keys on his machine faster than Speedy Gonzalez.

So far, the kid had eaten half of one of the club sandwich squares. Jensen couldn’t seem to stop watching him. He wondered, 'Would it be too much to hope he might be gay?' Just then, the kid looked up at him. 'Oh shit,' Jensen thought, as he instantly looked away. He mentally prayed the kid hadn’t caught him staring.

Jensen turned to look, as he heard papers and the laptop being folded up and shuffled in a hurry. He wondered what had the kid so spooked or intent on leaving that fast. He watched the perfect backside of the very tall slender hunk, as he walked to the register to pay. The kid put his stuff down and pulled out his wallet from a back pocket. The movement caused the slightly loose denim material to adjust up and down over a very perfect ass.

Dani tried to push the younger man to eat more of the sandwich. The kid shook his head 'no' but agreed to wait for a minute, under duress, so his new surrogate mother hen could box it for him to eat later. He smiled very sweetly at her and she laughed at something he said. Jensen watched her try to push a bill back at the kid, only to have him push it back to her.

He could barely hear his voice enough to determine that the charming tenor tones and soft giggle matched his perfect lightly tanned skin and five o’clock shadow. The long legs and perfect fitting jeans were a bit dusty from being outside. Jensen focused on the shiny brown hair with auburn highlights. 'I bet it catches the sun and blows with the breeze when he’s outside,’ he thought.

Jensen tried to slow his thoughts down from mentally undressing the poor kid who wasn’t even aware he was being ogled. ‘Jesus Jensen,’ he thought to himself, ‘he’s probably in a relationship or he’s not even gay.’ Jensen wondered how ‘anyone’ could ‘possibly’ make outdoorsy work boots look fucking hot, but this kid pulled it off. He sighed.

The young hottie took his stuff and went outside, then Dani came over looking way too excited. She slapped Jensen’s arm, "You 'have' to check that out." Jensen rolled his eyes, pretending to be put out, then smirked into his coffee cup, "Alright, what's his name?" Dani looked deflated, “Oh, I didn't get that part.” Jensen looked at her and sighed, "Dani, if you're gonna hook me up with a hot young dude like that one, you gotta get a name. What kind of matchmaker are you?"

Dani playfully slapped Jensen's arm again, "Shut it. He said he might come back. He ‘is’ working on that bridge and he's ‘super’ smart and was sent here to investigate the cracks and weaknesses. Cool, huh?" Jensen tilted his head sideways, "Yeah...he sounds super smart. Cute as hell." Jensen hoped the kid would come back. He wondered if he was as young as he looked.

Jensen had gone home after breakfast. He worked on his back yard for four hours, then showered and shaved before he returned to the restaurant. Steve took off for town, so Jensen planted himself at his usual spot to watch Dani manage the place and back her up, if needed. There was a ball game on, so Jensen decided he was definitely going to be ordering that steak in another hour.

He eyed the Giants game while sipping a beer. His thoughts went to contemplation of how he was ever going to meet the love of his life sitting on his ass in a dark corner and watching a game...his thoughts were suddenly interrupted as the restaurant's front door opened.
Jared

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces Jared.

This chapter includes some very emotional scenes. I have tried to make them feel real so please be warned they could make people sad. My fictional Jared character is a beautiful person who has endured great loss in his life and traumatic situations. In this chapter, he will lose his parents at a young age, he will be the victim of homophobic behavior and child abuse, though he is seventeen when it finally happens. He loses a love interest and later a serious partner that he's planning to spend his life with dies. He finally says "forget it" in the love department, after getting involved with the wrong person. There is sex with past OMC’s, but by the end of the chapter, Jared is where he is supposed to be and set up for his hero to come along.

Chapter Two

Jared

Jared Padalecki was a straight A student. Though his teachers and principal had tried to convince Jared’s parents to move him up to higher grades over the years, his parents refused. They believed their son deserved time with his own age group, especially throughout elementary school, and wanted to protect him from advancing too fast. By ten, teachers were already asking Jared to tutor other students. He was shy about his abilities, but he wanted to please his teachers so he never refused to help out.

Jared’s whole world came crashing down a few months after his eleventh birthday when his parents died in a tragic house fire. He still remembered his father grabbing him from bed in the middle of the night and carrying him outside. His chest burned from the thick smoke, as he choked and gagged, trying desperately to breathe.

Hands held him down while a mask covered his face, as his father ran back into their burning house. Unable to get up and help his father, Jared was whisked away by an ambulance and never saw his parents again. Jared’s aunt and her husband, Mark, came to the hospital and explained what had happened, as Jared lay breathing oxygen. Within a few days, they took him home.

They tried to make things comfortable for him, even though Jared cried himself to sleep many times. He tried to remind himself that his parents would want him to keep working hard, but it took some time to be able to focus without moments of grief and loss interrupting his studies.

Jared’s principal eventually called his aunt and uncle to once again recommend him for advanced placement programs. Mark and Marsha thought differently than his parents, and accepted the suggestions to place Jared in several AP classes. Jared’s uncle was the driving force, feeling that Jared should be challenged to rise above his hurt and grief and achieve the highest goals possible.

The increased work load put all kinds of additional stress on Jared, but he accepted the challenge with ambition. He kept himself extremely busy and tried to stay positive, even if it was forced. He got sick of teachers, counselors and neighbors looking at him in sympathy all the time, like they were
waiting for him to lose it or break down.

Jared quickly learned to internalize his feelings. He focused on things he excelled at. He felt that if he kept extremely busy, he could avoid dwelling on things and people treated him normally. It worked.

Jared’s aunt came to school events while his uncle often worked late. Marsha loved watching his debates and math metes. She was hell bent on giving her nephew the same loving support his parents would have done. She looked just like her sister, which didn't hurt matters. Jared often felt like his mom was still there, watching him, smiling and clapping for him.

When Jared was fourteen, he had a friend over from school. Jared was finally connecting with someone he could call ‘friend’, much to his aunt and uncle's delight. After goofing off outside for hours, the boys laid in their sleeping bags and talked about girls and all the drama at school. They admitted they had never kissed a girl before and decided to weigh the odds at who their choice would be for a first kiss.

This led to what it might feel like and an experiment to try kissing each other. Jared had no idea what he was doing, nor what his preferences were at that age. All he knew was that kissing his friend felt natural. As soon as they touched lips, he was really getting into it and his friend was too. They were both surprised that kissing a guy could feel this good. After pulling back and deciding to try it again with a little bit more gusto, Jared's uncle walked in and caught them.

To Jared's shock and surprise, his uncle yelled at him in front of his guest, then banned the boys from ever spending time together again. He drove his friend home, then came back to lecture Jared again. Mark informed Jared that ‘that’ behavior was unacceptable to society and an embarrassment to the family. Jared was to stop experimenting in that way and was to never speak of it again.

Jared felt so ashamed. He’d upset the only parents he had left, and felt terrible for his friend. It was embarrassing enough to get caught, now he had to deal with the aftermath. Jared wasn't really sure where he stood with his aunt and uncle after that. He knew he'd messed up terribly and he'd never wanted to let them down. His aunt never said anything, but he assumed they both felt the same way.

Jared reinforced his efforts to be as helpful as possible around the house. He took care of extra chores and tried to be pleasant but things felt different...quieter. He couldn't tell whether the coolness he felt was valid, or whether it was caused by his own shame and self deprecating thoughts.

By the time Jared started high school, his uncle seemed to have relaxed about things. He counted his blessings. Jared was starting a year earlier than everybody else, so he figured that probably had something to do with Mark’s approval. Jared was soon advanced into sophomore year, again skipping into a higher grade. He kept very busy with his studies, joined the debate team and chess club. Jared hoped he could continue to make his aunt and uncle proud with his accomplishments.

As Jared approached sixteen, his feelings and instincts kept veering toward guys and away from girls. One guy, in particular, became very interested in Jared and they began spending extra time together. John was a senior, more mature and focused and Jared felt relaxed and happy around him.

John watched Jared's debates and chess metes. Jared found himself spilling private feelings he’d never been able to talk about to anyone, but with John they just kept pouring out. John suddenly kissed him one day and it was hot. Jared found himself immediately responding. He realized ‘this' was what he was supposed to be feeling and ‘this’ was definitely right.

John and Jared became an item around campus. They found places to go where they could hold hands and be affectionate. They soon started parking in John’s car and became more physical. They came like freight trains within minutes of rubbing up against each other the first time. John wanted
Jared was older before they tried penetrative things, so the two teens stuck to hand jobs and clumsy inexperienced blow jobs.

Jared was totally smitten for the first time in his life. John was loving and attentive and always considerate of his feelings. Even though Jared had skipped to Junior by sixteen, John was still going to graduate before him. Jared was faced with more insecurity than he'd ever felt in his life. He tried to keep positive, but there was a terrible nagging sense that John was going to drift away from him when he went off to college.

Jared's worries were not unfounded. When John visited on his first break, he gently let Jared know he thought it was best to break up. He handled it as soft as he could, but Jared’s heart was pretty shattered. Jared thought about the last time his insides felt this battered, and it was his parents’ death. He told himself if he’d survived that, he knew he could survive this.

While still trying to process the hurt, Jared struggled through his school the next morning. He was thankful his aunt hadn’t seemed to be home the night before, so he hadn’t been confronted with any questions about his sadness. Jared walked out into the hallway, meaning to grab his backpack and head out the door. A sick foreboding feeling formed in his gut when his uncle stepped in his way.

"Come in my office," he was ordered. As Jared followed him into the den, his uncle whirled on him with a litany of curses and insults. Venomous hatred spewed from Mark’s every being, as he explained how he had been told by another parent about Jared’s relationship with John. Jared's eyes pooled as the only father figure he had left on the planet accused him of being disobedient and selfish, unappreciative of everything they’d done for him.

When Jared opened his mouth to apologize, he was immediately struck on his left cheek. The slap jolted Jared's face to the side and he froze with a quiet sob. He was afraid to look up. He felt the sting on his cheek, as tears rolled down his face. Jared realized he was more upset at the hatred he saw in his uncle’s eyes than being hit.

"I'm sorry," Jared whispered weakly, keeping his face turned down in shame. Mark showed no signs of hearing him, as he grabbed Jared's face with a tight grip and forced him to look up at him. Jared cringed backward, trying to pull out of the painful hold, as his uncle yelled further, "AFTER EVERYTHING THIS FAMILY HAS DONE FOR YOU, IS THIS SOME FUCKING BULLSHIT WAY FOR YOU TO EMBARRASS US? HAVE YOU BEEN MEETING THIS FAGGOT AND SUCKING HIS DICK? HAVE YOU?"

His uncle wasn't really expecting answers, as he continued his tirade, “ARE YOU SERIOUSLY CHOOSING TO TAKE A COCK UP YOUR ASS INSTEAD OF MARRYING AND HAVING CHILDREN LIKE A NORMAL AND ACCEPTABLE MEMBER OF SOCIETY?” Jared could feel his uncle’s fingers leaving imprints on his jaw. He tried to control his terror of the man who had raised him, given him shelter and clothed him, but he was afraid. This screaming man was a stranger to him...someone he never knew.

Mark pushed him backward, forcing Jared’s head to jerk back against the wall. As his uncle stood there with nostrils flaring, Jared felt a pool of anger rise up out of somewhere deep and it quickly rose to the surface at the words ‘unacceptable’ and ‘normal’ member of society. Jared was quite shocked at himself, but enough was enough. He had gay friends at school and he wasn't about to fail to defend them as wonderful and ‘acceptable’ people.

He blurted out, before thinking about the repercussions, "You're wrong. You’re being ignorant and unfair! There’s nothing wrong with loving who you love. It's normal and acceptable, no matter what people like you think...” Jared's sentence stopped there as he felt a ton of bricks hit his left cheek so hard it threw him off his feet. He fell sideways and hit the ground, not realizing he'd been punched
hard in his face until the enormous pain began a few seconds later.

Jared laid on the ground, in the fetal position, holding his head and breathing through the terrible pain until he felt the man leave the room. He ran to his room and locked the door. Jared was still in shock and didn't even realize he was late for school until a friend called.

Jared went to school with highly visible bruising on his face. He was sure teachers would report it to the office and his aunt or uncle would be called. He worried his uncle would think he had said something if they came to the house with questions.

Jared had befriended a guy in his drama classes named Manny. The kid was always nice and on this day, noticing his swollen face and bruising, Manny took him aside and asked if he needed a place to stay. Jared smiled gratefully because Manny hadn't asked any questions. He had just offered. Jared thanked him, but refused the offer for now.

Later in the day, Jared was called out of class and asked questions by a CPS worker about his face. He lied, making up a story about a disagreement with another kid before school. The worker looked at him long and hard, knowing full well the marks on Jared's face came from larger adult hands and were not the work of another kid, but she pretended to accept the excuse. She made a note to keep an eye on the family.

By the time Jared walked into the house after school, he was exhausted and his face was swollen and throbbing. He took some ice, Ramen noodles, and a glass of iced tea straight to his room. He hadn't seen his aunt's car so he had no desire to come out for anything other than the bathroom.

Jared talked to Manny on the phone and they came to the decision that Jared would graduate early with all his AP credits, get himself emancipated with a tutor job, and rent from someone until he went to college. Manny’s parents offered to let him stay with them. He had several teachers who would place him in paying tutor positions to help. Jared had options and felt so much better after his friend went over them with him.

Jared fell asleep that night feeling like he had a plan. The next day, his face was even darker, but sleeping with ice on it had reduced the swelling. He grabbed some aspirin and pummeled his way through the day, explaining the fake altercation story to those who asked. By the time he got home, his face was a painful throbbing mess again, like it had been twenty four hours prior.

Jared grabbed some drinks, his bowl of noodles, and went into his room to lay down. He hadn't realized his aunt had actually been home this time until she knocked on his door and announced herself. When Jared told her to come in, she sat on his bed and zero'd in on his injured face. She'd been at a friend's house for two nights, so looking at his face put a horrible knot in her stomach at not knowing he'd been hurt while she was gone.

Jared didn’t think she knew about what happened. He didn't want to lie to her, but he desperately did not want to lose her, so he told her the same story about getting punched by some kid he'd mouthed off to. She rubbed his arm and brushed her hand through is hair. Jared ate up the tenderness, absorbed the love she had for him, all the while reminding himself that she didn’t know he was gay. He couldn’t be sure whether she would support her husband’s opinion, or not, and he was too tired to face it.

Jared's bruises recovered and he stayed focused on his plan. He avoided his uncle and kept to himself, enjoying the times his aunt was home and he had her to talk to. Jared made it through finals and then it was winter break. He made sure to line up some jobs, keeping himself busy and on track to save up money.
The mood in the house was miserable. Jared didn’t think it was about he and his uncle’s issue anymore, there was something else going on. He worked most of the holidays, but still hadn’t failed to notice his aunt and uncle hadn’t celebrated anything. He never saw them together, nor heard them talking anymore.

Manny had become an even closer friend over the holiday break, but because he was also gay, Jared didn't want him coming around his house. He wanted to protect his friend from anything his uncle might say. Jared came home one evening, fully prepared to start packing. He hadn't seen his aunt in a few days and he would be graduating in January. Knowing she wasn't home much anymore, Jared didn't feel it would matter much to her if he cut out now and went to Manny’s until college.

Jared entered the house and froze in his tracks. His uncle was leaning against the door frame to his study, glaring at Jared like he'd been waiting for him. "You finally home, you queer little fuck?"

Jared's inside's sank. He knew his uncle drank, but he'd never seen him like this before. The man was slurring his words and swaying against the wall.

Jared didn't want any part of this. He tried to keep moving toward his room, but his uncle swiftly blocked him. Jared didn't move for a second, waiting in fear to see what the man would do. He felt like puking when he heard the loathing in Mark's voice, "You fucked up our whole lives, you know that?"

Jared's eyes pooled as he pleaded, "I never meant," but his uncle interrupted, "SHUT UP." Even though his uncle invoked his anger, Jared had some minuscule part of him that still hoped to conserve what little piece of a relationship they had left. He needed his uncle's love and it pissed him off that it was so. He wasn’t going to get it, so why couldn’t he stop wishing for it?

His uncle continued, "You've been hanging out with that Manny kid, haven't ya?" Jared's eyes widened at his friend's name but he said nothing. His uncle persisted, "WELL? Have you or have you NOT been smoochin’ and snugglin’ up with that other little cocksucker?"

"No," Jared immediately argued, because he and Manny hadn't been that way with each other, at all. They were just friends and his uncle had the wrong idea. Jared made a move to walk away and avoid further confrontation, but the man grabbed his arm and swung him around to face him.

Mark pushed Jared hard, causing him to fall to the ground on his back. He bent over and screamed in Jared’s face, "SHE’S GONE BECAUSE OF YOU!" In between the stench of alcohol, his uncle's hot breath and spittle hitting his face, Jared tried to comprehend the words that were being screamed at him. He shockingly realized that his uncle was saying his aunt left, but he said nothing out of fear, feeling dangerously at a disadvantage on the ground like this.

His uncle stood up and swung a sloppy but strong punch at the wall. Jared cringed and squinted his eyes at the impact. Mark left a crumbled hole, then growled in anger and frustration. He punched the wall twice more, as Jared used his leg muscles to scoot backward.

It looked like his uncle was distracted, so Jared got up quietly and tried to tip toe to his room. He didn’t notice when Mark stepped up behind him on his way down the hall. He felt a sudden powerful push between his shoulder blades and fell forward, landing hard on his chest and elbows.

Before he could get up, Jared's hair was pulled hard enough to force his head backward while the drunk man screamed more insults, "YOU WANT SOMEBODY TO RIP YOU OPEN WITH HIS DICK UP YOUR BUTT? HUH?" Jared begged his uncle, "Please stop." The older man dropped his weight on Jared's back hard, slammed his head forward into the hard floor, causing Jared's eyes to water.
Mark asked snidely, "Is that what you want, nephew?" Then he screamed, “IT'S WRONG! YOU'RE THE REASON SHE LEFT!” Jared felt his uncle lift off of him as he mumbled, "Fucking ruined our lives.” He lay absolutely still, except for the quiet sobbing and panicked breathing he couldn't control. He was alive, at least. With Mark's out of control mood, he hadn't been sure he would be.

Jared heard the drunk man stagger away and he scrambled on all fours as fast as he could into his bedroom. He took half a minute to let out the emotion he'd been trying to hold in, leaned against his door and caught his breath. Jared crawled to the bed and called Manny. Manny offered to come get him, but Jared refused, knowing that his uncle would go even more nuts if he saw him.

Jared gathered some clothes and some bathroom needs, grabbed his two pillows and a picture of his parents and himself, then took off out the window. He went three days before he finally saw his aunt in the school parking lot. He had just finished tutoring some kids over the New Year week. He hurried over and hugged her hard.

Marsha explained she had left Mark and had secured a new place. She made a room up for Jared, but hadn’t wanted to pressure him to move if he didn’t want to. He was so close to graduation, she was trying not to distract him with the separation troubles. Their marriage had been falling apart for some time, but Jared had been working so hard, it didn’t seem right to lay all that on him.

Jared realized his aunt had no idea what had transpired between he and Mark. He was glad she’d left the man, and was now able to make sense of the darkness he had felt between the couple in the last few months. Mark’s drunken statements during his abusive tirade also made sense. Jared hugged his aunt hard that day. Unbeknownst to her, he was still reeling from shock at his uncle’s words, and dealing with fresh bruises to his back side.

Jared chose to stay at Manny’s for the six months until college came, but he visited his aunt quite a bit. She gave him papers and keepsakes from his parents that she’d saved for him. She surprised him with a savings account book that his parents had started, and she continued over the years. Her sister had wanted Jared to go to college, so Marsha did her best to help him with that.

Jared had accepted a full scholarship to Stanford, but the additional funds would help him with extra expenses. His aunt reminded him again how proud his parents would be of him and how he better keep in touch. He marveled at how damn lucky he was to have her in his life.

Jared was packed and ready for the drive to Stanford. He thought he would surprise his aunt with one last visit before he left. When he pulled up to her house, he did a double take when he saw his uncle's car. Jared got out and walked a few steps up the walkway, watching his uncle on the porch with baited breath. It was the first time he had seen him in a couple months.

Jared found he couldn’t go any closer. Something inside of him cringed at being even this close. He waited until his aunt saw him. When she smiled with a delighted, "Jared," Jared smiled back, but held his distance at the hostile look he received from Mark. Jared backed away, unconsciously, his memories of the physical abuse haunting him.

When Jared turned and started back to the car, he heard his aunt's footsteps leave the porch and come after him. "Jared,” she called, "Jared, please," he heard as she caught him just as he opened the car door. He stopped, but he didn't turn around because he couldn't face the look of bigotry and homophobic hatred on his uncle's face.

Jared looked at his aunt with a sideways smile that didn't reach his eyes, "I appreciate everything you've done for me. I wanted to see you before I left, but I can't stay if he's around. Are you going back to him? Is that why he’s here?"
His aunt looked at him in silent confusion for a moment, her mind struggling to understand, "Jared, why would that bother you if I did? I mean...he only came to talk with me today...about things...there's no decisions made. Why? Why are you avoiding him and what’s between you two that I don’t know about?"

Jared looked up and closed his eyes, praying for patience. It was time. He needed to tell her before he took off. He looked into her eyes and saw the worry for him, but he wondered if he would still see it after he told her. Jared blurted out, "Because I'm gay, Aunt Marsha. I thought he would have told you, but he obviously didn’t. He’s always had a problem with it. He attacked me...hit me...more than once. He hates me. I was afraid to tell you because I didn’t want to lose you.”

Marsha’s eyes flooded with painful disbelief as her mind landed on a memory, “Your face...that was him? Tell me that wasn’t him, baby.” Jared continued with a nod, “Yeah, it was him...but I think what hurt me the most was when he told me neither of you ever wanted me. He told me I ruined your lives...blamed me when you left. That’s when I moved to Manny’s. Aunt Marsha, he doesn’t deserve you. That’s my opinion.”

Jared didn't wait for her response. He couldn’t do this anymore. Blurtng all that out and having to see his uncle brought those barely controlled feelings out in the open. He wiped at his eyes as he angrily got back in the car and started the engine. He certainly wasn’t about to bawl like a baby with his uncle standing a few yards away.

Jared drove off before the tears could fall. He left his aunt standing there and avoided looking at her as he pulled away. Jared headed for college and jumped in feet first. Graduating early from high school had left him on his own for months before Manny got there, but he kept in touch by phone. His aunt hadn’t waited. She called him the first day and every weekend since. They didn’t talk about Mark, and that much he appreciated, but Jared always wondered if she had moved back with him.

Manny finally arrived, the two befriended another student named Jeff, and suddenly college became less lonely and more fun. Between sophomore and junior years, Jared met a liberal arts major, named Chris. Jared's friends watched him fall hard for Chris, as they fell into a warm loving relationship.

By senior year, Chris and Jared had loose plans to work close to each other, maybe even share a place. Jared fully expected to be with Chris no matter where his future led him, so they searched for places that had a generous availability of jobs in both their respective fields.

Jared usually spent the night at Chris’ dorm, or Chris stayed with him. They were mostly inseparable and people rarely saw them apart. There was a huge party after graduation, where Jared, Chris, Manny and Jeff all celebrated together with a ton of other classmates.

Jared was filled with warmth when he saw his aunt at his graduation. Though she had kept in touch by phone, he hadn't seen her in person. He wound up staring at her for a moment before he could even speak. He hugged her hard, sighing with pent up emotion at her support. Jared had always felt his parents love through her and the woman was a saint for giving him that. He wound up commandeering her for several hours before she was allowed to go home.

Jared felt like his life had finally reached a point of happiness. He had a loving aunt, best friends, Chris, and now a bachelor’s degree under his belt. Jared was ready for a serious engineering future but first he wanted to take care of something. After the graduation party, Jared headed home to his apartment about thirty minutes ahead of Chris to prepare for what he was going to ask him. Chris had to drop off a couple inebriated classmates, so he was to meet Jared at his apartment later.

Jared's plan was to give Chris a beautiful ring, one from a matching set. He wanted to deepen their committed relationship and ask Chris to live with him in Austin, share a place he’d found for them.
Jared had job offers all over, engineering firms offering to pay for upper grad studies and his doctorate program if he landed with them, but his favorite prospect happened to be in Austin. Chris had family near Austin, so that was most likely where he would search for jobs, too.

Jared took the ring box out of his pocket and sat next to the table, going over his proposition to Chris in his mind. He thought he had it perfectly memorized and then heard a car pulling up downstairs. He looked out the window in anticipation, but was surprised to see Manny and Jeff coming into the building instead of Chris. Jared went to the door, confused.

For the second time in his life, Jared felt the lower half of his body fall through the floor in devastation. He collapsed onto his knees, as his friends fell with him and held him. They cried together, as Jared struggled for air between heart wrenching sobs. Chris’s sister had called them in a frantic voice twenty minutes prior. Highway Patrol had called her about a head on collision caused by a drunk driver. Three miles from Jared’s apartment, Chris had been killed instantly. She knew Jared couldn’t be told over the phone.

Manny and Jeff knew how much it took for Jared to reach out and love openly again after the losses he had endured. They knew this would brutally crush him from the inside out. They stuck with him through the days to follow, the post funeral madness, his move to Austin, and through many tearful nights.

Jared was offered advanced projects very early on with his new company. Competitive engineering companies were very eager to get their hands on him, but Jared was inclined to stay where he was. He finished his PhD within record speed and bulldozed his way into every learning opportunity he could find. Chris’ death had stunted his ambition on a social level, but his work ethic carried him to so many new challenges, it kept him rewardingly busy.

After a couple years, Jared realized he had basically run out of advancement where he was working, so he accepted an offer for a larger firm. He quickly became their top expert for structural engineering. He was soon offered another position with larger contracts and clients. Jared designed bridges, shopping malls, apartment buildings, schools, office buildings and hotels. He was in his element, loving the involvement of design and creation. The finished products were a thing of beauty to Jared, knowing they were sound and solid and going to last through the elements for many years.

Jared spent the next ten years with Skyward Engineering. His capabilities had brought them more clients, even though they were a marginally smaller firm. They sent him to accredited law classes, qualifying Jared to be an expert witness in huge cases involving engineering disputes. Outside companies borrowed Jared often, sometimes wearing him to exhaustion. Jared never turned any assignments down.

Jared had written off a love life. His heart had remained in ‘guarded’ mode and he liked it that way. He dated a few times, but steered away from serious involvement. Jared’s friends always nagged him when they got together. Manny was the most persistent. He was the most outspoken and frequently got Jared into conversations with people to try and nudge him into test the waters. “At least have sex, Jared. With your looks, you could have any guy you wanted and enjoy a few tumbles if you’re still not ready for a picket fence.”

Jared’s annoyed blush always managed to crack his friends up. Manny would floor him with his outbursts. Jeff would laugh. Jeff was the straight one in the group, keeping quite busy with his own love life, but watching Manny try and help Jared along in the gay dating arena was quite entertaining. Manny had no shy traits or inhibitions. Jared was full of them. Jared had been subject to many advances from both men and women. He really didn’t need Manny to encourage even more. Whether at work or off duty, Jared was oblivious to most of them, unless it was pointed out by his
friends or coworkers. Manny deemed it a ‘reluctance to engage’, but Jared couldn’t help the comfortable bubble he had settled in. It was safe in there. He kept to his work and enjoyed a few friends. That was just fine, thanks.

Cassie and Lisa were the receptionists in Jared's office who had taken Jared on like a lovable baby brother. Even though the young hot engineer was older, his innocent beautiful puppy dog eyes brought out protective instincts in them like a couple of mother hens. Jared stole hearts. He didn’t know it, but everyone else did. He spread his sweet charm around the office and worked hard on helping anyone who asked, totally oblivious to people hitting on him left and right.

Jared spent time off duty with a couple other engineers, Brad and Drew. He golfed with them, totally sucked at it, but enjoyed becoming more social again. They invited him to several outings, barbecues and picnics with their wives and kids. Jared had been asked out by a great looking architect named Kent. He hadn’t responded at first, but after admitting to himself that it had been five years since Chris’ death, he realized he really needed to give it a shot.

Manny screeched over the phone line when he told him. He instantly rambled off his advice...what to say, what not to say, what to wear, where to put things and what to do if they had sex because Jared surely had forgotten. Jared rolled his eyes, but smirked as he hung up in the middle of Manny’s unwanted advice. It was true, Jared’s right hand had become his only sexual partner for a very long time, but he was sure he remembered how the hell everything else worked.

Jared truly enjoyed Kent’s company. They dated a couple times, talked for hours and had similar interests when it came to engineering. They kissed, but nothing sparked into flames of arousal, so Jared wasn’t quite sure whether there was something wrong with him. The guy seemed perfect. Jared dated a couple other guys, pushing himself to open up and try new people, but still something held him back.

Cassie and Lisa were involved in heavy shelter work for SPCA. Looking for a distraction from his failed attempts at a love life, Jared decided to join them and threw himself into working with the animals and volunteers. He instantly felt a love for it. He became passionate about helping the shelter improve and drew up plans with an architect at work. He convinced some of his fellow engineering staff to help him hash out the construction and within a few months, they cut the ribbon on a rebuilt shelter.

Jared's advanced mind impressed everyone on staff at the SPCA. He researched laws that were restricting the ability of the local SPCA to thrive in it’s purpose, then threw himself into writing be an ordinance on adoption requirements, screening and regulations, euthanasia restrictions, and other small subsections that would support SPCA in their efforts to find homes for more animals.

Jared used up what little time off he had to perfect the ordinance and get it on the ballot. All they had to do was wait for the local election and hope. Between his new commitments to SPCA and his horrendously busy work schedule, Jared found even less time to think about relationships. He hadn’t dated anyone else and Manny was becoming more frustrated with him, "Dude, you don't even need to like them, at this point, just screw them. You’re young and gorgeous. You’ve gotta use up those goods or they’ll go to waste. Look, there’s one at the bar.”

Manny pointed, right in front of Jeff, right in the middle of the establishment, and right at the perfect moment when the likely prospect turned around and saw it. The man raised an eyebrow, as Jared’s mouth dropped open and he stared at his friend. Manny didn’t falter, “Don’t walk into a gay club with that adorable open mouth, or you’ll cause a riot. I’m telling you, friend, you’ve got all the goods and you’re way too perfect to be holding yourself back.”

Jeff giggled, even though he tried not to. Jared was mortified, his notorious blush flooded his face.
The engineer really should have known Manny was going to keep trying. The guy had been even more excited than Jared about putting himself out there again.

Jared spent a little while longer being resistant to going out with anyone, then shocked himself by noticing a new engineer who had started with the company. His name was Tom. He seemed to be low key and stayed away from the gossip mongers, which was right up Jared's alley. He seemed to flirt openly with Jared and act like he wanted to spend more time with him, so Jared asked him out.

Tom turned out to be incredibly funny and nice. He made Jared laugh and it felt warm and comfortable being with him. Tom was a bit secretive about his past, but Jared had things from his past he didn't really want to talk about, either, so he tried to look past that. This was the first time he had truly been interested in someone for many years and it felt so good.

On their second date, Jared realized he was very attracted to Tom and physically it was as if everything suddenly woke up and went into overdrive. If he was reading him right, he thought Tom was feeling it too. Jared was immediately so turned on he almost couldn't answer. 'Wait til I tell Manny,' he thought, 'He'll be so proud.'

Jared brought Tom to his place and the two men kissed hotly against the inside of his front door. Jared was instantly hard as hell. Within seconds, he was pushed up against the wall, pants stripped down and sucked to oblivion. Jared helplessly pushed his deprived hard cock into Tom's mouth, cumming hard down the man's throat within minutes. God to be touched like this after all this time. It felt so damn good and he could barely stand.

As Jared was still recovering his breathing, Tom rose up and pushed his whole body flat against him. He kissed him with hungry intent, causing Jared to moan, as his brain cells scrambled. Chris and he hadn't been this aggressive and Tom was bringing out a side of Jared that he didn't even know he had.

Jared's mind tried to reverse, repeating like a mantra that he couldn't cum again, but when he felt a finger rubbing his sensitive hole, his head fell back with a loud cry. Jared was unable to control himself. Tom's finger rubbed circles, pushed barely in and out, until Jared was moaning, hot and hard again.

It occurred to Jared that Tom obviously had done this a lot, and knew exactly how to stimulate a sex deprived insanely responsive body like Jared's. He was licking and sucking Jared's ear lobes and neck, telling him hot and nasty things in his ear, "You've been depriving this gorgeous body. It isn't good for you to be pent up and holding back release sweetheart. Let me show you how fucking hot I can make you...how hard I can make you cum, Jared. You need to cum over and over. It's been too long and your poor body is starving for it."

Jared had cum again that night, hard...and then several nights to follow, and then each time he and Tom got together. Things were hot and heavy. Jared had been looking for a relationship, but the blow jobs and finger play he was getting had completely distracted him. Jesus, he'd been long overdue.

Jared felt clumsy, at first, but Tom didn't seem to care that he had less experience. In fact, it seemed to turn him on more when they tried something Jared hadn't done. After the first few weeks, Tom started nagging Jared about anal sex. They'd done fingering, so he tried to convince Jared it wasn't really going to be that much different.

Jared didn't see himself dating anyone else. He felt a twinge of something off between them, but he forced himself to blow it off to nervousness and agreed to try anal sex with Tom. Manny, of course, wanted to throw a party for him. He threatened to post a full page announcement in the engineering
Tom was thrilled at Jared's willingness, but he didn't look as thrilled about Jared's condom suggestion. He quickly masked his reaction and agreed to wear one, but Jared noticed the irritation. He also noticed that Tom hadn’t kissed him in a couple weeks until now. It was obvious the man was kissing him now because of what they were about to do. The ‘off’ feeling grew larger.

Tom stared at Jared's naked body for a long time before he began preparing him. He ran his hands over Jared’s skin, thinking how incredibly hot the kid was, and how his innocence made him even hotter. Tom knew Jared was open and trusting, so that just made this even sweeter. “You’re beautiful, kid,” he grinned roguishly, to which Jared smiled in response with a nervous softness. Tom’s dick hot harder.

Tom took his time with prep and lube, but Jared was so fucking responsive that he forgot to stop and put the condom on. He hated the damn things anyway. He lined himself up to enter him, hoping Jared was too hot and bothered to notice, and he almost got away with it, but Jared stopped him. Tom couldn't argue. He forced himself not to roll his eyes, as he rolled the damn thing over his dick. Christ, he had wanted to do this bareback.

Tom went slow and easy at first, then made sure to pound Jared’s prostate with every thrust. He needed to make the kid cum because he was too fucking tight and Tom couldn’t last. He jacke[d Jared’s cock, thrust hard into him and wound up cumming before Jared. Goddamn, it was good. He could tell Jared was close. As soon as he caught his breath, he hunched over and finished Jared off with his mouth and fingers.

The kid came loud. He pushed off the bed with porn star quality. The timing hadn’t been perfect for this, but Tom figured no one fucking cared about that except someone like Jared, anyway. Tom got what he needed, and he couldn’t wait to look it over and jerk off to it. While Jared lay there recovering, Tom went to the bathroom and discarded the condom. He grabbed his propped up phone off the dresser on his way back and plopped onto the bed with a knowing grin.

Tom laid on his bed next to Jared, like he had done other nights. He patted Jared’s leg and fell fast asleep without saying a word. Jared realized this was the gap he’d been feeling. None of the doting charm from his first week with Tom was happening now. There was empty silence between them, except during sex.

Jared never discussed a relationship with Tom, but he had definitely assumed they were a couple. Maybe that was a mistake. He now realized he might be the only one thinking of them that way. There was more off between them than just this part. Jared knew there was a detached distance. Why he hadn’t realized it before now, he wasn’t sure. ‘Of course you’re sure, dumb ass,’ his mind chastised, ‘you were blinded by the first sex you’d had with another person in six years. Dumb fuck, you had so many sensations going on, your brain cells took a dive.’

Jared wasn’t in love, but he thought perhaps his relationship with Tom might lead that way. At least trust and commitment would be nice, but he wasn’t even feeling a friendship at the moment. What the hell had happened? Jared didn’t hear from Tom for a few days after their official first time, which was even more telling about their relationship.

Jared was sore as fuck, so the break was okay, but to not even call and ask how he was? Jared ran through scenarios in his mind of places he could have gone wrong, things he might have said, possible mistakes. Maybe he was giving off vibes of guardedness and that was mirroring Tom’s reaction toward him. Jared did what he usually did, looked for his own blame in most things that went wrong. He was sure he could find it if he kept thinking it over.
Jared finally called Tom to ask him over. He made a strong pot of coffee and waited on baited breath. Tom actually sounded excited to see him, but this was going to be a discussion, not a sexual tryst. Jared wasn’t looking forward to it, but it had to be done. These confrontations were never fun and he was sure today would either be a make it or break it point.

When Tom got there, he quickly put his hands out to touch Jared, but Jared stepped back. He saw the instant realization on Tom’s face that they were here for something different than he had expected. Tom went to Jared’s dining table and plopped down with a sigh. He waited in silence, while Jared formulated his thoughts.

“What do you think about our relationship,” Jared asked, “I think of us as a couple, but I’m not getting that from you, so I want to know what you think.” Jared waited. Tom stirred for a second, pursed his lips in thought, but he didn’t quite answer Jared yet. The silence between them was definitely not doing anything for Jared’s nerves.

Jared’s gut filled with dread, as he realized what he suspected was true...he had grossly misunderstood the depth of their relationship. Jared wasn't in love with Tom, but he thought maybe he could be or maybe it was heading in that direction. Now he realized that had never been the case. Tom avoided eye contact for a few more seconds, then finally sighed and looked up at Jared.

Though he knew what was about to come out of Tom’s mouth probably wasn’t going to be good, Jared’s mind never would have landed on the actual words. His brain had trouble even processing what he heard. Tom began, "I'm an addict for particular sexual tastes. I’m usually more of a straight to gay fetish but with you it was definitely the innocence of discovery. I get off on it. It feeds my fix, so to speak, and you’ve been an anomaly because I usually don’t stick around this long."

Jared felt his insides sinking, as Tom continued, "I don't have relationships, Jared...I get my fix, then move to the next target. I crave the chase, the set up, the lure, but I usually lose interest. I fully expected you to be a first few times, then to move on. Of course, that wait for taking you up the ass was worth it. Goddamn, you’re beautiful...and you’re ass is tight as fuck. I’d really like to enjoy it more if we can get past this."

Jared’s silence was broken only by his soft response, “Well, thanks, but no thanks.” He leaned against the bar, hoping Tom would cue in and leave, but Tom didn’t rise from the table just yet. He wondered why he even felt compelled to tell Jared this, but for some reason he had to, so he looked him in the eye and blurted it out, “I’ve video’d us.”

Jared definitely hadn’t expected that. His eyes widened, as he took a step forward, shock written all over his face, “WHAT?!?” Jared’s insides twisted, his stomach threatened to upheave, as he sickeningly watched Tom try to turn his confession into some glorious opportunity. “You’re so fucking responsive Jared...it’s a waste not to put it on camera. You’re gorgeous. When you turn all red and you’re about to cum, you make this incredible," “SHUT UP! SHUT THE FUCK UP,” Jared screamed his interruption.

Tom sighed, “Jared there’s nothing to be ashamed of. I jerk off to you...other’s jerk off to you...that's how hot you are. I try to cum at the same time. I save them and,” Jared punched him in the face. Tom fell backward and landed on the floor, Jared was so filled with humiliation that he barely noticed the blood splaying from Tom’s nose. On another day, he might be quite impressed with himself for showing such bravado.

“Jesus christ, Tom,” Jared vented, then turned away with his hands on his head. He turned back, “Please tell me you’re lying. Please tell me you did ‘not’ show those to other people, Tom, you had no fucking RIGHT.” Jared stepped toward him again, his eyes filled with a begging plea that Tom hadn’t really done this. But it was too late. Jared could see Tom had no intention of refuting his
Jared had another repulsive thought, “So how long? How long have you been recording us? The whole three months, or when did you start? And how many others have you fucked while you’re playing our goddamn video’s? Jesus christ, and you didn’t want to wear a condom? You fucking selfish son of a bitch. God knows what you’ve been spreading around.”

Tom's answer was non-committal, trying to take the blame off himself, "Jared, people do this all the time. It's just sex. Video's are popular, it's nothing new. We love the sex, we enjoy it, but we don't have to worry about emotions getting in the way. You are totally fucking edible, Jared. Can't you see the value in being the hottest new thing out there?"

As Tom moved toward him, Jared raised his hand, "Stop. Just stop. Shut up for a minute." Jared closed his eyes and sighed. ‘Jesus I’ve been so stupid,’ he thought, as waves of humiliation rolled through him. Jared looked up and held his hand out, “Give me your phone.”

Tom argued at first, "Why," but Jared stepped forward and snarled into his face, "Give me the fucking phone." Tom handed him the phone and Jared scrolled through it until he found several videos of other people, not just him. He held the phone up to face Tom, "Delete them.” Jared wasn't in the mood for delays or refusals and Tom seemed to get this. He snatched the phone back, angrily and deleted the video’s in front of him.

Jared grabbed the phone back and scrolled again to make sure Tom had erased every one. "HEY,” Tom argued, but Jared looked pissed as hell so the man shut up. Jared shoved the phone back at him, "Now, delete them from the fucking Cloud too, or wherever else you've got them saved." Tom complied, grumbling, his bleeding nose dripping on his shirt and Jared’s floor.

Tom was pushed out Jared's front door, as he continued to throw weak apologies at Jared to try mend their arrangement. Jared couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He shoved him hard out into the hall, as the vulgar asshole leaned in and whispered that he wanted to try sticking his tongue in Jared's ass and making him cum that way before Jared slammed the door. Jared leaned back against the closed door, still in shock and pissed at himself. He couldn't believe he had chosen this poorly on his first time out in the relationship department since Chris.

Jared tried to forget about Tom in the next few weeks. He hadn't seen him around the office and as far as he knew, no one knew anything. Jared poured himself into his work, just like he always did when he needed to keep his mind off anything. Work seemed to be where he made the least amount of mistakes in his life. He stressed over the possibility that other people had seen the video's, but started to relax when no one said anything. Tom called him twice in the weeks after, but he hadn't left messages. Jared recognized the number in his missed calls but had no interest in calling him back. He promptly deleted him from his contacts.

Skyward Engineering had been Jared's work home for nearly twelve years. He loved the firm’s business practices, loved the staff, and believed in his managers. Jared noticed there were a few less clients in the last year, but he hadn’t realized the serious financial constraints his bosses had been facing.

Skyward had been losing long time customers to a larger corporation that had been offering screaming deals for their services. Gradually, revenues were reduced enough to require some lay off’s in order to stay afloat. Jared’s manager’s were a personable duo. They’d given their staff ample warning of possible cuts and made every effort to provide references and severance packages to employees they had to release.

As Jared's bosses struggled to hang on for as long as they financially could, clients were dropping
like flies and being absorbed by the larger corporation. Eventually, Skyward folded up into the umbrella company, in order to keep their name and stay in business.

Jared waited until the end. Out of loyalty and commitment, he refused amazing offers he kept getting from this new company. Not everyone was being offered a spot in the new place, so he felt too much guilt to just go that easily. Jared’s manager’s had been released. Some of the other employees too. Jared was officially unemployed for one week out of stubbornness, before a visit from his former bosses changed things. They basically chewed him out and told him to go for it. Jared took the job, but he was hired by an engineering manager, not a top CEO or anyone high up. He seemed to receive a huge welcome, so he vowed to make the best of things.

Jared hit the ground running. He was handed a huge project with high caliber clients. Upon his impressive handling of that, Jared received more big projects. Some of them required extensive legal research to historical and zoning requirements. He recalculated the work of other engineers and adjusted architectural designs on a continual basis. His company really poured the work on, so Jared took it as a sign of their faith in his abilities.

He still volunteered at the SPCA when he could, but found himself immersed in a much more challenging schedule. It was kind of lonely to feel like he was brand new again, having to figure out who was a friend and who was not. He missed his old work crew and their off duty bowling matches, coffee and birthday cakes. It was definitely an adjustment.

The new place was colder, more cutthroat. Because they had required him to sign a two year committal document, Jared knew he was going to have to make the best of it, even if he discovered he didn't like it. Something felt off and he hadn't quite decided whether it was the company or it was just him. Jared thought if he poured himself into the place, stayed late and worked weekends until he felt comfortable, things might feel better.

Jared was glad that Brad and Drew had transferred over so he had a couple familiar faces to share engineering talk with. Everyone kind of stuck to themselves, except his new secretary, Blair. Jared loved her immediately. Blair was not just efficient, she cared about him and about her work. Some of the other engineers and attorneys in the office were short and rude around her, but Jared always made sure to treat her with respect.

Jared had gained a reputation as the gorgeous sweet young engineer who didn't have an ounce of conceit in him. He worked his ass off and always jumped in to help people, so he was in high demand. After his first six months, an exec moved into the larger corner office on Jared’s floor, who happened to be the owner’s son. The mood turned even more foreboding as the new boss made his attraction to Jared well known.

People in the office were bothered by the man, but Jared had it the worst. He tried to be professional and polite, knowing he was dealing with the bosses kid, but the idiot leered at him all the time and it was really uncomfortable. He didn’t seem to have any real responsibilities, but walked around and intimidated people with his condescending presence.

On occasion, he waltzed into Jared's office without warning and it was damned annoying. He undressed Jared with his eyes, not caring whether they were in meetings or alone in his office. After accosting Jared badly at the plotter printer once, the engineer spent as much time as he could avoiding him.

Jared had reached his first year and other than the disgusting bosses son, he finally felt more adjusted and comfortable. That was only until he finished work on a huge office building that was in the public eye. His corporate office’s tendency to brag about their successes had been something he’d never paid attention to until Jared was thrown right into the middle of it.
Jared was told to be at the ribbon cutting ceremony in case investors had any questions about the structural integrity of the building. As he stood quietly in back, the camera’s turned to him when a top exec he’d never met listed him by name and pointed to him. He bragged that Jared was the expert engineer who managed to defeat the challenges of building such a structure on rough terrain.

‘Fuck,’ his mind panicked, as the exec continued to brag that they’d ‘acquired’ Jared from one of their merged companies. He couldn’t remember working with, or for, anyone this arrogant...and it really hadn’t been a ‘merger’ with Skyward, actually, it had been a downright take over and forced deal. Jared offered a shy half smile, praying for no questions, while he felt like a bar of soap who had been ‘acquired’ and displayed for consumption. The newspaper article was nice, but the snapping of camera’s was a surefire way to get him to ‘not’ attend shit like ‘this’ anymore.

Jared had gained so much respect and notoriety from his work, it suddenly became a high priority to move him into another area. It was explained to him that he was desperately needed because of his expertise, even though Jared’s greatest love was creation and design. Jared was told he was their best choice to do corrective recommendations. He would be making sure structural safety issues were corrected before anything dangerous occurred in any of their designed buildings.

Jared was drowning in assignments right away. He figured it was a win because he was able to avoid the bosses groping son by being out of the office more. Jared figured he would keep up this momentum until his two years were up and then he could look for another job. In addition to the company exec who practically molested it’s employees, Jared couldn’t work for the arrogance anymore.

Jared received a call one day from a law firm who was supposedly filing a suit against his company. Apparently, one of the apartment buildings and parking structures they had designed were showing defects and they wanted Jared’s reports. Jared recognized the structures from a report he had done a year ago. He looked up the files and discovered several structural deformities and reinforcement recommendations he had submitted for those exact problems.

When he looked further into the files, he discovered there were no changes ever made as a result of his lengthy report. Jared had worked his ass off on that report and this new discovery was confusing. If he couldn’t find that the changes were made, they were going to lose against this claim.

Jared had signed a non-disclosure agreement when hired, which forbade him from releasing any information to an outside source. They had a formal unit that handled that. Since the law firm was requesting files that his name was on, he went to his manager about it. Jared was told the lawsuit in question had already been supplied with all of the documents needed and there should be no direct contact with Jared, at all. The engineer was confused, "But then why are they calling me? They act like they don’t have anything.”

His manager answered smoothly, "I’m sure it’s because your name is on those reports. They’re digging where there’s nothing because they don’t like whatever legal gave them. Just ignore them and we'll take care of it."

Jared questioned, "Okay, but they’re saying the reports we gave them don't recommend any corrections. That’s not the case. My reports were very thorough and there ‘were’ serious defects. I listed them all...and I can’t find that we ever made the changes, so what the hell happens if we didn’t?”

Jared was insulted, as his manager tried to placate him with a smooth smile that didn’t match his eyes. Jared tried to keep his cool, as the arrogant SOB told him to just focus on doing what he’s paid to do and let the executives worry about the bigger pictures. Jared left the office but he couldn’t let it go.
He looked into more of his cases. After an hour of research, Jared was shocked and sickened to discover the slew of safety issues and code violations he had documented were never dealt with, never disclosed to the clients and people were already using these structures, unaware of their safety risks. NO ONE WAS DOING ANYTHING!

Jared checked over and over just to make sure he was really seeing what he was seeing. He was having trouble absorbing that a company could blatantly ignore such warnings. The identified structures should have been repaired long before now...certainly before opening these structures to the public.

Jared had worked his ass off, certain he had been making a difference by supporting his company who simply wanted to make things right. He was led to believe that his lengthy reports were making a huge difference and being used out of concern and responsibility. He was used to corporate integrity and responsibility in his former employers. He had just found out he was 'not' working for the same type of organization anymore.

Jared went back to his manager to stress that people were in danger but his manager once again, gave Jared a song and dance show about how things have red tape, delays and require quotes and bids. He was certain executive staff was handling everything, probably just behind.

Jared argued, "This isn’t some delay, Robert. It's wrong and you should be questioning it. The apartments, the parking garage, the shopping mall...they’re filled with innocent people...babies, Robert. How in the hell can you know this and do nothing? What if it kills somebody?" Jared stormed out, at his manager's unwillingness to do anything.

Jared went immediately back to his office, slammed the door, and called the law firm back. The attorney agreed to send Jared the reports he had received from corporate. Jared declared in disbelief, “You're fucking shitting me,” when he saw that his own reports had been spliced and edited, before they’d been presented. He couldn’t believe this.

Jared felt stuck between a rock and a hard place. He wasn't sure if he could legally release his actual truthful documents to the attorney, since he’d been ordered not to and was under a company policy. He could, however, verbally let the man know and turn the information over to the attorney general.

Jared called his engineer friend, Brad, and told him everything, then asked him what he thought. He was shocked to learn that Brad had sensed something like that might be happening, but had been afraid to question it. He told him he suspected they were using Jared for some self serving purpose, but he'd gone about his business, hoping he was wrong.

Jared questioned, "Why didn't you tell me what you suspected?" Brad told him, "Jared, I can't get fired. I’ve got bills and a mortgage, two kids and a wife. I suspected but I'm sorry, I thought about it and realized I'd better keep quiet." Jared fumed, "And let people get hurt or die in a collapse? There are other engineer jobs, no one has to support his kind of crooked shit. What the hell, Brad? Does Drew know too?"

Brad sighed, "I'm sorry Jared. I’m not sure if he suspects, or not. He’s never said anything. They don't use us like they use you, Jared. You're the superstar whose getting shipped off to everywhere to do their dirty work. They knew you worked your ass off, and they also knew you'd been an expert witness and they needed your name on those reports to convince an audit they were legit. Your name’s reputable. It protects the company from having to pay out by using you to back their inspections. You were the perfect one to calculate all the shitty mistakes and identify everything they were screwing up so they could connive ways to counter them."

Jared continued to argue, "But they're changing my reports! They're editing them so it makes it look..."
like I found nothing but good sound designs. It's fake! The real reports are being mocked! It doesn’t mean shit to win some popularity contest by doing good work if it's being buried and misrepresented. People are going to get hurt, Brad!"

Brad apologized again, but he still refused to do anything, "Jared, I'm so sorry someone as nice as you got stuck in the middle of this...but dude, I gotta save my benefits. You should too. I like my job...like my place and I'm not gonna fuck that up. And dude, I know it’s dirty, but it’s not you doing it. Can’t you just know you’ve done a good job and leave it?"

Jared responded, “Fuck that,” and hung up. He was so damned disappointed in Brad and he couldn’t believe this was happening. He’d worked so hard over the last year and a half, gone without sleep and eating many times over, just because he believed he was making a difference. Well now, he finds out he wasn’t making ‘squat’. He wasn’t saving shit. He was beyond angry, as the betrayal stewed in his gut.

Jared thought for awhile. He decided what he could do was look into as many of his cases as he could, save them in separate files, and find a way to get them reported. If he managed to have enough files, at least he could prove a pattern and that this wasn’t just a once in awhile occurrence.

Jared dug into his database files. He discovered that cutting corners on several building structures had saved the company millions in constructions costs. The unspent funds went right back into corporate hands and the executives got to use it on whatever they wanted. In a nut shell, clients would pay them, they would cut corners, and keep the unspent funds for themselves.

By using Jared’s reports, his corporate exec’s could show they had paid a brilliantly honest and certified expert to review and investigate all structures and use his findings to ensure safety and sustainability. It was a brilliant tactic, actually, if you were a manipulative ass trying to screw other people to make more money.

Jared could not continue to work for this company, knowing what he knew...but now he had to figure out a way to make it to the end of his two year contract. Jared knew if they fired him for his outburst to a manager, he would lose his access to the shared drives and his evidential files would be deleted. He went to work quickly making copies of everything on his hard drive and on another separate thumb drive.

Jared’s two year commitment was up in less than two months. He was smart enough to know his disagreements with his company's tactics were already well known by management and maybe even the top exec’s. They hadn’t fired him yet, but things seemed to feel very quiet around the office.

Jared worked on projects, as if everything were normal. He thought maybe they were watching him and placating him, trying to treat him with kid gloves until they were sure he'd stay quiet. A couple weeks went by and Jared surprisingly received an impressive employment renewal offer. It was given to him by one of the employees he rarely saw.

The renewal offer included a raise, incentives for promotion to management and shared ownership. There was a letter of introduction, praising Jared's accomplishments and how he had been instrumental in the company's good fortune. 'Disgusting,' was his gut feeling, as he continued to read through the document.

He was caught off guard by the offer, at first, not sure why the heck they thought he would want him to stay. Jared was feeling uneasy. A bit of personalization to the promotional package was a sizable annual donation to his charity of choice. Everyone knew he was an animal lover and this was a unique fine print addition. The offer was obviously personalized for just him.
After thinking about it, he realized what this truly was...it was fattened up and highly attractive to lure him to stay. They needed him to renew, sign the disclosure renewals, so it would ensure his compliance. Jared was getting a bribe to keep quiet. 'Subtle,' he morbidly thought. He couldn’t fucking believe he’d fallen into this mess. This was the shit you saw in movies.

Jared’s anxiety level shot through the roof. There was no way in hell he could work for a company like this and he surely couldn’t keep the threat to people's safety a secret. He said nothing about the offer to anyone, nor about his intentions to refuse it, but he walked around with tension radiating from every pore.

With only twenty days to go on his agreement, Jared was definitely antsy to find an assignment out of town and burn off nervous energy. His stalker/boss' son hadn't been around lately, but he was due back in the next day or so, which made it even more attractive to get out of the office.

Jared knew if he gave all his files to the A.G., it would cause many coworkers to lose their jobs. The guilt and anxiety were overwhelming, keeping him up all night with a constant knot in his stomach. He knew it was the right thing to do, but Jared hated having to see people every day who were innocent in what was to come.

Jared checked the structures that needed investigations and reports, then chose one in Colorado regarding a new bridge. Blair arranged all his travel, he packed his bags and took off for the airport. Jared looked forward to keeping busy the next few days.
Jared stumbled into Jensen's life, bloody and gravely injured. No warnings, except a field medic surgical procedure that might be too detailed for some. Lots of medical trauma for Jared. Post military discussion, a bit.

Thank you to all the precious readers who are sending me kudos and feedback. You are appreciated more than words!

Jared landed in Denver and picked up the rental car. He was booked in Cedar Hollow, a town about thirty miles south of the airport. The hotel was supposed to be a few minutes from his inspection site. There was a bridge finished six months ago with complaints from the local Parks and Rec of cracks in the concrete.

Jared did some research on the plane. The bridge was built to improve connectivity between outlying areas and Denver, alleviating many of the traffic delays due to winter snow. Jared's company owned some businesses in the big city which employed several hundred people, most likely having to do with the quick turn around time for the project.

Jared wasn't one of the designing engineers, so he would be checking the work of others. No matter the stress, anger and frustration he felt over the fraud his company had committed, this part of his job was what he was good at, and he loved to be out of the office. Jared thought it kind of odd that they'd given him one 'more' opportunity to add to his case files against them, but figured they probably assumed he was going to accept the job offer and keep quiet.

The airline hadn't lost his luggage. He chalked that up to a successful trip, so far. He punched in Cedar Hollow on his GPS and headed south. Jared was thankful it wasn’t far too his hotel. He hadn’t eaten since breakfast. After checking into his room, he headed for the closest restaurant. The restaurant was willing to make him a hamburger and salad, even though he hadn't gotten there until after 8pm.

The couple inside was wonderfully welcoming. Jared asked for directions to the bridge, figuring he would head that way early in the morning. You never knew when GPS devices would lose a signal, so he now had local directions as a back up. After scarfing down his late dinner in his hotel room, Jared prepped his files for the next morning's report and set his alarm. The engineer was exhausted, but if he got out to the site early to measure, he would have the whole rest of the day put things together and write his report.
Jared hadn't slept well, nor had he stopped for coffee. That was a double disaster to any unsuspecting innocent person who might cross his path this early. He left his room at six in the morning and made it to the bridge by six fifteen. Jared wasted no time throwing himself into his work. It was damn cold outside so it was better to keep moving anyway.

After struggling through his usual meditation moment to control his fear of heights, Jared moved around and performed his measurements. He took several photos, zooming in on the fractures. Jared noticed some crumbling on a few of the concrete blocks and took pictures of them, too. 'Not good,' he thought to himself. He recorded his notes and findings, then double checked all his work before he packed up.

Jared knew damn well the bridge wasn’t stable. He couldn’t fathom his company’s greed and irresponsibility. 'God, people cross this damn thing back and forth all day. How can they fucking ignore this.' He headed back to the restaurant. He wanted to sit somewhere and put all of his information together, plus he was starving his ass off. The geologist wasn’t meeting him until noon, so Jared had time to put all of his findings together. He chose a table in the back part of the restaurant. It seemed slightly dark, but it looked very comfortable for setting up a temporary mini office. He spread out his tools and graphs, then opened his laptop and started his report.

Jared was happy to see the same woman he had met last night who took his order. He proceeded to work his way through his so called 'brunch'. He was appalled to find a surprising discovery in the shared drive. The bridge he was working on had already been investigated for the very same complaints two months earlier. His job was the second of such reports. He couldn't believe someone had already addressed this and the damn bridge was still open.

Jared knew his second report wasn't going to matter, either. He sighed and rested his head in his hand as he looked over his recent findings. He felt so guilty that his company was responsible for endangering people's lives. He looked around at the restaurant's other occupants. 'I wonder who crosses that bridge every day. They should have fucking closed it,' Jared thought to himself.

As Jared perused the room, his gaze landed on a gorgeous hunk sitting at the bar. He only had two seconds to appreciate the man's muscular lean build and perfectly chiseled face when he noticed the man was looking at him. At first, Jared panicked at being caught, but before he looked away, the other man looked away first. When he didn't look back, Jared reminded himself that he really sucked at picking people and should probably stop getting side tracked.

He smiled at the really nice lady that came back to push him to eat his lunch. She reminded him of his secretary, Blair, which was probably why he responded to her coaxing and ate a few more bites. A short while longer, Jared packed up his things and went to pay his bill. He joked with the waitress that she reminded him of someone at his office who was always reminding him to eat and sleep.

Jared paid her a hefty tip because he felt bad he hadn't eaten the delicious meal she had served him. He headed back to the bridge to meet the geologist, then when everything was done, he headed back toward his motel.

Jared's thoughts were on his future and what was about to come, as something large came out of his peripheral vision and slammed into his left side. He was violently catapulted into a surreal time warp, as loud smashing sounds and broken glass showered him. The airbag blocked his vision, as blunt force jerked him roughly within his locked seatbelt. The car slid, then landed hard on it's right side in a ditch with a final violent impact.

Jared impacted hard, suspended by his seatbelt. He felt nothing for a few seconds, no pain and no movement, like he was suspended in time. Sounds of metal creaks and shattered glass settled for a few seconds. He couldn’t see anything. It was eerily quiet, except for the slow leak of the deflating
Jared had no idea what just happened. His brain was desperately trying to make sense of the brutal impact. He wondered if maybe he fell asleep in his hotel and was dreaming. Within seconds, he felt tingling up and down his left side. He glanced down and saw the driver’s side door crunched in toward his body.

He realized he wasn’t breathing. He tried to inhale and realized it was no easy feat. He surmised that maybe the wind had been knocked out of him and he would only need a minute. He waited for a terrifying few seconds, then felt an intense burning starting in his chest, mostly on the left, now beginning to spread throughout his torso.

His head exploded and his chest felt like it was being crushed by a vice. He breathed in shallow short breaths because he didn't feel he could expand his chest any further. Jared managed to look himself over and see his arms were intact, but bloody with various cuts. He looked down and saw that he still had his legs and they seemed to be free from any severed arteries. He saw the front and driver's side windows were completely smashed out and the airbag was still deflating back down.

Jared turned his head to the right, expecting to see himself hanging from a cliff. Since he had a fear of heights that was his first horrific thought. All he could see was manzanita and dirt, so he deduced he was probably in the ravine next to the highway and not hanging from a cliff, 'Thank God.'

Jared realized he couldn't hear anything outside the car. He was either the victim of a hit and run, or the other car was wrecked somewhere like he was. Jared decided he should call 911, but he couldn't remember where his phone was. He had used GPS in the car, so his phone really should be in his pocket, but there was no way he was gonna be able to reach it like this.

He was still held tightly by his seatbelt, now realizing it had retracted and locked when he was hit. The seatbelt was holding him firmly from sliding to the right with the force of the leaning car. His chest really hurt and he wasn't entirely convinced that he wasn't going to lose consciousness and die out here, if he didn't get his ass up and do something.

Jared slowly moved his left hand to the door handle and pulled it. The lock gave way and the door popped for him, but it was way too heavy for him to push up and open. Jared felt like he had no strength, but knew he was gonna have to find a way to get out through the window.

He looked at the jagged edges of the busted out window and thought that maybe a few scrapes and cuts were probably the least of his problems. He really needed to find help, fast. He was having a hard time catching his breath and his chest was on fire.

Jared painfully unlocked his seatbelt and used his legs to push himself through the driver's side window. He grunted and moaned in pain, feeling something shift in his ribcage as he moved. His chest was killing him and his vision greyed out, forcing him to stop and rest his forehead on the top of the window frame.

Jared's cuts were stinging on his arms and something was overwhelmingly hurting up high on his forehead. He tried to stay focused on getting out of the car and when he pushed on the window frame with his hands, his chest gripped him painfully as his hands were sliced by jagged glass.

Jared's vision was spinning. He thought he might be dying, so he kept moving out of sheer will. Once the message from his brain had finally reached his legs to move, Jared slowly pulled his legs out of the car one by one. He sat on the door of the car for a moment, leaning his forehead on bent knees. His vision was spinning badly and he tried slow it down. He looked around and still couldn't find his cell phone, thinking maybe it had been ejected.
Jared forced his heavy limbs to crawl off the car and up the few feet of dirt to the road. His hands hit blacktop before he even realized he'd tilted forward and dropped to the ground. He glanced down the road and saw the restaurant about two hundred feet away. He looked around for another car, but couldn't see one. He was sure a huge vehicle had come out of the middle of nowhere and slammed against him, forcing him off the road. 'Did I imagine that? Where the fuck did the other car go?'

Jared was obviously over tired and confused, or maybe he was dying and this was what it was like. Or maybe he was already dead. He snickered to himself at that last thought, stabbing needles shot through his chest. He realized he still couldn't breathe except for inhaling short restricted breaths.

He forced himself into an upright position, then looked back at his car in the ditch. He had been just barely off the road in a five foot deep ravine. The car was stuck, but at least it hadn't gone all the way over and left him upside down. He thought to himself the rental company would be pissed.

Jared felt his jeans pockets out of habit and still couldn't find his phone. 'Damn,' he hated the feeling of not having the thing. Everything from his briefcase had probably flown around inside the car, including his laptop.

He felt himself fading, like he was about to pass out, so he turned back toward the restaurant and very unsteadily forged ahead. Jared kept his vision on the building in front of him. Even when he greyed in and out of focus, he kept putting one step in front of the other, knowing that the restaurant was getting closer.

He was beginning to feel weaker, and besides the burning pain in his chest, he was feeling very odd and disconnected. His ears were ringing and he realized his forehead was throbbing and stinging badly just at his hairline. He raised a hand to feel if there was a piece of glass stuck up there. He felt a ton of prickling razor sharp pieces of glass stuck in his hair and he figured it would be a bitch getting them out.

He couldn't pinpoint the painful throbbing and stinging that was high up on his forehead. When he pulled his hand away, he realized something was bleeding profusely up there and he thought he probably looked like something out of the Day of the Living Dead movie. He hoped people didn't run screaming when he walked into the business. People with small children might want to cover their eyes.

Jared tripped on the two step wooden staircase, looking down and wondering why it was such a problem. He was 'seeing' the steps, so why couldn't he step 'up' the steps? He swayed as he stared at the steps for a good fifteen seconds before tackling them. Jared had a second of confusion, forgetting why he had come here, but then remembered, 'Oh yeah, dying...my car, yeah.' He stepped forward, grateful there were no more stairs, then pulled the door open to step inside.

As Jensen reached them, he heard the kid trying to answer Dani, "...use y'r...phone?" Jensen quickly did a visual assessment. ‘Head wounds, abrasions, cuts, and his breathing is erratic and wheezy.’ The young man's voice was barely loud enough to hear his words. There was blood all over him, but Jensen zero'd in on his head, where it was definitely coming out too fast. The young man seemed to be barely conscious.

"Dani," he got his friend's attention without looking away from the injured man. When she looked
up at Jensen, he told her, "Call 911, he's been in a wreck...tell them he's having trouble breathing and has a bleeding head wound." As she rushed to call 911, Dani looked back at Jensen and realized he had taken command over the situation without a second thought. The man knew what he was doing and she had no doubts about following his instructions.

Jensen placed both hands on the younger man's arms and gently guided him a few steps backward to the couch they used as a waiting area for take out. Jensen knew the man needed to be off his feet and he could see he was about to go into shock. He could feel tremors in the younger man's body, just from gripping his elbows. The field surgeon in Jensen knew he needed to keep this kid breathing, awake and possibly talking until the medics showed up. He called to Dani and asked her to bring a clean towel and a blanket as quick as she could.

Jensen guided him to sit down without even having to say anything. The young man responded with complete compliance. Jensen reached back and pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, then used it to put pressure on the younger man's head wound. Jared squinted in pain and pulled back, but Jensen quickly grabbed the back of his head and stopped him. "I'm sorry," Jensen said softly.

Jared felt kind of euphoric now, sort of numb. He thought he noticed piercing green eyes a moment ago, then thought that he might have been imagining them, but now here they were looking at him. He felt very dizzy and cold but thought that was probably just nerves. Jensen held the cloth to the injured man's head and looked into his eyes closely. The kid's pupils were not reacting the same on each side, which meant a concussion.

Jensen noticed him shaking and asked in a gentle voice, "Can you tell me your name?" He was completely focused on trying to keep him alert for as long as he could, but the heavily blinking eyelids were not a good sign. When Jensen's new charge didn't answer his question right away, his internal alarm told him the young man was losing consciousness. He turned his own face to the side and yelled, not wanting to startle the injured man, "Dannii...need that blanket, darlin'.'

Jensen faced the younger man and asked him again, "What's your name." He used a louder voice of command that time hoping to penetrate any mental fog enough and establish a connection between them. The younger man blinked heavily but tried his best to answer him after taking several very short and unsatisfying breaths, "Jared."

That's all he could muster, then he felt himself losing awareness, until green eyes interrupted his fading, "Jared...nice to meet you, Jared...my name is Jensen, and you need to stay with me, alright? I know it's hard and you feel like crap, but I really need you to stay with me."

Jensen kept his eyes on the younger man's, as Dani handed him the blanket. Jared thought, 'Why are you telling me to stay with you when I'm right here?' And then he realized he heard the man's voice again, "Jared...Jared, hey buddy, stay with me," and then he understood, 'oh, okay, staying with, yes.'

Jensen took half of the blanket with his left hand and held it over the young man's right shoulder, then indicated for Dani to go around him and pull the blanket over Jared's back and left shoulder. When she was done, Dani pulled her half of the blanket over the front of Jared to meet Jensen's half and together they closed it in front, completely enveloping the younger man in warmth.

Jared thought he felt warmer, but he really wasn't coherent enough to know why, nor was he in any condition to verbally express that thought. He enjoyed it, because he'd been absolutely freezing a moment ago. Jensen held the blanket closed with his left hand. He kept his right hand holding the handkerchief to Jared's head, knowing head wounds bled profusely and were hard to stop without constant pressure.
Jensen said, "Jared, help is on the way, okay? Can you tell me what happened?" Jensen could see the kid was barely conscious and he didn't want take his eyes off him. Jared really didn't like talking because he wasn't getting enough air but he knew the nice man and lady were trying to help him. His vision was going in and out and it was really frustrating how weak he felt. He thought he might just puke for a second and really prayed he wouldn't because it would gross out this nice lady's restaurant and definitely hurt his chest and head.

Jared barely had a voice to answer, "S'mthn...hit...me...I...cnldn't...see..." Jensen had to really listen closely in order to hear Jared's words because the younger man seemed to be struggling to get enough air. He looked concernedly at him and decided Jared's breathing had gotten worse in the last few minutes.

Jensen asked his friend, “Dani, what was the eta on the ambulance?” She looked at him, “They told me 15 minutes and it’s been about five.” Jensen made a decision, "It's too long. I think his lung is punctured and I need to help him quick or he's not gonna make it." Dani knew she'd do whatever Jensen wanted, "Tell me what to do...we can't let him die, Jensen, look at the poor thing.”

Dani’s eyes pooled with liquid at the prospect that they might lose this innocent young man. She didn't panic, however, and Jensen had to admire her spunk during a crisis. He listed off, "Im going to need a completely sterile clean smaller knife, as sharp as you can get, an ice pick is even better. I need a large diameter straw and some alcohol, fast. Run."

Dani hurried off. While she was gone, Jensen opened the blanket in front and leaned his head down to place his ear against Jared's chest. He closed his eyes and listened very closely, completely shutting out all the white noise, any clanging or other restaurant noises made by the customers who had no idea what was going on.

Jared's chest was rippling, and airy. Jensen pulled back and gently pulled Jared's bloody t-shirt up so he could push on the skin around his ribs. He felt the crackling of little pockets of air. It was a sort of a Rice Krispie sound and feel. Jensen knew Jared was in trouble. Dani returned at break neck speed. Jensen told her to get on the couch and prop herself up enough to hold Jared up from behind. She quickly sat on the couch and leaned back against the side rest, stretching her legs out and slightly open. Jensen slipped both his arms underneath Jared's armpits, barely lifted him and slid him over to plant him directly in front of Dani. He gently let Jared lean back against her, so he was still partially propped up.

"Ready?" Jensen asked. She thought she understood exactly what he needed her to do so she opened her arms and wound them around Jared’s shoulders, best she could in relation to the size difference. With one hand, she took over holding the handkerchief against Jared’s head wound. Jared was much taller than her, but Jensen only needed her to hold up his chest so that Jared wasn't flat and drowning with the pressure on his lungs.

"Hold him," Jensen looked her in the eye. "Dani? I mean it. It's painful and terrifying for just a second and if he jumps and I slip, it'll be harder, so hang on tight to him, okay?" Dani nodded her head assuredly, "I got this." Jensen was damn grateful she was here. He proceeded to pour the alcohol over Jared's ribs, then stuck the straw and knife in the alcohol for thirty seconds. He saturated his hands in it. Dani hadn’t found an ice pick, but she'd brought Jensen the skinniest and sharpest little knife she could find.

Jensen began to feel his way down Jared's ribs, choosing the meaty part in between the third and fourth ribs as his target. Before he stuck the knife into the chosen spot, Jensen made eye contact with the patient, "Jared, if you can hear me, I'm going to help you breathe. It's going to hurt like hell but only for a second, and then you'll be sucking some air again and it will be worth it, okay? You have
a punctured lung and if I don't do this, you're going to die."

Jared was barely conscious, but seemed to be looking into Jensen's eyes. The older man could see the fear and pain, but he had no idea whether the kid actually understood him, or not. Jared was almost completely out of air and there was no time to wait, so Jensen focused on the younger man's ribcage.

Jensen stuck the knife in to create a small hole in Jared's chest wall, as the kid tensed up and moaned in pain. He finished shoving the knife in and pulled it out. A gurgling noisy release of air made its way out of the opening. Jensen quickly slid the straw into place and Jared's chest began draining pent up air. The pressure quickly released that had been surrounding his lung.

Jared's body began to relax from the release of pressure. He began to take short breaths again. Though it was still restrictive, being able to get some air felt less like he was dying. Jensen watched the kid closely to make sure things were getting better, not worse. He kept his hand on Jared's chest, feeling the short rise and fall, knowing the kid was now trying to breathe. "That's it, Jared. Just breathe. I know it hurts, buddy, but you need the air."

Gradually, Jared started to take slightly deeper breaths. Jensen told Dani, "You can be on my field medic team any time." Dani beamed at his praise, glad she could be of help and not puke embarrassingly when Jensen stuck the straw in Jared's chest. "Thanks, but I think I'm done after this, Jensen," she smirked.

Jensen could hear the sirens approaching finally. He looked into Jared’s eyes to assess whether he was still with them, or not. The kid’s eyes were beautiful. They were dilated but trying desperately to stay awake and focus. Jensen smiled, "Hey...you're doing great. It’s gonna be okay...you're going to the hospital and they’ll fix all this up, okay?"

Jared didn’t answer, but he continued to keep his eyes open best he could. When he started blinking sleepily again, Jensen put his hand back on Jared’s chest, "Don't go to sleep yet, you're doing great, Jared. Stay with me, buddy." Dani looked up at Jensen then, thinking of Jared's things, "Do you think we should go find his car? What if there's another car?"

Jensen knew they should go check on the accident and make sure there weren't anymore injured people at this point, but he told her they couldn't leave Jared to do that yet. The kid wasn't out of the woods and he had basically just bandaid-ed him for the moment. He knew the hospital wasn't that close and it was gonna be a risky 15 minute ride to get there.

Jensen started to worry about the young man being subjected to their more rural responses out here and thought maybe he should ride with him. He knew the first responders most likely wouldn't appreciate him interfering, but he also knew they were less advanced in their expertise and if the kid went into distress again, they may not be able to save him.

Jensen sighed. Dani looked at him and asked, "What?" Jensen twisted his lips for a moment, "I'm just thinking I should ride with him." Dani looked surprised but relieved at the same time. She had truly taken a liking to this kid. Jensen leaned down closer so Jared could hopefully see him, "Jared, my friend is going to get your stuff from the car for you. You're going to need surgery when you get to the hospital. Is there anyone we should call or give your stuff to?"

Jared felt a second of panic at his rescuer mentioning his stuff from the car. He couldn't let all that get into anyone's hands, just yet. Jared's panic showed in his eyes, along with his increased breathing and attempt at sitting up. Jensen easily held the kid in place with his hand on his chest, "Whoah, kid, you need to stay down." Jared seemed to be panicky about something and Jensen guessed there was something important in the car. He could see Jared gearing himself up to try again so he locked eyes
The younger man knew he needed to get that evidence and it was all he could think about. "Pls," he attempted, "...m'lptp." Jared wasn't sure if the man over him understood, but apparently he did because he told the lady something. He heard her respond, "Yes, I'll get it and keep it with me, no problem. When Steve's back, we can bring it to the hospital."

Jensen looked back down at the injured man, "See? It's all good. We're gonna get your stuff out of the car and my friends are gonna keep it for you, okay? It'll be safe." Jared's eyes were filled with pain and anguish and Jensen wasn't sure if he was following him, "Jared, you still with me?" The older man watched as Jared fought losing consciousness, "That's it Jared, you gotta stay with me, okay? You're doing great."

Jensen kept a hand flat on the younger man's chest in case he thought he was going to try to get up again and jar those ribs or that lung. For some reason, though, the veteran trained killer raised his other hand and gently brushed the younger man's shaggy hair off his face and out of his eyes. It was a soothing act...affectionate, and Jensen wondered where the hell it had come from.

He had a mental war with himself over why he was feeling 'mushy' all of a sudden and decided this kid must have some kind of mind altering super power. This was not like him. Jared hadn't answered Jensen's latest questions so he was highly concerned that they were about to lose the kid to unconsciousness. "Jaarrreed," Jensen called to him, "don't leave me, buddy, hang in there."

"FINALLY,' Jensen mentally bitched, as the slow as fuck paramedics entered the restaurant with all their gear. Jensen was not giving the kid over to them just yet, waiting for the responders to get situated and caught up on what had happened. Jensen touched Jared on the cheek and stayed in his line of sight, "You gotta stay awake for me, Jared, okay? You're going to the hospital and they'll fix you up...Jared, stay with me." Jensen tapped the younger man's cheek to keep him focused, since he noticed Jared's eyes glazing over.

"He's going into shock," Jensen barked at the other medical personnel, pissed off that they'd taken so long. "Jared...Jared come on, buddy, stay with me," Jensen kept up the mantra as he patted Jared's cheek once again. The kid blinked heavily, like he was really trying to do what Jensen wanted but his body was fighting him. "That's it, buddy, just keep with me, keep it up, keep those puppy dog eyes open."

Jensen wondered why the hell he just said that in front of everybody, but it seemed to be working because Jared opened his eyes wider and moved them back to Jensen. "Wrk," Jared weakly whispered. "M'wrk," Jared repeated, totally forgetting that Jensen had just assured him his things were safe. Jared had no idea what time it was or how long he'd laid there. He only knew he had to preserve the evidence he'd been carrying. "I cn't...m'wrk 's...'nthcar."

Jensen watched the younger man struggle to tell him something, but the kid wasn't getting much out. He still had his hand on Jared's cheek, hoping the touch kept Jared focused on staying awake. The paramedics were setting up an oxygen cannula and an iv, so Jensen kept talking to him, "Jared, you're going to be in the hospital for awhile, guy, and not gonna be able to work. You've got some cracked ribs and a punctured lung, kiddo, and it's not gonna be an instant recovery, I'm sorry."

Jensen waited to see if he got any reaction from Jared before he continued, "Does that make sense?"

Jared nodded very slowly up and down, but wasn't looking too happy about accepting his fate. Jensen tried to assure him, "Your stuff in the car is gonna be fine. My friend's getting it. Do you have a number we can call for somebody to come? In your pockets, in the car?" "No...," Jared squinted his eyes shut in pain, moaning and panting for a few seconds.
Jensen was worried something else might have been injured internally, aside from the kid's lung and ribs. He knew those ribs were poking into Jared's lung and that, by itself, was intensely painful, but on the other hand, maybe something they couldn’t see had been affected, as well. The paramedics made no effort to interrupt Jensen or take his place, noticing his obvious skills. One of the medics met Jensen’s eyes while listening to Jared’s heart and lungs.

He offered Jensen the ears of the stethoscope so he could hear the same thing he was hearing. Jared was still in trouble. His lung was continuing to leak air and it was imperative to get him into surgery fast. The medic eased Jared's shirt up and lightly placed his palm on Jared's rib cage. He did not push down, as his purpose was to feel for movement and fractures without jarring anything further into the lung. He shared a silent understanding with Jensen that the uneven rib bones were the dangerous root of the cause. The other medic quickly finished an iv of fluids into Jared's hand, and secured the temporary straw with surgical tape. It seemed they were ready for transport.

The lead medic told Jensen they could administer a light dose of morphine to help with the pain, but needed to know if the young man was allergic to it. Jensen looked into Jared's eyes, "Jared, are you allergic to morphine?" The kid shook his head back and forth, barely able to. Jensen relayed to the medics, "He's good," then turned back to the patient, "They're giving you a shot of morphine for the pain, buddy. That pain's gonna relax a bit, okay? Just hang in there."

Jared wanted to explain he wasn't trying to be such a baby, but his chest was cramping and on fire and his head was a throbbing pulsating mess. He really just wanted to fall asleep and miss all this. Jared blinked heavily but tried to keep focused on this gorgeous hunk who kept touching his cheek and speaking to him. He thought he was probably going to die, but at least it wouldn’t be so bad getting to stare at those lovely eyes. He thought they were green, but his vision was swimming and now Jared wasn’t so sure.

Jensen realized Jared still hadn't told them who they could call for him and he was about to be lifted onto the gurney. He knew the lift was 'not' going to go over well when that chest was jarred so he touched him on the cheek again, "Jared, we’re gonna lift you on the gurney, buddy, and it's gonna move your chest a bit. We'll try our best, but it might hurt."

Jensen's eyes were filled with compassion and concern. Jared focused on them, as he started to feel the floating sensation of the morphine. Jensen watched it calm the anguished eyes, but suddenly felt his gut twist with guilt knowing they were about to hurt him. Jared was falling into a more trusting mood from the drug, which made this even worse.

The medics lifted Jared's torso, Jensen took his legs. They lifted the patient simultaneously and quickly transferred him to the gurney. Jared cringed in pain, as they settled him with velcro straps and an extra blanket. Dani was finally able to slip off the couch and head outside to the accident scene.

The paramedics left the gurney in a slightly upright position so Jared's torso would remain elevated. 'Fifteen minutes,' Jensen thought, worried about the ambulance ride to the hospital. They kept Dani's blanket over Jared, and added a second from their supplies. Carefully, they held the blankets over Jared's makeshift air tube and cut a slit with a scalpel, gently easing the blankets down around the straw.

At the moment Jared was breathing shallow, so there was no desire to jar the straw and screw with that. The surgeons would fix it all up when they got to where they were going. Jared was shivering, obviously still fighting shock, but valiantly hanging on to that last ounce of clarity. He was lifted into the ambulance and rolled into place. One medic jumped in the back with Jared and the other got in the driver's seat.
Jensen jumped in back, as the medic tested Jared's pupils with a pen light. He watched the younger man wince and try to pull away from the uncomfortable bright light. Jensen watched an irritable look pass across the injured man's face when his eyes had been subject to the bright pen light. He would have grinned at that look if he wasn't feeling so guilty that the poor kid probably felt like he was being tortured even further.

Dani's voice came from behind him, "So, you're going?" Jensen turned to see her knowing smirk of pride. He shrugged, looking back at Jared, "Yeah, but he doesn't know me. I'm not sure what he'll think about it."

Dani had never pictured Jensen unsure or lacking in confidence, so witnessing it here was downright cute. She figured Jensen probably wouldn't appreciate it much if she shared that 'cute' thought with him so she didn't. She looked at Jared's banged up face, "Jensen, he shouldn't be alone. You're doing the right thing."

Jensen settled with his elbows resting on his knees, as the medic pulled the back doors closed. He watched Jared's face, sighing to himself at what the hell he was doing. This was kind of over protective, to say the least, but something about this kid screamed innocence. Dani was right, he shouldn't be alone.

Jensen was opposite the paramedic. As the ambulance started to move, he looked out the back door windows and noticed Dani talking with the cops. He could see the silver side of a car poking out of the ravine. The car was on its right side and appeared to have slid sideways into the ditch. He couldn't see another car.

Jensen thought about how far away that was and how heroic it was for Jared to make it to the restaurant in his condition. He was impressed. Jared's determination to survive had saved his life. He was sure Dani was asking all the right questions, but he seriously wondered if some son of a bitch had rammed into Jared and left the scene. He would have to wait until later to get the officer's take on it all.

The medic was addressing Jared's head wound. Jensen noticed the kid was looking a bit more relaxed. 'Probably the morphine,' he thought. The paramedic was talking to Jared, trying to coax information out of him while Jared bravely tried to focus. "Can you tell me your last name, Jared?" After his spinning brain cells managed to process the question, he forced himself to answer, "...Pad...lecki." Jensen was trying to spell the long name in his mind as the paramedic asked, "Padalecki?" Jared nodded in the affirmative, as the paramedic scribbled the information quickly onto a pad clipped to the bed.

"Do you remember what happened?" Jensen knew the paramedic was worried about the head trauma, as he was, so he persisted at trying to keep Jared from losing consciousness. He asked him again if he remembered what happened. Jared seemed confused for a few seconds, before he tried to answer, "th'nk sm'thn hit me...s'gone." Jared tried to get his story out with what limited air he could, but everything was so difficult with the pressure on his chest and his brain off line.

Jensen thought of some dick leaving Jared there to die. It brought some murderous feelings to the surface. Jensen masked what he was thinking, for now, so he didn't scare anyone. The paramedic did his pen light thing again, as Jared squinted and pulled away. Jensen knew the medic was just trying to keep apprised of pupil reactions. Concussions were a serious thing and the medic needed to be able to report all of this to the doctors when they arrived in ER. Even though Jensen understood that, his heart melted at Jared's sluggish, "No," plea when he pulled away from the light.

Jensen thought it was 'cute', then mentally chastised himself for thinking such a thing. The patient held his eyes shut trying to avoid any further bright lights. Jensen wondered if he should stop
thinking of the injured man as 'kid'. He looked at the paramedic, who was writing down some notes on a pad close by. The medic tried to push Jared for more information, in case the kid lost consciousness before they got him into surgery, "Jared, don't go to sleep, okay? Can you tell me what day it is?"

Jared was exhausted and irritable, in pain and definitely not in the mood to answer annoying questions. He furrowed his brow in concentration, then mumbled out "mmno." It was all he could manage. Jensen exchanged a raised eyebrow with the paramedic, before the man turned back and asked the patient, "Is that no, you don't remember what today it is or no, you don't want to talk to me, Jared?" The patient furrowed his brow, like maybe he didn't understand the question, then seemed to become frustrated, "I don't..."

Jared's eyes were still closed and he felt himself drifting, but the medic’s voice kept invading the peace he sought, "Jared, when were you born? Can you tell me your birthdate?" Jensen watched Jared struggle. It was really quite painful to see. "Juuuly...19...," he slurred, then paused. The medic was relentless, "July 19th? That’s excellent, what year were you born, Jared?"

If Jensen didn't know this was important, he would have interfered, just to give Jared a break from the questions. He could see the kid was frustrated and confused. Jensen leaned over and put himself into Jared’s line of sight. He touched him on the cheek and Jared opened his eyes sluggishly. Something within Jensen couldn't stand to see Jared in anguish, especially while he was hurting so bad. He didn't know where it was coming from, but he felt an intense protective streak. He locked eyes with Jared and waited a second to see if he recognized him from the restaurant. The pain filled hazel grey eyes seemed to show some recognition.

"Hey," Jensen said, "remember me? I’m still here with you. You’re going to be okay, alright? We just need to keep you awake for a bit.” He gently brushed Jared's hair back from his eyes, like he had earlier, as he kept his other hand on Jared's cheek. The kid seemed to be calmer. Jensen offered a soft smile. Jared was looking at him with trust, like he believed him. The medic asked again, “Jared, can you tell us what year you were born? We need your birthdate, buddy.”

Jared answered, even though he was focused on Jensen, "Nineteen...eighty...three.” The voice was gravelly and strained. Jensen smiled at him in approval, "Nice job, Jared...hang in there, we're almost there." Jensen removed his hand from Jared's cheek and placed it on his shoulder. He kept his other hand softly rubbing Jared's hair, for now. That head injury was right at the hairline, so he had to be mindful.

Jensen felt several sharp shards of glass mixed in the poor kid's hair and knew it must be all over his clothes and body. Shattered glass had a way of reaching all kinds of nooks and crannies and the nurses were gonna be pulling it out for hours. He realized Jared was now studying him, blinking heavily but desperately trying to focus on him for the moment. He held his gaze to give Jared that connection, a distraction from the fear and pain.

The ambulance finally pulled into the hospital bay. Jensen knew he would have to move out of the younger man's view when the ER staff got a hold of him. He quickly assured him, "Don't worry, they're gonna fix you all up. I'm not gonna let anything happen to you, okay?" Jared seemed to be totally relaxed and at peace. He nodded sluggishly, then Jensen watched his beautiful eyes slowly close.

Jared heard Jensen's voice and some others in a far away vacuum. He slipped into blackness, feeling the panic and pain vanish, as the green eyed savior raised his voice, "Jared...not yet, buddy...Jared stay awake," but it was no use. Jared slipped into unconsciousness. The speed at which he was removed from the ambulance and rolled into ER drastically increased. Jensen watched as seven
experts came out of the middle of nowhere and pulled together in a trauma room like the efficient team that they were. He was reminded of his field team as he watched the musical way these people called out bp's, sugar levels, heart rates and administered everything the doctor ordered.

Jared was whisked away fast into ‘Code 3’ surgery. Jensen knew there was nothing to do but sit around and worry for awhile. He knew full well the kid could take a dive on the OR table. That injury would take a few hours to repair. ‘Fuck,’ he hated waiting.
Chapter Summary

REVISED CHAPTER APRIL 2019- Jared's ICU stay with his rescuer hovering nicely. Hurt/Comfort galore in the next few chapters as injured Jared endures his painful recovery and the men get to know one another. I hope you enjoy!

Chapter Four

Jensen had been sitting on his ass way too long. He got up and rubbed out the soreness. He looked up at the clock and realized it had been ninety minutes since Jared had been wheeled into surgery. He decided to call Dani, give her an update, and see if she'd found out anything from the highway patrol officers.

Dani answered her cell on the first ring, obviously waiting on edge to hear something. She told Jensen that Steve had gotten back and they secured all of Jared's things in their business office for safekeeping. She had found Jared’s cell phone, a laptop and a backpack. Everything was ridden with loose glass pieces, but Steve helped her try and clean them off.

"How's our guy doing?" She asked. Jensen filled her in, "He's strong, he stayed awake all the way here, but he was struggling. The kid's got balls climbin' himself outta that car. I can't believe he walked all the way over to the restaurant in that condition. We got his birthdate and a last name out of him, at least, before he lost consciousness." Dani asked, “So? Is he going to make it, Jensen? Please tell me he's going to make it.” Jensen sighed, "I don't know...he's in good hands, but it's not a good place to have a puncture.” He tried to lighten the mood, “Guess what, though, he's not a kid. He’s thirty three.”

Jensen grinned when he heard Dani’s reply, “No he isn’t. No goddamned way Jensen, did you see how young he is? With THAT baby face?” Jensen commented, “Not the kid we thought he was,” as his friend continued, “Well, I'll be damned. He looks twenty five. Heartbreaking eyes, and don’t pretend you haven’t noticed.” Jensen didn’t argue. She proceeded to fill him in on the accident scene. The officers had confirmed Jared was blindsided by a very large vehicle on the driver’s side. Jared had been traveling well within the speed limit and probably didn’t see it coming. It was a brutal hit.

The officers were working on some pieces of paint they collected and trying to match up the markings with any models they could find. They had measurements, indentations and skid marks. There were no witnesses, but they had enough to reconstruct the scene and chase leads based on what they had. "The officers asked me to let you know they would be by the hospital for a follow up interview from Jared at some point tomorrow. They need his statement,” Dani said.

Jensen told her he'd call back as soon as he heard any updates about Jared's condition. After they hung up, he walked around a bit outside, just realizing it was already dark. His stomach growled loudly, reminding him of the steak dinner he missed. He went back inside looking for a cafeteria. Jensen found a cafeteria sign, but it was on another floor and he wasn’t hip on leaving the area yet. He spotted some vending machines and a small espresso/coffee set up nearby. He grabbed a pack of peanuts and an espresso and returned to the waiting room. There was a Three Stooges rerun on the t.v. He glanced at the clock again, noting it had been almost three hours, then settled into a chair with his snack.
Within minutes, he saw an exhausted looking nurse coming his way in scrubs. He stood eagerly to greet her. "Are you Mr. Ackles," the nurse asked? Jensen had a second of confusion then remembered he’d put his name on some paperwork when he got there. "Yes, that’s me. I brought Jared in with the ambulance. How’s he doing?" She motioned for them to sit, "The surgeon is still closing him up so he asked me to come out and fill you in...normally, we don’t discuss patients with other than family, but we understand he’s alone and we don’t have any contact information. We also understand you saved his life today."

Jensen adjusted slightly. He really wasn’t looking for acknowledgement, he wanted to know how the kid was. She continued, "Mr. Padalecki wasn’t doing that well when he got here. His lung was starting to deflate again and he slipped into shock. We repaired the lung, but it was punctured in two places and there are four cracked ribs...it was pretty extensive damage. His collarbone isn’t broken, but badly bruised along with everything on the left side of his chest cavity."

Jensen winced, knowing full well how painful that was and how recovering from it was not going to be easy. It wouldn’t be quick, either. 'Jesus,' Jensen thought about how the poor kid was gonna take that news. The nurse continued, "His fluids are back up and his blood work is showing acceptable levels, his heart rate and bp all stayed acceptable during surgery. He was dehydrated. We did an ultrasound just to make sure there weren't any other injuries hiding anywhere...internal bleeding we may have missed."

Jensen tried to relax, knowing Jared was being taken care of, but he still felt terrible for the kid. The nurse continued, “The concussion is moderate grade. There’s a deep laceration over the hairline fracture, but it’s on his frontal plate, which was the best place for it to hit.” Jensen nodded, 'yes,' he thought, ‘the hardest bone in the head.’ She continued, “The concussion will need to heal, but we’re confident it will. Probably faster with him being immobile for awhile because of the lung.”

The nurse asked if Jensen had any idea where Jared worked, or where he was from? They were running him in all the medical insurance databases, but they hadn’t received any hits yet. Jensen shook his head, “Nah. I just happened to be at the right place at the right time when he stumbled in...the officers said he was driving a rental, but I don’t even know where he’s from, at this point. We tried to ask him for a contact but he never gave us a name.”

She nodded in understanding, “I see, well I’d say you’re definitely right about being in the right place. The surgeon was quite impressed.” When Jensen looked unwilling to comment, she talked about something else, “Right now, our nurses are picking the glass out of his hair. He was covered with the stuff. He's got multiple cuts all over his arms but we've cleaned and treated them. He has really deep cuts on his palms, like he pushed down on cut glass at some point. We have those cleaned and stitched. The poor guy is a mess, but we’re getting him cleaned up while he’s asleep.”

Jensen nodded, “I appreciate knowing, thank you.” She stood up, “I’m going to go back and check on things. He won’t be awake for quite a while and we’re not sure how coherent he’ll be for the first couple days. Are you sticking around?” Jensen looked like he hadn’t really thought that far. “Uh...yeah, I guess. I mean the guy is all alone, right? At least until someone shows up for him?”

The nurse smiled, “Good. I think that’ll be very nice.” She started to turn, but Jensen quickly stopped her, “Can I see him?” When she turned back, Jensen shrugged, looking a little nervous, “I mean...I know I’m not a relative, it’s just that...” The nurse smiled again, “I think we can make an exception for his rescuer. We want him to feel as comfortable as possible and that includes not being alone. If he has a problem with it, though, we’ll have to kick you out, understood?”

Jensen nodded, “Of course.” Before leaving, she held her hand out, “I’m Natalie.” Jensen shook it, “Jensen.” Natalie ordered warmly, “Go to the cafeteria and get some real food. Try to relax for a bit,
“Alright? He’s going to be in post-op for at least an hour before we take him to intensive care.” Jensen took her advice. He found the cafeteria and loaded his tray with a salad, meatloaf and cornbread. As he enjoyed his meal, he thought over why Jared hadn’t been forthcoming with anyone to call for him. Something about this whole situation continued to keep Jensen’s protective instincts on alert. Something wasn’t right.

Jensen used the restroom, cleaned up and went outside to call Dani and Steve with an update. After that, he went back to the same waiting room and saw a blanket and pillow sitting on the couch. He wondered if Natalie had sent it out for him. Jensen sat next to it. He found the remote and clicked on some other old sitcoms. It was close to nine p.m. but he figured it shouldn’t be long before they allowed him to see Jared.

Jensen asked himself again what the hell he was doing. He'd saved countless people, done field surgeries, pulled people to safety but he never cared about the followup...not like this. When the fuck he had become such a softie he wasn’t sure. "Mr. Ackles," a young female nurse asked? Jensen stood up, quickly dismissing his private thoughts.

"If you’d like to follow me, the patient has been set up in his room now. Natalie said you'd probably want to see him." Jensen looked pleased. He quickly clicked off the t.v. and followed her. He couldn’t believe himself, really. Yes, he most certainly wanted to see Jared, but he wasn’t normally so transparent with his emotions.

He followed the nurse back to an area of beeping monitors and shuffling activity. The stationary nurses were monitoring several patients at once, while other nurses were coming in and out of rooms. His young tour guide led him to one end of the hall that was quieter, which had it's own monitoring station. There were twelve rooms with very thick curtains and sliding glass doors. The doors seemed to be permanently open and only thick curtains were used for privacy. Jensen followed the nurse into Jared's room.

When he saw the kid for the first time in several hours, Jensen felt overwhelming compassion flood his heart. The nurse informed him that Jared's RN would be with him shortly and he was welcome to make himself comfortable. He nodded a thank you at the young girl, unable to even look away from the man he'd been waiting so long to see.

Jensen immediately went to Jared's bed and looked closely at him. Jared's face was a colorful assortment of bruising on the left side, which continued down his shoulder and arm. Jensen could see the bandages everywhere that Natalie had talked about. The poor young man had been stitched up and cleaned and was now a collection of raw looking abrasions, cuts and bandages.

Jared had an oxygen mask over his nose and mouth and seemed to be breathing much better than he had been when they arrived. He had two bags connected to his iv, a heart monitor, a sensor clamped to his finger, tubes coming from under the blanket that Jensen guessed were coming from a catheter, and from a bulging bandage over Jared's chest.

The only sounds in Jared's room were pillowed leg massagers that clicked on and off, the beeping heart monitor and the motor of the bp machine which was inflating and releasing on its own. Jared was still out cold and it gave Jensen time to observe all the repair work the surgical staff had done. The kid was no longer propped up at an angle. Jensen guessed that was to keep the recently repaired lung flat until the tissue fused and they could move him. He saw a very nearby breathing machine with plastic covered sterile tubes, strategically placed to be used in an emergency if the patient's lung stopped working again.

Jensen's compassion for Jared’s plight deepened as he thought about what a wasted life it would have been today because of some uncaring asshole who didn’t even stop. He reiterated again, in his
mind, how damned fortunate it had been for Jared to head straight for the restaurant in as bad of shape as he was. Jensen looked around and found a padded chair, scooted close to Jared's bedside and planted himself in it. He figured he'd know more about the concussion when Jared's nurse finally entered.

He didn't have to wait long, as within 5 minutes a male and female in scrubs entered Jared's room with a slew of additional supplies. They both greeted Jensen with friendly smiles. The female was older and seemed to be the one in charge. Jensen watched her go over some times and medication orders with the younger nurse and fill him in on the settings for all of Jared's equipment. Jensen watched the younger man eagerly nod yes to her and confirmed everything she said back. He then left the room. The remaining nurse took a few moments to read the machines, looked closely at Jared's face, then felt the rise and fall of his chest with her hand before she checked under the massive amounts of gauze on his chest.

Jensen remained quiet, not wanting to interrupt her duties. Finally, she rolled her gloves off and tossed them in the garbage. She went over to the sink and washed her hands, then turned and made eye contact with Jensen, "I'm Darcy. I'll be Jared's nurse for the next 12 hours." She put out her hand and Jensen took it immediately, "I'm Jensen Ackles." Darcy asked, "Are you the one that brought him in?" Jensen replied, "Yeah...well and the ambulance crew, but yeah I was with him." Darcy realized this must be the hero that her fellow staff had been marveling about, "So, you're the one that relieved the pressure in his chest wall and saved his life?"

Jensen was really over people trying to give him credit for something that he'd been trained to do on automatic pilot for the last twenty years, but he went with it. He half smiled, totally ready to talk about something else. Darcy caught this and gave him his wish, "So, how much do you know, so far?" Jensen told her what Natalie had filled him in on, then waited for Darcy to pick up from there. While Jared was post-op, they had done another CT scan. There was major intensive bruising up and down his left side. The crack on his forehead was very thin, but it rattled him enough to cause the concussion, even though it wasn't as severe as it could have been.

They were going to bring in a portable scanner in 24 hours and were hopeful they would see the bone mending itself with lack of movement and interruption. He would have a headache and be dizzy, maybe be confused until the head trauma healed. Jared's lung needed to be immobile for the first 48 hours and he needed to be watched very closely, in case it collapsed and they had to insert the breather. They started him on antibiotics and anti swelling medication, not to mention heavy pain meds. Darcy finished with, "He's going to be in tremendous pain and we're ready for that. We've got to start him on breathing exercises as soon as possible, or he'll be susceptible to pneumonia. The first 72 hours are terribly critical so he'll be staying in intensive care. The lung heals very fast if uninterrupted and Jared seems to be a very healthy 33 year old without any complications. If we can control the pain, we believe we can get him better. If he does well, we'll be moving him to a less intensive area, but he'll be here at least 72 hours."

Jensen listened to all of the information. He didn't have any questions for her, since Jensen understood everything better than most people would. He certainly wasn't going to let Jared go through all this alone. He figured he would continue to hang around until Jared kicked him out, or someone else showed up. Jensen looked around the room and Darcy seemed to get the idea he needed a place to sleep, "That couch over there opens out sideways into a double bed. I'll bring you a couple pillows and a blanket. You can stay as long as you like, Mr. Ackles. I'd rather have my patients comforted by someone nearby, than feeling alone when they're sick or in pain."

Jensen half smiled at her, "I appreciate it...and I'm sorry I left the blanket and pillow Natalie sent for me in the waiting room. I really don't know if he's gonna be comforted by me being here yet, though. He doesn't know me from Adam." She smiled at Jensen, "Well, I'll have to kick you out if
that’s what he wants, but let’s just wait and see how he feels about it.” With that comment, Darcy left the room and returned a couple minutes later. She handed two blankets and pillows to Jensen, then checked over her patient again. She let Jensen know they would need to assess Jared if he woke up. He might be confused and groggy under the medication, but if they could get any information out of him and check his responses, it would help them decide how he was doing.

Jensen understood. He set up his bed as soon as she left the room. He settled in for what might be a long wait, glancing at his battered unconscious roommate. Jensen reminded himself the highway patrolmen were going to show up tomorrow to get a statement. He seriously doubted Jared would be in any condition to give them much.

Jensen couldn't believe he'd fallen asleep so fast on the pull out bed. Last thing he remembered, he was listening to the rhythmic ‘burrr’ of the leg massagers and the bp cuff, next thing he was pulling himself to an upright position, shaking his head out of a sleepy fog. 'I didn't even dream,' he thought to himself as he looked at his watch. It was 3 a.m. “Shit,” he mumbled, thinking to himself he really had slipped in his awareness skills over the last year. Jensen stretched, trying to work the kinks out as he walked over to Jared's bedside. He hoped he hadn't missed anything. He didn't know why it felt so important for him to be there for Jared when he woke up, but he couldn't deny the fact that this young man had some kind of pull on him.

Jensen leaned closer, noticing the ostrich egg knot on Jared's upper forehead had risen and a myriad of blues and purples had appeared there and all down his left side. The area around Jared's beautiful eyes had darkened to a slight charcoal shade and Jensen knew it was gonna get worse before it got better. 'He's gonna have shiners,' Jensen thought with sympathy. Jared's eyes were peacefully closed and he hadn't moved from his position of four hours ago. The younger man's head was tilted to the right, facing Jensen. He reached up, barely touching Jared’s head when he moved the loose hair away from his face. He still wondered why he felt compelled to do that.

Jensen sighed, looking him over. The kid was damn good looking, that was for sure. Even with all his battered darkening face, Jensen could see how gorgeous he was. He forced himself to sit down on the chair next to the bed. Hopefully, he would get to see those expressive eyes again. Jensen grumbled at himself, ‘You should write for Hallmark,’ thinking he really needed to get a handle on this mushy side.

Jared didn't seem to be on the same page, as far as waking up. After awhile, Jensen peeked around the curtain to make sure Darcy was on her way to do her checks before he took a break. He eagerly headed for some espresso, after Darcy told him the kiosk was open twenty four hours. He returned within minutes, carrying something called "Fireball" in a cup. He asked, “Did I miss anything?” Darcy smiled, "Not yet.” Jensen looked worriedly at her, "How long do you guys wait on a concussion before you lighten the drugs and get him to wake up?” Darcy explained, knowing damn well Jensen knew what he was talking about, “We prefer to assess him as quick as possible, but because he heals more rapidly when he sleeps, we’ll give it a few more hours. I hate to reduce the pain medication but the doctor will order it if he doesn’t wake by then."

Darcy prepared a warm wash cloth and wiped Jared's face very gently, removing some of the light sheen off his forehead and the leftover dried blood that the surgical staff had missed. Jensen sat in the chair, sipping his coffee while she worked. Darcy pulled up the oxygen mask and padded Jared’s skin underneath. She put the rag away and started making adjustments to Jared’s oxygen.

She noticed Jensen’s curious look, “I think the mask can be kind of scary when they wake up. I’m just switching him to a cannula. They’re a little irritating, but at least it won’t scare him if he wakes up confused. Anything to help lessen that, you know?” Jensen nodded in complete understanding. Darcy finished the cannula, then pulled a tiny tube from her medicine cabinet and peeled the
wrapping off. She proceeded to rub some chapstick on Jared's lips.

Jensen was flabbergasted. He couldn't believe her thoughtfulness. The hospitals he was used to weren't anything like 'this'. When Darcy left, Jensen decided he would sneak a look at Jared's chart. He was well versed with the medical science of it all and he understood the terminology. He didn't have anything else to do so he grabbed Jared's chart off the hook at the end of his bed, and sat down again with his coffee.

Jared's chart was full of all the details start to finish. The intake, the surgery, the scans and tests...they were all there. It was actually a bigger mess inside his chest than Jensen thought. Jensen hadn't realized that in the hospital intake, they had documented his own name and number as the only contact. They ran Jared's DOB in the medical healthcare system right away to get a hit on any insurance, but it wasn't scribbled in until an hour ago. Jared was covered by his employer, a company named Skyward Engineering.

Jensen didn't know where that was or what the kid's position was there, but at least they had something. He was sure this company would be looking for the kid soon. Jensen wondered if the kid was an engineer. It took great intelligence to do that kind of work. It also took a hell of a lot of perseverance to get out of that car and to the restaurant. Jensen watched Jared, pensively, 'And someone almost killed him'. His brain gnawed on that morbid thought, the warrior in him itching to get his hands on the asshole who'd almost ended this young man's life. Jensen put Jared's file back on it's hook, then stood leaning on the bed rail for a moment.

Jared was still in the same position, but Jensen noticed a very subtle change in his facial expression. He moved in closer, noticing Jared's eyebrows and forehead were crinkled slightly. As he watched, Jared’s face scrunched up in more awareness, then he moaned in a pitiful airy painful sound that melted Jensen’s nerves. He saw the pupils moving underneath Jared’s eyelids, so he reached over and pushed the call button.

Jensen kept his eyes on the patient as another nurse came in, "Sir?" Jensen glanced at her, "He's waking up," then returned his focus on Jared. The nurse hurried to go find Darcy. Jensen waited while Jared sluggishly moved his head. Darcy appeared and asked, "Has he opened his eyes yet?" Jensen answered, "No, he's got rapid eye movement and he's moving his head."

Darcy leaned over Jared's face and gently raised one eyelid at a time. As she was looking for pupil reaction, she tried to coax her patient into awareness, "Jared, can you hear me?" When the younger man didn't open his eyes at first, Darcy tried again, "Mr. Padalecki? Jared, you're in the hospital. Can you open your eyes?"

Jensen felt bad for the kid, knowing it must be terrible to wake up confused and in pain. Jared moaned again in a frustrated sound, then surprised them both by trying to speak, "Whaa." Darcy glanced up at Jensen. He gave her a slight grin because he'd already known the kid was strong and determined by his walk from the wrecked car. If they kept this up, they might get him to wake. Darcy continued to try, "Jared, you're in the hospital, sweetie. Denver Memorial. You were in a car accident and you've just had surgery. My name is Darcy and I'm your nurse. Do you understand me?" Jared took a few seconds to process what he'd just heard. He felt quite slow on the uptake. Darcy kept trying, "Jared, you have a concussion and we really need to see your eyes. Can you open your eyes, honey?"

Jared tried to speak, even though he missed what the question was, “n’kay,” he softly answered. Darcy glanced up at Jensen and they both grinned. Jared’s loopy attempt at communicating was a good sign. Darcy persisted, "Jared, can you wake up for me?" The groggy patient flopped his head over to face Jensen's side. It was quieter, after all.
Jensen watched him try and inhale a deeper breath but stopped with a painful grunt. He blinked heavy eyelids a few times before settling them half open. After a few more seconds, the kid looked right at him. Jensen smiled, "Well, hey." Jared focused on him for a second and then looked contemplative like he was trying to place where he knew Jensen from.

Darcy hated to ruin the moment but she really needed to assess Jared's alertness before he fell back asleep. Since her patient seemed to be focused on Jensen at the moment, she nudged his elbow, "Ask him questions." Jensen asked, "Do you remember what happened?" Jared slightly nodded. His limited ability to breathe in too deep interfered with talking, but he forced himself to try, "somthin'...hit...me...I thought...I w's...going to...die..."

Jensen felt mushy all of a sudden, really trying to quash it down. Darcy nudged his arm again, "Birthdate, relatives." Jensen started to ask more questions, but noticed the pen light Darcy was about to use. He knew Jared was sensitive to the damn things and wished he could save him from it. Before either could ask a question, the patient surprised them both by slurring out, "Thnk you...f'r...sav'n me." Jensen hadn't expected that and he didn't know what to say. He glanced at Darcy, who smiled at him, "Kinda melts your heart, doesn't it?" Jensen looked back at Jared and sighed. He crossed his arms in front of him, rubbing his face. The kid was a heartbreaker.

Darcy took over with her pen light, but she brought it from the sides, which had much less of an effect than the paramedic’s. She took over the questions, "Jared, what's your birthdate, sweetie?" The younger man turned his head very slowly toward her and answered in a soft sluggish voice, "July...19...19...eighty...three." Darcy coaxed, "That's excellent...can you give me the name of anyone who should know you are in the hospital? Relative, a friend, coworkers?"

Jared seemed to think for a few seconds but didn’t answer. Darcy tried again, "Jared, we have your workplace as Skyward Engineering, is it okay to contact them for you?" Jared shook his head in the negative, then clenched his face in pain and at the dizziness movement caused. "I thn'k...Blair. Maybe...is my...phone...here?"

Darcy looked up at Jensen for help so he explained, "Your phone wasn’t on you, buddy, but my friends have it and they’re gonna bring it here, okay?" Jensen saw something in the kid’s eyes that bothered him, so he leaned closer, "Hey, I promise you, they’ve got all your things from the car. The backpack, the laptop and the phone. They'll bring all your stuff to you, okay?"

Jensen watched the kid relax a bit. He could tell Jared was feeling his injuries, even through the heavy pain meds, but the kid was trying to stay with them. Jared eyes were starting to close, "How long...'m I g'na...be here?" Jensen looked at Darcy. She tried to answer Jared's question with as much honesty as she could, "Sweetie, you’ve had intensive surgery and it's all gonna depend on how fast you heal. You’ve got some rest and healing to do first and then we’ll assess how long you’ll be in here, okay?"

Jared was trying to follow, but whatever they had him on and the constant gripping pain kept interfering with his concentration. His head wasn’t feeling great, either, and he really hoped he was imagining that nauseous feeling churning in his stomach because throwing up did not sound appealing right now.

Jensen could see how exhausted Jared was. After a few seconds, he slipped back into sleep, unable to fight his body's weakness. He seemed to completely forget about whatever he had been stressed about a few seconds ago. Jensen stood back and watched Jared for a moment, while Darcy scribbled on Jared's chart. She looked up, "It's nice that you're here. At least we got a few tidbits from him but still no contact except for this Blair. He seems to have a little clarity, even under the narcotics, so that's excellent... ‘and’ he’s comfortable around you."
Darcy hung the chart back on its hook. "So, now we let him sleep. In a few hours, there will be a portable CT coming, blood work and dressing changes after that. It'll be round the clock for awhile. If you can, get some sleep...he hasn't kicked you out yet." Darcy smirked like she knew damn well Jared was really 'not' going to do that, but Jensen responded, "Well, he's kinda doped up. Maybe he hasn't realized he 'can' kicked me out."

Darcy grinned as she walked out. Jensen looked at Jared again and sighed. He'd just finished that battery acid espresso and he wasn't really sure he 'could' sleep but he went to the couch anyway. Jensen took a moment to de-escalate. The old feelings of being the first responder on a combat scene, dragging someone to safety and being responsible for them until they reached across a border were a tough act to forget. He had to remind himself there was a machine dosing Jared with pain meds, alarms all over him that went directly to the nurses’ station, and Jared was being tended to. This wasn’t Jensen’s command, but it took some self control to belay those old responses.

Jensen jerked awake, wondering if he'd been sleeping in a fox hole for a second, then he realized he was still in Jared's room on the couch. People were in the room with rolling machines, surrounding the kid’s bed. Darcy came over and put a hand on Jensen's shoulder, "Mr. Ackles, I'm off shift in a few minutes. We're briefing one another and there are a few tests going on. He's still sleeping." Jensen's brain seemed to register everything at once, the patient still on the bed, the wires being connected to his head, the two attendants leaning over Jared, one drawing blood from his outstretched arm and the other running the scanner. He felt the hand on his shoulder and managed to smile up at Darcy and nod. He congratulated himself for not waking up in a flashback and taking everybody out with deadly Koga moves. Christ, he hadn’t even realized he was asleep.

Jensen yawned and stood up to stretch, "How's he doing?" His eyes locked on Jared’s face as Darcy answered, “He’s got a slight temp, so we're watching it. Sometimes it’s normal after surgery, especially for the trauma he’s been through, but if it goes up, we’ll need to deal with it. His vitals are still holding.” Jensen stood passive with his arms folded in front of him, the running the scanner. He felt the hand on his shoulder and managed to smile up at Darcy and nod. He congratulated himself for not waking up in a flashback and taking everybody out with deadly Koga moves. Christ, he hadn’t even realized he was asleep.

Jensen exchanged a smile with Darcy. They were both glad at least one person knew about this poor kid and was on their way. Darcy added, "Oh, and there is a Manny Castro, but he doesn’t work there, he’s on Jared’s emergency contact. Blair knows him and she said she would take care of it. I made sure we told Blair that Jared ‘only’ wanted she told.”

Jensen nodded, “Sounds like progress.” He watched Jared for a second, then turned back to her, “Where’s his company?” Darcy said, “Austin, Texas.” Jensen looked thoughtful. Darcy added more, “Blair said he was here on an assignment and only supposed to stay a couple nights.” Jensen grumbled, “Well that sucks. The guy’s stuck here. How long before he can travel?”

Darcy looked guiltily at Jensen. "They won't let him fly with that lung for awhile...not until it’s strong enough in case there’s a pressure change. The doctor might let him ride back in a car, but he won’t be able to drive himself. It’s probably gonna be weeks.” Jensen considered that. While he felt terrible for this kid, he understood the healing process. Darcy added more, “Plus, he can have dizziness, pressure for up to a couple weeks from that concussion. Beyond that, the guy is gonna be sore for a few months. I don’t think they’ll let him work for awhile.”

Jensen thought that over. He sensed Jared wasn’t the type to be down long. Just from moving him,
he had felt the muscular definition of this kid. Jared was pretty fit. He wouldn’t be surprised if the kid tried to work before anybody gave him the green light. Jensen wondered how long these friends of his were going to stay and whether they would at least help him deal with hanging out here until he could travel. He again mentally asked himself why the fuck he cared so much, but he didn’t have an answer.

The equipment and tech’s all left Jared’s room and Darcy brought in another nurse to introduce her, “Mr. Ackles, this is Barbara. She’ll be Jared’s nurse for the day.” Barbara shook Jensen’s hand and looked him in the eye, “Please call me Barb...everybody does. I’ll take good care of him. I’m going to make my rounds and I’ll be back in a bit.” Jensen nodded and smiled, “Thank you. I’ll be hanging out.” Barb gave him a pretend salute and walked off with a knowing smirk at Darcy. The silent exchange of ‘Wow’ between the women was missed by the ex-soldier.
Chapter Summary

This chapter continues with Jared's painful hospital stay. Lots of hurt/comfort. Descriptive surgical things such as drainage tubes, seepage, bruising and stitches...squeamish for some. The boys connect and share some sweet moments, but Jared is still fresh out of surgery so it can’t go too far. Cops are introduced and the story moves toward how Jared got into his predicament. This is a huge traumatic injury so there will be a couple chapters like this one, where our young engineer suffers while trying to get better. The soldier and the engineer will get to know one another, though, and that is the fun part.

Hope you enjoy. Thank you for reading!

Chapter Five

Jensen decided he'd definitely partake in more of that Firebomb espresso, as soon as he made sure Jared was okay. His breathing was quiet and steady. He was glad to see a lack of pain lines on the kid's face, but the bruising was even darker now. "Yikes," Jensen exclaimed as he observed him. 'He looks like he's been in combat,' he thought. Jensen stared for a minute, actually thinking Jared looked a little flushed. He very lightly touched Jared’s forehead with the back of his hand and tested the heat there. Jared was warm, just like Darcy had mentioned, but he wasn’t scalding yet. Jensen carefully avoided the huge goose egg, just above where his hand was, not wanting to aggravate that sensitive and painful area.

Jared moaned and Jensen pulled back his hand, thinking he may have hurt him or disturbed his sleep. He watched him swallow, then blink his eyes open for a fraction of a second and flop his head over to face the other way. Jared moaned, then turned his head back to Jensen and scrunched his face like he was in pain. Jensen checked the machine. Jared’s next dose of pain meds was forty minutes away. He pushed the call button. Jensen touched Jared on his shoulder when the poor kid moaned again in pain, "They're comin, buddy, hang in there," then he lightly touched Jared’s head and smoothed the loose hair back. Barb came into the room and approached the bed quickly. Jensen didn't have to say anything. She took a look at Jared's pain lines, checked the machine and hurried to get a dose of something from the locked cabinet.

Barb shot a syringe into Jared’s IV. She asked Jensen, "How long has he been like this?" Jensen answered, "Just a few minutes. He wasn't even awake and then started moaning like he was hurting." Barb took a thermometer out of her pocket and placed it on Jared's forehead. She checked her watch, then peeled the device off after sixty seconds. Jensen mentally shook his head. Just another technological advance that hospitals had made while he was out in the field.

Barb checked Jared’s pupils while speaking to him, "Jared, my name is Barb. I'm taking care of you today. I've given you something for the pain and you're gonna feel relief in just a minute, okay? Can you tell me where your pain is?" Jared didn't open his eyes, but tried to respond. He lifted his left hand and indicated his left torso as best he could. The arm was bruised too so it wasn’t an easy feat.

"Okay, sweetie, how about your head? Is your head hurting too?" Barb waited for his response. When Jared slowly nodded, she patted his shoulder, “Okay, do you feel it getting better yet?” Jared
sluggishly nodded. Barb looked at Jensen, “It’s 100. It isn’t going down, but it’s not going up either. I’m going to try some tylenol on top of everything else and see if we can reduce it.” After she took care of the second syringe, Barb used her pen light and showed Jared’s pupils to Jensen. The light came from the side again, so Jared seemed to take it well.

“See the reaction time?” Jensen nodded, “Yeah, it’s better.” Barb agreed, “Yes. When he came in, they were way off. Six hours ago, they weren’t reacting at all the same. Now, they’re timing closer. That’s good for a concussion of his level.” Jensen felt some relief, as he visibly relaxed. Barb added notes to the chart. She went to Jared’s side and lifted up his light blanket, uncovering the surgical area. She glanced up at Jensen, “Are you squeamish? I’m changing his dressing.” Jensen smirked, “No.” He realized she didn’t know his background. “I’ve seen a lot, it’s fine,” Jensen added.

Barb continued with her task. She removed the thick packing over the wound and pulled all the used gauze and tape off. She dropped everything on the floor. When it was uncovered, Jensen saw even more hideous blue and purple impact bruises going down Jared's entire ribcage. There was a tint of yellow from iodine all around an approximately five inch long incision site. Staples held the wound together and a drainage tube came from the bottom end. It looked like the incision had been seeping blood and fluids all this time, as the gauze she had removed was tainted with it. The drain had some bloody residue coming through it but Barb seemed happy with the look of it.

She turned on her pen light and shone it brightly on Jared incision, very softly pressing around it with her bare fingers. ‘Feeling for heat,' Jensen deduced, 'and looking for red inflamed skin.' He watched the nurse skillfully place more large gauze pads over the incision, then tape them down without Jared even flinching. She checked the seep bag and told Jensen, "He'll lose this tomorrow, if it stays like it is and keeps getting clearer.” Jensen was glad. It meant Jared’s internal wounds were doing well, even if he looked like shit at the moment.

Barb glanced at Jensen, “It’s good that you’re here, but have you eaten?” Jensen looked caught off guard, as Barb continued, “And I don’t mean just coffee, real food?” Barb waited until Jensen shrugged, looking a little chagrined when he responded, “Well, no...I could eat but I don’t want him to be alone.” Barb smiled, “Go. I’ll stay.” Jensen smiled gratefully and took off. He enjoyed bacon and eggs, more coffee and gathered a few snacks and drinks in case it was awhile before he left the room again. Jared’s face was relaxed and pain free, so Jensen settled himself on the couch. He knew the cops were going to come at some point today, but he had no idea how they were gonna get a statement from a patient in his condition. It had been pretty tiring for Jared just to answer the minimal questions he and the nurses threw at him.

Jensen noticed a newspaper on the chair by Jared’s bedside. He moved over there, took a seat and opened it. He attempted the crossword for awhile, then rubbed his eyes and yawned. He was so relieved they had made it this far and Jared was still breathing and somewhat stable. Jensen took some deep cleansing breaths and leaned back in the chair, meaning to recline. As he was sliding his ass downward and leaning his head back he glanced over and noticed Jared’s eyes were open.

'Holy shit,' he thought, as he sat up and leaned forward. He wasn't sure if Jared was actually in a daze or really looking at him. “Hey.” Jensen tried. He tilted his head sideways and watched, as Jared’s eyes seemed to track him. After a moment, Jared softly responded, “Hi.” Jensen smiled. This kid had a way about him, that was for sure. Jensen realized he felt giddy like a complete sap on the inside, just at that simple ‘hi’. He asked further, "How are you feeling? Better now?" Jared blinked heavily, a soft smile accompanied his slow head nod, “S’bettr.” Jensen touched him on his head again, lightly rubbing his hair, “That's good.” Jensen added, “I’m so sorry this happened to you, Jared.”

Jensen watched Jared's face go from innocent confusion to disbelief, "No......s'not your flt...you sav'd
m'lfe...cdn't...breathe." Jensen was afraid Jared might remember that terrifying few minutes of not being able to breathe. "I'm sorry you remember that. I was hoping you'd forget it." Jared said, "I w's...dy'ng...but...you sv'd me." They looked at each other in silence for a moment. Jared surprised him with a kind of funny statement, "hrt l'ke...bitch, tho." Jensen snickered softly, caught off guard with the honesty, then he became serious again, "Yeah, I bet...I'm so sorry for hurting you like that, Jared. I wasn't about to let you die, buddy, but I know it hurt you."

Jared smiled at Jensen's apology, rolling his eyes because this man was apologizing for saving his life. Jensen smiled at the eye roll. "I saw that," he warned. Jared smiled with another eye roll. Jensen smiled back. Jensen had no explanation for this comfort level. It obviously went both ways. He was so relieved he could be a help to Jared, not an annoying stranger. Jared closed his eyes and Jensen thought maybe he was going to drift off so he stayed quiet for a moment. The younger man rested his eyes for about a minute, then opened them again, pleased to see Jensen was still there. Jensen still had his hand on Jared's hair but he wasn't sure if Jared was even aware of it. The kid suddenly looked as though he thought of something, "How much...time?"

Jensen thought maybe Jared wanted to know how long it had been since the accident, so he tried to fill him in, "The accident was about 3:30 yesterday. After you got here, you had surgery and got a room last night about 8:30. It's close to 9 a.m. right now." Jared tried to follow him, blinking heavily, "So...'s th' n'xt day?" Jensen knew the kid wasn't quite firing on all cylinders, so he patiently answered him, "Yes, it's the next morning. Your surgery was pretty serious. You've been asleep most of the time. This is the first I've gotten to talk to you this much. I must say I prefer it to being worried sick about when you're going to wake up." Jensen smiled. He thought it was pretty cute how Jared's sluggish heavy eyelids were trying so hard to stay awake. The kid seemed determined to try and focus.

Jared suddenly looked concerned, "You mus'..." he paused with his eyes closed for a few seconds, then continued, "you mus' be...so tr'd..you shl'd sleep." Jensen didn't know Jared yet, but he was pretty sure the gorgeous kid was trying to order him to get some sleep. The young man was obviously more worried about Jensen's welfare than his own. This brought out Jensen's protective streak, even more. He felt even stronger about keeping Jared safe from harm and making sure he was taken care of. Jensen thought he fell back asleep, but then Jared asked him with his eyes closed, "Is y'r n'm...J'nsen?" Jensen answered, "Yes," with a slight grin, "I'm amazed you can remember that." He waited to see if Jared was gonna talk anymore. He hoped so, but he knew the poor guy had to be battling his own strength. Jared wondered where Jensen had come from, 'Did he have a family, had he been on a date with someone or maybe he worked in that restaurant'. He was scrolling through his sluggish thoughts, as the stunning green eyes focused intently on him. Jensen was sure handsome. Jared was sure if he could see better, the man would be even more so. Right now, though, he could feel himself fading.

Jared mumbled, "Are you...gon'stay?" Jensen said, "Yes. I'll be here until you want me to leave, okay?" Jared relaxed, "Kay...th'n'k yoo." Jared smiled as he drifted, then he surprised Jensen with a few more slurred words, "You shl'd sleep...eat sm'thin," as he passed out into dreamland. Jensen's brow furrowed as he concentrated on the relaxed face. He wasn't used to having such tender conversations. Christ, could this kid be anymore alluring? Even with all the life threatening injuries he was more worried about 'Jensen' eating and sleeping.

In the next couple hours, Jensen watched a slew of activity come in and out of Jared's room. There was a breathing tech, dropping some kind of plastic breathing meter thing-a-kabob that Jared apparently would need to start doing often; the vampire returned to suck another couple vials of blood; then housekeeping dropped by to clean. The nurses came in for their 15 minute checks, but not Barb in awhile. He couldn't believe Jared slept through it all.
The officers showed up close to noon wanting their statement. They told Jensen they would hang out until the patient woke up again. Jensen talked to them first, telling them all he knew. The officers filled him in on their intel. The paint left on Jared’s rental came from a large commercial Ford truck. They were in the process of listing businesses in the area who used those types of vehicles. There were traffic cameras being reviewed from several surrounding intersections. Once they found the commercial truck business, they could narrow down which camera’s were most likely to match routes and go from there. It was all they had to go on, but they were confident they would find the other driver, it just took some leg work.

Jensen warned them Jared was pretty out of it and that he might not be able to communicate too clearly. They understood and assured Jensen they would make it as quick as possible. Jensen walked around the room to stretch out the kinks while the officers went to grab lunch. After a few moments, Jensen heard a noise coming from Jared which didn’t sound favorable. He hurried to the side of the bed, hearing sounds of distress. "Jared," he called to him. Jared moaned, higher pitched, his brow furrowed. He tried to move his head side to side, but Jensen held him gently with his hand on one cheek. "Jared," he tried to soothe, “Jared it’s okay.” He hoped he could wake the man before he tried to sit up.

Jensen rubbed his head soothingly until Jared seemed to accept the comfort and calmed back into a more peaceful sleep. "That's it, Jared, you're okay," Jensen soothed. After a few minutes, he straightened up, but stayed close in case it happened again. When the officers returned, Jensen was standing with his arms folded over his chest, watching Jared sleep. He stepped toward them, “Still asleep, guys.” The officers made themselves comfortable on the couch with cups of coffee while Barb came in and performed her checks. Jensen told her about the nightmare, but that it was quickly surpassed.

Jared’s temp still read 100.2. Barb sighed, not looking too happy about it. She shared to Jensen, “The doctor will be by this afternoon to go over everything.” Jensen nodded, watching Jared with a nagging feeling about that temp. Before leaving, Barb stopped in front of the officers, “Guys, he does NOT need any setbacks right now...he’s still at risk...easy going, are we in agreement?” Both nodded eagerly. Jensen grinned inwardly because they both acted like they had been subject to Barb’s wrath before.

With Jared still out, Jensen thought he would address the nagging questions that were plaguing his mind. He sat on the small coffee table facing both cops, “So this asshole just took off. Someone with any sense would have stopped, at least to see the damage to their own truck. Asshole in question came from the side, a direct t-bone hit. What the hell, fella’s?”

Jensen was serious. Just talking about it pissed him off, royally, knowing Jared might have been intentionally hurt. He watched the officers for a few seconds, then realized why they paused. Jensen had spent most of his life in high threat level situations. Every fraction of a second you survived depended on instinct. Awareness of your surroundings, reading the people you were dealing with, and always knowing at least three escape routes to every situation. Those were just a few deeply embedded habits. He smiled to himself, looking down. ‘They’re assessing me,’ he thought. It’s exactly what ‘he’ would do.

One officer’s face suddenly changed. His concentration on Jensen backed off and he relaxed with a smile, blurtling something out that Jensen didn’t expect, "You’re from one of the special forces." Jensen’s eyebrow raised. He mocked with a little annoyance, "Is it written on my shirt somewhere?" The officer chuckled and said, "No, it's just something that fellow ops can spot. That or you're a cop." He stood up and held his hand out. Jensen took it in a firm shake, "Damn, you're good." The officer answered, “Eric Dawson. Delta Force-1st Squadron detached, retired 2010 and joined State Patrols. Jensen said, "Black Ops, Special Ops, and a couple others that aren’t on paper anywhere.”
Eric turned Jensen’s forearm over and smiled at the small specialized tattoo before he let go. He glanced at Jared, “Damn, it’s lucky it was you he ran into. And you’re right, we’re definitely on the same shitty page. It looks deliberate. That’s what we’re trying to prove.”

The patient suddenly turned his head and sighed painfully. Jensen went to Jared’s side. The officers hung back, out of respect, letting their victim fully wake up. Jensen watched Jared blink heavily. He lifted his right hand and rubbed his eyes before reaching up toward is head injury. The thing was throbbing and he really wanted to feel what was there.

Jensen warned, "Careful," when Jared felt the bandage and winced in pain. He seemed to figure out not to touch that sensitive area again, but then lowered his hand to the cannula. When he pulled at it, Jensen intervened gently by stopping his hand, “No, it has to stay, it’s helping you okay?” Jared looked over with sleepy eyes, seemingly frustrated, to find Jensen standing over him. His gravelly unused voice barely made a whisper of a sound, "I thot'ws...a dream...m'still...here.” Jensen touched the man’s head gently, "Yeah, it’s real. I'm sorry Jared. How are you feeling? Are you hurting bad?"

Jared closed his eyes and thought about that. He remembered waking up in terrible agony and then feeling ‘no’ pain at all, then here he was. God knew how many hours ago that had been. He recognized this gorgeous man now. He had been here the whole time and for some reason Jared was completely at ease about that. There was a little pain at the moment, but if he didn’t move certain muscles, he seemed to be okay, so he conveyed that, "S'ok...just hurts...to breathe...n I forget." Jensen told him, "The officers are here to ask you questions about the accident. Do you feel up to answering them? If you don’t I’ll have them come back.”

Jared seemed to think about that for a few seconds. He nodded sluggishly, “S’okay.” Jensen watched him for a bit longer before he added, “If you hurt or you get too tired, I’ll kick them out, okay?” Jared smiled with a very soft snicker. This man was definitely a saint for sticking by his side. He nodded slowly, still smiling, “Thn’ku.” Jared suddenly looked away and raised his hands. He noticed the bandages over his palms. He went for his cannula again, but Jensen gently intervened. Jared looked back at him. Jensen had to grin at the adorably spaced out look, "You need to leave that in your nose, okay? It’s helping you breathe.” Jared thought about that for a long pause, then nodded, “Ok.”

Jensen knew damn well this kid was ‘not’ firing on all cylinders. The pain meds and concussion were definitely keeping him loopy. Unfortunately, he couldn’t stop thinking how ridiculously fucking cute it was. He glanced at the officers and nodded them to approach. Eric went to the other side of the bed, his partner Rick standing next to him. As the officers approached, Jared turned his head to face them. Eric spoke first, “Mr. Padalecki, I’m Sergeant Eric Dawson. Please call me Eric. This is my partner, Rick Spade. We responded to the scene of your wrecked car and we've been working on figuring out what happened to you. Are you up to a few questions?” Jared nodded slowly.

The officers noticed Jared was weak and sleepy but he appeared to be focused on them, so they continued. "Mr. Padalecki," Eric began, but Jared raised a hand to interrupted them. He gestured to himself, “J’rd.” Jensen was watching from the other side, marveling at how much more alert Jared seemed from earlier. Either that, or he was trying hard to ‘seem’ alert, when he wasn’t really feeling it.

“Jared,” the officer smiled, then asked, “We noticed your company is based in Austin. Is that where you live?” Jared nodded. Eric asked, “And that’s where you travelled from on this trip?” Jared nodded. Rick then asked, “Why were you in Cedar Hollow?” Jared took a minute to gather his thoughts and then told them, "S’m cracks...n'the new bridge...s’my job...to do...a report."
He lost his train of thought for a moment, his brain kind of scrambled. Rick tried to refocus the conversation, "So, your job is to report things you find...like defects? Are you an inspector?" Jared tried to focus, "M'no...m'an Engineer." He blinked heavily, as Rick responded impressed, "Oh...you’re an engineer. My sister’s an engineer. Damn smart, too, used to piss me off with her straight A’s in math. Are you structural?"

Jared grinned slightly. He thought the officer was nice, trying to compliment him, but he was too damn tired to care. He nodded, "Yeah...but s’nt ms I do...m’...oth’r areas." That had been difficult. Jared was tired. Jensen was beginning to think this conversation was over, but Jared forced his eyes open. Eric asked, "Does Skyward Engineering know you’ve been injured?" Jared paused, "I dn’t...m’not sure." Jensen took pity on the poor kid and interjected, "Guys, he was out, but the nurses said they notified someone at his work named Blair Robertson. That was the only name he wanted to notify. Apparently, she's coming here with a friend."

Eric acknowledged, "Oh, okay," then looked at Jared, "So what about family, Jared? Parents? A spouse? Brother or sister?" Jared shook his head 'no', offering nothing further. Jensen could see something flicker in the younger man's eyes before he looked away from them all. He thought it might be sadness or hurt or fear, but he wasn't sure as he didn't know this man well enough yet. Eric glanced at Jensen, but didn’t push the issue. He looked back at Jared, "Jared, I need you to tell me, in your own words, what you remember about the accident and how you made it to Jensen, okay? Take your time."

Jared furrowed his brow in concentration. Jensen moved closer when his eyes looked suddenly pained with anguish. Jared struggled to explain, "I w's driv'n g b’k...fr'm bridge." He squinted his eyes, his breathing sped up. Jensen touched his arm, "Hey...hey, it’s alright. Jared, are you in pain?" Jared shook his head, "I couldn’t...see it...s’mthn..hit my...left...evrythn’ w’s moving....sidewys."

When Jared’s eyes teared a little bit, Jensen thought perhaps this wasn’t a good idea anymore. Everything was still too raw and the kid could easily go right back into shock. He touched Jared’s hair and rubbed softly, leaning in close, as Jared turned his head, "You know you’re safe, right?" Jared took a moment. He nodded, then turned back to the officer’s to continue, "M’...seatbelt w’s stuck." Jared took a few breaths, "It hurt. I tried to...cl’mb out. I c’ldn’t f’nd my phone and..." Jared’s heart monitor sped up. Jensen pushed the call button quickly, as the younger man folded his arms over his chest. Jensen placed both his hands on either side of Jared’s face, holding him from looking away, "Jared, look at me."

The younger man met his eyes. Jensen saw the panic and fear, mixed with pain. He stressed to him, "You...are...safe. Just stay with me, okay? You are NOT back there. I know it seems like it’s still fresh, but you’re here with us and you’re safe now.” Barb’s hand appeared in view, injecting something into Jared’s iv. Jensen watched as Jared calmed down, the wetness in his eyes retreating and the machines slowing back to normal. He could feel Jared shaking, but it was going away. The pain meds were taking effect. He soothed him, "You’re okay. I think we’re gonna do this another time, okay?"

Jared shook his head sluggishly, "M’noo pl’s...s’okay." Much to Jensen’s disapproval, he slowly released Jared’s face and kept a hand on his arm. He waited until Jared felt grounded, then looked at the officers, "Keep it light.” Eric nodded. Both officers fully agreed. When Jared turned his head toward them, Rick asked, "Jared, did you ever see another vehicle? Did you see anyone pulling away or speeding off...anything like that?"

Jared shook his head. His mind was so fucking muddled, it was frustrating...at least the pain was at bay now. He pushed himself to answer, "Th’airb’g w’s...in...fr’n/of...me. I...climb’d th’ w’ndow’n...cut m’n’nds. Up’n the road I...c’ldn’t see n’ybody.” Jared stopped and rested with his
eyes closed. Jensen found himself rubbing a thumb absently back and forth on Jared’s arm. He wanted to jump between Jared and the officers to stop this, but he stayed quiet.

Jared pushed himself to continue, his anguished sob tearing at everyone’s resolve, “I thought...some’n else...might be...hr’t. I cldn’t see...a car...c’dn’t...breathe the...restri’n...sm’tin w’s wrong I...cldn’t breathe.” Jared’s terror returned. Jensen stopped him, placing his hands back on the younger man’s cheeks, “Buddy, look at me. Remember...we’re talking about it, but you’re outta there. You’re right here safe, okay? You saved yourself. You got out.”

Jared shook his head, “I wsn’t gon make it I w’s...dying. M’...head w’s...sp’ng.” Jesus,’ Jensen thought, he hated to think of how close Jared had come to dying out there alone...and just two hundred fucking feet away.’ “I j’s...kept wlkin.” Jared was exhausted. He could feel Jensen’s hand on his arm, on his head...grounding him. It was so frustrating to feel himself shaking again. “It’s okay, Jared,” he heard Eric’s voice, “you don’t have to do that anymore. You gave us what we needed. It’s very heroic what you did, you know. A lot of people might have panicked and just laid in the car until they ran out of air. You saved yourself by heading for that restaurant.”

Jared blinked heavily. Another blanket appeared over him and he wasn’t sure if it was Jensen or Barb, who had come back into the room. “Fellas, make it quick,” he heard Barb say. She stuck the thermometer on his forehead, then looked closely at his pupils, “Sweetie, are you feeling warmer?” Jared had a moment’s confusion, as ‘yes’ he’d been freezing a second ago but he didn’t know how she knew that. He nodded, “Yeah.” She pulled the thermometer off and told Jensen, “Still 100.2,” then turned toward the officers, “This isn’t good for him...are you done here?” Eric quickly answered her, “Just three more questions and we’re outta here.” Barb looked at Jensen, “And you’re kicking them out after that, right’? Jensen answered no nonsense, “Guaranteed.”

Jared was feeling better now...high as a kite, really. Having the pain subside gave him a euphoric feeling of ‘I can do anything.’ He was warm too. He opened his eyes and turned toward the officers, “S’okay...what ‘lse.” Jensen studied Jared’s dilated pupils and relaxed face, sighing to himself. He kept his hand on Jared’s arm. Eric asked, “Jared, where were you staying in Cedar Hollow?” Jensen watched, as Jared sluggishly processed Eric’s question. Finally, the kid spoke, “S’a...motel by the...restrnt...I don’t...” Jensen interjected, “Cedar Hollow Inn. There’s only two motels and that one is close to Steve and Dani’s.”

Jared opened his eyes, not realizing he’d had them closed, “Yeah,” he nodded slowly. Jensen shifted his stance. He almost grinned at Jared’s delayed response, but he was too worried about the kid. He looked at Eric, silently reminding them that they were almost done. Eric hurried, “Were you working with anybody else? Meeting anyone?” Jared thought for awhile, “Mmm, justa...geolg’st he...met me and we were...done. S’for my repo’rt.” Jared felt like drifting off to sleep, but the officers interrupted his journey to nothingness, “We’re gonna need his contact.” Jared mumbled, “s’n my phone.”

Jensen shared, “It’ll be here later today. If he’s able to get it, we can text it to you.” Eric nodded, then continued, “Jared, the vehicle that hit you was a Ford commercial type truck. We’ve got technicians looking at traffic cams. Even though there is very little to go on, technology has helped us to piece together things like this. We’re going to get some traffic camera photos and bring those to you to look at soon, maybe you’ll recognize the drivers.

Jared nodded his head saying softly, "Thn'ku...o'kay." Eric quickly glanced at Jensen first, then at Jared, “Jared, is there any reason you can think of for someone to want to do this to you? Why someone would want to hurt you? Is there something critical about the job you were on, a problem with a coworker or a recent break up...anything like that?” Jared looked confused. He wasn’t sure he had heard the question right. “I don’t...” His mind scrambled. He didn’t think he had enemies in the whole world. Tom was a dick but he hadn’t been threatening. His uncle but that was so long ago,
Jared sluggishly shook his head, his crinkled forehead showing the stress of trying to make sense of his thoughts. The officers knew this was never an easy subject for a victim to have to face. Jared finally mumbled tiredly, “I don’t th’nk...they w’d do that.” The officers exchanged a knowing look with Jensen, who leaned a bit closer, “Who, buddy? You don’t think ‘who’ would do that?” Jared seemed upset, but at the same time he was slipping into unconsciousness. The kid was beyond exhausted.

Jensen straightened and exchanged another silent look of understanding with the officers. Eric pulled a card from his pocket and handed it to Jensen, “If he thinks of anyone...or anything else, you’ll call me.” Jensen nodded, “Definitely.” He looked at Jared again, before walking the officers to the door. The three exchanged another look of worry and respect for the kid in the hospital bed. Eric said, “I’m hoping the traffic cams will pan out. We’ll keep in touch. Will you be hanging here and keeping an eye out ’til we find out what the hell’s going on?” Jensen nodded, “Yep. There’s no way I’d leave him alone.” He shook their hands and they left.

As Jensen sat next to the bed, contemplating his protective feelings over the kid next to him, his sixth sense alarm bells chimed at about half volume. There was something going on, and nudging Jared to disclose who he might have been thinking of before he conked out was high on Jensen’s ‘to do’ list. Barb returned with a pitcher of ice, a few cups and a spoon. She set them on the cart, then checked Jared’s vitals. When she finally looked at Jensen, there was a bit of hesitation, “I’d like to get him taking fluids as soon as we can. I’m not sure how you feel about this, but if he wakes up, do you think you can spoon him some ice chips?” Jensen smirked, “Sure, it’s no problem.” She asked, “You sure? You can buzz us and we can...” Jensen snorted, waved her off, “I got it.” He thought it was funny, as she walked off. Did he look mean or something? In truth, he would do ‘anything’ for this kid. For some reason, giving Jared a little comfort and pleasure in between all this painful shit seemed pretty great right now.

Jensen watched Jared again, thinking things over. There was something alluring about him. His innocent charm and his boyish good looks weren’t all that it was. He was intelligent and highly successful...and he busted his ass to get out of that car and seek help when his body was failing. The young man was a survivor. There was a lot more to Jared that Jensen hadn’t learned yet, but these were the traits that stood out. He hoped he got to stick around and learn more.

Jensen knew this was a vital time, the first few days after surgery. He also knew they were going to start moving Jared around soon, get him up and even standing. It was going to hurt. He really didn’t look forward to watching the poor kid go through any more, but he also knew he couldn’t leave. If Jared pushed Jensen away and let his friends take over, Jensen figured he would probably have to find a way to linger out in the hall more discreetly. He had to protect him somehow. It was too deeply ingrained in him not to.

Jensen turned on Jared’s tv very low and settled on some I Love Lucy reruns. He snuggled his backside into the bedside chair and enjoyed the comfort of old school humor. After an hour, Jared seemed to show signs of waking up. He blinked open his eyes, still looking utterly exhausted. Jensen kept quiet and watched him. He found himself grinning softly. Jared’s eyes slipped closed again. After a few minutes he yawned, but clenched with painful reality when his deep inhale was again thwarted.

Jensen leaned toward him, resting on his elbows. Jared blinked heavily, moaned his recognition with a half smile. Jensen couldn’t resist. He reached up and brushed the loose hair off the young man’s forehead again before he asked, “Are you doing okay?” Jared was groggy. He wasn’t really hurting badly, just feeling uncomfortable. “Mmm...m’just tired...but I wanna sit up. Th’sstoooflat.” Jensen
understood. He glanced up just as Barb came in, “Hey...he’s uncomfortable. He’s asking to sit up.” Barb looked pained, “Well, we can raise him a few inches. Just a few before the doc gets here. That might relieve some of the uncomfortableness.”

Jensen looked at Jared, “You hear that? We can give you a little incline okay?” Jared nodded, his eyes still closed. Barb checked the connected tubes first, then took a loose pillow and placed it gently on Jared’s chest. “You wanna hold this a little sweetie. The shift might be painful for those ribs and the lung. It’s the first move since they were worked on, so we have to go very slow.” Jared was too sleepy to say much. He clumsily folded his left arm over the pillow. Barb pushed the button under the bed and raised Jared’s torso. She stopped after a few inches while Jared moaned in pain. He breathed through it, Jensen rubbing his head. After a pause, Barb asked, “Is that better?” Jared nodded, eyes still closed. He was too tired to respond. He seemed to fall back asleep.

Jensen glanced up at Barb. She explained, “If we do any more than a few inches at a time, his pain will be overwhelming. Tomorrow, we’ll get him more mobile, but for now everything’s still trying to fuse together and it doesn’t need to be moved.” Jensen understood. He looked at Jared’s face, glad to see him relaxed in peace. Barb got his attention again, “The doc will probably let us add a button. He can push it for meds in between the machine. That way you won’t have to wait for us to respond if he needs relief. I just need to make sure you can remind him...make sure he pushes the button and doesn’t wait. It’s important not to get behind the pain.”

Jensen responded, “No problem.” Hell yes, he would. As she left, Barb looked back with a grin, “It’s too bad all our patients don’t have back up like you.” Jensen shrugged, “Well ‘this’ one’s a no brainer.” He smiled at her before she left. A couple hours later, Jensen startled awake when Barb seemed to be connecting that button she mentioned. She smiled, then laid the button by Jared’s head. Barb stepped around the bed to speak softly, “The doctor is running late, but he okayed it. Just make sure he knows it’s there, okay?” Jensen grumbled, “Sure,” as he sat up straight and worked the kinks from his neck. He stood up, as Barb left, walked around and stretched. Damn, a quick run sounded good. Being this immobile wasn’t normal for Jensen and his body was definitely complaining. He was starving too.

Jensen downed a bag of nuts and a granola bar, remnants of the snack run he had made earlier. He sat down on his chair next to Jared, thinking again about how angry it made him that someone had intentionally hurt this innocent young man. He really hadn’t expected to become this involved with a perfect stranger’s plight when he jumped in that ambulance, but here he was. Jared stirred, finally. He sluggishly moved his head to face Jensen, then slowly opened his eyes. Jensen kept silent, watching to see if Jared was truly awake, or if he would fall back asleep. Jensen smiled as Jared seemed to focus on him. His eyes opened wider, so Jensen was able to get a spectacular view of the beautiful array of colors in them.

They weren’t just grey like he originally thought, they were a gorgeous steel grey rim, with swirling mists of hazel, gold’s and green’s...even a hint of blue. Jensen wondered if they changed depending on Jared’s moods. He also wondered what the hell Jared put on his driver’s license. Christ, they were stunning.

Jared's thoughts were trying to make sense of the last two days. The accident, alone, had him quite rattled, but his guilt over this perfect stranger doing so much for him, then hanging by his side, caused a major guilt trip. Jared had no idea how he was going to thank this man for all he was doing. He needed to get well as fast as he could so he could show his gratitude somehow. Right now, though, he felt the downward pull of more darkness.

Barb came back in with a covered food tray. She placed it on the coffee table by the couch and pointed to Jensen, then to the tray. Jensen grinned with a muttered “thanks”. He turned back to Jared
and watched the innocent young man slowly lose his battle to stay awake. He stayed next to him for a few minutes. Finally, Jensen went to the couch and checked out the food tray. His mouth watered at the smells. Under the lid was some kind of stew, bread and salad. He started eating, as Barb came back in. “I’ll be back in fifteen to change his dressings,” she told him, then left again. Jensen scarfed his food, glancing at the patient in between, who still seemed to be dead to the world. The kid hadn’t even gotten to try the ice chips. Maybe later.

He quickly used the restroom in Jared’s room and washed up. Barb had told him to use it instead of traipsing down the hall next time. He thought about the interview earlier with the police. Jensen would have to find a sensitive way to approach the subject again with Jared and see if he could get to the bottom of who he might know that would want to hurt him. He kept his anger controlled. His protectiveness had become even stronger over Jared and he really had to watch himself from overreacting and snapping at the poor hospital staff.

Barb came back with a handful of supplies. She set everything on the roll away cart next to Jared and gently started to address his bandages. Jensen stepped closer, in case Jared was startled awake. Barb was quite gentle. Jensen watched her remove tape and gauze with precision care, in order to not startle the patient. He was impressed. Jared stirred slightly when she turned his hands to look closely at them. She leaned to the side so Jensen could see them, too. With her pen light, she looked for any signs of infection or open stitching and saw none. She quickly covered them with fresh bandages and taped them off. When Barb was done with Jared’s hands, she proceeded to his head injury. Jensen held the light for her as she worked. He saw the horrible gash on the kid’s head that had bled so profusely. It was closed with black stitches, surrounded by dried blood and dark bruising. The colors darkened even more as they traveled into the large goose egg on his hairline, then down toward Jared’s forehead. ‘Poor kid,’ he thought for the umpteenth time.

Barb took her time replacing Jared's head gauze, as she didn't want to hurt him by touching the sensitive wound or pulling his hair. She barely used pressure, enough only to get the tape to stick, then turned to clean up all of her things. Jared turned his head and sighed. He clenched a little in pain, but still didn’t wake. Jensen was so glad the kid was sleeping well. He knew it had been an exhausting day for someone in Jared's condition and it made sense that he was still out.

Jensen walked over to look out Jared's window. It had been beautiful outside lately, the fall weather moving in. Colors were changing, yet that only meant the air was going to become colder and crisp quite rapidly. His first year in Colorado had taught him that the winters were nothing to be taken lightly. By November, there would be quite a contrast from the beautiful oranges, reds and yellows.

Jensen heard a noise from Jared and turned toward him. He seemed to be stirring. As Jensen approached, Jared rubbed his eyes with his free hand, then dropped his hand back on the bed. He inhaled, like he was going to take a deep breath and yawn. Jensen winced, knowing that was gonna hurt and, 'ow', he watched the younger man clench in pain. Poor kid never seemed to remember he couldn’t do that. Jensen leaned on Jared’s bed rail and waited for him to wake up.

Jared still felt tired. It was frustrating to be so lethargic. He tested his body out, moving different muscles and clenching his most private parts to feel that the irritating and invasive catheter was still there. 'Fuck,' he thought, he hated that thing and he couldn't 'wait' to be able to go to the damn bathroom like a normal person. He'd never been down like this before and he was finding he hated it. Jared reached up and rubbed his irritated nostrils. He scrunched his nose up, in distaste, at still having the oxygen cannula in there, 'another fucking thing I hate,' Jared silently ranted. He turned his head to the right and saw Jensen watching him. Jensen greeted him, “Good morning,” as Jared suddenly felt at peace that this man was still here. “Hi,” he looked at him, dreamily.

Jensen asked, "How are you feeling?" The concern in the older man’s piercing green eyes was
overwhelming. Jared felt like the man could see through to his soul. At the same time, Jensen’s worry for him was genuine. It made Jared feel even more grateful. “Okay,” Jared confessed, “I just wish...I c’ld get up.” Jensen assessed the younger man for a minute. He saw no signs of pain Jared might be hiding, and it looked like the kid seemed to be a bit more alert than a few hours ago...his speech wasn’t quite as slurred. Jensen knew the nurses were going to try and get Jared up tomorrow and it was going to be very painful, but he didn't want to mention that now and just nodded in understanding, "You will get up, I promise. You're gonna get better and get past this."

Jared mentally latched onto Jensen's encouragement. He had so much to do and it felt like such a waste of time to be laying here doing nothing. It's not like he actually 'thought' he could get up, it was just so frustrating. He couldn't stop looking at Jensen. He really hoped he wasn't dreaming and that Jensen wasn't a figment of his imagination that was going to disappear when he woke up. Jared glanced over and noticed the cup with the spoon in it. His eyes lit up with interest, as he lifted his head. Jensen was so distracted by the new look that he forgot all about the ice. He hurried to grab the cup, “Sorry...I'm supposed to help you eat some of those.”

Jared spooned one ice chip into Jared’s waiting open mouth. Jared closed his mouth around the morsel and rolled his eyes. His moan of pleasure caused Jensen to grin. He spooned another ice chip, ridiculously giddy over the younger man's reaction. Jared rolled his eyes again, "mmmm...s'good,” he mumbled, sucking the delightful ice and swishing it all around his parched mouth. Jensen watched helplessly as Jared's face lit up with decadent and obscene reactions to the simple little taste and feel of each ice chip. 'This is fuckin' addicting,' Jensen thought.

Jared had taken all of the ice chips, so Jensen offered him a sip of ice water, just to see if he could drink a little in his reclined position. Jared sucked a couple sips, then relaxed with a sigh of pleasure. Jensen put the cup back. Jared turned toward him and studied him for a few seconds before he smiled, “Thank you.” Jensen gently brushed the hair back off of Jared's head, “Any time.”

Jared opened his mouth to say something, but the surgeon walked in and interrupted the moment. Both men turned toward him. He grabbed Jared's chart off the end of the bed and walked up to him, while scanning through some of the latest information inside. Jensen got out of the chair and moved to the back of the room, giving the doctor room for his exam. "Hi, Mr. Padalecki, I'm Doctor Bordin, the surgeon who worked on you yesterday when you were brought in. How's the pain right now, do you feel like the meds are working?"

Jared nodded, paying attention to the doctor and trying not to miss anything. The doctor read through the notes a bit more. He looked up at Jared again, "If it's hurting less than this morning, then I believe we've found a good pain medication to stick with for the next 48 hours. You were switched to Darvocet a few hours ago and it takes a bit to make sure it's working well for your system. How does your head feel?" Jared told him, "It throbs...pressure...but 's okay." The doctor studied him, "You have a nasty crack up there. Are you feeling nauseous or dizzy?"

Jared really hadn't thought about that, being on his back, so he answered, "No." The surgeon warned, "When you start getting up, I want you to listen to the staff here, okay? That concussion and your trauma are very serious and if you move too fast, it'll just set you backward. I'm gonna go over the tests and then do my own exam, so just sit tight, okay?" Jared nodded.

The doctor went over to a light up board and placed Jared’s X-ray’s and scans on it. He switched on the light and invited Jensen over. Jared watched the two of them study the tests on the board. The doctor pointed to Jared's frontal lobe, "See here?" Jensen leaned forward more, as the doctor explained, “This is the fracture. It’s slight, but defined enough so that we’ve graded it moderate. With too much jostling and without anti-swelling meds, it could be more of a threat. It looks good, at this point.” Jensen had to agree. The doc added, “There's no build up there and no inflammation, but the
crack needs to fuse before he'll be out of danger, so we’ll keep scanning and keep him on the meds, probably for a couple weeks. The pressure he’s feeling will diminish over time. He hasn’t been up yet, so we’ll have to be cautious about his balance and equilibrium.”

The doctor switched the photo’s. He put up an ultrasound from Jared’s arrival, then one from earlier today. He pointed to the left lung, “Here’s our biggest concern.” The doctor inspected both lungs, compared the shaded areas, some splotches and two obvious dark marks on Jared's left lung, which were still quite prominent. "It looks really good, it’s clean...I think we'll remove the drain," the doctor exclaimed and Jensen felt relieved that at least something was progressing. He waited while the doctor continued to study the lung and the area around the puncture wounds. Jensen inwardly cringed at the damage. There were two blatantly large tears, then a small more precise spot where his procedure had gone in. After a few minutes, the surgeon switched the photos again to Jared’s X-ray’s.

The doctor announced with a sympathetic sigh, "And here’s the cause of most of his pain, probably more than the actual lung.” Jensen felt his gut clench. He saw a mass of cracks and splintering on the initial X-ray. Jared’s life had definitely been in jeopardy. ‘Jesusfuckingchrist,’ Jensen thought to himself. Jared stayed quiet, somewhat bothered that he wasn’t included in the conversation, but he realized no one was doing it on purpose. He couldn't see from his bed, so he forced himself to listen and catch as much information as he could.

The doctor pointed out, "That's before surgery yesterday; but this one is just a few hours ago. See the fusion already starting? I had to stitch some of these, use the self dissolving binds to encourage the ribs to heal. His ribs were cracked in multiple places. Here's where the punctures occurred at the third and forth rib." Jensen definitely saw exactly what the doctor was talking about. He had seen a lot in his time, but Jared’s X-ray was nothing to take lightly. He was suddenly hit with the reminder that he easily could have lost Jared yesterday. Jensen sighed.

The doctor looked over, “You were at the right place at the right time. Definitely the reason why he’s still with us.” Jensen looked down, feeling a little sheepish. He knew the doc was right. He simply wasn’t used to someone acknowledging it. He nodded, not sure what to say. The doc turned back to look at Jared, “And you...I’ve seen some pretty incredible feats, but getting yourself out of that car and walking to help in your condition is going in my book.” He looked at Jensen, “Brave young man.” Jensen glanced at Jared and grinned when the younger man looked completely uninterested in the compliment.

After switching off the light, the doctor slid Jared’s results back into a folder and hung them with the file on the bed. He moved over to Jared’s side, "It’s very difficult to keep a person immobile for the first 48 hours. Your ribs were so severe, we had to use some organic sutures to bind them. The lung is extremely sensitive and will heal itself if it’s treated with kid gloves. Tomorrow afternoon, we’ll start to let you move more, then gradually more each day after, okay?” Jared nodded. The surgeon continued, “In two days, we'll x-ray again and they should be almost crack free on here, but still be very sore and vulnerable to re-injury for a few weeks as they repair themselves. These are very easy to re-injure, so we have strict movement orders, even when you go home. Overall, I'd say you’ve started to heal quite nicely, and only 24 hours after surgery. You’re strong and healthy. Non smoker, it all helps." The doctor washed his hands as he spoke, "I'm going to look at your incision, alright?” Jared said softly, "kay."

The doctor dried his hands, then skillfully removed Jared's gauze and tape from his chest. He inspected the wound, then left it uncovered for a moment while he grabbed some clean gauze. He stood over Jared and looked into his eyes, “I’m going to remove the drain. You’ll feel it slide out, which doesn’t sit well with some people but it’s over very quickly, okay? It might sting for about two
seconds, but it won’t cause any pain to your wound.” He didn’t start until he received a nod from Jensen, knowing the patient understood.

Jensen stiffened inwardly, watched the doc put a piece of gauze on top of the small opening, then pull the drainage tube out. Jared squinted with the sudden sting, but didn’t react other than that. It seemed to be over until the doc held the gauze over the tiny opening again. When he pushed down very gently, Jared sucked through his teeth, but quickly relaxed. ‘Thank God,’ Jensen thought. The surgeon kept the gauze held firmly over the tiny hole for a few seconds, then took that, the drainage tube and bag to the hazardous waste bin and dumped them. He pulled out a new gauze pad, placed it over the incision site and taped it down.

As he washed his hands again and dried them, Jensen locked eyes with Jared and offered a partial smile. Jared offered one back. Jensen held his gaze until the doc returned with a pen light. He checked Jared’s pupils, looked up his nostrils and in his ears for an extended period of time. He pulled out a stethoscope and listened to Jared’s chest. When done with the front, he held his hand on the uninjured side of Jared’s chest, "Okay, I don't want you to move yet, let me just slip under you. Don’t try to lift." Jared remained still while the surgeon listened from underneath his back. He seemed to listen for a long time. Jensen could see Jared was getting tired.

After a few minutes of concentration, the doc told Jared, “I know breathing in too deep is painful, but I’m gonna need you to try to inhale just as far as you can go, hold it for a few seconds, then let it go, alright?” Jared didn't look too overly excited about that idea. Jensen had to agree. Jared did as the doctor wanted, but it cost him. 'Oh my God, it hurts,' he thought, not wanting to be a crybaby and scream out. The doctor had him repeat the process four times, until he was satisfied. Jared was shaking when he was done, exhausted pain lines accompanying the raspy short exhales.

The doctor wrote notes in Jared’s chart, as Jensen couldn’t resist moving in to rub Jared’s hair softly. The kid blinked heavily, looking hurt and exhausted, as he focused on Jensen. “I’m sorry.” Jensen said. Jared relaxed into the comforting gesture. Jensen’s thumb rubbed back and forth on his arm. The pain was excruciating, but now that they were done, he could rest and relax.

The surgeon returned to Jared’s side and addressed him, "You’re healing remarkably well. Your lungs look good, your ribs look good and your concussion looks good, considering the damages. The next few days are the most crucial. Pain control is vital to getting better. I want you to push that button when you need it. The machine will dose you every six hours, but the button will give you extra if you’re hurting. Don’t put it off. The less pain, the faster your body heals, understand?” Jared nodded. The surgeon continued, “Ribs are terribly sensitive. Your torso is used for everything from breathing to standing. That’s why it’s easy to re-injure them. Your lung is recovering from trauma. It’s common for a punctured lung to react with COPD or pneumonia when it’s compromised. We’re trying to curtail that. You being a non-smoker is making it much easier on your body to heal. For now, we need to work on strengthening that lung so it isn’t susceptible to any complications.”

The doctor grabbed the plastic breather that had been dropped off much earlier to explain what it was, "A breathing tech will start tomorrow, then come twice a day for the next few days. They’ll have you work your lungs best you can to keep them improving. It’s gonna be painful, but I promise it’s not to torture you, Mr. Padalecki, okay?” When Jared nodded with a resigned, “‘kay,” the surgeon continued, “When I listened just now, I heard a very slight wheeze in that left lung. It’s minuscule, at this point, but with your low grade temp, it would be very easy for bacteria to attack that weakened lung. It’s imperative that you do the breathing exercises the tech will teach you. In the meantime, I’m going to make sure that lung is listened to often so we can monitor any changes, ok?” Jared didn’t look too positive about what he had to do to get well, but he didn’t argue and nodded. The doctor further explained, "With the breathing exercises, do not be afraid to dose the pain meds.
Remember, you want to be as low on pain as we can get you, so you can heal faster. Understood?" When Jared nodded silently, the doctor continued, "The other injuries you have...the deep bruising, the cuts and that concussion...they will heal but because your body’s got so much work to do, your energy’s going to be taxed quite a bit. You’ll get better each day, be able to move a little more, but you have to take it very slow and listen to the nurses."

Jared was trying to absorb everything the doctor was telling him. He really wasn't too keen on just resting. It's not that he didn't understand, he simply needed to get those files and reports to the A.G. The doctor didn't understand that this was important, way more important than his own injuries. He needed to save people from becoming hurt or worse when those structures crumbled. He didn’t have time for this laying around. The doctor sensed Jared's concentration had wandered. He glanced at Jensen, who realized he'd been reading Jared’s distraction about something. The surgeon told Jensen, “This can’t be rushed. He’s not well, even if he thinks he can skydive.” Jensen nodded in understanding, as he smirked, looking down at Jared. The kid was still thinking about something else. The doctor leaned closer into Jared’s eyesight, “Mr. Padalecki, do you have any questions?”

Jared blinked heavily, realized he’d probably missed something but shook his head, “No...th’nk you.” The surgeon glanced at Jensen again, both exchanged acknowledgement that they were on the right page. He told them both, “I’ll be back tomorrow afternoon. If you have any problems, the nurses will page me.” Jensen thanked him also. He turned back to Jared and took a seat next to him. Jensen leaned on his elbows, still keeping his hand on Jared’s arm. “So...glad that’s over,” Jensen said. They stayed silent for a few moments, Jared blinking heavily and seemingly more relaxed now. He turned to face Jensen, “Will you...tell me...’bout...y’rs’lf? I...w’nt to...know more...about you.”

Jensen was caught off guard for a second but quickly recovered. He realized Jared didn't know anything about him and it really wasn't fair since he'd learned a little about Jared during the interview earlier with the police. He worried if this might be where he scared Jared off, but he certainly hoped not. "Of course,” Jensen said, “Ask me anything.” Jared started to think of some questions but he was suddenly feeling so tired, he could barely keep his eyes open. Jensen asked him, “You tired?” He touched his hair softly, as Jared blinked heavily and nodded. The older man smiled, “It’s okay to sleep. You need it. I’ll be right here.” Jensen watched as the patient started to smile, then fell promptly fell into dreamland without delay.

Jensen bedded himself down after watching some black and white reruns on Jared's tv. He ate dinner in the room, lingered close to see if Jared woke up, but finally gave in. The young engineer didn’t seem to be coming around any time soon, so Jensen slept ‘til morning.
Chapter Summary

The boys share some very special moments. This is tender, sweet and funny. They are getting to know one another, while Jared struggles to get well. There are some likable support characters and that's about all the info on this chapter. Jared will get a bit sicker, but it's necessary to fulfill my hurt Jared fix. TONS of hurt/comfort between the two men, tons hardship for Jared being laid up on his back and a wee bit of pain and suffering...so buckle up!

Thank you for reading!

Chapter Six

Jared was hurting. Jensen watched him brave through his breathing exercises, 'probably wanting to get rid of her as fast as he can,' the older man thought. The breathing tech had come in about 7 a.m. Jared had been awake for an hour and had some water, but refused to try any juice. Jensen was sure he was mostly feeling ill at the torture he was about to be subjected to. He had to admit, as a seasoned veteran who had been through combat situations, watching Jared suffer through those breathing exercises was 'not' on his list of easy to do things. The poor kid was miserable and it hurt bad. He just wasn't voicing it.

Barb was back on duty and Jensen felt like he'd missed an entire day, even though it had really only been Darcy's shift overnight. He’d seen Darcy once, then hit the sofa bed like a ton of bricks after Jared went to sleep. Jensen hadn’t realized how tired he was. The breathing tech finally set the device down and informed Jared she would be back twice a day to do these with him. Before leaving, she asked Jared if he needed more pain meds and he shook his head. 'He just wants her to leave,' Jensen was thinking. He went over and sat down on the chair close to Jared. He waited for the kid to recover and collect himself. Jared was in excruciating pain, it was plain to see.

Jensen had caught on that Jared masked his pain when he wanted to. He answered people quickly with a ‘no’ or a ‘good’ or ‘okay’ or ‘fine’, but you had to check his eyes to get to the truth. Jensen knew this could be a problem as the kid’s shock wore off. Jared’s painful recovery wasn’t going to be a snap if he was used to readily pushing himself and ignoring his own pain. Jensen saw Jared look at the water cup, so he quickly grabbed it. He put the straw to Jared’s mouth and held it while the younger man took several sips of water. When he sighed in blissful satisfaction with his eyes closed, Jensen put the cup back. “Good,” he asked? Jared nodded, smiling softly, “S’good...thnku.”

After a few seconds, Jared turned his head toward Jensen and looked at him with those incredibly beautiful eyes. Jared had calmed from his painful exercises and now felt more relaxed. He studied Jensen at the same moment he was being studied. He really wanted to learn about this man, but he figured Jensen was probably starving. “Please...go eat...take a break...I’m so grateful...but you need a break.” Jensen smirked, “I thought you wanted to know about me.” Jared smiled, “I do.” Jensen said, “Then fire away, kiddo. I can eat later.”

Jared studied him for a moment, enjoying the chiseled cheekbones, deep green eyes that seemed to have a bit of hazel in them. Jensen had shorter spiked hair, but it was a little discombobulated at the moment from sleeping on that couch. He was fucking cute, and very hot, but Jared kept that
observation to himself. He asked, “Where are you from? Your...family n’job...whatev’r you’re willing...to share. I w’nt to know how you knew...how to save me.” Jensen noticed it was still painful for Jared to inhale too deeply, but his speech was much better. He prepared himself to talk. It wasn’t the norm for him to share things, but the kid certainly deserved to know and for some reason, Jensen felt at ease with him. He told Jared he was from San Antonio. He started with his childhood and explained the difficulties with his parents. He went through the problems between he and his dad, the differences between he and his brother, and his decision to join the military. Jensen didn’t mention the gay part yet.

Jared’s beautiful hazel grey beauties were intently focused on him for the next thirty minutes. He asked Jensen about his training and listened to Jensen talked about the feelings of accomplishment he’d achieved. The teamwork, the sense of family...they were things he’d never gotten from his parents. He loved sports, but he wanted a career that was beyond that. He had a need to make a difference...do something important. Once he was chosen for special teams, it pretty much became his life. Jared was fascinated. Jensen had many layers to his personality. It was enthralling to listen to him talk about his career choice, how he had saved so many people...all the rescues. Jensen had turned his negative upbringing around and become a hero. It sounded to Jared like he was a member of a whole family of these types of hero’s. Amazing.

Jensen reminded himself that Jared had refused extra medication after his breathing exercises this morning. This was probably why the kid was more alert and able to stay awake at the moment. He watched Jared for signs of pain, as he answered questions. Jared’s eyes spoke volumes about his depth of understanding and compassion. His heart shone through his eyes as he listened to Jensen’s hardships and triumphs. When he asked if Jensen had been home, the older man explained, “I went home at first. After graduation from basic, after special forces training, and then before my first deployment. The reception was always cold, so I stopped going.” Jared’s heart went out to him, “I’m so s’rry, J’ns’n. They sh’ld...have...been proud’f...you.”

Jensen shrugged his shoulders and stopped talking. He waited for the younger man to say something. Jared seemed to be absorbing all that Jensen had told him. He asked further, “So...when you get...picked f’r...the special ops...wh’t happ’ns? You jus’...have t’go?” Jensen rubbed his face, thinking about this. “Well,” he tried to explain, “Special forces has different groups. Some are on the grid, some aren’t. I was picked for Black Ops. We were interior teams that perform missions that don’t always exist, so to speak. If we were to be caught, or compromised, we may not be claimed or rescued.”

Jared concentrated on him, looking a tiny bit confused, so Jensen kept going, “It means we had to be trained in skills I never knew existed. When we go, we lose contact with everyone from the general special forces pool. It forces us to bond with only each other. It’s a survival thing. When we extracted people, whether they were politicians, druglords, or innocent students and missionaries, sometimes they weren’t in one piece. They’d been tortured, so we were trained to deal with that.” Jared said sadly, “Oh.” His brain hadn’t been going there, but now he was getting it. He couldn’t imagine what Jensen had seen.

Jensen tread more cautiously, "I was really good at my job. My whole team was, but...the things we excelled at aren’t acceptable in the outside world. It’s difficult. Black Ops teaches survival, but also advanced warfare. We saved people, but we also took people out when we had to. There’s nothing like being a trained killer then trying to convince yourself you’re not ugly and dark while you’re just waving ‘hello’ at someone.” Jensen shrugged and looked down at the bed covers. He didn’t know if he explained it all. He knew he should have stopped talking, but something about Jared caused him to spill the beans and he couldn’t stop.

After a long silent moment of thinking he probably just lost any chance he had with Jared, Jensen felt
a hand gently touch his cheek. It took him a second to register it was actually happening. Jensen
looked up to meet Jared's eyes. Those incredible eyes, however, weren’t filled with loathing or
disgust, they were filled with acceptance and concern. Jared wasn’t afraid, he was quite the opposite.
Jensen was having some trouble holding his composure. He cleared his throat, as Jared spoke softly,
“There’s nothing ugly...n’dark ‘bout you. You had to... learn...those things to stay...alive...and help
others. You saved...my life. You saved so many... people. You didn’t have to stay...with me.”

Jensen was having a hard time keeping the tears out of his eyes at Jared's response. 'Jesus,' having
someone care enough to comfort him was a new concept that was throwing Jensen off balance. He
was mesmerized by the young man’s gaze, but he tried to continue his story without a hitch in his
voice, “I uh...I’m retired. I trained the last two years and then moved here. It’s been a year now and
I’m happy here. I was ready to get out.”

Jared still softly held Jensen’s cheek with his right hand. He rubbed his thumb back and forth on
the five o’clock shadow. “Jn’sn,” Jared tiredly began, “you’re out...but here you are, still sav’n people.
You’re a hero on th’inside...s’just who you are... ‘ven w’thou th’trn’g.” Jared smiled sweetly, as
Jensen tried to absorb that. Christ, he could easily fall in love with Jared. Who couldn’t?

Jared was amazed that someone with Jensen's history could be so gentle and comforting. He could
easily fall in love with him, but he knew he couldn't address that flat on his back like this. Jared
wanted to talk more, but the pain in his chest had become more intense to ignore any longer.
'Dammit,' he hated giving in to it. At least Jensen’s voice had distracted him from it.

J Jensen immediately stood when Jared's face scrunched in pain. Jared withdrew his hand back and
folded both forearms over his chest. Jensen reached over and pushed the pain button. He placed his
hand on Jared’s crossed arms, “It’s gonna get better fast...just breathe. I’m so sorry.” Jensen rubbed
Jared’s hair with his other hand. He waited until Jared finally started to release a few anguished
sigh’s. Jensen asked him softly, "Is it working?" Jared nodded, his jaw shaking. Jensen pulled the
blankets up higher and kept rubbing his hair.

Jared finally relaxed. His eyes blinked open heavily. His arms relaxed and fell loosely back to his
sides, as his face slackened in peace. Jensen watched him battle staying awake for a minute, then
touched his cheek, “It’s okay to sleep...you’re exhausted.” Jared sleepily drawled out, “I w’nt...to
know s’much. Thnku...Fr tell’ng me. M’so gr’tfl, J’n’s’n...why r yu here...why’d yu...stay
w’thme?” Jensen could see Jared was long past the fighting sleep stage and damn near pre-comatose.
He figured if he could answer him, maybe he could get Jared to finally give in and rest.

He looked into the kid’s eyes, "I stayed with you because I was worried. I didn't trust the paramedics
to get you here in one piece and I thought maybe I couldn't stop worrying if I didn't go with you.
That’s how it started, anyway. Now that I'm here, I...I don't seem to wanna leave, Jared, and I'm not
sure why it feels that way. I just do.” Jared blinked heavily for a moment. He simply said, "Oh.”
Jensen smiled. This kid was adorable. Not very articulate at the moment, but cute as hell. Jared
looked like he was about to say something further, but then fell fast asleep with a very soft, "kay.”

Jensen shook his head. Something had just happened in the last hour. Jared had somehow moved in
behind Jensen’s defensive walls without even trying. Being so open showed vulnerability, which
was NOT Jensen’s thing. What the fuck just happened? He prayed it wasn’t a mistake to get this
wrapped up around a person he didn't even know.

Barb came into the room to check on her patient, as Jensen moved to the back of the room to call his
friends. He smiled at Barb and used his cell phone very quietly. Steve told him they were coming by
in the afternoon and would bring Jensen some clothes and hygiene supplies so he could shower and
change at the hospital. The couple really wanted to see Jared too, but only if he was up to it.
Barb finished listening to Jared's heart and lungs, then checked all his monitors and iv bags. She came over to Jensen after she had finished her assessments, "His bp is low...we need to get some calories into him. His lung is still a bit wheezy, so he absolutely 'has' to keep up those breathing exercises. I know it's painful, but it really is helpful. Temp is the same. Not great, but at least it's not up. How long was he awake?"

Jensen told her, "Only from about 7:30 to just a few minutes ago." Jensen looked at his watch, which read 8:27. "The breathing thing wore him out and then he was in pain after we talked for awhile, so I pushed his button." Barb confirmed, “So he didn’t ask for medication, and you had to push it?” Jensen nodded, "Yeah, he didn't seem to remember the button was there...and he waited too long. I've learned now, he buries his pain if he's focused on something and doesn't want to give in."

Barb smiled tiredly, "So, we have to watch him, then. Definitely getting to know him.” Jensen nodded. She continued, “The friend of his, Blair, called to say she’ll be here tomorrow. She’s bringing a couple people and wanted to make sure it was okay. Apparently, she’s certain he’ll want to see them.” Jensen grinned, “Cool.” The nurse added, "I'll be replacing the iv bags, dumping his catheter bag, and changing dressings again if you want to take off awhile. Did you get breakfast?"

Jensen saluted her with a grin and took off without delay. He headed for the parking lot first. His body craved movement after being so stationary.

Jensen felt the open crisp air in his lungs, as he took in a ten minute run around the grounds. He cleaned up in the public restroom, wetting down his unruly hair. The activity had felt amazing. He knew Dani and Steve were bringing some hygiene supplies later today so that would be a plus to get in a shower. He collected his breakfast with a large cup of the infamous 'Firebomb.' He didn't feel like bringing the wonderfully smelling stuff into Jared's room now that the kid was more aware. He figured when Jared started eating regular food, he would feel better about doing that. He scarfed his eggs and bacon down in rapid military style, which meant in under 4 minutes. He headed back to Jared's room with his coffee and saw Barb just taping a new bandage over Jared's head wound.

She smiled at Jensen, finished cleaning up and left the room. Jensen sipped his coffee as he listened to Jared's slow and quiet breathing. He was comforted by the fact that the kid was still resting peacefully. He planted himself in the chair and found the same tv station he had watched the night before. Jensen soon fell asleep with his arm propped up on his elbow, watching Andy Griffith arguing with Don Knotts. Jensen jerked his head up at unfamiliar noises. He instantly looked over at Jared to see what may have alerted him. The younger man had turned his head the opposite direction so Jensen couldn't see his face. Jensen stood up and rubbed the kinks out of his sore arm, which had been holding his head up for close to an hour. 'Shit, I didn't even know I'd fallen asleep,' the older man thought.

Jared's heart monitor skyrocketed and the younger man moved his right arm over his body as if he was going to push himself up off the bed. 'Holy crap,' Jensen thought, as he bolted into action. He leaned over Jared fast to grab his biceps and hold him down. It was the only place he could grab him without hurting him. Jared was breathing in short pants, moaning in a high pitched voice. Jensen realized the kid was having a nightmare. "Jared," he called to him in a not so subtle voice. Jensen knew the kid could very well hurt himself if they didn't wake him up fast. He heard the patter of running feet, as two nurses came flying into the room. Barb and another one hurried to the opposite side of the bed.

Jensen threw a natural command voice at the younger man, "Jared, wake up!" The patient moved his head back toward Jensen, then back to the other side. "Jared, you're in the hospital," Jensen tried to reach him. The younger man appeared to be trapped in his nightmare, as he moaned, "Noooo...I h'v to get out." Jensen had a hard time holding the kid down. He didn't want to grip him too hard and Jared was pushing up against his hold. "JARED," Jensen tried a louder voice, "Jared, you're safe.
You're not in the car buddy, you're in the hospital." Jensen repeated the mantra trying to reach the younger man.

Jared finally seemed to respond to Jensen’s voice. His heart rate and breathing were calming down. Jensen touched Jared's face with his right hand and rubbed his thumb back and forth over Jared's left cheek, hoping to provide some comfort and bring him completely back into the present. "Jared, it's okay buddy," the older man told him, as he watched Jared start to relax. Suddenly, a very loud metal clanging noise of a tray hitting the floor startled them all, causing the injured man to jerk both of his arms up over his face and hold them there tightly. His breathing and heart monitor flew threw the roof again.

"Goddammit, are you fucking serious?" Jensen sneered, as he looked over at the door intending on taking someone out for their stupidity. The kid was back to full panic mode, his mind back in trauma overload, associating the clash with the sounds of the accident. 'Shit,' Jensen was so fucking pissed. He knew it was an accident out in the hallway but 'mother fucker this poor kid didn't need this.' He firmly gripped both the kid's wrists and pulled them away from his face, "Jared it's me...it's Jensen...it's okay...."

He brought Jared's arms back down to a resting position over his body and was able to let them go after a few seconds and place both his hands on Jared's cheeks. The younger man's face was ridden with anxiety overload. Tears were beginning to escape his closed eyes and his high pitched moans were breaking Jensen's heart. Jensen knew the kid was terrified, trapped again and thinking he was going to die. He talked softly, “Jared it’s okay. You’re not back there, you’re safe.” His left hand moved up to rub Jared's hair again. The kid's panting started to slow down and the moaning stopped, as Jensen continued, "Sssshhh...that's it, buddy...you're safe. You're not in the car, you're completely safe now."

Without waking up, Jared moved his head toward Jensen's voice, subconsciously leaning into his touch. The kid didn't wake up and slipped back into peaceful slumber. Barb checked Jared's incision, at that point, and rechecked all his vitals, then took a deep breath with her hands on her hips. "God, the poor kid," she said, then looked at Jensen, “incredible job.” Jensen looked at her, then, not wanting any praise, just wanting her to stop him from pulling someone's limbs off for causing Jared this terror. "I'm on it," Barb assured him, taking off to go chastise someone and remove them quickly from Jensen's kill zone. Jensen looked back at his young charge and tried to relax, knowing that they had gotten Jared through a terrible nightmare, but there could be more coming.

Jensen straightened and rubbed his hands over his face, watching Jared sleep for a few minutes. 'He's out cold again, thank God.' Jensen was thankful. He sat back down on his chair, nerves still thrumming. The poor kid had been terrified. Jensen scooted his chair closer to Jared's bed, so it was touching the frame. He propped his feet up on the bed rails and tried to calm down enough to partake in more of his black and white favorites. He tried to think happy thoughts, like the shower and shave coming later, as Jared slept on.

Jensen figured Dani and Steve wouldn't be there until about 2 or 3, so Jared might be rested by then and up to a short visit. Barb came back in and checked on her patient, asking Jensen how it was going. Jensen replied, "He's been fine ever since. Been out like a light." Jensen looked over at Jared, "It was hard to see him like that. He doesn't deserve to ever feel that way." Barb smiled softly at him, "I agree. It's terrible. But you're good with him. He responds to you. It's nice knowing you're in here. It's helping him a lot." Jensen looked back at her, "I just want him to feel better." Barb went out and brought back a lemon lime soda can with a straw and a box of apple juice. She held them up in a gesture at Jensen to try them on the patient when he got a chance.

Jensen nodded and smiled at her, as she sat them down and left. He looked over at Jared and didn't
see any signs of the kid waking so he continued to relax. Jared had no more nasty interruptions and slept fitfully for the next hour. When he started to stir, Jensen waited a minute, to see if he was actually waking up or just moving a bit. When Jared raised his hand and rubbed his face, Jensen got up and leaned slightly over him. Jared automatically pulled on his cannula again, so Jensen stopped him gently. He pulled his hand away but refrained from saying anything yet. Jared gave up his attempt to pull the offending plastic tubes out of his nose and relaxed with a peaceful sigh. He sleepily opened his eyes to a black and white rerun of 'I Love Lucy'. He thought perhaps he was dreaming, or hallucinating, but then realized he was seeing a tv that he simply hadn't noticed before.

Jared took a moment to remember where he was and what had transpired in the last two days. His left side was bruised up and down, his left chest was a painful gripping mess that didn't hurt if he remembered not to move or breathe too deep, and the room was super quiet. He remembered the set of beautiful green eyes and Jensen telling him about himself...he remembered gentle touches but wasn't quite sure if he imagined them. Jared was comfortable, for the moment. He didn't want to move and kill the mood so he stayed still and enjoyed the lack of immense gripping pain that had hit him a few times since he'd been here. He looked over to his left and saw the red button by his head, 'Oh,' he thought confusedly, 'I don't remember that being there.' He looked at the nurse's call button laying next to it and thought, 'Huh...just noticed the damn thing.' Jared realized he was feeling much more alert than he had been before now. He wasn't as lethargic as he felt before. Something was different.

'My head is better,' he realized, as he further assessed himself. He recalled all that his rescuer had told him about himself and how it was so touching to get to know all those things about him. Jared finally looked over toward Jensen and realized that he'd been watching him all this time. "Hi," Jared said softly. Jensen smiled, "Hi." Jared didn’t seem to be aware of his nightmare, so Jensen left it alone, not wanting to ruin this moment. He noticed right away the change in Jared. The kid was more alert this time. As Jared was staring at him, Barb came into the room. She smiled warmly, "Hello, Mr. Padalecki."

Jared turned his head and smiled softly, "Hi." Barb asked, "How are you feeling right now?" Jared answered truthfully, "I feel better...for some reason...it’s different...my head isn’t throbbing." Barb could tell her patient was more alert than he'd been the day before. "It might be the anesthesia. The first day after surgery is confusing and the anesthesia mixed with pain meds is just a convoluted mess for your system. Are you hurting right now?" Jared answered her, "No."

At her look of disbelief, he assured her, "No...its better." Barb hated to break the news to him but she had to, "Good. Jared, we're watching your temp, sweetie and it's still elevated. That's why we keep torturing you with the terrible breathing exercises. It's to keep that lung clear, alright? I know it was rough this morning, and tonight's will be, too, but I promise you, it will hurt less each day as you get better, okay?"

Jared looked over at the offending plastic apparatus with the large blue ball inside and gave a sound of disgust. Barb immediately felt sympathy. "I'm sorry. I know it sucks, but it's necessary...that's why I want to know where your pain level is all the time. When you are about to do one of those, you need to push your button when you start. That way, it kicks in before you finish and you'll be pain free by the time you're done." The younger man thought he had a better idea, "Or...without the stupid...exercises...I don’t need the meds...so let's get rid of ‘those’." Jensen laughed out loud next to him, fully surprised that Jared was alert enough to joke. "Touche', Jared, I totally agree with you,” Jensen added.

Jared glanced at Jensen with a smirk, then back to Barb, "I have backup." She couldn’t help but smile at her patient's alertness and ability to respond today. Sensing Jared was going to be a fast healer and also sensing he was an active person who really hated being down, Barb decided to try a
bit of reverse psychology, "Mr. Padalecki...you are way ahead of what we would expect from someone just out of a serious injury and surgery. I’m sure it isn’t easy to accept being stuck in a hospital when you’re such an active person. Do you want to continue that rapid healing so that instead of 10 days in the hospital, you are only facing about 6?"

Jared perked up at her question, a renewed hope entering his eyes, "Serious?" Barb answered him, "Serious." Jared sighed and grumbled, "Fine," unhappily agreeing to go through with more breathing exercises. Anything to get out of here. "Nice," Jensen grumbled, commenting on Barb’s psychological handiwork. Even though Jensen hated Jared having to go through it, he realized the head nurses in this place knew their patients and how to deal with them very well.

Barb uplifted Jared's spirits when she offered to raise the bed another four inches. The gleam in Jared’s eyes had completely replaced his look of resigned sadness over the breathing exercises. She raised the bed while Jared held the soft pillow over his chest. There was some pain, but it wasn’t excruciating and by the time he was over it, he released a pleasurable sigh.

After the nurse left, Jensen leaned over Jared's bed rail and rested his weight on his elbows. He smirked as he observed the kid, "I sense wheels turning, Mr. Padalecki.” Jared looked over, "I was just thinking...you have all that...training. You could...sneak me...out.” Jensen guffawed. Jared was cute. Before Jensen could respond, Jared searched his eyes, “I...know we just... met...and I feel so close...to you. How does that happen? Or maybe it’s the drugs.” Jensen didn't have an answer to that but he offered what he could, “I’m not sure how it happens. I feel like I belong here and I don't know why. Until you kick me out, anyway. I might fart in my sleep and not know it, and you might decide to get rid of me."

Jared grinned and his breath hitched, as he folded his arm over his chest and held himself back from laughing. “Shut up,” he bitched, holding his arm over his chest, “Don’t...make...me laugh.” He turned back to Jensen, "I’d be a fool...to kick you out." Jensen was looking at him with his beautiful hazel grey depths. Jensen smiled, “Well, I’m glad. But, I should tell you I haven’t had a shower in two days, though.” Jared snickered and grabbed his chest with his right hand again, clenching in pain for a second. As soon as it subsided, he responded, "Jerk.” The older man immediately apologized, "I'm sorry,” but Jared smirked, “I havn’t showered either...so it’s okay.”

Jensen smiled, loving Jared's wit. He reached over to the tray and lifted the two drinks, "I have treats for you, young paddiwan.” He put the straw in the little apple juice container and held it for Jared to sip. Jared had a sparkle in his eye, “I can probably...do that...by myself.” Jensen snorted with feigned irritation, "Uh, no...you can't." When Jared eyed him with a disbelieving look, Jensen explained, "because then I’d have no purpose, and what the hell am I supposed to do with myself if you start drinking your own juice.” Jared grinned, “Stop.”

Jared proceeded to drink greedily. He took one break to catch his breath in between sips, but quickly finished the box. It was delicious. He released a gasp of pleasure, “S’so good,” as Barb walked back in. She beamed, "Good, you got some calories into him." Jensen commented, "Yeah, but he’s sassy when he's feeling better, look out." Barb and Jensen both giggled when Jared rolled his eyes. Barb said, "Yeah...I can see that." Jensen opened the little lemon lime soda can, put the straw in and held it up to Jared's mouth next. Jared placed his hand on the container, leaving their hands touching for the moment. His hands were weak and shaky, but he was determined to feel useful.

Jensen knew the kid was a lot weaker than he realized, but he didn't say anything. He understood Jared needed to feel as though he was holding the can by himself. Jared finished all of the soda, taking a few sips at a time. He sighed in bliss, licked his lips and took a moment to catch his breath. After a few minutes, Jensen had a straw ready with ice water. Jared appreciatively accepted the drink and didn't even pitch a fuss when his own shaky hand gave out and dropped back to the bed. He
realized he wasn't holding his own cup, but tried not to be embarrassed.

Jared didn't know why he was so damn thirsty. He felt like an endless pit, all of a sudden. He had just downed three full cups of liquid for the first time since before surgery and it felt wonderful. Jensen watched the kid for any green hue's overcoming his face, ready to grab the barf bowl, if needed. The first stomach contents after surgery weren't always well received. Jared seemed perfectly content, no nauseous reactions yet, so Jensen asked him, "How's it going? You feeling okay?" Jared answered, "It's good." Jensen asked, "Do you feel like eating anything yet...maybe soup?" Jared crinkled his nose and shook his head. Jensen could see the kid was slightly losing the perkiness he'd waken up with, but he still looked better today, even with his black and purple face. 'He doesn't know his face looks like that,' Jensen reminded himself. He reached up and pushed the hair out of Jared's face, gently brushing it back so he could keep his eyes uncovered. Jared thought, 'I'm going to fall in love with him, if he doesn't stop,' though he looked at the older man fondly.

As Jared began to feel even more relaxed, he thought about what Jensen said earlier. Because Jared was who he was, his guilt began to infiltrate over Jensen sacrificing his own time like this. Jensen saw the change in Jared’s eyes, reflecting something he hadn’t seen in them yet. "Hey," he drew Jared’s attention, "what’s wrong?" Jared explained, "I just...realized you haven’t...gone home and...I’m selfish. I’m so sorry you’ve been...stuck here.” Jensen instantly corrected this line of thinking, “Hey...no apologies, kiddo. I ‘wanted’ to be here. I’m happy where I’m at, okay? I was just joking with you. And it’s ‘not’ selfish to be almost killed and laid up in a hospital bed, so let’s just stop that line of thinking. I’m happy being here, okay?"

Jared stared at him, "But...you must have...friends or...family...or a...dog?" Jensen argued happily, "Nope. Nothing and no one is waiting. I'm here...with you...my choice." Jared began to relax at Jensen's assurance that he was 'not' put out. He felt loads of relief that the older man wasn’t sacrificing too much at home to be here. Jensen had just learned that Jared was someone who easily blamed himself. He took on guilt and ownership for other people's hardships as if they were his fault. It was a self sacrificial type trait. Jensen figured it probably came from somewhere...a loss maybe. He was glad to see Jared believed him and started to relax again.

Jared was trying to think of what to say. The machine just dosed him with automatic pain meds and it was slowing down his abilities. He turned to Jensen with something like worship and adoration in his beautiful eyes, “I keep...x’pecting to w’k up and you’re a...dream. M’so glad you’re here, Jensen. I don’t know why but...you make me feel..." Jensen rested his hands on the bed and leaned closer, "Make you feel what?" Jensen waited a few seconds, as Jared struggled against the pain meds. He asked softly, “What does it make you feel to have me here?” Jared yawned and said, "I think...safe. Nice. Warm." Jared blinked heavily, “Yeah...solid n’ safe.” Jensen studied him, "I'm glad you feel safe around me Jared. That’s good.” Jared blinked a few more times, then softly added, "I can't imagine not...ar’nd you." Jensen touched the younger man on the head, very softly rubbing his hair, "I would 'never' hurt you, Jared...and for some reason I'm finding myself quite pissed over the thought of anyone ‘else’ hurting you.” Jared wished he knew if he got to keep Jensen around. He realized he was becoming quite attached to this man, but he didn’t even know if it was platonic, or more. He reminded himself of how flawed he was in the relationship department, as a wave of past mistakes rolled through his mind. Jensen was beautiful and warm. Jared would probably fuck it up somehow, but damn he was already falling for the guy.

Being this vulnerable wasn’t helping to rationalize things. Aside from Manny and Jeff, Jared had stopped trusting people and now here was ‘this’ fabulous find. Christ, if he was on his feet, Jensen might be worth the effort to let down his guard. Unbeknownst to Jared, Jensen noticed the flicker of hurtful memories quickly appear and disappear in his eyes. He filed it away as an observation as he learned more about the young man.
Jared was still streaming a zillion thoughts through his sluggish brain not realizing Jensen had been watching him. When Jensen called his name, his cheeks burned with embarrassment, as he looked away. ‘Please don’t blush,” Jared mentally bitched, knowing damn well he probably was. He had just been wondering what it would be like to kiss the older man. Jensen had just witnessed another adorable side to this kid. As he watched the shy blush, he wondered what Jared had been thinking. With a smirk, Jensen cleared his throat, “Are you alright?”

Jared looked slightly annoyed at Jensen's attention. He felt like the older man had caught him thinking something he shouldn't have been. He mumbled his answer, “Yes, fine,” still avoiding eye contact. Jensen grinned, “Well I’m glad.” He paused for a few seconds, then added, “It’s cute...that blush. I don’t know what it was about, but it’s cute.” Jared looked straight upward with a heavy sigh. Jensen asked, “Can I ask you something?” When Jared didn’t immediately look his way, Jensen furthered, “It’s personal. It might seem too forward and I know you’re laid up, I just...I’m just uh,” he shrugged. Jared glanced over at him. Feeling like they’d gotten past the blush thing, he stared at him with curiosity, "Yeah, shoot." Jensen started out, "Well, I'm not very good at this. I'm way out of practice, but I...I kind of want to know if...you’re in a relationship? With anyone?” Jared was now intrigued. His hopeful expression would have given him away if Jensen hadn't been doing his own shy avoidance thing at the moment.

Jared looked up at the younger man, waiting. Jared didn't seem bothered by the question, thank god. He answered, "No." Jensen nodded with a pleasant, "Oh." He pushed himself further, “You don’t have to answer this if you don’t want.” Jensen seemed to be gathering himself before he finally looked into Jared’s eyes, “Have you ever...considered maybe a...or been with...” Jensen sighed. Fuck, this could make it or break it. He almost didn’t want to hear the answer. Jared suddenly smiled sweetly and finished the question for him..."you mean with a guy?” Jensen was completely disgusted with himself. He couldn’t even ask Jared the question and the cute kid had to finish it for him. He smirked in shy embarrassment, nodding. Jared answered him, “Yes.” Jensen perked up, looking at the younger man with pleasant surprise. "Oh,” he stupidly answered, so overwhelmingly pleased, he didn’t know what to say. Jared returned the question, Have you?”

Jensen looked sheepish because the weakened victim in the hospital bed had been forced to take the lead in the conversation. He nodded, “Yep. And also ‘no’ to the relationship.” He smiled at Jared, pleased that those two questions were out of the way. The two men pondered in silence for a few minutes. There was something magnetic going on here and as soon as Jared felt stronger and whole, he was definitely asking the gorgeous man out. Jensen was gentle, honest and loyal...which Jared wasn't used to. 'It's like I've been waiting for him all my life.' Jared reminded himself of the few times he ‘had’ trusted and loved people; Chris was ripped from him, like his parents...then he'd trusted his aunt and uncle and was let down, then there was Tom...Jared was humiliated and betrayed. He ‘really’ didn't feel like getting screwed anymore and found it was easier to simply not engage with anyone. Of course, ‘that’ was before Jensen.

The older man read a bit of uncertainty in Jared’s eyes, "Hey, nothing matters right now but you getting better, okay? Maybe there’s just more to look forward to now...after.” He smiled. Jared raised his right hand and took Jensen's left. He interlaced his fingers with Jensen's and felt the older man squeeze. Jensen asked, “You okay?” Jared smiled back, “Yes, very okay.” Jensen watched the younger man fall fast asleep. Jared's elegant fingers gradually relaxed their grip and Jensen let go when he realized it had been several minutes.

Jensen walked to the back of the room and checked his phone. Someone had sent him a text a few minutes ago, but he’d been too focused on Jared to pay attention to it. He was pleasantly surprised to discover his friends had arrived. He went out to the waiting room to get them, after ensuring there was a nurse in the room for a few minutes.
Jared woke to a quiet room, except for the very low hum of voices outside his door. He could hear the rich baritone of Jensen’s voice and two others. As if Jensen could sense him awake, the older man entered from behind the door curtain and came to Jared’s side. "Hey," he greeted him softly, "you okay?" Jared felt very relaxed and pain free. He answered softly, "Yeah…m’good." Jensen smiled and touched Jared on the forearm, giving him a squeeze of support. "If you’re feeling up to it, my friends are here from the restaurant. They’re dying to meet you, but it’s ‘not’ a requirement. They brought your luggage and phone from the car."

Jensen waited. He assessed Jared’s eyes to ascertain whether he might be bothered by visitors, or whether he was hiding any pain. The young engineer seemed to be perfectly at peace. Jared answered, “Sure, they c’n come in…th’s so nice of them to br’ng m’stuff." Jensen touched him on the head, then left to go retrieve the couple. When he returned, he led them to Jared’s bedside. Jensen announced, “This is Dani and Steve. You might not remember Dani, but she was there when you came in.” Dani stepped closer, overt concern at Jared’s visible bruising, "Hi sweetheart, I’m so sorry.” Jared wasn’t sure what she was actually seeing since he had no idea what he looked like, but he greeted her warmly, “Hi, I remembr you…thnku…for helping me...and keep’n my stuff." Dani held her hand out to Jared, who took hers in turn. She confessed, "I was so worried about you. All that work you had to do and then to have this happen. When you came in my heart stopped. I thought we were gonna lose you, honey."

Dani continued to study his face, as if he weren't real and were going to disappear any second. Jared felt a bit conscientious because he didn’t know what to say and he actually had a quick flashback of the terrifying lack of air in the last moments he’d been in this woman’s presence. He tried to keep his friendly smile going so they wouldn't think there was anything wrong, but the flashback had disoriented him for a few seconds. Steve stepped forward, “Dani, slow down, hon. He’s pretty raw right now. Jared, I’m Steve, Dani’s husband. I own the restaurant with my wife, but I wasn’t there when this happened. I’m really glad to see you’re getting better.” Steve held out his hand and Jared took it. He smiled tiredly, "I'm going to...be for'vr...grateful...your wife...an Jensen...saved my life."

Jared was feeling tired again, but he could see why Jensen had befriended these two people. They were a delightful pair and he instantly liked them. "Oh," Dani suddenly spoke, "all the stuff from your car is here for you, sweetie," as she knelt down and picked up a large black duffle bag and laptop case for Jared to see. Jared reached for the items with renewed interest, but Jensen blocked him just as he saw the kid clench in pain from forgetting about his left side. Jensen reminded him, "You tell me what you want and I’ll get it out for you, okay?" Jensen took the items from Dani and set them on the wide window ledge. He pulled the cell phone out of the side pocket and held it up to Jared, “You want this first?” Jared nodded. Jensen shook it to make sure there was no remaining glass in it first, then he handed it to Jared. The young man decided to set it on the bed, for now. He didn’t want to open it now, while Jensen’s friends were here.

Dani turned back to Jared, "Honey, we worked on your bags yesterday, trying to get all the glass out. You have to be careful, okay? We tried to get them all, but there might be some smaller pieces still in there.” Jared had not even been thinking that there would be tons of glass in everything, "Thank you...I wasn’t thinking of that...I hope you didn’t…cut yourself.” Steve assured the kid, "No, we were very careful, but for you, it’s probably better to let Jensen check it before you open anything. I’m sure you don’t need anymore cuts right now.” Jared smiled. He had run out of things to say, but he wanted to know more about Jensen. He tried to fight his tiredness by asking something, "So...how long...h’ve you known Jensen? And...how l’ng have...you own’d the restr’nt? It’s...nice place.”

Steve answered Jared by explaining how they gave up boring office jobs and used their life savings to settle somewhere they liked. The restaurant was an affordable adventure. They’d been running it for six years and been quite successful. Dani told Jared they had adjusted to night life crowds on
Friday nights, added private party rooms for special occasions, and offered open family friendly dining during other times. It was hugely popular, so far. They loved meeting the stop-in travelers and having so many local regulars. They built their house on the property behind it. Steve described Jensen wandering in about a year ago and how they took a liking to him immediately. “He helps us, too, even though he doesn’t have to.” Dani piped in, “He cooks, you know, Jared.” Jared glanced at Jensen, smirking when he saw the man look down with a shy grin. Jared just realized the fierce warrior had dimples.

He looked back at the couple, as Dani added, "Jensen's beyond a good friend. He only comes there for a steak and a beer, sometimes to watch a game. He doesn't have to bus tables and wash dishes, but he does. ‘Sometimes’ we get to hear some of his military stories. He’s awful secretive about some of it, though.” Steve interrupted, "Dani, you know why the man can't tell you everything.” Dani rolled her eyes, "I know, I know...I just wish." Jared watched them as they shared fond glances back and forth, while gushing over Jensen. He could tell they adored him. Jared yawned, but covered it with his hand and struggled to be polite, “I’m sorry.” He looked exhausted, but he was still smiling. Jensen thought he recognized some pain lines starting to form so he interjected, “Guys, I think we should cut this short.”

Jensen exchanged a look with Steve and Dani, who totally got the message and said their well wishes and good bye’s quickly. Jared smiled gratefully, so happy he got to meet them, but fading into darkness fast. Jensen escorted them out, gave them hugs and thanked them for everything. He told them he would keep them updated. He returned to Jared's side and noticed a slight pink hue on the kid’s cheeks and neck. He very gently placed his hand on the younger man's forehead. Jensen went to the curtain and peeked out to get someone's attention. When Barb appeared, he spoke quietly, "I think he feels hot, can you check him?" Barb immediately answered, “Of course,” as she hurried to Jared’s bedside and checked his temperature. She took Jared's pulse while she was waiting and looked closely at his incision. She checked the bp and oxygen levels and then retrieved the thermometer. “Dammit,” Barb cursed, “it’s 102.” She used her penlight and checked Jared's pupils, as the young man slept on. She looked into his ears, then grabbed the stethoscope from her pocket and listened intently to Jared's lung. "He's wheezing," she exclaimed worriedly.

Jensen took the earphones when she offered for him to listen. He could plainly hear the slight singing sound. He nodded in agreement, unhappy at this new complication. He looked at Jared in sympathy, gently wiped the hair out of his eyes and waited for Barb to page the doctor. Jensen couldn’t believe this was attacking Jared, especially after he'd tried so hard to do the breathing exercises they'd told him to do. It just wasn’t fair. Barb returned and told him she ordered an updated ultrasound and X-ray. The doctor would want it before he made any decisions. She looked up at Jensen, “This may be okay…we're heading it off at the pass before it manifests into worse, so let's hope for the best. It wasn’t that loud an hour ago, so we’ve caught it early.” Jensen nodded, feeling more reassured at Barb’s information, but still concerned about Jared going through any further shit.

The doctor arrived, just as the tests were being performed. He greeted Jensen before he grabbed the chart off the bed and read through it. When the technicians were done, he listened to Jared's chest. While the results were being printed for him, the doctor spoke to Jensen, "He's definitely getting some breathing treatments, one now and then two a day starting tomorrow. We’ll see if there’s a need for more antibiotics in a minute. If we combat this quickly, it’ll curtail anything before it gets started.” Jensen agreed, but he was glad Jared was missing all the activity. Within minutes, the surgeon was putting up fresh pictures of Jared’s lung and ribs. He explained to Barb and Jensen what he was seeing, “Here...this is what’s causing it.” Jensen saw the lightly shaded area in Jared's left lung. It was a new anomaly, in one of the lower corners. The doc continued, “The injuries are still healing, the punctures show no signs of leakage or infection. This issue is a common response to being tampered with. The lung is not a happy camper when it’s injured. It’s weak tissue, and bacteria loves to move in and attack while it’s trying to get better.”
The doc turned off the light and pulled down the pictures. He handed them to Barb, who slipped them back into the envelope. The surgeon continued, “There’s no reason why it won’t clear up within a day or two, but we’re going to give him some help fighting it off. I’m going to add antibiotics and with the breathing treatments, he should overcome it within a day.” Jensen nodded, thinking, ‘poor Jared,’ to himself. The doctor finished his orders and left. Barb gave Jared the first shot of antibiotic into his iv, then straightened up and touched Jensen on the arm, supportively, as she left.

A few minutes later, Jared stirred. He seemed to be restless, but hadn’t opened his eyes yet. Jensen watched the flushed face turn toward him, as Jared opened his eyes. He quickly asked him, “Hey...how are you feeling?” Jared scrunched his cheek up in a semi-negative response. Jensen knew that meant he was 'not' feeling that great, and Jared wasn’t even faking it this time. He touched the kid on his arm, “The doc ordered some antibiotics and some kind of breathing treatment to make you feel better. I’m sorry, buddy. I think the breathing treatment is on the way.”

Jared's eyes look strained, as he tried to focus. Jensen continued, “Your lung is trying to become infected. That’s why you feel like shit. They’re giving you some kind of breathing treatment. Have you ever done that before?” Jared shook his head 'no', looking miserable. He turned his head, as the sound of a rolling cart entered the room. A young female tech greeted him, “Hi, my name is Sarah. I’ve got your breathing treatment for you. Have you ever had one before?” Jared shook his head 'no', so she continued, "Okay, I’m putting the fresh medication into the machine and it’s going to process it into a moist fog for you to breathe into your lungs. The medication will help your lungs immensely, alright? While it’s working, we need you to breathe into the mask for ten minutes to make sure it’s all going in. The fog is going to feel cool. The most important thing is to keep the mask sealed for the full ten minutes in order to get all of the treatment where it needs to go, okay?”

Jared stared at her, not really looking to thrilled about this. Jensen leaned over him, catching Jared’s eyes. "I'm right here, okay? Nothing’s gonna hurt you and you’re gonna be just fine.” Jared half smiled at Jensen. He didn’t quite look like he believed him, however. Jensen assessed him while Jared looked over at the mask like it was an offensive piece of fecal matter. He knew Jared wasn’t feeling well and it could be amplifying his reluctance to the treatment, but he wondered if Jared was actually afraid. Jared was almost acting like he’d had to endured a mask before and it hadn’t been pleasant.

Sarah removed the cannula and started the machine. She gently placed the mask over Jared’s nose and mouth, then pushed a button to release the medication. Jensen kept himself in Jared’s line of sight, watching for any signs of panic. He could see Jared’s fear starting, but he seemed to be pushing himself to try and deal with it. As the fog entered the mask, the tech reminded Jared, "Just inhale, even when you smell the fog, breathe in....the first breath is awkward, but it's all easy after that." Jared immediately reacted to the bitter smell and coughed, his body trying desperately to expel the offending mist. He couldn't breathe. The burning...the smoke...he couldn't breathe. He reached up and tried to rip the mask away. Jensen grabbed his wrists, holding them still right over his collarbone, so he couldn't pull the mask off.

He saw the panic and ordered, "Breathe, Jared. Jared, breathe." Jensen held Jared's panicky eyes. “Come on, buddy, breathe in. It’s not gonna hurt you.” The tech calmly ordered, "Breathe in and it will get better, Jared, just take that first breath for us, okay?" Jared's eyes teared as he shut them. He tried to move his head to the side and avoid the invasive fog instead of inhaling it but he didn't have that much freedom of movement. He was going to die. "Buddy, come on, please breathe," Jensen’s voice penetrated his fear. Jensen’s heart was bleeding in sympathy, knowing Jared felt smothered. He held Jared firmly and raised his voice, "JARED, BREATHE, NOW." The sound of Jensen's raised worried voice seemed to push Jared into compliance as he took his first breath of the bitter fog. He coughed, miserably clenched his painful chest muscles, but something in his body let go of it's resistance and he took a second breath.
"That's it, buddy, you're okay," Jensen said soothingly. Jared coughed again, but inhaled further, as he listened to Jensen’s voice. “That’s it, keep breathing. You’re okay.” Finally, Jared was inhaling like they wanted him to and the horrible taste was no longer obvious. Jared was sure he was going to die for a moment, but now he was relaxing. Jensen loosened his grip on the younger man’s wrists and grabbed hold of his hands to squeeze them. He reached up and rubbed Jared's hair on the top of his head, still holding his eye contact, "The worst part's over, okay? You’ve got this.” Jared blinked the leftover wetness from his eyes, as the tech announced, “Just five minutes and we’re done.”

Jared looked a bit miserable, like he was losing his patience, so Jensen said, "Keep looking at me.” Jared refocused on Jensen's eyes. "You're doing great, kiddo. I'm right here with you, and you're almost done." The younger man was immensely grateful, having Jensen to focus on. He hated being such a baby, but the feeling of smothering had been overwhelming. The tech turned off the machine and gently removed the mask. She dabbed Jared’s face with a dry tissue, then explained, "We just need you to breathe some straight oxygen for a few minutes and then you're good to go. Are you okay if I place the oxygen mask on you?” Jared nodded, completely ashamed at his panic earlier.

What the hell had caused it, he had no idea.

Jensen studied him while he endured the lighter thinner oxygen mask. Jared was a little annoyed by it, but nothing like the gripping fear he’d seen earlier. Within five minutes, the tech unhooked him and replaced Jared’s cannula. She patted him on the arm and told him she would be back the next morning. Jared didn’t fucking care. That had come out of the blue and now his chest was throbbing because he’d had to cough. ‘Fuck,’ he mentally bitched, feeling exhausted and ready to sleep again. Jensen stayed quiet. He never moved from Jared’s side, hoping the closeness would fend off any returning fear of his experience. He knew the hospital staff was going to get Jared up later, so he was thankful the kid was resting now.

Jared slept an hour. He woke to see Jensen hunched over on the chair next to him. The older man’s crossword from the newspaper was crumpled to his chest and the tv remained on very low volume. There were black and white reruns of I Love Lucy. The ex-Black Ops special forces soldier was snoring softly with his chin leaning heavily on his chest. Jared smiled. The older man was quite the adorable picture. He watched him until Barb came in and announced the next adventure for the day, “Hello there. We’re going to help you sit up. If it feels okay, you can stand. Would you like that?” Jared's eyes showed a spark of hope and interest. He nodded, smiling, “Definitely.”

Jared observed his roommate/savior again. Jensen was adorable and cute. Jared wondered what the man would think if he told him that. Jensen stirred, snorting his airway clear, as he yawned and stretched. He stood up and stretched further, then walked in a circle while rubbing the kinks out of his butt. Jared enjoyed the show. Jensen finally turned to Jared and realized he'd been watching him, “Damn, you caught me sleeping on my watch.” Jared giggled softly, adorably cute. Jensen smiled at the dimples, definitely wanting to hear more of that sound. He came closer to Jared and assessed him, "How are you feeling?” Jared smiled, "Better."

Jensen could find no argument. Jared's face was no longer flushed with fever and the kid definitely looked more alert. "I'm glad," Jensen said, then he looked concerned, "I'm so goddamn sorry you had to go through that." The younger man reached out to grab Jensen's hand, "Thank you. It made all the difference...with you here...I don't know why it felt like...it was smothering me.” Jensen rubbed Jared's hand with his thumb, "I'm not going anywhere."

Jared absorbed this growing connection. He wasn't used to having loyalty and concern directed at him like this. He easily poured it out to other people, but having someone return it was overwhelming. Jared realized his damaged psyche from the past could totally fuck up any chance he had with Jensen. ‘Fuck, I'm a mess,' he berated himself silently. He was going to have to quash his self doubt and keep it at bay.
Jensen was adept at reading people. The emotional turmoil running through Jared's eyes wasn’t the first time he’d seen it. He knew Jared had been hurt, terribly, at some point, maybe multiple times. He wouldn’t push him right now. This wasn’t a good time to address anything that would make Jared feel vulnerable so he kept quiet. Barb returned with a tray of chicken broth, applesauce and another lemon lime soda. She told Jared, "Here’s the deal...all you have to do is get as much as you can down. Then, we're going to get you up and change your bed and gown for you, okay?" Jared looked at the tray. He wasn’t aware this was part of the deal. After a few seconds, he supposed he could try and eat 'something'. Barb looked at Jensen, "I'll be back in ten. I usually bring another nurse to be my tag team partner, but do you want that job?" Jensen wholeheartedly agreed, "Hell yes," then looked at Jared with concern, “Unless that’s not okay with you.” Jared smiled, “…s’okay.”

Jensen watched him look over the array of liquids, then reach for the applesauce first. He seemed to be too weak to pull the tab off the cup, so Jensen did that for him. He waited for Jared to try spooning himself the tasty treat. His arms shook a little, but Jared was able to finish the little cup of applesauce on his own. Jensen quickly assisted when Jared tried to lift the bowl of broth and failed. He downed half of the liquid, then relaxed back to enjoy the feeling of fullness in his stomach. Damn, it felt good. Jensen lifted the lemon lime soda for him to take a few sips, just as Barb came back in. She smiled encouragingly, “Excellent. You’re getting some calories down. Is it settling okay?” Jared nodded, eager to get on with the show.

Two aides entered the room and stood by the window, their hands full of bedding. Jensen moved to Jared’s left side of the bed, close to Barb. Jared was damn tall and his nurse was short as fuck. Jensen was sure they had some technique for doing this and he was curious. Barb explained to Jared, "I'm going to lower this bar and lift your bed higher. We're going to roll you very slowly toward me, then you’ll use your legs to scoot themselves off the bed. When you’re in the position, your right hand comes over and pushes here on the bed, in order to push your upper body up. At no time will we touch that left side, nor will you use it, okay?" Jared nodded, seemingly positive about this. Barb reiterated, “We’re only going to work on sitting up. We’ll wait and see how that feels, let your body get used to the shift. If you can stand, we’ll do that, but it’s not necessary to stand on your first time up, okay?” Jared nodded, wondering why everyone had to be so overly concerned. He felt really good right now.

"Jared," Barb waited for him to acknowledge her, "We're going to start as soon as you push that button so the pain meds will kick in by the time we’re done, okay?" Jared's face immediately turned to irritable disbelief, "What? Why?" Barb argued softly, “Because you will need it when we’re done, even if you don’t think you do right now.” Jared sighed, then blurted out angrily, "Fine." He reached for the button and bitched, “Pushing,” then tossed it back on the bed with attitude. 'Wow,' Jensen inwardly grinned. Jared’s pissy fit was a new side he hadn’t witnessed yet. Barb didn't seem phased by it, as she turned to Jensen, "Ready?" Jensen responded, "Yep."

Barb stressed to Jensen, "Whatever happens, we just don't let him fall. Our job is to keep him from falling if he runs out of steam. Hold him under his armpits and anywhere else you can get a hold without aggravating the rib cage. I've got a feeling he's going to try and go too far, so just be ready when his batteries dry up.” Jensen nodded. They both turned to Jared, as he spit out, “Right fucking here.” Jensen tried to control his smile, but lost the battle. Neither he nor Barb seemed the least bit perturbed by Jared's put out expression at being talked about like he wasn't there. Jared rolled his eyes. This was turning out to be thoroughly entertaining.

Barb spoke to Jared, “Those two assistants are going to give you clean bedding while we’re up, and I’m going to swap you into a fresh gown, so you’ll feel cleaner, okay sweetie?” Jared nodded, “Okay,” feeling happier with something to look forward to. Barb lowered the bed rail. She raised Jared’s bed a bit more, then adjusted all the blankets and tubes before Jared moved. Jared rolled very slightly to his left. The others helped him, as Barb adjusted the bed to even more of an incline. They
stopped twice on the way, to let Jared adjust and breathe, holding a soft pillow to his chest. He pushed with his right arm, but it was too weak on it’s own, so Jensen pulled him up by his armpit. Barb stood holding Jared’s left side, with all the iv connections, while Jensen stood holding him from the right.

Jared felt all of his injuries shift. ‘Oh god it hurts,’ his mind screamed. He breathed through the pain, keeping his eyes closed until everything started to settle. His chest was angry at the move, but now that he was upright, everything started to recede. Jensen watched Jared’s face, concerned about his pain level, but Barb seemed to be okay with it. She encouraged the patient, "This is normal Jared, just take your time." Jensen placed his left hand on Jared’s back, his right still held him under his armpit. He lightly rubbed his back, hoping to add a measure of comfort. After another minute, Barb asked, “How does it feel to be up?” Jared nodded, finally able to relax and open his eyes, “It’s good.” Barb watched him, “Are you queasy, light headed?” Jared shook his head. Barb said, "Let us know if you want to try standing. Remember, it’s not necessary on your first time up.” Jared nodded eagerly, “Yes...yes, can I stand up?”

Jensen wasn’t so sure that was a good idea, but remained silent thinking he might just be over protective. Barb answered, “Of course,” moving in very close to get under Jared’s armpit. The second Jared stood up, the two girls behind them attacked the bed at breakneck speed. They were a tag team of efficiency, having done this a million times. Jensen was impressed, but he was too focused on Jared to watch them. He held Jared firmly under his armpit and felt the vibrations thrumming through his body. Jared was pushing himself determinedly, further impressing Jensen but alarming him at the same time.

Barb watched Jared's face lose some color and asked, "You feeling sick?" Jared nodded slightly. He breathed in and blew it out a few times, attempting to control the sudden nausea. "I'm okay," Jared insisted, not wanting to quit. Barb looked at Jensen, exchanging a silent understanding that Jared was pushing himself and to be ready if his legs gave out. "Still okay?" Barb needled him, making sure Jared kept answering her. The younger man nodded. He looked at the restroom longingly, but Jensen headed the idea off at the pass, "Not gonna happen today, buddy." Jared sighed, “Can I walk a few steps?” Barb stared at him, "I'm not sure that's what we wanna do this time around, Jared...do you really feel that strong right now? Jared nodded, "Yeah...being upright...’s so damn amazing."

Jensen could feel the increased vibrations in Jared's body. He looked immediately at Barb and shook his head 'no'. She calmly waited and didn't say anything yet, seeing if Jared would wear himself out. She did this all the time and patients usually had no idea how fast their strength could fail them fresh after surgery. Jared seemed to do just that and started to lower back into a sitting position without any warning. Jensen and Barb took Jared's weight and eased his descent. His eyes stayed closed, as he breathed in controlled breaths for a moment without saying anything. Barb finally asked, "Are you good to sit here, while I change your gown?" Jared nodded, so the nurse changed his gown, working around all the iv lines and electrodes. She unbuttoned the shoulders, then put the new gown over Jared, before pulling the dirty gown out from underneath. It was an impressive way to replace a patient's gown with the least amount of exposure possible, respecting the patient's modesty.

There was a second of Jared's bareness where Jensen saw the painful collection of blacks, blues, purples and greenish yellows. Jensen was careful not to react, knowing Jared hadn't seen what he looked like under that gown yet. The younger man hadn't seen his own face, either, and that was another colorful display of bruising.

Jared hated to admit it, but he could feel himself waning, then gripped tight as he lowered to the bed. He didn't remember even warning them he was ready to lay down. He lifted his legs back onto the bed, as hands covered him with fresh blankets. He meant to thank them but he couldn’t even open his eyes. Jensen stood up with his hands on his hips and sighed. "Holy Christ," he exclaimed in front
the nurse. He was amazed at how fast Jared had begun to tilt to the side and become limp without warning. He reacted quickly and controlled the younger man's descent to the bed, thankful that he'd been paying attention. Barb wasn't kidding at how quickly he could run out of steam.

While Barb performed more dressing changes and bag swaps, Jensen took his bag of things to the visitor’s shower. He felt like million bucks after a shave and shower. He went to the lunch room and inhaled a sandwich and some fruit. He headed back to Jared’s room with a cup of his favorite espresso and a new line up of additional snacks. Jensen thought about Jared's determination to stand up and walk his first time out of bed. The kid had eye balled that restroom, definitely ready to push himself beyond his own safety. Jensen would have to be mindful and not take his eyes off the younger man while he was recovering. Jared was definitely the type to re-injure himself.
This chapter continues with Jared's hospital recovery. A ton of hurt/comfort is prevalent, mixed in between the delightful interactions between some favorite characters. Jensen gets to meet Jared's closest friends, and vice versa. A lot is revealed to Jensen, now that Jared is so trusting around him. The boys are becoming closer, as they learn more about one another. The threat to Jared's life becomes of much more of a reality. Jared really wants to get out of the hospital.

Medical situations are detailed, but nothing graphic.

A special thank you to all the readers who took the time to send messages and push the kudos button. You are greatly appreciated beyond words. I pray I can keep you entertained with these lovely characters.

It was early evening. Jensen watched Jared force himself to perform the breathing exercises with painful bravery. He could see pain grip the younger man's face as he took a few seconds in between each of the exercises. "That's excellent, only two more," the tech said as Jared completed the second repetition. 'Whoever invented this fucking thing needs to have an ice pick shoved into their left lung and see how it feels,' Jared mentally ranted. He looked at her frustrated and in pain, thinking she must be nuts to think that he could actually do this two more times. He rested for a minute, then pushed himself into finishing the last two repetitions, one immediately after the other.

'Fuck,' he mentally cursed, not understanding why this was so fucking hard. 'I fucking 'hate' this.' Jensen watched him struggle, ready to stop the cruel fucking procedure when he felt Jared was too done to continue. Hence the protectiveness overcoming him again, even with some damn procedure that was supposed to help the man get well. The tech explained, "Most patients make it to two this early...you did four this morning and four tonight. Your lungs are stronger, Mr. Padalecki...far ahead of schedule." Jared was glad he was done, but he found himself struggling for a minute, trying to breathe without puking. 'God, please don't puke,' he thought.

Jensen watched poor Jared rest his head back and look up into space. "Getting better," he asked? The younger man nodded but didn't say anything, still too raw to speak just yet. Jensen sat in the chair next to Jared and leaned forward. Jared licked his lips and seemed to be calming himself. Jensen waited until Jared looked over and met his eyes. Jensen gently brushed the hair back from Jared's forehead, watching him with concern in his eyes. Even though they had only been around each other for three days, this quiet time was becoming their special time of peace and security.

It was a long uneventful night after that, with Barb handing over the shift to Darcy. Jared zoned in and out of sleep. He spent a little time watching quieted television with Jensen, taking a few sips of
water. He never woke up once without feeling the solid presence of the six foot plus size shape on the sofa bed across from him. He was glad the man was getting some sleep. During the quiet times of the night, Jared worried over the evidence and stress that was to come. He worried about poor Jensen getting involved with him when his life was going to be so screwed, and then he thought about the condition he was in and how it was taking too damn long to heal.

The next morning, after some enticing apple juice and broth, Jared did very well on his breathing exercises, according to the tech. He did not know what the hell she was talking about as he lay there struggling to control his panting through the pain she had caused. 'Fucking shit,' Jared continued to rant in his mind. It hurt. Bad. They'd done four repetitions on the inhale and another four on the exhale. Yes, he'd done more than the tech expected, but he was so damn sick of waiting for things to feel better that he'd pushed himself. Jared had waken up angry, and he didn't even know why. He'd slept really well after the anxious thoughts stopped spinning.

When Jared woke up, Jensen was sitting in the chair close by. The breathing tech had shown up shortly after. Not wanting to throw an adult tantrum, Jared kept most of his pissed off thoughts to himself. The poor tech was just doing her job, after all.

When the tech suggested he push his button, Jared replied irritably, "Later." His raw nerves were 'not' in the mood to give into the pain just yet. He was definitely sick of being told what to do and when he had to do it. Jared was glad when she left. She looked back for a moment before leaving, because she wasn't comfortable with the level of pain he was in. Jared knew she was probably going to go get Barb, 'Fuck,' he cursed mentally. Jensen watched the interaction with interest, trying to get to the bottom of Jared's mood. Jensen knew Jared was cognizant of being watched, so he said nothing to escalate the kid's anger for the moment.

Barb came into the room and assessed the patient, looking for signs of drug reactions, rapid pulse, or anything she could detect. When she recognized the pain in Jared's eyes, she reached over to push the button and her hand was blocked. Jared growled, "Stop," and pushed her hand away, "I don't want it now." Barb backed off and watched him for a second. Jared knew he was being an ass but something was eating at him. Barb asked, "Jared what are you feeling right now? And I don't mean just pain, I mean overall?" She noticed the man was shaking. He probably wasn't aware of it, but she could see it. He laid his head back and tried to be patient, knowing his mood wasn't her fault. He was struggling with the gripping pain in his chest, but he was trying to battle it and overcome it without the damn narcotics.

Barb placed her fingers on Jared's wrist and took his pulse while waiting for him to answer her. Jared realized he needed to answer so he responded with, "Irritable." He looked at her after that admission and barked, "I need to do...something...other than just 'lay' here. I want the tube...out of my dick and I want...the stupid tubes...out of my...nose and...to fucking talk...without catching...my breath." Jared sighed, "Like I said...irritable." Barb announced, "Your pulse is racing. You need to push your pain button. I'm gonna have to call the doctor...this could be a reaction to the new antibiotic or the breathing treatment." Jared interrupted angrily, "It's a reaction...to...fucking laying here...and doing 'nothing'...good assessment." Jensen raised an eyebrow at the snotty comment. Jared was goddamn cute when he was angry and right now, he was pissed. Actually he was cute all the time, but Jensen knew this was 'not' a good time to laugh or share his thoughts.

Barb went to go page the doctor but wasn't sure she should step out with Jared in this mood, "Jared, do 'not' try and get up while I go page the doctor...do you understand me?" Jared snorted, irritably, but a commanding voice from the chair retorted, "He won't." Barb smiled at Jared, then, knowing full well the younger man wasn't getting up with Jensen in charge. "I'll be back...push your button, Jared," she added. Jared refused to push the button and the room remained silent for the next five minutes. He would not look at Jensen yet. Jensen observed him, this was a complete one eighty Jared's personality had taken. Being a victim of trauma can trigger reactions in people, and from what
he had learned about Jared, so far, the kid was a very hard working individual, always independent and not relying on others to take care of him. This situation wasn't easy for him.

Jared glanced over at Jensen, then back up to the ceiling. He knew he was being watched. He sighed and said, "I'm sorry I'm being an ass." Jensen immediately answered him, "You're not." Jared argued in a snotty voice, "Uh, yeah...I think I am." Jensen played along with Jared's argumentative mood, "Okay, you're being an ass. Why?" Jared was silent for a moment, perhaps thrown off by Jensen's unexpected agreement with him. He finally bitched, "I have no...fucking idea. I just...want them to...leave me...the fuck alone."

Jensen waited for awhile. He let Jared stew after his vent. The man was certainly entitled. After a few minutes of silence, Jensen asked him, "Can I say something?" Jared sighed, responding irritably and still not looking at him, "Yes." Jensen started with the positive approach, "You may not see it from being in bed on your back, but everyone else can. You're getting better...stronger. Every twelve hours, there's some improvement happening. This isn’t going to take much longer." Jared wasn’t happy, but he listened as the older man continued, "You've been gravely injured. You almost died. Trauma throws your mind into defense mode and it struggles for the control that it lost. You’re frustrated, you’re angry, you’re wanting to get up and get life back to the way it was...certainly makes sense that you’d feel that way, especially someone as capable and strong as you are. You’re entitled to be pissed off. This was a shit sandwich, and you're handling it amazingly well...better than most."

Jared didn't agree, now feeling like an ass because he knew Jensen made sense and was trying to help him. He didn’t want to make sense, he wanted to be angry, "No...I'm not handling it well." Jensen argued, "Yes, you are." He sensed the anger in Jared needed confrontation. The kid was still refusing to look directly at him. Jared suddenly faced Jensen with a spark of rebelliousness in his eyes, "No, I'm NOT handling it." he argued, not willing to give into Jensen giving him any credit. Jensen would not be beaten, "'Yes', you 'are'." Jensen raised his voice, matching Jared's tone. He resisted the urge to smile, as they continued a few more times. Jared blurted out, "Jerk." Jensen responded quickly with, "Bitch."

Jared's eyes were dilated with anger, but then he looked away quickly before Jensen could see the beginning of a smirk. Jensen knew he had handled him perfectly, so far. The kid was angry at himself and the situation. He wasn't able to control his physical condition, the accident, his freedom, nor how fast he could get his life back to normal. Jensen had given him an 'out'...a way to vent, even for a short few seconds. Jared glanced back at the older man and then away again, shameful at his childishness. He was trying to control a second smirk he felt breaking through from their short verbal sparring. Jensen had his own smirk, not quite proud of calling the kid a bitch, but he was pleasantly surprised that Jared actually looked satisfied with it. Jensen's thoughts were interrupted as the doctor walked in.

The surgeon came over and asked Jared, "How's the pain today?" Jared answered him in a guarded voice, "It's the same." The surgeon looked at Jared's crinkled pain lines, then over at the medication machine, then back at Jared, "You haven't had anything other than the dose almost 4 hours ago...and you just had a breathing exercise...I think maybe you've got some pain going, Mr. Padalecki...I think it's probably a 'lot'...is that a true assessment?" Jared told him, "It's fine." The doctor didn't look pleased, but didn't address it further. He felt Jared's glands around his throat and face, then put very slight pressure around the knot on his forehead. He brought out his stethoscope and performed the same listening routine he had done about thirteen hours prior. The surgeon took in all the vital signs, the elevated pulse and checked his surgical site. He asked Jared, "What happened with your first breathing treatment last night? I know it wasn't received well. You’ve got another one coming now. What does it feel like when the fog hits you, does it burn?"
Jared paused, not really wanting to discuss this. He hated that crappy mask and he didn't want it anymore, but did it burn? No, not really. Jared formulated his answer, "It's thick...like it's smothering me. I just...want it off...and...I can't breathe." The doctor continued, "Some rare instances have been reported where people’s skin burns. The inside of the mouth and nose can have that reaction. It could be a sensitivity that’s causing some anxiety and nervousness...or it could be the antibiotic. Do you have a history of asthma, chronic allergies, or lung conditions in your family?" Jared shrugged his shoulders, "I have...no idea." Jared didn't really want to talk about this, but the doctor was quiet and waiting so he explained, "My parents...died when I was...eleven...our house...caught on fire. I lived with...my aunt...so...I don't know."

Jared didn't elaborate, so the doctor nodded, "I see, I'm very sorry to bring that up again...any history helps us get you well." Jared didn't respond so the surgeon dropped the subject that his patient obviously didn't want to talk about. The doctor did not think Jared was having any kind of allergic reaction to medication. He explained to Jared, "Right now, you are only seventy two hours from surgery. That pain is nothing to mess around with. Pretending it isn't there is not helping you get well. Push that button, Mr. Padalecki. That's my professional opinion. I'll see you tomorrow, and I'm hoping we can rid you of a couple attachments that you probably will appreciate losing...and a few more breathing treatments will do the trick if you can just hang in there and get through them."

Jared was a bit grouchy with the surgeon's lecture, but he assured the doctor he would comply before he left. ‘Just to get him out of here,’ Jensen thought to himself. Jensen sat in his chair quietly, deciding to let Jared lead the conversation next. The younger man finally turned to Jensen, "I forgot...there was a...tv in here. It was on yesterday...when you were...asleep." Jensen feigned panic, "Oh no, I didn't fart in my sleep, did I...did I snore...drool? Are you just afraid to tell me?" Jared laughed and grabbed his chest, "Stop...doing this," he bitched, giggling in little spurts. Jared frustratingly sucked air through his teeth, trying to get control over his pain. He found his anger dissipating. Jensen loved that laugh, but felt guilty for trying to be funny, "I'm sorry that hurt. I'll stop."

Jared settled down, still smiling as he calmed with his eyes closed. Jensen gently scolded, "You know...you 'could' push that button, guy." Jared sighed and opened his eyes. He looked over at him, "I know. It makes me sleepy. The other stupid thing is gonna...dose me anyway. Makes me feel...useless." Jared’s eyes were begging, full of pleading angst and Jensen just learned what the term puppy dog meant. 'Holy fuck,' he'd never been subjected to those. Jensen stared at him, "You do know you have the most influential eyes on the planet?" Jared looked disbelieving, so Jensen argued, "Seriously? Nobody's ever told you that? Dude, you could make a mint off those. You could go to debates and negotiate treaties. The enemy would lay down their rifles with a look from those." Jared snorted, he shook his head and rolled his eyes, "That's not true." His friends ‘had’ teased him about it, but he wasn’t going to admit it. Jensen stared at him with an expectant look, too long, to which Jared whined, "Stop..." Jensen grinned knowingly. Goddamn, this kid was adorable. Jared sighed in frustration, "Would you quit looking, I'm not doing it on purpose." Jensen shook his head, smiling, "That just makes it so much cuter." Jensen giggled because his latest comment caused Jared to blush. He looked down shyly, showing those dimples. “And then there's that," Jensen said softly. His heart plummeted. There was no defense anymore. Jared was fucking beautiful, in every way, and he didn’t even know it.

Jensen kept his mouth shut further, feeling kind of guilty for already embarrassing Jared once today. Watching him was addicting, though, so he figured he would have to sneak glances instead of putting him on the spot. Jared was saved from anymore embarrassing attention when a cart rolled in. He looked toward the door with curiosity until he realized it was the breathing specialist. Jared's look of loathing left no question as to his feelings about that machine. He hated that thing. Jensen leaned over and touched Jared on the cheek to get his attention, "I want to try and make this easier for you.
You said something earlier. I don’t want to bring up painful memories, but I want to know if you can remember...you said your parents died in a fire?"

Jared’s eyes automatically filled with a wall of resistance. Jensen didn’t worry about it. This was a traumatic incident which had left a gaping hole in Jared’s soul. It was normal for him to be guarded. Jensen asked gently, “I want to know if you were in that fire. Did you have to go through a mask back then...maybe for smoke inhalation? If this is a trigger, we can work with it.” Jared recalled screaming when the house collapsed with his parents inside. The firemen had placed an oxygen mask over his face when his father first ran out with him in his arms. He was coughing profusely under the mask...and then he was screaming and in tears because they held him down and wouldn’t let him go back into the house and help his father.

Jared nodded, "I had a mask on. They wouldn’t let me back inside...when my dad ran back...I couldn’t help him...they kept holding me back...and they held that mask on me. I was coughing, I couldn’t breathe but...I needed to help him.” Jensen searched his eyes, feeling an overload of sympathy for what Jared had lost. The kid was amazing for becoming the incredible person he was. He said softly, “I think we can make this go better this time, alright?” Jared nodded. He looked worried, but he trusted Jensen. Jensen turned to the tech, “He can hold that mask himself, right?” She nodded, "Yes, of course. I'll start when he's ready. As long as the seal stays intact the whole time, if not we have to start over.”

Jensen looked back at Jared and noticed he was looking at the mask with repulsion. He pulled Jared’s face to look at him in the eye. "I'm going to be right here. You're going to be in control this time. You know you need this to get well, but this time, you're going to pick that thing up and hold it yourself. No one’s going to force you this time, alright? You control it.” Jared didn't really get the full reasoning, at first, but something inside him released. He nodded, unsure, but felt different about the whole situation. He looked at the mask again, then back at Jensen, “Okay.” The tech loaded the machine and held out the mask for Jared to take when he was ready. She showed no impatience, following Jensen’s lead.

After a few seconds, Jensen took the mask from her and held it in front of Jared. The kid slowly took it. He looked at it, then confessed, “I hate this.” Jensen smoothed his hair back, “I know, buddy. I hate seeing you have to use it, but it’s getting you well...and we’re gonna get you outta here soon if we can do that.” Jared looked down at it again. He put the mask over his face and nodded for the tech to start the machine. Jared closed his eyes and willed himself to stop being such a baby, 'It's only ten minutes, and I'm in control...nobody's forcing me.' He bent his knees, even though he couldn’t quite rest his elbows on them from his position. His incline wasn’t quite high enough. He clenched his eyes tight and braced himself as the fog entered the mask. He didn't breathe in right way. His muscle memory was trying to reject the mist. Jensen touched him on his knee and suddenly the panic receded. He inhaled partially, then coughed a few times until his lungs accepted the medication. Jared felt Jensen’s hand squeeze his knee.

Jensen knew how hard this was for Jared. Going against a long time trigger from serious trauma took remarkable inner strength. After five minutes, he encouraged him, "You're half way done, Jared. You got this." Jared never opened his eyes when the breathing tech swapped the mask for straight oxygen. Jensen knew he was worn out from the venting earlier, and the tension it had taken to get himself through this. He was shaking with exhaustion by the time the tech left. When they were alone, Jensen sat directly on the bed, facing the younger man. He bent his leg and nudged as close as he could. Jared’s face was hanging downward, his hands on his legs. Jensen placed his arms around Jared’s shoulders and pulled him slightly toward him. He rested his own head over Jared’s. He held the exhausted man in silence for several minutes, rubbing slow circles on his upper back.

Jared turned his head sideways and sighed, now safe, warm and at peace. His shaking stopped and
he let himself melt into the comfort of Jensen’s touch. Jensen laid his own head sideways on Jared’s. After several minutes, Jensen helped Jared lay back again. He took the younger man’s hands and held them as they sat in comfortable silence. Barb walked in, but Jensen didn’t even look her way. He was focused on the peaceful connection that was happening right now. This moment belonged to Jared and he wasn’t going to give it up for anything. Jared smiled softly at Jensen, realizing they had just shown the nurse how their relationship had been progressing into something more. Jensen smiled back. Barb cleared her throat, "There are lunch trays for both of you. Jared, there's more liquid, but I've added a couple other items to see how you do. I'll come back in a bit, guys, okay?" The younger man answered her softly, “Okay, thank you.” He was exhausted but he felt so much better…thanks to Jensen. When Barb left, Jensen asked him, "Hungry?" Jared nodded, "Yeah, actually starving."

Jensen guiltily took most of the solid items, not reacting at all to the delicious tastes out of respect for Jared. The younger man didn’t seem to be disappointed about his vegetable broth and more applesauce. He ate a few bites a roll and drank some pear juice. Jensen noticed he left the jello. Jared laid back against the bed enjoying the feeling of having more solid food in his stomach. Jensen asked, "Feeling good?" Jared nodded, "Very. S'good to eat." Jensen finished his own food and asked Jared if he was sure he didn't want anything more. The kid hadn't really eaten that much. He was wondering when they would bring Jared some heavier foods. Jensen didn’t even bring it up that Jared lifted his own soup cup this time, held his own water. He grabbed things for him, so he didn’t have to pull on his injuries by reaching, but Jared’s strength was obviously returning.

When Barb came back, she asked Jared if he wanted to get up again. At the instant spark of eagerness in his eyes, there was no question. Jensen and Barb placed themselves as they had last time, after making adjustments to get the bed higher. When they were ready, Jared scooted his legs to the ground and rolled to his left. When he pushed on the bed with his right hand, Jensen pulled him up by the armpit. "Holy shit," Jensen blurted out at the same time Barb sputtered, “Wow.” They were both surprised at Jared’s progress. The maneuver had gone much smoother than the first time. Jared kind of surprised himself, too. He still had painful spams he had to wait out, but things were definitely better than last time. For the first time since the accident, he felt like he was improving. The stupid pain medication was dosing him now so he knew this would be short lived if he didn’t get on it. When the pain in his chest subsided, he opened his eyes and indicated he was ready to stand. Barb bent over first and looked him in the eye, “Jared, you’re doing amazing. I know you probably hate my lectures, by now, but I have to say this, for Jensen's benefit, too. This is exactly when things go wrong. Right now, you feel like you can snowboard, but you can’t, okay? Your energy transfers back and forth between healing and helping you move. When you’re dealing with traumatic injuries, your body will take that energy away from you and apply it where it’s needed without warning. The last thing we can ever allow to happen is for those ribs or that lung to be jolted or jarred by sudden moves. You have to be immediately forthcoming with any dizziness or lightheadedness you feel. We have to be physically holding you the entire time you’re up...’every’ time. Got it?"

Jared nodded. Barb looked up at Jensen and the older man nodded. He knew exactly what they were dealing with. Jared was determined…and he was hell bent on getting better fast. He was also used to ignoring his body's warnings. Barb took her spot and they helped Jared to stand. Jensen could tell immediately that the kid had more strength this time. Barb asked the patient, "Dizzy or queasy?" Jared shook his head, "No.” Barb said, "Okay, you wanna walk?" Jared said, "Hell yes…I'm ready.” The kid put one foot in front of the other, taking it slow so his helpers could follow and drag all his attachments with him. He was half way to the restroom and feeling no weakness, so he continued, with everyone's encouragement. They maneuvered and scooted through the bathroom door, then to the sink.

Jensen wasn't too keen on Jared going this far, but he didn't say anything. He simply tried to enjoy Jared's feeling of accomplishment and kept his focus on catching him if he went down. Jared leaned
forward and looked in the mirror, "Jesus." He held the loose hair back from his face to look at the huge goose egg. There was still a bandage over the cut just on top of the knot, so he couldn't see the stitches. There was still dried blood in some areas around the bandage, which gained an animated, "Yuck." Jared turned to Barb, "When can I wash my hair?" She answered, "We might be able to shower you tomorrow and try. If not, we can use a dry shampoo and wash it for you in the room." Jared looked hopeful, "Really?" She nodded, "We can consider it. You'll have a different nurse, but he's really good and we have a shower method that he can get you through." Barb smiled at Jared's look of absolute rapture at the thought of a shower and clean hair.

Jensen had been watching the exchange, while focusing on Jared's slight trembling. He loved hearing Jared's reactions to everything, but he exchanged a look with Barb, warning in his eyes. Barb got the message, "Jared, do you want to use the supplies real quick? We need to head back to the bed soon." He looked down and noticed all the little complimentary containers of toothpaste and soaps, shaving supplies and lotions, and smiled, "Oh…thank you." His helpers both smiled because Jared had been a non-stop pool of entertaining reactions, ever since he'd left the bed. He proceeded to brush his teeth, going over them multiple times. It felt incredible just to have them smooth and minty. He used the mouthwash and then let go of the sink, as Barb slipped some disposable gloves over his hands. She reminded him he couldn't get the stitches wet in his palms.

Jared lathered up the mini bar of soap and washed his face. He used the rag by the sink to soak it in very hot water and held it on his face. "Aaaaah," he released a muffled pleasurable sigh behind the rag. Jensen grinned. He could still feel Jared slightly trembling, but the kid seemed oblivious. Jared used some mini deodorants he found, then eyed the razor. Jared was smart enough to figure out that would take some time and he probably wouldn't make it through a shave. His priority was the damn catheter, anyway, this trip. He looked over at the toilet longingly. Jensen said, "Buddy, be absolutely sure. Are you feeling 'any'...and I mean 'any' dizziness or weakness?"

Jared thought about it, then looked at Jensen, "I can feel it starting to come on…but I know I can do this…Jensen...please...just a little bit longer?" 'Damn,' Jensen thought, as Jared laid those powerful eyes on him again. He looked at Barb, "Let's go." Barb looked very pleased. They stepped over to the toilet together. Barb knelt down in front of Jared, "Okay, I want you to bare down and I’ll pull this out, okay?" Jared muttered under his breath, "God, yes…fuck’n finally!" He was thrilled to finally get rid of the offensive tube, but realized he should apologize to the nurse for his vulgar outburst, "Sorry." Barb chuckled, "It's fine, Jared, I'm just glad you're this much better. You're killin it today."

"Ready," Barb asked, from her position. Jared stopped her, "Wait." When she looked up at him, Jared said, "I think maybe I should apologize...before you pull that thing out of such an...important body part. I'm sorry...for my behavior before." Barb started to smirk, but realized Jared was serious. She responded with softness in her eyes, "Jared you’ve been through hell. There’s nothing to apologize for. It’s really sweet of you to worry about it, but you can stop now, okay?"

Jared nodded absently, as she repeated the instructions to bare down. He flinched slightly when she pulled the tube out. Jensen felt more comfortable with a tighter hold on Jared so he slipped under the kid’s armpit and held Jared’s arm around his own shoulders. He put his other arm snug around Jared’s waist.

As Barb disposed of the catheter, Jensen whispered into his ear, "Do you need to pee before we head back?" Jared shook his head 'no', slightly grinning in thanks at Jensen for asking. It would have been hard to go in front of the nurse and Jensen understood that. After Barb was back on the opposite side of Jared with the iv and med cart ready to roll, Jared began his trip back to the bed. They maneuvered out of the restroom and were half way to the bed when Jared suddenly stopped and closed his eyes. His ears started ringing and he felt the room tilt sideways. He thought he moaned,
but he wasn’t sure. Jensen felt it happening and tightened his hold. Barb did the same from the opposite side.

Jared tried desperately to regain his equilibrium and control the nausea. "I'm...sor..." he tried to convey. He felt terrible for doing this to them. He heard Jensen in his right ear, "It's okay. Just breathe." Jared favored Jensen's side. There was just something more secure about a strong and tall special forces soldier holding you up rather than a five foot two tiny stunted nurse. He could do nothing but focus on his breathing. He felt so guilty and useless for not even being able to stand, at the moment. After a few minutes, he started to feel good enough to open his eyes. Jensen and Barb watched the color return to his face. Barb asked, "Is it getting better?" Jared nodded but he didn't answer yet. Jensen knew this was taking too long and that he may just have to carry Jared back to the bed if they stood here much longer. He could feel Jared thrumming with effort at trying to stay standing. The kid kept apologizing, "I'm sorry...I think I can...make it now."

Barb and Jensen exchanged a knowing look. Jared was feeling guilty and it wasn't necessary. He had just accomplished great things which were way above what other patients managed this soon. Barb said, "Jared, honey, we need you to start taking steps toward the bed so we can get you off your feet, okay?" Jared took a few steps, which seemed to go well until just before they reached the bed. He suddenly grabbed Jensen's t-shirt. Jensen had him secure but Jared’s vision was greying out, leaving him with a spinning equilibrium. "I've got you, buddy, you're not gonna fall," Jensen’s voice assured him. Jared twisted the shirt even tighter, but emotionally latched onto Jensen’s warm solid presence.

Jensen and Barb turned Jared around, then backed him against the bed, so that Jared could feel it touching the back of his legs. Jensen still held him solid, as he sat down. “It’s okay, I’ve got you,” Jensen’s warm timbre of comfort reassured him. Jared soaked up the rock solid presence. He kept his grip on Jensen's shirt, though it loosened a bit, as he tried to breathe through the damned nausea. He was frustrated, but too weak to argue at the moment. Barb busied herself with Jared’s iv line and bedding while Jensen kept a tight hold on the patient in case he took a forward dive. When she was done, she bent over and spoke directly to Jared, "How's it going?" Jared didn’t answer. Barb continued, “You had an amazing accomplishment today. I’ve never seen anyone go that far on the fourth day here. I promise you this weakness will get better as you go, sweetie.”

Jensen exchanged a look of concern with Barb, then slid around to Jared’s front and knelt down. Keeping a hand on Jared’s knee, Jensen brushed the hair back from Jared’s face so he could assess him. Jared’s eyes were still closed, his face looking down. He was feeling better, but not completely free of the weakness. He desperately tried to quash that nausea from a few moments ago, still determined ‘not’ to throw up any way he damn well could. Jensen asked him, "How you doing, buddy?" Jared answered softly, "M’okay...it's better...I jus’ can’t move yet." Jensen and Barb watched him with compassion and concern. Jared lifted his head up, blinked his eyes open and shut a few times. He sighed, "God, this is so frustrating."

Jensen soothed, his hand resting on top of Jared’s loose one on the bed, “Hey, you were barely standing yesterday. Today, you brushed your teeth and washed your face, lost the catheter and walked a huge distance for someone fresh out of trauma surgery. This part is gonna get better. You’re way ahead of schedule, big guy, so give yourself a break.”

Jared felt some of his balance return. He sighed, and looked toward the bathroom. Maybe he ‘had’ kicked ass. He’d been hungry to move forward and it happened. He rubbed his eyes and sighed. He glanced up at Jensen and Barb, then mumbled shyly, “Thank you. I just thought I could make it...it was fine...then it wasn’t.” Jensen knew that Jared hadn’t given himself any credit for what he’d just done. 'Of course not,' he thought, as he realized he was beginning to know the kid better. Barb interjected, “That’s why you always have a spotter, okay? You’ll be getting up to use the bathroom
now, so it’s important you don’t go all super hero and forget.”

Jared nodded, “Yeah.” He looked at Barb, “Can I stay up for awhile longer?” Barb smiled, taken in by the innocent pleading eyes, “Of course.” After another fifteen minutes, Jared finally yawned and admitted he was done. Jensen and Barb helped him lay down, confident he would probably sleep awhile after outdoing himself. Jensen brushed that unruly hair off his face again, as the kid was already well on his way to dreamland. After dozing a bit, himself, Jensen dug into his paper and crossword. He was just thinking how tranquil everything was when he heard a commotion out in the hallway. It sounded like several raised voices, all talking at once. Looking at Jared, he realized the younger man was oblivious.

Jensen peeked around the thick curtain/door to spot a man talking to the nurse at the station. He was in front of a group of four other people. Barb and another nurse came over to the commotion, greeted the man in front first, then explained something to him and the others in the group. When their noise level dropped, Jensen figured she had politely shut them up. Within a few seconds, Barb sent the rest of the group to the waiting area and led the first man and an older woman toward Jared’s room.

Jensen stepped outside to greet whomever was approaching and let them know the younger man was asleep. He smiled at the man approaching him, noticing kind eyes filled with blatant worry for the patient. The woman had a motherly protective look on her face, definitely anxious to see Jared. Barb introduced them, "Jensen this is Jared's friend, Manny, and this is his secretary, Blair." The newcomers shook Jensen's hand warmly, then immediately asked how Jared was doing. Jensen detected love and concern from both of them. He filled them in, "Well, he's had a really tiring day with a lot of challenges. He's been sleeping over an hour...he's still out cold right now. If you wanna come in, just know he might be asleep for awhile yet."

Manny nodded, "I wanna see him, sleeping or not." Blair agreed. Manny asked Jensen, "Has he been alone all this time? Has his aunt been here?" Jensen answered, “No, it’s just been me, so far. He didn’t say anything about an aunt.” Barb added, “Actually, Jensen has been with Jared since the beginning. He’s never left his side. He’s been a great comfort to him, too.” Manny looked more intently at Jensen. The special forces expert suddenly felt himself being assessed from top to bottom by someone who had known Jared a long time. Manny obviously wanted to know if Jensen was a threat or not to his friend. It made Jensen smile because he had done the same thing. He was just more subtle about it.

Manny seemed to decide he could trust Jensen, for the moment, then looked guilty, "I should have been here...we grew up together, went to college together...I'm so damn sorry I wasn't here sooner, but I had 'no' idea." Jensen read the open regret in Manny’s eyes. Barb offered, "Jared arrived unconscious and was whisked into surgery. He couldn't give anyone's name until the next day. We found out where he worked through the medical system and then we worked on finding you after he was able to tell us your names."

Manny sighed in defeat, feeling terrible, "Jesus, how bad was it?" Jensen filled him in, "Severe broken ribs, punctured lung, concussion.” Jensen trailed off at Manny’s and Blair’s look of horror. Manny’s eyes pooled with liquid, “Jesus.” Blair looked the same, “My god, poor sweet Jared.” She told Jensen, “I can’t believe this happened to him...no one can. I brought only a few people, I think he’ll be happy to see them, but we don’t want to overwhelm him.” Jensen encouraged her, “I think he’ll be very happy to see you.” Barb added, “This is intensive care. He’s in here because he isn’t quite out of the woods yet, so please know he’s very good at pushing himself...” “Oooh, god yes,” “Yeah, we know,” both friends interrupted. Jensen liked them immediately for knowing the engineer so well. Barb smiled, “Just please take it slow and if you see him getting tired, force the issue that you're leaving. You can always come back again."
Jensen held the curtain aside for Jared’s friends to enter. He took a spot leaning against the window sill, as both Blair and Manny went right up to Jared, not awkward or uneasy, at all. Manny looked Jared over, "Jesus Christ," he blurted out, then rubbed a hand over his face and covered his mouth to prevent further outbursts. He was having trouble stomaching the damage to his friend. Blair said in a tearful voice, "Oh god...sweetie," as she tenderly started to touch Jared's bruised face and head, but stopped herself realizing it might wake him. Manny shook his head, “It looks so painful. He doesn’t deserve this.” Blair shook her head, "No...no he doesn't."

Jensen remained respectfully quiet, allowing Jared's friends to have their time with him. After awhile, Blair stopped quietly sobbing and Manny sat in the chair, waiting for his friend to wake up. Manny fidgeted a bit, eyes darting to Jensen but not really knowing what to say. He didn't know the man and wasn't sure how well Jared did. Jensen sensed this and tried to put him at ease, “So, you guys grew up together?” Manny smiled appreciatively, and walked over to Jensen, "Yes, Jared's family lived pretty close to mine. We wound up going through high school together, running for debate teams and doing chess club and theater. We ran a newsletter and broadcasted a daily ten minute show during morning break. He became a close friend, in between all the growing pains...luckily, we wound up going to Stanford together."

Jensen was impressed, “Wow, you guys made Stanford. Takes brains.” Manny snickered, "Well, I don't know about that...he's actually the smart one with the full ride. I've got student loans up the ass, but the genius over there doesn't.” Manny looked at Jared with a sigh, "He had a rough time as a kid, then again right after graduation.” He turned back to Jensen, “I'll let him tell you about it. Took him years to get his outgoing self back...he doesn't deserve this shit." Jensen had to agree but remained quiet, happy to be learning more about Jared.

Manny added, “He's really good at being there for everybody, ya know? Comes flying out to help you in the middle of the night...always responds, no matter what he's in the middle of. Pours his heart into doing the right thing. He helped all of us during college and then he helped us draft our applications, trying to get us all good jobs. Jared didn't need that because he was already in high demand by some well known engineering firms. He scored above the rest of the class and companies always scout for those people. He had half a dozen offers before he graduated. He's not snobby, though, never sees what everybody else sees in him. He just keeps pushing himself." Manny looked at Jared then with raw emotion, "Course, he's had is heart ripped to pieces more than once. Fucking life just keeps coming at him." Manny stopped, realizing he really should be checking with Jared before going on like this. He turned back to Jensen looking sheepish, "He knows I talk too much.”

Jensen smiled, appreciating the hell out of the information. This man loved Jared, it was obvious. Jensen said, "Friends mean everything when life is hard. You've obviously been there for him. It was you and Blair he told us to call...he was adamant that it be no one else,” Manny thought to himself, ‘Jared should fucking marry this guy, holy shit where’d he come from,’ but instead he asked, "So, how do you know him?" Jensen explained about the happenstance situation of Jared stumbling into the restaurant, covered in blood. Before he could finish, Blair interrupted, “Guys?” Manny glanced at her, then back to Jensen with renewed interest, “Wait, so you were a complete stranger? And you've been here the whole time?” Jensen opened his mouth answer, but didn't get a chance when Jared yawned and rubbed his eyes. Manny returned to Jared's side while Jensen stayed back to give them time. No one said anything as the patient continued to rub his eyes for a few seconds before he finally opened them.

Manny’s opening line was, "Bout time, numnuts.” Jared instantly looked his way. His face lit up with a smirk, "Man, the security in here sucks." Jared looked beyond Manny’s face and saw Blair. He smiled sweetly, "Hi Blair," then picked up his hand for her to take it. "Oh, 'she' gets a 'hi,'" Manny bitched. Jensen could see this was going to be a great mood elevator for the injured man. Blair was rubbing Jared's hair back off his face and inspecting him closely, 'tsk tsk'-ing about the
amount of damage. "Sweetheart, what have you done to yourself?" Manny announced, "Dude, you scared the fucking shit out of me...when I found out you'd been here almost four days already, I left bodies in my path to get here...I'm so sorry I wasn't here."

Jared rolled his eyes with a gentle smile, "You didn't have to kill anyone...to get here...God, it’s good to see you guys though...I scared the fucking shit out of...me too." Blair held Jared’s hand between both of hers. She asked him, “Honey, what happened? Did someone hit you?” Jensen could see Jared still looked tired. That huge walk earlier was probably still taking it’s toll. He wasn’t sure how he could kick these two out of here, but if it came to protecting Jared’s health, he would have to do it. Before he answered Blair, Jared seemed to search around the room, looking for something. When his eyes settled on Jensen, he relaxed. Jensen knew it had been him he was looking for. He smiled.

Jared maintained eye contact with Jensen for several seconds, much to the surprise of Blair and Manny. The visitors followed Jared’s line of sight, looked at Jensen, then raised their eyebrows as they exchanged a silent glance. When they turned back to Jared again, they eyed him knowingly. Jensen noticed it, but Jared was oblivious. Jared finally explained, "I was driving... back to the motel... from the bridge. Some big... something... smashed into me... from the driver’s side... shoved me into a ditch. It was all over... so fast. I had... no time... to think or react.” Jared stopped. Jensen could see he was avoiding going into too much detail like he had with the cops. Manny asked, "Who called the ambulance and how did you get out?” Jared explained, “I was stuck... at first... but I managed to get myself... out the window... and make it to the restaurant. I knew it felt bad... but when I couldn’t breathe... I figured I was going to die. Jensen saved my life.”

Jared yawned. He was looking tired, but very at ease with his friends. Jensen braced himself, as the two visitors looked back at him. He cleared his throat and filled in more of the story, “He walked two hundred feet from the car... that was after he climbed out. I’m amazed by it, so is the doc. His lung was punctured, ribs were broken, and he had a pretty good concussion. He wasn’t doing well when he got to me. We got him here, but it took awhile for the surgeon to repair the damages.” Manny and Blair listened intently. Hearing the recount first hand of how close Jared had come to dying silenced them both. Jared interjected then, “Jensen saved me... it was like... something was pushing against my chest... and it kept getting worse. I knew I was dying... Jensen shoved this straw between my ribs... then I could breathe. He kept telling me... I was going to be okay... and I think I started... to believe it.”

Jared added, "I'm here... because of him. Don’t let him... deny he’s m’fuckin hero.” Jared finished tiredly and Jensen found himself with an armful of a sixty two year old woman. Blair hugged him fiercely, then pulled his face down to kiss his cheek. Manny slapped Jensen’s back, then shook his hand once again, "We owe you everything, Jensen... thank you for being there for him.” Jensen shifted, a little uncomfortable with this of attention, “Really guys, it was just my training that kicked in. I mean I just... I would have done that for anybody.” He looked at Jared, silently begging him to rescue him from the onslaught of hero worship. Jensen was perturbed to see Jared smiling as he watched. Jared thought it was damn cute to watch the toughened soldier that uncomfortable under his friend’s gushing attention, but he took pity on him, “Guys, you’re embarrassing him. Can you back off?”

They immediately backed off, but as Manny pulled away, he pointed his finger at Jensen, "You wouldn't have stayed here night and day for just anybody... training or not.” Jensen opened his mouth to say something but Manny had already made his point... there was a connection between Jared and Jensen and he had definitely caught on to it. Jensen raised an eyebrow at Jared, glad to be saved from the attention, but warning the younger man that the unexplored feelings between them had been detected and were now in the open. Jared smirked before he returned his attention to his friends. Blair asked anxiously, "So, what can I sneak in for you? And what can I get done for you back at the office? You want cookies? Chocolate? Will they let you have coffee?"
Jared answered after another yawn, “No, I’m just starting on real food...but...God, coffee sounds good. I’m not sure if they’ll...let me have it.” Manny argued, “Dude, you survived without ‘that’? It’s like it’s own fucking food group to you.” Jared looked forlorn, “I know...it prob’ly sucks here ‘nyway.” Jensen made a mental note to give Jared some sips of ‘Firebomb’ next time he got some. Jared looked at Manny, "How's Jeff?" Manny said, "He was doing a presentation in Italy, believe it or not. It’s the big expo he was waiting for. I sent him a text and it took several hours for him to answer me. Dude, he dropped everything and took the first flight out. He’s worried sick, like we were, and he’s pissed off that he wasn’t here. I'm not sure what time he’ll finally get to Denver, but he’ll be here.”

Jared smiled tiredly, "Th’s good...I hope he’s...not in trouble. How'd you manage...to get away?" Manny gave a mocking sigh, "It's you, Jared, I didn’t really ask. I've got a few open ads on my desk but it's nothing that can't wait a few days." Jared smiled, his eyes full of loving fondness. Jensen noticed he was definitely looking more tired by the minute. Blair seemed to notice too, "Darlin, I think you need to rest soon, but I brought a few others to see you. It doesn’t have to be now, if you don’t feel up to it.” Jared focused on her, "Who's here?" Blair said, "Lisa, Cassie and Brad." Jared smiled and yawned, but Jensen saw something reluctant pass through his eyes before he responded, "Go get them. I'm not sure...how long I'm gonna be good for...but I don’t... want to waste their trip here."

Jensen became concerned because it wasn't like Jared to actually admit he was tired. The man usually fought being down at every turn. Jared seemed to be favoring his left side a bit, too. Jensen approached the bed, while Blair hurried to get the others. He leaned over him, "Hey...are you alright?" Jared nodded, blinking heavily. Manny remained quiet. He didn’t fail to notice the protectiveness emanating from the gorgeous beefcake leaning over his friend. Manny also watched the ease with which Jared accepted Jensen’s presence and wondered how the hell Jensen had been allowed entry past Jared’s normally iron clad defenses. 'Interesting,' Manny deduced to himself. 'I wholeheartedly approve. Of course, if he hurts Jared, I'm gonna have to kill him...and he looks pretty tough so I'll probably get killed in the process'. Manny sighed, as Blair led three more people back into the room.

Jared smiled as two bursts of mid twenty year old energy hurried into the room and shuffled quickly up to the bed. Both girls smiled excitedly that they had finally got in to see the patient. They doted over Jared for a minute, making sounds of distress over his multiple bruises and bandages. A tall blond man stood next to one of the girls. He waved a hand and smiled, "Hi Jared, good to see you awake and in one piece." Jared greeted the group, "Hi guys, thanks for coming." Jensen watched Jared's face closely. Not only was the kid getting tired, he was definitely hurting and hiding it in front of his visitors. The girls chatted on about animal adoptions, filled him in with some stories about some of his favorite foster pets. It seemed to distract him for awhile. Jensen noticed him relax. Suddenly the kid looked upset, “Oh crap...this weekend you’ll be short...I’m sorry.”

Cassie and Lisa stopped. They rolled their eyes, sputtering, "For God's sake, Jared, don’t worry about that. This isn't your fault. Does everything have to be your fault?" Jensen immediately liked these two for that. Obviously, Jared’s friends ‘all’ knew him too well. They both quickly assured Jared that the shelter would survive and they were sucking Blair and Manny into helping them. Jared grinned because he could imagine Manny and Blair working at the chaotic event. It was supposed to be a big one, since he'd written a new ordinance and it passed. They would be drawing many more people to adopt, and weeding out the idiots that shouldn’t. He looked at Manny, "Dude...they're so gonna boss you around...are you sure you’re ready for it?"

The girls looked shocked like they were being accused of something totally irrational and unfounded, but Manny rolled his eyes and sighed, "Yeah, I know. I'll be at the bar 5 minutes after they let me off work...none of your little favorites better bite me, Jared, or I'm going to pee in your mailbox when I
go by and check on your place." Jared chuckled slightly and winced, folding his left iv hand loosely over his chest. Jensen could tell it wasn't gripping pain, but Jared was definitely feeling it. He watched the kid fake it for his friends. The tall blond named Brad offered to cover some of Jared's work, but the younger man shook his head, "No...there's not really anything behind."

At first Jensen thought he was just another nice coworker, but Jensen didn't miss Jared's very subtle shift in demeanor when talking to the man. Jensen's inner hackles were already alerted, but he really hoped Brad didn't upset Jared, because with the way Jensen was feeling about him, he didn't want to have to take Brad out in the hall and snap a bone or two. Brad offered again to help Jared by doing anything for him that might be pending or on a deadline. Jared paused, then blinked, a bit too long for Jensen's comfort and the older man now realized Jared was controlling his answers. He hadn't seen him do that before.

Jared answered, "As soon as I can...sit the hell up...I'm gonna make sure...I get my work done." Blair seemed to be oblivious to the slight tension between Jared and Brad. She cheeringly offered, "Now, we know how you are, honey. Are you 'supposed' to be working? You tell me what can I do, sweetie. You know damn well you can give me all kinds of things to do, if you need to." Jared had been maintaining eye contact with Brad as Blair spoke, but he looked over at her briefly and smiled, "I know...you always...outdo yourself. If you could...mail the plans for... Weller...on my desk,...they're ready...but nothing else...is due." Jared laid the puppy dog innocence on Blair, "Can I please have some of your cookies?" Blair smiled adoringly, "That's a given, sweetie." Jensen shook his head, realizing everyone around Jared had been subject to his alluring eyes when he wanted something. 'Jesus, fucking christ, they work on me, too,' he mentally bitched, 'how can he possibly not know he does that?'

Jared looked back at Brad and the sweet relaxed exchange between he and his secretary was replaced by uncomfortable guardedness. Jensen studied Brad, wondering what it was about the man that bothered Jared. Brad responded with a positive 'want-to-help' attitude, "How about the bridge work here? Is there something you want me to work on, measurements or formulas?" And there it was. Jensen's years of experience pinpointed the fake offer right there in Brad's mannerisms. His voice did not match his eyes. The underlying tension between the two engineers was obvious to no one but Jensen. He couldn't believe he was the only one to notice it. Jared looked annoyed. He didn't trust Brad, but was holding back from voicing his opinion in front of the others.

Jensen broke the silence, "Guys, I think Jared's in need of his pain meds and some rest...are you guys staying over so you could come back after he sleeps awhile?" Jared and Brad continued to eye one another, while the other four friends generously offered to come back the next morning and give Jared plenty of time to rest. They were booked overnight in Denver and flying back late the next afternoon. Blair told him she had checked him out of his motel and the front desk had a few things from the room on hold. Jensen made a mental note to ask his friends to get those things. Jared relaxed and accepted the kisses on the cheek from Blair and the two younger girls, which Manny loudly refused to give him, even when Jared made a kissing gesture with his lips. Manny told him, "I'll text or call you in the morning, just to make sure you're not getting a sponge bath or the masseuse isn't in here before we come." Jared rolled his eyes and smirked.

Manny continued, "We'll bring you something horrible if you want it smuggled in...chocolate, coffee, porn...you know that midget/pygmy porn you like, with the one legged one armed," "Shut up...you're an...idiot," Jared interrupted, rolling his eyes. He shook his head at Manny's antics. Jensen looked down for a few seconds, so he missed when Manny jerked his head to the side in Jensen's direction. Jared grinned knowingly. Manny raised an eyebrow, then mouthed a 'HOT', with an approving smirk. Everyone said their goodbyes except Brad. When he shook Jared’s hand, their eyes looked forced. Brad asked, “I see your laptop...since you’re laid up, I could take it back, or handle any files for you...finish something.” Jared’s angry stare spoke volumes. Jensen moved subtly
between the two men. Jared’s forceful, “No,” left no room for confusion.

Brad backed off, feigning a cheeriness that didn’t match his eyes, “No problem...let me know if you change your mind.” Before he stepped out, Brad turned back, “Oh, just so you know, Jared, a lot of people say ‘hi’. Drew was worried. If you need anything, there’s good people working there who would love to help. Not a bad place, you know? I hope nothing ever happens to it.”

Brad turned and left. Jensen looked closely at Jared. He watched Jared process something, then fidget nervously, as if something suddenly became clear. When he looked at Jensen, the fear in his eyes was pretty obvious. Jared leaned over him, “What’s wrong?” When Jared hesitated, Jensen gently smoothed the hair back from his face, “Hey...this is me. I’m not gonna let anything happen to you. What’s wrong?” Jared finally answered, “I think...maybe I've figured out...I mean the when the cops asked me I didn’t...it was so crazy. I wasn't thinking straight.” Jensen could see Jared was fighting his pain, adding to the stress in his eyes about what he had just realized. “Let me push your button...get it going, okay? If there’s something you’re afraid of, I’m right here.” Jared nodded, closed his eyes for a few seconds, and looked back up at Jensen. Jensen pushed the button. He watched Jared’s expression as the kid pleaded, “Please don’t...let Brad...take my laptop?” Jensen furrowed his brow, "Of course not.” Jared repeated, "Just please...if I fall asleep...don't let him...come back...and take it.” Jensen could see Jared was afraid, “I won’t anybody take anything. Nobody’s getting back in here, okay?” Jared calmed down. He felt grounded in the presence of Jensen’s rock solid strength. He trusted this man. For some reason, Jensen was his anchor. Jared felt he owed Jensen an explanation...he’d been alone all this time, harboring all of this to himself, but now he had someone he could trust. He didn’t want Jensen bothered by this, but Jared was losing confidence that he was going to make it to the Attorney General. At least someone would have the story this way.

As soon as he felt the medication kick in, Jared started to explain, “I worked for...this company. They were honest...nice...good to their clients, I designed. I stayed a long time. They were...bought by...this umbrella corporation...huge...so I...h’d to...move.” Jensen could see Jared trying to fight the pull of the medication. He listened intently, trying to get every bit of information before the kid conked out. Jared continued, “They’re...not the...same.” Jensen asked him, “How?” Jared struggled to explain, “M’they screw people. They...cover up...n'hide things. They’ve been...using me and...it’s...” he shook his head, “I was stupid. Did stuff for them...thinkin’ I was...making a difference.”

Jared was becoming upset, more at himself than anything else. Jensen soothed him, trying to keep on topic, “Why are you afraid now? What’s happened and what does Brad have to do with it?” Jared looked upset, but he was so sluggish he could hardly keep his eyes open, "I have files and reports. All of my work. They've been...sending me...on jobs for over a year...like the cracks in the bridge...job after job...where things were failing. They were built...by cutting corners and...and it's all their fault...I did some of the designs, but....then they started...pushing me out on...inspections. I did reports...things were cut out...major safety things. I thought...I was...saving people from...the bad designs but...the imperfections...they were just...changing my reports. All my work...just changed to...win cases and cheat everyone...they saved millions.”

Jensen processed this while a dreaded churning in his gut began to form. ‘Fuck,’ he thought to himself, as he began to understand what it meant. Jared seemed to be fading. Jensen touched his cheek, “I know you’re tired, buddy, but I just want to confirm...you have these reports with you...all this evidence that would throw this company far under a bus and get them into legal trouble?” Jared nodded, yawning again, but trying to stay focused, "Not really a bus...more like...a freight train.” After a few heavy blinks, he added, “They made me...sign a...two year agreement. M’stuck. I can’t...work anywhere else...can’t disclose or...t’lk to...vict’ms...cl’nts.”
Jensen asked, "When are your two years up?" Jared slurred his response, "I th’nk...m’ybe fifteen...fifteen days or...f’reen." Jensen thought he fell asleep, but Jared added, "They...off’rd a...ren’wl." Jensen asked, "What’s the offer?" Jared scrunched his face, like he still couldn’t believe it, "S’huge...bonuses...benef’ts...donation to...char’ty...s’huge." Jensen sighed, "I bet." He was beginning to suspect this man he seemed to be forming an attraction to was on somebody’s chopping block. This company may very well have tried to shut Jared up, permanently.

"Jared," Jensen got his attention before he fell asleep, "what’s Brad got to do with all this? Why are you uneasy around him?" Jared sighed, "Brad w’s a fr’nd...I thought. When I found out ‘bout...one’f my...reports...from last year...I c’mplained to Brad. I thought...he would be supportive. I expected...h’l to care ‘bout...integrity...people...n’ safety, but..." When Jared stopped, Jensen finished for him, "He didn’t back you." Jared shook his head. "No...can’t...trust ‘im...he only cares ‘bout...getting fired." Jensen sighed, his concerned eyes focused intently on Jared. The younger man shook his head, "He wasn’t...conc’ned ‘bout...h’lpin me...he was...takin’ m’files." Jensen asked, "So, besides Brad, who knows about this?" Jared paused, thinking first, "I had...an argument...with my manager. He jus’...blew me off. I cussed at him...thought I was...fired. The...ren’wal made me...sick. They d’nt know there are...people who...don’t act...that way.” Jensen sighed, “Unfortunately, less than there should be.”

He stood upright, he paced a bit while thinking this over. Jared became more upset, “J’ns’n there are...people...living in...working in...th’s b’ldn’gs. They...shldn’t be...open. I did the math...ov’r n’ov’r it’s...” he shook his head, his eyes filled, “I can’t...wait, I have to...turn the...re’prts over...to the...att’ney gen’rl or...s’mone...I...can’t let...people get...hurt or...die.” Jensen leaned over him again, gently touching him on the head, “Hey...it’s gonna be fine, okay? You’re gonna be just fine, Jared...I know you’re worried about all these people but buddy, you have to focus on getting better first, okay? We’ll take care of the cops...we’ll get the attorney to come to ‘you’ if we need to, but we can’t let this interrupt your healing process, okay?” While Jensen appreciated the kid’s honest do good-er personality that wanted to save people from unsafe buildings, this wasn’t good. This innocent young man hadn’t even realized what kind of danger he was in, or how serious this company was about keeping him quiet. Jensen’s inner protective streak was committed now, whether he wanted to be, or not.

Jared watched Jensen with very sleepy, worried eyes. He got the impression Jensen felt overburdened now, trapped with all of Jared’s problems. “M’sorry,” Jared’s emotional plea tore at Jensen’s resolve. He quickly countered softly, “Jared none of this is your fault.” Jared shook his head, “I sh’ld h’v...gone right away...I didn’t...believe until I...looked through and looked through again and...th’ot I c’ld...quit when...my contr’ct was done.” Jensen argued softly, “Jare, they were never gonna let that happen. They couldn’t. That’s why they tried to bribe you to renew. This company has known all along what they’ve got in you, how goddamn valuable you are. They were trying to keep you where they wanted you.”

Jared nodded, "Buddy, the cat’s out of the bag, now. They know you don’t agree with them so they have to try and keep you. Or, they have to find another way to stop you. They can’t let you out with all that evidence.” Jared’s tired wheels turned, the befuddled argument quick to rise, “No,” he shook his head, “no but...I nev’r told ‘nyone I was...goin’ to rep’rt them. They gave me a...ren’wl.” Jared looked miserable and utterly exhausted. Jensen knew he didn’t need this added stress to interfere with his healing. He sat on the bed and faced him with his knee bent. He held Jared’s hand just to help keep him grounded. He asked about Jared’s friends, "Jared, do Blair and the girls know about this? How about Manny?"

Jared shook his head, "No, Manny’s in…another firm...he’s in marketing. I havn’t...told him. Jeff too. The girls just...they d’n’t know and...Blair’s jus’...right n’the middle of it but...she doesn’t know.” Jensen nodded, then watched Jared’s anxiety skyrocket, “Jn’sn they’re...all gonna...lose th’r
jobs if...’nything...happens. I don’t...w’nt to get...all these people...fired and...jus’ wanna...do th’right thin’g but...” Jensen stopped him, “Hey.” When Jared stopped rambling, Jensen leaned in closer, “Listen to me...NONE of this is on ‘you’. Everything that happens to that company is ‘their’ fault, not yours. Jared, I’ve been all over the world, in the grimmest shittiest situations you can possibly imagine and you know what I’ve learned? There are ‘not’ that many people who would do the right thing when faced with something like this. There are ‘far’ too many people like Brad who would just stick their head in the sand and pretend it wasn’t happening. ‘YOU’ are the stuff that hero’s are made of.”

Jensen thought privately, ‘And he fuckin’ climbed out of that car against gravity and made his way to me...barely alive.’ The fact that this kid was worried more for the employees than himself astounded Jensen. Jared continued to look up at him with beautiful sleepy eyes. Jensen knew he was slow on the uptake by the time it took for Jared to twist his face up in disbelief. “S’not..” he shook his head, while Jensen smirked. Jared had caught on to Jensen’s ‘hero’ comment...a little late. Jensen continued softer, “You’re that guy who doesn’t think about himself. He just jumps in to help everybody without realizing there’s a danger to himself. I don’t know where you came from, but something tells me you take care of everybody else around you first...it’s important to you...vital...that’s why you’re surrounded with nice people who have to stop you when you’re tired or want to take care of you and feed you cookies.”

Jensen smiled, watching the heavily blinking eyes, “Am I right?” Jared was silent, mainly because he wasn’t comfortable with so much reverence being shot his way, but he was also half asleep already. Goddamn, if Jensen was pushing all these false character assessments his way when he was too drugged to argue. Jared tried to roll his eyes but they were too sleepy. Jensen's anger at someone setting Jared up boiled dangerously beneath the surface. He was feeling murderous. He knew the corporate world, very well, and he'd stayed away for a reason. Jared had become a target, being open and honest and innocently trying to do the right thing.

Jensen knew there was no safety for Jared until this all went to the authorities and public. There was also no question in Jensen’s mind, he had done exactly the right thing sticking close to the kid. Jared was almost asleep, but Jensen noticed him heavily blinking his eyes, trying to fight sleep. He spoke softly, “I’m going to call the officers and update them, okay? There’s a voicemail on my phone from Eric, but I haven’t checked it yet. Do you think you can sleep while I call them?” Jared shook his head, looking exhausted and emotionally spent, "I can't..." Jensen's thumb rubbed back and forth on Jared's arm, "Jared, no one is going to hurt you. You’re not alone anymore. You’re absolutely exhausted, buddy, I can see it.” Jared looked up at the ceiling with a frustrated sigh, “How can I...lay here and...rest I'm...bl'wing a..whistl on...ev'ryb'dy.” Jensen held Jared’s face between his hands and looked directly into his eyes, "Hey. Jared whatever you’ve got in those files is because you’re trying to save all those people from being crushed or severely injured. Buddy, you’ve been working on this because you want to save everyone. It’s a lot to be responsible for and now you’ve got help, okay?”

Jared looked at Jensen with gratitude and relief. He definitely felt better knowing someone else was with him now. He hadn’t realized what an added stress it had been to keep everything a secret. Jensen kept an eye on Jared while he played the officer’s voicemail. Eric’s message said they had shots from traffic cam’s to show Jared. They were hoping he might recognize the driver from his hit and run. When Jensen called them back, he told them about Jared’s situation and asked if they had any contacts with the AG. Eric told Jensen he would take care of the AG’s office and bring different views of the driver of the truck from two different traffic cameras. They believed it to be the truck that hit Jared. A rental company had confirmed that a man rented one of their commercial moving trucks only 9 miles from Jared’s accident. The company had little on the driver, most likely fake information. They really needed Jared to ‘id’ the driver, if possible.
the apprehension in Jared’s eyes, “Hey...you okay?” Jared blinked heavily, “I hate to say this but...I h’v to go.” Jensen eagerly went to the other side of the bed, let the bedrail down and pushed the button to raise the bed, “It’s okay, we got this.” Jared carefully rolled toward Jensen and let the man help him sit up. He was too damn tired to do it by himself. He closed his eyes, waiting for his body to settle at the new position, then he mumbled, “M’sick of being useless...can’t even pee on m’own.” Jensen forced himself not to smile. The cuteness of Jared’s beautiful expressions never matched his bitch. Jensen wouldn’t voice that, though. “Let me know when you’re ready, Jare,” he said. This kid couldn’t ever be useless, even if he tried.

Once he stood up with Jensen holding him around his waist, Jared took a few seconds for his equilibrium to even out. He yawned as they walked to the bathroom. Jensen kept a hold on him, knowing Jared was way past exhaustion now and well into the effects of his pain meds. They reached the toilet and Jared looked over at him with a question in his eyes. Jensen argued, "I'm not letting go of you, dude. Not a chance in hell. I can look away...will that work?" Jared sighed, "Not really...c’n you stand...by the door? I've got the bar." Jensen did not like this idea, at all. "Jared," he warned and Jared felt immediately guilty for being a pain, "I know...’s just that," he sighed, "’s just...hard to pee with you...stand’ng th’r.” Jared looked miserable. Jensen reneged with an irritable sigh. He backed up three feet from Jared and turned his back. He kept his head sideways, listening, "I’m not goin any further." Jared thanked him. He kept his grip on the bar with his left hand while taking care of business with his right.

Jared still had a complex about peeing with Jensen in the room, but he tried to remind himself it wasn't any different in a public restroom with people hearing each other and he should just relax. Soon, he was done and dropped his gown back down. He really hated the damn thing and was gonna ask to put some of his sweats from his duffel on after the shower. Barb came in just as the two men made it back to the bed after Jared had waned in strength from stopping to wash his hands. She announced, "I'm bringing dinner trays, then doing last checks. It won't be me tomorrow, so I wanted to let you guys know. Tonight is Darcy, then tomorrow you'll have Christian. Everybody likes him...and Jared, if you’re rested up, he’ll get you that shower."

Jared instantly lit up with anticipation, "Oh, that sounds’g’d...I can’t w’t to f’l clean.” After Jared was settled back in bed, his early evening breathing exercises and treatment showed up, one after the other. Jensen was glad they had pushed the pain meds button earlier because all the activity today and the exercises had really pushed Jared’s ribcage to the limit. After the breathing tech left, Jensen sat on the bed, as he had before, and held Jared in silence. He rubbed comforting circles on his back, feeling amazed at the way Jared had faced that mask head on this time. The kid had been repulsed and reluctant, but he pushed his way through it again.

Both men dug into the dinner trays, both loaded with real food this time. There was chicken, rice, vegetables and some little fruity cinnamon thing for dessert. Jared ate about a fourth of everything and sighed in blissful satisfaction at the full feeling in his stomach. He looked relaxed, but utterly exhausted. Jensen rolled the cart away, then encouraged Jared to drink water for a bit before finally sitting on the bed to face him again. He held his hand loosely. Jensen watched him blink heavily. He seemed to be zoning in and out, but not able to sleep yet. Jensen’s thumb was doing it’s own thing again, rubbing back and forth. Darcy entered and took all of Jared’s vitals. She changed out the ice water pitcher and changed all of Jared’s dressings. After she listened to his lungs, she told Jared, “I’m not hearing any wheezing. That’s a good sign. You might lose the cannula, honey.” She wasn’t quite sure if the patient was coherent enough to get everything she was saying. She glanced at Jensen, then checked Jared’s pupils, “Jared, honey, are you feeling alright?” Jared looked at her with half opened eyes and tried to force a smile, “Mmmh...’m just tir’d.”

Jensen and Darcy smiled at Jared’s near comatose response. “The doctor is on his way to see you, sweetie, okay? He might take the tubes out of your nose, would you like that?” Darcy and Jensen
watched him try and answer with his eyes barely open, "Oh...that wu'd be nice...’kay." He couldn’t
exert anymore than that. His eyelids finally fell closed. Jensen kept hold of his hand until Jared was
deept into dreamland. Jensen couldn’t get over how much he already cared for this man. Jared was
becoming a part of him and he really hoped Jared was okay with that because the poor kid was stuck
in a hospital bed, recovering. Jensen had no business pressuring him with that kind of interest right
now, but he couldn’t deny his insides. Something about Jared had him completely tethered to this
man.

When the surgeon arrived, he went right to Jared’s chart. He pulled out all of the latest scans and X-
rays. When Jensen joined him at the light board, the doctor explained, “He’s a fast healer.
Remarkable improvement here and here.” Jensen agreed. The cracks were all diminishing, the scar
tissue not as dark as the day before. Jensen also noticed the lung looked clearer. The surgeon went to
the bed and checked Jared’s eyes closely. He checked the pain meds machine, then listened to Jared’s
breathing. The doctor looked pleased, “His breathing is much better. Excellent.” He looked over
Jared’s chart, then shared with Jensen, “I’m taking him off the breathing treatments. He’ll still have
the exercises, but he’ll lose the cannula too. I think tomorrow morning, he’ll have some things to
look forward to.”

Jensen smiled, “Man I wish he was awake to hear this...he’ll be ecstatic.” The surgeon answered,
“Nice to deliver good news sometimes. I have some concerns, though, and I’ll go over them with
you.” Jensen listened as the doctor continued, “I’ve been told how he pushes himself. I think I saw
part of it with his stubborn attitude yesterday. Sometimes, that can be a problem. In his case, it
worries me. Any problems getting up and using the restroom?” Jensen shook his head, “Nope, his
last trip was forty five minutes ago and problem free. He’s very sore, but he only seems to become
weak or dizzy when he pushes it. He moves better each day. This was a huge day with visitors and a
lot of activity. He fights taking the pain meds until he can’t any longer. He was way past exhaustion
when he finally fell asleep. He ate something solid tonight, so that was a plus.”

The surgeon nodded. He studied the test results again. He turned around and added, “I might release
him from intensive care after he tries the shower tomorrow...provided there aren’t any setbacks. His
rib fractures still have a lot of fusing to do, but they’re doing well. The lung is healing nicely.
Without the need for oxygen, he’s really at a more moderate care risk. I’m not comfortable releasing
him, though. Not with his impatience and pushing himself like he does. There is too much damage
for him to be out of here without constant support.” Jensen nodded. He was relieved Jared wasn’t
hearing this part. If the engineer knew there was a chance at leaving this early, he would probably go
crazy trying to talk the doc into it. Jensen asked him, “So...when do you think he’ll be okay to
release?” The doc met Jensen’s stare, “Without constant care? Never.” Then he snickered, and
Jensen smirked knowingly.

The doc explained, “I can’t release him knowing he’ll re-injure himself. Those ribs are barely
together. A soft jolt and they can splinter right back into the lung.” Jensen nodded. The surgeon
continued, “I could send him home with pain meds in a couple days, but someone would have to
help him around, make sure he’s stable and not overdoing it. He could travel back to Austin, but not
for a couple weeks, and as a passenger only. Six weeks to fly. No lifting for at least twelve weeks
and he could work off duty in six, but very light, nothing strenuous. From what I’m told, he’s
probably going to disobey all of this, am I right?” Jensen grinned, "Probably. I guarantee you he isn’t
going to refrain from pushing himself.” The surgeon sighed, "He'll be very sore for weeks after he
gets released, but he'll be able to move around and do things, just slow and no lifting, putting as little
stress on that area as possible as it becomes stronger. There'll be some dizziness and nausea if he
pushes that concussion too. It’s healing nicely, but not if he tries to work.”

The surgeon rubbed his hand over his face and thought for a moment, then looked at Jensen, "What
does he do for a living?” Jensen answered, "He's an engineer.” The doctor nodded, "So some
outside work, in between office and design work. Well, I ‘really’ can’t release him then. He absolutely has to have a support system at home.” Jensen said, ”Well, he’s got great friends. They’re here to visit him, but none of them live here. I do, but honestly Doc, he doesn’t know me that well. I'd love to watch over him, and we get along, but again...not sure how he’d feel about actually going to my place.” The doctor nodded in understanding, ”Considering what he's like there’s not a chance I can release him without a full time caretaker. Either that, or he’ll be stuck in a rehab hospital. At least for the next two weeks. That's the only way he's getting outta here, so if you wanna discuss that with him, maybe it'll get him outta here in a couple days, tops.”

Jensen nodded, ”Yeah, that sounds good. I'll talk to him.” Jensen then thought of something, “Doc, he’s got an interview tomorrow with the police...and we’re looking at some possible lengthy interviews with attorney’s. If there’s any way to keep him in intensive care through tomorrow, it’ll be a huge relief. The security is better up here.” The doc looked even more concerned, “I see. Well, I’m glad you told me. Certainly, consider it done. I don’t want anything upsetting his healing process.” Jensen relaxed, “Thank you.” The surgeon nodded, then finished his exam before he left. Jared moved his head once, but never woke up. Jared didn’t even get to experience the pleasure of Darcy removing the cannula. When she arrived, Jensen used the opportunity to go for a short run around the grounds again, then took a shower and shaved. He returned feeling wonderfully refreshed.
Chapter Summary

Jared's past tries to hold him back, but he is starting to let Jensen in, as the men become even closer. Jensen and the cops learn more about the danger Jared is in. Friends come back to visit and there is a sweet first kiss. Things have come more to light and Jensen is hellbent on letting anything happen to the young man he believes he might just be falling in love with.

Thank you so much for reading.

Chapter Eight

Jared slept through most of the night. He woke up once around one a.m. and pushed the nurse's button for help to the bathroom. He could see his exhausted roommate under the covers of the sofa bed, but one, he couldn't reach the older man, and two, Jensen had been there so much Jared knew he needed his rest. Darcy supported Jared to the toilet. Once he hung onto the bar, she felt confident enough to stand just outside the door. He kept his agreement with her and never moved without her holding onto him. Darcy let him wash his hands very gently around the stitching, then patted them dry. Jared made it back to bed with no problems and slept deeply until later that morning. The sounds of shift change, lowered voices and rolling carts drifted him awake. Jensen, who was already up and making his bed, looked up and smiled at the younger man, "Hey, kiddo."

Jared yawned, feeling remarkably refreshed this morning. He stretched everywhere, except his left side, and finally greeted Jensen, "Hi." A male nurse they had never seen before came into the room and smiled at both of them, "Hello gentlemen, I'm Christian and I'll be taking care of Mr. Padalecki today." Both men answered their greetings. Christian approached Jared, "How are you feeling today, Mr. Padalecki?" Jared responded, "It's Jared, please...and I'm feeling really good right now."

Christian nodded happily, "Good, that's good to hear. I understand you lost an annoying tube from your nose last night." Jared nodded and smiled. He had noticed the cannula was gone when he went to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Christian added further, "So, did anyone tell you the breathing treatment is gone, too?"

Jared froze, "It's…it's gone? Are you serious? Really?" Christian was nodding, and just to be sure, Jared looked at Jensen for clarification, “Please tell me it’s not a joke.” The older man made a mental note of the soul wrenching puppy eyes he was being subjected to when he answered, “It’s true, buddy. You were sound asleep when the doc was here.” Jared turned back to Christian, “They totally sucked...that is the best news ever.” Christian laughed and added, “Well, you don't have to suffer through them anymore. You'll still have the breathing exercises, but maybe you’ll lose those by tomorrow too.” Jared laid his head back and sighed in blissful relief. He reveled in the simple pleasure of feeling almost normal again. He definitely felt better today and he felt nothing but a slightly sore twinge in his chest. ‘Glorious,’ he thought to himself.

The nurse interrupted Jared’s thoughts, “Are you hungry?” Jared perked up at the question, "Starving.” Jensen and Christian smiled at one another because it was obvious the patient was having a good morning and full of energy. Jensen bet Jared didn’t even realize that he wasn’t pausing much
in between speaking anymore. He was definitely better. Christian spoke as he checked Jared’s eyes and ears, "If you promise to eat and drink as much as you can, Jared, I'm going to help you shower. How does that sound?" Jared answered eagerly, "I would wash your car to get a shower.” Christian laughed, “Nice of you, but it's okay. You don’t have to wash my car. Just eat as much as you can and we’ll be square.”

Christian proceeded to stick a thermometer on Jared's forehead while he took his pulse and bp. Jensen cleared his throat, “Anyone mind if I take about fifteen or so to move around and grab some coffee?” He watched Jared’s face to make sure he was comfortable with him leaving, then looked to the nurse. Christian smiled at him, “I’ve got a lot to do in here. Go stretch your legs, man and I’ll have breakfast for two in here when you get back.” Jensen nodded his appreciation, “Thanks.” He took off to do a ten minute run around the grounds, then headed for the espresso bar. Now that he knew Jared was a coffee nut, Jensen was hellbent on getting a little Firebomb for him.

Christian wrote little figures on his forearm as he worked. Jared grinned at this. Jensen returned with one large and one small cup of the high octane treat, noticing Jared’s amusement right away as he set the cups down, “Wanna share what's got you smiling?” Jared glanced at Jensen, then back at his nurse, “He’s writing on his arm. I do that in the field. I just never realized other people did.” Christian stopped to grab the stethoscope from his pocket and asked, "My arm notes?" Jared nodded. Christian added before placing the stethoscope on Jared's chest, "Best note pad ever, right? Unless you forget to transfer it all before washing your hands." Jared and Jensen smiled at Christian's admission. He had Jared breathe deep a few times so he could listen to his lungs, then he went to the end of the bed and transferred all his findings to Jared's chart.

Jensen noticed the medication machine was packed up and rolled to a corner. He then looked at Jared’s hand and saw only a tight white bandage. “Hey,” Jensen pointed to Jared’s hand, “you lost the iv’s.” Jared looked back at Jensen with a proud grin, “Yep.” Christian concentrated on his notes for a moment, then finally looked up and relayed his assessment, "So...bp has gotten better. It's still lower than average, but it's much better than it was. Jared has promised to ‘wow’ me with ingesting more calories and fluids today. Your temp is 99, not perfect yet, but much better, and I still don't hear any wheezing. Incisions are free of redness and swelling. Everything’s looking pretty good. We discussed the pain pills, so I’m just reminding you of that. You ‘will not’ wait, and we agreed on that, yes?"

Jared nodded in agreement. Christian looked at Jensen, “I left all the bandages on, for now, since we’ll replace them after he gets a shower. I asked Jared in private if he was comfortable with you helping during the shower and he was a-ok with it. We try and give the patient as much cover and modesty as possible during the whole thing, but it’s still an exposed situation. Are you game for being my second person?” Jensen looked to Jared before he answered the nurse. All he cared about were Jared’s feelings, at this point, and if the younger man felt too vulnerable this early on in their relationship, he would back off and let another nurse help. Jared assured him, “It’s okay.” Christian left for a few minutes and Jensen looked into Jared’s eyes, “Are you sure? I totally understand if you’re not comfortable. I mean…I know we’re getting to know each other, but I don’t want to hurt you in ‘any’ way…especially by making you feel uncomfortable.”

Jared touched Jensen’s cheek and smiled, “Maybe that’s why it feels perfectly fine.” The two men shared a few seconds of connection, then Jared retracted his hand and gave Jensen a mock warning, “Do ‘not’ look at anything I might want to save for later, though.” Jensen grumbled with feigned annoyance, “Where’s the fun in that?” Christian returned with full trays, "I want you to eat up...I'll be back in twenty minutes, or so, to take the trays away and get everything all ready in the shower, okay? Oh, and your breathing exercises are due so the tech should be in here soon. At Jared's look of revulsion, both men laughed.
After Christian left, Jensen pushed the cart close to Jared, then leaned over to share quietly, “I brought you something.” Jared looked at him with question in his eyes, “You did? What?” The older man paused for effect, as he watched the wheels turn in Jared’s beautiful intelligent eyes. He grabbed the small cup that had been out of Jared’s view and held it up between them. Jared’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped, “Oh my god.” He looked up at him, then down at the cup again as if he couldn’t believe it was there. Jared’s face changed from moderate interest to the overwhelming excitement of a five year old on Christmas morning. Jensen had a sudden desire to devour the kid’s mouth and especially chew on that lower lip.

Jared grabbed the cup with both hands, looked back up at Jensen once more with total happiness and gratitude, then set the cup on his tray and opened the lid. Jared lifted the precious black liquid to his nose, closed his eyes and inhaled. He took his first sip, then moaned. “God,” he blurted out in between several more sips of the powerful liquid. Jensen was thoroughly entertained watching Jared make love to his coffee, but he thought he should encourage solid food instead of just filling the patient with empty calories. He uncovered both their food trays, which definitely distracted Jared enough to set the coffee aside. "God," Jared blurted out at the stack of pancakes, sausage and bacon on his tray.

Jensen grinned because Jared was full of happy reactions this morning. He watched the younger man take his first bite of bacon with his eyes rolling back into his head and a sinfully erotic, "Mmm…god, yes." Jensen decided watching Jared enjoy his breakfast might just kill him. He thought to himself that Jared must be the hottest fucking thirty three year old on the planet and ‘nobody ‘eats pancakes like that.’ He was duly impressed when Jared ate a whole third of his pancakes. Jensen ate his own stack while the patient downed half a milk carton and the rest of his bacon. It was pretty good, compared to the tiny bits Jared had eaten last night.

Jensen finished his own meal as the younger man rested his head back on his pillows with a relaxed smile. Jensen thought the improvement in Jared today was amazing. He asked, "Feeling okay?" Jared responded with closed eyes and a look of peaceful bliss, "mmm…‘very’ okay." Christian came back in and marveled at his patient's accomplishment at getting so much of his breakfast down. He let him know the “evil breathing lady” was outside and going to get his exercises done first, then he would be back to help him shower.

Jared wound up doing an impressive job with his repetitions, motivated mainly by the fact that his breathing tech told him that ‘this’ might be his last session. It hurt, but the pain was more tolerable and Jared laid his head back with an exhausted but happy sigh when it was over. He was taking a few minutes to regroup when he spotted Christian taking supplies into the restroom. Jared perked up with renewed excitement at the fact that he was going to be clean. ‘Fucking yes,’ he mentally exclaimed. Christian came out of the bathroom and left the door wide open, “Ready?” Jared immediately answered, “Definitely.”

Jensen smiled and waited for Christian to give him directions. The nurse lowered Jared’s bed rail and raised the bed. He instructed, “Okay, you’re going to sit up just like you have been. Avoid using that left side.” Jared easily rolled into a sitting position, well practiced now at keeping his left chest out of the picture. Jensen and Christian took their places on either side of him. They put gentle grips on the patient’s elbows and under his arm’s. When Jared stood up, it was immediately obvious he was stronger today. They walked to the sink where Jared saw the shaving supplies all set up for him. He marveled, "Oh my god…thank you.”

Christian responded, “You're welcome, Jared. Just remember to say something right away if you feel sick, or like your vision is fading, okay?” Jared nodded, "Okay,” and started to shave himself for the first time in five days. It took awhile to get the five days growth off. He brushed his teeth, then
washed his face with a hot rag. It felt like heaven and he made it known to the other two men with expressive sighs and moans. Jensen and Christian exchanged smiles at Jared’s reaction. The nurse indicated he was going to let go, so Jensen tightened his grip on Jared while Christian opened the shower curtain behind them. He moved a chair over with a stack of towels and scrubs on it, then unhooked the shower head.

Jared turned around and saw the bench in the shower. “Oh,” he exclaimed in surprise. He started walking forward with Jensen hanging onto him. Jared reached the shower and Christian quickly explained, “The bench is higher than a normal chair, made especially for patients. Jensen and I will get you into it, and then you’ll have to hold this towel over your incision, while I do most of the work.” Jared nodded, "Okay, but am I gonna like...do the private parts?" Christian patiently showed Jared the long handled sponge that he could use to reach his personal areas and do everything he wanted from sitting down. Christian would do the upper areas and legs, then Jared would to the other stuff. Jared nodded agreeably, "Okay.” The nurse pointed to a chair outside the shower, “Those are clean scrubs for you after. Would you like that better than a gown?” Jared said gratefully, “Yes, definitely...thank you.”

Christian and Jensen held Jared under his arms, as the younger man stepped gently over the low barrier and sat on the bench. As he was sitting, Christian pulled the back of his gown apart and left it draped over the front of Jared, keeping only the underneath and back of him exposed against the chair. Jensen bent over Jared to look him in the eye with total concentration, "I need you to be totally honest if you feel weak or dizzy, or have any pain. Do you understand me?” Jared nodded in agreement, “I will,” but Jensen pressed the issue, “Slippery shower...naked...getting you back to bed if you pass out isn’t gonna be easy nor safe. Please don’t hesitate, okay?” Jared could get seriously re-injured doing this and Jensen wanted to make sure he had the younger man in the right mindset. When Jared nodded, “I promise,” Jensen nodded to Christian, who had been poised at the faucet controls. The nurse took his cue from Jensen and turned on the water to adjust the temp.

Christian and Jensen stepped outside the lip of the shower to keep their feet dry, while remaining only a foot and a half from Jared. ‘These showers were designed perfectly with this in mind,’ Jensen thought to himself, ‘probably by some brilliant engineer,’ he smiled with that last thought. Christian handed the long handled sponge to Jared, "If holding this aggravates your hands, let me know.” Jared tried gripping the handle and shook his head, “No, it doesn’t hurt,” so Christian continued, “The stitches are dissolving and a little water won’t hurt them, but just try not to spray directly on those cuts, okay?” Jared responded, “Okay.” Christian continued, “Squirt the gel onto this sponge and then you can use it to scrub everywhere you want, while keeping one hand over your chest holding the towel. Let me do everything above your stomach, your back and feet, okay?”

Jared nodded, so Christian handed him a dry towel to hold over his wound. "We're going to stand right here and close the curtain for a minute, just so you have some privacy. No bending over. You drop it, you say something and wait for me to get it, got it?" Jared nodded in approval, adding "Kay,” at the nurse’s warning. Christian handed him the sprayer and pulled the curtain across, holding it. Jensen didn’t feel comfortable having his view of Jared obstructed so he was having to use incredible self control to keep himself calm while concentrating on every little sound. Jared pulled his gown off and threw it out of the shower, past the open end of the curtain. Jensen saw it fly out of the corner of his eye and knew the younger man was naked in there. He guessed Jared was gorgeous all over and he prayed he would get to explore every inch some day in the future. For now, though, he had to remain respectful and keep quiet about his thoughts.

Jared rinsed his whole lower body and spent time just enjoying the hell out of the warm water flowing over all of his lower parts. He squirted a generous amount of gel onto the sponge and scrubbed the latter all over his balls, his butt and all around his dick. God, it was good to feel clean. The movement slightly aggravated his chest, so he had to move slow. He scrubbed his upper legs,
his abdomen and lower back. Jared knew he probably put way too much soap on the sponge but it was such a wonderful feeling and very soft and moisturizing. "God, this is good shit," was all Jensen heard through the curtain. He and Christian exchanged matching grins. Jared rinsed all his lower parts and made sure he was completely free of soap before he called to them, "I'm done." Jared saw a towel come around the curtain and heard Christian explain, "Take this and cover yourself so you're comfortable before we come in, okay? It can get wet, it's just to give you some coverage."

Jared grabbed the large towel and completely covered his privates and wrapped the towel around to cover his rear end, tucking the towel under his butt to hold it. He appreciated the thoughtfulness of his nurse. He wanted to share nakedness with Jensen someday, but this wasn't really what he had in mind for their first time. Jared said, "Okay," and the curtain slid open. Both helpers were pleased to see the patient looking a healthy shade of pink and hopeful at the next step. Christian grabbed the long handled sponge and finished Jared's legs and feet. After rinsing them, he handed Jared a new dry towel and had him hold it over his incision while he washed his underarms, chest and shoulders.

Christian wiped the soap off his chest with a wet rag, avoiding using the sprayer close to Jared’s incision. When Jared was squeaky clean, Christian explained to Jensen, "If we turn him kiddie corner, facing away from us, I can wash his hair from the back.” Jensen understood and he proceeded to grab Jared's chair, looking him in the eye first, "Hang on to the sides, just sliding you a little." Jared hung onto the chair handles as Jensen smoothly slid his chair to face him toward the back of the shower, putting the back of the patient’s head toward his nurse. Jensen noticed the pinkish glow on the younger man's skin. He was happy Jared felt good, but cognizant of how much time they'd already spent doing everything.

Christian showed Jensen the chair mechanism, explaining how he could lean Jared back at an angle before they washed his hair. Jensen was impressed at the ingenuity of the special device. 'Again, probably designed by some brainy engineer,' he repeated his thoughts. Jensen warned Jared to relax against the back and hang onto the handles, reminding him not to flex his chest, then he lowered the patient back to a workable angle. He watched Jared for any signs of pain or weakness, while Christian went to work on his hair. Jared’s hair was no light matter to be dealt with and it took awhile to get the majority of his glorious locks lathered up.

Christian washed carefully around the wound, holding a small dry rag in place while he dabbed and wiped around it with a wet rag and some gel. He got as much of the dried blood off as he could without touching the actual laceration site. Christian started to rinse the shampoo out with a low drizzle spray while Jensen watched. He was fascinated that they could actually do this for Jared. Jared was getting tired and intended on mentioning it to Jensen as soon as they were done with his hair. He was glad to be sitting down, hoping he wouldn't be falling all over Jensen again, like he had the day before. He promised Jensen he wouldn't hide anything and he intended on keeping that promise. It was getting worse, now that the hair was taking this long, so Jared looked up at Jensen to say something. The older man wasn't currently looking at him, so Jared raised his hand and touched Jensen on the arm. Jensen instantly bent over and looked Jared directly in the eye, "What is it, buddy?"

The ex-soldier could see right away that Jared looked tired and pale. Jared weakly confessed, "I think...I'm just running out of steam." Jensen signaled to Christian that things were done. The nurse quickly put the spray back and grabbed towels to dry the younger man. Christian dried Jared's hair, face and shoulders, while Jensen covered the younger man completely with a dry towel and pulled out the wet one underneath. He let Jared loosely towel himself in all his private places, noticing the kid’s sluggish movements. Christian slid the chair so the patient was facing more to the front, then dried Jared’s legs and feet. Jensen touched Jared on the cheek, as very worried eyes met tired and drawn ones.
Christian assisted Jensen in getting the scrubs top over Jared’s damp hair and over his upper body. They had to move slow, as lifting his arms through the holes slightly aggravated the ribs. Jared noticed neither one of his helpers were very talkative at the moment. He guessed they were focused on hurrying before he literally passed out on them. This made him feel so guilty, but he really didn't have the energy to even address it. Christian grabbed a mini portable dryer and proceeded to blow Jared's hair dry, while Jensen slid Jared forward enough to have his legs outside the shower in the dry zone. He put on the socks and then pulled the scrub pants up to Jared's knees, telling him, "As soon as you stand, we'll pull these all the way up, okay?" Jared nodded, smiling very sluggishly. Jensen noticed it didn't reach his eyes.

Jensen touched Jared's cheek, "Hang in there, we're almost there." Jared still felt terribly guilty and struggled with failure, "I'm sorry, it felt so good," Jensen interrupted, "Hey...you're doing great. I mean it. Incredible accomplishment and soon you can rest while feeling clean." Jensen had the intense urge to kiss Jared right then, in that second, but he pushed himself to let that go. He could not get used to the fact that he already had these intense feelings for the younger man, and only after six days. He didn't want to scare the poor guy off before he was even well. He controlled himself for the time being and kept his supportive hold on Jared until Christian turned off the mini dryer and announced, "All dry."

Jared responded tiredly, "Thank you so much, Christian. Thank you both. It feels so good." Jensen bent over and assessed Jared's drawn and tired look, "Buddy, thank you for telling me you were tired. I mean it...thank you for not pushing yourself too hard." Jared smiled gratefully and even though he was looking exhausted, Jensen was pleased that this time, the smile reached his eyes. He looked up at Christian and after exchanging a quick look of understanding that they would be taking most of Jared's weight, the nurse grabbed some thin rubber soled booties and sipped them over the patient’s socks. Christian mirrored Jensen and took hold of Jared's right side, "It's okay to stand up, we've got you, Jared. Don't be afraid to lean on us." Jared stood up, feeling strong grips underneath each of his newly cleaned underarms.

He just realized how comfortable the scrubs felt, compared to that crappy backless gown. 'Damn, this is so much better,' Jared thought. He smiled when he felt the soft pants being pulled up quickly to cover his ass and family jewels. "What are you smiling about?" Jensen asked him. Jared explained tiredly, "This outfit is so soft...and it smells clean...I’m clean.” He paused for a second, then added, “It...feels so...” and Jared was suddenly falling. He lost all sense of clarity and equilibrium. His vision greyed out and he came back to awareness feeling the edge of the bed against the back of his legs. It took a few minutes for Jared to realize that he was still standing up.

He’d missed the distance from the bathroom to the bed somehow. He came further back to awareness and noticed two muscular arms around his torso. His hands were loosely laying on two very muscular shoulders. His chest was against a very thick muscular one. Jared blinked heavily, as his vision cleared. He saw a pair of deep green eyes swirling with specs of gold and hazel. He realized he was in a kind of bear hug, and it was Jensen holding him. For the first time, Jared realized he was a few inches taller than Jensen. Since his wit was recovering, he shared that thought, "You’re a little shorter than I thought.” Jensen smiled, losing some of the worry from his eyes, “I’d say you’re a bit taller than I thought.” Jared stared for a moment, his innocent expressive eyes full of dreamy adoration that anything could feel so comfortable, and so right.

Jensen tried not to overthink the fact that Jared seemed at peace and perfectly fine with not moving. Jensen 'never' imagined he would feel this way about anyone. He reminded himself to be patient, to hold back, that Jared was on medication and fresh out of trauma. Jared raised his hand and gently touched Jensen's cheek. He traced his forehead, then down toward his mouth. Jensen remained still. Jared continued to study him, touch him gently, as if mapping his face close up for the first time. His eyes were full of wondrous adoration. Jensen certainly wasn’t going to stop him. ‘I’m falling,’
Jensen’s mind whispered, as Jared rubbed his cheek and then his lips. Jensen’s mouth opened slightly, as the fingertips smoothed back and forth. Jared was looking at his mouth. When he looked into Jensen’s eyes, he searched with loving tenderness, as if he was trying to figure out Jensen’s thoughts. Jared’s other hand slid behind Jensen’s head and barely played with the short hairs there. Jensen couldn’t ‘ever’ remember someone doing that to him, nor looking at him this way. Maybe Robbie, but if he had, Jensen couldn’t remember. God, it felt good.

Jared warred with the depth of tenderness in Jensen’s eyes. No one had ever looked at him like that. Maybe Chris, but it had been so long. Jared had lived through much loss and betrayal when he’d opened his heart before but the way Jensen was looking at him now was different. Jensen 'felt' different, like maybe he was a sure bet. Jared realized it was hopeless to fight what was already happening. 'If this isn't real, it will destroy me because he is absolutely everything I’ve been waiting for,’ he thought. He looked at Jensen's mouth and the older man found himself unable to look away. "Jensen," Jared whispered so close to Jensen's face that he could feel Jared's breath when he spoke. 'Jesus Christ, I bet he tastes like honey,' Jensen thought. He felt his heart rate increase, but the protector in him warned that maybe he needed to stop this and get Jared back to bed. "Jare, I,' Jensen was cut off because the nurse came back in from dumping all the used towels.

"Everything okay, gentlemen?" Christian asked and both men smiled at each other. Jensen answered without taking his eyes off Jared, "I think he's back with us, now." Jared felt the pull of exhaustion return, as he sat on the bed and allowed Christian and Jensen to help get him comfortable and covered. Christian asked, "Are you cold?" Jared nodded, "Maybe a little." He hadn't realized he'd started to shiver. Jensen stayed focused on him with his usual concern while the nurse grabbed an extra blanket and covered him. Christian added, "Sometimes after a shower, you're still feeling a little damp and we don't want you cold. How do you feel?" Jared yawned, then said, "Christian, this is the best day, so far. I feel amazing." The nurse asked, "No pain? After all of that?" Jared shook his head, "Nope." Christian was pleased. He promised to return with more ice water and other juices.

Jared said to Jensen, "Thank you. I can't remember how you got me back to the bed." Jensen sat on the bed, facing Jared, "You warned me, just like we agreed, and we were both ready for it...you lost partial consciousness on the way out of the bathroom and I grabbed you and backed you the rest of the way. Christian got your bed changed in record speed while I held you up. You really feel okay now?" Jared nodded, "Yeah. It feels amazing to be clean...and these scrubs are so much better than that gown. That sudsy gel was good shit for a hospital too." He was feeling quite relaxed and sleepy at the moment, but Jared couldn't stop thinking about what was going on between he and Jensen.

Jared's mind scrolled through the last five days. 'What am I doing?' His heart screamed at him to keep up his walls, 'but Jensen is amazing,' his mind would argue. The internal battle of whether to trust another relationship or turn Jensen away was a constant mental struggle. 'What if this isn't real,' Jared panicked, 'what if he doesn't return my feelings?' Jared was lost in thought when he felt Jensen gently touch him on the cheek. It caused the younger man to look up and lock gazes with him. "Hey," Jensen greeted him. His thumb rubbed back and forth on Jared’s jaw. He sensed Jared's thoughts had turned pensive and worried. Jared thought for a moment, then closed his eyes and sighed. He bravely chose to ignore his fears and looked into Jensen's eyes. "Jensen," Jared paused for bravery, then continued, "there's a side of me that's," he paused, "I guess it's trying to stay closed off." After another paused he confessed, "These feelings...it's...intense...new." Jared’s beautiful grey eyes met Jensen’s. Jensen took Jared's hands in his and squeezed, "It's okay."

Jared looked to the side and closed his eyes for a second, "That felt ‘so’ damn good." Jensen tilted his head inquisitively, "You mean the shower?" Jared glanced at him, then down with a shy smirk, "No...not the shower." He looked back up at Jensen, finally, "You." Jared stared at Jensen and further explained, "You...felt good...being held by you." Jared looked a nervous at his admission, like he was waiting for Jensen to argue, or be on a completely different page and run away.
screaming. Jensen raised one eyebrow, instead, completely fixated on Jared's adorable way of admitting something he was insecure about. Jensen said, "I liked it too." Jared grinned, showing his dimples, as he looked shyly down. Jensen then added, "a LOT." Jared glanced up then grinned shyly downward with a soft, "Oh."

Jensen’s thumbs were doing that rubbing thing again. He was honored and humbled that Jared had lowered his defenses and let him in this far. He understood how hard it was for someone who had been hurt to trust again. "Jare, as soon as you're well," Jensen paused, glancing at the younger man's mouth again. He sighed, then delivered, "I can't be held responsible for my actions." A surprised Jared softly giggled and Jensen lost himself in that magical sound. Jared became serious, "You know...no one gets to call me anything other than Jared. I don't have nicknames."

Jensen looked apologetic, “Yeah...I'm sorry. I didn't even realize I was doing it and should have asked.” Jared smiled softly at him, “No, it’s okay. It's different with you...when you do it.” Jensen raised his eyebrows in response, "Oh?" Jared said, "It's not okay...normally," he shrugged his shoulders, "But from you, it’s nice...personal...like something no one else does." Jared suddenly yawned. He seemed frustrated at being sleepy again. Jensen brushed his hair back from his face again. He could detect no pain and Jared wasn't shaking anymore. "I think it's not a bad thing if you rest. Maybe your body needs to catch up from the big shower."

Jared yawned again, keeping his hold on Jensen’s hands, as he battled his lack of energy. Jensen watched him blink heavier and heavier, not quite willing to fall back asleep yet. Christian came in quietly and dropped some fresh ice water, juice and soda. He looked closely at Jared, but did not disturb his very relaxed patient. The younger man didn't seem to even be aware that the nurse was there. Christian looked at Jensen and pleasantly whispered, "That's good. He needs the rest. Lunch trays will be here in an hour. His friends called ahead, since Jared didn’t answer his cell phone. They’ll be here around lunch time too. This will give him some much needed rest before then."

Jensen nodded and Christian left. Jared was almost asleep. Jensen's closeness and his exhaustion from the activity this morning were lulling him into nothingness. Jensen kept hold on Jared’s hands until he finally lost his battle with consciousness. Jensen slept soundly for the next hour. He got up with Jensen’s assistance to use the restroom, then came back to bed and dug into his lunch. Christian had brought them trays of sandwiches and salads, of which Jared ate almost half of everything. It was delicious. Jensen pushed him to down all the drinks, nudging Jared to keep up his fluids. He downed the juice, the small soda, and two cups of ice water with no argument. Jensen knew he was probably dried out from days of medications. After he moved all the trays away from his bed, Jensen heard a commotion out in the hall. It sounded like the voices of Manny and Blair. "Think you're about to get visitors, buddy," Jensen smiled and turned to greet Jared's friends.

The heavy makeshift curtain/door slid open and Blair, Manny, Lisa and Cassie came sailing through. 'No Brad,' Jensen noticed. Jared's eyes lit up and showed his happiness at seeing all of them again. The room filled with noisy, echoing chatter that went on and on. Manny’s first exclamation was, "Holy cow, dude, look at you." Jared smiled at the multiple comments, "Oh my God" and "You look so much better today" and "Are you supposed to be in a hospital." Jensen loved the reactions the younger man was getting. Even though he still had ugly bruising and some cuts on the left side of his face, Jared definitely looked a ton better today.

The girls were rattling on and on about the huge reception for Jared's new ordinance and then how the adoption numbers had risen significantly because of it. Manny bitched over and over about the girls giving him a huge laundry list of too much to do and how he would be exhausted by the time Jared got back. Jared couldn't even keep up with all the overlapping conversations going on at once. Jensen sat comfortably on the couch and listened to the exchanges. He heard a couple magical giggles coming from Jared that were quite enchanting. He decided these were going on the list of
adorable sounds he wanted to hear from Jared as much as possible. He realized Jared’s friends had been glancing at ‘him’, off and on, during their conversations. They were including him, like he was one of the group. They had obviously accepted him as a prospect for Jared’s love life. ‘Approval,’ Jensen mentally grinned. He listened to Manny explain about how Jared’s aunt was horrified and how Manny had calmed her down and assured her Jared was getting better. “You better call her, Jared, or she’ll kill herself, financially, to get up here.” Jared rushed to agree, “I will. Thank you filling her in, Man.”

Christian looked in on his patient and glanced at Jensen to share satisfied grins at Jared’s appearance. He grabbed the dirty trays and removed them. Jensen knew the officers were coming by at some point with doom and gloom so this was a welcomed distraction. Jensen saw a shadow of feet under the curtain, then a tall blond man walked in and smiled at him. The guy looked inquisitive and a little uncertain at Jensen's presence, which put Jensen on guard, at first. He was ready to jump up and take the guy down if this was some kind of threat to Jared, but the second Jared saw him, he blurted out happily, “Jeff!” Jeff was as tall as Jared, which had Jensen picturing the three of them on campus with a short Manny sandwiched like an elf between his two six foot five friends.

Jensen smiled, watching the exchange. He could see Jared's dark circles under his eyes deepening with tiredness, but at the same time his eyes were sparkling, his smile genuine and relaxed. Jensen knew this was really healthy for him. Jeff hugged Jared around his shoulders and sat on the bed to face him. He was responding to Jared's comment that he thought he wouldn't be able to make it, “Screw that, Jared, when I got Manny’s voicemail, I switched my return flights around and got here soon as I could. I tried to respond, but I don't think it went through.” He looked at Manny, "Dude, did you get my text?"

Manny responded in frustration, "I just got it a few minutes before we walked in here. I didn't say anything…thought you'd surprise him.” He smiled at Jeff and they both looked again at Jared. Jeff kept his hand on Jared's shoulder, looking at him with great concern, "I am so sorry I wasn't here the first day. It sounded horrible.” Jared moaned and closed his eyes in a frustrated manner, "Oh God, would you stop acting like 'him',' indicating Manny on the other side of him, "You guys have lives, and I know that, Jesus you're frickin here and I am so grateful." Manny looked at Jeff, "I'm glad you made it, buddy. Wonderbutt here was 'not' looking this good yesterday when we saw him. He looks like a million bucks compared to yesterday...and I didn't make it here either, so don't feel bad. And I wasn't even in Italy."

Jared shook his head, "Shut up, both of you." He then proceeded to talk to Jeff about his current marketing job, his girlfriend and how he’d thought about sharing a place with her. Both Manny and Jared responded with delight, “Awesome.” Manny accused, “It’s about time, you guys have been together for like a hundred years.” Jeff countered, “It’s not a hundred years, Man, and yes, its supposed to be awesome, Jared, but why they hell do I think it’s going to change things after four years of knowing each other, I have no clue. We’ll see how it goes.” Manny looked like he’d thought of something, “Wait, are you moving or is she? Either way, ‘this’ one’s off our moving crew for awhile,” pointing to Jared, “which means ‘I’ have to take up the slack.”

The younger man rolled his eyes in irritation and Jensen smiled as Jeff responded, “I’m moving to hers. It’s bigger and I’m always there anyway. She wants to get a dog together, Jesus,” he rolled his eyes. The whole group giggled at Jeff’s comment, then he continued, “But seriously, I’ll hire movers this time, so we don’t need to do our usual back breaking routine, popping beer and motrin for days after.” Everyone paused, as Jeff sighed and added, “Save THAT for if this doesn’t work out.” Jeff finished with a worried look at the reality that he might be making a mistake. Jared nudged him, “Well, you won’t know until you try. Go for it, dude.” Jeff nodded and Manny piped in, “You know, guys are much less trouble, Jeffrey. Less dramatic, if you ever decide to jump the fence,” Jeff rolled his eyes, “Yeah yeah, thanks Man. Christ stop trying to recruit me.”
Jared giggled at Jeff being the brunt of Manny’s nagging this time. It was usually him. They talked about Italy and some funny stories about Jeff’s family. Jared had spent time with Jeff’s sister and parents over the years and it was obvious to Jensen how close these three were. Jared yawned in front of them all and rubbed his chest lightly. He wasn’t even realizing he was doing it. Jensen smiled when the group immediately silenced and focused their undivided stares on the patient. As Jensen finished that thought, he saw the two officers from before trying to enter Jared’s room, 'Damn, too soon, guys.' Jensen hurried to greet the officers and asked them if they could wait until Jared’s friends were gone. He explained it was the first excellent day Jared had and he really needed their company before he faced the interview. The officers were happy to grab lunch and return.

When Jensen turned back to the room and went to stand by the window, Manny was just telling Jared about his townhouse. He’d started Jared’s car and ran it a few minutes, brought in his mail and made sure everything was okay. Jared gave Manny some information on paying a few bills that were due, then talked to Blair about something in his office. Blair pulled out a small paper bag from her purse that she had been hiding, and Jared’s eyes lit up. He took the bag and opened it. He inhaled the aroma, then exclaimed with orgasmic pleasure, “Blair, oh my God, they’re THOSE cookies.” Blair joyfully laughed, along with the others. She admitted, “I baked ‘em for you before we left. They’ve stayed fresh wrapped in moist paper towels inside the bag.

Jared reached over and hugged her, then kissed her cheek, "Thank you so much for everything." Jensen could tell that move had cost him. He detected Jared’s slight cringe and noticed how he held his left arm subtly over his injured ribs, trying not to complain in front of the crowd around him. After a few more minutes, Blair announced that they really needed to catch that afternoon flight and that would require leaving very soon. The whole group moaned and groaned and gave her their saddest faces. Poor Blair looked at Jared for help. That relaxed giggle Jensen loved made an appearance, as Jared said his ‘thank you’s’. Manny leaned toward him and whispered close to his ear, "Do 'not' let that one get away. Jesus, Jared, he's fucking gorgeous...and I can see the way he looks at you, holy Christ it's like a Harlequin fucking romance in here." Jared giggled again, but hurried to ‘ssshh’ him before anyone else heard. Manny continued, relentless, “Seriously, you ‘are’ checking into that, are you not?”

Jared glanced very quickly at Jensen and back again, not even aware that he’d just clued Jensen in that he was the subject matter. The older man smiled and looked down shyly, went over to the couch and sat down. Jared looked embarrassingly at Manny, but indicated by mouthing, "Yes.” Manny loudly exclaimed, “YESSS,” causing Jared to cover his friend’s mouth with an open palm and admonish him, "Stop!" Jared was thankful that Manny seemed to be done pushing the matter, for now. Everyone hugged Jared and reminded him they were all ready to help him in any way and he only had to call for anything he might need. Jeff and Manny were within a two hour flight. They even offered to drive him back when he was released, if he couldn’t fly.

Jared thanked them over and over, really grateful for the visit. Before leaving the room, Manny stopped and asked Jensen if they could exchange numbers. The older man wholeheartedly agreed. Before everyone completely filtered out, Jared had a worried thought that he should tell Blair what was coming as far as their company went. Jensen saw the change in Jared’s mood and wondered what had caused it. Waiting until the other’s walked out, Jared held Blair back by grabbing her arm gently. The older woman sat down right next to Jared and he looked her in the eyes guiltily, "I have to tell you something but it's only for you. I'm worried about a lot of people getting hurt, and you don’t deserve to be in the dark about it.” Jared paused because the guilt overwhelmed him as he looked at the wonderful woman who had treated him so lovingly.

Blair touched his cheek, "Jared...what is it?" Jensen moved over to the other side of the bed, folded his arms and stood silently behind them. He wasn't too keen on Jared telling this to Blair, thinking that it might put Jared in greater danger, but then he reminded himself that Blair was devoted to Jared
and the younger man felt he could trust her. Jared swallowed, "I have detailed reports that show our company was purchased by a bunch of criminals. They have ignored safety reinforcements that were part of the foundation of public structures. The latest one was the stadium."

Blair looked alarmed, "OUR stadium? The one we just finished?" Jared nodded, "Yes. It's the second level...there's no rebar and no second set of steel rods and the weight of a full crowd is going to bring that balcony down. The structural calculations are off and they shaved corners to finish faster. It's going to fall." Jared waited for that to sink in. Blair looked shocked, "Oh my God. Jesus, sweetheart, what are you gonna do with the files?" Jared sighed, "I want you to know because when they get in trouble I don't know what'll happen. I don't know if they'll close down, or have to pay fines and downsize, or punish people close to me. I'm just worried...I care about you and everyone else." Jared watched her with concern and uncertainty. He wasn’t sure how she was going to react.

Blair thought about what Jared had told her. She considered the information and seemed to settle on a conclusion, "Okay, so how can I help?" Jared shook his head, "No...I'm not telling you because I'm involving you. I just want you to know. If it's coming, you might think about looking elsewhere in advance. The girls too." Blair took Jared's hands in hers, "Well, it's just like you to think of everyone 'else' isn't it, honey. Jared, stop worrying about everyone 'else'. What about 'your' safety?"

Jensen practically fell in love with the woman at that last question of hers. He instantly realized why Jared had taken her on as a second mom. The woman was priceless...and she knew Jared well. "His safety isn't gonna be an issue, Blair," Jensen said from behind her with absolute certainty. When Blair turned to look at him, Jensen added, "I'll make sure of that."

Jared felt chills run through his entire body when Jensen made that vow. For some reason, he was hot and cold all at once, shaky and energized all at once. Something in Jensen's voice felt powerful and strong...Jared couldn't remember 'ever' feeling so secure. Blair perused Jensen for a moment, then seemed to accept his determination at watching out for her favorite surrogate son. She turned back to Jared, "I think you should keep him around, Jared." Jensen smiled because Jared was instantly embarrassed. The blush could only be seen for a second by both parties before Jared hid his face.

Blair looked at Jensen and caught him smiling. She couldn't resist, "He's irresistible, isn't he?" Jensen smiled wider and said, "No argument there." Jared whined, "Stop," looked up at the ceiling and sighed. Blair looked back at the patient, "Okay...I'm not gonna worry about you with this guy around, but Jared...don't let worry for me or anyone else stop you. This needs to come out, honey, and you'll be doing a good thing. Remember, you're the good guy. They used the hell out of you and I watched it all...the weekend trips, the late night call outs, the boss's idiot son trying to molest you at every turn." Jared blurted out, "Ew, stop reminding me," as he remembered how stressful it had been to avoid Daniel's harassment at every turn.

Jared noticed the younger man's second painful cringe and the folding of his left arm over his chest. He knew Jared was hurting pretty badly now. This was the only reason he didn’t ask him about the boss’s son Blair mentioned. Jensen pushed Jared's nurse call button and waited for Blair to kiss Jared on the cheek and say her goodbye's. The younger man smiled and nodded at her when she reminded him to keep in touch. As soon as Blair was out of the room, Jared's face openly expressed the pain he'd been trying hard to hold back while they were all there.

Jensen rubbed his left arm gently. Christian quickly came in and saw the look on his patient's face. "Pain?" He grabbed the pain pills from the cabinet. Jared swallowed them quickly with a few sips of water. He laid his head back to wait it out. His ribs were on fire and every time he breathed in, it felt like a crushing bruise. "Did you move suddenly, Jared, or do you think it's from this morning’s shower?" Christian asked that, as he took Jared’s temperature. The patient grunted out, "It was fine...just sore. I hugged somebody and it just," Jared couldn't finish. He was trying to concentrate.
Jensen held Jared's shoulder and squeezed in comfort, "It grabbed when you reached for that hug, buddy. It cost you."

Jared truly appreciated Jensen's comfort but he wasn't feeling the effects of the pills yet. He was trying to control himself from tearing up or whining. Christ, it hurt. Christian tried to soothe the situation, "You're remarkably improved, but a sudden move like that will jar the raw areas, Jared. That part about not moving suddenly is serious. That's why you'll be taking the pain pills home with you for awhile." The medication took a good twenty minutes to engage. Christian listened to his lungs and heart, finished taking his pulse and bp, then scribbled notes on Jared's file. Jensen brushed his hair back off his forehead and rubbed his head gently. Jared inhaled and sighed in some relief, enjoying the hell out of Jensen's ministrations. "Better?" Jensen asked. The younger man nodded, but said nothing as he focused on the gradually receding pain. It was bearable now, at least.

Christian said, "It's been a busy morning, Jared, with the shower and visitors. Are you tired?" Jared nodded, "Yeah, but not too much." Jensen knew the kid had to be exhausted to agree that quickly but he remembered the officers were coming back soon. "Jare, the officers brought the traffic pictures and they're coming to show them to you. They grabbed lunch downstairs when your friends were here. I'm sorry, buddy, but they'll be back soon." Jared looked fully willing to participate, even though tired. He wasn't complaining, now that the pain was letting up. "That's okay, I'm okay. It's kicking in."

Christian and Jensen exchanged a look of understanding. The nurse was going to allow the police interview but Jensen would be closely monitoring and controlling Jared's welfare during the visit. "Thank you Christian…thank you Jensen…for everything." Jensen smiled and when Jensen noticed the dreamy spaced out look, he raised an eyebrow at Christian. The nurse said, "It's Percocet, so there's a kick to it." Jensen nodded in understanding, "Ah." He enjoyed the hell out a cute compliant Jared. The nurse took off, reminding them to push the call button, if they needed him. Jensen decided he’d take their private time to bring up Jared’s release. "Jare, since we have a minute alone, I need to talk to you about something your doctor brought up last night." Jensen waited for Jared to focus on him before he continued. “Your doctor said he was close to letting you go, but not to go home alone. He stressed about the dangers and what would be needed for the first two weeks out, then he asked me to talk to you about your choices. Basically, you have to be with someone. You can’t be alone. After two weeks, you can do more by yourself."

Jared looked like he might argue, but then seemed to accept his fate. Jensen continued with the rest, “You have to have someone shadow you and help you get around for a little while. The doc wants no setbacks and says the first two weeks are the most crucial. I wanted you to know…I know it’s sudden and I know you are still getting to know me, but…I would love for you to stay with me.” Jared looked at Jensen, in surprise, as Jensen continued, “My place is big enough, I have a spare room and it’s just me. I’m retired. I’ve got the time. It’s either that or your friends will have to fly back here and stay, maybe take turns. I can be there, can help you. If you stay with me, I’ll do anything to make you comfortable…even if you need me to lay low, ya know? It’s perfectly okay if you don’t choose this, but I wanted to throw it out there.”

Jared figured he should just shut up and wait to see what Jared thought. At least he’d given the young man something to consider. Jensen had a spark of hope since Jared hadn’t balked at the idea yet. After a few moments of studying Jensen in silence, Jared asked, “So, when can I drive and fly and all that?” Jensen answered, glad Jared was at least still talking to him, “Two weeks to ride as a passenger back to Austin. Six weeks to fly. Six weeks to drive yourself around. No lifting for a few months. He said you could do very light work in a couple months, but your chest will still be sore if you aggravate it. The first two weeks, he doesn’t want you to do anything…no bending, putting weight or pressure on it.”

Jared was unhappily thinking it over. He looked at Jensen and realized how attracted he was to the
older man. Jared mentally bitched, ‘I don’t want to start our relationship by being a pain in the ass weakling that he has to take care of.’ It wasn’t that he was uncomfortable around Jensen, quite the opposite. The issue was Jared being angry at himself. He hated being down and hated feeling like he couldn’t do things. It would be hard to ask Jensen to do even ‘more’ for him. Did he really want Jensen to see him like that?

Jared’s inside voice rudely reminded him, ‘Hasn’t he already?’ The younger man sighed in annoyance, ‘Why yes, Jared, he’s helped you pee and helped you shower…is there anything ‘else’ you might need help with that he hasn’t helped you with yet?’ Jensen watched Jared think hard about his immediate future. He patiently waited for him to make a decision, while staring into Jared’s beautiful steel grey orbs. There were specs of hazel swimming in them today, but the grey was dominant. Jensen knew he could get lost staring at them for hours. Jared’s gaze moved to Jensen’s lips. ‘God, I bet he kisses like…’ Jared’s thoughts were interrupted as the two policeman walked into the room.

Jensen smiled at Jared. Jared smiled back, knowing damn well they’d been interrupted, once again, from what could have been an enjoyable intimate moment. Both men turned reluctantly away from each other to greet the officers. Eric announced, “We’ve brought some cleaned up video footage from traffic cameras of the driver of the truck that hit you, Jared. We only need to see if you recognize the driver…are you feeling up to looking at pictures?” Jensen looked at Jared, letting Jared be the lead in this. "Certainly, it's okay," he replied. Rick chose the cart next to Jared's bed to set the laptop down and open it. Eric explained, as Rick set up the videos, there were nine pictures, some better than others, "All we need is a positive ID, if you know who it is, and we'll take it from there. Jared, if you don't know who it is, then we'll deal with that another way. We may still catch the person that hit you, but it will take longer."

Jared yawned, but focused on the laptop, as he cart was pushed over Jared. Jensen stayed perched on his left side for support. He sat close enough so he could see the laptop that was going to be on the table in front of the kid. Jensen worried what would happen if Jared recognized the driver as someone he knew. He knew Jared was already having a hard time with the concept that someone may have been trying to kill him. Rick opened the first picture. It was fuzzy and distorted. Jared could see the large white truck and a dark shadow of a man standing next to it. "That one's really bad...they get better," Eric said, as he scrolled to the next one. This one showed the driver entering the truck and looking back at a gas pump. It would have been a perfect view if it had been closer. Jared looked closely and tried to place the familiarity but he believed it was just too far away to recognize the person. He still couldn't believe he was looking at somebody that had purposely hit him.

Rick scrolled through the fifth and sixth pictures with no recognition from Jared. The younger man was beginning to think none of the photos were going to be clear enough to get anything positive. He was also feeling the deeply intoxicating effects of the pain medicine now and struggling to remain as alert as he could. On the seventh photo, Jared straightened up and fixated on the laptop screen. He looked closer at the driver of the truck who had plainly been looking in the camera's direction before he got into the vehicle. The sunlight brightened up the driver's face and hair. The man was a Caucasian guy, slightly heavy build, and looked an awful lot like... “Are there more?” Jared
suddenly looked anxious. Rick clicked to the next photo, which was a close up of the one before. Jared visibly tensed, as he stared at the eighth photo. His memory was a bit sluggish and he was feeling kind of slow on the uptake, but he was sure he knew this guy.

Jared was so focused, he hadn't realized all three men were intently watching him. Eric spoke first, "Do you recognize him?" Jared looked up at Eric, then at Jensen, and back at the picture, "I'm sorry, I..." he paused and raked his hand through his hair, bringing his hand back to his mouth to chew on his fingernails. Jensen didn't like this mannerism because it meant Jared was nervous. 'He's scared,' and it pissed the ex-special forces soldier off that someone as beautiful as Jared had to go through this kind of shit. "Jared, he can't hurt you now, buddy...is he familiar?" Jared glanced at Jensen, before staring at the screen again, "Yeah, I mean I've...been trying to think of his name, but...yeah, I've seen him in meetings, planning committees, things like that..." Jared leaned his head on his hand, frustrated. He was trying hard to place the guy and think of his name.

Rick said, "Perhaps we'll go to the last photo, Jared, and maybe it will help." Jared said, "Okay," sighing in frustration again, until he saw the ninth photo. The younger man immediately sat up straighter. He placed his hands on the laptop. "I know him, that's...some kind of special position...he's the one that has you sign your two year agreements, the disclosures. He's the one that brought me my proposal." Jared looked at Jensen. Eric asked him, "Are you sure?" Jared looked at him, "Yeah. I know him. He's an employee and he's like in and out and you don't see him much, but he's usually the one who does employee agreements...he brought me my job package and I was on the phone and in the middle of something, so he held it up to bring it to my attention, and then he put it on top of my in basket."

Eric looked up at Jensen and they exchanged a knowing look of silent concern. Jensen asked, "Jared, have you ever seen him do other things...maybe like hanging around the managers or the top executives...could he be a security type person?" Jared looked at Jensen with confused curiosity but he searched his memory and stared more at the photo. "Yeah, actually an employee was fired for something and he was the one that escorted them out. He's in meetings, but he doesn't say much, he just stands by the door and..."

Jared looked off like he was remembering something, which caused another look between Jensen and Eric, then their eyes went back to the younger man. Jared added, "He's the last to arrive with the exec's and stands by them or back a little. He says 'hi' to people but he doesn't interact. Everybody just kinda knows he works there but doesn't talk to him." Eric asked, "Do you know his name?" Jared would have answered but his brain was denying the concept that this man had rammed his car on purpose, "But why would he give me a job proposal and then bash into me, I mean I don't understand." Jared was getting upset, so Eric asked him again, "Jared, do you know this man's name?"

Jensen put his hand on Jared's arm to offer some solid support while the younger man calmed a bit, "I think it's Matt. Matt...something or other." Jared looked over at his luggage and laptop case, "Jensen, can you bring me that?" The older man hurried to get the laptop for him. As he opened it for Jared, he kept glancing at him to make sure he was okay. Jared’s anxiety was obviously skyrocketing. Jared turned on the screen, "I have pictures...and names...just give me a second." He looked through his files until he landed on what he was looking for. He opened up a picture and pointed to it, "He was on some grand openings....they take pictures and he's in them with me and other engineers..."

The other men leaned in closely and focused on Jared's file. "This was the library we worked on," Jared explained, "another one of my calculated risk reports that got ignored...he was there. Annoying as shit, too." Jensen looked at him, "Annoying..why?" Jared glanced up, as if he didn't realize he'd even said anything, "Oh...he just...followed me into every room...never picked up any equipment or loaded the damn car...just fucking followed me and looked over my shoulder. And when the
librarian was trying to talk to me, he kept interrupting. Irritating ass doesn't really do much and I have no idea why he was there." Jared looked up with a double take at Jensen’s face. There was sudden shift in features, as if Jensen had transformed into something deadly and dangerous. His intent stare made Jared nervous, as he scrolled quickly through everything he’d just said, wondering what he’d said to make Jensen so angry.

Jensen realized he must be showing his true thoughts because he could tell he was scaring the kid. He quickly explained, while trying to soften his delivery, "Jared, he's their 'go to' guy...every large company has one, or more than one. He's an eliminator, equalizer, bodyguard, security guy, and I truly suspect, his assignment that day was to watch you. I bet he wasn't supposed to allow you to interact with anyone because you might tell them about the defects you'd found. What scares the living shit out of me, Jared, is that he could have killed you at 'any' time, or tried. They must have been watching you this whole time and when you came here and hadn't accepted the deal yet...well?"

Jensen looked at the officers and then back at Jared, who was still looking at Jensen with an open mouthed guppy expression. Jared tried to force himself to understand what Jensen was telling him. He didn't want to overreact and dissolve into some useless shaking mold of jello here, wanted to be useful to them all who were helping him, but just realizing that someone had literally tried to end his life had finally hit him. Eric read the name out loud, "Matthew Gurnaby," as he compared the photo Jared opened to the one from the traffic cam. “Yep, that’s him. Nice job, Jared.” Jensen spoke to the officers, “Jared has the evidence with him. They tried to get him to sign a renewal early, thinking they could placate him enough ‘not’ to go to the authorities. When they weren’t sure what he was going to do, and he went out of town alone,” Jensen shrugged, “they tried to make it look like an accident.”

Eric looked serious, “Agreed.” He looked at Jared, “Jensen filled me in over the phone about everything you’ve been dealing with at work. Have you talked to anyone from the Attorney General’s office yet?” Jared had been looking paler by the minute. He shook his head, not quite capable of speaking at the moment. Jensen helped him, "He’s been fighting to get well in here, and he really didn’t think of this until one of his visitor’s shows up yesterday and it came to him.” Jensen rested his hand on Jared’s shoulder. He noticed the kid had become pale and quiet. Eric spoke up, "I'm going to send an intake attorney over to you guys, and I'll give him an intro and that way you can at least get this going. We don't want to lag here." Jensen agreed, "No we don't." Jensen sighed and rubbed his hand over his face. He knew this was way beyond anything Jared could have ever imagined. He squeezed the younger man’s shoulder, “Breathe, Jared. No one’s going to hurt you.” Jared nodded mindlessly. He really was not feeling well, 'How the fuck could I have gotten into this,' he was thinking.

Jensen waited Jared out a moment while he watched the kid collect his wits…and more importantly, breathe. Eric asked, "Jared, do you know much about this company?" Jared thought for a second, "Not really, but I didn't like them right off. Honestly, I was always working so much that...," Jensen interrupted him, "Why didn't you like them right off?" Jensen thought about it, "At first, it was the way they ate up my old company...the way they congratulated themselves on how much money they brought in...I mean, there were these charts posted in every lounge showing their success and it was all rated in dollars. I hated it and the employees that came 'with' them were just like that. Dog eat dog. It's not the culture I was used to and I didn't like it. I just wanted to work, do what I loved, and get into big projects. They liked me, I thought, gave me incentives. They gave me recognition I didn’t want. Then, I found some really bad oversights on a parking structure and submitted them...after that, I got sucked into many more of those types of projects. They said they needed me to do the inspections, to point out every crucial defect so they could address them...make corrections. I missed design, but they told me this was vital and they didn’t have anyone as detailed who could do them.”
Jensen was beginning to feel a sickening familiarity with the style at which this big corporation was treating the smaller businesses. He asked him, "Is Skyward Engineering the corporation name?" Jared shook his head, "No, that's the old company. That’s the nice one I came from. When they bought them out, they allowed them to keep that name. Apparently, most of the companies they take over are all allowed to keep their names." Jensen had a horrid thought, "Jared...what's the name of this huge corporation?" Jared pointed to a page within his files, spread the document with his fingers to enlarge it, and looked at Jensen again, “That’s it.” Jensen was looking at a flow chart of fifty six sub-companies. Sure enough, the top square was A.E. He blurted out, "Fuck," as he stood up and stepped away from everyone.

Jensen took a moment to rub his hands over his head, gathering his self control. He turned to face Jared, who was staring at him with innocent concern and confusion. "Jared," he sighed looking down, then he looked up with guilty regret in his eyes, “that's my dad's company. It's ‘my' family that did this to you...I'm so goddamn sorry." Jared was still stuck on the first words out of Jensen's mouth and having a hard time following. He shook his head, "Wait, A.E. is your...?" Jared was on overload. The officer's own faces were stuck on Jensen, waiting for an explanation of his admission and what his family had supposedly done to Jared.

Jensen saw their expectant looks and sighed. He placed his hands on his hips and looked up to explain, "I left at seventeen. Didn't want any part of it. Oh, my dad tried. He pushed me and dragged me to every event he could until I was about fourteen, maybe fifteen. By then, I was so fed up with their style that I pulled away. We fought all the time and I enlisted. Best thing I ever did. I went home a few times, in between deployments and assignments, but my refusal to follow dad's footsteps was never forgiven. I haven't seen them in...probably close to twelve years. My brother stayed with them, never left...and he's rolling in it, happy as a clam because he never had to raise a finger of actual 'work' to get where he's at..."

Jensen looked over at Jared and saw something alarming come over the younger man's face. Jared was losing all color. Jensen thought maybe he was dropping blood pressure and about to lose consciousness, "Jare," he immediately moved closer. He leaned over and placed a hand on Jared’s cheek. The kid was breathing way too fast, almost hyperventilating, "Jared, what's wrong?" "Jare," he said in a louder tone. Jared finally asked in a slightly shaky voice, "You have...a brother?" Jensen hadn't been expecting that question and tilted his head as he answered, "Yes, I do have a brother. Why, what's wrong?" Jared didn't answer Jensen because he couldn't. A hundred thoughts were racing through his brain in that second, 'Oh my God'...'no'...'it can't be'...'fuck no'...'I knew this was too good to be true'...'no, please God, no'....Jared's mind was a ranting mess because he was now picturing his office molester, the boss's son who harassed him at ever turn, who brushed against him and touched his ass at the copier...'Jesus fucking christ, I can't tell Jensen,' Jared thought.

Jensen took his chin between his fingers and forced him to look into his eyes. "What about Daniel, Jared? What has he done?" Jensen knew Jared was panicking about something. He mentally searched through all the information he'd learned about Jared's office and Jared's history, then his thoughts landed on something he'd heard when Blair was talking to him. Jensen’s insides twisted, as he asked Jared, “He’s the one you and Blair were talking about, isn’t he?" Jared swallowed. His eyes spoke volumes about his fear at hurting Jensen with the information, but he nodded silently.

Jensen blurted out, “Fuck,” then walked a few steps away with his hands on his hips. Jared forced himself to keep tears out of his eyes. He really didn't feel well. "Jared, are you alright?" Rick asked that. Jared nodded, smiling sideways, but not really feeling it. He was too busy watching Jensen. Both officers looked at Jensen, then came over to the bed and leaned on his arms next to Jared, “A.E. stands for Ackles Enterprises. It's been in business for about forty two years. My dad inherited it from my grandad...but granddad didn't run it that way. When my dad took over, he became an egomaniac, loving corporate greed and hostile takeover bullshit. My mom became addicted to the
night life, the politics, the corporate social gatherings...it was something I didn't want to do. I wanted a different life. Best thing I ever did was get out. I didn't want him paying for my college, either, so I got my degree in the service. My brother is different. From the start, we were night and day. He was unmotivated, laid around a lot...got out of things. He never wanted to really work at anything. I played a lot of sports and liked to be on teams. Daniel liked things for free. Honestly, I have no idea what he's like now."

Jensen looked at Jared, with guilt and remorse in his eyes, "Obviously, he's upped his game, adding sexual harassment to his laziness. Jared, I had no idea. Has he done this to anyone else besides you?" Jared wasn't sure how much to say, "I...I really don't know...I just...I'm just usually not, uhm...I avoid him. I know people don't like him much...he's in meetings and people don't respect him much because they feel he doesn't really do anything," Jared stopped and looked reluctant and panicky. Jensen leaned in and looked Jared in the eye closely, "Jared, this is not your fault...and if he's an asshole, it's okay to tell me. I want to know. We aren't exactly close, ya know?"

Jared still held back, his kind heart not allowing him to hurt Jensen with further admissions about his own brother. "Jare, has he hurt you...what does he do to make you feel like this...please tell me he doesn't grab or touch you." Jensen looked at Jared with expectant dread at what he might be about the learn. Jared's eyes moved away in avoidance and then back to Jensen a few times before he said, "I don't think that's a good idea...I really don't want to say." Jensen touched Jared's arm, "Hey...it's okay. This is me. Jare, I'm on your side."

Jensen knew Jared was just protecting him from knowing more ugly shit his brother had gotten away with. He could see how upset Jared was at telling him anything further, so Jensen backed off. If Jared didn't want to tell him, that meant there was something truly shitty Jensen was going to hate. He studied Jared for a moment and realized the kid was way past his limit on exertion today. This was an overload of shocking information for him to absorb. He looked up at the officers and saw that they were looking at Jared with concern, also. Eric spoke up, "I'm going to contact that intake attorney and have him direct us how to proceed. This isn't my expertise, but I can at least get you to the right people. In the meantime, I'm going to document this in my report with a positive 'ID' on Matthew Gurnaby as the driver. We're gonna chase our lead and progress from there with our hit and run investigation, which means he will know and 'they' will too, that you have positively id'd their guy."

Eric looked at Jensen, "When does he get out of here?" Jensen understood they were worried about another attempt on their victim if he were to stay in the same place. "Pretty soon," Jensen said, "Maybe tomorrow. We're not sure where he's going yet, but we can keep that confidential from his office." The officers nodded and Jared looked at all of them, suddenly alarmed, and asked "Why? What's about to happen?" Eric looked at Jensen, then back at Jared, "I'm going to introduce this to the intake attorney and they'll wanna come talk to you. It won't take long because they won't wanna sit on something this big. Once they file an investigation, your company will know it's under official scrutiny. I'm sure they'll guess where it came from...they might try again to get to you and, Eric paused and looked at Jensen for permission to say it, which had Jared looking back and forth between them, "And WHAT?"

Eric looked down at the patient, "And make another attempt on you. Send someone here you might not see coming." Jared froze, because hearing it out loud just made it more real. He couldn't believe this was happening. "But...all I ever did was my job, I never...I didn't do anything to anybody," Jared looked back to Jensen for reassurance and noticed the older man looked sympathetic and guilty as hell because he hated that Jared was scared. This meant Jensen believed it too. They were coming for him. Oh God, they were really coming for him. Jared finally pushed the denial away that had been trying desperately to hold on all this time. He finally realized what kind of danger he'd been in ever since he'd approached his manager with the problems and voiced his anger at the company's
illegal wrongdoings. "Guys, this needs to be over, for now," Jensen announced while watching Jared's pale face. Jared was on the verge of shock and this wasn't good.

The officers agreed and packed their stuff, assuring Jensen they would call in an hour with an update on the intake officer's plan. Jensen shook both their hands and they left. He pushed the call button for Christian to respond, then folded Jared's laptop closed and put it away in the bag. Jared was too out of it to even notice the officers had left. As soon as Christian entered, he zero'd in on the patient with very pale skin and slightly dilated eyes. "Jared, are you alright?" The younger man nodded, "Yeah," which had Christian looking at Jensen. Jared's voice was weak and distant like he'd just been given a huge shock. Christian took Jared’s pulse, as Jensen explained Jared needed to be moved as fast as possible to a room that was not in the system nor on a board anywhere. Christian looked confused, but listened. He took Jared’s blood pressure, then assured both men he would take care of it. He told Jensen, “His vitals are all over the place, try to calm him down,” then left.

Jensen went to Jared's bedside and sat on his right side of the bed, facing him. He placed his palm on Jared's cheek and the younger man turned to look at him. Jared was on overload. He couldn’t scream or cry, like he felt inside. He was angry and terrified all at once. His emotions were battling and he couldn’t seem to talk at the moment. He thought about his friends and wondered if he would be able to ever see them again. He thought about the bold blatant attempt on his life, in plain daylight, someone running him off the road...someone that had smiled at him while walking by in the office...someone that wore a suit in the office and maybe had a family.

‘What kind of person does that?’ Jared thought, not able to go there because it wasn't in him to go to that kind of thinking. Jared's mind wouldn’t stop rolling through scenarios, rolling through the accident, the gripping pain he felt after the initial brutal impact. Someone hated him that much that they could leave him laying in the ditch, hoping he was dead. 'Oh my God, they really want me dead,' Jared hadn't realized that Jensen had called his name a few times and that he was breathing rapidly, starting to hyperventilate. Jared finally focused on Jensen, after he heard his name the fifth time. Jensen was leaning over him now, both hands on his cheeks, “Hey...that’s it, come back to me.” His thumbs rubbed back and forth as he watched Jared closely.

When Jared seemed to be calming down, Jensen asked him, "Are you in pain, buddy?" Jensen shook his head, "No." Jensen decided he would keep Jared answering him, just to make sure he stayed focused. "Do you think you can sleep now?" Jensen immediately shook his head, "No...no, I don't...please, I can't go to sleep." Jared was panicking and trying desperatly to hold it in. Jensen scooted as close as he could and placed his hands behind Jared’s shoulder’s. Jensen pulled him forward a few inches. “Come on,” he said, as the younger man went easily into Jensen’s arms. He laid his head sideways on Jensen’s shoulder, like he was meant to be there.

Jared relaxed his own arms loosely around Jensen's shoulders and began to fully let go of the panic and tension. Jensen was so pleased that Jared felt secure enough to let him do this. He began rubbing soft circles on his back, as he held him. He spoke softly into the back of Jared’s head, “It’s going to be okay. I won't let anyone hurt you anymore, Jared...it’s okay.” Jensen slid one of his hands up to the back of his head. He gently rubbed Jared's hair and then pushed his own face into the crook of Jared's neck. He held the younger man for several more minutes, while Jared became boneless, practically melting against him.

Jensen continued to hold the younger man almost thirty minutes. He smiled when he realized the kid was very lightly snoring. He loved that he could get Jared relaxed enough to asleep, even after he'd been panicked over today's news. He enjoyed holding Jared for a few moments longer, then decided he would very gently try and get the kid back to the pillow without waking him. He lowered him back to the bed, not letting go, until he had Jared softly landing on the pillows. Jensen slid his arms out from around the younger man and gently brushed the hair off his face. He looked at Jared and
admitted to himself, 'I'm falling in love with him.' Jensen pulled up the covers to make sure Jared was warm and comfortable, hoping he would sleep for a long time. He stayed close for an hour, until Eric called from the police station.

Jensen stepped to the back of the room to talk with Eric. The intake attorney wanted to arrange an interview, in person, with Jared, to go through the files and evidence, and bring an investigator and engineering expert witness with him. Jensen told him they would be ready in the morning, and that Jared was moving to another undisclosed room within the next hour. Eric wholeheartedly approved and let him know they were waiting for an arrest warrant from the judge to go and pick up Matt Gurnaby. They were running airline rosters to find out if Gurnaby had flown back to Austin after Jared's accident, or not. Jensen understood that it was quite possible the son of the bitch was still in Denver, waiting for an opening to take another shot at Jared.

Christian came in and announced that the new room was ready and they could move Jared as soon as he woke up. The nurse made sure that the new room information was left out of the computer system where reception could give it out to visitors or callers. Jensen called Steve and Dani to update them that he would be home in the next day or two. Even though Steve had a hold of the phone, Jensen could hear Dani’s voice in the background, “Is he bringing that adorable young man with him?” Jensen said, “Well, tell her I offered, but he didn’t answer yet...he seems to be thinking about it, though. I would love it, but he’s got to feel comfortable.”

Steve said, “Okay, well let us know, Jensen. We’ll stock your kitchen with some stuff so you don’t have to go out for a bit. We’ll give you some of our good stuff.” Jensen chuckled, “Everything you ‘make’ is good, Steve. I appreciate it, friend.” Jensen finished his call and sat on the couch with his head laid back. He turned on the tv very low and found some old movies. It was over two hours when Jared finally showed signs of stirring. Jensen went over to sit by his bedside while Jared sluggishly rubbed his eyes and yawned. He leaned his elbows on the edge of the bed and simply waited.

Jared finally blinked his eyes open. He realized he felt more grounded now, not as overwhelmed and panicky like earlier. Jensen was the only explanation for that. The man's presence was becoming a lifeline. Jensen waited until Jared turned his way and gave him a sleepy but warm smile, "Hi." Jensen smiled, "Hey." Jensen studied Jared's eyes to see if there was any fear or pain in them. He thought he detected a sad acceptance and some worry, but it wasn't the panic and fear he'd seen earlier. "You okay?" Jensen asked. Jared nodded, "Yeah...I still can't believe it. This isn’t quite what I had in mind when I got my degree.”

Jared finally reached up again and gently brushed Jared's temperamental hair off his forehead. He lingered his hand to rub Jared's cheek, "I'm so very sorry, Jared. None of this is fair, I know. Remember you're not alone in this, okay?" Jared smiled, "I know. It's hard to believe you're still here, though. Each time I wake up, I'm afraid you might be gone." Jensen saw flickers of past hurts, abandonment and betrayal flash in Jared's eyes very quickly and then they were gone. He took Jared’s hand in his, "Jare...something you need to know about me is...I don't disappear. And I especially don’t plan on disappearing from 'you'. So, if that's what's happened to you up 'til now, prepare yourself for something new."

Jensen could see he’d caused the brilliant wheels to turn in Jared’s psyche. The younger man was silent for a moment, then obviously came to some decision. "Jensen, we haven’t started off in the normal direction. You’ve done ‘everything’ for me and what have ‘I’ done? I owe you so much, I just..." Jared sighed, frustrated, “I don’t want this to go away, or fuck it up somehow...I’m still paranoid that it’s a dream or I’m in a coma.” Jensen interjected, “I don’t mind, Jare.” Jared argued, “But I want to ‘do’ things with you...like normal people getting to know each other. I don’t want you to have to put my socks on for me, what the hell does that do for ‘you’?”
Jensen raised an eyebrow, further amazed at the younger man’s ability to take on such guilt and obligation. Jared wasn’t practiced at giving himself a break, that was clear. Jensen looked him in the eye for a moment, thinking. Jared realized he was being studied and then began to feel a bit on display, moving his eyes around nervously. Jensen smiled slowly because Jared really had no idea how damn addicting he was to just watch, to be around, to listen to. Jensen decided his new favorite engineer was over thinking the arrangement of staying with Jensen and he needed to put a stop to that. Jensen rose from the chair and sat on the bed. He faced Jared and leaned forward. Jensen braced his weight on his arms, either side of Jared’s shoulders and lightly touched his lips to Jared’s. He moved slow, allowing Jared plenty of freedom to turn away or say something.

He kissed him gently, moving dry lips together for a few incredible seconds. When he backed off, Jared seemed star struck. He was staring at Jensen completely mesmerized. Jensen licked his lips, trying not to glance back at Jared’s mouth. Christ, that first feel of Jared’s soft lips had sent sparks of awareness through his whole body. Jensen held Jared’s gaze, “For your information, you don’t owe me shit. People who care about each other do these things…anything…for each other. And they enjoy doing it, just like I do.”

Jensen stared into his eyes, “You’ve done plenty for me, Jare, and you don’t even realize it. ‘And’… I told you stuff from my life that I’ve never told anyone, and you told me a few things, and I’ve been through all your medical stuff…I’d say we’ve technically reached about the third or fourth date level…maybe more, what do you think?” Jared took a second to realize Jensen wanted an answer. He could still feel that kiss, “Uhm…I…yeah, okay.” Jensen had to grin at the fact that he had distracted Jared completely from his worrying, “And that exploring you wanna do? Don’t worry ‘bout that, we’ll definitely be doing that.”

Jensen grinned knowingly, picturing the ‘exploring’ he would definitely like to do on Jared. Jared’s eyes widened, then he looked down with a dimpled grin. Jensen giggled this time because he was a goner for this kid. ‘Sooo…are you actually considering taking me up on the offer? Cuz I’ve got two outstanding restaurant owners who are ready to pack my fridge with good stuff for my guest.” Jared looked up at Jensen, opened his mouth open to speak, but Christian came into the room and interrupted, “Hi gentleman.”
Chapter Nine

Chapter Summary

There is more kissing and it's hot. Way too hot, so they have to simmer it down. Jared's predicament grows, as the attorney general finally arrives to see what evidence Jared has collected. Things get more serious and scary for the younger man. This chapter is filled with many things; lots of hurt/comfort, angst, and loving tender moments between the guys. There is humor and silliness, schmooop and sweet stuff. Of course, right? Jared finally tells Jensen about the sexual harassment and sexual battery Daniel committed in his office, which pisses the special forces retiree off, naturally. The tension increases as Jared is close to getting out of the hospital and danger is lurking. New characters come into play. I hope you like them all!

Thank you for your kind words and encouragement. Enjoy.

Chapter Nine

When Christian announced they were ready to roll Jared to his new room, the patient looked confused. Jensen quickly explained they had arranged to move him just as a safety precaution, in case Brad or the others happened to mention what room Jared was in. He added that the AG was coming the next morning so it would give them more privacy. Jared was doing so well, the ICU was kicking him out, anyway.

Jared glanced at the bed, then back to his nurse, “Well, why are we rolling the bed? I can walk. I've been doing it for three days.” Christian countered, “Yes, and you do a great job at that, but making it all the way to another floor and down several hallways is a totally different matter.” Jared sighed and laid back in the bed with folded arms. He was rolled out while Jensen carried all his things. Jensen watched him endure the ride with appalling irritation. ‘Cute as hell,’ he thought to himself.

The new room was pretty far, like Christian indicated. They took the elevator a couple floors down and went down a long hallway. Jared realized he never would have made it. ‘They could have used a damn wheelchair,’ he thought to himself. Christian told them he'd shared all of Jared's recent history with the new nursing staff. "The checks down here are regular hour checks, unless call buttons are pushed. Don't worry, they're a good crew." Jensen smiled, "Thank you Christian, for everything. You've been awesome." Jared shook the nurse's hand and thanked him for all he'd done, especially all the encouraging talks and the shower.

Jensen helped Jared into the restroom and stood by the door. He felt better about the distance. Jared had slept a long time and seemed strong enough to allow him some space. After washing his hands, Jared dabbed them dry, and looked closely at his cuts, “The stitches are almost dissolved.” He held them up for Jensen, who inspected them closely, then nodded, “Yes, they are.” He smiled, as he took Jared’s elbow.

Jared grumbled while they walked back to bed, “I don’t know why I couldn’t just go home tonight.” He sat on the bed for a moment before a nurse named Janet arrived. She greeted both men, then took Jared’s vitals and noted them in the chart. Janet explained they had been instructed not to house
anyone with Jared so Jensen was free to use the second bed to sleep. She lectured Jared to take his pain pills on time, then left to go retrieve some dinner trays. Jensen grinned behind his hand because he had watched Jared use incredible self control not to rudely roll his eyes at the short lecture.

Not much time passed before they were both enjoying plates of salad, chicken fettuccine and bread. Jensen thought to himself that staying in the hospital wasn’t as bad as it used to be. The food was actually good. He ate all of his tray and looked over at Jared’s tray, asking him concernedly, ”Are you gonna eat anymore?” Jared looked at the leftovers and shook his head, ”Nah…it was good, but I'm okay...not really that hungry. Tomorrow's kinda on my mind, you know?”

Jensen figured he would take the partial win. Jared had eaten about a third of his meal. He rolled the cart away and sat on the bed facing Jared. He took his hand and squeezed it. Jensen knew the evidence was going to be impressive to the AG, but scary for Jared to present it. He had an idea, “Hey…do you wanna take a walk?” Jensen couldn’t have planned his suggestion at a better time as he watched the younger man’s face light up with anticipation, “Really? You wouldn’t mind?” Jensen smiled, “Of course not. Come on, kiddo.”

Jared rolled efficiently to his side and breathed through some minimal pain, as he sat up, then stood up. Jensen took his arm, “Steady and slow…as far as you want, but keep it slow in case your energy gives out, okay?” Jared nodded, so damn grateful to have some exercise. As they left the hospital room and entered the hallway at a slow speed, Jared asked, “So can you tell me about tomorrow? What’s going to happen?” Jensen filled him in on what he knew, so far, which was not that much, “The local Attorney General is bringing an expert with him and an investigator. He wants to see your files and then he’ll advise what’s next. Eric recommended him. Some guy named Price, supposed to be really good. If he takes the case, he’ll tell us what to expect. If they decide to move the case to Austin, I guess this guy will take care of all that. Eric wasn’t sure beyond that.”

Tomorrow was a huge deal and Jared couldn’t stop thinking about it. Jensen’s rock solid presence was a pillar of support, however. Jared couldn’t imagine even facing tomorrow without him. Something was nagging at him, though, “Jensen...am I really down here because I’m getting well? And to have privacy for tomorrow’s appointment...or is it more than that?” Jensen hesitated. He knew how smart Jared was…but he also knew it was damn important to keep Jared as stress free as possible so he could heal. He sighed reluctantly, “Gurnaby is still at large, Jare. Eric and Rick have a warrant out for him, but since he hasn’t turned up, we all felt better about keeping you off the grid, okay? So while those other reasons are true, this was the biggest for us.”

Jared looked worried at Jensen for a few seconds, then looked away, “Oh.” He still had trouble believing he was in the middle of an episode of the Sopranos. He stayed silent, as they made their way further down the hallway, then stopped at some artwork on the walls. This was a newfound distraction. Jared read the awards, the historical plaques, and studied all of the paintings. Jensen waved to the nurse who was monitoring the desk. She had been watching the two men, obviously making sure Jensen had a grip on the patient.

They walked back toward the room, but didn’t go in yet. Jared asked to sit in a couple hallway chairs for awhile. Jensen knew the kid needed to feel ‘free’ from his hospital room and burn off some of his nervous energy, so he was fine with it. Jared wasn’t shaking with weakness yet, nor did he seem dizzy or nauseous. They simply sat there and watched a few hospital staff go by, then a couple patients walking with nurses. Jared felt better. He looked over at Jensen with a soft smile, “Thanks for this.” Jensen returned the smile, “It’s no problem. Believe me, seeing you move around like this is worth it.”

Jared nervously tried to process the protective concern coming from the gorgeous man next to him. Christ, he wasn’t sure he could get used to the intensity in those green eyes. He was kind of glad for
the interruption when Janet walked up to them, “Hello gentlemen. Jared, how was your walk?” Jared responded eagerly, “Really good.” Janet bent over and looked into Jared’s eyes, then took his pulse. She asked him if he was feeling any pain. Jared shook his head, “Not at all...everything’s sore, but it’s not bad.”

Janet quickly exchanged a knowing look with Jensen, “Your pulse is a little jumpy, are you feeling okay?” Jared looked eager, “Yes...very okay.” Janet watched him, “You ate very little. Your pulse is a little fast.” Jared started to say something, but looked between Jensen and Janet. She smiled, “You had an impressive walk. I’m thinking your body’s over taxed with it, though, and you’re probably about to crash. If you head back to the room and get back to your bed now, would you like some dessert?” Jared’s eyebrow perked up with interest, “What kind of dessert?” Jensen smiled, knowing it had been a lure. Jared’s innocent childlike response was adorable. He watched Janet smirk, “Well, there’s jello, pudding, pie...” Jensen perked up, “Pie, really?”

Jared glanced at him, amused. Janet looked at Jensen, “Yes, and I’ll bring you some,” then back to Jared, “and if you’re a chocolate lover, there are brownies, ice cream and cookies. Any of that sound good?” Jared’s eyes were flooded with grateful excitement, “God, anything chocolate please... except pudding.” He felt fine so her assessment kind of surprised him, until she left and Jensen helped him stand up. The light headedness was immediate. Jared felt the instant grip around his waist grounding him.

“I gotcha, buddy,” Jensen said softly, as Jared shakily shuffled back to the room and got into bed. Once he was reclined comfortably, the dizziness slowly dissipated. Jensen sat quietly on the bed, watching him, holding one of his hands. Jared relaxed, feeling better than he had this whole week, especially after the exercise. The ex-special forces soldier thought over Jared’s situation. He knew full well that whomever ordered the attempted murder on Jared was ‘not’ going to give up trying to silence him. Jensen knew if the attorney general decided that depositions weren’t enough and Jared needed to be on a stand, the danger could continue for a longer time. Letting Jared run around unprotected was simply unacceptable...yet, Jared hadn’t given him an answer on whether he would stay with him, or not. Jensen knew he had to protect this kid, no matter what.

Jensen’s thoughts strayed to the inevitable confrontation that would be necessary between he and his father. He was distracted by the look on Jared’s face, however, when Janet returned with a bowl of chocolate ice cream, a brownie and chocolate sauce. She sat the dessert on Jared’s cart, along with a piece of banana cream pie. ‘Nice,’ Jensen thought, as he smiled at her gratefully. Jared’s dreamy eye roll and, ‘’omygod,” were quite entertaining, as he took his first bite. Jensen ate his pie, but his thoughts strayed back to his father. He really hoped that this might be some piece of shit manager or exec who acted on his own. He couldn’t picture his dad actually going so far as to attempt murder on one of his employees.

Jensen’s thoughts turned even darker as they went through a dozen scenarios that might be the cause of Jared’s uncomfortableness around his brother, Daniel. Jensen’s mood was brooding and intense. He pushed aside his empty bowl, then realized Jared was staring at him with worried eyes. The engineer had left half his dessert untouched. Jensen immediately asked, “What’s wrong?” Jared replied, "You looked angry...and I think you kind of growled." Jensen did a double take, caught off guard, "Oh...I did? Sorry,” he looked sheepish about Jared reading him so well.

Jared asked, "What were you thinking?" Jensen looked hesitant, at first, then sighed, "Well, I WAS thinking about my family…and about the dickwad that did this to you. ‘Then’ there’s Daniel.” Jensen paused. He watched the reluctance flood Jared’s beautiful face, as he added, “I thought about what I wanted to do to him...what he may have done to you...then, I reminded myself I don’t ‘know’ what he’s done to you...not ‘yet’..” Jared looked down, finding sudden interest in the stitching on his covers. After some silence, he quietly replied, “He’s your brother.”
Jensen leaned forward and gently lifted Jared’s chin so he could see his eyes, "I need to make something perfectly clear. If someone hurts you, I want to rip them apart limb by limb. It’s been barely a week, but it’s embedded in me. I don’t care if he’s a relative, or not, he’s caused you hurt. I want to know." Jensen watched Jared’s eyes. The beautiful orbs were windows to Jared’s heartfelt reluctance at causing Jensen any hurt. Jared asked worriedly, “Are you going to get into some fight with your brother over a little harassment? I can’t be the cause of that. It’s not your fault.” Jensen tilted his head. He studied Jared, while he braced himself on his hands, facing him.

"Define 'a little' harassment,” Jensen said, unwilling to let this go. He knew Jared was quite skilled at hiding the depth of his hurt and ignoring his own needs. Jensen was damn sure this situation was no different. Jared looked down and sighed in defeat. He looked up at Jensen, still not sure he should even be discussing this with the way Jensen was looking at him so intently. Jensen gently brushed the hair off Jared’s face and looked him in the eye, “Jare...it’s okay.”

Jared looked miserable but began anyway, "In meetings, he would stare at me...sometimes my uh...my crotch. It was irritating so I started picking different angles to sit, not facing him. I had to get up sometimes and...present...it wasn’t great knowing he was looking, ya know?" Jared cleared his throat, looking nervous, but continued, "I started leaving the meetings quicker...I never stayed after with everyone else gone..." Jensen interrupted, "Why?" Jared paused, at first. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and sighed, "Because he’d undress me with his eyes...after meetings with others there. It was embarrassing. If I was alone, sometimes, he would block me from leaving until I acknowledged him. I did everything I could to show disinterest because I thought maybe...you know, maybe he mistook something I did...or maybe I led him on by being nice or..." Jared looked innocently at Jensen, then abruptly stopped talking when he noticed Jensen’s darkening mood.

He proceeded with more caution, “I...made sure it was obvious by walking away fast...or not staying late...and I never talked to him. I tried to make it clear I wanted nothing to do with him. That’s how it started.” Jensen raised an eyebrow at that last comment, but he remained silent, knowing this was hard for Jared to talk about. He stared hard into Jared’s eyes with loving concern, "Jared, no one should ‘ever’ have to feel that way, ‘especially’ when they’re trying to work. I’m so goddamn sorry you had to go through that." Jared argued softly, "No, please don’t apologize. You aren’t like him.”

Jensen couldn’t wait to punch his brother in the jaw for making Jared miserable. That son of a bitch had tortured Jared for months with this shit. He made sure he kept his rage masked in front of the younger man, wanting to hear the rest. He waited a minute for Jared to continue and when the younger man hesitated, he gently encouraged him, "You said that’s how it started. Jare, what else is there?"

Jared’s eyes darted, looking away for a few seconds, “When I started ignoring him, he started coming to my office...he got between me and...and the door. He rubbed up against me and stuff like that when I tried to get past him. He grabbed my ass twice...once in my office and once when I was printing some plans at the plotter.” Jared ran his hand through his hair, a nervous gesture before he continued, “I didn’t see him coming...I mean I didn’t expect it when he grabbed me at the copier. I jerked forward and...”

He closed his eyes and sighed, knowing Jensen was already stewing and this would definitely set him over the edge, ‘He pushed forward against me...from behind...his whole body was against mine...and I could feel his hard on and it was...pretty pronounced and...anyway, there was a second there of thinking ‘fuck, what do I do,’ because I was kinda pinned...he’s the bosses son and...I can’t stab him in the eye so...I shoved my body back and pushed him off balance. It worked and I got away. He made some comment to my back about how it just turned him when I did that. It was humiliating, but no one was there, thank God. I started having Blair get my stuff off that printer because it’s in an isolated spot.”
Jensen was silent for the moment. Jared's feelings of being threatened, trapped, scared and humiliated incited his rage past the boiling point. He was going to kill Daniel when he saw him. Jared continued much to casually for Jensen’s liking, "So, I was much more careful not to be alone after that. When I had to stay late or work weekends, I just made sure people were around and it worked out. He never got that close to me when others were around. Blair started giving me a heads up when he was in the office, or gone, so I could avoid him.”

Jared wasn't sure what more to say. His eyes glanced nervously at Jensen, worried that he'd made a mistake by telling him everything. He heard Jensen inhale deeply, then exhale in a very controlled way. The ex-soldier exuded loads of intensity, but none of his outer demeanor displayed anything. Jared’s thoughts went to self blame. What if Jensen was disappointed that Jared hadn't defended himself over the situation. He looked down. He soon felt the familiar hand on his chin again, gently forcing his face up. Jensen searched his eyes, "Jared, you know this is none of your fault, right?"

He waited, then continued when Jared didn't respond, "Daniel was harassing you...badly. He assaulted you. And you had nowhere to turn, since he's the boss's son. He knew that, Jare, and it gave him the freedom to do whatever the hell he wanted. He was a fucking prick and you did 'not' deserve to be treated that way. Don't you think, for one second, there was anything you did wrong, am I clear?"

Jensen watched Jared struggle between self doubt and believing his words. The special ops expert was beginning to understand Jared better. This brilliant kid put incredible pressures on himself to handle most things without help and certainly without giving himself a break. Jared was not good at receiving compliments and recognition, but he 'was' very good at taking the blame for things that weren't his fault. Jensen wasn't sure how long it would take to reverse some of Jared's thinking, but he sure would love to try.

He touched Jared’s cheek lightly, “What you are about to do is one of the bravest things I’ve ever seen. It's not fair that you were forced into this corner, but you know what? No one else is smart enough and 'willing' enough to do the right thing. You've held it together all this time while working your ass off at gathering more information. Most people would have fallen apart." Jared looked disbelieving, as Jensen continued, "Jare, I've seen lots of people in my life that have the choice to take the easy way out, or blow things off. Hell, my brother is one of them. Most of the time, people will choose what's best for 'them'...what’s easiest. One of the most beautiful things about you, Jare, is that you are almost incapable of thinking of yourself first...and you are 'not' someone who walks away from difficulties...even if it means it's gonna hurt. And it 'has' hurt you, 'terribly'. But here you are still willing to fight that fight, save people, and do the right thing. That takes a unique person. Your friends see it, just like I do."

Jensen paused to let that sink in, even though Jared looked like he was arguing such a profound compliment in his mind. Jensen added, “There might be other smarties out there, Jare, but they don't have the combination of the heart and soul superman do-gooder thing like you do." Jared argued, "Jensen, don’t give me so much credit. I'm not some kind of super hero. In the beginning, I really just wanted this to 'not' be true so I could work and move on...I don't want to be in the middle of this. I can't let it go, but I'm not...I'm not some do-gooder...I don't 'want' to do this."

Jared looked into Jensen's eyes, "I do have my stupid 'do-bad' moments, you know." He looked down, perturbed at his own comment. Why had he even said that? He supposed it was Jensen’s presence. Jared felt like sharing, especially things he wouldn’t normally say. Jensen snorted with feigned annoyance, "I doubt you have any bad, Jared. Maybe life has hurt YOU, but there ain't no bad stuff coming 'from' you, buddy. I’ve seen a LOT of bad. You're something uniquely good. In fact, you're so good the brightness of your aura is burning my retinas, it's fucking hurting my eyes, dude."
"Shut up," Jared interrupted, grinning helplessly and shaking his head, because Jensen had covered his eyes like Jared had truly been hurting them with some kind of heat ray. Jared giggled further when Jensen pretended to be confused, like he didn’t know why Jared had stopped him. Jensen was once again transfixed by Jared’s sparkle when he giggled like that. The younger man had no idea how gorgeous he was, inside and out. As he fixated on Jared's mouth, Jensen wondered what Jared thought he ever could have done that was 'bad' in his life. Jared sobered into seriousness. He really thought Jensen was about to kiss him, but the older man didn’t. Jared thought about Jensen’s offer to stay with him. He really had nowhere else to go, but they barely knew each other. Jared thought it should feel totally awkward, ‘but it doesn’t.’

Jensen was about to ask Jared what he was thinking about when the surgeon walked in and interrupted his train of thought. After greetings, the doctor looked at Jared's file and talked to both men, "Tomorrow morning, I understand there’s a stressful meeting with some attorneys and investigators?" Jensen answered first, "Yes, Jared's a key witness in something, that's why he's been moved." The doctor nodded, "So, did you talk about a caregiver for the next two weeks?" Jensen looked at Jared and waited. He wanted the younger man to come to his own decision.

Jared glanced at Jensen first, then answered the doctor, "I'm going to stay with Jensen." ‘Yes!' Jensen tried to suppress the outright grin that started to appear on his face, not wanting to show his over eagerness. "Good, that'll be excellent," the doctor continued, “With his training I can certainly feel better about releasing you tomorrow.” Jared couldn't even hide his excitement at getting out of there, as both men smiled at one another. "Great news, buddy," Jensen said. "Yeah," Jared added with a smile.

They turned back, as the doctor spoke, "Tomorrow morning you'll have a slew of tests. We'll do the release orders and make up your home regimen for medication and restrictions. And as long as I see nothing alarming on the latest tests, you'll be outta here by noon...or after whatever it is you're done with, BUT...," the doctor paused to make sure Jared was looking at him, "I'm concerned about everything we've worked on reversing itself if you don't follow instructions, Mr. Padalecki. A nurse will go over my orders before you leave tomorrow. They aren't meant to be taken lightly."

Jared nodded, then the doctor emphasized to Jensen, "Strict." Jensen nodded in understanding, slightly grinning, when Jared made a disbelieving snort. He looked between them, appalled. They both turned to him and the doctor said, "Jared, I'm concerned, that's all. You're a workaholic, you're very active and you obviously push yourself. I know you don’t like to give in to your pain, either.” Jared sighed irritably. The surgeon continued, “I want Jensen to understand the activity restrictions, the calorie intake, fluids and medication, in case you decide to ignore them. All of it is extremely important. Here, we can control most of those things. Out there, it's risky without a dedicated support person to watch you."

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Jared looked at them both, “I'm not seven!” He sighed again, rolled his eyes and looked to the ceiling. The doctor and Jensen exchanged a smile. Jared lost his pissness when the doctor finally finished a quick exam and assured him everything looked good before he left. Jensen sat on the bed again, but waited a moment before he said anything, “Depending on what goes on tomorrow with the AG, I want you to be prepared. If he tells us you need protection, and if it’s going to take longer than your couple weeks of having a spotter, I want you to know you have a place for as long as it takes...whatever you need. You’re safe with me and welcome...and I won’t jump your bones in the middle of the night.”

Jensen closed his eyes for a second, not believing he had blurted that last part out, 'Nice job, Jensen.' He tried another route, "My house is unlisted. I have two ex-special forces buddies close by and if the AG isn't protecting you the way they should be..." Jared argued, "Do you really think I need all that 'protection' stuff? I mean..." he couldn't even fathom Jensen's thinking. Jensen watched the kid
Jared scrolled through his mental files, picturing all the reports he wanted to show the AG. "It's going to be a long interview...there's so much shit." He thought about staying at Jensen's, then his thoughts returned to the accident, and how someone had gone 'that' far to protect themselves. Jared's attention was suddenly drawn back to Jensen's face, as the older man called his name. Apparently, he'd called his name a couple times, but Jared hadn't heard him. "Hey," Jensen said, looking at Jared with concern, "you okay?" Jared nodded, "Yeah." Jensen studied the younger man's eyes as he waited. Jared added, "It's okay...it's just hard to believe...and I feel kind of useless like this."

Jensen could see the kid was frustrated. He quickly argued, "Jared, you are 'anything' but useless. Where do you get that from?" He was irritated now that Jared was being hard on himself. "You ARE the reason there is evidence against this monster of a company...and you've healed faster than anyone they've ever seen around here. I'm sorry, but where does the 'useless' thing come in?" Jared sighed and looked guiltily at him, "I'm not having a pity party, I swear, it's quite the opposite. You do 'everything' Jensen. I do 'nothing'...it's unbalanced. I wanted us to start differently, that's all." He shrugged, looking down, "I just need to get...going."

Jensen raised an eyebrow, as Jared closed his eyes, trying to regather his thoughts and make Jensen understand. He tried to explain, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..." he paused, "I meant that staying with you, it's...it's such a gracious offer and...everything you're doing for me and...this is just so 'one' sided because...I...want more with you. It feels like when this part is said and done...maybe you'll be gone and I'm just..." Jared's shrug didn't match the uncertainty in his eyes. He looked down. Jensen's brow furrowed at this admission. He was concerned at why the younger man still feared he was going to just disappear. This wasn't the first time Jared had said something like that.

Jared chuckled mockingly, "You're so goddamned perfect, Jensen." He looked up, "After all this time, how can this just happen? How can it be true? And how can it be explored when I can't even walk around without passing out?" Jensen now realized how afraid Jared was to trust these new feelings. This was only partially coming from needing the help from his injuries. The rest was about losing people, someone he loved and trusted who had abandoned Jared in his past. 'Maybe more than once,' Jensen thought. Manny had mentioned Jared had a rough time. This was a deep seated issue that came from somewhere, starting with his parents. Jensen took Jared's hand.

Jared swallowed for bravery, then continued, "'I feel something I have 'never' felt...it's terrifying to think that staying that close to you might," Jared swallowed again, nervously, "It might be either too much or...or it might not be what I..." he looked down. Jensen helped him along, "Might not be what, Jare?" Jared looked up, afraid, but knowing he needed to be open with this man to find out if staying with him was even a good idea, "Might not be what I want it to be. I mean I want so much."

Jensen remained still. He could see this was a fearful thing for Jared to address. The young man was being cautious. He was worried. He had just admitted he wanted more...more than just to stay with Jensen as an injured recovering person...he needed to know whether it was okay for him to expect more, or whether it was time to brace his heart for 'not' getting those things. Jensen thought this might be a good time to gently share some of his own feelings. "Jare," he waited for Jared to look him in the eye, "this isn't some sense of duty. There's so much more I want with you too. It's fast, I know. And neither one of us seems to have figured out why we found each other like we did, but...I'm terrified, too. First of all, you've got serious injuries and the last thing you need is some war horse pressuring you. Second, I've done things with my job that I have to worry might turn you away from me."

Jensen shrugged a shoulder, feigning nonchalantness, but his eyes spoke volumes about the fear that he would eventually scare Jared off. He continued, "I've learned so much about you in the last six
days. I've seen you struggle bravely to get well. I've seen you sad and mad, hurting and sick. I've also seen that incredible smile, which lights up the room when it happens, and I've seen you playful and joking, cute as hell and there's that little giggle that I absolutely love."

Jared looked down with a self mocking snort. Jensen chuckled softly, “Fucking adorable.” Jared looked up quickly, searching Jensen’s eyes. Jensen leaned closer, “Everything about you is alluring. I worry about ‘you’ not sticking around, Jare, because what do ‘I’ have to offer a brilliant engineering expert with degrees and certificates I certainly do ‘not’ have. You put everyone around you above yourself. You kick ass. If you didn’t have arms and legs, I’m sure you’d still kick ass. Why the fuck you keep feeling useless escapes me.”

Jensen sat back, “Plus, I’m sure I’ve got stiff competition for the things I want with you, because you are too goddamned gorgeous, inside and out, not to have a long list of suitors.” Jensen sighed, “I’m a trained killer, so I probably shouldn’t run into those people.” Jensen could see Jared was having trouble absorbing that someone could feel this way about him. ‘I can’t believe he’s surprised,’ Jensen thought. ‘How can he not be used to people falling all over him.’

Jared was disbelieving that Jensen wouldn’t change his mind or turn out to be some fantastic dream that his subconscious had made up. ‘Maybe I'm in a coma right now and none of this is real.’ Jensen was just too goddamned right. "Jare," Jensen added, "if it isn't obvious, let me make it more so...I'm falling in love here...and I’ve never fallen before, so it’s all new to me, but I’m pretty sure that’s what it is.”

Jared’s eyes widened. He may have stopped breathing, but he wasn't really sure. He had 'never' been told that. 'Never'. He loved Chris and Chris loved him, but it had been eleven years since he had heard 'anyone' tell him they loved him...and it certainly hadn’t ever been with such intensity. Their relationship had been a gentle slow build of trust, then friendship and finally love. THIS was something powerful, it was magnetic. If he jumped into this and lost, he would not survive it. 'Why?' Jared asked himself. And the only answer he could surmise was that, 'I'm falling in love with him, too.'

Instead of sharing that thought, Jared decided he owed the older man some explanation of his character defects. Then, Jensen could decide if he really wanted to stick around. He began with guarded nervousness, “Jensen, I'm not...I’m really not...very good at...I mean it's been a long time since," Jared paused. Jensen focused intently on him. Jared really wanted Jensen to understand because he deserved to know. He regrouped, then began again, "I had a fiancé in college. I was happy. I mean I 'thought' I was happy...I guess I was for awhile.”

Jared hadn't talked about this to anyone but Blair. He wasn't used to bringing Chris up, but somehow this was freeing up the lock on his heart to share it with Jensen. "I had a ring...I was going to propose a commitment, live together..." Jared trailed off. Jensen asked gently, "What happened?" Jared shrugged his shoulder, "He died. On the way to see me, after graduation....and that was it." Jensen’s soul flooded with compassion, "Jared, I'm so sorry.”

Jared smiled softly, "It's okay. It's been a long time, but," Jared shook his head remembering, "In the beginning it was pretty devastating. Manny and Jeff were there. I wasn't really bouncing back easily, but they kept me busy until things were better. Anyway, since then it was like...I couldn’t connect with anyone. I tried, gave it a shot, you know? My parents dying was pretty awful...then I finally ‘love’ again and...THAT happens...so I went through about four years of non-interest in anyone other than friends. Everyone was telling me to 'get on with it Jared' and 'get out there Jared'. I thought maybe there was something wrong with me since I couldn't seem to get back in the groove...I couldn’t engage, you know?"
Jared sighed, "And there were mistakes made, that's for sure...bad choices...I think I lost my sense of judgment...didn't really trust anything after...one’s that didn’t work out." Jared looked back up at Jensen, "And then there's you. I don't know what to make of you. It's like I can't get enough. I want everything with you, Jensen...so much. But then I feel like it's too much too soon and I shouldn't want it...plus, I'm not good at knowing. I'm not sure if I'm judging this right and I've misjudged before...badly." Jared stared intently at Jensen and shook his head, "Jensen if I'm wrong about this...if I'm wrong," Jared closed his eyes in anguish, "I can’t," he opened them to see Jensen moving closer.

Jared took Jared's face between his hands, "Jare, I have 'never' felt this before. I've dreamt of being in love and what that might feel like. Now, I think I know...now, I see what that's supposed to feel like. I feel it happening...finally. And it's happening because of you. Jare, I would never hurt you. If you take a chance on me, you will 'never' have to worry about that." Jared's guarded heart finally started to open, his eyes filled with liquid, "But people die...Jensen, people die...or they’re not who they seem or...it doesn't work...or they stop," the younger man closed his eyes, "if you think...and you believe...if you throw yourself into a vulnerable situation, it ends badly....every goddamn time."

Jensen searched his eyes. Jared was wide open in this moment. This was the vulnerable 'inside' of Jared speaking to him. This was where all the hurt was...where he stored all the damage…and this was where Jared's fear was coming from. He had trusted Jensen enough to let him in this far, Jensen was determined not to blow it. He asked gently, "Who did you live with...after your parents…where did you go? Is that the aunt Manny was talking about?"

Jared nodded, but looked undecided, like he wasn't sure he wanted to go into the subject, "I moved in with my aunt...my mom's sister and her husband. They gave me a place to live. They were nice...even though I was dragging my feet for awhile getting back into my studies." Jensen wondered why the hell 'anyone' would consider a grieving eleven year old 'dragging his feet' after his parents died, but he stayed silent. Jared continued, "I know my aunt love's me. She's always been kind," Jared smiled for a fraction of a second, "...she's really tried to be there." He looked down admitting softly, "My uncle found out I was gay."

Jensen’s sixth sense didn’t like this. He lifted Jared's chin with his hand, "What happened?" He could this was another painful piece of Jared's past that he was giving him. He forced himself to control his anger as Jared explained, "I had to leave...I couldn't stay there. He didn’t love me...he never did, and knowing I was gay was just...it caused problems." Jared moved his head away from Jensen's hold and looked down again. Jensen easily let him pull away. He watched Jared curl slightly into his own familiar cocoon of self preservation. Jensen realized this had been an overload of raw trauma coming out and Jared probably felt vulnerable.

Jared had never shared 'any' of this with anyone, except for Manny. Blair knew some parts, but Manny knew everything. He hadn't meant to share so much with Jensen, but something about the older man kept drawing things out of him. Putting a few inches of separation between he and Jensen felt better, for the moment. Jared inhaled, then braved a bit more, "My uncle didn't take it well about me being gay. He was ‘really’ angry...they separated and he drank...he blamed me...attacked me. He said things," Jared shrugged, "I left and Manny’s family took me in. I earned money tutoring and assisting the teachers until I could afford a car, then I graduated early to get out."

Jensen was so in love with this man. He knew it now, for certain. Every hurt, every damaging blow Jared had described, Jensen could feel it all. He wanted to crush Jared to him and absorb all of the younger man's hurts, take them away so he would never have to feel them again. He couldn’t believe how incredibly wholesome and successful Jared had turned out after all the loss and hurt that had been thrown at him. And the abusive uncle...well that just pissed him off, royally, but Jensen knew this wasn’t a good time to show it. He brushed aside some wayward strands of hair off Jared’s face
and asked, “So, where's your aunt now?”

Jared was distracted back to a slightly happier discussion, "I talk to her pretty often. She’s still in San Antonio. She never stopped trying to come see me...she was in the audience at my college graduation.” Jared paused before continuing, trying to hold back his emotions, "When I first saw her out there...it was like my mother was watching,” the younger man looked down with a self mocking chuckle, "kinda stupid, I guess." Jensen rebutted him gently, "Jared, nothing you could say or do would ever be stupid. She loves you…and she sees how gorgeous you are…inside and out."

Jensen could see Jared was tired and emotionally worn out. He pulled him into his arms and held him tight, while snuggling his face into the young man’s neck. The engineer sighed a heavenly sound, then turned his head and pushed his face into Jensen’s neck. Jensen smiled to himself because he knew Jared was completely relaxed with him now. It was quite a precious gift to be given the amount of trust it took for Jared to tell him all of that.

Jensen rubbed his hands up and down Jared's back, kneading the tight muscles as he went. The exhausted man listened to Jensen's soothing words, "You deserve nothing but happiness, Jare. I want to make it up to you...show you how being loved is supposed to feel." Jared melted bonelessly. He didn't know right from left, up from down. He was in a trance from Jensen's ministrations. He inhaled Jensen's scent, then touched his lips lightly to Jensen's skin.

He kissed Jensen lightly on the neck, inhaled the man’s earthy sent, then felt the smooth warm skin against his lips. Jensen tensed up, at first, because one he couldn't believe Jared was kissing him on his neck and two, he wasn't sure he would survive this if Jared kept going. ‘God, it feels so good to feel him touch me,’ Jensen marveled. He closed his eyes with a pleasure filled sigh, as Jared nuzzled him and kissed him again. Jensen continued to sigh in pleasure. Encouraged, Jared continued more sweet kisses of fire up Jensen's neck.

At first, the kisses were lazy and soft, then they gained in purpose as Jared’s mouth traveled up to Jensen’s jawline. He headed along the jawbone toward Jensen's mouth. Just when Jensen’s brain caught up and he thought maybe he should stop this, Jared's lips reached his and their hot breaths collided. Jared slid one hand up Jensen’s chest to wrap it around the back of his head. He pulled the older man forward and locked their mouths together. Jensen's whole body filled with electric sparks and he completely forgot about anything else.

Jared's kiss started gentle and hesitant. He was testing, inquisitive, asking and giving Jensen the chance to pull away if he didn't want this. Jensen responded with tender pressure, giving Jared gentle approval and encouragement. He slanted his head sideways, gliding his lips against Jared's back and forth. Both men sighed heavenly sounds, as they became lost in the moment. Jared meant to keep things light, but it felt so good he found himself melting into Jensen's heat. The older man’s lips were full and warm and smooth. This was sweeter than Jared had imagined and he didn’t dare stop. He pulled Jensen's head closer and opened his mouth. Jensen went with it, in total awe that this was actually happening. It was good. It was better than good, Christ, it was spectacular.

Jared slid a tentative tongue against Jensen's lips, the older man responded wholeheartedly. 'He tastes incredible...I fucking knew it,' Jensen heard someone moan, erotically, then realized it was him. Jared sighed, then pushed harder. In seconds, the kiss became wet, messy and hot. Jensen eagerly pushed back, immediately engulfed in delicious new tastes. ‘Jesus Christ,’ he knew he was in trouble. Jared was like an addictive vacuum of hot wet suction that tasted better than anything he’d ever imagined.

Jensen’s mouth traded sides with Jared, slanting the other way. Mouths pushed harder, opened wider, as tongues became more demanding, more aggressive. Both men were breathing heavier. Jared moaned and sighed, which Jensen thought was the sexiest sound he’d ever heard. He was
quickly rising to places he knew he couldn’t go. 'Oh my God....fucking stop this!' Jensen's logical mind screamed. His body was screaming something entirely opposite like climbing on top of Jared and grinding him into the bed.

Jensen was shaking, fighting to maintain some control. The younger man was way too delicious and intoxicating. Fuck, he had no idea how he was gonna pull back, but he knew he had to. His cock was hard and he panicked that Jared wasn't ready for this kind of intensity. Jensen quickly pulled his face downward, breaking away, "Fuck," he growled. He kept his eyes closed, held himself poised, while struggling to keep his mouth away from Jared’s. Jensen’s breathing was incredibly hard. He could hear Jared breathing hard, too, and he knew that probably wasn’t good for him right now.

Jensen knew he couldn’t look at Jared until he could regain control. He refrained from looking at those swollen lips and gorgeous eyes. 'Jesus Christ, I almost shoved the poor kid down on the mattress,' he berated himself, still trying to recover. He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. He blew out a calming breath, finally able to focus. When he looked up, Jared had beautifully dilated pupils and swollen lips. He looked flushed and absolutely edible. Jensen searched his eyes for pain or dizziness, but couldn’t find any. He asked him anyway, "Are you alright?"

Jared smiled sweetly, exhaling the breath that he'd been holding because Jensen had pulled away so abruptly, he hadn’t been sure what to think. "Definitely," Jared said. Jensen looked at him longer, still worried sick that Jared might be about to pass out any second, "Jared, I," Jensen had worry and fear in his eyes, “I can’t let that happen. I almost lost control.” Jensen's thumb rubbed back and forth on Jared's cheek and Jared smiled. His protective special forces hunk was blaming himself for something Jared had initiated...and thoroughly enjoyed. Jared touched his cheek, “It’s my fault...and I wasn’t stopping either. I’m sorry, I hadn’t meant...well, actually I’m not sorry.” Jared’s eyebrow perked up with a smirk, “That was the hottest fucking thing that’s ever happened to me.”

Jensen sighed, "For me too. But your health is the only thing that stopped me. I can't hurt you, it would kill me and that's the 'only' reason I was even able to regain some control over myself...I was losing it," Jensen said to him embarrassingly admitting his desire for Jared was that strong. He actually looked pissed at himself. Jared was beginning to allow himself to open up to this new possibility at happiness. He was pushing himself to give this a chance. It felt pretty goddamned wonderful, so far.

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After getting up one more time for the bathroom, Jared very sluggishly washed his hands and face, then brushed his teeth and brushed his hair carefully around his head wound. Jensen watched him closely. He helped him back to bed by keeping his arm around the younger man, noticing how heavily he leaned on him. Jared yawned consistently the whole time. Jensen stuffed extra pillows under him so he could roll to his right side. It was a pleasant relief from being only on his back the last six nights. He sighed blissfully, then slid his hand out toward Jensen so the older man could take it.

Jensen smiled at Jared's loopiness, as he brushed the hair back from his face with his other hand. Jensen watched him closely. He helped him back to bed by keeping his arm around the younger man, noticing how heavily he leaned on him. Jared yawned consistently the whole time. Jensen stuffed extra pillows under him so he could roll to his right side. It was a pleasant relief from being only on his back the last six nights. He sighed blissfully, then slid his hand out toward Jensen so the older man could take it.

The next morning, Jensen jerked awake to the sound of rolling cart wheels and movement in the room. He panicked, at first, because it sounded like Jared was in the bathroom. He sat up quickly, rapidly swung his legs over the side of his bed, as he noticed Jared’s bed was empty. Jensen started
to stand, but the bathroom door opened and his charge walked out with a nurse. Jensen tried to calm
himself. He rubbed his neck and face and tried to look like he ‘hadn’t’ panicked. Jared smiled a
greeting, "Nice spikes, dude." Jensen patted the top of his head with a perturbed look, realizing Jared
had been teasing him about his bed head. "Gee, thanks for noticing," he grumbled.

Jared seemed in a chipper mood and asked if he could just wander around for awhile before sitting
down again. The nurse said, "Of course. You can come out in the hallway if you like, just not too
far." Jared perked up, "Sweet." She and Jared headed toward the door, as Jensen quickly peed and
performed his morning ablutions. Jensen was running out of clean shirts and couldn't wait to get a
real shower again. 'Jesus, I didn't think about my shower at home with Jared in it,' Jensen's brain
went south and his cock tingled at the thought of how exquisite Jared would look in his recently
finished double shower with the grip bars and tiled seats. 'Fuck,' he mentally cursed and willed his
balls and dick to back off. 'That kiss did 'not' help matters.'

Jensen followed them out of the room. It only took a few seconds to see that Jared was looking better
today. The kid was walking upright, with a very slight hunch to his upper torso. He could tell his ribs
were sore, but he was definitely moving faster than last night. Jensen shook his head and grinned, as
he watched Jared thoroughly charm the nurse who was with him, and the ones he passed behind the
nurses station. Both engaged in conversation about something and Jared's smile had them transfixed.
A second nurse wound up coming to walk on the other side of him and Jensen figured he'd just stand
there and watch the magic.

The nurses had no clue they had been caught in a tractor beam and Jared had no clue how magnetic
he was to everyone around him. They couldn't stop staring up at him, hanging on every word, and
Jared just thought they were really nice. Jensen stood with his arms folded over his chest and
continued to watch Jared on the return walk to his room. People didn't hang onto him anymore, they
just walked beside him in case he took a dive. 'What a difference to see him like this,' Jensen thought
proudly.

He waited in the hallway outside Jared's door until the younger man looked up and saw him. He
smiled at Jensen and the older man noticed it was a totally different smile than the nurses got. This
was meant for him. It was knowing, with a bit of shyness. Jensen thought his eyes darkened, which
sent tinges of electricity all over Jensen's body. He smiled warmly back at the younger man, then
backed off so Jared had space to enter the room. "Damn, buddy, you're looking good," Jensen
commented.

Jared responded, "Thank you, it feels so good to actually walk around and not lean all over
everybody for a change." He chose to sit in the visitor's chair to eat breakfast. The trays had been
brought in while he was walking and the room smelled of bacon. Jared bent his knees and sat in the
chair with the nurse and Jensen holding him under his armpits to ease his descent. He slightly cringed
at the painful pull in his chest, but once in the sitting position, he felt fine.

"You okay?" Jensen asked. Jared nodded. The nurse asked, “Do you need any pain medication?”
Jared answered, “No…thank you though.” The men devoured the bacon, sausage and scrambled
eggs. It was delicious. There was actually coffee this time and even though Jared gave a 'blac' sound
because it was too watery for him, he drank it anyway. Jensen blurted out, "Don't worry...now that I
know your tastes, I'm gonna rock your world with some battery acid espresso in my kitchen." Jared
licked his fork, as he turned serious, “You’ve already rocked my world, Jen. The battery acid will be
icing on the cake.”

Both men were silent, as Jared had just stunted Jensen’s processor’s for a minute. He realized one,
Jared had actually ‘said’ that, and two, the younger man had called him “Jen.” ‘The little shit is
making up nicknames for me,’ Jensen had to grin. He noticed Jared had slowed down, and appeared
to be stirring his eggs around but not eating. He reached over and took the hand that Jared had laid on the table.

When Jared glanced up, Jensen asked, "Hey, you alright? I mean...with everything that's happened between us. Are you really okay?" Jared responded, "God yes, Jensen. I'm better than I've been in...well, since my whole life went to shit. I mean...someone's out to kill me and I've got to get through this case and then I have to figure out what I'm going to do about my job and my friggin life, for that matter...I don't even know where I'll work or what's gonna happen or if anyone will want me after I'm known as a whistle blower.” Jared sighed, realizing he had a lot of stressful times coming. But then he perked up at Jensen, “But I’m ‘very’ alright in the ‘you and me’ department.”

Jared still thought he could offer Jensen more. He could have probably told him he thought he was falling in love with him, too, but somehow it just didn't come out. 'Fuck,' Jared sighed, frustrated. He started off on a roll, but fizzled out before the end game. He wished he didn't have these damned insecurities, but he just wasn’t ready to say 'those' words and continued to hang on to his walls by a very thin tether. Jensen squeezed his hand, returning Jared back to the present. They finished eating and as Jensen was moving their trays to the rolling table, Jared blurted out, "So...what did you think about last night?"

Jensen almost dropped the trays at being reminded of such an intense memory between them. After all, he could still taste Jared in his mind. The older man moaned a deep baritone response and Jared smirked knowingly, "So...you liked it?" The younger man was trying to kill him, Jensen was sure of it. He turned to face him, leaned back against the wall, and tried to assess where Jared was going with this line of questioning.

Jared was staring at Jensen's mouth, which was not keeping Jensen's mind in the proper place. 'God, he's beautiful,' Jensen thought. He swore the younger man was enticing him over. Before he could argue with himself, Jensen disbelievingly felt his legs actually betray his mind and take him over there. He started to kneel down in front of Jared, but the patient would have none of that and struggled to stand up. Jensen quickly grabbed his arms, “Hey,” in case he was dizzy. Jared moved into Jensen and slid his arms around the older man's waist. Jensen slid own arms around Jared. They stood looking into each other’s eyes, as Jared spoke, "Jensen, you’ve saved my life. And you've saved 'me'...the 'real' me. You're in my soul somehow. You're behind all the walls. The guards are down and it's terrifying. It always changes, or it just ends. I'm afraid you're gonna disappear, and I'm struggling with that...but I don't want to lose you over it, so I won't stop struggling with it, okay? I won't let it ruin this, but sometimes it's strong and it tries to stop me.”

Jensen stared intently into Jared's beautiful eyes. Jared’s hands slid up and down Jensen's chest, then around Jensen’s neck to cup the back of his head and pull him closer. Jensen had no defenses. Jared had just basically told him he was his and at the moment, Jensen was lost in the loving adoration filling Jared’s eyes. Jared said softly, “You’ve done so much for me. I'm speechless that you care so much about me. I wanna take care of you, too. I want to do everything for you, with you, right alongside you. You’re so beautiful, Jensen. I can't get enough of wanting to be with you.”

Jared kissed him then. He was solid and strong, his mouth hot and open. He slid his tongue along Jensen's lips, asking for entrance. Jensen's mouth opened without hesitation. They took their time, exploring the new sensations and memorizing every new corner of each other’s mouths. Little did they know, a nurse had walked in to retrieve the breakfast trays. She turned an about face silently and left with a knowing grin. 'God, that's hot,' she thought to herself.

Jared gentled the kiss, knowing full well they needed to stop. His dick was certainly tingling and willing to stand up at attention, but Jared knew neither one of them needed that kind of
embarrassment right now. They kissed each a few more times, while they rubbed each other with their hands. They stayed in each other's arms for awhile, gazing into each other's eyes. Jared smiled and Jensen asked him softly, "What?" "It's nothing," Jared deflected, "Something I just thinking, that's all." Jensen touched Jared's cheek, "It's not nothing if it's in that fabulous brain of yours, what is it?" Jared giggled that special sound that Jensen loved so much, "It 'is' silly...I was just thinking how no one's ever gotten away with nicknames for me, so I 'know' you're special."

Jensen kissed the younger man multiple times because he couldn't resist that mouth. He responded, "Well, I didn't really plan them...they kinda just slipped out...so if you insist on returning the favor, what would you call me? Wait, you called me 'Jen' and I let you get away with it, so you only get to add one more..." Jared giggled again, thoroughly enjoying this light banter, "Oh, you 'LET' me get away with it? Like you could stop me, Rambo."

Jensen looked put out, "RAMBO?" Jared giggled again, "How about Chuck?" Jensen kissed him again a few more times, "Who the hell is Chuck," he asked? Jared said in disbelief, "Chuck Norris, the special forces dude with all the karate chopping." "Aaaah," Jensen understood now. Jared enjoyed watching Jensen think that over until he asked, "Wait, isn't he like five foot four?" Jared giggled again, "Well, he's a muscular little thing, though...and he does seem to get his man," Jared tried to make up for comparing Jensen to someone not quite up to his stature.

Jensen held Jared in his arms and studied him. He couldn't believe the difference today in the younger man's demeanor, his energy level and his overall participation in this conversation. And the kissing...God, Jared could kiss. Jensen was a lucky man...and best of all, Jared was getting better. 'Finally,' Jensen thought. Jensen smirked at the nicknames Jared had tried to pin on him, "Are those the only two you can think of? Rambo, a five foot nine little italian dude and Chuck, a five foot four little karate champ-slash actor?" Jared smirked, "Well, I'm sure you could kick both their asses at the same time, my cupcake."

"Goddamn right, I can kick their asses...hey...'cupcake'!" Jensen registered what Jared just called him and moved his hands around to tickle Jared's good ribs. He instantly had Jared laughing that magical sound again. Not wanting to push him too hard, he skimmed lightly over his good ribs, just enough to get that giggle to keep coming. Jared wiggled, but Jensen held him from jerking too hard and twisting his torso. The younger man was so free, so happy in this moment, Jensen didn't want anything to ruin it. Jared's hands pushed Jensen's annoying hand down from his stomach and Jensen stopped.

He used the same to hand to cup Jared's cheek and rubbed his thumb back and forth. Jensen kissed the younger man very softly, brushing the hair back off his face and assessing him closely. He noticed a slight strain in Jared's eyes, something that had just appeared and wasn't there before. "You look tired...are you hurting?" Jared shook his head, "No. Nothing hurts." Jensen studied him and saw nothing to indicate Jared was covering. "Are you tired," Jensen asked him again?

Jared unfortunately felt his superpowers of the morning waning, and there was no way he was going to lie about it to Jensen, "Yeah...a little," he admitted with a sigh. Jensen kept his hold around Jared's waist and nudged him toward to the bed. "It’s okay to be tired. It'll be good for you to rest awhile. I'm sure your slew of tests are coming soon." Jared yawned, confirming Jensen's suspicion that the younger man was definitely in need of a nap. That AG appointment was going to be grueling.

Jared went willingly, laying back while Jensen adjusted his covers over him. He yawned again then said, "It was such a fun morning." He was obviously not too happy about having to give in. Jensen brushed the hair off Jared's face again and lingered his hand there to rub the top of his head. "Yes, it was. It's so good to see you like that," Jensen said softly, smiling down at Jared. The younger man looked upset about something suddenly, "I'm not going to be this tired after getting out of here, am I?"
I don't want to be like this at your house, Jensen, I want to do things." Jensen encouraged him, "Just for awhile...it will get better. Remember, each day has been better than the last. And there's nothing wrong with rest, Jare, that's how you're getting better."

Jared said sourly, "There's something wrong with it when it interferes with what I wanna do to you." Jensen took a moment for that to sink in, then he responded, "Oh...well, there's a hell of a lot I want to do to you too." He leaned closer over Jared, "You know...some of those things don't require you to move too much, so...I think we'll be okay." Jared managed a very groggy snicker before his eyes closed. Jensen smiled, as he kissed him gently. The engineer was quickly fading into dreamland.

Jensen thought about the difference between now and an hour before. 'Jesus, I'll have to remember this at home.' Jensen didn't want any fuck ups at home. Jared was 'not' getting hurt again on his watch. The younger man had proven to be a fireball of energy when he was feeling great...and that's a surefire way of getting re-injured. Jensen would have to watch his timing, knowing Jared's patterns and how far away from a bed or couch he was when he ran out of steam.

The older man took the opportunity to update Dani and Steve with the latest. He told them Jared would be staying with him starting tonight. The couple said they would take care of stocking Jensen's kitchen with supplies. Jensen called his special forces buddies. He hadn't caught up with them in awhile, so he went over everything that had happened. Though Jensen was respectful of the guys' retirement, he knew damn well he didn't even have to ask if he needed their backup. Jensen asked them to stand by until after he knew the AG's plan. He may or may not need their help.

Jared slept for an hour and stirred just as the techs showed up for his portable scans. He rubbed his eyes and tried to wake up before they attached all the equipment. The lab tech showed up and drew blood for the last time. After that a nurse took all his vitals and listened to his chest. Once all the hospital personnel allowed Jared to lay back and relax, Jensen came over to sit by him, looking worried, "You okay?" Jared said, "I'm just glad they're all gone." The younger man yawned, which had Jensen a bit concerned that he hadn't gotten enough sleep.

Jared took a restroom trip. Jensen stood by while he took care of business and washed up. The younger man definitely wasn't as spunky as he'd been earlier. Jensen could tell this investigation was gonna take a lot out of him. Jared didn't want Jensen to think he was feeling sorry for himself because he wasn't. Most of the stress setting in now was about what would happen to the employees. His guilt was returning. What would happen to their paychecks?

When Jared sighed and looked down, Jensen sat down facing him on the bed and took his hand in his. "Jared," Jensen tried to get the kid's attention. Jared was lost in thought and didn't reply right away, so Jensen gripped his chin and gently forced him to look up, "Hey...are you alright?" Jared was caught off guard, not sure why Jensen thought to ask him that, at first. He answered, "Yeah," nodding his head with a forced smile. The older man searched Jared's eyes and saw the angst and worry. He asked, "What are you thinking about?" Jared hesitated a few seconds, looking away. Jensen moved his hand to Jared's cheek, his thumb rubbed back and forth, "Hey, what's wrong?"

Jared confessed, "I'm thinking about all the people at work...the families with medical insurance and mortgages...I know...I know what you said, I just," he shrugged, "I can’t help it." Jared was trying hard not to be an emotional wreck in front of his military special forces rock that had been here for him more in the last week than anyone had ever been in his life. "There's so much shit, Jensen," Jared shook his head sadly, "They're going to be pissed...and all those people. What happens to all the employees?"

Jared dropped his head back on the pillows, sighing heavily. He looked at Jensen again, "They have no warning. I should have at least warned them. It's my fault they're going to be shocked," "Jared,"
Jensen cut him off, "it's 'not' your fault. This is going to save many more people than it will hurt. Thousands, Jared. And the people involved have disregarded thousands of innocent people's safety. They are selfish and arrogant and they will continue to run their business that way if they are not stopped...or until people die. You’re not going to let them do that."

Jared knew Jensen was right. He still couldn’t feel good about the hardship that was going to come to the innocent people. It felt as though he was hurting them. Jared was worried for all the nice people like Blair and Lisa and Cassie...even Brad, because they were stuck in the middle. "I never wanted this," Jared said. Jensen squeezed his hand, as he repeated, "I don't want to do this...I don't want to do this to people." Jensen argued softly, "Jare, you’re having to do this because of the assholes that have been screwing everyone over. This is all on them. You’re not responsible for their selfish actions."

Jared looked worriedly at Jensen, "What about your dad? Have you talked to them?" Jensen assured Jared, "Oh, I ‘will’, but not until everything’s solid with the AG. If they’re involved, I don’t wanna tip them off. I will ‘definitely’ be paying them a visit and it’s not gonna be a pleasant one." Jared looked concerned, "Are you going to be okay, though? I mean...this is your family, Jensen."

"Hey..." Jensen held Jared's face between his hands, "Don't you worry about me. Jare, you're my main concern. I left them for a reason and I'm sure that reason hasn't changed. And I'm 'certainly' kicking the shit out of my brother. I suspect someone lower than my dad has more to do with this than he does. My dad's older now and I suspect he may have assigned a bunch of protege's to run the branches. He's never been the violent type, just full of hot air. Either way, though, the old man's still gonna lose. Even if he didn't know about all this, he's still responsible to know what the hell his dumb ass executive cabinet is up to. Most likely they were looking out for their own pensions and bonuses."

Jared said, "I'm trying not to freak, Jensen, I'm just worried there was something else I should have done first, ya know? Something I could have tried, or at least given everybody some warning."

Jensen took hold of Jared's hands, "It's okay. It's gonna be okay. I'm sure the AG will consider all that and work some kind of plan out for the employees." Jared half smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes. He asked, “How will they know what room we’re in?” Jensen explained, “Eric texted me for it while you were asleep.”

Within seconds, four men entered Jared's hospital room. Jensen got off the bed to greet them. Eric, the lead officer on Jared's accident investigation had come with three AG representatives. He shook Jensen’s hand, then moved over to Jared to shake his. Eric announced, "Gentlemen, this is Deputy Attorney General Darren Price and Investigator Chuck Cervetti and this their engineering expert witness on contract, Bart Stincelli." The men all shook hands. Jensen was more at ease to meet the engineer in the room. He relaxed a bit at knowing Bart would at least understand all the defects and oversights that Jared was going to point out.

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After they were done hunting for enough chairs in the hallway, everyone sat down and opened their own working tablets. Jared suggested he could sit at the table with them if it would work better, much to Jensen's apprehension. He knew Jared was still tired. Price was very grateful, knowing it would be much easier to exchange information. Jared slid out of bed with Jensen spotting him. He made his way to the table and sat next to the AG and engineer. The investigator sat kiddie korner and Jensen sat where he could see what Jared was doing from behind.

Before sitting down, Jensen took out Jared’s laptop and placed it on the table in front of the younger man. Jared looked up and gave him a grateful smile. Eric sat by Jensen, after closing the door, and both first responders prepared themselves for a lengthy session. Jared powered up his laptop and went to his files, then looked up and waited for the group to tell him how they wanted to proceed. The investigator led the conversation, "Jared, normally, an intake occurs with a file coming into our
office that gets reviewed by one attorney and a supervisor. They decide what our office accepts and what gets rejected. Big cases, which is what we consider yours to be, are done differently. I'm the legwork person...I do the evidence gathering, interviews, subpoena's, research, etc.”

“Darren here is the legal expert on winning the case. He knows the laws, the requirements to prove something and the requirements we need in order to win a case such as this, plus he handles the courtroom. Between all of us, we decide if the case is even worth filing. It doesn't mean it's not valid or not crap shit illegal, it's a matter of what we can prove to a jury, and win. In other words, if we can't win, we don't go for it. If we 'can' win, then we all need to be on the exact same page at all times. Does that make sense?"

Jared nodded, "Yes," appreciating the introduction and explanation of their process. It made him feel more comfortable with them before he started. Jared looked at the engineer as Chuck explained his purpose, “Bart here is our resident engineering expert that we contract when we need him. I understand you've done some expert testimony, as well?" Jared nodded, "Yes, I have," realizing these people had already looked at his background before they came here.

Chuck continued, "Good, well then you both definitely speak the same language. Bart will make sure the hot shot attorney and the slow minded cop at this table actually understand everything you show us, so that's why he's here. Make sense?" Jared smiled appreciatively, not able to stop the snicker at the investigator's comments. He realized how much more relaxed he was than when they'd first arrived, then wondered if the investigator had done it on purpose, "Yes, thank you."

"Okay, here we go," Chuck exclaimed, "Jared, how many reports do you believe you have, for starters, that possibly fit the scenario of negligence, code violations, and fraud?" Jared looked down at his reports that he had highlighted, before he looked back up and answered, "Eighteen." The attorney and investigator exchanged a look, letting out an expletive and sigh. Jared tensed up thinking he'd done something wrong, but when they looked back at him, the AG said, "Jared, it only takes one...one really solid good violation that threatens the safety of the public." He shook his head, while Jared's eyes darted back and forth between the two men. "I'm sorry," Jared said nervously, “it took me awhile to realize what they were doing...I had to move the files and then I didn't..." Jensen leaned forward with the intention to go over and offer Jared some support, knowing full well the kid had slipped into guilt mode, but before he got up, Price interrupted Jared, “Whoa, stop right there. I apologize for our reaction. It isn't often enough we get the evidence we truly 'need' and if you have that many reports, it's just upped our ante. It isn't a bad thing...it's a good thing. A very very good thing.”

Jared took comfort in that comment, but he couldn't help thinking that the AG looked like a car salesman that had just made the deal of the century that was gonna get him a sizable holiday bonus. Chuck piped in, "Okay, I've got my folders all created and ready for you. If you can open the first report and explain. Just give us the history, what we're looking at, and then if you can explain the findings you have and then show where it wasn't adhered to...that kind of thing. Remember, you have Bart here, if our eyes glaze over."

Jared said, "Okay." opened the first file from fourteen months ago and started with an explanation of the design. He showed the original designs, the investigations of the inspections, then the recommendations and findings. Jared had email copies of recommendations and receipts that they were accepted and read by the managers. Then, he showed them the final inspections that were ignored. The table of men were silent during Jared's explanation. The first case took thirty minutes to complete and Bart nodded a few times, gaining more and more respect for Jared as he went.

Bart never needed to translate, as Jared eloquently explained every detail to the attorney and investigator in non-engineer terms. The men were enthralled by Jared's enigmatic charm and
brilliance. They really didn't need much explanation from the other engineer in the room. When Jared finished the first file, the room was silent. Chuck had been typing several notes as Jared spoke and now, the AG was scanning over them. He pointed to some areas, providing comments and edits.

‘Holy fuck,’ the AG thought, as he reminded himself this was only the ‘first’ file. The brilliant witness even had schematics with arrows, showing them exactly where the weaknesses were. Jensen watched the magic occur at the table. He grinned to himself, knowing full well that Jared was blowing these highly educated professionals out of the park with his skill and innocent charm. He knew Jared's case was much bigger than they'd thought, but he also knew that Jared's safety was going to be on the investigator's mind.

After the investigator and AG finished some additional comments and conferred with Bart on a couple minor details, they closed the first copied folder and looked at Jared encouragingly. "Ready for the next," Chuck said. Jared swore they all three looked like they had just won the Nobel prize. Jensen placed a cup of water in front of Jared, knowing it had been awhile since he'd had fluids. Jared drank it without hesitation, smiling up gratefully at the older man. The older man felt his forehead and asked, "Are you alright?" Jared nodded, "Yeah," then held the cup up for more.

Jensen looked closely at him for a few seconds, deciding he was okay for one more case, but he intended on making Jared take a break at some point. The kid sipped his second cup of water as he continued with the second case. "This was the library, thirteen months ago, that I designed with the architects and went back to inspect about ten months later." Bart, Chuck and Price were glued to Jared's screen.

Jensen could see the respect they had for Jared, now. He could also see they were in awe by his talent and intelligence. Jensen shook his head grinning because he noticed Jared still had no clue. Jensen sighed as intense worry invaded his mind over Jared's safety. He looked over at Eric and the officer looked slightly bored at the subject matter, but very eager to know the AG's thoughts when the case was finally presented. He returned Jensen's look and asked, "Worried?" Jensen nodded, his face showing his seriousness over the situation. "I'm just not sure these people are as personally motivated as I am about keeping him unharmed...and alive, for that matter..." Jensen sighed. He spoke very softly so the table of experts couldn't hear him.

Eric leaned forward slightly to get his point across to Jensen, "Believe me. This isn't a light matter to them. Wait for it, Jensen. The AG knows. I've seen his work many times. He's not gonna let him walk around without a wall of protection, 'if' the kid gets to walk around, at all. He knows what he's got here." Jensen looked back at the table, feeling slightly better about the situation, now that Eric assured him. He knew the officer wouldn't lead him to believe anything if he weren't sure.

The engineers exchanged some design talk on the case, while the attorney and investigator watched them. It was like a couple of chatty scientific nerds bouncing off each other for a few minutes, equations flying back and forth, while the rest of the room stayed respectfully quiet. Jensen caught, "The portability shown in this functionality model is a lack of sustainability..." and then he was lost. "The equations here," Jared was pointing to a zoomed in diagram for Bart, who nodded his head an agreement to whatever the hell Jared was showing him. 'Jesus,' Jensen thought, as he looked at the others and noticed they looked just as amazed and lost as he was.

"So, the binomial probability is failure. It's right there. Jesus, this isn't even debatable," Bart stated and Jared nodded, "Yes, exactly." The two engineers turned back to Chuck and Darren. The investigator spoke first, "So...what did we just decide here, guys?" The AG added, "I got 'something' isn't probable and 'failure' and that's great but, what the fuck in dumb old non-engineer terms does it all mean, please?"
Jensen snickered, deciding he really liked the attorney now. Jared and Bart exchanged a look which seemed to ask, 'how do we explain this to them?' Bart took the lead while Jared finished sipping his water. As Bart simplified everything Jared had pointed out, Jensen watched his charge yawn and rub his eyes. He also rubbed his left chest area. Jensen noticed he wasn't cringing in pain, but he'd been up quite a bit and maybe it was starting to bother him.

Jensen got up when Jared looked over at him and started to rise. He took Jared's elbows and helped him out of the way of the table. "I just have to use the bathroom, sorry," Jared mumbled, as he shuffled that direction. Jensen went in with him, turning back to the group, "He has to have a spotter," offering an explanation. The men nodded in complete understanding. They continued to focus on the computers, editing and adding notes and explanations.

Jensen could tell this file was more involved, which gave him a few minutes to make sure Jared was okay. After the younger man performed his ablutions, he turned to Jensen and yawned again. The older man tilted Jared's chin up so he could look in his eyes. "You're getting tired. Are you alright and are you hurting?" Jared tiredly shook his head, "I'm fine, but..." Instead of saying more, the younger man slipped his arms around Jensen's waist and surrounded him in a hug.

He laid his head sideways on Jensen's shoulder and sighed a heavenly sound. Jensen returned the embrace by enveloping his arms completely around the kid. He kissed Jared's head and leaned his face into Jared's neck, sighing peacefully. Both men stood there drinking in each other's comfort and warmth. "This feels so good," the younger man sleepily exclaimed. Jensen held Jared tighter, "Yes...yes it does."

When Jared backed away, Jensen held his face in between his hands for a few seconds more, "I'm worried about this, Jare. You're not gonna be able to do all of these files today." Jared sighed resignedly, "I know. One more, I can do. Actually, two. The next two aren't as long, and it's getting easier with Bart to help. Can we give it a couple more? I can do it." Jared looked at Jensen with eagerness, wanting to help and not wanting to give in. Jensen smoothed Jared's hair back, "You're what's important to me. I know you 'can' do it but you're going to run yourself into the ground and it's not gonna get you released, baby. We can have them come to my house tomorrow to finish this."

Jared thought about it, then kissed Jensen. He pulled back and smiled sleepily, "I must be tired because I'm not even upset about you calling me that word." Jensen smiled, "Thought maybe that slipped by you." He kissed Jared once more very quickly, knowing they needed to open the door and get going. Jared exited the restroom and went back to sit at the table, with Jensen escorting him.

The group of experts at the table set up their next file and gave their attention to Jared, as he led them through the next case. Jared finished in ten minutes, then moved to the next. The two parking structures were basic beam placement issues. There was a lack of support for distribution of weight. A.E. had cut eight support beams from each floor, which left them with only thirty four, instead of forty two. This left a consistent failure probability, which increased as you went higher from the ground. The bottom two levels were destined to collapse under the weight of the top four floors.

Depending on things like ground erosion, plate adjustments, earthquakes, or other material failures, the length of time for failure was a matter of speculation. It was inevitable, but timing wasn't exact. They got halfway through the second structure and Jared started to pause in between his sentences and slur his words. Jensen immediately got up and squatted down in front of him. "Hey," he looked up into his face, "can you make it to bed?" He knew Jared was done. "M'sorry," Jared mumbled, as he folded his left arm over his side.

Chuck and Darren stood up quickly, rushing to flank Jared, as Jensen helped him stand. He kept his hands on Jared's upper arms, as Jared moved toward the bed. When he swayed a bit, Price and
Chuck supported him from under his armpits. Together, they helped Jensen get Jared back into bed and covered up. Jared fell fast asleep with his mouth still open. Jensen sighed. This kid was going to be exhausted for the trip home.

The men went back to the table. Jensen told them about Jared’s release and how he was staying with him. They agreed to continue the interview the next morning, hoping a night’s sleep would be helpful. Price looked to the others with concern, then motioned for everyone to move to the far side of the room. He first addressed Chuck, “So what the fuck is going on with the warrant team and their search for the dick that tried to kill our witness?”

Chuck explained, "I've given our resources to the team and they've got APB’s out with pictures. They’re watching the flights and ATM’s. No one's seen him yet. Austin PD is checking all known addresses and watching those. He hasn’t moved in six days. He could be holed up with a company person calling the shots, or he could still be around here. We have permission from that warrant to go in and search any of the A.E. branches for him, but we’re holding off because we know it will tip the company off and might push them to try for Jared again.”

Price thought it over, then announced his decision, "Go in. Search them all. Get the fucker. Nothing's touching our witness now. He's under our protection." Chuck looked at Eric and both moved away to make quiet phone calls a few feet away. Jensen secretly jumped for joy at hearing the AG's commitment to Jared's safety. On the outside, the only gesture Jensen showed was a slight grin and quiet sigh of relief. He looked at the younger man who was passed out. Jared was slightly on his right with his face tilted upward on the pillow. His mouth was still partially open, his limbs in disarray. The kid was wiped out and completely adorable.

Jensen looked back at the group just in time for the AG to ask him a question, "You're gonna have armed investigators on your property round the clock...that gonna be okay for you?" Jensen nodded, "Of course...the more the merrier." Price looked at Chuck, who had walked back to the group, "Arrange a loose watch for Jared, for now. We'll discuss tighter when the case is ready to go.” Chuck nodded. Eric piped in, "Jensen's ex-special forces, guys, nothing will phase him and he'll be a huge help." Chuck immediately looked at Jensen with renewed understanding and respect, "Well, no 'wonder' you're so damn calm. Excellent for us, you'll be a solid presence around him when all this hits."

Chuck copied Jensen's address and phone, as he and Jensen listened to Price giving more orders. He turned to Jensen, “We’re gonna need to dump the kid's cell when you leave here. If he has any important numbers, have him retrieve those today, you save them for him, then we're gonna need to keep his phone with us in case anyone's tracking him. We can reverse monitor and watch for any ping’s on it. If someone tries, we can place the phone somewhere and hope they’ll come. He can't use any debit or credit cards, either...we'll give him one from our office that he can use to buy stuff and reimburse it later."

Jensen nodded, "No problem." Price nodded, "Good. So, if he wants to talk to anyone, it's gonna have to be from your unlisted number. Does anyone know about you? Would Gurnaby or A.E. know about you?" Jensen shook his head, "Nope. I have an inevitable encounter to make with my father, but as of right now, no one in that cabinet should know 'shit' about my presence here. Jared did have office visitors and Jared was uneasy around one of them. He could have mentioned me. He never knew who I was, though, and he certainly didn't know my last name. I'm not sure if the secretaries would have mentioned me. It's quite possible they may have in innocence."

Everyone thought for a second, then Jensen added, "My family hasn't seen me in twelve years. There is just 'no' reason their minds would even go there...and they don’t know where I live." "Okay," Price said. "That's where I was leading to...if they figured 'you' out, they could figure out your
numbers, or credit histories, look for property records, things like that. If they really wanted to find our witness, they could use that trail. If you feel absolutely comfortable that they 'don't' know you're with him, then I think we can roll with that."

The room was silent for a few long minutes while all the men thought about what was to come. Price looked at Bart, "Can you continue some of the testimony if we have any issues with bringing our witness out into public?" The other engineer nodded, "Yes, certainly. But, he's terribly advanced so I need complete tactical knowledge before I can be confident in my answers. That's just more of this, like we've done today. Once we go through every file, then maybe finalize once more before hitting the stand, it will be fine. If they'll take it from me."

Price said "Well, I can try and fix that. We'll see what kind of shape he's in, as we go. Considering the fuckers tried to kill him and he's trying to recover, the judges might let me use that to bring you in as a substitute for explanation." Silence again, then Chuck asked, "Boss, what's the timeline here? So, the arrest of a large corporations' muscle man may not hit the press, but this case? Jesus Christ, what are we talking about here?"

Price rubbed his face and head with his hands, walked around and sighed heavily, looking like the weight of the world was on his shoulders. He looked over at the sleeping witness before sighing again and putting his hands on his hips. Price looked at Jensen and the others with intensity. "Remember NASA? Or Texaco oil spills or the CocaCola fiasco dirtying wells overseas?" The men nodded silently.

Price paused while the men absorbed the idea, then continued, "The press will get this once it's in the court's public record and it's going to be like a fucking Super Bowl tailgate party to them. Gentleman, we 'have' to stay organized and on the same page. Everything has to stay perfectly timed. What we have are two cases which will be going at once. One...Jared's attempted murder will be filed against Gurnaby, and even though related that's a DA case handled locally. Two...our case is astronomical, from what I've seen so far. Jesus Christ, the kid hasn't even hit the stadium and the shopping mall yet...not to mention there's an apartment building with twelve hundred units!"

"This isn't going to just dent their future progress, gentlemen, or gain them some hefty one time fine...this is going to put them out of business. When we're done proving the criminal aspect, they're going to get sued by each and every one of those clients, 'and' by the people living in their buildings...oh, 'and' by the businesses who spent money opening their shops in that mall."

'Jesus f-ing Christ,' Jensen knew it was bad but his brain hadn't gone to something even that large. His father was going to be bankrupt and completely done. Jensen rubbed his face and the back of his neck. "Fucking arrogance," was all Jensen grumbled, shaking his head. The other men looked at him and Chuck showed concern, "Jensen, this can't be easy for you. Are there any effects this will have on your life, I mean financially...I 'know' there's the family connection and it can't be a great thought to see what's coming for them."

Jensen held up his hand in a 'stopping' motion and shook his head, "Not affecting me. They cut me off when I left the nest. Even when I came back to visit between deployments and tried to connect, they never forgave me. I just never fit. And financially? If there is something they've cut me into, I have no idea and I'm not interested. I really doubt it, though. Got my own income, thanks."

Jensen paused for a minute and then added, "Thank fucking god I left. I knew they were a bunch of stupid ego driven assholes, but this?" He sighed, "I'm just so goddammed sorry for this," then Jensen looked guiltily over at his sleeping charge, "and for 'him'...that's what I'm the most sorry about right there is 'he' didn't deserve this." Jensen turned back to them, "And the employees that will lose are Jared's concern. They don't know and they're in the middle, like he is. He feels terrible for them and
he feels responsible." Chuck interjected, "This isn't his fault. Nothing is his fault, it's their executive staff that did this."

Jensen nodded, "I know...I know, fellas but...that's just him." Jensen smiled and they all sighed, now knowing even more about Jared's character. Price looked at Jensen and Chuck, then asked, "Can Chuck and I speak to you privately for a second?" As Jensen was nodding, "Sure," he noticed Eric and Bart immediately left the room without question. Price and Chuck sat down at the table, so Jensen did the same.

Price looked Jensen in the eye, "I need my witness to stay whole. He's vital. This case and the other case will be full of holes without him. He needs to be capable of being on the stand, and he needs to be believable...that means no mental breakdowns, no changing of testimony, no doubt showing in front of any defense attorneys or juries. I can help him with that...we'll have preps and walk thru's but what I'm saying is...we have to keep him as untouched as possible, Jensen. No interference, no upsets, no more attacks, no personal issues."

Jensen looked silently at the AG. He wholeheartedly agreed but had an uneasy feeling at what the AG was inferring with his explanation. Jensen's only response was, "Okay, I agree...where's this going?" Chuck took over, "Are you in a relationship with him? Something...intimate? It's good, it's just that we are trying to ascertain who his emotional support people will be...and whether it could disappear in the middle of this, or not."

Jensen sighed, not wanting to discuss their personal life, but totally understanding these two were just interested in protecting Jared. He decided they deserved to know, "We're getting very close, yes. I believe it's manifesting itself into much more, yes. Where it's going? I'm not sure yet, but we 'both' agree it's something very strong and it's going to continue. I'm sure 'hoping' it's permanent. I think he is too. Is that what you wanna know?"

The two men nodded, then Chuck spoke up, "It's something we wholeheartedly support when we have a key witness like this whose gonna be a target, but we can't be half-assed in our understanding of things that may cause him to be thrown off kilter during this. You know, when relationships are new sometimes there can be rocky times...miscommunications...anything like that...sometimes when you're still getting to know one another, there can be setbacks or ups and downs...you know what I mean. We're not unhappy about this...it's frickin fabulous that our star witness is gonna have that kind of grounding and support. We just wanted to assess how solid it was."

"Jensen, this is gonna be a fucking field day for the press. We're talking reporters coming at him, camera flashes going off, people nagging him, trying to get at him. We'll have him picked up and snuck into testimony as much as possible. It can be overwhelming to a sane person who isn't used to it. This military special ops experience is an asset because you'll understand what we're doing, but you'll be able to react to it and switch gears quickly. Most importantly, you'll be close to him and if the pressure gets to him, he'll feel safe and comfortable because you're there. He strikes us as a remarkably honest and hard working person who wants to do the right thing. If we can keep him in a cocoon for awhile and away from all the news frenzy, that's what we need to do so he's confident on the stand. Does that help with why we even opened the subject?"

Jensen wasn't so unhappy about the subject matter, now. It felt like an invasion to his and Jared's privacy, but it also felt very good to know these two were completely covering Jared's welfare from all aspects. "He's so not gonna like this. He needs it to be over." Price said, "I'm gonna try to get this through fast, Jensen. I'll do everything I can to get this through with only Jared's deposition and statements, then use Bart for translations and explanations. That kid's reports are so damn detailed, we may be able to do this without him being on the stand."
Jensen looked at them both with hardened intent, "I'm not letting anyone hurt him. That's the one thing you 'may' have bad press over because keeping me from injuring an asshole reporter or anyone 'else' that won't take no for an answer or tries to hurt him will be dealt with by 'me'. That is, if your security people don't take care of it first." The men at the table were in agreement. Price confirmed the next step, "So for today, we're going to let him sleep. He gets released, then you make it home. You'll have your hands full with his condition, we know. So, we'll come tomorrow, say 0900?"

Jensen nodded, "Yeah, that's perfect, thanks." Price continued, "We're not filing until we've completed all the files. So, this isn't public yet. Keep him inside, no matter what he says. You'll see investigators in the hospital and your transportation will be followed as you leave here and go to the house, agreed?" Jensen nodded, pleased with the arrangement. "Yep." Price acknowledged that each team of officers would have a lead that would connect with Jensen and make sure he and Jared had a direct cell number with two way talk immediate access to them before they took positions. Jensen admired how organized they sounded. He decided he most likely didn't need to call his old team to help because these people seemed to know what the hell they were doing.

Price and Chuck left their cards and cell phone numbers. Bart and Eric came back in and everyone shook hands. Price looked at Eric, "If Gurnaby gets nabbed they're gonna call me. Markell is going to be handling that case and he's gonna let me know, even if it's the middle of the night. So, at this point, the company will know that we're looking for Gurnaby, but they will only think it's from the traffic cam's and being id'd. If I'm reading them right, they'll probably claim he doesn't work for them and let him take the fall for it...he might even claim 'just' a hit and run with no pre-meditation...we have to let them roll with that for a bit, until we tie it all in. We won't offer him a guilty plea on the hit and run because we'll get attempted murder as soon as we get the other case filed. We need one to get the other and Markell and I are on the same page. Everything make sense?" Jensen and Eric nodded.

After they were gone, Jensen sat in the chair next to Jared and rested his head on the back cushion. He thought about the upcoming ordeal and how it was going to upheave Jared's life. He would be with him every step of the way, of course, but he hated that Jared had to go through any of it. Jensen realized how tired he was and allowed himself to drift off for a nap. He didn't move for two hours and when he woke up, he immediately smelled hot food. He hadn't even realized they'd all missed lunch.

Jensen stretched his arms and yawned, as he looked over to see a nurse checking Jared's vitals and temp. He noticed a food tray on the rolling cart. Jared was more on his back than he'd been earlier, but he was still facing Jensen's side of the bed. He was still out cold, even with the thermometer taped to his forehead. The older man leaned over to gently brush the hair back off of Jared's forehead and looked up at the nurse, "How's he doing?"

She nodded, "Everything looks okay. He hasn't asked for any pain meds today, was he okay earlier?" Jensen sighed, "He was exhausted all of a sudden after being up awhile so we hurried him back to bed. It looked like he might be starting to get sore, but then he didn't react when he moved so I don't think he needed anything earlier."

The nurse nodded, "Okay, he might when he wakes up, then. I brought lunch in thirty minutes ago, but he hasn't stirred. When did he fall asleep?" Jensen looked at his watch, "It's been over two hours." They both looked at Jared with concern. The nurse took the thermometer off and announced, "99 even." Jensen looked at her with slight alarm, "Isn't that going back up?" The nurse responded, "Well, it was never lower than 99, so not really. It's holding, but it isn't gone. Maybe being up so much yesterday and today is just aggravating his recovery. He's still on antibiotics so he should still be okay. I can't hear any wheezing."

Jensen rubbed his face and sighed, looking at Jared. He shared with the nurse, "We're supposed to be
taking him home today." She smiled at Jensen, "I'm sure the doctor will be here soon. He called and asked if all the test results were ready and they are. If he releases him, it will only take us about an hour to get everything processed. Oh...and there are some guys in suits outside the door? I wasn't sure if they were like FBI or if the patient is a movie star or something? Thought you might want to know."

Jensen nodded in thoughtfulness, "Oh, I forgot about those for a minute. It's okay, they're with us and we need them. They're here to help." The nurse looked relieved but a bit disappointed that she hadn't got the full scoop. Before leaving, she added, "I think we need to get him to take a few bites, at least. We're still working on his energy level and that touchy bp drops...if you can? And I'm close by if he needs pain meds, it's not problem."

Jensen thanked her and snuck a look under Jared's trays. "Mmm, not bad," he commented. There was a croissant turkey sandwich and some thick soup. Juices and pudding were off to the side. Jensen hoped he could get Jared to down some calories. It was already after two o'clock.
Chapter Ten

Jared finally woke up just before three o'clock, his untouched lunch tray removed long ago. He awoke with a dull ache in his chest and a slight headache, but the lethargy of earlier was gone. He looked over at the bare table, then to Jensen, in confusion. He couldn't remember getting back in bed. He looked adorably sleepy, but free of pain. Jensen grinned, "You okay?" Jared answered softly, "Yeah. I just don't remember what happened. I remember showing them the files and then...nothing." Jensen leaned forward, resting his elbows on the bed, "You crashed pretty hard. We got you back to bed fast and you were out." Jared was still trying to remember, "Oh...so, how much did we finish?" Jensen said, "You were on the fourth report, I think." Jared made an annoyed face, "Is that it? Man, that's not even the worst shit." Jensen added, "They were really impressed with just what they saw already. They're coming to the house in the morning to continue."

Jared perked up at Jensen's reminder of leaving, "Really? Are we still leaving?" Jensen smirked, "Still waiting for the doc, buddy, but that's the plan, yeah." He noticed the puppy dog eyes were in full force. 'Not sure how the doc could refuse those,' Jensen thought. Right on cue, the surgeon walked in. He grabbed Jared's chart and pulled out the scan results from a few hours before. After placing them up on the light board, the surgeon turned and examined Jared. "How are you feeling, any pain?"

Jared said, "Everything feels good." The doctor looked closely at Jared's head wound, "This is closing nicely. The stitches will dissolve on their own, you don't need to worry about coming back to have them removed, just be very careful with that area for awhile." The surgeon raised Jared's shirt and gently felt around the incision. Jared slightly winced when he touched specific areas. His chest was ridden with black and blue all over the left side. Yellow hues had taken over on the outer edges.

After looking closely at Jared’s palms, the surgeon said, "These have closed very nicely. Stitches are dissolving. Some of them are already gone. The staples from your surgery come out at ten days. So, you'll come back in a few days and have those removed at my office." Jared remained quiet. He was so anxious and worried over getting released he didn't want to spoil the moment by saying anything. The doctor listened to him breathe from the front and back of his chest. He went and looked over Jared's CT scan and X-rays. Jared tried to see the board as well as he could while Jensen went to look closer.

The surgeon explained, "I don't see any fluid, and everything is healing nicely...but I do hear a very
faint wheeze. It's intermittent. I'm not perfectly happy it's there, but since he's at a 99 temp and it
hasn't gone back up I think he's okay to go. We'll have him continue the antibiotics at home, but I'm
sending a breathing machine. I want a breathing treatment morning and night if you wheeze before I
see you. If you feel out of breath, you come to ER immediately."

The doctor put all the scans away and came back to face Jared. "You haven't had any pain pills
today, and I heard you wore yourself out earlier. What are you feeling like right now?" Jared knew it
was pointless to fake anything like he used to get away with before Jensen came along, "I'm not
hurting bad like before. Just sometimes. Right now, it's like a very bad bruise. Once in awhile, if I
move my chest or twist a bit it will grab and hurt. It's just not excruciating like it was before."

The doctor explained, "Okay, I'm not going to hold you hostage and you're going to get out of here,
Mr. Padalecki, but it's going to be kind of rigid for awhile, at least until we see you next week to get
the staples out. You'll have medication and restrictions. Lots of them at first. Are you feeling dizzy
when you're up?" Jared shook his head, "No." The doctor continued, "Good. Well, the concussion
will ache if you bend over and let the pressure come to your head, rising too fast, that kind of thing.
Other than that, it's graded low now and on it's way to recovery. There could be very minimal
dizziness so be careful turning around or getting up too fast. The ribs are a different matter. They will
hurt like hell if you jar them wrong. Just try and remember they're there. If you hit them wrong or
twist or try and pick something up, they will remind you quite unpleasantly. If you do too much
activity, they're gonna be painful and you will have pain medication for as much as you need to use
it. The bones are fusing very nicely but the nerve endings and the rest of the tissue are weak and we
can't have 'any' pressure or jolts to the area until they completely fuse."

Jared listened intently, as the doctor continued, "No lifting. I mean 'none' for the first two weeks.
Then we'll ease off the restrictions gradually. 'No' driving, 'No' bending over to pick things up. Not
even a dish rag, or a sock, okay?" Jared sighed, looking resignedly unhappy, as the doctor kept
going, "You'll have to take a breathing treatment asap upon any wheezing you have. Take your
antibiotics. Take the pain meds when you need them. Your energy levels will fluctuate and it will
take weeks to stop feeling like you need to rest throughout the day. Remember your body's using it's
energy to heal and takes it away from your regular routines. It's just a process."

Jared looked unhappy. He asked, "What about running? When can I run again?" Jensen's eyebrow
raised as he didn't know about this commonality. The surgeon answered, "Four weeks, you can try it
out but you'll have to see how your ribs feel and all the other bruising." Jared argued in disbelief,
"Four weeks!?!" He sighed, bouncing his head back on the pillows. Jensen thought to himself that
Jared might be harder to keep an eye on than he originally thought.

The surgeon looked at Jensen, "You're the confirmed caretaker for the first two weeks, right?"
Jensen nodded, "Yep, that's me." The doctor added, "Okay, I'm going to write out the instructions,
all the restrictions, and organize the release. You guys give it thirty minutes, alright?" Both men
nodded and thanked the doctor. Jensen stood with his arms folded over his chest and watched Jared
stew silently over the doctor's requirements. Jensen interrupted his thoughts, "So, you have any
clothes in that duffle bag?" Jared looked toward his bags. He totally forgot he needed to change.
Jensen grabbed the bag and placed it over his lap. Jared pulled out a pair of sweats, underwear, a t-
shirt and a flannel. "This is all I have, and a pair of Nike's," he held the clothes as Jensen put the bag
on the floor.

The older man pulled out the tennis shoes. Jared added, "I only brought one pair of jeans." Jensen
took the clothes from him with a soft smile, "These'll do, kiddo." He helped Jared to sit up, then
started to pull off his scrub shirt. Jensen glanced at Jared’s colorful array of bruises, but he didn’t
stare. The younger man was already folding his arms over himself with shyness. Jensen quickly
pulled the soft grey tee over Jared’s head and held it for him to push his right arm through. They took
their time with the left. "Easy," Jensen reminded, as Jared slowly pushed his arm through the sleeve. He didn’t miss the painful wince on the kid’s face from the movement. After he pulled the shirt down, Jensen asked, "Okay?" Jared nodded, "Yeah."

Jensen slid the flannel over Jared’s arms, then pulled it up over his shoulders. He thought about the close to freezing temps outside, “Do you have a jacket?” Jared thought for a second, “I think it was in the hotel room.” Jensen responded, “No problem. I’ve got a couple hoodie’s in my truck.” He watched Jared look down at his pants, then touched his cheek. When Jared looked up, he kissed him gently, “I got this, okay?” Jared nodded, but looked a little shy, as he stood up and pushed his scrub pants down part of the way. Jensen quickly knelt down, pushing them the rest of the way and holding them while Jared stepped out. 

Jensen was careful not to look at anything tempting, since Jared was already feeling vulnerable. He quickly grabbed the underwear and sweats from the bed and held them steady for Jared to step into. As he pulled the clothing up, Jared bent slightly to help, but instant excruciating pain shot from his chest. Jensen grabbed him around the waist to hold him steady, while Jared struggled for several seconds. “You okay,” Jensen asked softly? Jared nodded, “Yeah,” as he forced himself not to cry like baby. ‘Holy fuck, the doc wasn’t kidding,’ he thought. Jensen knelt once again to help Jared with his shoes. After tying the Nike’s, he stood back up to face him. Jared fixated on Jensen's beautiful sparkling green orbs. They were filled with tender affection, completely focused on him. Jared forgot all about his painful ribs. He felt Jensen’s thumbs rubbing back and forth on his lower back. His hands slid up Jensen’s arms and hooked behind his neck, then he leaned forward and kissed him.

Jensen grabbed the back of Jared’s head and pushed them closer, as heat exploded. Mouths opened wide, tongues intertwined with erotic dances, as both men groaned into each other’s mouths. They kissed with greedy hunger, the overwhelming need to taste and feel every aspect of each other. Jensen’s cock swelled fast. His hands roamed all over Jared’s back, kneading and rubbing. ‘Fuck, I have to stop,’ he panicked. He couldn't believe Jared had him this out of control...AGAIN. The younger man felt ‘so’ fucking good.

Jensen turned his mouth to the side and broke off the kiss, breathing fast and loud. He struggled to calm down. Jared was breathing hard too, but instead of stopping, he started kissing under Jensen’s jaw. Jensen clenched his hands in the back of Jared’s flannel, as Jared’s kisses became sizzling touches of wet suction, traveling down Jensen’s neck. Jensen groaned, “Mmm, fuck,” as he tilted his head more for Jared to reach. “Fuck, baby, I can’t,” he mumbled, his eyes rolled back into his head when Jared nibbled near his collar bone. Christ, Jared’s mouth was fucking talented.

"Jared," Jensen panted, badly wanting to throw the sexy engineer down and fuck him through the tile. “Jared stop,” he ordered, then groaned loudly before grabbing the kid’s head and pulling him off. “Jesusfuckingchrist, stop,” he ordered again, panting, while holding Jared still and struggling for air. “I’m gonna fucking cum in my pants if you don’t stop, and that’s ‘not’ how I want us to enjoy our first time.” Jensen quickly kissed him twice to ease the rejection. He glanced at the dilated pupils and felt his dick twitch. Jensen’s voice dropped to a low gravelly sex laden tone, “I want wanna fucking taste you everywhere, swallow you whole, Jensen...I want you to fuck me....I want everything with you.”

Jensen almost blew his load right there in his pants. "Jesus, I'm with you...I'm so fucking with you, buddy, but you're hurt...and right now, you have to stop or I'm gonna lose it." Jared gave Jensen the nastiest knowing look Jensen had ever seen. He had no idea Jared was capable of such a look. The younger man followed it up with, “I could suck it down right now and no one would know.” Jensen leaned his head back and closed his eyes, "God." He looked back at Jared with an admonishing sigh, then reached down and adjusted himself with one hand, “You’re trying to kill me, is that it? There’s
fucking security outside the door and I’m already having trouble not fucking you on that hospital
bed, guy.”

Jared raised an eyebrow. He grinned knowingly, leaned forward and kissed Jensen once more, slow
and tender. When they pulled back, Jared’s thumbs rubbed back and forth on Jensen’s cheek.
Leaving the more vigorous ventures at bay for now, they kissed several more minutes, enjoying
loving caresses and gentle heat. Jensen finally backed away and sighed. He wasn’t quite sure he was
ever going to be able to master his expertly trained self control again around Jared. He looked down
and blew out an exhale through pursed lips with his hand on his hips. Jared smiled with full blown
diamond wattage, loving that Jensen was feeling the same overwhelming attraction. He rubbed his
hands up and down Jensen’s arms, knowing damn well he was falling deeply for this man, even
though he couldn’t voice it. Jared glanced at the door, just realizing what Jensen said, then looked to
the older man with innocent confusion, “Security?”

Jensen kissed him again, still processing the gorgeous smile he’d been privy to, “Yes, the AG
assigned them to protect you. They'll be following us to the house, then hang around until the case is
over. You aren't to go anywhere without security for awhile.” Jared didn’t look too happy about that,
"Oh...seriously?" Jensen knelt down to zip up the duffle bag. By the time he stood up again, he
could see Jared still hadn't grasped the full concept of the danger he could be in. He was glad the AG
had. He moved closer, slipping his hands around Jared again, "I know it's uncomfortable...and it
might feel invasive...but believe me, your safety isn't something that's debatable. It'll be okay. And I'll
be keeping you safe 'inside' the house.”

Jensen watched the wheels turn for a few seconds, then he asked, "Are you alright?" Jared nodded,
"Yeah...this is just so surreal, ya know? I had no idea this shit really happened, it's like a movie or a
dream, or something. It's way out of my comfort zone, I guess.” Jared looked down and sighed, "It
still sucks that I can’t warn them all." Jensen rested his face on the top of Jared's. He kissed him,
breathing in the scent of Jared's hospital shampoo, "I know. That's who you are. But you're saving
so many people and I'm not letting you do this alone. It'll be okay.”

Jared melted into Jensen’s arms. He laid his head sideways on Jensen's shoulder for a few minutes of
silent comfort. Soon, they heard approaching footsteps and broke apart as a cheery nurse entered,
"Hello gentlemen! I have papers here and there is a wheelchair on the way. Are you ready to go over
the release instructions for home?” Jared said, "God yes," which made Jensen smile. The nurse laid
out several pieces of paper on the bed and went over each order. All the medication details and
movement restrictions, instructions on the follow up appointment for staple removal and how to
shower were all gone over. One final paper was for Jensen to sign, as Jared's promissory caretaker
for the next two weeks. Jared's head was spinning. There was so much to remember. He felt great. It
was annoying to think he needed all of this interference at getting on with his life. He thought it was
overkill, but he played along just to get the hell out of there.

Jensen knew exactly what Jared's thoughts were. Funny how he could read the younger man so well
after this short of time. He smiled internally at Jared's balk when the nurse went over the lack of any
effort the first two weeks. He knew he would have his work cut out for him keeping Jared from
getting re-injured. After everything was signed, the nurse handed Jared his pain pills, some higher
capacity Motrin's, and the antibiotics. She lifted the laptop and duffle bag, then opened a nearby
closet and brought out a blue plastic bag. "These were your clothes and shoes when you were
brought in,” she announced. Jared reached for them, but Jensen reached past him and took the bag
first. He looked at Jared with gentle compassion in his eyes, “I don’t think you’ll want these back,
kiddo. You were kind of a mess that day.” Jared looked at him in confusion, so Jensen explained,
"There’s blood all over them. It won’t come out, so let's get you some new clothes, okay?” Jared
now understood, “Oh...yeah okay, I guess so.” He hadn't even realized.
Jensen handed the nurse back the bag, who put them into the hazardous bin. He was happy Jared dropped the subject. It wouldn’t be a good idea for Jared to see all that and have some kind of ugly flashback. The nurse announced, "The wheelchair will be here in a few minutes, then we'll get you downstairs and you're free." After she left, Jared turned to Jensen, "Do I really need a wheelchair?" Jensen stepped closer, "It's a long way to the car, so yes." Jared sighed, frustrated, so Jensen moved the hair out of his eyes and tucked it behind his ear, "Hey...this is gonna take a few baby steps.” Jared grumbled, “I know I just...I’m feeling good right now.” Jensen argued softly, “That’s good, but you just woke from a three hour nap. Just bare with me, okay? If you pass out, I have to carry your glorious ass.” Jared looked at him in surprise, then smirked as he looked away, "Well, it's not all that glorious.” Jensen snorted, "Beg to differ, it is indeed goddamn glorious." Jared was sorry he started the commentary, because he felt his notorious blush come over him, as he looked down with a shy smirk. Jensen grinned, but decided to change the subject, “I almost forgot...you need to transfer your important contacts to my phone. The AG wants to take your phone before we leave here.”

When Jared asked confused, “What?” Jensen said, “It’s for your safety.” At Jared’s continued look, Jensen explained, "The people who sent Gurnaby to run you down know your number and they can trace any movement and calls. They can track you. We need to dump your cell with the AG’s people.” Jared bitched, "What a fucking pain in the ass." Jensen tried to soothe him, “I know, but you can transfer contacts to mine, for now. You can use mine to make calls and you won’t lose anybody. A.E. doesn’t have my number.”

Jared sighed in irritation, “I can’t believe this,” as he scrolled through his contacts and moved the most pertinent ones. They completed the transfers just as the wheelchair attendant entered the room. Jared’s security team followed. Jensen shook their hands first, Jared second, looking a bit nervous. This was new to him, he felt out of place. He couldn’t help it. They looked like something out of Criminal Minds with their investigator badges on their belts and the bulge of a weapon showing through their casual jackets. It was hard to believe they were here because of 'him'.

Jensen and the investigators exchanged cell numbers, then they explained they would be walking on either side of Jared at all times. They would stand with Jared while Jensen retrieved his truck downstairs. The men would be following Jensen's truck all the way to his house. There was already a team at Jensen’s house waiting. They would be the overnight team. These two would be leaving when Jared was secure with the night team. Jensen nodded, appreciative of their process. He looked at Jared and realized the younger man was still having a hard time with the enormity of what was happening. He asked for a moment of privacy, so the investigators left the room.

Jensen placed his hands on Jared’s shoulders and squeezed, as he looked into his eyes. He hated the fear he saw in them. He wanted nothing more than the remove every hurt and painful memory from this threat and hide him away from of everything. "It's gonna be okay," he assured him. Jared nodded, trying not to panic. He attempted a fake sideways smile. Jensen thought it was a valiant attempt. "Hey," he reminded him, “you’re surrounded by help now. This is temporary...and it's important." Jared knew Jensen was trying to relax him and he hated that he couldn't go there, "I'm sorry, I...I just...I've never had someone want to kill me before..."

Jensen said, "Jare, you’ve gotta stop apologizing." Jared couldn't help it. He felt terrible at all of these people going through all of this trouble...and for 'him'...it was just overwhelming. Jensen could see guilt on the kid's face. "Jare, you’re presenting one of the most important cases of a lifetime to reach the corporate responsibility world. These assholes have millions invested in their hidden nest eggs and pensions for themselves. I guarantee you they are screwing the employees, too, even stealing from their incentives or retirements somehow. The AG knows how important it is for the criminals in this not to lose. He’s not about to let them get at his star witness. Without you, these assholes would probably be able to pay a few loose ends off and move on. The AG is doing exactly what he should be doing. He’s keeping you safe. And beyond that, I’m doing that too. You’re gonna feel smothered,
I get it, but it’s for a damn good reason.”

Jensen let that sink in while Jared quietly tried to absorb the enormity of what he was in the middle of. He finally said softly, "I had no idea." Jensen touched his cheek, “I know.” He felt so much compassion for what a kind soul like Jared's was going through, “Remember please...cooperate. I know your independent spirit isn't comfortable with all this, but please for right now, stay with me or them. No jumping out in the open alone, got it?” Jared nodded. The worried concentration on his face told Jensen he was finally starting to believe this was all real.

Fifteen minutes later, Jared sat in the wheelchair, sandwiched between his security. Jensen brought his truck around, then left it running as he jumped out to help Jared get inside. Jared’s legs worked fine, but the act of pushing off with his arms was a 'no no'. Jensen helped him stand, then helped him climb into the truck, while the security team put his bags in the back seat. Jensen felt the tightening in his ribs when he tried to use his torso. He gladly let Jensen lift some of his weight until he was seated inside. He pulled his legs in and scooted on his ass until he was finally situated. He was out of breath from the simple move.

Jensen reached over him and buckled his seatbelt. He touched Jared on the cheek, then shut the passenger door. Jared noticed a car was parked in front of them. A man got out and walked back to meet one of the security crew. Jared saw his cell phone handed to the newcomer, then the man took off. Jensen surprised him when he touched him on the knee. He searched Jared's eyes for a few seconds, apparently okay with what he saw, because he turned the heater on and buckled his own seatbelt. After waiting a moment for the security team to be in position behind them, Jensen turned to assess his passenger again. He reached behind Jared’s seat and pulled out a thick hoodie sweatshirt. After he unzipped it, he told Jared, “Let’s put this on, okay?” Jensen reached over him and buckled his seatbelt. He touched Jared on the cheek, then shut the passenger door. Jared noticed a car was parked in front of them. A man got out and walked back to meet one of the security crew. Jared saw his cell phone handed to the newcomer, then the man took off. Jensen surprised him when he touched him on the knee. He searched Jared’s eyes for a few seconds, apparently okay with what he saw, because he turned the heater on and buckled his own seatbelt. After waiting a moment for the security team to be in position behind them, Jensen turned to assess his passenger again. He reached behind Jared’s seat and pulled out a thick hoodie sweatshirt. After he unzipped it, he told Jared, “Let’s put this on, okay?” Jared didn’t argue. It was cold as hell outside. After he unbuckled his seatbelt, Jensen gently pulled the hoodie on, helping Jared’s left arm through the sleeve. He zipped the jacket up to Jared’s chin and smiled. Jared smiled softly, “Thank you.” Jensen touched him on the cheek, “No problem, are you okay?” Jensen told him, “It’s twenty five to thirty minutes from here. It’s okay if you fall asleep.”

He thought the kid looked tired, but as he hooked Jared’s seatbelt back together, the younger man explained, “It’s so good to be out. I don’t think I can sleep.” Jared looked out the window. He felt so peaceful and comforted with Jensen, it was hard to remember his life was actually in danger and that there was a frickin’ security team following them. Jensen buckled himself back in. He stared at his charge for a moment, enjoying the hell out of the light in Jared’s eyes. He knew Jared would probably crash by the time they got to the house, but for now that sparkle was pretty irresistible.

Jensen put the truck in gear and pulled out of the parking lot. He headed for the interstate, keeping his speed pretty slow in order to avoid any sudden stops that would aggravate Jared’s fragile chest injury. Jared remained silent, enjoying the hell out of being free. There were no busy carts rolling by, no pitter patter of nurse’s rubber shoes. He wouldn't miss the needle sticks, nor the antiseptic smell. Overall, he realized that having someone try to kill him hadn’t ended too badly. At this point, he'd landed right in the lap of a gorgeous loving man who he could quite possibly be in love with. As soon as Jared could get his heart to drop that protective wall around being hurt and betrayed again, he could freely admit he was wholeheartedly in love with the man. Jared sighed, aggravated at his own inabilities. It dampened his elated mood, for sure, but he knew it was his own past fighting against him. He would need to keep working on this because he was 'not' letting Jensen go, that's for sure.

Jared felt a strong warm hand cover his and interlace his fingers. He glanced over and smiled. Jensen squeezed his hand, his eyes searching Jared’s like he knew something troublesome had been on his mind. When Jared smiled softly again and looked out the windows, Jensen put the truck in gear and pulled away from the curb. Jared yawned while watching all the beautiful fall colors go by. He was
feeling more and more relaxed, the steady vibration of the truck, the warmth of the heater, and the cocoon of Jensen’s jacket lulling him to sleep. He jerked awake twice, before finally succumbing with his head dropped on the back of the seat.

Jensen glanced over and smiled. It made him happy to know Jared could relax enough to let go. He flicked his gaze up to the rearview mirror and saw the investigators right on their tail. The traffic was light so Jensen pulled into his driveway earlier than expected. Jared was still asleep, looking innocent and relaxed when Jensen looked over at him. He got out of the truck and walked around to unload Jared’s bags first from the back seat. He handed them to the awaiting security team, then opened Jared’s door. After Jensen unhitched the sleeping man’s seatbelt, he gently touched Jared on the shoulder to wake him, just as one of the security men decided to be helpful and shut the driver’s side door.

The loud slam of the door startled Jared awake. He grabbed the dash with a white knuckled grip in full blown panic mode. Jensen leaned in front of him fast, “Hey...Jared hey, you’re okay.” He grabbed the younger man’s cheeks, “Jare, it’s me, buddy, you’re safe. You’re right here with me, it’s okay.” Jensen held Jared’s face, as the terror flooding Jared’s eyes began to recede. “That’s it, you’re safe, it’s okay,” Jensen soothed, while he gently smoothed Jared’s hair back. “S’sorry,” Jared stammered, “m’sorry,” as he tried desperately to calm down. ‘Christ, it was so real,’ he thought. Jensen spoke softly, “There’s nothing to be sorry for. This is normal. You actually did really well for your first time in a car since the accident.” Jared didn’t look reassured that he wasn’t a basket case, as he forced himself to let go of the dash. Jensen rubbed his arms, “Right now your mind’s a little leery of being in a vehicle. This is perfectly normal after a traumatic incident. It’ll get better, buddy, I promise.” Jared nodded, finally feeling grounded again. Jensen gave him a few more seconds before he asked, “You okay now?” Jared nodded again, then looked out the window, “Are we home?”

Jensen loved the fact that Jared called his place ‘home’ but he tried not to read into it more than he should. 'Maybe when this is over, that will be so,' the older man thought to himself. "Yes, we are. You ready to go in?" After Jared nodded, Jensen backed up and allowed the man to move his legs toward the door. As Jared slid off the seat, Jensen caught him by the elbows to steady him. He took a snug grip around Jared’s waist, holding one arm over his shoulders as they walked from the truck to the house. If the kid took a nose dive, he could catch him quite efficiently.

Jared was completely distracted by the beauty of Jensen’s property. He loved all the trees. He smelled the fresh pine and cedar in the air, while he marveled at the rustic feel of the wood siding. Jensen kept him moving forward, knowing his charge wasn’t even focused on his own welfare. Jared could see other houses, but they were at least a few acres away. It was so peaceful and private. "This is beautiful, Jensen,” his eyes searched everywhere at once.

A strong breeze kicked up and Jared shivered. The six o'clock evening chill wasn’t thwarted by his thin layers of clothing. Jensen felt it and encouraged him to pick up speed, "I'm glad you like it, buddy. We need to get you inside, okay?" Jared’s step slowed each time he saw something new in the beautiful landscape. Jensen kept pushing him until they finally reached the door. He couldn't help but smile at Jared’s wondrous distracted look. The heavy wooden front door gave the feel of an old fashioned cabin. Jared loved it. They stepped inside to a large common room with hard wood floors and a beautiful large open fireplace. Jensen had throw rugs all over that were a contrast between Native American patterns and sheepskin. Everything was like a scene from Bonanza. It was so masculine, yet so warm and welcoming. 'So very Jensen,' Jared realized.

The house wasn't considered large, it was actually a standard three bedroom, two bath...the center island kitchen was really nice and Jensen could see the sliding back door leading out into Jensen’s property. "This is so incredible," Jared told him. Jensen smiled, pleased that Jared loved his home, "I want you to be comfortable here...I'm glad you like it." Jared looked at Jensen, "I'm always
comfortable with you, Jensen, but this..." Jared looked around again, "This is definitely icing on the cake. Did you do all this?" Jensen kept Jared moving toward the couch, then helped him sit down. He started working on a fire, as he answered, "Well, not really...I mean I bought some stuff, collected some old keepsakes, but the main house was already built. I'm working on enlarging the master bedroom and adding a game room. I like to work on it, so I figured I'd buy it and change things as I go. I grabbed it, mainly for the property. I didn't need a big house. This was enough for me."

The security team put Jared's bags on the table, then came over and introduced themselves to Jared, shook his hand, then turned to Jensen and did the same. The two men explained they would be in the background as much as possible. They would be keeping an eye on the perimeter, so would be outside most of the time. They would only come inside if absolutely necessary. Jensen noticed they seemed familiar with the layout of the inside of the house, so he assumed they'd looked around before he arrived with Jared. He offered, "You're welcome to use the kitchen and the restroom, fellas, just don't startle my ass in the middle of the night."

The investigator known as Dean chuckled, "We've been briefed on your Black Ops background. We won't be surprising someone with your skills." Jensen smiled as they continued, "But in reality, we aren't going to disturb you for things like that. We're self-sufficient outside." He handed Jensen a flip phone, "You text or call us any time for absolutely any concerns and we'll do the same. We're only going to check windows and doors from the outside, unless you see a reason for us to come inside and check them. If you and Mr. Padalecki leave, then we'll be checking inside before he returns. If anything come's up in or out, we'll be texting or calling you. You can do the same. The vibrate's on just for that reason."

Jensen was satisfied with the coverage. He liked these guys. They had a competent feel. Jared was quiet, however. Jensen knew he was still coming to grips with the fact that they were here to prevent any threats to his safety. After the team left, Jensen sat on the coffee table, facing him. He studied the worried eyes for a moment, "You with me?" Jared nodded, trying to offer a sideways smile but failing. Jensen felt his forehead for fever. Jared was slightly warm, but not hot. Jensen noticed how pale Jared looked, "I seem to recall you didn't get any lunch...it's dinner time. Are you hungry?"

Jared hadn't been thinking of food, but damn he just realized Jensen was right, "Yeah, I'm starving, actually." Jensen smiled but was worried about Jared going so many hours without food. He gently laid his two fingers against the younger man's wrist and took his pulse. Jared waited silently. He looked at Jensen in wonder, still marveling at the fact that Jensen said he was falling in love with him. Jared had been so alone since his parents died. He temporarily felt happiness when he was with Chris, but soon that had been destroyed and then it had been so many years. Now, he was suddenly the object of someone's undivided devotion. It was overwhelming and was certainly going to take awhile to get used to.

Jared realized Jensen had been talking to him. "Huh?" When he suddenly came back to earth, Jensen smiled but his eyes showed deep concern, "You zoned out on me for a second. You feeling okay?" Jared nodded, "Yeah...sorry." Jensen continued to watch him, "What's wrong?" Jared shook his head, "Nothing...really, nothing...it's just overwhelming." Jensen waited patiently for Jared to clarify that. "I mean being here...with you. Not in a bad way. It's good...it's better than good. I'm...I'm..." Jared looked off, reaching for an explanation and not really finding a perfect one. "I guess I was just...dying, then I'm here and...there's security people and...you're a little 'too' good. It's a lot to process," Jared smiled, looking down. Jensen leaned forward and kissed the top of Jared's head, "Just relax, okay? Try not worry. You're safe here. I'm gonna go whip us up some dinner, okay?"

Jared looked up, seeming much more at ease. Jensen felt better about leaving him for a few minutes. He kissed him on the lips, then asked, "Will you promise you're gonna stay put and not try to get up before I get back?" Jared nodded, "Yeah. I'll stay here." Jensen smirked, "Okay, it's gonna take me
about fifteen minutes." He stood up to leave, then leaned over and met Jared’s eyes again, “I mean it. I don't want to come back over here and find you passed out because you thought you were gonna move the furniture or go out and chop firewood, okay?” Jared sighed and rolled his eyes. Jensen giggled, then headed for the kitchen. Jared looked around more at Jensen’s decor. There were framed pictures of soldiers he guessed were buddies from Jensen’s team. There were large paintings of wolves and horses. Jensen's coffee table seemed to be hand carved from a redwood tree. There were some very old discolored books on the table, which immediately sparked Jared’s interest. He reached for them before he thought better of it. "Ah," Jared cried out, grabbed at his chest, then exhaled several painful sighs as his ribs screamed at him for trying such a terrible thing.

Jared turned to Jensen, who was standing by the kitchen island, his hand on his shoulder. "Better?" he asked, with concern in his eyes. Jared nodded, then looked bewildered as Jensen held up one of the books for him. He took it, looking confused. Jensen pointed over the kid’s shoulder, for Jared to look behind him, "I can see you from the kitchen." Jared looked slightly ashamed and embarrassed when he was reminded the living room and kitchen were only separated by the center island, “I just...forgot.” Jensen brushed his hair back, gently, "I know it's hard to get used to. You okay?" Jared nodded, "Yeah," rubbing his sore chest for a second longer. He looked up at Jensen with adorable puppy dog eyes, "Thank you." Jensen felt his weakness for this man raise up another notch, if that were even possible. He kissed Jared once more, "Just be careful, okay?" Jared nodded, "kay."

Jensen went back to finish dinner. Within a few minutes, he brought trays over to the couch. The trays were perfect to go over someone’s lap, with foot high fold out legs. The height was perfect to keep Jared from having to lean forward. Jared dug in without hesitation. Jensen had made them fresh salads, reheated some tortilla soup and tortillas for dipping. What Jensen called a simple meal tasted like five star quality to Jared. Not only had he been stuck with hospital food, but Jared had rarely eaten home cooked meals even before that. Jared was pleasantly stuffed, having eaten almost everything on his tray. After thanking Jensen way too much for the older man’s liking, then politely refusing to eat anymore, Jared stared into the fire. He felt he could just stay here for the rest of his days and be quite content. Jensen rested his head on his hand, his elbow bent on the back of the couch, pleasantly entertained by watching the brilliant engineer. He wondered if Jared felt pressured at being here, especially with things moving so fast. He wanted tonight to be comfortable and relaxed, for Jared to forget about all the crap that was coming when the AG filed the case.

Jensen quietly got up to stoke the fire and add more wood. Jared’s eyes landed on the muscles busting through Jensen’s white t-shirt as he moved. The older man had removed his flannel shirt earlier, leaving Jared with a very appealing view of Jensen's incredible muscle tone and broad shoulders. 'Jesus, he's sexy,' Jared thought, 'if I weren’t melted into this couch I could probably do something about it.' His gaze dropped lower as Jensen bent over to pick up more wood, 'And he said 'my' ass was glorious. Holy fuck,' Jared glanced up quickly as Jensen turned around and looked at him. Feeling like he'd been caught, he quickly turned on what he thought was an innocent look of 'who me'. Jensen seemed to buy it. He smiled warmly, then turned back to finish his work on the fire. He closed the screen, then turned to gather up all the dirty dishes and take them back to the kitchen. He took a few moments to rinse things and wipe off counters, load the dish washer and grab some water bottles before he returned.

Jensen put the water bottles on the table, then sat next to Jared. He bent a knee and rested his elbow on the back of the couch, so he was facing Jared. The kid seemed mesmerized by the fire, still looking the other way. Jensen couldn’t stop watching him. He wondered if Jared was going to fall asleep like this. He looked at his watch and realized antibiotics were due in an hour. He’d have to give them to him early, or keep Jared awake until then. Jensen knew the dreaded breathing treatment was in Jared’s duffle bag, but he decided that could be unpacked in the morning. He didn’t want anything ruining tonight. Jensen's phone vibrated in his pocket. He looked at the caller id and noticed
it was Dani and Steve. "Oh, cool," he exclaimed, then grinned as Jared turned his head to look at him. Jared looked adorably sleepy, but he tracked Jensen, as he answered the phone. Jensen couldn't resist gently brushing the hair off Jared's face and rubbing the top of his head. Jared smiled bonelessly, as Jensen talked with his friends. He only caught a few words here and there. The heat from the fire was saturating his whole body, and Jensen's comfortable couch felt like a bed of cotton pillows. He didn't feel like he could ever move, nor did he want to.

Jensen thought it was definitely cute how relaxed Jared had become. The younger man could barely keep his eyes open. Jensen ended his call and continued to play with Jared’s hair, easing his hand to a bare touch. He could see Jared was falling asleep, so he decided to let him rest. He would wake him up at eight and give him the meds, but for now, he would let him sleep. Jensen had explained the situation to Dani and Steve. They were fully supportive and vowed to protect the younger man from any crappy press that might show up asking about him. They would definitely keep Jensen's identity and location a secret. Jensen counted his blessings for such good friends, then decided to call his special ops buddies. After a three way conversation, Jensen felt very confident that he could call them both to respond immediately for help. So far, Jensen was impressed with the professionalism and capabilities of the AG investigators, but he knew if things escalated beyond their capabilities, he could call in the best trained backup anyone could ask for. Jensen watched Jared sleep for awhile, then decided he better check on the guest bedroom to make sure he had sweats and shirts for Jared to wear.

As Jensen pulled out some extras and piled them on the chair in the guest room, he thought over the sleeping arrangement. The distance between his bedroom, this one, and the guest bathroom wasn’t that conducive for keeping a close eye on someone in Jared’s condition. It would certainly be easier if Jared stayed in Jensen’s bedroom but to suggest that right now seemed way too pushy. Jensen couldn’t put that kind of pressure on him. The problem was Jared couldn't even bend over to dress himself yet, nor could he shower or use the bathroom without supervision. No matter where Jared slept, Jensen was gonna have to be close by. He certainly wasn’t leaving the injured man alone, that’s for sure. Jensen returned to the living room. He smiled at the cuteness of Jared’s lax slightly opened mouth. The kid would be embarrassed if he knew Jensen saw him like this, especially with the tiny trickle of drool coming from the corner of his mouth. God, the kid was beautiful. Jensen thought over how fast Jared had reached for that book out of impulse. The young genius could hurt himself very quickly, if Jensen didn’t stay on his toes. He watched him for a few seconds, realizing if Jared slept out here, he would have to, also.

Jensen went to the kitchen to investigate what he might be able to cook for Jared in the morning. There were fresh strawberries and whipped cream so he decided to make Jared the waffles of a lifetime. Jensen had perfected a rich fantastic recipe. It would include a load of much needed calories for the recovering patient. Jensen turned on the television very low and played back a recording of a sitcom while Jared slept. When he checked his watch, he realized it was time to wake Jared and give him his antibiotics. The younger man stirred when Jensen gently nudged his shoulder and called his name. He told him softly, "I'm sorry, it's time for your antibiotics, okay?" Jared nodded sluggishly, "Okay," then sat up straighter with Jensen's help. He yawned while he rubbed his eyes. Jensen still couldn't get over the 'cuteness' of it all. He handed Jared his pill with an open water bottle. Jared took the pill, drank half the water bottle, then yawned again before looking up at Jensen, "Is it morning?" Jensen brushed the hair out of Jared's eyes and rubbed his head, "It's only been an hour since you fell asleep, buddy. You fell asleep after dinner. You feeling okay?" Jared felt incredible, actually, compared to the last week, "Yeah, feeling great actually." Jensen smiled, "Good. Are you hungry anymore? You feel like something else, like a piece of pie... some ice cream?"

Jared thought for a second, "Nah, not really. Jensen?" He looked at Jensen with such open innocence, the older man was reminded how Jared shared his soul through his eyes when he had his guard down. Jared said, "Thank you. I mean...you've done so much for me. I love being here.
Maybe too much. It just never stops. I keep thinking it will and...” Jared looked down shyly, seeming at a loss for words. Jensen knelt down in front of him. He braced his weight on his arms, his hands on either side of Jared. He looked into the younger man’s eyes as he spoke, “Jared, this is no hardship for me. I love doing things for you. And I love taking care of you. I am thrilled that you came here and I’m happy you feel comfortable here. I want you to tell me if anything doesn’t feel right, okay?” Jared smiled, but still looked a bit worried. Jensen asked him, "Jare, answer me this...if you can. Why would you think you being here...my taking care of you and doing things for you...why would you think it would stop? Why would you say that?”

Jensen felt immediately regretful because the look in Jared’s eyes told him he’d opened a deep wound. This wasn’t his intention. Jared’s sweet relaxed mood took a dive, the open innocence putting up instant shields of armor. ‘Fuck,’ Jensen watched the whole thing happen. Jensen’s years of psychological training tended to jump to the surface. Before he knew it, he was assessing people when he needed to wait to be invited. Jared’s eyes began to tear up but he controlled it, his walls raised back up to spectacular heights. Jensen chastised himself mentally, ‘Nice job, expert, you’ve lost him for the moment.’ "I’m sorry,” he told Jared, “I shouldn’t have pushed you to explain that. You’ve shared so much of yourself with me, already. I have no business being so nosey. It’s a habit of mine to know everything. Especially with the way I’m feeling about you...about this. I want to help you with anything that’s hurting you and I pushed.”

Jared’s eyes were guarded. Jensen hated to see it, but at least Jared was still listening. He finally asked Jensen, “Help...me?” Jensen sighed, rubbing his hand over his face, “It’s okay. It’s not what I meant. I shouldn’t have pushed.” Jared offered nothing, so Jensen continued, “I hope you’ll give me everything some day. When you trust that I’m not going to disappear, I want it all. I’m right here and I’m not leaving.” Jensen stood, kissed Jared on the forehead, then went to fiddle around with the fire. Jared stayed silent. He hadn't experienced this before. Someone caring this deeply for him was threatening his comfort zone. His walls had automatically responded when he felt things going too well. Jared was open and relaxed for the first time in a long time. Being with Jensen felt like ‘home’...and ‘home’ was something Jared hadn’t experienced in over twenty years. That kind of openness had triggered concrete pillars to block his true feelings immediately. He was ashamed over it...but he felt safer at the same time. Jared knew it wasn’t a healthy way to become involved with someone. Jensen deserved better. Jensen looked over and studied Jared’s face intently. When he finished the fire, he sat down on the coffee table and faced him. He watched Jared’s face for a few seconds before he spoke, "Baby, I am NOT going anywhere...you got that, right?” Jared nodded, still feeling like he was a fucked up individual who needed shock therapy. Jensen was mentally cursing his stupidity at jumping forward with Jared’s emotions tonight. The kid didn't need this.

Jared suddenly looked like he wanted to sit up, effectively ending the conversation. Jensen asked, “Bathroom?” Jared answered, “Yeah,” so Jensen helped him stand. He held him loosely under the arm while they walked to the hallway. He guided Jared to the guest bathroom and waited out in the hallway while he performed his ablutions. Jared found a hilarious large bellied cowboy statue in the corner of the bathroom that held toilet paper. When he pushed the belly button, the statue's recording bellowed, "Yippee kiyay, partner, you found the waterhole!” After giggling out loud, Jared pushed the button again and was thoroughly entertained by the statue's next recording, "Cowboys with smaller guns should stand closer.” Jared snickered, then remembered Jensen was standing on the other side of the door. He quickly brushed his teeth and washed his face. After he dried his face and hands, he came out of the bathroom, avoiding Jensen’s eyes. ”Nice statue,” Jared offered with a smirk, as Jensen took his arm. The older man grumbled, “My idiot buddies gave it to me as a housewarming gift.” Jared nodded, “I see. I can't wait to try the rest of the recordings and see what awaits.” Jensen rolled his eyes, “Oh yes, there are thirteen different sayings for your enjoyment.” He smirked to himself, glad Jared’s mood had lifted. "Do you wanna see the rest of the house?” Jared perked up, "Yeah, sure. I'd love to."
Jensen walked Jared down the hall. He showed him the master bedroom, bathroom and the huge tiled shower that he just finished. Jensen was quite proud of the tiled bench, grip bars, and the 'real' shower head with strong jets. There was no weak pansy pressure. Jared definitely had a few ideas for that shower but he refrained from voicing his thoughts at the moment. Jesus, the possibilities were going straight to his groin. Jensen explained his plans to extend the master bedroom. He showed Jared where he would knock out the wall and add square footage. He took Jared to the slider door and turned on the outside light for him, "So, there's a bunch of stuff I want to do out there, but it's too cold to go out right now." Jared looked out at the small patio, trying to imagine where Jensen was going with it. He couldn't see very far, "Is it really too cold to go out for a minute and just look?" Jensen argued, "Hell yes. It freezes at night this time of year. It's almost November and our winters aren't too kind to people not used to them. It's in the high thirties right now, and you aren't getting sicker on 'my' watch. We'll go out tomorrow. During the daylight, I'll be able to show you all of it. There's a ton of room. I mainly want a huge deck right here and definitely a hot tub. I barbecue a lot so it's kind of a priority to me to make it really nice out there. More important to me than the inside, really. There's a wall of cedar, pine and oak all around each fence line so it's very private. The neighbors are cool, but having the privacy is pretty much what sold this place for me."

Jared looked at Jensen with sparked interest, "I can't wait to see it, Jensen, I bet it's beautiful." The men moved to the spare bedrooms. One had a single bed and a treadmill, a Bowflex and some barbells laying on the floor. Jared's room had a queen bed with actual furniture in it. "I set this one up for you. It’s closer to the bathroom, and closer to me, but I'm gonna have to listen and be close to make sure you're okay, you know? The bed is new and really nice. If you don't like it we'll set up something else." Jared interjected, "No no, it's fine Jensen. It's really nice." Jared was a bit nervous and he had no idea why. He looked at Jensen and added, "I can't believe how nice your house is. I mean," Jensen wasn't sure what he meant but then added, "I think I mean for a guy. A macho soldier guy, like you. You're so good at making it look nice and homey." Jensen never really thought about it. He just added things he liked. It certainly wasn't wildly decorated, or even expertly thought out. He just saw things, decided he liked them and brought them home. He shrugged, "Well, I never owned my own house before now. Maybe it was all my traveling...being away from home all those years. It was always a tent, or the outside, or a bunker. And my growing up home kind of fell apart, so...maybe finally being able to build something permanent was the driving force in picking things out that felt homey." Jared nodded in understanding. He stared closer at Jensen with wonder and maybe a bit of hero worship, "I'm very happy for you Jensen. After saving so many people and all the ugly things you had to go through...risking your life time and again...all the sacrificing you did. You deserve total happiness. It's fitting that you've found a beautiful place like this to land."

Jensen stared into the younger man’s eyes for a moment. He had never met anyone who showed him such understanding and kindness, who looked beyond his deadly skills. He was overcome with emotion on the inside, trying to process the empathy Jared seemed to have for what his team had gone through, how much they’d sacrificed in order to do their job well. Jared was full of light, which seemed to reach into Jensen’s soul and relieve some of the darkness Jensen had locked away there. Curious, Jared went out on a limb, "Jensen...can I ask how you said you had to do ugly things, horrible things...things you were trained in and quite good at. With all that, how in the world have you turned out to be so...I mean so...I mean how do any of you turn out..." Jensen tried to help Jared finish his question, guessing what he was trying to ask, "Nice and non-murderous?" Jared sighed in irritation, now worried he had been too nosey, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, Jensen, it's just that you're so...you're so..." Jensen smiled in understanding, "It's alright, Jare. When we decide to withdraw from Black Ops, the service places us in a non-confrontational position for a minimum of one year. I was a training master sergeant for the last year, working with special ops recruits, teaching martial arts, psych and medical classes. The process lets you come down from the field while they watch you. We go to intense counseling. It's called decommission counseling. No one gets out with their honorable discharge until they are deemed 'decommissioned'. It means we’re 'okay', in the military’s
opinion. They do everything they can to make sure we are as well adjusted as can be...safe for society, so speak."

Jared raised an eyebrow, "Safe for society?" Jensen explained further, "We're trained to kill in many different ways...with weapons and without. We can react under any threat...we're taught martial arts, pain tolerance, emotion control, resistance to torture...they make us into machines so we can react without having to hesitate...without having to think. It's what keeps us alive out in the field. Unfortunately, it doesn't meld with normal society, believe me...they have to reverse as much of it as they can." Jared dared to ask, "Or you'll react to someone touching you on the shoulder by ripping out their vocal chords when they were just going to ask you for the time?" Jensen raised an eyebrow and smirked, "Something like that. I mean...we've got discretion so self control and quick responses would kick in and we would be able to know the poor guy asking for the time wasn't a threat before engaging, but," Jensen paused, so Jared finished for him, "They like to make sure before they let you go." Jensen nodded, "Yes, exactly." He was astonished at himself for opening up so much. The loving acceptance in Jared’s eyes seemed to reach in and tug on piece after piece of the layered toxins Jensen had accumulated over the years.

Jensen added, "When I first bought this place, I had nightmares for awhile. They were pretty violent. I might have one now, but it's nothing like the vivid flashback ones I had at first. I took awhile to get close to any new people. I just wanted to make sure I was okay. The other guys and I spent a lot of time talking about it...checking up on each other. I've been here almost a year,” Jensen shrugged,,” the dreams are gone.” Jared stared at the gentle warrior for a moment. It was hard to imagine Jensen in an environment where he had to be anything other than the warm caring person he was. He finally offered, "I can't imagine the things you've seen and had to go through." Jensen smiled softly, “Well, things seem to be looking a lot better these days.” Jared looked down with a shy smile before he looked back up. He touched Jensen’s cheek lightly,"You're so damn beautiful Jensen. You're so honest, so genuine and caring. None of those things you had to do to survive defines you. None of it. You took care of the dirty work so the rest of us could live in a safer world. Your soul deserves a break, it deserves to heal from all you went through. You deserve to be happy.”

Jensen searched Jared’s stunning intense eyes, knowing damn well this kid was so self sacrificial and generous to a fault he never thought enough about himself. He slipped his arms around him, drawing him in close, “And what about you, Jare,” Jensen asked, “look at how much life has hurt you, and how you’ve had to fight your way through it. How many hits have you taken, baby, and yet here you are, the strongest person I’ve ever seen, with the most beautiful way of looking at things.” Jared looked down. Jensen touched his cheek, “I know,” he kissed his forehead, “I know it’s overwhelming...I know this powerful connection is terrifying...it is for me too.” When Jared looked up, Jensen added, “I'll be anything, be any way you need me to be. I want you in my life, in every way possible, any way you feel like you can give. You can heal...with me.” Jared felt a dam breaking. Raging waters of doubt were threatening to pour out of his every pore, as his subconscious struggled to resist it. When he spoke, his voice was shaky, “I don’t know why this is happening...or who decided to place you in front of me at this point in time when...well, when things weren’t really looking all that uplifting, you know? I wasn’t...expecting...I mean I wasn’t...looking to...I mean I was kind of done with...” he looked down with a sigh. Jensen rubbed his fingers through his hair. Jared looked up, “Being with you is...it feels like ‘home’. Jensen, for the first time since I was eleven, it feels like I’m home around you and I...I just can’t make sense of it...not that I want to,” he shook his head. Jensen knew damn well the confession cost Jared a huge piece of his heart. Showing this kind of trust left him wide open and vulnerable. He rubbed his back soothingly, then up and down his arms. Jensen watched him with loving concern, as Jared exhaled with pent up emotion. He felt defenses start to crumble, realizing there was no escape from allowing himself to be loved.

When Jensen leaned closer, Jared’s pulse sped up. He met him half way, eagerly grabbing the older man’s head in anticipation. Their lips touched soft and gentle, at first. Jensen’s protective instincts
were full of warnings, but Jared’s little moan and sigh weren’t helping. When Jared deepened the kiss, Jensen went with it. Need sparked between them, strong bodies pushed against each other, Jensen growled insanely turned on, as he pushed Jared back against the hallway wall. Jared met his strength. Raw power and heat skyrocketed, as tongues danced erotically, exploring, conquering every inch. Moans of pleasure filled the silent house. Nerve endings ignited, cocks swelled to demand more, the need for friction and release overbearing. They started to grind, gyrating harder, pushing harder, sparks of intense pleasure escalating them toward orgasm. Jensen growled, “NO,” as he pulled off to the side, breathing, panting, “Goddammit,” he struggled for air. He looked up at Jared, who was beautifully flushed, poised with over exertion and probably in pain, but the kid was with him, right there with him, his darkened eyes intense, determined, halted on his way to orgasm.

“Come on,” Jensen grabbed him, kissed his cheek as he clutched his head close, “Come on, I gotcha.” He pulled the injured man with him, backing his way to his own bedroom while pulling Jared to walk forward. They kissed on the way. Within seconds, Jensen turned him and lowered him to the bed, helping him to lay down without using any of his chest muscles. Jensen mentally chastised himself for letting it go this far. This was too soon, it was too early, but Jared was past the turning point. He undressed quickly, threw his shirt aside and kicked his shoes off as he unzipped his jeans. Jared’s darkened eyes stared at Jensen’s chest with wonder, the golden skin covered unending cuts of sinew and muscle. He couldn’t look away. His gaze traveled down to the six pack abs, to the sexy v line of sandy reddish brown hair just above his jeans. As Jensen slid the jeans down, Jared saw the huge rock hard dick peeking out at him over his underwear. Jesus, Jensen was gorgeous. He was fucking hot and perfect. He stepped over to the wall and pushed a switch. An electric fireplace turned on immediately, golden flames dancing on high until Jensen adjusted them down. He returned to the bed and leaned over to unzip the hoodie Jared wore.

Jensen’s eyes never left Jared’s. He opened the jacket and the flannel, but left them on for warmth. He started to lift Jared’s t-shirt, meaning to explore and taste, but the younger man quickly crossed his arms, "I don't think..." Jensen hesitated, then laid his body over him, supporting his weight on his elbows. He smoothed Jared’s hair back, “s’okay...s’okay, but you’re beautiful everywhere.” He kissed him gentle, at first, then became lost in Jared’s delicious heat. Jensen moaned, passionately ensconced with every taste, every sensation of kissing someone who totally seemed to meld with his soul. Jared was open and hot. He was undulating under him, creating soft friction that Jensen could not refuse.

Jared’s moans and sighs were driving him fucking crazy. He felt the rise to orgasm take hold. Jared gripped the back of his head and pushed up harder. “Jensen oh god, yes, I’m gonna cum,” Jared’s comment sent boiling madness through Jensen’s brain. There wasn’t even time to remove clothing, but somehow Jensen managed to push Jared’s sweats and underwear down fast. He handled his own even quicker. He kept himself firm over Jared, holding him down. The younger man’s legs came up, knees wrapped around Jensen’s hips. “JENSEN,” Jared cried, pushing up harder, as Jensen placed a hand on his forehead, holding his head back. “Come on,” Jensen said, “I gotcha,” as Jared tensed up and came, “Aaaaaahhh...aaaaahhhhh,” he spasmed and cried, over and over, shaking with the exertion, knowing goddamn well this wasn’t going to end well but flooded with orgasmic pleasure at the same time.

He grunted and sighed, as he rode out the intensity, Jensen completely mesmerized by beautiful site. Jared relaxed bonelessly when released, panting with over exertion, as Jensen’s own orgasm pushed it’s way over the edge. He growled with a vengeance, his eyes rolled back and he exploded hard, gripped with intensity, and desperately determined not to hurt Jared while he rode it. “Mnnnngh...mnnnnghh,” his body tensed and shook, forceful waves of release rolling through him until finally they gentled. He struggled with his aftershocks, gasping for some control. “Fuck,” Jensen’s breathy complaint was more for himself. He wasn’t accustomed to losing control. Goddamn, this kid was going to test his limits. Sex with Jared was going to be dangerous, he could
see that now. What was supposed to be a gentle introduction, due to Jared’s condition, had turned hot as fuck in mere seconds. Jensen’s concern skyrocketed for the kid. He had somehow managed to ‘not’ slump bonelessly over his ribcage, but still knew this kind of cardio had been way too much this soon.

Jensen forced his sluggish brain and arms to work. He adjusted himself to look down into Jared’s face. The kid seemed to be out cold. He checked Jared’s pulse, “Jare, can you hear me?” He lifted up Jared’s eye lids, seeing reactive response. The kid was breathing, thank god, and his pulse weren’t too rapid. Jensen tapped him on the cheek, “Jared? Hey...hey, baby come back to me.” Jensen called to him louder, “Jared,” as his concern escalated. “Baby, come on, open your eyes.” Jensen watched the younger man begin to stir. He could tell Jared was trying hard to open his heavy eyelids, “Come on, Jare, that's it. Open your eyes for me, love.” Jared crinkled his forehead, moaned and forced his eyelids open. He didn't feel too great. He was thinking there was a bag of sand laying on his chest, maybe a gallon of milk filling his left lung, and on top of that his head was throbbing, but, ‘Oh yeah,’ he thought as he remembered what just happened. Jared smiled, lazily sluggish, his loose arms managing to rest on Jensen’s shoulders. He could barely move.

Jensen was focused on him, looking painfully worried and guilty, as Jared tried to smile reassuringly. Jensen admonished, “No, you're not alright, so don't even go there. Tell me where you’re hurt. Your chest?” Jared shook his head slowly, “I,” he whispered, trying to answer but too unwilling to admit that it had been a mistake to explain. He cringed with soreness from his left side, and maybe from the throbbing in his head, then nodded because he couldn’t hide it...but he wasn’t gonna take anything back. No matter what Jensen said, he was just wasn’t. Jensen touched his cheek. “You stay put, I’ll be right back,” then Jared felt the cooler air hit his body when Jensen stood up. The older man dropped his underwear and jeans, then trotted from the bedroom to grab Jared’s pain meds. He returned within a minute, tossed the pills and a water bottle on the bed, then hurried into the bathroom. Jensen came back with two hot wet towels, which he used to clean the residue off Jared and then himself. He wished he had time to savor the gorgeous genius and his beautifully put together body, but Jensen knew damn well his lover needed rest.

Jensen quickly pulled is own underwear back on, he gently pulled Jared’s sweats and underwear back up, then shook out the pain pills and slipped his arm under Jared’s shoulder to help him lift enough to take them. When Jared shakily plopped the pills into his mouth, Jensen handed him the water bottle, already opened, but kept a hold on it as Jared seemed too weak to do so. He drank half the bottle, then handed it back while gasping to catch his breath. The pain wasn’t as bad as the hospital had been, but it wasn’t friendly, either, and he was dried out as fuck. Jensen gently eased him down until he was supine against the plush pillows. He set the water bottle on the side table behind him, then turned to lay on his side and watch Jared. As he played with Jared’s hair, Jensen stewed with anger at himself. How could he be so stupid? Jared blinked heavily, trying to deal with the pain while knowing goddamn well where his lover was going inside his head. It fueled his own defensiveness, but Jared didn’t have the strength to argue right now. “Ssssh, just rest,” Jensen soothed him, sensing the anxiety and seeing something besides pain in his eyes. “No,” Jared’s anguished response came out defiant, “no, you’re...blaming...you need to ‘stop’.” He struggled for air, feeling the pain start to recede but not enough yet.

“Jare,” Jensen started to insist, but Jared cut him off, “No. It was fuckn’ amazing...dn’t regret it,” he turned to Jensen, “please don’t.” Jensen kissed him gently, he searched his eyes while holding his hand on Jared’s cheek, “Hey...yes it was amazing...and yes, I am mad at myself because we shouldn’t have done it that soon.” He kissed him again, “But I will ‘never’ be sorry...I’ll never regret anything, it just should have waited. Right now, you need to rest, baby, okay? Let the medicine work and just breathe.”Jensen kissed him on his face and just under the jawline, nuzzling himself into Jared’s cheek, as he waited for the younger man to relax. He rubbed the kid’s other cheek, rubbed soothing strokes through his hair, until he felt the engineer succumb to the effects of the medicine.
“Mmmh,” Jared’s moan of blissful release was like music to Jensen’s ears, as the younger man’s pain subsided. He now drifted on clouds of euphoria.

Jensen was glad they gave Jared the good shit. It worked fast. He lifted his head and inspected the dilated irises, grinning his approval. “How you doin,” Jensen asked, to which Jared yawned his dreamy response, “Mmm s’...s’good.” Jared’s lazy response was very telling about his pain free narcotic flooded system. Jensen kissed him again, then continued to play with his hair, “You sleepy?” Jared sluggishly blinked, “Yeah...m’stayn’ here?” Jensen smirked, “Hell yes, you’re staying in here. I’m keeping my eyes on you. You warm enough?” Jared smiled softly, as his eyes closed. He nodded, thinking how the hell could he ‘not’ be warm enough with Jensen around. Jensen snickered at the cuteness, but he was still chastising himself for being an asshole. He was a goddamn medical professional and knew better. When Jared was out for the count, Jensen got up and pulled on sweatpants and a t-shirt. He still had his socks on from earlier. He covered the younger man with layered bedding, then went around the house to check all the windows and doors. He banked the fire in the living room, then went back to Jared and slipped under the covers.

Jensen had never slept next to a lover before. Hell, he reminded himself he’d never even ‘had’ a lover, not since Robbie. It surprised him to be so readily able to attach himself to this kind of feeling. He lay there for awhile watching Jared. The slow rise and fall of Jared’s chest and the beautiful angelic face were a comfort to have next to him. For some reason, Jensen’s hard ass mental barriers seemed to have no problem shutting themselves off around this kid. He allowed himself to drift, knowing his internal sixth sense would continue to monitor his surroundings and wake him, if necessary. Four hours later, Jensen woke suddenly. It was dark, except for the glowing flames of the fireplace. His internal alarm told him it was around two a.m. He quickly checked Jared, relieved to find he was breathing the deep rhythmic pattern of sleep. His face was slack and he didn’t feel feverish. Jensen looked around the room. His instincts told him something was off. He glanced at the bedside clock, noting it was indeed close to two a.m. ‘Haven’t lost ‘all’ my touch,’ he thought.

Jensen eased out of bed silently and stood listening. He focused on the common sounds of the house. Even from here, he could hear the gentle burr of the refrigerator motor when it kicked on, the sound of the central air running, meaning the rest of the house must have dropped to below sixty. Within seconds, Jensen realized what had alerted him. He heard light footprints outside. Someone was on his property, walking by the house. He checked on Jared again, then quietly left the bedroom and padded through the house. He went room to room, stealthily silent. When he reached the front of the house, he peered outside from the bottom corner of a window. He could see the investigator's car, but the men weren’t inside it. He tried to reassure himself they were probably doing a perimeter check, but it wasn’t in his nature to just assume, ‘ever’. Jensen checked the phone in his sweats pocket, but there were no messages from the security team. He sent a question mark text and waited for a response. When the phone vibrated almost instantly, Jensen was relieved to see that the team had indeed been on a check of the grounds. They were on their way back to the front of the house.

'Of all the fucking,' he sighed, as his thoughts were interrupted by a soft knock on the door. Jensen’s phone vibrated at the same time with additional text, ‘at the door.’ Jensen looked out the peephole, then let the investigators in. He was cranky, but reminded himself they really hadn’t done anything wrong and he was just pissy about feeling a possible threat to Jared. 'At least they stay awake on the job,' Jensen thought. One of the men asked Jensen, "Everything okay in here?" Jensen replied, "Yes, just fine.” The other one explained, "We noticed your shadow in the house on our way back from checking the fence line. We thought there might be a problem.” Jensen rubbed the back of his neck, “Well, no, it’s fine. I just woke to something and then I heard your footprints.” The investigator looked guilty. Jensen held up his hand, “It’s fine...I’m just not used to it, you guys are much appreciated. I can’t help it, ya know?” They both smiled and nodded. “I’m sorry we weren’t as quiet as we thought,” one of them said. Jensen smiled, “It’s okay. Thank you for being thorough.”
After Jensen offered them coffee and they refused, he shut the door and locked it. He thought about how this team wasn’t a half assed group of wanna be’s. They were alert, they were on the job, and they actually ‘were’ being quiet, but Jensen’s years in the field weren’t easy to get around. Jensen went back to Jared and happily got under the covers with him. He scooted closer, felt the man for fever again, then adjusted Jared’s covers so they reached his chin. Jensen nestled himself down for the night, laying facing the younger man. He wondered if Jared was going to want a shower in the morning. The AG was coming at 9. That didn’t give them much time for breakfast and a shower, unless Jared woke up early. Jensen soon fell asleep and didn't move again until six a.m.

He rose quickly and took care of his bathroom and shower routine. He dressed in faded soft jeans and a long sleeve navy cotton shirt. He put clean wool socks on, but left shoes off for now. He looked out the slider, noting it was going to be a clear day. Jensen hoped to show Jared the property, but he knew that appointment with the AG today might completely wear Jared out. There was ice on the ground. He checked the weather on his phone and it read mid forties for the day, but only twenty nine at the moment. Jensen went to make his organic triple espresso blend, which he absolutely couldn't wait to share with Jared. He started a fire in the living room to warm up the house, then went back with his coffee to check on Jared. Jensen had never been such a mother hen before, but Jared had really scared him last night. The man was strong and built like a lean Greek God, and with all that muscle and power pushing back at him last night, Jensen completely lost control. Jared was fucking hot and Jensen got lost in it. He was supposed to be his protector, though, not do further damage. Jensen knew Jared was an active guy...he knew he was in a hurry to get back to normal, but last night was a perfect example of what ‘not’ to do this soon, and ‘why’. Jensen knew he had his work cut out for him in keeping Jared in one piece, but he didn’t need to add to the problem.

'Pushing him up against the wall and grinding him into the mattress was 'not' really on the list of hospital release instructions, Jensen,’ he mentally lectured himself.

Jensen heard a knock on the front door at the same time his phone vibrated. He took his coffee with him and went to the door while checking the text. It was apparently time for shift change between the security teams. When he opened the door, the two investigators from overnight and the two from yesterday's trip home were all standing there. They quickly went over the schedules for the next few days, letting Jensen know there would be new people tomorrow. Every time there were new faces, they would come to the door and introduce themselves. Jensen offered them all coffee, but they politely declined. He told them he needed to take Jared to some clothing stores and asked how that could be accomplished. They advised he do it before the case was filed. Once the AG filed the case and the corporation was aware, the threat to Jared would increase. Being out in public would become a huge ‘no’. Jensen understood.

He shut the door and headed back to the master bedroom. He felt the weight of what the young man was about to endure and hated it. He noticed Jared stirring, so he sat on the end of the bed and sipped his coffee while he waited. Jared turned over onto his right side and nestled further down into the covers. Jensen smiled because Jared's hair was in complete disarray all over the pillows and he could barely see his face. He guessed it had to be seriously warm in that cocoon of bedding the younger man had snuggled himself into. Jensen continued to watch him, enjoying the view of someone that was too goddamn adorable for his own good. As he sipped more of his coffee, Jared yawned and reached up to rub his eyes. Jensen checked his watch, noting it was almost 8. Jared was due for an antibiotic soon so he would have to wake him, anyway, if he didn't do it on his own. Jensen soon watched Jared do something highly classified as cute as hell, when he pushed against the circle of covers, seemingly wanting to get up, but not knowing why he couldn’t.

Jensen set his cup down and reached over to help. Jared hadn’t opened his eyes yet, but he was definitely struggling to free himself from his cocoon. Jensen tried not to laugh, while peeling the layers off to get him untangled. Jensen had to work at it, but finally got him freed. Jared blinked open his sleepy eyes, looking confused. Jensen asked with smirk, “Better?” Jared wasn’t really sure what
time it was or where he was for a second, "Huh?" Jensen smiled at the innocent question. He straightened Jared’s hair a bit for him until Jared announced, "I have to go to the bathroom." Jensen held his hands out for Jared to take, then pulled him upright. He moved all the covers aside, so Jared could slide his legs over the side of the bed, then helped him stand. Jared swayed, at first. Jensen steadied him, as he watched him with concern, "You okay?" Jared thought about it for a few seconds, then blinked and nodded, "Yeah." Jensen shadowed him as he walked to the bathroom, not quite comfortable with the younger man’s limited awareness. Jared performed all of his morning ablutions with Jensen standing at the door. When he finished, he seemed to be more alert. Jensen asked, “You want a shower?” Jared's face lit up like a Christmas tree, "Really? You wouldn't mind?"

Jensen touched him on the cheek, "Of course I wouldn't mind." The younger man smiled, "God, that would be awesome." Jensen said, "I have to stand with you, though, is that gonna be okay?" Jared slipped his arms around Jensen’s neck and kissed him. Jensen moaned at the delicious onslaught of Jared’s tongue. The younger man ended the kiss, then whispered, "You don't have to just stand with me...you can come in and we can do so many things." Jensen mentally cursed at himself for how fast his dick stirred to life. He grabbed hold of Jared's biceps and held him back a few inches, as hard as that was, "Believe me, I cannot WAIT to try out the shower with you. I've got ideas, but baby we gotta hold off." Jensen saw a flicker of hurt and insecurity pass through his new lover’s eyes and that was just unacceptable. "Hey," he grabbed Jared's face between his hand, "you scared the hell out of me last night. I couldn't wake you up for a few minutes, and then you were in terrible pain.” Jared looked immediately concerned and guilty, "I'm sorry. I really had no idea I was gonna pass out." Jensen rubbed his cheeks with his thumbs, "Don't ever be sorry. Just give it couple days, that's all. Believe me, it isn't gonna be easy, but I can do it if it'll mean you're getting better." Jared looked at him with sweet understanding, "Okay. I'll be good." Jensen kissed him softly, then Jared raised an eyebrow, "For now." Jensen growled, wanting badly to bite the younger man's lower lip, "Jesus, this is gonna be hard." He sighed, "Come on, let's get your shower. I'm making you some fabulous waffles."

Jared smiled brightly, "Really? Is there coffee?" Jensen grinned, "Oh yeah, and it's the good shit too." Jensen helped slide Jared's clothes off and supported him as he stepped into the shower. He stood outside the lip of the shower bottom, wearing nothing but his underwear. He kept a hand on Jared's elbow in case he needed to grab him. Jensen was pleasantly entertained by the erotic sounds Jared made when the water washed over his skin. The tension in his neck melted with pleasure filled moans and sighs. He held the dry towel over his incision, as instructed. Jensen helped him wash his hair, avoiding any scrubbing over the head wound. When it was time to rinse, Jared tilted his head until Jensen finished working the suds out. He handed Jared a rag so he could soap his body, then held the sprayer to the side so Jared could let the towel go for now. When he finished his upper torso and private areas, he held the towel over himself while Jensen rinsed him.

Jensen knew the kid was completely clueless at how beautiful he was...especially with water running down his body. 'Fuck, definitely got my hands full,' Jensen thought, as he worked relentlessly to keep his hard on at bay. He wanted to run his hands over the smooth wet skin so bad, but he stuck to their new agreement not to start anything. Jared needed to heal more. At least get the damn staples out. Jensen squatted and soaped all of Jared's enticing long legs and feet, then sprayed them off. He turned the water off and quickly grabbed a dry towel. Jared towel dried his hair and part of his body, then Jensen did the legs for him. He threw all the towels aside, then grabbed Jared’s elbows and helped him step out onto the dry mat. He padded a dry towel gently over Jared’s staples, just to make sure they'd kept his incision as dry as possible. Jared winced just a tad, but looked at the older man with such gratefulness in his eyes, Jensen did a double take. “What,” he smirked. Jared smiled gratefully, “Just thank you. It felt so good to be in a real shower.” Jensen kissed him, "I'm glad you enjoyed it." He kissed him again, then added, “I gotta say my new shower's never looked as good as it does with you in it." Jared smiled shyly. Jensen fixated on the lovely blush and dimples for a few
seconds, "God, I love that."

Jared looked up, but he was looking totally uncomfortable and frustrated because Jensen was still staring, so Jensen kissed him again, “I’m sorry, it’s just so damned cute.” He escorted Jared to the bedroom, while Jared kept his hand folded over his chest a bit, still conscientious. Jensen knelt for Jared to step into his underwear and sweats. He pulled them up for him, just like he had the other day. He pulled a long sleeve cotton shirt over his head, then carefully assisted the man with getting his arms through the sleeves. Jensen tried to convince himself the dark grey shirt he’d picked out for Jared had absolutely nothing to do with the steel grey in his piercing eyes.

Jared sat on the bed while Jensen knelt to put clean wool socks on him. The younger man sighed defeatedly at his inability to simply lean over and do something so easy. When Jensen finished, he looked into his eyes, "It's just for awhile, okay?" Jared nodded, "I know. It's just lame." Jensen noticed Jared was looking pretty agile and energetic now. He watched him stand up, without any trouble this time, so he let him walk toward the bedroom door without any support. Jensen walked behind him down the hall, keeping an eye on him in case it looked like he was gonna take a nose dive. Jared looked around again at the open dining, kitchen and living room areas, further falling in love with the simple rustic feel of Jensen's home. "You wanna sit at the table?" Jensen asked, "I'll bring you your first cup of my favorite Joe." Jensen grinned, as Jared showed no hesitation in sitting down and looking up for his promised treat. He went to the coffee pot and poured, "Do you like cream, sugar?" Jared said, "A little cream, but no sugar, please. I use coconut milk, but you probably don't have any." He felt the heat of Jensen's fireplace and thought to himself how easy it was to feel at home here. The place was so welcoming. Or maybe it was just the man in it. Within seconds, Jared was treated to a steaming cup of thick black battery acid style espresso, placed in front of him with a carton of coconut creamer. 'He likes coconut,' Jared thought, trying not to act like a silly idiot because the older man liked something he liked.

There was a white pill sitting next to the cup. Jensen added, "Take that, okay? We're about thirty minutes late on your antibiotic." Jared answered, "Okay," picked up the cup with two hands and inhaled the rich caffeine laden aroma. "Oh, God," he closed his eyes, as he took his first sip. It was hot. He knew it was scalding his mouth but he couldn’t resist taking his second and third sips before he stopped to grab the pill. “Oh god, it’s so good,” he exclaimed, then swallowed the pill with another gulp. Jared held the hot cup against his face, just resting there for a moment with his eyes closed. When he looked up, he realized Jensen had been watching him this whole time. Jensen cleared his throat, "Well 'that' was worth waiting for." He had been glued to watching Jared make love to his fucking coffee cup. Jensen grinned slightly embarrassed, as Jensen went to the stove and prepared a stack of Belgian waffles. He topped them with real cream and fresh strawberries, then drizzled some strawberry juice and powdered sugar just to make Jared’s first breakfast here taste even better.

When Jensen put the plates on the table, Jared put down his coffee and stared at the food with his mouth open. Jensen loved the reactions he kept getting from this kid. He reminded himself to not even go where his mind was trying to go. There would be plenty of time later to coax more 'interesting' reactions from him. Jared finally found his voice, "Jensen this is too much. You didn’t have to go through all this trouble for me. He looked up at the older man with worry and guilt in his eyes. Jensen assured him, "It's no trouble. I enjoy cooking...and I'm glad to have someone to cook for." Jared looked back down at his plate and took a moment to control the overwhelming feelings of happiness that he wasn't used to. He still had an internal war going on whether to relax and accept all the good that was happening, or to refuse it, back away and run away. Jared suddenly felt a bit queasy, but it wasn't physical, it was mental. He took a deep breath and forced himself not to show any doubt or fear in front of Jensen. God, he could get used to this and that’s really what terrified him.
Much to Jared's oblivious nature, Jensen had been assessing him and knew damn well how badly the kid was fighting himself. Jared had built comfortable walls of protection over the years, and Jensen was easing in, penetrating them. Just because he had opened up last night didn’t mean there wouldn’t be bouts of internal panic where his subconscious tried to protect him again. This was a huge struggle and Jensen understood it completely. He decided to distract the kid, "It's at it's best right when it's hot, you know. You 'have' to be starving." Jensen knew Jared hadn't had any calories since eight last night and his tank was seriously low. He was glad when Jared perked up with renewed hunger, “You're right, I'm starving. Jensen, thank you. This looks so good,” he commented as he grabbed the fork and began eating. Jensen could barely get through his own plateful without stopping between bites to take in the damn erotic sounds Jared made. He was glad the younger man liked his food but fuck he had no idea what he was doing to him. Jensen sighed, finally giving up at keeping his cock from reacting. He had limits to his above average self control. Jared was an addictive powerful force and sexy as hell.

Jared finally dropped his fork on his plate with a clank, looking uncomfortable and bit miserable. Jensen asked, “What's the matter, buddy?” Jared moaned his complaint, "I can't finish. It's so damn good but I can't eat anymore." Jensen didn't finish his either, but in all fairness he 'had' given them three waffles. Most people probably couldn't stuff all that in. He glanced at Jared’s plate, “You actually did really well for your first big breakfast out of hospital prison. You downed half your plate, kiddo.” Jensen downed the rest of his coffee, then stood up to clear the table. He leaned over and kissed the top of Jared’s head before he headed for the sink. Jared rested a few minutes, then got up from the table and came up behind Jensen. The older man had his hands deep in soapy water when he felt Jared's hands sliding around his waist. He grinned as the younger man laid his head on his shoulder. Jensen turned the water off and dried his hands quickly, then turned in Jared’s arms. He wrapped his own arms around Jared’s, then kissed Jared’s neck, “I’m gonna have a hard time keeping you down, aren’t I?” Jared answered, “I’m okay. I feel really good. Actually, I feel really good ‘because’ I feel good.” He lifted his head to look at Jensen, “Does that make sense?”

Jensen grinned softly at the beautiful innocence. He kissed him. Jared’s expression filled eyes were too hard to resist. “Of course it makes sense,” Jensen said, as he smoothed his hair back from Jared’s face, “you’ve been through hell and it’s so good to see you perky like this. But I need you to please be careful. Always remember to stay close, okay? Please remember that when you’re moving around.” Jared had a little spot of whipped cream on the corner of his mouth. Jensen wanted so badly to lick it off, but instead he took a napkin and dabbed at it. Jared was having none of that and leaned forward for a kiss. Mouths opened instantly like they'd been desperately starving for days. They pushed into the kiss, opened wider, tongues reached into the farthest spaces of each other's oral cavity, tasting strawberries, sweet cream, and coffee.

The kiss continued for several minutes. Both men couldn't seem to get enough. Jensen finally eased off to look at his beautiful lover's swollen lips and dilated pupils. "God, just look at you," he whispered, “I can't get enough of tasting you.” Jensen pulled Jared's head forward and kissed him again. Jared responded immediately by opening his mouth and letting his tongue play with Jensen's. It felt amazing. Neither man heard the doorbell ring. Jensen was the first to finally hear something annoying invade his senses. He backed off with several short calming kisses, then he looked into Jared's eyes and smiled heatedly, "I can't fucking think with you near me." Jared smiled just as heated, "Mmmm...then don't," then kissed Jensen again, fully intending to keep going until the older man forced them apart. “Fuck,” he panted through his arousal, “It’s the damn doorbell. The attorney.” Jared raised an eyebrow, "Oh. I forgot he was coming." He kissed Jensen once more for good measure and added, "Thank you for breakfast...and dessert." Jensen pulled away and sighed,
"Any time...any goddamn time, Jared, Jesus Christ," he grumbled as he adjusted the bulge in the front of his pants. Jared smiled. He was lucky the loose sweats and shirt he had on hid his reaction to their kiss much better than Jensen's jeans did. Jared thought about dropping to his knees and sucking Jensen's cock right there in the kitchen, then heard his lover's commanding voice, "Jared."

Jensen saw the dirty look in Jared's eyes briefly before he feigned innocence. He sighed, "Come on, we gotta let 'em in," then went to the door with Jared. They greeted the same men who were in Jared's room the day before and everyone sat down at the table to open their laptops. Jared's was handed to him over his shoulder by Jensen, as he smiled up at him in 'thanks'. Bart sat next to Jared again, so he could follow and translate, the attorney and investigator sat across from him. Once the files were open, Jensen had little to do but watch Jared work. He watched Jared's confidence as he flowed through his drawings and formulas with expert knowledge of what he was talking about. Jared was so smart, Jensen had to shake his head. He was lost on some of the terminology, but even Bart had to pause a few times to keep up with him. He watched the men at the table fixate on the young genius' examples, and then on him.

Jared didn't realize it, but his mannerisms and the way he charmed people were naturally magnetic. He was earnest and believable. You could see no deception in Jared's wholesomeness and the experienced prosecution team at the table knew it. They liked Jared, and respected him, Jensen could see it. The special ops soldier’s mood darkened, though, when he thought of how Jared had been a perfect target for the manipulative greedy business world. He wanted to painfully punish them all for lying to him, misleading him, and then ultimately trying to end his life when he wouldn't play along anymore. Jensen couldn't wait to get his hands on his brother...and father. They both needed to pay for what they'd done to Jared.

After the first hour, Jensen brought them all coffee and placed a water bottle in front of Jared. The engineer received the message to 'drink' it before he had more coffee. Jared complied without argument, knowing Jensen was right. He had a ton more evidence to get through and he didn't want to go weak and give out before they were done. They'd gone through about three major files, huge cases with corners cut so badly that Jared felt sick even going through them. The AG and investigator had seen a lot in their careers. This had them shaking their heads more than once at the audacity and blatant disregard for the numerous disasters waiting to happen. "Holy fucking shit," Price blurted out, when they open the stadium file. He wiped a hand over his face as he intently listened to Jared and Bart go over scaffolding, rebar and pillar placements. Jensen watched Jared lean back and stretch his neck from side to side. He finished his explanation to the table, "The dynamic load is probably already shifting because the joists are not filler reinforced. The mortar isn't designed for that kind of pressure. The second balcony will fail first, then the weight of it will weaken the ground level.” The whole room was quiet for a few minutes.

Jensen watched Jared yawn but he didn't interfere yet. Chuck finished typing something, "So...where's your recommendation report and the emails you have going back and forth to show they knew exactly what your findings were?" Jared went back to this laptop and pulled multiple items up for the investigator. He sent them to Chuck, then the AG clicked and dragged them where he wanted them. Opening one email with the report attached, Jared's communication plainly stated his opinion. Jensen leaned over and read it, 'To disregard this report is a blatant safety violation. The stadium is NOT safe. I've done these measurements and calculated them over again and it still comes out the same. As you can see in the calculations, to reinforce the balconies, reinforcements and pillars have to be added beneath the concrete. The original design wasn't followed.' Price asked Jared, "Did they answer this email?" Jared clicked on the next one where his manager had responded, 'Jared, I know you throw your heart into these things, but really, this company is professional and would never ignore this and I'm sure they'll appreciate your report and fix everything. You just worry about your next job, okay? Let the top dogs worry about making all these corrections. Thanks for all your hard work.'
Jared looked between them, "Next thing I knew, they'd opened the damn thing, complete with ribbon cutting ceremony. I wasn't invited, so I didn't even know until I saw it on tv." Jared suddenly stood up sluggishly and leaned on the table. Jensen instantly took his arm, “You okay?” Jared nodded, “Yeah...I just need a break. I’ll be back,” he announced to everyone, then moved to leave the room with Jensen’s support. Price announced, “I think it’s a good time for everybody to break.” Price and Chuck went outside for a few minutes. Bart chose to stand over by the large fireplace. Jared used the bathroom, then splashed cold water on his face while Jensen stood by. When Jared was finished, Jensen put his hands around the back of Jared's neck and looked at him closely, "You’re tired. Are you feeling okay?" Jared smiled weakly and nodded, "Yeah...I just needed a break." Jensen rubbed Jared's shoulders, massaging and kneading the tense muscles. He was concerned that Jared was exhausting himself, but his determined lover kissed him, then walked back toward the dining area. "How much more is there?" Jensen asked, as the two AG personnel re-entered the house and Bart came back from the fireplace. Jared looked up at Jensen after he sat down, "Sever more." Price offered, "Its almost lunch. You guys okay with some subs, if I supply them?" Both men looked at the AG in surprise. Jensen asked, "You're buying?" The AG grinned, "Hell yes, I'm buying. Chuck and I will go pick them up. I don't want Jensen's address on any delivery orders right now. Jared, you rest."

The ‘address’ comment reminded Jared of the serious predicament he was in, 'Jesus, I still can't grasp this.' The AG men took their lunch orders and left for the local sandwich shop. Bart stayed behind at Jensen's mention of showing Jared the backyard and the deck he wanted to build. Jensen tried not to show his disappointment at the other engineer's decision to stay behind, though he would have preferred to show his property to Jared alone. Jensen knew Jared needed a distraction from all the negative subject matter. He could see the kid's mood had become gloomy. “Come on,” he invited, and pulled Jared up to stand. They went to the living room slider and stepped outside onto Jensen's temporary patio. The older man had slip on shoes by door. He slipped a pair on himself, then helped Jared do the same. Jared didn't even notice the chill in the air. He was awe struck by the wide open property and it's natural beauty. Without even pausing, he moved forward. He whispered in appreciation, "Jensen...oh my God it’s so beautiful out here."

Jensen followed Jared out to the clearing behind the house. He kept a decent clearing in order to protect from fire, but beyond that the woods were filled with cedar, pine and oak trees, intermixed with scrub brush and manzanitas. Everywhere Jared looked, there were trees in fall colors. He walked a hundred feet out, then stood listening to the breeze in the tall trees. Jared could hear birds singing. He smelled the crisp scents of cedar and pine. This was incredible. He turned around and looked back at the house. Jensen looked around again, reminding himself of why he bought this place. He then turned back to Jared and realized Jared had the same look on his face as when he was explaining the formulas. He could see the advanced wheels turning. 'Jensen shook his head and sighed, 'I didn't bring you out here to work, big buy, stop thinking.'" Jared looked at him in surprise, "Stop thinking?" He smiled when Jensen tried to explain, "I can see your magnificent engineer wheels turning, and that's not what you're supposed to be doing. There’s no work allowed while you’re recovering." Jared turned back to look at the prospective deck in his mind, then he turned back to Jensen, "Well it relaxes me." Jensen almost kissed Jared right then, but he remembered Bart was only a few feet away. Jared really 'did' look more relaxed. He was in his element, Jensen decided. The kid truly loved his work. Speaking of Bart, the engineer interrupted by encouraging Jared to share his 'vision' for Jensen's backyard, “What are you thinking?” Jensen felt like he completely lost control of Jared's welfare as the two engineers started discussing Jared's mental analysis of where the shape and design would fit best and be perfectly balanced. They went back and forth with joists, arcs and footings. Jensen heard Jared say, "I just need to get all the measurements and then I can design it however he wants,” so Jensen felt he had to interject now, "Uh...no, you are ‘not’ measuring anything for awhile." When Jared looked defeated with an
adorable pout Jensen had never seen, the older man softened, “You can do anything you want, in time.” Jared looked sideways at him with an affectionate grin, then shivered when an icy breeze picked up. “Come on,” Jensen urged, as he pulled Jared to get moving.

Jared walked toward the house, but kept turning his head to look at the surrounding woods and clearing. He missed most of his footing, as Jensen steadied him over and over each time he tripped. Jared was definitely distracted, as he continued to marvel at the older man's place, "I see why you bought this, Jensen...it’s absolutely wonderful and I totally get wanting to make it so you can spend more time out here." Jensen agreed, "Yeah...I was thinking a fire pit would be cool. Something cozy to stay out late, if you wanted." Jared got quiet. Jensen looked over at him and saw those wheels turning again. With a mind like Jared's it was gonna be an aerobic and mental work out just trying to keep him from breaking every restriction on the hospital's release order. After they removed their shoes, Bart followed them into the house. Jensen placed his young charge on the couch, then tended to the fire. Jared released a peaceful sigh when the heat started to kick up. "Mmmmm....," he moaned as he turned slightly toward it. Jensen heard the others coming in the front door, so he went to grab napkins and plates from the kitchen.

The AG team brought sodas and iced teas, thinking they'd probably gotten something everyone would like. Jensen sat everything down on the large wooden coffee table so everyone felt free to eat by the fire. Lunch was filling and delicious. Jared only finished half his sandwich and a small bag of chips. Jensen noticed Jared was starting to look a bit sleepy. He also noticed him subtly cross his left arm over his chest. Overall, they'd done the shower and their trip outside, then Jared had been working for hours on this case. For being one day out of the hospital, the kid was pretty active...'of course, there was that situation on the bed last night,' Jensen reminded himself. He knew it was gonna be a long afternoon getting Jared through the last of the cases. He pointed at Jared so the other men would understand, then suggested they get to it.

Jared was looking at the fire, oblivious that they were talking about him. The three men stood up, as Jensen went over to get Jared’s attention and help him to the kitchen table. The fact that Jared was quiet meant he was definitely getting tired, but Jensen knew he would try to fight it. They sat down again, reopened their laptops and continued. Jared led them through several more cases. It was almost two hours later when Jensen knelt down next to Jared and looked up into his face. He brushed the hair out of his eyes and looked closely. The kid had started losing focus a half hour ago, but as they were on the last case, Jensen hadn’t interfered. Right now, the young genius seemed to be stuck. Chuck had just asked him for the follow up email proofs on the last case and Jared sort of zoned out. "Hey, buddy, you okay?" Jensen saw drawn sunken eye sockets. Jared looked utterly exhausted. "Guys, we’re done," Jensen told the other men in the room, without looking away from Jared. Chuck piped in, “It’s the last one. We’re finished, other than the backup emails.”

"He can't, he's done," Jensen argued, then he looked back at the investigator. He could see the men hated pushing their accident victim like this, but they really needed the emails to complete their case. Jensen sighed, "Fucking look at him." Jensen looked back, holding Jared’s face up where he could see it. Jared was valiantly trying to force his eyes to stay open. “I can do it,” he said sluggishly, then reached for his keyboard. He was uncoordinated, so Jensen scooted the machine closer to him with a sigh. He wasn’t happy about this. Jared barely remembered the question, "You said...the mall emails?" Price and Chuck both answered Jared at the same time, "Yep.” Price added, "That's it, and we're done. You did fantastic, Jared." Jensen didn't think the younger man even heard that last part as he forced himself to click on the emails and send them to the investigator. When he closed the files, Jensen powered down the machine and closed it in front of Jared, ending the discussion. He was so done watching Jared torture himself. "You wanna be by the fire?" Jensen asked. When Jared nodded, Jensen took him under both armpits and lifted him up to stand. “M’s’rry,” Jared mumbled,
as he leaned his weight on Jensen and made it to the couch. Jensen helped him lay down, slipped a cushion under his head, then covered him with a nearby blanket. Jared fell asleep immediately.

The older man brushed the loose bangs back off Jared's forehead again. He rested his hand there testing for heat. He found none at the moment, much to his relief. Today was huge for Jared so he suspected the kid would sleep for quite awhile. He stoked the fire a bit, then returned to his other house guests. The men were discussing and exchanging files, organizing their evidence. The AG stood to fill Jensen in, "Jensen, I'm upping his security team and he goes 'nowhere'...I mean 'nowhere' outside of this house after tomorrow evening, okay? If you want to take him out anywhere, do it tomorrow." Jensen nodded, "Sure," but looked at the attorney with renewed worry, "What's happened?" Price answered, "Gurnaby's dead. He was found with his neck broken just a few moments ago." Nothing else needed to be said. Jensen rubbed his face and the back of his neck, "Jesus Christ."

Price continued, "Jensen, we all agree that poor kid in there doesn't deserve to be in the middle of this, but he is. Jesus Christ, he's a brave son of a bitch. It's not often I get a witness that's worked that hard to dot every i and cross every t like that. I don't have to prove the damn case...he 'IS' the damn case...and he doesn't even 'know' it." Jensen could see the AG had taken a liking to Jared, just as he knew he would. "My father," Jensen started out, "When can I hit him up for an explanation, bring this shit to light...he still doesn't know I'm involved with Jared at this point." Price thought about it, "I'll be ready by Monday afternoon to file. And then it goes public. I would guess by Monday afternoon the case will hit the public court filings and everything will explode. You can discuss anything you like after the case is out, but Jensen, your dad is showing as Chief CEO, but not as the sole owner anymore. I think he's got something like six partners. Jensen, this may or may not be him. Either way, they'll lose their company. This is way too much for them to even stay in business. They're gonna lose millions...'millions' of dollars. All their plans for early retirement, all their secret little funds...it's all gonna be frozen and then liquidated. That's how we help the employees, get them severances. We force them to liquidate, then split it for the employees who are stuck in the middle. The guilty parties will get nothing. I'm convinced they'll kill for this case to be thrown out. 'That' young man," Price pointed over at Jared, "stays completely hidden until we have a verdict. After they're convicted they can't do anything to him. It wouldn't matter after that."

Jensen asked, "So, how long will that take?" Price said, "If they rush the case through, see the evidence and enter a plea, then only a few weeks. If they fight me...well, it could be months. They 'could' even file motions and continuances just to try and draw it out, give themselves time to get their hands on him...if not directly, then just to intimidate him...wear him down...exhaust him into refusing to testify. We'll have to keep Jared under thick protection the whole way." Jensen sighed, 'Fuck,' he couldn't imagine Jared having to live like that for too long. He looked back at the man he loved and sighed again. Jensen closed his eyes and looked down, worried as hell about Jared and his safety in all this. Chuck and Price discussed a few more details, then explained they would be by Sunday afternoon to go over some things. They needed to confirm all of the depositions and make sure everything was written exactly in Jared's words before they filed. They also wanted to go over the risk to being exposed and what Jared was to do if approached by reporters or feeling threatened.

Chuck explained further to Jensen, "We need our key witness to feel safe and comfortable, and we need him kept in a healthy mental state as much as possible. Things could get overbearing when the press is involved. People might start calling him from the company. People he thought were his friends. Not everyone will agree with what he's doing and we don't want him answering his coworkers' phone calls, just yet, and getting some kind of guilt trip put on him." Jensen nodded, "Agreed. He's good at that, on his own. He feels responsible for all of them." Jensen rubbed his eyes and Chuck said, "I can see that. He's a pretty amazing person." Jensen nodded again, agreeing wholeheartedly. There was a knock at the door. When Jensen got up to go answer it, Price held his hand up, "I'll get it Jensen. It's just the additional security."
Price said his 'hello's' and introduced the men to Jensen. He pointed to the couch, "That's our target, fellas. Nothing touches him...not even within yelling distance, is that clear?" Jensen didn't like it when Price called Jared a 'target' but he stayed quiet. The new security team explained they'd be on watch throughout the night. There would be another team exchanging with them in the morning and they'd make sure Jensen knew their faces before they swapped. Now there were going to be four on watch at all times. Jensen nodded in understanding, then Chuck explained further to the team, "The kid’s seriously injured from a previous attempt on his life. He's been through enough. We don't want anybody talking to him, 'unless' it's somebody pre-approved by one of us. Jensen is his caretaker and you’ve all been briefed on his capabilities. If Jared has any kind of medical issue, Jensen will call the shots in that area." Jensen watched the four men's focused expressions. These were good men. It didn't mean he wasn't still considering his own team on speed dial.

After everyone left, the security team positioned outside, Jensen went to poke around in the fire again. He added more wood, then locked up the slider and shut the curtain. Jensen checked the exhausted man on the couch, wondering if Jared would even want dinner. He leaned back in his recliner and watched the flames for awhile, trying to force himself to relax. He turned on the television, flipped through some news, then landed on the CW channel. He loved some of the shows on this channel so he left it there, not intending on dozing off. Jensen woke close to nine. "Holy fuck," he cursed to himself, pissed that he'd succumbed to sleeping that long. He went over to Jared and lowered himself to his knees. The younger man was still sleeping hard. He had rolled slightly but showed no signs of waking up. Jensen felt Jared's forehead and cheeks for a temperature, then took his pulse. He noticed Jared's pulse was a little fast. Jensen thought he might be hearing a slight whistle on Jared's exhale, but he wasn't positive. The kid was practically laying on his right torso so listening with his ear was impossible without waking him. Jensen went to retrieve his stethoscope from the medicine cabinet. When he returned, he blew hot air on the steel pad first, then slipped it under the back of Jared's shirt. He hated to admit it, but there was a very slight whistle in the kid’s left lung. “Damn,” he cursed quietly.

Jensen went to the kitchen and grabbed a water bottle, a glass of Sprite, Jared’s antibiotics and the breathing machine. He brought everything back to the coffee table, then lowered himself onto his knees again. He gently brushed the hair off Jared's face, hating to wake the poor man. Jensen spoke softly, not wanting to startle him, “Jared.” When there was no response, he rubbed the kid’s arm and called in a sing song voice, “Jaaaarreeed.” He kept up the routine a few more times, “Jaaaarreedd...come on, baby, can you wake up for me?” When Jensen sensed Jared’s breathing had shifted, he coaxed him again, "Jared, I need you to wake up, okay? You need your medicine." Jared moaned a high pitched soft sound, like he was tired but trying to comply. The sound broke Jensen's heart and he felt even worse about what he was doing. He sighed, "I am toast when it comes to you, you know that? You’ve turned me into a fucking marshmallow."

Jared finally stirred. He inhaled deeply and yawned. He rolled slightly onto his back, then turned his head to face Jensen. He blinked heavily before locking his sleepy hazel grey eyes on him. "Hey," Jensen greeted him. The younger man answered tiredly, "Hey." Jensen brushed a stray hair off the kids' face again, "I'm sorry I had to wake you. It's time for your antibiotic and I know it sucks, but we have to do a breathing treatment." Jared argued unhappily, "No, I don't need that anymore." Jensen almost reneged when he heard the whine in Jared’s voice, combined with the anguished sadness in his eyes. He felt terrible about forcing the issue, "I'm so sorry, buddy, but I can hear you wheezing so we can't ignore it." Jared rolled to his right and pushed himself into a sitting position, with Jensen's help, much like he'd learned to do in the hospital. He yawned again and bitched, "Why am I so fucking tired?" Jensen told him, "You did a lot today." Jared looked around, "Is everyone gone?" Jensen realized the poor man didn't even know he'd slept almost four hours yet. He answered, “Yeah, they all left...except for the security guys outside.” Jensen thought the younger man still looked pretty wiped, but he offered him the Sprite and the pill first. While Jared took the pill
Jared drank most of the water next, feeling like an endless pit all of a sudden. Jensen explained, “It’s the fire. It’ll dry you out, along with the meds. We have to keep pushing the fluids, okay?” Jared nodded. He yawned, then eyeballed the breathing machine with obvious distaste. “I’m sorry,” Jensen offered. Jared half smiled, knowing it wasn’t Jensen’s fault. He worked on preparing himself for the ten minute hell. He took the mask from Jensen, closed his eyes and placed the mask over his face. Jared inhaled a cleansing breath, held it for a few seconds, then blew it out. He looked at Jensen with a nod. Jensen pushed the release and watched Jared close his eyes tight. The poor kid huddled his shoulders up and held the mask tightly over his face. Jensen felt horrible putting him through this, but Jared’s lung wheezing wasn’t anything they could take lightly. Jared worked his way through the resistance from the first couple breaths, then he did fine. Jensen rubbed his back, soothing him as best he could. When the breathing machine timer went off, Jensen reached over to turn off the machine, then peeled the white knuckled hands away from Jared’s face. “Hey...Jare, it’s over. You did it.”

Jared opened his eyes, finally realizing it was over. He allowed Jensen to take the mask, feeling embarrassed. “Sorry,” Jared mumbled quietly. Jensen put the machine away, then turned to face Jared again, “Are you alright?” Jared smiled with tired eyes, “Yeah.” He avoided looking at the repulsive machine, but eyed the water bottle again, so Jensen handed it to him. After Jared finished it, Jensen asked, “Do you want to sleep in the bedroom or out here?” Jared yawned, “Uhm...I don't really know...everything is so damn comfortable.” Jared yawned again, looking up with concern, “Have you been stuck in that chair this whole time?” Jensen leaned over, “Don't worry about me, Jare. I'm fine anywhere. But the bed does sound more inviting. You know it's almost nine thirty...”

Jared’s eyebrows perked up, "Really? It's that late?" He looked down in confusion, "I don't believe I slept that long." Jensen gently moved the hair aside from covering Jared’s eyes, “You kicked ass today and you've only been out of the hospital one day. That's why you're so tired. Do you feel like you need any pain pills?” Jared yawned again, "Uh uh.” He let Jensen pull him up, then lead him into the master bedroom. Jared immediately felt the cozy temperature in the room, “Mmmmm...it feels nice in here,” Jensen had turned on the fireplace awhile ago. Jared used the restroom and brushed his teeth while Jensen stood outside the door. He helped him into a pair of pajamas, then assisted the younger man getting into bed.

When Jensen covered him, Jared sighed in ecstasy, snuggling himself deeper into Jensen’s covers. “Thank you,” he exclaimed, looking beyond exhausted. Jensen kissed him on the forehead, then went to take care of a few things. He straightened up the house, checked the locks and returned to do his own preparation for bed. When Jensen got under the covers, Jared inched closer to his natural body heat. He draped himself over Jensen’s side, laying his arm across the older man’s waist. This was a first. Jensen was taken off guard, pleasantly so. He realized the kid might not even realize what he was doing, but Jensen quickly enveloped him with his arms and enjoyed the hell out of it. Jensen slept more soundly than he had in two decades.
Chapter Eleven. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

This is a love story chapter. J and J get to know each other even more. There is a shopping mall outing, mixed with tender and humorous moments. Kissing, hurt/comfort, and angst warnings. This chapter isn't quite as long, but it's filled with lots of juicy fun. The sexy special ops retiree gets to work out and Jared gets to talk to his friends, finally, who are worried sick.

Chapter Eleven

Jensen awoke early from his internal time clock. Jared was still out cold next to him. The young man had rolled onto his back at some point. Jensen still felt the residual warmth from Jared being on his chest most of the night. Jensen slipped out of the covers and threw on a robe. He took care of his morning bathroom routine, then went out to make coffee. Jensen knew the security team would be doing a shift change in awhile and would probably be sending a text. He looked out the front window and saw two men in the car. 'The others must be walking around,' he mentally assessed. The men hadn't made any noise overnight. 'Either that, or I’m just getting soft,' he considered. After making sure Jared was still dead to the world in wheeze free slumber, Jensen changed and headed for his treadmill. He had missed the feeling of a solid run, opening his lungs up to breathe hard while pushing his muscles against their threshold. He finished four miles, then slowed to a cool down. It felt incredible. He added a few weight repetitions before laying into some ab work.

Jensen hit the shower and got dressed in silence, donning a pair of faded jeans and a plain white t-shirt. His bedmate was still out cold, hair spread out in disarray. Jensen smiled as he observed him. Jared’s breathing was quiet and clear, this deep sleep exactly what he needed most. Jensen headed back to the kitchen to grab his coffee, just as the security phone vibrated. He answered the door and made the connections to all the faces in his brain. He wanted to see about getting Jared some new clothes today, if the younger man felt up to it, so he discussed that with the team. After he closed the door, Jensen decided to pull out some food and start on breakfast. Within minutes, the house smelled of good old fashioned bacon and eggs.

Jared didn't want to move, but he could no longer ignore the need to relieve his bladder. He grumbled to himself, “Shit,” as he wormed his way out of the covers and sat up. He looked at the bedside clock and saw it was after eight. The bedroom was silent, except for the sound of the synthetic flames of the fireplace. Jared assessed his body for a moment. He realized he felt no pain, no headache and a startling amount of energy, for once. 'YES,' he rejoiced. He didn't think twice about standing up and heading to the bathroom. He took care of business, brushed his teeth and shaved. He brushed his hair, then smoothed it back with wet fingers. Jared had been up for about fifteen minutes before realizing he usually waited for Jensen to get up and do things. 'Oops,' he thought guiltily. He knew the older man cared deeply about him staying in one piece. He really didn't mean to break the agreement, he just felt like a million bucks and forgot his condition for a little while.

Jared looked at the shower in longing. He sighed, feeling guilty for even thinking of grabbing a shower alone. He knew that would be pushing it without his spotter. He suddenly caught a drift of some delicious smells coming from the hallway. 'God, it’s bacon,’ he realized. Jared was looking
down when he headed out the bedroom door. As he rounded the corner, he hit a solid wall of muscle with a startled "Mphf," causing him to tilt backward. Jensen quickly grabbed him under both elbows so he wouldn't fall backward, as Jared grabbed Jensen's t-shirt in a slight panic. Jared's eyes landed on the dog tags under Jensen's t-shirt, traveled up the silver cord around the retired soldier's neck, then landed on the very pronounced muscle definition. He cleared his throat, as he righted himself.

'Sexy as fucking hell,' Jared's mind spun. Jensen assessed him in silence for a few seconds, as Jared let go of his shirt. He internally panicked when he first heard Jared walking out of the bathroom alone, but when he saw Jared's face, he realized the kid was stronger today.

"Good morning," Jensen tried for a smooth greeting, knowing the worried look in Jared's eyes was most likely because he thought he'd pissed him off doing things by himself. He didn't. Jared deflected, "Hi. It smells so good. Is that breakfast?" Jensen smirked knowingly. He decided to let Jared off the hook for now, "It 'is', young paddiwan. Are you hungry?" Jared answered eagerly, "God yes, I'm starving." Jensen stepped backward and turned to walk toward the kitchen. He called over his shoulder, "Well come on, it's waiting for you." Jared was so grateful he was being let off the hook this time. He mentally vowed to watch his impulsiveness from now on. If he passed out, or ran into something and hurt his ribs, Jensen might not be so forgiving again.

Jared was distracted by the back side of Jensen's snug t-shirt. His eyes traveled from his shoulders, down his back, past his tapered waist to his very defined, perfectly rounded ass cheeks. 'Jesus,' Jared gulped, 'they don't even shake when he walks...and those jeans.' After sitting at the table, Jared was treated to a feast of scrambled eggs and cheese, bacon and delicious high octane coffee. He emitted the same orgasmic sounds of appreciation that he'd shared with Jensen over yesterday's waffles. Jensen enjoyed the hell out of it, but had to use all his strength to control his hard on. Jared was clueless, of course. The kid's innocence was astounding. He blurted out, "You're such a good cook, Jensen. I can't cook like this, can you teach me?"

Jensen appreciated the compliment but his mind went straight to the gutter as he pictured it, "Sure, I'll teach you whatever you want," he paused, "but standing against you and having to keep my hands off and my dick from reacting isn't gonna be easy. I'm not sure if we'd get through the lesson without me molesting the hell out of my student." Jared choked on his coffee and spent the next full minute trying to clear his windpipe. He felt a helpful palm hitting between his shoulder blades, as he grabbed his chest to try and alleviate the spasms. Jensen felt terrible. He hadn't meant to do that to the younger man. He rubbed Jared's back until he cleared his windpipe, then knelt down to face him, "Are you alright?" Jared nodded, calming his cough but chuckling in frustration, "I didn't see that coming." He looked at Jensen, who was looking at him with enormous guilt and concern, "Jensen, it's okay." Jared chuckled again lightly, "Really. It's good to laugh. I wasn't sure I could swing it...but now that I've tried it, it's good to know it won't kill me."

Jared delivered that lightly, meant to downplay Jensen's worry, but the older man grumbled, as he got up and went back to his chair, "It was stupid and don't try and pretend it doesn't hurt." Jared sighed and rolled his eyes, "I'm not...and yeah, it hurts, it's so much better. It hurts, but it's going away already. I mean it...this whole morning has been so much better, man I can't get over it." Jensen believed the kid. He had seen it back in the hallway. Jared was much better, but having energy meant he was going to get into trouble easier. Jensen didn't need to create 'more' possibilities of the kid hurting himself again. He decided to drop the subject and talk about something else, for now, "So, I wondered if you would like to get some new clothes today. We can go into town and pick whatever you want." Jared's face could not have lit up brighter at Jensen's suggestion, "Really?" He was definitely up for it, "That would be awesome. I'm serious, Jensen...I feel so energetic today. I want to do as much as I can. Maybe we can see other..."

"Uh, hold on there, Sparky," Jensen stopped him, "it will all depend on how long your batteries last this morning, is that in agreement?" Jensen was damned serious about this and Jared could see it. He
didn't want to cause any kind of further problems for the man who had done so much already, "Yeah. I'll be careful, Jensen, I promise. Can we go soon?" Jensen cleared the table and told Jared he'd do all the dishes later. He knew the younger man could fade within a couple hours and he definitely wanted him to enjoy himself, first. He opened the front door and waved to the security team. They came in quickly and discussed the method for going out. Jared thought it was all over the top, thinking this was way too much trouble for just 'him.' He agreed to stay next to Jensen and between the team, though, knowing he wasn't going anywhere if he didn't. 'Really...four guys and a black ops master sergeant? I don't fucking believe this,' Jared bitched mentally because he still hadn't grasped what being a key witness meant. He'd seen this shit on tv shows...now he was in the middle of it and it was surreal. Jensen held the passenger door for Jared while he climbed into his truck. He watched Jared push himself into the seat without too much trouble. The younger man winced slightly when he tensed his torso, but it seemed to dissipate quickly.

Jared buckled himself in by taking his movements very slow. Jensen maintained that Jared was amazingly stronger today, but he drove a bit slower and with more caution, just in case the younger man had another flashback. Jared did extremely well moving around. He walked to four different stores in the mall, sitting on a bench to rest when Jensen insisted on it. He fussed when Jensen insisted on carrying all bags, but he had to admit, aside from having security people following him around, he was smiling inside at being amongst other shoppers and breathing air with everyone else. Nine days ago, he thought he was going to die, and now his life felt renewed. And, most important of all, he had met Jensen. Jared was caught looking at the older man, smiling in wonder and amazement. Jensen slightly blushed, grinned and looked down. Jared giggled in response because Jensen had only done this in front of him one other time. "I love that you blush, even it it's subtle, Ackles." Jensen played irritated, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about." Jared giggled again. Jensen smiled. He found himself glued to the sparkling lights in Jared's beautiful eyes today. When the kid looked this happy, Jensen found it exceedingly hard to concentrate.

Jensen couldn't believe Jared had picked the same style clothing. He bought soft faded jeans, a pair of ripped jeans, a really nice black pair and a dressier pair of slacks and shoes. He picked long sleeve shirts in maroon, grey and blue. Jensen couldn't help but think how they were going to go perfectly with the kid's gorgeous coloring. Jared got a couple flannels and some white t-shirts, then grabbed packs of socks and underwear. He got one dress shirt and sweater to go with the nicer slacks. He picked out some outdoorsy smelling shampoo and gel soap, deodorant and toothpaste. Jensen had gone over the purchasing process with Jared in the truck. Since Jared's credit and debit cards could be traced, he would have to accept the AG's witness protection fund paying for his things. Afterward, he could pay back all the funds with his own money. Jared reluctantly accepted once he knew he could pay it all back. After they rested on a bench for the third time, Jensen followed Jared into a tech store. He wasn't sure what Jared had his eye on, at first, then watched the kid sit down immediately at a display computer. Jensen checked his watch, just so he could be prepared for when Jared ran out of steam. He made sure to mentally stay within the two hour time frame he expected Jared to last. As he returned his focus to what Jared was doing, he leaned in closer and dropped his mouth open. He was unable to look away from the screen. The engineer was currently building commands to insert trees around the perimeter. He had already thrown a mock outdoor fireplace and jacuzzi on the deck. "Jared, how did you..." Jensen couldn't even finish his sentence. It was one thing to envision what someone wanted in their backyard, but to see it in a picture like this was...it was so...'so much more real,' he thought. Jensen looked at Jared, as if he was seeing him for the first time. Jensen already knew how smart and talented the kid was, but Jared had thrown that together in less than ten minutes.
Jared mindlessly asked, “Hm?” then did a double take, as he took in the way Jensen was looking at him. “I,” Jared cleared his throat nervously, “I was...just wanting to do something...you know, nice...for you.” It was a very rough sketch, lacking in detail and Jared wasn't even using real measurements. This was just a fun computer program and he thought he'd... Jared's thoughts were interrupted when he was pulled into a kiss, full of sweet tender promise. Jensen’s tongue made him forget anything he was about to say...or pretty much where he was. Jared whimpered, helplessly, as Jensen swept him away. When he pulled back, Jensen drank in the sight of a flushed gorgeous young man who was obviously clueless to his own talent and beauty. "Jared, just so you know, that is the coolest thing I've ever seen someone do. I had no idea you could throw something like that together so fast. And baby, you do not have to do ‘anything’ more than just be yourself for me, alright? I want you to understand that. You owe me nothing, okay?”

Jensen started to grin because it looked like Jared hadn't quite recovered from that kiss yet. The kid was pretty flushed and dreamy looking. He finally found his voice and naturally tried to downplay his talents, "Well, the software makes...something like this much faster. I have this on my laptop...we could play around with other designs after I have measurements. I just...I make it fit with existing structures and the natural landscape. It'll be fun." Jared looked up at Jensen as he looked closer at the diagram. He shook his head and looked down at Jared again with the same look of awe, "Yes, it will be fun. But of course, you'll floor me again with all your damn genius mathematical brilliance. It pisses me off, Jare, I swear you got all the brain cells and the rest of us common folk are left with, "UGH," Jensen grunted as Jared punched him in his six pack, giggling, "Shut up, that's not true." Jensen grinned at Jared's giggle. They closed the program and Jensen helped pull Jared up out of the chair. He kissed him once more. They were in a peaceful place right now, Jared temporarily forgetting about the two security men who had been flanking them everywhere they went. Jensen hadn’t forgotten, of course. He had been aware of the tech store clerk, watching them kiss with something similar to longing on his face. He also noticed the grandma who had grabbed her accompanying youngsters and pulled them out of range quickly, not comfortable with two gay men showing affection. Jensen's sixth sense knew who was checking out Jared's ass, his face, or who was checking out his own. He was aware, but it wasn't something that required excessive energy or focus. It was something on automation at all times, from years of field work and trying to stay alive and keep others alive.

Jensen noticed a group of dangerous individuals, up to no good, who seemed to be casing one of the stores and people passing by. ‘Probably about to grab somebody’s purse,’ Jensen thought, as he noticed the security team was watching them too. They ignored the group, since they didn’t seem to be a threat to Jared, but they kept watch on them. Jensen eventually saw one of their team tell a passing security guard about the questionable subjects. He knew their dedication was to Jared’s safety, so they weren’t going to get involved in chasing thieves through the mall, but at least they’d helped out by passing the info along. Jensen turned toward Jared when the younger man stopped walking. Jensen followed Jared’s line of sight, which seemed to be zero’d in on a toy store. Jensen couldn’t resist asking, “Don’t tell me, you want a Chuck Norris doll?” Jared looked at him surprised, then burst out laughing. He grabbed his left side, in frustration, “No.” Jensen smirked, “A Rambo action figure?” Jared laughed again, still holding his chest. Jared was quite the vision, relaxed and happy. Jensen couldn’t take his eyes away. There were little diamond chips sparkling in Jared's soft grey irises and it was intoxicating to stare at. The hazel was at bay, the grey more dominant with a little green swimming around. Jared’s eyes were unfuckingbelievable, in Jensen’s opinion. The younger man was still smirking when he corrected Jensen, "I was actually thinking of a chess board...and that maybe we could play later." Jensen raised his eyebrows in surprise, “That’s a great idea. I would love to play with you and I don’t have a board.” Jensen walked toward the store, but stopped just before they walked inside, holding Jared back by the arm, “Wait a minute, I remember you and Manny saying you played chess. Is this one MORE thing you were gifted with extra brain cells to do? Am I even gonna last five minutes playing against you?”
Jared looked innocent, "I'm pretty good from being on teams in school, but I don’t ‘always’ win.” He shrugged his shoulder and looked at Jensen, “I love to play.” Jared loved the mind exercise and concentration used in chess. To him, it didn’t matter whether he won or lost, it was the actual game that was fun. After Jensen watched him with suspicion for a couple seconds, Jared worried he might not get to play and accidentally laid on the disappointed puppy dog orbs. Jensen reacted defensively, "No, not that! Do NOT do that!” Jared looked upset and confused, "Do what?” Jensen shook his head, "Come on...let's get your chess board, my young friend and lover with 'THE' most dangerous eyes on the planet.” He sighed as he escorted a confused Jared into the toy store to hunt down a chess board. Jared was definitely slowing down and yawning as they left the store. Jensen immediately guided him toward the exit. They reached the truck, Jensen thanking the stars they had parked close. Jared’s movements were slow and sluggish, as he climbed into the passenger seat. Jensen threw the packages into the back seat, then helped Jared with his seatbelt since the younger man seemed to be failing in coordination. He hurried to the driver’s side, then jumped in to start the truck. Jensen turned to his charge. He had to admit it had been a really good trip. Seeing Jared joke and laugh had been the highlight of his day. It was easy to forget Jared was recovering from such life threatening injuries when he was full of sparkling energy. Right now, the kid was yawning and blinking heavily.

Jared looked at Jensen, giving him a more frontal view of his exhaustion, "It's so pretty out. When does it snow here?" Jensen started the engine and began to pull out as he explained, “Well, it’s starting to freeze now at night. It will snow by Thanksgiving or a little after. It snows pretty steady until end of January or February. Last year, we had some seventeen below temps. The winters here can be deadly if you're not prepared or caught out in it. Most people are in before nightfall when it's that cold. You see a lot of hibernating people until by February.” Jared tried to imagine what a freezing winter would be like, since he’d never experienced it in Austin or California. He had a sudden worry, "I didn't buy a jacket today." The older man answered him quickly, "It's alright, I have some. You can't wear just anything, it has to be something with down, made for this weather. Something on your hands too when you're outside. I have all that stuff." "Okay," the tired man conceded, then he yawned again and leaned back against the head rest. 'Dammit,' he really didn't want to fall asleep, but he was having trouble even holding his head up. His chest was a little sore, but not too bad. "Today was so fun, Jensen, thank you,” Jared said, then he turned his head toward his gorgeous protector and smiled dreamily. Jensen glanced at him and smiled. Jared was barely conscious. “You’re welcome, Jare.” Jensen wasn’t sure his passenger had heard him, since he caught Jared’s heavy eyelids closing before he turned back to watch the road.

Jensen focused on getting them back to his place in one piece. When they reached the house, he was grateful the security guys took all their bags to the door for them. He was careful to shut his driver’s and back doors gently, then came around to open Jared's door. Jared wasn't responding to 'any' of Jensen's coaxing, so he finally accepted the fact that he was going to be carrying Jared to the door. Jensen unhitched the seatbelt and pulled the younger man’s legs out of the truck. He further pulled Jared’s upper body into a shoulder carry. Jensen used his position under Jared’s armpit to pull him out of the car and secured his left arm around Jared’s waist. He had a tight grip on the younger man’s right arm around his shoulders. Jared stirred just enough to go through the motions of walking so that Jensen didn’t have to use a fireman’s carry and risk hurting his ribs. The younger man’s head was leaning loosely on Jensen's shoulder as they walked.

The two steps on the front porch were an issue, but one of the security men helped Jensen lift Jared enough to get him past it. Once inside the house, Jensen led the younger man to the bedroom and lowered him to the bed. Jensen couldn’t believe he hadn't waken up from all the movement. 'He's totally wiped out,' Jensen worried. He checked Jared's forehead for fever and listened to his breathing with one ear to his chest. It sounded clear, so he covered him and went to put Jared's clothes away for him in the spare room. Jensen put the chess board on the table, then got out the
ingredients to make a chicken salad. He was starving. He knew Jared probably was, too, so he made extra for the younger man to devour when he woke up. Jensen cleaned up the kitchen after he ate, did a load of laundry and read the paper. He talked to his military buddies on a three way chat for almost an hour. They joked and talked of day to day things, then addressed the serious situation that Jensen's new friend was facing. Jensen was reminded again that he only needed to text a word and they would respond immediately to help him keep Jared safe. If he was important to Jensen, he would be protected like family. Dave and Mike both teased Jensen about the change in his tone of voice when he talked about Jared, but Jensen told them to "knock it off, you're both dicks." They laughed and insisted it was true. Jensen had gone soft over a new guy and their former team leader was a goner. Jensen hung up feeling the solidarity of his brothers that had gone through so much with him. They would always be there for each other, but Jensen was perturbed that the 'assholes' could read him so well. ‘Fuckers, I do NOT sound different,’ he decided.

Jensen checked on Jared and saw the younger man had moved in his sleep, but was still out cold and looking quite peaceful. He went outside and brought in more firewood, deciding to stock up enough inside for a couple days. After Jensen folded the laundry, he enjoyed a beer while watching a couple deer in his yard from the porch. ’Forgot to tell Jared about those,’ he smiled to himself. The security men were placed strategically. He noticed a couple of them were watching the deer, too. Jensen smiled. People had no idea what damage the cute soft brown eyed creatures could cause. He knew, since he planted several types of vegetables once and found all them eaten to the stubs. They'd eaten the damn roses right off his bushes, too. 'Innocent looking little shits,' he thought. Jensen heard the slider door open behind him and turned quickly to see Jared coming out to him. He immediately noticed that Jared wasn't quite functioning at one hundred percent, so he jumped up and went to him. "Hey," Jensen took his elbows and smiled. Jared yawned, "Hey," sleepily rubbing his eyes and swaying a bit. He didn't seem to be aware he wasn't firing on all cylinders, so Jensen held him close while he stepped out onto the small patio. Jared's vision cleared enough to see the deer. "Oh," he stared at them in wondrous fascination. There were two does and four spotted babies. Jared thought they were so quiet and peaceful, so beautiful and he couldn't stop watching them…and Jensen couldn't stop watching Jared.

"Can we feed them? Do you leave stuff out for them?" Jared was innocent in his need to take care of the beautiful furry animals, so Jensen tried to let him down gently, "Well, I did at first. But I’ve learned they tend to help themselves. Believe me, they've gone through all of my vegetable garden and stripped my strawberries and my pomegranate bush, not to mention my rose bushes. I'm sure they're not starving." Jensen watched Jared's face drop in understanding. Jensen added, "And they bring all their friends too. We could leave apples and bread, but it won't stop there and we'll wake up to a whole herd on my porch. The bucks aren't friendly and very protective of the others. If you come out at the wrong time, the buttheads will charge at you. I was dumb enough to try and hand a cracker to a little guy once. His father came at me like fuckin' Cujo." Jensen smiled at Jared's surprised reaction, "Oh." The younger man was really too adorable for his own good. Jensen had the sudden urge to pull Jared in closer and wrap his arms around him. Jared immediately slipped his arms around Jensen's waist and laid his head sideways on his shoulder. They held each other in silence, sharing a long moment of comfort and peace, until Jensen felt the younger man's subtle shivers from the cool air. He pulled back to look at him, “You hungry?” Jared nodded at the same time his stomach growled loud enough for Jensen to hear. They both smiled and headed for the kitchen.

Jensen pulled out the salad and sandwich he made and served it to the kid with a large glass of apple juice. Jared was in heaven. He felt his energy returning as soon as the food hit his bloodstream. He eyed the chess set box and raised his eyebrows, not realizing Jensen noticed him looking. "We can play, if you want...I'm not banking on winning, though, and playing against a fucking genius probably ain't too bright. Long as I don't bet my truck, I guess I'll be okay." Jared gave an annoyed sigh and rolled his eyes, "I'm not that good...and I'm certainly not a genius. I haven't cured cancer or
performed brain surgery, Jensen. There's a lot smarter out there." Jensen sat at the table across from Jared and began putting the board together, as he argued, "Just because you have a different career than those people doesn't mean you aren't smarter than they are. I know you are. You just don't give yourself any credit." Jared chose to ignore Jensen's comment. After they were set up and just about to start, Jensen had a thought, "Hey...you want some fresh coffee?" Jared's face lit up, "Yes!" His excitement and smile were worth it, so Jensen jumped up and made a quick pot of late afternoon caffeine.

The men played for two hours, stopping only for a second cup of coffee. They both turned out to be matched pretty evenly. Jared won the first game, but he had to work for it. He pointed that out to Jensen, who feigned mock confusion at doing so well. After the second round, Jared was sure Jensen was hustling him. By the third, Jensen accused him of ‘letting’ him get ahead and to ‘knock it off’. It was quite enjoyable to have stiff competition. Jensen's cell phone buzzed. After he responded to a text, he told Jared it was the AG confirming their appointment the next day. When Jared looked confused, Jensen quickly filled him in on what had transpired after Jared crashed on the couch. Without laying the Gurnaby death on him, Jensen explained the AG’s concerns over the press frenzy and how they planned to keep Jared safe from it all. He stressed about the increased protection, then about how Price expected dire circumstances for A.E. Jared listened intently. He wasn’t happy about it all, but at least it felt like things were moving forward. It was terrifying to think these men could be right about the danger he was in, but that part was still surreal.

Jared suddenly thought about the enormity of what was going to happen to Jensen's father's company. A.E. was going to be destroyed. Jensen asked him concernedly, "Hey, what's wrong? What are you thinking?" Jared’s eyes were filled with guilt and sadness, "What's going to happen to your family, Jensen?" The older man grabbed Jared’s hand and squeezed it, “Hey, none of this is your doing, remember? They did it to themselves.” Jared knew Jensen was right, but he felt terrible about his family being so devastated. “Jensen,” his eyes filled with such sadness, Jensen reached forward and touched his cheek, “Hey...my dad ‘let’ this happen. He and my brother ‘chose’ this. They hired assholes just like them to help run it. I left a long time ago because of it. The only regret I have in this is YOU. Them using you, treating you like shit, hurting you...” Jensen squeezed his hand, “Baby, do not worry about me in this. I’m ‘fine’ with what’s happening to them. They deserve to lose, for once.”

Jensen waited for Jared to process that. He could see the younger man still wasn’t used to the depth of his feelings toward him yet. When Jensen finally got to confront his family, he’d have some satisfaction at breaking Daniel’s nose for treating Jared so badly. The other bone crunching he’d like to do was to the manager or executive who had ordered Jared's so called accident to get rid of him. 'THAT' guy needed to be in severe pain. The younger man sighed, which brought Jensen back from his unpleasant thoughts. Jared looked like he’d let the worry go, for now, but thought of something else, "Do you think I can call my friends? It's been a few days and I'm sure they're confused because my phone isn’t available." Jensen smiled, “Of course,” then took out his cell phone and handed it to him. Before dialing, Jared asked, "What can I tell them? I mean before they see it on the news and all that. I don’t want them hurt or put on the spot because of me." Jensen answered, "Just tell them you’re okay, but you can’t tell them where you are. They might slip and we don’t want them to accidentally repeat my name or anything. I’m sure it’s fine to warn them about the general case, but they can’t give away your location or that you’re with me." Jared nodded, "Okay."

For the next hour, Jared spent time talking to Manny, first, who demanded over and over again to come and see Jared, wanting to see for himself that the younger man was being taken care of. Jared had a hard time working around Manny’s persistence. His friend finally reneged, only when Jared promised he would keep in touch and that he could visit as soon as things calmed down. Manny was curious, as hell, about the man Jared was staying with, but Jared couldn’t elaborate much. He knew his friend was ecstatic for him to find someone, but Manny not being able to see for himself was
killing him. He called Jeff next. Manny blew up Jeff’s voicemail while Jared was on the line with him, making both men laugh. Jeff joked, “He’s going nuts. Probably thinks I’m getting more information out of you than he did and he’s missing out.” “Yeah,” Jared agreed affectionately, “I know. And I promise you guys, when this is all over, you’ll know everything.” Jared reminded himself he truly had the best friends ever. They cared about him, immensely. Jeff reminded him to call his aunt. The woman was beginning to think Manny had been lying and her nephew wasn’t really getting better. Jared promised to call her before he hung up. Blair was next. Jared filled her in on what he could say, then assured her several times he was safe. She had been pretty worried, just like everyone else.

Jared warned Blair that the big case was going to be filed Monday. He wanted to her to lay low, maybe take Monday off, just to avoid any backlash in case the company took it out on her because of him. Blair argued, “Well, how am I supposed to get intel for you from home, my sweet boy. I’m going to work, Jared, because then I can see first hand how they react and I can report everything back to you that I see. Don’t worry, I’m ready and the girls are too. We know something’s coming and we’re all gonna be okay.” Jared sighed. He knew Blair was a force to be reckoned with when it came to helping him, but this really wouldn’t do any good to put herself in harm’s way. “Blair… I don’t want them hounding you about me. You can’t tell them we’ve talked, okay? And don’t think you’re doing some undercover Agent 99 thing for me, these people are gonna be pissed off and dangerous. Would you please just take the day off?” Jensen looked over at Jared, watching the frustration on his face while he listened to Blair. The two men exchanged knowing looks of concern, but Jensen couldn’t help grin at the determination of Jared’s friend’s. They loved Jared, that was obvious.

The older man grabbed two beers out of the fridge while Jared continued to talk with his secretary. They seemed to finally reach agreement that Blair would take Monday off. The older man set one beer on the table for Jared and went to tend to the fireplace. Jensen had no idea what they were talking about next, when Jared reacted with, “What?! Why?”

Blair let Jared know that Daniel had been asking about him. He reacted to the news just as she expected. The older woman continued, “He wanted to know the hospital, your room number and when you’d be out. I let him know you’d been moved to a recovery location for awhile and that I didn’t know the details. He just walked off after that…without a thank you, of course.” Jared sighed, “Thanks Blair. I hope he wasn’t planning to visit me, gross.” Blair assured him, ”I would have warned you, sweetie, if he’d headed that way. I’m sure he wouldn’t be pulling any of his groping shit with that protective hunk around, though. He ‘is’ still around, isn’t he? And are you truly okay?” Jared responded, “Very okay. I’m much better than when I saw you…and yes to that other question too.” Blair squealed in delight, then lowered her voice. “That is so good to hear, honey. I’m sure that tall drink’s got a lot to do with your amazing recovery, so that makes me happy.”

Jared tried not to blush, as he looked immediately over at the subject of their conversation who was innocently stoking the fire. ‘God, those jeans touch his ass in all the right,’ “Huh?” Jared’s thoughts were interrupted when he realized Blair had called his name. Blair giggled at Jared’s lack of response, knowing she had been right. He told Blair he was worried about the SPCA shelters, and asked her to make sure Cassie and Lisa knew about the limelight they might endure because of the recent ordinance publicity. Blair assured him they were all going to be just fine. She reminded him that he was a hero and he’d better not forget they loved him and were all behind him. Jensen returned to the table to see Jared roll his eyes and sigh in irritation.

He figured she must be blowing compliments Jared’s way because he certainly didn’t want to hear anymore of whatever she was saying. Jared said his goodbye’s and promised to eat and sleep and do everything that the ‘hunk’ told him to do. He hung up, mentally exhausted from his friends’ overly protective concern, but he had one more call to make. Jensen gently rubbed Jared’s hair, as the younger man dialed his aunt’s number. When Jared leaned into his touch, Jensen smiled. He bent
over and kissed Jared, just as his aunt answered the phone. Jensen went around and checked the windows and doors, making sure he didn’t have to do it later. He planned on a laid back evening. If they went straight to bed, he wouldn’t have to worry about securing anything later.

Jared was exhausted when he finished talking to his aunt. He rested his forehead on his arm for a minute, face down on the table. When he sighed and looked up, he was surprised to find Jensen standing over him, looking down with concern. He hadn’t even heard the older man’s approach. Jensen could read the mental exhaustion in the younger man’s face. He held out his hand for Jared to take. He pulled Jared up to stand, then circled his arms around his waist to study him closely. Jared was transfixed by the deep pools of green that were focused on him. He realized he would give Jensen anything. Do anything. Say anything, just to be looked at the way Jensen was looking at him now. Jensen smiled softly, then guided Jared to the couch. He sat next to him, then turned to face Jared, resting his head on his elbow, “So I was thinking, maybe if we rest awhile, watch some movies, you’ll be hungry later. I have some steak dinners from the restaurant waiting to be eaten. That sound okay?” Jared smiled sleepily, “That sounds good.” He felt hypnotized by Jensen and the heat of the fire. Jensen played with his hair for a few seconds, then grabbed the remote and flicked through a variety of choices. When he landed on the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, Jared perked up, “Oh, can we? I’ve never seen those.” “Of course,” Jensen smiled, and set up the first one. Jared was glued to the movie, laughing at the antics and slapstick humor for the first hour. After that, his growing quietness prompted Jensen to lean forward and check on him. Jared’s face was slightly dazed. Jensen asked, “Do you want to save this until tomorrow?” Jensen wasn’t sure if Jared was even hearing him, at first, then Jared softly smiled, “No, it's good...'okay.” Jensen smiled because Jared was so goddamned cute he could hardly keep from mentioning it. It was obvious the younger man was trying hard to fight sleep.

By the time the credits were rolling, Jensen was sure there was a slight snore coming from his right side. Jared was leaning further toward Jensen and his hands were slightly twitching, his body letting go of the stress and the worry of everything that was going on. The younger man was obviously going to miss his antibiotic if Jensen didn't interfere. 'Dammit,' he hated to force him awake, but he better do it now instead of letting him slip further into deep REM. "Jared," he called softly, as he pulled the sleeping man up by his shoulders. Jared innocently responded, "Huh?" "Can you swallow your pill before you go to sleep, buddy?" Jensen asked. Jared tried to respond while Jensen reached over and got the pill. He put it in Jared's mouth since the kid didn't seem to be coherent enough to raise his own hand. Jared downed the pill and several sips of water. He sighed in relief as Jensen let him lay back again, completely boneless and relaxed. Jensen loved seeing him like this. 'He needs this,' the older man thought. Jensen added wood to the fire, grabbed himself Jared’s untouched beer from the table and heated up some burritos that were in the freezer. The steak would have to wait.

Jensen downed his food and drink, then nestled himself on the couch with his stockinged feet up on the coffee table. He enjoyed a few of his favorite shows before finally accepting the fact that he was exhausted, too. He looked over at the recovering man, pleased to notice the lack of pain or stress on his face. He listened to the soft quiet breathing with no wheeze, then smiled at the tiny bit of drool attempting to run out the side of Jared's mouth. He touched it with his fingertip to stop it, then lightly brushed the hair away from the kid’s eyes. Jensen rearranged Jared to lay his full length on the couch. He covered him with a blanket, confident he would be warm enough out here, as long as he kept the fire going. Jensen settled on the connecting length of the sectional, pulling another loose blanket over himself. His head was just a few inches away from Jared's should he need him or have to get up during the night. He fell asleep to the sound of Jared's soft breathing and the soothing glow of the fire. He slept soundly until he awoke from an unfamiliar noise sometime after midnight.

Jensen sat up. He noticed the fire had dwindled down to glowing embers, causing the temperature in the room to drop considerably. He mentally scanned the perimeter of the house while he went to build the flames back up. As he closed the grate, Jensen heard the sounds again that had originally
interrupted his sleep. They were coming from Jared. They were so slight, Jensen realized he wouldn't have noticed if the room hadn't been so quiet. He went over and dropped to his knees. The cover he used on Jared had slipped to the floor and the younger man was shivering. He covered him again and gently brushed the hair out of Jared’s face. The kid’s eyes were moving restlessly underneath closed lids. He seemed to be in distress. Jensen tried to soothe him, "Ssshhh...it's okay, Jare...it's okay,” he said softly. Jared cried out weakly, "mmnoooo,” which tore at Jensen’s heart. “Baby, it’s okay,” he continued trying to soothe, rubbing his hair. Jared moaned in a high pitched sound, “Noooo,” which convinced Jensen he had to do more. He slipped onto the couch, matching his length with Jared’s and pulled the blanket over them both. He wrapped his arm around Jared and held him close under the shared blanket, grateful for his decision to buy such a wide couch since neither one of them was slight in size, by any means. He was able to keep his right hand high up and in a bent position to keep rubbing Jared's hair, while his left arm stayed locked around Jared’s body. "It’s okay,” Jensen kept up the soothing ministrations, noticing the tears coming from Jared's closed eyelids.

Jensen kissed Jared's forehead, holding him even tighter when Jared moaned once again. “Ssshhh, it’s okay,” the older man continued. Jared rolled more into Jensen, and nestled his arms and face into the older man's chest. Jensen encircled him completely, holding his arms around Jared and locking him in safe. “I’ve got you, baby, it’s okay.” He held still for a moment, just waiting to see if Jared was going to wake or settle. Within seconds, Jared let go of whatever was causing him such fear and relaxed back into a deep sleep. “That's it, Jare, let it go.” Jensen kissed the top of the younger man’s head and smiled to himself that Jared felt secure enough to let his fears go and sleep in his arms. It didn’t occur to Jensen, at the moment, that Jared was putting some of his weight on that left side. He fell back asleep to the rhythmic rise and fall of Jared's rib cage and little whispers of warm breath on his chest.
Chapter Twelve. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

Chapter twelve is filled with different happenings. There is sex, but trying to be realistic here with Jared's injuries. It's HOT, but it's mindful. The case deepens, threatening Jared's welfare. More is learned about the dangerous criminals. That always puts Jensen in a mood, doesn't it? Jensen remains on full protect mode and falls deeper in love with his new man as he learns more about him. They get to talk.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter Twelve

The Black Ops expert woke to the buzzing of his security cell phone. He backed himself out from underneath the shared blanket and stood up to stretch. Jensen couldn’t believe he’d overslept. What the fuck was wrong with him? He hadn’t overslept since before the service. He looked closely at Jared, as if the younger man had surely poisoned him somehow, or performed some alluring witch's spell. Sure, he was becoming more affectionate, but goddammit this was a pinch too far in the ‘mush melon’ department. Jensen checked the text message, seeing it had been the security team from last night wanting to change shifts and introduce the replacement team. The damn phone had been going off for ten minutes before he'd managed to notice it.

Jensen felt Jared's forehead for excessive heat, then brushed the unruly long hair to the side of his face. Jared was in the same position he had been several hours earlier when Jensen soothed his nightmare away. The kid was still out like a light. The older man pulled the blanket up over Jared's shoulders, then added the second blanket from the couch. The morning chill had permeated the house when the fire died, so Jensen spent some time building it back up. He started the coffee maker, then went to greet the security team at the door. He was met with half a football team of semi-casually dressed men wearing jackets that hid firearms. Their DA Investigator badges could plainly be seen on their belts, so Jensen knew who they all were.

Randy, the lead investigator for the last two days, shook Jensen's hand and apologized if they'd woken him up. Jensen invited them in for coffee, which they all gratefully accepted. Randy introduced Jensen to the next team, then confirmed AG Price would be there later today at 3pm. Jensen didn't elaborate on why he hadn't been up at his usual 0600, nor did he offer any of his mental grumbling about finding love and becoming distracted. They didn't need to know. After the new foursome went back outside to check everything out, Jensen headed back to Jared's side with his cup of coffee. He noticed the new love of his life was still out cold, exhibiting another cute tiny drool spot running out of the corner of his mouth. Jensen loved seeing Jared sleep so hard, but he just realized the kid had been on his left side for way too long and it was probably going to hurt like hell. ‘Damn, why didn’t I notice that?’ Jensen punished himself, mentally, for missing something so important. Sighing at his own hopeless loss of resistance around the beautiful creature on his couch, Jensen went to grab a quick hot shower and shave. He realized, upon returning, that Jared was an hour overdue for his antibiotic. Jensen decided to say ‘fuck it’ this time. The kid would be a little late on his pill this morning. He wasn't going to ruin the healing sleep Jared was getting after they’d moved around so much yesterday.
Jensen thought about how easy it had been to comfort Jared through his nightmare. His closeness had put the man right back to sleep. Jensen had to admit that holding Jared had obviously influenced his ‘own’ sleeping patterns. ‘Toast, Ackles…you are fucking toast around him.’ Jensen's mind wandered to the hot intensity of a couple nights ago. It was hard to wake up to Jared's heat, be up against his incredible body, and not do anything. Jensen couldn’t ‘wait’ to do all sorts of other things with him. He sighed, realizing he may just have to take another shower and take care of himself if he didn’t control his thoughts. It wasn’t helping him to visualize Jared in the throws of passion. He watched Jared sleep for awhile, sipping his coffee. The house was silent, the fire was soothing and warm. Jensen reminded himself he would need to stuff Jared with calories today and get him back on track after missing dinner last night. He read the newspaper until Jared started to stir. ‘Shit,’ he knew right away from Jared’s painful moan that he’d been laying on his left side for too long. Jensen knelt at his side as Jared rolled onto his back, his clenched face showing the agony. “Ow…shit.” Jared blurted out in between stuttering breaths, trying to get a grip on the pain. Jensen smoothed his hair back from his forehead while Jared struggled to wake up completely. He took a few calming breaths, knowing the pain would subside if he just waited it out.

Jensen asked, “You wanna sit up?” Jared nodded, not quite in the mood to answer just yet. He rubbed his chest, trying to soothe the tight muscles. Jensen slid his forearms under Jared’s armpits and easily pulled him upright to lay against the back of the couch. Jared moved his legs to the floor and laid his head back to further wait out the dissipating pain. Jensen kept a supportive hand on Jared's knee. He asked with concern, “You want some pain pills?” Jared rubbed his eyes and yawned, then shook his head. “No, s’okay…s’going away.” After a few steadying breaths, he finally opened his eyes to see his special forces expert watching him with overwhelming sympathetic concern. Jared smiled gratefully, almost free of pain, “Hi.” Jensen smiled back, “Hi,” still watching him. Jared glanced around in confusion, “Wait...did we sleep out here?” Jensen grinned at the cuteness, “We did.” Jared looked apologetic and guilty, “I'm so sorry...that can't have been comfortable for you...God Jensen, I'm so...” Jensen kissed him to stop the apologies, which worked beautifully. Jared was distracted and totally forgot what he was worried about.

Jensen rubbed his thumb back and forth while staring into his eyes, "Hey...it's the best I've slept in a lifetime. Snuggled up with you...holding you...it obviously agrees with me." Jared looked confused, then raised an eyebrow. He hadn't realized there was any 'holding', or 'snuggling', going on. ‘Damn, I missed it,’ he thought, then he looked back at Jensen and asked, “There was ‘snuggling'? I don’t remember that. Does the Black Ops force approve of 'snuggling'?” Jensen giggled at Jared's question, "I think it's reserved for only you, Jare. I'm learning there are a 'lot' of things I feel, say and do and they're 'only' around you." Jensen hoped that meant what he wanted it to mean. Jared looked at the clock over the fireplace, "Well I must have liked it too because it's after nine fucking o'clock.” He looked at Jensen, “Jesus, what did you do to me?” Jared yawned, then complained, “I don't remember the end of the movie.” Jensen grinned, "I think you were exhausted, kiddo.” He assessed Jared more closely, noticing a lack of the usual sparkle in his eyes. This was nothing like the energy he’d seen yesterday.

Jensen took the kid’s pulse, noting it was a bit slower and weaker than usual. Jared didn’t even roll his eyes or make a pissy comment, either. Jensen was concerned at the kid’s lack of energy after sleeping over twelve hours. He announced, “I think your blood sugar is low. I could get my bp cuff, but I’m fairly certain your pressure isn’t that great, just from what I’m seeing. You need to eat, drink and lounge today...are you hungry?” Jared perked up, "Yeah, I'm starving actually." Jensen grinned, “Good...you sit here and I’ll bring you your feast.” Jensen started to get up, when Jared grabbed his arm, "I would love to, but I have to use the bathroom." Jensen responded, “Ah,” but paused to see if Jared could get up by himself. After a valiant attempt, Jared signed in resignation, “I HATE this, but I can't fucking get up.” Jensen put out both hands and pulled Jared up with an iron grip. He kissed the frustrated genius and held onto him as they walked to the bathroom. “Thank you,” Jared said
slightly embarrassed, while closing the door to the guest bathroom. Jensen stood in the hall patiently, just in case. When Jared came out, Jensen noticed his eyes were a bit more clear. He was still moving sluggishly, so Jensen escorted him back to the couch. Before sitting down, Jared noticed the back slider curtain was open. He moved over to look outside. “It looks a lot colder today,” he remarked. Jensen agreed, "Yep, it's supposed to hail today." Jared looked at him in surprise, "Really?" He looked back at the yard with what looked like disappointment. Jensen could see his wheels turning, "Why? You plannin' on digging some trenches and building my new deck before nightfall?"

Jared rolled his eyes and sighed, "No," then glanced at Jensen sheepishly, “but I could have gotten some measurements.” Jensen nodded, "I see," then smirked at knowing Jared so well this soon. He turned Jared to face him and slid his arms around the trim waist. Jensen looked at him closely, then smiled. Jared looked back at him through some hair that had blocked his eyes. It was ironic, Jared was three inches taller than him, but it always seemed like Jensen was the taller of the two. He deduced Jared just had that youthful innocence about him which took away from his size. ‘Hence the cuteness,’ Jensen thought to himself. He said, "I 'love' that you want to do that for me...but right now, you have to take it easy, okay? Don't push yourself, there's plenty of time." Jared flicked his head to shake the hair out of his eyes, "I'm just..." he paused, looking everywhere but at Jensen, then looked down in defeat. Jensen tried to guess, "What, that useless feeling again? Which is completely without merit, you know." Jared failed to answer Jensen, therefore Jensen decided he had hit the nail on the head, "Okay, so let me get this straight...you are nine days from almost dying and major surgery...you've completely blown my brains out with one of the most incredible orgasms I've ever had, then you scared me half to death by passing out, you've spent two days exhausting yourself giving the Attorney General the biggest raging hard on of a case he will probably ever get in his career, and you managed to make it through the mall yesterday, then designed my damn deck on that computer in ten fucking minutes from your sheer imagination, then kicked my ass at chess, then fell asleep on the couch, immovable, because you had literally tried to act like a well person and 'not' the seriously injured person that you really are...soooo, where’s the useless part again? And I seem to remember having a conversation similar to this one back in the hospital."

Jared hadn't expected to be reminded of everything he actually 'had' been doing while he was supposed to be recovering. He looked suddenly at a loss for words. After a pause, he looked at Jensen, shyly, “I…the deck for you...it's yours. I love that there's something I can do...and do it well for..." Jared shrugged, “for someone I care so much about.” Jensen pulled him closer and touched his cheek, “Baby, no one’s ‘ever’ done something like that for me. I know you love it, and you’re goddamn good at it, which makes me the luckiest new backyard owner in the world. But right now you ‘have’ to hold yourself back...please. 'You' might not think of it as work, but I think your injuries might have something to say if you go stooping and crawling around to get all those measurements.” Jared finally conceded. Jensen asked him, "Are you still hurting?" Jared shook his head, but yawned, “Not really. It's better.” Jensen asked, “Okay, will you do something for me? Will you let me just wait on you today, take care of you a little where you just relax on the couch and let me do the work?” Jared couldn’t help his indignant whine, "You ALWAYS take care of me. You want me to do even LESS today?" Jensen chuckled because Jared looked so put out by the suggestion. It was fucking cute. “Yes, Jared,” he countered, “just humor me, would you? Remember, the AG is coming at three today but if I can get you to rest until then, I'll call that a 'win'.” Jared sighed, "Fine. Wait on me. Feed me...whatever. I 'should' be on the damn treadmill." Jensen nudged him toward the couch, then as Jared plopped down, he kissed him then argued, "NOT." He eyeballed the younger man with a stern threat in his eyes.

Jared suddenly grinned wolfishly, "So, you liked your orgasm, did you?" Jensen’s eyebrow perked up. He was astonished at the abrupt change in direction Jared’s mind had gone. Jared added in a sultry voice, “If you're so intent on me laying around, why don't you join me on this couch and let me suck you like I want." Jensen kissed Jared again, both men opening up their mouths immediately.
They kissed several seconds, Jensen finally pulling back when things became quite heated. He quickly stood and adjusted himself, trying to control his rapid breathing. "Jesus fucking christ," he growled. Jared grinned devilishly. His dick was hard and he knew Jensen could see it tenting his sweatpants. Jensen looked at him, like he considering it, but then Jared could see the second Jensen's concern for his health stopped him. He laid back with a defeated sigh, but Jensen softened the let down, "Hey. Here's the deal...if you eat, your bp comes up and you're pulse is strong and the next two hours goes well then..." he glanced quickly at Jared's crotch. "Then what..." Jared looked at him with definite interest. Jensen leaned over and kissed Jared before he pulled back, "Then we'll see who sucks who." Jared's eyes widened. The thought of tasting Jensen or having Jensen's mouth on him...'fuck yes,' his mind screamed. As Jensen walked away, Jared blurted out, “Well, I don’t know how I’m supposed to think about breakfast ‘NOW’, Ackles.” He heard Jensen laugh from the kitchen.

After a huge meal of sloppy scrambled eggs, ham, onions, mushrooms, cheese and salsa, Jared laid back with his eyes closed, “God, that was so good. I’m gonna get so fat.” He also downed orange juice with his antibiotic before even touching the espresso blend Jensen had brought him. Jensen cleared the dishes and stopped to kiss Jared quickly, which startled the younger man's eyes open. He grinned, “I think you’re a long way from getting fat, kiddo, so the calories are gonna keep comin’. Good job getting that protein down.” He kissed him again and took the dishes to the kitchen. Jared turned his head to watch the fire. Jensen had banked it lower for the daytime, but kept it going just so they wouldn't get cold and have to start it all over again. Jared couldn't believe how at home he was feeling. He hadn't experienced the security and warmth of a real home since his parents died. He had tried so hard to feel it with his aunt and uncle, but he never truly felt like he belonged. He tried with Manny’s family, but even though they were good people who cared about him, Jared was still just a guest. Jared thought over the few dates he'd had since college that actually looked like they might be hopeful prospects, then weren't. He thought about the times he'd held back and never engaged when people propositioned him. Then, his thoughts landed on Tom and his mood went sour. 'What a fuckin' mistake 'that' was,' Jared chastised himself for reading that whole situation wrong. He knew something was off, but he kept going with it in hopes that something would become of it. He sighed at his naïveté and he wondered again whether Tom had kept any of the embarrassing videos.

Jared had been on break from the love scene when he ran into Jensen. He had focused on his work, just like he'd learned to do from eleven years old when things went bad. It was a way to avoid painful situations. He’d been hell bent on working himself out of his anger and disappointment in Tom, and in himself for being such a fool. Maybe that's why he was so reluctant to just lay here and recover. Jared had nothing to keep him busy…nothing to help him forget about the upcoming trials...forget about the employees he still felt responsible for...about the shelters he wasn't helping at, or about his friends that might be bothered by the press because of him. Jared’s work was his distraction when he didn’t want to feel, or have to deal, and right now it wasn’t available to him. ‘Fuck,’ he thought, frustrated. Jared also knew he was falling deeper for Jensen by the minute. His panicked subconscious was putting up a fight, ranting about loss and disappointment, convinced there was some shoe ready to drop from somewhere. Jared needed to keep busy so he could avoid this thinking. Jensen was fucking ‘it’. He was perfect. Jared loved him. He was deeply in love with him. This thing with Jensen was what he’d been waiting for his entire life. He needed to quash down the doubts coming from his scarred psyche and avoid them. Jensen was strong, gorgeous and sexy as hell. He was kind and giving, and supported him in every way.

Jared casually turned his head and jumped in surprise. Jensen had been sitting right next to him. He hadn’t even heard him sit down. Jensen scooted closer with a hand on his arm, "I'm sorry...you alright?" Jared smiled, trying to calm his breathing, “Yeah, I just didn’t know you were there.” Jensen brushed the hair back from Jared’s face, then gently rubbed his fingers through the silky strands. Jared relaxed instantly from caresses. God, he felt so cherished. Jensen watched his eyes,
"So, where were you when I startled you...can you tell me what you were thinking about?" Jared’s emotional walls weren’t up at the moment, but he worried about saying too much. He didn’t want Jensen to know all the stupid mistakes he’d made in the past. He was so happy in the moment, he just didn’t wanna go there. He finally offered, “I was just thinking...’bout you...especially about how everything’s so right with you...how it feels perfect.”

Jensen knew that hadn’t been everything, but he accepted it, for now. He laid his head on it’s side, so he could keep staring into Jared's stunning eyes. Jared was wide open at the moment. His windows to his soul were unguarded and absolutely beautiful. The hazel turned to a pale gold, and the steel grey was now a smokey mist. There were little specs of green and blue. Jensen was mesmerized by this unguarded version of them. Jared suddenly cleared his throat, "You know, I remember you now." Jensen perked up his eyebrows in question, but he didn't move or make a sound, not wanting to interrupt this rare moment. Jared continued, "I saw you...in the restaurant...before ‘that’ happened." Jensen smiled then, catching on to what Jared was talking about.

Jared continued, "You were at the bar. I knew you had to be a regular, because the waitress talked to you like she knew you.” He paused in thought for a few seconds, "If I hadn't been so pre-occupied, I would have been able to enjoy the view longer." Jensen interjected with a fond smile, "The view?" Jared smiled, "I thought I saw you looking at me, but you looked away. I wanted to see your eyes again. They were the most beautiful green...but then I wasn't sure so I hoped you looked back again." Jared sighed forlornly, "You never looked back, so I figured I was dreaming and you hadn't really been looking at me, at all." Jensen argued softly, "Oh no, I was looking. I looked away because I chickened out like an idiot. Dani knew I was checking you out. She saw me staring at you." Jared raised his eyebrows in surprise, "Really? You were watching me?" Jensen continued to play with is hair, "Yes. I'd been watching you for several minutes before you looked up and caught me. I panicked. Felt like I'd been gawking over you. At the time I thought you were much younger than you are." Jared looked at Jensen with thoughtfulness, now realizing the two men may have met, even without the terrible accident between them. "So...I went to pay and glanced back and you were pretty much ignoring me then...was that..."

Jensen answered for him, "Yes. That was me being a complete coward because I was so smitten with you I couldn't think straight. Dani chewed me out right after. I was hoping to see you again...hoping you’d come back." When Jensen confessed that, Jared thought for a moment, before he added, “Well, I did come back...sort of." He grinned at the intended pun. Jensen became more serious, "When I saw you come through that door, it was like nothing I've ever felt before. In all the people we rescued and treated, this was different. Something about you was different and I can't explain it. After I got you breathing, I couldn't let you go alone. I had to go with you. I didn't know why at the time." After a moment, Jared said, "So, maybe we would have wound up meeting, even without all this. Would you have wanted to go out? I mean if I came back in a normal way?” Jensen said immediately, "God yes. I’d gone home to chop wood all day, showered and came back for a steak. I was hoping you’d come back in and definitely wouldn't have let you walk out that door again without talking to you.”

Jared grinned in shyness, looking away for a few seconds. "Oh," he said, finally turning back to Jensen. Both men remained silent for a moment, contemplating where to go with the conversation. Jensen finally asked, "Would you have gone out with me?" Jared looked him, surprised with the question, so Jensen added, "If I’d asked you." Jared thought about it and realized he may have been quite stupidly reluctant to go out on a date if Jensen had asked him in the restaurant because he was in the middle of some foolish cock block anti-relationship phase. Jensen was hot as hell, but Jared had still been angry with himself about Tom. 'God, I might have passed up the new best part of my life.' He finally answered him, "I would have been stupid, but I might have said no...or been a coward who made up some lame ass excuse about having to work.” Jared looked at him with shame that he could have ruined them getting together. Jensen tried to lighten the mood with a knowing
grin, "Even with the 'view'?'" Jared smiled, "It wouldn't have been you, not in a million years...it would have been me."

Jared sighed, amazed at himself for feeling like sharing this much, but Jensen was looking at him with such gentle understanding in his eyes, he felt he could tell him everything. He wondered if Jensen had drugged his orange juice. "I made a mistake a while back. A lapse in judgement. I was wrong about somebody and it turned me off to relationships. I wasn't in a good mindset for meeting someone new. I didn't see you coming...that's for sure." Jared noticed Jensen had raised his head and was now watching him with fierce concern and maybe a bit of anger. Jared asked, "What's wrong?" Jensen studied Jared for a few seconds, "I'm wondering if this 'lapse in judgment' is someone who deserves to be hurt severely?" Jared was learning that Jensen's protectiveness toward him was nothing to mess around with...he'd never had anyone rise to his defense like this before. He answered, "No...no, I ended it when I realized...probably too late because I was stupidly believing it was something it wasn't..." Jared shrugged his shoulders, trying to convince Jensen there was less depth to the story, but Jensen was not fooled. He knew Jared wasn't telling him everything. Not wanting Jared to close up on him and end this moment, Jensen decided to play things cool and let Jared lead the rest of the conversation. He knew he needed to control his instincts when Jared told him something like this, or he'd miss the rest of the story.

"So," Jensen laid his head to the side and smiled encouragingly, "you didn't see me coming...bet you never dreamed a guy wearing dog tags would be calling you pet names, either." Jared giggled that special sound Jensen loved. He started playing with the younger man's hair again. Jared relaxed even more, even seemed to snuggle into the back of the couch. He went on sharing, "The first thing I felt with you was being safe...and I hadn't felt safe in a long time with someone." Jensen wanted to push Jared and find out every little thing about him, but he knew it was important for Jared to offer it. He waited quietly until Jared offered more, "I was so sure I was gonna die, Jensen. I was afraid I was going to die...and then you wouldn't let me." Jensen remained silent, watching Jared until he continued, "Then it wasn't just keeping me from dying, it was...catching me when I fell...seeing you when I woke up confused...catching me...and the mask...that mask was..." Jared paused and regarded Jensen with wonder, "I was so sure you weren't real, at first. You were there, every time I woke up and you were so beautiful...I told you things...like now, it's...it's hard to stop."

Jensen forced himself to remain quiet. This openness of Jared's was something to be savored and he wasn't about to interrupt. When Jared was quiet for awhile, Jensen thought it might be okay to ask a question, "Can I ask you something?" When Jared nodded, Jensen asked, "What did you mean by finally feeling safe and never having felt that in a long time?" Jared thought about it. Jensen wondered if maybe he wasn't going to explain but then he did, "My parents dropped out of my life when I was eleven. It was like my life decided for me that...'you don't get to have that'...one week they were clapping for me at my first speech meet...then they were gone." Jared looked away, holding back the tears that had almost come. Jensen waited. When Jared turned back, there was no wetness and Jensen knew the self preservation walls had kicked in. Jensen waited. When Jared turned back, there was no wetness and Jensen knew the self preservation walls had kicked in. Jared continued, "After that, nothing felt permanent...nothing was safe anymore...to rely on that it would be there forever...to feel that permanence. When I met Chris, I thought...or maybe I finally started to believe...that maybe...I let myself hope, you know?" Jared turned away in order to regroup once again before becoming emotional. He sighed and took a moment before he faced Jensen again, "What I meant is the safety of something that doesn't go away. Something you can trust to be there...some'one'. I believed it wasn't meant for me. Part of me still tries to refuse that you are right in front of me...yet I feel safe...for the first time since my parents were around, it feels safe to believe that maybe something 'could' be permanent." Jared snorted distastefully at himself, "So, I may well have screwed it up that day. I would have been so goddamned flattered, Jensen...but I may have 'not' gone out with you because it was just TOO good."

Jensen respected the hell out of Jared's bravery for explaining that to him. He was grateful to be
learning so much, especially since it was rare to get this much out of someone who had been hurt so badly. This was a gift and Jensen decided to treasure it, yet tread very lightly from here. He bellowed with disagreement, “Huh!” When Jared looked at him, Jensen argued, “I think you would have been toast to my charms, Padalecki. I would have had you at ‘hello’.” Jensen was rewarded with Jared's adorable giggle and diamond wattage smile. Within seconds, Jared sported a playful gleam in his eye, ”Well, you ‘have’ had me, Ackles...though I don’t remember a ‘hello’ in there beforehand.” Jensen burst out laughing. The engineer had caught him off guard. Jared added with a perturbed look, “I kind of missed the afterglow, though.”

Jared waited for Jensen to finish giggling and focus on him before he added coyly, "You can, you know." Jensen searched Jared’s eyes for explanation, then finally raised an eyebrow, "Can what?" Jared smiled with intent, moving his leg back and forth, opening his crotch and closing it. Jensen didn't know if Jared was even aware he was doing it, but it was sexy and playful as fuck. Jensen had never seen this coy Jared before. The kid explained, "You can have me.” His eyes darkened with intent, “Any way you want.” Jensen searched Jared's beautiful mouth, then into his incredible hazel grey eyes. Jared's eyes were weapons that could take down the strongest man to his knees and right now, the expanding black irises were lustfully focused on ‘him’.

Jensen was having a hard time believing Jared was injured, at all. The kid looked totally alert, focused, and absolutely edible and incredibly hot. He was laying against the back of the couch with his long limbs resting slightly open, inviting Jensen to devour whatever he saw. ‘Jesus,’ the older man thought. Jensen suddenly growled, as his command presence took the lead. Without losing eye contact, he hooked his arms around Jared's body and slid the younger man over into the deep corner of the couch. Jared landed in a wider area, forced to lay back, having been manhandled without the slightest pain to his injuries. He didn’t have time to show surprise, as Jensen moved over him, his knees between Jared’s legs. He looked into the face of his lover, who just now seemed to be realizing the position he was in and wondering how he got that way. Jensen’s voice dropped low, “Just so you know...there are a lot of ways that I ‘want’ to ‘have’ you, so be careful about offering yourself up on a platter like that.” Jensen's cock reacted immediately to Jensen's voice. "Fuck, my own special forces trained killer...fuck me now," Jensen thought.

Jensen watched Jared's pupils enlarge at his unveiled warning. Jensen tried to control his breathing. He was suddenly nervous, dying to know what Jensen was intending to do with him and feeling a bit impatient. "So," Jensen was interrupted by Jensen’s deep growl, "Uh uh...any way I 'want', I was told.” Jensen's eyes widened. He nervously tried to inch his way back, not sure why, but maybe he just felt a bit vulnerable like this. Jensen quickly dropped to his elbows, pinning Jared immobile. His lips were right above Jared’s, "Where you goin?’" Jared stopped trying to move, realizing he was effectively trapped by Jensen's body over his. "Um," he barely blurted out before he realized Jensen was staring at his mouth. Jensen looked forcefully into Jared's eyes, as he licked his tongue across Jared's lower lip. Jared gasped, not expecting the erotic assault. Jensen did it again, eliciting another gasp and moan, as he went for a third. He then licked a long swipe from Jared's collar bone to his chin.

"Aaaah," Jared moaned again, in between high pitched whispered exhales. His breathing was rapidly increasing, "Oh my god...Jensen..." Jensen had never felt ‘anything’ like this before. Jensen whispered over Jared’s mouth, "You're exquisite, Jared. You taste so fucking incredible. I'm going to taste as much of you as I can...then I'm going to suck you.” Jared panted in between trying to formulate some kind of response, "Jesus, Jensen...god." Jensen licked another swipe all the way up Jared's neck, making the kid moan louder. "Mmmmm...God, you taste so good,” he mumbled. Then he began kissing and licking up and down Jared's throat, up to his ear on one side, spending time there to nibble and suck behind Jared’s ear, then back down again and up the other side. Jensen was indulging himself, taking everything he wanted, tasting the delectable skin, inch by inch. Jared turned
his head to give Jensen better access. He pushed his neck harder into Jensen’s mouth, because he couldn’t help himself. It felt so goddamn good and his dick was harder than concrete. Every swipe, every lick, every suck, every nibble, put him further under Jensen’s control. "Oh, God...oh, Jensen....oh, God, that feels so good," Jared felt on the verge of tears, as emotions were released over the unimaginable pleasure. No one had 'ever' done this to him.

Jared's responses were driving Jensen crazy. He couldn't wait to suck the gorgeous cock and see what sounds would come out of Jared then. "Jensen..." Jared whispered, trying desperately to say something but the older man was driving him wild with a tongue in his ear. Jensen moved to Jared’s collarbone, where he sucked and kissed, then moved back to his mouth and decided to spend time there. Jared tried to say something again but Jensen kissed him, and Jensen forgot everything. When Jensen pulled back from the kiss, he licked Jared's swollen lower lip, then nibbled on it. He ordered Jared, "You stay right here,” then raised Jared’s shirt up to continue his kissing and licks all over Jared’s chest. Jared meant to argue with being told to stay still, but Jensen's mouth on his chest totally blew all coherent thought out the window. He cried out, moaned, grabbed the older man’s head and kneaded his fingers through Jensen’s short hairs. Jensen loved the “Oh my god's and oh god’s” he was getting, in between all the other delicious sounds. His own dick was begging for involvement. Goddamn, this kid was hot as hell.

Jared had no idea he would 'ever' get to experience something like this. Jensen was awakening sensations and nerve endings he never knew he had. Tom had taught Jared sex, but not 'this'...not loving foreplay, not tasting and worshiping of another person. Jensen was devouring him...drinking in every inch of him. This was what being 'wanted' and being loved felt like. Jared was fucking lost in it. When Jensen bit down on Jared's nipple, he cried out, as his hips pushed upward. He gently forced Jensen's head harder against his chest, wanting more...begging for it, while his cock begged for touch. Jensen continued to nibble and suck, driving the man to heated madness, while he eliciting sounds Jensen had never heard Jared make before. His voice went high and then it went low, moaning between octaves in reaction to the pleasure. It turned Jensen’s cock to stone to know he could do this to the younger man.

"Christ, you’re so fucking hot, Jared," Jensen whispered loudly, then hummed with his lips and teethed latched on, providing a stimulating vibration to Jared's over sensitive nub. Jared cried out, beyond comprehension. Everything Jensen did felt so fucking good. Jensen moved to the other nipple and performed the same enticing moves. "Fuck," Jared blurted out, panting hard, "Fuck," Jared's hips were pumping, "Jensen," Jared pulled the older man's head up, "Jensen, I'm gonna cum." Jensen stopped what he was doing and kissed Jared to soothe him, "It's okay baby, it's okay." He kissed Jared again, the younger man kept apologizing, "I'm sorry...I'm sorry, I can't,” Jared panted and sobbed in anguish at not being able to hold back. Jensen moved down Jared’s abdomen. He pulled Jared's loose sweats down to release his rock hard leaking cock. "Jesus, you're cock is gorgeous,” he commented, then licked Jared from base to tip. Jared jerked and moaned, "Ooooh, God...Jensen, I'm gonna cum. I'm so sorry...oh fuck, you feel so good.” Jensen ordered, "Don’t be sorry. Give it to me, Jare...right here, in my mouth. Cum for me." Jensen lifted his head to look at Jensen, pleading with eyes that showed conflicting guilt and desperation, needing to cum, but feeling guilty at the same time for cumming too soon. "Are you...sure? You don't have to..." Jared slammed his head back onto the cushions, screamed in ecstasy, as Jensen sucked the head of his cock. He pumped his hips. Jesus Christ, nothing 'ever' felt so good. Jensen fucking ‘owned’ him.

Jensen didn’t have time to play, to lick Jared's swollen balls and take his time. He would do that next time. Right now, he slid his mouth downward as far as he could go, relaxed his throat and sucked to make this feel as good as he possibly could for Jared. Jensen had only done this twice in the barracks, but it was quick and didn’t include swallowing, at all...the men always finished one another with hand jobs. Those were just 'mechanical assists', he labeled them, in the dark, no faces and no names... and there were no emotions attached. 'This'... 'this' was someone he loved... ‘this’ was
something he wanted more than anything because it was pleasuring the most important person in his life and the love behind it made it crucial to do his best. ‘This’ was something he ‘definitely’ wanted it over and over again.

Jared’s precome tasted incredible, like salted honey. Jensen slid his mouth up and down, sucking a hard and fast rhythm. He used one hand to massage Jared’s balls, feeling the huge sacs draw up tight. Jensen felt the rigid dick swelling in his mouth, getting ready to shoot it’s load. ‘Fuck, he's so goddamn hot,’ he willed himself to pay attention and not blow his own load. Jared’s thrusts were pushing higher, so Jensen put both his hands on his hips and held him down firm to keep him from hurting his chest. Jared grabbed the back of Jensen's head, he screamed, “YES! FUCK!” He threw his head back and screamed in ecstasy, ”Aaaaahhh...oohh....aaaaaahh,” as Jensen held on and sucked hard. Jared shook and strained, crying out with every spasm, as his orgasm rolled through him. Jensen gentled his pressure, gradually slowing down, prolonging Jared’s rapture as long as possible. The loud cries turned to groans and grunts of intensity, as Jared’s orgasm continued until finally it released him to gentle aftershocks. Jensen swallowed the salty liquid, making sure not to miss a drop. His own cock was hard as nails and dripping. Jared cumming was the newest all time favorite turn on of his whole life. ’The fucking security team is probably jerking off right now, if they heard any of this,’ Jensen thought.

Jared moaned his way through the blissful afterglow. He was bonelessly collapsed, helpless and struggling for coherency. Jensen grinned with his mouth full at the way Jared’s arms had flopped loosely on the couch, laying on either side of Jared’s head. He kept the swollen member in his mouth, keeping it warm and wet until it gradually started to soften. Jensen released it gently, then he moved up to cover Jared's body and make sure he hadn't passed out. Jared was breathing heavily, sweaty hair stuck to his forehead. He seemed to be in post-orgasmic lala land. Jensen was quite pleased with the look of wondrous peace on his face. "Beautiful," he remarked. The younger man moved his head sluggishly, still trying hard to catch his breath. He had no coherency yet, overwhelmed with boneless satisfaction. Jensen kissed him softly all over his face, his eyes, and his lips. He softly rubbed the younger man's head, smoothing back the unruly strands. He was still hard as a rock but would deny himself until he was sure Jared was okay. The younger man finally moved, though still looking dazed. He slid his arms around Jensen and looked dazedly up at him. When he smiled dreamily, Jensen had to smile back. He loved the post orgasmic look on this kid. Jared stared at Jensen's mouth and Jensen immediately obliged, never wanting to miss an opportunity to taste Jared in any way.

Jared was still sluggish, but fully capable of showing Jensen just how much he'd loved that blow job. The kiss was hot, wet and full of Jared's sensational tongue, thanking Jensen and promising more in the future. Jared could taste himself in Jensen's mouth. He pulled out of the kiss, wanting desperately to taste Jensen in the same way. He slid his hands down Jensen’s back and slipped them into his jeans, "I want to suck you…please let me do that to you." Jared kept one hand rubbing Jensen's ass, while the other slid around to the front, feeling the thick nest of hair drenched in Jensen's precum. He rubbed his hand in it, then slid his hand over the huge dick. Jensen lost it the second Jared touched him. “Mmmngh,” he groaned as he pushed into Jared's hand. His body responded without any direction, "Oh, fuck...Jared...oh fuck...I'm too close." Jensen started to pump his hips, out of control. Jared realized his poor lover had been poised on the edge, forcing himself to wait. He rushed to unbutton Jensen jeans and push them down with his underwear. Jensen was jerking his hips, grunting, climbing to orgasm fast. He’d lost awareness so he didn't know how it happened, but somewhere in between Jared getting his pants open and him reaching his peak, Jared had somehow slid down and gotten his mouth onto the head of his cock.

“FUCK,” Jensen screamed, "Oh fuck, don’t hurt yourself!” He cried, as he gripped the couch cushions behind Jared’s head and pumped his hips hard. Jensen jerked his head back and screamed a deep guttural growl, “Aaaaaaaahhhhh...uuuuggghhhhh,” he came hard down Jared’s throat. Jared
gripped the shaking thighs. His throat was hit with salty liquid, as he struggled to swallow fast in order not to choke. Jensen pulsed and strained through orgasmic pleasure, having no idea of his surroundings. He jerked and grunted, powerful waves of intensity causing helpless groans of rapture. Jared gently sucked him, gradually following his lover down as his orgasm ran its course. Jensen greyed out for a second, never having experienced someone swallowing before, staying with him, riding the waves down to the end. He was at Jared’s mercy for the moment, moaning with wondrous pleasure, almost embarrassingly. Jesus christ, he could never have imagined. Jensen felt unguarded, vulnerable. He trusted Jared, but christ, this was new. He had no strength right now. His limbs shook with the struggle to support his own weight. He’d never cum that hard in his life. He pretty much figured his brain cells were fried.

Jared's chest was reminding him this wasn't a good position to be in, but he didn't care. Jensen tightening up and jerking into his mouth, groaning uncontrollably was the hottest fucking thing he'd ever experienced in his life. The controlled confident military expert had been at his mercy. He loved this man, and making him feel that good was priceless. Jensen was sure the younger man had hurt his chest but he couldn't move yet to check on him. He certainly couldn't exhibit any energy on anything but the simple task of keeping his weight off of Jared until he recovered. Jared slid his hands up and around his waist, then rubbed his back in soothing gestures. He was feeling terribly affectionate, even with his chest on fire. He had painfully tried to relax his upper torso back onto the couch, but it was pissed. Jensen moaned in wonder, finally attempting movement. He bitched, "God," at his weakness, then raised up to look into Jared’s eyes, "Are you alright? And don’t ‘even’ lie, because I'm looking right at those gorgeous hazel grey beauties of yours and I can see everything." Jensen saw pain lines. Jared sighed in annoyance, "Yes, I'm alright, and I do 'not' regret a thing...not a 'fucking' thing, so stop looking like we shouldn't have done that because it was the hottest thing I have 'ever' experienced and I 'not' taking it back." Jared looked at Jensen with such a pissy challenging face, Jensen raised an eyebrow and grinned, "I wasn't actually ‘regretting’ the hottest experience of my life, either, but baby you didn’t have to use your neck and shoulders like that and put all that strain on your ribs." Jensen started to lift up, as Jared softened, "I wanted to taste you. Knowing you were that close I just...went for it.” Jensen sighed, “How bad is it?” Jared finally let the pain sound in his voice, "It hurts...but it's okay." Jensen could see it in Jared's eyes, "No...it's not okay." Jared folded his arms over himself, "I'm not sorry...I'm 'not' regretting it, Jensen, I mean it."

Jensen slid down enough to gently raise Jared's shirt, "Not regretting either, baby...just looking...hold still." Jensen reached above Jared to turn on the lamp, then held the shirt up so he could inspect the damaged ribs. He inspected the staples closely, then felt around the incision for excessive heat. None of the staples had come out, but some of the skin was red around the edges. It didn't look like they had jarred any of them loose. The incision was pretty solidly together, anyway and some of the staples were already being pushed out a bit by Jared's body. Jared's pain was most likely from the strain on the inside where all the tendons and muscles were still badly bruised and raw. Jensen rubbed Jared's chest and stomach soothingly, "I'm so sorry, love. I know it hurts bad." He raised up and kissed the younger man soundly, then hurried to get Jared’s pain pills. Jensen had gone and returned with his jeans still unbuttoned and if Jared hadn't been distracted with his painful condition, he would have thoroughly enjoyed the view. He couldn't move, he was flat on his back trying desperately not to bawl like an infant. The pain was getting worse. Jensen pushed the pills into Jared's mouth. "Take these," he ordered in a no nonsense voice. Jared swallowed the pills with a few sips of bottled water Jensen held for him. Jensen arranged several pillows, slipped his arms under Jared's back and lifted him to lay propped up on the pillows. He quickly added more wood to the fire, then laid on the couch, lengthwise next to Jared.

There was a sudden thunderous sound on the roof. Jared's eyes widened in confusion, "What's that noise?" Jensen covered them both with a blanket, as he answered, "It's hailing." Jared was visibly
shaking, so Jensen felt his forehead for fever, “You cold?” Jared shook his head, "No," but Jensen could feel him shaking, "Do you feel sick?” Jared hadn't quite gotten a handle on his pain yet, still waiting for the pills to help. His breath caught in between exhales, "No. My ears are ringing. S'okay...s' going away." Once the pills started to kick in, Jensen could feel the younger man relax under his touch. The shaking stopped and Jared began to breathe more evenly. "Better?” Jensen asked. Jared nodded, then yawned. He never liked how his pain pills made him sleepy, but it felt wonderful laying here with Jensen. The older man asked, "You doing okay?” Jared turned his head toward Jensen and smiled softly. He had more peace in his eyes than a few moments ago. Jensen could tell the pain was letting go. Jared nodded, "Mhmhm. S'okay." Jared sleepily rolled toward the older man, so Jensen slid his arm around him. He continued to rub his fingers through Jared's hair. Jared sighed, then sleepily confessed, "I love you," before shutting his eyes. Jensen stared at the younger man for a long time. He thought he might combust from the overpowering feelings of Jared’s three words. The heart that had been burned so many times had decided to take this chance, one more time, and give itself over to Jensen's keeping. He kissed Jared’s forehead, "I love you too, Jare...so much."

Jared’s face was snug under Jensen's chin, his arm wrapped around the older man's waist. 'This is definitely snuggling,' Jensen smiled at that thought, enjoying the hell out of holding Jared like this. He closed his eyes and let himself drift, then was startled awake, wondering what the hell had caused it. He checked his watch first, noting it had been just over ninety minutes. Jared was still in his arms and the house was silent, so what the hell had waken him up? He listened for a moment and could detect no out of place sounds. After a few seconds, he smiled pleasantly, realizing the thing that had waken him up was the tickle of Jared’s eyelashes on his collarbone. Jensen realized Jared’s breathing was that of an awake person. He kissed the younger man on the head and rested his chin there, "Hey...you awake down there?” Jared raised his face up and looked sleepy at Jensen. "Yeah." Jensen looked down at him, "You okay?” Jared smiled dreamily, "Very okay...I just didn't want to move yet." He yawned, as he snuggled back under Jensen’s chin. Jensen sighed contentedly, "I like you there too, and you certainly do not have to move yet.” He rubbed his hand up and down Jared's back, kneading the muscles there to massage him. "mmmmmm....mmmmm," Jared's response was encouraging. It felt like he might be falling asleep again, so Jensen kept rubbing his back. Jared sighed and snoozed lightly for another thirty minutes. Being held like this was a new concept. He felt grounded, peaceful, and loved. Jensen didn't want to ruin this peaceful rest for Jared, but he knew it was getting down to the wire on time. He checked his watch, noticing they had two hours until the AG showed up. When he knew the younger man was finally awake, he asked, "You want a shower?” Jensen witnessed a spark of happiness explode in the younger man’s eyes, as he perked up with the hopeful puppy dog eyes, “Can we?” Jensen smiled, "How the hell could we ‘not’ when you look at me like ‘that’.”

Jared sighed forlornly, "Guess we have to get up, though." Jensen reminded him, "Tonight...we can snuggle...maybe we can even finish the Pirate movies." Jensen watched Jared's happy reaction to that idea, then he added, "As long as you don't tell anyone from my team, cuz I'll never hear the end of it." Jared giggled, "Okay...no one has to know what a softie you are." Jensen moved to get them both up. Jared felt good, so Jensen let him walk toward the spare bedroom on his own, shadowing behind. Jared picked out some jeans and a long sleeve navy cotton shirt. He went over to the dresser and bent out of habit to get a pair of socks from the drawer. "Aah," he cried out as he froze, realizing that had ‘not’ been a good idea. Jensen got to him fast. He pulled Jared's upper torso back from behind, opening his ribcage more. "Easy," he soothed, as Jared panted, "Ow...fuck.” “Relax your upper body,” Jensen encouraged. When Jared’s chest started to relax, he took a deep breath and exhaled, then took back his own weight. Jensen moved around to the front of him, touching Jared's cheek, "Better?” Jared didn’t look happy about his restrictions, but he managed to nod, "Yeah. Sorry, it just...thank you.” He looked down at the socks he'd failed to get from the drawer, so Jensen bent down and got them. He handed them to Jared, “You forgot?” Jared nodded. Jensen reminded him,
"Hey...look where you are and where you were a few days ago, okay?" then he kissed him.

Jensen pulled Jared toward his own room. Jared held the dry towel Jensen gave him against his incision while the older man sprayed his body and hair, like he'd done the first time. Jared loved the feel of the hot water pulsating over his head and shoulders and voiced his appreciation quite openly. Just like the first time Jensen had done this, he had a hard time keeping his hands from exploring Jared's gorgeous body. He soaped up a rag and washed the kid's legs, feet and back, then let the him do the rest one handed. Jensen watched and enjoyed the hell out of his view. God, Jared had a beautiful body. The older man tried not to stare when the kid washed his dick and balls and his butt. 'I would really love to do that for him, but I'd definitely spend a lot of time there,' Jensen glanced up and knew he'd been caught. The younger man had a gleam in his eye, as if he knew exactly what Jensen had been envisioning. He smiled, knowingly...inviting...enticing. Jensen held back from shoving Jared up against the tile and fucking him senseless, as he watched the younger man blatantly keep rubbing his soapy balls and dick.

Jared throatily moaned, keeping his dilated eyes locked with Jensen. His hand kept moving and Jensen could tell Jared was not going to stop. He moaned once again and Jensen moaned in response. 'Jesus,' Jensen was on overload. The soldier was overtaken with need, as he ripped off his own underwear, stepped into the shower and pulled Jared into a hot opened mouthed kiss. Fuck, Jared's mouth was so very responsive. They kissed aggressive...tongues licking and exploring. Jensen continued to move his arm and Jensen could feel the younger man's breathing speed up even more. He pulled away briefly to witness Jared's dark lust filled eyes, "God, you're so beautiful," Jensen said, as he kissed him again, hard, hot and wet.

He noticed Jared was forgetting to hold the dry towel in place over his wound, so he pointed the spray away from them and let the towel fall. Jared backed into the wall and Jensen followed, their mouths never leaving each other. While they kissed, Jensen's free hand came up to cup the back of Jensen's head and pull him harder against him. His other hand dropped the soapy rag and continued to grip himself and pump his own cock. Jared managed to breathe sideways for a few seconds in between locking mouths with Jensen. "Jensen...uh...oh," Jared tried to catch his breath in between moans, but never stopped pumping his cock. Jensen growled against Jared's mouth, hips pumping faster, "God, you feel so goddamned good." They licked at one another with hot swipes of lips and tongues, their moans rising in pitch.

Jensen felt Jared's energy waning and he knew he needed to take over. This was quite vigorous for someone in Jared's condition, especially since they were standing up. He stopped briefly to take both Jared's wrists in his hands and raise them to the nearby shower handles. Jensen gently placed Jared's hands on the handles and held them there for a few seconds. He whispered hotly against Jared's mouth, "Just hold on baby, I got this." Jensen used his free hand to guide his rock hard cock to line up right alongside Jared's. He slid some soap from Jared's cock over to his own and started to pump his dick back and forth against Jared's. Both men moaned loudly because it felt so fucking incredible. They instantly pushed into each other's slippery grip, groaning over and over with each thrust. "Oh God, Jensen, yes...yes," Jared's voice became more high pitched. Jensen growled against Jared's mouth, hips pumping faster, "God, you feel so goddamned good." They licked at one another with hot swipes of lips and tongues, their moans rising in pitch.
the pleasure showing all over his face.

Jensen watched the waves of intense pleasure roll through his lover as he continued to fuck his own hand even harder. There was no way he could hold back. Jared cumming in his arms was the hottest fucking thing he’d ever seen. Jensen stiffened and jerked violently, "Uuuuuugggghhhhh...nnngghh...aaaahhh." Jensen jerked several times, groaning in deep growls, spasming over and over from the power of his orgasm. He rote the waves until it finally gentled and released him to a shaking boneless mess. He braced himself against the wall with one hand, hung onto Jared's waist tightly with the other. He panted helplessly, trying to control his breathing, because that's all he could do for the moment. "Jesus, Jare...what you do to me,” Jensen managed to whisper, in between catching his breath. Jensen’s head was bent slightly, which put his forehead resting against Jared's collar bone. He finally caught his breath enough to look up sluggishly and check on his gorgeous shower mate. Jared was loosely hanging on, leaving his hands where Jensen had left them, trying to catch his breath. He was barely holding his head up, looking like he was barely conscious. Jared’s head was hanging downward, so Jensen grasped his jaw and pushed his head up to look closer at him. He searched Jared's eyes and saw the post-orgasmic peace there. Jared treated him to a silly sloppy grin to go with it, "Heeeyyyyy.

Jensen couldn't help but smile, realizing he probably had the same look on his own face. 'God, that was hot,' he thought to himself. Jensen kissed Jared hot and tender, growling at how delicious Jared tasted. He pulled back and looked into his boneless lover's eyes, smiling tenderly. He held Jared's cheek, rubbing his thumb back and forth. Jensen sighed, "You want me to wash your hair? We kinda didn't get to that." Jared leaned his head back on the wall and admitted dreamily, "I don't think I can move," shaking his head back and forth. Jensen rubbed his cheek, "You can sit down." Jared looked up at his right, then his left hand, then back to Jensen. He told Jensen frustratively, "I don't think I can let go." Jensen didn't say anything, but he'd been supporting most of Jared's weight for the last few minutes, anyway. The younger man obviously thought he was doing that by holding the handles, but he really wasn't. He encircled his arms around Jared and nudged him a few inches toward the bench, "I gotcha...it's okay." When Jared still failed to stop gripping the handles, he repeated, "Jare...you can let go." Jared's arms came loosely away from the handles and slumped down to his sides. He lightly placed them on Jensen's arms, as the older man sat him on the bench. Jensen was looking into Jared's eyes and smiling. He brushed the younger man's hair away from covering his face and kissed him on the forehead. Jensen tested the water and gave Jared another dry towel to hold over his incision. "Lean your head back," he said, then proceeded to wash and rinse Jared's glorious locks.

When he finished, Jensen used another dry towel to rub most of the water out of Jared's hair. He proceeded to dry his upper torso, since the younger man didn't seem to be quite with it. Jensen hung the towel up over the shower rack and gently took away the towel Jared had been using to cover his wound. The kid looked down like he hadn't realized he was still holding it. When Jensen bent over to get a closer look at Jared's pupil's, he couldn't help but smile at the kid's dreamy expression. Jared looked at him with dazed, slowly responding pupils and smiled, "Thank you." He yawned and Jensen thought maybe that wasn't good since Jared had already had a nap earlier. "Thank you for what?" Jensen asked the adorable young man to keep him as alert as he could. Jared smiled, "For washing me...and washing my hair...and for the hottest shower ever." Jensen grinned affectionately, took Jared under the armpits and lifted, "Stand up, so we can get you all dry." Jensen was smirking at Jared's listless behavior. He should be worried, but he couldn't stop thinking about how damned cute Jared was after sex. Jensen managed to stand up and let Jensen dry him down below.

When Jensen dried Jared's private parts, he lingered for just a few seconds at Jared's gorgeous cock, resting limp and happy for the time being. 'Is there anywhere he's 'not' perfect?' Jensen thought to himself. As Jensen stood and held him around his waist, Jared snickered playfully, "Did you wanna play with it again?" Jensen kissed him, chuckling, "Why yes, Jare...I would love to play with it
again.” Jared grinned, "Cuz, I happen to know it likes you a lot." Jensen said, "Oh, it does? Mmmm, well that's good to know, since I plan on playing with it a lot in the near future...actually there's a whole 'lot' of you I'm going to play with, soon as you're well."

Jared slid his arms around Jensen’s shoulders. They hugged and held each other in silence for a moment, enjoying the comfort of each other's arms. Jensen finally pulled back, "It's freezing, come on." He pulled Jared out of the shower, then helped him pat dry his feet. He noticed right away the younger man was looking a bit more alert. 'Thank God we didn't kill those over active brain cells of his,' Jensen thought. Jared yawned again, but he seemed to be pretty coordinated. Jensen stood by while the younger man shaved. He helped him dress by taking care of the bending over needs and putting on the socks. Jared looked stunning in his soft new jeans and long sleeve navy shirt. 'Jesus,' Jensen openly had to take a moment to admire his beauty. 'He doesn't even know it,' he sighed. Jensen pulled on his own jeans and long sleeve shirt, but he didn't imagine he looked half as hot as the man before him. Jared shook his head and ran his fingers through his hair. Jensen thought it was another totally hot thing that Jared did which he had no idea was hot.

When the two men made it back to the kitchen, Jensen opened the fridge for Jared to pick something for lunch. Jared loved that he could actually be more involved this time, not just sit and be waited on. He eyed the beer and meant to reach for it, when suddenly the older man gripped his upper arm and pulled him back. "Uh uh," Jensen was no nonsense when Jared suddenly looked over at him in confusion. The confusion dissipated quickly, as Jared remembered he wasn't supposed to lean over like that. Jensen had just saved him from another rude awakening if he'd done that. Jared nodded, "Forgot,” but Jensen kissed him. “I'll get it,” he said, then retrieved the beer. He supposed one beer wouldn’t hurt Jared, as long as he didn’t mix it with his pain meds. He also thought to himself 'thank God' he had stopped Jared from the gripping pain that move would have caused. While Jared held the two beers, Jensen opened a couple drawers of lunch meats and some cold barbecue chicken and macaroni salad. When the kid’s stomach growled loudly, Jensen smiled at him, "What do you feel like? You pick, I'll heat it up or put it together."

Jared pointed to the chicken and macaroni salad, "Is that okay?" He looked at Jensen to see if he'd picked something the older man would like too. Jensen realized Jared was trying to be polite and he kissed him, "Baby, if it looks good to you, it's what we're eating." Jared still looked worried so Jensen kissed him again, "I like everything in my fridge...believe me, most of it is from the restaurant and it's delicious. Can't go wrong." Jared gratefully smiled, "Okay." Jensen showed Jared where the plates, utensils and cups were, in case the younger man came in here alone and needed to find things. Jared took out the plates and plopped the macaroni salad on them while Jensen heated the chicken. Jensen handed Jared the church key so the kid could open their beers and then took one from him. Jared seemed relaxed and comfortable, which made Jensen feel pretty proud of himself. This was 'not' the Jared that arrived at his home a few days ago. 'This' was the Jared that was beginning to know what it felt like to have someone he could trust...someone that loved him. Jensen hoped they would eventually kill those insecurities and doubts that had invaded Jared's psyche in the last thirty three years. The poor kid had been dealt so much crap. He’d been let down and screwed out of happiness so many times. Jensen admired the hell out of his strength and ability to accomplish all that he had. Jared was due for some happiness in his life and Jensen was hell bent on giving it to him.

Jared looked over at Jensen and realized he'd been studying him while waiting for the toaster oven to heat their lunch. Jensen was so handsome, leaning casually against the bar, sipping his beer. He looked at Jared with way more reverence and admiration than the younger man was capable of receiving. Jared looked away, showing Jensen his adorable dimple. He tried to control his blush, but failed. He sipped his beer without looking back up at Jensen and looked away when he sensed the older man was stepping into his personal space. Jensen chuckled softly, then gently pulled Jared's chin his way. Jared was so shy sometimes, Jensen fell in love with him all over again each time he did this. The engineer wasn't so keen on it, but Jensen couldn't resist the behavior. He gently forced
Jared to face him, "Hey. I can't help it. Everything about you is just..." Jensen refrained from pouring too much on the kid since he looked about ready to bolt. Jared was definitely still uncomfortable with intense compliments or too much attention directed at him. Jensen saw everything Jared didn't know about himself. He brushed the kid’s hair back from his face, glad Jared relaxed under the touch.

The slight embarrassed tension from Jared disappeared, so Jensen let it go. The chicken was finally done, so Jensen grabbed the plates and scooped several pieces onto each plate. He put the plates on the table, while Jared carried the napkins, utensils and beer. Both men enjoyed their tasty lunch. Jared couldn't believe how good everything tasted. He continued to entertain Jensen with his moans of approval and licking the barbecue sauce from his fork. 'Jesus,' Jensen had to mentally push is cock back down from standing up at attention. He decided to talk about the food and stop watching Jared for a second, "It's from Dani and Steve's place...most of their food is awesome. They stocked my place with a few days of their plates so we didn't have to go out or shop. I've still got steak and potato for dinner tonight and it's made with a fantastic seasoning that they mix on their own." As they were sucking down the rest of their beer, they decided to play some cards. Jensen quickly put the plates away and came back with a couple card decks. After a few games of Black Jack and Poker, Jensen realized Jared was doing something remarkable which almost made his heart stop. "Jared," Jensen finally got his attention after calling his name three times. "Huh?" Jared looked up at him innocently and Jensen almost forgot what he was going to say. Those damn puppy dog beauties were sucking him in and the older man sighed, "Baby...don't ever do what you're doing in a casino, okay?"

Jared looked at him in innocent confusion, "Do what?" Jensen immediately felt guilty because he wasn't criticizing Jared and his brilliance, he simply didn't want the kid to get his ass on the 'do not allow entry' list for anywhere they might want to get into some day. Jensen smiled fondly, shaking his head, "You are so fucking cute." Jared looked immediately insulted and argued loudly, "What?! I am NOT." Jensen giggled at Jared's reaction, noting that he was even cuter when he was bent out of shape about something, "Well, if it wasn't cute before, it's even cuter now, dude." Jared huffed in absolute irritation, rolled his eyes and sighed, "I am NOT. Would you please just tell me what I'm not supposed to be doing?" Jared thought the older man was a bit insane, thinking he was 'cute', for heavens sake. Jensen had stopped him because he noticed Jared was weighing probabilities in his advanced brain and actually attempting to keep track of which cards were played. He couldn't believe he’d finally met someone who could actually 'do' that. He forced himself to stop teasing Jared and explain, "I think your brain isn't wired like the average guy."

When Jared looked at him in confusion and alarm, Jensen shook his head and put his hand on Jared's arm, "No...not a criticism...what I mean is you are waaaayyy too smart for your own good. You're smarter than the dealers and this mind thing you're doing...it's not something everyone is capable of...I'm watching you and I see it isn't even that hard for you, is it." Jared still looked a bit confused, "Mind thing?" He asked. Jensen explained, "You are a casino bosses nightmare, Jare. Someone like you would be considered very dangerous to their profits and they'd kick you out immediately for doing that." It finally dawned on Jared that Jensen was trying to help him and he finally realized this was like the counting cards thing that Manny and Jeff had tried to explain to him in college. Jensen saw the light bulbs come on in Jared's face, but the kid argued, "I'm just doing math. It's just probabilities against ratios and outcomes, and the..." Jared stopped at Jensen's look.

The older man took both Jared's hands in his, "Like I said...too smart, not the average guy. You'd figure out the card decks, Jare, figure out the roulette wheel, and they'd ban you quickly when they saw it. Hasn't anyone ever taught you this?" Jared looked down and thought about what Jensen was saying...he remembered the trip he'd went on with his buddies. They all went to Vegas after finals in Sophomore year and the guys kept Jared far away from the tables, forcing him to play the slots and down the drinks they kept bringing him. They told him that he'd win too much and they’d all get in trouble if he played. Jared looked up at Jensen, "So, this is why my friends ditched me, then." Jensen
stared at him, so Jared explained, "We drove to Vegas together in college...three cars full of us, and they stuck me at the slots and wouldn't let me play any of the table games. Then they poured way too strong drinks down my throat, making me choke it down...then they manhandled me to the room where I puked and laid on the floor for two days. It was depressing, while they went out and played...but now I think I understand it." Jared ended with a sigh. Jensen was silent, as he rubbed his thumbs back and forth on Jared's hands. He wasn't too happy about the tale of his supposed friends getting him that drunk, but at that age at least they were mature enough to get Jared into the room where he wasn't vulnerable to other people. He would have to ask Manny about this trip.

Jared looked up at Jensen, newfound guilt showing in his eyes, "I would never cheat. I don't want to win that way. And I tried to tell Manny that. I didn't realize that's what I was doing...I mean, it's like a mental exercise...math is just...it comes natural to me...and I don't mean to," Jensen could tell Jared was becoming upset at himself, so he interrupted him by putting one hand on Jared's cheek, "Baby, don't ever apologize for being that smart. You are one in a million and don't you ever forget it." He let that sink in, then added, "I'm just gonna make sure you stay close to me while we're in casinos cuz that's gonna piss people off." Jared still looked worried, so Jensen assured him, "Hey...we'll practice turning it off, okay? You'll just have to play with chance like everybody else...take your losses...have some fun. No thinking. You can do it and I'll help you." Jared smiled gratefully, then remembered something that upset him, as he looked up at Jensen, "Jensen, that's the way I play chess. I'm doing the calculations and picking the probable outcome, is that..." Jensen hurried to interrupt, "It's fine in chess. It's not gambling, so it's expected...it's just like playing cards at home. And by the way...don't every stop doing that at home, Jare. It's fucking hot watching your wheels turn like that."

Jared looked up in surprise. He was completely caught off guard, "Uhm," looking everywhere but at Jensen, while the older man watched him. Jensen grinned at catching Jared off guard. "Hot," Jensen added with a serious look. The younger man looked at him, finally receiving the message, "Oh," he responded. The doorbell rang, so Jensen got up. He leaned over the table and kissed Jared, "Cute...and Hot." Jensen grinned, as noticed Jared's immediate blush and shy reaction to his compliments. He went to answer the door. The attorney and investigator followed Jensen into the dining area and everyone sat down. Jared was no longer the open and playful young man Jensen had been with all morning. His face had transformed into serious concentration and emotions were masked. Jensen hated to see the real Jared hidden, but he understood this was extremely unpleasant for Jared and the kid had to call upon his years of protective barriers to help him cope. After he brought everyone hot cups of coffee, Jensen followed along as the AG explained what they needed to do. Jared paid close attention to every detail. There were seventeen valid incriminating cases and six were the most prominent that would effectively end the careers of anyone heading up Ackles Enterprises.

Jared felt the knots twisting inside his gut, the reminders of all the lost jobs coming back to haunt him. He knew this had to be done, but the thought of so many people's lives being disrupted was eating away at him. "Jared?" The younger man suddenly realized Price had been calling his name, "Huh? Oh, sorry," Jared felt terrible for drifting those few seconds. Chuck studied him, "What's wrong?" Jared tried to sound convincing, "Nothing, sorry." He wiped his hair back from his face and rested his chin on one hand, propped on the table. The AG, Chuck and Jensen all glanced knowingly at one another, so Jensen took the lead, "Jared, it's okay to tell us. We need to know what you were thinking?" Jared sighed, "It's just the employees...all the people. I was thinking of their shock...of the final notices in their hand and how that will feel...and their children...bills and," Jared stopped speaking, looking miserable before he looked away. He looked back and sighed, closed his eyes, then seemed to regroup himself, "Sorry, it's just...it has to be done, I know." He looked up to three sets of eyes all studying him. Price was contemplating something, Chuck was grinning and shaking his head, Jensen was concerned and loving, wanting badly to take Jared into his arms right then.
Jared wished they had the privacy to do just that.

Price cleared his throat and explained, "Jared, let me try and ease your mind a little...at least I hope I can." When Jared focused on the AG, he continued, "What you've done is helped thousands of innocent people. You're saving them, from serious harm or death. You understand that, right?" Jared very slowly seemed to understand and nodded. Price continued, "The right thing isn't always the easy thing. Everything these exec's have been doing for the last thirty years has been the 'wrong' thing. It's detrimental, it's life threatening, and it's deadly. It's an ugly and illegal way to do business and you're helping us stop that. You're saving people’s children. Now let me explain what will happen to the employees, okay?" Jared nodded, so Price continued, "This will hit the press tomorrow afternoon because all filings hit the public media within an hour of them being processed. Now, before that happens, the company will have warning. They will be served with a huge summons, thick with discovery and all the facts against them. Once they're served with that, it's incumbent upon them to notify their employees of the allegations. It's up to them on whether they continue status quo, or whether they shut off the lights, lay people off, et cetera. Their employees are gonna see it on the evening news anyway. I can tell you all assets and accounts will be frozen when the paperwork touches their hands. AE will not be allowed to liquidate or withdraw any of the employee's shares or IRA's or funds of any kind. It will remain frozen until the case is completed. We've done things like this before and it's imperative to move quickly in order to head them off at the pass and keep them from moving accounts to protect their own butts."

Jared looked amazed at how much Price knew about corporations and how they worked. Jensen left this world, not wanting to fit in, and Jared could see why. He was nothing like the dog eat dog cutthroat world of big business. Price continued, "If, by chance, the top exec's decide to cut and run and leave all their employees in the crapper, well, they won't have access to the cash to do that. We have to do these things in a certain order...and that's what Chuck and I have been working on since we saw you last. We've identified all the assets and accounts and at this point, are on electronic stand by waiting for the summons to be served. We click the buttons as they are served and their money is frozen. At the very end of all this, the funds are liquidated and allocated out to the employees who lost their jobs. It takes awhile, but we get it to them." Jared thought over everything the AG was saying and felt his respect for the man rise up a few dozen notches. The man was good. He was trying hard to cover everything and not make a mistake on this. Jared really needed to stop worrying because it was as good as it was going to get for his coworkers. He still felt bad for them, but it felt a lot better to know they wouldn't completely lose 'everything' and hopefully, they would have time to look for other jobs before the company's lights went out.

Jared glanced at everyone, then gratefully smiled at Price, "Thank you. It means a lot to know they are at least important in all this." Chuck stressed once more, "They are, Jared. We won't leave them hanging. But right now, we know it's hard, and we know it bothers you. Can you tell us whether you've talked to anyone there since we saw you last?" Jared answered, "Yes, my secretary, but that's all. She was going to relay how I was to the two receptionists that I work SPCA with...and I talked to my friends, Manny and Jeff...but they don't work there."

Price asked, "So, your secretary knows?" Jared nodded, "Yes. She deserved to know, and so did the others...they wouldn't repeat it, though," Jared suddenly felt defensive, like he had to justify telling them. Chuck put a hand up, "We trust you. If you feel they won't give out your location, who you're with, and anything about the case, in advance, that's fine. But are you absolutely sure they wouldn't say 'anything' about your whereabouts?" Jared thought it over and realized that he could definitely trust them all with his life and that's why it wasn't even in question to tell them. "No...Jensen stressed that before I called them, so I told them not to ask where I was and to just know I was okay. I told Blair that she and Cassie and Lisa should stay home from work Monday, but they don't completely know why. Blair knows a bit...and the bosses son came by and asked her about me, but she told him something different about my recovery, deflected him so he doesn't know." Jensen's eyebrow perked
up at this news, "Daniel was looking for you?" He wasn't happy, imagining the perverted harassment Daniel had probably had in mind if he'd visited Jared in the hospital or seen him coming back to work. Jared nodded and Jensen sighed frustratingly, as he laid a comforting hand on Jared's back.

The two AG men contemplated in silence for a moment while Jensen assessed them. He could see they were worried about something, "What's happened?" Jensen asked them in a no nonsense command voice. Jared looked at Jensen when he asked that, wondering what the hell he had missed. He then looked at the two AG men and asked in haste, "What? What is it?" Jared wasn't sure he really wanted to know, but Price sighed and looked at him in the eye, "Jared, the man that ran you off the road...Gurnaby...you said he was kind of a 'bouncer' type guy, following management around, came to big meetings with exec's, showed up once in awhile at your investigations...then he tried to kill you, as we've seen on traffic cams." Jared wasn't sure where this was going, but he quickly agreed, "Yes, that's him...so, what, did they catch him? Is he in custody?" Jensen watched the play between investigator and AG and he subtly moved closer to Jared, pretty much guessing what was coming. He'd never told Jared the perpetrator had showed up dead. Jensen placed his left hand on Jared's right forearm, which was now resting on the arm of the chair. He lightly squeezed to give Jared silent support that he was there...to let Jared feel his presence. As he did, Chuck spoke, "Gurnaby was killed last Friday. He was found in one of the AE owned warehouses." Jared listened intently, but his mind still refused to connect the dots, like the other men had done.

"Oh," the younger man responded, wondering why he felt bad for the man that had tried to end his life with the nasty car wreck. "So...so, what happened to him?" The investigator explained, "There was a warrant issued, right after you identified him. Law enforcement teams were looking for him. Our office gave the green light to hit the AE buildings and see if he was hiding out there. There was a tip that his car was at one of the downtown warehouses, so a team went there and found him." Jared waited for the rest, but the investigator glanced quickly at Jensen before he delivered the rest. Jensen appreciated the fact that he was asking permission to hit Jared with something that would floor him, but Jensen nodded his acquiescence because much to his dislike, the poor kid had to know the truth. Chuck turned back to face Jared, "His neck was broken, Jared. It was broken by the twist of someone's hands, someone who could do that sort of thing fast and efficient. It was quick and quiet. No gunshots and no blood to worry about. There were a few struggle marks on his hands, but that's it. Notes in his car and on his phone indicate he was told to meet someone there...probably his boss, or the shot caller. We think he was taken out for being pinpointed in your case, Jared. He was sloppy and left you alive, now to ruin the company's false reputation. His job was to take you out and he failed, then got himself implicated by the traffic cams and leaving you alive. So, they took him out, to avoid being linked to your accident in any way."

As the investigator was speaking, Jensen could feel the tension radiating from Jared. The younger man's arm was tightened up and his hand was clenched. Jensen gripped the hand and held it tight. The kid was in danger of hyperventilating, so Jensen took control, speaking to him directly, "Jared look at me. You need to breathe. In through the nose...hold it...out through the mouth." Jensen tried to help Jared regain control, "That's it...keep breathing...in...hold it...out...you're okay, just keep breathing." Jensen breathed with him, keeping Jared's focus until he was convinced the kid was back in control. He so wished he could get that look of panic and fear off his lover's face. He hated this. Jensen glanced at the other men and noticed how sympathetic and concerned they were. Jared took a deep breath, found enough inner strength to accept the reality of his situation and return to the rest of the discussion. He closed his eyes and inhaled, then exhaled and looked up at the AG men, "I...so...so, who was it...I mean, who..." Jared paused and sighed, frustrated at his own failure finish a question. He tried again, "Was it...like management people? The bosses from...headquarters? I mean...I know some of them and...I mean are they like...a bunch of killers?" Jared really hadn't worded all that very well and he knew he must sound like a bumbling idiot to these professionals, but he was really busting his ass to be tough, here, and they should appreciate the fact that he was just an
Jared couldn't imagine being used to this 'sort of thing' and his mind wandered back to the ribbon cutting ceremony he hated being at, the company articles and awards on the walls, the meetings and the fake smiles and the hand shakes. He heard something in his right ear which sounded a lot like Jensen's voice, "Jared!" The younger man looked at him then. Jensen told him for the third time, "breathe." Jared had apparently forgotten to breathe while his mind was trailing off into other areas. After a few calming breaths, he apologized, "Sorry." He looked up at Price and Chuck, "I'm sorry, I'm trying not to be so lame about this." Jensen looked at him, sighed unhappily at the self-deprecating comment of Jared's, then turned to the two AG men.

Price leaned forward to make his point, "Jared, you are 'never' to be sorry. This is a huge shit sandwich and you are an innocent party stuck in the middle of it. 'We' are sorry, 'very' sorry, Jared, because you never asked for any of this and 'I' am sorry that 'we' haven't caught all the assholes in the world like this so nice innocent geniuses like yourself don't have to be used or hurt by them."

Jared looked immediately contrite and about ready to argue with Price at the young genius comment, but when he opened his mouth, he was interrupted as Price continued, "We're gonna focus on keeping you safe, Jared. Now, all I need is for you to promise, 'promise' that you won't have a bad day and run off by yourself or lose it for a minute and enter a public restroom alone...or go out for a midnite walk...or anything that leaves you out in the open. You'll get sick and tired of invasive security, I know, but you 'have' to know it's not overkill. With Gurnaby killed, we know these people mean business." Price paused and watched Jared, hoping the kid was absorbing the importance of his compliance with the safety rules. Jensen smirked at Jared's put out reaction to the AG's 'genius' comment but he said nothing. He marveled at how other people caught on to Jared's light and intelligence, but the kid remained oblivious. 'That' fact, in itself, was part of Jared's charm. "Fine." Jensen wasn't really irritated, but more in a fog over it all. He still had trouble grasping that the men outside were there to protect 'him' and that any of this was necessary. Hearing about Gurnaby, though, had hit home. He was in the middle of an action movie...something that never happened in real life...that's what he thought, anyway.

'Fuck,' Jared wasn't sure if he'd said that out loud, or not, so he said it again, "Fuck. This is...this is...fuck." Jared put a hand over his face to block out the light and the enormity of it all for a few seconds. Chuck added one more piece of information that he hadn't shared yet, "Jared...that isn’t all we needed to tell you before we go over the case."

Jared looked up, "What?" Jensen stiffened up with tension, as Chuck glanced at him before addressing Jared with a response, "Someone pinged your location...through your cell number." Jared looked at Jensen, then back at the two AG men, not entirely clear on what that meant, "Is that...when you triangulate the frequency signal of a live phone and try and track it's whereabouts within so many feet?" In the middle of the unbearable tense subject, the three men couldn’t help but grin because their resident genius had just described his take on what 'pinging' meant. Jensen’s smile didn’t match his eyes. His angry tension at whomever was doing this to Jared just rose up a few notches.

"Who was it?" Jared squeezed Jensen’s hand when he heard the angry growl that his lover used to ask that question. Price responded, "We don’t know. There was a nine second attempt at six twenty a.m., then another twenty four second attempt at three fourteen p.m. Both on Saturday. Nothing today yet. The reverse ping identified back to Austin, but we don’t have an exact radius because the window was too short."

Jensen spoke then, "So...Gurnaby’s been axed. The shot caller, or someone ‘else’ who’s been hired to finish what Gurnaby failed to do, tried to locate Jared on Saturday, twice. He obviously knew now long he could stay in the search mode, so you couldn’t back trace him. This shit just went up a dozen
notches, boys, cuz that’s not beginner behavior. How much of a trace did ‘he’ get?’” Chuck sighed, which told Jensen the answer wasn’t gonna be good, “The search has a quicker kickback than the response. So, whoever he is got more of a pinpoint than we did on the reversal. The earlier one was too short to probably tell him anything other than a sixty mile radius…but the second was probably within a few miles. We got the city of Austin, but it’s so large we needed about ten more seconds to get the actual address. I’d say he knows where the phone is…and since we’ve got it in a coffee shop, I’m sure he’s headed that way…or someone is.” Jared was quiet and Jensen was worried about him. Jensen asked, “I take it there’s a wall of surveillance around the coffee shop?” Both AG men nodded. Jensen sighed and looked over at Jared, “You alright?” Jared didn’t answer Jensen, as he was focused on Chuck and Price at that moment, "What about my friends? Will they hurt my friends? What about Jensen? I don't want anybody getting hurt because of me.”

Jensen adjusted himself on the chair, not used to having someone be that concerned for him. With all his skills, he was used to ‘being’ the protector...he didn't play the one that 'needed' protection very well. Chuck answered Jared, "We've got investigators watching your friends, though not as closely as you. Your friends don't know they're being monitored. They're watching for anything threatening, and also any press that might try and hound them to get to you. We've got people watching your house in Austin, totally expecting the press to flock there and question the neighbors." At Jared’s alarmed expression, Chuck stopped and asked, "Did we go over the press yet?" Jensen squeezed Jared’s hand under the table, “Yes, we talked about it, but not in depth. Jare, A.E. is a multimillion dollar company. It’s going to be huge when it goes down. The AG tried to circumvent that by covering your family and friends, too, not just you. There will be people to intervene if anyone tries to block or bother Manny or the girls or anyone else during their day."

Price added, “We’ve even got your aunt covered, Jared.” Jared was confused, "But...how does everyone know it's me reporting them? I thought my testimony was a secret." Price answered, "It is..your identity is not mentioned in the complaint. 'But'...your reports and findings are very precise. They're very detailed. My expert witness tells me that you are a high level master engineer and you've obviously developed your skills beyond that of any normal engineer. What that means is..." Jensen finished for him, "They'll recognize the reports. They'll know your work, Jare." As the younger man looked at him, he added, "They'll know it can't be anybody else." Jared paled as Jensen watched the realization hit him. "I'm sorry," Jensen added. Chuck continued, "Jared...when the corporation feels attacked, they might be the ones to point the blame...they’ll formulate some lies, make things up to cover, maybe even make up a false employment record, just to save their asses. It won’t work, but they’ll try. That’s what we’re anticipating, making sure we prepare for any angle. If your name gets out, the press will search for you...anything on you, or about you. They’ll look like crazy until they find every little tidbit, just to be the first to put the story of the year in print. It will be a media frenzy and they’ll hound the company for information. We don't care about them. Our only concern is you. We want you to stay off the news stations and be totally separate from that craziness...can you do that?"

Jared nodded, "Sure," still looking a bit shocky. Jensen knew he would need to get Jared's mind off of this later, as much as possible. The kid didn't need this to terrorize him into going backwards in his recovery. Price continued, "We've got the team here at the house, and there will always be four with you. There is a movement team, for when you go out. They are totally separate and they will be with you at all times when you are away from home. Aside from the two that will be close by you, you'll probably notice some further away and then in various other positions. The team will be huge compared to the last few days. We don't want anyone speaking to you that's unwarranted...anyone unexpected coming up to you that hasn't been pre-approved...that sort of thing. I know this is hard, but we've dealt with it before...reporters can look like buddies, totally unsuspecting and innocent. They'll ask you for the time and when you aren't aware, they'll move right in. They are crafty bastards."
Price paused, hoping Jared was absorbing it all. He continued, "I know this is hard to get used to," then Jared interrupted, "You have no idea," before the AG continued, "The increased team will come in here tomorrow and explain the process and schedule. They'll ask you for advance schedules of appointments, errands, even entertainment. If there's anything you are going to do, they'll need to organize security for it before you go. Our guys don't mess around, and they're very good. They're used to high notoriety cases." Jared was quiet. He silently stood up, excused himself claiming he needed a few minutes, then left the room. Jensen eyed the two worried AG men, and when Chuck commented, "We've hit him with quite a bit," Jensen nodded, "I'll be right back." Jensen found Jared in the master bedroom, leaning on the frame of the slider door, watching the hail. It was now slushy enough to melt when it hit the ground and Jared seemed transfixed. Jensen knew Jared could sense him behind him, but the younger man remained focused on the outside. Jensen slid his arms around Jared’s waist, resting it on the younger man’s shoulder. He held him for a moment, until Jared sighed and turned around to face him. Jared’s face was turned down, so Jensen kissed his head, rubbed his back and shoulders. "Are you alright?" The older man asked him with concern.

Jared looked up with tormented anguish in his eyes and said something Jensen didn’t expect, "I think maybe I should go.” Jared backed out of Jensen’s hold, and walked away with his back turned. Jensen stayed where he was in stunned silence. The younger man raised his arms, rubbed his hand and his face, then laced his fingers behind his neck before turning around. Jensen was struggling to deal with the sudden blow to his gut from Jared’s opening line, but now he could see the desperate defeat in his new lover’s eyes. He read it for what it truly was. It was agony…and sacrifice. ‘He’s forcing himself to do this,’ Jensen realized. He took a step toward Jared, but paused before he touched him, “Jared, what are you saying?” Jensen forced himself to remain still. He kept his internal feelings at bay, until he heard what the younger man had to say.

Jared’s eyes darted unsure before he finally forced his argument, “This isn’t fair to you...you never asked for this. I think that...I could go away...wait somewhere until this is over and...then you would be safe...maybe ‘everybody’ would be safe. All this trouble is just...” Jared chuckled mockingly, as he looked down, “why didn’t I think of this sooner.” Jensen knew goddamn well this man was hurting over this. He didn’t want to leave, he doing this to protect ‘him’. If Jensen thought he could ever be more in love with Jared than he was already, this was the moment. He wanted to shake some sense into him, scream into his face at how stupid of an idea this was, yet kiss him and worship him all over his beautiful body and declare his undying love to him at the same time. The thought of Jared being alone out there, without him, unprotected fueled his anger. Jensen controlled it, for now. He finally responded, “So, you want to protect everyone else. Protect me. Save everyone, by sacrificing yourself. Is that your idea? Going it alone. Throwing yourself out to the wolves...draw them all off, so to speak...keep them coming after ‘you’ and leave everyone else who loves you alone...'that' what you’ve come up with?"

Jared knew Jensen was angry now, and it wasn’t what he wanted. He suddenly felt unsure of his plan. Jensen took a step closer, “THAT is just not going to happen.” Jared’s eyes filled with desperation, “But what if you get hurt, Jensen? What if anything...?” Jared’s raw emotions were at the surface, his eyes pooled but he looked away, “I can’t...I can’t lose...what I’ve been waiting for...’who’ I’ve been waiting for...” Jensen stepped closer. He gripped Jared’s arms and turned him, "Hey." Jensen gripped the younger man’s cheeks when he didn’t immediately look at him, "Jared." Jared finally looked at him, allowing Jensen to see the fear for him. "Hey," Jensen held his gaze, “Remember Rambo? Chucky N? You said I could kick ‘both’ their asses. You need to give yourself a break at worrying about everybody else. I’m gonna be okay, kiddo...and I am gonna be right beside you to make sure ‘you’re’ okay too." Jared angrily confessed, “I don’t care about me!” There, he’d said it. Jensen and everyone else were the most important things that mattered. He meant it. Jensen sighed, “Well well, you’re handling this in true Jared fashion, aren’t you.” Jared stewed silently, so Jensen continued, “You're taking it all on your own shoulders. Everything is your doing, your fault,
and your responsibility. You didn’t start this, but damned if you’re gonna make it your own and handle it all without anyone else involved.”

Jared looked down, overwhelmed at being so obvious. Jensen pulled his face back up to look in his eyes, “First of all, Jare, you are the most beautiful soul I have ever met. Those eyes of yours are irresistible, and the rest of you is off the chart so far I can’t even ‘believe’ how lucky I am. BUT...there is no fucking way in ‘HELL’ you are going to leave here and go off by yourself, so get that through your head. Second, if you decide you don’t want to be with ‘me’ anymore, well then…I would still stick to you like glue, just to keep you safe. So still…no going away by yourself. Third, and let me repeat, HELL FUCKING NO, you’re NOT leaving, so let’s just get that straight.” Jensen read the turmoil of emotions flowing through Jared’s eyes. There was the desperate need to argue, to sacrifice, to punish himself and stick to the old comfort zone of denying himself any happiness. Jared was warring with acceptance that he wasn’t going to be able to do ‘any’ of those things with Jensen around. He finally sighed, “Well can you at least promise me you won’t go out and tackle anyone? Please stay behind the security too...with me?”

Jensen didn’t seem like he was going to agree, at first, but when Jared opened his mouth to argue, Jensen cut him off, "Okay, but if someone gets close, they’re going down...and if the security sucks, I'm snapping some bones myself. I ‘can’ promise you...if the threat is being appropriately handled and it's not that close to you, then ‘yes’ I will stay behind the security. I'm not leaving you unless I feel it would be absolutely necessary to protect you. That’s the best I can promise." Jared used that argument against the older man, “Well, then you understand how I feel with wanting to go away...to keep you safe.” Jensen looked him in the eye, “Yes, Jare. I do, and it’s a new concept for me to have someone care about me like that...someone willing to do that for me.” Jensen continued, “But let me explain something...leaving YOU alone as prey for killers is a whole lot different than MY being alone and having to defend ‘myself’.” Jensen let him think about that for a second. He could see the moment Jared realized that in his panic, he’d completely forgotten the skill level of his new lover. Jensen wasn’t an average guy. His abilities were something incomprehensible to a scholar like Jared. Suddenly, the younger man was beginning to think he looked kind of foolish in his overreactive panic, “I guess I panicked. I guess it seems silly for me to be so worried about my own special forces black ops Chuck doll.” Jared looked down shyly.

Jensen kissed on the top of his downturned head, then nestled his face into the younger man’s hair, “No...it’s not silly...it means more than you can possibly imagine. You’re worried about ‘me’. Believe me, that’s not taken lightly.” Jared sighed, then looked up. Jensen smiled and kissed him, “I gotta say, it’s out of my comfort zone, but I’m kinda ‘liking’ this being worried about thing…it’s something I could definitely get used to.” Jensen meant to lighten the mood, but Jared looked at him with such intensity, he froze. The engineer threatened, “Well, get used to it, Ackles. I’m in love with you. And if you get hurt, I’m gonna be pissed.” Jared took Jensen by the hand and pulled him toward the hall. The older man quickly recovered from his guppy impression then pulled Jared back, “Wait just a goddamned minute.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all of the encouraging words in your responses.
Chapter Thirteen. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

Continues exactly where the previous chapter left off. The lovers become closer, the AG case is getting filed, and there is some awesome oral sex. Fingering. Jensen and Jared are trying to enjoy their newfound love for each other, while preparing for the danger to come. Everything in this chapter is pretty much laced with more angst, hurt/comfort, humor, discussions of the past and Jared's experience with Tom. Very light, but enough to make Jensen want to hurt the ass. Jensen is hopelessly enamored with his adorable engineer, Jared feels the same about his ex-military protector. They are becoming more glued to one another in this chapter, but they're going out in public next and Jensen is definitely worried about it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jared turned inquisitively. He slowly grinned as his special forces military expert spouted off in shock, “You can’t tell me something like that and just...just walk away like you’re going to pick up the mail.” Jensen had waved carelessly like he was mocking the way Jared pretended it wasn’t a big deal. It made Jared smile even wider. Jensen searched his eyes, then gently grabbed the younger man’s face between his hands, “Tell me again, what did you just say?”

Jared leaned forward and kissed him. He poured all the love and devotion he could into showing Jensen how he felt. His tongue danced with Jensen’s, loving strokes worshiping him, cherishing him and promising everything he could from deep inside his soul. Jared backed out of the kiss slowly, with one more soft touch to the older man’s lips. He looked into Jensen’s eyes, “I love you, Jensen. I’m so in love with you, it pisses me off because it’s terrifying...you aren’t allowed to get hurt, you understand me?” Jensen released the breath he’d been holding. He grabbed Jared tighter and kissed the living shit out of him. Jared was lost in it, pushed against the wall before he even realized he’d been moving.

The AG men were checking their watches, hoping the other’s would come back soon. They looked uncertainly at the coffee maker, then back at one another with raised eyebrows. Chuck asked, “Do you think they would mind?” Price got up, “Nah...I’ll get it.” He took their cups and refilled them. As they sipped, the two lovers returned. Jared looked much better, the AG team noticed. He seemed a little flushed, but the sparkle in his eye had returned. He was no longer pale. The engineer quickly sat down with his hands in his lap, praying the visitors hadn’t noticed the bulge in the front of his jeans. Jensen seemed different. ‘Definitely different,’ Chuck noticed. The ex-soldier sat down slowly, like he was favoring an injury, definitely flushed and looking like he’d rather be somewhere else. He faked a smile, “Sorry for the wait, gentlemen.”

Jensen was dealing with a hard on, willing it to give up, but the fact that Jared was dealing with his own wasn’t helping. They’d quickly wound up against the wall, rutting against one another passionately, but forced themselves apart when they remembered their guests. They returned with tingling swollen lips, still tasting the lingering flavors of one another’s oral assault. When Jared had confessed he was in love with Jensen, the older man went wild. Things escalated way too fast, and gotten way too hot. Chuck cleared his throat, “So...we’ve covered all the security issues and we’ve delivered all the bad news we’ve got right now. Jared, now all we need is for you to look over the
complaint and make sure the facts are written just as you reported them. We don’t want any misconceptions or anything to be out of whack from what your reports have in them. Feel free to bring up any discrepancies and we’ll fix them. Once you’re okay with this, we’ll be preparing the formal cover sheet with seventeen counts of criminal negligence and filing it tomorrow afternoon. The eighteenth would be the Cedar Ridge bridge you almost finished, but we really don’t need that one. We can add it when you finish it.”

Jared nodded in understanding. He took a deep cleansing breath and went to work on going over the complaint. He had a couple adjustments to things that were written in slightly different verbiage than his reports. Price had Chuck fix them, then after an hour of going over every detail, Jared gave his approval. Price and Chuck put away their files and focused their attention on Jared. The attorney explained, "You and Jensen have my personal cell and work cell, and my desk phone...you also have all of Chuck's numbers. The team outside is organized by this person, Lance Parker," Price slid a business card to both the men, “He works directly for me. That's Parker's private cell. He’ll be here shortly to meet you, but if there is ‘anything’ not to your liking or not feeling status quo, tell him. The teams will be on you like glue, Jared, and I'm sorry in advance for the feeling of invasion, but it is important we 'never' leave you out in the open...not until this case is over."

Jared nodded, looking at the card. Jensen studied the card and glanced at his lover, who had gotten quiet. Jensen asked, "Jared's going to the doctor on Tuesday and I'd like to get him lunch outside of here, something simple like that to give him a change of scenery, is that doable?" Price nodded, "Certainly. The teams will be agreeable to anything that is organized in advance. Just give them notice and they'll be fine. Jared, whether you’re in a store, or a gas station or a coffee shop, stay with Jensen or the security team. NOWHERE on your own, is that clear?" Jared said in a slightly whiny voice, "I think...but can I go pee alone?" Chuck looked at Jensen and both men smiled at Jared's innocent inquiry. Chuck answered, "You can do that, but never alone outside of the house."

When Jared looked a bit alarmed, Jensen said, "I go into the public restrooms with you, buddy, or one of their guys. No exceptions. Everywhere you go that's not in this house, you are with one of us, or all of us." Jared looked a bit wiped out to Jensen, in addition to looking overwhelmed with everything, so Jensen decided to try and end the visit now, "So, what happens now, and what else does Jared need to do?" Price explained, "So, now, we file the complaint, serve the suspects, then we see if the Grand Jury accepts the case. I believe that will happen within about three days. After that, the case will involve them getting attorneys to harass the hell out of my office and both sides will be beefing up their versions of the case."

Price continued, "The Grand Jury will have their clerks schedule deposition hearings to go over the evidence, with the accused present. I'll be doing that without you. Your statements are all in here, and my expert witness will be with me for questions. That whole process might take another few days. If the emails and documents and timing on everything isn't enough for the GJ, they will demand I include witness testimony to match. I'm hoping to avoid that. If that happens I have to put you on the stand and you answer questions to both counsels in front of them." Jensen angrily interjected, "Wait, aren't they dicks?" Price said, "It's primarily their job to get the defendants off, so yes, they can be known to be dicks, but that's because they have a purpose. I'm sure AE employs shrewd players to defend them." Jensen didn't look pleased, so Price continued, "I'll try and keep him from that part, Jensen, I swear. And if it comes to where they are being assholes, I can be an asshole too, in defense of our witness. But, the GJ is a little different from what you see on t.v. They are a jury, but there isn’t a crowd watching. It’s just the counsel and witnesses before a judge. You’re also kept in a separate room, not in the GJ room with all the witnesses at once. You won’t have to sit there and be stared at by their people. I'll help you ahead of time, Jared, if they insist on talking to you. I’ll prepare you how to answer and what to say, so try not to worry about that unless it’s actually gonna happen, okay?"
The younger man nodded, “Okay.” Jensen wasn't happy, but at least he knew Price was going to try and avoid putting Jared through that. The AG reiterated, "Guys, stay off the news after tomorrow morning, okay? They do not report things right and it can be hard on you if you see or hear something that's just an outright lie or stretch and I don't want anything interfering with your mental or physical health, okay?" Jared looked a bit confused that something could really upset him that way, but he agreed by nodding, "Okay." As Price rose, the others did too. They all shook hands, then Chuck spoke directly to Jared, "Price is the best, Jared. You're in good hands. Try and relax, as much as you can. If it goes like we really hope, this will be over in two weeks. If they fight it, longer, but we'll deal one thing at a time." Chuck spoke to Jensen, "Anything at all...24/7." Jensen nodded, "Got it, thanks." The AG team walked out to the drive way and spoke to the security team before getting into their car. After they drove off, Jensen held the door and waited, as one of the security guys he'd never met was coming toward him.

"Hi, Jensen, Lance Parker, just wanted to make sure you could put a face to the number on the card." Jensen shook his hand, "Appreciate that, good to meet you." Parker continued, "I'm organizing the teams. Please call me with your schedules, outings, even if you're going for a walk, and having anyone over is just a matter of you identifying them ahead of time so we know. I'm in constant contact with these guys so we can stay tightened up." Jensen nodded in understanding, "Definitely." Parker continued, "The team takes breaks in shifts, so they will come and go throughout the day and night, but there will always be four here. There's another team that is monitoring Mr. Padalecki's credits, debits and cell phone for reverse scanning."

Jensen nodded, impressed and feeling much better about Jared's safety, "Sounds perfect. Let me know what you need from us. I don't anticipate going beyond the back yard until Tuesday. Jared's appointment is in Denver at 10:30 so we'll need to leave about 9:45. If he feels good, I'd like to let him stay out for awhile before we come back home. If your team can plan for that, we'd appreciate it."

Parker nodded, "Perfect, it will be just fine. Thanks for the heads up." The men shook hands again, Jensen closed the door and walked back to the kitchen. Jared wasn't at the table where he left him. He looked over toward the living room and saw him sprawled out on the couch. He seemed to be a bit zoned, staring at the dying embers. It was getting close to 5 pm, so Jensen went to the fire first, added more wood and built the flames up to warm the house before nightfall. He knew the meeting with the AG had been stressful and upsetting, to say the least, but Jared had handled it with stalwart bravery, just like he had lived through everything else. Jensen knew the kid needed some relaxation tonight to get his mind off of things. Jensen closed the fireplace curtain and walked past Jared's limp form. He sat on the couch next to him, “How does a steak dinner sound, maybe some popcorn and another pirate movie?” Jared turned his head to look at him, “Sounds perfect,” he answered with a lazy grin. Jensen played with the younger man’s hair for a minute, assessing him to gauge how tired he might be. The kid looked relaxed and stress free, at the moment, so Jensen made a pact to keep him that way for as long as possible.

Jared was mesmerized by how much he felt for this man. His eyes were full of dreamy devotion at the moment. It was something Jensen hadn’t quite become accustomed to but he couldn’t help grin at the sweet adoring look he was receiving. He mentally cursed at himself for becoming such a silly sap in the last nine days. “I’ll be right back,” he said, as he left Jared on the couch and reheated the delicious steak dinners he’d been saving. When he brought everything back to the coffee table, Jared asked for a hand to get up, then headed for the bathroom. Jensen shadowed the kid, waiting outside for Jared to finish and wash up. The younger man changed into sweats, with Jensen’s help, then headed back to the living room. Dinner was delicious. Jared had to agree with Jensen on eating the best steak he’d ever had.

After Jensen cleaned the dishes up, he went back to the living room and built up the fire again. When
Jensen turned around, he smiled at what he saw. His new lover was laying against the back of the couch, his stockinged feet propped up on the coffee table, looking like a happy toddler after a busy day and a warm bath. Jared was in very soft comfy clothes, stuffed full of a delicious dinner and gradually becoming more boneless by the second. Jensen knew he was 'finally' letting go of the upsetting meeting earlier. This was exactly where he wanted him tonight, as far away as possible from stress and worry.

Jared sluggishly looked up at him with a lazy smile, "Hey." Jensen approached him, still smiling at his adorable house guest. He sat next to him, "Hey." He brushed back the hair from Jared's face and asked, "How are you doin?" Jared smiled lazily, "Really good, this is so nice." Jensen smirked, again amazed at how damn adorable Jared was. "Are you havin a nice time?" He asked. Jared's eyes were at that lazy open unguarded state Jensen loved. "Mmmhmm," Jared nodded and smiled innocently at Jensen. The older man giggled because Jared was damn irresistible and he would never get tired of watching him. "Do you want me to start the movie?" Jensen waited for the loopy young man to answer him. Jared looked like he was trailing off on another subject, then surprised the ex-soldier with his next slurred comment, "You're sooooh handsome, you know? You're like a frickin model from one of those...those hard body porn videos...or wait...maybe a Guns and Ammo centerfold for you." Jensen laughed out loud, not expecting that. He shook his head, "Are you dipping into your pain meds when I'm not looking?" Jared smirked, but continued his perusal, "Your face is like chiseled, with this strong jaw and your eyes are just...not just green, which I hadn't realized at first. They change to dark green, then very light green and right now they have hazel and a little gold swimming around in them. How do you 'do' that?"

Jensen grinned, thinking perhaps Jared was just over tired at this point. He'd only been around his buddies and they did 'not' assess one another's looks, but Dani had told him he was a looker. She just didn't elaborate. Jared was elaborating a whole lot. He shook his head. "I'm not sure what to say. To me, 'you' are the most gorgeous thing on the earth and clueless as hell about it. And if you think 'my' eyes change color...holy shit, dude, 'yours' have like a sea of different tides in them...always changing and swirling. It's fascinating." Jared concentrated on Jensen for a few minutes, wondering if he should argue that Jensen was nuts or if he should just continue to mention what he noticed about his new boyfriend out loud. Jared snickered to himself all of a sudden, which made Jensen smile, "What?" Jared snickered again, then Jensen pushed him, "What's so funny? Tell me." Jared said, "I just called you my boyfriend in my head and it sounded funny." Jensen tried to follow, as Jared continued, "Boy-friend...doesn't it sound girly? It's funny to say 'boyfriend' like you're my boy toy or my bitch or something. It's such a label."

Jensen didn't say anything. He decided Jared could call him any damn thing he wanted and he'd follow him to the ends of the earth. Watching Jared like this was continuing to be quite entertaining. The younger man studied Jensen for a few seconds longer, then became serious, "And you've become so much more that, Jensen. You're not just a boyfriend...it's like you're in my soul." Jensen looked into Jared's eyes, "And you're in mine. I've been locked away for a long time, but somehow you're right smack in the middle of it." Both lovers gazed at one another before sharing a gentle kiss.

After another minute, Jensen turned on the television and searched for the movie. He ran to the kitchen and returned with two large root beers in frosted mugs. He set them on the table and kissed Jared because he just had to. He ran back to the kitchen for a longer amount of time, then returned with a huge bowl of hot buttered popcorn and an unidentified steaming mug.

Jared watched with curiosity. Jensen helped him sit up a bit, still supported by the back of the couch. He then poured the contents of the mug all over the popcorn. "Oh my God," Jared blurted out. He guffawed excitedly, as he picked up the bucket to inhale the rich scent of caramel and butter, "God, Jensen, this is fantastic." Jensen smiled at Jared's happiness. He slipped little cup holders on the bottom of the root beers so they would sit on the couch, then made himself comfortable next to Jared and clicked on the movie. Jensen had a feeling it had been a very long time since Jared had been this
After the movie ended, Jared assured Jensen he could make it through the last movie without falling asleep. Even though it was getting late, Jared looked vibrant and sparkly eyed when Jensen studied him. He knew it could be the sugar, but Jared's influential puppy eyes were looking so hopeful, there was no defense against making this kid happy. They both took a quick bathroom break, then returned to the living room. Jensen stoked up the fire, then cozied up next to Jared to enjoy the last of the trilogy. He brought back some water bottles from the kitchen, knowing the fire would dry Jared out, in addition to the junk food and meds. Within the first half hour, Jared downed the first bottle. When he asked for a second, Jensen felt his forehead, “You feeling okay?” He thought the younger man looked tired, but not overly exhausted. Jared answered, ”Yeah. I feel great, this whole night has been perfect.” Jensen felt no heat but he did notice the yawns Jared tried to subdue. Jensen grinned to himself, knowing Jared was pushing to get the most out of this evening before he succumbed to exhaustion.

The third movie was quite the hit. Jared loved it. Jensen had seen all of these movies, but not for years and it certainly hadn't been as much fun without Jared. He had to agree with his counterpart, it had been a perfect night. Jensen shut everything off and banked the fireplace for the night. He cleaned up their leftovers and went to start the fireplace in the bedroom. Jared moved slowly, trying to get his limbs to cooperate. It was futile to even try getting up without Jensen to help him. He was wiped out and he had to admit it. Jensen came back and helped him get up. He held onto him this time, as Jared shuffled down the hall. Jensen knew damn well the kid wasn’t firing on all cylinders. When he moved for the bed, Jensen stopped him, “Hey, do you need the bathroom first?” Jared wobbled slightly as he looked at the bathroom like he wasn't sure where it came from. Jensen waited with his grip on Jared's elbow. When Jared headed weakly for the bathroom without saying a word, Jensen simply guided him and kept watch. Jared was plainly beyond exhaustion. Jensen stayed very close while he brushed his teeth, used the toilet and washed his hands, yawning through it all.

Jensen finally escorted the barely functioning genius to the bed. Jared's eyes were at half mass, so Jensen kissed him on the forehead while he pulled the covers up to his chest. The older man went to take care of his own bathroom needs, then turned off all lighting and slipped under the thick covers with his lover. Jared's hand was laying loosely under the covers so Jensen took hold of it. He wasn't sure if Jared was even still conscious until he felt a responding squeeze. After a few silent minutes, Jared turned his head toward him and smiled sleepily, ”Thank you...this was such a good day.” Jared yawned as he was falling asleep, then mumbled, ”I love you, Jensen.” Jensen rolled on his side, used his free hand to brush back the unruly hair from Jared's forehead, then kissed him there. He rested his lips sideways on Jared's forehead and rubbed his hair lovingly, "I love you too, Jare.” He kissed him again, then laid his head down facing him. Jared was so goddamn beautiful, he could stare at him for hours. Jensen watched him fall deeper into sleep, then finally succumbed to his own slumber.

When Monday morning arrived, Jensen blinked sluggishly at the bedside clock, which read 0559. His internal alarm hadn’t failed him, once again. He decided that it was warm in the bed, he didn't have to pee, and there was a decidedly affectionate warm body laying next to him. He really had no pressing reason to even think of leaving the bed. Somewhere during the last eight hours, Jared had moved further onto his right and burrowed himself closer. Jensen smiled when he felt Jared’s breath on his left arm. Looking down, he saw the rumpled head resting right against his shoulder. Jared's left arm was wrapped around Jensen's, his right hand still holding Jensen’s under the covers. Jensen couldn’t believe he was becoming addicted to this, fast. Jared sought him out in his sleep, and it felt amazing. He slanted his head just a bit so he was closer to the top of Jared’s head, loving the fact that he could hear Jared's rhythmic breathing. He squeezed Jared's hand and fell back to sleep. Jensen later awoke to the feel of the bed moving. Jared turned in his sleep to his other side. Within a minute he moaned in pain, as he rolled back. Jensen reached up and rubbed Jared's head gently, whispering,
"I'm sorry it still hurts." He fell back to sleep when Jared's breathing returned to it's relaxed rhythm.

Jensen couldn't believe he slept another two hours. He figured he was making up for lost sleep over the years in the service, or he was getting old, or...maybe he was just exhausted as hell from things lately. Either way, he felt like a million bucks after so much rest. He sat up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. He yawned hugely and looked at the clock, reading 0915. "Jesus," the older man grumbled. He shook the last of the fog out of his head and scrambled to the bathroom to take care of business. The ex-soldier thought maybe he'd like to run a few miles before he hit the shower. He checked Jared just to assure himself he was resting peacefully, then changed and went to his spare room. Jensen was so energized, he did weights and core exercises before finally partaking in another four mile run. Ridden with sweat, he headed back to his room for a hot shower.

As he quietly bent over and pulled some underwear and socks from the dresser, a very sleepy sexy voice greeted him from the bed behind him, "Well, hello there." Jensen straightened up immediately, letting out a slightly embarrassed chuckle. He realized Jared had been privy to his very sweaty crotch and ass, probably outlined in perfect detail right through the damn running pants. He felt a rare blush at Jared's comment, literally 'hating' his inability to control his reaction. Jensen tried to play off the embarrassment, as he turned nonchalantly, "Good morning," but the look on his very sexy lover's mischievous grinning face was obvious. He was enjoying the view. Jensen felt gross, layered with sweat and stuck to his clothes, but obviously, Jared had a different opinion while watching the outline of Jensen's 'package'. "Think you should trade those socks out for another pair," Jared said with false concern. Jensen looked at his socks, then confusedly back to his lover, "Why?" Jared grinned knowingly, while he stretched his long arms and legs, never breaking eye contact. "Why would you want me to," Jensen asked again, as he looked down at the bottom drawer, still confused. He suddenly looked back at his lover in understanding, adding a defeated sigh and eye roll. The younger man giggled, after trying to display a mock innocent look at wanting Jensen to bend over again...an innocent look which promptly failed.

As Jensen started to walk toward the bathroom, the younger man whined, "Whaaatt. I can't help it if my new lover is hot beyond words. It's not my fault if that impressive undercarriage is perfectly visible in those things." Jared reached for Jensen and the older man sighed in feigned irritation. He simply could not resist detouring his trip to the shower and going to his lover first, "I'm gross." Jared grabbed the older man behind his sweaty neck and pulled him down for a good morning kiss. He hummed agreeably, "Mmmm...you don't taste gross." Jensen grinned because it was obvious Jared was feeling pretty damn frisky this morning. 'He's so much better,' the older man thought to himself. He had a seconds thought at fucking his sleepy sexy gorgeous mate through the mattress, but it was quickly dispelled as Jensen backed off, growling at his limited self control, "You're too goddamned edible. Stop tempting me. This is a rest day.

Jensen watched as it was Jared's turn to roll his eyes irritably. He whined again, "We already had a rest day...I can't just lay around, Jensen pleeeeaase?" Jared's eyes turned full force. It was a nuclear powered force of anguished lost sad puppy dog browns, greys, greens and golds, complete with lower lip pout. "Jesus fucking christ," Jensen bitched because those eyes were definitely were not something he could fight. "Dammit, you're hurting me with those gorgeous tractor beams of yours, stop it." Jared was distracted from rubbing his hands up and down Jensen's sweaty arms by Jensen's comment. He further damaged Jensen's resolve with a clueless, "Huh?" Jensen realized Jared didn't realize he'd turned on the powerful puppy dog beauties, so he waited for the kid to figure out what he'd meant. He wasn't disappointed as the younger man finally rolled his eyes and relaxed his look, replacing it with annoyance, "I think you make that up." Jensen smiled, "Uh, no, I don't need to make that up. YOU have dangerous eyes and YOU test my control with them. Now, you see the surgeon tomorrow and I want him to be impressed that we didn't bust you in 'any' way and we kept his trust at letting you out of that hospital. We've already done some...'activities' that are not on his list of okay things, I'm sure."
Jared perked up an eyebrow with a hopeful gleam in his eyes, "He said I was a fast healer. Everyone
did. I'm ahead of schedule." Jensen had to agree, "Yes, he did...and you're right, you are ahead of
schedule. I'm not arguing with that, baby, and it's so good to see you feeling this good. Believe me,
I'm grateful that you're so much better." Jensen kissed Jared to follow up that admission. Jared
moaning his appreciation. When Jensen pulled back, he looked into the younger man's hopeful eyes
and grinned. He was so beautiful, Jensen still couldn't believe the incredible turn his life had taken.
'He's mine,' he couldn't help the possessive part of his psyche reminding him. Jared asked, "Can we
go out back?" Jensen started to argue, but Jared hurried to cut him off with explanation, "You can
help. I'll do the calculating and tell you what needs to be done. You can do the bending over stuff."
Jared waited while Jensen considered whether he was being pulled into something bigger than Jared
was supposed to do. Jared added further, "It's good...it won't hurt me...and it will give us something
fun to do after. Remember the computer program? I have it and we can input all the measurements
and design your back yard. It'll be fun."

Jared waited, watching Jensen with pleading and hopeful eyes. He wanted this so bad and it showed.
Jared didn't realize he'd poured on the puppy orbs again. Jensen sighed, grumbling, "Damn, alright.
Yes, I guess it will be fun. But Jared, I mean it. Take it easy and listen, alright?" Jared nodded,
excitedly, "I promise. Yessss! Thank you, Jensen! I was gonna ask to walk the treadmill for awhile,
too, but I figured you'd say no." Jensen tilted his head mockingly and rolled his eyes, "Well, yeah,
that would be a 'no'...the doctor said no treadmill, Jare. No exercising." Jared argued, "Well, there's
nothing wrong with my damn legs! They can move. I bet I could do some curls too and lunges." Jensen
argued louder, "Jared. NO," then he softened the bellow, "but, ask him tomorrow, okay? Maybe he'll
be okay with just walking and even jogging, since you're doing so well."

Jared kissed Jensen soundly. He was so happy Jensen was supporting his need to get moving in
some way. The younger man wasn't used to being tied down like this and it was killing him to have
all this energy. Jensen finally continued his trek to the shower and looked back once to make sure
Jared stayed put until he returned. Jared smiled, "Don't worry. I feel really good, Jensen. I can go
make coffee and I'll get dressed when you get out." Jensen smiled, "Okay, big guy. Save me a cup
out of the fifteen that pot makes, will ya?" Jared sat up. Jensen watched him stand with no trouble
and yawn. The kid was definitely full of positive energy this morning. Before Jensen turned to take
care of his morning shower, he heard Jared call to him, "Hey, let me know if you need any help in
there," which had Jensen grinning and shaking his head.

Jared went and grabbed some jeans, a t-shirt and flannel from the spare closet, then got a pair of
underwear and socks from the top drawer set aside for him to use in Jensen's room. He was smart
enough not to drop his frickin’ sock this time. He realized he could only get the shirts on without
Jensen's help, but not the rest. 'Damnit,' he mentally exclaimed, reminded of his limitations. Jared got
the shirts on and went to the spare bathroom to use the other set of hygiene supplies. He brushed his
teeth, washed his face and hands, then applied some deodorant and lightly wet his hair to brush it
back with his fingers. He still had his sweats and wool socks on from the day before, so he headed
for the kitchen to make friends with Jensen's coffee maker. He noticed right away the drop in
outside of the bedroom. Fuck, it's cold,' he thought. Jared hurried through his coffee
preparations and stood in silence with his arms tightly wound around himself. He watched the holy
liquid drip slow as fuck into the pot. He looked over at the fireplace and studied it for a moment. If
he could figure out a way to get the logs into the damn thing without ripping his chest to shreds, he
would be happy to get it started. He could certainly stoop, no problem, but leaning forward just
wasn't in the cards. 'Damn,' Jared hated feeling incapable of doing something as simple as starting a
fire, but looking back at the brewing pot of black organic espresso blend in front of him brightened
his spirits. Coffee made everything better.

Jared grabbed two decent sized cups from the cupboard for he and Jensen. He poured a scalding hot
first cup, then put the pot back to finish dripping. Jared was inhaling the magic aroma with his eyes
closed just as Jensen came down the hall. He was pleased to see the younger man up and in one piece. It almost looked like Jared was completely well, but Jensen knew better. He realized Jared had managed to get his sweatshirt off and put on the two shirts he currently wore. He thanked the heavens the kid hadn't hurt himself trying to change his pants or socks without help. It must have taken him a few minutes just to get his arms through those shirts. Jensen stood still for a few seconds, just to enjoy Jared's blissful reaction over his coffee. The 'orgasmic' reaction to his first taste went straight to Jensen's dick. He mentally bitched as he walked up to Jared, who had just taken another sip, "Mmmmm...god." Jared saw Jensen and smiled with a beautiful light in his eyes. He kissed the older man, looking so innocently happy, Jensen forgot why he'd been irritable. "Jensen, this is so good...god, it has to be the best coffee I've ever tasted," Jared had no idea of the problem Jensen was dealing with, nor that he'd caused it. The older man focused on an alluring drop of coffee hanging on the kid's upper lip. He slid his hands around Jared's waist and attacked the younger man's luscious mouth. Jared gasped and moaned into the older man's mouth. His senses were taken over so fast he barely had the coordination to plop his coffee cup down behind him without spilling it.

The kiss was hot, wet and delicious. Jensen licked, sucked and explored every corner of Jared's mouth he could reach. Jared's arms wound up around Jensen's neck, his fingers playing with Jensen's short hair. After several long minutes, the men gently broke apart. Not without several lingering licks between tongues. They kissed sweetly once more, as Jensen rubbed his hands up Jared's back to his shoulder blades. He gently rubbed Jared's upper back, then slid down to his waist again before pulling back. Jensen gazed at the beautiful kiss swollen lips he'd caused and at the beautiful dreamy look in Jared's glazed over eyes. He smiled softly, then used one hand to brush back his lover's hair. Jared smiled back, dreamily pushing his cheek into Jensen's hand. Jared turned his head slightly to suck one of Jensen's fingers into his mouth. Jensen growled once again, "mnmnmnmnm, goddammit, Jared, you're playing with fire." The younger man kissed Jensen again, tongue invading Jensen's mouth. When he pulled back, he remarked, "Speaking of fire. I was gonna ask you to start one, but, nobody's cold now. It's your fault, ya know, you started it." Jared moved to the side so Jensen could reach the coffee pot, then he turned to retrieve his own cup. The older man adjusted himself, barely suppressing a moan when he put pressure on his sensitive bulge. Fuck, it was gonna take a hot minute for that to go down.

Jensen added a retort, "Actually, YOU started it with that coffee orgasm you were having when I walked in." He grinned and blew on his fresh coffee, as his confused lover responded, "Huh?" Jensen really could not resist the cluelessness that his adorable genius had sometimes. He finished his cup and poured another. He heard the unmistakable growl of his counterpart's stomach and immediately felt terrible for starving him. "I'm sorry, love...let me feed you something." He turned and slid his hands around the younger man's waist again, asking Jared, "What do you feel like today?" Jensen quickly noticed the raised eyebrow and sexy look from Jared, his slow grin suggesting something 'else' he would like to eat. Jensen sighed admonishingly, "I meant for breakfast, Jare," then he giggled and shook his head because he couldn't stop himself. Jared was sassy this morning and Jensen was still sporting his damn hard on. That kiss lingered on both their minds.

They eyed each other's mouths, then Jensen set his cup down, having made his decision to get what he wanted. His lover was suffering with a huge rock hard 'problem' and Jared would not be deterred in relieving him of it. He'd gotten a better look at Jensen's enticing 'problem' when the older man was drinking his coffee. Jensen let his cup go when the younger man took it out of his hand and placed it on the counter next to his. He placed his hands on either side of Jensen's face and looked him in the eye. "I feel like having 'this' for breakfast," Jared slid one hand down to grip Jensen's cock firmly and squeezed. Jensen groaned as his eyes rolled up at the pleasure of Jared's hand squeezing him. His breathing sped up, "God." Jared rubbed his hand up and down the huge bulge, causing Jensen to moan and grab Jared's arms. "Baby, you can't," Jensen looked at Jared with such need, the younger
man was floored. He could see Jensen was holding back. The man needed relief badly, but he was afraid of hurting him. Jared kissed him sweetly, "I have an idea. Just back up."

Jensen allowed Jared to guide him backwards until he reached the living room couch. He still held onto Jared's arms, never losing eye contact the entire time. Jared gently nudged Jensen to sit down and lean back against the cushions. He kissed Jensen once more, hot and wet and hard. Jared got on his knees over Jensen's lap, the position driving the older man crazy. Jensen felt his cock get even harder at Jared's weight on his lap. By the time Jared's tongue pulled out of his mouth, Jensen could barely catch his breath. He began kneading Jared's ass, "God, Jare...I don't want to hurt you...please be careful." Jared drove Jensen wild with kisses, licks and nibbles all over his neck. Jensen moaned in all levels of pitch. When Jared, stuck his hot tongue in his ear and wiggled it, Jensen shouted. “Aaaahhh...fuck.” By the time he went behind Jensen's ears, the hardened soldier was putty in his hands. Jensen was trying hard not to cum in his pants. Jared was touching him and tasting him in places where he'd never been touched before. Jensen had never felt like this. He was powerless to stop Jared from peeling his control away and tossing it to the side. 'Oh my fucking,' Jensen couldn't even finish his thought as the younger man slid down his body, using the strength of his right arm and legs.

Jared was careful not to use his left side and ruin this special moment by crying out in pain. He moved down toward his target, anxious to taste his prize. Jensen was so hard, by now, his jeans were stiff and tight, making it difficult for Jared to get them open. The older man was breathing hard, his green eyes almost taken over by black. He lifted his hips and helped Jared get his jeans and underwear down to his ankles. He quickly leaned back against the couch like Jared ordered, and let his lover drink his fill. 'Jesus,' Jared thought, he could barely speak, as he slid his hands up Jensen's legs slowly, feeling the baby fine reddish gold hairs that covered them. "God, Jensen, look at you. You're so beautiful." Jensen's legs were rock solid, muscular, gorgeous and sexy. 'Just like the rest of him,' Jared thought. He was so strong and so very alpha and confident...yet here he was laying still, at Jared's order, so Jared could do whatever he wanted to him. Jared looked up and saw Jensen still focused on him. The older man was still and quiet, except for his barely controlled breathing. Jared noticed Jensen had thrown his arms over his head and now gripped the back of the couch in an iron hold. His arms were taught with tension and his six pack abs tightened when Jared slid his hands over them to raise Jensen's shirt. Seeing what the older man was going through just to keep from losing control and being too rough went straight to Jared's heart. He was hellbent on making this good for Jensen. This man loved him and had done so much for him, Jared wanted to send him to oblivion.

Jensen's balls were beautiful, the sacks surrounded by a thick patch of the same reddish blond hairs. He rubbed the older man's thighs and his abdomen, watching his lovely huge cock twitch and leak. Jared decided this was indeed going to be the best breakfast ever. He dove right in to lick Jensen's balls. "Ah," Jensen panted in between loud moans of appreciation. "Oh my god...oh...oh...Jared," Jensen whispered in between waves of intense pleasure, then groaned louder when Jared took one ball at a time into his hot wet mouth and sucked gently. Jensen was lost in the incredible sensations. No one had 'ever' done this for him. "Jared...ohmygod...aaaah," Jensen had no control, as Jared sucked and licked his sensitive sac. He kissed and licked Jensen's perineum before dragging his tongue all the way up past the sensitive balls to the top of his rock hard dick. "Aaaah," Jensen had reached higher pitched volumes now, with no coherent thought other than the extreme overload of sensations from Jared's mouth. Jensen raised his head to look at his lover, who took that second to meet his gaze. Jared was impressed...the powerful trained killer was staring at him with dilated eyes that were almost completely black now. Jensen's face had developed a light layer of sweat and was completely flushed. He panted, glanced at his cock and back at Jared with such need that Jared knew he was practically begging.

He noticed Jensen's white knuckled grip on the couch. In a low sultry voice, Jared told him, "I want
you to cum hard for me, Jensen." The increase in breathing was immediate, Jensen tensed up even more and slammed one of his hands on the couch to grip it almost violently. Jared placed his mouth on the tip of Jensen's cock, then paused to look up at Jensen alluringly. "Mmmmmngghgod," the older man growled, "fuck, your mouth feels so goddamn good." Jensen could barely catch his breath before his next question, "God, Jared, are you fucking hurting yourself?" Jared shook his head slightly and hummed, "mmm-mmm," then grinned as much as he could with his mouth full of the tip of Jensen's dick. Jensen's breathing increased even more and he barely managed to blurt out, "Jare," before Jared slid his mouth down Jensen's dick. "Aaaahhh," Jensen's head slammed back and his body tightened up, trying desperately not to thrust like he needed to. Fuck, it was so good. Holy fuck, he had 'never' experienced this in his life. Fucking Jared's mouth was the 'only' thing he wanted to do and it took every nerve of steel to hold back from pushing his hips upward hard into that gorgeous hot wet mouth.

Jesus Christ, it felt so fucking good. Jensen could feel himself already approaching orgasm. He needed to pump so bad. "I'm gonna cum," Jensen grunted, in between moaning and tensing up. "Oh, fuck…Jare." Jared knew he was close. He moved his left hand down to massage Jensen's drawn up balls, loving that the older man got even louder. "Uuuhhh....oohh....oh, god, Jare....yes....oh yes." Jared loved doing this for Jensen. The older man was so vocal over everything and had completely lost control. It was fantastic to see him like this. As Jensen’s balls drew up tight and his gloriously large cock swelled even more in Jared’s mouth, the younger man focused on keeping up his suction and rhythm. Jensen was grunting hard and absolutely fucking losing it. “M'gonna cum,” the older man cried out in desperate building need. He thrust up, trying so hard not to but losing the battle. Jared put a restraining hand on Jensen’s hips and the older man screamed, "Fuuucckk...Jaaaaarreeedd," rapidly pumping the last few times. Jensen clenched hard and growled, “Uuuuuugggghhh,” the force of his orgasm taking over. He screamed on the second wave, "Aaaaaaaahhhhh," because there was so goddamned much pleasure he couldn’t hold it in.

Jared kept moving his mouth up and down, sucking as hard as he could. Jensen’s seed pulsed into his mouth and Jared tried to swallow fast enough to catch every drop. The older man was no small matter to be doing this for, so he knew he probably let some escape. Jensen clenched and strained through every wave, loudly moaned in pleasure and jerked with every spasm. He came long and hard, shaking with the intensity. After several intense spasms, Jensen gradually gentled into aftershocks, moaning and grunting through the contractions gripping his body. Jared gentled his movements, drawing out the blissful aftershocks as long as he could. Jensen was still moaning, much softer now, obviously in euphoric bliss from the orgasm of his life thrumming through his whole being. He vibrated with post orgasmic endorphins flooding his body. Jared gently removed his mouth from Jensen's softening member, placed a kiss on it and on the gorgeous ball sac he had enjoyed tasting earlier. He looked up and noticed the older man was spread out in complete utter abandon. Jensen was still breathing fast and seemed to be lost in his post orgasmic cloud.

Jared used his leg muscles to lift up and moved snuggle into Jensen's side. He rested his head on his bent arm, elbow supporting him on the back of the couch, watching Jensen’s beauty as he recovered. Jared couldn't resist rubbing Jensen's abdomen, then rubbed soothing circles around his chest. It was delightful to relax against him like this and enjoy the exploration. Jared grinned, watching Jensen's eyebrows raise up and lower back down, like he was trying to open his eyes but couldn't. He loved that he had done this for Jensen. This was definitely a huge turn on to reduce such a trained killermuscular protective alpha soldier into such a puddle of goo.

The younger man leaned his head comfortably sideways, watched Jensen slow his breathing and struggle back to awareness. He softly touched his head and rubbed the top of it in slow circles. Jared thought about the love and eagerness he had put into that blowjob and how giving pleasure to the new best part of his life was the greatest thing he'd ever experienced. He must be in love because he'd never felt like this with anyone. He wanted to give Jensen every pleasure imaginable, do
everything he could for him, help him in any way, be there to love him night and day.

Jared had always been alone. He had his work and his friends, but Jensen was something his soul had been missing. This was the new most important part of his being. 'So this is what it feels like,' he rejoiced to be feeling in love for the first time ever. As if Jensen could hear his thoughts, the older man turned his head and faced him, finally able to open his eyes. Jared watched the dreamy gorgeous green orbs focus on him. He smiled tenderly, still rubbing Jensen's head, "Hi." Jensen took a second to respond, looking at his lover in wonder and adoration before he grinned back at him, "Hi." Jensen's voice was gravelly from all the grunts, groans and screaming he'd recently done so he cleared it and shyly looked away for a second. Jared reached over and turned his face back to kiss him before cupping his cheek, "You okay?" Jensen was still unable to move too fast, but he absolutely couldn't resist the beautiful sparkling grey beauties focused on him. Jared had love and sweet adoration in his eyes, concerned for him.

Jensen sighed and looked sheepish, "I'm kind of embarrassed. Jesus Christ, Jared, I've never felt anything that good in my whole fuckin' life. It was like...it was like I had no control. I was fucking gone, goddamn it felt too good to give it up like that." Jensen rubbed his eyes like he was still trying to clear his head. He looked into Jared's beautiful face and added with a raised eyebrow, "I thought you might have killed me for a few seconds there. Christ, I came so hard I greyed out and couldn't move." Jensen shook his head at the enormity of it all. Jared kissed him again and lovingly searched his eyes, "You deserve to feel that good, Jensen. You deserve everything that's good." He kissed Jensen again, the older man responding happily. They shared lazy tongues for awhile, Jensen tasting himself in Jared's mouth. After they pulled away, Jared grinned knowingly, "You taste delicious, and that equipment of yours is gorgeous. I would have kept tasting it, but it went off on me." Jensen giggled, which made Jared smile. The older man responded, "Just being around you makes it stand up. I'm serious, Jare, all the fucking time…and then you go and put that gorgeous mouth of yours on it. How's a man supposed to doing anything 'but' shoot his load?"

Jared smiled in full diamond wattage and Jensen was distracted for a second, 'Damn, he really has no idea how beautiful he is.' He had trouble believing this innocent looking angel had just sucked him to oblivion. Jensen started to turn his body toward Jared, but realized his ankles were twisted up in his jeans. He felt the cold draft on his private parts and looked down, "Oh." Jensen pulled his pants back up and fastened them while Jared smiled again. The older man was still loopy and cute as hell. He didn't get to see this side of Jensen very often. Jensen suddenly looked concerned and reached for him, "Jared, are you sure you're okay?" Jared rubbed Jensen's cheek and kissed him softly, "Yes, I'm okay. I used my right side and reminded myself not to put weight on the left and no problem." Jensen studied him for a few seconds before he accepted that. He stood up and turned with his hand out, "Come on...I'm feeding you an actual 'food' breakfast." Jared took Jensen's hand and stood up to follow. The two men decided to eat something quick, Jared dying to get outside and take advantage of the clear sky.

They threw together some cereal and shared a banana, then headed for the bedroom to finish dressing. Jensen noticed Jared had a spring in his step, 'Probably quite proud of himself for blowing my brains out...literally,' he thought to himself. He helped the younger man get his jeans on, much to Jared's annoyance at not quite being able to dress himself yet. Jensen softened his feelings with a kiss and some encouragement, "Think where you've been, baby, and look what you're doing now. It'll be just a little longer before you can do those yourself.” Jensen loved the eagerness in Jared's eyes, but knew damn well it would be a challenge to keep the kid from pushing himself while taking these measurements. He pulled on his work boots and offered an old extra pair to Jared, knowing he’d better be ready to move quickly, if needed. Jared kissed Jensen in sweet gratitude, then pulled him along, excited to start their work. He dug out a collection of devices that Jensen had never seen before, plus a few he recognized. The kid's laptop travel bag was like a mini office. He headed for the slider fast so Jensen hurried to cut him off, "Uh uh...hold on," he grabbed Jared and held him
At Jared's confused look, the older man held up his pointer finger and explained, "Hold on a second, my young genius, you need a coat." Jared waited while Jensen trotted to the closet and brought back two down jackets. "Here, put this on," Jensen told him as he handed him one of the coats. Jared lingered a few seconds, unsure of wanting to be that layered and having such a hindrance to his movements. He decided to trust Jensen's assessment of the weather outside and set down the tools he’d been carrying to put the jacket on. Once the men were covered and zipped up, Jared handed a camera, pencil and notepad to Jensen, then kept all the other items to himself. He pulled open the slider and they went outside. Jared immediately felt the chilly air hit his cheeks, along with a shiver that went through his whole body when an icy breeze lifted his hair. He looked at Jensen with embarrassed understanding, 'Okay, I get it,' he thought, now realizing Jensen was right about the temperature. As Jared turned back to look around, he admitted to himself he would have fallen for the beautiful sunny day like a dumb ass and barreled outside to freeze his nuts off. Jensen was used to this shit and he’d better pay attention to him.

Jensen followed the engineer around while he measured every single corner of the house, the existing small concrete slab, then the distances between corners and imaginary structures that Jensen wanted. Jared was thorough. He instructed Jensen to take three pictures of each measurement, so he could match them when they got inside. Jensen wrote everything down and numbered his notes, taking pictures in the same order. They measured things twice, just to make sure there were no mistakes...Jared said it was something he always did and Jensen thoroughly respected that. They used some rocks to mark corners and additional spots where future support footings would go. Jared used his leg muscles to stoop and kneel, very slowly dropping on his right side when he needed to use his measuring tape. He found if he kept his upper body stiff and upright, he could bend down and use his leg muscles for most of the work.

Jensen watched him closely. He was distracted several times by the total hotness of his new lover when he became absorbed in his work. The kid used an electronic measuring tool, then set up some linear something or other's with strings between them. He looked through a surveyor type machine to scope some kind of vision in his brilliant mind. Jared's wheels were turning at a rapid rate of speed. When he sat on his knees to scribble something with his own pencil pulled from above his ear, Jensen noticed he'd totally forgotten about the wet ground. He smiled because the site of Jared in his element was a beautiful thing, for sure. It was totally hot to watch the young genius at work. Jared's hair fell over his face every time he looked down and he shook it back. He moved with such grace and ease that Jensen had a hard time realizing the kid was still injured. 'He's amazing...well, and yes, still gorgeous as fuck,' Jensen thought to himself.

It was obvious to Jensen how good Jared was at his work...the kid got totally lost in it. Jared's knees were damp from the wet ground, his boots and jeans already filthy just from being out here an hour. Jared made adjustments to his measuring when Jensen stopped to reconsider things. He listened to Jensen as they moved around and never complained once when the older man changed his mind. Jensen kept apologizing, but Jared waved him off. "This is about 'you', Jensen. It has to be perfect for 'you'. Don't worry about anything else. Just take your time, picture being out here and what would feel just right." Jensen relaxed and stood silently, trying his best to envision sitting out here and what it would be like. Jared was right because suddenly he could see it. He could almost feel the hot tub bubbles, cold beer and beautiful deck extension. He could envision the chairs, the barbecue, and even the fire pit close by for roasting marshmallows. "I've got it," Jensen softly announced, "I can see it." Jared smiled at him, "Good. Now keep that going, cuz we're gonna play with the computer program and try to recreate what you're seeing." Jensen had a thought and looked at Jared, "Can I ask you something?" Jared innocently answered, "Of course, what is it?" Jensen asked with feigned concern, "Is it wrong that I keep seeing 'you' in my hot tub vision?" Jared's mouth dropped and he started to grin, but the blush started and he had to look down shyly.
Jensen continued as if he wasn't noticing Jared's embarrassment, so the younger man had to sigh and start walking toward the house. Jensen kept rambling, "I mean, you know, I've tried and every damn time it's there on the deck and the stars are out, the fire pit's great...but there's this damn hot gorgeous engineer in the water and I lose the rest of my vision, it's...it's damn annoying, really." Jared was trying his hardest to look serious and non-affected by Jensen's banter. He rolled his eyes and grinned when Jensen crowded up close to his back and said in a low voice, "I think he's naked too." Jared sighed and rested his forehead on the slider glass, trying not to laugh. Jensen was enjoying himself immensely. Jared was adorable, and currently he was busting his ass to control the blush that had traveled up from covered places to his neck and face. Jensen waited for him to collect himself for a moment, then leaned in and asked, "Can you put that guy in the drawing?" Jared laughed in surprise before he could stop himself. He finally looked at Jensen feigning annoyance, "No...no, I cannot put him in the drawing."

Jensen displayed mock disappointment and said, "Oh...well, that's a bummer. He really improves the whole picture, you know." Shaking his head and giggling, Jared opened the slider and sighed again as he looked down. He wanted to take his boots off but couldn't without Jensen's help. "Fuck," was all he said. Jensen knelt down and took care of the laces, then pulled Jared's boots off to leave them on the door mat. He balanced the kid as he stepped inside, then removed his own boots. Once inside, both men removed their coats and Jensen hung them by the door. "You okay?" Jensen rubbed his hands up and down Jared's arms and inspected him closely. Jared looked a bit tired and he had a fine sheen of sweat on his forehead. He wasn't identifying, at all, with being tired, it was such a great day. "I'm fine. Thank you for doing all that with me," Jared responded. Jensen reached up and felt his forehead, noting it was slightly warm, and a bit damp. "Come on...hot shower, okay? We need to get you under the heat."

Even though Jared followed him, he whined, "But I'm already warm. I'm not cold, at all." Jensen explained as they walked to the shower, "I know it feels that way, but it was only thirty nine degrees out there. Your body's counteracting and working too hard so we're gonna give it some help. Does that make sense?" Jared said, "Alright, I guess I need to clean up anyway before sitting anywhere, God, look at me." As Jensen started the water and helped Jared out of his clothes, the younger man apologized, "I'm sorry about your boots." Jensen kissed a shirtless Jared on his slightly sunburnt nose, "I don't care about the boots. They're supposed to get dirty, that's what they're for." Jensen got the filthy wet jeans down and Jared balanced himself on the older man's shoulders as he stepped out of them. Jensen took the socks off while he was down there, then stood up and looked at his charge in the eyes. "You still okay?" He could see the younger man was more subdued and he wondered if they'd spent too long moving around outside letting Jared get sweaty in the icy temps. 'Maybe he's just slowing down cuz he's tired,' Jensen thought.

Jared nodded, but only responded with a "Mnhmmmm," as he allowed Jensen to lead him to the shower stall. "Lemme get your undies and here," Jensen handed him a dry towel to hold over his staples. Jensen took a quick second to look at Jared's surgical site, "Wow, nice. Some of them are 'really' popping out today." Jared responded, "Yeah, they get caught on my clothes, though. And it's starting to itch." Jensen kissed him and pulled the younger man's underwear down, "They're almost gone, buddy. You're doing incredible...and the itching is an excellent sign." He quickly removed his own clothing and hurried to help Jared get in. Before stepping over the lip to get in, Jared was stopped by Jensen's hands on either side of his face, "Hey." Jensen looked at him serious, "I know you're not gonna want to admit this, and I know it's hard for you to give in...but, Jare, you look 'really' 'really' tired. We need to get you out of here and into comfy clothes as fast as we can. Okay? No hot shower action, for now." Jared actually didn't argue. He simply yawned and nodded, "Okay," stepping into the shower with Jensen's support. Jared held the towel over his wound while the older man washed his hair for him and most of his body. Jared couldn't believe he was this tired. It was frustrating.
Jensen soon finished and helped the kid to dry off a bit before stepping completely out. Jared wasn't shivering and his skin was a nice hot feel. The older man dried himself off and donned his clean clothes before helping Jared get his sweats on. Jared sat on the bed while Jensen slipped his socks on for him, then he went to flip on the electric fireplace. When he turned back to the kid, he noticed Jared was staring into the flames. Jared's hair was still damp, but the unruly strands still managed to fall over his eyes. Jensen knelt down in front of him, reached up and pushed the hair back off his face. Jared looked at him, then, and Jensen could see the exhaustion in his eyes. 'Definitely losing him,' Jensen thought. Jensen smiled, mainly because Jared was frickin adorable, 'and' because he was thankful they had done something Jensen loved for awhile but hadn't sent him into relapse. 'Of course, that was 'after' he'd sucked my brains out through my dick,' Jensen reminded himself. "You hungry?" Jensen didn't really expect Jared to want to eat, but he offered anyway. It looked to him like the kid was gonna pass out any second. Jared yawned once again, "Mmm...nah...I think maybe we'll play with that program in a little bit. I can't wait to show you how to use it."

Jensen could see his lover was fading but he loved that Jared was trying so hard to continue. He brushed the hair off the kid's face again and touched his cheek, "You feel like laying down?" Jared surprised Jensen by nodding and starting to lean toward the pillows. Jensen quickly helped Jared to a soft landing without stressing his torso muscles. Once he was on the cushiony pillows, Jared rolled to his right side and sighed his complaint, "I hate being so tired. Sorry...I just...jus' a minute, 'kay?" Jensen rubbed his hair and whispered, "S'okay...ssshhh...s'okay." That was the last thing Jared heard before he faded into dreamland. Jensen grabbed one of the folded down top blankets and covered the younger man, then he went to clean up the bathroom. He brought in more firewood and stacked it by the fireplace. He finished a load of laundry and looked into what he would throw together for lunch. Jared would be starving when he woke up. Jensen returned to the bedroom, noticed Jared was still out cold and hadn't moved an inch. He pulled off his jeans, put on comfy sweats and slid under the light cover next to the younger man.

Jensen smiled when Jared moved closer and wrapped his arm around his bicep. He was snuggling the warrior's arm in his sleep and it was damn endearing. Jensen relaxed and enjoyed the feel of Jared's breathing against his arm, loving the fact that Jared was sleeping so well, and right next to him. He clicked on the tv and set the volume very low, meaning to enjoy some old sitcoms, but soon found himself lightly snoozing, instead. Jared moved, after awhile, and shifted to his other side, which was actually what woke Jensen up. Jared yawned but went right back to sleep, breathing deep and even. Jensen decided the kid probably wouldn't sleep too much longer, since it had been just under two hours. After a few more minutes, Jared turned onto his back, rubbed his eyes and yawned. He turned his head toward Jensen and finally opened his eyes. "Hey, sleepy head," Jensen smiled. He gently brushed some unruly hairs off Jared's forehead. "Hi," Jared responded, then looked at the clock and let out a frustrated sigh, "I hate it when I sleep all the damn time." Jensen tried to soothe him, "I think you're skipping the fact that you were working this morning and wore yourself out, guy...and that was 'after' you killed my last brain cell."

Jared whined, "I used to do work all the time. I exercised, and I worked nights and weekends too...and I never needed any granny naps!" Jared threw his hands up and dropped them loosely on the bed. He hadn't noticed the adoring smirk on Jensen's face as he watched the pissy tirade. Jared looked over and noticed Jensen grinning, "What," he asked in a thoroughly irritated tone. "You're damn cute, that's what," Jensen blurted out. The younger man argued, "I am not!" This made Jensen giggle, as he rubbed Jared's hair. The beautiful pout was in full force now and Jensen couldn't resist kissing that delectable mouth. He stood and offered his hand out, "You've gotta be starving, kiddo," hoping to lure Jared to eat something. The younger man's eyes widened and he took Jensen's hand with an eager response, "God yes." Jensen kissed him one more time before they headed to the kitchen. "Sandwiches okay?" The older man didn't want to take too much time cooking something when he could plainly hear Jared's complaining stomach. Jensen answered eagerly, "Yes, anything."
Jensen pulled out a variety of lunch meats, some sliced cheeses, all the condiments and bread. Each man put together his own concoction of a homemade sub. They spooned out the rest of the macaroni salad from the restaurant and took two beers, two water bottles, and their loaded plates to the coffee table near the fire.

Both men sat comfortably on the floor, propped up with their backs against the sofa. Jensen took a few minutes to start the fire before he sat down to partake in his own meal. Jared tried to wait, but hunger overtook him and he began devouring his lunch before Jensen even finished with the fire. Jensen turned around and grinned when he noticed Jared attacking his sandwich. Jared glanced up when he noticed he was being watched, apologizing with guilty eyes. He mumbled something with a full mouth about being sorry and how it was "so good", as Jensen leaned over and kissed him on the top of the head. He sat down next to Jared, "Don't apologize. Dude, it's been a long time since breakfast and your tank is below 'e'." Jared blushed, still feeling a bit embarrassed, but that didn't stop him from shoveling the food. After he finished half his sandwich and most of the salad, Jared leaned back against the couch and moaned happily with his eyes closed. He felt really good. The nutrients were hitting his blood stream and the fire was warming up. Jared sipped his beer while watching the fire grow, totally oblivious that he was being watched.

The morning had been a blast. He couldn't wait to input the measurements and start playing with designs for Jensen's backyard. 'Finally,' he was thinking how good it felt to be able to work on something for his rescuer. Jensen had been a saint, taking such good care of him, and Jared wanted so badly to do this for him. Jensen nudged the younger man, noticing he had been lost in thought. Jared looked at him innocent and inquisitive, "Hmm? Sorry, did you say something?" Jensen brushed the hair off Jared's forehead and smiled at his adorable partner, "Just making sure you were okay. You zoned for a minute." Jared smiled in response, "I was just thinking how good it was to be working this morning, ya know? And doing this design with you is something I can't wait to start on." Jared sighed happily and rubbed his stomach, "And lunch is soooo good," Jared leaned his head back and moaned in contentment. Jensen raised an eyebrow when Jared seemed to study him for a few seconds. He asked, "What," wondering what Jared was about. Jared looked down, with a shy grin, as if he'd been caught. He glanced back at Jensen and explained, "You just...I still can't believe this is happening. I'm waiting for the proverbial shoe to drop, but it just doesn't."

Jensen could still read the insecurity and doubt in Jared's beautiful eyes but it was better now than the panic he'd seen several days ago. Jared shrugged a shoulder as if trying to show he wasn't really worried and took another sip of his beer. Jensen placed a comforting hand on the back of Jared's neck and rubbed his thumb back and forth while Jensen continued, "Being with you...it's...it feels so right. Ten days ago I was done. No more relationships, no more disappointment...and here you are," Jared looked up at the older man, "kinda throwing my rational thought processes for a spin." Jared smiled at Jensen, showing him that it wasn't a complaint, at all, just honesty at the suddenness of their closeness. He couldn't believe they were here and together and nothing felt rushed. It was so comfortable and he was beginning to feel at peace, which kinda still terrified him. Jensen couldn't think of anything to say, except, "I feel the same way. Being with you feels perfect and there's no place I'd rather be...fast or not, it feels damn good." Both men smiled and chuckled at the same time. Jensen made a comment, "That didn't help with the rationalizing, did it," which had Jared looking away shyly, "No, not really."

Jensen was glad to see that the kid kept his grin as he looked away. He realized that Jared seemed to be dealing with his doubts and insecurities much better than before. Jensen hoped that aside from the younger man's physical injuries getting better, his wounded heart was healing too. They sat in silence and finished their meal. Jared helped Jensen clean things up, against Jensen's advice to simply sit and enjoy the fire. Once they were seated at the kitchen table with fresh coffee, Jared opened his engineering design program and went to work. Jensen watched the professional in Jared set the measurements and rough drawings from earlier next to his machine and enter commands and figures
at rapid speed. It was just like earlier, when Jared was focused on walking the back yard and pulling his measuring spool all different ways. Jared's beautiful face was a picture of steel concentration, occasionally picking up the notepad to look twice at something before inputting it into the program.

Jared's lips moved, mouthing something to himself, and suddenly Jensen wanted to suck on and bite that lower lip. Jared's engineer brain was totally hot. Jensen found himself turned on, once again, from simply watching this kid. Of course, Jared would probably turn bright red if he announced what he was thinking. The young engineer suddenly looked up and innocently did a double take, "What?" Jensen quickly feigned innocence, "Huh?" After looking at him and searching for some reason why Jensen would be staring at him, Jared gave up and went back to his work. Jensen smiled because his oblivious lover was so cute and really quite addicting to watch. He continued doing so. Jared looked up once more after a few minutes, totally catching Jensen smiling and staring at him, "What?" Jared asked, starting to grin in embarrassment. Jensen tried to fake his innocence again, "What?" but his smile blew it for him and Jared whined, "Dude, why are you staring at me?"

Jensen chuckled because Jared just got cuter, if that was even possible. The older man sighed and looked at the screen, "I'm sorry, I can't help it. You're just goddamned adorable, that's what." Jared sighed and looked back at the screen, "I think you might need glasses." He continued to work as Jensen added, "Mm-mm, perfect vision, baby." He crowded in a bit closer to Jared and rested his head in his hand to keep watching him work. Jared glanced at him with annoyance, truly wondering what the hell Jensen saw in him, but he forced himself to keep his focus on the project at hand. Jensen loved watching Jared's wheels turn. He became lost in concentration, going over every detail, making sure things were perfect. He went from screen to screen, inputting shapes and formulas. Jared spent a few minutes correcting some areas and then pushed enter. He sat back and announced, "Wallah! There we go."

Jensen sat up straight and looked intently at the screen, "Cool...now what?" Jared patiently explained, "Just give it a couple minutes. It's going to configure everything I've told it to do and match it with my measurements." Jensen waited until the laptop 'beeped' and Jared exclaimed, "There. Now we get to play." Jensen smiled at Jared and moved his eyebrows up in interest, "Oh?" Jared giggled that magical sound Jensen loved, "Not 'that' kind of play...though I'm sure we can look into that later." He motioned toward the screen, "That!" Jensen looked over and saw the back of his house. Well, not a true photo of it, but a perfect diagram, complete with color, showing his entire house and back yard. "Oh...sweet," he blurted out, very impressed and surprised. Jared was right, this was going to be fun.

The two men enjoyed themselves immensely for the next two hours. Jared responded to all of Jensen's ideas. He changed shapes and structures, moved things around, listening intently to Jensen's ideas about what he wanted to 'feel' when he sat in his back yard. Jared spent time on re-calculation, sometimes deep in thought. Jensen brought them more coffee and the men only took one break to stretch their legs and use the bathroom. Between Jensen's pauses, Jared offered gentle suggestions and explained certain support details that helped the older man to make sound decisions. At one point, Jared threw Jensen into raucous laughter when he programmed a smiling shirtless miniature man in the hot tub. Jared obviously hadn't forgotten his teasing earlier in the back yard about the hot young engineer being included in his design.

At Jensen's request, they added another miniature guy and used the click and drag to try and force the program to put the two models in compromising positions all over the yard. Both men laughed at each other's antics, as Jensen dragged them into the trees and hung them upside down. Jared had one under the water and one above with a huge oversized grin on his face and a beer in his hand. It was an incredibly entertaining afternoon. Jared reminded Jensen the finished drawings and plans had to be submitted for permits. He 'could' accidentally forget to take the mini's out and it would be an awfully embarrassing appointment for the home owner.
Jensen had switched from coffee to another beer earlier, and after forcing a water bottle down Jared, he also gave him his second beer. Maybe it was the light buzz from the alcohol, or the fact that Jared was so much healthier, but something had the two men feeling light, silly and playful. It was great to forget about the stress of the case and what might be happening at Jared's work. Jensen made a mental note to schedule the visit with his father. He certainly wasn't going to put Jared in their presence, so he'd have to figure that one out. He checked his phone after feeling a vibration, which turned out to be a confirmation by the security team of Jared's appointment the next morning. It also included an outing afterward, since the security team hadn't forgotten Jensen's request to let Jared stay out for awhile and get some lunch. The kid could use a change of scenery.

Jared tried to hide the few times he'd rubbed his side or shown a slight twinge of pain on his face. Jensen noticed but kept quiet until now. When Jared finally closed his eyes and left his hand on his side the older man decided enough was enough. He gently closed the laptop and placed a comforting hand on the younger man's back. When Jared looked up at him through his bangs, Jensen got lost for a second in the kid's puppy dog soulful eyes. He gently smiled and brushed the bangs out of Jared's eyes. "You okay?" Jensen asked, concerned that the younger man might have overdone it. He couldn't help leaving his hand on Jared's soft cheek and rubbing his thumb back and forth. Jared smiled softly, "Yeah." Jensen searched his eyes but found no avoidance or deception. Jared knew the older man was protective of him...he also was beginning to feel how much Jensen loved him. "It's okay. Maybe it's just sore from earlier, ya know? Moving around for the first time in awhile." Jensen leaned over and kissed him gently on the lips. When he raised back up, he told him, "Please tell me if it hurts bad, okay? I'm sure you're right about the moving around." Jensen waited for Jared to nod and then he added, "and all the laughing." Jensen agreed with his adorable giggle, "Well, yes, that was probably a strain." Then the younger man blurted out, "Which was completely your fault, by the way." Jensen placed a hand on his chest and mocked total shocked innocence, "Me?! It was NOT. YOU put the little guy in the hot tub first, darlin' and I didn’t even know how to use the program."

Jared didn't argue. He was smiling and looking at Jensen like he was just discovering something new that he hadn't realized before. How the hell Jared had caught Jensen was beyond the younger man’s reason, but damn if he wasn't the luckiest guy on earth. Jared cleared his throat and found himself kissed again. This time, it was intense and lasted much longer. Jared broke off only to stand up and get in a better position. He slid his hands around the older man's shoulders, so Jensen wrapped his arms around the younger man's waist. They kissed deeply for a long time. Their tongues happily danced together, thoroughly exploring and tasting every aspect of each other. Jensen finally got to nibble on that delectable lower lip of Jared's. Their hands slid all over one another, feeling the muscle and sinew, the flexing at each other's touch. Things heated up. Jensen found himself getting hotter by the second. His dick was hard already, and Jared wasn't helping with his little moans and magic tongue. Fuck, the kid tasted so good, he couldn't get enough.

They were devouring one another, pushing harder against each other. Jensen mentally rejoiced at how strong the younger man felt. Jared was still recovering, but Jensen felt the power of the sexy young man melting against him. They broke apart, trying to catch their breath in between more tongue swipes and kisses. Jensen walked backward, pulling Jared forward. The two men stole tastes of each other's tongues, as they walked. When they reached the couch, Jensen fell back, gently pulling Jared down on top of him, encouraging him to bend his long legs and get on his knees. When Jared was firmly planted on Jensen's lap, he braced his hands behind Jensen's head on the couch. Jensen smoothed his hands up and down Jared's gorgeous thighs, then up around his hips and waist. He slid them down over Jared's ass and squeezed, moaning at the perfection of his new lover's physique. "God, you're so perfect, Jared."

Jared kissed Jensen deep and hard. He was slightly above Jensen, due to his position on the older man's lap, with Jensen tilting his head back to participate. Jensen's dick was going crazy, Jared moaning and gyrating over his crotch. Jensen could feel the intensity of Jared's need. He slid his
hands around to Jared's front without breaking his lip lock. Jared's sweatpants were easy to slip his hands into. He rubbed Jared's bare ass cheeks a few times, then pushed the sweats down enough to reach Jared's upper thighs. Jared felt the cool air hit his ass, his hips pushed forward with his cock's need for some friction. Jensen slid his hand tip to base and Jared moaned, then turned his mouth sideways to catch his breath, "Oh God." There was so much precum, Jensen was able to slide his hand easily up and down Jared's shaft. "Ooooh, God," Jared pushed his cock forward, fucking Jensen's hand. "Mmmm," Jensen moaned appreciatively at Jared's sexy reactions, "That feel good, baby?" Jared moaned, "Oooh," in between panting, "Yes...yes, Jensen...that feels so good."

Jensen moaned appreciatively again, "Mmmm...love to make you feel good." He stuck his tongue into the younger man's ear, eliciting louder moans, as Jared pushed his ear harder into Jensen's mouth. Jensen traveled behind Jared's ear and down his neck, sucking and nibbling the skin there. It drove Jared wild. He moved his head to give Jensen better access. He moaned at every bite and every suck, groaning and pumping faster into Jensen's hand. "Fuck, Jensen," Jared spiraled out of control. He grabbed the back of the couch in tight fists and kissed Jensen again hard. Jensen was eating this up. Goddamn, he loved seeing Jared like this. Jared was lost in sensation. Jensen made sure to keep him safe, not let him hurt himself or fall off the couch, while lost in his pleasure. Jensen was preoccupied. He hadn't been aware that the younger man had moved his hands down and opened his jeans. 'Fuck,' Jensen's mind screamed, knowing full well he was going to shoot his load if Jared touched him. ‘Jesus, I thought I was too old for this, I’ve already cum once today,’ his mind ranted.

Jensen moaned loudly when Jared grabbed his dick. His hips pushed upward and he broke away from the kiss to pant, "Fuck....Jared....baby, fuck." Jensen managed to line Jensen's dick up with his own. They both groaned in absolute rapture at the feeling of sliding against each other. Jared leaned forward and gripped the back of the couch. Jensen held their slippery cocks together as they both pushed into his fist. The friction felt incredible, their moans louder in between rapid breathing. Jared fucked Jensen's hand. Jensen pushed up, fucking his dick into the same grip. This was too much. Jared's rhythm sped up and he started grunting loudly, closer and closer together. "Jensen," his hips pumped even faster, "Fuck...cum with me, Jensen...I'm cumming...Jen...oh...oh." Jared lost his rhythm, pumping mindlessly at the last few seconds, "YES!" He yelled, as he hit the precipice. Jared jerked forward hard, threw his head back and came, "Aaaaaahhh." He shook hard with the intensity, overtaken by waves of pleasure.

Jensen hit that precipice when he saw Jared throw his head back and scream in pleasure. He grabbed the younger man's ass with one hand and pushed him closer to him, while squeezing their dicks tighter. "nnnghhnnn," Jensen came hard with a fierce deep growl. He shook with intensity, grunted and groaned as each wave kept coming. God, he'd never cum like this, and never this close after cumming before. Jared had fried his brain cells earlier with that blow job, and here he was doing it again. The man was going to kill him from the strength of his orgasms, he was sure of it. In between his own uncontrollable moans and spasms, he could still hear and feel Jared’s. Jensen rode the spasms of his own orgasm as he felt Jared's subside. The kid collapsed on him, causing Jensen to emit an "Oopf." He held him close while they bathed in the afterglow of their climaxes. Both men were breathing heavily, struggling to remain consciousness.

Jared forced himself to adjust and move slightly to take the brunt of his weight off Jensen. He kissed the older man on the neck and below his jaw line. Jensen smiled with his eyes closed, thoroughly enjoying the post orgasmic affection. He rubbed Jared's back and turned his face toward him for a kiss. They kissed lazily, Jared nibbling on Jensen's lower lip. The older man was treated to the dreamy gaze of his beautiful lover grinning at him. Jared was happy and relaxed, sporting a gorgeous after sex twinkle in his eyes. Jensen thought it looked especially good on him. He brushed the hair back from Jared's face and smiled, "You amaze me, kiddo." Jared kissed him, then looked at him confused, "Why?" Jensen rubbed his cheek, "Because...for twenty two years, I never never broke,
never gave myself up to someone else. It could have got people killed...got me killed. I was trained that way. When you touch me, it's like...I'm fucking yours, Jared. I'm safe. I can let go and you feel so damn good. It feels so good to let go but...only with 'you'." Jensen almost lost himself to the strength of the emotion in his words, but he brought himself back before tearing up.

Jared could see it had been difficult for Jensen to admit that, but he loved that he felt he could. Jared wanted him to. He wanted Jensen to feel the same peace and safety that the older man made him feel. Jared whispered while rubbing Jensen's hair back, 'I want to do that for you, whenever you'll let me. Whenever you can let go, just let go, and I'll catch you.' Jared could see Jensen's eyes darken with intensity, as he absorbed the younger man's words. He rubbed the Jared’s thighs for a moment, then was suddenly overcome with motivation. He pulled a completely unexpected tactical maneuver that Jared believed had to have come straight out of the Ninja warriors handbook. The flip was quick. It was a complete, whole body take down maneuver. Jared found himself giggling after gasping at the shock of landing flat on his back on the soft couch.

His bent legs were now on either side of Jensen, the older man effectively positioned on top of him, looking down. 'Holy shit,' Jared took a second to realize what the fuck had just happened. He wasn't falling and wasn’t hurt, not one bit...Jensen made sure of that. It was a totally hot move and he felt himself turned on by Jensen's strength. Jensen watched Jared's sudden uncertainty at feeling off balance for a fraction of a second...then playful acceptance. He made sure Jared was perfectly safe and uninjured in his controlled move, but he had to use both his hands. One of them still had cum on it, which was now on Jared's ass. Jensen realized that was a perfect place for it, if Jared let him do what he was thinking. Jared asked, "How did you do that? I'm huge and heavy." Jensen kissed him, "No...you're not...and I'll teach you." At the sudden light in Jared's eyes at learning the hot move, Jensen quickly clarified, "When you're better." Jared's pout made an appearance. Jensen giggled and kissed him again.

"So, what am I doing down here, Chuck?" Jared asked that with a playful grin, reaching up to kiss and nibble on Jensen’s lips. Jensen lowered down over him, careful not to crush him, and explained in a deep sultry voice, "I wanna try something. If you don't like it, tell me to stop and I will." Jared was thinking they were going to get snuggly and lay together, but Jensen obviously had other ideas. Just as he was rubbing the older man's back and shoulders, Jared felt the light touch of fingertips ghost over his balls. He clenched in reaction, "Jesus," Jared's breathing deepened and his eyes clenched shut. Jensen continued to gently drag his fingertips from Jared's balls back over his perineum and further into his crack. Jared was not sure what Jensen was up to, but damn it felt good, and he surely wasn't gonna stop him. Jensen could touch him anywhere, and it would turn him on.

"What are you...oh Jensen," Jared's grip on the older man's shoulders tightened when Jensen slid his fingertips back over his hole and rubbed lightly in a circle. Jensen kept massaging the rim, loving the reactions he was getting from Jared. “Aaahhh....aaaaahh,” Jared looked up at him in between moans and Jensen could see his pupils enlarge and darken. "Mmmmm," Jensen groaned in approval, "I like what this does to you." Jared's breathing increased at the sensations Jensen was causing. Jensen kissed his gorgeous lover, then added, "I've never done this to anyone...never wanted to. Only done it to myself." Jensen kept circling the ring of muscle, using more pressure now. Jared grabbed Jensen's shoulders. Not only was he reacting to the sensations of Jensen rubbing his sensitive opening, he was also envisioning Jensen doing this to himself. 'Jesus,' Jared thought as he felt his dick thicken again.

Jensen slowly pushed his middle finger inside, watching Jared's face. He only went to one knuckle, pumped in and out, using the slippery effect of the leftover cum. Jared moaned, gripping Jensen tighter. It obviously wasn't a rejection to what Jensen was doing. Jared was on fire and Jensen was encouraged. Jared pushed back and pumped his hips with Jensen’s rhythm. He hadn't expected this and 'holy fuck' he was so turned on. "Jensen," Jared panted out in between moaning and pushing
back on his finger, "God..."

Jensen kissed the younger man hotly, forcing Jared's mouth wide open. Fuck, he couldn't believe his own dick was getting hard again, just from doing this to Jared. He pumped his finger in and out, gradually pushing in deeper. Eventually, he was up to the second knuckle and then all the way. He pumped a few times and then added a second finger. Jared moaned loudly as he felt two fingers pushing inside. It was incredible to feel this with Jensen. Jared's experience with Tom had been 'nothing' like this. Jensen touched his soul, he loved him, and it showed in every way he touched him, looked at him, and held him. Jared's hips pushed back, begging, accepting Jensen's fingers and drawing them in further. "Christ, you're incredible...look at you," Jensen was transfixed on Jared's reactions.

Jared was tight. God, Jensen couldn't believe how hot and tight it felt. 'How am I ever gonna get my dick in there,' he thought, as he fucked Jared with his two fingers. He wanted to find that prostate, the magic gland with the over sensitive nerves. He’d found it on himself, and he just wanted to find it on, "Aaaaaaaaahhh, FUCK...JENSEN," Jared loudly cried out when Jensen apparently had found it and rubbed against the nub a few times. He'd read enough and seen enough video to hope he could be a more experienced lover, but fucking Jared with his fingers and making him cry out like this...it was better than any video he'd ever seen. Jesus, Jensen wasn't sure he could wait to stick his dick in there. He'd vowed to wait until Jared was better, but damned if it wasn't killing him to hold back.

He imagined what it would feel like to have his dick shoved up into that hot tight tunnel and found himself hard as a rock and pulsing with precum again. Jared fucked his fingers harder now and Jensen groaned, "Fuck, you're so hot." The younger man wrapped his legs around Jensen, pushing his pelvis up. He was practically begging to be fucked and he needed it bad. Jensen was hell bent on maintaining his rhythm. He lightly crooked his fingers forward and 'BAM' Jared cried out again in pleasure. "Jensen...fuck me...please...yes....oh, Jensen, please fuck me." Jensen continued to cry out, as Jensen kept his rhythm up over that gland. He kissed the younger man, then pulled away, having to catch his own breath, "I will, baby...almost...you're almost well. God Jared, so fuckin' hot."

Jensen sped up his rhythm, pushing Jared's body into overdrive. He tensed up and hung onto Jensen, groaning out in pleasure, "mmnh fuck...mmnh fuck...oh fuck...Jensen..." Jared’s hips were pumping on their own, forcing his hole back onto Jensen’s fingers. The pleasure was unimaginable. His prostate completely took over and controlled Jared’s every move. Jensen loved to see this, "Yes, Jare...fucking look at you. You’re gonna cum for me, aren’t you. From fuckin’ you with my fingers? That gonna make you cum?" Jared was lost in sensation, spiraling. He couldn't answer, could do nothing but grunt and moan louder. He almost there, almost there...Fuck, Jensen was killing him. Fuck, he was gonna cum..."Aaah....fuck…," he screamed, "ohhh Jeennnsseennn!

Goddammit, cumming this way took longer on the precipice and longer on the release, but "Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh," Jared bore down hard, screaming and straining so hard his face turned red. He’d felt a pull in his chest, but he didn’t have the ability to pay attention to it right now. Jared came hard, clenching and screaming in absolute pleasure filled waves. His emotions were crying out for Jensen to stop, but his body was crying out for him to keep rubbing. The massage of that magic button was causing overwhelming forceful pleasure and he wanted to fight it because it was too strong, but he couldn’t. Jared’s dick squirt pulses of cum up on his stomach while Jensen watched. He kept rubbing that magic button inside, though it was a challenge with Jared’s spasming tight channel clamping down on him. Watching Jared pulsate and moan pushed the older man to his own peak, once again. “Christ,” he exclaimed. He hadn’t planned on this, as he reached the edge of his build and fell over the top. Jensen groveled long and hard, grunting and pushing his dick against the younger man’s pelvis, desperately trying to keep his eyes on Jared’s face.

He had a thought that it couldn’t be possible for a man of his age to cum three times in one day, but
dammit if he wasn’t enduring the tremors of pleasure once again. Jensen groaned at the receding waves. He stilled his fingers as Jared flopped his arms loosely on the couch with his eyes closed. Jensen kissed him on his chest over his heart, feeling the rapid pace of Jared’s heartbeat. He prayed that the force of that orgasm hadn’t hurt him, then carefully removed his fingers and wiped them on Jared’s sweatpants. The kid’s sweatpants had already been a sticky mess, earlier, so why the hell not. The older man scooted up to kiss his way up Jared’s long beautiful neck and under his jaw. He finally reached Jared's face and brushed his sweaty bangs back while enjoying the view.

Jared was still breathing hard, thrumming with euphoric post orgasmic pleasure. Jensen would have grinned at the sight, but he was still recovering, himself, and barely had the energy to keep is weight off the younger man. Jensen kept up the gentle rubbing of Jared's hair and watched him. Jared's breathing gradually slowed but he hadn't opened his eyes. He laid to the side of the him and waited. "Mmmmmmm," Jared seemed to have difficulty speaking and opening his eyes, but he subconsciously sought out his lover. He rolled his body onto his right side and slid his arm around Jensen. They held each other snug for a moment, then Jensen asked him softly, "You back with me?" Jared smiled and raised one eyebrow without opening his eyes, "Mmmaybe...I can't move." Jensen grinned, "I've got you. It's okay." He waited another minute while listening to Jared’s breathing, "Are you cold?" The younger man answered, "Mm...no...not with you." Jensen snuggled closer and held Jared tight against him. "Are you hurt? Tell me. You came so damn hard." Jared yawned, "Well...not now, but...kinda...y'know at that crucial moment."

Jensen became concerned, "Oh. Is it hurting now?" Jared still didn't open his eyes but he kissed Jensen quickly and offered, "No, it's okay. S'alittle but sore, but s'like a bruise, nothing else. It's fine." The men were silent for a minute, then Jared opened his eyes and kissed Jensen lovingly. He looked at him with wonder in his eyes, "What possessed you to do that? God, it felt fucking amazing." Jensen paused a second before answering, "I've got all sorts of ideas running through my brain. I've seen stuff on line, read stuff...heard stuff in the bunker...but I never got to try it out, ya know? Never wanted to do anything that intimate with somebody else. With you, I want everything." The men gazed into each other's eyes for a moment. Jared started to say something but Jensen interrupted him, "I know I have less experience. I have basic stuff, but nothing on the inside...never inside...that's the other stuff I want to try."

Jared smiled softly at his new lover trying to explain his lack of sex with other men, "Jensen." When the older man looked at him, he explained, "Jensen I've done things...things with...uhm, ya know...that mistake I told you about?" Jensen grumbled irritatedly, "You mean the lapse in judgement?" Jared nodded with regret in his eyes, "Yes, unfortunately." He sighed, then continued, "I wanted to know...wanted to experience things...things I'd never done. I thought it was safe to do it with him. Chris and I...Chris and I were young and inexperienced together. It was 'very' light...sweet...and I'm sure we would have explored things together in time, but," Jared looked down in a second of sadness and Jensen knew that loss still hurt. He waited for Jared to collect himself and look up into his eyes and continue, "Jensen, we did things, but..." Jensen's brow furrowed and Jared elaborated, "The dumbass and I." Jensen answered, "Oh." He looked down suddenly feeling a bit out of his element, but Jared quickly grabbed his chin and pulled his face back up. "Nothing will ever feel as good as you make me feel. Nothing. You just look at me and it's a thousand times better than anything I've ever experienced." Jared paused a moment to let his words sink in. "Jensen, everything you do, every time you touch me, the past just doesn't exist anymore. That asshole didn't love me. I was empty, and it was cold...every damn time, it was cold...empty. And it wasn't good. I thought it might be. It had been forever and I was hoping it might turn into more...that he might feel something...that I might...until I realized it wasn't going that way. And he begged me, cajoled and manipulated me to try the anal part so I did. I thought it was me being frigid, or something. I wanted try it, but something about doing it with him just wasn't that great. Now, I know why. He sucked because he was using me and that’s why it was cold."

Jensen absorbed what Jared had just told him, beginning to feel the confidence returning. He was surprised that a tough old soldier like himself had felt threatened by a past lover of Jared's, but he couldn't help it. Now, Jared was sharing some of it and he was realizing it had nothing to do with 'now'. 'He' was meant for Jared and all the times before were insignificant now. Jared continued, "I couldn't keep going with the wrong person...so I told him to take a hike." Jared kissed Jensen and pulled back slightly to look at him, "What?" Jared could see wheels turning and a carefully controlled deadly intent in Jensen's eyes. The older man knew Jared still hadn't told him the full story. Something happened and Jared walked away. This beautiful loving creature walked away from someone. Jensen knew this 'Tom' person had been a bigger jerk than Jared had disclosed yet. It had his blood stewing. "I'm just feeling like popping a few of Tom's vertebrae...damaging him a bit, that's all." Jared's eyes widened, "Oh...well, it's not necessary, he's been gone awhile." Jensen searched Jared's beautiful eyes and pushed, "How long is awhile?'"

Jared answered innocently, "Uhm...at least a few months." Jensen remained quiet for a moment and then asked, "So, you haven't heard from him?" Jensen couldn't imagine someone getting over Jared that easily. Jared thought about it and answered honestly, "No...not at all." Then, he remembered the first couple weeks after he left Tom, "I mean, there 'was' a phone call that I missed on my cell a couple times after, but I never called him back. No voice mail. That was right in the beginning. I deleted him, actually, and there's been nothing...thank God." Jensen dropped the subject, but he didn't quite let it go in the back of his mind. If he ever met this 'mistake' of Jared's he might feel better if he got to break a few bones or at least the guy's nose. Anyway, Jared was kissing him with light pecks on his lips and he was terribly distracted. "Jensen?" Jared wanted to add one more thing for Jensen to chew on. When the older man looked at him, he added, "Just so you know, ‘everything’ with you feels like my first time. There are so many feelings, and nerve endings, and everything else combined that have suddenly waken up after all these years. Nothing has ‘ever’ felt this good. It’s pretty overwhelming...so fucking overwhelmingly amazing, it’s terrifying to believe it’s real.”

Jensen kissed him, this beautiful devoted Adonis like creature that seemed to think he walked on water. He loved this man more than life and could never get enough of him. He really needed to try and forget the vision of his beautiful lover reacting like that for someone else, because here Jared was, devoted to him now, and trying desperately to make him understand that he was the best and everything sucked before Jensen. When Jensen pulled back from the kiss, he told Jared, “I feel that way, too, baby. I’m going places I never dreamed I could go...only with you.” After laying together for awhile, Jensen let out a disappointed sounding sigh, “Damn, I’d really love to put you in the oversized guest bathroom tub with me.” Jared smiled, kissing Jensen all around his jawline, “Mmmm...yes, that sounds yummy.” Jensen sighed again, “I can’t. Your incision can’t soak in hot water yet.” Jared laid on a glorious pout. Jensen nibbled on that delectable lower lip and turned the pout into a heavenly sigh.

They finally broke apart, enough to get off the couch. Jared stretched and cracked various body parts, feeling pretty good, though kind of lethargic. ‘Gee, wonder why?’ The younger man thought, then bitched out loud, “Jesus, Jensen, I can barely move.” Jensen led him to the guest room, grumbling on the way, “Well maybe you shouldn’t be so goddamned hot. I can’t stop touching you, and wearing you out.” Jared grinned, loving that Jensen touched him, in really glorious ways...and he truly didn’t mind being worn out. He was a bit sore, but who fucking cared? Still feeling somewhat tipsy, Jared giggled when the older man turned him and slid his arms around his waist. He slid his own hands around the older man’s neck. Jensen smiled at his loose compliant mood, “We both need to clean up. We’ve got cum on our pants, you know.” Jensen tried to be the responsible one, while Jared kissed him, “mmmm...yes, I seem to have put some of it there.” The younger man was still loopy and giggled once again, while Jensen tried to gently manhandle him into the bathroom.

Jensen helped Jared change his pants, then left to go do the same while Jared cleaned up in the guest
bathroom. He looked back just to make sure the kid wasn’t taking a nose dive first. They met back in the kitchen where Jensen noticed the tiredness in Jared’s eyes. ‘Of course he won’t admit it.’ Jensen thought to himself. He asked casually, “What do you feel like for dinner?” Jared considered it, but he wasn’t really that hungry. He shrugged a shoulder, “I don’t know. Anything’s fine. I’m not really hungry.” Jensen was immediately concerned. He held Jared’s face between his palms, “You’re tired.” Jared couldn’t really dig up that rebellious nerve he was looking for. He had a second of argument in his eyes at Jensen’s assessment, but then it died without the fuel he needed to actually spit it out. When Jensen saw Jared’s defeat, he knew this needed to be an early night.

“How about something easy…taco’s?” Jensen waited a few seconds longer than normal for Jared to smile and approve, “Okay, that sounds good.” Then the older man had a thought, “Hey, you wanna cook with me?” He knew Jared was over tired, but the lack of sparkle in the kid’s eyes was getting to him. Jensen hoped Jared wasn’t starting to worry about the case. That stress combined with exhaustion wasn’t going to be healthy for him, especially before his post-op checkup tomorrow.

Jared’s eyes lit up at Jensen’s suggestion, but the light faded with worry about not knowing much about cooking, “That would be so fun, but I’m not very good with,” Jensen interrupted him with an encouraging kiss, “Neither was I. I totally sucked. Genius, remember?” Jensen received a lazy eye roll when he tapped on Jared’s forehead and called him ‘genius’.

“Come on,” the older man pulled Jared to the counter and started bringing out supplies. Jared enjoyed himself, immensely. Jensen gave him vegetables to chop, showed him the seasonings and how to brown the meat. He had Jared brush the shells with vegetable oil and warm them in the oven. Once all the little bowls were lined up with grated cheese, tomatoes and lettuce, Jensen showed Jared how to make an easy fresh salsa. Jensen couldn’t believe how much fun it was to have someone to do this with. Jared was an easy student, of course, and he caught on quickly. “Next time we’ll make homemade margaritas to go with ‘em.” Jensen didn’t think it was a good idea to pour any alcohol down the kid’s throat. Jared looked pretty tired, but happily responded, “That would be awesome. This was so much fun, Jensen. I want to learn everything. Thank you.” Jared looked at the older man with grateful happiness in his eyes. Jensen had to kiss him, “I’ve never had this much fun cooking. You can help me any time, love.”

Jared sat motionless for a few seconds, then he withdrew his hand and went back to his plate. Jensen didn’t like this. The kid’s automatic defense modes were up and he didn’t need to do that around Jensen. “Hey,” the older man waited. When Jared didn’t look up right away, he tried again, “Hey… Jare.” The younger man looked up at him, then, “Hmm?” He’d obviously been preoccupied and didn’t even realize it. Jensen searched his eyes for any fear or doubts but didn’t see any, “It’s going to be okay.” Jared nodded, “I know.” He rubbed his hands on his pants nervously, then added, “Well, I’m trying to know,” then sighed with a false chuckle. Jensen gave him a few seconds to regroup himself. When Jared finally took a deep breath and went back to his meal, the older man dropped the subject.
Tearing into his own meal, Jensen tried to deflect to happier thoughts, “You’re right, these are delicious. I made these when my friends were over, but they didn’t taste this damn good. Must be you.” Jared chuckled softly, knowing what Jensen was doing and appreciating the hell out of it, “I doubt that. I can’t get over the salsa. It was that easy all this time and I never knew.” Jared was on his third taco and seemed happily distracted with a sudden memory, “I don’t remember everything, but my mom used to make frittatas. We did it together a couple times. It was really fun, but it was a mess. She said I made them totally delicious, but I always wondered if she was fixing the mistakes I’d made when I wasn’t looking.” Jensen smiled, completely enamored with Jared’s happy memory and the fact that he was willing to talk about his mother. “You’ve been holding out on me, guy. I’ll expect some frittatas sometime in the near future.”

Jared smiled, “If I can remember how. I think we made a lasagna once. I was very interested in watching her make lasagna. Something about the layers, building it…putting it together…” Jared shrugged his shoulder and looked down. Jensen piped in, “The little engineer mind showing itself.” When Jared looked up a bit puzzled, Jensen explained, “Building things, like lasagna layers.” He smiled and Jared got it and grinned shyly. Jared suddenly looked up and shared another happy memory, “She’d put crazy sweet things in my pancakes. Chopped up candy bars, glazed pecans, chocolate chips, those little marshmallows…stuff like that. She was fun like that. My dad didn’t like the goopy stuff so she’d sneak them in mine and give him the plain ones.” Jensen smiled, loving Jared’s peace at remembering happy times. When Jared looked at Jensen, he asked, “So, you didn’t cook ‘before’ you left for military, only ‘after’?”

The older man realized it was his turn to share something, “My parents weren’t domestic type people. There was a cook, usually. We weren’t mansion people, but Mother wasn’t the Leave It to Beaver mom. She could put things in the oven and reheat, but she never made anything herself. She grew up doing all that, but when she married my dad, her plan was to ‘never’ have to lift a finger again. Hired people cleaned, babysat us, and cooked before they left in the evenings. Mother went to parties and planned ladies’ events and stuff like that. Dad travelled constantly and she rarely stayed home with us because she loved the jet setting. We had different sitters. Food was always delicious, but I spent most of my time playing sports. I wasn’t at home, except to eat or sleep. Daniel was different than me. Honestly, I think I remember coming home once and sensing something really awkward in the house between he and the ‘at the time’ nanny. It pissed me off to think he might be doing the housekeeper, or she was doing him, but I couldn’t prove it. My parents fired her, so maybe that was the reason all along. He was a socially odd duck, private and moody. I tried to drag him to my camping trips with other families, birthday parties, stuff like that, but he’d refuse. So, I stopped trying.”

Jensen caught himself, not meaning to remind Jared of the groping asshole of a brother he’d grown up with. When he saw the slight tension in Jared’s demeanor, he immediately felt terrible, “I’m sorry, kiddo, I didn’t mean to bring up that dick.” Jared sighed apologetically, “He’s your brother. I love hearing about your life. He’s a part of it so of course you should talk about him…I have issues with him, they don’t have to be yours.” Jensen leaned forward to meet Jared’s eyes with intensity, “Your issues with Daniel are now MY issues with Daniel. Do ‘not’ think he’s gonna get away with what he did to you, because he’s not.” Jared was rather overwhelmed with Jensen’s intense anger boiling underneath the surface at his brother, so he kept quiet for a few seconds before arguing softly, “Jensen, you really don’t have to…” Jensen interrupted, “No…No I really ‘do’ have to.”

Jared backpedaled because it was clear Jensen was hellbent on confronting his brother about his treatment of Jared. He thought for a moment and decided to change the subject, “So, how…how did you turn out so…so beautifully different? I mean, surrounded by all that, how in the world are you so…perfect?” Jensen paused for a moment before answering. “Probably the same way ‘you’ turned out the way ‘you’ did.” When Jared looked at him questioning, Jensen explained, “I’m not perfect, in any way, but I spent time away from the family. I wasn’t drawn to the coldness. It was revolting. My
dad tried, but I just couldn’t get into his circle of fake friends and business mergers. I spent loads of time with other families. They invited me over and on trips and it was influential to see how ‘those’ families were. They loved each other. They hugged, and they hugged me. They cooked and cleaned up their campsites together, told stories, laughed, played bored games. It was my happy place and the materialistic family of mine was not. So, I think I was drawn to that at an early age and knew that’s what I wanted when I grew up.”

Jared remained silent, absorbing everything he was learning about his new lover. Jensen amazed him. He was such a hero, Jared was in awe of him. ‘He’s so perfect,’ he thought and still couldn’t believe this man loved him. “So, did your aunt cook with you, too?” Jensen asked the younger man. Jared considered for a second, then answered, “Some…not much. She offered things…things my mother might have made me…but I didn’t ask for anything. My nose was in a book, most of the time and I was shut down and probably rude. I was angry. She made muffins, though and cakes on my birthday, so it smelt the house up.” Jared smiled, remembering his fondness for his aunt, but Jensen caught the flash of hurt that has passed through Jared’s eyes at losing his parents and moving in with strangers. Or maybe it was the uncle that Jared still seemed to avoid talking about.

“I was on debate teams and some chess tourney’s. They put me in all these AP classes so I had hours of homework every night. I was busy. Like you, I guess, but with different things.” Jared looked down and added, “It was good to be busy.” Jensen watched him pick up his plate and take it to the kitchen in silence. He respectfully observed the younger man while he knew damn well the kid was trying to work off some of the hurt and loss that had reawakened itself over his childhood tragedy. He still wondered about the uncle. Jensen realized Jared’s workaholic nature had been his saving grace. When things went sour, Jared bulldozed his way through his schoolwork, then college, then for his jobs. He always had an overabundance of things to keep him busy so he didn’t have to deal with his emotions. ‘He fought his way not to become a curled up ball of tears when life screwed him over,’ Jensen thought to himself. There was a resilient inner strength in Jared and Jensen admired the hell out of it. There were walls and avoidance techniques, but they helped him get where he was today. ‘He probably doesn’t even realize he’s using them. Like now,’ Jensen thought. He truly appreciated understanding Jared on a deeper level, even if the kid didn’t know it.

Jensen cleared the table and put things away while Jared washed the dishes he insisted on washing. Jensen sighed, knowing he’d lost the short battle. “You know, you could use the damn dishwasher, Padalecki.” Jared smirked, his hands covered in suds, “I can’t bend over that fucking far, Ackles, so I’m doing them myself.” Jensen smirked back, “I would have done that ‘for’ you.” Jared rebutted, “NO, I am doing ‘something’ without help, Ackles. I’m finishing these damn things so just like it.” Jensen smiled to himself at Jared’s lecture. He loved the fact that Jared had found a way to make himself feel useful, ‘and’ come back out of his sadness at past memories. He came up behind the younger man and slid his hands around Jared’s waist. Jared jumped at the surprise move, then felt a loving kiss on his cheek. Jensen’s voice dropped low in his ear, “How can I ‘not’ like it when my gorgeous lover’s got his hands all hot and wet and sudsy like that.”

Jared started to grin when Jensen continued, “Kinda reminds me of a recent shower scene,” which caused Jared to giggle adorably and whine, “Stop!” Jensen kissed him once more and went to wipe off the table. The lovers turned in by eight. Jared was exhausted and with some coaxing, Jensen managed to get him to change into pajamas. Once under the covers with the fireplace going, Jared yawned hugely. Jensen slid under with him and rubbed his hair. “Are you sure you don’t want to play cards or something?” Jared’s words were slurred. Jensen knew it was just a matter of minutes until he lost him to dreamland. “This is perfect, just laying here with you,” Jensen tried to soothe the exhausted young man. Jared fought it for a few minutes longer, “What’s gonna happen tomorrow?” Jensen could tell he was barely awake, “Nothing’s gonna happen tomorrow. The doc is gonna take those staples out and we’re gonna go to lunch outside of here, maybe site see just a little. Then we’ll come back and do more of this.”
Jared grinned with heavily blinking eyelids, “Oh…nice. I like this. Okay.” Jensen chuckled softly, “Me too.” Jared seemed to decide ‘I’m ready to stop thinking now’ and suddenly rolled closer. He laid himself half over Jensen’s chest and bent his leg up. He nestled for a few seconds, getting comfortable, then sighed with his arm around Jensen’s waist. ‘Well…isn’t this a cute first,’ the older man thought, as Jared stillled. ‘Now, ‘this’ is definitely snuggling,” he said. Jared smiled with his eyes closed, before finally falling asleep. Jensen mentally went over the next day’s plan. This would be his first assessment of the security team in a more threatening environment. If anyone found out Jared was in the vicinity of Denver, there could be people scouting for him. Jensen would evaluate this enlarged security team to himself. If shit went down and they weren’t up to par, he was definitely calling in his buddies. ‘Fuck it, this is Jared,’ he decided. Nothing would interfere with him keeping Jared safe, even if it pissed the AG off.
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Summary

The boys go out with the new security team accompanying them. Jared has a good appointment with the doctor, there are enjoyable excursions with tender moments. Jared continues to help Jensen heal some of his darkest feelings from the past. The day out goes pretty well until Jared sees a couple familiar faces in a crowd...not the good kind of familiar, either.

Jensen lay there for twenty minutes before he convinced himself to move. Jared was a dead weight of long limbs and lean toned body all wrapped around him like a personal furnace. The younger man hadn’t moved all night. Leaving the bed was not going to be easy, but it was 0600 and Jensen had things he wanted to accomplish before they started their day. He kissed the top of Jared’s unruly mop, then unfurled his way out of his lover’s grappling hold to slip out of the bed. He wrapped the covers snug around the engineer, then headed for the spare room. Jensen ran a slow easy mile in his t-shirt, pajama bottoms and socks, then headed for the living room. After a deep meditative breath and a bow, Jensen spent the next forty minutes working his body through kata combinations from various forms. He moved with grace and control, gliding through deadly moves with expert muscle memory. He finally ended his session with a closing bow.

Jensen felt focused and centered. It had been a few months since he’d honed his skills. The soldier had worked up a sweat, his thin clothing stuck to his skin. He walked in circles for a bit, coming down from is cardio, then dropped for some pushups. Jensen had been anxious. This was the day after the case went public. Today, he would be out in the open with his lover, who was now a target, and not being alert nor capable enough to react to any threat to Jared was an unacceptable thought. He felt much better now, like he was ready for the day, ‘except for coffee,’ Jensen laughed at his thoughts, ‘always need the coffee.’ Jensen loaded the coffee maker and headed for the master bathroom to grab a much needed shower and shave. He noticed, as he passed by the bed, that his lover was right where he left him. The covers were up to the kid’s ears, his temperamental hair sprawled all over the pillow. Jensen longed to kiss him, but he didn’t want to wake him.

When Jensen exited the bathroom, clean shaven and showered, Jared was just starting to stir. The older man got himself dressed while watching Jared drag himself into a sitting position. He sat yawning and rubbing his face for a moment. Jensen thought he seemed sluggish this morning. As he approached him, Jared’s hand went to his left side and held there for a moment. Jensen knelt down in front of him and waited for Jared to look up. The kid looked barely coherent, which wasn’t doing much for Jensen’s concern. “Good morning, kiddo. You okay?” Jensen waited for Jared to open his eyes completely before finally looking at him. Jared offered him a one word greeting, “Hi.” Jensen’s eyebrow raised at the less than enthusiastic response. Jared asked, “Is it time to get ready?” Jensen assessed him while answering, “Yeah. There’s coffee going and if you want a shower, we can do that.”

Jensen noticed Jared was still holding his side. He didn’t even know if Jared was aware he was doing it. He felt the kid’s forehead, deeming him fever free. Jared finally looked at him closer, “Fuck, you look like you’re out of a GQ magazine. It feels like I’ve been run over.” Jensen smirked at
Jared’s assessment of him, but wasn’t thrilled with the ‘run over’ comment. “You’re sore from yesterday,” he remarked. Jared nodded. Jensen helped him up, then held onto him as they walked to the bathroom. By the time Jared reached the sink, he seemed to be more alert, so Jensen let him go. He pulled extra towels out while Jared brushed his teeth and shaved. Jared did really well in the shower. He seemed to be waking up, finally. Jensen stood by and reached in to help with his hair, but the younger man handled most of the washing himself. He used one hand and managed to keep a dry towel over the incision.

By lifting his feet, Jared managed to wash them too, though it took longer than when Jensen had done it. ‘At least he can bend a bit now,’ Jensen thought to himself. He commented, “This should be the last shower holding that towel.” Jared smiled at Jensen’s comment, “Yeah, that’ll be nice,” but his mannerism’s were still less than chipper. Jared’s answers were actually short and choppy. He was usually pretty chipper after he first woke up. Jensen sensed something was off. Once Jared was done, Jensen helped him dry off and dress. Jared blew his hair dry and combed it back while the older man made the bed. Jensen felt his mouth water when he turned around to see Jared walk out of the bathroom. ‘Jesus,’ was the only coherent thought Jensen’s frozen brain could come up with as his lover walked out of the bathroom with jeans and socks on, and nothing else.

Jared was a vision of broad shoulders, lean muscular definition and smooth slightly golden skin. Jensen couldn’t stop staring. Just to throw him over the edge, the gorgeous engineer flicked his head quickly to get the hair off his face and make it fall backward where it belonged. It was goddamn sexy. He cleared his throat, realizing he’d been blatantly staring. Jared walked up to him, put his hand behind Jensen’s neck and pulled him into a good morning kiss. Jared’s mouth was hot and inviting. His tongue deliciously played with Jensen’s, slid all around for a thorough indulging buffet until Jared was satisfied. He backed out of the kiss, touching their lips together once more, then looked into Jensen’s eyes with a bit of curious insecurity, “What were you staring at?” Jensen was sure his last brain cell was fried. His dick answered for him, “Something I’d like to taste and chew on for breakfast, and every meal after, if you must know. Something too goddamn gorgeous, that’s what.”

Jared still wasn’t quite confident about his blacks, blues and brownish yellows. The red incision line wasn’t very attractive, either. He felt like he’d been slacking in the working out department too. He was secretly relieved Jensen was blinded by what he saw, even though he didn’t quite understand it. Jared just realized he’d walked straight up to Jensen without any shyness about these insecurities. This was totally not like him. “You shouldn’t walk around like that, looking like that…it’s hard to…,” Jensen’s lack of ability to finish his weak lecture made Jared smirk, “Oh? How hard is it, Jen?” Jared kissed him once more, then backed off to put his shirt on. Jensen adjusted himself with a regrettable sigh that there just wasn’t time to appropriately get his fill of this young adonis.

The two men grinned when they realized their chosen t-shirts with flannel over shirts were the choice of the day. Jensen wore a black t-shirt with black and blue checkered flannel, Jared wore a dark grey t-shirt with a lighter blue and grey cover shirt. “Well, at least they’re different colors,” Jared snickered. Jensen grinned with notable lingering reverence. His lover’s greys were perfect matched with the stunning hazel grey eyes. The unique eyes had little bits of teal in them today. ‘Jesus fuck,’ Jensen shook his head, ‘too fucking hot.’ Jared did his orgasmic impressions again while partaking in his first two cups of coffee. Jensen was quieter, but grinned into his own cup at the reactions. They heated up breakfast burritos, knowing they didn’t have much time to cook. As they sat down, the security cell phone vibrated.

Jensen read the text first, then showed it to Jared. The younger man responded, “They’re early.” Jensen nodded, “Yep.” Jared ate a few more bites, but Jensen thought they looked forced. Jared suddenly took his half eaten breakfast to the sink and washed out his coffee cup. He wrapped up the burrito in foil, then put it back in the fridge. Jensen scooted sideways to finish his breakfast, while
watching him. Jared had put the burrito in the refrigerator door without any problems, but it cost him a subtle painful twinge when he reached for a water bottle. As he stood looking out the kitchen window, sipping his water, Jensen guessed he was probably mentally scrolling through the ‘what if’s’ about what was to come. Jensen couldn’t imagine what it felt like for someone like Jared to see those security people out front, knowing they were needed for ‘him’. Jensen knew there wasn’t a damn thing he could say that would erase the reality of the situation, but Jared wouldn’t be alone in this, that’s for damn sure. He got up and put his plate in the sink. He hoped he sounded perky enough to derail the kid’s upsetting thoughts, “You ready to get those stapes out, kiddo?” Jared smiled, “Sure,” but it didn’t reach his eyes. Jensen knew he’d been right, Jared was probably terrified and covering it.

After they donned their jackets, at Jensen’s insistence, they opened the front door. Jensen greeted the four men standing on the porch, “Hello guys.” Jared stepped out behind Jensen cautiously, not really sure on the protocol. Did he run to the car like some celebrity or politician? Or crouch down to avoid a bullet? He was replaying the scenes in his mind from various movies he’d seen, but he really didn’t know what was expected of him. Jensen touched him on the elbow, “Hey...it’s okay,” which brought Jared back to the present. He didn’t realize he’d been holding his breath. He smiled nervously, “Sorry, I’m just…” Jared didn’t know how to finish, so Jensen helped him, “Try and relax.” One of the men in front held out his hand to Jared. As Jared took it, the man explained, “Mr. Padalecki, I’m Frank, the team leader for today. This is Paul, to my left and we’ll be your closest, most annoying and invasive part of the team today.”

Jared shook the other man’s hand, as Frank continued, “The others in the car are Phil and Don. You will be between two of us, or one of us and Jensen, at all times. These two, Greg and Tim,” Frank motioned to two other men on the porch, “will be staying at the house, as soon as you’re in the car. You’ll see a couple more throughout the day. Jensen’s provided us with an itinerary so we’ve placed some other people where you’ll be going.” Jared nodded, “Okay,” still not knowing what the hell to do. He was usually much quicker to catch on than this, but for some reason he felt pretty slow on the uptake in this area. The men were nice, at least. He found himself trying to take Jensen’s advice, forcing himself to relax. Jared walked to the car with Jensen, trying desperately to ignore the two men sandwiching them. He could feel the other man’s tweed jacket brushing against his arm, ‘not helping’ Jared thought. There was nothing normal about this, his mind was screaming ‘THIS IS FUCKING CRAZY.’

Frank got in the opposite side of the backseat of the car after the two men in the front greeted Jared and Jensen, “Good morning.” Jared half smiled, trying to be polite but his heart wasn’t in it. Jensen gave the men a returned “Good morning,” for both of them. Jared scooted into the middle, Jensen entered after him. Once settled in the car, the driver pulled away. The car was quiet. Jensen knew it would be uncomfortable until they got used to this. There wasn’t much to say, except trying to ease Jared into what would be his life for the next couple weeks. Every time he went out, this would be the case. Jensen squeezed Jared’s hand, hoping to keep him grounded. He could feel the stiff tension coming from the younger man next to him. Jared finally cleared his throat, struggling for some kind of normalcy, “So, are we still going someplace after the doctor?” Jensen looked at him and smiled, “Yep, we sure are. I’m introducing you to a fantastic lunch place in Denver, then we’ll drive to some historical sites before coming back. I think you’ll enjoy them...and if you want to see more, we’ll play that by ear, okay?”

Jared immediately felt better. He smiled gratefully at Jensen, more hopeful about today’s adventure. Jensen’s suggestions sounded like exactly what he needed. At any rate, it would be a fun day and probably take his mind off of everything that was happening. They soon arrived at the surgeon’s office, adjacent to the hospital Jared had stayed in. There were two security men at the curb, who he’d met on the porch. Along with Frank and Phil, they sandwiched Jared and Jensen until they got inside. The one known as Frank walked with them into the doctor’s office and stood next to Jared.
while he checked himself in. Jared grinned to himself because Frank was right in his description that he would be one of the two most invasive and annoying during the day. ‘They’re doing it for me,’ Jared reminded himself, feeling the brush of the investigators’s jacket while he sat down right next to him. ‘Annoying as shit.’ Jared was sandwiched between Frank, Jensen, and Phil on the other side of Jensen. He tried to control his need to push them a few feet to the side so he could enjoy his own personal space.

Jared mentally celebrated that when the nurse called his name, none of them pushed their way into the back area, except Jensen. The older man placed a hand on Jared’s lower back and followed him into the exam room. Jensen sat on the chair while Jared was on the exam table, getting blood pressure and temperature taken. After the nurse left, he bitched, “I hate these things,” causing Jensen to smile, “I think everyone does, but maybe not as much as those paper gowns.” Jared admitted with a soft smile, “True,” appreciating his comfortableness with Jensen. The man could calm him in any situation. Jared was so glad they were alone, even if they had to hide in a doctor’s exam room to do it. The doctor didn’t take long. He soon whisked into the room, greeting both Jared and Jensen. He looked through the file, refreshing himself with Jared’s case, before turning back to the patient for a closer look. He gently touched Jared’s face, then moved his head back to look closely at his bruising. He turned his face to the side, noting the fading colors, then tilted Jared’s head downward to look at the progress of his head wound. “Looks good. Any pain or dizziness?” Jared answered “No,” while the surgeon tested his eyes with a pen light, then inspected the inside of Jared’s ears, then up his nose. “The stitches have mostly dissolved. You can wash that area freely now, but just don’t scrub it, alright? It’s going to be very raw for awhile.”

Jared answered, “Okay,” as the surgeon moved on to his hands. He inspected the hands closely, “Do you have any irritation here? They’re a tiny bit red. Not inflamed, just looking a bit irritated.” Jared responded, “No, they feel fine. They itch sometimes.” The doctor looked up at Jared. “Have you done some kind of work with them? Maybe used them for something that might have irritated them?” Jared thought about it, but couldn’t identify anything that would have irritated his hands. “I don’t think so,” he responded, but he really hadn’t felt any pain in them so nothing stood out. Jensen, of course, had to pipe in and tell the truth, “There was an hour of some measuring outside yesterday. I did the bending, but he was working with some tools and holding stuff for awhile. He did really well, but that might be the culprit.” Jared tried to control his partial eye roll and sigh, but Jensen could tell he was slightly irritated by his truthfulness. He knew Jared was simply paranoid the doctor might extend his lack of activity orders if he felt Jared was pushing it. The surgeon looked Jared in the eye, “So they didn’t sting while you were working, and they’re not irritated now?” Jared answered honestly, “No. Really, I didn’t notice it, at all. They don’t hurt. I had no idea they were like that.” He felt a little resentful that he had to even defend himself, for fuck’s sake.

The surgeon remembered this patient better now. He’d seen so many patients, it took a moment for him to recall this was the young man who refused to take his pain meds one morning out of stubbornness. He glanced at Jensen with a knowing look while he helped Jared to lay down. The engineer tried to relax when the surgeon lifted his shirt and felt around his rib cage. He tenderly pushed down in several different places, feeling for movement underneath the skin. Jared’s face showed a slight twinge of hurt when the doctor touched more sensitive places, but nothing was pushed on hard enough to cause excessive pain. “Is this starting to itch now?” the surgeon asked, addressing Jared’s incision. Jared nodded, “Yeah.” The doctor continued his close perusal with a bright light over the bed. Jared could feel the heat from the small powerful light, as the doctor pushed lightly around the staples with his fingers. “This looks good. Some light irritations, but nothing detrimental. You did good for being such a workaholic. I think we assigned a good caretaker.”

Jared was glad for the doctor’s words, but still irritable at the same time for being thought of as an errant seven year old that couldn’t take care of himself. “I guess,” was all the patient responded. He couldn’t help his stubborn streak from it’s reaction. Jensen smirked, reading the pissyness that was
barely concealed in Jared’s answer. He remained quiet while the doctor finished. The surgeon rolled a chair over and sat leaning over Jared’s chest. He spoke to him first, “You’re going to feel some pinches, but they should be very quick and miniscule. As soon as I remove all the staples, I’m going to apply some sticky glue and you’ll be all done and able to shower without the towel, alright?” Jared nodded, “Okay,” anxious to be rid of the damn things. The surgeon proceeded to clip and pull the staples, one after the other. Jensen watched Jared close his eyes and concentrate. He clenched a few times when a staple would grab or be a little more difficult at sliding out from tender skin. When that was over, he made a sour face at the cold goopy glue before it formed a hard protective barrier over his wound.

The surgeon helped Jared to sit up. He noticed the younger man couldn’t control the immediate urge to grab his ribs with his left hand. Jared closed his eyes and sighed at the painful throb, then opened them to realize he was being watched by his doctor and lover. ‘Fuck,’ he mentally bitched. The surgeon observed him silently for a few seconds, “You’re quite sore today.” Jared couldn’t argue. He nodded silently while looking down, “Yes.” The doctor looked over at Jensen, who immediately took the blame, “It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have let him work.” The surgeon looked back at Jared when the he immediately came to Jensen’s defense, “It was not his fault. I pushed him and begged him. It’s my fault. I’m just so tired of laying around. It felt so good to be outside for just an hour.” Jared laid the puppy dog begging eyes on the doc, but Jensen wasn’t sure if they would work on him. The man was a professional and he wouldn’t be bending to Jared’s charm if it meant the patient wasn’t getting well because of his activity. Of course, there were other activities that Jensen suspected probably led to the soreness too, but he wouldn’t betray Jared by sharing those with the doctor. “I’m still the person left in charge of you, Jare. I could have stopped you, but I didn’t,” Jensen tried to ease the guilt from Jared’s eyes.

The younger man opened his mouth to argue further but the doctor raised his hand, “Alright, okay. It doesn’t have to be someone’s fault. What I’m worried about is you thinking that just because you got some soreness out of yesterday’s moving around, you might think to do more next time and really throw yourself into a more excruciating effect. Working those ribs isn’t what they need right now.” The men were silenced. Jensen was beating himself up at the thought of Jared hurting himself more on his watch, Jared worried at the thought of being held back from doing even more. He was dying to start running again, but because this wasn’t going the way he planned, he was now afraid to ask. The doc observed Jared for a minute before turning back to Jensen, “Is he tired?” Jensen gave the doc a review of Jared’s last few days, “He has amazing energy and endurance when he first wakes up. Then, when he’s been burning it at both ends for a few hours, he crashes. After a nap, he’s back up and good to go. He’s really strong, much more capable than when he left here, so it’s easy to think he’s well...then when he crashes, it’s a reality check. Yesterday he started bending and stooping by using his legs. If he does it right, he can accomplish things without using his upper torso. This morning he bent forward just a little bit with just a twinge. If he goes slow, he can do it. It’s a hell of a lot of progress over the last few days, but he does wear himself out. I know he’s dying to start the treadmill, but we’ve managed to hold off.” Jensen let that be absorbed, both by the physician who appreciated his assessment, and by the irritated engineer sitting on the exam table. The kid obviously wanted to be cleared for running a foot race, but Jensen had to be honest. Jared’s health was not to be screwed around with and Jensen wouldn’t cover anything up for him. ‘Except the incredible sex,’ the older man reminded himself. ‘I’m sure that didn’t help his condition,’ he thought further.

The surgeon turned back to Jared, “What I’m going to do is have you swing by the X-ray and ultrasound office downstairs. Those results will be sent to me by tomorrow morning. I’ll call you if there’s anything that looks alarming on them, but for now I think you’re good. I want to see you back here at your six week post op, but between now and then, no lifting anything over five pounds on the right side, no lifting at all on the left. You’re still ahead of schedule and I know how active
you’re used to being…so, Jared, I’m going to do something I don’t normally do at ten days. You can use the treadmill.” Jared’s reaction was priceless. The kid looked like he’d just won the pulitzer prize. “REALLY?” He looked so hopeful, Jensen had a hard time keeping from smiling. He was sure the surgeon did too, as he watched the doctor smirk, “Yes, you can use it. Walking first. Can you promise…‘absolutely’ promise to start with walking only, and not even try a little running until next week? I mean a ‘very’ slow start…baby walks until gradually you get back to the distances you’re used to, then kick in with some jogging. And you have to stop ‘instantly’ if you feel weak or dizzy.” Jared nodded excitedly, “Yes! Yes, anything. I’ll do anything. Thank you so much.” Jensen now worried that with this new allowance, he was going to have his hands full trying to keep Jared from breaking his word. Obviously, the doctor had the same idea as he looked over at Jensen, almost apologetically. “You gonna be okay with that?” Jensen nodded, grinning, “Yep,” while his lover spouted in disbelief, “What?! I promised, didn’t I?” Jensen continued to grin knowingly at the doctor, while the physician turned back to Jared, “Yes…yes you did, Mr. Padalecki. But I’m only comfortable with this because ‘he’s’ keeping an eye on you. I’m sure he’ll remind you if you get over zealous in your workouts.” Jared sighed, “I have no doubt,” he added in defeat.

The appointment was soon over, the men downstairs, waiting for Jared to be called for his tests. Jensen went inside with him, but waited just outside the room while the techs performed the X-rays and ultrasound. Once they were complete, Jared found himself ensconced by security again, escorting him to the car. ‘I almost forgot they were all out here,’ Jared thought to himself, realizing that Frank had become a more comfortable presence, and he could at least relax a bit further around the man. Jensen seemed perfectly unaffected by their situation to an innocent bystander, but Jared didn’t fail to notice the controlled concentration and determination as the military expert glanced around their surroundings. ‘He’s seeing everything that I don’t,’ Jared was smart enough to realize. He had become so close to Jensen, he could feel the subtle strength and power, the alertness, and the carefully hidden concern at keeping Jared safe. Jared worried for everything Jensen was going though, but also blamed himself for being such a pain in the ass for his new lover. ‘I know he doesn’t deserve this, and he sure as hell didn’t plan on having a lover that needed a nurse maid and a goon squad of guards to travel around.’ Jensen was glad the appointment had gone so well for Jared. Now, it was time to do some fun things to see if he could get Jared’s mind in a better place. He knew the kid was thinking about something that involved guilt or self blame. Whatever his thoughts were, they were wholeheartedly unacceptable. Jensen squeezed his hand, “You hungry yet?” Jared looked pleasantly caught off guard, “Kind of, but not that much yet.” He confessed happily, “Jensen, I don’t care what we do. I’m so glad to have the damn staples out, whatever you want to do is going to be fine.” Jensen smiled, then looked at Frank, “Capitol,” to which Frank nodded. He sent a text to the other teams, then nodded to Phil, who began driving. Jared became oblivious to their communications. He was thoroughly distracted by what was outside Jensen’s window. They were driving through a very obvious historical area, with fascinating buildings and 1800’s architecture. Jared loved this kind of thing, loved history. He immediately scrolled through a hundred mental questions about each and every building he saw. He soon fixated on a building with a gold dome on top before he realized they were stopping at that very venue. Jensen waited until the security team let them out of the car, then pulled Jared out to join him. The younger man couldn’t take his eyes off the building. Jensen smiled, pleased that he’d chosen right.

Three other men walked them to the building. One was on Jensen’s right, the other two on Jared’s left, just in front and back of him. Jensen took Jared’s elbow when the younger man almost tripped on the steps leading up to the entrance. He was definitely pleasantly distracted. Jared asked in wonder, “Is this...?” But he couldn’t finish his sentence as the gleam of the golden topped dome sparkled in the sun. As Jared squinted, Jensen answered, “Yes, it’s the capital of Denver. It’s really cool, and very popular.” “Wow,” was Jared’s response. He eyed the architecture with appreciation,
as Jensen guided him to the ticket booth. Once inside, Jensen had to keep Jared moving along, as gently as he could. The kid was definitely in his happy place, but he spent several minutes gawking at each and every picture, each artifact, long after he’d read the explanations. Jensen knew there wouldn’t be much time for anything after this, if he didn’t keep the younger man moving.

Jared was having a ball. He’d completely forgotten his accident, completely let go of any worry about the case, and especially forgot about the security team following him around. This was a precious gift from Jensen and he couldn’t get over how much the older man had figured him out. Jensen had known exactly how to take his mind off things. He looked over at him, wanting badly to kiss him, but instead tried to transmit all the love and gratefulness he felt into his gaze. Jensen smiled in receipt. Seeing Jared like this was a soul cleansing experience. As they continued through the museum, Jared became even more fascinated. The history of colonists, past Presidents, the building of the city were all laid out. There were real black and white photos which were especially interesting. Jared could almost place himself back in that time and imagine what they may have been thinking. He respected the cathedral like architecture, imagined what it would be like to design something like this could survive that many years. ‘People still enjoy it,’ he marveled, loving that something this old was still in good shape.

After Jensen went outside with him, Jared turned around to look again at the amazing architecture of the building. After studying it’s angles and lines, he followed Jensen’s lead out to the gardens. People tended the gardens all year ’round. The flowers were stunning, groomed and healthy to match the seasons. Jared inhaled the scent of them with a pleasure filled sigh, as he looked up to feel the warmth of the sun on his face. He could feel the slightest bit of heat through the icy nip in Denver’s air, remembering Jensen had told him this place would be covered in snow soon. Once they finished the gardens, Jensen told Frank they were going to hit lunch. Jared was in a great mood and even though he was starving now, he wasn’t tired at all. It could have been happy distraction, but who cared? Jensen was giving him a fantastic day out.

Phil drove them to the top of a hill. At first, there seemed to be nothing there. Upon exiting the car, however, Jared was flabbergasted at what he saw. There was a large river and lake below them, rolling hills and beautiful rockies in the distance. After studying the view, Jared turned around to see an enormous historical gravesite, complete with statue of a man, surrounded by a rot iron fence. Jared started moving toward the gravestone, his attention caught in a tractor beam to see what it was about. Jensen stepped quickly to take his arm and walked along side of him. Jared hadn’t even noticed the security men had hurried their steps, much like Jensen, in order to keep up with him. He was thoroughly entranced at the fascinating headstone.

As Jared stared at the statue in awe, he read the name plate out loud, “Frederick Buffalo Bill Cody.” Jensen waited patiently for Jared to read some of the markings and gravitate to the plaque that further explained Buffalo Bill’s famous activities in bringing together the immigrant colonists with the Native American Indian tribes. Jared was once again, fascinated. Jensen pulled on his arm, “We’ll come back out okay? I just want to get some lunch in you first.” As Jared compliantly went with him, he answered, “Okay,” still looking back at the grave. Jensen smirked as he explained, “The restaurant here is fantastic.” Jared stepped inside and saw a museum erected in memory of the famous person outside, at the same moment he smelled barbecue, “God, that smells good.” Jensen smiled, “Oooh yeah. Everything is good here, so don’t over think the menu too much. Anything you order is gonna be fantastic.” He requested a window table, so Jared could admire the view while they ate. Jared looked at him with so much happiness and gratitude, Jensen was floored for the moment. Jared added, “Thank you so much for this, Jensen. This whole day is amazing.” The beautiful sparkle in Jared’s eyes was distracting, but Jensen managed to smile warmly in return, “You’re very welcome, buddy.”

The two men ordered ribs, chicken and some side dishes. Jared was certain he would be too stuffed
to breathe after eating it all, but Jensen told him to order it anyway. While they were enjoying soda’s, Jared happened to glance at the other men standing at the restaurant entrance. They were watching the entire restaurant, perusing everyone who came in and out of the place, while the third sat at a table behind Jensen. Jared asked in a quiet tone, “Are they just going to wait? Can’t they eat something?” Jensen smiled because Jared was so goddamned cute…and still considerate to the last, “I’m sure they can eat, but it’s probably at different times. Watch…I bet the guy behind me eats, then swaps with the other two.” “Oh,” Jared seemed to understand that, as he looked curiously past Jensen. The man at the table was Phil, Frank’s partner who had driven. Frank was at the door with the front seat passenger of the car, ‘Don, I think?’, Jared tried to remember his name.

The waiter brought their salads and rolls, so the two men dug in before their main course arrived. Jared asked way too many questions about the history of Denver for Jensen to keep up with. He tried to answer a bit, but reminded Jared he wasn’t from Denver, and had only been a few places, so far. The only other things he was familiar with, and wanted to show him, Jensen wasn’t sure they’d have time to do that day. “Maybe I’ll take more of an interest now that I have somebody to see it with,” Jensen smiled at the younger man. His insides did somersaults at the shy responding smile he got back. Within minutes, the waiter placed full plates of barbecue smothered meats right in front of them. “Jesuschrist, Jensen,” Jared exclaimed. He smelled the delicious entree first, then eagerly picked up a rib. He couldn’t stop himself from aggressively digging into one bite after another with gusto. It was delicious. “Ohmygod,” he mumbled, in between moans of appreciation. “Told ya,” Jensen smiled knowingly, thoroughly enjoying Jared’s reaction. They finished as much as they could, then begged for boxes to take home. Jared peeked at the security team, noting Jensen had been right. Each man had taken a turn to eat something, though not as hearty of a meal as Jared and Jensen had ordered.

Jared absolutely hated to ask for the restroom, knowing damn well he wouldn’t be allowed to go alone, but he had to give in to his body’s demands. The rest of the team waited outside by the museum, while Jensen and Frank entered with Jared. ‘At least Frank stood by the door,’ the younger man thought, while Jensen used the stall next to him. Jared tried to pretend no one could hear him, while using the toilet. ‘God, this is humiliating,’ he thought, but he knew he needed to get used to it. He washed his hands in silence while Jensen did the same. After they exited the restroom, Jensen took his arm and gently turned him, “Tell me how tired you are. Are you feeling up to the museum?” Jared wasn’t about to give this up, “Heck yes, I’m dying to see it. We can’t quit now, Jensen, please, I’m okay.” Jensen studied him closely for a few seconds, noting the puppy dog eyes had a bit of a strain in them. “Okay, but stick close, okay,” he reminded him. Jared’s gorgeous smile was worth that answer. Jensen knew he was getting tired, but he couldn’t deny the kid anything, at this point.

They made their way through the museum, Jared especially interested in the stories of hardships that became successes. He read every description of opposing sides that became partners, and battles that paved the way for treaties. It was fascinating to relive the famous heroic tales and learn all about how people lived. He’d learned some of this in college, but it had just been the surface. The museum was a detailed display of artifacts, pictures and artwork that laid everything out from Colorado’s past. There were no biases, just fact, which left the reader with objective freedom. Once they were finished, Jensen walked Jared to the car and asked him if he felt up to one more place. Jared eagerly nodded, “Definitely.” Jensen smiled, as he said to Frank, “Lookout Mountain.” Jensen looked at his watch, as they drive. He realized it was later than he’d planned. Jared seemed so eager to keep going, however, so he decided to keep going. They weren’t more than a few minutes from the next spot.

Jensen wanted to show Jared the stunning views from Lookout Mountain. As they entered the windy trek to the top, however, he became very still and quiet. Jensen noticed he sat back further and refrained from looking outside, like he had earlier. He also seemed to tense up as they climbed higher. Jensen didn’t want to embarrass the kid by bringing attention to his plight, but he thought he knew what was wrong. He immediately felt terrible for not knowing before getting on this damn one
way road. ‘He’s afraid of heights,’ Jensen thought, quickly blurtling out anything he could think of as a distraction. He started talking about the museum, bringing up some of the details, as Jared focused on him. He asked about the construction of old buildings such as the Capital, fueling Jared to discuss the lack of modern day materials, the engineering of old water ways, plumbing and irrigation. Jensen asked questions, loving how his charge became engrossed in his subject matter. Jared relaxed, seeming to forget about the steep drop off outside for the next few minutes.

Jared jumped slightly when he felt the car stop. He looked worried as he braved a look outside. He was pleasantly surprised to see they weren’t plummeting to their death, but sitting in a parking lot that was flat. There were no drop off’s and dozens of other cars were around, people enjoying the park like setting. ‘Thank God,’ Jared thought to himself. Now he only had to worry about getting back down that goddamned narrow road. He tried not to think about that. Jensen squeezezd his hand, knowing damn well how hard it was to have a fear of heights and struggle with it, deal with it. Jared seemed to be very well versed at covering it. The security team got out first, then let them out of the car. Jared felt the biting wind from the eleven thousand foot elevation. Jensen handed him his jacket before both men put them on. They walked a short easy trail over to what Jensen thought was the most beautiful side of the mountain. He watched Jared closely. He didn’t take them to the edge, but stopped about twenty feet from it, letting Jared decide if he wanted to be near the rail. The view on this side was of valleys, rolling hills and the snowy rockies in the distance. It reminded Jared of the pictures in calendars and post cards.

On the other side was Denver and some other surrounding cities. Jensen explained it was spectacular at night, but he’d only been one time with his buddies. Jared didn’t voice it, but his mind went right to how the fuck anyone would get ‘down’ the mountain on that winding road in the dark. Everything was breathtaking. He enjoyed it immensely, but fuck if he couldn’t quite forget how they’d gotten up here. He felt okay, in control, as long as he stayed back from the rail. Like he’d practiced for years when doing his measurements, if he knew what he was facing, he could focus and deal with it better. Jared was immensely grateful that Jensen didn’t seem to mind this cowardice part of him. He was sure the older man could sense it by now with his astute observation skills. ‘Nice of him not to say it out loud,’ Jared berated himself for having this problem. He walked along the park to further enjoy the views, not realizing he was heading right for the one thing Jensen knew he wasn’t going to like. Jensen was impressed, as he always had been with Jared’s ability to use inner strength to get himself through something. Jared could bury his internal panic in a heartbeat. Jensen attempted to slow Jared down a bit, just to get him to take his time. He called his name, meaning to explain something to him and reroute their direction, but Jared was fixated on the majestic rockies. Suddenly, the military expert had his hands full, as Jared saw what was in his path and jerked back in panic.

He backed up and almost pulled out of Jensen’s grip, his rapidly paced breathing revealing his panic. Jensen grabbed his arms quick, as Jared stepped backward. He stood in front of him to block his view, “Look at me…Jare…look at me,” Jensen repeated while switching his hands to Jared’s cheeks. He waited until Jared looked into his eyes, “We’re not going over there. You’re on solid ground here, buddy. It’s flat and it’s safe, and we’re ‘not’ going over there.” Jared tried to calm himself, listening to Jensen’s reassurances. He knew the security team had probably peed themselves and drawn their weapons, thinking someone was surely about to attack. That visual caused him to snicker, self mockingly. “I’m sorry,” he looked at Jensen guiltily, “I’m so sorry, that’s kinda not my thing.” Jensen lovingly rubbed his thumbs on the beautiful face, “That thing is on a lot of people’s ‘no’ list. Don’t ever be sorry. Is it safe to assume you don’t like heights?”

Jared figured the cat was out of the bag, now. He nodded, but looked down, feeling like such a wuss. Jensen gently raised his chin up, “Jare, there were guys on my team who had to have a bridge buddy, or a climbing buddy, because they couldn’t get past the heights issue. It’s okay, and it isn’t some irrelevant weakness. It’s a very serious fear and most people can’t find a way to control it as much as I’ve watched you manage up here. Is that how you manage when you’re working?” Jared
looked more hopeful that Jensen wasn’t disappointed. He nodded, “Yeah. I have to spend a few minutes doing these breathing exercises before I can actually walk on a bridge or a roof. It’s not easy, but I have to sometimes. I’ve never told anybody.” Jensen studied him for a moment. Jared started to feel a little overwhelmed with the unexpected reverence and respect in Jensen’s eyes, accompanied by the protective concern. Something suddenly occurred to Jared, “Wait. You were distracting me.” Jensen stayed silent, as Jared continued, “The conversation in the car. You knew. Was I that obvious?” Jensen touched his cheek, “No, Jared, it wasn’t obvious. I’m sure nobody else saw it, but I’m usually focused on everything about you so I tend to notice a lot.” Jared answered, “Oh,” unsure of whether to be flattered or nervous at being such an open book to Jensen. “You okay now?” Jensen asked, then started to turn Jared the other way so he wouldn’t have to look at the damn walkabout. Jared nodded and followed his lead.

Jensen knew the monstrosity they’d avoided extended out about two hundred feet over a ten thousand foot drop. He didn’t mention it, but he also knew the damn thing had a floor of thick glass so it was see through in places. Jesus, he’d saved Jared from a psychotic meltdown at finding that out. He mentally cursed himself at what he almost put the kid through. They walked back to the car, only stopping a few times so Jared could listen to Jensen point out different points of interest. They could actually see pretty far, even to the cathedral that Jensen knew Jared would love to see, eventually. “The architecture is astronomical, taken right from the churches in Rome.” Jared loved the promise of future site seeing with Jensen. He especially loved the idea of tackling the numerous hiking trails all over the state. He loved the outdoors and was loving the fact that Jensen wanted to share it all with him.

When Jensen pointed to a far away gorge, he walked Jared over to a viewfinder and explained what to look for, “The bridge over that gorge is called the Royal Gorge Bridge. Don’t worry, we’re not going there. Even I would have a problem with that one. It’s nine hundred and fifty two feet tall. It was the tallest bridge in the world, until China built something higher.” Jared looked at the architecture through the magnified glass. He focused on the suspension, the cables, the angles and positions of the steel bars. The structure was impressive, that was for sure. He would ‘not’ be going on it, of ‘that’ Jared was certain, but the design was still standing after over seventy years. His analytical brain took over, “If I remember right, it was built in 1929.” Jensen raised an eyebrow and looked over at him, “Yes, it was. It makes me wonder…like that bridge you were here to investigate…it got me thinking about how long this one has been standing and it’s never been closed that I know if. It looks so limber, so thin, like it would be wobbly, but it’s not. It withstands thousands of cars and pedestrians every year, survives harsh winters, and it doesn’t move, hasn’t buckled, nor has it fallen.”

Jared thought for a moment, then added to Jensen’s observation with a more professional explanation, “It was designed so that the foundations on the ends are dropped low enough into the bedrock and granite, to offset the weight of the center. Those steel suspension cables are placed strategically to keep the weight off the center and actually rest it back on the foundation. It retracts the pressure from the center and pulls it to the sides. It’s a successful design. If they hadn’t done it right, it would have fallen long before now.” Jensen thought about what Jared said. He also thought again about Jared’s brilliant mind, then he smirked, “Where the hell would we be without engineers.” Jared looked at him before grinning shyly. As Jensen looked back to the bridge, Jared remarked, “And where the hell would we be without silent hero’s that nobody knows about, protecting our freedoms with secret missions…keeping us safe so that we can go to whatever school we want, whatever church we want, become whatever we want…live how we want…build things like that bridge. It’s you who make it possible for the rest of us…and most often without any thanks.”

Jensen had to look down for a second. He tried to control the water forming in his eyes at Jared’s heartfelt opinion about his former job. He wasn’t used to someone bringing attention to it. There was so much that he’d done, so much Jared didn’t know, so much he wished he could share, but he knew
it might repulse the kid. Jensen was repulsed with himself, at times. He sometimes wondered whether anything they were doing actually helped his country, at all. He was amazed at what came out of his mouth next, “In some of the villages we snuck into…the filthy places we extracted people from…places ridden with rodents and disease…it was easy to get confused, become displaced, to forget what the whole entire purpose was…what we were trying to accomplish.” Jared listened intently. He was shocked and honored at what Jensen was sharing, “When we returned to civilization, we received awards and medals from the President, but we got spewed hatred from some of the public. It plays on a person’s emotions. You start to forget what was right, start believing you were wrong. You start believing that maybe you’re the piece of shit some hateful people say you are. We don’t usually tell people what we were…don’t usually tell any of it.”

Jensen slipped into his darkened past for a moment. He looked out over the landscape, lost in thought, thinking over some of the worst places he’d been. Jared wasn’t here then. Love wasn’t here then. Nothing existed back then but reaction and survival. He didn’t have to like himself, he only had to survive and make sure others survived. Jensen looked over and met the younger man’s stare. Jared was observing him, searching his eyes for what the older man might be thinking. Jensen must have been less stealth than he thought because the next thing he knew, Jared’s hand was on his cheek and he was so close Jensen could feel his breath on his face. Jared wouldn’t look away, and he wouldn’t let Jensen do so, either. Jensen busted his ass not to release the threatening waterworks at the love he saw in the younger man’s eyes. He forced himself to remain still and accept what Jared wanted to say, even though his emotional barrier was screaming at him to turn away.

“There’s a part of you,” Jared began, “a part of you that you haven’t shared with me yet…and I respect that. I hope that in time, maybe you will share it. It’s okay if you don’t want to, I’m sure it’s darker and deeper than anything I could imagine. And maybe you think that I can’t handle it. But know that I’m here, and I’m in love with you, and I’m not going to turn away from anything you could tell me. You deserve to forgive yourself, Jensen, for whatever it is that you think isn’t acceptable. And you deserve to be thanked, for all those people you saved. For the fight you fought to make so many lives better. I’m one of those people, so I know how it feels…and I know what I’m talking about.” Jensen looked down with a sigh, then he looked back up. He searched Jared’s eyes for a moment, reading the love and openness there. The beautiful kid was an open book. He sighed again, “Jare, I’m not really sure who actually saved who, here. However the hell you’re doing it, you’re healing ME…and that’s something I never ‘EVER’ thought possible. You amaze the shit out of me.” He took Jared’s hand, “I’ll tell you the things that I can. But not until this is over and I’m completely sure you’re safe.”

Jared smiled softly, knowing that he’d managed to breech a barrier with the special forces soldier. There was an even deeper connection now between them, deeper than it had been before and the fact that Jensen felt he could tell him his secrets made Jared feel trusted and honored. Jensen gently took hold of his chin to look at him more closely, “You’re exhausted,” he said worriedly, “come on, we’ve been out here too long.” Jensen guided Jared toward the parking lot, security closing in on them. Jared knew Jensen was right. He felt the lethargic heaviness in his limbs. The throbbing soreness in his wound started an hour ago. He’d been having so much fun, it was easy to set aside his body’s warnings. Once they were safely inside the back seat, Phil drove them out of the parking lot toward the downhill trail. Jared laid his head on the back rest, turning toward Jensen, “It’s been the best day ever. Thank you so much for all of this,” Jared said tiredly. Jensen smiled at him. He knew the kid was exhausted, but seeing Jared’s sparkly happiness had been exactly what he wanted. Except for the small heights scare, Jensen thought Jared had pretty much had a perfect day. Jared tried to cover a yawn, as Jensen moved some stray hair aside, “I’m happy you enjoyed it, kiddo. It’s good to see you happy. It won’t be long before we can tackle some of those hiking trails either.”

Jared smiled sleepily before he laid his cheek against Jensen’s shoulder. Jensen thought he was falling asleep, but Jared suddenly lifted his head sluggishly and looked toward Frank, “Thank you
for waiting and taking us everywhere, Frank...and Phil and Don, too. And for the bathroom too...it wasn’t really as bad as I thought.” Frank looked over in surprise, then tried to suppress a grin, but failed. Jared plopped his head back on Jensen’s shoulder and fell asleep within seconds. “You’re welcome, Mr. Padalecki,” Frank finally managed. He wasn’t used to clients being so personal...nor grateful. Jensen saw him share a smirking glance with Don, then with Phil in the rearview mirror. He knew there were a few more victims that had fallen for Jared’s innocent charm. Jensen eyed the cliffs and drop off’s outside the car window, thankful Jared was missing them all. It was a slow winding drive to get to the bottom of the park.

Getting to Jensen’s house was going to take about an hour. There was a popular chocolatier between Denver and Cedar Ridge, which also served ice cream, but if Jared didn’t stir before they got there, Jensen would have to save it for another time. The men rode in silence, while the object of their protective detail slept on, oblivious. There was some heavy traffic getting out of Denver, so they had a few delays. Once they got close to the creamery on Jensen’s itinerary, Frank looked over at the special ops soldier for direction. “What do you think?” The older man bent his head down and inspected Jared’s face. Jared was actually yawning and blinking heavily, but he wasn’t sleeping as hard as everyone thought. “Hey, you awake?” Jensen questioned the younger man softly. Jared smiled sweetly at him, still leaving his head on Jensen’s comfortable shoulder. He’d really like to wrap his arms and legs around the older man and snore for the next fourteen hours, but he had trouble sleeping too deeply in the car. Especially with the other three strangers around.

Jared lifted his head and looked around with barely functioning senses. He turned to ask Jensen, “Are we out of the city?” Jensen wished he could kiss the shit out of his gorgeous rumpled adorable lover, but he held himself back from shocking the security team. Instead he answered, “We’re outside of Denver, closer to the house.” Jared laid his head back on Jensen’s shoulder, “That’s good. I’m glad we’re almost there.” Jensen squeezed Jared’s hand that was laying between them, “How do you feel about one more quick stop if it involves homemade chocolate and caramel?” Jensen didn’t think the kid had it in him, but he lifted his head up and looked sleepily at Jensen, “Huh?” Jensen grinned. Jared had definitely zoned in on the words ‘chocolate’ and ‘caramel’. He explained, “There’s a family creamery that’s famous for miles around. It’s actually a chocolatier, but they make all kinds of candy. They added homemade ice cream to the menu years before I moved here, and man, it’s incredible. You gonna be able to stand up if we stop?” Jared stared at Jensen for a few seconds. It looked like he was trying to decipher and translate what Jensen just said. ‘Not firing on all cylinders,’ the older man thought, as he added, “You’re exhausted, and we can go another time.” Jared rubbed his face with his free hand, then sat up straighter, “Are you kidding? Chocolate and caramel? Holy fucking ‘yes’, Jensen.” The security team, and Jensen, all laughed at Jared’s comment, not expecting it. As Phil pulled over and parked on the curb, Don got out and put some coins in the meter. When Don opened the rear door to let Jensen out, Jared scooted over while Frank got out the other side. The men surrounded Jared before walking to the door of the business. They chose a table for four in the back of the business, as Jensen stood at the counter with Jared. He pointed to some favorites he knew Jared would like, then let the kid peruse through all the other choices while he waited. Jensen noticed Frank was answering a text with a look of concern on his face. The other two men continued to watch the front door and all the other customers.

Jared drank his fill of all the delicious looking treats. He was unaware of the tension that had invaded the four men accompanying him. Jensen stayed close to him, almost crowding his personal space, not sure of what the other men were worried about yet. He watched Jared make his order, while simultaneously screening every person in the business, and outside the front windows. Jensen showed nothing on the outside, smiling at the clerk helping them and paying for his and Jared’s treats. On the inside, he was ready to do anything to protect the young genius that had recently become the best part of his life. Jared was delighted that they had stopped here. Not only had Jensen paid attention and pegged him for a chocolate freak, he was able to watch the cooks work through
open glass windows to the kitchen. The ice cream was in huge churners, the chocolate in an enormous mixing bowl. Jared was sure there had to be math behind the productivity. The volume of treats had to match the volume of demand. There were so many different treats, someone must continually do the statistical ratios’s of what sells in order to be this successful for this long. He stared at the cutters for longer than the cooks. The cutters had specific angles, lines and corners in order for each piece to be the same size, and to get the number of pieces they wanted out of a batch.

“Huh?” Jared looked immediately at Jensen, who had nudged him back out of analysis mode. Jensen smiled at him, “Were you redesigning those machines in that fantastic brain of yours?” Jared looked sheepishly, “I was thinking about how they calculated how much to make and how many pieces they got from each batch…and the angles they use to cut the fudge.” While Jensen enjoyed Jared’s confession, Jared started to look apologetic. Jensen leaned in closer, “Don’t you dare feel bad about using that grey matter of yours. It’s hot, remember?” Jensen smiled wider at Jared’s blush. The younger man looked shyly away, as the clerk handed them their desserts. ‘Jesus,’ Jared thought as he rushed to sit down. He really didn’t think anything of the fact that Frank went to the front door, Phil went to the back door and Don went outside. Jensen stayed aware. He knew something had alerted the team. He could no longer see Phil, as the back door was past the hallway with the restroom in it, but he could keep watch on the other two. Jensen waited for absolutely ‘anything’ to cause him to cover Jared with his own body and flatten him under the table. ‘The real trick,’ Jensen challenged himself, ‘would be not to ruin that monstrosity of diabetic overload Jared is having an orgasm over.’ The object of his attention licked the chocolate and caramel off his spoon, then closed his eyes and slid the remaining partially melted gob of double chocolate ice cream off the spoon with his mouth, “Mmmmm.” Jensen felt his dick twitch. ‘Dammit,’ was his first thought. ‘Knock it off, Jared,’ was his second, then ‘Keep going, God yes,’ was his last, which Jensen was sure came straight from his dick.

He glanced around while spooning his own concoction of toasted almond ice cream with some of the shop’s homemade butter crunch candy sprinkled over it. Jensen noticed a couple families that were oblivious to his loving partner’s pornographic display, but he also noticed the single man sitting alone over in a corner. The man was eyeing Jared like he was his last meal, which threw Jensen immediately went into ‘kill’ mode. He glared at the blatantly offensive guy who couldn’t seem to take his eyes off his lover, knowing full well what the bastard was probably envisioning. ‘Jealousy, Jensen, really?’ his mind ranted. He berated his immaturity while trying to hold himself back from walking over to the gawker and slamming his head onto the table. ‘Maybe just a light concussion would rattle his brain enough to distract him from staring at something he’s not ever going to get,’ Jensen continued the mental conversation with himself. Jared got his attention, “Is everything alright?” Jensen looked at his lover and had to work to clear his face of the possessive injury-inflicting mood he was in. He sighed, “I know it’s juvenile. That behemoth in the corner is enjoying your oral relationship with your spoon and it’s pissing me off.” Jared glanced over at the individual, just now noticing he was there. He glanced quickly back at Jensen when the man smiled at him and blew a fake kiss. The look on Jared’s face of morbid disapproval told Jensen the man had done something offensive. “What?” he demanded.

Jared shook his head, “It’s nothing. He’s not worth getting angry over.” Jensen said, “He is to ‘me’.” Jared countered, “He’s alone. We’re not. I have the best thing that’s ever happened to me sitting right in front of me,” Jared shrugged one shoulder and added, “He doesn’t.” Jensen searched Jared for some shoe to drop that he could possibly be so damn lucky that someone as gorgeous and perfect as Jared was in love with him. He felt the possessive jealousy dissipate. Both men continued eating their ice cream in silence, smiling at one another in between bites.

Jensen finished first, so he rested his elbow on the table, holding his chin with his hand. He had completely forgotten about the dickweed in the corner because he was pleasantly watching Jared. The younger man took a few more bites, but gave up with one last gob of fudge, toppings and
melted ice cream, “God I think I’m going to puke, it was so good.” Jared was drinking his glass of water, as Jensen watched Frank coming over to their table. The investigator sat down next to Jared and faced Jensen. This was what Jensen was waiting for. He wanted to know what the hell was going on.

Frank explained, “There’s a protest going on. It’s semi-peaceful at this point, but we’re monitoring it. More of our team is outside. Apparently, it’s a social media organized protest, going on in several cities at once and they’re all streaming each other.” Frank was no nonsense, “We’re going to use the back door when we leave here, just to be safe.” Jensen nodded in approval, “Okay. Just tell us when and how you want us to move.” Jared looked between them, then asked Frank, “What kind of protest?” Frank answered, “It’s a protest against cities that aren’t copying Austin’s new SPCA ordinance. The majority of animal lovers want cities to copy what you wrote, and apparently they aren’t moving on it yet, so this is their public protest.”

Jared’s eyebrows raised, “Really?” He looked down like he couldn’t believe his ordinance had become that popular. “Oh,” the clueless genius commented in disbelief. Frank asked, “Why does that surprise you?” Jared looked at him, glancing between he and Jensen, “I…that’s great…that’s a good thing…it should be a law everywhere, but…wow…just wow.” Jensen smirked at Frank, who was still looking at Jared like he couldn’t figure out if the kid was just pretending to be that good of a caring citizen, or he really was. Jensen understood. They didn’t make ‘em like Jared, they just didn’t. Frank sighed, “While I agree with you, the timing of this isn’t practical. We’re redirecting your exit to avoid the largest part of the crowd. The last thing we want is you caught on someone’s live feed. Or for anyone to see you and recognize you.”

Jensen now understood what Frank had been stressing about during the last thirty minutes. It would be a nightmare to keep someone safe when you had a bunch of cameras around. Jensen’s respect for the team leader just rose up about four notches. Frank stood up when Don came back inside and planted himself at the front door. He turned over the ‘open’ sign to it’s opposite side and stood to block the doorway. The only people left in the place were the creep in the corner who had been eyeing Jared, one family of four, and the clerks and cooks in the back. Frank motioned for them to come with him, so both men stood to walk toward the hallway. Jensen walked in front of Jared, Frank walked behind. At the back door, Jensen saw Phil opening the glass door for them. Jensen stopped at the opened door and noticed a new sedan, darker than the other one they’d been in, with a new driver and passenger he didn’t recognize. “Who are they?” Jensen wasn’t getting into the car without knowing who the hell these new players were. Phil answered him, “They’re getting out and leaving the car for us. Frank and I are staying with you and our former driver will be here shortly. They’re taking our other car.”

Jensen nodded, making a quick assessment of their surroundings. He could hear the loud chanting of the protest groups, moving through the street. There was no broken glass or gun shots, no screaming, so Jensen agreed this was peacefull, so far. They entered the car, as Jensen saw Don come out of the creamery and get behind the wheel. Phil was the passenger this time. Once Jared was comfortably between he and Frank, Jensen asked, “Why the change of car?” Frank answered, “Mr. Padalecki’s picture has been shown on the news in reference to this. We weren’t solid on whether anyone may have seen him get out of the other car. Just a safety precaution to help prevent anyone knowing he was here today.” Jared was still finding his situation quite surreal. He remained quiet, watching out the car windows as they cruised by some of the picketing people. When they passed by one small group of people carrying signs, Jared sat up straight and leaned toward the window, “Oh…they’re from Austin.”

Jensen placed his left arm in front of Jared and gently pushed him back, “Buddy, they can’t see you, okay?” Jared immediately sat back, as he glanced around the car apologetically, “Sorry.” Jensen touched him on the knee, “It’s okay.” The younger man smiled softly in understanding. Frank and
Jensen watched out the windows as Phil and Don looked for ways through the crowds. Jared turned to Frank, “Has my picture been on the news for the case yet?” Frank answered, “Not yet, Mr. Padalecki.” Jared nodded, “Well, that’s something. You know, Frank, you can just call me Jared, it’s fine.” Frank smiled, “Jared, it is then. Thank you, Jared.” The team continued to work their way through the crowd, watching everything at once, while Jared sat twiddling his thumbs. He felt like he was out of place, not knowing what he was supposed to do with himself.

Jared wasn’t accustomed to having nothing to do. He tried to watch the people going by, staying back from the windows. When the sedan stopped at a red light, Jared looked out Frank’s window and stopped breathing. Jensen had been looking out his own window, not noticing Jared’s demeanor, at first. When he turned to look at the younger man, he immediately asked, “Jared, what’s wrong?” When Jared didn’t immediately answer, Frank and Jensen quickly tried to follow Jared’s line of sight. They saw nothing but a few guys standing around, more protestors and a couple people taking videos with their phones.

Jared looked disbelievingly at something outside the car. Jensen reached over and touched his shoulder, “Jare, who are you looking at?” Jared glanced at him, “I don’t...I mean I don’t know why...they would be here.” The men in the front seat sat frozen. Phil turned to face Jared, waiting for explanation while Don was ready to take off fast, if needed. Jensen continued to scroll through his brain at an astronomical rate of speed. ‘Why?’ was all he could come up with, ‘Why would they be at an SPCA event?’ Jensen was overly concerned now. The kid didn’t look too thrilled at seeing whomever it was he was focused on, but he also looked confused, pale, and utterly exhausted after their long day. ‘Fuck, he doesn’t need this,’ Jensen kept that thought to himself. Jared seemed to come back to his senses, then glanced between Jensen and Frank, “It’s Robert Harriman. That’s my manager that I argued with about the files when I first found out what they were doing.” Jensen asked, “Is it normal for him to attend this kind of thing?” Jared shook his head, looking back at his former supervisor, “No. I don’t think this really fits him. I mean, I don’t know him that well, but he’s never said anything about animals or charity work. I mean we had a couple fundraisers, locally, and he never came to those.” Frank had been listening to Jared, while staring at a group of three men, “Is he the balding one...blue shirt?” Jared answered, “Yes, that’s him.” Frank snapped a few pictures with his phone, then asked, “Whose are the other two with him?” Jared leaned forward a couple inches and studied the group. When he stiffened and leaned back looking confused, Jensen knew he’d recognized someone else. Jared said, “It’s Drew…he’s another engineer. I used to hang out with he and Brad after work.”

Silence followed Jared’s information. Phil asked, “Wasn’t Brad on our ‘no way’ list, a far as contacts?” Frank answered, “Yes, he was.” Jared leaned his head slightly forward and looked again, “But that’s not Brad. I don’t know who that is.” Frank searched out the window for a moment, watching the three men standing out like sore thumbs, “They’re not here to be part of this. Look at their demeanor. They’re looking, searching for something, definitely not blending with the crowd.” He snapped photo’s of the other two men. Jensen had to agree, except he wasn’t as focused on the two men Jared recognized, who stood out like a couple of techie nerds at a mud wrestling match. He was concentrating on the third man, the one Jared didn’t know. This man wasn’t one with the crowd, at all, nor was he one with the office people that worked with Jared. The third man wasn’t one with anyone. He was solo. The third man studied the crowd like a robot. Every detail, every movement, every sound and every possibility was being considered as he turned his head and watched everyone with purpose. Robert and Drew would turn to him every few seconds and say something, but the man would only nod abruptly. He was stoic and down to business, and he never stopped searching. Jensen stewed about this one…”he’s a professional,’’ the older man thought unpleasantly, ‘and he’s after Jared.’

Jared still didn’t want to believe it, but finally hit him. He turned to Jensen with renewed worry in his
eyes, “They’re looking for me, aren’t they?” Jensen squeezed his knee, “I believe so, buddy.” Jared searched Jensen’s eyes for a few seconds, then looked elsewhere, trying desperately to understand why the men outside that he’d always been nice to and treated fairly could be involved in trying to hurt him, to kill him. Don looked in his rearview at Frank, who nodded for him to go. Don pulled past several stopped vehicles, wound his way out of the crowd, then took off from the area in a hurry. The team was obviously getting Jared the hell out of there.

Jensen thought about the men who had been bold enough to assume Jared would be at the SPCA event. He wondered if maybe they had fictitiously planned the damn thing just to draw Jared out. Jared was very quiet on the car ride back home. Jensen glanced at him once and took his hand. Aside from being exhausted, the kid looked haunted. Jensen knew it was not going to be easy to get Jared to sleep without nightmares tonight.
Chapter Fifteen. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

The men return to the house from their long day out. Jensen learns a lot of information about the main bad guys involved with the case, then has to lay it on Jared. There is a horrible nightmare that comes out of the blue, with angst and loving moments between the guys. Some humor and playful moments are in here. There is fear and concern that escalate, as we learn just who the intricate web of criminals are. Jensen gets his point across to Chuck, Frank and Lance. He's done messing around, so he calls his buddies in.

The original story warnings apply here, for some abuse, bigotry and hatred displayed by Jared's uncle. Way in the past, just retold from a nightmare.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Why are they coming tonight?” Jensen irritably questioned Frank after he mentioned Chuck from the AG’s office and Lance Parker were on their way to the house. Jensen had escalated to protective overload when his new lover couldn’t even manage to get out of the car without help. Jensen pulled Jared by the elbows while the younger man scooted toward the open door. Frank responded to Jensen, “They have information on the group of individuals we saw earlier, and some updates on the case that I haven’t been told about yet. We’re to stay here with you until they arrive.” Jensen sighed, knowing full well Jared was way too tired for this crap. The kid had dark circles under his eyes. Jensen hadn’t missed the fact that Jared had been rubbing his side as they pulled into the driveway. He held him around the waist and by his elbow, as they slowly walked to the door. Jared swayed a bit when Jensen used one hand to unlock the door. He quickly returned his grip on the younger man to keep him from tripping on the entry step.

Frank followed them inside and closed the door while Jensen walked Jared back to the master bedroom. The engineer absolutely ‘hated’ being this weak and needy, but he couldn’t seem to get his brain or his limbs to function. Jared yawned several times while the older man took charge of getting him changed into comfortable sweats. Jensen helped him to sit on the bed, then switched the bedroom fireplace on. The house was pretty chilled without a fire all day. Jensen leaned over and brushed the hair off Jared’s face in order to get a good look at him, “You’re exhausted. How do you feel, are you hurting?” Jensen was very concerned they had overdone it. Jensen reached up and felt Jared’s forehead, “Damn. You’re a little warm. Headache?” Jared nodded with his eyes closed, “Mmhmm.”

Jensen had an idea, “Will you let me give you one pill? I know you hate them, but one will at least take the pain away without putting you in a coma. Course, I think you’re about to fall into one, anyway. You need to drink some water and then I’ll work on that headache. Sound good?” Jared looked miserable. ‘Beautiful as ever,’ was Jensen’s opinion, but miserable. He watched him try to formulate a response, or maybe an argument, but the kid’s brain and sore body simply wouldn’t go there. The puppy dog eyes were filled with sadness and pain, gnawing at Jensen’s resolve. Jared nodded, a delayed response to Jensen’s suggestion a few seconds ago. Jensen touched him on the cheek, “Stay right here for a few seconds. Don’t try to get up without me.” Jared answered with a
nod before Jensen trotted to the kitchen. He grabbed Jared’s pain pills off the top of the refrigerator, plus two bottles of water from inside of it. He almost forgot about Frank standing inside the door, “I’ll be a few, Frank, make yourself comfortable. If they show, please let them in.” Frank answered with a polite wave and smile, “I’ll watch for them. Is he alright?” Jensen hurried back to the bedroom, but turned over his shoulder to answer, “Not now, no. But I think he will be.” Jensen returned to the bedroom to find Jared right where he left him, only now the kid was holding his side and squinting his eyes shut.

Jensen got on his knees and took a pill from the prescription container. He sat the rest of the pills down on the nightstand with the second water bottle. Jensen opened one water and held it in his hand with the pill. He brushed the younger man’s hair back from covering his eyes, “Hey, can you swallow this for me?” Jared hadn’t even been aware Jensen had returned. He took the pill first, then began to drink. Jared was parched, he just didn’t realize it. After a few sips, he realized how good it was and upended the rest. Jensen watched him, then took the empty bottle when Jared finished it. “Do you want more water?” Jensen waited for Jared to think a few seconds. When the younger man answered softly, “No,” Jensen moved to sit next to him.

“I’m going to try something on you, okay?” Jensen waited for the younger man to nod that he’d heard him. “Okay, don’t be afraid. It’s very different, but I’m not trying to pop your neck, or anything like that. It’s something I learned in the special forces and it usually works on headaches.” Jared was too tired to speculate on what the hell Jensen might be going on about, so he just nodded.

The older man nudged Jared to turn his body slightly away from him, then he put a hand on the back of Jared’s neck. Jensen pushed on Jared’s neck, forcing the younger man’s head down, a bit, while he seemed to be feeling around for something. Jared didn’t know what the hell Jensen was doing, but he would never argue with Jensen’s hands on him in any way, so he just waited. Jensen put his right hand on Jared’s shoulder to hold him steady, his left hand was kneading the taught tendons on the back of the kid’s neck. Jared was just starting to wonder, in his sluggish mind, why Jensen felt the need to hold him steady when a stronger than fuck grip grabbed the back of his neck tight.

Jared’s cry out, sharp intake, and the bunching of his shoulders was exactly what Jensen was expecting. He knew the poor kid had been shocked. Everyone did that the first time because in order for this to work, the grip had to be sudden and strong. “It’s alright,” Jensen soothed, leaning his head around to see Jared’s face, “It’s okay, just hang in there for a minute.” Jared was tense, his face scrunched and his shoulders bunched up. He couldn’t help it, that grip was tighter than hell and he was afraid to move. He was afraid to even breathe. “Breathe, baby,” Jensen encouraged the younger man. Jared tried to nod, but couldn’t move, so he focused on inhaling a couple times, trying to breathe like Jensen instructed, but gasping instead. Jensen adjusted his grip and tightened his hold once more. This time, Jared didn’t react as much as the first time. Something was beginning to happen on the back of his neck that was distracting his focus from the tight hold.

He felt heat. It started in the tendons and skin that were in Jensen’s grip, then spread like a heating pad outward. The hot feeling travelled up toward Jared’s head, and down toward his shoulders. He began to relax and let go. He could no longer feel Jensen’s grip anymore. ‘What the fuck,’ Jared’s overtired foggy brain tried to understand what was happening. Jensen gradually loosened his grip, then began pushing in on one particular tendon that had popped up during his tight hold. When he pushed and kneaded on the sore angry tendon, Jared’s surprised moan told Jensen it was exactly the right place he needed to work on. This was the source of Jared’s headache. Jensen had learned this from a Korean martial arts master in his Black Ops training. The man taught his team how to get rid of forms of pain without medication, if they were in the middle of nowhere. It was amazing how the pressure points and nervous system were all connected.

Jared couldn’t believe it. When Jensen pushed and kneaded into one particularly sore place on the back of his neck, the force of it pushed pleasure and heat right up into his brain. ‘Oh my God,’ he
thought, as he moaned from the blissful waves of relief transmitted from that spot up into his head. He couldn’t stop moaning and sighing in pleasure as Jensen continued the ministrations. Once Jensen was done with that spot, he expanded his area of attention and began kneading his knuckles and fingertips into more of Jared’s tight tendons. Jensen moved slightly, to improve his angle, then used both hands to massage Jared’s head from the back to the front. He rubbed his fingertips in small circles all over the younger man’s head, while applying pressure. Jensen became a loose limp noodle, emitting embarrassing high pitched sighs of immeasurable relief and pleasure. He thought he was probably drooling but he couldn’t even check himself, at this point. Jensen smiled when Jared dropped his open hands loosely onto his lap. The kid was completely under his spell. “Is it better?” Jensen meant the headache, but Jared was beyond comprehension. His head was filled with so much peace and relaxation he couldn’t even remember how he got to this point.

The older man slowed his ministrations and slid his arms around Jared’s torso. He knew when he didn’t get an answer that Jared was probably about to pass out. Jensen gently lowered his lover to the pillows, keeping his head supported. Jared’s eyes were closed, his mouth slack. Jensen had to manhandle every long limb in order to get him underneath the covers. Jared was feeling weightless and drifting on clouds. He barely felt himself being touched and covered, but he wasn’t even sure if it was real or a dream. Jensen brushed the hair off Jared’s face, feeling the slight warmth from his forehead at the same time. He hoped the pain pill would combine it’s efforts and relieve the slight temp, too. He kissed the younger man on the forehead, then rose up to admire his handiwork. Jared was a picture of pain free peace. He needed this, and if he slept ‘til morning, Jensen wouldn’t care. The older man changed into his own pair of sweats, washed his hands and returned to the kitchen.

Frank was just letting Chuck and Lance in, so Jensen rerouted to the front door, “Hey fellas.” The men shook Jensen’s hand, then Chuck apologized, “I’m sorry for the abruptness, Jensen. I felt it was important we study these together and make sure we’re aware of what we’re dealing with. Is Jared available?” Jensen shook his head, “Not a chance, guys, he’s out and I’m sure he’ll be that way for awhile.” The men headed for the kitchen table and sat down, while Jensen offered them drinks of any kind. Everyone agreed coffee sounded fantastic, so the ex-soldier put on a pot. Chuck pulled out some papers and distributed copies to all four men, then opened his laptop. He clicked around for a moment, then typed a few sentences. Chuck looked up as Jensen was placing full cups of coffee on the table, “Mm..Jensen, thank you,” he said as he grabbed the first one.

Jensen looked at Chuck worriedly, “Any time fellas, but I feel like I should’ve put some whiskey in it, depending on what you’re about to tell me.” Jensen sat down with a sigh, ‘Jared does not need this to be even more terrifying,’ he thought. Chuck sipped his freshly brewed drink, then explained, “I’m just speaking to Price so he knows we’re all together and discussing things. He’s ordered a complete update and for us to confirm security and what’s going to happen tomorrow.” “Tomorrow?” Jensen raised an eyebrow as he eyed the AG investigator. Chuck sighed, regretting he had to bring Jensen any bad news, at all. It wasn’t really bad, but it would require more from Jared. “The case was filed, as planned, Monday afternoon, and it was served on the Austin office. The formal receipt and response from A.E. was from a law firm called Baerresson. That’s fine. The response was, of course, denying everything and demanding disclosure of the evidence against them. Nothing uncommon there. All evidence was put together this morning as a formal discovery response and the firm picked it up from our office this afternoon. Jared’s name wasn’t in the report, but the files are now in their hands. Still, his name was nowhere mentioned, ‘but’ as we knew prior to filing…”

Chuck eyed Jensen, who finished for him with a nod, “They’re gonna know exactly where it came from.” Chuck nodded in response, “Yep.” The investigator eyed the other two security experts who were in charge of Jared’s safe keeping. Lance and Frank glanced at one another, then looked back at Chuck, “So, are we increasing, cuz I got no problem with that,” Lance asked the investigator. Jensen liked them. He appreciated their tact and professionalism, but also their commitment to Jared. He really had expected to call in his Black Ops buddies, by now, but so far these men hadn’t
disappointed him. Chuck pointed at Lance, “Lance, earlier today, you were privy to some social media alerts about an organized gathering having to do with one of Jared’s special interests. “Yes,” Lance confirmed, so Chuck kept quiet while the head of the security team took over from there, “I was told by my tech team that social media sites were indicating a large protest was planned right where Jared’s itinerary was going to end up. I let Frank know what was coming and gave him all the meeting sites we identified through our sources. We sent some extra protection to the area, while Frank and his team stayed close to Jensen and Jared. We didn’t feel it was related to Jared at that time, but an unfortunate coincidence that the damn thing was planned for when our witness was going to be there. Frank took it from his end.”

Lance indicated for Frank to take over, “Initially, we got our witness out of the car in front of the chocolate/ice cream place. Once inside, we had the team switch cars and planned to take Jared out the back. I saw several phone cameras and one reporter on the scene and didn’t want to take any chances that someone would recognize Jared. I must admit, knowing it was SPCA was a bit rattling. The first thing I thought of was this could be on purpose to draw Jared out.” Jensen nodded in agreement, since that had been exactly what he was thinking. Frank concluded his rendition, “So, we got Jared out of there but traffic was slow because of the protestors. It caused us to stop the car long enough for Jared to recognize some people. He saw a couple friendlies, but they didn’t see him. At least I don’t think they did, Jensen?” Jensen shook his head, “No. Almost, but no.” Frank said, “Then Jared recognized two of A.E.’s people. One was his manager and the other was what he thought was a nice uninvolved friend. There was a third suspicious looking man but Jared didn’t know him. My guy, Phil, snapped their pictures and sent them to you with the names Jared gave us, then we high tailed it out of there, as soon as there was a traffic opening.”

The men at the table remained silent for a moment, absorbing the information and connecting with one another in their heightened concern. “Okay, so gentlemen here’s what we found out since then,” Chuck indicated they should follow along on the stapled papers, so each man opened to the first page. Jensen saw a picture of Robert, the man Jared had identified as his idiot manager. This was the manager who had sent the half-assed response emails on some of Jared’s cases. He was the one Jared argued with, trying to get him to actually ‘do’ something about what was being ignored. “Robert Harriman. It’s his real name, believe it or not, and the man is easy to run because he’s got a long history with A.E.” Each man turned to the next page following Robert’s picture so they could follow Chuck’s information. “Robert has been transferred around to every management position in the company. He’s probably some sort of a ‘cleaner’ or a ‘hatchet man’ that goes where they need an increase in productivity or revenues. He first worked in the Boston office, starting as an assistant to your dad’s top man, Gerald Dyer, Jensen.”

Jensen searched his memory, “I think I remember dad talking to someone named Gerald. He came to the house a few times when I was a teenager. He must be old, by now.” Chuck confirmed, “Yes. Gerald is retired now, Jensen, and upon his retirement, another man took his place named Tony Malens. We aren’t sure why Robert Harriman wasn’t chosen to replace Gerald at the time. Tony Malens brought some additional men into the scene. They were sort of extensions to his power. One was running the California office, one in Austin, and one in Boston. The smaller offices had managers assigned to run them, but reported directly to the exec’s that worked for Tony. All of this happened over a matter of a few months. Dyer retires and a complete reconstruction of the management system was done very quickly. Your dad used to be the monarchical type shot caller, involved directly in every company move, but something caused him to allocate out his control to this new guy, allowing him to delegate some of the executive decisions. Maybe the company had grown too big and it was just too much. Your dad is in his early seventies, now.”

Jensen thought about it. He rubbed a hand over his face, thinking about the change and why it may have happened. He asked, “So, what’s the scoop on this Malens person?” Chuck flipped the page and waited for the rest of the men to do so before he answered Jensen’s question. “Tony has no
criminal record. He’s an educated executive who is used to big business, but he really isn’t well known. The interesting part is he suddenly stepped down.” That stopped Jensen in his proverbial tracks. “Why, how old is he?” Chuck answered Jensen, “He’s not…he’s only in his forties and nowhere near retirement. The case was filed Monday afternoon. This morning, only one day later, Tony announced he was leaving. But…and here it is…Mr. Malens tried to withdraw several million dollars from one of the off shore accounts that Price and I had frozen. It’s obvious he’s trying to run. Price issued a warrant for him, based on the probable cause flight risk, and we’ve got APB’s out with local law enforcement and at the airports.”

The kitchen remained silent until Chuck continued, “He wasn’t successful with that account, so several other accounts were tried. He’s not the only one. The executives working for Tony also tried extraction of funds from their separate IP addresses. No one has been able to get anything from the accounts we froze. Now, there could be a few smaller accounts that didn’t show up when we did our tracking, but the largest ones haven’t been touched. That’s where the employee money will come from, eventually, that Jared was worried about. Jensen, I’m not convinced yet whether your dad knows anything about this. It looks like he handed the operational management over to some discretional executives eight years ago and he’s remained an owner accepting gains. He’s just enjoying the benefits of profit.”

“Yeah, the benefits to a bunch of fucking criminals losing his company for him. Great choices, dad,” Jensen blurted out irritably while studying Malens’ photo. The Alan Ackles he remembered was a tyrant, controlling and pushy. He never thought of him as capable of murder, but definitely of screwing little companies over to enjoy a profit over it. Jensen was pissed off that his father could show some kind of weakness after being such an ass all those growing up years. ‘Why would he give so much power to someone else?’ Jensen asked himself. Chuck continued, “What we’re dealing with now is the following,” he said as he turned his page and waited for the men to do the same.

“Robert Harriman has a motive. I’m sure he’d love to move up to Tony’s spot. If he can get them out of this mess and save the company, I’m sure he will be the next top executive. The man that was with him today, known as Drew Wyland, is an engineer for the company. We know Jared knows him and from his history, he looks a bit like Jared in that he’s done some good designs, been involved in some successful projects. He and Jared may have been on good terms, but his resemblance to Jared stops there.”

“Drew seems to be a puppet for Robert. He’s been at every ribbon cutting event, every meeting with the top management, and Robert has taken him to meetings way behind his pay grade. The guy has only done four projects, compared to our witness’s record breaking thirty five in the time he worked there. Jared, being who he is, wouldn’t have had the suspicion to see Drew was up Robert’s ass full time. The nice mild mannered Drew was probably chosen to be a sidekick to Brad and Jared for a reason. He’s a pawn and he’s been strung along with company bonuses, increased benefits and he gets to go to every seminar and training class that he wants. The guy will do whatever they want him to do. He’s a ‘yes’ man. He might be incapable of hurting someone, or killing them, but he’s certainly used to sort of ‘playing’ with Jared…socializing with him…and keeping them apprised of Jared’s thought processes. He was probably reporting back to them anything Jared said about the company, or any plans Jared was making about his cases.”

“Drew doesn’t seem capable of anything more than being a clueless information exchange. He may not even know he was screwing Jared. Guys like that are easy pawns. The fact that he was with them today tells me he’ll do ‘anything’ Robert tells him to do, including pointing out Jared, if he were to see him. He isn’t placing two and two together that Robert is definitely wanting to silence our witness, violently if necessary…and Robert surely hasn’t communicated it that way to Drew. Next subject,” Chuck paused while the other men turned their pages. A picture of Brad darkened Jensen’s mood even further. “Lovely,” was the special ops soldier’s only comment. “Brad Donovan,” Chuck continued, “Jared told us this was kind of an after work buddy. They golfed
together, did family barbecue’s, with Drew sometimes, and Brad seemed really supportive and nice until Jared talked to him about his concerns.” Jensen piped in, “Yes, and he tried to visit Jared in the hospital. I was just getting to know Jared but the tension between them was immediately obvious. Jared told me later he didn’t trust him. Brad tried to talk Jared into letting him take his laptop with him when he left. The kid was stressing badly over it. Brad was a little pissed when he left.”

Chuck nodded, “Within reason. Gentleman, Brad Donovan disappeared from the Austin office. As of yesterday, he was on a plane to California. At 0400 hours this morning, his was one of the laptop IP addresses that tried to retrieve funds.” “ Fucking shit,” Jensen exclaimed, resting his hand on his forehead while closing his eyes in frustration. Jensen sighed and sat up straight, irritably. He looked up at the other three men and noticed they were watching him. Jensen vented, “He was right fucking ‘there’ in Jared’s room! I can’t believe this! All of these imbeciles played Jared all this time?” No one said a word while absorbing what they’d learned, so far. Chuck gave them a moment before continuing, “Jensen, Brad isn’t an engineer.” Jensen did a double take. Even with all his skills and training, he hadn’t see that one coming. Chuck knew Jensen had developed a relationship with Jared. He knew Jensen’s instincts to protect and save civilians was amplified ten fold by his feelings for their witness. He respected Jensen wholeheartedly for only showing a tiny smidgen of what he must truly be feeling, as he continued, “The lovely Brad has served time for embezzlement more than once, been convicted of several chicken shit thefts where he screwed people into paying deposits for things they never got, he’s had nine small businesses that failed and even spent time doing some insurance scams that were never proven. It looks like the businesses failed because he never paid his bills. He filed bankruptcy every time, so he didn’t have to repay his customers.”

“Brad’s a salesman, but he’s also a player. He spends time studying where he can make money and jumps in. When it doesn’t work out, he moves on. He’s an expert people watcher, so he probably knows exactly how to fool people into thinking he’s the nicest guy on the planet.” Chuck adjusted in his chair, “So why the hell did A.E. hire somebody with a record like that?” Chuck looked at Frank, “Good question. Actually, that’s a great question for a nice integrity driven business…but A.E.’s executives and managers? They would be interested in someone like this who would launder the money, invest, allocate it into hidden accounts, and not be the least bit worried about pretending to be an engineer and using that position as a front. They weren’t looking for a tattle tale with a conscience.”

Chuck looked back to Jensen, “When Brad realized Jared wasn’t going to play along anymore, he probably thought he could grab the kid’s evidence and erase it all. You say he looked pissed when he left? Yeah, probably was. Can you imagine the stress, the pressure? He’s probably got all their millions tucked away and was sure he was going to have to tell them it was gone.” Jensen interjected, “Okay, so Brad’s only been there as long as Jared. He was one of the engineers that rolled over from Skyward ‘with’ Jared…like Drew.” Chuck considered for a moment, then added, “I bet money that Brad was a leak and had much to do with Skyward being taken over. He was probably placed with Skyward, with false degrees and documents to support him, and fed A.E. all their financial information the whole time.” Jensen commented, “Jared said they were a nice company.” Chuck agreed, “He’s right. Their record and their relationship with their clients was impeccable. They were very reputable. The fact that they were in enough financial trouble to finally roll up into a merger with A.E. is fishy. They should have been just fine on their own. In fact, they were…UNTIL Brad Donovan came along. They hired Brad five years back, and things began to take a dive. It makes sense that Brad was manipulating their revenues somehow.”

Jensen shook his head, “It’s amazing their accountants didn’t catch something like that.” Chuck nodded, “Yes, it’s a damn shame. But, Brad is good. He’s been doing this for years…’and’ he’s good with people. He’s friendly, Mister helpful, likable and seems genuine…that’s how he gets away with it.” “Jared knew. He knew something about Brad was fake.” He sighed and rubbed the back of his neck, “Jared was right about him. Wait ‘til he hears all this.”
He sighed again, feeling terrible that he was going to have to lay all this on the younger man. Chuck continued, “At any rate, the dickhead, Brad, is in California now and he’s also got a flight risk warrant out for him. He won’t be able to use the airports, just like Tony Malens. So, thanks to Jared, at least we’ve got Tony, Brad, and Robert all pegged in this. Tony is a huge shot caller, Brad is the manipulative money launderer, Robert is another possible shot caller who might have ordered Gurnaby to take Jared out. Which one killed Gurnaby, we do not know, but we have an idea. Drew is just a weak ‘yes’ man who is probably clueless to the rest of the group’s dealings.”

After a few minutes of silence, Lance offered his opinion, “Well, it’s interesting two of the three, who were making the most money in this ring were the first to run away with their tails between their legs. Interesting how Robert is still here and not running.” Jensen had been thinking the same thing. Robert had a lot to gain by taking Tony’s spot, running the whole business, and he was the one that had been on the scene looking for Jared today. He also had a lot to lose by staying around in case they couldn’t get themselves out of trouble. Jensen hadn’t missed Chuck’s earlier comment, “What did you mean by ‘we have an idea’ who killed Gurnaby?” Chuck hesitated. Jensen raised an eyebrow, “I’m not going to like this, am I.” Chuck glanced at the other two men, then back at Jensen, “No, you’re not.” He looked down at his paperwork and turned the page. Jensen slowly turned the page of his own stapled copy. He looked at the picture of the third man they had seen today, standing with Jared’s manager and Drew. After a few seconds of perusal, Jensen pulled out his cell phone and sent a text, ‘BBQ tomorrow…1730…pack a bag.’ Jensen put his phone back in his pocket and continued to pay attention to the group discussion. No one asked Jensen anything about the text and the Black Ops expert didn’t offer to explain.

Jensen might look nonchalant to an innocent bystander, but the group at the table knew better. Frank wasn’t much better than Jensen, and neither was Chuck. All of them had come to like Jared very much. They took Jared’s safety personal. The tension at the table was thick as Chuck continued, “The man in the picture is known as Gustav Talinov in Europe, Darren Sparks in Vancouver, Justin Merk in New York, and currently he has a Texas Driver’s license stating he’s Lawrence Baker.” Jensen felt even more foreboding coldness creep into his soul. He guessed what was coming next, as Chuck continued, “He has no prints on file, no pictures in the criminal database ANYWHERE. No Interpol record, no Department of Justice, and no state record in ‘any’ of the United States. Basically, he has local identifications that appear when he’s living somewhere, then they disappear. No death certificates, no owned properties, no vehicle records. Nothing for us to link him to any company or any address for any length of time. No employment records to speak of.”

“Jesusfuckingchrist,” Jensen grumbled, leaning back irritably and rubbing his face. “He’s a hired gun.” Chuck confirmed what Jensen already knew to be true, “Yes.” Jensen stood up abruptly and walked around while letting out a curse, “FUCK.” The retired special forces sergeant stood with folded arms, studying the hitman’s picture again. He looked at Lance, “No offense…your team is good. It’s been impressive, with everything covered right down to the last detail. But ‘this’,” Jensen pointed his finger at the hitman’s photo and tapped it a couple times, “this isn’t your every day idiot. This guy can shoot Jared from a hundred yards away…probably more.” Jensen tried to control his nerves while the other men studied the photo and thought about what they were up against. Chuck finally cleared his throat and spoke up first, “We researched the Facebook and Twitter accounts that had posts about today’s event. The oldest original post wasn’t from any of these men, Jensen.”

Chuck waited for the ex-soldier to look at him before he finished, “It was posted by Daniel Ackles. Your brother planned today’s event, Jensen, hoping to lure Jared out and get him within their grasp.” Chuck really hated having to deliver bad news…and he felt like he’d been doing it over and over for the last forty minutes. ‘Good news would be nice…if I had any,’ the investigator thought. Instead, he continued with even more crap, “There’s a direct post on Jared’s page, Jensen, and it’s from Daniel. As far as we can tell, our young genius doesn’t have a personal Facebook page or Twitter account, he’s only got the shared ones associated with his job. Your brother sent Jared an invite a few days
ago, for today’s event. He threw in some well wishes, told him how he was missed, then added all kinds of uplifting inviting news about prospective ordinances being passed, if they could get enough support. From what our team discovered, not one request or document has been filed for review. Nothing. What I’m saying is, the cities haven’t copied Austin because no one’s written anything and submitted it. Not like Jared did for Austin. Denver wasn’t even considering it, as it wasn’t on a calendar anywhere. Today was a confirmed ruse, gentleman. It was all made up to get Jared’s hopes up and definitely try and draw him out into the open. Interesting Daniel wasn’t there, though, so maybe his interests aren’t the same as our other assholes…or maybe they are.”

Jensen stared at Chuck for a moment, then contemplated something. He finally spoke to the rest of the men, “Daniel has a fixation with Jared. It’s more of a perverted interest. He sexually harassed Jared so bad the poor kid had to make excuses to work on days Daniel wasn’t there…or he took jobs just to get out of the office. Daniel’s a piece of work, gentlemen, but I’m not sure he’d get his hands dirty with murder. He doesn’t ‘have’ to. Look at him…he’s sitting in a position that his daddy handed him, didn’t have to work for it, probably gets all the inheritance since I’m out of the picture, and he probably has access to company credit cards and all the salary raises he wants to give himself. While Brad, Tony and Robert all had regular duties within the place and had to work to build their crooked millions, Daniel is just an inheritor. He doesn’t have to go through all that. He would just replace my dad and collect the profits if anything happened to him.”

“Until now,” Frank spoke up. Jensen looked at Frank, as the man explained, “Until now, Jensen. Daniel will lose too, over this. The case blows the whole company to bits. Daniel will lose all of it. If he wasn’t a killer before, he might be now if it means his freeloding position is going away.” Jensen’s jaw twitched, as he stared at Frank in reluctant agreement. The retired soldier was grinding his teeth and stewing at what Jared had innocently landed in the middle of. Sighing, Jensen braced his hands on the back of his chair, leaning on it because he wasn’t quite ready to sit back down yet. Jensen watched the team and observed each man’s worry in their expressions. Jensen knew Chuck had been right to call them all together. “What’s happening tomorrow?” Jensen recalled the investigator had said something about the next day.

Chuck explained further, “As of yet, no press has been alerted to Jared’s identity. The company is choosing not to publicize his name, nor to draw attention to the accusations. We planned for the worst, expecting that the company would publicize something negative and sinister on Jared’s part, so every reporter and their cousin would be trying to find the kid and exploit his life history. We expected the company would try to make him out to be a bad guy with some kind of vengeance plot against his employer. None of that has happened. Instead, the company seems to have taken the fifth. They’re avoiding a response. We know they’ve been approached, begged for interviews, but the formal response has been nothing. Jensen, it means to me, and correct me if I’m wrong, that if the company quietly disposes of the key witness, they could secretly erase his employment records… delete him from their files. If nobody knew about him and his identity wasn’t all over the news, he would be easier to eliminate. If they ‘don’t’ pick on him publicly, they can have him removed and then work on removing all the evidence that he ever worked for them. If one of his coworkers or friends tried to bring up a case later, there wouldn’t be anything to back it up. They’d make sure of that.”

Jensen ‘hated’ Chuck for saying it. He ‘hated’ Chuck for throwing out the truth like that. No one was fucking hurting Jared, and no one was removing him, and ‘NO ONE’ was eliminating him. He knew Chuck was on his side, but Jensen was so pissed off that the crooked assholes from A.E. had been ganging up on the beautiful engineer, he had trouble dealing with it. Jensen found himself not in the mood for the next thing that came out of good old Chuck’s mouth, “Jensen, I’m thinking if Jared were to answer Daniel’s post,” Chuck froze in mid sentence. If he ever thought the deadpan stare of a Black Ops trained killer could cause him to have an immediate loss of bladder control, he certainly believed it now. In all his years of dealing with the bad guys, knowing what he knew and facing
what he’d faced, that deadly stare from the killer before him was no comparison. Jensen could kill with his eyes, Chuck was sure of it. The military expert placed his hands on the table and leaned forward to look closely into Chuck’s eyes, “No.”

Jensen didn’t need to yell. He didn’t need to use violence, nor did he need to even explain himself. The simple word “No” delivered with deadly intent was seared directly into Chuck’s brain. ‘Forever,’ Chuck thought to himself, ‘That look will be ensconced in my memory forever. Yep, that was a bad idea.’ Chuck immediately gave up on the plan he was about to share as Lance piped in, ‘I think I know what you were about to say, Chuck, but I have to agree with Jensen. We’re the good guys, fellas. Our witness has been used by the bad guys enough. We don’t need to use him too.”

Chuck looked up at Jensen with compassion in his eyes, “Jensen, I’m sorry. It wasn’t anything further than a message and maybe some back and forth. I thought if we could set Daniel up, get him to talk to Jared, maybe Daniel would stupidly admit to something. I had no idea what Jared had been through with your brother. You’re right, we’re not putting Jared through that.” Jensen’s mood remained dark. He didn’t like people thinking they were going to ‘use’ Jared. He was still pissed, but he controlled it as he spoke to the group, “Since our purpose here is to stay on the same page, let me make one thing clear, ‘NO one’ puts Jared through anything more than he’s already going through. No set ups, no operations. He doesn’t have to speak to any of those assholes. He stays out of any undercover operations…completely. He doesn’t need to be put under more stress than he already is…especially while he’s still recovering, and especially since he’s already worked his ass off to give ‘you’ the entire case!”

The group was quiet for a moment. Frank spoke first, “Chuck, who have we got on Jared’s friends? And his secretary?” Jensen zero’d in on Frank. He appreciated that the likable security lead was already thinking ahead. Chuck answered, “Scotty’s group is on the secretary, the two receptionists and the closest friends Manny and Jeff.” Frank asked, “He’s got people on them, 24/7?” Chuck nodded, “Yes…and the aunt too.” Lance added, “We should increase. If they tried to draw Jared out today with one of his interests, they may try and use one of the friends to get him to respond next.” Jensen unfortunately knew this to be true, “I wouldn’t put it past the hired hand, that’s for damn sure.” Frank offered, “He’d have to fly back up there to do that. If we increase over night, the friends will be beefed up with coverage before he gets to any of them.” Lance agreed, “Okay, we’ll have Scotty increase and we’ll escalate the threat levels. The friends will notice. Jensen, are you gonna tell Jared all this because he probably should call them all and make sure they understand the security.”

Jensen nodded, “I’ll have to. He deserves to know. And yes, I can have him talk to them and explain why they’ve got a goon squad around them.” Frank and Lance raised an eyebrow at Jensen’s ‘goon squad’ comment. Jensen grinned, “No offense.” Lance looked defeated, “None taken.” Frank smiled at the exchange. Chuck typed a few sentences and then waited for a response before looking up at the other men, “Price is heading for Grand Jury in the morning. They’ve accepted the complaint and are putting it in front of other cases. We’re in sooner than we thought. Jensen, our witness needs to be ready, if they want to speak with him, but other than that, he doesn’t need to do anything.”

“Except stay alive,” Jensen said. The three men looked at Jensen with deep concern for what their greatest responsibility entailed. They needed to be top notch and protect their witness at all costs. Jensen looked at Lance, “I’ve got two friends coming for dinner tomorrow. They’ll be staying over.” Lance nodded, “Just give me their names and I’ll have the team clear them when they drive up.” Jensen nodded, “Thanks.” Lance asked, “Are they like you?” Jensen searched for the meaning to Lance’s question before he realized what the man was asking, “Yes…like me.”

Lance nodded in approval, “Good to know. I’ll forego the car search and pat down that we would normally do to other visitors. Wouldn’t want them to go all Ninja on my poor team.” Jensen smiled at the man, “Thanks…but I’m sure they wouldn’t do that.” Frank and Lance headed for the door, as Jensen wrote down his friend’s names on a piece of paper. Lance took the names and told Jensen
they were going to discuss things with their teams and then call up to the Austin team to increase protective watch on Jared’s friends and his aunt. Jensen nodded in appreciation and shook the men’s hands. Chuck closed his laptop, collected the loose papers and headed for the door. Jensen turned as the AG investigator approached. Chuck held his hand out. Jensen hesitated a second before taking it. The investigator sighed, “I suggested something unacceptable and I’m sorry. You’re pissed, I get it. I promise you, I didn’t mean him any harm. I never would.” Jensen searched the man’s eyes, finding only guilt and self blame there. He decided to give Chuck some breathing room, “I know you’re trying to catch the bad guys, Chuck. As long as you catch the bad guys without using Jared, we’ve got no problems. The kid is off limits for anymore pressure than he’s already got.”

Chuck nodded, “Understood. We’ll talk soon, Jensen. I’ll keep you apprised of everything that happens tomorrow.” When the investigator left, Jensen closed and locked the door. He went to the refrigerator, grabbed a beer, then went to build a fire. He was bone weary tired. It was only six thirty, but the last ninety minutes had been one shitty piece of information after another. His lover had worked around these assholes for nearly two years and had no idea who he’d been dealing with. Jesus, Jared had been in the middle of this and working his ass off…oblivious to what A.E. was doing. Jensen wanted to talk to his dad. He didn’t want to leave Jared, for any length of time, but with Mike and Dave here, he wouldn’t have to worry. Maybe when Jared seemed comfortable with them, he would bring it up to the younger man. Speaking of Mike and Dave, Jensen realized he needed to get the spare room in order. He spent some time moving Jared’s things into the master bedroom, so his friends would have room to unpack. He cleaned the guest bathroom, then added a stack of clean towels and rags for them.

Jensen knew they’d be ready to stay as long as necessary, but he really didn’t expect this case to go much longer. The fact that the Grand Jury had scheduled the first hearing so quickly sounded promising. Jensen stood perusing the bathroom and bedroom where his guests would be staying, then he remembered to pull out two sleeping bags, an air mattress and more pillows from the hall closet. The guys would share the room, but unless they were drunk as hell, Jensen didn’t think they’d sleep on the same bed together. After starting a load of laundry, Jensen went back to stoke the fire and enjoy the heat that was now permeating the whole room. He stood for a moment, sipping his beer, enjoying the quiet stillness and flutter of the flames. It wouldn’t be this quiet tomorrow night, Jensen knew. He hoped Jared felt comfortable around his buddies.

Jensen made a sandwich for dinner. He checked all the doors and windows to make sure they were secure, then looked out the front window to see two security men. He knew the other two were walking around his property. Jensen looked at his watch, noting it was eight thirty, so he went to his bedroom to check on Jared. Jensen quietly sat next to Jared’s sprawled out form. He gently moved the hair aside to uncover the engineer’s face, then felt him for heat. He felt some warmth but it wasn’t as much as before. The younger man was still as stone, showing no signs of waking any time soon. Jensen leaned over and placed his ear to Jared’s chest. He listened for a good minute just to make sure the kid wasn’t wheezing. They certainly didn’t need that complication right now. Hearing nothing alarming, Jensen pulled up the covers and went back to the living room. Jensen grabbed his own laptop from underneath a corner table, sorted through some mail and did some banking for awhile. When he was finished, he transferred his load of laundry to the dryer, then returned to his laptop.

Roaming around the internet, Jensen landed on A.E. to catch himself up on the public version of the company. He read through financial reports, customer complaints, customer compliments, and anything else he could find. Jensen was sure the Forbes financial information was only what the company wanted people to know. Businesses usually submitted their bragging reports, not their problems. While the corporate responsibility requirements were meant to govern and control what happens in big business, there were still a ton of ways to get around it. Jensen knew about fudging reports, fudging survey results, and fudging tax returns. What he was finding on the internet was
simply a generic outline and not the real juice of the situation. The pictures were interesting...Jensen studied pictures of his father, Gerald Dyer, and Tony Malens. He clicked to a short summary of the business tycoon’s ‘family’ and was surprised to see his name, plus Daniel’s, and his mother’s. There were short bio’s, his including a proud few quotes from his father about Jensen being a decelerated service man. Jensen mocked, “Cuz he was so proud.” His mother’s bio talked about her work with charities and her donations to art exhibits to raise funds for starving students. “Bullshit,” Jensen growled, knowing full well this was a showcase about a woman who donated ‘only’ to something highly publicized. Her strive to get in the public eye and be popular was sickening. The charities they mentioned were well funded and only benefited the rich. Jensen sighed, feeling renewed affirmation after twenty two years of being out of that house.

Daniel didn’t have a bio, but there was an interesting article about him on a complaint page. Apparently, A.E. paid out on two separate incidences of sexual harassment and abuse of power because of his brother. “Unfuckinbelievable,” Jensen said out loud. Daniel had been at the Boston office for the first ten years of his career. The company decided to pay out on two big lawsuits of employees that had been harassed to a degree of sexual battery. The only reason they paid is because the cases had gone public. ‘Jesus dad, why’d you keep him on the payroll,’ Jensen mentally cursed his father’s idiocy. Daniel obviously had issues and was a walking liability. After the cases were settled, A.E. had no mention of Daniel’s position with the company. Then two years later, he showed up at the California office. Daniel later showed up at the Austin office, as part of an agreement that A.E. would remove him from the California office. Apparently, there were several ‘unfounded’ complaints there and in order to keep any official cases from being filed, his father’s company agreed to move the center of the problem elsewhere.

‘Poor Jared,’ Jensen sighed, ‘that’s why Daniel ended up in Austin.’ Jensen had a thought and decided to take a picture of the hitman’s photo and email it to his friends. They all checked their emails from their phones so Jensen knew they would get it right away. He sent the various names Chuck had found in his research, along with pics of Robert and Tony. He wasn’t as concerned with any of them as he was with the hitman, and maybe Robert. There was something about Robert’s style, ‘persistence’ Jensen thought. Robert wasn’t someone to just give up, and he had endured patience over the years in order to finally reach the top position. That was somebody who meticulously worked on something for long periods of time. Jensen bet it was Robert who hired this freelance gunman and he was ninety nine percent sure it was the same man who had killed Gurnaby. ‘Fuck,’ Jensen thought, again frustrated. He ‘had’ to get Jared out of this. Jensen stayed up ‘til midnite going over scenarios in his head. He folded the laundry and put some tri tip meat in a container to marinate for tomorrow night. He wiped off the counters and table, then finally gave in and banked the fire for bedtime.

Jensen slipped under the covers and scooted over closer to Jared. He smiled when Jared flopped his face over, only to cause about fifty strands of unruly hair to fall in front of his eyes. ‘He’s so goddamned adorable,’ Jensen thought as he sighed helplessly. He reached up and barely touched Jared enough to move the hair aside. He just had to kiss him, but he kept it very light to Jared’s forehead. When he settled back into his pillow, Jensen watched Jared sleep. “Oh, the guys are gonna give me so much shit over you,” he said softly. He grinned just thinking about it, when Jared shifted in his sleep and snuggled right up against him. Jensen sighed, ‘Toast,’ he thought, as he fell asleep to Jared’s whisper of breath on his shoulder.

Jensen woke immediately to something off. It took only a second to realize Jared was thrashing about next to him. The younger man seemed to be trapped in a nightmare. Jensen turned to prop himself on an elbow so he could soothe him, but Jared became even more physical. “Jared,” Jensen now sat up on his knees. He quickly tried to get over the kid’s torso to at least keep him from hurting himself. “Fuck,” Jensen cursed when Jared pulled away from him and dragged himself to the side of the bed. “Nooooo…nnnooo,” Jared was moaning and now sobbing while still pulling away from Jensen,
who was trying to get a grip on him without hurting him. Jensen suddenly had to overcompensate fast when Jared fought his way to the side of the bed and started to fall head first toward the floor. The older man pushed himself off the bed, grabbed him around his arms and twisted just before they landed. Jensen took most of their weight on his ass. He quickly pulled Jared tight against him, while wrapping his legs around the flailing young man. Jared was struggling, emotional, in the middle of something quite traumatic. It was heart wrenching to hear the sobs and “no’s” over and over. Jensen kept talking to him in his ear, holding on tight, “Baby, it’s me. Wake up for me, it’s me.” “Stop,” Jared kept trying to get away, “Stop, please.” After a few seconds, Jared stopped, but he stayed tense, still begging, “Please don’t.” Jensen thanked his internal senses for waking him before Jared had fallen on the hard wood and jarred those ribs. At least he had kept him safe.

Jensen noticed Jared was openly sobbing now, but gripped his arms with both hands, like he finally accepted the hold he was in. Jensen couldn’t stand it. Jared’s fearful sobs were heart wrenching. He felt his own unshed tears threaten, “I’m so sorry, it’s okay. It’s okay now.” He kissed the side of Jared’s head again, then snuggled into his neck while holding him as tight as he could, “I’m here, it’s okay.” Jared sobbing finally quieted. Jensen couldn’t see his face that well, but he tried to lean his head around and assess whether Jared was awake, or not, “Baby, it’s me…I’m here…you alright?” Jared nodded, still calming his spasms. Jensen soothed, “Ssshhh…it’s alright. You’re safe, sweetheart.” Jensen held him longer until he felt the gentle spasms go away.

When Jared’s body seemed to release the tension and melt against him, Jensen felt it was safe to slide into a position where he could get Jared back into bed. He spoke softly into Jared’s ear, “I’m just going to get us back under the covers, okay? Can you come with me?” Jensen pulled Jared to sit on the bed, then laid him back and pulled the covers over him. He slipped in on Jared’s right side, then wrapped his arm around him. Jared tilted his head to touch Jensen’s, resting his hand on the older man’s arm. Jensen’s left elbow was bent on the pillow, supporting his head, so he extended it to gently rub the kid’s hair. He didn’t say anything. He wanted Jared to feel relaxed and trusting. Whatever it was had been horrible and Jared was still raw from it.

“I’m sorry,” Jared’s voice quavered. “Sssshhh…please don’t. It’s okay,” Jensen realized Jared’s emotions were still vulnerable and the last thing Jared should be doing is feeling guilty. “I’m worried about you…are you alright?” Jensen continued to play with the younger man’s hair. He noticed Jared’s thumb was rubbing back and forth on his arm. “I’m okay…,” Jared spoke quietly. After a moment of silence, he added, “I haven’t dreamt about him in so long.” Jensen remained silent. He had at least thirty questions come alive inside his brain, but he forced himself not to push. Jared continued on his own, “We had this fight…I mean, not such a fight, but…he’d been angry about my being gay since I was fourteen. I think I’d finally had it when he said something about Manny that wasn’t true. I tried to defend my friend and…”

Jared’s voice wavered. He stopped and rubbed his eyes, held his fingers there for a few seconds. Jensen said nothing. Jared continued, “He basically blamed me for everything. My aunt left him. He said it was all my fault and that I’d been embarrassing the family. I didn’t appreciate what they’d done, taking me in…and they never wanted me.” Jensen stopped moving his hand. He suspected they were talking about Jared’s uncle, but until he mentioned his aunt, Jensen hadn’t been sure. Now, he sighed, feeling helpless, angry and frustrated that he hadn’t been there for Jared. ‘How could anyone say that to a kid,’ he thought to himself. ‘Fucking asshole.’ Jared continued, “He was really drunk. He’d already punched me once before when he found out about a boyfriend I’d been seeing, so I mostly skated around him ’til I could get to college. I knew he was drunk, but I argued with him. He was wrong…he had ‘always’ been wrong, and he was so damn ignorant.” Jared wiped his eyes again. “He pushed me hard, so I fell on my back. When I landed, it kind of stunned me. He was out of control, my aunt had left him, and he blamed me.” Jared sobbed openly again, as Jensen kissed him on the head, “I’m so sorry.”
Jared kept going, “I saw it in his eyes. I thought he was going to kill me. I turned over to crawl away, but...he landed on my back and pushed me down flat. I tried to crawl out but he kept pushing my face into the floor. He was screaming about taking it up the ass and other stuff I don’t remember. He kept banging my face on the floor and I panicked because he was bigger and I really thought he might kill me.” After a few seconds, Jared added, “He finally got up. He wobbled and fell against his desk so I thought it was an opening to get away. I crawled as fast as I could into my bedroom and slammed the door. I called Manny and grabbed the bare minimum, then ran to his house. His parents were so nice and let me stay there.” Jensen continued to play with his hair, watching Jared as he continued, “That’s not something I ‘ever’ dream about. I have no idea why it’s coming up now…and I’m not afraid of him anymore. I’m probably bigger than he is and it’s just not a threat to my life. I don’t know where the hell that came from.” Jared sighed and relaxed, feeling exhausted with the weight of the emotions that had been pummeling through him. It had seemed so real.

Jensen knew that shit like this stayed with a person, even if they didn’t think it did. This was a big deal for Jared. This was someone who Jared had needed love from, someone he needed to be a surrogate father to him, someone he could rely on to support him and love him. His uncle betrayed him by denying him those things, and Jared’s emotions weren’t just from the physical abuse, they were even more deeply about the loss of a potential loved one, and the betrayal. Jensen wished people would care how much damage they are doing to a child when they let them down, like Jared’s uncle did. Jared finally looked up at Jensen, “Thank you for listening. I’m sorry it woke you up.” Jensen took Jared’s face by his cheek, “Jare, you know you didn’t deserve to be treated that way, right?” He waited for an answer. Jared looked questioning, like maybe he hadn’t thought he was thinking that, but then maybe he was. Jensen watched the younger man think about it. The bedroom was dark, but the light from the electric flames provided enough of a glow to at least see Jared’s facial expressions.

The younger man finally reneged, “When I left there, I knew he was wrong. After I was gone, I started to replay things that he said to me. I wasn’t quite so sure, anymore, thinking maybe I’d been some kind of interruption to their life. Maybe I didn’t do well enough, or maybe there was something I missed.” Man, it pissed Jensen off to hear Jared questioning himself. He was an innocent kid, and that self doubt ‘never’ should have been placed there. After losing his parents, though, Jared would have been on a low. He’d already had something taken away and it would be easy to stick blame and guilt into a vulnerable person’s psyche. Jared continued, “The gay thing was always a crutch. It started with just an experimental kiss in my bedroom with a friend, but he caught us. It really wasn’t going any further. We were actually talking about girls before that. I wasn’t really feeling it with girls and wondered why. After he screamed at me about it in front of my friend, I didn’t look at guys until I was sixteen. I met someone older and mature who cared about me and I started seeing him for awhile. I didn’t think my uncle knew, but then he found out somehow and it was ugly after that.”

Jensen had to say something, “I’m sorry to say this, Jared, but where the hell was your aunt in all this? Why didn’t she protect you from that bastard?” Jared thought for a moment, like he’d never considered that question, “Well, I think she was so absorbed in her own unhappiness with him, maybe she missed it. Things were okay for the first year I was there, but I noticed she spent longer times away from the house and then she was distant. I just didn’t know why. You have to understand, I felt like a guest there. They were relatives, but I was a guest and it didn’t feel like I should complain. She didn’t tell me she was leaving, but two days after I moved in with Manny, she came to school and told me. She offered me her new place and she’s been in my life the whole time. She at least cares…I know she loves me. They had problems, and I probably arrived right in the middle of it, bringing one more thing for them to disagree about. She finally divorced him when she found out what he did to me.” Jensen sighed. He understood the way Jared explained it, but it took some self control to let it go that Jared’s aunt hadn’t noticed the signs and been more protective. Jensen hated that the kid was so alone then. ‘Manny was godsend,’ Jensen thought.
Jensen sensed Jared’s exhaustion, so he pulled Jared to roll over and lay on him. The younger man went willingly, his arm around Jensen’s waist. He snuggled his head under Jensen’s chin. Jensen kissed Jared on the head again and rubbed his hands over his back, while he held him close, “I love you, Jare. It amazes me just how much.” Jared looked upward so he could look see Jensen’s face, “I love you, too, more than I could possibly describe.” Jared slid his head back down to where it had been, yawned, and added one more thing before he fell asleep, “Thank you for changing my life.” Jensen kissed the younger man on his head, snuggled him tighter, and fell back asleep with a smile. They slept solidly for the rest of the night. When Jensen woke, he was so goddamn comfortable in his cocoon of covers and engineering expert, he could barely force himself to raise his head and check the clock. ‘Seven thirty,’ Jensen noted the time, in addition to noting his internal alarm had failed him. He looked down at the person who had caused him to oversleep and felt a rush of peace wash over him. The love of his life was almost completely on top of him, now, his head in the middle of Jensen’s chest, his rebellious hair spread out in all directions.

Jensen brushed Jared’s hair back from his face, feeling the smooth strands of the silky locks sliding through his fingers. Jared’s mouth was slack, a tiny drop of drool coming from the corner. He was a picture of blissful relaxation, sleeping soundly and completely lost to the world. Yesterday had been a full day, after his visit with the surgeon. Jared was well on his way to recovery, but now he simply needed to be held back from re-injuring himself. Jensen recalled the horrible nightmare from the middle of the night. The poor kid had been stuck for several minutes reliving that traumatic incident before Jensen got him to wake up. He was amazed that Jared had even told him about such a painful memory. Jensen wondered if Jared would even remember having a conversation about his uncle before going back to sleep. He felt the kid’s forehead and happily noted there seemed to be no fever any longer. He was glad the kid had gotten so much sleep. With their time awake in the middle of the night, Jensen estimated Jared had gotten about eleven hours, so far. The only drawback to this situation was that the kid would would be starving his ass off. Jared hadn’t had anything to eat since yesterday’s ice cream, so Jensen vowed to get his ass up and make something. ‘Soon as I can move,’ the older man thought, as he shifted to snuggle further with his gorgeous lover.

After snoozing another hour, Jensen opened his eyes to the sound of loud thumps outside. He listened further to identify hoof noises hitting his concrete patio, then heard the unmistakable sound of antlers hitting against one of his trees. ‘Aah,’ Jensen smiled and looked down at Jared, ‘I think his little friends have returned…and they’ve brought more friends,’ he thought. Jensen felt the vibration of the security phone in his pocket. He usually sat it on the bed stand, but he must have forgotten and left it in his pocket. He kept his left arm around Jared and slipped his right down into his pocket to retrieve the phone. The text was actually just a thoughtful communication from Phil, the second security guy working for Frank yesterday. ‘Big herd outside your property. One four and one six point buck close to the patio.’ ‘Phil’ Jensen responded to the text, ‘Appreciate it, P. Bambi’s dad isn’t so cute if you piss him off.’

Jensen received a laughing smiley after that. He put the phone on the side table and put his arm back around his warm snuggly lover. “Mmmmm,” Jensen released an appreciative sound of pleasure, as he kissed Jared’s head and inhaled the younger man’s shampoo. It felt amazing to hold Jared like this. Jensen waited comfortably for another few minutes, until Jared finally started to stir. He amused himself by watching the beautiful young genius try to wake up. Jared rubbed his eyes and yawned a couple times, then rubbed his face like a cat on Jensen’s chest. Jared made no move to get off the older man yet, so Jensen simply waited it out. He rubbed Jared’s back lovingly, until finally the younger man looked up at him. He was treated to a stunning view of sleepy morning grey beauties focused on him. He couldn’t stop staring into them. Much of the hazel and golden browns had receded and right now they were a clear light grey. Christ, they were so fucking beautiful. Jared leaned into his ministrations when Jensen rubbed his hair. Jensen smiled, “Hi.” Jared smiled dreamily back, “Hi.” Jensen thought the kid looked pretty damn relaxed and pain
free and that fact had Jensen feeling damn good, himself. “How do you feel?” The older man
scooted down and turned sideways, so he could look into Jared’s eyes on his level.

The engineer smiled softly, “I feel lazy…relaxed…and pretty wonderful to be laying here with you.”
Jensen kissed him gently, “Mmm…it is pretty damn wonderful waking up with you laying on me,
that’s for sure.” Jared yawned, then looked adoringly at Jensen, “That was so much fun yesterday.”
Jensen agreed, “Yes it was. It was great to see you enjoying yourself after all the shit you’ve been
through.” Jared responded with gratefulness in his eyes, “Thank you, it was perfect.” “Except for the
evil skywalk,” Jensen smirked. Jared giggled magically, “Mmm…well, the goopy homemade
toppings and ice cream made up for it. I plan to hit that place a lot, you know.” Jensen was still
smiling, not yet recovered from Jared’s giggle, “We can hit whatever you want, anytime.” Both men
were quiet for a few seconds, each wondering if the other had caught on to the innocent double
meaning of Jensen’s comment. Suddenly the giggles could not be contained, as both men laughed
out loud at the older man’s unintentional statement. Jared retorted, “Well, gee, Jen, thanks for that. I
do have quite a bit of hitting I want to do.” Suddenly, a loud thumping noise banged outside the
window, causing Jared to sit up and turn toward the slider.

Jensen sat up slower, not startled like Jared, though secretly amazed at how the younger man could
sit up that fast with his injury. Jared could see shadows moving in between the cracks of the curtains.
He held his breath. Jensen placed his hand on Jared’s back and rubbed soothing circles, “It’s alright.
Your deer are visiting.” Jared looked at Jensen, then back at the curtain, “Oh.” After a few seconds
he looked back at Jensen, “Jesus, that scared the shit out of me.” Jensen smiled, “It’s okay, they’re
pushy little buggers and there’s probably leftover seasoning on the barbecue, maybe pinecone seeds
on the patio and chairs.” Jensen warned, “Be careful,” as Jared scooted quickly out of the bed and
hurried to the slider without warning. Jensen hurried to prevent the kid from opening the slider and
being butted right in the gut. He helped Jared to open the curtains, slowly, so as not to startle
anything close by. The joyful sigh of Jared’s surprise at seeing over twenty deer through the window
had Jensen transfixed on his beautiful face. “Wow, look at them all,” Jared was amazed at all the four
legged creatures, some on the patio, the rest all over Jensen’s property. Jensen was glued to watching
Jared, convinced he was never going to get tired of Jared’s adorable reactions. The younger man
looked like he wanted to go outside, but Jensen gently cut him off at the pass, “Look to the right…
see the big ones?” Jensen pointed toward two bucks over on the side of the yard. When Jared looked
that way, Jensen continued, “The one with the huge six point rack will charge us if we step out this
door. He’s the boss, and that’s his second next to him. They won’t take kindly to use mixing with
their ladies and kids.”

Jared watched the large muscular bucks, understanding and appreciating what Jensen was trying to
Teach him. Jensen smiled, as two very young fawns came right up near the window and stood within
two feet from it. Jared dropped to his knees, and enjoyed the privilege of staring at them for several
minutes. They looked directly at the two men through the glass a few times. “They’re so cute,” Jared
said, “I wish we could feed them something.” Two doe’s joined their babies and Jared watched them
lick the fawns on the head, then nudge them to leave the patio. Jensen was so glad Jared was seeing
this. He knew the kid loved animals. The four deer walked off the patio and joined the rest of the
herd. The two bucks had been staring at Jensen and Jared the entire time, as if challenging the
humans to dare take a step outside. Jared stood up, leaning against the glass with his palms, “Bitchy,
aren’t they,” he motioned toward the heads of the herd. Jensen nodded in agreement, “Yep. They
Can be assholes if you get too close. I didn’t see the buck when it happened to me. I innocently
walked out here with bread, totally zeroed in on the cute babies. F’ing father tried to gut me.”

Jared glanced at Jensen, then smirked, but tried to fold his mouth over and hide it. Jensen did a
double take, “You are ‘not’ laughing at me.” Jared looked back at him in mock confusion, “What?”
and shook his head, “No, of course not.” Jared grinned and looked away quickly before he finished
his fake response, hoping Jensen missed it. “You think it’s funny,” Jensen accused, which started
Jared giggling while shaking his head, “No…no, I don’t.” Jensen put his bottom lip out in a mock pout, “I almost died. I had to throw my bread slice at him and finally the whole bread loaf before I could get back inside.” Jared shook, covering his mouth with his hand and trying not to bust out laughing. Jensen made it worse, “Hit him between the eyes with a full pack of Wonderbread.” Jared went into hysterics, busting out laughing. He couldn’t stop picturing his special ops bad ass soldier running from a deer. His side hurt from laughing, but he didn’t care. Jensen throwing a useless pack of bread at a charging buck kept replaying in his mind. Jensen grabbed Jared around the waist and held him close. Jared tried to twist out of his hold, “No,” knowing what was coming. Jensen had done this in the hospital. “Uh uh,” Jensen stopped him easily, “You don’t get to laugh at my Wonderbread near death experience and get away with it.”

Jared tried to backpedal, still twisting to get out, “I didn’t mean it.” Jensen teased him a bit longer, barely grazing Jared’s ribs with his thumbs. The younger man giggled and tried to pull away. Jensen said, “Oh, you didn’t mean it? Oh, I see,” Jensen wiggled his thumbs into Jared’s ticklish ribs again. The younger man jumped and giggled each time Jensen dug into his ribs, which was exactly what Jensen was hoping for. He pulled Jared in tighter, easily overcoming Jared’s struggles to pull away. “What’s wrong, baby?” Jensen again pushed his thumbs into Jared’s very ticklish rib cage, causing him to laugh helplessly and push on Jensen’s shoulder to get away. Jensen loved seeing Jared laugh, it was quite mesmerizing. He wanted to keep going, but he could see the younger man needed a break, especially with his recovering condition. Jensen stopped tickling him and held him to let Jared catch his breath. He watched him closely, while rubbing his back, just to make sure he wasn’t over taxing the recovering kid.

Jared leaned his forehead against Jensen’s for a minute. Jensen rubbed his back, “Do you want some french toast? You have to be starving, kiddo.” Jared responded immediately, “Mmmm…God, that sounds good.” Jensen kissed Jared, finally getting a much appreciated ‘good morning’ taste of the kid’s responsive tongue. ‘God, he tastes like honey,’ he thought. Jared moaned appreciatively before they ended the kiss. Jensen stopped it before it lead to more, then nudged Jared toward the hallway, “Let’s go and I’ll make you some fabulous french toast.” Jared walked in front of Jensen, calling over his shoulder as they went down the hall, “Are you sure you’re not out of bread?” Jensen took off after Jared, who ran the short distance to the kitchen and giggled magically when Jensen caught him. Jensen loved that giggle. He could listen to it all day. He kissed Jared on the side of the head, then let him go with a light slap on the ass to get the coffee going. Jared jumped slightly and giggled once more when he felt the hand on his rear end.

Jensen leaned around Jared to grab the bowl he needed, stealing one more kiss on the lips, then went to work on their french toast. He made a pact to let the kid get some calories into him first, then he would update him on the latest information and unfortunate need for heightened security. Once they were full, with Jared whining miserably about not being able to breathe because Jensen cooked so good he couldn’t stop stuffing himself, Jensen took their plates to the sink. He returned with the hot coffee pot and refreshed both their cups, grinning at Jared’s suffering look, while the kid rubbed his stomach. Dani’s cook had taught him to put coconut cream, vanilla, cinnamon and nutmeg into his egg batter, which made a screaming delicious french toast. It meant so much more to share it with Jared and get that kind of reaction. He put the coffee pot back and returned to sit across from his lover, “Time to fill you in on everything from the meeting last night.” Jared sipped his coffee and nodded to the stapled packet of papers laying on the table, “You mean whatever that’s about?” Jensen nodded. He let out a reluctant sigh, then pulled over the papers and turned the first page.

Jared’s eyes widened when he saw the picture of his boss, Robert, then he looked up at Jensen disbeliefingly, “Are you serious? ‘He’s’ involved in this?” Jensen sighed, knowing this was going to be shocking, “Yes, I’m afraid so.” Jared looked back down at the picture while Jensen continued, “Robert’s been with A.E. many years. He’s moved around and managed several different areas. The guy is used to improve things…clean things up, so to speak…he’s always worked directly for the top
executive and used for ‘special’ assignments.” Jared tried to follow along, feeling the betrayal creep in, while staring at his former boss. He looked up at Jensen, “Do I wanna know what ‘special things’ are?” Jensen explained, “Fishing people out, firing the low performers, covering things up, reporting directly to top executives. That kind of ‘special’ thing. It makes sense that he’s running this crooked racket they’ve got going because he wasn’t picked by my dad to be at the top, for some reason. He’s waited a long time get up there. This could be his compensation he feels he deserves. Maybe he accepted not being the top exec just because he’s been banking all these millions another way. He was most likely the main person keeping an eye on you…trying to keep you contained…controlled.”

Jared began to understand, though it made his gut knot up. He thought back about the couple arguments he’d had with Robert and the emails that were fake efforts to placate him. ‘Jesus, I had no idea.’ He thought Robert was just a company idiot, afraid to question things, but now this made perfect sense. He was actually right in the middle of it. “What a fucker,” Jared said, shaking his head, “I had no idea.” Jensen turned the page to Tony Malens. “This is the top executive. He’s the right hand man to my dad…actually, I found out last night that my dad isn’t really running things, at all, anymore. He’s at home collecting, but he’s left all the operations to this guy…seems like it’s been that way for the last eight years. And it’s ‘this’ guy that Robert works for. Have you ever seen him?” Jared glanced at Jensen, then back at the photo, trying to recall all his meetings and functions. “I’ve seen his picture on the wall, but I can’t remember if he’s ever been in my meetings. The awards and certificates…even the paychecks are signed by him, though.” Jensen nodded, “Well, he isn’t a criminal on paper, just like Robert, but because he tried to skip out and retrieve his millions from the frozen bank accounts, Price is after him. He’s sure this guy and Robert are sort of ring leader’s, so to speak.”

Jared looked at Jensen in surprise, “He tried to take money out?” Jensen nodded, “Yep. Robert too.” Jared’s jaw dropped at that comment before he looked back down, “They’re in it together…all that unspent money is going to ‘them’?” “Not anymore, love,” Jensen touched Jared on the hand, “turn the page, there’s more.” The younger man did what Jensen asked, exclaiming, “No way…him too?” When Jared looked up at him, Jensen corrected his assumption, “No, he doesn’t seem to be part of the intricate little get rich scheme going on, but he is kind of a puppet for them. He’s only in here because he was with them yesterday and Phil snapped his picture. Drew has a good background, he seems to be just an information highway…used for passing details back and forth and keeping an eye out. We think he’s probably been reporting your thoughts and feelings on the company’s dealings right back to Robert, without really realizing he was helping the bad guys. Drew seems to be innocent of anything sinister, other than being their kiss ass. The fact that he was out there looking for you yesterday makes us think he probably doesn’t realize their goal is to hurt you, or worse. He thinks he’s kissing up and winning points by helping them locate their injured and recovering employee. We’re not sure if he even knows about the case yet. He hasn’t tried any of the bank accounts so he may have no idea what the others were up to.”

Jared looked back down and thought everything over, so far. The younger man sighed, “Okay, who’s coming next,” he grumbled as he turned the page. The kid’s reaction was instantaneous when he saw Brad, “I ‘knew’ it! He’s a dickwad, right? It wasn’t just me?” When Jared looked at Jensen for confirmation, the older man nodded with an approving grin, “Yep, you’re were right, kiddo.” Jared looked back down and turned to Brad’s bio. Jensen recited some of the pertinent information that he’d learned, “First of all, and brace yourself for this one, kiddo…Brad isn’t a real engineer.” Jared looked up in shock, “What?!?” His wheels turned, wondering how the hell anyone could miss such a thing. Jensen explained, “I know. I’m sorry, Jay, but he’s never even been a real engineer. Brad is complicated. He may not be a killer, but he’s at the very center of this whole pile of shit.” Jared shook his head and sighed, “Wow, I can’t believe this.” Jensen continued, “Brad is an ex-con whose done time for other fraud and theft. He’s been convicted of several incidents where he got people to invest, then took off with their funds. He’s done some insurance fraud, and also deals with
a lot of different overseas banking. The guy is a swindler and he’s good with people so he tends to
go a long time before getting caught.” Jared asked, “So, did he try and get the money out too?”
Jensen nodded, “Yep. He tried all the accounts, and since he’s so good with this type of thing, the
AG suspects he might have other nests hidden that the rest don’t know about. He’s probably
cheating the cheaters, so to speak. Fits his profile, anyway. At least there’s a warrant for him, too, so
he’ll be caught if he tries to travel.”

Jared remained quiet for a few minutes, absorbing it all. He had a hard time believing Brad had
fooled everyone for this long. Then something occurred to him, “Wait…Brad came over with ‘me’. I
worked with him at Skyward before it went belly up…so my old bosses didn’t even know he was a
fake?” Jensen explained, “Brad was hired by your old employer under false pretenses. He probably
showed up with fake degrees and certificates, even fake references. Chuck traced Skyward’s
financial problems to have started right after Brad got there. They think he was fudging and stealing
from them for a long time, manipulating the revenues, just so they would fall so far down they
needed to fold up into A.E.” Jensen could see Jared getting angry, feeling protective of the former
bosses that he loved working for. He asked angrily, “So, A.E. planned this and sent their asshole in
there to ruin them…just so they could take them over.” The older man looked into his eyes, “I’m
sorry Jare. This asshole totally sabotaged your company. It was all a big master plan to get them to
merge.” Jared’s guilt showed in his eyes, “Thirty people lost their jobs when that happened, Jensen.”

Jensen knew it shouldn’t be there, but Jared’s propensity to feel guilty for something that wasn’t his
fault was just part of his personality. “Baby, this wasn’t your fault.” Jared sighed, “I know, but I
can’t help it. I was right there and I couldn’t even tell he was a fake! It just…it just feels like I should
have seen it…plus, I got to move on to another paycheck.” Jared paused, then asked Jensen, “So, I
don’t understand something. Why the hell did the bad guys hire ‘me’?” Jensen said, “Because you
were a genius, well respected with an impeccable reputation. Skyward had all your work history and
they saw the golden boy that was the resident expert. Your word would hold up in court and no
matter who tried to sue them, they’d always win with your name on it. None of them have a
conscience, so it probably never occurred to them that you did and wouldn’t play along, even if they
paid you well and offered huge bonuses.”

Jared sat back in the chair and thought about everything he’d learned. He rubbed his face and sighed,
trying to come to grips with it all. He sighed in regretful acceptance, then looked up at Jensen, “So,
these are the people who want to kill me?” Jensen looked at Jared with sympathy and determination,
“Baby, you do ‘not’ belong in the middle of this shit...it’s so unfair…but we ‘will’ get you out of it.”
Jared nodded, believing his lover, wholeheartedly, but he couldn’t help be worried. Jensen turned to
the last suspect and Jared found himself looking at the third man from yesterday, standing next to
Robert and Drew. He sighed, “So who is he?” Jensen answered, “He’s our biggest concern.” When
Jared looked up at him for explanation, Jensen continued, “He’s a heater. A hired gun. He’s got
multiple identities and no records. Not even a birth certificate or a social so Price and Chuck can’t
identify him.” Jared’s mouth dropped, “You mean a hitman…for ‘me’?” Jensen nodded, seeing the
younger man’s fear return. Jared still tried to grasp it, “You mean there really are hitmen? Like in the
movies?” Jensen sighed, “Yes. Unfortunately, yes.” Jensen couldn’t help thinking, ‘I am one,’ when
he thought about some of the operations he’d been sent on.

Jared stared at Jensen for a few seconds until the reality set in, then he looked down at the picture.
He covered his face with his hands, then rubbed them over his hair and dropped them back to the

table. “Holy fuck,” was his only comment, as he shook his head. Jensen watched Jared contemplate
what a mess he was caught up in…he knew this would have nuttered up other people much sooner,
but his lover was trying to face it as calm as he could. “So…so what do we do about him?” Jared
asked Jensen with innocent worry. The older man took his hand and squeezed, “So, ‘now’ they’ve
bumped up the security to your aunt and your friends. They’ve had the minimal tail up until today,
but now the security teams are beefed up. You’ll need to call everyone because they’ve probably
noticed the additional security, by now and it’s sure to freak them out.” Jared nodded in understanding, “Okay. What about ‘him’?” The younger man pointed to the picture of the hitman. Jensen answered, “So, ‘that’ guy is being watched from a distance so they can see what he does. If he goes for your friends, trying to lure you out, they want to cut him off at the pass. If he tries to trace your cards or cell phone, they’re gonna try and nab him that way. So far, there’s nothing but the visual on him yesterday and they can’t pick him up on just nothing. But, if he’s good, Jare, he knows all of that. Price thinks he’s probably who killed Gurnaby.”

Jared’s fear showed in his eyes, “He would hurt them all to get to me, wouldn’t he?” Jensen sighed, “He’ll do anything he can get away with. He’s a hired gun, he doesn’t have feelings about it one way or the other…and he probably gets paid a shitload if he succeeds.” Jensen squeezed Jared’s hand, “Which he will NOT.” Jensen gave him a moment, then delivered the last detail, “Baby, there’s something else you have to know. Yesterday’s rally, protest, whatever you call it…was a fake…it was just made up to get you to come out there.” Jared looked confused so Jensen elaborated, “The event was planned by a Facebook post and then it spread. The required paperwork that you filed, when you applied for the ordinance back in Austin, to get it on calendar with the City Council?” When Jared nodded, Jensen explained, “Well, that was never filed here. So, the AG figured it wasn’t a real public showing, at all, much to the attendee’s ignorance. They didn’t know. The fake event was a lure to get you out in the open where they could find you.”

Jared’s face showed his reluctant understanding at what Jensen was telling him. He still could not believe he was in the middle of all this shit. The older man added the last tidbit, “They traced the invitation back to it’s original post. It was started by my dickwad brother, Daniel.” Watching Jared absorb that Daniel had been trying to lure him out into the open was not on Jensen’s list of favorable things to do. He kept hold on Jared’s hand as he watched the younger man’s face fall in sickening despair. Flashbacks of the gross pervert pushing up against him from behind were shuffling through his mind. Jared shook his head, “I don’t understand. How did this happen? I just liked my work…I just wanted to keep working. I should have never accepted the job with them. Fuck.” Jensen waited until the kid looked up at him, “Jared…they’re going to catch them. Your evidence is going to help the AG convict them. They never would have been caught if it weren’t for you. After this, you’re going to be out of this and go back to work.”

Jared looked so sad and doubtful, it gnawed at Jensen’s heart, “Who would hire me now? No one would trust me,” Jared argued, practically begging Jensen with his eyes for some positive tidbit of news. The older man leaned closer, “Lots of honest companies will go crazy over you. Trust me, they’re not all like that. AND, there’s a lot of people in A.E. that aren’t like these fuckers, too, and have nothing to do with what this small group of assholes has been doing. You’re going to be okay.” Jensen gave Jared a few seconds to think about what he said, then he pushed, “Trust me, okay?” The younger man nodded, “Okay,” trying to believe Jensen was right, as much as he could get himself to. Jensen went around to Jared and sat on the table in front of him, “Now…there’s one other thing you have to know.” When Jared looked up at him in disbelief that there could possibly be more bad news, Jensen kissed him and brushed the hair back from his face lovingly, “I invited my two buddies over tonight, Mike and Dave. They’re gonna barbecue and have some beer with us and they’ll finally get to meet you.” Happy that he would get to meet more of Jensen’s friends, Jared smiled in relief that it wasn’t another piece of shit news about the case, “Okay.” Something occurred to him, “Wait, why now?” Jared sighed with a bit of annoyance, “Is it because of what’s going on?” Jensen admitted, “Yes. I got worried. I saw this guy and…” Jensen shrugged a shoulder, “You’re too important to me.”
Chapter Sixteen. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

The lovers have all day before Jensen's friends show up. There will be SEX.

Warnings? With these two? I appreciate my readers beyond belief so out of respect for everyone's boundaries, here are the warnings: They finger each other, Jensen rims Jared, and there's anal sex with Jared as bottom. Hopefully, if one tries to picture the beauty of these two men doing it all, the warnings aren't really necessary. :-)

Enjoy this fun sort of spa day with them--there are several upsets coming. I hope you enjoy finally getting to meet the special ops buddies.

Chapter Sixteen

Jensen busied himself with the fire, then went to the kitchen to start some side dishes for tonight’s barbecue. Jared spent the next thirty minutes talking to every one of his friends under AG protection, explaining the reasoning behind it. Jensen glanced over at him, just as Jared rolled his eyes in annoyance at repeating for the twentieth time he was okay. The older man grinned. Every person had pushed Jared for a run down of his recovering status, why he was still not home, made him promise that he was safe and wasn’t hiding anything. Jensen loved the incredible support system. He mentally vowed they would need to get everyone together as soon as it was safe.

Jensen grinned to himself when he heard some laughing and pleasantries in between the seriousness Jared was forced to lay on his friends. He picked several potatoes out of a bag, then began to scrub them clean in the sink. Within a few minutes, Jensen felt loving hands slip around his waist and a chin rest on his shoulder. “What are you making?” Jared asked him, while looking over Jensen’s shoulder. The older man turned to kiss him, “Twice baked potatoes. You wanna help me?” Jared grinned, “Of course.” The two men enjoyed the hell out of themselves, cooking together, once again.

They spent over an hour getting the potatoes done, having to bake them, then prepare the insides, then bake them again. Jared filled Jensen in on some of his best friends’ antics. Jeff was still getting along with his live in girlfriend and Manny had met an ‘over one week’ guy which he was bragging about. “They kept nagging me about when I was coming home or when they could come here to see me. The girls are busier than ever at the shelters, and Blair has taken a liking to helping out. She’s even brought home a couple furry friends. She’s still going into the office and she says no one’s saying a thing. It’s quiet. She says Daniel asked about me those couple times, but since then nothing.”

Jensen looked at Jared with a raised eyebrow when he mentioned Daniel, but his hackles went back down when there was nothing to report. He was still going to hurt his brother severely, as soon as he could get to the asshole. Jensen went back to lightly oiling a pan, as Jared remembered something else, “Oh…Manny says his two bodyguards are older than Barnaby Jones. He’s disappointed.”

Jensen laughed out loud, knowing Manny’s personality a little better now. Jared remembered one more thing, “Aunt Marsha likes it. She says they carried her groceries in this morning.” Jensen shook his head, grinning. Jared’s fan club was full of loving funny people and he was glad the kid had them.
Jared had no idea it took this much effort just to make a slightly fancy potato dish. “Geez, I always just dug into these. I hadn’t realized someone spent this long on them.” Jensen smiled at him, “Yeah, I don’t do them too often, but our upcoming guests go nuts over ’em.” Jensen looked down at their successful tray, “Though I don’t know ‘why’ I slave for the suckholes.” Jared giggled. He could tell Jensen’s relationship with his friends was probably similar to his own with Manny and Jeff. They mocked one another, but they were grounded with deep loyalty and respect. Jensen added, “We’ll put together a salad just before we put the meat on, so it’s fresh, then we’ll warm these babies, and we’ll have a pretty damn good dinner tonight.” Jared stared at Jensen for a moment. The older man was filled with so many levels and facets to his personality. He was an All-Star sports player in school, a declared military hero, a cook, a loyal friend and a gorgeously caring concerned lover. Jensen smiled at him, thoroughly enjoying the cuteness of his green eyed ex-soldier sporting a piece of grated cheese in his hair and looking at him with one raised eyebrow. “You’re beautiful, you know,” Jared said. Jensen shifted his stance, tilting his head with blatant disagreement, “Are you feverish again?”

Jensen held up his hand and felt Jared’s forehead while the younger man giggled and pushed his hand away, “Knock it off. If I say you’re beautiful and gorgeous and quite the catch, you have to believe me.” Jensen perked an eyebrow, “I do?” Jared admonished with a grin, “Yes, you have to.” Jensen argued, “I’m not following…why is that?” Jared let out a ‘tsk, as if Jensen was being purposefully obtuse, then he moved closer and stretched to his full height, “Because I’m taller.” Jensen looked up the three inches into Jared’s smirking eyes and said, “Hm…I see.” Jared pulled the piece of cheese off Jensen’s head. The older man watched him toss it on the counter. When he looked back up, he saw a very different set of eyes focused on him. ‘Jesus,’ the older man thought, as his dick stood up on alert. Jensen’s look was smoldering. He was looking at Jensen like he’d rather have licked off that cheese. His eyes were pools of intense darkened heat, undressing Jensen with their passion.

The older man felt his internal body heat skyrocket when Jared slipped his hands around his neck and pulled him closer. Their lips touched and instant electricity shot through their bodies. Jared started out tender, with loving strokes of his tongue to coax Jensen to open up. Soon, the lovers were pushing against each other, wide open mouths, licking and tasting every part of each other’s oral cavity. The kiss was hot and wet, each man devouring the taste and feel of the other. Jensen found himself forgetting everything around him. There was nothing except the hot wet playfulness of Jensen’s skilled tongue. ‘That tongue’s been all over my body,’ Jared’s mind went to recent memories. As the heat and pressure of the kiss increased, Jared felt his himself escalating, his dick ready to jump out of his sweats. Jensen was in no better shape. Jared was a delicacy, strong and sexy. Jensen wanted to lift him on the counter and fuck him senseless. Kissing like this was pushing them quickly to a point of needing release. Jensen broke away, panting heavily, “Baby, I want you so fucking bad.” Jared pushed Jensen against the counter, attacking his mouth once again. He broke for long enough to pant out, “Me too,” then pushed back into the kiss.

Jared’s groin pushed against Jensen’s, their rock hard erections finding much needed pressure. “Ngh,” “Mmm,” both men grunted in pleasure. Jared’s eyes rolled up, as his hips pushed forward and found more friction, moaning right into Jensen’s mouth. Jensen growled in pleasure. He gripped Jared tighter, knowing full well this was not gonna slow down until they exploded. It felt so goddamn good, and it was rising fast, which alerted Jensen he’d better pull back now if he wanted to finish this another way. Jared was extremely hard to pull away from, “Jesus Christ,” the older man ripped his hungry mouth away and panted hard. He looked at Jared who was breathing the same way, staring at his mouth like he wanted to devour it. Jensen grabbed the kid’s cheeks roughly between his hands and ordered, “Shower. Now.” Jared’s breathing sped up and he moved to kiss Jensen again, but the older man pulled him with him, first, “Come on.” Jensen dragged the younger man down the hall, stopping to kiss the hell out of him twice before they got to the bathroom. They
kissed so hard, it was almost impossible not to drop to the floor and finish things right there.

Jared began stripping his clothes off, while Jensen started the water. The older man turned around and was promptly relieved of his clothes...the hot wet kiss continued, without pause, as both men stepped into the shower. Jensen realized there was ‘nothing’ wrong with Jared’s power and ability right ‘now’. The kid was a lean tower of muscle and sinew, not weak, at all, and he certainly didn’t need Jensen to support him like before. They stepped under the hot water simultaneously, still not breaking their kiss. Jensen reached for the gel soap, without looking, and squirt it all over his and Jared’s bodies. He didn’t have time for a perfect landing, and he certainly wasn’t going to break away for the stupid soap. Jared felt the squirts land on his body. He rubbed lather all over his lover, while Jensen returned the favor. Smooth chests slid against each other. Hard cocks touched, twitching with anticipation. They had to break form so they could wash each other’s hair. It was a sensual process, massaging luxurious suds into each other’s scalp. Jared washed Jensen’s short hair first, then vice versa. By the time they were clean, each man’s breathing sped up, anticipating what was coming next. Jensen glanced down, seeming to have an idea, then took Jared by the waist. Staring into his eyes, he side stepped his lover to stand next to the bench. Jensen stared into Jared’s eyes, as he lifted his left knee and placed his foot on the bench, leaving his groin area more open. Without breaking eye contact, Jared felt Jensen lift his right knee, mirroring him.

Jensen only glanced away to grab the gel and squirt a significant amount on his hand. He reached between his legs and rubbed a generous amount of the gel around his balls and back into his crack. Jensen avoided his dick, knowing full well he was too close to exploding. Jared’s breathing increased, his eyes rolled up with a pleasure filled moan, as Jensen applied a generous glob of the gel all over his balls and into his crack. Jensen fingered over Jared’s sack. He felt the full tight globes and rubbed them gently. “Ooh,” Jared grabbed Jensen’s forearms, panting with his eyes closed. Jensen knew the younger man didn’t need to be teased, and that wasn’t his intention. He simply loved Jared’s balls and couldn’t resist an extra few seconds of feeling them. Jensen slid his hand to the younger man’s cock. He slowly slid his soapy hand from base to tip, watching Jared drop his head back and groan with absolute abandoned pleasure at the touch. “Mmmm, that’s goddamn hot,” Jensen growled before the younger man lifted his head back up and attacked Jensen’s mouth. They kissed wildly, each man feeling himself spiraling out of control.

Jensen’s right hand slid it’s way around Jared and down to the crack of his ass. He slipped his middle finger to the puckered ring and began massaging it in circles. “Ah,” the younger man’s eager moan of anticipation was music to Jensen’s ears, and then another louder one, “Ah,” as Jensen slipped his middle finger to the little puckered hole with no resistance. “Oh God yes,” Jared whispered loudly in desperation, panting helplessly. Jensen could make him cum, just like this. The older man had such an effect on him, Jared was always on fire anywhere he touched him. They stared into each other’s eyes, Jared having a hard time staying still. Pupils were dilated to full black now, restless libido’s were past waiting and both men needed hard release. Jared growled, “You’re gonna fucking cum with me, Ackles,” as he slid his hand down to cup Jensen’s balls. Jensen’s hips automatically pushed forward. He grunted, pushing his dick against Jared’s groin, begging for Jared’s hand to move up and squeeze it. The younger man kneaded the sack, rolling the full jewels between his fingers. “Uuggh,” Jensen’s eyes rolled up at each movement, then returned back. Jensen lose it like this. He grunted hard when Jared began pushing his finger in...never having experienced this much dual sensation.

Jared’s finger pushed up inside to the first knuckle. Jensen moaned loudly and moved his finger inside of Jared. “Aaah,” Jared’s eyes rolled up and he moaned in pleasure. They fell beyond concentration. Nothing mattered but fucking their fingers and being fucked at the same time. This
was the hottest thing either man had ever done. Jensen knew this was gonna be over quick. He forced himself to look at Jared, “Look at me.” Jared’s dick got even harder, responding to Jensen’s command by meeting his stare. Jensen gripped Jared’s cock, which spiraled Jared closer to orgasm. “Fuck Jensen…ohgodyes,” he cried out, uncontrollably, still trying to hold his stare. Jared managed to grip Jensen’s cock and returned the favor with a squeeze, as Jensen pushed into his hand helplessly. “Jesusfuckingchrist,” Jensen growled, pumping his hips faster. “Aaaaah,” moans escalated and reached new octaves, at the unbearable pleasure of their tension building. The pleasure was indescribable. Jensen forced himself to maintain eye contact, struggling to maintain control, but losing it. “Jare, you feel so goddam good…oh, my god….oh my god,” Jensen’s groans rose to a pitch Jared had never heard from him. Jensen was letting go, and it was amazing to see him do it.

The younger man lost his rhythm, he was falling over the edge. He saw Jensen’s eyes roll up, just before his did, and they both stiffened and jerked, “Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh,” they screamed hard as their orgasms tore through their bodies and it felt sooo goddamned good. Even greater sparks of pleasure shot through their groins when fingers stiffened and jerked inside their bodies. Both lovers screamed again, then moaned over and over in blissful orgasmic rapture. The shockwaves came for several seconds. Sparks of electric pleasure rolled through their bodies as each man spasmed helplessly. They tried to catch their breaths, but the wondrous aftershocks still gripped them and controlled their actions. They continued gentling sighs of overwhelming bliss, as the post orgasmic peace flooded their senses.

The special forces veteran leaned his forehead against his brilliant engineer’s, finally able to return his breathing to normal. He was amazed at the release of control his mind was willing to give up during sex with Jared. It was addicting and terrifying, all at the same time. Jared had become his lifeline when he was able to let go like this. He gently removed his finger and his hand from where they were, then slid both hands lovingly over Jared’s ass to rub and squeeze them for a bit. God, Jared was perfect and he would never get enough of feeling every perfect part of him. Jared removed his finger also, then slowly slid his hand off Jensen’s dick, eliciting a sensitive moan from the older man at the action. He rubbed Jensen’s ass, then slid both his hands up his lover’s torso until he reached the back of Jensen’s neck. Both men were still thrumming with aftereffects and waiting for their legs to stop shaking.

“Mmmm…” Jared moaned his appreciation for the best sex he’d ever had in his life, while he rubbed his fingertips over Jensen’s short neck hairs. Jensen finally looked up, searching Jared’s face to make sure he was okay. Jared grinned sideways, obviously feeling pretty satisfied and giddy at the moment. Jensen thought it was an incredibly sexy look on him. Jared pulled his lover’s neck forward and commented, “Freight train,” before engaging Jensen in an exquisite after sex kiss. Jensen found himself out of breath from Jared’s incredibly talented tongue and what it had been doing with his for the last few minutes. He managed to respond, “Freight train,” nodding in agreement, when the younger man pulled back and looked into his eyes. Jared snickered softly at the older man’s confirmation. He reached behind Jensen and turned off the water. Jensen marveled at the fact that Jared was so much better today. He touched his cheek and looked at him with so much love and devotion, it was almost too painful for Jared to accept. He forced himself to not look away, knowing he was still getting used to receiving such intense feelings focused on him.

Not long after, they dried and stepped out to continue with their morning ministrations. They were using the double sinks to shave side by side. Jensen was Jared-watching, and trying to be nonchalant about it, since the younger man was only wearing a towel wrapped around his sexier than fuck waist. He admired the gorgeous body, noting several spots he’d like to lick and suck, possibly chew on, just to test out more of Jared’s erogenous zones. Jared glanced over at him with a toothbrush in his mouth, sensing he was being watched. Jensen looked away quickly, hoping he wasn’t busted. He knew the younger man would blush if he felt like he was on display. He already had to convince Jared to finish cleaning up together, instead of taking turns. Jared grinned and looked down,
knowing damn well Jensen had been staring. He finished his teeth and tried to ignore him, while starting to shave. Jensen finished before him. Jared could see him leaning on the counter out of the corner of his eye. He forced himself to resist the embarrassment he felt creeping in from Jensen’s blatant perusal. When Jared finished shaving, he looked directly at Jensen. “Why are you staring at me? It’s making me nervous.” Jensen smiled at him with a gleam in his eyes, “Because you’re fucking gorgeous.” Jared rolled his eyes and sighed, “I am not,” as he turned to wipe up the water he’d splashed on the countertop.

Jensen moved close, sliding his arms around Jared’s slender waist. The kid was still wasn’t quite looking up at him. “You have no idea how perfect you are. Jesus, I would keep your naked ass in bed with me 24/7 if I could get away with it,” Jensen announced. Jared looked up at him as he slid his hands around Jensen’s neck. He grinned slightly, but with a hint of shyness because of Jensen’s blatant attention. This did nothing to relieve Jensen’s addictive need to kiss him. They kissed sweet and tender for a moment, then pulled back to smile at one another. “That outfit isn’t helping me hold back, ya know. I can see almost every perfect part of you, and I know what’s under that towel,” Jensen said with a gleam in his eye. Jared felt his shyness slipping away, as he whispered sultry in the older man’s ear, “Whether it’s under the towel or not, it belongs to you, soldier, so you don’t have to hold back.” When Jared ended his statement with a lick to the older man’s ear, Jensen’s libido ignited once again. “Jesus,” he had just received the invitation of a lifetime and he found himself instantly responding. Before he was aware he was moving, Jensen pulled the younger man toward the bed, ripped off the towel and laid him out naked. Jared laid still and let Jensen drink his fill of his naked body. He couldn’t believe himself, not knowing where this newfound comfort zone was coming from…’from Jensen,’ Jared thought. Jared would never have laid naked in front of anyone before.

Jensen threw his own towel to the side and Jared was treated to an appreciative view of the older man’s hard toned body. Every inch was chiseled, from his powerful muscular shoulders, right down to his rock hard abs, and the beautiful trail of reddish hairs that thickened around his cock and continued down his legs. ‘Fuck, he’s all gorgeous power,’ Jared’s heartbeat quickened. Jensen turned to move the temperature switch up on the electric fireplace, loving the fact that he had his beautiful lover naked and laid out for him, but concerned about keeping him warm enough. Jared indulged himself with a blatant stare at the Black Ops expert’s ass. ‘Perfectly rounded and taught, of course,’ Jared thought. Jensen had four hours before his friends showed up, and he wasn’t gonna waste it. He walked up to the bed and ran his hand up Jared’s smooth leg. The kid was gifted with sinfully long legs, perfectly tapered, and even though thin, they were muscular from years of running and field work. Jensen spent time on those legs, feeling the muscles twitch as he glided his hand over them. Jensen’s mouth watered from what he was looking at. He felt himself starting to heat up down below, astounded at how Jared could get his motor running so soon after he’d just blown his load. Jared’s cock lay to the side. Jensen could see the organ twitch and swell as he ran his hand between Jared’s thighs. He moved his hand up and rubbed his thumb back and forth in the crease between Jared’s leg and his balls. Jared adjusted himself on the bed and became just a bit restless, which told Jensen his touch was having an effect. Jensen’s eyes landed on the younger man’s gorgeous balls, which were churning and swelling from Jensen’s very light touches. He smoothed his other hand over Jared’s chest and down the younger man’s arm. Jensen could feel the muscular definition in his lover’s lean body no matter where he touched him. He climbed over Jared and planted himself on his knees, one on either side of the younger man’s hips. Jared rubbed his hands softly up Jensen’s thighs, enjoying the tension he felt in the powerful muscles from Jensen holding up his own weight.

The older man rubbed circles all over Jared’s abdomen, then slid his hands down to rub fingers through Jared’s dark brown pubic hair. The younger man exhaled, knowing damn well Jensen could see his dick hardening. ‘Fuck, what he does to me,’ Jared was thinking, as the older man leaned his torso over him. Their chests touching, Jensen looked at Jared with an intense knowing look. Jared’s
mouth dropped open in high pitched pleasure when Jensen held himself an inch above him and barely touched his nipples to Jared’s.

Both sets of nipples went rock hard, instantly. Jensen moaned as he began to move, rubbing them gently back and forth, and around in circles, letting them stimulate each other. The nipples were an obvious hot spot for both of them and Jensen couldn’t get over how erotic it was to look down and watch them touching each other while feeling the effects. It was even more erotic when Jared moved restlessly from the sensation. His hips were gyrating on their own and he couldn’t stop moaning. Jensen remembered the response he got when he licked Jared the last time, so he bent down to do it again. “Aaahh,” Jared moaned loudly and moved lithely like a cat when Jensen’s tongue licked up his neck to his ear. When he circled it with his tongue, Jared cried out louder. Jensen wiggled his tongue inside his ear, getting even louder responses. After spending time there, he traveled back down to suck on Jared’s collarbone. Jared’s hard on was obvious, as the younger man’s hips absentmindedly pushed the swollen member into Jensen’s legs and crotch. “Mmmm,” the older man moaned as his lover reacted just the way he wanted. Jensen licked his way down to Jared’s nipples, biting and sucking the fabulous chest. “Damn, you taste good,” he mumbled on the way down.

When Jensen licked a nipple, Jared jerked in reaction, crying out in pleasure. Jensen sucked and licked and wiggled his tongue back and forth, eliciting the most erotic and sexy sounds from Jared. The kid was ‘his’, Jared had made that clear, and Jensen was partaking in his very own scrumptious buffet. He sucked harder and loved the way his hair was pulled when Jared’s hands tightened in it. Jensen moved across to the other nipple sucked on it hard. While holding it gently between his teeth, he flicked his tongue back and forth on the hard nub, causing a scream from Jared at the overwhelming sensation. When the kid screamed, Jensen almost blew his load right then. The older man had a hard time pulling himself away from that nipple, but he wanted to taste Jared in some other interesting places. He sat back up, admired his flushed lover, while rubbing his hands up and down Jared’s torso. The kid was breathing rapidly, looking at him in anticipation, squeezing his hands on Jensen’s thighs. Jensen leaned over and kissed him, licking Jared’s gums and teeth thoroughly. When Jensen pulled back, he pulled Jared’s lip between his teeth until he finally let it go. Jared was breathing hard. He held Jensen’s gaze with gorgeous darkened steel grey eyes.

Jensen knew exactly what he wanted to do next, “I want to taste you, in places that I haven’t yet. Is there anything off limits for you, baby? Anything that you don’t want me to do?” Jared could never deny Jensen a damn thing. It was chivalrous to ask, always protective and concerned, his Jensen, but Jared couldn’t think of a goddamned thing that he wouldn’t let the older man do to him. He couldn’t think, at all right now, actually, as he was practically losing his mind. Jared managed to shake his head no, “No. Nothing. Take anything you want, Jensen…anything.” Jensen’s eyes darkened almost to full black, then, and he kissed Jared again with utter abandon. The younger man didn’t remember where he was when the special ops soldier finished with him. Jensen quickly moved down to gently nudge Jared’s legs open. He planted himself in the middle of them on his knees. ‘What a view,’ he marveled, as he looked over his stunning lover once more. He lifted Jared leg and started kissing at the knee, then licked his way up Jared’s thigh. When he reached Jared’s groin, he set the leg down and moved to the other side. Jared whimpered with emotion at the overwhelming feeling of being savored and worshipped. He was completely at Jensen’s mercy.

Jensen set Jared’s leg down and reached over to his night stand to grab something out. Jared was still dazed and had no idea what it was. The strong hands lifted Jared’s knees, kissing them both and pushed them gently toward Jared’s stomach. Jensen held the bent legs for a moment, rubbing his thumbs back and forth on Jared’s shins. Jensen watched his face, looking for signs of uncomfortableness, but he wasn’t seeing any yet. Instead of panicking and pulling away, Jared met Jensen halfway and took over holding his legs up with his hands. Jensen kissed each leg again, and sat back on his haunches. “Fuck, Jare, you look good like this,” Jensen whispered with so much emotion, Jared felt his eyes water. When Jensen lowered his face to Jared’s crotch, Jared felt
powerful hands tilt his ass upward, and he knew he’d guessed right. ‘Oh my god…ohmygodohmygod,’ Jared thought, as he panted harder, knowing what was coming. Jensen licked Jared’s balls first, not being able to pass them up. He took each one in his mouth and sucked gently, hearing the cries of ecstasy coming from above him. Jensen hummed with his mouth full, hearing more encouraging sounds, so he repeated the same thing on the other side.

Jensen licked his way down Jared’s perineum and stopped to suck on the area. A pleasure filled “aaaaahhhgod” told Jensen he was throwing Jared into an overload of sensation. ‘Man, this fun,’ Jensen thought as he moaned in appreciation at the smell of recent gel soap and the recent memory of what they’d done in the shower. Jared was perfectly put together down here, as well. It was just another delicacy getting to know every secret inch of him. ‘It’s mine,’ Jensen reminded himself, ‘Jared said so.’ He licked his way further down, until he reached Jared’s hole. He knew the puckered ring was extremely sensitive. He wanted to taste the intimate prize, while sending sparks of sensual overload throughout Jared’s body.

Jensen had read up on this, but he had never actually done it. He was counting his blessings that Jared seemed to be totally willing to let him do it, and he planned on enjoying every bit while making it good for the kid. Jensen kissed and sucked the inside of Jared’s cheeks, instantly loving the taste and feel of him. This was the center of intimacy, and Jensen found himself melting into Jared’s very core as he explored. The kid was moaning with abandoned pleasure by the time Jensen was ready to go further. He held his mouth over Jared’s pink hole and blew on it. “Aaaaah,” Jared moaned, then panted and moaned again while Jensen kept blowing. “Aaah, aah, ohgodJensen, ohmygod, fuck it feels so good.”

The kid seemed to be beyond comprehension now, as Jensen continued to blow air on the little sensitive ring of nerves for a while longer. The older man grinned to himself, absolutely loving this, and loving Jared’s reactions even more. Jensen’s tongue finally took a swipe over Jared’s sensitive hole, sparks of liquid heat going right to Jared’s dick. He could not control his reactions when Jensen’s tongue swiped him again, and then began circling around his hole. “Aaaah my god…oh god Jensen…Jensen ohmygod…” Jared had never been so lost to sensation before. Jensen loved the emotional sounding sobs in between Jared’s moans. It certainly egged him on. His own dick was now leaking on the bed covers. Jared had no control over himself anymore as he pushed his ass up against Jensen’s face, begging for Jensen not to stop. He screamed when Jensen finally stuck his tongue inside the hole and started to slide it in and out. The hot wet heat now fucking him in and out was sending him into sensational hysteria. Jensen wiggled his tongue, eliciting another scream of pleasure, then he stiffened his tongue and fucked Jared harder, and as deep as he could. He wiggled and circled his tongue inside, while fucking the stiffened muscle through Jared’s basket case sounding cries of pleasure. Jensen didn’t want Jared to cum yet, but he could feel the kid’s body tensing up. He slowed and used his teeth against the rim, just to see what would happen, carefully rubbing them against Jared’s nerve endings there.

“JENSEN,” Jared screamed and pumped his hips, so Jensen grabbed the top of the younger man’s ball sack and squeezed it tight, stemming off Jared’s orgasm. “Nnnngggghhh,” Jensen growled in deep frustration, still pumping his hips like he was going to cum. “Nnnooofuck,” he couldn’t cum. He was sure he couldn’t survive this if Jensen didn’t fucking let go. Jensen continued his grip, blocking the supply of fluid from flooding into Jared’s cock. It was just in time, from what Jensen could tell…and by the sound of Jared’s desperate groaning. He lifted up on his knees and rubbed Jared’s abdomen with one hand, while staving off the kid’s orgasm with the other. Jared seemed to be calming down, but definitely experiencing desperate frustration. Jensen crawled up over his younger lover again, wanting to see his face close up. “Baby…I’m so sorry I stopped you. I want to do something else first.” He kissed Jared to soothe him and the younger man whined, still frustrated, but trying hard to accept waiting, “Fuck, Jensen, it felt so fucking good…I couldn’t stop it.”
Jensen looked into Jared’s eyes with serious intent, “I’ve never done this before, and if I’m not doing it right, or you just want to stop, then tell me. I’ll always stop if you tell me.” Jared was having trouble focusing after not being allowed release, but he tried to pay attention. “What?” He tried to figure out what the hell Jensen meant, “What…” Jensen watched Jared’s incredibly darkened eyes widen with understanding and turn even darker. “Jensen,” he whispered. Jared’s breathing increased again and he grabbed onto the older man’s shoulders, “Are you asking to fuck me cuz that’s gonna be a ‘yes’…more like a ‘fuck’ yes.” Jensen felt the younger man raise his legs even higher gyrate his hips with hungry anticipation. Jared definitely wanted it. “Baby, do you want me to wear a condom?” Jensen asked softly, as he kissed him and smoothed the hair back from Jared’s face. Jared again had trouble concentrating and took a few seconds to answer the question. He shook his head and whispered, “No. No it’s okay. I’m safe. It was only twice and I made that dumb fucker wear one, even though it pissed him off.”

Jensen looked down into the eyes that he loved so much and kissed his lover one more time. He couldn’t imagine the type of inconsiderate selfishness it would take for someone to deny keeping this beautiful man safe…especially with something as simple as slipping a condom on. Jensen vowed, once again, to have a private session with Tom, if he ever met him. When the older man pulled back, Jared could see that he was worried, ‘probably about hurting me,’ he figured. “Jensen,” Jared held the older man’s face between his hands and locked gazes with him, “Fuck me.” Jared couldn’t make it anymore plain than ‘that’, Jensen thought. He kissed Jared’s chest and moved back down to sit up on his haunches again. Jensen eyed the gorgeous writhing man on his bed, as he squirt a generous gob of very old lube on his fingers. Jensen leaned on one hand and placed his cold slippery fingers right on Jared’s entrance. He spoke to him as he circled the rim with his middle fingertip, “You know, this is all a first for me. I’ve only read about what to do and everything is coming from that.”

Jared responded while thrusting to Jensen’s ministrations, “Must’ve been some book, Jensen, no matter what you do, it’s fucking incredible.” Jensen smiled, “Good…then let’s see if I can get ‘this’ right.” Next thing Jared felt was Jensen’s talented finger pushing inside. “Oh God,” Jared clench and pushed his ass back back, luring the finger in deeper. Jensen moaned along with Jared, as he slid his finger in and out, feeling how tight the kid was. “Fuck, Jensen,” Jared was thrusting on Jensen’s finger and desperate to feel something larger inside of him. The older man pushed in a second finger, and Jared screamed “YES,” pushing back. He spiraled, rising fast toward orgasm, “AH…Ah, god,” but Jensen clamped the base of his cock and stopped him again. “Mmmmm, you’re so fucking hot,” Jensen said, knowing Jared was about to bust his load the second he let go of his cock. “Jensen….Jensen fuck me…please,” Jared was desperately pumping his hips and meeting Jensen’s thrusts. It felt so goddamn good.

As Jared wasn’t having any trouble with two fingers, Jensen added a third. The resistance was immediate, and Jensen slowly pushed in, stopping to hold still while Jared’s body adjusted. Jensen had definitely been deflected from that orgasm, for a second, stretching to accommodate the added width. It burned, as this was farther than Jared had been stretched in a long time, but the pain soon receded and he felt himself relax. Jensen moved experimentally, pumping his hips back and forward, Jensen moved his fingers to match him. “Jensen, it feels so good. Oh my god, it feels good.” Jared was ridden with tension, so past being turned on he couldn’t even speak. He could only feel. His face was tilted up with desperation and pleasure all over it. Jensen started to cum from just Jared’s look. He grabbed the base of his own cock and held it tight. “Goddamnit,” he growled, then leaned over to kiss Jared senseless. Jensen’s tongued fucked Jared’s mouth, at the same rhythm and speed as he fucked Jared with his fingers. The older man ripped his mouth away, panting with desire, “I’m gonna fuck you…baby, I’m gonna fuck you right now….Jay, are you ready?” Jared cried out, “Yes…yes fuck me,” as his hips pumped with more speed.

Jensen removed his fingers and placed another generous gob of lube on his cock. He found himself shaking and trying to hurry. When he looked at Jared’s glistening hole, slightly opened from his three
fingers, he nearly lost his load again right there. He realized looking at the tight hole while rubbing lube on his cock wasn’t the safest idea right now. He aimed himself at the target and pushed against the opening. Jared held his head up and watched him, while holding his legs up. Jensen pushed against the rim, straining hard to hold back from forcing his way in too fast. Jared focused on relaxing his ass as much as he possibly could. The ring was tight and even though Jared was begging for it, his body felt like it was pushing back at the invading force. Jensen closed his eyes at the tight sensation while pushing a bit harder. He felt the ring start to give and then tried to catch his breath, not realizing he’d been holding it. He didn’t know if he would even get all the way in, with Jared being so goddamned tight. “Fuck, it’s tight,” Jensen pushed harder and cried out in shocking pleasure when the mushroom head of his cock popped past Jared’s tight ring. “Oh...oh, Jesus,” Jensen paused to enjoy the new sensation, while giving Jared a chance to get used to him. He couldn’t seem to stop grunting, and he hadn’t even started moving yet.

Breathing incredibly hard, Jensen tried to blurt something out, “You’re so fucking tight...baby, are you alright? Tell me if you want me to stop,” but Jared answered him in between his own concentrated breaths, “Don’t stop.” Jensen braced himself and pushed in further, “Oooohh,” groaning in pleasure. Jared’s passage was the hottest tightest thing he’d ever felt around his dick and Jensen began to wonder if he would even survive this. He almost came when he saw Jared’s mouth drop open with the feeling of Jensen being inside him. Jared’s face was locked in concentration, trying to breathe and relax until he adjusted. Jensen paused between every inch, refusing to hurt Jared in any way. He couldn’t contain the loud groan when he finally slid home. “Ooooh...oh Jare...oh, Jesus it’s fucking tight,” Jensen held still until Jared could adjust, but the pleasure he felt was overwhelmingly dangerous, and he had to breathe and focus hard not to cum. He held his eyes tightly closed in concentration. Jensen soon felt loving hands rubbing his chest, encouraging him to open his eyes. Jared smiled at him and pulled his head down for another loving kiss. He looked into his eyes, “It’s okay...you can move now.” Jensen released the breath he’d been holding, braced himself on his arms and pulled himself out a few inches, then pushed back in. “Uhh, God,” the ex-soldier cried, as the first time feeling sent sparks of pleasure to every one of his sensitive nerve endings. His dick was being milked and squeezed by the hottest tightest place in the universe and Jensen couldn’t stop himself from starting to pump faster.

Jared raised his legs higher and clamped them around Jensen’s hips. “Fuck,” he was groaning right along with Jensen. His body pushed up on it’s own in order to meet Jensen’s thrusts. Jared could feel the rock hard muscles in Jensen’s shoulders shift and twitch every time he moved. “Harder...harder...Jensen, that’s it, fuck me!” Jensen responded by fucking him harder. ‘Fuck,’ he knew he was going to cum, and pretty goddamned quick. The kid below him writhing and pumping his hips, touching him with his hands and making those delicious sounds, was escalating him to orgasm fast. He didn’t want to cum without Jared. “FUCK,” Jensen cried out, feeling himself swelling inside the gripping channel. “I’m gonna cum,” Jensen yelled, “JARED, FUCK...TELL ME WHAT TO DO,” Jensen cried at the edge of his wit. Jared was getting there, but he knew he was a few seconds behind. He needed just a touch on his dick or his prostate and he would fall over the edge. He couldn’t lean over and he couldn’t stop. When he growled in frustration, he realized his lover was already shifting.

Jensen had a thought and adjusted quickly, not stopping his rhythm. He pushed up hard toward the front of Jared’s channel and, “Aaaahhh!” Jared screamed, as Jensen found his prostate and fucked his dick right into it. “That’s better,” the older man approved as he started to fall over the edge to Jared’s screaming of “YES,” and “YES!” Jared’s passage clamped down hard and Jensen was practically crying as he tensed, “Mmmgod, it’s so good...Fuck,” Jensen cried, completely losing control. He threw head back with a guttural cry, “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh,” clenching violently to the power of his orgasm. Jared’s scream was a vacant awareness, as the older man vaguely felt himself greying out. The younger man’s channel was clenched so hard, Jensen felt like they were
locked together forever. He greyed in and out, hearing Jared’s screams of pleasure, as Jensen jerked and strained uncontrollably. The pleasure was so intense, he couldn’t even open his eyes. Jensen felt his dick empty it’s load, pulsing with shockwaves of extreme pleasure. Jared emptied onto his stomach, shooting white fluid each time his body spasmed.

The lovers rode the waves with grunts and moans, having no ability to do anything but clench from their intense spasms. The endorphins washed through them, and after several pleasure filled aftershocks, Jensen was finally able to see again. Jared’s orgasm finally released him to desperately suck in some oxygen. He’d been moaning and screaming so hard, he felt the scratchiness in his throat. Jensen slipped out of him and dropped on his front, able to find enough of a brain cell to land on Jared’s right side and not crush his injury. Jared smiled, but still couldn’t open his eyes. The special forces master was definitely having issues with his recovery, and Jared admittedly was not able to try moving, in any way. He couldn’t even think yet, and he wondered if his brain might have exploded. Jensen moaned in peaceful bliss, feeling terribly useless and unable to move. The fact that he could feel his lover breathing beneath him, at least told him Jared was alive. ‘What the hell has happened to me,’ the older man thought, as he moaned and attempted to actually speak. It took a good five minutes for Jensen to raise his head and clear his vision enough to focus on Jared’s face.

The younger man had gained back some alertness. He grinned at the short hairs sticking up on Jensen’s head. The disheveled look was adorable. Jensen’s inability to bounce back and regroup that steel control he always exhibited was quite an entertaining thing to witness. Jensen rose up enough to scoot over Jared and look down into his face. He gently rubbed the younger man’s hair and studied him for any damage. Jared looked quite post-orgasmically peaceful and happy, but Jensen wasn’t sure he wasn’t hurting anywhere, “Are you alright?” Jared smiled dreamily, “Oh yeah…I’m pretty sore…but deliciously so,” Jared added with a knowing smirk. Jensen had concern in his eyes but couldn’t stop the grin at Jared’s response, “Mmmm…yes, it was delicious…you’re delicious…inside and out. I love what fucking you with my tongue does to you.” Jared barely had time to blush before Jensen saw it coming and commandeered his mouth for the next few minutes. When Jensen pulled away, his lover looked quite flushed, and pleasantly distracted from his embarrassment.

Jensen knew he needed to get the hell up. He groaned, loudly, as he hoisted himself up to stand and walk to the bathroom. Jared yawned and watched him go, missing Jensen’s heat immediately. When Jensen returned with a hot wet rag and some soothing anal cream in his hand, he was greeted by an adorable pout. The pou went away, as the kid’s interest was deflected by Jensen placing himself between Jared’s knees again. Jared lifted an eyebrow when his lover lifted his legs again, but Jensen assured him, “No, just relax…I’m gonna help you.” Jared closed his eyes and moaned heavily when he felt hot moist heat touch him and penetrate his sore rectum. The heat drifted through his swollen nerve endings and relaxed the bruised ring. Jensen held the rag there until Jared sighed peacefully, then he wiped the area gently, to remove any cum that had leaked out. He wiped the dried cum from Jared’s stomach, admiring his lover’s body again, then threw the rag on the floor.

Jensen squirt a generous amount of the soothing cream on his pointer finger, then very softly rubbed the liquid around Jared’s opening. Jared felt coolness, then gradual numbing, as the cream soaked through his skin. The high pitched sighs of relief from Jared told Jensen the cream was working, so he pushed another dollop up inside a few centimeters. Within seconds, the kid sighed dreamily and flailed his arms out loosely on the bed. Jared was feeling fantastic, now, but he still couldn’t get up. Jensen put the rag and cream away, did some quick washing of himself, then came back to the bed. He looked at the clock and realized they still had a couple hours before the idiots from his former team showed up. Jared needed to rest and Jensen was not going to miss the opportunity to lay naked with him for awhile. He pulled back the covers and slid in next to him, then pulled the covers back over them. Jared immediately rolled over on his side and snuggled close to his lover, laying his head on Jensen’s chest. “Feel better?” Jensen kissed his head. Jared nodded, “Mmhmm…thankyou.”
Jared rubbed his hand over Jensen’s chest and stomach, then wrapped his arm and his leg around him. “Mmmm…you have an incredible body, Jensen. It feels so smooth and hard. I think you broke something though…maybe my brain, not sure.” The older man responded, “Mmm, I was just thinking the same thing about you, my young paddiwan. I passed out there for a few seconds…and my dick is definitely broken.” Jared smiled at the nickname. It was so cute how Jensen called him that sometimes. After resting for over an hour, the lovers groaned their way out of bed to get dressed. Jared was moving slow but he assured Jensen he felt like a million bucks. His ass was only slightly complaining after whatever magic gel Jensen had put on him.

Jared put on his jeans and a typical white t-shirt with a long sleeve flannel over it. He finished putting on socks and turned around to see an Adonis, who was shirtless and barefoot, wearing faded jeans with tears in various places. Jared hadn’t buttoned the jeans yet and Jensen was transfixed. He stood there with his mouth open like he was a useless blob of putty in Jared’s hands…which he really was. Jared walked toward him, clueless as a blind man, kissing Jensen and looking at him confused, “What is it?” Jensen shook his head, “You just can’t walk around like that. Not like that. Not where other people can see you, baby.” Jared looked at Jensen like he’d grown horns, but then he completed the sexy picture by jerking his head back like he did to get his hair to fall into place.

“Jesus,” Jensen grumbled. Jared looked at him again with a raised eyebrow so Jensen explained, “You’re just too fuckin’ hot and that’s all there is to it. You can’t walk around like that, or I’ll go to prison for killing all the lookiloo’s.” Jared kissed him and pulled back with a smirk, still having a ‘yeah right’ look on his face, “I’m not planning on walking around like this. I’m not comfortable like this. Correction…comfortable like this with anyone ‘else’. I would have ‘never’ walked around in a towel or laid on a bed naked in front of someone. It’s your fault. You’ve done something to me. Some Jedi mind trick, or something.” Jensen grinned at Jared’s Star Wars reference, then he squeezed his hand and asked him again, “Are you sure you’re okay?” Jared put a hand on his cheek and answered, “Jen, you felt so fantastic I couldn’t even think. You made me cum so hard, I’ll have scrambled brain cells for a week. It’s probably a good idea to play cards or chess with me right now.” He kissed him softly, “Thank you for being so considerate and going slow. I’m gonna be sore, but it’s a wonderful reason to be that way. You’re not very scrawny, y’know, so it took some time to make things fit up there.”

Jensen smiled at his lover and squeezed his hand, “It was like sticking my dick into hot molten honey. Fuck, I had no idea. I lost myself. It was the most incredible thing I’ve ever felt. I want you to do that to me, Jay. When you’re ready. It’s nothing I’ve ever wanted with anybody else, just like a lot of things we’ve done. But when it comes to you, I want absolutely all I can get.” The two men wrapped their arms around each other and kissed for several minutes. Jared was overwhelmingly touched by Jensen’s openness. He loved this man so much and Jensen was letting more and more of himself go when they were together. Once they were dressed, Jensen helped Jared with his socks and shoes, and then they returned to the kitchen. Jensen put the plate in the oven to reheat the tray of potatoes, then invited Jared to make a salad with him. Once again, Jared jumped in and chopped vegetables, helping Jensen put things together. They went outside and wiped off the folding chairs. Jensen looked around to make sure the herd from this morning hadn’t left any droppings for them to step in, then cleaned off the barbecue. Jared watched everything Jensen did. He never owned a barbecue, and it was enlightening to think he could actually finally cook something for someone if he paid attention.

The older man checked his watch, then tilted his head as if listening for something. The sound of the doorbell went off and Jensen smiled, “Right on time.” Jared walked behind him to the front door, as he asked, “Are they always on time?” Jensen looked over his shoulder and said “Oh yeah. I told them five thirty.” Jared looked at the microwave and argued, “But it’s only four thirty.” Jensen turned and kissed him, explaining, “It’s a Black Ops thing. If I tell you a time, you be there an hour early.” Jensen smiled at Jared’s “Oh” then turned to open the door. “Fuckers, you better be on time,”
was Jensen’s welcoming line. Jared stood back and observed, waiting for the three friends to greet one another. The two on the porch broke out in laughter, then one of them balked at the security, “Who’re the fuckin’ Backstreet Boy rejects, Jensen,” nodding his head in the direction of the security team. Jensen sighed, “Please tell me you were nice to them?” The man on the porch looked astonished and put out, putting his hand to his chest, “What? Mua? Of course I was nice. Shook his hand, didn’t I,” the friend hit the taller one on the arm and looked at him for backup. The second man nodded and rolled his eyes, “Yes…yes you were nice. He did shake the guy’s hand.”

Jensen said, “They’ve actually been pretty capable, guys. They’re good and they’ve been thorough.” The shorter of the two men snickered, “Sure…that’s why we’re here.” Jensen sighed, knowing it was obvious why he was inviting them over and feeding them. Speaking of the reason they were here, Jensen said, “Come in fellas,” and stepped aside to let them enter. Jared found himself a little nervous. Maybe it was his experience with his uncle, which he hated to admit, but he wasn’t sure about these seasoned war horses being too accepting of he and Jensen’s lifestyle. Of course, Jensen wouldn’t have brought them over if they were like that, but Jared found he had to work on controlling his apprehension about it. His demeanor immediately relaxed when the taller of the two men went right for him with his hand out and a welcoming smile, “You must be Jared.” The engineer shook the hand and smiled back, “Jared Padalecki. It’s really nice to meet some of Jensen’s friends.” The taller man snickered and nodded his head at Jensen, “Jensen? We’re his ‘only’ friends, no matter what he tells you. We don’t really like him, either…but he makes a mean barbecue.” Jared giggled, seeing the friendliness in the man’s eyes. The man finally introduced himself, “I’m Dave, by the way. I’m the more intelligent and better looking one.”

Jared continued to smile and giggled again, “Thanks for letting me know…nice to meet you, Dave.” When Dave nodded at the shorter friend stepping up beside him, he said, “That’s Mike. He’s an idiot. Don’t worry about him, we just keep him around ‘cuz no one else will do it.” Mike shoved Dave aside exclaiming, “Shut the fuck up, asswipe.” He held out his hand and shook Jared’s, then offered a completely friendly, “Hi Jared.” The younger man suddenly felt his shyness creep in as he responded with his own “Hi.” Mike looked directly into his eyes before letting go of his hand. When Jared glanced at Dave, he realized he was looking at him too. Jared felt studied…assessed…almost dissected. The friendly greetings out of these men’s mouths was totally different from what he saw in their eyes. ‘Fuck,’ Jared barely started to fold in on himself when his lover came to the rescue, “Knock it off, assholes.” Jensen slipped his hand around Jared’s waist, just as they looked at Jensen with feigned hurt. Jensen looked right back at them admonishingly, “You’re assessing. I know it’s natural for us, and I do it too, but remember how we practiced not doing it on ‘everybody’?” The two friends nodded, “Yes,” and “Yeah,” looking shamefully chastised. Jared felt himself grinning, realizing these two responded to Jensen like loyal followers…’kids’ even. They adored him and Jared immediately liked them for that.

Both friends looked at Jared and started to apologize, but the younger man shook his head, “Please, it’s okay.” Both friends smiled at him, then looked at Jensen with mock sadness, “See? He says it’s okay, boss.” Jensen sighed, “Because he’s like that. He’s nice. You suckholes remember he’s the love of my life.” Jared did a double take at Jensen, then back at the two friends. He felt the blush starting when they perused him. They were trying to be less intimidating this time, but checking him out just the same. Mike said, “Well, I see why. Damn, Jensen, he’s hot. Even being straight, I can tell that one.” Dave turned to Mike, “You’re embarrassing the kid, stop it. Jensen’s going to kick us out of here with a few fingers missing, asshole.” Mike shrugged a shoulder like he wasn’t worried, “Sorry Jared, but it’s quite a revelation to meet the man who caused our team leader to go all soft and mushy. I hear you’re a genius…engineer, right?” Jared opened his mouth to answer, but his lover spoke first, “Damn right. And his brilliance is pretty much what got him into this mess.” Jensen looked over at Jared and realized the kid had been about to answer for himself. “I’m sorry,” feeling bad about interrupting him.
“You see? That right there. That’s what I’m talking about,” Mike piped in. Dave nodded, looked between the two lovers, “Mmmhmm, yeah, I see it.” Mike and Dave looked at Jensen and Jared, nodding like they had just arrived at some private agreement. “What,” Jensen blurted out, slightly irritated. Mike sighed, “Well…when you talk to ‘him’,,” Mike indicated a hand toward Jared, “Your voice goes all sweet and airy.” Jensen shifted his stance and grumbled, “Not this again,” and Dave interjected, “Nope,” shaking his head, “He’s right…you’ve got it bad, Ackles.”

Jensen sighed in annoyance, then shook his head as his friends stepped back out the front door to retrieve huge duffle bags from the porch. When they lifted them, multiple metal clanging sounds caused Jared’s eyebrows to raise. The two soldiers walked by, as Jensen shut the door. Jared watched them head for the guest bedroom like they’d done it quite a few times. Jared followed Jensen to the same room. He jumped when the bags were dropped on the floor with a loud heavy metal sound. Jensen bitched, “Hey…watch the hard wood.” When Jared looked at Jensen in question, the older man shook his head, “Don’t ask.” He turned to his friends and explained there were stacks of extra towels in the bathroom, back up soaps and razors if they needed them, and that dinner was going on the grill.

Jensen went back to the kitchen so Jared went with him. He suddenly seemed very quiet and Jensen was a little worried that his friends had overwhelmed him. The potatoes and salad were put on the table first, then Jensen pulled the meat out of the fridge. Jared pulled four bottles of beer from the fridge and turned to find Jensen already outside. He set one on the table for his lover, just as Dave and Mike came toward him. “Oh, sweet,” Mike exclaimed, “Awesome,” Dave said simultaneously, as Jared handed them each a beer. He sipped his own beer in silence as the two men seemed to study him again. Jared smiled and looked down, so Dave caught his attention and apologized, “Jared, it’s okay. I know we’re doing it again and I’m sorry.” Mike nodded, “We don’t mean to…it just becomes natural.” Jared looked up at them and did his own close assessment. Each man was genuine. They seemed like they really wanted him to accept them so Jared tried for some common ground. He cleared his throat, “Jensen does it. He ‘was’ doing it to me a ‘lot’ when I was in the hospital, but not as much now.” Jared smiled, hoping he was building a rapport. “Actually,” Mike spoke up, “He would never stop…he can’t. I bet it’s ‘you’ that’s simply become accustomed to it.” Jared nodded, never having realized that, “Oh, I guess you’re probably right.” Dave spoke up, “And in our defense, we spent twelve years in close quarters with the guy. Seeing him like this…with ‘you’,,” Dave grinned and shook his head, “Well, we can’t help but be damn curious about the man who caused him to turn into Mr. Happy all the time.”

Jared smirked, but tried not to look embarrassed. He was sure the gesture of pushing his hair back with his hand was a sure fire indicator of it to these two trained killers. Jared knew about all the medical and psychological training Jensen had and these two surely had it too. He felt cornered, pinned for study like a lab rat, but tried to keep those feelings at bay, because he knew these two didn’t mean it. Jared went for honesty, “He saved my life…and…he kind of still is. I’m glad he seems happy to you…because he deserves to feel that way.” The two soldiers studied Jared in silence for a few seconds, then Dave spoke up, “I’m sure you know why Jensen brought us over here. The real reason, yes?” Jared looked between them and then down. The two men glanced at each other, then Dave touched Jared lightly with his beer bottle to get him to look up, “Hey.” When Jared looked up, Dave said, “We don’t mind being here, Jared,” but the engineer retorted, “I mind.” He paused in frustration for a second, then explained, “I mind because this disrupts Jensen’s life…it disrupts all the,” Jared threw up his hand, indicating the men outside, “security people and…and my friends and family have twenty four hour guards on them now. And you and Jensen should be having a nice barbecue and drinking beer and…” Mike interrupted, “Isn’t that what we’re doing, cuz I specifically came here for the food and beer tonight.” Mike looked at Dave and they clinked their beer bottles together, then looked back at Jared nodding in feigned innocence. “Mmmhmm,” “Yep”, “That’s what we’re doing,” both men answered Jared at once.
The engineer sighed, and tried very hard not to smirk at their obvious attempt at ignoring his complaint about why they were really here. Jared became serious and locked eyes with them, “I’m sorry.” Dave and Mike were suddenly reading the soulful guilt that was flooding Jared’s eyes, “I’m sorry your friend is stuck in this…and now, I’m sorry that now you’ve both been brought into it. All of you deserve happiness after everything you’ve done to save so many people…and you shouldn’t be here. You’re supposed to be enjoying your retirement.” The military experts were silent, as they each took a few sips of beer while absorbing their first impressions of the young genius. Dave finally spoke, catching Jared off guard, “Jensen is family, Jared. That’s why we’re here.” Mike added, “Yep, and Jensen says you’re the love of his life. I’m beginning to see the reason why. Our type of family takes care of it’s own. Whenever it has to, whenever it’s needed. There’s no favor to ask, no debt to pay back, it’s a bond that responds between us. There are others, but they live too far and we’re close enough that Jensen knew we could get here.” Mike glanced at Dave first before he concluded, “Because Jensen loves you, we don’t want to have to deal with the bastard if anything happens to you, so we’re not going anywhere until you’re safe.”

Dave nodded, “You’re a part of Jensen’s life, so you have to put up with his family, Jared. Unfortunately, his family is made up of the two meat heads standing in front of you.” Jared found himself overwhelmed with emotion, but he tried to go for stoic and keep it controlled. He smiled softly, not knowing what to say after the conviction that had just been laid out for him. Jensen chose that moment to open the slider and call out worriedly, “Jay…are you okay?” Dave and Mike opened their hands, as they walked toward Jensen with feigned hurt, “What?” Mike asked. Jared yelled in answer, “I’m good,” and smiled, then laughed, when he heard the friends bitching to Jensen, “Why you asking him if he’s okay? Huh?” “Yeah, what the fuck do you think we’re gonna do to him, Ackles? He’s fine. And I like him. He’s too good for ‘you’ that’s for goddamn sure.” The three soldiers went out back together. Jared grabbed Jensen’s beer off the table and decided to join them, his nervousness gone.
Chapter 17. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

We get to know the special ops friends better. So does Jared. The bond between these veterans becomes more apparent. There is humor, angst and deep committed loyalty. Some intense emotions between the three ops brothers.

I hope you like it. :0)

Chapter Seventeen

“They’re full of shit,” Jensen said to Jared, as Mike and Dave bitched about Jensen being a natural at the techniques they had to learn in training. Mike said, “The fuck we are…I’m serious, Jared. Fucking annoying…the guy can absorb something from a book and know exactly what it’s talking about, while the rest of us ‘normal’ people have to actually practice things, get them wrong, practice some more…like ‘NORMAL’ people.” Jared smiled, genuinely appreciating Jensen’s friends for sharing about his past, but also already having learned about Jensen’s ability to pick things up from a book. ‘Learned that earlier today,’ he thought to himself. He grinned at Jensen knowingly. The older man grinned back with some of his rare shyness. Dave explained to Jared, “We had to test on fifteen different types of knots, then learn the mechanisms and components of various locks and undo them in a certain amount of time. If we didn’t pass the first test, we got punished until we did. ‘Fucking Einstein over there passed ‘every’ test the first time. NO one does that.” Jensen returned quickly from putting the dishes in the sink to bark at his teammates, “I tried to help you dickwads.” Mike glanced at Jensen, then back at Jared, mocking Jensen’s claim, “Oh yeah…you know how he helped us, Jared?”

When Jared shook his head, grinning, Mike piped in, “He tied us up…in every knot. All fifteen knots! All at once!” Jared’s eyes widened in shock and he looked at Jensen, only to see Jensen shaking his head and rolling his eyes, as if what Jared was about to hear wasn’t quite the truth. Jared grinned and looked back at Mike, while the man continued, “It took us all fuckin’ night to get out of them. I was starvin’…almost pissed myself.” Mike sighed forlornly, “We could’ve died, Jared, it was inhumane.” Jensen bitched loudly, “It took you assholes an hour and a half, not all night, and you weren’t dying.” Jared looked at Jensen with a smirk, then back at the two friends for their response. The whole dinner had been like this and it was quite entertaining. “So…tell Jared whether you passed, or not…did you?” Jensen pushed. Mike and Dave glanced at one another, then answered with a simultaneous snicker, “Yeah…we did.” Jared laughed at their admission, enjoying himself immensely. After spending half an hour outside waiting for Jensen to cook the meat, the four men decided to eat in the living room by the fire. Jared helped Jensen put the side dishes on the coffee table, while the guests built a fire. They were now sitting around the living room, telling stories.

Jared wasn’t happy when he felt the complaints of his injured body start to creep up on him. It started when they were setting up the table earlier, seemed okay through dinner, but now it was intensifying. He certainly didn’t want to take any damn pain pills, or give in and go to bed at a ridiculous seven o’clock. He was in the middle of shifting his position for the third time, trying to alleviate some of the soreness away, when he felt a familiar hand brush the hair back from his face. “How bad are you
hurting?” Jared turned his head toward Jensen, realizing the older man had noticed his discomfort and moved next to him. Jared hesitated, not quite willing to share just everything in front of the other two sets of eyes watching him. Jensen glanced back, then looked at his lover reassuringly, “Don’t worry, they were just going to do the dishes.” Mike and Dave took their cue and immediately went to the kitchen, leaving Jensen alone with Jared. He brushed Jared’s hair back from his face again, rubbing it gently until Jared finally answered his question, “My ribs hurt. It was okay, but it’s getting worse. The other end is complaining a little too.”

Jensen looked into Jared’s eyes with concern, “I actually can’t believe you’re still awake. This day has been an awful lot on your system.” Jared’s beautiful puppy dog eyes were hard to resist, “I don’t want to go to bed. This has been so fun. I don’t want to take that sleepy crap.” Jensen sighed, “Do you wanna try a Motrin? We have the big fat eight hundreds the doc gave you…he said you could use them if you don’t want use the Percocet anymore. It’ll relax everything and maybe not conk you out so bad.” Jared nodded with a grateful smile. Jensen kissed him, then rose to go retrieve the muscle relaxant. He felt terrible about Jared’s soreness, knowing damn well that mind blowing sex earlier today had taken it’s toll. He grabbed a Motrin out of the container on top of the refrigerator, chuckling to himself at the argument going on at the sink, then returned with Jared’s pill and a water bottle. While the engineer downed both of them, Mike and Dave came back with dessert plates, utensils and a delicious looking pie. Jared handed Jensen back the half empty water and laid his head back to wait for the Motrin to kick in. He turned his head and stared into the fire, looking a bit miserable. The two guests noticed, but kept silent, for now.

Jensen felt the younger man’s forehead, then put the water on the table. He accepted a beer from Dave, then met his eyes in silent communication over the condition of his lover on the couch. Jensen’s eyes moved to Mike’s next, and offered the same silent exchange. Jensen knew they wanted the full story on Jared, now that they were reminded of the accident the poor kid had endured. Up until this point, all they knew was that Jensen had saved his life, stayed at the hospital with him while he recovered from surgery, and now he was in some kind of danger. Dave picked up his pie and sat back in his chair with one leg crossed over the other, “So, who’re the pics you sent us?” Mike grabbed his own plate and sat back on the short end of the couch to start digging in, while Jensen answered Dave’s question, “They’re the reason for all this. He knows two of ‘em from work, but the last one I sent you is an unknown. He’s a heater and I’m not convinced he’s incapable of getting around security.”

Jensen let his friends absorb that, while he looked over at Jared. The younger man was still facing the fire, within ear shot, but more focused on willing the pain to go away than he was on the conversation. After several minutes, Jared felt the gripping pain ease off in his chest and the throbbing in his rear end start. He sighed, starting to relax, then looked over to see the dessert on the table. Jensen’s friends watched Jared hold his left side and struggle, while Jensen helped him sit up. Jared leaned forward very slowly, holding his chest, then grabbed the piece of pie that had been left there for him, “This looks so good.” Jared hadn’t really caught on yet to the silence in the room, so he savored his first few bites, “Oh my god, this is so good.” Jensen smiled, as Jared moaned over his dessert. He glanced at his two friends. They had stopped eating and were watching his lover’s clueless responses. Jared didn’t know he was being observed and that made it so much more fun to see. Jensen paid attention to his own dessert, knowing perfectly well his fellow team mates were falling under the spell of Jared’s innocent charm. The kid had a way about him and even the seasoned special forces experts weren’t immune to his earnest open responses about things.

Jared took a few more bites, then finally realized no one was talking. He stopped chewing and looked around, “Is everything okay?” The young engineer’s innocent expression jolted the two visitors back into eating and voicing their opinions about Jensen’s pie. “Delicious, Ackles,” Mike said, forcing a smile, then Dave added, “Mmhmm…fuckin’ incredible.” Jared raised an eyebrow and looked at Jensen, knowing damn well that had been a feigned response. Dave broke the silence, “So
Jared, we know you’re an engineer.” The younger man looked surprised, “Yes.” Before Dave could ask more, Mike interjected excitedly, “That’s fuckin’ sweet, Jared. You design machines and buildings and shit like that?” Jared grinned, “Sort of, yeah,” not wanting to correct Mike when he was looking at him with such hero worship. He was learning Dave seemed the more focused and calm one, more like Jensen. Mike was the more instant response type of person who didn’t use as much self control. Funny and energetic, but not as patient as the other two. Jensen interjected, “He’s actually quite an ‘advanced’ engineer, a brainiac wonder.” Jared rolled his eyes and looked annoyed, which Jensen expected, but it didn’t stop him from continuing to compliment the kid, “Brilliant, talented…annoyingly advanced at math. I wouldn’t suggest playing cards with him…or chess…unless you don’t mind losing. He’s a natural at counting cards and figuring out probabilities.”

Mike looked at Jared suspiciously, with narrowed eyes, “Hmpf, I see,” sensing he had just found a new opponent to try out. Jensen and Dave grinned, knowing perfectly well Mike’s tendency to take on a challenge like that. Jensen set his plate down and took a swig of his beer. He sighed, then guiltily met the younger man’s eyes, “They’re waiting to be caught up on everything that’s happened. They’re trying not to push, but we have to tell them what’s going on. Do you feel okay with that?” Jared suddenly lost his appetite, knowing the subject they were about to discuss wasn’t on his ‘favorites’ list, but he realized the two visitors were here to help and they needed the full story. He nodded, “Sure,” then put his dish on the table and grabbed the rest of his water. “So, who the hell tried to kill you, Jared?” Mike blurted out the question, which gained him an admonishing glare from Dave and Jensen. Jared choked on his water, mid swallow, not expecting to jump to that part of the story yet. He’d expected to start at the beginning and sort of ease into the almost dying thing.

Jensen wasn’t done glaring at his friend, “Could you have waited a damn minute?” Mike glanced back and forth between the choking young man and Jensen, “Sorry. I’m sorry. I’m on your side. Just want to get the son of a bitch for you.” Jensen sighed, “I know,” then looked at Jared apologetically. The kid was recovering from his near drowning experience and looking quite out of sorts that they’d skipped right to the killing people part, but Jensen watched him regroup and put up the resilient walls he still used when he needed them. Jared cleared his throat and tried his best to answer, “Well, my boss...actually boss-es were doing something really crooked, and illegal…and they’re pissed at me for realizing it. I went to the Attorney General with it and now they’re in trouble...and I’m sure they’re beyond pissed now.” Jensen looked at his team, “And they want to kill him for it…before they’re found guilty. They’ve already tried once, and they almost succeeded.” Jensen watched the wheels turn inside both his teammates’ heads.

Jensen explained the background about Jared’s success with his old company, his long time career with them, and then the take over by the new organization. “Jared’s reputation was a desirable asset to them. He was a well respected expert that had been certified by the court and they knew they could use him to cover up all their bad deals.” The two men listening were glancing back and forth between Jared and Jensen, absorbing and assessing. ‘Always,’ Jared thought to himself, amazed at himself that he was actually getting more comfortable with it.

“You have questions,” Jensen said matter of factly. Dave asked just how they were using him to cover things up, so Jared explained, “After the first couple design jobs, they started sending me to inspect things…like cracks in mortar, creaky suspension, stuff like that. I was ‘told’ that they needed my attention to detail and I was to go out there and inspect and report. I didn’t really like that part of the job, my favorite thing is design, but they were the bosses and they told me they needed me to do it. So, I went out and did my own inspections and my own calculations, then put together my findings of defects I found.”

The two visitors were listening intently, as Jared kept going, “I found the structures were put together by cutting corners. Safety supports and other vital reinforcement requirements, mostly required by building codes, were ignored. The company was finalizing the jobs and collecting the money, but the
structures were incomplete. They never should have been opened to the public. I recommended all the corrections and how to fix them in my reports. Without the corrections, the structures weren’t safe. I ‘thought’ that this was the company’s way of getting an expert’s recommendations so they could make the corrections. Then this attorney called me on one of the original cases I’d done over a year ago. I didn’t know why he called me directly, at first, but then I realized my name was on the report he had from our office. The attorney said he didn’t believe the report was accurate, so I had him send me the one they gave him. I was thinking ‘why the hell does it matter’ so I looked at it for him.”

“My manager told me not to talk to him, but I got curious. When I saw the copy the attorney sent me, I realized why. Not one of the defects and corrective recommendations were in there. The copy he had and my original didn’t match. What set me off, more so, was that people were already using that building…they were in danger and it didn’t seem to bother the idiot manager I worked for.” Dave piped in, “But it bothered you,” to which Jared answered, “Yes. I ‘thought’ it would bother ‘anyone’.” Jared sighed defeatedly, “apparently not.” Jensen watched his friends gain a new respect for his lover. He knew it would happen. Dave and Mike were realizing this kid had gotten himself into life threatening trouble by trying to do the right thing. Even if he weren’t Jensen’s new life partner, they would certainly feel compelled to help him anyway.

Mike leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, “Did you confront them?” Jared paused for a few seconds, “At first, it was like I couldn’t ‘possibly’ be seeing what I was really seeing. I argued with my manager twice about it. The second time was loud and I thought for sure they would just fire me over it.”

Jared responded to Mike, “Hell no. It was fucking ‘wrong’. I went through and checked them all and every damn report I had done had been altered. Their version on the shared company drive was a variation of my original. Every…damn…one. Thank God I had the originals.” He sighed, “I knew I still had the emails so I pulled all of their fakes off and put them with my files. I saved them and made sure I went over them and over them…just to make sure I was right. It took me awhile to even absorb it. Eighteen structures opened to the public that shouldn’t have. I hadn’t been helping to make things safer for people with my inspections…I’d just been helping the assholes get richer and endanger people along the way.” Jared took a few seconds to regroup himself while the other men remained quiet. Every time he thought about how he had been duped, it pissed him off. Jensen put a hand on his back for comfort, then glanced at his friends to contemplate what they might be thinking. They were studying Jared. Jensen could see they had already decided to protect him and kick the shit out of anyone who tried to hurt him. Jared was oblivious to anyone’s scrutiny, as he continued, “I didn’t know where to go, at first. I talked to one of my so called ‘friends’ about it, thinking he would back me, but he didn’t.” Jared paused, finally catching on that Jensen had sent these two pictures of the people he was talking about. He sighed before admitting to the group, “Honestly, I had no idea it would go this far…I was
sure I’d get fired, but…this isn’t really what I had in mind.” Everyone was quiet. The men were absorbing everything. Jensen could see Jared was looking exhausted again, his body’s strength waverling after everything today. He kept his hand on the kid’s back, as he looked back at his friends.

Dave led the next question, “So, how’d you run into Jensen?” Jared glanced at Jensen, then at Dave and Mike, “I needed to get away from them. They handed me a renewal package and it was…it was ridiculous. A bribe. I grabbed a job here and took off for a few days.” Jared’s short response told Jensen he really wasn’t feeling that great and going over the accident again wasn’t on his favorite things to talk about list. Jensen took over the explanation, “He came to Cedar Ridge to work and the fuckers ran him off the road. The guy they sent hit him hard, then left him there to die. The traffic cams showed a company beefhead, somebody Jared knew that handled all the muscle jobs, odds and ends. Thanks to his own survival instincts, he climbed out the window of the car, completely slicing up his hands, then he walked two hundred feet with a double pneumothorax, four broken ribs, deep lacerations all over him, and a moderate grade concussion.”

Jared looked down, not too thrilled at reliving the memory. It was a bit easier now that it wasn’t as fresh, but he still remembered the smell of his own blood, the sounds of the sliding and screeching tires, the feel of the tight retracted seatbelt and the painful slice of his hands. He’d somehow blocked out the breathing difficulty for the moment. Mike whistled and shook his head, “Fuck, Jared, that’s going in my book. You kicked ass.” Jared looked up and was shocked to find that Mike wasn’t the only one who looked at him in awe. The men were very experienced field medics with advanced skills, so they knew how close to dying Jared had come. Dave asked, “So, how many days has it been?” Jensen looked upward to count and confirm before he answered, “Thirteen tomorrow.” Dave was quiet, but he did raise an eyebrow. Mike blurted out, “It hasn’t even been two weeks since all that.” Both men studied Jared. Dave glanced at Jensen, “That’s a fast recovery for something that extensive.” Jensen nodded, “Yes, it is, but he’s not recovered, really. The doc said he was the fastest healer he’d ever seen. He let him out, but only with a spotter for awhile.”

Jensen looked at his lover, “He’s better and better every day.” Jared was trying not to puke while everyone was looking at him, ‘they’re assessing again, fuck,’ he thought to himself. Mike and Dave studied the young engineer for a few seconds, looking for any signs that he’d been in such a terrible crash. They could make out fading bruises on the kid’s left cheek, up near his eyes, and a couple light cuts that were healing, the shape of a goose egg knot high up near his hair line, but other than that, you couldn’t tell. Dave asked, “So, what are the restrictions?” Jensen said, “No lifting, bending and stooping is at a minimum but gradually getting better, passenger only until he hits four weeks, then he can drive. He warned about transference of energy for weeks to come while his body repairs it’s injuries, which hit him hard in the beginning, but it’s much better. He’s not to jolt his chest in any way…no pushups or weights, or anything that stresses that left chest area. It’s quite painful, though, and it reminds him if he does too much.” He looked at Jared and added, “which is pretty often.”

Jensen smiled when Jared glared at him. The younger man looked at Mike and Dave to argue, “My surgeon said I was ahead of schedule and I could run soon,” to which Jensen corrected him, “No… he said you could ‘walk’ and at two weeks. He also said you’re to ‘walk’ first, ‘then’ work up to an easy jog…then’ work up to running over several weeks. ‘Weeks,’” Jensen stressed again as Jared rolled his eyes and sighed once again. “I used to run all the damn time,” Jared bitched, but Jensen countered, “Not with broken bones and holes in your chest, you didn’t.” Jared sighed again, looked at Dave and Mike and realized they had been watching the exchange. “Difficult patient?” Dave asked. Jensen glanced at his very put out lover and grinned before turning back to Dave, “Not really…he just likes to overdo it…doesn’t take being down too well…wants to do absolutely everything at once. He’d like to build me a new deck but so far I’ve only let him measure for it with my help.” Mike and Dave smirked at the blatant frustration being emitted from the young man. Jared was obviously wanting to skip all the physical restrictions. All three special ops men knew exactly how dangerous his injuries had been and how easily he could re-injure the weakened areas.
The two friends were dying to know the details, but Mike was the only one pushy enough to blurt out his curiosity, “So how bad was the lung?” Jensen answered first, “The ribs were splintered, tweedled different ways. The breaks punctured his left lung in two places. I had to use a straw to relieve the pressure before the ambulance got there.” Jensen looked over at Jared and indicated his hairline, “Deep laceration right on top of the concussion was bleeding like Niagara Falls,” then he took Jared’s left hand and turned it over so they could see the palm, showing a long dark pink line, “These were pretty deep, too, both of them.” Jared really wished they would move on to the rest of the story now. These damn Black Ops people were fascinated about something he’d really like to forget. Mike and Dave shook their heads and whistled, almost in awe over the description of his injuries when all he could think of was the horrible accident and the painful days in the hospital.

Mike and Dave could see Jared was looking a little green at their conversation so they moved away from the medical details…Dave asked, “So, who is this dickwad corporation that you work for?” Jared glanced at Jensen, first, then turned back to the two friends, “It’s Ackles Enterprises.” That got at least two sets of raised eyebrows. Jensen sighed in disgust, “The one and only,” then paused with a sideways mocked grin. After pausing, Jensen further explained, “According to the A.G. my dad hasn’t been running things directly for eight years and they feel he may not be involved in Jared’s case, but I haven’t seen him because we’ve been keeping a low profile to protect Jared. His evidence blew the A.G.’s office away and they ran with it. Now, the case has been opened and A.E. knows who the secret witness is. A.E. hasn’t responded publicly about Jared, so the belief is that they have confidence they can take out the star witness before the Grand Jury indicts them. Jared’s under A.G. protection, and they’ve been doing a good job, so far,” Jensen paused. Dave finished for him, “But you don’t think that’s enough.” Jensen shook his head, “Nope. Picture three,” Jensen stated as he held up three fingers.

Both friends removed their phones from their pockets and studied the third picture sent by Jensen. The older man added, “He’s new, and he’s hired.” Jared watched their demeanors change. No longer were Mike and Dave the playful joking buddies. Their eyes had darkened, a thick tension filled the air. The three special forces veterans exchanged a silent look between them before Mike and Dave returned their phones to their pockets. Jared remained quiet. He knew they’d been looking at this so called ‘hitman’ Jensen told him about. He still couldn’t believe those people actually existed, and that any of this was really happening. Dave broke the silence, “What’s next and do we know who he is?” Jared had no idea what to say to that, so he looked at Jensen. The older man put his hand on Jared’s knee, before he answered, “Right now, we’re waiting for the prosecutor to call Jared in, if he’s needed. He’s trying to get the Grand Jury to take testimony from depositions and another expert engineer witness, so Jared doesn’t have to hit the stand. The guy in the picture has been run every which way by the investigators on the case and they can’t find a single solid bit of information on him. He’s been documented in different countries for very short lengths of time, but nothing that sticks. No address here and several different temporary id’s. He was with Jared’s manager and another company engineer yesterday…they were in Denver, hoping to draw Jared out and get at him. It didn’t work, so they’re expected to try something else. Jared’s friends and aunt have been covered with their own security and his has been doubled.”

Now that it had been laid out there in the open for all to contemplate, Jared felt even sicker to his stomach. These people he worked for, people he thought were just coworkers, they were all trying to kill him. None of them had been the people he thought they were. Daniel had set him up. Daniel…and Robert…and…Jared didn’t realize he’d been turning a pale white until he felt Jensen gently nudged him to lay back against the couch. “Just lay back, buddy,” Jared heard Jensen say as he desperately tried to control his nausea and the spinning room. It felt like he was in a tunnel, barely able to hear the others in the room. What the hell was happening, Jared had no idea. Jensen kept one hand on Jared’s cheek, the other held the kid’s hand that was laying in his lap. “Breathe, Jare, just breathe and try to relax.” Jared felt his lover squeeze his hand, while another set of fingers was taking
his pulse on the other wrist. Jared realized it was Dave, who had somehow appeared on Jared’s right side in an instant. When Jensen looked up at Dave questioningly, he looked at Jensen with concern, “Too fast, a little weak.” Mike showed up with another two ice cold water bottles, just as Dave and Jensen looked closely at Jared’s coloring. The kid had a fine sheen of sweat on his forehead.

“Jare, you’re a bit shocky, buddy. You need to drink some water for us, okay?” Jensen’s voice always made Jared feel grounded, even when the room was spinning. He thought he nodded, but he closed his eyes for a few seconds to stop the nausea. Mike removed the cap and handed one of the bottles to Jensen. The older man tilted Jared’s head up and put the bottle to his lips, coaxing him a bit, “Keep your eyes closed, if you need to. Just try and drink as much as you can.” Jared brought up a shaky hand and took a sip of the ice cold liquid. At first, it wasn’t very appealing, and he made a disturbed face as his stomach stirred. Jensen encouraged him to drink more, so Jared forced another sip, then another. Soon, he realized he was craving the ice cold liquid and drank the rest of the bottle like a champ. He realized he felt much better, less nauseous, and the room had stopped spinning. He felt heavy and tired, but at least the spacey feeling had passed. He inhaled deeply and tried to clear his head, irritated at himself for being so much trouble. Jensen’s hand was on his cheek, his thumb rubbing back and forth. Jared could still feel Jensen holding his hand at the same time. He saw a second cold water bottle appear in front of him and realized Mike was holding it. He looked at Jensen, who grinned softly, then looked back at Mike and thanked him. The water tasted even better than the first bottle. Jared hadn’t realized he was still craving it.

He downed half of it before handing it back to thin air and felt it grabbed by someone. Jared finally focused more on his surroundings and noticed three sets of worried eyes staring at him. How had they gotten so close? Jared tried to sit up with an “I’m sorry,” but Jensen held him back with a hand on his collar bone, Mike with a sudden hand on his left shoulder and Dave with one on his right. He was definitely surrounded…trapped by three overly concerned special ops field surgeons. ‘Well, fuck,’ Jared cursed mentally. Jensen tried to soothe the slight panic in Jared’s eyes at feeling cornered, “It’s alright. You just need to stay down for a minute. You scared everyone for a second there.” Jared looked at his lover and tried to offer a reasonable argument, “I’m okay. I’m sorry, I don’t know what happened, but it’s okay now.” Jensen’s friends rushed to his defense, as Dave spoke first, “Jared, you’re fresh out of trauma surgery and our discussion probably brought it all back. We’re the ones who should be sorry.”

Mike added, “Yeah, you have to take it easy on yourself, Jared. Between the fire and the beer and your condition, you were running low on fluids and your system finally said “screw it”…your color’s coming back, thank goodness.” Jared sighed, accepting his fate of now having three mother hen’s. He knew they meant well. He rubbed his eyes and yawned, just as a loud burr interrupted everyone’s concentration on him. “What the fuck is that?” Mike exclaimed, as Jensen started to stand, “It’s the security phone they gave us.” Jensen looked at Jared, “You can get up slow,” then he glanced at Dave and Mike, “His bp drops sometimes,” then he walked to the kitchen to grab the persistently buzzing cell phone that was vibrating across the table.

Jensen answered the phone while looking back to the couch. Dave had moved in closer on Jared’s right side, Mike on the left. Dave asked him, “You wanna get up?” Jared nodded, thinking to himself that he didn’t know what the hell Jensen had been worried about with this kind of fucking backup hovering over him. Instead of bitching, he took the two hands that were offered from either side of him. Together, both men supported Jared under his armpits while he sat up and tested out his equilibrium. “Okay?” Mike asked.

The younger man nodded, “Yeah, it’s just fucking annoying…I’m so sick of this,” he expressed, then yawned hugely. The two ex-soldiers glanced at one another and smirked. Dave said, “It’s to be expected, Jared, especially with you kicking it at both ends like you are.” Mike added, “Yeah, and I’m sure you’re getting better all the time. It’s better than when you got out of the hospital, right?”
Jared nodded in agreement, “Oh yeah, definitely. When I can put my own stupid shoes on and go running, I’ll be in a better mood about it all.” Jared sighed again, then looked at the two visitors and grinned shyly, “Thank you.” Jensen returned and grinned at the sight of his stubborn lover having to accept the two additional concerned protectors on either side of him telling him, “You’re welcome” and “You don’t need to thank us, Jared.” His lover was looking adorably defeated, just a tad annoyed but trying hard not to show that and still be polite. Jensen noticed him yawning again, but he knew it wasn’t going to be possible to get the kid to bed yet. Price needed to talk to him.

“Jare,” Jensen said, “it’s Price. I’m going to put him on speaker phone and bring your laptop to you. He has questions on some of the material.” Jared looked confused for a few seconds. He glanced at the table, then back to Jensen, “Can’t I just sit at the table?” Jensen wasn’t too sure about Jared’s idea, so he leaned over and looked directly into Jared’s eyes, searching for any signs of weakness or dizziness. The older man sighed, “I can see how tired you are. Are you honestly feeling well enough to sit up at the table? How’s the pain?” The other two men watched in silence, as Jared answered, “I don’t have any pain.” Jensen gave him a disbelieving look, so Jared immediately added, “I mean, you know, it’s normal…really, it’s fine now. I’m fine. Whatever it was is gone now.” Jensen considered for a second, then told Price with a sigh, “Hold on, we’re gonna set him up at the table for you.” Jared took Jensen’s offered hands in front of him and felt himself lifted up by multiple sets of hands from both sides, all at once.

The younger man was definitely going to have to get used to this new invasion of space, as three sets of hands stayed on him until the men attached to them were convinced he was steady.

Jared walked to the table with Dave and Mike, while Jensen grabbed his laptop and set it up. The engineer slid into the chair and logged on, with Jensen sitting right next to him on his left. Jensen put the phone on speaker and introduced his friends, so Price knew who was listening in. Mike took a chair on Jared’s right, looking very interested to see Jared’s work. Dave sat across from them.

“Okay, ready,” Jared let Price know he was ready for questions. The AG explained, “Jared, I’ve got Bart here with me. He’s going to address some of the details with you, alright?” Jensen explained to his friends, “Bart’s the engineering expert witness they were trying to use instead of making Jared testify.” Both men nodded in understanding. Bart’s voice came on the line, “Can we start with file three? The mall? Jared, I can’t recreate the flexural loads you had on those beams. This is where you’re above my pay grade, so can you go over those formulas with me?” Jared answered, “Of course,” then proceeded to recite step by step formulas and terminology that had Jensen’s friends’ heads spinning. They were duly impressed. Jensen was right. The kid was a frickin’ genius. Jensen would have smiled but he was focused on Jared’s increased tension.

Mike was the one who actually knew a little about engineering and could at least follow some of what Jared and Bart were talking about. When they got more complicated, though, Mike was just as lost as Jensen and Dave. Jensen could tell something about this conversation with Bart was bothering Jared. He was currently reminding Bart of something, “Remember, horizontal frames are subject to flexural forces only…the vertical frames are only subject to compressive axial.” Jared waited while Bart seemed to be thinking that over. Jared rubbed his face with his hand and sighed. He looked frustrated, so Jensen whispered, “What’s wrong?” Jared looked at him and whispered back, “It’s just that he should know that if he’s gonna represent this case.” Jared’s eyes showed his concern, telling Jensen this was something extremely vital to proving their case. Bart made some sounds of understanding but asked Jared to clarify another area of the structural defects, “On the southwest corner, there’s the elevator shaft and the beams and columns are short from what they should have been. How does this affect the transfer moments in order to prevent flexibility and save it from failure?”

Jared hesitated, feeling like the answer should be more obvious. He thought about how to best explain his answer to someone who hadn’t studied truss connections in depth. Jared finally spoke, “The failure begins at the interface between the truss plate and the wood. Because they eliminated
half of the plates and beams, each interface is experiencing too heavy of a load bearing effect. The weight of the structure is going to fold in, like a deck of cards. Once that area goes, the rest will follow because their failure will instantly put even more load bearing on everywhere else. Does that explain it?” “Yes, Jared, thank you. I’m sorry I was getting lost,” Bart sounded enlightened, which relaxed Jared slightly, but then Bart asked him to look at file fourteen. This was the library Jared had pegged for scaffolding and moulding weaknesses. “Okay, what’s up?” Jared tried to sound positive. To him, this was a walk in the park, really. He was losing confidence in the fact that Bart didn’t quite understand everything. It meant A.E. could bring in an expert beyond Bart’s capabilities and really screw with his explanations in front of the Grand Jury.

Jared found himself explaining the progressive collapse of the entire structure, imminent due to load bearing overage. “The joints behind the moulding are separating due to minimized tresses, fittings and clamps. There are only twenty four main weight bearing beams, instead of thirty six. The cracks in the ceiling and moulding are coming from the separations behind them.” After a long pause, Bart thanked Jared, but didn’t sound as confident as Jared was hoping for…the younger man’s concern for proving this case increased. “Is Price still there?” Jared asked. The attorney responded, “Right here, Jared.” The younger man vented some of his anxiety, “That library was already failing when I did my report four months ago. It’s going to collapse, can’t we do something about that now?” Price explained, “I hear you, Jared. I filed an injunction on it and the stadium for immediate holds until we resolve this case.” “Oh,” Jared answered surprised and relieved at the same time, “that’s good…wow, that’s really good…what about the apartment building?” Price answered, “Jared, the apartment building is owned by another hotshot company that refuses to listen. They’re claiming falsehoods. It’s not even A.E. it’s actually the damn owner who paid A.E. to build it for him. Just another greedy a-hole that doesn’t wanna have to relocate his tenants and miss rent collections while we do this. I’m sorry Jared, but we got two out of three of the most critical held empty. That particular owner will have to be forced into closing the building after we prove these charges.”

The younger man rubbed his eyes, rested his chin in his hand and yawned. ‘At least Price tried,’ he thought, as he tried to relax and feel better about Price being so ‘on it’ about the dangers. He couldn’t really do anything about the idiot apartment building owner until they proved the case. Price asked further, “Jared, do you have enough for a report on the Cedar Ridge bridge problems?” “Yeah, you want that one too? I can finish it real quick,” Jared answered, eager to help in any way. Jensen wasn’t too keen on the idea of the kid pushing himself further tonight, but he knew Jared couldn’t be talked out of it. The other Black Ops men remained quiet, observing. Price piped in, “Jared, we’ve got ‘em on seventeen cases, might as well add that one. If we get a conviction it gives the financier the backing to file for whatever refunds they’re owed. I think we can help them out by getting their bridge in on this.”

Jared responded, “Sure. Can you give me twenty minutes?” Price sounded astonished, “That’s it? You can whip the report out that fast?” Jared looked at the phone in disbelief, “Yeah, I already have all the formulas done from before the accident. It’ll be quick.” “That’s incredible. Okay, I’m gonna let you work on that, but real quick I need to talk with you and Jensen about the Grand Jury presentation.” Everyone at the table heard Price and Bart exchange a few pleasantries, then a door shut. “Okay,” Price’s voice came back on the phone, “Gentleman, I hate to do this. I know I told you it was most likely we wouldn’t need you in the courtroom.” Price paused for a few seconds, then continued, “We’ve got all the i’s dotted and the t’s crossed, thanks to you, Jared, but I’ve been informed that A.E. lawyers are bringing their own expert witness to scrutinize the evidence. If an expert is beyond Bart’s experienced level, well,” Price paused and Jensen finished his thought for him, “They’ll pick him apart.”

Price continued, “Exactly. GJ isn’t like a trial, it’s only to get them indicted. That means there won’t be a huge set of witnesses and back and forth play, but A.E. will have a chance to see what I’m presenting against them. Bart can handle quite a bit, but the details that confuse him can be just the
opening the defense needs to stick a knife in some of our evidence. We have to be confident and I’m seeing some hesitations in Bart. He and I have discussed this, but he was trying hard to overcome the weak areas for you, Jared, so you didn’t have to come in. Are you well enough to come and help present this day after tomorrow?” Jensen and Jared locked eyes and shared silent understanding over what was to come, and how goddamn worried Jensen was about it. Jared sighed, speaking to Price while looking at his lover, “It’s okay. It has to be done right so you can win this.” Price sounded relieved, “I was hoping you’d feel that way, but I’m terribly sorry and I assure you we’ll discuss your recovery needs with the court. We’ll be able to meet at City Hall, then have prep time in a private office, before we go in there. I’m gonna let Bart handle the summaries, then when the details hit, you’ll be going up. That way he doesn’t get tripped up on anything.”

Jared answered, “Okay,” already working on finishing the bridge report. He reached behind him to grab the laptop case off the floor. As he leaned back and started to twist and bend, Jensen grabbed his left arm and stopped him. Mike snagged the case and handed it to Jared, who was again reminded that he was sandwiched between two very protective forces. “Thanks,” the engineer mumbled, then took out his sketches and calculations and spread them out on the table. Jared went right to work while Jensen picked up the phone and grilled Price further. “What’s going to happen on the security Thursday?” Price said, “I’m texting Chuck and he’ll arrange heavy teams with Lance. The pick up will be around 0800, and we start at 0930. That gives us time to go over some things first.”

“What about the press, and who’s coming from the other side? I wanna know what Jared’s walking into,” Jensen made his point clear while Jared glanced at him before going back to his work. He knew Jensen was worried. He truly was, too, but he was trying not to show it and become a basket case. That wouldn’t help anybody. Price told Jensen the defense hadn’t indicated who was going to be present yet. He had presented the preliminary case earlier and there were only legal representatives present. The defense had come back with a counter that the evidence wasn’t clear and too weak to prove anything and they were bringing their own experts to discredit it. “Normal shit, Jensen, but as far as the press goes, nobody has released Jared’s name yet. As of now, the press knows the case was filed and they’ve tried to interview me, my office, and the defense. They know the schedules and that tells us they will be staged around City Hall, hoping to catch a glimpse of A.E. people or anyone related. We’re gonna organize Jared’s and your arrival at a side entrance.” After a pause, Price added, “I’m gonna do something I’ve never done before, Jensen, but because of who you are and who your two friends are, I’m comfortable with it. What I’m gonna do is deputize you, just until this is over. You’ll be okay to defend Jared in any way without legal action against you. If I don’t do this for you, it’ll be too hard on you guys to defend him and not have some deadly force charge against you because of your skills. This will cover it.”

Jensen was surprised and grateful at the same time. He knew they had to be extremely careful because their skills were considered an advantage over the average person and the law didn’t take too kindly to them using them, even for defense. What Price was doing was out of the ordinary but highly appreciated. “Damn Darren, that means a lot and it’s much appreciated.” Price continued, “It’s already in process. We’ll do that at City Hall Thursday morning. You know, as well as I do, that after he’s seen in the courtroom, Jared will be visual to whoever is there from A.E. I’m sure Donovan and Malens won’t come, but as bold as Robert is? Maybe. And anyone else who would love to sit there and look intimidating.” Jensen’s protective hackles rose at that comment, “Anyone trying anything is going to be dealt with, Price. Do you know what it’s going to be like for Jared to walk into that gauntlet?” Price agreed, “I know, I do Jensen, believe me. I’m so overbearingly sorry for having to drag Jared through this, but it will pay off, I promise you…and we’ll keep him safe.”

Jared kept his momentum going, trying to squeeze out the report he’d promised Price in record time, while Jensen finished his conversation with the attorney. He caught bits and pieces of the conversation. Jared also noticed the special forces expert on his right that was closely watching his formulas and drawings. He had to smile, internally, at the kid like interest coming from Mike. Jensen
sighed, “Okay, thanks Darren, do you need to talk to Jared anymore?” The younger man looked up at Jensen, in case, but Price said, “No, just have him email that to me when he’s done. I’ll add it to the case tonight and send the discovery to the defense tomorrow.” Jensen nodded, “I’ll tell him,” looking into Jared’s eyes. He hung up and continued to look at Jared, contemplating the unpleasant idea of Jared going to that courtroom. “I don’t like this,” Jensen exclaimed, to which Dave responded, “I don’t blame you.” Jared looked back up at Jensen with concern in his eyes, “It’s going to be okay. Just not doing this alone is…it’s a huge relief.” Jensen sighed, more so at the fact that his beautiful lover was trying to comfort ‘him’ about this when ‘he’ was the one in danger.

Jensen nodded to Jared, “Price said just email that to him,” then looked at his friends, “This isn’t going to be easy for him. Security is beefed up, but…I’m not enough of a personal barricade and I just don’t trust them like I do you.” Dave said, “Jensen, don’t worry about that.” Mike clarified, “No one’s touchin’ him without gettin’ through us, Ackles…which they won’t.” Jensen appreciated the hell out of his friends. Jared poured himself into finishing his work, desperately trying hard not to feel the intense stares he knew were focused on him. ‘God one was enough…now there’s three of them,’ he mentally bitched at the oppressive weight of over protectiveness in the air. After several more minutes of no sound but the clicking of Jared’s keyboard, the engineer finally pushed ‘send’ and held his hands up, blurting out, “Done.” Jensen said, “Good,” then stood up and closed Jared’s machine for him. He was tired of watching Jared fight his exhaustion and decided to force the issue of rest. The younger man looked up with innocent question in his eyes. Jensen leaned over and kissed him, “You’re going to bed.” Jared’s brain was too busy catching up to the fact that Jensen had kissed him right in front of their company to realize he’d just been ordered to bed like an eight year old. Once his grey matter clicked on, he argued with an adorable pout, “Now?”

Every other man at the table could see the circles under the kid’s eyes and the drawn look. Jared was definitely over tired and that spell earlier still had them all concerned. The injured man needed to sleep, especially in preparation for what was to come. Jensen answered, “Yes, now, buddy. Your body has had it.” He was entranced with Jared’s beautiful pouting lower lip, for a few seconds, but he held out his hand and Jared took it. The younger man was unable to refuse his lover anything, even if he was feeling pissy at himself for being tired. Dave and Mike watched them go down the hall, Jensen leading a sleepy shuffling Jared who turned back to say “Night guys,” to them. Both grinned and answered, “Night, Jared,” watching the two lovers go.

Dave looked at Mike until the man looked back at him to meet his eyes. They snickered at the same time, shaking their heads. “He’s got it bad,” Dave said, talking about Jensen, to which Mike responded, “Oh yeah. Can you see why, though? That kid rocks.” Dave nodded, “He’s cool, very much so. I like him. They’re a perfect match. They make a lot more sense than some of the straight couples out there.” Mike guffawed mockingly, “That’s for damn sure.”

Both men were silent for a moment before Dave asked, “So, we gonna keep that kid in one piece so our team leader doesn’t have a mental collapse?” Mike looked at the other man, “S’been awhile since we went on an assignment.” Dave said, “This isn’t an assignment, though…this is a choice for us.” Mike nodded, “Well, I’ve made mine. The kid’s worth it, Dave. What he’s trying to do…you don’t see that every day. I wanna protect him. Fuck it, he’s gonna save a lot of people with this.” Dave nodded and smiled, “Was hoping you’d say that.” The two ex-soldiers clicked their beer bottles together and drank a toast, knowing damn well they were glad Jensen had called them in.

Jensen started the bedroom fireplace and folded down the covers while Jared finished in the bathroom. He helped the younger man change into pajamas and get under the covers. Jensen brushed the hair back from Jared’s face and rubbed his head gently. Jared blinked heavily, as he focused on Jensen’s face. Jensen smiled, “You’re so damn beautiful, Jare.” Jared gave a sleepy disgruntled look, “No m’not.” After gazing at one another for a few seconds Jared gave a sloppy sideways grin, “You blew my mind today, Rambo. Almost gave me brain damage.” Jensen chuckled while arguing,
“Mmm no…it was ‘you’ who blew ‘my’ mind, I think. My dick’s still smiling.” Jared giggled that lovely sound that Jensen loved. He leaned over and kissed him thoroughly. After a slow sloppy exploration of Jared’s mouth, Jensen pulled back and looked into his eyes. Jared was looking at him with such love and adoration, Jensen felt it right down to his toes. He had never imagined being the recipient of such devotion. It saturated his soul with warmth. “You know I’ll keep you safe, right?” he suddenly asked. Jared nodded without hesitation, “I know.” He smiled, “I just want this to be over. I hate everyone having to go through this because of me…especially you.” Jensen’s brow furrowed in disagreement, “You mean because of the assholes. Not you, baby. Remember it’s the assholes that caused this. Not you. You’re the hero.”

Jared couldn’t even begin to understand Jensen’s hero comment. He could never compare himself to what Jensen’s team had accomplished…what other’s had accomplished in the world. Jensen was giving him way too much credit. The older man had become adept at reading his eyes, by now, so he quickly corrected him, “Uh uh. I see what you’re thinking. Yes, you ‘are’ the hero, Jare, the guys are thinking it too, so you might as well accept the way we think of you in all this.” Jared shook his head in denial, “Jensen.” He looked away, but Jensen pulled his face back with his hand on Jared’s cheek. “Baby, don’t downplay what you are doing. Other people would have run away.” Jared argued further, “Well what if I ‘wanted’ to run away? I considered it before the crash,” he looked down feeling a little bit ashamed to admit that. Jensen asked, “So…why didn’t you?” Jared swallowed and looked back up at Jensen, “Because I couldn’t. Something inside wouldn’t let me.” Jensen argued further, “Baby, hero’s are people who get scared all the time. They want to give up and run. You don’t think my team had second thoughts about going into a situation?”

Jensen held Jared’s cheek and wouldn’t let him look away. “It’s that wiring inside of you…that part of you that won’t let you ignore something that isn’t right. That good guy instinct that pushes you to ‘do’ something. You’ve bettered thousands of animal’s lives and now you’re saving thousands of people’s lives. It’s even gone so far as threatening your life…but you can’t let it go. That’s who you are…and that’s why you’re a hero, baby.” Jensen kissed his pouting lover, who was now getting uncomfortable at being forced to receive too much credit. After kissing him, Jensen smirked knowingly, “And a very ‘hot’ one, at that.” Jared didn’t have time to stop the instant look of shocked disbelief on his face. He tried not to smirk, but failed, so Jensen kissed him again. When he pulled back, he explained, “I’m going to talk to the guys for a bit, plan some things, but I’m coming back in here to sleep with you. Remember, I’m a bad ass trained killer, and I do ‘not’ snuggle,” Jensen warned, to which Jared giggled, “Okay…I’ll try and remember that.” Jensen asked with concern, “I want to know how you feel about Mike and Dave staying with you, if I go see my father tomorrow. I need to know what the hell involvement he has in this, but I’m not leaving on a day you have to be out in public. If my dad’s close enough, I can fly out and back in one day, but I don’t want to do that if you’re not comfortable with the guys.”

Jared rubbed his hands up and down Jensen’s arms. He could plainly see Jensen’s concern for him in his eyes, “Of course it’s okay. I don’t have a problem with them. They’re nice.” Jensen grumbled, “Well, I don’t think they’re ‘nice’.” Jared smiled, “You know damn well they are…and they worship you, Jensen, I can see that.” Jensen studied Jared’s eyes, making sure there was no worry or fear there, no stress about him leaving for a day. He finally sighed, “It’s gonna be hard to leave you, dammit, but I know they won’t let anything happen to you, so that part is solid.” Jared gave an irritable sigh when his thoughts went to the two caretakers Jensen was leaving him with, “Fuck, there’s two of them.” Jensen smirked and kissed his lover again, “Well, maybe you’ll actually get a day of not doing things you shouldn’t be doing and you won’t hurt so bad at the end of the day, kiddo.”

Jared contemplated what it was going to be like, then turned determined eyes on Jensen, “I’m trying the treadmill, Ackles. It’s day fourteen tomorrow, not thirteen, and I’m cleared to at least ‘start’ on the damn thing. Will you tell them to let me do that, at least?” Jensen chuckled at Jared’s put out
expression, “Yes, I can do that. Only ‘cuz I know they won’t let you overdo it. I’m sure they’ll stand right there too.” Jensen laughed when his lover snorted and bitched, “I’m sure.” Jensen kissed him long and lovingly, then Jared sighed and nestled himself on his right side and closed his eyes, as he mumbled, “Hurry up, Chuck.” Jensen smoothed the hair back off his lover’s face again, then whispered, “Okay,” knowing damn well that Jared was going to be out cold in sixty seconds flat.

Jensen headed for the living room. Someone had put the pie away, cleaned up the dessert dishes, and the fire had been stoked up higher. It was comfortably warm in the house. Jensen walked over to his military brothers, who were currently leaning against the mantel and enjoying the heat of the fire. The men stood in silence for a few minutes, thinking to themselves about what was to come, waiting for someone to speak first. Jensen took a deep breath, then looked at both of them, now concerned for their welfare and for their lives being disrupted by helping him. He opened his mouth to speak, but both friends held up their hands and interrupted with a simultaneous, “Stop” and “Don’t.” Jensen shut his mouth back and waited for a few seconds, darting his eyes around. He opened his mouth once more and was interrupted again, “Not a word,” and “Shut it.” Jensen looked down, folding his lips in, and tried to keep from grinning. These men were sacred to him, and they obviously didn’t want to hear any shit about him being sorry for dragging them into something. They were ‘in’…and they obviously knew Jensen had been intent on apologizing and giving them an ‘out’ they didn’t want.

Dave opened the conversation, “So…run down how the security works for us. We’ll only carry the bare minimum, what’s legal and what we have permits for…and we’re the closest to you both. No one between us.” Jensen nodded, “Perfect. But, that’s for Thursday. I need to confront my dad, and tomorrow seems like the best time. I’m not bringing Jared out, so…” Dave interrupted him, “Done.” Mike agreed, “Yeah, that’s a given, he’ll be fine with us.” Jensen nodded again, grateful. He looked at his friends, “He’s important to me. Beyond this case, he’s…he’s what people hope for and never seem to find. I don’t know why he dropped in front of me when he did, or why I get to be that lucky, but,” Jensen sighed, not finding anymore words. Dave studied his friend, “Jensen, just the fact that it’s happened for ‘one’ of us inspires the rest of us. We can see it in you. He’s healing you, helping without even knowing he is…Jared’s awesome…he’s good people. We’re glad you called us.” Mike nodded, grinning at Jensen and smacking him on the shoulder, “Kinda robbin’ the cradle with the kid, though, aren’t you, you old fuck? How old is he?” Jensen sighed, “No, I’m NOT. I thought the same thing when I first saw him. He’s thirty fuckin’ three, dude, he just looks twenty four!” Both friends looked at one another, then back to Jensen. Dave grinned in silence, while Mike argued, “No fucking way.” Jensen argued back. “Yes fucking way. He’s only four years younger than me, asshole.” He looked at Dave, “Well, are you gonna give me shit too?” Dave held up his hands in surrender, “Hey, I didn’t say anything.” Jensen nudged him, “You were ‘thinking’ it though.” Dave admitted, “Yeah. I admit, I thought he was way younger than that.” Jensen shook his head at both his friends and grumbled, “Suckholes, I’m not robbing any cradles.”

Mike nodded, grinning at Jensen and smacking him on the shoulder, “‘Kinda robbin’ the cradle with the kid, though, aren’t you, you old fuck? How old is he?” Jensen sighed, “No, I’m NOT. I thought the same thing when I first saw him. He’s thirty fuckin’ three, dude, he just looks twenty four!” Both friends looked at one another, then back to Jensen. Dave grinned in silence, while Mike argued, “No fucking way.” Jensen argued back. “Yes fucking way. He’s only four years younger than me, asshole.” He looked at Dave, “Well, are you gonna give me shit too?” Dave held up his hands in surrender, “Hey, I didn’t say anything.” Jensen nudged him, “You were ‘thinking’ it though.” Dave admitted, “Yeah. I admit, I thought he was way younger than that.” Jensen shook his head at both his friends and grumbled, “Suckholes, I’m not robbing any cradles.”

Dave became serious then, “Jensen, if you visit your father, you can’t say you’re aware of Jared being the special witness. If he knows you know Jared, then we’ll be protecting this house, too…and you.” Jensen nodded, “Good point.” Mike added, “Yeah, as hard as it is not to go blazing your way in there and kick some A.E. ass for what they’ve been doing, you have to play it safe like you heard it on the news, or someone told you about it…but you can’t mention the kid…or the not kid,” Mike rolled his eyes at correcting himself over Jared’s newfound actual age.

Dave added, “And…after the courtroom on Thursday, A.E. is gonna know you’re involved. When you’re in there with the AG, they’ll definitely know you’re involved in some way. Someone will see you and report back, unless one of the dickhead’s is actually there. Did you think of that?” Jensen opened his mouth, but before he could answer, Mike interrupted, “Of course not. You’re thinking about Jared.” Mike continued, “The way we see it, depending who is in that courtroom, and whether
they know you’re together with Jared, or not, might make you a second target, Ackles. Of course, ‘you’ aren’t looking at it that way because you’re protecting the genius in the other room, but ‘we’re’ thinking it because we need to be ready for all possibilities.”

Jensen nodded, realizing he hadn’t been thinking about that, at all. Mike continued, “So, we’ll be between ‘both’ of you and the Menudo brothers out there, at ‘all’ times, until this hired fuckstick is caught…or until somebody kills him…hopefully the latter.” Jensen’s silence conveyed his disapproval that they wanted to protect ‘him’ instead of just focusing on Jared, but he understood their concern. Jensen wanted to make sure he clarified something, “Both of you…no one’s jumping in front of a bullet for me. I want you to understand that Jared comes first. Protect ‘him’, guys. If anything threatens me or happens to me, he’ll try and save me…his first instinct will be to sacrifice himself for me. That’s who he is. I need to know you’ll keep him safe. Even if you have to drag him outta there.” Jensen left no room for question in his eyes. He really should have known better, though, because his team mates had their own ideas about what was going to happen. They matched Jensen’s cold deadly stare with two of their own. Mike finally rebutted, “Let me counter your counter with ‘our’ clarification about Thursday, “You are ‘both’ first, Ackles. We’ll save you ‘both’, and if you don’t like it, then you shouldn’t have called us.”

Jensen sighed, knowing he wasn’t going to win. These two were doing exactly what he would do, and they weren’t going to back down. Jensen went and grabbed a few more beers and passed them out. Everyone was silent while the older man searched for his father’s numbers on his phone. He got a hold of someone who confirmed Jensen’s parents still lived at their California address, and that Jensen would be able to find them there. He booked an early round trip flight from Denver to Orange County and a rental car, then he closed the laptop to discuss it with the group. “If one of you can drop me at the Denver airport by 0600, I’ve got a return flight that gets back at 2200. Later than shit, but it works. One of you come get me?” Both men nodded without question. Jensen continued, “I didn’t get the chance to tell you,” as both friends looked at him expectantly, “The attorney is going to deputize us…all three of us.”

Both friends raised eyebrows, as the normally more reserved Dave blurted out, “No shit?” Mike and Jensen grinned at Dave, then Mike turned to Jensen, “That’s fuckin’ sweet, Jensen.” Jensen nodded, while grinning, “Yep. He said he’ll do it Thursday when we get to City Hall.” The friends marveled at that revelation for a few minutes. “Cool,” Dave said, while Mike nodded. “Very.” Jensen was about to call it a night, when Dave asked, “So, how much does Jared know, Jensen? What have you told him…about us?” Jensen sighed. This was something they had all talked about…in their decommissioning and after they moved here. Their psyche’s were unique. It wasn’t something just anyone could talk about and it certainly wasn’t fitting for just anybody on the outside. Bringing a civilian into their tortured line of work history was something none of them had done yet. They were curious about how Jensen was handling it. One of them finding love was new for all of them.

Dave had been dating, recently. It wasn’t serious yet, but he thought he might like it to be. This subject of his past always overwhelmed the shit out of him with anxiety. He already took Benadryl and Nyquil to help him sleep when his particular love interest stayed over…he was paranoid he’d have a nightmare and hurt the poor woman, not meaning to. Mike had bounced around. He’d had one night stands, but was much more reluctant to relax enough to see someone more than once. He didn’t feel he was ready yet. Jensen knew it would help them both, if he shared in this area, “He knows what we did, in summary. The basic outline of our jobs. I can see it in his eyes that he guesses about the things we had to do, what we went through, the things we saw…he pictures it, but he doesn’t push. He told me he was here when I was ready. Said no matter what, he wouldn’t run from it. He said he loved me so much he wanted to take some of it from me, and then he told me to forgive myself for whatever it is I hadn’t told him about yet.”

Mike shook his head, in wonder, while Dave silently thought that over. Again, Jared amazed them
and they were ecstatic that Jensen had found him. Jensen looked down for a moment. When he faced his friends, again, there was a new level of openness in his eyes, “That’s why I haven’t, ya know? And when this is over, I’m not sure if I will, even though I told him I would.” He looked down again, wiped away the tear that had escaped, then looked back up, “How can you tarnish that? Or stain something so beautiful? He’s this sparkling piece of goodness, ya know? He’s so goddamn refreshing, in this day and age, with all the selfish cruelty in the world, with the way he looks at things…the way he looks at me. We’re hero’s to him, you guys…but he’s a hero, too, and he can’t see that in himself. He’s been hurt, many times. He’s suffered terrible losses and then this bullshit he’s going through now. But just look at him. He cares about everyone, works his ass off to please everyone…never stops being that supportive light for everybody.” Jensen knew a few more tears had escaped, but he noticed Mike and Dave’s eyes were now reacting, too. They were deeply devoted men who knew hurt, they knew evil, and they definitely understood self sacrifice. Jared was full of it.

Jensen finally concluded, “So anyway…it’s going to take a bit, but I’ll tell him what I can, share it with him. I want to save him from hearing it, but he’ll insist and I’ll give in.” Jensen grinned at his weakness around the younger man. His friends grinned back because they knew, already, the effect the young engineer had on their team leader. Jensen confessed, “When you find it, fellas, it’s like something you’ve never been trained for. Comes right in and plants itself in your soul without asking. It’s like a non-hostile take over. You suddenly realize your damn defenses you worked so hard to perfect over the years are useless. The right person will be the right person. You’ll feel it and the guilt and depression, the hesitation to get close, the closed off emotions, all of that will be suddenly turned around. You might not see it coming, because I sure as hell didn’t.”

Dave, Mike, and Jensen clinked their beer bottles together and drank in silence. The comfortable silence allowed them to process what they had talked about and to think about how far they had come from the day they all got on the plane to leave the service. Jensen broke the silence after a few minutes, “Speaking of my newfound reason for living, boys, I’m going to go get under the covers with him right now, since I’m leaving him with you all day tomorrow.” Dave grinned, as Mike asked Jensen, “You’re not gonna…” Jensen sighed, “No…and even if I was, I wouldn’t tell you about it.” Mike rushed to defend himself, “I was only worried about the kid’s health. Shit Jensen, should he even be doing anything?” Jensen paused with his mouth open, while Dave tried not to laugh, and failed. “Not telling you that, dick, so just mind your own beeswax,” Jensen barked. Mike looked disappointed. Dave asked in a more serious tone, “So, what kind of help will he need, Jensen? What’s he okay for tomorrow?” Jensen answered, “Well, he’s dying to walk on the treadmill.” At Dave’s disbelieving look, Jensen held up his hand, “I know. I know it’s soon, but the doc said since he’s progressing so fast and he’s already a runner, he could start by walking. ‘Short’ distances, guys, maybe not over a mile?”

Both friends nodded, “Got it,” Dave said. Jensen warned, “He’s really good at pushing it, guys. He’ll keep going and he’ll jump into shit if you’re not on him, and I know he’s going to absolutely hate being held back but sometimes you just have to do it, okay? He’ll run himself into the ground.” Both men nodded again, so Jensen continued, “He can shower and walk around, I just shadow him. He needs help with shoes and the pants are difficult. He can bend but it’s not easy and it’s very slow. He lifts nothing heavier than a pencil. And if you go outside, watch it. He’ll get himself into trouble real fast by picking up rocks and shit like that, trying to measure.” Mike perked up, “Measure? Wait, you were serious about the deck?” Jensen nodded, “Oh yeah. The gorgeous little shit has all the measurements and is in the middle of designing it for me. At his insistence, of course. I followed him for over an hour outside and helped him measure, just so he had something to do that he enjoyed. It’s amazing what he can do, you should see it.”

Mike grinned hugely, “Sweet.” Dave smiled, “Sounds easy. We’ve got him, Jensen. What time does he get up?” Jensen answered, “Usually between eight and nine. He’s a coffee addict so if he gets up before you guys, you’ll hear him out here.” Both friends responded to Jensen almost perfectly in
tune, “He won’t,” then they looked at each other and smirked. Jensen knew Jared was going to be pissed. These two were not going to let him get away with ‘anything’ and they would watch him like hawks. Jensen felt completely at ease leaving the kid with them. “Good night, fellas, I’ll see one of you at 0530 then.” Both friends nodded, saying good night. Jensen knew they would bank the fire and check all the doors before they went to bed, so he headed for the hallway. There was no need to thank them. In fact, they would be insulted if he did that.

Jensen slipped his clothes off, donned a pair of pajama bottoms and a plain white t-shirt. He slid under the covers and spooned Jared from behind. He kissed him on the neck, whispered, “I love you so goddamned much,” then sighed in peace as he fell fast asleep.
This chapter contains some deep seeded family resentment. Jensen goes to confront his father. While he's away, Jared gets to know his tag team of mother hens better, and so do we. This chapter became so long, I had to splice it and start a new one. Jensen’s friends become more attached to their young genius.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Jensen found it harder than hell to pull himself away from the sleeping man in his arms. He wrapped the blankets snugly around Jared so he wouldn’t be disturbed by the cold air, kissed him on the top of his rumpled hair, then made his way to the bathroom. He grabbed a shower and shave, then dressed in jeans, a dark tee shirt and a long sleeve flannel. He knew it wouldn’t be as cold in California, so layers were more practical. He went to the kitchen and stuffed his jeans pocket with a couple protein bars, his wallet and cell phone. After realizing he was a bit early, Jensen grabbed his laptop and searched for a small picture off the internet. When he found it, he printed it and taped it to the master bathroom mirror. He added a bubble message caption, grinned at his handiwork, then sighed at himself, “So immature, Ackles.”

Jensen was met in the hallway by Mike. Obviously, Mike had drawn the short straw between he and Dave, for getting up in the dark to drop Jensen off. Mike didn’t speak on the way to the car. The man was on autopilot, efficient as ever, just not ready to socialize at this point. Jensen grinned to himself. These two would never let him down, even during the pissy hours of the morning. He had Mike stop next to the security car parked in front of the house. When he realized it was Frank, the man he really liked, Jensen got out of the car to greet him. Frank got out of his own vehicle and shook his hand. Mike sighed irritably, absolutely ‘hating’ dark mornings, but unable to fathom being a rude stick in the mud. He dragged himself out of the driver’s side and came around to be introduced to the security lead. Jensen introduced them then explained to Frank what he was going to do today, “I booked the flight late last night so you’re the first one that knows about it on the team. I’ll be back tonight, though, so we’ll all be going to City Hall with Jared tomorrow.” Frank said he would brief the rest of the team, then turned to Mike, “Text or call me, or just walk out any time, if there is ‘anything’ you need from us.” Mike shook his hand again, “Will do, and you do the same. And if your guys are freezing their nuts off, like I am, please feel free to ask us for some coffee or heater packs for their pockets. Dave’s got the phone right now and I know he’s awake. It’s colder than fuck out here.”

Jensen smiled and looked down, ‘Leave it to Mike to blurt things out to someone he just met.’ Frank chuckled, “Well, they do have those handy heater packs and I happen to know they’re in more places than just their pockets. They’re layered in down, too, but I keep in radio contact with ‘em just to make sure they’re not stuck to a tree somewhere. Thanks for the offer, Mike. Actually, here comes one of ‘em now,” Frank indicated a completely covered well over six foot dark outline coming toward them. The man was as tall as Jared, maybe taller, had fur around his hood and was hunched over with hands stuffed deep in his pockets. Jensen wouldn’t have pegged him for security, at all, except for the obvious gun shaped impression behind the man’s right pocket. “This is Dale,” Frank
indicated to Jensen and Mike, “Dale’s been walking perimeter for the last hour.” The man who had been wrapped up like an Eskimo managed to pull back his fur lined hood long enough to greet the two Black Ops retirees. “Mornin’, guys,” he said in a raspy voice. Jensen was sure he’d probably have at least a sore throat from this assignment.

Jensen and Mike shook Dale’s hand, Mike piping in, “Dude, Jesus, how’d you get lucky enough to be stuck on perimeter?” Jensen grinned again at Mike’s forwardness. The great part about Mike was he spoke to people as if he’d known them all his life. Luckily, Dale was receptive and laughed at the question, “Actually, I volunteered that round. Now, I get to sit on my ass and drink out of a thermos while Frank joins Murphy at the fence line.”

Dale turned to Frank, “Nothing suspect out there but a few bunnies and a couple doe’s. Oh, and Murphy, who ate chili for dinner so watch out. Probably what’s keeping all the other animals away…any bad guys too. You might not get any birds around today, either, Mr. Ackles, due to the gas fog.” All the men laughed while Frank began layering himself with the same type of get up. Dale looked at Mike, “We’ve been briefed on your experience. It’s an honor for us to work with you guys.” He pointed a thumb at himself, “Army Ranger, and Murphy out there’s a Green Beret. Frank here…well we give him our understanding, he was a bit softer being from the Air Force and all…”

Frank had just finished zipping up his thick down jacket, “Shut up, grunt. My wings are much prettier than your fairy patches.” Mike now understood why Jensen liked this team, even at this god awful hour. “Jensen says you guys are an impressive team. I’m sure we’ll work well together,” Mike offered, even though he would rather be in the damn car with the heater running.

Frank met Jensen’s eyes, “Don’t worry about anything, we’ve got our genius’ back.” Jensen could see Frank meant what he said. “Thank you,” Jensen shook the man’s hand again. He turned to Mike, “Well, let’s go, Mrs. Cleaver. Try not to sing in the car, I know how you love mornings.” Mike grumbled, “Fuck you, Ackles.” Jensen boarded his flight, full of churning stomach acid. The last time he’d been home was a sour Christmas over twelve years ago. He’d been treated like the black sheep of the family and vowed never to return.

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Jared yawned and nestled further into the toasty warm covers. With his eyes still closed, he listened to his surroundings, hearing only the soft sound of the electric fireplace. If Jensen’s friends had made any noises, Jared hadn’t heard them. He immediately felt Jensen was gone. Everything was so quiet and still. Jared had never been a bleeding heart codependent, but he was feeling new things now, and knowing his lover was gone for the day felt like a loss. Jensen would be back tonight, but Jared already missed him. The younger man grumbled to himself to grow up and be an adult, then sat up to look around the room. He dragged himself out of bed, yawned and stretched, then shuffled to the bathroom. He had slept really good, and realized he felt pretty damn good. He knew this was going to be the morning he hit that treadmill.

Jared had a quick thought that maybe Mike and Dave were still asleep, and he could sneak in an actual jog instead of walking. He looked over at the bedside clock, registering the eight fifteen time, then his mind quickly bitched, ‘fat chance, Jared, they probably rose at the crack ass of dawn, like Jensen does, and they were given strict instructions on your boundaries for today.’ Jared sighed, knowing damn well the voice in his head was probably right. He brushed his teeth and pony tailed up his morning hair before he noticed the taped piece of paper on the mirror. Jared leaned closer to see a hilarious printout of Sylvester Stallone’s Rambo character, all dress up in his special forces garb. The character had an intense angry look on his face, with one finger pointed at the viewer. Jared laughed out loud at the bubble message, ‘I do NOT snuggle’. He shook his head at his lover’s antics, then went to get dressed. He figured he would throw on some loose sweats and walk the treadmill first before showering. ‘Then coffee, of course,’ he smiled to himself. He reminded himself there was no such thing as ‘throwing on’ anything right now, and getting his sweats on was going to
take a ridiculous fifteen minutes.
He donned a white tee shirt, then sat on the bed and leaned forward very slowly to slip the bottom of
the sweats over his ankles. He actually did better than he thought at getting the sweats on by himself.
Slight pull in the left chest, but nothing horrible. He already had socks on so he didn’t have to endure
that part.

The engineer walked over to his tennis shoes and slipped his feet into them. The fact that these were
going to be more of a challenge finally occurred to him. He knew tying the laces would probably
flex his chest. ‘Maybe I can try the right one first,’ Jared thought to himself, as he sat on the bed to
try. He bent his leg on the bed so he could reach the shoe, then he took his time tying it, using
minimal muscles in his torso. He was quite pleased at his progress. He lifted the left foot the same
way, but paused and looked at it for a second. It seemed like such a simple thing, ridiculous that he
couldn’t find a way to do this by himself. He sighed, hating to ask for help with his damn shoes.

Stubbornness won over and Jared slowly bent over just a few inches. The movement immediately
brought painful twinges to his left side. The distance was only half a damn foot, but the angle wasn’t
going to work. Jared leaned back and braced himself on his hands, with his eyes closed. He sighed in
defeat. He startled slightly and opened his eyes to see Dave kneeling in front of him tying his left
shoe. Dave made no sound when he approached, and said nothing now. Jared was filled with
heartfelt gratefulness, but part of him still couldn’t let go of the frustration he felt at needing this type
of help. ‘Fucking irritating,’ he mentally cursed.

He gave a half smile of gratitude to his helper, then reluctantly accepted the offered hand to stand up.
Dave steadied Jared by his elbow for a second, then asked, “Hitting the treadmill?” Jared nodded,
further grateful that the seasoned veteran said nothing further. He simply followed Jared at a
respectable distance into the spare room. Dave understood the younger man’s need to be treated as
normal as possible, like a man who didn’t need help, who didn’t need a spotter, and a strong person
who wasn’t happy being like this. He would try his best to support Jared, but there were limits to
what he would allow the kid to do, especially if it was detrimental.

Jared stepped up on the machine and looked at the settings pad, then sighed defeatedly before he
touched them, “So, what’s my limit? I’m not dumb enough to think he didn’t give you one.” Dave
smirked at Jared’s spunk, “Not over a mile.” Jared responded irritably, “Fine,” then set the treadmill
on an incline of 2.0 before pushing start. A hand crossed in front of Jared and lowered the incline
back to zero, “I don’t think we’ll start with that yet. Go five minutes, then we’ll go up half points
until we reach your two, ‘if’ you’re doing okay.”

The engineer looked at the board for a few seconds. Jared’s stubborn independence was a hard thing
to keep at bay. He was fighting himself between telling the soldier to ‘fuck off’ and being polite, but
logic finally won out. Jared knew Dave was probably right. He said nothing and started the machine.
Dave respected the internal war he saw going on within this kid’s brain. He noticed the young man
pushed the start button a little punchier than necessary for Jensen’s touch screen model. Dave figured
Jared was barely controlling his natural stubbornness, at this point. As soon as the belt started,
everything Jared had been warring with was forgotten. He was so happy to be moving, he could
have bellowed it to the world. He felt the familiar rise in heart rate, the opening of his airways and his
legs were screaming ‘YES’. Dave let Jared enjoy his five minutes of warm up, just to make sure he
was okay. He watched the kid’s coloring, noting whether he was turning too red or too pale. So far,
the young accident victim seemed to be handling his gentle warm up like a champ.

Jared looked over at the special ops expert with a raised eyebrow. Dave couldn’t help but smile at the
look of anticipation in the kid’s eyes. Jared was feeling great and ready for more. The older man
pushed the incline button to .5, then increased Jared’s speed to 3.0. Jared was loving life. He was
feeling so good, ‘almost’ normal, and the very slight resistance to his muscular calves and thighs was
an incredible ‘high’. He closed his eyes, smiling. He leaned his head back and enjoyed the endorphin response to his leg muscles finally being challenged. When he felt something on his wrist, he looked down to see that Dave was attaching the velcro monitor from Jensen’s machine. Jared looked at the panel and realized he was running out of time. If Dave really made him stop at a mile, he wasn’t going to get much out of this if he didn’t push the envelope. He looked at Dave and again, so the older man raised Jared’s belt to 1.0. Jared pushed the speed up to 3.2, then looked at Dave in question to see if he would stop him. The older man folded his arms over his chest, grinned sideways, but he didn’t interfere. “It’s okay, I’m watching you,” Dave told him. Jared smiled, joyfully, and focused again on his workout. ‘Oh my god, this is fucking incredible,’ he thought to himself, not able to keep the smile off his face.

Dave watched him closely. His heart rate was at 120 now. Even though the young man seemed to be doing okay with it, this wasn’t meant to be a full blown aerobic session. This was just a nice and easy re-introduction into exercise for Jared’s traumatized system. It had only been two weeks, and Dave fully intended on stopping this before Jared’s heart rate went too high. Mike appeared in the doorway, so Dave nodded to him, letting Mike know that their ‘charge’ was okay, so far. Mike watched the engineer from the doorway for a few seconds, then told Dave, “Makin’ breakfast,” before walking off. Dave noticed the kid was walking a bit more sluggish, so he leaned in close to see his face, “Talk to me, Jared, do you need to stop?” Jared shook his head, “No,” but Dave wasn’t comfortable with the exerted look he was seeing. Jared was looking like someone who had run a race and the younger man wasn’t smiling any longer. It had come on pretty suddenly. Dave reached over and lowered the machine back to ground level, but let Jared keep walking at the same speed for the moment. He kept his hands on the bar very close to Jared, knowing he could catch him if he went down. Jared wasn’t wanting to give up, but he knew the last thing he wanted to do was pass out in front of Jensen’s friend, when the man was just trying to help him. He lowered his own speed. He bitched to himself for starting to feel sick and light headed at the faster speed, but now it was getting better. ‘It’ll get better,’ he repeated like a mantra to himself, angry that he couldn’t even run a damn mile.

Jared leaned on his elbows for his last quarter mile. He heart rate was leveling out at 100. He stood back upright, Dave noticing his overall condition appeared much better. Jared looked a bit tired, but determined to get in his full mile. Dave knew it would be frustrating to an active person like Jared to realize he couldn’t return to his old activities right away. Dave had his appendix removed years ago and even that routine of a surgery had taken the wind from his sails. It took weeks of struggling to get his energy back. Jared had an even bigger hill to climb. Dave reached over and lowered the machine back to ground level, but let Jared keep walking at the same speed for the moment. He kept his hands on the bar very close to Jared, knowing he could catch him if he went down. Jared wasn’t wanting to give up, but he knew the last thing he wanted to do was pass out in front of Jensen’s friend, when the man was just trying to help him. He lowered his own speed. He bitched to himself for starting to feel sick and light headed at the faster speed, but now it was getting better. ‘It’ll get better,’ he repeated like a mantra to himself, angry that he couldn’t even run a damn mile.

Jared leaned on his elbows for his last quarter mile. He heart rate was leveling out at 100. He stood back upright, Dave noticing his overall condition appeared much better. Jared looked a bit tired, but determined to get in his full mile. Dave knew it would be frustrating to an active person like Jared to realize he couldn’t return to his old activities right away. Dave had his appendix removed years ago and even that routine of a surgery had taken the wind from his sails. It took weeks of struggling to get his energy back. Jared had an even bigger hill to climb. Dave waited until the kid finished his mile, then he slowed down the belt so Jared would have a cool down period. He still seemed okay, so Dave didn’t stop him until Jared walked for a few more minutes and finally pushed ‘stop’ on his own. He breathed hard for a few seconds, then turned to step shakily off, so Dave grabbed his elbow for support. Jared wiped his face with a towel, “Well, that was depressing,” he grumbled, then he headed for the hallway. Dave disagreed, knowing damn well that most patients didn’t even start exercising until four weeks after surgery, but he decided not to argue with Jared. He escorted the younger man to the shower. Dave warned him to take it slow. Jared apologized for Dave having to do so much for him. The seasoned war horse interrupted Jared’s third apology, “Jared…this is no problem. I drank some tropical juice once in a village, even after my commanding officer told me not to. I had no muscle control for forty eight hours. My team mates ridiculed the shit out of me while they carried my useless ass back and forth to pee. You can stop apologizing.”

Jared hadn’t expected that bit of information. While his mind scrambled to catch up to Dave’s words, he grinned at the picture it created in his head, but couldn’t think of anything to say except, “Oh,” in response. He let Dave help him remove the difficult pieces of clothing, including the underwear. The soldier put everything in the hamper and hovered outside the slightly cracked bathroom door as Jared took care of his shower. He wasn’t taking any chances that Jared might have a dizzy spell. The hot
water felt amazing. Jared stood under the heavenly stream for several minutes. He washed his hair and body, then rinsed and turned off the faucet. After he got out, he dried off and stood naked in front of the mirror. After answering Dave’s inquiry of “Jared, you okay?” with, “Yes, doing fine,” Jared took perusal of himself. It was nice to have a minute alone to view all the scars and bruises that were still present. Jared’s left side had been black and blue from his neck to his leg in the hospital, but now there were scattered splotches of brownish yellow colors, some of them lighter than others. He was happy you couldn’t see any leftover evidence of the shiners he had in the hospital, and his left cheek was finally fading. His face seemed to be slower at turning from blues to yellows, but it was definitely right behind the rest his body.

Jared raised his hair, parting it over the wound and looked at the long red line, similar to the thicker one on his gut. The scar was getting lighter and the hair that had been barely shaved around it was now an eight of an inch or so long. Jared’s long hair had covered the site most of the time, so no one knew it was there. The younger man gently pressed on the bulge under his hair line and thought it felt more like a slightly raised golf ball size, now. It wasn’t the damn ostrich egg size it had been. It was still slightly blue, but you couldn’t really see that, either, without pulling the hair back. ‘Better,’ he thought, brushing his clean hair back. Jared decided to save shaving for court the next day, so he left his two day shadow alone. Again, he looked at the printout stuck to the mirror and smiled. He wondered if his lover had done that last night or this morning. When Jared exited the bathroom he quickly grabbed a towel to cover his crotch. ‘Fuck,’ the younger man mentally cursed, when he realized he’d almost walked out naked in front of Jensen’s friend. Dave was sitting on the bed, waiting to help him get dressed. He didn’t even react to Jared’s nakedness, but his piercing gaze went directly to Jared’s ribcage.

“Wow,” the older man stared at the incision as Jared walked shyly toward the bed. Dave truly had no idea Jared was even bashful. In the military, they walked around naked all the time and it wasn’t abnormal. He leaned over to closely inspect the wound, while Jared forced himself to control his nervousness. Whistling in wonder, Dave finally looked up and noticed Jared wasn’t comfortable. “I’m sorry,” he stood up to help, “Really, I’m sorry to stare. It’s an excellent stitch job…good surgeon, whoever he was.” Jared smiled at Dave, trying not to look as embarrassed as he felt, “It’s alright. I’m just not used to people seeing it.” Jared’s nerves shot back up a notch when Mike appeared at the bedroom doorway. ‘Goddammit,’ Jared’s mind ranted, as Mike zeroed in on his chest, “Holy shit, Jared, let me see.” Mike quickly stepped up to Jared, as he bent over to inspect the wound. Jared looked uncomfortably startled when the outspoken team mate ran his finger tips lightly down the rough scar. “Looks really good, but Jesus I’m so damn sorry you had to go fuckin’ go through that, man.”

Jared instantly tried to control his embarrassment, as Dave watched him struggle with Mike’s clueless forwardness. Dave put his hand on Mike’s shoulder, “I think he’s had enough of our inspections. You make us breakfast?” Mike was distracted by the question, “Oh, hell yeah. Hurry up, I’ve got military mud espresso, eggs and bacon and some of Jensen’s little homemade biscuit things…they’re these mini biscuits he gets from Steve and Dani’s. You’ll love ‘em, Jared.” The younger man couldn’t help but smile, even if he was still feeling exposed. Mike was obviously proud of his breakfast. Even though Jared felt invaded, these two special forces buddies of Jensen’s were some of the nicest guys on the planet. Jared felt confident it was going to be a good day with them, but first, he’d really like to get some damn clothes on.

As Mike left for the kitchen, Dave looked at Jared, “I’m just gonna hold these for you to step into.” Jared sat on the bed and looked gratefully at the back of Dave’s head, as the older man bent over and let Jared put his feet into his underwear. Dave did the same with Jared’s jeans, then put on Jared’s socks for him. He pulled the pants and underwear up to Jared’s knees, then stood up and walked to the door with his back turned. Dave waited for Jared to stand and pull up his clothing. He got his own long sleeve wine colored shirt on, then walked up to Dave.
When he touched the ex-soldier on the shoulder, Dave turned back to him, “Okay?” Jared smiled and nodded, overwhelmed with Dave’s considerate nature. “Thank you,” Jared offered, gratefulness in his eyes. Dave answered, “No problem,” then followed Jared to the kitchen. Breakfast was fantastic. Jared voiced all his appreciation for everything Mike had worked so hard on. The mini biscuits were addicting. Jared stuffed himself with quite a few. The coffee was extra strong, just like he craved. Dave and Mike had stuffed themselves pretty thoroughly, too. Jared guiltily wondered if they’d been up for hours waiting for him. Jared got up and started the dishes, after refilling the other two men’s coffee cups. He rushed into the process, hoping the other two didn’t try and stop him. When Mike began wiping off the stove and table, Dave started drying, he smiled to himself that they were actually letting him continue.

Later, Jared found himself suckered into playing cards. Dave repeated Jensen’s warnings from the night before, but Mike wouldn’t have it. He was dying to test out Jared’s skills. They played pinnacle for an hour, then switched to poker. Dave found a jar of pennies and poured an even amount on the table for everyone, just to avoid Mike getting too stupid and betting something he actually needed, like real cash, or his car. “Stop letting me win,” Mike raised his voice at Jared, frustrated that the younger man seemed to be able to win only about every fifth round. Dave grinned, when Jared feigned argument, “I’m not.” Mike argued, “Yes you are. I know you are.” Jared glared at Mike, as both men seemed to be in a stand off. Dave cleared his throat, “Mike, he’s being nice. Shut it and be grateful the kid’s leaving you with some pennies.” Jared looked worriedly at Dave, then back at Mike, “Jensen told me I shouldn’t count cards all the time, so I’m not playing that way. I don’t ‘want’ to win all the time. It isn’t fun.”

Dave said, “Jared, it’s okay. Mike,” Dave’s admonishing tone caused Mike to look at him, then back at Jared. Dave was right, Mike could now see the younger man was worried he’d done something wrong. Mike sighed and tried to explain, “It isn’t any fun, now, either, because you’re not challenged. What I want is for you to completely rake my ass over the coals, alright? Sock it to me with that incredible brain of yours. It’s okay to beat me, I’m seriously dying to see how you do it.” When Jared looked at him in disbelief, Mike insisted, “I’m a ridiculous addict when it comes to sports and games. I love this shit. I’ve ‘never’ managed to count the cards or use math to win at the tables and I am ‘dying’ to learn. Jared please…don’t hold back, alright?” Jared shrugged his shoulder and gave in with a sigh, “Alright.” He looked at Dave worriedly, “You won’t let him kill me, will you?” Dave smiled back at Jared, “No way. I’m faster than he is, don’t worry Jared.” Mike snorted at Dave’s comment, “Bullshit. Jared he is ‘not’ faster, but don’t worry, I’m giving you full permission to kick my ass.”

The next hour included several games of Black Jack, of which Jared taught Mike just how humiliating it would be to play against a numbers genius, professionally. “Fuck,” he vented for the twenty seventh time. “How does he fuckin’ ‘do’ that?” Dave laughed out loud, thoroughly enjoying Jared’s continued ass kicking. Jared remained quiet, glancing at Mike once in awhile, just to make sure the man was still wanting to continue. He had to admit, using this skill was a great mental work out. Mike was actually very good, so Jared had to focus. When they finished several more hands, Jared agreed to go through his practices with Mike and try to teach him the steps he used. Dave brought them water bottles and sat down again to follow along. Jared was very patient. He did one hand at a time, explaining his thought process. Both men tried hard to repeat what Jared showed them. Jared could see that both men were becoming more successful the more they practiced. They only needed to practice and it would be easier. Dave shook his head. Mike pushed himself to keep trying over and over, getting more frustrated. He didn’t seem to be able to accept that he couldn’t grasp the complete concept and get as good as Jared was.

The younger man patiently explained, “I’ve been doing this since I was fourteen. It takes a long time to do it automatically. Of course, I had no idea what I was doing until Jensen explained it to me. I didn’t know it was considered cheating.” Mike finally admitted defeat and leaned on the back of his
chair, exhausted. He was still staring at the cards thinking. Dave and Jared watched him shake his head, then he looked up at Dave, “He really ‘is’ a genius.” Jared sighed, not expecting the unwelcome praise, but Mike insisted, “Jared, that was the most patient and informative lesson I’ve ever had…and I will ‘still’ never get it. Not completely. You’re fuckin’ brilliant.” Jared began shuffling the cards, shy as hell. He opened his mouth to change the subject, just as Dave’s cell phone vibrated. It turned out to be Jensen, who had just landed in California. The plane landed a little after ten thirty, Denver time, nine thirty California time. Jensen grabbed his rental car and a quick breakfast burrito. The protein bar he’d eaten on the plane wasn’t enough. He set the directions to his old house into the car’s GPS system, then relaxed in a shady parking space while he dialed Dave’s number. Dave gave Jensen a run down of the morning, then handed the phone to Mike, who was begging to talk to him. “Fuck, Jensen, your genius slaughtered my ass. Jesus, he could make us millions if you took him to Atlanta.” Jensen chuckled, “I told you, asswipe. Don’t bet your house, idiot. Now, don’t make him feel bad…the poor kid feels bad if he thinks you’re mad at him.” Mike countered, “Nah, I was begging for it. Get this, he was nice enough to actually spend the last hour trying to teach me and Dave how to do it like he does. Tried his best, but fuck, we’re just a couple of dumb soldiers.” Jared instantly argued, “You are NOT.” Jared was angry at Mike putting himself and Dave down, the two men didn’t notice.

Jensen urged, “Let me talk to him, and Mike, thanks again for what you guys are doing.” Before he handed the phone to Jared, Mike responded, “It’s no trouble, Ackles, he’s frickin’ awesome.” Mike handed the phone to Jared, “He’s bored with us, it’s your turn.” The younger man took the phone and immediately found himself alone at the table. The two team mates of Jensen’s quickly went into the living room to give him privacy. When Jared snapped out of his open mouthed response at their respectful gesture, he put the phone to his ear and said “Hi.” Jensen felt Jared’s voice right down to his toes. The sound of his lover’s voice had the ability to soothe his soul and ground him, no matter what Jensen was doing. “Hey,” Jensen answered back. Jared immediately smiled, the effect of Jensen’s voice having the same effect on him.

“How did your morning go?” Jensen asked him. Jared filled him in on the treadmill experience. Jensen was concerned about Jared pushing himself, but Dave’s control of the situation sounded exactly like what he would have done, had he been there. He took a deep breath to calm himself, as he listened to Jared recite the fantastic breakfast Mike had cooked for them, and the card games they’d been playing. It hadn’t been easy leaving the younger man with all the danger lurking about, but he knew his friends had been right by Jared’s side, so far. Jensen was confident that his lover definitely wasn’t getting hurt on their watch.

“What time does your plane land tonight?” Jared asked. Jensen responded, “It’s late, 10:45. I hate that it’ll take so long to get back, but once I’m snuggled up against that hot perfect body of yours, the long day will all be forgotten.” Jared snickered softly, looking over at the living room to make sure no one was listening. He saw the guys talking over something and building up the stoked fire. “Well, a little angry dude on the bathroom mirror kind of warned me not to expect any snuggling,” Jared told him smiling. Jensen laughed out loud, “I love you, baby, don’t listen to that guy.” Jared returned with, “I love you too, Jen.” Jensen became serious, “Jare, are you absolutely okay with my idiot friends? If you’re uncomfortable, in any way, please tell me and I’ll change my flight and be back by this afternoon.” Jared rushed to assure him, “No, they’ve both been absolutely great, really. They watch me every second, which is damn annoying because I don’t know what you’ve told them, but having them on either side of me just to do the dishes is a bit overkill.”

Jared’s announcement made Jensen smile. The younger man continued, “So far, I’ve learned Mike is the extroverted one who blurts things out without thinking first, and Dave’s more like you…calm and a thinker. I’ve got them figured out now. They’re funny as hell, and I appreciate them…I just wish I could do more.” Jensen relaxed, knowing damn well Jared was in good hands. His friends were doing him proud. Jared asked, “They want me to show them the deck plans, do you mind?”
The older man responded, “No, I don’t mind at all. Just remember our little guys we put in there. You might wanna get rid of those, first, or you’ll never hear the end of it.” Jared’s face showed his mortified shock at Jensen’s reminder, “Fuck, I forgot those were in there.” Jensen laughed, feeling some of the tension melt away about seeing his parents. Jared changed the subject, now focused on Jensen and what he was about to go through, “Are you going to be okay?” Jensen smiled at the loving concern in Jared’s voice, though he still wasn’t used to having someone worry about him, “Yes, I’m okay. This isn’t on my favorite’s list but I ‘am’ curious as hell to find out what’s going on. I’m not going to mention you, I’m just going to tell them I saw the news and came to see for myself. Hopefully, my dad will buy that and tell me something.”

Jared felt terrible for Jensen’s plight, “I’m so sorry you have to do this,” but Jensen argued, “Hey…it’s their fault I have to do this, not yours. Remember that. And baby, I’m in love now, so none of their bullshit even matters anymore. It’s just the crooked deals I want to know about…if dad will even tell me.” Jared still felt guilty for his lover having to face his family, his silence giving him away. Jensen called his name in a sing song voice, “Jaaaaarrreeed, I know you’re feeling guilty…you need to stop.” The younger man sighed, “I’ll be worried about you until you’re back tonight. Just be careful, please.” Jensen said, “It’ll be less than twelve hours before I get there. Hang tight and Jared, do ‘not’ stay up and wait for me…tomorrow is going to be draining and you’ll need your strength.” “Yes, Rambo,” Jared answered jokingly, but Jensen wasn’t done making his point, “I mean it. Don’t try and stay up.” “I know, I know, I’ll go to bed early,” Jared sighed, giving in. Both men said their goodbye’s and Jared set the phone down, thinking over his conversation. He still couldn’t believe the turn his life had taken. During the traumatic injuries and his recovery, Jared had somehow become completely and helplessly enamored with another person and he couldn’t imagine ever being without him.

The young engineer looked over to see Mike and Dave watching him. He supposed they were politely waiting to be invited back to the table, instead of interrupting is private thoughts. Jared realized, once again, how incredibly nice these two were and how glad he was that Jensen had them nearby. Jared smiled at them, “You guys wanna see the deck design?” They eagerly came to sit with him. Mike handed Jared his laptop, then both men waited for Jared to open up the file. ‘Thank God,’ he thought to himself, as he remembered to open the file without the little men in it. When the design popped up in full color, both friends’ jaws dropped. “Wow,” Mike exclaimed immediately. Dave studied the design for a few seconds, in silence, then shook his head, “That’s damn amazing.” Jared explained the rough drawing was computerized, as he wasn’t a landscape architect, at all. “I can connect my measurements in basic drawings, but the artwork is done by the program.” Dave and Mike had gotten used to Jared’s habit of downplaying himself. They glanced at one another, silently agreeing not to mention it.

Mike asked, “So, if we were to help Jensen build this, what would be need to get the permits and all that crap? Can you do that part?” Jared answered, “Each city and county has their own spec requirements, but usually the levels of support and spacing, fittings and joints have to be drawn and measurements have to be considered safe to get approved. You can use a picture like this, but you don’t have to…they only want the mechanics of the structure.” He shuffled some papers from his laptop case and pulled one out, “See, this is what they’d want. I have to redo it on the right paper. When I’m finished, Jensen won’t need to hire anyone, they’ll approve it.” Mike looked at Jared in awe, then looked at the papers with precise measurements and formulas on them, angles and lines, support beams and concrete footings. Mike noticed each paper had a different layer of the deck on it, each with different information. “So, these layers will be on drafting paper when it’s done and you’ll have a 3-D type drawing of the thing with all the numbers to go with it?” Jared nodded, “Yes, exactly,” pleased Mike was following so intently. The special ops expert shook his head and rubbed his face, trying to grasp how much this younger man was actually capable of, “Jared, this is something you’d have to pay a ton of money for someone to do.” Jared knew Mike was right,
“Yeah, I guess,” but he hadn’t really thought about that since he’d been out of the hospital. “I love doing this…big jobs are much more challenging, but these are fun too…it’s nice to be busy and it’s ‘really’ nice to do this for Jensen. I mean, look at everything he’s done for me.”

Mike looked at Dave and both men shared a knowing grin. Jared looked between them, clueless to their thoughts, not really knowing where to go next with the conversation. It felt like they were sharing some secret private opinion about him and he began to feel some uncomfortable shyness creeping in. Dave noticed it, “Jared, we’re just amazed with you. You know, there are engineers out there who are just ‘so so’, but you’re above and beyond and it’s really kind of cute that you don’t see it.” Jared’s sudden look of disbelief, leading to distaste, then to anger and a roll of his eyes had the men chuckling. He shot out of his chair in a huff and went to pour himself another cup of coffee. He was six foot four, goddammit, and he really didn’t need anymore people around him thinking he was fuckin’ cute. Dave looked at Mike, feeling bad for embarrassing the kid. He looked at Jared, who was sipping his coffee and looking out the kitchen window. Dave glanced at Mike, then got up and went to fill his coffee and stand next to Jared. “Jared…we’re not trying to be insulting or embarrass you. It’s quite the opposite.” Mike got up and joined them, “Yeah, Jared, we think Jensen’s the luckiest bastard on the planet…you’re just really cool and we keep discovering more cool stuff about you, dude.”

Jared softened and grinned to himself. He forced himself not to be embarrassed anymore and looked over at the pleading faces of the two bad ass killers who were there to protect him. ‘They don’t look so tough now,’ Jared thought, seeing the two faces who were begging for his forgiveness and approval. “Now look who’s being cute,” Jared said as he took another sip of his coffee. Mike’s jaw dropped and Dave smiled. The two men exchanged a glance with raised eyebrows, knowing they had been cleverly paid back. Jared sighed, “I’m not mad at you guys…I’m mad at me.” Jared thought, ‘why am I telling them this,’ then continued, “I never used to need people. Having someone tie my shoes and pick stuff up for me it’s…well, it’s fuckin’ annoying. Feeling weak, or ‘cute’, it’s…” Dave and Mike immediately sensed there was more to the statement of not needing people, but they weren’t going to pry into Jared’s life until they were invited. Dave piped in, “Remember the story I told you about when I stupidly drank the berry juice?”

Jared nodded while Mike looked at Dave, surprised, “You told him about that?” When Dave nodded, Mike looked at Jared, “Dude, he ‘hated’ being down. He bitched all the time, not being able to move his limbs and having us carry him everywhere. And look at him. He’s fuckin’ huge. I wanted to stuff a sock in his mouth.” Dave rolled his eyes at Mike, but nodded at Jared, “It’s true.” Mike added, “And when I was shot, I was the same way.” Jared looked alarmed, “You got shot? Jesus.” Mike shook his head, “No, it’s okay. It went clean through.” Jared argued, “How the hell can getting shot be okay? Getting shot is ‘not’ okay.” Mike looked at Dave, in question, then back at Jared, “Dude, no main arteries, clean through. It was fine.” Jared was stunned to silence as Mike continued with the purpose of his story, “It was my right shoulder. I couldn’t tie my boots for four weeks. I cussed them all out every time they had to help me pee or put my shirt on.”

Dave nodded, “He was a worse pain in the ass than me.” Jared was still stuck on the fact that he was standing next to someone who had been shot and recovered, and it didn’t seem to be a big deal. Dave took pity on the kid, “Our point is, we understand, Jared. I think, especially for guys, it’s hard to accept help. We’ve all been there.” Jared nodded, reminding himself of what they’d been through. He suddenly felt pretty small for being so defensive about something so silly. He cleared his throat, “Uhm, well, thank you for understanding, and for telling me that.” Dave glanced at Mike, then both veterans assessed Jared for a second. The kid seemed to be doing okay, so far, and still full of energy, but they both knew they had to watch him. Jensen had warned them of Jared’s tendency to push himself into exhaustion, and his bp liked to drop sometimes. Mike decided to change the topic back to Jensen’s deck, “You know, it’ll be us building that deck you’re designing. We helped him with the shower, and when he gets to the master bedroom, we’ll be doing
that too.” Jared looked at Mike, “That’s cool you guys can do things like that,” then he suddenly realized something else Mike had said, “Wait...the master bedroom? He wants to do that too?”

Both men nodded, and engineer looked thoughtful, “Huh, he never said anything about that. Hey...if you guys help me measure, I can enter it in here too and help him with the drawings.” Mike looked skeptical, “I’m not sure you should be doing all of that, Jared.” The engineer looked at both of them, “I did the others. Jensen helped me.” Mike sighed, then looked at Dave, “What do you think?” Dave contemplated saying ‘no’ but decided Jared might try and do it anyway and then where would they be? He looked seriously at Jared, “Okay, but Jared, ‘no’ bending over, ‘no’ picking anything up. You tell ‘us’ what you need moved and ‘we’ do it, or this will not happen.” Jared nodded, “Of course...absolutely.” He was happy and excited to be doing a new project, but knew full well it would be cancelled immediately if he didn’t agree. These two were not going to face Jensen’s wrath by letting him do too much. The three men spent the next thirty minutes measuring every corner and wall in Jensen’s bedroom, plus the ceiling and floor. Jared hadn’t been allowed to even pick up his tape measure, as both men did all the stooping and bending for him. They stuck to him like glue, which gave him no chance to even kneel down on his own. ‘Fuck, they don’t miss a thing,’ Jared mentally bitched. Once they were done, Jared told them he needed measurements of the ground outside the bedroom walls, so he could calculate and plan every support piece that was needed.

The ex-soldiers were impressed by Jared’s attention to detail, but they weren’t too keen on the kid being out in the freezing temps for too long. Jared moved quickly, his tag team had to keep on their toes in order to flank him. Mike had stuffed him into a heavy down jacket while Dave helped him into Jensen’s work boots by the back door. They never left his side and Jared was beginning to feel like the middle of an Oreo cookie. Unfortunately, he couldn’t really complain...at one point, he’d been so focused on one of the outside corners of the wall, he lost his footing and tripped over a rock. Jared would have fallen flat on his face if the reflexes of his tag team hadn’t been so quick. Before he knew what was happening, Jared was uprighted with firm support hands under each armpit. “Sorry...thank you,” he mumbled softly, quite embarrassed at his clumsiness. “No problem,” Dave said, as the three continued to finish with everything.

Back inside, Mike helped Jared get his boots off, while Dave put all their jackets away. Jared went to the table and began entering all the measurements into a new file for Jensen’s bedroom, while his protective support team scooted their chairs close enough to watch Jared’s work from either side of him. Once Jared entered all the new measurements, he showed them how he could manipulate designs. Both men watched in amazement, as Jared rotated the room and dragged the corners of the walls to different angles. He was oblivious to the scrutiny from his two caretakers, as he held his hand over his left side for a few seconds in response to a painful twinge. Both medical experts exchanged a concerned glance and mentally agreed there would be no more physical activities for Jared today. Dave got up to bring some lunch to the table. Mike was unable to look away from Jared’s screen. The kid was putting all the joints and supports together. Soon, there would be walls and a ceiling.

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Jensen felt the twisting knots in his gut, as he forced himself to get out of rental car and walk up the cobblestone steps of his childhood home. Like he remembered, the house wasn’t overbearingly ritzy. It was a large five bedroom, with three bath’s and a huge yard and pool, but it wasn’t something you’d see on Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous. Jensen’s father had banked his money, spent it on some elaborate vacations and cars, but he never blew it on his home. There was some driving force within his father’s neurotic makeup that kept the man selfishly hoarding his millions...and he never gave to charities. His mother did, but that was more for notoriety. Jensen used to wonder if maybe they’d adopted him, or found him on a doorstep. They had ‘nothing’ in common with him. The only dead giveaway was Jensen’s marked resemblance to his mother. He had her coloring, her nose, her eyes and her slightly reddish freckles. That was it. Jensen refused to even try his old house key. He
pushed the doorbell, like a visitor would do, ‘because that’s what I am,’ he thought. When the door was opened, Jensen was greeted by a young woman he didn’t know. She politely asked, “May I help you?” Jensen suddenly felt even more like a stranger than he did the last time. He remembered the housekeepers, the cooks, and the babysitters and this certainly wasn’t one of them he had known. “Uh…well…I’m Jensen Ackles,” he answered.

The woman didn’t react, at first, but then something like recognition entered her eyes, “You’re in the pictures.” After a short awkward pause, Jensen answered, “Yeah, I suppose. I’m their son.” The woman introduced herself as Beatrice and opened the door wide to let Jensen in. She closed the door, then asked Jensen if he would like anything to drink. “Nah, thanks though.” He glanced around, then noticed she wasn’t leaving and seemed to be waiting for him to tell her what he wanted. Jensen asked, “Uh, I haven’t been here in…well, in a long time. Can you just tell them I’m here? I don’t think it’s a good idea to just walk in on them.” Beatrice nodded, “Of course, Mr. Ackles. I’ll let them know. Please make yourself at home…it ‘is’ your home, after all.” Jensen smiled, “Not for a long time, but it’s okay, just tell them I’m here,” when she seemed nervous. After she left, Jensen walked around leisurely. He scanned the familiar surroundings. There were new furniture pieces and some of the flooring had been replaced, but the layout of the house was the same. Jensen knew it so well, even with his eyes closed. His parents entertained a lot here in the large common rooms. He remembered some really happy times, but most of them were way before he was old enough to start learning the truth about his father and his business practices.

He stood by the back slider, looking at the huge back yard, surrounded by towering cedar trees. He and his brother had slept out there, in tents and makeshift forts. They swam until midnight in the summer and played with their hot wheels collections in the flowerbeds. Jensen had no stinkin’ clue about harsh realities back then. There was sports, school and joking around with his brother and his friends. He thought he was happy, but somewhere around ten years old he started to notice that the laughter and hugs were coming from housekeepers and babysitters, not from his family…and not even from his brother. Daniel pulled away at an early age, not really interested in the same things. Jensen drifted toward friends and found comfort and happiness with their families. He realized his family wasn’t close, nor loving, and he knew he didn’t want any part of his father’s business.

Jensen was just coming back from his thoughts, when he felt a presence behind him. Someone had invaded the room. He could tell they weren’t close to him yet, but someone was definitely standing in the room watching him. He stayed where he was, looking at the backyard, but kept all senses on alert until he was ready to turn around. Whoever it was, Jensen knew he needed to face them, so he inhaled a cleansing breath, closed his eyes and exhaled, then turned around to face what he thought was going to be one of his parents.

‘Fucking son of a bitch,’ Jensen froze in a rigid stance.

“I’ll be damn, brother,” Daniel said.

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Mike was very interested in Jared’s work. He asked several questions. Jared enjoyed sharing his subject of interest with someone and Mike seemed to be quite interested and knowledgeable in some areas. “How do you know so much about engineering?” Jared asked. Mike eagerly explained, “I don’t, but I do a lot of construction odd jobs so some of this makes a lot of sense. I’ve always wanted to design it, but you know the military career and all…it was the only thing I did for over twenty years.” Jared contemplated in silence for a moment, thinking about how to help Mike. An idea popped into his brain like a lightbulb turning on, “If you’re interested in doing this, there’s an accelerated course. You have to take a basic test to get in, then you can take the accelerated degree program. It’s a basic engineering degree. You could stay with that, or add specialized certificates
later if you wanted. The basic one would at least get you a license to design stuff like what we’re doing.” Mike was beyond grateful, but looked a bit defeated, “Yeah, I’ve actually researched those.” He shrugged his shoulders, “But I don’t think I could get in.” Jared looked concerned, “Why not? Is it because of the test?” Mike nodded, “Yeah. I can’t pass that test.” Jared argued, “The hell you can’t. You’re asking questions right now that are right along the lines of what’s on that test. I know what’s on it. I can help you and you’ll pass it with flying colors…I mean if you want.”

Mike sat up straighter and glanced at Dave. The ex-soldier in the kitchen paused what he was doing for a second. He knew damn well this was something Mike had wanted for years, but had given up on. Mike hadn’t had it easy, and Jared’s offer meant more to both of them than the kid knew. Mike looked back at Jared in wonder, “Are you sure you wouldn’t mind helping me?” Jared glanced at Dave, then looked back at Mike confused, “Why would I mind? It'll be fun. You're smart as hell about this stuff.” Jared smiled, relieved to be doing something to help Jensen’s friend, “You’re welcome, and it’s nothing, really. Let me know when you want to start, okay? We can start now, if you want.” Jared shrugged a shoulder, “Okay,” not really sure what the case had to do with helping Mike, but both of Jensen’s friends knew the kid didn’t need anything else on his plate right now. Jared’s strength was going to be taxed by tomorrow’s testimony and they weren’t about to put anymore expectations on the kid. Dave placed several different items on the table he’d pulled from Jensen’s refrigerator. Jared continued to make notes and calculate math equations, while Mike helped Dave unwrap some lunch meats, cheeses and crackers. Dave pulled the lid off some potato salad and grabbed paper plates and three beers from the fridge. When everything was opened and ready, Mike nudged Jared to get him to look up from his laptop, “Huh? Oh…is it that late?” Jared’s cluelessness caused both the ex-soldiers to shake their heads and grin. “It’s a quarter to two,” Dave piped in, putting together his own meal. “Oh,” Jared grabbed for the beer and Mike stopped him, “Uh, you can have that,” he said, as he slid the untouched water bottle in front of the beer, “after you drink this.” Jared sighed, looking hopelessly defeated. “Fine,” he said, and grabbed for the water.

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Jensen’s rigid stance showed no reaction, but his internal hot rage boiled right beneath the surface. He wanted to twist and grind into every one of Daniel’s pressure points, cause him immense pain and make him scream for what he’d done. The ‘only’ thing saving Daniel from that experience, was Jensen’s concern for Jared’s safety. Jensen drew on his years of special forces training to formulate his smile and controlled response, “Hello, little brother.” Jensen thought to himself, ‘There, that wasn’t too bad,’ while he envisioned a knuckle or two pushing into Daniel’s sternum. Daniel came toward Jensen. Both brothers shook hands and participated in a sort of half hug and pat on the shoulder. Daniel seemed to be clueless to Jensen’s true thoughts, as the older man searched his brother’s eyes for any sign that he knew why Jensen was here. “What are you doing here?” Jensen asked Jensen innocently, but Jensen could see the younger man was more worried than he was letting on. “I came because of everything I’ve seen on the news…and on the internet,” Jensen shrugged, “Didn’t know what the hell was going on with the company, so I came to see for myself.”

Daniel nodded, “Ah,” then rubbed the back of his neck, nervously, pretending to be overly concerned, as well, “yeah, it’s crazy, isn’t it,” but Jensen could tell it was an act. After waiting a few seconds, Jensen asked Daniel, “So…is dad here?” Daniel rushed to answer, still looking nervous,
“Uh yeah…he’s resting. Uhm, I saw him upstairs, but he took his medication and it always makes him sleepy.” Jensen was sidetracked, “Medication for what?” Daniel opened his mouth to answer, but was interrupted by the arrival of their mother, who answered Jensen’s question, “Heart medication, Jensen. He has a pacemaker now, and the medication they give him makes him sleepy during this time of day.” Jensen’s mother added a snide, “Not that you care, right?” but her eyes betrayed her with a few seconds of longing appreciation that her oldest son was standing before her. Jensen wanted to refuse it, but seeing her actually care for just a second still had an affect on him. He sighed, “Of course I care. He’s still my dad…and this is still my family, even if we’re different people.” Jensen’s mother gave a sudden, “Tsk,” then shook her head, “Different people? Jensen, you took off and never looked back. You didn’t appreciate anything. Your dad had everything worked out for you. Your future, your success…everything he worked so hard for, and you just walked away.”

Jensen wanted to refuse it, but seeing her actually care for just a second still had an affect on him. He sighed, glancing at Daniel just long enough to see the anger and resentment his face showed at their mother’s words. ‘So,’ Jensen thought, ‘there it is. Daniel wants it all to himself, he always has,’ Jensen finished his thought, feeling the poison working it’s magic in his gut at facing the same old issues. “I chose a career you two hated. Every time I came back, you all shunned me. You treated me like the black sheep of the family and I was actually earning a living, doing something important. You never had to support me, ‘and’ I got a college degree out of it. Why wouldn’t a parent be proud of that? You realize you and dad are not the normal ones, right?” Daniel touched Jensen on the sleeve and looked at his mother, “He’s right. Mom, it’s you guys that shut Jensen out.” Jensen glanced at his brother, then back at his mom. It sickened him to think the asshole that had actually been so abusive to Jared was actually on his side. ‘Wait,’ Jensen reminded himself, ‘don’t get all excited…he’s only on my side, of course, because he knows I’m not here to change my mind and take his fortune away. When I took off, Daniel loved the fact that he had it all to himself. Jesus, this family is so fucked up.’

Jensen sighed and looked down with his hands on his hips. Instead of controlling his reactions to Daniel, he would really prefer to break the younger man’s nose with a quick palm strike. When Jensen looked up, he saw sadness in his mother’s eyes. This confused him for a minute and he almost softened, but then he reminded himself that she was ‘also’ on the brink of losing everything she loved. Social recognition, parties, glamorous trips were her favorite thing. The woman was sure to hit a low when his father lost his profits. Hence the true reason for the sadness. Jensen asked, “What’s going on with A.E.? That’s what I came for…I saw shit on the news and I wondered if any of it was true? Is it? Has dad been doing some kind of crooked bullshit that’s going to cost him his company?” Jensen watched the panic cross his mother’s face. Her eyes darted back and forth between he and Daniel, then she seemed to finally sigh in acceptance and decide to talk to her son. “Daniel says he’s trying to fix it,” Donna said as she looked at her younger son with misplaced gratitude. Jensen controlled his gag reflex at the exchange, as his mother continued, “Your father’s in a slump and he knows damn well he needs to do something, but Jensen…” Donna sighed and closed her eyes before continuing, “Jensen, he isn’t the same man.”

Jensen interjected, “What do you mean he isn’t the same man?” Donna looked at her oldest with regret, “It started about nine years ago. The weakness, some dizzy spells. Your dad was worried about keeping up. He knew they were talking about it behind his back.” Jensen asked, “Wait…who? Who was talking about it, his right hand people?” Donna nodded, “You know how strong he was…what a leader he was. When he started getting sick, he panicked and made some changes…put some people in place to keep things solid.” Jensen argued, “Well, it isn’t so solid, now, is it.” Donna instantly rose to her husband’s defense, Well, ‘you’ weren’t around, ‘were’ you. What was he supposed to do, Jensen? You were his son. You were supposed to take his place. Luckily, Daniel rose up and offered to help. He’s been a loyal son, every step of the way.” Jensen turned his head toward his brother, pinning him with suspicion, “How convenient you were still living so close
by...in the same free house, with the same free room and board.” Daniel argued immediately, “What! I was here, Jensen, and I’ve worked my ass off to keep this company successful.” Jensen moved into Daniel’s personal space to stare him down, “Worked your ass off, did you? You’ll have to excuse me, I’ve never seen you work at anything so it’ll take me a moment to process what that might look like.” Jensen looked up in the air for a few seconds, like he was trying to picture something, then shook his head, “Nope,” looking back at Daniel, “Can’t even picture it.”

Daniel gave an irritated sigh, as Jensen’s mother piped in, “Knock it off, Jensen. Daniel’s been here every step. He helps me with your dad’s appointments, brings him things, and he reports everything back for your dad so he can keep in the loop with the business.” Jensen looked back at her, “Oh really? Did he happen to keep him in the loop about the millions of dollars in false inspections and violations of building codes? Did he keep him apprised of all the shit he can go to jail for?” Donna looked at him in disbelief, “That’s not going to affect your dad, Jensen. Daniel says it’s all false. His partners have it all covered and it’s just the press turning things around.” Jensen had to pause. He couldn’t believe the stupidity. Not only was his mother completely in denial, she actually had the audacity to act like her deadbeat son wasn’t using the hell out of his father’s illness to benefit himself. “Mom,” Jensen moved closer to look her in the eye, “How does dad know he can trust these people? What if they’re really doing all this shit…what if it’s real and what if they leave dad hanging? Everything you love, your lifestyle and everything you’re used to…it’s gone.”

Daniel moved closer and pulled on Jensen’s arm to get him to face him, “I got this, Jensen. Trust me…I wouldn’t let anything happen to dad’s company.” Jensen looked at Daniel with such loathing in his bones, he almost lost control of his ruse. This fucking son of a bitch, who ‘used’ to be his little brother, was the epitome of true slime. The asshole had entertained himself with years of sexual harassment to the innocent employees of A.E., then he used his own father’s heart problems to conveniently intertwine himself into being the family savior. Now, he was trying to convince Jensen, and his blind parents, that everything was under control?

“How,” Jensen asked him in a deadly calm voice, “How have you ‘got this’ Daniel?” Jensen’s brother took a step back. Maybe Jensen was projecting too much of his violent thoughts against his brother in his demeanor, or maybe Daniel hadn’t expected that question. Either way, the younger man was perceptive enough to take a step back from Jensen’s personal space before he answered, “Well, dad’s lawyers are going to beat it in court. We made a plan. We’ve pinpointed where the accusations are coming from and I’m taking steps to prove they are all loosely based on someone’s incompetence and personal agenda. It’s just a disgruntled employee, Jensen, it’s nothing more than that.” Jensen admitted to himself what was fueling most of his rage. It wasn’t just the fact that this bastard had touched Jared, had made him miserable by assaulting him at the office and caused the poor kid to turn his head all the time in fear, it was also because he tried to kill Jared. Daniel was in on all of this, and now he was trying to portray his brilliant lover, his innocent lover, as some bitter employee that was making it all up. ‘Fucking piece of work,’ Jensen thought as he looked closely at his brother. Jensen forced himself to take a calming breath. Only his years of training allowed him to keep up the facade he needed to follow this through. Jensen found his resolve and forced a lopsided grin, “Well, if you really believe it’s not going to go anywhere, Daniel, and all this will go away, then I guess I’ve made this trip for nothing.”

Daniel rushed to counter that statement, “No…no, Jensen, it’s nice that you care. I’m glad you’re here. We haven’t been together in so many years. Dad wanted to talk to both of us, anyway, but he wasn’t going to bend his stubbornness to call you.” Daniel shrugged his shoulders, “Now we can both visit at the same time.” Jensen looked confused, “Why does he wanna talk to us? And why didn’t ‘you’ tell me he wanted to see me?” Daniel started to say something, but seemed at a loss for the correct words. He was reaching for an excuse. Jensen watched his eyes dart back and forth with blatant insecurity. Daniel finally formulated an answer, which Jensen knew was completely made up, “Well, I figured you’d had enough of his badgering. You were so angry. I thought you’d wanna be
left alone.” Jensen blurted out, “Right,” then thought for a few seconds before asking snidely, “And is that what you were thinking when you knew dad had heart problems and you didn’t call me?” Daniel’s face changed, the resentment of Jensen’s judgment of him showed. Donna Ackles looked at her youngest, “You said you called him.” Daniel was angry, panicking as his eyes darted between his mother and brother, “How dare you imply I didn’t call you on purpose?” He looked at his mother, “I left messages, mom.” Daniel turned back to Jensen, “I left messages, so maybe you never got them.” Daniel seemed to be reaching for some kind of saving grace in front of their clueless mother. So far, he seemed to have her fooled, but Jensen wasn’t, “What’s the matter, brother? Afraid I’d have a change of heart…come back here and take away your VP bank account from you, or your travel cards, or your loosely earned executive suite that dad handed you on a platter?”

Donna yelled, “JENSEN,” stopping the brothers from escalating any further. Daniel stewed, red faced and silent, while Jensen stared him down. It was the same between them. Even though they hadn’t been around each other in over twelve years, Jensen still had the same feelings about Daniel. He was younger, and Jensen was supposed to be the mentor, right? He was supposed to fall into that roll of protector, guidance counselor, teacher…but it had never been like that between them…not since they were ten years old. Jensen had tried, but somewhere in their youth, Daniel had decided to take his own path. “Let me know when dad’s awake,” Jensen announced, then walked off to drop heavily onto the couch, turning his back to the other two in the room.

“No need,” everyone turned at the sound of Alan Ackles’ voice.

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Jared had eaten three full cracker sandwiches, drank two bottles of water, one before and one after his beer, and now he was being manhandled to the damn couch like he was ninety. ‘Goddammit, these two,’ he thought, as Dave and Mike practically carried his exhausted body to the couch. He’d held the two medical experts at bay long enough with his drawn out lunch, loading one cracker at a time with meats and cheeses, working on Jensen’s bedroom and deck in between. He drank the stupid water they forced on him, and he really thought that was making strides with them, but apparently he’d been too obvious with the soreness of his wound. ‘Fuck,’ Jared had no choice with these glorified babysitters. He had to admit, the warmth of the newly built fire felt wonderful. As his back hit the soft cozy couch, Jared closed his eyes instantly and gave in to dreamland. Both ex-soldiers reached for Jared’s forehead at the same time, Mike landing his hand first. Mike told Dave, “It’s good.” They covered their charge with a blanket, both taking a moment to watch the younger man sleep. “He sure doesn’t like to give up,” Mike remarked. Dave agreed, “No, he doesn’t.”

The friends cleaned up the kitchen, then decided to sit on the patio for a bit. They left the slider slightly cracked and their senses on alert, so no sounds would get by them. After sipping his beer, Mike asked, “How’s the book?” No one knew Dave had been writing a book except Mike and Jensen. He wouldn’t let either of them read it yet, but both knew one of Dave’s deepest passions was to try and get published some day. “Actually, it’s coming along,” Dave updated his friend, then he smirked, “Yeah, yeah, I know you wanna read it.” Mike asked, “Is it really about our experiences?” Dave answered, “Yeah…complete with all the bad, all the good, the let downs, the morbidity. Yeah, it’s all that.” After Mike whistled in awe, Dave added, “Changed all the names and locations, of course.” Dave frowned worriedly, “I’m not sure if people will take to it, ya know? But, it’s all there…from my perspective, anyway.” Mike studied his friend for a few seconds, “Dude, you’ve always been a good writer, and you’ve always known just what to say in just the right moment. Even if it’s not for everybody, the ones that ‘do’ choose to read it, they’re gonna be glued to it, I’m sure. It’s gonna be the best thing they’ve ever picked up because it’s from someone who knows his shit.”

Dave smiled at his friend’s support, “Thanks, I hope so. Wouldn’t hurt to make a little money from it.” Mike laughed, “Hell yeah, get something out of that fuckin’ shit we went through.” Both men sat
in silence for a few more minutes. They waved back when the security men doing perimeter acknowledged them. Mike said, “I met a couple of ‘em this morning. They were cool.” Dave nodded, “That’s good to know. They’re still not gettin’ between us and that kid.” Mike grinned, “I’m with you…he kinda grows on ya.” Dave smiled, “Yes, he does. If Jensen fucks this up, I think we’ll keep the ‘kid’ instead of ‘him.’” Both friends laughed, knowing damn well Jensen and Jared’s relationship wasn’t going anywhere. They’d never seen their former team leader this happy before.

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“Alan,” his wife started toward him, “you shouldn’t be moving around on your own.” The older man waved her off, “Oh stop it…I’m fine.” As Alan Ackles moved into the living room, Jensen started to stand, but his father waved him down, “Stay.” Jensen studied him. The man had aged, as had everyone else, but Alan’s full head of white hair and tottery mannerisms gave the effect of being much older than only seventy two. Jensen could see he wasn’t well. He felt a twinge of guilt at being away so long…that is, until his father opened his mouth, “Bout time you came to see us.” Jensen remained silent after the bitter opening line. He wasn’t about to get sucked into a pity party because he knew damn well his father had more insults saved up. “You still runnin’ around with boys?” Jensen wasn’t to be disappointed. At least he still knew the man. He went straight to the point, “What did you want to talk about, dad?” He waited while his father stewed at not getting the confrontation he craved, then started in, “I got in a bind ten years back. You remember Gerald?” Jensen pretended to think about it before answering, “Think so. He came to the house a few times…he was in some of the meetings you took me to. Nice guy, seemed loyal.”

Alan looked irritated, “He was...then I took over Ross-Peterson. Gerald didn’t agree with me. We had a falling out over it. He told me to let it go or he’d walk.” Jensen said knowingly, “Lemme guess…your ego wouldn’t let you choose a friend over money.” Alan’s temper flared, “It was a seven million dollar deal, Jensen. He was an idiot. Of course I didn’t listen. Gerald became soft. I couldn’t understand where the hell he was coming from. He spouted off things like morals and having a conscience. Made no damn sense.” Jensen sighed, “So what happened?” Alan Ackles actually had the decency to look sheepish. ‘Not quite ashamed, or even sorry, but maybe just a tad bit regretful that he’d made a mistake,’ Jensen thought. The older man continued, “Ross-Peterson had a condition to their merger. I had to take on their CEO and make him my right hand. I had to take him on as top man to seal the deal.” Jensen shook his head, “So you sold out Gerald? Screwed him over for money? Nice, dad, real nice.” Alan glared at his eldest, “Anyone in the business knows it isn’t personal, it’s just business Jensen and sometimes you have to do things…things that you don’t want to do. We made a lot of money off that deal.”

Jensen argued, “No dad…no, you don’t have to do things like you’ve done. There are plenty of businesses out there who go through their whole existence without screwing other people over. They exist and they don’t have to worry about who their friends are. I hope Gerald landed something nice because he deserved it.” Alan asked snidely, “Can I continue?” Jensen gestured to his father, “By all means.” Alan sighed, “I’d checked the guy out. Malens was his name. Man, he was an aggressive SOB. I liked him. For years, he brought us to heights we never imagined. He expanded us fast…mergers and absorptions. We got into designing and building our own structures. The man was a gold mine.” Jensen said nothing. He had a very different opinion of Tony Malens. Alan continued, “I developed this pain in the ass heart condition after that.” Jensen’s mother interjected, “He passed out at work and they rushed him to the ER.” Alan looked at her, irritably, as she argued, “Well…it happened twice because you stubbornly ignored the first time, Alan.” Daniel spoke for the first time then, “He was in A-fib. It’s when the electrical…” Jensen interrupted his brother without looking at him. “So, you ignored the first warnings and what, you ignored the recommendations for meds or a pacemaker? Sounds like your ego. So what happened the second time?” Jensen’s father answered him, “Nothing. I finally took the stupid medication. Which did ‘nothing’ and then came the pacemaker.” Donna didn’t care anymore, she was going to make her
point, “Your father ignored the warnings for so long that his heart began to fail. After a year of putting it off, he finally took the medication but it was too late to stop the deterioration.”

Jensen realized what she was trying to say, “So, you let A-fib go and did nothing. I’m guessing CHF?” Jensen’s mother nodded. Jensen stared at his father, who glared back, stubbornly when Jensen asked, “How much damage is there?” Jensen was sure they all forgot his medical expertise, but his father seemed to get it, “I have twenty five percent of my heart muscle left, and that leftover part isn’t even doing that well.” Jensen was shocked. His father had been the hostile egomaniac, victimizing all sorts of companies for so many years. It was hard to imagine him being weak and ill. Still, the man didn’t seem to have lost any of his iron will over it. Jensen still continued to play dumb, “So, is this Malens character still running things?” His father answered with a tired sigh, “I couldn’t get in there anymore for meetings. I couldn’t even get out of bed some days, so I started missing what he was doing. That’s when Daniel seemed like the perfect solution. Your father had been here helping out…he’d been going to the doctor with me and keeping things straight around here. He already worked in the local office. I realized he was right in front of me so why not send him in my place? I mean…’you’ certainly didn’t want the job.” Jensen grinned knowingly at his brother, “Took care of things, did you? Is that why you’re on the news now?” Jensen looked back at his father, “You do know you’re on the news, dad, right?”

Daniel took over defensively, “I told you that wasn’t what it seemed, Jensen. Dad, it’s just a troubled employee. Believe me, he was just after fame and fortune. He made a pass at me, more than once. And I happen to know he had a pretty thick relationship with another engineer that was into some pretty kinky stuff. The jackass was cocky and it pissed him off when I didn’t give him the time of day. We sent him on some assignments he didn’t like and that’s it. He’s just trying to get back at us. He won’t win, dad…Jensen, I’m taking care of it,” Daniel said to his brother, having no clue that Jensen knew everything he had just said was bullshit. Jensen found himself, once again, visualizing his hand around Daniel’s throat like a vice, slowly squeezing the life out of his brother’s eyes. He decided to humiliate his brother. It would feel a bit better, and keep him from breaking his cover, “So dad…I researched all about you on the internet before coming here. Thanks for the nice bragging bullshit paragraph about your war declarated son, but as surprised as I was when I saw it, the sexual harassment suits you’ve lost were the biggest shock.” Jensen turned toward Daniel, “Little problem keeping your hands off the employees? Hand in the shower wasn’t doin’ it for ya’?”

Jensen’s brother rose to lunge at Jensen, but his father stopped him, “DANIEL…SIT DOWN.” Jensen stayed in a relaxed pose, pleased to have struck a nerve. He hadn’t even twitched a nerve at the younger man’s aggressive demeanor. Daniel telegraphed everything he did. Alan looked at his younger son, “You can stop pretending it didn’t happen, Daniel. It’s public knowledge.” Daniel argued loudly, “How can you side with them? They came onto ‘me’. They came onto ME.” Daniel’s eyes spoke volumes about the denial and refusal to admit guilt. Jensen saw the panic as Daniel tried to convince his dad and Jensen of his innocence, “It’s because I’m the bosses son. They all knew who I was. Do you know how awful it is to go into work knowing how they feel about you? And then to…to be hit on…be asked out and think that someone actually likes you. Then they sue the shit out of us.” Jensen laughed and clapped, hard and slow, mocking his brother’s performance, “Bravo, little brother. You should be in the theater with that show.” Daniel screamed at Jensen, “AND WHAT WOULD YOU KNOW? Running around in the jungle with your little fuck buddies, cleaning your guns and sharing your bedrolls. HOW WOULD YOU FUCKING KNOW?”

“Daniel,” his mom warned, but Daniel was on a roll, “I...WAS...HERE...AND YOU WEREN’T!” Daniel screamed at Jensen, then paced away from the couch and back again. Jensen noticed his parents were staring at Daniel as if they’d never seen him before. ‘Maybe they haven’t,’ Jensen thought to himself, ‘not the real Daniel.’ Alan looked at Jensen, sighing defeatedly. Jensen raised an eyebrow. It was the first time he’d ever seen the man admit to a mistake. He still couldn’t let him off that easy, ‘So...like he said, ‘he’ was the bosses son. Those employees had nowhere to
go. He victimized them…made their lives miserable. You moved him around to different offices instead of firing him. You ‘let’ him abuse them.” Daniel interrupted, “YOU know NOTHING. Those people forced me…they lured me in and I trusted them and then they betrayed me.” Jensen shook his head at his brother, “And that’s why they won in court? Because they were false claims? I don’t think so, little brother. You’ve got issues.”

Daniel yelled, “Don’t you call me that!” He turned to his father, got down on his knees in front of the older man, “Dad…I made you tons of money. You know it’s true. Jensen was nowhere to be found and I brought in contracts and engineering jobs and all kinds of mergers. I did well. This stuff right now, it’s…well, it’s just like I said. It isn’t what they’re saying in the news…it’s just a matter of finding that damn whistle blowing little shit and making sure he shuts up.” Jensen stood quickly, grabbed his brother by the shirt collar and twisted tight enough to restrict movement, barely allowing him to breathe, “And just ‘how’ are you planning on making sure the so called ‘little shit’ shuts up, Daniel? This is some heavy shit you’ve pulled A.E. into and I’m ‘really’ wantin’ to know, here, ‘how’ you’re gonna shut another human being up? The only way I’m thinking of isn’t legal. In fact, it’s quite a qualifier for the death penalty. Is that what you’re planning to do, Daniel? How far have you gone in this, and how much further are you going?”

Daniel paused, reluctant to answer. He still hadn’t a clue that Jensen knew about all of this. He turned to his father, with difficulty, “Dad, I have people working on it. They’ll talk to the complainant. They’ll make him an offer to shut up. A.E. will be okay. There’s a court appointment tomorrow and we’re gonna intercept him before he testifies.” Jensen knew damn well ‘that’ wasn’t gonna happen. This piece of shit and his goonies were going nowhere ‘near’ Jared. He pushed Daniel away, hard enough for him to land on his ass. If he didn’t put a few feet between them, he was going to break his facade. Jensen rubbed his face, as he sat back on the couch, “Holy fucking shit,” he bitched, shaking his head. Alan had been watching the exchange between his sons. He finally looked at Daniel, “You ‘did’ bring in millions. You practically broke the bank after the first four years and Malens had to open multiple overseas accounts to avoid taxes.” Daniel looked hopeful that his father was rewarding him with approval. He started to grin, glancing at Jensen with arrogant satisfaction until his father continued, “I should have known better. It was blind greedy indulgence that stopped me from wondering how the hell would ‘you’ be able to do all that? I knew Malens was good, but…but how the hell did YOU go in there without any training or experience and just…start racking in the dough? I’d beg you to tell me this code violation shit isn’t true, but…” he bowed his head, “it makes goddamn perfect sense.”

Daniel’s expression fell into disappointment when he realized he wasn’t going to get the appreciation he’d hoped for. He argued, “What does it matter, dad? Isn’t that the whole point? To make money, to get ahead, grow as a company? Isn’t that what mattered to you? Build the empire, no matter what? I did that. We were doing great. I did great.” Alan yelled at his son, “Going to prison is not great, Daniel! Jesus Christ, if that evidence is true…if you ‘have’ been falsifying inspections, slipping past codes and ignoring safety supports…instead of counting our millions, we’ll be counting our weekly commissary in fucking prison!” Alan leaned back in his chair, exhausted. Not only the stress of what was happening, but also his weakened condition, had tired him out. He spoke forlornly, “I should have promoted Harriman…Robert’s the one I should have given Gerald’s position to. I see that now. He would have steered us in the right direction.” ‘Fat chance,’ Jensen thought, knowing it was Robert who had been with the hitman looking for Jared. “And I shouldn’t have put you in there,” Alan eyed his younger son, shaking his head. Daniel’s rage showed on his face. Silence followed. Alan Ackles finally spoke up, “I’d like to talk to Jensen alone.” The older man looked at his oldest son. Jensen nodded, as his mother willfully left the room. Daniel’s eyes darted between them, then he huffily stomped off, “This is bullshit.” Jensen would have smiled at Daniel’s misery, but he was too busy convincing himself not to blow his cover and kill him.

Once they were alone, Jensen forced himself to face his father, giving him his full attention. He really
didn’t want to be here, but the day hadn’t been a total bust, so far. The cat was out of the bag, so to
speak. His father knew Daniel was a piece of shit now. “So,” Alan began, “I’m sure you’re gloating
now.” Jensen said nothing. The old man never stopped trying to goad people into confrontation. He
loved to argue. Jensen knew the best way to win with the man was to not say anything. Alan sighed,
“Jensen, I’m dying.” The special ops soldier had not expected that honesty. He searched his dad’s
eyes for some mental game, some guilt trip or sympathy pull, but could detect none. Maybe his father
was being real with him for the moment. Alan continued, “I’ve known it for awhile, but I wasn’t
going down without a fight. I’m pissed as hell, but there doesn’t seem to be much they can do.”
Jensen gently argued, “Dad, there’s a long extension of life with pacemakers. You might not be as
close to death as you think.” Alan corrected him, “No. Jensen, your mother doesn’t know. The last
time I went in with Daniel, they told me I’m now at fifteen percent…not twenty five.” Silence. “So,
basically, the little gadget in my chest is the only thing keeping me running.”

Jensen became angry. He wasn’t quite clear whether he was angry at the situation, angry with his
father, or angry with himself because he was suddenly feeling things he didn’t want to feel. ‘Fucking bullshit,’ Jensen’s mind bitched. This man had been a complete ass to him, never supported his
dreams, put him down at every turn because of his career choices and his sexual preferences. He’d
bragged to his associates about taking over small companies and putting the hard working employees
out of a job. How the fucking hell could he be feeling ‘anything’ toward this son of a bitch? Because
he was sick? ‘Dammit,’ Jensen was frustrated for actually caring. Alan continued, “I know you hate
me.” Jensen sighed, shifting irritably, “Don’t turn this around on me, dad. You pushed me away
because I wasn’t what you wanted.” Alan argued, “Jensen, you couldn’t see it. I had it all planned.
Everything was perfectly aligned for you to take my place. All you had to do was just step in…why
the running around with guys instead of girls, the sports and staying with friends instead of here?
Why join the service? It was like you hated me and were rebelling against me at every turn.
Everything I lined you up for, YOU did just the opposite.” Jensen’s temper flared, “I do ‘not’ want
to have this conversation with you. Not again. It’s ‘never’ been about me, dad, ‘never’. It was ‘your’
fantasy, ‘your’ vision and ‘your’ need to win and control everything that came first. I never hated
you…for God’s sake, I ‘needed’ you.” Jensen paused to keep his emotions at bay, “But because I
wouldn’t play into your games, learn how to fake my smiles to your business associates, laugh about
the hostile take overs and count the winnings over screwing innocent people, it was ‘you’ who hated
‘me’. I couldn’t stand it and I saw a chance to do something noble, something useful, maybe a little
bit heroic. Maybe deep down I was trying to make up for all the innocent people you walked all
over.”

Alan’s temper flared, “Well excuse me for building a comfortable nest egg for my family. Your
mother and you had it all and I earned it for you. Yes it ‘was’ about you, Jensen, you and Daniel and
your mom. It was secure for you all and I made it that way.” Jensen begged to differ, “Have I ever
used any of it? Have I ever come asking for handouts?” Alan sighed in acceptance, “No. No you
haven’t.” Silence. Jensen thought it was the loudest silence he’d ever endured until his father finally
spoke again, “Jensen…it’s because of that. You made your own way. I see it…I always have, I’ve
just been too proud to say it. I was angry, you were angry, but I always saw the man you were
becoming. I saw a man that held his own. You never mooched and you never lied about anything.
You never had to.” Jensen waited, knowing there was a point to all this and he really wished his
father would get to it. A part of him reveled at the compliments, but was too leery from years of put
downs to believe it. Alan continued, “You’re strong. Remarkably strong. I watched you stand up for
yourself, believe in what you were doing and who you were. You’re solid and you don’t doubt your
decisions. Your brother is the opposite.” Jensen made a mocking ‘tsk’ sound, “Well, hallelujah.”

Alan continued, “I’ve never changed my inheritance, Jensen, not since you were fourteen. It’s
‘because’ of our disagreements, ‘because’ of our fights and our coldness toward one another. It’s
‘because’ of the very part of you that pissed me off all these years that I knew you were the perfect
one to replace me.” Jensen opened his mouth to speak, but his father held his hand up, “I know. I know you didn’t want it. But Jensen, no one else would have done right by it. When I’m gone, no one would be a better choice to take care of things. You might not do things my way, or even half of what I would approve of, but…but whatever you do, I know it will be solid…it will be the right thing.” Jensen shook his head, allowing the unwanted tears to enter his eyes, but not quite letting them fall, “You’re a fucking asshole, you know that? All I ever needed was to know you approved of me. You gave me nothing but insults and put downs. Now…after all these years…now, you’ve been let down and betrayed by your other son, NOW you tell me you ‘respect’ me?” Jensen walked away with his hands on his hips, trying to calm his nerves. Alan cleared his throat and stood up. Jensen turned to see the wobbly man coming toward him. “Dad,” Jensen said, “goddammit, sit down,” he ordered, helping Alan to sit on the sofa.

Jensen didn’t trust the pleading he saw in Alan’s eyes…this was way out of his comfort zone when dealing with his father. Alan continued, “Jensen, your grandfather told me you were a better man than me and he was right.” Jensen interjected, “Dad, this isn’t,” then sighed, “this isn’t solving anything. What do you expect me to do? I can’t fix what’s happening right now, it’s too late. Daniel’s got everything in so much trouble, I’m not gonna be able to stop it. We’re talking criminal violations, lot’s of them, and the way he talks about ‘stopping’ this witness…I’m afraid there’s more shit we don’t know about yet.” ‘There,’ Jensen thought to himself, hoping he still sounded ignorant about what was going on. Alan responded, “Jensen, Daniel’s mistakes are going to run their course. What happens, happens. What I want to explain is there are two other corporate divisions of A.E. that won’t be a part of the penalties. After the courts rule on this, and after all the damn lawsuits that follow, you take what’s left of A.E and you build your own company. Build it the way you like, the way it suits you. At least I’ll know it’s going to live on in some fashion.” Jensen’s resistance showed. He wasn’t about to accept that his father had changed this easily, and he surely wasn’t about to accept some kind of nest egg his father had built on other people’s pain. Alan interrupted his thought, “Jensen dammit, I am LEAVING this earth. If there’s one thing I can do right, let me goddamned do it, would you? Are you so programmed to argue with everything that you’re even gonna argue when I’m doing something right?”

Jensen was stunned, still angry, and the damned water works were threatening again. This felt like a goodbye and some kind of retribution. He hadn’t come here for this, “I never wanted money, dad. I wanted you to fish with me, play catch with me. You never could forget about the money and the power long enough to just be my dad. Even now, you’re still doing it. You’re talking ‘to’ me instead of ‘with’ me and it’s still about that damn money and the damn business.” Jensen looked away. He couldn’t look at the man he’d just lowered his defenses to. Fuck, this was exactly what Alan Ackles always did. He manipulated people until he got them to weaken, and then he sliced them up with his knife. ‘Here comes the next insult,’ Jensen braced himself. Alan’s next comment shocked him into looking up again, “Maybe I don’t know how to do that.” Jensen read the sincerity, as the older man continued, “This is what I ‘can’ do, Jensen, it’s what I know and it’s ‘my’ way of ‘trying’ to give you what you said you wanted. Just do something good with it, Jensen…the papers are in the safe, and there are copies with my lawyer. I want there to be peace between us.”

Jensen studied the weakened man for a moment. As Alan turned and yelled for his wife to come back, Jensen took a deep breath. He and his father at peace? He reminded himself with an inward grin that the old man had done it again. He’d had the last word and he’d gotten his way. He couldn’t believe it. This was so far from what he’d expected. More than giving him the company leftovers, Jensen had earned his father’s respect. Alan Ackles had told him, in his own very limited vocabulary of niceties, that he thought Jensen was a good man. Jensen hadn’t realized how much that meant until he felt a spark of pride from it. Donna came back into the room without Daniel. Jensen wondered where the younger man went, but his mother distracted him, “Are you staying for dinner?”
Jensen considered it, but he was emotionally done, and he knew she didn’t really mean it. His mother’s eyes had returned to detached propriety again. He couldn’t spend any more time here. Dad wasn’t killing people and that’s what he needed to know. His mother was still fake, which he already knew. Daniel, on the other hand…Daniel was still a problem. Jensen stood, “Nah, I’ve got a plane to catch.” He headed for the door, not able to get out of the house fast enough. There was too much unhappiness in the air…too many years of let downs, too much emotional unavailability to even attempt. As he headed out the front door, he heard blaring music coming from his brother’s bedroom.

When Jensen got to his rental car, he called Price’s number, “You have a warrant out for my brother, right?” Price asked, “Jensen? Yes, we haven’t seen him at any of the offices yet and your mom told the locals she hadn’t seen him.” Jensen sighed, “Well, he’s there now. Feel free to pick up the piece of shit. No matter what she tells you, he’s on the second floor, first bedroom on the left. Dad won’t stop you.” Jensen waited while he heard Price barking out orders to someone else in his office. He knew it wouldn’t be long before investigators pulled up to arrest his brother. Price then asked, “Jensen, does he know about you?” Jensen answered, “No. He has no clue. And Darren, dad isn’t in on it, but Daniel is guilty as shit. Dad’s just guilty of being stupid and greedy enough to trust my brother with things. He told me about Malens, about his falling out with Dyer and how he bypassed Robert Harriman. Dad’s sick, that’s why he did it, but he’s been off the grid. He knows he fucked up.” Price sighed, “Okay. They’re on their way for Daniel.” Jensen replied, “Good. Daniel also said something about a plan to interfere with Jared tomorrow. He said they were going to intercept him. I didn’t get the details.”

Price assured him, “We’ll be ready, Jensen.”
This chapter continues through Jensen's return home. Jared, Mike and Dave get to know each other better. Everyone is gearing up for the trip to the courtroom tomorrow and Jared's testimony. Jensen has pent up tension from the family visit, and a sleepy Jared wakes up to help him. There is hot handjob action for the guys. They really missed each other: 0)

There is a mention of an activist group of people who work to improve the treatment of animals. PETA. I don't want anyone to misunderstand this as making fun of the actual group. It's not, I assure you.

Thanks for bookmarking and your comments! There is more to come!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

After his ninety minute nap, Jared felt rested. He wasn’t quite as energetic as he’d like, but he felt better than earlier. He dragged his sluggish ass to the bathroom to freshen up. As Jared dropped heavily into one of the dining chairs, he grumbled at the bottled water that suddenly appeared in front of him. His pissy mood lightened when it was followed up by a fresh cup of steaming espresso. He took his first few sips, then sighed with his eyes closed as the acidic liquid merged into his blood stream. ‘Jesus, they’re getting to know me,’ he thought, then looked up and smiled his thanks to Dave. Mike came from the spare bedroom, dropped the chess set on the table with a greeting, “Welcome to the land of the living, kid.” He asked Dave, “Did you caffeine him up?” Dave nodded, as both men smiled knowingly at Jared. His caretakers had mentioned chess earlier. They were dying to test out Jared’s skills. As soon as the younger man finished his cup, he eagerly said, “Alright, bring it on. Who’s going down first?” They played several matches. Dave was the better player, but he still couldn’t quite get a strategy around Jared’s abilities. Jared tried to teach them how to use math and probabilities as a strategy, but they found that the chess game was more intricate than learning cards.

The afternoon was quite entertaining, with lots of banter and funny stories. After Mike recited funny experiences from their time in the military, Jared was pushed to give them something from ‘his’ line of work. He was reluctant, at first, not really thinking they’d be interested in his boring career, but Dave and Mike both egged him on. Jared thought for a minute, then shrugged, “Okay, here’s one.” He explained how he and another engineer were teamed up to do a design for a new building. “We were ‘told’ it was an office building with a McDonald’s franchise in the lobby.” After days of measuring, calculations, and working with architects on the design, my partner convinced me I was the better speaker so I should present it. I dragged my Powerpoint and my easel flip board into the conference room. Everyone in there was staring. I wasn’t really too nervous because I knew it was a solid design and we’d worked hard on it. So, I turned to the first image where we had inserted the finished building…complete with little yellow arches in the lobby.” ‘Here goes,’ he told himself. “It turned out the new secretary wasn’t that organized and she got this job mixed up with another one.” Jared paused for effect. His captivated audience looked so innocently endearing. Dave asked with
concern, “What happened?”

Jared answered, “So, the group I was standing in front of was from P.E.T.A. You know, the activist group for the ethical treatment of animals? Well, that includes not eating them.” Silence filled the room. Jared sighed, “Needless to say, they weren’t too thrilled with my yellow arches.” Dave and Mike stared at the younger man with their mouths half open for a few seconds. Dave slowly started to grin, as Mike bellowed out, “Oh my fucking god, Jared!” Mike laughed hard. Dave finally lost his cool composure and joined him. They couldn’t stop. Jared giggled along with them, please he could put these two in stitches. He complained, “It’s funny NOW,” then added, “We lost that job, by the way, because the group was so sensitive they refused to accept an apology. I felt terrible that we’d insulted them. I’m an animal lover, too, and that just made it worse. I mean I eat meat, but I certainly respect and value anyone who tries to help animals. I think it was the last straw, though, when I followed the six of them out. We passed my damn desk, which had an Arby’s bag on it I forgot to throw out.” The two ex-soldiers full belly laughed once more. Mike finally exclaimed, “I’m sorry, Jared, but that was goddamned funny.” Dave nodded, “Have to agree, though I’m sure it wasn’t funny back then.” Jared shook his head, “No…it wasn’t a good day.” Dave smiled at Jared, “Thank you for sharing, Jared.” Mike agreed, “Definitely…that was fuckin’ awesome.” The engineer smiled, happy he could entertain them for awhile.

Dave clapped his hands together and stood up, looking excited, “So...what do you think about pizza and movies tonight?” Jared happily blurted out, “Hell yes, sounds awesome.” Dave went to retrieve the ad and showed it to Jared so he could pick something out. He sent a text to the crew outside and took their orders, as well. Jared loved that they were including the team outside. He wished they could take a break and watch movies, too, but knew better than to downplay their reason for being there by suggesting it. Jensen had lectured him about how things usually went wrong when someone let their guard down. Jared’s guilt came creeping in, like an old friend. He started to feel the familiar responsibility of the people outside and their sacrifices to keep him safe. It was freezing outside at night, and here they were. The two men inside with him were sacrificing, too. He sighed, lost in thought for a few seconds. Jared had no idea he was being observed until he looked up. His eyes moved back and forth between the assessing faces confusedly, “What?” Dave raised an eyebrow, as Mike shook his head. “What?” Jared asked again, this time a bit louder. “Nothing,” Dave said, but he didn’t look quite truthful. Mike decided to lay it out, “There’s guilt in those expressive eyes Jensen was talking about. Kinda pisses us off, that’s what.” Jared was stunned into silence. He had no idea what to say but he thought, ‘why the hell do I feel like I’m in trouble for something?’ He felt cornered, and when that happened his defenses kicked in. “I can feel guilty if I want,” Jared blurted out. ‘Real mature, Jared,’ he chastised himself with a sigh, “What I mean is, it’s freezing out. Everybody’s going through a lot of trouble and this isn’t their fault.” Both veterans stared at him for another few seconds. Dave leaned over to meet Jared eye to eye, “This isn’t your fault, either, Jared. NONE of this is.” The young engineer felt his natural guilt tendencies derail themselves to the sidelines, for the moment. Dave’s intense stare was nothing to argue with. Jared accepted that neither of these two men were going to put up with him blaming himself for anything. Jared cleared his throat, looking between them nervously. Mike added, “Jared, not ‘one’ of those guys outside regrets what they are doing. They believe in it.” Dave said, “And so do we.” The younger man didn’t know what to say. He nodded, trying to show he understood, but he still couldn’t stop the internal need to pay everyone back somehow. He figured he would keep that thought to himself. Dave ordered the pizzas, while Mike stayed at the table and watched Jared do a little more design work on Jensen’s bedroom. He watched some of the sparkle fade from Jared’s eyes, making a mental note the kid was still pretty tired.

Dave told them, “They’ll take care of getting the delivery outside and bring it to the door.” Jared smiled tiredly, “Cool. I’m starving. I haven’t had pizza in so long.” Mike signaled with his eyes for Dave to look closer at Jared, just as the younger man discreetly covered a yawn. He was oblivious to
being scrutinized, of course. “How about you change into sweats,” Dave suggested, “Maybe it’ll be more comfortable for movie watching.” Jared furrowed his forehead as he thought that over, “Yeah, okay.” He started to push himself tiredly up from the table. Mike took his elbow when he seemed sluggish. He walked with Jared down the hall. The kid didn’t seem to notice he’d accepted the help without complaint. Dave smiled, thinking how the brilliant successful scholar was like a toddler when he was tired. Mike didn’t have to do much. Jared was more capable than he thought. He bent down to help Jared get out of his jeans and slip on the sweatpants, but the kid put on his own t-shirt and sweatshirt. He was slow, but Mike was impressed at his increased mobility. He followed the engineer back out to the living room, shadowing him until he reached the couch, then he helped Dave set the coffee table up with sodas, paper plates and napkins. They split the arriving order with the team outside, then got comfortable in the living room.

Jared couldn’t seem to get enough of the freshly made pizza. He ate four pieces before he realized it. The other men were happy, since Jared hadn’t eaten much for lunch. Just as they were cleaning up, Jensen called Dave’s cell. He gave him a short report on what had transpired, then listened as Dave filled him in. Within minutes, Dave brought the phone to Jared, then went back to the kitchen. Jared immediately heard the tired tension in Jensen’s greeting. His anxious concern heightened, “Are you okay?” Jensen sighed, “It wasn’t a great visit, but it wasn’t a waste. Don’t worry about me, I always have to cool off and come down after a visit with my beloved relatives. I’ll tell you everything when we have time, okay? And when I’m laying next to you, this will all go away.” Jared sighed, “I can’t wait to see you.” Jensen grinned softly, “Me neither. Now, we’re clear that you’re not going to stay awake and wait for me, right?” Jared complained, “No, we’re not clear, but it’s not like your team of back up Chuck’s would let me stay up anyway.” He grumbled in feigned annoyance, even though he truly appreciated the way the two had helped him so much. Jensen chuckled, “Good to know they’re on the job.” The younger man softened, “It’s actually been great getting to know them. They’re pretty incredible.” Jensen countered, “Just remember that when they’re acting different tomorrow, okay?” Jared wasn’t really sure what Jensen meant, “What’s going to make them act different?” Jensen hated that ‘any’ of this was touching Jared, but he felt strongly that he had to warn the kid, “Your protection is gonna be first on everyone’s mind tomorrow. When they’re working, they’re different. Just remember who they really are, and it’s just a mask to block out everything but their mission, alright?” Jared stayed silent for a good half a minute, trying to picture what Jensen was implying. He finally answered, “I get it, I think…are you going to be different, too?” Jensen was silent for a few seconds. Jared asked, “Am I going to even recognize you?” Jensen’s voice softened, “We’ll all be on guard, and we’re gonna be very serious about what we’re doing. I’m not leaving your side, okay?” Jared tried to relax, “Okay,” but Jensen could hear the worry. Jared asked, “Is there some reason why everyone is so worried about tomorrow? I mean, we’ve been out before and nothing happened. Why is tomorrow such a bad deal?” Jensen paused for a few seconds. He wasn’t thrilled about telling Jared too much because he knew just having to testify was trying enough, but the engineer deserved to know why they were so concerned, “If A.E gets indicted tomorrow, it’s the final straw for them. We’re expecting if they’re going to try ‘anything’, it’s gotta be tomorrow. Everyone will be focused and prepared.” Jared absorbed that in silence. He forced himself to try and relax, “I’m glad you told me. I wouldn’t have even realized what was happening. I guess I think I’m on the same page, but I’m really not. This is all just so surreal.” Jensen assured him, “You’re going to be okay. All you have to do is stay between us and if we get bossy, it’s not because we’re trying to be assholes, it’s for a good reason.” Jared looked toward the kitchen. He could tell the two friends were meandering with nothing to do. It made him giggle quietly. Jensen heard the change in his voice, “What are those dorks doing?” Jared spoke quietly, “They’re in the kitchen, failing at looking busy because I’m talking to you. They’re trying to be nice, but it’s cute because they’ve run out of things to do.” Jensen grinned,
“They like you, ya know. I knew they would.” Jared smiled, “I’m glad. I like them too.” He paused for a moment, then asked, “Please wake me? I really need to feel you with me before tomorrow comes.” Jensen felt the longing in his own soul, “Yes. I guarantee it. I love you, Jare.” Jared answered softly, “I love you too, Jen, so much.” The men said their goodbyes. Jared had barely set the phone down on the end table when the special ops veterans returned from the kitchen. They brought popcorn and several water bottles. Mike proudly gestured to the first movie choice up on the large screen, then waited for Jared’s reaction. “Alien,” Jared blurted out in disbelief, “Is it good?” Mike threw back his own look of disbelief, “You’ve never seen it?” When Jared shook his head, the Black Ops soldier shook his head making a ‘tsk ’tsk sound of sympathy, “You poor thing. You were working 24/7 and you were deprived of all the best movies.” He turned to Dave, “We need to help him.” Dave grinned at Jared, “I suppose we do.”

Jared threw his hands up, “Fine…educate me…help me please.” Mike excitedly blurted out, “YES,” then started the show while Dave added wood to the fire before he sat down. An hour into the movie, Jared realized he didn’t have a chance in ‘hell’ at falling asleep during this. He was surprised, terrified, entertained, mesmerized and glued to the screen all at once. His counterparts ‘loved’ the fight scenes the best, gauging all the tactical moves and weaponry. Jared was painfully relieved the cat survived. Neither of his caretakers had the heart to tell him the cat gets it in a later movie. Jared didn’t eat much popcorn, but he drank two water bottles like there was a fire in his gut. He was dried out from the salty pizza and wonderful blazing fire. His caretakers were pleased that he’d had a load of calories and fluids, but they definitely noticed he was fading. Dave asked, “Jared, can you make it through another one?” The engineer nodded, “Sure.” After exchanging a knowing glance with Mike, Dave asked, “How about something lighter? You like super hero stuff?” Jared answered enthusiastically, “Sure, that sounds great. Anything you guys want.”

Dave and Mike knew Jared was over tired and probably stressed about the next day. They figured they would lose him at some point during the next movie. After scrolling through choices, Mike started Thor. Fifteen minutes into the movie, Jared slipped all the way down on the couch. He lay flat on his back with his head facing the t.v. The veterans watched him blink heavily for awhile until finally Jared’s eyes closed for the last time. Mike ran to the master bedroom. He turned the covers down, then trotted back to the living room to help Dave. The men slid their arms under the sleeping man and carried him effortlessly to the bedroom. The only challenge was adjusting their angle so they didn’t hit any part of Jared’s long form on a wall somewhere. Once Jared was under the covers, the guys turned on the bedroom fireplace and left the kid in the dark. They didn’t shut his door, wanting to keep an ear out for any sounds that he might make. They relaxed by the fire, discussed the next morning and how they thought it would go, then talked over what Jensen had told Dave. They went through various possible combinations until it was time to pick up Jensen.

Mike stayed at the house, while Dave went to the Denver airport. When Jensen came out at close to 11 p.m., Dave was parked right up front. Jensen grinned as he jumped in the car, “Thanks for the curb service.” Dave returned the smile, “No problem.” The two rode in silence for the first twenty minutes. They were so comfortable with each other, they could almost read each other’s minds. Dave knew Jensen had seen his family today, he also knew Jensen had turned his brother in. Daniel had been involved in trying to kill Jared and Dave especially knew how Jensen felt about Jared. Keeping his cover hadn’t been easy. Dave remained respectfully quiet. Jensen would talk about it if he wanted, but until then, Dave would wait. When they were ten minutes from the house, Jensen opened, “So.” Dave responded, “So.” Jensen grinned to himself over his reserved friend, “So, how is he?” Dave glanced at Jensen, “I’m assuming you mean the resident genius.” Jensen looked at Dave. The older man smirked, “He’s good.” Silence. Jensen waited, knowing Dave’s calm demeanor was taking a moment to formulate his response, “He’s spectacular if you can keep him from tripping over his own feet because he’s so focused on his work, he isn’t watching where he’s stepping…and if you can get him to rest when his two week old trauma injury gets sore and he’s plainly exhausted…and if
you can keep him from feeling guilty and responsible for everyone else, then…well, then I guess he’s pretty cool.”

Jensen looked out the window. He smiled wider to himself, knowing damn well they had definitely gotten to know his lover better today. He looked forward and nodded, as Dave glanced over at him again, “AND…he’s got a new agreement with Mike to teach him everything he needs to know about getting into an accelerated engineering program.” Jensen looked at his friend in surprise, “Really?” Dave smirked. Jensen looked back to the front, watching the road, “Wow,” he said, amazed. Dave agreed, “Mike is stoked.” Both friends rode the rest of the way in silence, pleased beyond belief that Mike would have something encouraging to look forward to. Mike had been plagued with some depressing times since they got out. One of his closest team mates didn’t do well on the outside and gave up. Mike had a terrible depression over it and fought his way back. Jared had no idea that what he’d done for their friend meant more to all of them than he could possibly imagine.

Jensen waved to Phil, who was in the security car out front. He entered the house with Dave, as the two tossed their keys and jackets on the table. Jensen went to the living room, instantly, to feel the blessed heat from the fire. Mike came into the living room, “Glad to be back?” As he and Jensen exchanged a hand shake and half hug, Jensen blurted out, “Fuck yes. Fuckin’ couldn’t wait to get back.” When he looked at Mike in question, the soldier knew exactly what he was asking, “He’s sleeping hard. I just checked on him. Breathing fine, no fever.” Jensen glanced at the clock over the mantel, “How long?” Dave approached, handing Jensen a beer, “We carried him back at 9:05.” Jensen took the beer and smiled knowingly. These two were such softies. As they twisted off their caps, Dave said defensively, “He was exhausted. It was easier not to wake him.” Jensen nodded while smiling. ‘Sure,’ he thought to himself, ‘you guys are toast, just like I was.’ After a few sips, Jensen announced, “Price sent me a text. Daniel’s in custody.” Dave nodded, “Good.” Mike said, “Fuckin’ sweet. That’s one prick down.” Jensen said, “I talked to Jared a little. Told him about the concern about tomorrow. He’s smart and he gets it. He isn’t ‘happy’ about it…neither am I, but at least he knows what to expect.”

Both friends remained silent, but they understood perfectly what Jensen meant. They liked Jared quite a bit, and they hated this was affecting his life, but they also knew they would do everything they had to do in order to keep him alive…even if it pissed the kid off. There would be no goofing around tomorrow. Mike broke the silence, “We need to establish who’s calling the shots. What’s the chain of command and how much discretion have we got?” Jensen thought about it. Dave sipped his beer, then looked at Jensen. The three of them had all been given honorable discharges with Lieutenant’s pay as compensation for their duties. Their unit was so top secret, there weren’t any established ranks within it. Jensen was a Master Sergeant, technically their team lead for four years before they decommissioned. He knew they would do whatever he told them to do, but he didn’t want that. These men were capable of leading anything on their own. He made his decision, “Tomorrow, we’re a team of leads. Whoever eyes a possible threat, first, takes the lead between the three of us. The outer team knows you’re coming and they respect our experience. We’ll let them keep us moving, as long as everything’s tight. If there’s a gap, we’ll correct it. They won’t disagree.”

Dave and Mike nodded in agreement. Jensen looked at them concerned, “Jared has a kind heart, guys. They used the animal thing to lure him out before…they might do something like that again…but the good part is, they don’t know about ‘us’. That motherfucker without the record is our biggest concern. I’m sure he’s anticipated Jared will be going through a side entrance and he’ll most likely be waiting.” Dave and Mike’s controlled tempers flared beneath the surface. They quickly scrolled through the possible scenarios they had discussed earlier, determined they would get Jared back home safe by the end of the day. Tomorrow was going to be like old times. Teamwork, protection of the innocent, survival and hopefully taking out the enemy. The three friends finished their beer, agreeing to be ready at 0700. That would give them time to throw some breakfast burritos together, and make sure Jared ate something before the security vehicles arrived. Jensen confirmed Chuck
would have their convoy there by 0800, “Apparently, we’ll be in a Suburban XLT with Jared and a couple others. There will be a chase car and a point.”

After that sank in, Jensen announced, “Well, girls, I love spending time with you, but right now I’m dying to go see the resident genius for myself.” The men grinned, as Mike rolled his eyes, “Hurry, or you’ll start bawling in front of us at being away from him for a day, you fucking baby.” Jensen chuckled, “Yeah, you’re the one that carried him to bed, you weak asses.” Jensen walked away as he turned his head, “Thanks for taking care of him.” Mike said, “Yeah, yeah.” As the two friends banked the fire and headed for their own beds, Jensen entered his bedroom. He shut the door quietly. The fireplace was creating a dancing glow on the walls. He could make Jared out in the middle of his bed. ‘My bed,’ Jensen reminded himself with a hint of possessiveness. Peace and tranquility flooded his body, as he moved closer and began to discard his clothes. Jensen left on a t-shirt, socks and boxers. He figured he was ‘not’ gonna be cold once he got in there with Jared. He carefully lifted the covers and slipped himself into bed without disturbing the sleeping man. Jared had migrated toward the center. Jensen wasted no time. He slid his right arm around Jared’s waist. He used his left to gently brush the disheveled hair aside from the beautiful face. He bent his leg to rest on top of Jared’s, as he snuggled as close as possible.

The smell and warmth from the young man in his arms was an instant safety net. Jensen’s family had always been a disappointment. He had left that place more too many times hoping for changes that never happened. This visit wasn’t that different, except for the private conversation with his father. Finally, there was some kind of resolution between them, and he’d gotten Daniel arrested. All in all, it had been a successful trip. So why did he still feel the churning in his gut? Because what he’d dealt with earlier had been just the opposite of the innocent honesty of the gorgeous creature in his arms. He was still coming down. When he looked closer, he realized Jared’s eyes were open. ‘Damn’, Jensen thought. He hadn’t meant to wake him. Jensen greeted him warmly, “Hey.” Jared slid his own arm around Jensen, as he searched his eyes, “Hey.” He asked softly, “Are you okay?” Jensen paused for a few seconds, looking into Jared’s loving concerned eyes. ‘Concerned for ‘me,’ he reminded himself, “I am now.” Jared smiled, but he was still concerned. He touched Jensen’s cheek, rubbing it softly. Jensen still reeled inside from his earlier confrontations. It was quite the powerful contrast to be faced with greed and arrogance, then be in the arms of the most beautiful thing he’d ever encountered. Somehow, Jared had the power to take everything dark within Jensen and turn it to light…the younger man didn’t even know it. Jensen took a few seconds more to enjoy his lover’s closeness, then he gave in to the overwhelming desire to taste him.

He touched his lips to Jared, lightly sweeping his tongue until the younger man opened up. The kiss was instantly intoxicating. Jensen moaned with hunger, as Jared’s hand pulled him closer from behind his head. They pushed harder, bodies melding against each other, as tongues and lips eagerly explored. Jensen moved closer, almost covering Jared with his body. He ground his mouth harder against his lover, heating up fast. Jensen was already hard as fuck. He hadn’t meant to go this far. He knew Jared needed rest and tomorrow was huge…this wasn’t what Jared needed. When Jensen’s protective instincts tried to ease up, Jared intercepted him. He pushed his pelvis forward, knowing they both needed this. “Ah,” they both gasped when their cocks touched. Jensen kissed the younger man harder, moving half over Jared more aggressively. The younger man pushed back against Jensen, his tongue trying to devour every centimeter of the older man’s mouth. Jensen moaned at Jared’s responsiveness. Jesus, Jared ‘always’ did this to him. Jared broke for a second to breathe against Jensen’s mouth. “I need you,” he cried desperately, “to touch me,” as he pushed Jensen’s hand down toward his crotch. ‘Fuck yeah,’ Jensen grabbed hold of the rock hard bulge through Jared’s sweats and he squeezed, “Aah,” Jared cried out, panting now but still trying to be quiet.

He put his tongue back in Jensen’s mouth, continuing the kiss in between the sparks of pleasure, as Jensen rubbed his dick. Jared’s hand slipped into Jensen’s boxers to touch him. Jensen’s dick was huge, leaking and begging. Jared knew Jensen needed to let go after all he had dealt with today. He
slipped his hand around Jensen’s engorged cock and squeezed. “AH...ohJesus,” Jensen growled, “fuck...ohmy...fuck, baby, you feel so good.” Jensen’s hips started pumping. Jared’s hand had plenty of natural lube. Jensen moaned and grunted, his hips pumped faster, as waves of intensity controlled him. “Jare....I can’t...ohfuckingchrist Jare,” Jensen’s guttural voice spoke of raw openness. Jared’s lips were against Jensen’s, “Let it go. Give it all to me, I’ve got you.” Jared pushed his mouth over Jensen’s quickly, when the older cried out, “Ohgod,” then came hard. “Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmm,” Jensen screamed into Jared’s mouth, spasmimg with consuming ecstasy. He strained and grunted powerfully, his moans turning to higher pitches from the release of pent up emotions with his physical pleasure. Jensen felt gentle kisses to his face, as the climactic waves gentled into rolling aftershocks. He was safely coaxed down by Jared’s hands. When he could finally breathe and focus again, he felt the rock hard cock that was still in his hand.

Jared’s gorgeous cock was patiently waiting for it’s turn since Jared had put him first. ‘Oh, this is gonna be fun,’ Jensen thought as he licked Jared’s lips. He slipped his hand inside Jared’s sweats, as the younger man opened his mouth. Jensen began sliding his hand up and down the engorged member, while erotically swiping his tongue through every delectable corner of Jared’s mouth. Jared wasn’t able to keep quiet. His hips pumped by themselves, as Jensen sped up his hand to match Jared’s need. The younger man cried out, “Oooohgod,” at the overwhelming pleasure of the faster speed. He panted hard, trying to muffle high pitched moans against Jensen’s collarbone. Jesus, he was cumming. “That’s it, Jare,” Jensen said, “that’s it, cum for me.” Jared cried out as he clenched up. Jensen covered his mouth with his own, as he screamed and came hard. Jared shook and poured cum all over Jensen’s hand. He spasmed, gasped and grunted with pleasure filled waves until finally his body released him into an exhausted heap, totally spent. Jensen kept kissing him, and bringing him down, gently, as Jared’s breathing slowly returned to normal. Jensen kissed his eyelids, his cheeks, and everywhere else he could reach. He pulled his t-shirt off quickly, without separating himself from his lover, then used it to wipe off as much of Jared’s sticky fluids as he could, then wiped off himself. Jensen burrowed them deeper to intertwine their limbs and get perfectly aligned with each other’s warm bodies. He pulled the covers up higher, so that they had nothing above them but the tops of their heads. Jared slid his arm around Jensen’s waist and his leg in between the older man’s thighs. He sighed dreamily and grinned with his eyes closed. Jensen smiled at the snuggly post orgasmic man, as he fell instantly back asleep. He kissed him on the nose, wondering who the hell had possessed him and how he was going to dig deep enough to pull the bad ass soldier back to the surface tomorrow.
Chapter Twenty. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

Jared gets ready to face the courtroom and help the A.G. He is surrounded by his personal bodyguards who are determined to keep him safe. Jensen and his friends prepare to keep the young engineer in one piece, as they meet with Price again and start proceedings. Jared is served a nasty low blow, and his protectors react. There are some really good moments here between the friends, and Jensen and Jared. A.E. is not going down without a fight. They are awful to Jared, truly, but the case is just beginning so there is more to come.

Hope you enjoy.

CHAPTER TWENTY

‘This sucks,’ was Jared’s first thought, as he woke to the sound of the blaring alarm. After smacking the snooze button violently at six thirty, he heard the hum of voices and the soft sound of walking around. He could tell the men were trying to be quiet. Jensen had left the bed earlier. God only knew what they were all doing out there. ‘They’ve probably been up for hours,’ Jared mentally bitched, knowing damn well all this trouble was for him. ‘I really need to stop this,’ the younger man chastised himself. ‘Every one of them has lectured me on it, but I can’t seem to stop going there.’ He closed his eyes while standing under the hot stream of water, hoping the liquid heat would melt through his tension. As he soaped his body, he noticed some crusty leftovers from his late night experience. It was obvious Jensen had wiped them off with something, or Jared would have found himself stuck to his sweatpants. Jared’s thoughts were pleasantly distracted by visions of last night while he finished his shower. After he shaved and brushed his teeth, Jared felt more energetic and motivated. He was determined to kick ass in that courtroom. Whatever Price needed him to do, he would gladly do. A.E. had screwed people over for too long.

Jared whipped open the bathroom door, a little harder than he was used to…he guessed his anger at the bastards who had caused all this was fueling his actions. His insides melted as he went to the bed and saw several choices in dress clothes laid out for him. Jared had purchased some semi-dressy slacks and a sweater, but he didn’t have any suits with him. Jensen obviously remembered that. He picked a dress shirt and tie to match his slacks, then chose one of Jensen’s jackets. He slipped on the socks, while sitting sideways on the bed, like he’d done the day before. Leaning over wasn’t too bad, a tightening bruised feeling in his left side, but he was careful and went slow. He relished his success at putting on his own damn underwear, pants and socks. This was a first. He was feeling some residual complaints from his ribs, but he would deal with it. Being able to dress himself had been worth it. Jared realized the shirt was a couple inches loose around his chest and neck. He was broad shouldered and tall, but obviously not quite as thick as his lover was…hopefully the jacket would complete the ensemble and mask everything that was a bit off in the size department.

Jared brushed his hair back, then smoothed a thin bit of hairspray over it with his hands. He simply wanted to coax it back, not restyle it. If Jared could get through court without the unruly locks falling in his face, he would call that a win. He slipped into the suit jacket, straightened himself up and
tightened the tie. He looked himself over in the mirror, thinking he’d cleaned up pretty well for the
jurors, thanks to Jensen. He was just coming toward the bedroom door when Jensen stepped into the
bedroom and froze. “Holy fuck,” the seasoned veteran exclaimed. He stared, frozen, then trailed his
eyes down and back up. “Goddamn,” Jensen shook his head. Jared felt himself burning. He sighed.
Jensen finally caught himself, “I uh...I’m sorry,” he said, then shook his head again as his eyes
traveled down, “but not really.” ‘There aren’t even words,’ he thought to himself, then finally
changed the subject, “I’ve got some dress shoes that don’t have laces...you wanna try those?” Jared
smiled and nodded, thankful Jensen had moved on, “Yes, those would be great.” While Jensen
pulled the shoes out of his closet, Jared added, “I was afraid I would have to show up in more casual
stuff. Thank you for thinking of all this.” Jensen set the shoes at Jared’s feet, “It’s my pleasure. Next
time I wear that shirt and tie, I’ll probably sport the biggest hard on in history knowing they’ve been
on your body.”

Jared snickered shyly, stepping into the shoes with Jensen’s hand on his elbow to steady him. When
he was done, he focused on Jensen with knowing intensity, “I don’t know, Ackles, it was a pretty
big one last night.” His steel grey beauties spoke volumes about the passion boiling beneath the
surface. Jensen sighed, “Damn, I am a lucky son of a bitch.” He kissed Jared quickly, “And if we
don’t get going, it’s going to happen again. Jesus, you are edible.” Jared battled himself not to sport a
reddish hue all over again. Of course, the white t-shirt and indentation of Jensen’s dog tags was
causing a stirring in his own loins. His lover looked damn good in ‘anything.’ He started to move by
Jensen, but the older man stopped him when he saw a flicker of guardedness in the engineer’s eyes.
“Jared,” Jensen called him softly. When Jared didn’t turn around, Jensen pulled him gently around to
face him, “Hey,” he gripped Jared face between his hands, “Talk to me, okay? I know today is huge.
It’s okay to be worried.” Jared didn’t want to break his composure. He had already been working on
keeping any emotions at bay. It was his comfort zone to bury things. It had certainly gotten him
through plenty of crap. Unfortunately, Jensen always drew it out of him. With a bit of resentment,
Jared answered with honesty, “Fine. I’m worried I’ll fuck up by saying the wrong thing when they
ask me questions. I’m scared for people I love’s safety. I’m terrified I’ll let everybody down. And if
anything happens to any of you…” Jared looked down. He couldn’t bare the thought of anyone
getting hurt, especially Jensen.

Jensen knew Jared had been covering. He was glad he had been honest, but was trying not to be
pissed at the same time. Jared’s propensity to take all of this on his own shoulders was frustrating,
‘like he’s still alone,’ Jensen thought, ‘and it’s all his fault.’ Jared looked at him worriedly, “Please
don’t be angry… I’m sorry because I know you all want me to stop, but...” Jensen interrupted,
“Baby, no. I’m not angry at you. It’s because of you. I’m so goddamn protective of you, I can’t
stomach anything hurting you...even if you’re doing it to yourself. You’re you and that’s why
everyone loves you so much. I’m pissed off that you’re having to go through this, that’s all.” Jensen
kissed him softly, “Everyone involved is behind you. Don’t forget the support you have now, okay?”
Jared nodded, “I know...and it means so much...but Jensen, I had ‘no’ idea this was going to turn
into something like this...I mean security and going in side entrances...people wanting me dead?
Jesus.” He chuckled mockingly, “It’s just way over my head, I guess.” Jensen understood, still
admiring the young genius wholeheartedly, “Well, unfortunately for the bad guys, you’re not alone.
This is regular stuff for us. The only difference for us today is that we all have a heartfelt invested
interest. YOU.” Jared argued, “That doesn’t help me feel less guilty...it only makes me feel MORE
like I need to pay everyone back somehow. This is to terrible for ‘all’ of you.” Jared closed his eyes
with a sigh. Allowing some anger to surface helped him avoid thinking of anyone getting hurt
because of him. Jensen grinned knowingly, “There’s that pissy little spark I love so much. I’m glad
to see it. You’re gonna blow ‘em away in court. That’s all you need to focus on today, Jare. Let us
handle the rest. You kick ass on all those files you know so well and let everything else go, okay?”

Jared looked disbelievingly at his lover for a second, then tried to force down the anxiety to another
chamber in his brain. He refocused his thoughts on just the evidence, like Jensen wanted him to. He didn’t know if he could hold this demeanor, but he would try. Jensen watched him force the nervousness down. He slid his hands down Jared’s arms, then took hold of the younger man’s hands. He kissed him gently, then leaned his forehead against Jared’s. “I love you,” Jensen said. Jared smiled, “I love you back.” Jensen squeezed his hands, then let him go, “I’m gonna throw my nice clothes on so I don’t look like a dirtbag walking next to you. Dave made breakfast burritos and he’s quite proud of them.” Jared smiled. He turned and left, mumbling behind him, “A pretty hot dirtbag.” The older man giggled, “Glad you think so, kiddo.” Jensen wanted this morning to be as relaxing as possible for Jared, before everything became more rigid. The former Black Ops team had agreed to keep an easy going normal atmosphere. It would relax Jared before they had to become more focused.

As Jared sat at the table, Dave served him a steaming hot tortilla filled with eggs, sausage, cheese and hash browns. “God, this looks amazing,” Jared said, inspecting his burrito. Dave sat a steaming cup of espresso and a glass of orange juice in front of Jared next. The engineer looked up with gratitude, “Thank you. I can’t believe what good cooks you all are.” Dave smirked at Jared, “Well, I’m lazy about it. I much prefer to let Jensen feed me, or the idiot over there feeds me too.” Mike was coming out of the spare bedroom, “Heard that…and I’m the better cook, anyway. Not as good as Ackles, though. Watch out Jared, Dave doesn’t melt his cheese before he puts it in there, like I do.” Dave countered, “I melted it for Jared, I just didn’t for you.” Mike spat his disbelief, “You melted ‘his’ cheese? You ‘never’ do that.” The indignant man went to the kitchen to put together his own burrito, mumbling “asshole.” Dave rolled his eyes and went to make his own. Both friends continued to spout off and banter with one another, while they fixed their own plates. Jared was thoroughly entertained. By the time they finally sat down, Jensen returned and took the plate Dave had saved for him. Mike looked appalled, “You made his ‘for’ him?” Dave argued in between bites, “Maybe you shouldn’t have kept me up all night with your fuckin’ snoring. Noisy idiot hasn’t changed a bit,” Dave indicated to Jensen, who smiled and shook his head, “I remember that buzz saw.”

Mike said, “Good thing you need me to remind you what to pack and what you’re supposed to be doing. That old age makes you feeble. You’ll always need me.” Dave grinned at the pun. He was the older of the three veterans, pushing forty four. Mike was just turning forty and Jensen was the ‘youngin’, as they called him. When he had been made team leader, he was constantly teased about being the ‘teenager’ in charge of the geriatric ward. Jared loved this time with them. He didn’t know if they were doing it on purpose, or not, but when he had first come out here his stomach had been revolting at putting anything in it. Now, he sat comfortably relaxed enough to get some food down and laugh at the distracting entertainment. Dave got multiple compliments from everyone, despite the ribbing. He had made a delicious breakfast. Jensen’s eyes flicked to Jared, off and on. He was in constant protective mode, making sure the younger man wasn’t failing to nourish himself and was as relaxed as possible. Jensen packed Jared’s breathing machine and pain medication, just in case things went too long today, or were too taxing for his condition. There were several other medical supplies and first aid treatments in duffle bags. The team wasn’t taking any chances, so if the younger man needed to rest in some judge’s chambers somewhere, or if any one of them needed immediate medical treatment, they were quite capable.

Jensen noticed he wasn’t the only one assessing Jared. It made him grin while resting his chin in his hand and sipping his coffee. The other trained observers at the table were being very subtle, but they glanced at the young engineer off and on to keep watch on his health and his demeanor. Jensen was thankful for it, but ‘poor Jared,’ he thought. Looking at his clueless lover, he smiled even wider, ‘he’s surrounded.’ The military retirees finished their plates fast, in Jared’s opinion. He guessed they were used to eating under time constraints. Jared was more opt to just skip a meal if he was in a hurry. The younger man looked at his half eaten burrito and contemplated whether to stuff it in or just give up. He really felt pretty full, already, but he didn’t want to waste it. He opened his mouth to
Jared focused on going over his files for as long as he could. There were voices coming from the
spare room, discussions over “where are you gonna wear it,” and “that’ll work, it’s concealed,” and
“no, we’ll be deputized but let’s not push it.” ‘Fuck,’ Jared forced himself not to listen to any further
details. His breathing started to increase when his brain panicked, ‘What if they have to shoot
somebody.’ By the time the three friends returned to the kitchen, they all had semi-casual slacks and
jackets on, without ties. They looked nice, not like a bunch of camouflaged killers with black shoe
polish on their faces and bullets strapped to their chests. Jared internally chastised himself for even
 picturing it. Dave and Mike dumped some duffle bags by the front door. Jensen went to the master
bedroom for a few minutes. When he came back, Jared could see the outline of a gun on the older
man’s waistband. The jacket concealed it, but Jared knew what that bulge was. He sat quietly,
knowing full well these men were experts in their field and he needed to just do what Jensen said,
‘Focus on the evidence.’ Everything was going to be okay.

Jared closed his laptop and looked up when Jensen approached him. The older man knelt down and
looked up into his eyes. He grabbed Jared’s hand and maintained eye contact, as the other two
friends approached. Jared looked between them all. Mike spoke first, “We’re just getting you used to
being between the three of us, buddy.” Dave grinned, “Yeah, you’ll probably get sick of us real
quick, Jared.” The engineer tried to give them a smile. He looked at Jensen innocently, not knowing
what the hell to say. Jared was so nervous, he was afraid it wouldn’t come out right, anyway. Jensen
rubbed his thumb back and forth on the younger man’s hand, getting Jared’s attention, “You’ll be
between us at all times. When we’re in the jury’s room, we’ll be the same until you have to get up
there and answer questions. The jury knows you’ve got security with you. They know the team
won’t interfere with the court, but we are allowed to intervene if anyone tries to mess with you or
your testimony. That includes anyone eyeballing you or trying to interrupt or intimidate you.”

Jared asked worriedly, “Who is going to be there? I mean from A.E.?” Dave answered, “We don’t
know yet. Lance said they claim to have a couple engineers with them to challenge the evidence, if
they even can, but other than the lawyers, we don’t know who else will be there.” Jared wondered
who the engineers were. He imagined even if he knew them, whether they were on the payroll and
most likely weren’t choosing to be there. Jensen interrupted his thoughts, “All you have to do, Jare,
is focus on your expertise that you worked so hard on. If you feel threatened in ‘any’ way, and I
mean even a ‘feeling’ about someone or something, you look our way and we will take care of it.
Hopefully we’ll see everything first, but if you do, you tell us or gesture to us immediately. Again,
the court knows we will stop and take you into the back room if there’s a threat and that’s okay with them. Price has them all set up. Make sense?” Jared nodded, “Okay.” Jensen knew he was probably terrified, but the kid would never want to tell them that. Jared was drawing on his amazing inner strength to handle this and it impressed them all. “Jare, I want you to understand,” Jensen added, “if anything happens we don’t like, we’ll be moving you tightly between us…hopefully not crushing you too bad, but shielding you, or even having you lay down with us flattening the heck out of you.”

Jared tried to imagine what Jensen described. His fear at the possibilities flashed very quickly in his eyes, but Jensen watched it quickly masked. Dave added, “It doesn’t mean that anything is ‘going’ to happen, Jared.” Mike added, “We just don’t want you to be blindsided if it does, dude.” Jared nodded, looking between them, “Okay.” He was actually feeling better about things, knowing these men were experts. It was nice of them to care enough to include him on what to expect, anyway.

Jared watched Dave check the security phone. “They’re ready,” he announced, then went to look out the kitchen window. He looked back at Jensen, “Suburban, two sedans.” Everyone seemed to change moods, at that point. There was almost an electric charge of alertness and cold calculation rippling through the oxygen in the room. Jared realized what Jensen had been trying to tell him before. These men were focused on their task and nothing was going to derail them. The engineer took a deep breath and tried to calm his nerves, then busied himself with packing his laptop case. He started to walk to the door, when Mike intercepted him and took the laptop from him. Jared didn’t argue.

Dave opened the door to greet Frank and Phil on the front porch. The men had already briefed out front, so they didn’t need any introductions or formal greetings. Dave picked up both duffle bags that he and Mike had left by the front door, took them down the driveway and loaded them into the SUV. Phil and Frank stepped up to the doorway, looked at Jared and smiled. Frank spoke, “It’s us again, Jared. Hope we don’t drive you too nuts today.” Jared smiled, “Thank you guys for everything you’re doing.” Frank snorted, “We wouldn’t miss this for anything. You just concentrate on kickin’ A.E.’s ass for causing all this trouble, alright?” Jared smiled gratefully, “I will.” Frank motioned to them all, “Let’s go, gentleman.” Jared followed him to the car, while Jensen locked the front door and joined them. Mike jumped into the back row of the SUV with Jared’s laptop case, Dave took the middle row. Frank shut Mike’s door, then motioned for Jared to scoot in next to Dave, “Star witness next, please.” Jared grinned at Frank, then climbed in as instructed. When he got situated, Jensen entered behind him and sat on Jared’s right. The younger man was now between Dave and Jensen, Mike right behind them. Frank shut their door, then got into the front passenger seat, as Phil took the wheel. Once everyone’s seatbelts were fastened, Frank asked out loud, “Clear?” Jensen turned to Jared and asked, “You okay?” The younger man nodded, “Yes, fine.” The older man turned back to the front and he, Mike and Dave all answered “Clear.” Frank touched his left ear, “Green,” then the convoy pulled out.

The car ride was silent, except for a couple “affirm” comments and one “745” comment Frank made. No one attempted any ‘small talk’. Jared tried to focus on the case and not what was going on in the car because he really didn’t need to be reminded that all this was because someone wanted to kill him. Instead of exiting the freeway for downtown, they actually went one exit past. As they pulled into a parking lot, Jensen touched a confused Jared on the arm to get his attention, “We’re going to stop and move into another car, okay?” Jared paused for a second to process the surprise, “Oh…okay.” Jensen added, “Nothing’s wrong, I just want you to know what we’re doing.” Jared nodded, “kay.” He looked out the windows and saw a very unattractive brown minivan pull up on their left side. There were chips in the paint, some oxidation on the top, and a dent in the right front quarter panel. ‘Huh,’ Jared blurted out, mentally, now realizing what they were doing. Two security men got out of the minivan and came to stand by Dave’s door. From that point, Mike got out with Jared’s laptop and climbed into the back of the ugly van. Dave got out next and turned to help Jared out of the car. Jensen was right behind him. Everyone got out Jared’s side and surrounded the younger
They climbed into the second row of the minivan in the same order as they were in the SUV. Frank drove this time, with Phil in the front passenger’s seat. Once inside and secure, Phil turned slightly to give Jared an apology, “Sorry, Jared, this one’s a bit of a tight fit for you back there. I hope they showered, at least.” The young engineer snickered softly, not expecting anyone to actually joke with him. It was nice and it relaxed him. ‘Just a bit,’ he thought to himself. Switching cars had unnerved him. He wasn’t showing it on the outside, but things became a bit more real now, as to what was going on. The minivan was put into gear, ready to pull forward, but Jared saw something that shocked him. He sat up straighter and twisted, so he could see out Jensen’s side of the van. This behavior caused everyone in the minivan to tense, as Frank put the van back in ‘park’. Phil turned around, then followed Jared’s line of sight outside Jensen’s window. Jared watched a tall slender man with shaggy brown hair get into the back of the SUV, wearing what looked like a bulletproof vest over his clothing. ‘No,’ Jared’s mind rebelled, “He’s pretending to be me?” Jared asked in disbelief, as he looked from the SUV to Jensen, then back out the window. He leaned further over Jensen so the older man had to stop him. “Jare,” Jensen put his retraining hand on his chest to hold him firm without pushing on his sore ribs, “You have to stay back, buddy, okay?” Jared was in anxious guilt mode now. He was worried about the look-a-like getting hurt and Jensen knew it. When he finally sat back, Jensen dropped his hand. Jared sighed heavily. His anger was available, like an old reliable friend, so he drew on it and let it come to the surface. This charade was out of his control. People were throwing themselves in harms way for him and now there was a human being used as bait out there. ‘This is fucking bullshit,’ Jared mentally bitched. He was stoic and pissed. The men in the car could sense when Jared shut down. The younger man was steeling himself, knowing damn well he had no control over anything but his own actions right now. ‘Kick A.E.’s ass,’ was Jared’s focus. He would forget anything else. That’s the only way he was gonna get through this. Jensen hated to see it, but he knew Jared’s iron will would do him good to wear for awhile. “Ready?” Jensen asked him, to which Jared answered snidely, “Fine. Go.” Jared didn’t even look at his lover, nor did he lock eyes with Phil, who was still facing him. Jensen glanced at Phil, then Dave and Mike. The special forces experts matched subtle grins over their charge. They were proud of him, but sympathetic at the same time that Jared had to go through this. Jensen was sure they were worried, as he was, about the tremendous strain all of this would have on Jared’s still recovering system. “Clear,” Jensen affirmed, then Frank took off. When they arrived at City Hall, Jared was again surprised when they passed the side entrance. The minivan stopped at the back of City Hall and backed into a freight loading dock. ‘Huh,’ the young genius thought, impressed at the amount of planning and organization this took.

The van doors were opened by Lance and Chuck. “Hello boys,” Chuck smiled, then looked at Jared, “Hi Jared,” while everyone responded with their own greetings. Jared smiled, glad to see someone else he knew. Chuck and Lance stood aside so everyone could get out of the van. Jensen was first, then Mike climbed out. Jared stayed next to Dave until Mike and Jensen held out their hands to help Jared climb out between them. As he did so, he soon realized what Phil meant by being ‘annoying.’ Jared was boxed in a very effective cocoon, the men surrounding him so close they were touching him. There wasn’t one inch for someone to get through and if he weren’t six foot four, Jared probably wouldn’t be able to see a damn thing outside of his surrounding muscle sandwich. They walked in step. Jared had no choice but to keep the same momentum, even though he couldn’t see where they were stepping. Mike and Jensen had crossed their arms behind Jared’s waist, then held his elbows with their opposite hands. Jared could feel Jensen’s strong muscled shoulder rub against his, a silent reassurance that his lover was right next to him.

Dave was as tall as Jared, and that’s how he knew the man was behind him. He could feel Dave’s chest against his upper back and hear his controlled breathing from behind. Someone had a hand on his shoulder. Jared assumed it had to be Dave. As they approached the loading dock, Jared noticed
two other figures in suits opening the freight elevator and two more men inside. ‘Jesus,’ Jared wondered if there were any investigators left at the AG’s office. They rode the elevator to the fourth floor. Jared was whisked through a smelly dark hallway until they went through double doors and ended up in a plush waiting room of sorts. He looked around and saw tall fake plants, beautifully arranged paintings, very shiny waxed tile and a few rows of empty chairs. They only stood for half a minute in silence, when the second door on the left of a short hallway opened and AG Darren Price walked out. After Price waved them back, everyone moved simultaneously again until Jared, Jensen, Mike, Dave and Chuck all entered the office with Price. Lance, Frank and Phil shut the door and stayed out in the hall. Jared realized there wasn’t a chance in Hell anyone was getting to him. It was a comforting thought, but he really hoped the poor guy dressed like him had this kind of protection. Once inside, Jensen and his friends disbursed to let Jared have more personal space. Dave leaned against the wall, while Mike placed Jared’s laptop on a small table before he joined Dave. The two leaned against the wall with their arms folded across their chest, like they were ready for something Jared couldn’t even imagine. Chuck stood to the side of a huge ornate desk, waiting. Jensen stayed next to Jared for the moment.

The AG held out his hand and smiled, “Hello again, Jared.” “Hi Darren,” Jared responded, as he shook the attorney’s hand. Price shook Jensen’s hand next, then returned his attention to Jared. “Remarkable,” he said, looking at Jared’s face. He smiled at Jensen, “He looks so much better than last time I saw him.” Jensen grinned, as Price looked back to Jared, “You’re feeling better?” Jared said, “A lot, thank you.” Price said, “Jensen’s filled me in on your current condition, so I’ve filled the jury in too. It’s not gonna be a problem if you get tired and need a break, so don’t be afraid to ask for one.” Jared told him, “It’ll be fine,” but Price insisted, “Jared really…if things go too long, we can do part of it today and part tomorrow.” Jared nodded, “Thanks,” knowing if he didn’t agree they would stand there forever. Jensen obviously had given Price the rundown on his exhaustion after a few hours and soreness and all that crap. He rolled his eyes, internally, but not in front of everyone. Price turned his attention to the others in the room,

“Well, first things first, gentlemen. Let’s get you deputized before we start.” The three special ops veterans stood in front of him as Price placed gun metal brushed silver shields in each of their hands that said, “Deputy Attorney General” on them. He swore them in, with Chuck as an official witness, then they all signed paperwork. “Done,” Price said, “Now you all have peace officer rights under ‘my’ direction for the time being. If you have to respond while protecting our witness, or to defend yourselves or any of the other staff involved, I can protect you from being prosecuted for something stupid like excessive force because of your advanced skills.” “Sweet,” Mike said, marveling at the badge. “Thank you,” said Dave with an appreciative gleam. Jensen added, “Thanks Darren.” Chuck piped in, “I assume you guys are packin’?” All of the men nodded, so Chuck announced, “Okay.

The jury has their own security. I’ll let them know before we go in so nobody worries.” Price said to Jensen, “We’ll all go in and sit close on one side of the room, then whoever they have will sit on the other side. You have plenty of room to keep Jared in the middle of you while he’s sitting, but he’s gonna have to go up alone if he has to point things out on the screen. They might ask him questions, directly, as these jurors are allowed to do. The opposing sides aren’t meant to object or interrupt in a Grand Jury hearing, but they can ask questions.”

Price continued to Jared, “The jury isn’t in a box, they’re in a semi circle of chairs. We’ll be projecting your files on an 80 inch screen. No more flip charts and overheads anymore. The screen is interactive, if you want to touch and drag anything.” Jared was surprised, “Wow, okay.” He looked eager to get started, but then looked around, like he just thought of something, “Where’s Bart?” Price answered, “He’s on his way...in fact, probably in the building as we speak.” Price motioned for anyone to sit down that wanted to, then returned his attention to Jared. “The lawyers are top paid, I know them. They can skillfully wind a question into an argument, but they can’t get around the truth. Because they aren’t as smart as you, Jared, that’s all they’ve got. Just stick to what you know. They
won’t derail you if you stick to the real truth, alright?” The younger man nodded, “Okay.” Price continued, “This isn’t like a regular Superior courtroom, it’s more informal, but it’s also not set up for arguments and a string of witnesses. The presentation needs to be made, the evidence clear, then the jurors will decide if it’s enough to indict. Once the indictment hits, then it will be scheduled for court later. The jurors won’t put up with anything too lengthy or heated in there. This isn’t a trial. Basically, if the other side causes a scene, which they might when they feel like they’ve lost, the Jury will see the guilt and let us have our indictment without going any further. The evidence is solid, Jared. It’s really too good to be argued, but that’s what they’re paying the defense to do, so they have to at least try.”

Jared interjected, “I have a question.” Price sipped from a covered cup on the desk, as motioned to Jared, “Shoot.” The engineer asked, “What if their witness is misleading the jury and I see it? Can I interrupt?” Price raised an eyebrow at Jared’s perseverance. He glanced at Jensen, as both men grinned, “Hell yes, you can, but there’s a way to do it.” Price then sat down in a chair, facing Jared, leaning his elbows on his knees, “If you’re at the screen explaining things and answering anyone’s question, and their so called expert witness or a lawyer challenges something, feel free to argue with that perfect courtroom charm of yours. Credibility is received by the way we present ourselves. I know you’ve been to court before. The other side might make you angry, but remember we’ve got the truth as our foundation. They do ‘not’. That means they have to try to discredit, confuse or manipulate. That’s all they’ve got.” Price paused a few seconds, then continued, “Misleading could happen. I expect it. Be respectful, and if we have to wait until they’ve finished their incorrect presentation, then rip it to shreds, we will. Everything has to be polite and timed. Now...if you’re being overwhelmed by their side interrupting ‘you’ by being assholes, I can interject. The jury will back me because again, they don’t put up with that, either. There aren’t supposed to be objections and arguments in this setting. There’s a lot at stake here for A.E. If they become heated, they’ll just bury themselves.” “And,” Price continued, ‘if ‘anyone’ is being a real piece of shit asshole, Jared, looking threatening or intimidating at you, your security team,” Price motioned with a wave and glance to Jensen, Dave and Mike, “has Jury permission to move in between you.” Jared was quiet for a moment, absorbing everything. Price finished, “We’re not putting up with any shit in there. Especially where ‘you’ are concerned. We’re gonna make sure our star witness feels safe.”

Jared finally spoke, “I’m not worried about me.” Price raised an eyebrow in question, which urged Jared to explain, “I don’t want all this to be for nothing. We need to win this and close that damn apartment building. And we need to keep the other structures from being opened. Hell, the bridge in Cedar Ridge isn’t safe, either, and nothing’s been done about it. I’m worried because these employers of mine don’t respect rules. They’re used to winning by cheating. There are a ton of other people to worry about, not me.” Jared was on a roll, and with everyone staying silent, it felt like his moment to vent a little, “I mean, ’I’ have all this help and protection, when thousands of others are living in these places and driving through them every day.” Jared sighed, “I have all of this,” the younger man waved to all the men in the room, “and those people have ‘nothing’…not even a clue.” Jared looked down for a moment. He wasn’t criticizing Price, nor the prosecution techniques...Jared was ‘damn’ happy they had finally reached this point. He supposed some of it was tension at being in front of a jury, but the main root of his anger was the knowing what dangers were threatening innocent people...if any of those buildings failed before they were shut down...Jared couldn’t go there. Price glanced at Jensen to see the stoic warrior wasn’t phased. He obviously knew Jared very well. When Price glanced at the other men leaning against the wall, he could see the collective understanding of who their charge really was. Jared was a hero in this, and even more so because he didn’t see it. Price looked at Jared, “Those people aren’t left with ‘nothing’, Jared. They have ‘you’.” When Jared looked perturbed, Price elaborated, “Of course you don’t see it, so let me remind you. Without you coming forward, and all the background and evidence you’ve worked so hard on, we wouldn’t be doing this. ‘You’ are saving them, Jared, it’s just requiring some legal red tape to get it done.”
Jensen watched his lover war with himself over accepting Price’s words. He liked the prosecutor more and more for his continued admiration and respect for Jared, and especially for this perfectly timed ‘pep’ talk. Everyone’s thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. Chuck went to answer it, as Jensen moved instantly between Jared and the door. Dave and Mike had flanked the young genius in the blink of an eye. Price was impressed. ‘Maybe I’ll offer them a job when this is over,’ he mentally joked. Chuck opened the door and let Bart in. Jared was glad to see him and stood up. “Hey Jared,” Bart said happily, finally noticing him behind the wall of protection. He had a second’s fear that he was about to be killed for something he wasn’t even sure he’d done, but relaxed when he saw Jared. “Good to see you, Bart,” Jared greeted from behind them. Jensen assured Dave and Mike, “It’s alright, he’s our other friendly brainiac, guys.” Bart chuckled, “Well, I appreciate that Mr. Ackles, but there’s only one star brainiac in the room and it isn’t me.” Bart went to the desk and pulled out some files and a laptop. He looked at Price, “I’m serious. Some of his formulas almost gave me an aneurysm this week,” then he looked at Jared, “Are you sure you’re not an android?” Jared rolled his eyes, which had Jensen grinning. Bart went back to his laptop and soon all of Jared’s files were up on the large monitor.

“Here we go,” said Bart. Price explained to everyone, “Here’s our order of presentation. I have an introduction, then an explanation of what Bart’s going to do and what you’re going to do, Jared. I’ll explain to the jury we’re going to summarize eighteen files of code violations, neglect, criminal intent, and disregard for human life. Bart will take over with your caseload. You’ll be his backup. If you think, at any moment, that Bart isn’t doing something detailed enough, or proving something that’s not up to par, you motion to me, Jared, immediately. Bart is ready for that, okay?” Jared turned to the other engineer, but Bart insisted, “Jared do not worry about me being hurt or insulted. We need to win. You have more education, training and experience than me and if you see something I don’t, you don’t hesitate, alright?” Jared nodded, feeling much better about things, “Okay.” He turned back to the screen, “So, we’re starting with the moulding…the library?”

Price explained to Jared, “Bart spent time with Chuck and me. We reorganized the caseload by degree of violation and type. So, the five similar buildings that already have visible failure signs are first, then large ones like the stadium, mall and apartments, which are huge structural support violations, are lumped together…they’ll probably take much longer. After that, the rest of them, including the bridges and parking structures, will follow up. Bart thought it would be easier to lead the non-engineer objective people through like cases, grouping them by similarity. We’ll keep them from being bombarded with too much varied information coming from too many different angles at once.” Jared nodded, impressed by the forethought, “That makes perfect sense. Okay, so what am I supposed to do, aside from watching for little details and stuff?” Price answered, “I’m going to call you up on these specific cases to do the entire presentation,” then he clicked to the larger structures. Bart piped in, “These calculations are profound, Jared. I’ve got them, but I’m not confident enough if they ask me questions. It’s easier if we just put you on these more complicated ones.” Jared studied the four files and refreshed his memory. They were, indeed, more complicated. He remembered spending extra time on those reports. They were also the ones Bart had called him about the other night. “Okay,” Jared nodded, “I can do those.”

Price explained to the room, “Gentlemen, this could take hours. It would be nice if we could just run our program and get everything done in ninety minutes, but allowing for questions by the jurors or the defense is what will slow everything down. There may be just a few, or there may be a lot. We just don’t know. Breaks are decided by the jury, and they usually like them every hour, but it’s only a few minutes at a time. I don’t know what they’ll do once they become ensconced in Jared’s files.” Dave piped in, “So, the three of us will be monitoring Jared’s health closely, and if we feel he needs to stop, we’re not waiting for their break schedule, right?” Price answered to everyone, “By all means, if you see the need to stop him, it’s fine. The jury already knows he’s injured. All I ask is that one of you indicate that to me, so I can voice it for the jurors and their security, then they’ll know
why we’re stopping.” Price looked at Jensen, “Don’t worry, Jared’s health is of the highest consideration today.” Jensen watched his lover drop his head on the back of his chair with an irritable sigh. “He is right here”, Jared mumbled, more to himself than anyone else. The rest of the group tried not to grin at Jared’s pissy outburst but all of them failed. The kid was definitely not happy about not being in control of whether he needed to take a break, or not.

A knock at the door interrupted them. Again, Jared’s mountain of Black Ops experts stood between him and the door, as Chuck cracked it open. Someone said something to him, then Chuck closed the door and turned to the group. “We’re on in ten,” the investigator announced. Price let everyone know, “The restroom’s two doors down on the right, everyone use it now and get a drink, if you like. It’s public, but there’s no one else scheduled for this side of the fourth floor until late afternoon. I know you’ll be using precautions, but there shouldn’t be many, if ‘any’ outside people to deal with this morning. Lance has people in the hallway, too. They’ll intercept if you need interference.” Jensen felt his old familiar barriers come up. He easily blocked everything out except the mission at hand. He watched the same thing occur to his closest counterparts. Jared picked up on the change, instantly. Jensen was right in front of him, but he wasn’t ‘with’ him. That’s what it felt like, anyway. Jared reminded himself Jensen had lovingly warned him of this and not to forget the man inside…the one who loved him. ‘Okay,’ Jared told himself, ‘I can do this.’

The trip to the restroom was similar to the walk from the van. Jared was in the center of a surrounding wall of safety. They entered the men’s room, after Frank and Phil checked it clear from other people. Jared thanked God that the rest of his group had to pee, so it wasn’t just ‘him’ having to go while multiple people stood by and listened. The hospital had been hard enough with Jensen and the nurses nearby. This f-ing football team all hearing him would be mortifying. Jared washed his hands and dried them, like all the other men had already done. ‘They even pee like they’re in a hurry,’ he humorously thought to himself. Before he left the sink, he stood in front of the mirror and closed his eyes. The team remained quiet, respecting his need for a private moment. When Jared finally turned to Jensen, the older man saw the renewed determination in his eyes. “Ready?” Jensen asked. Jared nodded, “Yes.” When Jensen smiled softly, Jared appreciated it because it was the real ‘Jensen’. He took a deep breath and walked toward the door. Jensen slid his hand around Jared’s back. Dave did the same from the other side. Both men took Jared’s elbows in their other hands. Mike handled the door, then walked in front of Jared to the juror’s room. Frank followed close behind. Chuck met them in front of the juror’s door to hold it for them all.

Everyone entered, then paused inside for a few seconds. Chuck made his way around to the front of the group and motioned for them to walk to a group of padded chairs on the left, facing the front the room. Price sat in front with Bart, Jared right behind them, very close so they could talk quietly if they needed to. Dave was on Jared’s left, Jensen on his right, and Mike was right behind him. They sat so close, they were touching. Jared felt safe. He appreciated them more in this moment than he even realized he was going to. He mentally thanked his lover for knowing this, in advance, and bringing them all together. Fuck, he would be terrified and lost without this kind of support. ‘Or dead,’ the younger man’s thoughts went to, but he didn’t have time to dwell on it as the group of jurors entered the room, so did the defense.

Four men entered and proceeded to the right side of the room. Jared had no idea who they were, but he assumed the two in front were the lawyers. ‘Funny how you could always peg the lawyers,’ he thought to himself. A guy Jared’s age sat right behind them. He was clean shaven, looked intelligent, but Jared had never seen him before. Next to the supposed expert witness, there was another guy. He was older, maybe in his forties. After studying him, Jared thought he recognized him from his office. He scrolled through his time with A.E. and tried to identify him. Meanwhile, a large group of men and women entered the room from a back door and started to take seats within the semi circle of plush comfortable chairs. Jared counted eighteen of them, by the time the last one took a seat. He wasn’t used to a jury this size, nor was he used to them being out in the open like this. It was
interesting how the jurors smiled and shared quiet conversation with one another before everything started.

Jared almost relaxed until another person entered the room and went to sit behind the right side group. “Fuck,” Jared’s anxiety skyrocketed as he watched his old manager, Robert Harriman, take a seat. He hadn’t blurted that out too loudly, but it was loud enough for everyone in his group to hear. Jensen and Dave squished tighter into Jared from either side. He closed his eyes and focused on controlling his breathing for a minute. ‘Where’s my anger? Where’s my anger?’ Jared kept repeating the question in his mind, praying he could refocus himself and get pissed enough to ignore Robert’s presence. There was a baritone whisper of encouragement, coming from his right. It was just loud enough to penetrate Jared’s cloud of inner panic and reminded him he was safe. “He can’t hurt you. Remember you’re not alone anymore.” It was Jensen.

Jared could have released a loud emotional cry, at the relief he felt from Jensen’s words. He forced himself to relax. He was surrounded by safety, encouragement. He nodded, more so to convince himself everything was fine. Jared heard Mike’s voice, very soft from behind, leaning on bent elbows, “You want me to kick his ass for you, Jared? We can skip all this. Just say the word, buddy, and I’ll break his arms and legs, leave him screaming on the floor. I’ll even make him say ‘sorry’ if you want.” Jared looked down quickly to cover the huge smile Mike brought to his face. He hadn’t expected that. He almost laughed out loud. Jared suspected that had been exactly what Mike was going for and it worked. He felt much better now, thanks to his tag team.

Everything went as planned for the next fifteen minutes. Price did his intro, explained all of their roles and how they were going to present. He reminded the court of Jared’s condition and his reason for high level security. There was another criminal case filed separately, showing video of an employee of the accused, moments before he tried to end Jared’s life. Price explained Jared’s security would intervene if any interferences seemed disruptive or harmful. ‘That covered it,’ Jensen thought. Price had brilliantly just brought attention to the fact that the defense was suspected of attempted murder to the prosecution’s expert witness, ‘showing what assholes they are,’ to the objective jurors. He planted that seed in their minds before they even started.

It was Jensen’s turn to react out loud when he turned to the sound of the back door to the courtroom opening. Not loud enough for the rest of the court to hear, but loud enough for Jared and the men close by, he cursed. “Fucking hell.” Price addressed the defense attorneys, “Why wasn’t I notified of this?” One lawyer stood to answer Price, “Mr. Prosecutor, everyone who has a vested interest in the loss of profit or faces criminal charges from this indictment has a right to be present.” Price countered, “No need to recite the rule book to me, counselor, but there’s a respectful responsibility for you and I to be truthful about everyone attending, in advance. This is Daniel Ackles and he wasn’t announced to me, in advance, therefore he should at least be out in the hall.” Jensen appreciated Price’s quick response. The attorney and Chuck both knew of Daniel’s previous harassment to Jared at work. They also knew Daniel was quite guilty of planning Jared’s demise, even if it hadn’t been proven yet. Daniel had somehow gotten his attorneys to get him a pass from custody for this hearing. Everyone was silent while the second lawyer conferred with Robert and the jury talked to their spokesperson. Daniel sat down behind Robert, then bent over to confer with him. The two accompanying officers who had arrived with Daniel went to the back of the courtroom to wait for their prisoner. Jensen couldn’t believe they let the fucking asshole come here.

Soon, a woman speaking for the jurors told Price, “The jurors will accept it, only if it isn’t a viable threat to the prosecutions’s witness, but if he is allowed to remain, they don’t feel the latest arriving person should be allowed to speak, since he wasn’t announced in advance.” Price wasn’t too disappointed in that decision. He nodded, but still argued, “Well, he’s a distraction to our witness, and is definitely a viable threat to him. I respectfully request that he wait outside. There’s another partner in the room and the company is adequately represented by him. Daniel Ackles doesn’t need
to be here.” Price turned to the jurors to speak to them directly, “Respectfully, your honors, the prosecution apologizes for any inconvenience, but the latest arrival is one of the major suspects in the attempt to end our innocent witness’s life. It was brutal, terrifying and almost killed him. I’m begging the jury to have him removed so my witness can feel trust in the court’s secure environment.” That had done it. Jared’s entire group of protectors, including Chuck at the side door, sported half grins when the jurors called their representative back to tell her they approved of Daniel being removed. Jensen decided he definitely owed Price one of his barbecue steak dinners for that one.

Daniel looked like a petulant three year old who had been told to give back a piece of candy he stole when the jury’s rep announced their decision. He knew better than to make a scene, but he was pissed as Hell. Robert whispered something to him, then Daniel nodded and stood as his accompanying officers came to get him. Daniel blatantly looked toward Jared, while slowly walking by, not wanting to miss this opportunity to stare the young man down. He used to be quite infatuated with the gorgeous kid who he now wanted to kill. It was a damn shame Daniel never could get Jared to return any interest. ‘The kid could have had everything…an ‘in’ with the bosses son, a share of the millions, everything,’ Daniel thought to himself. He stopped in his tracks when he noticed Jensen for the first time. His look of ‘what in the hell’ was priceless. Jensen met his stare, as Daniel’s eyes darted between he and Jared for a second, obviously trying to figure out why Jensen was there. Daniel realized he wasn’t going to get close to the kid, but leave it to the child in him to try one last attempt at weakening Jared’s confidence before he left. He surprised his officers as he bent over toward Jared in a fraction of a second. He didn’t get far, as the special ops team instantly pushed him back, swept his knees and took him down. “I SAW YOUR VIDEO,” Daniel screeched, as he went down. “NAKED JARED...I FUCKING JERKED OFF TO IT! SHOWED IT TO EVERYBODY,” Daniel yelled before he screamed in frustrated pain. Jensen and Mike had flown at the bastard instantly to take him down, while Dave moved in front of Jared.

Daniel screamed in pain as his arms were twisted harder to insure compliance. His face was pushed into the floor, his brother’s voice in his ear, “You fucking piece of shit, I hope I get you alone. Alone, Daniel, no holds barred. Jared doesn’t have to deal with your shit anymore because you’re going to prison. You’re never coming near him again.” Jensen twisted his hold, causing screaming protest. Trying to catch his breath, Daniel complied while his escort officers put the handcuffs on. No one heard Jensen’s threat, except for Daniel and Mike. It was effective, for the moment, because Daniel didn’t yell anymore obscenities. The Black Ops experts helped lift Daniel for his escort officers, then stood their ground while they walked off. “Jensen,” Dave called from behind. Mike hurried back to the seat behind Jared, as Jensen hurried to the front and knelt. Dave have moved back to his side of the witness and was taking his pulse. Jensen immediately understood Dave’s warning. Jared was pale, unresponsive. When Dave shook his head, Jensen knew Jared’s pulse sucked. He turned to Price, “We have to take him out...now.” The AG turned to the jurors and explained they would need some time to assess their witness, as Dave and Jensen lifted Jared from underneath his shoulders. Mike followed with his hands on Jared’s shoulders, as Frank led the way. ‘Nonononononono,’ Jared’s mind ranted, ‘Tom must have shown him,’ he panicked, ‘Ohgod, ohgodohgod, this can’t be real,’ Jared’s mortified embarrassment started to overcome his rational thought. He couldn’t breathe, mortified that someone else had seen those video’s.

Robert Harriman sat calmly with a satisfied grin on his face. He was quite pleased they had rattled the Padalecki kid. He remembered what an open book the kid was from working with him, and had whispered the idea to Daniel to do something bothersome on his way out. It had obviously worked. If they’d upset him enough, maybe the kid would pull out of this.
Chapter Twenty One. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

The courtroom drama ensues. Jared is threatened and pushed to his limits, while his closest security team members protect him at all costs. The young man isn’t out of danger yet, and the defense is lower than pond scum.

I hope you enjoy the action. There is more to come.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

Jensen and Dave carried Jared into the office by his armpits, Mike helping from behind with his hands on Jared’s back. The three special forces veterans escorted their charge to the office couch. Lance closed the door behind them, he and Frank remaining there to keep everyone else out. Jensen and Dave coaxed Jared to lean back, while Mike lifted the engineer’s legs up onto a small coffee table. He hurried to grab one of their duffle bags, as Dave helped Jensen get Jared’s suit jacket off. Mike pulled a stethoscope out and handed it to Dave, while Jensen loosened Jared’s tie and top button. He raised Jared’s eyelids to check pupils, “Jared, can you hear me?” Dave listened to the younger man’s chest while Jensen looked closely at eyes, “Jared buddy, can you hear me?” Jensen told them, “They’re responding to light, he’s just not focusing.” Jensen felt the kid’s forehead, “He’s cool. Damp.” Dave announced, “Heart beat steady, no wheezing.” He took the bp cuff Mike held for him and put it on Jared’s arm.

Mike took Jared’s wrist between his fingers and counted. Dave announced, “BP is low, 114 over 64.” Mike announced, “Pulse is 80.” Dave responded, “That’s fast. He’s acting shocky.” Jensen agreed. Three sets of worried eyes watched Jared, as Jensen brushed the hair aside from his face, “Jared, can you hear me?” He looked into Jared’s eyes, “Hey, you with us?” Jared suddenly exhaled emotionally, like he’d been released from whatever trance he was in. The three veterans breathed easier, but Jared’s breathing was too fast. It was full of panic, as he covered his face. “I’m sorry,” he shared. Jensen rested his hand on Jared’s shoulder, “Hey just relax. You scared the shit out of us.” Jared still covered his face, “I’m sorry,” panicking because he didn’t remember getting in here from the courtroom. “Take it easy,” Dave warned. Jared made an attempt to get up, but was held down by three firm hands and loud “Whoah’s.” Jensen said, “It’s okay…the court’s on a break. You just came out of shock and I’m afraid we are too.” Jared leaned his head back in defeat. He suddenly looked like he wanted to be anywhere but there, with three sets of eyes staring at him. He put a hand on his forehead and rubbed some of the tension, while everyone further studied him.

Jensen assessed Jared closely and drew on his knowledge of the kid’s past and the things Jared had shared with him. He thought over his visit to the old house yesterday and tried to remember exactly what Daniel had blurted out about Jared before he left the house. Jensen suspected there was some connection to what happened today. To think his brother had deliberately tried to hurt Jared enough to interfere with his testimony pissed the ex-soldier off to exponential levels. Jensen looked at his friends, “Can you give me a few minutes alone with him?” Both men quickly agreed, willing to do anything to help Jared feel better, even if it meant backing off. They quickly stepped outside and shut the door, taking Lance and Chuck with them. Just outside the door, Mike let his pent up anger show...
at the defense’s emotional attack on Jared, “Those fucking pieces of shit.” Dave sighed, “I agree.” Mike continued, “They did that on purpose. They’re trying to wear him down.” Dave said calmly, “Agreed again. Be easier to just kill them.” Mike did a double take at his friend because it was usually ‘him’ that said things like that. The two grinned at each other and made themselves comfortable against the door.

Jensen sat on the coffee table and faced Jared, knee to knee. He leaned on his elbows and assessed his lover for a few seconds. He could see the kid was miserable, but he could also see frustration, anger, and something that pissed Jensen off to the hilt, humiliation. Jensen opened his mouth to speak, but was beat to the punch by Jared, “I can’t.” Jensen waited. After a few seconds, Jared sighed and looked at Jensen, “I can’t because it doesn’t belong anywhere near you and me.” Jensen moved to sit next to him and put his hand on Jared’s cheek. The younger man looked panicky for a second, but Jensen held his face toward him, “Did you forget I’m in love with you? You are the best thing that’s ever happened to me. Nothing you could possibly tell me would ever change that.” Jared took a moment to let Jensen’s words soak in. He knew Jensen wouldn’t hate him, nor would he walk away. It was just so damned humiliating to admit his foolish mistake and he really hated himself over it. “Jared, it’s just you and me,” Jensen nudged. After another moment, the younger man finally seemed to come to reluctant painful acceptance. Before he said anything, Jensen took a chance, “Does this have to do with the ‘lapse in judgment’ you hated telling me about?” Jared looked at Jensen, realizing the older man remembered his mention of Tom before. He never wanted Jensen to know the whole story because he still felt so damn foolish over it, but he sighed and finally gave in, “Yes, it has to do with the lapse in judgment. And yes, it was the ass I told you about.”

Jensen let Jared collect himself before he continued, “What I never wanted to tell you was Tom was making videos of us…and I didn’t know it.” Jensen hadn’t seen that coming. He watched his defeated lover look down in shame and boiled inside at the fucking asshole that had done this to him. After a few seconds, he asked, “How did you find out?” Jared felt like a raw open book at the moment, but he tried to remind himself that this was Jensen and Jensen meant safe. He looked up bravely, “Something didn’t feel right with him. It was off, but I didn’t know why. Sex was…it was cold and he was pushy, like he had another agenda. I confronted him and then I broke it off.” Jared looked at Jensen with shame in his eyes, “God, Jensen he showed those to Daniel. The pervert who rubbed up against me and followed me around. He showed them to him.” Jared looked down in self disgust, “I had no idea they even knew each other.” Jensen took Jared’s hand, “I’m sorry,” Jared said, his eyes filled with guilt and sorrow. “I don’t know what happened, I just…when he said that it…” Jared shook his head, “I shouldn’t have frozen up like that but it was just…” Jensen was seething with so much anger, he was afraid to speak without taking a few calming breaths first. “Jared, stop blaming yourself. You were open and innocent, it’s not your fault.” He squeezed Jared’s hand, “How’d he take it when you broke it off? Was he pissed?” Jared shook his head, “Not really. Not at first, anyway. When I told him it was over, he told me he jerked off to it. Then he told me he showed it to other people. I didn’t even know he was seeing other people.” “Jared, stop blaming yourself. You were open and innocent, it’s not your fault.” Jensen had a morbid thought that Daniel had orchestrated Jared’s relationship with Tom, and that the two of them had probably used Jared as a toy between them. Jared hadn’t responded to Jensen’s sick brother’s advances, so his brother did the next best thing and set up another guy that would get Jared’s attention. Jensen had to stop himself from imagining the two perverts watching those videos because he felt himself reaching a murderous level. He took a moment to calm himself down, then remembered something Jared told him prior, “You said before you broke his nose?” Jared half
smiled, “Yeah. He tried to get me to keep doing it with him. Keep meeting him to make more movies. It just pissed me off.” Jensen shook his head, “Jesus fucking Christ.” He couldn’t believe this had happened to Jared.

Jared tried to force himself to regroup. Jensen’s presence was grounding him. He knew he needed to take control of himself and get back in that courtroom and kick ass. He finally asked, “You think they did that on purpose?” Jensen nodded, “I have no doubt.” After a few seconds, the older man added, “But they don’t know you like I do. They can’t derail you from kicking their ass. That’s why they’re down to distractions and nasty insults.” Jared paused for a few seconds, then asked, “So…he’s not in there anymore?” Jensen squeezed his hand, “No, Jare, he’s not. You won’t have to see him anymore.” Jared thought about that. He sat up straighter, Jensen watching him closely, “You feel okay?” Jared nodded, “Yeah. I can go back. It’s okay, I know what to expect this time.” Jensen studied him for a few seconds, then agreed, “Okay. We’ll try it, but I want you to drink some water first.”

Jared stood and followed Jensen to a water cooler. He sipped the offered cup, while Jensen let the other two men back in. Jared soon found himself surrounded by three friends who were assessing him, but trying not to ‘look’ like they were assessing him. It seemed they were trying to convince themselves he was ‘okay’. Jared lectured himself, mentally, to not let them down again. They were working hard to help him, and here he was falling apart. He looked between them with a mix of gratitude and guilt in his eyes, “Thank you. I’ll try not to do that again. I’m sor,” Jared was interrupted by Mike, before Jensen had the chance, “Jared, I swear to God, if you apologize for that dick assaulting you into shock, I might have to explode.” Mike’s outburst stunned the engineer into silence. Jensen had to smile. Dave said, “I think that was well said, actually.” He looked at Jensen, “So, are we sitting close to Harriman when Jared goes up?” Jared obviously had been dismissed in his apology. ‘Figures,’ he thought to himself. Jensen looked at Dave, concerned, “Yeah, you said the dickwad smiled when we had to take Jared out…I think we need to spread out and cover that side, in case he tries anything else when our genius fries his bank account.”

Jared did a double take at Jensen’s confidence in him, then looked at the other two friends, who had no argument to Jensen’s comment. He argued taking too much credit, “Bart’s doing most of the work, you guys,” but no one listened. Jared finally sighed in acceptance. They weren’t listening. Price knocked, and after identifying himself, Mike let him in, followed by Lance and Chuck. “Jared, are you alright?” Price looked worried, but Jared assured him, “I’m fine. And I’m ready. It was a shock, but it’s over. I won’t let you down again.” Price argued, “Jared, I’m so very sorry that happened. I’m telling you, they’re at their wit’s end, here, and that’s why they are resorting to other means. They can’t win.” Jared nodded, “That’s good…I think,” he added, worried about what else Robert might have up his sleeve…or the damn hitman they still hadn’t caught. Price further told him, “And there’s no letting anyone down. We wouldn’t even be successful without all your hard work to get here. The courtroom was supposed to be a safe place for you and I feel terrible they did this.”

“It’s fine…we’ll just get ‘em back,” Jared rebutted, oblivious to the knowing grins he received from his security team. Price questioned him, “Do you know the others he has with him?” Jared answered, “No. The older guy looks familiar but it’s not like I know him, really. I think I’ve seen him, maybe at meetings or in passing. I just can’t remember. The younger one is a complete stranger.” Price nodded, relieved, “It’s alright. I just don’t want anymore surprises to hit us. He has them both listed as professional engineering witnesses, but that’s it.” After a few seconds of silence, Jared looked around and realized his lover and friends were giving him another ‘once over’. He looked between them, finally landing his eyes on Jensen’s.

The seasoned war veteran watched the hopeful pleading in Jared’s puppy dog orbs turn to full force and he sighed. Jensen looked around and realized everyone seemed to be waiting for his approval to let the kid go back into that courtroom. He stepped closer to Jared, “Remember what you agreed to this morning, alright? Please remember you’re not even three weeks out of surgery?” Jared rushed to
nod, “I know. I remember. I’ll be okay.” Jensen glanced at his two friends, the exchange silent and knowing…they would all force the kid to stop if he looked like he was going down. The group of jurors reconvened. Everyone returned to the courtroom and Price called up Bart to the presentation screen. After explaining his role and Jared’s backup role, the attorney stood aside so everyone could view the large monitor. Jared saw movement out of the corner of his eye and realized Mike had moved to the other side of the group of chairs. He planted himself right behind Robert, directly in between the two guest engineers. Both witnesses glanced at the Black Ops veteran irritably because he’d forced them to move a few inches apart when he wedged his way into the middle of them. Robert seemed to hear something and turned around. His annoyed sigh, as he turned back around, was priceless. Mike exchanged knowing grins with Jensen and Dave, pleased to be such a bother to the son of a bitch in front of him.

Dave wasn’t crowding Jared this time. He was actually sitting two seats over, more on the center aisle. It put more response effectiveness between he and Mike. Jensen stayed glued to Jared’s left side, for now. Bart presented the first six cases. He explained the variations between design and final construction, showed the jury all the simple support footings that were left out. Jared watched the faces of the eighteen strangers, searching for any confused looks. He thought Bart did a really good job and everyone seemed to understand everything. The first group of files took only thirty minutes. The court took a small pause while Price conferred with Bart and Jared. The opposite side did the same thing. Unfortunately for them, Robert’s witnesses had to lean far over in order to speak to the attorneys and Robert, and not include Mike in the conversation. Dave and Jensen smirked at the feigned innocence displayed on Mike’s face. Mike was obviously rattling the defense with his presence. The three men hoped it would be a deterrent to try anything when Jared went up to speak. Jensen watched Jared’s demeanor. So far, the kid was a bundle of determined energy and showed no signs of slowing down, nor did he seem to be in any pain. Price and Bart introduced the next group of files and let the jury know that Jared would be taking over in some complicated areas, then everything started again.

These buildings were large and they were popular public bearing structures. Jared waited until Bart made it through the basic footings and support beams, then stood and joined him when things got more complex. The jurors began to ask questions. This was why Price was ecstatic that the young engineer was feeling well enough to be here. Jared was captivating. He was perfect. The attorney glanced at Jensen with a subtle grin. Jensen realized his lover was the brand new lovable shiny toy to the entire courtroom. Even the defense attorneys looked enthralled at the moment. Robert looked pissed, and that just meant so much more, in Jensen’s opinion. Jared bent over backward to give each juror who had a question his undivided attention. He took the time to explain the different types of load bearing formulas and why they were necessary. There was the weight of the structure, itself, the weight of the materials and support, and those formulas had to be added to the maximum load bearing capacity needed for all structures. “The building codes and laws are there for a reason,” Jared explained, “and all certified engineers know them and all inspectors do, too. There aren’t exceptions because it would threaten the safety of innocent people...which is what was done here.” Jared indicated the files on the screen, as he said that, then went to the pictures of failing trusses which hadn’t been properly distributing loads between girders and horizontal rivets. “See this joint? Here’s what happens,” Jared continued, as the jurors leaned forward to watch the talented young expert show them step by step what happens when the buildings are overloaded.

He drew with the pointer to show the non-engineer’s in the room how the stress fractures in his reports are a result of the internal failures and why. Jared stressed that the structures began to fail immediately, and were impending catastrophe as soon as all of the steel components started to fold. “What’s time sensitive is these were opened to the public, and now bear even more weight.” Jared was enigmatic and charming. Even Jensen and Dave had caught up to speed on a subject that had rattled their brains up until now. Mike was a bit better, since he was already knowledgable in the
subject, but even he shook his head and grinned with pride. Jared was blowing the case out of the park. Jensen’s team kept glancing at Robert, watching the man’s invisible steam come out of his ears. The lawyers didn’t look too affected. Jensen supposed they got paid, no matter what. Jared was feeling a bit of a pull in his left side, but it was just beginning and this was something he was used to. He was only on the first of six intricate building violations and he wasn’t about to let the jury look away. They were all paying close attention, so he figured this was the very opportunity to kick the hell out of Robert and his partners. Jared paused, in between his explanations, just to make sure the jurors were getting it. So far, their questions had been easy, but time consuming. Jared was thrilled they seemed to be interested in the subject and not falling asleep. He looked at the defense witnesses, not sure why they hadn’t at least tried to argue any of his points yet. Bart seemed to be confused about it, too, but they continued anyway.

Well into the third of six files in this grouping, one defense witness stepped forward with a thin binder in his hand. Jared was glad, since they were going to hit the formulas soon and this might finally be where his skills were especially needed to counter any arguments. Everything had been a bit easy up until now, in his opinion. The defense witness opened his binder, as if to pull some information from it and ask a question, then the binder slipped from his hand. When it hit the floor, Jensen tensed, as did his two other ops buddies, because the binder was close enough to Jared that they knew the polite young man would feel compelled to pick it up. ‘No,’ Jensen immediately thought, as Jared started to bend over and grab it. Bart beat him to it, however, which placated the three special ops’ internal alarms that Jared was about to hurt himself badly. Bart put out a quick hand to Jared’s chest to stop him, then stooped down to retrieve the binder, and hand it back to the other engineer.

The three greeted each other politely and shook hands. They seemed to be pleasantly addressing one of the files, then something went wrong. Suddenly, Bart grabbed the back of a desk nearby and tried to hold himself upright, but it was obvious the engineer was going to pass out. Jared reached toward him, but was blocked by a flash of sinew and muscle that had arrived in an instant to block him. “Get back,” Mike pushed him gently a couple feet, keeping himself between Jared and the other engineers. Jensen and Dave were seconds behind, just as quick to react but further away. Price and Chuck headed forward behind them, as the jurors stood up in alarm.

Bart dropped to the floor and went into convulsions. Jared struggled to get to him, out of reaction, but he was held back by his protector. “BART,” Jared yelled, being pushed backward. “What’s wrong with him?” Jared asked. He couldn’t take his eyes off the poor engineer on the ground. Mike easily restrained him without hurting him. He knew Jared’s need to help was blocking out everything else. Jensen and Dave had reached Bart just as he hit the floor. The two medical experts immediately rolled Bart to his side, just as Chuck and Price reached them. Jensen and Dave quickly assessed the engineer. “It’s some kind of toxin,” Jensen said. He continued to hold the poor engineer sideways, while Dave ran to get the duffle bags from the office. Jensen told Chuck, “Call 9-1-1, but we’ll start treatment. It doesn’t look good, but we can try and flush it. We’ve got some counter methods but we don’t know what it is yet so we can’t give him anything. The wrong one can kill him.” Chuck looked at the defense engineer, who seemed to be standing there in shock, “What did you do? Did you hand him something?” The man looked at Chuck in panic, “No. I wouldn’t do anything. I just shook his hand, I swear.”

Chuck and Jensen took a second to assess the expert witness but all they saw was shock and panic on the young man’s face. Jensen’s eyes roamed to the binder on the floor that the engineer had dropped earlier, and now had dropped a second time when Bart went down. “Chuck,” Jensen ordered, “Get the binder.” The investigator moved quickly, hearing Jensen’s warning, “Careful.” He pulled out a handkerchief and was handed an additional one by the bailiff and Price. He picked up the suspected item and place it on a chair. Lance was just approaching, “Paramedics are Code 3.” Chuck ordered, “Get a CSI team stat to test this for residue.” Lance made the call, as Chuck turned to
the defense engineer again, “Why did you drop it?” The man looked panicked, “Uhm...I don’t know, I just...I...well, it felt funny, like tingly or something. I thought it was my hand falling asleep. I didn’t mean to drop it.” Jensen looked up. He studied the engineer and Robert.

The engineer was clueless, Robert wasn’t. Jensen asked the engineer, “Is your hand still feeling that way?” The younger man shook his head at Jensen, “No..no, it stopped. But it didn’t stop ‘til I dropped it a second time. When he handed it to me, it was still doing it.” Jensen considered the new information. He looked back at Bart and waited for a hustling Dave to return with the bag they needed. Chuck looked like he was contemplating something, then realized it was probably the same thing Jensen had been, “So, why would it affect him less,” he asked Jensen. The panicked engineer asked, “Why would ‘what’ affect me less? What are you talking about?” Both men turned to him quickly and said, “Shut up,” simultaneously. The young man looked put out but was definitely silenced. Jared was still focused on poor Bart, unable to look away. Mike tried to soothe him, “Jared, he’s in good hands, I need you to relax, buddy, okay? You’re gonna hurt your ribs like this.” Jared knew Mike was talking to him, but he couldn’t seem to concentrate on what he wanted him to do. The sight of Bart laying on the floor, with white foam coming from his mouth, was overwhelming. Mike was worried because his charge was still pushing against him, subconsciously needing to help. He hadn’t heard much of anything except something about the binder and tingling hands, then something about flushing something out.

Jared knew he needed to listen to Mike and maybe he wouldn’t be oblivious to the information being passed. He started to ease up and try to calm himself, accepting that he really couldn’t do anything to help Bart...the experts were already doing that. Mike felt the engineer in his hold relax a bit, “That’s it, Jared. Just try and relax. They’re gonna do everything they can to help him.” He continued to hang onto Jared, just in case any further emergencies happened and he had to rush the kid out of there. He was also observing Jared’s condition. The young man felt pretty strong, but he knew Jared’s propensity to go like a bullet train until he literally drained himself and dropped. He stayed ready for it. “Please tell me he isn’t going to die,” Jared’s plea was for Mike, even though the younger man was looking at Bart. Mike sighed, because he really couldn’t lie to his friend, “I’m sorry, Jared, I just don’t know. If it’s poison, it could be fast or slow, but if it’s something we can counter, they’ll give him an anecdote before paramedics get here. The problem is not knowing, but they’re trying to figure it out.” Jared’s eyes filled with anguish, “Can’t you just hurry and give him all of them? Maybe one of them will work?” Mike explained softly, “We can’t do that with poison. The wrong one will kill him.” Jared seemed to understand that. He finally agreed to sit down with Mike, after the ex-soldier coaxed him several times. They sat in one of the defense chairs, closest to what was happening, with Mike keeping his hold on Jared’s arm. The other two veterans continued to work on Bart. Jensen was using rags and a small suction tube to clear his mouth, while holding him on his side. Dave administered a fast drip of fluids and was holding the bag up high. Bart was still breathing, at least. Jensen kept checking his pupils.

The jurors wound up exiting the courtroom. CSI arrived and went straight to the chair to mix several chemical tubes and swab them on the suspect binder. The defense engineer who had handled the binder was sitting close by. One officer swabbed his right hand for testing. None of the procedures took long. Jensen had to admit Price’s team had been impressive. The ambulance took fifteen minutes, claiming the security and getting into the courtroom was quite the challenge. Jensen and Dave helped paramedics get Bart onto a gurney, after initial checks showed that he was still in acute distress. Bart’s breathing was shallow, his heart erratically bouncing all over the place. His eyes were rolling up into his head. The men collectively weren’t even sure he was going to make it. Dave stepped over to the CSI team, “We only need bases. Just give us a base substance and we can stabilize him. We don’t need an entire chem panel.” Jensen knew the older man was pissed. The CSI team was too slow and they damn well needed to give Bart something ‘now’. One of the officers showed Dave a spot check from the engineer’s hand and from the binder. They were a match with a
definite reaction. Dave didn’t wait for explanation. He didn’t need it. He looked at Jensen, “Conium maculatum.” Jensen looked confused, “Alkaloid based? What plant is that from?” Dave looked back to the findings, then returned to Jensen as he confirmed, “It’s something called poison hemlock.”

Jensen immediately ordered the paramedics, “Let us shoot him before you leave.” The medics started to argue, explaining to Jensen procedure and why they couldn’t allow anything to be injected, but Jensen cut them off, “There isn’t going to be any need for procedure because your patient is going to die. Now, hold the fuck off a minute while my partner gives him the proper treatment.” Jensen held the upset paramedics’ gazes, while Dave quickly chose the correct vial and administered a large dose of Atropine, as he explained, “This will get him started, but do not waste time getting the ER’s attention. He needs more and spending time on lab tests and scans isn’t going to save him.” Dave waited for the argument, but received none.

The medics obviously accepted that these two men knew what the hell they were doing. Dave put the syringe and vial on top of Bart’s blanket so the medics had it readily available, then the engineer was wheeled out. Lance sent two of his security officers to follow the ambulance and stay with Bart. The CSI team finished their assessment and were placing the binder into a large clear bag. One of the officers was cleaning off the defense engineer’s hand with alcohol wipes. When he finished, the young man was told to go wash his hands thoroughly with soap and water. Lance sent another team member to follow the witness and make sure he returned without talking to anyone. Everyone seemed to regroup in the front of the room, waiting for a collective sort of after brief.

The prosecution team, including Jensen, Dave and Mike, all took notice of the entire defense team that was left. The lawyers looked perturbed, like they hadn’t expected this to be as eventful as they’d thought. The older engineer looked disturbed, like he was possibly thinking he was glad it hadn’t been ‘his’ turn. The only one in the group that seemed unaffected and reserved was Robert Harriman. Price immediately knew this had been another plot to prevent this case from being heard, but he couldn’t believe the audacity to actually use something this deadly in the middle of a damn court proceeding. The prosecutor had seen quite a bit in his time, but this was definitely the boldest and blatant attempt at getting out of guilt. ‘Jesus, that binder had to be meant for Jared,’ Darren thought. He looked at his expert witness, finally observing the pale young genius sitting next to one of his protectors. Looking around, Price realized that Jensen and his close friends had all been thinking the same exact thing. Their murderous glares toward the defense, particularly at Robert Harriman, left nothing to the imagination. Jensen went to Jared and knelt down in front of him. He softened his gaze from murderous intent to concerned protector in seconds, knowing this was going to play ‘Hell’ with Jared’s soft heart. Mike was still holding the younger man by the arm, just to be sure he didn’t have some instant drive to get up and move. Jared had been fixated on the floor where Bart lay only five minutes before. He moved his gaze to Jensen’s now. The older man could see the strain and anxiety weighing Jared down. He knew Jared had to be feeling monstrous amounts of guilt and responsibility over Bart. He was probably turning it over and over in his mind how he should have been the only one up there and how Bart didn’t deserve this and no one should be standing in for him. ‘Yeah, that’s definitely what he’s thinking,’ Jensen mentally confirmed for himself.

Jensen felt Dave behind him. The three friends said nothing, but seemed to be convincing themselves that Jared was okay and they hadn’t let anything hurt him. Jared was breathing and he was okay. They kept repeating that to themselves in their heads. After a few minutes of sitting there, Jared sighed in acceptance. He thought to himself that he must still be here for a reason, and he really needed to make the most of it. Those bastards needed to go down. He at least needed to kick some ass for poor Bart. ‘Please don’t let him die,’ Jared silently prayed to any deity who would listen. He glanced over at Price and Chuck, watching them discuss something. Price looked at Jared, suddenly, and stopped what he was saying to walk over to the engineer. He leaned over and asked his star witness, “What is it?” Jared asked angrily, “Are we going on now because these assholes need to be
stopped.” The surrounding special forces men stilled, and so did Price. The attorney stood up and continued to study Jared, then he glanced quickly at Jensen and his friends. “Is he clear to finish this?” Jensen didn’t like it. Dave actually stood up and turned away, “Fucking Christ.” The other ex-soldiers looked at him, in wonder, because it wasn’t normal for Dave to do that. Jensen’s first instinct was to grab Jared and take him away from here, hide him at home and never let him out, but he admitted to himself, that was the lover talking. Jared was the one talking like a warrior and he wanted to fight. Jensen knew that fighting things face to face was exactly what he would have done, if it were anyone else. He was going to have to quash this automatic reflex and let Jared finish this.

Jensen glanced at Mike and quickly assessed that the man was totally on the same page. He didn’t like it, either. His protective lean into Jared told Jensen that Mike was in serious guardian mode, too. Dave finally turned around and sighed. He looked at Price, angrily pointing at Robert Harriman, “If that fucker moves, he’s fuckin’ done...everyone agrees, right?” Mike and Jensen grinned, then Jensen looked at Robert, “He’s already done, we’re just trying to find a legal way to do it.” That comment gained a slight twitch and adjustment to Robert’s position. He’d obviously received the message. The defense lawyers had enough sense to argue, “Threats aren’t appropriate toward our client, counselor. If these men can’t control themselves, they’ll have to wait outside like our other client.” Price sighed, “Yes, yes. I agree with you. But, honestly, they’re showing considerable restraint, considering that your client is obviously a manipulative cruel murderous bastard who keeps trying to interfere with our testimony, don’t you think?” The lawyers started to stand and argue, but Price held up his palms, “Alright, alright.” He turned to the bailiffs, “The parties are prepared to continue when the jury is ready.” One of the officers nodded and went to inform the jury.

Jensen took a hold under his lover’s arm and helped Mike to escort him back to the prosecution’s front row. Jared was obviously going to have to present the rest of the cases alone, which meant an even greater strain would be put on his recovering system. His tag team were all impressed and worried at the same time. This wasn’t in the plan for Jared to have to be up front that long, and there were several more lengthy cases to present. As Jared watched the jury return, Jensen, Dave and Mike talked quietly about how to best keep the kid upright and conscious for the duration of his testimony.

Jared was going to crash, for sure, they just didn’t know when. Price reminded them to intervene any time, if necessary, then went to introduce the continuation of cases and that would be finished by Jared. The jurors seemed pleased. Jensen grinned, ‘Of course they are,’ knowing damn well all of them had fallen under Jared’s spell. He looked into Jared’s eyes just before the engineer had to get up. He detected a very slight tiredness, but it wasn’t bad yet. The younger man hadn’t clutched his side, either. For the moment, Jared seemed to be doing okay. The team had decided to push a short nap after they stuffed Jared full of calories and fluids during lunch. Hopefully, they could get him rejuvenated enough to survive the afternoon without passing out.
Chapter Summary

Jared kicks ass in front of everyone, but not without some emotional bruising from the bitter defense. We finish the testimony and almost get out of the parking lot. Almost. There is hurt in this chapter, some violent thoughts in the minds of the special ops veterans who are protecting the star witness. The defense shows more of their true colors.

Warning: There is violence that erupts later in the chapter and it involves gunfire. Because of too many real life horrible tragedies that involve gunfire, I feel I have to mention it. I wish I didn’t have to mention it, but I can’t ‘NOT’ in case anyone has been affected by a shooting.

I appreciate all of you who keep up the comments and encouragement.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

The next ninety minutes actually proved to be quite uneventful. That is, unless you were A.E. Jared’s support team watched as time and time again, the younger man countered the defense’s questions, trying to find every little structural defect in the choice of materials, or perhaps the over reactive tones of his reports. They were obviously trying to deflect guilt to other areas. At one point, the defense lawyers even tried to question Jared’s expertise, to which Price stood up and proceeded to list over fifteen years of Jared’s degrees, certificates and awards. ‘Holy shit, the man does his homework,’ Jensen thought to himself, further impressed with the attorney. The jury looked at Jared several times while listening. They looked impressed, but surprised. Jensen grinned to himself, ‘They probably thought he was much younger and couldn’t possibly have that long of a work history.’ Robert’s face fumed when Price asked him, “Shall I continue with the young man’s gift of a full scholarship ride to Stanford, due to his high school AP performance and extra-curricular activities?” Everyone was silent and Jared was trying not to turn beat red, as Jensen watched him with a knowing grin.

The lawyers whispered to Robert and finally the subject of Jared’s qualifications was dropped. Jared seemed a bit flustered with shy embarrassment. It took him a moment to continue when Price acknowledged that they could resume with the last case before lunch break. Jensen figured his lover still wasn’t over the fact that Price had dug up all those awards and certificates. The last of the large structural group was completed with a few questions from the jurors. Jared patiently ran through corners and cracked moulding and anything else he needed to address for them. It was almost noon, lunch was overdue. Jensen, Dave and Mike had been standing for ten minutes. Their eagerness to get Jared out of there was obvious. The younger man was now looking exhausted and favoring his left side, but they were trying to allow him to get as far as he could. Finally, when it looked like lunch break was about to be called, the defense team suddenly played another card. One thing that hadn’t been presented yet were the emails showing Jared’s submission of his warnings and reports to management. For some reason, defense lawyers complained that they needed to see them now, yet Price had them lined up at the end of the presentation.

Price countered with an explanation, but the defense tried arguing it should be done now. They
insisted that the expert witness go back to the beginning and show all of the emails, which received several sighs of frustration and disbelief from Jared’s team and the jurors. Jensen stewed. He was focused on the beautiful star witness who was leaning on a table, while everyone seemed to discuss this. Jensen knew his pissed off friends were focused on the same thing. Jared was trying not to give up, but his batteries were almost down to nothing. Jensen felt Dave and Mike inch closer to the younger man, obviously worried he was going to go down. “Jensen,” Dave’s tone was no nonsense, as Jensen looked at Price. “Darren,” Jensen bitched, then he nodded his head toward Jared. The younger man seemed oblivious, as he was focused on the speaker for the jurors. Jared’s eyes were practically begging for a break. The attorney quickly looked at Jared, then turned to the jury, “Your Honors, my expert witnesses’ injuries absolutely have to be tended to...as you can see, Mr. Padalecki needs to rest, immediately. The prosecution promises to show the emails in any order you see fit, but after my witness gets to rest.”

The defense argued once again, as Jared’s team cursed under their breaths. They couldn’t believe this was even allowed. The defense could plainly see Jared was hurting, and this was their shitty way of wearing the kid to the bone even further. The special ops veterans, once again, considered killing Robert and being done with this. Their charge was waning before their eyes. The jury’s speaker didn’t even finish the break announcement and Jensen’s team was over to Jared in two seconds flat. Jared said, “Thank God,” and let his three bodyguards whisk him back to the office without argument. When they got to the office, Lance was there to open the door. Jensen was thankful the kid was conscious, at least, as they got him to the couch and took off his jacket. Jared was gently eased back against the couch while all of the men went to work on assessing his condition. Jared was breathing hard, like it was taking everything he had just to stay upright. His vitals weren’t as bad as they’d feared, even though his bp was low. “You need to eat,” Dave commented. Jared raised one eyebrow and opened one eye, from his reclined position, “Good, I’m starving. Thought they’d never fucking shut up.”

Dave, Jensen and Mike all grinned at one another, before focusing on their charge again. Six hands helped him slowly sit forward until his side grabbed painfully. He grunted in pain, as he held his ribs. “Shit,” he added. Jensen brushed the hair back from his face, “There’s no way you’re gonna want a pain pill, is there?” Jared shook his head, knowing damn well he didn’t need any help getting sleepy. He was already past that point, but he certainly could use some relief from the stabbing needles in his left side. Mike suddenly dug into one of the duffles and pulled out some large square packages. He showed them to Jensen for approval, “I’ve still got these. They’re not expired yet.” Jensen grinned at the packages, “Nice,” then turned to Jared. “Mike brought something golden, Jare. It’s gonna help your side with the pain, okay?” Jared nodded, “Okay, but please don’t make me more tired.” Jensen assured him, “It won’t. It’s topical...it just needs to soak through the skin for a few minutes.” Jared looked surprised when he felt Jensen undoing his shirt buttons. His lover soon had Jared’s shirt opened and was gently pulling Jared’s undershirt up to expose his wounded chest. Mike peeled two squares from their packages and handed them to Dave, one at a time. The older man placed them gently onto Jared’s chest, right over the damaged ribcage.

Jared flinched when the first one touched his skin. “Sorry, Jared,” Dave said. “S’okay, s’just cold,” Jared mumbled sluggishly. Jensen touched Jared’s face, “Hey...stay with us, okay? You still need to eat.” Jensen could see they were gonna lose the kid if they didn’t hurry up. Jared was exhausted. The young engineer was soon sitting up, not pain free, but better, being stuffed with croissant sandwiches and fruit salad. Lance had hunted down the freshest healthiest food he could find and filled the office with it while everyone was finishing up in the courtroom. The office got quiet, as the starving group of men ate their lunches. Jensen kept an eye on his lover, as did everyone else. Jared ate well. He downed his sandwich and half of another one. He ate the fruit cup and drank a carton of milk before pausing to sit and stare at his plate for a few seconds, like he couldn’t believe he’d eaten all that. He yawned and blinked heavily, realizing he seemed to feel a lot better. He looked over and saw his
laptop case on the small couch. He automatically started to lean toward the laptop, not really sure if it would make the best pillow, but unmotivated to look for anything else. Jensen saw what Jared was going for, snagged the laptop and replaced it with some throw pillows, quickly, before his lover even realized what was happening. Jared looked sluggishly at the pillows, then up at Jensen, then to the others in the room as if he just realized they were all there. ‘Oh boy,’ Jensen thought to himself, ‘he’s done.’

Jared then leaned toward the pillows, as Jensen supported his torso to take the weight off his left side. When Jared was laying on his right side, Mike lifted his bent legs to lay them on the too short couch, hoping it was at least more comfortable than leaving them on the floor. Dave appeared with Jared’s suit jacket and his own. He handed them to Jensen, who gently covered most of Jared’s torso. The three men stood up to look over their charge, then Mike and Jensen took their jackets off, as well, and made sure Jared was completely covered and warm. The three ex-soldiers watched their young charge snuggle into the pillows and fall fast asleep. This is what they wanted him to do and it pleased them all to see something finally go their way today. Of all the shit that had happened, at least Jared was fed and resting. Everyone in the room seemed to share a collective sigh, as their food digested and they thought over the day’s happenings. Price had been in and out of the office, but he finally came back to sit down and gesture for the others to gather around. He kept his voice low, “The attempted murder is going to be added to the first case, as soon as we have an official perp. The team is questioning everyone, trying to determine who put the poison on that binder. That older guy on the defense witness team is squirrelly. I’m not ruling him out. The younger one is clueless. I think he’s still in shock over it. Jared couldn’t remember where he’d seen the older one.”

The attorney looked over at a sleeping Jared and then looked at Jensen and his friends, “We have enough to nail them, gentleman...and I’m not insecure about the jury, at all. I’m sure we have our indictment. The problem is that die hard good sumeritan over there...if we quit now and get them on the first twelve cases, I’m not sure how he’d accept that.” Price nodded his head toward Jared when he spoke. Everyone thought it over, how it would be best for Jared’s health to be done with this now. Jensen finally responded, “He wouldn’t accept it. You said the indictment is a baseline. From there, the clients who got screwed can proceed with their own avenues to get their money back. Jared knows that and it’ll eat him up if we don’t finish the last of the cases and someone loses out.” Jensen looked over at Jared, unhappily, “Unfortunately.” Dave asked, “So, how long will the last session take?” Price answered, “Well, I’d say the jury has been thoroughly brought up to speed on the types of defects and failures, thanks to our resident scholar over there and his way with them.” The men all smiled, Mike commenting, “He has a knack, doesn’t he? I think we all learned quite a bit today.” Price responded, “Yes, the expert over there could probably run through those files in under an hour. The emails won’t take more than thirty minutes. We would be walking out of here before three thirty, but based on the behavior of the defense, so far, I’d bet they’re gonna try irritating petty delays again, just like they have, so far. I’ll stay on it, of course, but questions about the emails could slow us down. I know you wanna get Jared out of here, believe me. He wasn’t even supposed to be doing all of this.”

Price added, “Speaking of Bart, word is the convulsions stopped ten minutes after your infection. He regained consciousness after a poison control specialist advised the hospital to administer a second dose. They say he’s got seventy two hours of observation and iv’s to get through, but he’s gonna make it. He’s still weak and confused, but he’s getting better. His family’s there with him now.” The special ops experts were relieved. At least they wouldn’t have to tell Jared that his fellow engineer had any permanent damage from the assault. They knew their young charge was already feeling terrible about it. Mike broke the silence next, “So, we have to keep our kid out of danger for another ninety minutes, then we get him out.” The other men nodded. Lance announced, “We’ll go out the same route. The freight hallways and elevator are the best way to keep him hidden.” Jensen nodded, “Agreed.” He looked up at Chuck, “Where’s the unknown in all this? He take any shots at the
Chuck shook his head, “Nope...nothin’. It’s good, but it’s not good. I know it’s on everyone’s minds. He may have been cancelled due to the failure of getting to Jared in advance, or he may be waiting outside for the exiting convoy. He hasn’t been seen by any of our outside team, nor has he entered the building. We’ve got eyes on the rooftops, and we’re gonna use the decoy when we leave again.”

The mood of the team was brooding and suspicious. Killers for hire didn’t tend to just walk away from a job, nor did they give an ‘out’ clause to their employers if they changed their mind. None of the men felt comfortable, to say the least. Mike paced around for a few minutes while he, Dave and Jensen went over ugly scenarios in their minds. If the hitman hadn’t made a move yet, then when the hell was he going to...and where? They looked over at Jared, knowing they weren’t out of the woods yet. It was definitely not sitting well. Jared slept hard until just before two. Jensen had a hard time waking him up. Needless to say, he felt terrible about it. Dave and Mike felt just as bad and they weren’t even the ones doing the deed. They gave Jensen some space until his gentle nudging finally brought the engineer out of dreamland.

“Hey,” he greeted the kid, while Jared finally stirred. He sleepily opened his eyes, “S’time to go back?” Jensen felt lower than dirt. He brushed the kid’s hair back and rubbed his head gently, “We’ve got just enough time to use the restroom. How do you feel?” Jared started to push upward so Jensen put his arm around him and helped him sit up. He took a few seconds to clear his head before answering, “Okay...pretty good, actually.” When Jared yawned again, Jensen smiled. Jared was quite adorable, as he rubbed his eyes and struggled for alertness. He finally looked around and tried to focus, then looked at Jensen, “I think I have to pee. Is that okay?” Jensen grinned, “Yes, it’s okay. We’ll go together.” He looked around to his friends, “Trip to the bathroom, boys?” Dave and Mike joined Jared and Jensen, just as the younger man stood up. They helped Jared put his suit jacket on, then got back into their own. Together, the team walked Jared to the restroom. Phil was in the hallway and greeted them, “Fellas,” to which all the men nodded. Jared smiled at the man, “Hi Phil.” Once Phil and Lance checked the restroom clear, Jensen’s team moved into the restroom with their engineer between them.

Jared finished washing his hands and took a few seconds to look in the mirror and smooth his hair back. He took a deep breath and steeled himself for what was to come. ‘It’s just the tail end of it now,’ he reminded himself, hoping he could hold things together until they finished. As they walked back to the courtroom, Jared asked if Bart was okay. Jensen answered, without looking away from his observation of everything going on around them, “Price said he’s going to be okay. He needs to be on some medication for a couple days, but he’ll get better and better every few hours and then they’ll let him go home.” Jared looked relieved, “Thank God. I thought,” he paused, “I mean he didn’t deserve...” Jared couldn’t continue. The three veterans knew what Jared had thought. As soon as everyone took their seats, the jury returned. Price sat next to Jared at the front table, with Jensen, Mike and Dave right behind them. Price turned to Jared, “You do your magic on the files and let me help with the emails, alright? That’ll give you a break.” Jared nodded, “Okay,” then Price continued, “But if you see anything you want to interject to, you go right ahead. They’ll be fine with it.” Jared nodded again, “Okay, but what would I have to interject to?” Price responded, “Unfortunately, Jared, I have no idea, but I don’t trust them not to pull some stupid little detail again and try and challenge something out of the next cases or the emails. Even if it’s chicken shit, it’ll require us to counter.” Jared understood, “Okay.”

The proceedings began and Price took the lead. He asked the defense if they were waiting for anybody else, noticing they were now down one attorney and the second engineering witness. The remaining lawyer responded irritably, “No, we are not.” Price knew damn well the second lawyer had been taken into custody, along with the engineer who had dropped that binder. Chuck sent Price a text two minutes ago that the attorney was the one that had brought in the binder. He also placed it on the front table and told the younger engineer to take it up with him. The engineer said the lawyer
told him to drop it and see if Jared would pick it up. It was enough probable cause the connect the lawyer with the attempt to poison Jared. The prosecutor didn’t have enough time to fill Jensen in, or the team, so he vowed to do that first chance. Jared joined Price up near the monitor and took over presenting the next six cases. The security team kept piercing eyes on Robert Harriman, in addition to his remaining lawyer and witness. The first two cases went smoothly. The jurors had no questions and nodded in understanding to Jared’s calculations and findings. The defense didn’t seem to argue any points, so Jared moved on.

The third case was one of the bridges Jared handled before he was sent to Jensen’s town. When Jared got to some of the support beams and how they were relative to the earth’s erosion rate, the defense’s engineer approached to argue. Jared stood patiently while the man looked through his calculations and argued some of the points. “How do you know the erosion and scour are going to increase? You don’t. In this case, you’ve made assumptions just because it is a coastal area bridge.” Jared loved challenges. He didn’t mind being questioned because it forced him to use his mental processes. He wasn’t angry at the argument, he was quite happy to explain why the other engineer was totally wrong. “Actually, an assumption is an action of fact that is taken as truth without proof. That isn’t the case here, or in any of the other cases.” Jared clicked the file open and showed one of the pictures he took on scene, “The inspection was requested by the local state department because ‘this’ was unexplainable.” Jared zoomed in and showed two support beams which were tilted. “This bridge is only two years old. It’s built on eroding sand and river bank. The weight bearing load has to be completely absorbed by the land these supports are drilled into. The formula for erosion used on this bridge matches the two nearby structures which are now collapsed.”

Jared clicked to two office buildings that were in shambles and continued, “The incoming water eroded the foundation faster than was expected. The design should have accounted for it. The bridge in this case shouldn’t have been based on engineering used for those. It should have been based on the structure fourteen miles east of it, shown here.” Jared clicked on another picture, “This structure is nine years old. No cracks, no crooked support beams. They used reinforced concrete bases, with thirty five foot steal pegs to add additional weight absorption. Even with floods and tidal waves eroding the soil, this structure has survived without deterioration. Of course, it cost triple what the failing bridge cost. It’s all in the report.” Jared fixed his piercing intelligent eyes on the other engineer, waiting for him to even find one way to challenge what he just presented. The jury had no questions and the other engineer accepted defeat, nodding unhappily. He moved to the side, but stayed standing, as Jared presented the fourth case.

The three Black Ops specialists were perturbed. One, they hated that the defense had someone standing that close to Jared; two, they were delaying Jared’s presentation by interrupting him and asking questions that lead nowhere; and three, Robert Harriman looked too calm. As Jared discussed a couple points with one of the jurors, Jensen noticed Robert scoot closer to his lawyer to discuss something. After he finished, the asshole moved close to the end of the table, which put him a couple feet closer to Jared. Jared continued to present the case, only stopping when someone from the jury had a question. He seemed to be oblivious to the tension that was going on between his security team and Robert. The manager called his defense engineer over at one point and told him something, then the engineer remained standing by Robert. Jensen’s ops team inched forward to put themselves in a more strategic position, while Jared continued to answer a juror’s questions. They didn’t want to piss the jury off by overreacting, but they weren’t about to allow Harriman to get closer to Jared. Everyone seemed to quiet as Jared finished the fifth case. He clicked onto the sixth file and began to explain the defective areas and support systems that were left out. Jared seemed to notice Robert had moved, finally, and did a double take at his security team and how close they were. He paused for a moment, feeling the thick tension in the room. Jensen, Dave and Mike were eyeing Robert and his engineer, while Price was standing closer to Jared. The younger man thought that perhaps he had missed something, but no one
said anything to him so he turned to continue. He was so thankful it was the last case. He could definitely feel the tiredness coming on again. Price had moved closer to Jared, because he intended on taking over for the email portion of the testimony when the young man was finished. When they reached that point, however, Robert stood up and attempted to walk around the defense table toward the monitor.

Dave and Mike moved to flank Robert, which caused the manager to pause. He looked between them, then at his lawyer, who immediately argued that his client had a right to view the evidence close up. Jensen moved quietly to stand a few feet from Jared. He remained poised to protect the younger man, if necessary. Jared watched between everyone, not sure if he should continue yet, or not. Price seemed to take over as he spoke to the defense attorney, “Counselor, your client is one of five that have warrants for their arrest relating to this indictment. Mr. Padalecki is presenting the evidence against Ackles Enterprises which directly affects the future of Mr. Harriman’s income. If this indictment is approved today, your client will be the subject of ‘two’ cases against him...the criminal assault on my witness’ life, which I mentioned earlier as a separate case, and the fraud and negligent charges within this case.” Price turned to the jurors, “As you can understand, Your Honors, the concern for my witness’ safety is of the utmost concern. If the defense is approaching him, logical security coverage will be necessary to keep Mr. Padalecki safe.” Robert angrily turned to his lawyer, “That’s all happenstance...nothing is proven and I am the representative for A.E. If I’m accused of something in this case, I have a right to see it up close.” Robert turned to the jurors, “I simply can’t see the emails from this far away....and I certainly have posed no threat to ‘anyone’.” Jensen and his friends stewed with boiling anger. They knew damn well the smooth articulate executive was indeed involved in the attempt on Jared’s life, from the accident and today’s tainted binder. Robert’s feigned innocence was sickening.

Robert’s lawyer seemed loosely determined to argue his client’s point. ‘Maybe he doesn’t believe his own client,’ Jensen thought to himself. In a tone of voice that sounded rehearsed, the lawyer argued, “My client is accused with a group of people, Your Honors, it doesn’t mean anything is his fault, or he is even aware of, or guilty of any of the accusations. He knows there’s a warrant for questions on this case and for a car accident he had nothing to do with, but he’s here anyway to face the evidence as a responsible executive.” Robert and his lawyer turned to the jurors’ representative, at that point, to see if the feigned innocence had been believed. Robert wasn’t going to get a few jibes in at Jared, like he wanted, that much was obvious. Jared had a wall of protection with him, and fortunately, Robert hadn’t gotten where he was by being stupid. The juror’s spokesperson agreed that security was logical for the prosecution witness. They also agreed Robert needed to be able to see and was not formally charged with anything yet. Robert’s obvious relaxed grin annoyed the shit out of Jensen, until the juror’s rep continued, “We implore the prosecution to enlarge the emails so the defense can see them well from where they are. No one needs to approach any closer.”

That pissed Robert off. The cool composure wasn’t quite polished enough to hide the annoyance that no one would let him get close to Jared. He sighed, in annoyed acceptance, but said nothing, while the three Black Ops friends exchanged knowing grins. Jared’s insides relaxed. He wasn’t sure how much the jury was going to buy Robert’s manipulative demeanor, at first, but at least now he could stand with Price and present the emails in peace. Jensen was next to him and the other two friends were close enough to Robert to stop him, if necessary. Jared’s impeccable history of communication included original submissions of files, the attachments of full reports and their professional warnings about changes that needed to be made. There were cited building codes and safety concerns. Jared had included pictures of premature cracking and separations. His emails were thorough and showed a traceable attempt to get his company to listen and correct their actions.

Price read through most of them, with Jared interjecting only when Robert’s lawyer asked a question. The juror’s paid close attention. Jensen had to admit that it was quite a feat for Jared’s former dickhead manager to stand there and watch email after email prove what a negligent asshole he
appeared to be...the evidence wasn’t half assed, and Roberts’s answers to Jared had been patronizing and uncaring. Once the emails were completed, Robert’s lawyer made the appalling accusation that his client hadn’t been uncaring, at all, but had simply tried to avoid inflating Mr. Padalecki’s aggressive attitude toward the changes he was suggesting. “Mr. Padalecki was a designing engineer and attacking his own employer just because highly expensive repairs weren’t completed as fast as he wanted them to be was not his position. He was confrontational and my client felt more comfortable trying to placate him at the time. They argued, in person, and Mr. Padalecki was quite hostile so Mr. Harriman chose not to argue with him.”

“I was NOT,” Jared fumed. He took a step toward Robert, but Jensen intercepted him. He let Jared argue, but remained poised with a hand on the younger man’s chest. The kid continued, “You know damn well you were blatantly blowing me off about the defense in that office building lawsuit demanding the original reports. They were right, and they were going to win. You specifically told me I wasn’t aloud to talk to them, and to ‘let the executives handle it’ and ‘you just do your job, Jared’...and that building was going to ‘kill’ people.” Robert’s lip curled and he started to inch forward, but Dave and Mike stepped to block him. “You were an engineer,” Robert sneered, “Your job was the design, the inspection and the report. THAT was your job. This vengeful aggressive attack on your own employer that ‘paid’ you...oh, and paid for your hospital bills, recently, and the cost of that rental car you ruined, is atrocious.” Jared was appalled. He shook his head, not believing what he was hearing. The others in the room were pretty much on his side, except for the defense engineer, who looked a bit disgusted at Jared’s involvement in this. “I can’t believe this,” Jared said frustratingly. The defense engineer looked snidely at Jared, “I can’t believe you’d do this.” Jared argued, “What...you’ve forgotten the oath we took when we got our licenses? The obligation to abide by the building laws and codes? What about the mandated requirement for us to bring to attention anything we discover that is unsafe for human habitation? Is that what you can’t believe because I’m not sure why you’re in this line of work then. I can’t believe you’d throw your integrity out the window for whatever they’re paying you.”

The other engineer stepped toward Jared, anger on his face. Mike stopped him with a hand on his arm and another on his chest. The engineer seemed to be too pissed to even look at Mike. He pointed to Jared, “They don’t have to pay me for this. You stole jobs from me in the past, you little shit, and you know it. He looked at the jurors, “That’s what he’s like.” Mike said calmly, “Don’t move forward again, dick.” The engineer seemed to do a double take at Mike, finally noticing he had been received as a threat and was now being held back. The engineer forced himself to stand calm in order not to get his ass kicked, but he still looked back at Jared with blatant anger. Jared froze in disbelief for a few seconds, trying to scroll through his memory again at what this other engineer could possibly be talking about. Something...something...wait, “Now, I remember you.” Jared looked up in thought before continuing, “Yep, I remember you now. Jerry or Gene or,” the older engineer finished snidely, “It’s Gene.” Jared continued, “Gene,” then nodded. “It was the library and then that children’s museum, right? Is that what you’re saying I stole from you?” Gene remained silent, but his eyes bore through Jared’s with resentment. Jared stepped a bit forward against Jensen’s better judgement but his lover allowed it, remaining between them.

Jared continued, “Stealing isn’t the correct word, Gene. We were in design meetings and some of your calculations were missing steps. The customers ‘chose’ to move the designs to me. I didn’t ask for it.” Gene argued, ‘But ‘you’ pointed out the missing flaws knowing damn well they would choose you.” Jared shook his head, “I didn’t. I pointed out the flaws because I checked your work, like my supervisor instructed me to do, then told you what to fix. When we presented, you still hadn’t fixed them. I couldn’t go along with it because I was supposed to be checking your work. When you did it a second time, it kind of looked like a habit of yours to cut corners and skip things. You lost your ‘own’ jobs, Gene.” The older man was pissed, “Fucking goody two shoes prick,” he said and jerked away from Mike while being pushed back to the table. Mike stood back, then
glanced at Dave and Jensen to exchange knowing grins at their charge’s incredible come back on that one. Jared sighed, trying to calm down after the idiocy of the arguments being instigated by the defense team. Jensen watched his lover, noticing the tiredness. Jared still looked alert, but the afternoon was dragging and taking it’s toll. Jared seemed to be waiting for the next round of pointless arguments to come at him, when Price spoke up, “Your Honors, the information is complete, except for a closing summary. Shall I continue, so our injured witness can be aloud to go home and recover?”

Jared looked quickly at Price, “I don’t,” then at Jensen and sighed, then back at the jurors, “I’m fine. If we haven’t convinced this case, we don’t need to rush it.” Price grinned subtly at his witness. He knew damn well they had enough to get the indictment, but his concerned expert was obviously willing to push himself to make sure. “Please offer your summary, Mr. Price,” the representative announced. Price made his case and in two minutes he had effectively rounded up all the accusations from the evidence presented and connected the emails as proof. He reminded the jurors the case involved criminal conspiracy and embezzlement charges, along with the violations codes. It would mean high notoriety. “My witness remains in protective custody because of multiple threats to his life. The attempts are the desperate acts of a guilty party. We respectfully request that you see an indictment of Ackles Enterprises.” Price was outstanding and the jurors looked like they were clearly convinced. Jared didn’t think they’d left anything out. Unfortunately, it was the other side’s turn.

Jared’s team of protectors let out a collective sigh of annoyance, as the defense attorney took his turn. He argued that the evidence was a collection of made up documents and emails, just to get back at a group of people that Jared had daily problems with. Jared shook his head in shock. He couldn’t believe this was their defense. That he was somehow demented and making things up?

‘Unfuckingbelievable,’ the younger man thought.

Jensen could see Jared deflate right before his eyes. The defense was nastily trying what to confuse the jurors from what they had seen. When the attorney repeated that emails could be easily faked, Jared stood up. He was bone tired. It was obvious, but he wasn’t going to stay quiet when his integrity was questioned like this. Jared asked the jurors, “If I may, Your Honors, take just a few minutes to show you that it isn’t that easy to ‘fake’ an email.” The jurors agreed, so Jared grabbed the pointer again and clicked to the emails that had just been presented. “See the shaded lines here?” Robert stepped forward but was instantly blocked by Mike, therefore forced to argue from where he was, “Your turn is over, Jared.” The engineer turned to his former manager, “It was until you started lying, Robert.” Jared turned back to the screen and went through the few emails he had brought up. Mike whispered to Robert, “He’s annoyingly smart, isn’t he?” Which pissed the manager off even more. Jared went so far as to try and fake an email and make it look real. He sent an email to Price in his name, then asked him to display it. “If you look close here,” Jared pointed to the ‘To’ space and ‘cc’ block, “and here,” he pointed to the date and time and follow up signature. “As you can see, all of these fake areas have a very small shaded mark.” The jurors leaned forward and watched intently, as Jared completely ripped apart the defense’s claim once again. By the time he finished convincing the jurors of the falsehood of the defense’s accusations, Robert was staring at his former employee with steel daggers.

Jared turned to the jury and waited to see if they had any questions. Price looked them over and then grinned at Jared. The engineer had just made the damn case and countered any argument...’AGAIN,’ Price thought to himself. He really needed to put Jared on the payroll. Jared mistakenly glanced at Robert. He wasn’t prepared for the murderous look directed toward him. The evil determination to ‘end’ him somehow wormed it’s way behind Jared’s internal walls and gave him chills. Jared thought it was terrifying to know this man wanted to kill him. He felt the whisper of panic, but then the heat of warm solid muscle next to him when Jensen leaned closer against him. Jared felt instantly grounded...safe. Robert suddenly pointed to Jensen, “That man is the son of our corporate owner, Your Honors. I don’t know why he’s insisting on siding with this ungrateful disgruntled employee of
mine, but why isn’t this a conflict to have him performing some kind of security function for the prosecution?” The jurors seemed surprised. They looked from Jensen to Price. Jensen shifted stances, unnerved at the attention directed toward him. He visualized snapping Robert’s neck. The prosecutor quickly refuted, “Your Honors, there isn’t a conflict here. Jensen Ackles is one of the son’s of Alan Ackles, owner and founder of the company, but he hasn’t been part of that world for twenty two years. Mr. Ackles left home to serve our country and never was a partner or recipient of any of the profits from A. E. This has all been confirmed by records and financial background.” Price let that sink in, then added, “He is entitled to serve as security, if he wants to...he’s not a witness in this case.” The room remained silent, except for Robert, bitching to his attorney. They spoke in low volumes for a few minutes, then turned back toward the rest of the men.

There seemed to be a mood of finality coming from the jury. Jensen’s team thought maybe they were done, but then the next card was played. Robert’s lawyer gave dismissal one more try, but it required him to follow through with what his employer just urged him to try. The lawyer took a deep breath, then glanced at Jared quickly. Jensen thought he saw a flash of guilt in the man’s eyes, which didn’t sit well. ‘Oh shit,’ the older man knew something ugly was coming. Robert didn’t wait for his spineless attorney to say it. He spoke up himself without any guilt, “They’ll never prove this in trial and it’s a waste of the court’s time and budget. They have no witnesses other than one. There are numerous professionals in the same office that worked with Jared Padalecki and they will testify that this is a farce. The whole thing is a set up because of one person who had some deep personal losses in his life, no parents, troubled relationships and never had any friends. A.E. has always been a respectable prosperous company with a friendly track record. The things you saw today will be disproven. It’s a waste of the court’s time to even let this be indicted.” Jared’s stomach dropped out through his feet, the blood rushed from his face. He leaned back against the table holding the large screen, in shock that the defense was capable of such insinuated cruelty. How dare they mention his parents, and his fiance’. He could barely even process what he had just heard.

Jensen stepped toward Robert, blocking Jared from his view, “You son of a bitch.” Dave and Mike had never seen their team leader this pissed off before and knew damn well how he felt about Jared. They tensed, knowing if Jensen lost control he could cause unimaginable damage to anyone in his path. They’d back him up, of course, then they’d all go to prison. Jensen was barreled and ready for attack, but he seemed to catch himself just before he committed anything illegal and the mask of stoicism returned. Robert deserved to have his face caved in, but their focus was to get the man sent to prison, and not themselves. Dave and Mike relaxed their stance, but kept ready in case Robert lost it. It seemed the executive was about to. Jensen stood angrily poised, daring Robert to even try and step toward him. The executive was intelligent enough to see that he’d struck a nerve, however, and he thought it best for his own safety to stay where he was. Robert’s eyes darted back and forth for a second, trying to see the young engineer Jensen was blocking, but Jensen didn’t move. “You’re going down, Robert. One way or another, you are done. The kid you tried to kill is stronger than you are. He’s been through hell because of you, but now he’s not alone anymore and he’s just proven you’re a lying piece of shit. You’ve just shown the jury what you’re really made of...you pulled some of his most painful life experiences up, just trying to get yourself out of trouble. You are a liar and you’re a lowlife piece of shit, and now everyone sees it.”

Jensen turned to the jurors and grumbled, “At least, I fuckin’ hope so.” He backed up a couple steps, to stand in front of Jared, who was very quiet behind him. Jensen wanted to turn around and check on his lover, but he was intent on providing a shield from further threatening looks or insults thrown at the younger man. Robert’s controlled anger was easy for everyone to read, but the manager’s backbone wasn’t quite strong enough to stand up to the forces that were in front and on either side of him. Even his own attorney and engineering witness had nothing to say. Robert decided he would have to try another angle. At least they all had enough money to bail themselves out, anyway. Price had moved toward Jared, close enough to touch the younger man on the sleeve. He obviously felt
compelled to race to Jared’s side when the unfair accusations were thrown at his expert witness. The poor kid had gone sheet white. Now that Jensen was back in Jared’s personal space, Price stepped forward, “Your Honors, please see this for what it really is...an act of desperate nastiness that was meant to distract you from the indictment. The case needs to move forward and there is no defense. The reason we have only one witness is because of the very fact that he is the bravest and most honest soul on the planet. His integrity and heart run the deepest I’ve ever seen and it was ‘not’ easy, to say the least, for him to submit any of his files to me. He has numerous trusted friends at the company and he isn’t a troubled person, and the nasty attack on his person was just another way to distract you all.”

Jared had to take several calming breaths in order to control the hurt he felt. He had always treated people so well, and he wanted what was best for everyone. He had given his heart and soul to these people and they were throwing shit at him. He was suddenly exhausted to the point of tears, but he couldn’t shed them, however. Not in front of these piece of shit assholes who were spouting off everything in the book to derail the jury. Instead of wilting like a dead flower, Jared found it within himself to stand back up straight and hear the end of Price’s speech. He was too tired to even feel shy at the attorney’s praise of his character, literally feeling battered inside with all that had happened today. The only thing that soothed Jared’s torment, in that moment, was the grip on his arm. Jared didn’t look, but he felt Jensen’s hand holding his elbow. It was enough to send an electric current of courageous confidence through his entire body. He took a deep breath and tried to hold on until they could get the decision they were all waiting for. Unlike a full official courtroom, the jurors didn’t leave. The group of people turned toward one another and discussed things quietly. Jared was either too upset, or too tired to read their expressions, but Jensen, Dave and Mike weren’t...neither was Price. They tried to hide their inner smiles at the anticipation of what was about to come from the representative’s mouth.

Jensen grabbed Jared’s waist and arm, similar to what he did when he and Dave were walking the man into the building this morning. He held him tight, poised to get him out as soon as the verdict was announced. Dave saw the secure hold and moved slightly closer to Robert. Mike was between the lawyer and the engineer, poised and ready. The team had planned to get Jared back to the office the second the verdict was out. They weren’t keeping him out in the open any longer. After just five minutes of discussion, the speaker for the jury turned to announce, “The Grand Jury grants the indictment against Ackles Enterprises.” Jensen immediately moved to block Jared completely from Robert’s view. He wasn’t taking any chances. “Fuck,” the former executive blurted out. He tried to stare down his former engineering genius but the kid was effectively blocked. “Fucking little prick,” Robert mumbled to himself. The defense attorney told Robert they needed to go out and let Daniel know what happened. “Fine,” the pissed off executive agreed. Dave and Mike did not relax their stance until the defense team shuffled out of the small courtroom with some of the security team following them. They returned to Jensen and Jared and immediately took up their former positions surrounding the young engineer.

Jared seemed to finally come out of the void he’d been stuck in after Robert spewed his insults. He turned to Jensen tiredly, “Did we win?” The older man smiled, “YOU won, Jare. You did it.” Jared seemed surprised and pleased. He let out a sigh of relief, just as Price walked up to him. Jensen took the hand offered and shook it. Price was smiling, “Jared, you deserve a vacation, young man. I wish I had you on all my cases.” Jared looked put out, “I just know engineering, you did the rest.” Price shook his head, “No, Jared. YOU got this indictment.” Jared begged to differ, but he knew no one would agree so he shrugged a shoulder and changed the subject, “So, what happens now?” Jensen wasn’t too keen on standing here forever. Jensen was practically swaying with exhaustion. Dave noticed the weakness had moved in so he mirrored Jensen’s hold on Jared from the opposite side. Mike poised himself in front of the group, ready to head for the office. Price seemed to get exactly what the team was inferring, so he walked with them as he answered Jared. “The indictment is
overwhelming. They have a right to trial but there isn’t a high paid lawyer anywhere that’s gonna recommend they fight this. Too pricey and they’ll lose. The criminal charges will be something we play by ear. You might be called to that, but it won’t be lengthy like this.”

Jared listened while his three special ops bodyguards guided him into the office. He looked longingly at the couch, feeling the pull to just sleep forever, but Jared knew they needed to leave soon. Jensen touched him on the shoulder and squeezed, “Soon buddy. You can sleep all you want.” Jared looked surprised the older man had been watching him so closely. Then he half grinned, sluggishly, ‘really Jared? Are you that surprised?’ Lance and Phil collected Price’s things into a large briefcase, while Mike and Jensen picked up duffle bags and dumped them by the outer office door. Dave stood hanging onto Jared for the moment. The engineer figured he must look like shit, because his special ops veterans weren’t letting him stand by himself. Price continued so everyone could hear, “We’ve taken the second attorney into custody. His name is Lawrence Kennison. The kid is Mark Ferris and he’s still looking like a very naive party in the binder incident, so we may let him go, for now. Kennison is staying. Robert and Daniel are in custody. I’m going for no bail flight risk on them, praying I’ll get it.” Jared’s anxiety wasn’t appeased when he pictured the two biggest assholes in this getting out of jail. ‘Fuck,’ he thought to himself, then felt a firm squeeze on his arm coming from Dave. Jared didn’t think it was to comfort him. He figured Dave had been thinking the same thing and it was a natural protective reflex.

Jensen asked, “What about the unknown?” Jared’s nerves perked up again, at the mention of the hitman out there somewhere. ‘Looking for me,’ he thought. It was getting hard to keep up between the binder incident, the accident and the hitman still out there. Not only was Jared still processing that someone had tried to kill him AGAIN, but also the fact that someone paid money to end his life. Lance answered, “We thought we had a sighting earlier near the south entrance. Nothing panned out. Rooftops are being scanned right now. Nearby office windows too. The decoy’s going out and he’s going to delay, cause a press related raucous. We’re hoping to draw him out.” Jared looked panicked, “You actually ‘want’ him to shoot the poor guy?” Jensen’s crew tightened around his lover. This was a lot for Jared’s exhausted condition and they knew it. Jensen eyed Lance to hurry with the details so they could get Jared out of here. Lance continued, “Sorry Jared, I know you’re worried...but, he’s a federal agent. They do this stuff all the time. They wear bullet proof vests, too, and they’ve never lost anybody.” Jared didn’t know what to say so he said nothing. He knew Lance was trying to assure him, but his mind kept ranting, ‘This isn’t real,’ ‘This isn’t real.’ Robert’s nasty claim that Jared had no friends and had been an unfriendly recluse in the office wasn’t doing much for his stomach acid, either. The thought that all those nice people would turn against him and testify he was some kind of hostile loner really hurt Jared to the bone. Even if Robert was lying, it hurt to think about the possibility.

Jensen lifted Jared’s chin and assessed him for a moment. He was too pale and his face drawn way beyond exhaustion. Jensen glanced at Dave and Mike, sharing the concerned silent exchange that Jared could be on the verge of passing out. The car was a long way. The group decided on a restroom trip before heading for the loading dock. Jared was sluggish, but he took care of business, as did others on the team. He was too tired to even make note of all the other people in the bathroom. He knew Jensen was right next to him and that’s all that registered. Jared washed his hands and noticed Lance and Phil touch their ears at the same time. They paused a few seconds, then cracked the door and looked out into the hall. With the door cracked, Jared could hear loud voices in the middle of an argument.

Mike went to look out the door and then came back to Jensen, Dave and Jared while Lance and Phil remained poised at the door. “Your brother and Robert.” Jensen raised an eyebrow, then looked at Dave. They exchanged a satisfied grin, then turned back to Mike, who joined in. Dave said, “Not having a good day.” Mike said, “I suppose not.” Jensen chuckled because it was a glorious day to have those bastards finally lose. Jared agreed, but he was too distracted by the increased yelling out
in the hall. He noticed Lance and Phil had their hands on their guns and Jared’s overtired mind tried
to go for humor, ‘In the restroom. We’re going to have a shoot out in the restroom? Fuck, I’m glad I
got to pee first.’

Jared’s mental capacity wasn’t firing on all cylinders. His mental processes had gone for some
humor, but it wasn’t really that funny...especially since the voices were getting louder. Jensen’s team
tightened up around him, while Lance and Phil glanced back at them. Lance said irritably, “They
bringing them to use the restroom.” Jared’s nerves shot straight up out of his head, as the noisy
shackles and cuffs came closer to the restroom. ‘No,’ his mind yelled, ‘Don’t let them in here,’ but
Jared didn’t have to panic. His team of loyal protectors had it handled. Phil rushed out the door and
everyone could hear him, “Back up everyone. The restroom isn’t available. You’ll have to take them
back until we vacate.” There was a discussion between Phil and another deep male voice, then
everything seemed to quiet. Phil came back in, “It’s not clear yet, but they’re moving them back a bit.
Close the circle, the assholes are three benches down, but still visible.” He looked at Jared, “Don’t
worry, Jared, they’re locked in chains.” Jensen turned to touch Jared on the cheek for a moment,
“Hey...we’re gonna move. Remember, just go with the flow and stay in the middle of us, okay?”
Jared nodded. Jensen could see the intense worry in his eyes, mixed with fear and exhaustion. “It’s
gonna be okay and we’re right here.” Jared nodded again, then attempted to smile at his protectors.
He knew they wouldn’t let anything happen to him. It was the sound of the voices outside that had
him rattled. The hatred it took for a human being to order another to be killed was just beyond
comprehension to Jared. It made him physically ill to be the target of someone’s hate.

Soon, the team had Jared whisked out of the restroom and were approaching the heavy freight
hallway doors. Behind him, Jared could hear the voices continue their argument. Something about
how they should have “done something about it sooner” and “fuck you” and there were a lot of
“what was I supposed to do” arguments. Jared wondered why the hell they were arguing right in
front of the officers and lawyers in their group. Before going through the door, the men in chains
must have seen him. Robert’s voice suddenly boomed, “If that car wreck had put him in the dirt with
his mom and dad, this wouldn’t be happening.” Jared’s insides dropped when he heard that. His
knee jerk reaction was to look over in hurtful shock, but his human military fortress wouldn’t let him
see through them, nor would they let him stop. Jared kept moving. He felt the tears threaten, and he
really would prefer to collapse now, but he tried to keep his feet moving and his eyes clear so he
didn’t create anymore work for Jensen’s friends. Why did he keep feeling like this when Robert
threw bitterness his way? The man lost and he was just bitter and pissed. Jared tried to remind
himself to stop being so sensitive.

The group entered the smelly elevator and silently rode down together. Upon reaching the ground
level, Phil and Lance both drew their weapons and held them steady at the unopened door. Jared’s
three bodyguards huddled him into a crouched position. They put their hands on their weapon and
watched the two men in front of them. ‘Is someone going to shoot at us?’ Jared’s mind blurted out,
but he was too afraid to speak and distract anyone. The elevator opened without incident and Jared’s
team got him up and began moving again. The two investigators kept their weapon’s drawn and
ready as they escorted the four huddled men behind them. For some reason, the tension was much
higher this trip than it had been this morning. Or at least Jared thought so. Maybe he just hadn’t been
that perceptive this morning. They reached the three vehicles and Jared was put into the huge SUV.
He was sandwiched between his protectors, just like this morning. As soon as all investigators were
in their vehicles, the convoy pulled out and started through the parking lot. Pulling around to the
front of City Hall, Jared saw another convoy of vehicles, a group of reporters, and a group of similar
looking security men walking someone in between them. Jared watched closely.

The group stopped a few times on the way to the car, answering a question or two for the reporters.
Unfortunately, Jared’s own convoy of cars were stopped because of the crowds. Lance was driving,
with Phil in the passenger seat. They inched their way around some of the traffic, heading for the
exit, but going was slow. This gave them time to see what was transpiring with the decoy group. Jensen’s team wasn’t happy about this. They wanted Jared out of here. Jared sat forward as something sounding like the backfire of a car rang out. Suddenly, the crowd in front of them scattered and more backfire rang out. ‘Oh my God,’ Jared’s mind panicked. ‘What’s happening?’ He cried out, as the decoy went down and security took someone down, close by, who must have tried to shoot at him. Jared couldn’t see the man in the middle of the mess. He was on the ground but was he okay? Everything was happening so fast, Jared didn’t even see the car pull up next to them. Dave, Jensen and Mike did, because within two seconds, Jared found himself packed into the floorboard, between the back and front seats with a hundred and eighty pounds of Jensen on top of him. Mike had flown over the seat to flank Dave, as the two men instantly opened the door and pulled their guns.

Jared felt the SUV turn sharp and take off at a rapid pace, then it suddenly jerked to a stop. ‘What the fuck were they doing?’ He screamed in his head. ‘Jensen?’ Jared’s panicky voice risked that question. The older man answered him chopply, “Stay down.” As if Jared could even move with Jensen on top of him like this. Was everyone okay? Was anyone hurt? Jared’s mind raced through panicky questions. ‘Jesus,’ he realized he would have been lost without their help in this. Jared would have been dead by now if Jensen hadn’t insisted on all this protection. Before Jared could have another thought he heard the loudest ‘bang bang bang’ he’d ever heard. The sounds reverberated through his body, causing him to jerk with each one. ‘Ohmygod, are they shooting?’ There were multiple ‘bang’ sounds with different levels of pitch, then silence. Jensen didn’t move so Jared didn’t. It was as if time had stopped. Jared heard nothing for what seemed like hours, but was probably only seconds. Next he heard Dave’s voice, “Fuck.” Mike piped in, “Dude he got you.” Dave answered, “It’s clean. Fucking son of a bitch.” Jared instantly panicked, “Is Dave shot?” Jensen quickly answered, “It’s okay. I can see him.” Jared was thinking, ‘How can it be okay’ but he didn’t say anything. ‘Shit,’ he couldn’t believe this was happening.
Chapter Summary

This continues with the attempt on Jared’s life outside of City Hall. The same respectful warnings apply, as mentioned before Chapter Twenty Two. There are some aftermath feelings and dead bad guys from the shooting. There is an abundance of angst and hurt/comfort toward Jared in this chapter. He’s had a rough day, Jared is way beyond exhausted and he isn’t really in the best shape to be doing all this. The hitman is on the run somewhere, and the special ops veterans are determined to keep their charge in one piece.

Thank you for the sweet feedback and lovely comments.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

“Shouldn’t we help him?” Jared was still panicking over Dave. Jensen quickly responded, “No. Stay down.” Silence. Things were surreal. Jared wondered if maybe he had fallen asleep in the car ride home and this was all some kind of dream. A few sounds of metal, some footsteps, then car doors being wrenched open. That’s all Jared heard before the door opened for the back bench in the SUV. Jensen waited ‘til the back door closed, then eased up on Jared. He took some of his weight off of him, but he didn’t quite ‘get’ off of him. Jensen’s voice sounded stern, “Clean it twice.” Jared heard Dave spout off angrily, “I am.” After a few seconds, “Fuckin shit,” Dave bitched. Jared supposed it hurt, whatever it was. He now realized Dave must be okay because he was obviously pissed, not laying on the ground dying. “You good?” That was Jensen. Dave answered, “Yeah. Just nicked me.” Jensen said, “Where’s Mike?” Jared realized his lover was still laying too low to see out the window. Dave told him, “I’ve got eyes on him. Phil’s with him and the others.” Jared assumed he meant the officers from the other two cars. He still had no idea what the hell happened. Dave finally had his bandage on, so he sat back and reported to Jensen, “Two in the backseat. One took pot shots at Mike and I drew him off from the back fender. Lance and Phil fanned out. Phil was watching our tail, Lance had the front seat pinned. I’m sure the shots at Mike were in hopes that one of them might hit their target. There’s more damage in Mike’s outer door than any where else.”

Jared’s insides twisted in knots, ‘I’m the target,’ he thought. Dave continued, “Mike took the one out just after he nicked me, then the driver rolled out and aimed at me, so I took him out. At least I think I did, Phil and Lance were on him too. I’m sure he’s got a few holes. They’re checking to see if either of them was our unknown.” Jensen spoke to Jared, “I’m getting up but I want you to stay down here, okay?” Jared nodded, then he felt Jensen’s warmth leave him as the older man got up on the seat to look out the windows. Dave told him, “I’ve got eyes on him. Phil’s with him and the others.” Jared assumed he meant the officers from the other two cars. He still had no idea what the hell happened. Dave finally had his bandage on, so he sat back and reported to Jensen, “Two in the backseat. One took pot shots at Mike and I drew him off from the back fender. Lance and Phil fanned out. Phil was watching our tail, Lance had the front seat pinned. I’m sure the shots at Mike were in hopes that one of them might hit their target. There’s more damage in Mike’s outer door than any where else.”
Jared nodded, then remembered in his panic that Dave couldn’t see him, “Yeah.” That didn’t sound too convincing to Dave, so he leaned over the back seat and looked at the engineer in between the two seats. Dave couldn’t see Jared’s face, but he guessed what was happening, “Jared? Do you need to take the weight off those ribs?” Jared finally admitted his chest was excruciating, “Yes.” Dave softened at the innocent tone. He thought Jared sounded on the verge of hysteria. “It’s okay, I’m gonna come help you.” Jared quickly argued, “No, it’s okay. You’re hurt.” Dave sighed, “No Jared, it’s not okay. We need to get the weight off that chest.” Dave scooted toward the door, grunting in pain as quietly as he could. “I can move. Stay there,” Jared’s panicky voice tried to sound reassuring. Dave accepted defeated and sighed in frustration, “Fine, can you roll up onto the seat without sitting up? Just slide yourself. I’m comin’ to help you if you can’t do it without hurting your ribs.” Jared wasn’t about to let Dave hurt himself more because of ‘him’. He managed to inch his way up onto the seat without even raising his head. He grunted in pain, only crying out once when his nerve endings and tendons grabbed painfully, but he finally made it.

Jared wound up laying in the seat with folded knees, holding his chest and breathing heavily. He’d done it, but man it hurt like a bitch. At least he was on his right side now, freeing up the pressure on his injured side. Dave watched the kid try and control his breathing, “I would have helped you,” he complained. Jared panted a bit, then answered, “I know. But I didn’t want you to have to move. I’m okay.” Dave paused for a frustrated moment, then told him, “Don’t get up. Stay like that a bit longer, okay?” Jared turned his head toward Dave, “Dave?” The older man responded, “Hmm?” Jared asked, “Is everyone okay?” Dave looked over the seat and down at a very worried Jared, “The bad guys are not. Everyone on our team is, though. It’ll be okay, Jared, we’re just not convinced the threat is neutralized yet.” Jared felt relief at Dave’s assurance that all of the security personnel were okay, but the comment about the ‘threat’ not being ‘neutralized’ had his nerves skyrocketing again. Jared remembered something, “Dave?” The older man patiently responded, “Yes, Jared?” The engineer asked, “Is that decoy agent guy okay?” Dave realized he had no idea, so he responded, “I don’t know yet.” Jared seemed to quiet down after that. Dave watched Jensen and Mike come back to the car. Their expressions looked worried, which was not good, in Dave’s opinion. Phil and Lance came with them.

Mike jumped in the back with Dave and Jensen got in the middle seat with Jared. After the doors were closed, Jared heard Dave bitch, “It’s fine, fuck stick, I know how to dress a wound.” Jared heard Mike respond, “Shut up...you know how to dress other people’s. I’m making sure you didn’t screw up your own...you need stitches, old man.” A heavy irritable sigh was heard, which Jared guessed must be Dave’s. Jensen wasted no time getting a close look at Jared. The younger man was laying on the middle bench seat, so Jensen balanced himself on his knees over him. He studied Jared’s face for several seconds, noting the paleness and exhaustion. He felt him for fever, then checked Jared’s pupil response. Jensen brushed the hair off his lover’s face and searched his eyes, “Are you hurt anywhere?” The younger man quickly shook his head, “No.” Jensen studied him longer. Jared looked alert and free of shock, but Jensen could plainly see the tension and fear built up in the kid’s eyes. “How are your ribs, are they hurting?” Jensen’s eyes were filled with loving concern and Jared soaked it up. He hadn’t seen that look since early this morning. It was like a drug to his soul seeing it now. He shook his head, “No,” but Jensen didn’t think it sounded too convincing.

He brushed his thumb gently back and forth on Jared’s cheek, noticing how the younger man leaned into his touch. Jensen took a few more minutes to soak in the sight of a living, talking, breathing Jared in front of him, then finally asked him, “You ready to sit up?” When Jared nodded, Jensen slid his hands around Jared’s chest to take most of his weight. He didn’t believe Jared’s quick ‘no’ about his ribs hurting so he was careful. Jensen knew he’d slammed Jared down pretty hard when the attack came on. Once upright, Jared looked around and caught the sight of the car next to them with broken out windows. There was a white sheet covering most of a body, but the left leg was sticking
out. Dave had mentioned there was another shooter, so Jared searched for a few seconds, then saw it. There was a second person under a sheet adjacent to the first one. ‘God,’ Jared thought, ‘ohmygod.’ Jensen watched Jared’s face turn a shade whiter when he saw the bodies on the ground. He kept a hold on the younger man while he got situated in his own seat. Jensen knew the adrenaline was going to wear off, at some point, and Jared would crash. The kid was definitely on overload after everything that had happened today.

Jared saw cops and security everywhere. Phil and Lance had gotten into the front seat of the SUV, but there were several others outside Jared had never seen before. Chuck came out of the middle of nowhere and finally, Price arrived. They spoke for a minute and then Price left. Chuck came toward the SUV and leaned forward slightly to see in Jensen’s side, “Everyone okay in here?” Jensen turned away from Jared to answer, “We’re good. How’s the other team?” Silence. Jared couldn’t see Chuck from behind Jensen, but he knew they were speaking with their eyes. He hated it when they did that. Jared felt the air in the SUV thicken to quicksand and he was sure they were all drowning in it, ‘or maybe it’s just me,’ he thought. There was something they weren’t saying out loud. His mind felt sluggish and slow on the uptake. Otherwise, he might be quicker at figuring out what they weren’t telling him. Mike’s voice distracted him for a second, coming from the back, “Now look at that masterpiece.” Dave’s voice, “Not bad.” Mike argued, “Not bad...dude it’s perfect. Tylenol!” Dave responded, “Yeah, gimme.” Jared almost smiled when he heard Mike add, “Here, you sure you don’t want some Geritol with that, old man?” There was a deep baritone giggle, “Thanks, asshole.” Jared would normally be entertained by the two men’s banter, but right now his anxiety over the recent attack was taking precedence. He heard the sounds of something being packed up in the back seat and figured Mike must have stitched up his friend. His mind was racing. ‘I can’t believe these people act like it’s a walk in the fucking park,’ Jared angrily processed. He was intelligent enough to guess that anger was his mind’s way of trying to keep his sanity in all this craziness so he let it flow through him. ‘Those fuckers tried to kill me. Robert...someone tried to poison me. Jesus,’ Jared’s mind was racing and he couldn’t seem to slow it down. During their silent exchange, Chuck had conveyed to Jensen and the other two in the back seat, that the decoy had been shot outside of the vest’s protection. It was bad. Chuck had indicated two fingers to his neck, telling Jensen where the decoy had taken the hit. Jensen shook his head very slightly to let Chuck know it wasn’t a good idea to spring that information on Jared right now. The kid was already close to shock. Chuck stuck to the rest of the necessary information, “My expert opinion, from being an old man who has done this for a lifetime is that ‘your’ attack was some kind of secondary team. It’s sloppier.” Jensen nodded, “Agreed.” His friends in the back silently agreed but Jared thought, ‘Sloppy? THAT was sloppy?’ Chuck continued, “The other attempt was more precise...professional. It wasn’t perfect, but it was damn close on.” Jared’s fragmented mind struggled with, ‘precise’ while Chuck continued with more, “Our team closed in on him. Second story post office next door...long range...he knew the layout, the stairwells. Barreled out a back door faster than the planted officer could be advised of on the radio. Officer chased, called radio info and the team pursued. Right now, there’s a perimeter with a chopper. He’s somewhere between two square blocks.”

Jared deduced in his own shocked and panicked mind that the hitman had tried to kill the decoy, thinking it was him, and the attack on his SUV was someone else. ‘There’s more people involved?’ His mind was racing to try and follow along with something that was way out of his area of expertise. ‘Jesus, who were these two?’ Jared couldn’t even believe he was actually trying to sort this out. Jensen squeezed Jared’s arm, feeling the increase in Jared’s tension. He glanced back at Jared and searched his face for a second, then continued to talk with Chuck. Jared wanted to ask about the other team, about the shooting and the decoy, but something told him not to. Jensen asked, “He shoot at anyone else?” “No,” Chuck answered, “His obvious priorities were his target and getting away. That was the only attempt he made. He’s carrying, but he’s made no attempt to fire at anyone else.” Everyone was silent again, Jared’s mind was reeling. ‘There’s that fucking ‘target’ word again.’
After a collective pause, Mike said, “So, he doesn’t think he missed, at this point. Is that what we’re all thinking?” Jensen glanced back at his friend in the back seat, “Yep.” He looked back at Chuck and the investigator nodded, “That’s the general jist of it.”

Jensen commented, “When you get him, it doesn’t mean we lighten up our efforts.” Chuck agreed, “No. Even if we catch him now, the fucker paid these two, in case he was wrong about the other team. He set this up figuring one of the teams would be successful. He was determined.” Jared’s brilliant mind was processing everything they were saying. He was picturing it, replaying everything over and over. ‘Figured one of ‘em was going to be successful,’ he processed, ‘meaning I’m dead.’ Jared’s brain was scrolling through the information. He was beyond exhaustion and emotions were barely kept at bay, but he couldn’t stop his wheels from turning. Jared’s mixed up facts finally landed on something vital...something he had missed until this second...something Mike had said. ‘He doesn’t think he missed.’ ‘No,’ Jared thought, as the words sank in and he asked out loud, “Why would he think he didn’t miss? Why would he think that?”

Jensen turned to his lover and paused, assessing him first. He didn’t like what he saw, so he quickly turned to Chuck, “Are we clear to leave?” The investigator answered, “Yes, get the hell out of here, all of you,” then shut Jensen’s door and tapped on the top of the car. Mike jumped out of Dave’s seat and sat on the other side of Jared. As soon as everyone was secure, Phil touched his ear to speak to the other cars, then the SUV moved. The team seemed to be anxious to get home, for some reason. Jared’s worried exhausted eyes pinned Jensen, “Did someone else get shot because of me? Please tell me no one else got hurt?” Jared wasn’t focusing too well and he was about to drop. Jensen wasn’t about to hit him with anything else. Jared looked confused, but he nodded and remained quiet.

Jensen exchanged a concerned look with his friends that Jared missed. All three of the veterans were worried about the kid. The ex-soldiers knew the shooting attack had caused a rush of adrenaline for all of them. Jared wouldn’t be aware of it, nor would he be expecting the eminent crash that followed such a rush. The experts knew how to handle it and they knew exactly how to counter it. Their young genius was already running on fumes and all of them could see his crash was coming soon. The twenty minute trip to Jensen’s was at higher than normal speeds. Jared was still a bit confused at the feel of silent anticipation in the car. It seemed everyone was anxious to get back to Jensen’s, for some reason, and they weren’t in the mood for talking. Jared watched the traffic and scenery go by, then he felt Jensen lean heavily against him. He wondered why Jensen was leaning on him, at first, then he realized it was ‘him’ doing to leaning. Jared heard Phil and Lance talking in a low mumble. He noticed Jensen was lifting a water bottle and drinking from it. Jared noticed Mike doing the same thing, and he wondered when the hell they had pulled those out of somewhere. He totally missed it. He felt too tired to sleep, too tired to eat, and certainly too tired to even think beyond anything except his sore ribs. That was all he could feel, at the moment. Everything else was numb. Jared thought about the men with him, and how they had saved his life today. He worried for their safety while protecting him, and especially felt terrible for Dave getting wounded.

Still feeling Jensen’s warmth, he forced himself to relax a bit. He wouldn’t sleep because he couldn’t. There were too many things racing through his sluggish mind. Jensen looked over to see Jared’s eye’s at half mast. He was blinking heavily and staring ahead, unfocused. Jensen watched his eyes close, then he blinked a few times like he was fighting it. Finally they stayed shut. Jared heard one of the men in front say “Two minutes.” He blinked and then suddenly he was alone with no one beside him. Jensen’s warmth was gone and there was a cold wind blowing through the bench seat of the SUV. Jared panicked and looked around, wondering where the hell everyone had gone. No one was in the back seat and the doors were open. Jared got out and looked around outside. The SUV was in
some kind of field with darkness for miles. No one was there. His stomach plummeted and his breathing increased, ‘NO,’ his mind screamed. He frantically ran around the car, looking everywhere. Jensen was gone, so were Dave and Mike. ‘They’re gone,’ he started to heave, ‘NO,’ his heart cried. ‘JENSEN? JENSEN WHERE ARE YOU?’ Jensen cried out. He was sobbing now. He was alone. As the cold wind blew through him, chilling him to his soul, Jensen stilled. A familiar presence appeared behind him and he sobbed harder. He didn’t want to turn around. Somehow he knew what was coming. Jensen forced himself to turn around and was faced with his former manager, Robert. The man was grinning, but it did not match the hatred in his eyes. “Hello Jared. Looking for everyone you care about?” Jensen’s eyes filled, as he shook his head. ‘NO,’ he cried, ‘NO, YOU CAN’T TOUCH THEM!’ Robert smiled, “Too late. They’re in the dirt with your mommy and daddy, Jared. Wanna join them?” Robert grabbed Jensen by the throat and squeezed. The younger man felt his airway cut off, felt the pain of Robert’s hand. “Die, you little prick...join your parents,” Jensen heard as his eyes rolled up into his head.

Jensen and Mike had just opened their doors when Jensen began choking. Jensen leaned over Jared in an instant. Mike scrambled for a tracheotomy kit and breathing tube from a duffle thrown over the seat by Dave. Everyone’s mind went straight to the possibility that Jared had touched that poison somehow. “He’s asleep,” Jensen announced, after quickly checking Jared’s pupils. He tapped his cheeks, “Hey...Jared wake up, come on buddy.” He shook him, as Jared continued to choke. “Fuck, Jensen,” Mike bitched, moving closer to help Jensen pull Jared forward. “JARED, come on buddy, wake up.” Jensen took his loose lagging head between his hands and shook him, tapping his cheeks again, “JARED, WAKE UP !” Jared suddenly grabbed Jensen’s wrists and inhaled. He struggled for air, still choking. “That’s it, buddy, breathe,” Jensen shook him again, “Keep it up Jared, come on, breathe.” The engineer gulped in shuddering breaths, terror in his eyes, as he gripped Jensen’s wrists. “Jared, it’s okay,” Jensen soothed, “hey...it wasn’t real, it was just a dream.” He watched Jared struggle with awareness, emotional exhaustion flooding his eyes, as well as physical. “Thank god,” Mike muttered, glancing at Dave. The two warriors shared a collective sigh of relief. Jensen continued to coax Jared down for another minute. Jared hadn’t let go of his wrists yet.

“Jared, it’s okay,” Jensen soothed, “hey...it wasn’t real, it was just a dream.” He watched Jared struggle with awareness, emotional exhaustion flooding his eyes, as well as physical. “Thank god,” Mike muttered, glancing at Dave. The two warriors shared a collective sigh of relief. Jensen continued to coax Jared down for another minute. Jared hadn’t let go of his wrists yet.

“You back with us?” Jensen asked, watching the kid look around, as if to convince himself everything was real. He finally nodded, then let go of Jensen’s wrists, “M’sorry.” Jensen wasn’t sure what kind of dream Jared had in the seven minutes he’d been sleeping, but it was pretty clear it had been terrible. “You ready to get inside?” he asked. Jared looked at his lover and nodded, “Yeah.” Jensen wasn’t sure Jared was going to make it to the door without being carried. He certainly wasn’t firing on all cylinders, that was for sure. Mike went around to help Dave. They took the bags and headed for the front door, Dave leaning on his friend to keep the weight off his injured leg. Mike muttered under his breath, “I think I shit my pants. Poor kid.” Dave answered, “No kidding.” Lance and Phil had been quietly standing by to assist, if needed. When the emergency passed, they radio’d the house team and went to talk with them for a moment. Mike came back to the SUV, “You need help with him?” Jensen answered, “Maybe,” leaning on the door frame, facing Jared. He had just manhandled Jared enough to get his feet out of the car and on the ground. The kid seemed to be fixated on the ground. Jensen squatted down and looked up into the younger man’s face. He pushed the hair aside so he could see him better, “You awake?” Jared looked around, as he tried to focus. “Yeah,” he tried to sound alert. When he moved moved to stand up, Jensen grabbed him by the elbows, then quickly shifted to grab his waist. Mike grabbed the opposite side, both soldiers holding up the wobbly engineer with his arms around their shoulders.

They took a couple steps, both noticing Jared wasn’t holding his own weight. “How’s it going over there?” Mike asked. Jensen snorted, “What’d you think?” Mike leaned his head down to look up into Jared’s downturned face, “Hey big guy.” Jared looked up drowsily, then dropped his face back down. “Oh boy,” Mike muttered. Jensen nudged them to move, “Come on, buddy, we’ve gotcha.” Jared tried, but he couldn’t seem to coordinate walking. Soon, he was being lifted up the steps, his
sluggish brain wondering how the hell he’d gotten there from the car. “M’fuckn’feet...don’t wrk,” he sluggishly mumbled, feeling the icy air disappear as they entered the house. They went toward the couch, then gently lowered Jared on it before Jensen checked his eyes closely, “You’re crashing hard, bud. You wore yourself out taking down all those motherfuckers.” Jared blinked heavily. Jensen smoothed his hair back, as Dave limped in from the guest room, “He crashing?” Mike looked up, “Hell yeah. He’d probably still beat me at chess, though.” Jensen watched his lover struggle, “I wanna try to get some food in you before you sleep, okay?” Jared answered with a weak nod, “Kay.” Mike commented, “It better be something quick.” Dave piped in, “There’s leftover chili and stew from the restaurant.” He started to turn toward the kitchen, but Mike headed him off, “Sit the fuck down, old man, I got it. Get off that bum leg of yours.” He hurried to heat something up while Dave took a seat in the recliner.

Jensen quickly got the fire started, then leaned over Jared again, who looked a little green, “Are you feeling okay?” Jared nodded, “Is Robert in jail?” Jensen looked concerned, “Yes, that dickhead is locked up. He can’t hurt you.” He wondered if Harriman had been what Jared’s nightmare was about. He felt Jared’s forehead. Dave asked, “Is he hot?” Jensen answered worriedly, “Yeah, a little warm,” then quickly went to retrieve the thermometer. Jared yawned hugely, barely able to keep his eyes open. When Jensen returned, Mike was setting up a bowl of hot stew and biscuits in front of him. After they helped the engineer sit up, Jensen held the thermometer in his ear. Jared started to eat, seeming oblivious. When Jensen returned, Mike was setting up a bowl of hot stew and biscuits in front of him. After they helped the engineer sit up, Jensen held the thermometer in his ear. Jared started to eat, seeming oblivious. When the device beeped, Jensen checked it, cursed, then tossed it to Mike. “Fuck,” Mike exclaimed. He sat next to Jared while Jensen went to grab the bp cuff and stethoscope. “It’s 100.2,” Mike told Dave. The older man watched Jared worriedly. The stew was delicious. Jared hadn’t realized he was so hungry. He wished he didn’t feel like there were bags of sand hanging on his arms.

Jensen returned with a bp cuff and stethoscope. Jared stopped eating, only a few seconds, as his caretakers manhandled his jacket off. Mike listened to his chest while Jensen took his blood pressure. Jared dopped one of the biscuits in the stew before he looked up at Jensen. He thought he missed something Jensen said. The older man’s eyes were filled with worry, but he had to smile at Jared’s beautiful exhausted innocence, “I asked if you’re in pain. Are your ribs hurting?” Jared shook his head, “No,” then ate his biscuit. Damn, the thing was amazing. Dave asked, “Well?” Jensen removed the cuff, “It’s low, not horrible but not great either.” Mike announced, “I hear a whistle, Jensen. Not loud, but it’s there.” Jensen sighed defeatedly, “Damn.” He smoothed Jared’s hair back gently, while Jared finished his biscuit, “I wanted to let him zonk out after this, but I’d feel a lot better if we got a breathing treatment into him.” He thought about how Jared would be totally pissy about them talking about him like this if he were more aware. Mike commented, “I can’t believe he’s not in shock, kid’s a fucking rock, Ackles.” He picked up all the supplies, then took everything back to the kitchen. He grabbed the breathing machine bag and returned. Jensen sat close to Jared with his hand on his back. Mike opened the machine bag and set everything up.

Jensen looked at his friends, “He has a PTSD issue over the mask. It’s not easy for him,” he rubbed his face tiredly, “God I hate doing this to him.” Dave asked, “PTSD from what?” Jensen told them, “From a fire. Childhood. He’s got it down, but I hate to do this right now when he’s this exhausted. I just don’t think he should go to bed without it.” Dave looked at Jared unhappily. Mike tried to uplift the mood, “He seems to like that stew.” Jensen smirked. Jared finally dropped his spoon about two thirds through his bowl, left the last biscuit and closed his eyes with a sigh. He moaned, “Mmmm, th’t w’s s’good,” then yawned hugely. He seemed to finally realize his three protectors were having a conversation right in front of him. He tried to unscramble the last words, but could not. “Did I miss s’thing?” Jensen answered, “You’ve got a temperature. Unfortunately, you’ve got a slight wheeze too. How do you feel right now?” Jared blinked heavily, “I don’t know. I can’t feel anything, really.” Jensen asked, “What about your ribs, are they hurting?” Jared yawned again and shrugged, “I guess so...yeah, but not that bad.” That wasn’t really a positive answer, in Jensen’s opinion. He glanced at
Jared was exhausted and he’d been attacked today, twice. It was obvious to everyone, Jared did not want to take the mask, as Mike held it out to him. He swallowed his Motrin with a few sips of water first, then sat staring at the offensive machine. Jensen’s voice soaked into him like a blanket of comfort, “It’s not gonna do anything until you make it. You’re in control. You know you can do this and I promise you can rest after this.” Jared took a deep breath. He took the mask, put it over his face and closed his eyes. When Jared nodded, Jensen nodded to Mike to start the machine. Jared concentrated on the cool mist. He forced an inhale, but couldn’t breathe at first, finally working himself through the resistance. Jared had to admit, his emotions were right at the surface. It was an internal struggle to keep himself from sobbing like an infant in front of his protective team of warriors. By the time Jensen gently coaxed him to let go of the mask, Jared was trembling with utter exhaustion. “Well, that sucked to watch,” Mike vented, as he put the machine away. Dave mumbled, “No fucking kidding.” Jensen smiled inwardly at the way his friends had taken Jared into their protective wing. He helped his lover lean back against the couch, then removed his tie and loosened some of the buttons on his dress shirt. He searched the beautiful sleepy eyes, “I think you’ve had it, kiddo. You wanna lay down out here or in the bedroom?”

The engineer shook his head sluggishly, “No m’stay here, pl’s.” Jensen kissed him softly, then helped him to lay on his right side. He lifted his feet for him, pulling the shoes off one by one, then covered him with one of the blankets. When he smoothed some of the hair back from his face, Jensen noticed some of the residual trauma swimming in the engineer’s eyes. He got down on his knees to lean closer, “You’re safe, okay?” Jared nodded. “Can you sleep?” Jensen asked. Jared yawned once again, “I’m n’t s’r...is Dave okay?” Jared’s eyes blinked heavier. Jensen rubbed his hair, “Yes, he’s okay. He’s right here.” Within seconds, Jared feel fast asleep. Jensen waited another minute before he got up and helped Dave stand. They met at the kitchen table for some of the same leftover stew Jared had eaten. Mike brought them all bowls with hot biscuits while Jensen grabbed beer from the fridge. They ate in silence. No one talked until everyone had a chance to settle their thoughts first. Once they finished eating, Jensen sat back and studied his two friends before saying anything. Dave and Mike had been forced to shoot at people today. They’d killed. This wasn’t supposed to be a part of retirement for them. Jensen wondered how they were doing. He suddenly announced, “I want you to take tomorrow off. Both of you. I want you to go for a run, work out, escape to the bowling alley, or sleep in and have a pedicure...whatever you need. I want you to take whatever you both need and I’ll keep my eyes peeled here. And if you need to be gone overnight, that’s okay too. He doesn’t have to go out.”

Dave and Mike glanced at one another. They actually hadn’t expected that. Dave was definitely thinking of a run in the neighborhood, but he wasn’t sure how his leg would feel in the morning. Mike was feeling hyper as Hell, and he wasn’t even sure he could sleep tonight. Both men were on edge and it was going to take awhile to come down from the shooting today. Dave lectured, “Jensen, we know what you’re doing, and it’s not necessary. We’re fine.” Mike remained quiet. Jensen watched him, “I know better...and this wasn’t what you were supposed to be doing with your retirement.” Mike spoke up, “Hey, I can’t think of anything more meaningful to do with my retirement years than help out that nice genius of yours in there.” Dave chuckled, “I have to agree. It wasn’t what I planned but it feels good to be choosing who we get to save, doesn’t it?” Mike agreed, “Yep.” Jensen grinned at his friends’ statements. “You’re both still off tomorrow.” Dave said, “Alright, if you insist.” Mike added, “Fine, you wanna be alone with the good looking engineer, we get it.” Jensen looked put out. Mike and Dave grinned. Jensen added, “All I ask is that you bring back some groceries. We’ve got about a day and a half’s worth left.” The two men eyed one another. “That means we get to pick,” Mike reminded Dave. The older man grinned, “Sounds good to me.”

After they cleaned up the kitchen, Jensen and Mike gently lifted Jared and carried him to the master bed, while Dave went to change his dressing. Jensen removed Jared’s dress pants and shirt with
Mike’s help. He left the undershirt and added some pajama bottoms. Jared shivered, as Jensen quickly pulled the covers up to surround him. Mike went to the wall and turned on the fireplace. “I can’t believe you found him, Ackles. He’s totally out of your league, you fucker.” Jensen smirked, “Actually, he found ‘me’. And yeah I know.” He stood standing with his hands on his hips, “I just hope he doesn’t come to his senses.” Mike snickered. Jensen asked, “You gonna be okay?” Mike answered, “Of course, Ackles. Get some rest. I hope he’s better by tomorrow.” Jensen thanked his friend and closed the bedroom door as he left, leaving a tiny crack. He cleaned up in the bathroom, then slipped under the covers with his gorgeous bedmate.

Jared seemed to be sleeping peacefully. Jensen couldn’t hear any wheezing at the moment. He spooned up behind the younger man and slid his arm around Jared’s waist. If there were nightmares, Jensen would be ready for it. He inhaled deeply, finally able to release the day’s tension. Jared almost taking a bullet, or touching that poison, had been harboring in the corners of his brain for hours. He kept those fears at bay, so he could focus on the immediate response, but now they were free to process themselves. He hoped they would burn themselves out so he could get some sleep. Jared was alive because Jensen insisted on bringing in his two experts. He hadn’t been overreacting...this poor kid in front of him would have been dead if he hadn’t been proactive. Jensen sighed, tightening his grip on the kid. He kissed the back of Jared’s neck and breathed in his shampoo from the morning shower.
CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

Chapter Summary

This is a longer chapter of love, angst, hurt/comfort, and some really hot sex in front of the fire. The two visiting friends are gone for the day, giving Jensen several hours to focus on his gorgeous engineer. There are some updates to the case in here, too.


CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

With his arm around Jared, Jensen could feel the slightest twitch. He woke instantly when Jared’s breathing hitched and he turned on his back. Jensen glanced at the bedside clock with half opened eyes, ‘Fuck, it’s only been three hours,’ he thought, wanting to kill the fuckers for doing this to Jared. “Jare,” Jensen called to him. Jared turned his head away from Jensen with a sob, “No...no...” Jared’s heart wrenching cries continued. Jensen kept talking to him, “Jared, it’s okay.” Jared suddenly surprised Jensen when he sat up and pushed himself backward, like he was backing away from something. “Whoa,” Jensen blurted out, scooting toward the younger man. “Hey hey, Jare?” Jensen held his hands slightly up, not touching the kid yet. “Jared, it’s okay,” he repeated himself. Jared looked around in fear. He was sobbing, in between whatever panic he had been experiencing. “Hey...it’s me, you recognize me?” Jensen soothed. He closed to Jared, but didn’t touch him yet. “Whatever you’re seeing, it’s not real. You’re right here with me,” Jensen coaxed. Jared covered his face with one hand before pulling his knees up to his chest and resting his elbows on them. He dropped his face downward and sobbed a few more times. Jensen could see the tremors rolling through his lover’s body. “You awake?” he asked softly. Jared nodded, but kept his head down. He didn’t look at Jensen yet. “I’m sorry,” he said, then sobbed again, which broke Jensen’s heart. “Sssshhhh, there’s nothing to be sorry about,” Jensen began rubbing his back. “It must have been terrible,” he gently brushed Jared’s hair back from his face. “Can you tell me about it?”

It was just a dream, Jared knew that, but it seemed so real. He took a steadying breath, “You were dead...everyone was dead...he killed you all.” Jared lifted his head, but still didn’t look at Jensen. He was trying to convince his mind that none of it was real and he was here in Jensen’s bedroom. Jensen pulled Jared’s chin up to look at his face. In the faint glow of the fireplace, he could still see the exhausted lines and the tears, “Baby, I’m right here. Everyone’s right here.” Jared sighed, “I know, but it was so fucking real,” he confessed. Jensen could feel him thrumming with leftover tension, as he rubbed his back. “Who killed everyone?” Jared wasn’t thrilled having to repeat his old manager’s name, but he admitted to himself it felt better sharing this with Jensen. “It was Robert,” Jared said, then he looked down again and sighed.

Jensen was already having to control his anger at the attacks on Jared today. The fact that Robert was invading his lover’s dreams was just bitter icing on the proverbial shitty cake. Jared continued, “He told me he put all of you in the dirt...with my parents.” Jensen’s heart dropped. Jared added more, “I looked everywhere and you were gone...everyone was gone...then he told me I should be in the ground, too. There were graves.” ‘Jesus,’ Jensen thought. No wonder Jared woke up in a panic. Jensen continued to rub Jared’s back, watching his face as best he could in the low lighting. “Is that
what happened in the car? Was it the same dream?” When Jared looked at his lover in question, Jensen explained, “You were choking. Mike had a breathing tube and tracheotomy kit ready.”

Jared’s look of distaste was priceless in the dark shadows. He touched his neck in response to the vision of his throat being sliced, “Well, I’m glad he didn’t jump the gun, ’cuz I really don’t want anymore holes in me, thanks.” Jensen grinned slightly, “He was afraid for you. So was I...was that dream about Robert too?” Jared nodded, “Yeah. He told me he should have killed me and I should be in the ground with my parents and then he grabbed me by the throat and choked me. I couldn’t breathe.” Jensen slid his arm around Jared’s shoulders, kissed him on the temple, “God baby, I’m so sorry. None of this is fair. No one’s getting killed and going away. You’re stuck with me, and with those two idiots out there.” Jared’s anger took over, “Well, how do I know that, huh? Maybe ‘now’ it’s fine...maybe ‘now’ you’re all here. Dave was shot. Fuck, Jensen, how the hell am I supposed to just...” he sighed, “How am I supposed to just continue pissing them off and expecting...expecting them to leave all of you untouched?” Jensen kept quiet for the moment, knowing Jared needed to vent his fear. Of course, the kid was terrified about everybody ‘else’. “Dave’s hurt.” Jared blurted out. “Dave’s fine,” Jensen countered. Jared looked at him in disbelief, “He isn’t ‘fine’, he’s ‘shot’,” Jared couldn’t fathom being that nonchalant about having someone fire a bullet at you. “Baby, stop,” Jensen ordered softly.

Jared kept going, “Stop what? Being upset because your friend got shot because of ‘me’?” Jensen argued, “It was ‘not’ because of you...it was the ‘assholes’ that were trying to ‘kill’ you.” Jensen paused, Jared was stiff and vibrating with fear and anger. He added, “He’s ‘not’ fine.” Jensen sighed, “What I mean is it just nicked him. He’s ‘okay’, trust me. It’s nothing worse than skinning your knee.” Jared snorted mockingly, “Yeah, right.” He sighed and looked away. Jensen let him be for a moment. Jared had a sudden thought and turned back, “What the hell happened that no one is telling me? I know I was a puddle of goo in the car, but right now I need to know. What happened? The decoy agent guy...please tell me he didn’t die? Was he shot?” Jared was desperate for good news. Jensen sighed and looked down. When he looked up, he could see the painful torment in his beautiful lover’s eyes at someone else suffering because of him. Jensen knew he deserved the truth, “No...he didn’t die, but yes, he was shot.” Jared’s jaw tightened with angry anticipation, as he continued, “He was being worked on at the hospital. I haven’t received an update yet. Chuck will call or text us the minute he finds out how he’s doing...it’s been several hours so I suspect he’s successfully out of surgery, or we would have heard.” Jared was tense and quiet for a few minutes. Jensen wasn’t sure what was going through his mind, but he was sure guilt played into it. Jared asked, “Jensen, what if it’s you? What if it’s you next time and I can’t,” Jensen stopped him, “Hey, it’s not gonna be me.” Jared swiped at his eyes, “I’ve done this. I’ve done this before and I’m ‘not’ doing it again. Your friend got shot. That poor agent is shot. My friends have guards on them 24/7.”

Jensen pulled Jared into his arms. He held him tight, nestled his face into the side of his head, as Jared melted into him. Jensen kissed his head, “I’m not going anywhere. No asshole is gonna ruin what we have, baby...I won’t let him. You’re not gonna lose any of us, Jare. I’m right here.” Jared laid his head sideways on Jensen’s shoulder, reminding the older man of the first time he did this in the hospital. He slid his arms around Jensen’s shoulders and gradually relaxed even more. He mumbled into Jensen’s shoulder, “I waited for you for so long.” Jensen grinned softly, “I’ve waited for you, too...and I won’t let anything take this away.” He kissed his head again, “I’m so damn sorry, Jare. Today was horrible. You kicked ass and impressed the hell out of everyone, just like I knew you would. You need sleep...and without any assholes in your dreams.” Jensen could still feel the heat emanating from his lover. He wondered if Jared still had that temp. After awhile, he felt the engineer getting heavier. Once Jared’s breathing evened out, he lowered him back to the bed. He was a little high up, so Jensen grabbed him around the waist and pulled him down. With his head on the pillows again, Jensen pulled the covers up and packed them closely around him.
Jensen retrieved a thermometer out of the bathroom and returned. He held it to Jared’s ear, while smoothing some hair back from his face. When the device registered 100.2, Jensen made a face of disapproval, but decided to listen to Jared’s breathing before making a true assessment. He couldn’t hear any wheezing, at all, which was outstanding. That breathing treatment must have worked. Jensen looked closer, he thought he could see the gorgeous long eyelashes blinking slowly in the dim lighting, “Hey, you still awake?” Jared sleepily responded, “Mhm.” Jensen snuggled next to him, “You feel okay?” Jared answered softly, “M’okay..., jus’ tired.” Jensen rubbed his hair, “You’re about three and a half hours into your Motrin, but you’ve still got a temp. I’m not sure I wanna give you anything this early on...but maybe in another couple hours. Do you feel achy or uncomfortable, like you can’t get back to sleep?” Jared shook his head, “M-m, no, I’m fine.” Jared nestled his head into the pillow, which made Jensen smile affectionally. The kid was adorably relaxed and sleepy. He rolled slightly to the left side to wrap his arms around his lover, but Jensen stopped him, “Not the left side, love.” He climbed over Jared’s body, then laid up against him from the opposite side, “There we go.” Jared rolled into Jensen’s arms. He slid his own hands around the older man’s waist, nestled his face into Jensen’s chest and sighed. Jensen kissed the top of his head. He prayed Jared would have a nightmare free experience the rest of the evening.

Jensen woke the next morning at 0600 hours, from his internal alarm. The house was quiet. He had turned onto his back, at some point, during the night, and was sprawled out comfortably under the thick covers. Jensen felt smooth skin and heat coming from his left side. He turned his head and smiled at the adorable sight right next to him. Jared was also on his back, his body slightly turned toward Jensen. The kid was breathing deep and even, his right arm under Jensen’s left, his face turned into Jensen’s shoulder. Jared’s hair was a wild disarray of brown shiny locks covering his whole face. Jensen couldn’t resist the temptation. He rolled toward the younger man and slipped his arm around him. He laid on the pillow and watched him sleep for awhile. Everything was so peaceful after the grueling day they’d been through that laying here with a relaxed and safe Jared was right where Jensen wanted to be. After snoozing another hour, Jensen heard soft movement out in the hallway. He guessed his friends were up and moving around, trying to be quiet. They didn’t make much noise, but Jensen could hear the zipper on the bags they carried, and the bedding they probably were removing to throw in the wash. His friends were clean. It just came with the military package. He couldn’t hear the coffee maker, but he smelled a freshly made pot.

Dave and Mike had risen around 0630. They decided to check on their homes, run errands and repack a few clean clothes. They would regroup for the grocery trip on the way back to Jensen’s. After coffee and toast, Mike wrote a note to leave on the table. They knew Jensen was trying to coax Jared to sleep as long as possible today, and they weren’t about to disturb him. Just as the men were about to leave, the security phone vibrated. Dave checked the device and was glad to see a message from Chuck. He was letting them know that the agent in the hospital was doing well and expected to make a full recovery. The gunshot wound was life threatening, but the quick response and emergency surgery had saved him. Bart was also expected to get out of the hospital tomorrow. Dave almost sent a response, but Chuck continued. The gunman had evaded capture. They were still looking for him. Dave sighed, irritably, then held up the phone for Mike to read. Mike cursed under his breath. Chuck text further that he was going to California to intercept an arrest team who had taken Brad Donovan into custody. ‘Good’, Dave responded. He had nothing to comment on the gunman getting away. He was too pissed to comment on that one. Dave forwarded the messages to Jensen’s private cell, then followed Mike out the front door. The veterans stopped to tell Phil of their plans for the day. They verified that Jensen would be alone with Jared until they got back tonight. They told him to use Jensen’s cell, for now, until Jensen was up and retrieved the other one.

Jensen felt the vibration of his cell phone deep in his pajama pocket. He unhappily removed his arm from Jared’s waist to retrieve it. The message was good news, except for the missing gunman. He sighed as he shoved the phone back in his pocket, then studied his lover closely. He gently touched
Jared on the forehead. The younger man was a bit warm, but he wasn’t burning up. Jensen would let him sleep as long as he needed today, then assess him further when he finally woke up. He headed for the bathroom. Today was going to be a complete contrast from yesterday. No rushing, nowhere to be. After a shower, he dressed in soft jeans, t-shirt and a flannel. He kept glancing at the beautiful genius in his bed, happy to see he hadn’t moved yet. He went out to the kitchen to find the coffee he’d been smelling for the last hour. He smiled when he noticed the full pot of dark espresso. The guys had obviously made more for he and Jared. Jensen grabbed his first cup and looked outside the window at the security team’s car. It looked like Phil was out there today. Jensen went out the back slider and stood on the patio for a few minutes. He closed his eyes and breathed in the smell of pine and cedar. He saw one of the team on the back perimeter, walking around, then searched the opposite fence line until he spotted the other one. It was certainly a comfort, knowing Price hadn’t lightened up the protection.

Jensen wasn’t really sure what the hell Price expected from Jared next. The kid had practically won the whole damn case for them yesterday. Price had to address the trial and even though he assured them it would be a cake walk, Jensen brooded about this crap not being over for Jared. He walked around his property for a few minutes, waving at the security men when they greeted him. It was grey outside, the air had a moist feel to it. He wondered if rain was coming later. Jensen came back inside and looked at his fireplace. A ton of wood had been stacked by the mantle, plenty for the next few days. He would definitely be starting a fire later. He headed for the garage to check the laundry machines and found the guys had put their sheets in the wash. He transferred the load to the dryer, then went back inside. Jensen enjoyed a second cup of coffee while throwing together an omelet with some lunchmeat, tomatoes, spinach and feta cheese. He made extra for Jared, but put it in the refrigerator for whenever the kid woke up. After he ate and cleaned up, Jensen went out front to visit with Phil. The team leader filled him in on all he knew about their missing hitman. A perimeter of officers was closing in, thinking they had the assailant sectioned off within a square block. Somehow, the gunman changed in, thinking they had the assailant sectioned off within a square block.

Jensen boiled under the surface, worried about the safety of the beautiful innocent man in his bed. It didn’t allow for much understanding that they hadn’t caught the asshole. He could see Phil was already pissed about the team’s failure, however, so he kept his opinion quiet. Phil took a quick call, then looked at Jensen, “Price is coming over within the hour. He’s checking on Jared and making sure you’re updated with everything he’s got.” Jensen talked with Phil a few minutes longer, confirming his friends’ were returning later, and that tomorrow they were going to be venturing out with Jared for a bit of normalcy. He grabbed his newspaper from the driveway, then went back inside. He briefly wondered how the security team handled the newspaper kid every morning, but he supposed it must be going well because his paper hadn’t stopped coming. He smiled at the tiny detail he hadn’t even thought about ‘til now.

Jensen headed toward the bedroom and checked on his charge. Pausing in the doorway, Jensen took a moment to enjoy the view of his adorable engineer sleeping peacefully. Jared had moved, but not much. He was still snuggled under the thick covers, partially on his stomach. Jensen went back to the living room, built up the fire and sat down to read his newspaper. Within about forty five minutes, the security phone vibrated with a text that Price had arrived. Jensen went to let the attorney in before rang the doorbell. The two men shook hands, then Jensen invited Price to sit at the table. “Coffee?” Jensen offered. “God yes,” Price answered, as he took a seat. Once Jensen was settled at the table with his own fresh cup, he waited until price took a few sips before he looked up, “First of all, how is the star witness doing? Is he alright?” Jensen’s mood darkened, “All of it. Mostly Harriman. The hatred. The bullshit that went on in
that courtroom never should have been allowed, Darren. What the fuck was the jury thinking to let Robert be in there threatening the kid and eyeballing him? Do you know what it did to a guy like Jared to feel responsible for Bart getting poisoned and that decoy getting shot? He’s sick over it.”

Price had no argument, “I know, Jensen. It’s part of the law that protects the rights of the accused. There’s some I could do, but the rest was allowed to run it’s course. I’m so sorry Jared had to go through that added stress.” Price looked guilty and desperately worried, “Is he going to be okay?” Jensen sighed, trying not to lose his temper in front of the A.G. He knew Price had been very attentive and done everything he could during the testimony, but it still pissed him off, “He will. He’s strong, but right now he’s beat up emotionally. You aren’t gonna ask him for anything, are you? He desperately needs to chill and relax after yesterday.” Price quickly agreed, “Of course. The case is good to go. We’re setting prelim dates today.” Jensen didn’t look too keen on that idea, so Price quickly assured him, “Jared doesn’t have to do those. I do them with Chuck. When they call for clarification, we’ll have Bart. I’m hoping to keep Jared far away from those.” Jensen looked placated for the moment, then thought of something, “What if Bart doesn’t come back to work in time? He ‘did’ almost die.” Price sighed, “He’s already spouting off about getting them back. He’s more pissed off over their attempt to get Jared. Our star witness made quite an impression on him. Bart’s coming back as fast as humanly possible.”

Jensen wasn’t fooled into believing everything was going to be smooth sailing. Jared wasn’t out of the woods until these people were all behind bars. Price continued, “If the defendant’s pleads guilty at the hearings, we won’t need further action.” Jensen countered, “And if they don’t?” Price answered, “Then, we’ll have a discussion. There might be some testimony.” Jensen’s gut churned. The thought of Jared having to go through a damn trial did nothing to reduce his protective anger. “Great,” he blurted out mockingly. Price tried to soothe, “I really don’t expect that, Jensen. I’m hoping their lawyers will advise the plea. Once they’re sentenced, the company will have no reason to pursue Jared any longer.” Jensen argued, “I don’t think there’s ‘any’ reason for them to back off Jared. They’re pissed off, losing everything, and that hitman only cares about getting paid. They’ll go for revenge if Daniel or Robert are in charge...and now we know they’ve hired God knows who else to do their dirty work. If they’ve paid him an advance...” Jensen sighed, not wanting to even think about this today. He wanted Jared far away from anything that could harm him. Price nodded, “He’ll have my team until we break this down, Jensen. The risk to Jared is enough for me to keep them assigned, and we’ll try to give Jared as much normalcy, as possible, while he’s under protection.”

Jensen sighed, rubbed his face with his hand, “I know. It’s appreciated, Darren. I just want him to have a normal life again, ya know?” The attorney nodded, “I agree, Jensen. We’ve got Harriman and your brother in custody. I’ve filed them both as flight risks so they won’t be able to bail. The only possibility was the pricey lawyer staff trying to squeeze five million dollars out for bail. From what I am hearing, though, the hot shot legal unit isn’t too keen on doing that, nor on sticking around.” At Jensen’s confused look, Price explained with a grin, “They know it’s a lost cause. And they’re probably realizing they’re not gonna get paid. I mean really, look at their situation. A.E. out of business, at least a huge portion, the bad guys out of money...there isn’t a paycheck for the attorneys.” Jensen enjoyed the thought of his brother and Robert being SOL after all the heartache and damages they had caused...especially the psychological and physical effects on poor Jared. “Darren,” Jensen gained the prosecutor’s attention, “my dad signed everything over to me...whatever’s left. He told me to make something good out of it, after this is all over. I haven’t had the time to mention that yet, but whatever’s left of A.E. will be under my control.” He waited for Price’s reaction. The attorney looked shocked, but then thoughts of what Jensen could do to turn around Ackles’ Enterprises sunk into his brain, “Jensen, that’s not such a bad thing.” Jensen looked at the man with distaste, “I didn’t ask for it, and I certainly don’t want it.”

Price countered, “I understand but maybe you should think about it. The remains of the company could be a new venture...it doesn’t have to be the same type of business. ‘Any’ business,
Jensen...and you certainly wouldn’t run it the way he did.” Jensen’s snorted mockingly, “I left that life for a reason. I don’t want to fly in and out of meetings, have meals with people I don’t know...and I’m not gonna manage a bunch of damn employees, that’s for sure. I really didn’t expect that from him.” Jensen ended the discussion by sipping his coffee. Price kept silent, hoping Jensen would at least consider the possibility of turning the company around. They discussed the apprehension of Brad. The fake engineer had been caught trying to use stolen credit cards to buy airfare. Jensen leaned back his chair, “Well, at least they’re all getting caught, one by one...now just for one more asshole.” He rubbed his face. Price sighed, looking blatantly unhappy about something.

Jensen’s eyebrow rose, along with his anger, as he leaned forward, “What the fuck, now!?” Price explained, “We believe there’s another party we haven’t identified yet. This morning, there was another attempt to draw on the frozen accounts from an IP address on our list. All A.E. perps are in custody.”

Jensen asked, “Is it our shooter?” Price admitted, “We aren’t sure. If it’s him, he might have been trying to retrieve his owed balance, thinking he actually shot Jared yesterday. If not, it’s another party we haven’t identified yet. We’re not going to assume anything so we’re assuming the worst.” Jensen thought for a few seconds, “How about pings or searches on me? No one knows where I live, but now that they’ve seen me protecting him...” Price answered quickly, “No. Not yet anyway. We think it’s because yesterday’s press was focused on the main shooting of the decoy. Jared’s name wasn’t in the release. We controlled the information they were given...so far, they haven’t seen Jared, nor gotten his name from A.E., and they have no pictures of you or the others on his security team.”

Jensen asked, “What about Jared’s friends who have my number? Can their phones be traced?” Price shook his head, “They’re all blocked, Jensen...and we’re tracing them all.” The special forces expert sighed in relief, “Well, that’s good, at least. I told Phil I want to take Jared out tomorrow...just to get him out.” Jensen looked at Price, “I’m gonna wear your boys out a little, because he needs it.” Price nodded, “Whatever he needs, Jensen, I mean it.” Jensen thought of something else, “I’d like to try and get his friends to visit, is that okay?”

“No problem,” Price answered, “Chuck’ll be back by tonight. He, Lance and Frank will make it happen.” Jensen was relieved, “Thank you...if you need him for testimony in the future, I think this will help him keep as sane as possible before anything else comes his way.” He and Price contemplated in silence for a moment, until Jensen heard something in the bedroom, “Excuse me for a few minutes.” Price answered, “Sure,” as Jensen walked away. The curious veteran wandered into his bedroom, worried about his lover’s condition. The messy bed covers indicated that Jared had gotten up, so Jensen went to the bathroom door, which was cracked open a bit. He pushed the door open slowly, seeing Jared leaning against the counter, rubbing his face. He couldn’t stop the affectionate grin, as the sleepy engineer yawned and blinked heavily. The kid’s beautiful mane was going every which way it wanted to, the rumpled t-shirt and the low riding pajama pants were hanging loosely, and he didn’t seem to be aware that he was being watched yet. Jensen slid his arms around Jared’s waist from behind. He rested his chin on the younger man’s shoulder. Jared grinned shyly at his lover through the mirror. He knew Jensen’s soft grin had to be because of his sluggish appearance. Jensen kissed his neck, then rested his chin back on the shoulder, “Good morning.”

Jared grinned shyly, “Morning.” He yawned again, “What time is it?”

Jensen smirked, “Mmm...well, let’s just say you’ll be eating a late lunch. It’s almost one.” Jared’s brain was too sluggish to show as much disbelief as he felt, “Damn, I didn’t mean to sleep that long. I’ve ‘never’ slept that long.” Jensen kissed the side of his head, “You needed it, and we’ve got nowhere else we need to be.” Jared yawned again. Jensen grinned, “Maybe you’re not done sleeping.” He rubbed his hands around Jared’s front torso and felt the leftover Lidocaine pads. He turned Jared slightly, as he knelt, “Lemme get these off for you.” Jared yawned as he looked down, “I forgot they were there. I guess they work pretty well.” Jensen peeled the pads off Jared’s smooth skin, “Yeah, they’re good for something topical or just below the surface. I’m glad Mike had them.”
He threw the used pads away, then slid his arms around the younger man, facing him. Jensen assessed him closely. The steely grey and hazel were a little dark this morning, meaning Jared wasn’t completely unguarded, but the eyes weren’t blood shot or dilated. Some of the heavy exhaustion lines had disappeared. He felt a little too much heat coming from Jared, however. The kid shivered slightly. Jensen asked worriedly, “Are you cold?”

Jared nodded, “Yeah,” but knew Jensen would worry if he didn’t reassure him, “but I’m okay.” He slid his arms around Jensen and laid his head sideways on the muscular shoulder he loved so much. He sighed with his eyes closed, “M’sorry for last night.” Jensen tightened his arms, “Hey...sorry for what?” Jared sighed again, “For freaking out. I was never such a baby about things.” Jensen nestled his face into the younger man’s neck, “Please don’t be sorry, ever...don’t blame yourself for any of this. I love you so much, baby.” After a few minutes, Jensen pulled back to cup Jared’s face with his hands, “You’re gonna take it easy today, okay kiddo? Eat, rest, some Motrin. That’s the extent of your day, alright?” Jared argued, “There isn’t much of a day left.” Jensen argued back, “That’s a good thing. That means you’ve done what you’re supposed to do, so far. Your mind went through heavy trauma yesterday and you need peace so it can catch up and process it all. Okay?” Jared nodded, feeling Jensen’s taught tension and concern for him. He suddenly asked, “Where is everyone? Are they okay?”

Jensen filled him in, “The guys’ll be back later tonight. They’re checking on their homes and getting more groceries. I told them to take off and do what they needed to do.” Jared looked worried, and guilty, which Jensen immediately had to correct, “Hey. Dave’s fine. He’s probably pissed he has to change the dressing for a couple days, but that’s it. He was walking around fine this morning.” Jared looked pleasantly relieved, “Oh...that’s good,” he nodded. When he looked at Jensen with renewed fear and worry, the older man cut him off, “Bart’s fine too. He’s going home tomorrow. He’s already made plans to stand in at the pre-lim. And the undercover agent is going to recover. He’s in the hospital, just like you had to go through, but he’s gonna recover, just like you. Everyone’s going to be okay.” Jared let out a relieved sigh, “Thank God.”

Jensen rubbed Jared’s arms up and down, feeling the goose bumps there, “Now that you’ve run out of things to blame yourself for, do you want a hot shower? If you don’t, we’re putting sweats on you and planting your perfect butt by the fire.” Jared grinned slightly when his brain caught up to Jensen’s words, “Actually yeah, a hot shower sounds great. My butt’s not really perfect, though.” Jensen grinned, “Beg to differ on that. Are you feeling weak or dizzy?” Jared assured him, “No. I’m fine. I’m just kind of pathetically lethargic, but I’m fine.” Jensen studied him for a few seconds, “I’m not letting you shower by yourself if there’s any possibility...” Jared put a finger to Jensen’s mouth, effectively cutting him off. “I’m fine,” Jared repeated with an affectionate grin. Jensen’s eyebrow raised because he couldn’t remember ‘ever’ being silenced like that before. He started to grin, then Jared blew his mind with an incredible open mouthed kiss. After several seconds of Jared’s hot wet tongue invading his mouth, Jensen found himself in a delirious fog. When Jensen backed off, Jensen was just opening his eyes. His beautiful hazel green depths focused solely on Jared, pinning him with intensity. The look in the protective warrior’s eyes practically curled Jared’s toes. It definitely went straight to his dick and filled his mind with vivid ideas. Jensen rubbed the younger man’s arms again, then backed up a couple feet with a soft growl, “You are a dangerous weapon, Padalecki. It isn’t safe for me to be in here right now.”

Jared’s eyebrow raised, as he asked coyly, “Isn’t safe for who?” Jensen shook his head, as he backed toward the door, “Get your shower, then I’m feeding you.” Jared grinned and took a step toward him, “Feeding me what?” Jensen held up a hand, “Stop right there. I can’t fucking resist you and you know it. Price is out there.” Jared moved forward, ignoring Jensen’s weak attempt to stop him. He kissed the older man deeply once again. When Jared pulled back, he ordered, “Get rid of Price.” Jared turned and proceeded to undress in front of the shower, giving Jensen a parting view of the perfect butt in question, as he bent to turn on the water. Jensen had to adjust himself. “Fuck,” he
grumbled, as he returned down the hallway. “How’s he doing?” Price asked Jensen innocently concerned. The veteran explained with wonder, “Better than I expected,” then nodded in thought, “a LOT better than last night.” He had a nasty thought that wasn’t appropriate to share with the attorney, so he busied himself warming the visitor’s coffee. After Price left, Jensen put Jared’s breakfast into the toaster oven to have it ready when he walked out. He couldn’t seem to will his dick to stay down. ‘Dammit,’ he had completely lost his control around the young brainiac he was in love with. It was annoying to think his half a lifetime of training and experience had no chance against the younger man’s power.

Jensen folded the laundry and put the sheets back on the spare bed. He tended the fire for a moment, then turned to see his lover shuffle into the kitchen. Jared made a beeline for the coffee, so Jensen put the poker aside and joined him in the kitchen. He leaned against the opposite counter with his arms folded, watching Jared’s orgasmic reaction to his first few sips of the strong espresso. Jensen tried to will his cock down to quarter size, but watching Jared wasn’t helping. The engineer had glowing pink skin and wet hair. The navy sweats Jared chose to wear did nothing to hide his gorgeous curves. Jensen took the kid’s breakfast from the toaster oven and slid it onto a plate a little more forcefully than he needed to. He was still dealing with the inability to control himself and it frustrated him. Jared eagerly grabbed the tasty omelet from him. He kissed Jensen, “Thank you,” then walked to the table to sit down. Jensen sighed because Jared was oblivious to how innocently charming and downright sexy he was. Jensen’s half hard dick certainly knew. He brought Jared another cup of coffee and placed two water bottles next to it. The younger man didn’t even complain about having water forced on him. He was too busy savoring his omelet. “Mmmmm, this is so fucking good,” the heavenly orgasmic sounds continued, as Jared licked the fork. Jensen moved to the couch, irritably trying to concentrate on other things. Pretending to read the rest of the paper, when all he really wanted to do was taste, lick and nibble on that delectable skin was not easy.

Jensen hadn’t realized he’d been staring over the newspaper. His eyes travelled from Jared’s bare ankles, up the sinfully long legs hidden inside baggy sweats. His eyes hesitated at the waistline, knowing damn well he’d like to pull those sweats down and suck on what was under there. Then, there were Jared’s sexy hip bones and the smooth warm skin on his stomach. Jensen’s eyes suddenly deterred up to Jared’s face, noticing the knowing grin and raised eyebrow for the first damn time. ‘Shit,’ Jensen thought, ‘how the hell did I miss him walking in here?’ He looked at the table and back at Jared, who was standing right in front of him.

Jared loved Jensen like this. It was making his morning. ‘Or afternoon,’ the younger man thought. He could read the distracted thought of something encouragingly sexy in Jensen’s eyes. He even saw the second Jensen realized he’d missed him walking into the room. Jensen thought it was kind of adorable to see the older man’s annoyance at himself for not being on guard, for once. He had put his plate in the sink, announced how absolutely delicious breakfast was, then thanked Jensen loudly. He had come to stand in front of the fire before he realized the warrior on the couch was distracted.

Jensen put his paper down, adjusted his seat and cleared his throat. Jared loved the nervous shyness. No one got to see Jensen like this, but him. He played it kind of cool and stepped closer to the fire, “So, how long will the guys be gone?” Jensen feigned nonchalance, “Oh...I don’t know, probably ‘til dinner...or maybe later, if they stay out longer.” Jensen glanced around the room, trying to look care free. The younger man asked, “So, we have five hours? Or so?” Jensen’s breathing increased, even though seemingly under control, “Yes...or so.” Jared could hear the deeper underlying tone in Jensen’s response.

The engineer nodded, “That’s good.” Jensen answered, “Yeah...it is.” Silence remained between them for a few minutes, with nothing but the sound of the flames. Jensen crossed one bent leg over the other, and rested his elbow on the end of the couch to prop up his chin. He silently watched Jared. The engineer stared into the flames for a moment, drinking in the blessed heat. He glanced at Jensen, thinking he was the sexiest thing he had ever seen. Jared looked back at the fire quickly,
knowing Jensen’s eyes were on him. His breathing sped up, as his libido ignited. He didn’t know what Jensen had in mind, but Jared’s dick was getting hard just thinking of the possibilities. Jensen watched the glow of the fire dance on Jared’s face. When Jared noticed he was still being watched, he looked down with a shy grin. Jensen’s dick twitched when the younger man licked his lips. God, his genius was edible. Jensen stood up and came up behind Jared, silently. When he slipped his hands around Jared’s waist from behind, the kid jumped at first. Jensen grinned because even though he’d startled him, Jared instantly leaned back into him. Jensen inhaled Jared’s shampoo, then kissed him on the neck, “You okay?” Jared melted further into him. Jensen’s arms crossed in front of him, holding him tighter, as Jared answered softly, “Better than okay.”

Jensen slipped his hands underneath Jared’s loose sweatshirt to rub the smooth warm skin beneath. He started to kiss Jared on his neck, then hummed his approval when the younger man granted him full access by moving his head to the side. In between kisses, he mumbled, “God, you smell good...and you taste incredible.” Jared sighed in pleasure. He rolled his head back on Jensen’s shoulder with his eyes closed. He loved this. Whenever Jensen touched him, he couldn’t think straight. Visions of Jensen and he spread out naked in front of this fireplace were flashing in Jared’s mind, as Jensen began sliding his hands into Jared’s pants. Jared was breathing quite heavily now. The older man rubbed his fingers in circles through Jared’s pubic hair, while continuing to kiss his neck. Jared breathed faster, “Jensen,” he whispered, then grabbed the back of Jensen’s head with one hand. Jared’s other hand slid around behind him to touch the front of Jensen’s jeans and rub the bulge there. Jensen moaned, breathlessly into Jared’s ear, “You’re gonna make me cum in my pants.” The skilled warrior turned Jared around in his arms, “Tell me what you want, baby...tell me before I cum in my pants from just looking at you.” Jared leaned his forehead against Jensen’s. They both stared into each other’s eyes. He rubbed his hands up and down Jensen’s incredible chest, feeling the chiseled muscles through his t-shirt.

Jared wanted everything. He loved this man so much, he would do anything for him...and with him. He kissed Jensen softly, then gently licked his lips, as they breathed into each other’s mouths, “I want you to kiss me...then I want you to take everything you want,” Jared whispered, then shoved his tongue into Jensen’s mouth. The veteran’s eyes rolled up and he moaned, his mouth opened wide. He gave himself over to the magnetic experience of Jared’s hot wet tongue making itself at home. He was enraptured. Nothing felt like this. Jared tasted better than sweet cream. He was addicting. Jensen was lost in him. The kiss became more aggressive, both men pushing harder into the other. Their hands roamed every part of each other at once. Jensen finally pushed his mouth to the side to gasp for air, “Jesus fucking Christ, Jare.” He rubbed Jared’s back, slid his hands under the kid’s sweatshirt, then slipped them down to rub the younger man’s ass. Jared felt amazing, the soft smooth skin warm and inviting. “Mmmm,” Jensen kissed Jared’s throat, still trying to get some semblance of control back.

Jared moaned and panted. He was rock hard. When he felt Jensen’s hot tongue behind his ear, he almost lost it. Jensen’s voice penetrated the haze fog, “You want me to put a blanket down?” Jared tried to make sense of the question, but Jensen blew into his ear, sending sparks of electricity through his whole body. “Aaah,” Jared’s moan and answer of “Yes,” had Jensen moving fast. He kissed him on the neck once more, then cupped his face, “Stay right here, and I’ll be right back in thirty seconds.” He kissed Jared and left him there. Jensen trotted to the bedroom to grab the lube and two pillows. On the way back, he grabbed a huge blanket from the hall closet, then returned to Jared. The young engineer was right where he left him. As Jared watched, Jensen quickly spread out the huge white fur blanket. There was no way they would be getting cold, even with their clothes off. Jared smiled when Jensen thoughtfully dropped the two pillows from his bed. The older man dropped the lube next to one of the pillows, just in case, not knowing whether they’d use it, or not. Jensen slid his arms around Jared again, “I’ve never used this blanket, but it’s really thick and soft. Is this okay?” Jared smiled softly, his eyes full of loving adoration, “It’s perfect...like everything else you do.”
Jensen tightened his hold around his gorgeous genius, “The only thing perfect about me is standing in front of me...and I’m ‘damn’ sure this blanket will never look as good as it’s about to with your gorgeous body spread all over it.”

Jared’s breathing quickened. He looked down at the blanket, picturing it under his skin, then he smirked, “Five hours.” Jensen whispered into Jared’s ear, “Or longer.” Jared closed his eyes and moaned while Jensen sucked the skin behind his ear. He slipped his hands under Jared’s clothing and started rubbing the smooth skin everywhere. “Oohh...” Jared moved lithely against him. The heat was immediate and overbearing. “Mmmmmm, you’re so fucking gorgeous, Jay,” Jensen spoke against Jared’s skin, his hands roamed up and down Jared’s back, rubbing and kneading from his shoulder blades down to his ass. He rubbed the perfect cheeks and squeezed them, then moved back up, while licking and kissing the younger man’s neck. Jared was long and lean, but muscular and curved in all the right places. Jensen couldn’t get enough of the feast in his arms. He needed to feel and taste every part at once. Jared was mindlessly rubbing and kneading Jensen’s muscular shoulders. He loved Jensen’s shoulders. They comforted him, held him and saved his life. They were strong, powerful and loving all at the same time. When Jensen stuck his tongue in Jared’s ear, he cried out, “Aaaahhh.” Jensen was frying his brain cells, Jared was sure of it. “Oh my God....Jensen,” he couldn’t muster anything else. His pelvis automatically pushed into Jensen’s. The spark of pleasure when their cocks touched caused both men to shudder and groan.

Jensen slipped his hand down the front of Jared’s sweatpants, felt the amount of pre-cum flooding the kid’s underwear. He moved his hand around in the liquid until Jared panted, “Touch me...please.” Jensen couldn’t resist. He smoothed his hand over Jared’s cock and squeezed, pumping it twice. “Aaaahhh...oh, fuck...fuck, Jensen,” Jared cried out. He was spiraling toward orgasm. Jensen almost couldn’t stop, mesmerized by Jared’s head thrown back, his look of rapture. He removed his hand and pulled Jared tighter against him, “I want to suck you so bad,” then pulled Jared’s mouth hard against his and kissed him. Jared’s tongue eagerly responded. They kissed eager and desperate, Jensen attempting to guide Jared onto the blanket. Jared’s hands slid down to Jensen’s ass. They rubbed up and down, kneading him, which was terribly distracting. Jensen knew they needed to breathe, but he was so fucking lost in Jared’s mouth. Jared’s hands slid under Jensen’s t-shirt, then moved to the front and scraped his nipples with his thumbnails. “Mmmm,” the older man moaned. He pushed Jared’s sweats down, slowly, as Jared slipped his hands down into Jensen’s jeans. He undid the button and slipped his hands fully into Jensen’s underwear.

Jensen had to break away, panting, “Jesusfuckingchrist, Jare,” as Jared slipped his hands through the leaking fluid to reach the engorged member. “Aaaahhh,” Jensen couldn’t control his reaction to the hand around his dick. Jared slid up and down and Jensen was lost, “Ohmyfuckinggod, yes.” Jensen pushed his cock forward into Jared’s hand, as his own hands became more aggressive. He was on fire. Jensen pushed the sweats down further and pushed up the sweatshirt. Jared’s hands slipped Jensen’s jeans down a few inches, then pushed up Jensen’s shirt. Jared managed to slide his mouth to the side of Jensen’s face and lick his way toward the older man’s ear. As he stuck his tongue in it, Jensen’s grip tightened, he shuddered with a growl, “Oooollllll...fuck.” Jensen had a coherent thought that he really needed to get Jared on the floor before he came in his half-opened pants. The younger man continued to wiggle his tongue in Jensen’s ear. Jensen couldn’t stop his moaning. It felt fucking incredible. “Baby,” Jensen gripped his arms. He meant to pull him off, but instead he pulled him harder against him just for a moment, “Oh Jesus,” it felt so good. What Jared was doing. Jensen knew he was going to cum. “Get on the floor,” Jensen barked in a gruff voice he’d never heard from himself before. Jared responded, “Yes soldier,” before he sucked behind Jensen’s ear. Jensen groaned loudly. Christ, he wasn’t going to make it if he didn’t do something.

Jensen pulled a take down move, but altered it slightly, to go with the current situation. He didn’t want his lover to be hurt or afraid, so he chose something simple. He devoured Jared’s mouth in a deep kiss, while curling his lower legs behind Jared’s. He put his knees right behind the younger
man’s, blocking him from stepping back. When Jensen leaned his weight into Jared, he pushed the younger man backward, effectively pushed him off balance. Jared’s knees bent naturally, as Jensen safely controlled his descent to the ground. Jared was soon lying flat with Jensen on top of him, never having broken the kiss. He panted, as Jensen released the kiss. He was so turned on, he was sure he was going to combust. Jensen lowering him like that was a remarkable experience. It was also hotter than fuck. Jensen removed Jared’s shirt, then drank his fill for a moment, watching the beautiful body catch the glow of the fire. He slipped the sweats the rest of the way off with the underwear, then kissed Jared again. When he sat back on his heels, he grabbed Jared around the thighs and pulled, sliding him down into the perfect spot. His lover had landed a bit skewed and he wanted him perfectly comfortable. Jensen pulled his own shirts off, then rubbed his hands up Jared’s long legs as he moved over him again. Jared’s hands slid up the impressively taught pecs and trailed down the soft reddish hairs toward Jensen’s abdomen. “You’re so beautiful, Jensen, so goddamn perfect,” Jared couldn’t get enough of feeling the beautiful golden skin.

Jensen dropped his body down to completely cover Jared. “Not as beautiful as what I’m looking at,” he said, then kissed Jared again. Jared could barely feel the chill of the rest of the house, but with his lover’s heat enveloping him, the blanket and the fire, there was no way in hell he could be cold. He moaned at the feel of their bodies touching. Something about being completely naked out here in the open like this, with a gorgeous buffed trained killer was frying every last brain cell Jared had left. He pushed his body up against his war horse and felt the eagerness returned as Jensen pushed down. “Mmm...” Jensen moaned, “I’m gonna cum in my pants...you’re too fucking hot, Jare.” Jared raised his legs and pushed his pelvis upward. “Then take them off,” he ordered forcefully, as he pushed pushed the jeans down with his feet. He couldn’t get them too far, but at least he had started them. Jensen grinned without taking his eyes from Jared’s, “You’re talented with those gorgeous legs of yours.” Jared didn’t wait for pleasantries, “The underwear too,” he ordered. Jensen pulled his jeans and underwear off, never losing the sexy half grin, totally turned on by Jared’s forcefulness. He returned to his position, laying completely naked over his lover, except for his socks. Jared loved the feel of the dog tags on his own chest. They weren’t cold, they were hot from Jensen’s body heat. Jared had a fraction of a vision of that chain wrapped around his dick, but he was quickly sidetracked by the light feather touch of Jensen’s fingers, going up his inner thigh toward his groin.

He was panting loudly by the time Jensen lightly touched his balls. “Oh my God,” he warned, “Jensen, I’m gonna cum, if you don’t stop. Oooohh my God,” Jared grabbed the plush blanket with twisting grips, his body flushed with a reddish hue, as Jensen lightly fingered his sensitive sac. The older man’s eyes were on Jared’s all over flush, the dilated eyes, the grip on his blanket, and the leaky cock that was begging to be touched. Jared was almost at the end of his rope. Jensen almost burst his load just from watching him. “Jensen,” the younger man sounded desperate. Jensen moaned, “You gonna cum for me?” He kept rubbing Jared’s sac. Jared didn’t want to end this but it was impossible to fight the immense pleasure and the need to pump his hips. “Oh Jensen...Jensen, I can’t, oh my God,” his voice rose higher when the older man encircled his balls and started rubbing them. “Mmmmnooo,” Jared was panting, “I don’t want to cum yet.” Jensen moaned in appreciation, “God, you are gorgeous. Maybe I want you to cum...maybe I want to watch.” Jared was at his wit’s end, “Jesus Jensen, fuck,” he panted harder. “God, you feel so fucking good. Oh my God,” Jared’s hips were pushing up, begging for Jensen’s hand. Jensen was mesmerized. “I don’t wanna...ruin your nice blanket,” Jared tried to warn. Jensen licked a trail around Jared’s chest, grumbling, “You won’t.” Jared strained to look down. Jensen’s bulging muscles, the goddamn dog tags dragging over his skin, the all over golden tan, “FUCK,” Jared cursed. Jensen looked up, “You’re not gonna ruin my blanket, baby. You’ll cum in my mouth.” Jared growled, “Fuck me on it. Fuck me on this blanket...do it NOW, I’m gonna cum.”

The feel of Jensen’s mouth hesitating on it’s way down his abdomen, pausing to lick and kiss the smooth skin there, was driving Jared wild. He knew Jensen had heard him, but the older man hadn’t
Jared answered him yet. Jensen wanted to be sure that’s what Jared felt comfortable with and he wasn’t just desperate for release, “That what you want, baby?” Jensen hummed smoothly, as he licked his way down to the generous amounts of pre-cum leaking from Jared’s cock. “Yes,” Jared cried...“Oh my god, yes,” he said again, “Fuck me, please.” “If that’s what you want,” Jensen spoke in a deep breathy tone. Jared felt the hot breath on his dick. “Oh God,” Jared was panting high pitched...”Jensen,” he was practically begging. Jensen announced, “But first...I get to eat this, like I’ve been waiting to for days...I’m gonna swallow you down...and then you’re gonna cum again when I fuck you.” Before Jared could even respond, Jensen enveloped his entire dick with heat. “AAAAAHHHHH,” Jared’s head shot backward, he screamed in utter abandon, it felt soooo goddamned good. His hips pushed his dick up into the cavern of wet heat, pumping, pulsing toward that ultimate pleasure. He had no control over himself. The pleasure was mindless, starting at his dick, shooting outward through his entire being. “Mmmmm,” Jensen hummed in approval. He let Jared pump a few more times, then flattened his hands on the kid’s hips.

Jared cried out from the restricted movement, but Jensen sucked hard, wiggling his tongue around Jared’s dick. He knew his lover was close. He kept his mouth on his target, while he grabbed the lube by the pillow with one hand, and squirted it on his middle finger. Without without taking his mouth off Jared’s dick, Jensen rubbed Jared’s perineum, then slid his finger back toward the hole. He circled Jared’s puckered ring. “Aaaaaayes,” Jared cried in ecstasy. Jensen pushed his finger in half way and pumped it. “YES,” Jared screamed. His white knuckled grip on the blanket tightened, his whole body locked up with tension. Jensen sucked hard. “AAAAAHHHHHHH,” Jared screamed his release. He shook with intensity as waves of pleasure burst through him. Jensen’s vibrating hum of approval prolonged the rapture longer. He sucked and swallowed, feeding on the glorious liquid pulsing from Jared’s dick. “Ooohhhhh,” Jared continued to moan, “Aah...oooh,” as his orgasm worked it’s way through him until finally he collapsed on the thick blanket, his arms loosely laying to the side. “Ohmygod,” he said cried weakly, “Ohmygod,” Jared repeated, not even aware of what he was doing. He vibrated with wondrous euphoria flooding through his system.

Jared moaned. He turned his head and responded lazily to Jensen’s lips on his. Jensen snickered softly at the lack of coordination. “God, you’re beautiful,” he mumbled. then continued light kisses until Jared sluggishly slid his hands around his back and opened his mouth to respond. He moaned when he tasted himself in Jensen’s mouth, starting to wake back up the longer the kiss went. When Jensen pulled back, he searched his lover’s swirling masses of soft greys and lighter golds. Jensen smiled, thinking this was definitely a good look on Jared. “You okay?” he asked him. Jared nodded, not really done swimming in Jensen’s dark green pools yet. He rubbed his hands over Jensen’s shoulders and his back, loving the feel of the older man’s soft chest hairs laying against his own. He was feeling really super affectionate, for some reason. The fire was still blazing, keeping them warm. Jared moved his legs up and down the back of Jensen’s, rubbing his stockinged feet up to his ass and back. Jensen grinned. His lover was getting his friskiness back, definitely able to move again. He...
pushed down with his pelvis, groaning at the slippery friction against his engorged cock. “You still want me to put this inside of you? I can cum like this, just looking at you,” he offered, feeling his climax begging to released.

Jared’s mind went into desperate determination mode. He pulled his knees up, opening himself wide for Jensen’s easy access, “No. I want you to fuck me...cum inside me, Jensen, please.” ‘Fuck,’ Jensen held the base of his dick for a second and squeezed hard. He never looked away, as he sat on his haunches and applied more lube. He squirt the lube on his fingers, holding Jared’s gaze. Jared soon felt the first lubed finger circling his hole. As Jensen pushed in, Jared tensed, “Aah,” in absolute pleasure. “God Jensen,” Jared exclaimed. He lifted his legs to open up wider as the older man slid his finger further in. After sliding it in and out to meet Jared’s thrusts, Jensen slowed and added a second finger. “Oooh god,” Jared closed his eyes, feeling the nerve endings of his ring try to resist the invasion. It felt too damn good. His body quickly loosened to let Jensen inside. Jared pushed his hips against the fingers, while Jensen pumped them in and out slowly. He was extremely careful not to go too fast. He didn’t want to hurt Jared. At the same time, when the kid opened his legs wider for him and pushed his hips up to thrust, Jensen had to grab the base of his own cock again and squeeze hard. Jared was giving this to him. He trusted him again, to enter him and to take him like this. God, Jensen wasn’t sure he could last once he felt that tight heat around him. It was hard enough feeling it on his fingers. Jared’s hips were pumping now, fucking himself on Jensen’s fingers. “M’ready, Jensen...m’ready, s’okay to put another one in,” Jared panted out, now getting hard again. Jensen squirt more lube on his third finger and began pushing it in. He braced himself on one hand over Jared, watching him closely. “Tell me how it feels, baby...tell me if it hurts and I’ll stop.” He pushed his third finger in further. Jared’s eyes rolled up and he grabbed Jensen’s shoulders, panting, “Fuck...oh, fuck, it feels amazing, Jensen.”

Jensen growled, “I’m not gonna make it. You are just too fucking hot like this. Jesus christ, you should see yourself. You’re ass is so fucking tight.” Jensen breathed faster and harder, trying to hold on until he could get his angry deprived cock in there. Jared moaned and fucked himself slowly on Jensen’s fingers, getting used to the feel of that much girth. He gave himself a minute to stretch, to accommodate, then he nodded his encouragement, “Yes...God Jensen, it’s so good.” Jared had given him the signal, but Jensen wanted to watch him react to something first. He crooked his fingers slightly forward on his way out of the channel. He felt something soft and swollen and when he touched it, Jared quivered, “Uuuhhh.” “Mmmmm,” Jensen moaned with interest, “Is that it?” Jensen’s smooth as silk baritone voice, along with those persistent gentle fingers were Jared’s undoing. “Mmmmm...oh...oh,” he began gyrating as Jensen rubbed his fingers on the quivering gland. Jensen loved what it did to Jared when he found his prostate. Jared was now fully hard again. He was leaking, grunting with renewed need. The kid was losing it, the powerful tiny gland sending sparks of pleasure throughout. “Jensen,” Jared’s breathing was rapid, “Oh...fuck me...please...please...yes...,” now Jared was begging and Jensen had a hard time forcing himself to stop what he was doing. But, seeing Jared lift his legs for him, spreading himself open further and holding his knees with his hands, convinced Jensen he needed to get his dick in there. He scooted up against Jared’s ass. He squirt some lube on his dick, then rubbed the younger man’s beautiful legs and kissed them. Jensen braced himself with one hand, and guided his dick with the other. He never took his eyes off his lover’s face as he pushed against the lubed ring. He pushed, slowly but persistently, until he popped inside with a hoarse guttural cry. Fuck, it felt so good, and he wasn’t even in yet.

Jared bore down, feeling Jensen’s controlled power as he pushed further in. Jensen was breathing hard, pushing slow and watching Jared’s face. He was full of power and strength, but with Jared, he was always loving and gentle, careful. Jensen breathed his way through it, feeling Jensen’s rock hard cock splitting him in two until it finally stopped. Jensen let out a breath he’d been holding. He groaned in between pants, “Mmmmm...fuck, you’re so tight...oh my God, you’re tight. Jesus, Jared,
you feel amazing.” Everything was taught and tense on the older man. Jared knew he was controlling himself from moving. “Are you okay?” Jensen asked in a barely recognizable voice. He was straining himself to hold back, but the desire to push and start pumping was overwhelming. Jared took Jensen’s face between his hands and kissed him. He pulled back, “I’m very okay. Fuck me now, Jensen...cum inside me.” Jensen groaned at receiving the green light. He slowly slid his dick out and pushed it back in with a shudder, “Ooh, God, that’s fucking good.” He saw colors behind his eye lids. He pushed in and out, groaning louder at the feel of each thrust. Jared was moaning, pushing back to meet him. Jensen pushed in harder, speeding up his thrusts. “Oh God, yes,” Jared cried out, while Jensen moaned louder. The older man couldn’t focus...he was losing it. The sparks kept coming, pushing waves of intense pleasure out from his dick. His hips pumped harder, “Fuck,” he was losing control. “Fuck, Jared, oh my God,” it was too goddamn good. Faster...harder, Jensen kissed his lover, breathing too hard to hold it for long. “I’m gonna cum,” Jensen warned, “Oh fuck, Jare, it’s too goddamn good,” he was a basket case of overwhelming sensation. He adjusted slightly. When he hit Jared’s magic gland the sparks flew.

“YES,” Jared screamed, flying toward orgasm. “YES, JENSEN, FUCK YES!” he cried as Jensen pounded him harder. “Fucking cum with me,” Jensen ordered, as he grabbed Jared’s dick and pumped it. Jared tensed, “OH GOD JENSEN YES,” he screamed. Jensen thrust hard two more times and came, “Aaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh.” He jerked hard into Jared’s body. Jared screamed right after him, clamping down like a vice, forcing Jensen’s continued cries. The pleasure was incredible. They grunted, moaned and cried in ecstasy, each clenching and releasing from their own waves of pleasure. After a few minutes, Jared seemed to be spent. His feet and hands dropped back to the ground loosely, as he lay struggling with his eyes closed. All he could do was breathe. Jensen still pushed into him, grunting with leftover aftershocks that hadn’t quite released him yet. He had no power to move, other than to hang on and pulse when his body forced him to. He finally collapsed. He couldn’t even muster the energy to be embarrassed at his inability to move. He was barely conscious, draped over Jared like he was a precious lifeline he needed to cover from the rest of the world. His body floated on clouds. He was completely open and free. His shrinking dick was still inside Jared. He was sure it would love to stay there, but it would have to wait until next time. Jensen wondered if he could even live through a ‘next time.’ Cumming this hard had surely broken something.

Jensen drunkenly raised up on his elbows to look his lover over. Jared was breathing, thank God. He gently touched the younger man’s cheek and pulled his face over to look closer at him. “Hey,” he greeted softly, “You doin’ okay?” Jared moaned with his eyes closed, “m’not sure,” then yawned, “I can’t feel anything.” Jensen bore down for a second, causing his dick to twitch. Jared startled, “Oh,” laughing softly, “except that.” Jensen smiled. He kissed the younger man tenderly, nuzzling against his cheek, “I think that part of me is quite happy in there.” Jared started rubbing the back of Jensen’s legs with his feet. “Mmmmm,” he was practically purring, nuzzling his face into Jensen’s neck. Jensen asked, “Are you hurting?” Jared hummed, “Mm-mm.” They kissed with lazy tongues for a couple minutes. Jensen still looked concerned, “Are you sore?” Jared shook his head, “No, not like the first time,” then he corrected himself at Jensen’s disbeliefing look, “I mean sore yes but it’s much better than before.” Jensen accepted Jared’s evaluation of his condition for the moment, then gently pulled his dick out. Jared grinned, “There goes the blanket,” then giggled when he felt the gush of Jensen’s cum dripping out of his hole. Jensen sat up and held Jared’s bent legs up so he could watch the liquid running out of Jared’s ass. “Mmmmm,” Jensen groaned, “I see your point.” He looked at Jared and moved up to cover him again, “It’s damn hot knowing I put all that there.” Jared stared into his lover’s eyes, completely ensconced for the moment. He could live in Jensen’s eyes. The older man was thinking the same thing, but he also was thinking of something else. Like that cum leaking out of Jared’s hole. They had three more hours and Jensen was curious.....

Jared started to smirk, because he could see Jensen’s wheels turning. “What?” He asked with a
giggle, which made Jensen smile. “Can I ask you something?” Jensen asked, then started to kiss Jared’s chest. Jared looked down at him with a grin, “Of course. You can ask me anything.” He was still filled with endorphins, making him pretty much agreeable to anything. Jensen kept kissing around the beautiful pecs, “Have you ever cum three times?” The kid looked down at the top of Jensen’s head like he had grown horns, “No. Hell no, who can?” Then he looked flustered, “I mean...no, not...no.” He admitted to himself Jensen’s question had turned him on a little, but he figured his mechanical parts were too done to have any reaction over it. Jensen grinned knowingly, then raised up and kissed him with delicious passion. Their tongues danced lazily until he backed off with knowing interest, “Well then, this’ll be the first time for that, too,” and moved downward. He kissed the smooth flat stomach and abdomen on the way to his target, while Jared sputtered nervous warnings, “Uh...I’m not sure I can, Jensen...I’m not...I mean, it’s really sensitive and it’s...” Jensen sat on his haunches and pushed Jared’s legs back up so he could see the glistening hole. “Mmmmmmm,” he liked what he saw. The kid was flooded with moisture and lube obviously wasn’t gonna be a problem. He looked at Jared and braced himself on one hand over him, “Don’t worry...it’s okay if you can’t. I just wanna play a little. It’s part of my ‘Jared gets to feel only pleasure today’ mood.”

Jared’s breathing increased. ‘Jesus,’ he was still trying to accept being the object of someone’s full attention, like this. He wasn’t sure how long it would take to get used to it. Jensen had fried his wiring today, already...but obviously the man felt Jared hadn’t lost enough brain cells yet. Before he knew it, Jensen’s finger was rubbing his hole. “Ooooh,” Jared moaned. It felt amazing. He relaxed, as Jensen gently played with his ring for awhile. He rubbed his hole, massaging it in and out, then started using two fingers. “Mmmmm,” Jared began to feel lost in the soothing sensation, while Jensen continued the massage. The natural lube was in abundance. Jensen had gobs of the substance inside and out. After rubbing the entrance for awhile, Jensen subtly started to push his way in. Jared was breathing harder, moving restlessly like he wanted more. Jensen noticed the kid’s dick wasn’t even half hard. He didn’t touch it or suck on it yet, because like Jared said it was probably still too sensitive. Jensen pumped his fingers in and out, loving the lazy sexy response he was witnessing. He could see what he was doing felt good. Jared’s breathing was interrupted by moans of approval. Jared’s hips gyrated sensuously. He closed his eyes and pulled his knees up further to hold them out of the way. This told Jensen he certainly didn’t want him to stop. Jensen kissed Jared’s chest, then mumbled, “Does it feel good?” Jared nodded, “Yes...yes, it’s good.” The older man pushed his fingers in further and located that special spot, without pushing on it or massaging it yet. Jensen thought it felt a bit swollen, ‘maybe from the two orgasms earlier,’ he thought.

Jared braced himself. He knew that gland was going to drive him crazy the second Jensen touched it. “Jensen,” Jared looked anxious, like he was having some kind of performance anxiety, which Jensen rushed to counter, “I’m just exploring your gorgeous body...and I wanna make you feel incredible. Do you want me to stop?” Jensen looked into Jared’s now smoldering gaze. The younger man shook his head, “No...I love it...I can never get enough of you touching me.” Jensen kissed him thoroughly, tasting the heated silk of Jared’s delectable mouth. He kissed down his neck, wanting Jared to feel nothing other than cherished and loved. “You’re so beautiful, Jare. Don’t worry about anything.” Jensen paused to look down at Jared’s now half hard cock, “But wouldn’t it be something if you could cum again...hard.” Jensen looked up at Jared with smoldering eyes, then he watched Jared’s face go into ecstasy mode when he touched the gland. Jensen’s dick twitched as Jared’s eyes rolled up in pleasure. The younger man moaned loudly, fell helplessly out of control. Jensen’s fingers massaged him, taking him far away from any coherent thought. Nothing existed but blessed sparks of pleasure, starting at his core and pushing outward to all his nerve endings. His hips pumped with a mind of their own. The pleasure was so intense, it controlled him. He cried out, and moaned as Jensen rubbed his gland over and over. His dick filled quickly. Jensen became lost watching him. Jared had no choice but to ride that tension upward. He started crying out Jensen’s name, feeling the fingers stimulate his ass, in addition to the powerful sensations from his prostate. He felt a hand
pumping his dick, and he only then realized he had become rock hard again.

‘Fuck,’ he was going to cum. Jensen was going to make him cum, oh fuck, he was going to cum. Jesus it felt too good. Jared’s shocked mantra kept repeating in his mind, as he was forced to admit that he was indeed cumming again, and NOW. His hips sped up and the pleasure was too much, “YES,” Jared screamed. “OH FUCK...JENSEN YES!” The older man was breathing heavily now with his own dick reawakening. Jesus, he was going to shoot another load just watching the kid.

Jared pushed his hips up hard and tensed, “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh,” he shook and screamed, then tried to gulp a breath before the next wave, “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh,” Jared screamed again. Jensen had never seen anything so incredible. He kept up his massage, as Jared grunted and cried out from the powerful orgasm. He was completely at it’s mercy. His defenses were gone, and he even sobbed a bit at the intensity of being so vulnerable. Jensen gentled his touch, easing his fingers from the younger man’s body. He kissed Jared’s face, soothing him down, knowing damn well Jared’s senses were on overload. For a guarded person like Jared, this openness and vulnerability was probably overwhelming his logical brain.

Jensen lowered himself over Jared to blanket him with his warmth. He kissed him gently on his face, his eyelids, then around his chin and throat. He nuzzled his face into the kid’s neck and waited, letting Jared feel him and know he was secure with Jensen. The younger man still couldn’t open his eyes, but he felt Jensen and knew he was safe. He was finally able to bring up his hands and loosely rest them on Jensen’s back, but he still couldn’t open his eyes. “Ngh,” Jared managed to muster, but couldn’t do anything beyond that. Jensen smiled to himself, loving that he'd put this stillness and peace into Jared’s body, but concerned enough to wait it out and see if Jared was alright. When Jared finally shifted a bit and took a deep breath, Jensen took up watching him. Apparently, Jared wasn’t capable of anymore than that. He seemed to be falling asleep. Jensen kissed him lightly, “M’gonna fix the fire and clean us up, okay? You don’t have to move.” The younger man turned his face slightly, but showed no other signs of hearing Jensen, nor understanding him. Jensen didn’t want him to get cold, so he grabbed a blanket off the couch and covered him, before he tended to the fire. Once Jensen was satisfied with the rising flames, he made his way to the bathroom. He washed his hands and genitals with soap, then soaked a hand towel in hot water.

Jensen returned to the fireplace and uncovered Jared’s lower half to stick the hot wet towel between Jared’s ass cheeks. “Mmh,” Jared’s response made Jensen smile. “F’ls good,” Jared offered. Jensen held the towel where it was so the heat soaked in for a minute, “I’m glad it feels good.” Jared nodded, barely. Jensen had to grin because even half unconscious, Jared was trying to communicate. He rubbed Jared clean, using gentle strokes all over his crotch and through the crack of his ass. He rubbed the blanket below Jared’s hole, trying to clean some of the cum off, at least. When Jensen finished, he covered the kid back up and ran to put the towel in his hamper. He thought about grabbing a snack for them from the kitchen, then thought better of it. He really wanted to enjoy the skin on skin feeling before their alone time was over. He slipped under the blanket and moulded himself to the younger man’s warm body. Jared was cuddly and compliant, instantly turning on his side to face him. Jensen held him snug in his arms, inhaling the fresh scent of the kid’s shampoo. It felt complete, grounded and peaceful holding Jared like this. He kissed the top of his head, then smiled when Jared practically wiped his face on his chest and sighed happily. Jensen checked his watch, noting they had about two hours left. He would let Jared rest, then they could dress and decide on some food for dinner. By that time he would probably hear from the guys.

Jensen allowed himself to snooze, listening to the rhythmic breathing of his counterpart. When Jared finally yawned, Jensen started to rub his back. Jared’s skin was smooth and hot from his backside being closest to the fire. Jensen rubbed a bit longer, then shifted his hand to rub through his lover’s hair. Jared was trying to get up. He was sure there was a two ton safe laying on him and that’s why he couldn’t move. After a few more minutes of struggling to make himself move, Jared finally found enough inner resolve to tilt his head up and look at Jensen. “What did you do to me, Ackles?” He
feigned a tortured cry and struggled blatantly to push himself up but dropped back down, giving up with a frustrated cry. “Fuck...can’t move.” Jensen kissed the top of his head, “You don’t have to get up...they’re not coming for awhile yet.” Jared whined, “I have to go to the bathroom, dammit. Jesus, you fucking broke me.” Jensen now understood Jared’s dilemma. He sat up and pulled Jared up with him. “I’m sorry, baby, come on,” Jensen got on his knees and then helped Jared get onto his. He helped Jared to stand up then hung onto him while Jared rubbed his face. “Jesus,” he grumbled, as he proceeded to walk unsteadily toward the bathroom. Jensen started to go with him, concerned, but Jared waved him off, “s’okay.” Jensen held him for second, “Hey, are you alright?” He rubbed his thumb back and forth on Jared’s cheek, searching his eyes. Jared snickered softly, “What?” Jensen grinned, “I just wanna make sure you’re okay.” Jared admitted, embarrassingly, “I’m fine. You just fried my circuits.” He kissed his lover to reassure him, then walked toward the bathroom alone.

Jensen grinned after him because he got to watch Jared’s perfect ass at the same time he realized Jared probably hadn’t remembered he was walking around completely naked.

When Jared returned, he stopped in his tracks with his mouth hanging open. ‘Holy mother of all Greek Gods,’ his eyes were glued to the shift in muscles under slightly golden skin as Jensen poked around with the fireplace. He wasn’t facing Jared, completely involved in what he was doing. Jared took his time appreciating the gorgeous back, which tapered down to Jensen’s perfect ass. The man had put on his jeans, but left his shirt off. Jared noticed the jeans were loose, and when his lover turned around, he could see it was because Jensen had left them unbuttoned. The front wasn’t any less addicting to look at, Jared realized, as his gaze travelled down from Jensen’s buffed chest and shoulders to his rock hard abs and the trail of reddish brown hairs leading into the open jeans. ‘Fuckin’ adonis,’ he sighed, then he looked up and realized Jensen was looking at him. Jared’s eyes darted, then he looked embarrassedly caught and scrambled for his underwear and sweats off the couch. Jared slipped his bottoms on while Jensen smirked. When Jared stood up, Jensen cupped his face with his hands and kissed him. When he ended the kiss, he slid his hands around Jared’s arms. He felt the shivering and goose bumps. “You’re cold,” he said as he guided his lover to the fire. “It’s freezing in the bathroom,” Jared blurted out, then moaned appreciatively when Jensen slid his arms around him, instantly heating him, along with the fire.

Jared sighed a peaceful sound, “I could get used to this.” Jensen countered, “You better get used to it.” The younger man loosely complained, “You’re spoiling me. I’m gonna get lazy.” Jensen kissed him, “Mmm...I doubt that,” then kissed him again, “And maybe it’s about time you were spoiled after all the shit you’ve been through.” Jared stayed quiet, thinking to himself. He wasn’t sure if he should be this trusting that his life was going to stay this good. He couldn’t seem to stop himself from being this open around Jensen anymore, but that nagging voice in his head was still hell bent on bursting his bubble with warnings that this was not gonna last and he shouldn’t be counting on it. Jared hated that voice. Jensen suddenly added, “You’re like the energizer bunny when you’re working, you know. It’s not an easy task keeping you from overdoing it.” Jared laughed in surprise, then argued, “That’s not true.”

Jensen loved the engineer’s mood, so he continued forlornly, “I won’t be able to keep up. I have to take advantage of you now, as much as I can.” Jared giggled, as he kissed Jensen, “Right. I’m completely hopelessly attracted to your hot body, Rambo, and there’s no way I’d be running anywhere but toward you.” Jensen feigned disappointment, “So, you just want my body.” He sighed dejectedly, “Well, I guess if that’s all I’m gonna get.” Jared punched the older man lightly in his six pack, giggling, “That’s not true and you know it.” He was enjoying himself immensely. Jensen held him tighter against him so his hands couldn’t punch him as easily, “You know, you can’t hit me like that. I’m kind of an old man now and you have to be careful with me.” Jared shook his head, laughing, “You are not old. And you promised to teach me some moves, you know, I haven’t
Jensen stared into Jared’s sparkling multi-colored grey eyes for a few seconds. He saw happiness and peace there. Jared was carefree and open. This is exactly what he wanted for him, after the horrible day yesterday. This wasn’t a look Jared had very often, and Jensen was quite enchanted by it.

“Well,” Jensen considered for a second, “I’m not sure I should teach you ‘all’ my moves.” Jared pushed, “And why not?” Jensen argued, “Because...I need some private take downs for when I want you on that blanket again, spread out for me and willing.” Jared kissed him, “Why the hell do you need moves? Just snap your fingers, Ackles, and I’m yours. I have no resistance anymore. I can’t even play it coy, or flirt. It’s freaking annoying, really.” Jensen chuckled, “Oh, so what you’re saying is...I can have you whenever I want...any time? Even if it’s bending you over the barbecue while I’m cooking some steaks?” Jared looked at him speechless, his mouth hanging open. “...well,” Jensen interrupted him, “You ‘said’ any ‘time’, Padalecki, did you not?” Jared smirked, “I did...but...really? In front of the barbecue? Isn’t that kind of dangerous?” Jensen kissed him, using his tongue to coax Jared’s to come out and play for a moment. He loved that they could banter like this. Jensen pulled back from the kiss with a deep growl, “Mmmm...the problem is, I want you everywhere, all the time. And that ‘is’ dangerous. I have to keep my focus, you know. I have an image to keep up.” Jared grinned with feigned innocence, “You mean the studmuffin warrior image with the rock hard muscle definition that pretends he’s so mean and serious? That image?” Jensen sighed in mock irritation, which egged Jared on, “I happen to know he’s a gentle and considerate teddy bear who snuggles with me in between making me crazy with the most intense orgasms I’ve ever had in my life.”

Jensen’s eyebrow perked up, “Oh really? Hmpf, well I do admit you screaming during an orgasm is quite a favorite thing for me. Especially when you’re screaming ‘my’ name.” Jensen felt his dick twitching at the subject of their conversation. Jared argued playfully, “I wasn’t ‘screaming’ really,” then looked alarmed at Jensen’s knowing look, “Was I?” Jensen guffawed, then moaned while mentally replaying some of Jared’s beautiful reactions during sex, “Oh yeah.” Jared looked at his lover decisively, “Well, it’s your fault. It’s certainly not ‘my’ fault. God, I hope the guys outside didn’t hear it.” Jensen rubbed Jared’s back and shoulders, thinking to himself, ‘I’m sure they did,’ but he didn’t elaborate for Jared’s sake. He asked with concern, “How’s your soreness...everything okay?” Jared smiled softly, “It’s a very satisfied sore.” Jensen studied him, “You want some of that cream?” Jared shook his head, “Naw, it’s good.” Jensen rubbed his hand lightly over the scars and bruises on Jared’s ribcage, “How about this?” Jared glanced down, “Yeah,” then he looked up at Jensen, “It’s pretty sore. I think it’s fine, though.” Jensen argued softly, “You think everything’s fine when it comes to ‘yourself’, even if you’re bleeding out. Do you need a Motrin?” Jared looked a bit put out, “No...I’m serious, it’s okay. S’not as bad as it’s been. It’s better.” Jensen studied him longer, finally accepting that, “Okay,” then felt Jared’s forehead, “You had a temp all night. At least ‘that’ feels gone.” Jared smiled, “I think you fried my nervous system. Maybe it’s gone for good.” Jensen finally smiled, accepting that his lover seemed okay.

“So,” Jared began excitedly, “What are you gonna teach me first?” Jensen looked immediately unfavorable, “Not ‘now’...you’re not in any condition to do that ‘now’...wait ‘til you’re better.” Jared argued in earnest, “I am better!” Jensen looked at him with disapproval, so Jared kept goading him, “One thing...just one! Just pick something, I want to learn something.” Jensen sighed, ‘fucking toast,’ he mentally bitched. Jared seemed so excited. “Alright, fine,” Jensen bitched. Jared practically beamed with gratitude. Jensen slid his arms around the kid’s waist and kissed him first, “Maybe you should put your shirt on...it’s distracting me...all I wanna do is lick your beautiful skin right now.” Jared paused and sputtered, “Jensen, you’re the beautiful one...and why do ‘you’ get to stay half naked?” Jensen smirked, “I can put mine on too...if that’s what you want.” He rubbed Jared’s back in circles, then made a decision to teach him something very simple. “Let’s start with choking,” Jensen announced. Jared paused in surprise, but quickly recovered, “Okay...why?” Jensen said, “Because...if you have that ugly dream again, you’ll know what to do in your sleep and maybe it
won’t be so terrifying. Use it in your nightmare.” Jared was amazed at Jensen’s ingenuity, “Oh.” He agreed, “Okay. Show me.”

Jensen said, “Choke me.” Jared looked at him in disbelief, “What?” Jensen said again, “Choke me.” Jared said, “Why?” Jensen smirked, “Well, how am I gonna show you the move if you don’t pretend to choke me?” Jared suddenly caught on, “Oh...sorry.” Jensen thought it was cute. Jared put his hands on Jensen’s throat. His thumbs began rubbing back and forth on the smooth skin, as Jared became instantly distracted. Jensen sighed, smirking, “You’re not a very good bad guy.” Jared argued, “Well, maybe I don’t want to be one. You’re too hot to be my enemy.” Jensen sighed again, “It’s just for practice, now choke me like you’re angry. Pretend I’m Robert...or Daniel.” Jared tried to focus. He tightened his grip around Jensen’s throat. The older man never broke his slight grin, while watching Jared. He instantly used one hand to brush Jared’s arms to the side. Jared was stunned. Jensen said, “Again.” Jared looked confused for just a second, then placed his two hands on Jensen’s throat again. In a fraction of a second, Jensen swept his hands away, without even moving any other part of his body. Jared was shocked, then argued, “Why do you keep doing that? I’m doing what you told me to.” Jensen waited. Jared’s expression cleared, “Wait, that’s the move?” When Jensen grinned, he asked, “That’s it? That quick?” Jensen said, “Yes.” He put his hands on Jared’s neck in a strangling position, “Now, you do it.” Jared tried to remember what Jensen had just done. He quickly used his forearm to sweep Jensen’s two arms to the side. “Good,” the older man said, pleased at his lover’s success.

Jensen waited for Jared to absorb what he’d just learned. He seemed to be having trouble at the simplicity. He watched his wheels turn. “Okay,” Jared said, “So, Robert was using one hand in my nightmare.” Jensen said, “Same thing. The arm only has so much leverage. When it’s extended like that, you just look for the counter move that’s going to easily push it off balance. It doesn’t bend the correct way to resist. You have to do it quick, though, in a real situation.” Jared thought about it, “Okay, but if you’re really choking me, then it’s going to be a lot harder to just sweep your arm aside like that. I can see you’re just letting me do that and not really using your strength.” Jensen grinned to himself at Jared’s intelligence. Of all the trainees he’d had, this non-soldier engineer was going to be the quickest to challenge him with questions. ‘Cool,’ he thought. “You’re right,” Jensen responded, “that’s because I’m having trouble using any force against you.” Jared paused, looking confused. He was trying to figure out the meaning to that before asking a stupid question, “I don’t get it...what does that mean?” Jensen’s eyes softened, “It means I’m in love with you, Jay. I want to protect you...I can’t even fake an attack. I’ll have to work on that if I’m going to teach you.” Jared rubbed Jensen’s arms up and down, lovingly, “I feel the same way. I love you Jensen. How did you train, when it was other soldiers?”

Jensen answered honestly, “I beat the shit out of them.” Jared said, “Oh.” Jensen kissed him, “It’s different with you. I wasn’t head over heals for any of them.” They kissed again. Jared offered, “You can pretend you’re angry at me...I mean totally pissed off. I drank all the coffee in the house and peed in your truck.” Jensen laughed, “I’m not sure that’s working, baby. I just couldn’t hurt you, even if I was angry.” Jared kissed him again. He finally suggested, “Maybe for the rougher stuff, I should learn from Mike...or Dave.” Jensen’s reaction turned brooding, “No.” He pinned Jared threateningly, then explained, “If they hurt you, I’d have to hurt them. That’s a no.” Jensen sighed, “Well, that picture did it. Now, I know it’s gonna have to be me. I’ll try and fake it better...come on, let’s do this.” They continued the lesson, Jared practicing the move over and over with Jensen. The older man taught him another move, similar to that one, but the sweep was coming from the top of the attacker’s arms and brushing down their forearm’s against the bone. It was instantly uncomfortable enough to force an attacker’s arms down, the hands immediately letting go.

“Wow, that’s awesome,” Jared innocently praised. Jensen did the move very gently on Jared, but explained you had to really be quick and come down hard. There was no room for hesitation. “When someone’s trying to choke you, you come down like breaking their arm is no big deal.” Jared tried to
picture it, then practiced with increased force. He worried he wasn’t being very effective. He pushed harder, but he felt like he was hitting Jensen’s arms too hard. Jensen tensed his arms and held them firmer, “Here...let me give you a harder challenge.” Jared tried the move, but Jensen had a grip and he wasn’t budging. “It’s not working.” Jensen explained, “It’s because you’re holding back. Do it like you’re saving your life.” Jared looked at him worriedly, “I can’t.” Jensen asked patiently, “Why?” Jared said, “Because it’s you.” He looked at the older man guiltily, “Doesn’t it hurt?” Jensen looked at him with so much devotion and love, Jared felt goosebumps. Yes, it hurt, but it was supposed to. If this move saved Jared some day, it was worth the temporary pain. He encouraged him, “It’s okay. You’re not going to hurt me. Practice like it’s real.” He changed the move slightly to save his lover any anguish at doing something out of his comfort zone. Jared wasn’t used to this, after all, and there were over two hundred moves he could teach him. These were the easy ones. Instead of dropping an arm down over his outstretched attacking arms, Jensen showed him how to break the choke hold by putting his palms flat together and pushing his hands up between the attacker’s arms, then pushing outward.

Jared was amazed, once again, at the simplicity of it. He practiced with Jensen over and over until he wound up literally sparkling that he’d gotten it right. Jensen grinned at the little diamonds swimming in his eyes. He could tell Jared was relaxed and care free. ‘Perfect,’ He thought to himself. He went in for another kiss, just as his phone vibrated. He pulled the phone from his pocket and answered without looking away from Jared, “Yeah.” Mike asked, “You guys lost without us?” Jensen smirked, “Totally. What’s going on?” Jared slid his arms around Jensen’s waist and laid his head on his shoulder. He rubbed the dog tags between his fingers, feeling the raised print, while Jensen listened. Mike announced they were at Costco. He asked about spices and meats, marinades and for any requests. Jensen kept his other arm around Jared while he answered questions. He looked at him when Mike asked him something, “Yeah, get some, Jared likes ‘em too,” then smiled at the younger man. Jared smiled back, not sure what he was even smiling about. Jensen finished his conversation and hung up. He slipped his second arm around his lover’s waist, “They’ll probably be just under an hour. They’re bringing Philly Steak sandwiches so we don’t have to cook tonight.” Jared said, “That sounds good.” Jensen added, “And they’re getting more fresh strawberries and cream. Dave likes your strawberry waffles, too.” Jared’s giggle was adorable, so was the whine that came next, “Do we have to get dressed now?” Jensen rubbed his back, “Soon. It’s probably not a bad idea, though...it’s gonna freeze tonight.” Jared kissed him, “Well, there’s no freezing with you around. Ackles.” Jensen pulled him closer, glancing at the kiss swollen lips, “That’s cuz I can’t keep my hands off you.” They kissed for several minutes. Finally, Jensen grabbed their shirts so they could put them on by the fire. He picked up the blanket and went to put it in the wash. When he came back, Jared was reclining on the couch, looking like he’d been to a day spa. The kid was relaxed and happy, at the moment.

Jensen went to the kitchen and grabbed a couple Gatorades, thinking it would be the perfect drink for them right now. He stoked up the fire while Jared wound up gulping most of his drink down. Jensen offered him another one, to which Jared shook his head, “It’s okay.” Jensen sat on the couch, facing him. Jared stared into his eyes for a moment, then broke the silence, “I love you, Jensen.” Jensen smoothed Jared’s hair back, smiling softly, “I love you, too, always.” He played with the hair for a few more minutes, until they heard the turn of the deadbolt. They grinned knowingly when Mike yelled out, “Lucy, we’re home!!”
This chapter continues with the friends at Jensen’s trying for some normalcy. Everyone needs to come down after the horrific court day. Jared gets a bit banged up again, which upsets the team, especially one of them. This is full of angst, some great moments of tension and humor.

Jensen helped the others carry in groceries while Jared waited inside. He unpacked a few items, then turned and saw the 48 beer pack on the floor. He bent to slip it into the fridge instantly flinched back when three loud voices startled him, “Whoa!” “Hey!” “No!” Jared froze, as everyone took a few seconds to calm their nerves over what Jared had almost done. “I’m sorry, I forgot,” he guiltily explained. Jensen quickly soothed, “Jare, it’s okay. That just wouldn’t have been a good move.” Jared nodded, “I know. Sorry.” Dave grumbled as he moved to the counter, “You can stop apologizing for being injured and come look at this.” Jared argued, “Well, ‘YOU’RE’ injured.” Dave argued, “My injury is a paper cut. Yours isn’t.” Jared shifted his stance, irritated. Dave slid a box closer to him, as Jared bitched, “Good to know a bullet is a paper cut. Thanks for that.” Dave stared at the younger man for a second, assessing him further. Jared wasn’t angry, he was guilty. Dave bluntly argued, “This is not your fault, Jared. The bad guys shot people, you didn’t.” The engineer sighed in annoyance that Dave could read him so well. ‘Fucking ass Jedi mind shit,’ he mentally bitched. Jensen and Mike grinned at the exchange. The other two men were exact heights, perfectly evened up in a standoff. It was comical. Jensen was proud of the bond that had grown between them, and especially the trust Jared had for his friends, enough to be unafraid to argue.

Jared finally looked into the box, completely distracted from any further rebuttals. “Oh,” he remarked in surprised wonder, “is this for,” he looked back up, “what I think it’s for?” Dave smirked at how easily the kid had switched gears, “Yes. Jensen said you might remember how to make them.” Jared glanced at his lover, then back at Dave, then down at the ingredients, “Well, I think so. It’s been a long time but I’ll certainly try.” Mike came over to look in the box, “What’s it for?” Jared glanced at Dave as he answered Mike, “He got stuff to make frittata’s.” Mike looked between them, “Nice. When are we getting those?” Jared looked at Dave, who smirked, “Whenever Jared wants to make them for us.” Jared noticed all three of the Black Ops veterans had a knowing grin on their faces. He didn’t voice it, but he almost could sense that this had been on purpose to give him that ‘useful’ feeling by preparing a meal. He couldn’t believe how perceptive they all were...and goddamned nice, too. He was feeling gratefully silly, at the moment, “I’ll make ‘em tomorrow if you want. You want breakfast at some godawful foxhole dark thirty time?” Mike guffawed while Dave smirked, “That’s up to the cook, I think.” Jared looked at Jensen, “I’ll have get up early. They take awhile.” Mike feigned worry, “Oh...is that ‘real’ person early or...” Jensen cut him off, “Shut up. Jay, you get your rest and we’ll eat when you’re feeling up to it.” Everyone went quiet. Jared piped in, now excited at the opportunity to do something nice for them, “How about seven thirty?” Jared was happy they looked pleased, “If I screw them up, at least we have time to run get donuts.” Mike lifted the beer
After things were put away, the four sat at the table and ate Philly Steak sandwiches from the restaurant. Jared couldn’t believe how good they were. After they finished their meal, Jared asked Dave and Mike, “So what did you guys do today?” Dave answered first, “I did some yard work, helped my neighbor fix a sprinkler head, I read the paper, went for a walk and had lunch.” Mike elbowed his friend, “Tell ‘em who you had lunch with.” Dave sighed and rolled his eyes, looking annoyed, “Does ‘everyone’ have to know?” Jensen grinned because he suspected Dave had been on a lunch date. Dave explained to Jared, “I had lunch with the woman I’ve been seeing.” Mike reiterated, “A date, Jared. He had a real date.” Dave sighed and shook his head, while Jared eagerly sat forward, “Really? Who is she? Is it serious?” Jensen loved Jared’s reaction. He sipped his beer as he watched the exchange between his friends and his lover. They had all been closed off and guarded for so long, this allowance of someone else into their personal space was a new concept. It was clear, his team considered Jared a part of the group.

Dave bitched at Mike, “See what you started?” then he looked back at Jared, “We’ve gone out a few times. I decided to finally tell her some things...see how she reacts, you know?” Jared understood, “You mean your job. The military...secret team and all that.” Dave answered “Yes,” grateful to Jared for understanding. The younger man could see it hadn’t been easy for Dave to go out on a limb and share that with a stranger, “That took a lot of guts to share with someone you don’t know that well yet.” Jensen piped in, “Hey, I shared it with ‘you’ early on.” Jared rolled his eyes and sighed, while still looking at Dave, “That’s because I couldn’t get up and he knew it. I was stuck in a hospital bed attached to a bunch of machines.” Jensen tipped his beer at Jared with a smirk, “True.” Jared gave him a gentle smile, knowing damn well Jensen knew he was kidding. He sought out Jensen’s hand under the table and squeezed it, looking back at Dave. “So how did it go? How much did you tell her?” Dave considered for a few seconds, “Not bad, I guess, she didn’t run screaming.” Jared smirked, but he wasn’t laughing at Dave, it was a reminder that Jensen had expected him to do the same thing. Running never even crossed Jared’s mind. He prayed this woman didn’t do that to Dave, either.

Dave shrugged, “But then I only told her about the teams I was on, explained some missions. She wanted to know why I’d been without a relationship for so long, so I thought I needed to tell her. I told her I used to have nightmares, had trouble blending with everyone on the outside.” When Dave paused with a slight worried look, something inside of Jared sparked to life, “Well, I hope you told her all the skills you have. All the medical, all that annoyingly accurate psyche stuff you guys are so good at...and about the hero’s you guys are for rescuing so many people. Did you tell her any of that part?” Jensen watched Dave, reminded of the first time Jared had called ‘him’ a hero. It was deeply moving when it happened. Mike was even quiet. He seemed to be looking at Jared in renewed awareness, like he was seeing the kid for the first time. When they were silent too long, Jared’s eyes darted between them like he thought he said something wrong. “Jared, it’s okay,” Jensen said, his thumb rubbed back and forth on Jared’s hand, “Remember when I told you it’s not how we see ourselves and other people don’t always approve of us? It’s why we’re reserved about it. Someone like you is...well, it’s a bit much to take in, at first.”

Jared spoke defensively to all of them, “You guys should ‘not’ have to be scared to tell people what you did for this country. Do you have any idea how many years of classes and even degrees it would take for someone in the civilian world to have the skills you guys have? It’s incomparable.” Jared continued to the dumbstruck group, “And you’re nice.” Jensen smirked at the raised eyebrow on Dave and Mike’s faces. “Yeah, that’s right...you’re nice,” Jared continued, “You help each other, you help your neighbors, you’re giving and caring...it amazes me that you’re just ‘used’ like that for so long and then just ‘dumped’ out here and expected to just fit in with the general population who...who doesn’t even appreciate what you’ve done.” ‘Oh boy,’ Jensen thought. Jared was on a
Jensen grinned at his lover’s earnest bright eyed look. Jared was a sight when he was fighting for something he believed in...this is probably the way he looked when he was writing his friends resume’s, or working on that ordinance for the SPCA. Jensen loved him beyond words. He looked at his two friends, hoping they weren’t going to have breakdowns or self combust at Jared’s overwhelming protective ness and admiration for them. He could see they were struggling to maintain a semblance of control and coolness, but Jared had touched them deeply. Jared turned to Mike, “So what about your day?” Mike’s mind was still reeling from being the subject of Jared’s heartfelt outburst. He quickly overcame it with cheery pride, “I totally kicked ass at the gym. After the usual workout, I went to the boxing room for an hour of sparring. It was fuckin’ sweet.” Jared smiled at Mike’s eagerness until Jensen groaned, “Please tell me you didn’t.” Mike argued defensively, “What?” Jensen shook his head, “Just tell me you did ‘not’ do that.” Mike countered, “I know what you’re thinking, Ackles, and no, I did ‘not’. It was good...it was a great time,” Mike looked sheepish, “They’re better fighters now.” Jared looked between them in confusion, “Is something wrong?” Mike looked at Jared, “Your friend here thinks I kicked all their asses and left them bleeding on the mat.” Jared looked worried, as Mike argued to Jensen, “Which is ‘not’ what happened. I held back, I swear. They got their money’s worth and they learned.”

Jensen finally grinned, “Well, as long as you didn’t break any bones.” Mike assured everyone at the table, “I didn’t. I mean they’re probably popping some muscle relaxants by now, but...no one’s in the ER.” Mike snorted, “This Green Beret dude showed up and begged me to kick his ass, but I didn’t even go all crazy on him.” Mike turned to Jared, “Those berets are kind of pussies, but they get their feelings hurt real easy, so I went soft on him.” Jared giggled. Mike announced, “Then, I did something I never do, my friends...I sat in the sauna.” Jared giggled again, which had Jensen grinning. Mike looked thoughtful, “It was okay...kinda reminded me of the damn jungle when it’s fuckin’ ninety nine percent humidity, but it was neat to try. After that, I went to brunch with another of our brethren. Haven’t seen him in months, it was fun.” Jensen asked, “Pete?” When Mike nodded, “Yep,” Jensen commented, “Sweet.” Mike continued, “Then, I went home, cleaned my house and did yard work...washed my truck. I also called a few places about that engineering school, and paid some bills.”

Jared laughed when Mike added, “Then I just waited for Euell Gibbons here to come get me.” Dave shook his head and rolled his eyes. Mike looked at Jared with renewed admiration, “You know who Euell Gibbons is?” Jared nodded, “Yes,” trying to control his infectious giggle. Mike nodded sideways toward Dave, “I waited two hours for him to take his senior nap.” Dave argued, “I was not napping, dickhead...I finished another chapter.” Jared’s interest was suddenly sidetracked, “Chapter? For what?” Dave hesitated, so Jensen interjected, “Dave is a writer, buddy.” Jared looked like he’d discovered a new element on the periodic table, “Really? That’s awesome. What do you write?” Dave looked out of sorts at sharing this part of himself, “It’s based on what we did. Sort of a mixed genre of fictional characters, but based on real life experiences.” Jared was amazed. Dave had brought creativity to the surface and was willing to share it with the world. He couldn’t quite pinpoint where the slight reluctance came from because he thought it was the greatest thing ever. He asked, “Are you going to publish yourself or submit it somewhere?” Dave started to relax more, “Yeah, the first one. I’ll introduce the second of the series to a formal publisher...if it goes well. I’m not sure how people will like it.”

Mike interjected, “I know ‘I’ll’ like it.” When Jared looked at him, Mike grinned knowingly, “I’ve
seen it.” Jensen complained, “Well, he hasn’t let ‘me’ see any of it. What the fuck? Are we gonna be your first guinea pigs?” Dave sighed, “Yes, you are. I’m just insecure about it. It’s like a work of art, and I keep making adjustments.” He looked at Mike, “And I didn’t really ‘let’ you see it, fuck stick, you looked at part of it when I was in the shower last week. You saw it by accident.” Jared understood works of art, wholeheartedly, and he totally understood wanting something to be perfect before you shared it. Jensen and Jared grinned at each other, as Mike argued with Dave, “Well, you were supposed to be ready when I got there, so it’s on you for taking your sweet time with your handicap bar and your soapy right hand.” Jared guffaw had Jensen laughing. Dave turned back to Jared, “I’m gonna try it out on a veteran’s forum then I’ll be releasing it. The situations are real, there’s some gore, but there’s heart and courage, relationships, espionage and betrayal. It’s got quite a bit.”

Jared eyed the older man, “I think it’s going to be better than you think, Dave. People will love it. It’s real. And it’s written by someone who’s lived it. I can’t wait to read it...but I get it...wanting it to be perfect and all.” Dave smiled appreciatively, then glanced at Mike, “See? ‘He’ gets it. The thing isn’t ready yet.” Mike sighed, “Well, it’s been over a year, that’s all. It’s killing me, dude.” Dave finally admitted, “Soon. I’m closing the last chapter.” Mike and Jared exclaimed, “Really?” They looked at one another in surprise, then back at Dave. Jensen chuckled to himself, while Dave answered, “Yep. It should be ready by next week.” Jensen stood up, “Beer anyone?” When everyone answered favorably, Jensen went to the refrigerator. Mike got up and cleaned off the table, throwing everyone’s wrappers and napkins away. Dave made his way to the fireplace, stoked it up and added more wood. Jared was handed a beer by his lover, then treated to a quick kiss. He glanced around at the others thinking, ‘Oh, we’re doing this.’ Jensen smiled at him and winked. Jared wasn’t used to being affectionate in front of anyone else, but it was starting to become obvious that Jensen’s friends didn’t care, at all. Jared supposed it was his uncle’s old prejudice and bigotry that had been stuck in his mind all these years. His uncle was so angry back then, and Jared was just a kid...impressionable and vulnerable. Jared had to remind himself that not everyone was like that. He gave Jensen a half grin of assurance that he was fine when he realized his lover had been watching him.

After they stood close to fire sipping their beer, Dave looked at Jared, “How do you feel today Jared? You look much better.” Jared looked surprised at the question, “Tons better...thank you.” He nodded then snorted self mockingly, “Sleeping til one o’clock probably made a difference.” He shook his head, “Still can’t believe I frickin’ did that.” Jensen countered, “You needed that...that’s why you did that.” Jared glanced at him, then nervously adjusted his hair. Dave knew it was just a shy habit from being on display. He asked, “No pain today?” Jared shook his head, “Nope,” then shrugged, “I mean it’s sore, but just like always.” Mike asked Jensen, “How about the fever last night? That gone?” Jensen nodded, “Woke up without it. He’s been pain free today, no problems.” He had a flashback of their afternoon. Jared was full of strength and energy, that was for damn sure. Mike turned to Jared, “Dude, you so kicked ass yesterday...those motherfuckers wore you down, but you still won that case. You fucking nailed it.” Jensen smiled when Jared’s cheeks sported a faint pink hue at Mike’s compliment. The younger man looked down in shyness, after smiling a quick, “Thanks.” The veterans exchanged a knowing smirk. They were proud of the kid, yet knew full well he would like for them to stop gloating over him and move on. “So,” Mike innocently tried to change the subject, “What did you guys do today?” When the two lovers were silent for a few seconds too long, Mike immediately looked accusingly at Jensen, “You DIDN’T.”

Dave caught on after Mike, then looked at Jensen, “Tell me you didn’t.” Jared looked between them with concern. “What’s...” he started to ask, then looked at his lover who looked completely stuck for an answer. ‘They know,’ Jensen portrayed with his eyes, silently pleading for some kind of distraction. Jared stuttered, “Uuhhh, well, Jensen taught me some moves.” Mike and Dave glanced at their charge. Jared smiled, proud that he’d thought of something to offer. The two men looked at each other, as Mike mumbled, “I bet.” Dave and Mike both looked at Jensen. “Moves?” Mike asked
suspiciously. Jensen defended himself, “He’s talking about simple choke hold breaks.” Jared tried to help, “Yeah, it was really cool. They were so simple. It was really fun.” Mike and Dave studied Jared for a few seconds, then turned back to Jensen, who chuckled at their intense protective reaction to Jared’s safekeeping. Dave finally exclaimed, “That’s not all you did. Mike’s right. What the fuck, Jensen, he’s got broken ribs and a hole in his lung.” Jensen looked at the ceiling with a sigh, begging the stars for patience, as Jared tried to defend him, “What...wait what are you...?” Jensen shook his head at his lover, “Don’t...don’t even, Jare, it’s okay.”

The two friends looked back at Jared. He was secretly mortified at discussing this in front of them, but, “It wasn’t,” he started out...Jensen interrupted, “Jare, it’s okay. They’re concerned about you, that’s all.” The younger man’s mouth dropped open. His mind panicked, ‘please help me God’, because he really didn’t want to discuss this in front of them. The two friends looked back at Jensen. Mike blurted out, “You DID. What the fuck, Ackles, is he okay?” Jensen balked a guffaw, “Of course he’s okay. Look at him. I love him, you dicks, I’m not gonna hurt him.” Mike and Dave studied a very embarrassed Jared from head to toe, while he stood there and looked annoyingly resentful. “Done?” Jared asked irritably, because he was ‘so’ not having fun with this. ‘Great, now ‘everyone’ knows what we did this afternoon,’ Jared sighed, ‘Jesus Christ, is nothing sacred.’ The engineer went to the couch and sat down in a huff. He put his legs on the coffee table and sipped his beer, refusing to look at any of them. Jensen whined, “Now look what you’ve done,” indicating toward his brooding lover. Dave and Mike instantly adjusted their stances. They hadn’t meant to upset the kid. They admitted to themselves their newfound overprotectiveness toward him had fueled their reaction.

Dave put a hand on his hip and sighed, “Fine.” Mike took a few extra seconds to concede. He looked at Jared and sighed, “I don’t have to like it...but you’re right, he does look better.” He looked back at Jensen and pointed his finger, “But, if he’s hurt, at all, because of you,” Jensen grinned, “If he’s hurt because of me, I’ll let you.” Mike seemed satisfied with that. All the men sat down, Jensen close to Jared but not touching him. Jared was still refusing to look at any of them. He was too busy dealing with his anger at being horribly embarrassed that they assumed he couldn’t have sex when he wanted. He wasn’t a teenager, for chrissake, and he didn’t need these men protecting his damn virtue. “So what are we gonna do?” Jensen asked of the room. He looked at Jared, hoping for an answer, but Jared wasn’t ready. Everyone seemed to be on the same page and wanted to watch something. When Jensen nudged him, “Mission Impossible movies?” Jared nodded with a half smile, “Yeah, that’ll be fun.” It was the least he could say, after they were trying so hard. After the first movie started, he realized he was having a good time again.

Jared obviously had several big titles to catch up on...he’d missed quite a few movies during his career. He’d been so busy pouring himself into his work, he never took a break. This was fun. The guys were hilarious and sharing the couch with Jensen was...well, it was like having a permanent solid presence that wasn’t going anywhere. Jared felt Jensen’s heat, heard the deep guttural laugh at something his team mates said, he felt the smooth skin of Jensen’s arm, knowing it had held him, lifted him and comforted him many times. He was in love with this man. It still hit Jared hard when he reminded himself of it. Jensen was here...still. After the first movie, Mike and Jensen went to the kitchen to make the infamous caramel popcorn. Jared took a bathroom break, then returned to the couch while Dave tended to the fire. The older man noticed Jared was still pensive and quiet. He offered Dave an easy going smile, but the trained observer wasn’t quite convinced by it. Dave put the poker away and came over to sit on the coffee table, facing his favorite engineer. He leaned his elbows on his knees. Jared sipped a beer, trying to look nonchalant about Dave’s perusal. The older man grinned but his eyes showed great concern.

Jared liked Dave...the man had saved his life and he continued to come here and offer Jared further protection. He was a close friend to his lover, a brother, and today he’d shared even more of himself to Jared. He had a passion to write, to create...but he was reserved, more quiet. He was shy about his
date today, and worried about being accepted by her. Dave was a beautiful person...all of these men were. Why was Jared so nervous in front of the man, then? ‘Maybe it’s that goddamn study/assess thing they all do,’ Jared thought. They could tell what you were thinking and feeling, pretty much by staring at you. Jared sighed because the older man kept looking at him, ‘Dammit,’ “What?” Dave looked down with a grin for a few seconds, then back up into Jared’s eyes, “I want to make sure you know that Mike and I care a great deal about you getting better...maybe too much...and I’m sorry if it embarrassed you. ‘Very’ sorry, Jared. That’s not what we meant to do.” Jared sighed, wanting to be annoyed, but unable to muster it toward the nice man in front of him. Instead, he argued softly, “I know...but you’re all like a bunch of over protective big brothers.” Jared looked him explain himself, but he really didn’t have to. They had invaded Jared’s privacy, stepped into his inner space without being invited. Jared was independent and according to Jensen, had been on his own for most of his life. He wasn’t used to a nosey family...brothers...’or even parents,’ caring what happened to him.

Jared blurted out, “I’m thirty three, you know. I’m not gonna let some dude stick it where I don’t want it.” Jared hadn’t meant to say it like that. He immediately tried to retract it with his eyes, but it was too late. Dave laughed out loud, totally caught off guard. Jared was something else. The kid turned a bright shade of crimson, while his new eldest big brother tried to contain himself. Dave said, “Well, I’m glad to hear that,” still chuckling while Jared hid his face with one hand, “I can’t believe I said that.” He looked up to see Dave grinning, “It’s alright, Jared. And you’re alright, you know that?” The younger man spent the next minute trying to control the blatant coloring on his cheeks. He was so thankful when the others came back. “What’s so funny in here?” Jensen asked, but Dave just shook his head and excused himself for a bathroom break. Jared was beyond thankful the man hadn’t said anything. Shit, he still couldn’t believe what he’d said.

Jensen knew something had transpired, but the slightly embarrassed demeanor on his lover told him not to bring it up. ‘Later,’ he thought to himself. “You okay?” Was the only thing he asked. The younger smiled up at him, “Awesome. It looks delicious.” Jensen lingered his gaze for a few seconds longer, “Are you feeling like you can make it through this one?” Jared answered, “Yes, definitely. I’m not missing ‘that’,” as he pointed to the table full of buttered sugary delights. Jensen smiled, “Okay then.” He sat next to Jared and held up two finger’s at Mike, “Roll it.” Mike pushed the button, then yelled out, “You better shake it off, old man, we’re starting.” Jared giggled, which caused Jensen to smile.

By the end of the movie, Jared looked very tired. He was pleasantly relaxed, yawning, but he could proudly say he wasn’t being carried to bed tonight like a five year old. He had finally managed to stay up like a normal person. Mike commented, “You know that mask shit isn’t possible. I mean the facial tissue would never regenerate after it’s removed to become some kind of mask.” Jared looked at the other two, curious of their opinion. Jensen looked thoughtful, then nodded, “Agreed. It was an interesting idea, but you’re right, there’s real looking polyurethane rubber that can do that...but not real skin, no way.” Jared looked at Dave, who finally added, “True. But that wouldn’t make the movie as interesting.” All the special forces experts in the room nodded their heads and silently agreed, while Jared studied their seriousness. He thought he would push them for further expert evaluations of the movie because it could wind up being fun, “So, what about the cables...like in the first one when he had to break into that room. Was that real?” The guys had finished their caramel corn and rootbeer. By this time, they were all laying around like a bunch of sugar crashed kids, enjoying the heat of the fire. Jared could see them thinking. He had given them something to stew over.

Dave shook his head, “I don’t think...well, maybe. We’ve done some cable and rope stuff. Who’s to say those CIA agents might know how to do that?” Mike looked disbelieving, “That kind of
training? I’m sure they do ‘some’ things, like breaking into security, but, those cables?” Then Mike thought for a few more seconds, “Well, maybe, I guess.” Jared had actually got them thinking. He entertained himself watching his protectors contemplate the cables used by Ethan Hawke for the next several minutes. Jensen finally spoke up, “They’re a bunch of suits in CIA. Their training is totally different. They don’t do combat, they sneak in and out and steal information and codes.” Mike blurted out, “We’ve done that.” Jensen countered, “I know, but it wasn’t usually that quiet.” Dave said, “It’s cleaner.” The other two nodded, as Mike added, “Definitely that.” Jensen added, “I think maybe those guys have different things they know how to do, but they couldn’t do our jobs and we ‘could’, in fact, do theirs, if we learned.” Mike mumbled, “Mmm...pussies.” Dave and Jensen hummed in agreement and nodded. Jared smiled while watching all of them. It was good to see them relaxed like this. He loved that they were in this state. They had done so much to keep him safe, he wanted them to stay this way for as long as they could...he also wanted to put his heart into that breakfast. Jared cleared his throat, “I think I’m going to bed so I can get up.”

Jensen looked over at him, instantly concerned, “Sure, are you alright?” Jared looked into his eyes, as Jensen put a hand on his forehead, “I’m fine. This whole evening was perfect. I just wanna be ready in the morning.” Dave watched the younger man struggle a bit to get off the couch. Not as bad as before, but still a bit painful. He decided to give Jared an out, “You really don’t have to feed us, Jared. We can do it the next day, so you can sleep in tomorrow.” Jared held his hand up, “Nope...I’m doing it tomorrow and I’m looking forward to it. Goodnight, you guys...and thanks for this. This whole evening was really cool.” Three sets of piercing eyes watched the young genius retreat. Jensen knew Jared must be exhausted. Dave and Mike looked to Jensen, wondering if he was going to follow, but Jensen held up his hand, “I’m going, don’t worry.” Mike asked, “For what?” Dave looked at Mike, “For you and I embarrassing him earlier. Poor guy was trying to be nice about it, but,” Dave looked back at Jensen, “I’m sorry, we just care a lot for the kid.” Jensen smiled, “I know.” He paused for a minute, then turned serious, “But believe me...nobody gets to hurt him, especially me.” Dave and Mike nodded, as Mike added, “We know that. We just overreacted.” Jared smiled, “I’m glad you guys like him.” Mike added his comment, “It’s beyond that. We’ll do anything for him. He’s been happy...all day and tonight. This was exactly what I wanted for him. I told Price he really just needed to chill like this and hopefully he wouldn’t need anything from him.”

Jared had turned the electric fireplace on, cleaned up and gotten under the covers. He loved Jensen’s home. Everything about Jensen spelled ‘home’, even his friends. He felt the longing in his soul for something he hadn’t had in over twenty years. He hadn’t even realized he’d been missing it...not until now. His mind still tried to play tricks on him. ‘Great, you’re hooked. that’s when things go to shit.’ Today was a taste of how fantastic normal life would be with Jensen. After the case and after all the threats were gone. This was how wonderful his life could be. Even his new surrogate brothers were becoming an important part of his life. Jared spent years distracting himself from the loss of his parents, the loss of Chris. He had denied himself the possibility of building roots again...and here he was planning to make breakfast tomorrow. ‘When the hell did this happen,’ he thought to himself. ‘I’ve completely lost myself. If anything happens to any of them,’ Jared closed his eyes trying to
reverse his thinking. He couldn’t stomach the thought of where his mind was going. “Hey,” Jensen’s loving deep timbre surprised him from his left side, as the warm body enveloped his own. Jared felt instant heat binding their souls. He hadn’t even heard Jensen come in. Everything he’d been thinking, everything he might have been panicking over, it was all melting way with Jensen’s touch. “I’ve got you, baby,” Jensen soothed, as he wrapped Jared tight in his arms. The younger man slipped his hands around Jensen’s waist and sighed dreamily into his chest. This was where he belonged...where he needed to be. His old insecurities were starting to rear their ugly head, but Jensen immediately chased them off. “God, I love you,” Jared rubbed his face on Jared’s chest, “I love you so much.”

Jared’s arms tightened. Jensen kissed the top of his head and spoke softly, “I love you too, Jare. Are you okay?” He could sense the anxiety when he came into the room. After getting this close to Jared, this felt exactly like what the younger man needed the most. Jensen answered, “Yes...very okay. This was the perfect day, Jensen.” The older man had to agree, “Yes it was.” Maybe Jared just wasn’t used to perfect days and he needed more of them. Jensen vowed to give him more. He kissed Jared on his head again and let himself fall fast asleep. Jared slept like a stone. He was in a warm cocoon of peace. He could smell Jensen, feel him, and that meant safety and love. He reluctantly came out of sleep, realizing he’d been sleeping with his mouth open, leaving a wet spot on Jensen’s chest. He’d been completely out of it. Not wanting to leave where he was, Jared took a few minutes to try and fight his body’s demands. ‘Fuck,’ there was no getting past the need to pee. He sighed, hating having to get up. He tried to slip himself out of Jensen’s hold without waking the man up, but he really should have known better. Jared leaned back over and kissed Jensen when he stirred, “It’s okay. I just have to pee.”

Even in his sleepy state, Jensen managed to be worried, “S’your left side okay?” Jared smiled lovingly and kissed the older man again, “It’s okay. I’ll switch when I get back.” He rubbed the older man’s short hair back lovingly, then went to take care of his business.

When Jared came from the bathroom, he decided he was thirsty. He and Jensen hadn’t brought any water bottles to the bedroom like they usually did, so Jared thought he would just go grab one. He shivered a bit, but standing in front of the synthetic flames for a minute took care of that. He headed down the hallway and when he came to the kitchen, he saw the shadow of a dark figure there. Jared froze, at first, then realized it was just Mike. Jared glanced at the clock on the microwave, noticed it was three a.m. and thought maybe Mike was thirsty too. “Hi Mike,” Jared offered, as he headed toward the refrigerator. He barely noticed the ex-soldier hadn’t answered him, so when he closed the fridge and faced him, he was suddenly surprised that Mike hadn’t seemed to hear him. Jared stopped unscrewing the bottle cap and reached out to touch the man, thinking maybe he didn’t feel well. “JARED, NO!” Dave yelled from the bedroom door, just as Jared innocently touched Mike’s shoulder.

The engineer started to look toward Dave, but he suddenly he cried out in pain, as he felt the powerful force of an iron grip twisting his wrist painfully. Another powerful force came from behind his legs and swept him off his feet. Jared’s impact of his back and tailbone on the hard floor wasn’t the end of it. He was pushed down hard against the floor, his head snapped back with an arm across his windpipe. “MIKE, NO!” That was Jensen’s voice. Just as Jared’s air was cut off, the panic that he was going to die ended faster than it started, as the weight of his attacker was lifted completely off him.

Dave pulled Mike backward with a choke hold from behind, forcing him to let go of Jared. Dave was joined by Jensen, who enforced painful compliance holds while wrestling Mike to the other side of the room. Once they had Mike up against the wall, near the dining table, Jensen left Dave in charge of him and rushed back to Jared’s side. “Jare?” Jensen called to the kid, as he got down on his knees to take a look at him. Jared was pushing himself up with his left hand, scooting back against the cupboard. He held his right hand tight against him. He didn’t seem to register Jensen was there.
Jared heard Mike’s angry growl, pissed beyond belief that he couldn’t move. “Fuckers!” Mike screamed, but Dave kept him under control. Dave barked in Mike’s ear, “Mike! Wake up! Dammit, Mike, wake up!” Jared was desperately trying to make sense of what he was seeing. “Jared?” Jensen didn’t get a response so he moved into Jared’s line of sight. The younger man looked up at him, still breathing hard from his panic. Jensen said, “Hey,” pleased he had finally gotten a response, then he took Jared’s cheeks between his hands. He examined his pupils closely, then turned Jared’s face from side to side, looking for any bruising. He slid his hands under Jared’s hair and took his time feeling for lumps under the skin. He tilted Jared’s head back to examine Jared’s throat, looking for swelling or bruises.

Jared finally processed at least part of what was happening, “So...he was asleep?” His voice sounded borderline upset, so Jensen avoided that question just yet. He kept a hold on Jared’s shoulder with one hand, then held out his other hand, “Can I take a look at that?” Jared’s eyes showed his confusion at the question. ‘Shock,’ Jensen kept to himself. “Your arm...can I see it?” The younger man looked down, like he just realized it was there, “Oh,” then offered it to Jensen. The older man looked at Jared’s pale face, as he took the arm. “Just stay with me, okay?” He waited until Jared nodded before he focused on the injury. Jensen turned Jared’s arm in his hands, he gently pushed on tendons and ligaments, making of note of Jared’s painful winces. He pushed the kid’s hand up and rotated it slowly until Jared jumped and cried out, “Ah.” Jensen touched his cheek, “I’m sorry.” He let Jared have the painful limb back while he retrieved something on top of the refrigerator.

Jared’s view of Mike was now unobstructed. Dave had loosened his grip on the ex-soldier, but Mike was still facing the wall. “I’m sorry,” Jared heard Mike say. “I’m sorry,” he repeated. Jared thought Mike sounded painfully guilty and knew immediately this had definitely been unintentional. His heart went out to the man. Dave soothed him, “It’s alright,” then pulled Mike from the wall and pushed him down into a seat at the table. Mike was now facing Jared but his head was down, covered in a crooked elbow. Mike’s other hand hung loose in his lap. The special ops veteran wasn’t quite sobbing, but his exhales were emotional, as he tried to calm himself. “I’m sorry,” he kept repeating. Dave sat on the table. He kept his hand on Mike’s shoulder. Jensen returned to Jared with two items in his hands. He snapped a cold pack to activate it and gently pulled Jared’s wrist back out so he could wrap the device around it. He opened a small box and pulled out an ace bandage. He wrapped it around Jared’s cold pack and tied it off to keep the pack secure.

Jensen brushed Jared’s hair back from his forehead and looked into his eyes again. He couldn’t see any signs of concussion. He knew Jared had hit the floor hard, so that had been his main concern. “Are you hurting anywhere else?” Jared was still trying to process what just happened, but he was starting to calm down now. Knowing poor Mike was just in a nightmare explained a lot. He shook his head, but commented, “Just my ass, really. This floor is hard.” Jensen smiled, but it didn’t reach his eyes. He was ‘so’ not happy about this, Jared could see that. “How are your ribs?” Jensen was still worried. He couldn’t stop rubbing the kid’s back. “I’m okay,” Jared assured him. Jensen pulled Jared to him and took a moment to close his eyes and thank the stars the younger man was okay. He kissed the top of his lover’s head and put his hands under Jared’s armpits to pull him up, “Come on, I gotcha.” Jared went with Jensen’s pull and was soon standing with his lover’s arm around him. “I’m okay,” He looked at Jensen, thinking maybe the older man needed to hear him say it again. Jensen sighed. He hugged Jared to him. “I know, but I think it’s going to take awhile for me to believe that. When I saw him on you, I thought,” Jensen couldn’t even voice what he’d been thinking. Mike could have easily hurt him badly, or killed him. Jared shouldn’t have been part of ‘any’ of this. ‘Fuck’ Jensen mentally chastised himself. He should have known this could happen after the recent shooting. Jensen’s words were interrupted when Dave asked, “How is he?” Jensen looked at his friend, “He’s gonna be bruised. Looks like a sprained wrist.”
Dave did his own assessment of the younger man who was holding his bandaged wrist to him. He felt terrible about not getting to Jared sooner. He’d moved the second he saw Jared reach for Mike, but it hadn’t been fast enough. “I’m sorry, Jared,” Dave surprised the younger man with an apology. Jared glanced at Jensen, then back at Dave, “For what? It wasn’t your fault.” Dave half smiled. Of course the kid wasn’t going to let him take any blame. Dave argued, “I should have seen it coming. I saw you get your water out of the fridge, but I wasn’t anticipating you would touch him.” Jared glanced at the defeated, emotionally torn veteran with his head resting on his arm, “Is he going to be alright?” Jensen shared an emotionally filled exchange with Dave. They knew Jared’s heart. It made it even harder to know the emotional baggage they carried from their former careers had affected him in any way. Tonight it hurt him and both men were greatly upset over it. Mike was going to be even worse when he found out. Jensen said softly, “He’s alright, Jare, he’ll go back to bed soon. This hasn’t happened in a long time and he isn’t gonna want us all around him until he’s ready.” Jared was compelled to go over and comfort the distraught special ops expert, but he certainly understood nightmares. He finally accepted Jensen’s nudge toward the bedroom.

As they walked by, Jensen locked forearms with Dave. His eyes spoke volumes beyond the simple words, “Thank you.” Jared’s windpipe could have been crushed in another two seconds, but Dave pulled Mike off him fast. Jensen had been one second behind and probably would have been too late. Jesus, it would scare the shit out of him for years to come. When they reached the bedroom, Jensen waited until Jared drank some of the water he had been searching for earlier. When he was done, they laid facing each other. Jensen remembered to get on Jared’s right this time. Jared was exhausted, but he was still worried about Mike, “Is he going to be able to sleep?” Jensen brushed his lover’s hair off his face, “Yes, he’ll sleep. Don’t worry, we’ve seen this before.” Jared thought for a moment, blinking heavily, “Jensen, that must be terrible. Is that what it was like for you? Were your nightmares like that when you came back?” Jensen tried to tell himself he wasn’t ready to have this conversation with Jared, but he was already there. He didn’t want Jared to be terrified of this...but after what had just happened to him, the kid certainly deserved an explanation. He explained, “The nightmares were something we all had when we first got out. They continued after we settled in our new homes. It’s why we stayed away from having other people over for awhile...except each other. It was just too risky that we’d fall asleep and wake up like Mike just did. Dave and I left those behind well over a year ago. Mike wasn’t clear of them until about six months ago.”

Jared furrowed his brow, concerned, “Why would they come back?” Jensen wasn’t looking forward to Jared blaming himself for what he was about to tell him. “Usually, it has to be a trigger. Mike hasn’t had any...except the shooting the other day. It was probably the two assholes he had to shoot when he was covering Dave outside and,” Jared interrupted, “And protecting me? Fuck.” He dropped his head back on the pillow, looking up at the ceiling. He shook his head at what these men were going through for him. Jensen sighed, “Jare, this is something that isn’t supposed to touch anybody in our lives. ‘No one’ is supposed to ever have to see that or be hurt by it. You never should have been near him. If I had been with you, at least I could have gotten between you. Thank God Dave was so quick. Mike’s going to feel terrible.”

Jared was filled with compassion and sympathy for these men. No wonder they hadn’t melded with society for so long. My God, he had just gotten a taste of what they weren’t telling him. They never had to be sorry. Their experiences were much worse than what Jared was going through right now with people trying to kill him. These men had been through horrid things...things Jared couldn’t even imagine...and he felt so damn sorry for causing them so much trouble.

Jensen knew the take down had been rough. He was waiting for his lover to concede to the sore muscles and bruising that had probably been too fresh for him to acknowledge earlier. Now that he’d been laying still for a bit, he was sure Jared was going to feel it. Not to mention that painful wrist. “Hey,” Jensen got his attention. When the younger man looked at him, he asked, “Is this hurting, or anything else that might need a Motrin?” Jensen had taken the bandaged wrist in his hand while
asking that question. Jared answered, “It’s fine.” Jensen looked at him disbelievingly, so Jared assured him, “It is’ fine, really.” Jensen continued to look unconvinced, but decided to be placated, for now. He rubbed Jared’s back, “And how about your beautiful backside? Is anything hurting?” Jared shook his head, “No, it’s okay.” Jensen watched Jared worriedly, knowing damn well the kid usually downplayed his pain, “Okay...you’re probably gonna be sore in awhile.” Jared looked at the clock, then back at Jensen, “Well it kinda is morning, and I’ve got to start breakfast in three hours. Jensen looked suddenly argumentative, “Jared, no one’s expecting you to cook breakfast after what just happened. You need to rest.” Jared looked like Jensen had lost his marbles, “What? For this little thing?” Jared held up his injured wrist.

Jensen sighed, “Jared,” he warned, but the younger man kissed him, “It’s okay. I think the normalcy will be good for all of us, don’t you think?” Jensen tried again, “How are you gonna mix things and pick up pans with that? You can’t. You need to let it rest for a couple days before you try using it.” Jared argued, “You said it’s just a sprain.” Jensen argued back, “And sprains need to rest, or they get worse.” Jared sighed, “Jen, I really think it’ll be a good thing...everyone needs to have a nice sit down...like dinner was...I can do it.” Jensen sighed again, “I’ll be making the coffee, then, and helping you. No frickin lifting, Padalecki.” A few hours later, Jared was quick to wake up to the alarm. He reached over to shut the thing off and cried out at the nasty clench of his neck, back and gluteus muscles. Jensen reached over him and slammed his hand on the blaring box. He looked at his lover closely, “Will you take that Motrin now?” Jared nodded, not having enough control over his emotions to do anything else. It hurt like a bitch. Jensen trotted to the kitchen and grabbed the medicine. When he returned with Motrin and a small amount of milk, Jared was just starting to try and roll back onto his right side.

Jensen slipped under the covers to sit next to him. He took the Motrin out and put it in Jared’s hand. He slipped his hands under Jared’s upper back and paused, “Now, let me do the work, okay? Stop trying to move.” When Jared relaxed, Jensen lifted him to a sitting up position. He reached behind him and brought the cup of milk around, so Jared could take it and swallow the pill. After he finished the milk, Jensen put the glass back behind him on the stand and sat holding Jared upright for the time being. He rubbed Jared’s arm with his free hand, then brushed back his hair, “As soon as that kicks in, I wanna check you over again, okay?” Jared nodded, barely, not wanting to move too much. He was controlling his breathing and willing the tightness in his back to go away at the same time. Jensen kept watch on him, as they both waited for the Motrin to work. ‘Thank God,’ the engineer thought to himself, when he could feel the tension lessening.

Jensen gently eased him back, “Don’t tense, I gotcha.” He rolled him gently to his right side and turned the bedside lamp on. Jensen performed a thorough check from head to toe. He felt for lumps and hot spots down Jared’s spine, then lifted his sweatshirt gently to see underneath. Jared was clear of visible bruising, except down by the tailbone. The older man knew better than to push on them or knead them this early on. The pain would be excruciating. Jensen kissed Jared’s beautiful back and told him to hang on. He hurried to retrieve a tube from the bathroom.

When Jensen returned, he announced, “I’m going to rub some gel on you, okay? It doesn’t stink and it’s going to feel cool. It soaks in over five minutes and it will alleviate some of the pain.” Jared nodded, “Okay. Thank you.” Once he had applied the gel to most of Jared’s lower spine and neck, Jensen lowered the kid’s shirt and put the tube on the night stand. He went around to Jared’s front, “Does it feel like it’s getting cool yet?” Jared nodded and shivered, so Jensen pulled the thick covers around him. He pulled Jared’s injured arm gently out of the covers to unwind the bandage and remove the cold pack. He checked the swelling and turned the arm around to see if there was any new discoloration, but he saw none. He put the ace bandage back on and left it alone. Jensen
brushed Jared’s hair back from his face and watched him blink heavily for a few minutes. He wondered if Jared would give up his crazy idea that he was still going to cook for everyone and go back to sleep. The kid would be better off resting, for sure.

He wound up sighing and cursing to himself, however, as his lover stubbornly eased himself out of the bed. Jared groaned when he stood up. The pain wasn’t excruciating anymore, just a stiff soreness. “You sure about this?” Jensen grumbled, more than asked, as he accepted the fact that Jared’s determination was going to win out. “Yeah…it’s much better,” the younger man said, “I can do this.”

By 0700 hours, Jared was pouring fresh egg batter into a heavily buttered cake pan. Jensen had never seen frittata’s made this way, but his lover insisted he remembered his mother doing this. The younger man added green chilies and chives that he had chopped earlier, then added ground up pieces of cooked sausage. He topped the ensemble off with a layer of cheddar cheese. Jensen had made coffee, while Jared warmed up the pans and mixed the eggs. He cut Jared off at the pass when he tried to open the oven, or pick up bowls and pans. The young genius was a master at forgetting his own injuries and seemed hellbent on aggravating that wrist. Jensen kept his eye on the kid, however, and put the loaded baking pan into the oven, while Jared set the timer for ten minutes. “When it comes out, you sprinkle Parmesan on the top and put it back for another few minutes.” Jared looked at his lover with hope in his eyes, “It was really good back then. I hope they like it.” Jensen smiled at his beautiful lover, thinking how good it was to see him enjoying himself. He removed some egg that had gotten into the hair over Jared’s face. Jensen noticed the slight painful drawn look in Jared’s eyes, but the sparkle from enjoying himself was worth letting him do this. He leaned in and kissed his lover long and slow. The quiet still of early morning made it feel like they were a thousand miles from anyone else. God, he tasted incredible.

Jensen was lost in Jared’s delectable mouth for a few minutes until he heard Mike’s voice, “Smells damn good out here.” Mike had exited the spare room and made a bee line for the guest bathroom. Jensen touched Jared on the cheek, as he gently pulled out of the kiss. He stayed lost in Jared’s eyes for a few minutes. Jared melted into his lover’s stare before targeting his gaze on Jensen’s full lips. He decided he really needed more and pulled Jensen into another kiss. After a few minutes, the timer dinged. Jared pulled back, reluctantly, “Mmmm, you taste good.” He stole a few more little kisses.

The oven needed attention, unfortunately. After Jensen managed to peel himself away from Jared’s heat, he reached into the open oven and sprinkled the fresh parmesan on top of Jared’s casserole type frittata. He closed the oven, then went back to his previous activity. Jensen slipped his hand around Jared’s neck and pulled him closer, “Need more of that mouth, Padalecki.” They kissed again for a few moments longer. Jared’s hands wound round the older man’s neck. Jensen’s hands slipped around Jared’s waist. They soon became distracted until the oven dinged again, unfortunately having to pull away in order to save breakfast from burning.

Jensen removed the pan and set it on the potholders Jared had put on the table. He was intrigued with Jared’s gourmet masterpiece. Instead of making the usual frittata separate servings, Jared’s mother had taught him to make a big pan and let people cut and scoop their own servings. The cheeses on top were a nice touch. Together with the added items and butter layer on the bottom, Jensen guessed he was looking at something quite delicious. Jared went to grab the four plates and carry them to the table, but Jensen reached past him, “Uh uh.” He grabbed the stack and carried them to to the table. He disbursed the settings, while Jared used a serving spoon to dish out little piles of a fruit delight on each plate. He carried glasses to the table, while Jensen handled the heavy orange juice container.

Dave appeared in the doorway, blinking heavily and grumbling, “What the hell are you still cooking for? Ackles, why isn’t he resting?” Jensen looked at his friend, knowingly, “Really? Don’t you think I tried that with him?” Jared sighed, “Standing right here,” then looked at Dave, “And I’m fine...he helped me. I hope you guys are hungry.” Dave grumbled, “I’m starving after smelling whatever that is, but I need that bathroom first...and you really should be resting, Jared.” The engineer ignored him.
and continued to set things on the table. “I haven’t said a word to him about last night yet,” Dave continued. Jared looked between them, anxious, “Can we just not say anything please? I don’t want him upset about this...it wasn’t his fault.”

Jensen touched Jared on the back, “I know you’re worried about it, Jare, but he’s gonna notice your wrist.” Jared looked at the offensive arm, then back at Jensen, “Then I’ll take it off.” When both men looked at him in disapproval, Jared argued, “For now...we’ll take it off and he doesn’t have to know anything.” Jensen growled, “Jay, your back is hurting too. He’s definitely gonna notice when you can’t get out of the chair.” Jared argued, “I CAN. You gave me that fat Motrin, I’m fine.” Dave zero’d in on the mention of Jared’s back, “Your back’s bruised?” Jensen nodded at his friend, “Yeah, it’s pretty sore. I’ll check it again later, the bruises haven’t shown up yet.” Dave sighed, “Jay, this isn’t a good idea. Mike will be pissed that we didn’t tell him right away.” Jared argued his point, “He’ll be pissed at himself and guilty if you do tell him. Does he really have to be? No, he doesn’t.” Jared looked stubborn, but anxious, as he waited for the two men to agree with him. It didn’t look promising. “Holy shit, Jared, this looks fantastic,” Mike blurted out, as he came out of the bathroom and eagerly took a seat. Dave headed for the bathroom, while Jared quickly glanced at Jensen to beg him with his eyes not to say anything. Jensen sighed, more in annoyance at himself for not being able to resist Jared just about anything. ‘For now,’ he mentally decided.

Jensen went to the coffee maker and pulled Jared with him to quickly remove the ace bandage, while they faced the counter. When the two men turned around, there was no sign of Jared’s injury, except the slight hunch in Jared’s stance, which only Jensen noticed. ‘Poor kid is sore as hell,’ the older man noted. Later, Jensen thought to himself that maybe Jared hadn’t been wrong. The relaxed feel at the table was too rare and it was good for all of them. Except for Dave and Jensen’s slight tension at keeping a secret from their team mate, everyone enjoyed the hell out of Jared’s breakfast. “This is fuckin’ delicious, Jared,” the normally quiet Dave remarked. He and Mike took seconds and devoured everything on their plates. “You absolutely have to make this again, Jared, it’s incredible,” Mike complimented. Jared was thrilled they liked it. His memory of cooking with his mother was a bit sketchy. Jensen added, “Gotta agree with ‘em, Jare...we definitely need this on a regular basis.” Jared smiled, “Thanks. I’m really glad it doesn’t suck.” Just as the ex-soldiers were enjoying more coffee, Jensen’s cell phone vibrated. He checked it, then handed it to Jared. “For you,” Jensen smiled. He was pleasantly surprised to see Manny’s number on the screen.

“Hey,” was Jared’s spirited greeting. “Ola’,” Manny responded, “it speaks,” which had Jared giggling. When Jared giggled, Jensen smiled. Manny wasn’t sure about calling this early, “You got time to catch up with me and assure me you’re in one piece?” The case had been on the news for a day and he hadn’t heard from his friend. Jared responded, “Yes, hold on,” then meant to get up and go into the other room. His attempt to stand was thwarted by the clench of his bruised backside and an unexpected cry of pain, which he immediately tried to soften and cover up. Jensen jumped up to help him, while the others jumped up, and started around the table. “Easy buddy,” Jensen lifted the engineer from under his arms while Jared finally stood. “Thank you,” he said as he shuffled out of the dining room with Jensen’s help. Both friends at the table watched the younger man struggle with his sore body. Dave knew why, but Mike was terribly confused. He asked, “What was that?” Dave glanced at his friend, “He had a rough night.” Mike did a double take at Dave’s comment, wondering what the hell he’d missed. Then he looked back at Jared, feeling terrible that the kid seemed worse today, instead of better.

Jensen knew they would have a conversation soon, but for now, he wanted to get Jared’s wrist back in it’s bandage. He helped Jared lower himself to the couch, then went to the kitchen to get the ace bandage and another cold pack. The other two military experts started cleaning off the table and doing dishes. Mike was uncharacteristically quiet, still sensing he was missing something. Jared talked to Manny while Jensen examined his wrist again. The joint had definitely been aggravated because it was swelling worse than last night. “Damn,” the older man spoke more to himself than to
Jared. He wrapped the wrist with cold pack and ace bandage, then accepted a ‘thank you’ kiss from Jared. He busied himself with building up the fire for the cold day they were going to have. He was forcing himself to be polite and not listen to Jared’s conversation, but he couldn’t help grinning when he heard the melodic happy sound of Jared’s tone. This was wonderful timing. Jared was laughing and telling Manny he was an idiot, in between some more serious renditions of what had transpired with the case in the last few days.

Jensen came back to the kitchen and took up wiping down the counters and table. When the other ex-soldiers finished at the sink, he approached them, “He’ll be awhile. Let’s go outside.” Dave glanced at Jensen, knowing it was time to tell Mike what happened last night. They definitely needed to do this away from Jared. Jared listened to the escapades of Manny and his assigned security team. Apparently, he moved to fast for them and it required switching his teams every six hours. No one seemed to be able to do an entire shift. They talked of Manny’s parents and the rest of his family that Jared had been close to. Jeff arrived at Manny’s while they were still on the phone, so Jared got a three way conference chat about Jeff’s girlfriend, the marketing business and the argument over Manny’s security problems. Jared loved the sound of their voices. The best part of the conversation was knowing they were safe. Things were okay, Manny asked, “So now that we’ve covered all the other pertinent details, let’s get to the good stuff. How’s it going with the beefcake?” Jared went quiet. He half smiled as his lover and friends walked by going out the back slider. “Jared?” Manny kept on... “Jaaaaarrreedeed...is he standing right there?”

Jared was sure his cheeks were burning, but hopefully the others would think it was just from the fire. He whispered into the phone, “I can’t...” Manny giggled, “Aaahh, I see. He’s right there, is he?” Jared whispered, “Yessss,” mortified. He waited until the slider was all the way closed, then laid his head back on the couch with a heavy sigh. Jeff said, “We’re happy for you Jared. All we care about is that he’s good to you.” Jared answered, “He’s too good...sometimes I think I’m dreaming.” Manny giggled again, “You’re just not used to being with a good guy, Jared. You deserve it. I, for one, though, want to know if you’ve tested out that machinery. Are we talking a rifle or a pea shooter?” Jared’s face flushed, as he glanced outside in alarm and heard the unmistakable sound of someone getting hit through the phone line, “Uhmph,” Manny grunted.

Jared whispered, “I’m not gonna talk about that. He deserves better than me blabbing everything.” Manny was relentless, “Oh, so there ‘is’ something to blab, then.” Jared rolled his eyes and sighed, while his friend continued, “I like the fact that he doesn’t go too far from you, Jared. It’s been over three weeks and he’s still watching you like a hawk. Is he protective or possessive?” Jared said, “I don’t know, protective I guess...maybe possessive. I don’t know, we haven’t been able to just ‘be’ yet, you know? Everything is so out of whack with my life. I don’t even know why he loves me...I’ve caused him so much trouble. The poor man is supposed to be retired.” Jared heard Mike’s voice raise from outside, which distracted him for a moment. “Huh?” He missed Manny’s question. “I said...so he told you he ‘loves’ you?” Jared sighed, cursing himself mentally for saying too much, “Yes...and just so you know, I’m in love with him too. There, I said it.” Manny screeched with joy, which had Jared smiling until he heard further voices raised out back. He started to worry when he realized they were probably discussing what happened at three this morning. Jared tried to get himself off the couch but his damn back wasn’t cooperating. “Fuck,” he was pissed at himself for being useless.

“Jared?” Manny called to him a couple times, then finally got a response, “I’m sorry. The guys are discussing something outside and I can hear them.” Manny never missed much, “Guys? Just how many beefcakes do you have, Jared?” Jared rolled his eyes and sighed, “They’re Jensen’s friends and they protected me in court. The hitman is still out there, so they’re hanging around.” Manny and Jeff were silent for a minute, not having known about this hitman and the level of threat to Jared. Jeff argued, “Jared, what are they doing to stop this guy?” Jared spent the next few minutes defending Price’s team and explaining how much everybody had been trying to keep him safe. He really didn’t
Outside, the three Black Ops specialists stood quiet and tense. The details about last night had been shared. Mike was pissed at himself, thinking he should pull out of the group and leave now, before he hurt Jared again. The others had been chewing his ass about it not being his fault and to keep his voice down because Jared didn’t want him to feel guilty. Mike finally sighed. He was standing up, leaning on the back of a patio chair, his head down in defeat. He finally shook his head, “How can he ever feel safe with me again?” Dave stepped closer to him, “Because it’s Jared...and he understands.” Mike looked up in anger, “No, Dave...no, he doesn’t...and I don’t want him to. I don’t want him to know what I’m seeing and who I’m fighting when these shitty dreams come around.”

Jensen argued, “Mike...if anyone wants to keep Jared as far away from harm as humanly possible, it’s me. When I saw you almost crush his windpipe, my heart stopped. My fuckin’ heart stopped.”

The veteran looked at Jensen with his eyes full of anguish and guilt, “Ackles, I would never,” but Jensen cut him off with a tight squeeze to his arm, “I know that. I know you’d give your life to protect him. He knows it, too.” Jensen paused for a few seconds, then continued, “If anyone would have wanted to kill you for touching him like that, pulling those moves on him, it would be me...but Mike...you and Dave are my closest friends...and Dave and I would ‘never’ blame you for this. You’ve got no control over this. Jared has nightmares too...and there have been a couple of doozies. He understands you thought it was someone threatening you. Don’t worry...Jared won’t be up with you in the middle of the night again...and if he ever is, he knows now to make sure you’re awake before he tries to touch you.”

Mike closed his eyes and looked down again. He thought for a long time. The ex-soldier was filled with shame that he couldn’t control one piece of him that seriously could have killed Jared. He hated himself for it, in that moment, and his two friends knew it. This was something they had worked with Mike on for a long time. He finally sighed, then he turned toward the slider. Apparently, everyone had been so intensely focused on their discussion, no one noticed Jared had come outside. The three veterans froze. Jensen stepped toward Jared and took his arm, “Are you okay?” After nodding, Jared asked him, “Can I talk to him?” Jensen touched Jared on the cheek, searching his eyes for pain or fear. The older man was worried about him, but he didn’t see any warning signs, “I’ll be right inside.” Jared rubbed his cheek against Jensen’s hand and closed his eyes. He nodded, so Jensen went inside, followed by Dave. Jared was left alone with Mike. He waited a minute, before he spoke, not sure of what to say. Mike started out, “It’s freezing out here, Jared. You should be inside.” He looked the engineer over, head to toe. His eyes stopped at Jared’s bandaged wrist, for a few seconds, then he swallowed, and continued down to Jared’s feet and back up to land on the wrist again.

Mike turned away from Jared and rubbed his face with his hands. When he turned around he folded his arms and looked at the ground first. After a sigh for courage, Mike’s eyes reached Jared’s. The amount of self hatred and guilt in the ex-soldier’s anguished eyes tore at Jared’s heart. Something deep inside of Jared’s gut rose to the surface in defense of the man before him. Mike didn’t deserve to feel like shit over this. He’d been through enough. Jared opened his mouth to speak, but was cut off, “Don’t,” Mike’s unexpected command caught Jared off guard. “What?” A confused Jared asked. “Don’t,” Mike repeated, “Don’t look at me like you owe me some kind of forgiveness, or you feel fuckin’ sorry for the tormented soldier who has bad dreams. Just don’t. I tried to kill you, Jared...and if they hadn’t stopped me, I would have. You certainly owe me no sympathy.” Jared had to take a minute to regroup his thoughts. The bitterness in Mike’s voice had completely thrown him off. He sighed and thought about what to say to counter Mike’s obvious attempt at keeping Jared from giving him any breaks. He badly wanted this to be okay. “Well, Mike, since you so eloquently reminded me, ‘you’ tried to kill ’me’. I don’t think that gives you the right to tell me what to do, or how to think and feel.”

Now Mike was thrown off. He dropped his hands to the side and looked at Jared like he’d never
seen him before. Jared continued while he had him sidetracked, “You did not try and kill ‘me’, Mike, you were defending yourself against some horrible threat to you. I didn’t know you had these dreams and I touched you, like a dumb ass, in the middle of the night. I will ‘not’ be doing that again, so there’s no reason for you to leave and no reason for you to blame yourself over this.” Mike shook his head, “Yeah, well, that’s just not gonna happen. I hurt you and it’s never gonna be alright with me.”

The special ops soldier stepped closer and looked into Jared’s eyes, “You’re supposed to be able to trust me. I ‘need’ you to trust me.” Jared argued instantly, “I do!” Mike argued in frustration, “How? Why would you think you could? And how can you even face me after what I did?” Jared shook his head...he couldn’t believe this guy. “Dude...you’ve saved me and you keep me safe all the time. You’re always protecting me. I’m trying to figure out ways to pay you back for what you’ve done...what you’re doing. You would also do anything for Jensen. You’re loyal and smart...and if anything, this is all ‘my’ fault that you’re even having these dreams.” Mike was floored about that one and argued immediately, “What the fuck are you talking about? Nothing is your fault, Jared, how can you even say that? I had these stupid dreams from before...from something that happened. It’s just been triggered, but it’ll go away.” Jared stepped closer and sighed, “You and Dave and Jensen...you’re supposed to be out of this crap. You’ve done your time. You’re not supposed to be having to shoot people and run around doing security for some dumb ass who got himself into a bind.”

Mike sighed and looked up. He shook his head like he was praying for patience, then responded to Jared’s comment, “Jared, you have a unique way of looking at things, bro. It’s completely demented and it’s throwing me off.” The engineer wasn’t sure if that was a good or bad thing, but Mike continued, “You’re not a dumb ass in a bind. I happen to like being your bodyguard because you’re a great guy who makes my former boss happy and you’ve championed a very important cause that needed to be done. It’s my pleasure to help you. But Jared...last night was unforgivable. It can’t happen...ever...shouldn’t have happened...ever. This is something we talked about before we ever started interacting with people on the outside. Now, I’ve fucked that up.” Jared argued, “No...I’ve fucked it up.” Mike looked pissed, “Are you gonna get off that? Nothing is your fault, for christ sakes.” Jared countered, “Nothing is your fault, either.” Mike’s eyes pinned Jared with steel resolve in them. He seemed to finally let that go, since he wasn’t going to get the blame from Jared he seemed to be begging for. His eyes changed to remorse and concern, “Does it hurt bad?” He moved into Jared’s space and pushed Jared’s chin up to look closely at the kid’s throat. “No,” Jared lied because the last thing Mike needed to hear was that his wrist and tailbone were throbbing like fucking crazy.

Mike proceeded to feel the back of Jared’s neck and head, looking for himself. He took Jared’s tender wrist in his hand and inspected the bandage. He sighed, “I’m not sure I can do this Jared. I feel too terrible.” The younger man looked at Mike, “I know...but I don’t want you to leave. Please stay.” Mike searched Jared’s eyes, just to make sure he didn’t see any fear there. “I couldn’t stand it if you were afraid of me. I’m so goddamn sorry, Jared. I would never hurt you, nor would I let anyone else hurt you.” Jared took Mike’s arm, “I know that. You’re my friend. You and Dave and Jensen are becoming like a family I never had.” Mike seemed to think for a minute, then sighed, “Fine. I’ll stay. Thank you, Jared,” Mike’s eyes relayed his intense loyalty and devotion to being Jared’s protector and friend. The younger man smiled. After a moment’s hesitation, Jared asked...“So, can you teach me that impressive take down and windpipe crusher thing?” Mike looked at the kid, astonishingly, “Fuck no. Jesus, Jared. I’m gonna try to forget that move.” He walked toward the slider, “But I’ll teach you something ‘else’ when you’re ready.” Jared smiled as both men went back inside.

The rest of the day was filled with a lengthy poker game, which Jared enjoyed thoroughly. The three gave it their best, but the young genius took them out most of the time. “Good thing we’re only betting macaroni noodles,” Jensen grumbled. He was sure he had Jared’s numbers thing figured out,
but the kid still won hand after hand. Jared tried to teach them something that felt natural to him. They got better, but he still had years of experience over them. Pretty soon the young math genius was yawning too much for the three protector’s comfort. Jared hadn’t slept that many hours, and getting up early to cook was finally weighing on him. Jensen helped his sore body off the chair and to the couch. “Just lay by the fire for awhile. If you get hungry I’ll bring you something.” Jared hated to give in, but the heat from the fire instantly started melting into his bruised body. “Mmmm...feels nice,” he moaned, nestling his head into a pillow. Jensen grinned as he played with Jared’s hair, “You’re more tired than you think, baby. Are you warm enough?” Jared nodded with a lazy smile. Jensen covered him with one of the blankets, anyway. “We’ll be right here. Sleep well,” he said before he kissed Jared’s forehead.

Once Jared started to breathe deep and even, Jensen built up the fire more and returned to the kitchen. He walked in to meet two knowing faces who had been watching him, “What?” Jensen’s crabby defensiveness made them smile. Dave went for a sip of his coffee but Mike responded, “You’re toast, Ackles. Fucking crumbly useless toast.” Jensen sighed and went for the coffee pot, “Yeah whatever. Don’t I fuckin’ know it.”
CHAPTER TWENTY SIX. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

This chapter is full of multiple things. There is a continuation of Jared’s rest and recovery after the attempts on his life and the trying testimony. Jared gives Jensen an over the top pleasurable experience. There are some deep discussions between friends, more bonding, on Jared’s part. The danger still lurks around them, but Jared is able to forget for just a little while.

Warnings: Rimming. There is an emotional discussion of soldier suicide. It happened in the past, but the friends discuss it and share it with Jared. Since it is a heartwrenching reality, I wanted to list it as a warning.

Thank you readers! I hope you enjoy! Buckle up because shit is going to hit the fan soon! :0)

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

The veterans spent the rest of the late afternoon doing their own activities. Mike scrubbed the guest bathroom and stayed close to Jared. Dave and Jensen went for a slow run outside. Jensen hadn’t been on a run in quite a while and Dave wanted to test out his healing leg wound. They wound up doing four miles at an easy pace. Throughout their run, the men noted the unmarked security vehicles hanging around several blocks from the house. Jensen was glad to see there were lookouts who could notify the team that was on the property of anything suspicious. They hadn’t had any reason to suspect anyone knew of Jared’s whereabouts yet, but Jensen wasn’t going to take anything for granted. Obviously, Price wasn’t either. Mike wound up warming up some afternoon chili for the group. He chopped some onions and grated cheese, lined everything up on the counter, then went and poked around in the fire. Jared had been sleeping fitfully. The kid had been exhausted and the military experts all knew it. Mike noticed it was close to four thirty, so he was pretty sure they weren’t going out to dinner. When the two older men were a few blocks from Jensen’s house, all hell broke loose in the fire. Jared had been sleeping fitfully. The kid had been exhausted and the military experts all knew it. Mike noticed it was close to four thirty, so he was pretty sure they weren’t going out to dinner. When the two older men were a few blocks from Jensen’s house, all hell broke loose from the skies. The crack of thunder was their first warning. “Shit,” Jensen blurted out. Dave looked up, “Yep,” and the two men sped up. Within seconds the downpour of thick water droplets turned to hail as the two men sprinted faster. “Fuck,” Jensen bitched while breathing hard.

Jared had just been coming out of a deep sleep, feeling warm and relaxed. ‘Boom,’ the sound of thunder caused him to jerk and push himself up. At first, his mind panicked, thinking they were being shot at again. ‘Boom,’ the second explosion from the skies further startled him until he saw Mike coming toward him. “Dude, it’s okay. It’s thunder.” Jared looked around, like he was absorbing that the house was in one piece. Mike put his hand on the kid’s shoulder, “You okay?” Jared nodded and slid his legs off the couch to sit up in a better position. “Sorry...I just wasn’t expecting that,” he mumbled, as the sound of heavy downpour echoed through the house. Jared glanced up at the ceiling, as Mike grinned, “You and me both...and the others went out running. I bet that ice stings.” Just as Mike said that, Jared heard a thundering set of footprints coming up Jensen’s front deck. He had been sleeping hard. Apparently, he’d missed quite a bit and now it was pouring outside. Mike helped the younger man stand up, then let go of him when he seemed steadied.
“Thank you,” Jared smiled softly. “No problem, dude...do you need another Motrin?” Jared thought about it, then shook his head. “No, it’s okay...actually everything’s much better.” Mike unwrapped Jared’s wrist, gently, while the front door practically slammed open. He removed the cold pack from Jared’s ace bandage and inspected the wrist, pleased to see there wasn’t much swelling. “It’s looking good, probably because you let it rest for a few hours.” The younger man yawned. “Thank you, it feel’s better.”

The special ops veteran wrapped the wrist back and went to greet his friends while Jared headed for the bathroom. Dave and Jensen were breathing hard, gigglng like madmen. Mike shook his head, “Dumb fucks, did you read the weather before you left?” Jared looked back and smiled at the dripping runners, who were pulling their wet shoes off by the door. “Nope, that would’ve been smart.” Dave responded. Jensen tried to catch his breath, while he removed his shoes and headed for the back bedroom, “I smell food. Fuckin a, Mike, you make a good husband.” Mike bitched, “Shut up. I had to make ‘something’, it’s late. Jared’ll be starving.” Jensen turned back, “He okay?” Mike responded, “See for yourself. His wrist looks good and he slept three hours.” Jensen turned and went into the bedroom. Dave inspected the chili, inhaling the aroma, “Mmmm...shit, that smells good.” Mike said, “It’s ready when you are. How’d the leg do?” Dave answered him, “It wasn’t bad. Stings a little, but it’s holding together. I’m gonna hit the hot shower and I’ll be back in five to eat.” Dave grabbed extra clothes and towels, then entered the guest bathroom, “Fuck, you cleaned the bathroom too? Jesus, dude, you ‘do’ make a good husband.” Mike snickered while his friend shut the bathroom door. He went to build up the fire and watched the hail outside until they all returned.

Jensen found his lover coming out of the bathroom and rubbing his eyes. He looked like he was still trying to wake up. Jared looked at him and snickered when he saw a fully drenched Jensen watching him. “What are you looking at,” Jared asked him shyly. Jensen stepped right into Jared’s personal space and kissed him, “I was taken by your very doable hotness.” Jared looked disbeliefing, “Mmm, yeah right, I’ve seen my frumpy clothes and hair in the mirror.” Jensen made a pout, “I like frumpy...and you could be wearing a unicorn costume covered in mud and you’d still be the cutest hottest thing around.” Jared sighed, “I don’t think,” Jensen interrupted, “M-m, you don’t get to tell me what I think’s adorable, kiddo.” Jared studied Jensen with a half grin, “You’re in an awful good mood. Running in the hail does that for you?” Jensen argued, “No...YOU do that for me...especially seeing you upright and moving around like you are. And I don’t usually run in the hail, no...we sprinted the last two blocks when it started.” Jensen gave a sour look, “I probably stink. I’m all wet and sweaty.” Jared’s eyebrow raised, “Is that supposed to be a turn off?” Jensen giggled at Jared’s comment, then his eyes turned to worry, “How’s your back and that?” The older man indicated to Jared’s wrist with his eyes. Jared answered, “It’s not bad. It’s sore but nothing’s throbbing like it was...I think your couch has healing properties...that damn fireplace too. It’s like a drug and it lures me into it’s tractor beam.”

Jensen raised the bandaged wrist and looked closely at it, “Did Mike take off the cold pack?” Jared nodded, “Yeah, and he looked at it. He said it looked better.” Jensen felt the size of the wrist through the bandage and nodded, “It’s definitely smaller than this morning. That’s excellent.” He looked up at his lover and kissed him again, “You’re a quick healer. I ‘was’ going to suggest we all go to Dani and Steve’s, get you out for dinner, but now,” Jensen shook his head, “maybe we’ll partake in the chili Mike put together and have another ‘inside’ evening. That okay?” Jared nodded favorably, “Oh yeah, that’s okay.” He kissed Jensen and looked into his eyes dreamily, “Thank you for thinking of dinner. Maybe we can do tomorrow. I’d love to see your friends again.” Jensen smiled, “I know they’ll wanna see you, too. Maybe a late breakfast.” Jensen kissed Jared more deeply for a few minutes. The younger man moaned in appreciation, as Jensen’s hands roamed all over his back side. Jensen was careful and rubbed softly, just to feel Jared’s beautiful shape, but he didn’t push hard enough to aggravate his bruises. When he pulled back from the kiss, Jensen cleared his throat and sighed. Jared snickered and grinned, “What?”
The older man sighed again, “I’m gonna have to shower alone, and it’s not what I want.” Jared’s eyebrow raised again, “Well, it’s not what I want either, Rambo.” Jensen raised an eyebrow, “Don’t tempt me, genius...I don’t want to hurt you.” Jared smiled softly, then looked at Jensen challengingly, “You can try.” Jensen growled a Jared’s coyness, “Knock it off. We’re giving it at least a day, Padalecki, so you can heal.” It was Jared’s turn to sigh forlornly, “Man...jilted and left to sit against the wall, waiting for some other hot stud to ask me to dance.” Jensen shook his head, “Uh no...you’re never gonna sit against the wall...and if anyone but me asks you to dance, you better say no or I might have to kick somebody’s ass.” Jared turned more serious and fixed his beautiful grey eyes on Jensen’s pools of hazel green, “I wouldn’t be able to see anyone else, anyway.” Jensen’s heart fluttered at the amount of devotion he saw in Jared’s silvery grey beauties. At the same time he chastised himself for letting the toughened hard ass Black Ops expert part of him turn into such a love sick school boy.

“I love you,” Jared confessed. Jensen kissed the beautiful man in his arms, then pulled back, “I love you too.” They took a moment to savor the feeling of closeness, then Jensen reluctantly let his lover go. He noticed a hesitation in Jared’s eyes, so he took hold of the younger his hands worriedly, “You okay?” Jared smiled softly, “Yes, very. I wanted to talk to you about something...and I’m worried you’ll say ‘no’.” Jensen remained silent, waiting for Jared to request something horribly dangerous or maybe to start building his new deck. Instead Jared surprised him. “I’m tired of laying around. It’s frustrating...and my first walk on the treadmill totally sucked. I feel like I’m wasting away. I know we’re still waiting for the shooter to get caught, and I know there was the other unknown person, but...I need to be able to at least start on a trek to get stronger and kind of get myself back.” Jensen studied him for a few seconds, “A trek? Are you talking about engineering or workouts?” Jared looked doubtful when he answered, because he wasn’t sure how Jensen was going to react. “Yeah, a work out...sort of a lighter routine and then gradually increasing. I know I can’t run right away, but I don’t think it will take that long to be able to.”

Jensen opened his mouth to speak, but Jared cut him off at the argumentative look he saw on the older man’s face, “I’m not talking about a mud run, I swear. I’m irritable sitting around. I’m tired of it and I just need to be ‘doing’ something. I can’t work...not ‘til this is resolved and I know where the hell I can find a job. I need something constructive to do...a goal to work toward.” Jensen assessed him silently. “I understand, Jay, I do.” He sighed, “It’s hard for me to let you do this...believe me, these restrictions are here for a damn good reason. And baby...killing it in court the other day isn’t really laying around. You’ve only been officially resting for the last day and a half. The way you’ve burnt it at both ends to get this case just perfect has been a lot for your system. That’s why you’re so tired. Just remember, it’s not like you’ve been sitting around doing nothing.” Jared looked doubtful when he answered, because he wasn’t sure how Jensen was going to react. “Yeah, a work out...sort of a lighter routine and then gradually increasing. I know I can’t run right away, but I need to feel like he was working toward something or he was unfulfilled.

Jensen finally conceded, “Okay.” Jared looked eagerly at him, “Really?” Jensen grinned, as he simply could not resist the sparkle in Jared’s beautiful eyes. “Yes, really. But you do it with a spotter, okay? You never do this alone, Jare...and if you eventually go running outside, you realize there’ll be a squadron of security running with you.” Jared nodded, then smiled that diamond wattage beauty, which sent Jensen’s heart way up somewhere in the clouds. “Yes, of course,” he agreed wholeheartedly. He kissed Jensen, “But you know I used to run all the time, and do weights.” Jensen nodded, “I get that. And yes, I know it’s been hard for you to sit by while we go do those things. But baby...we don’t have holes in our chests that need to heal. Just bare with me, okay? Easy and light...at least for a few weeks. No damaging that beautiful ribcage of yours...and as for work, I’m sure between the guys, my house and the restaurant ideas, you can be damn busy, if you want.” Jared couldn’t contain his happiness. He kissed Jensen, giving him all his gratitude and devotion.
When he pulled back, the older man had to catch himself from the delirious fog he was floating in. “Thank you,” Jared kissed him again. Jensen decided getting thank you’s from Jared were quite an addicting habit he would have to keep earning.

When they finally pulled away from each other, Jensen encouraged him to go, “Go eat. Mike made chili for everyone. I’ll be there in a few.” Jared grinned, kissed Jensen once more before he turned to leave. Mike and Dave were just sitting down with their bowls when Jared walked in. “Sweet, this looks amazing,” the engineer exclaimed. Mike got back up to grab Jared a bowl, “You gotta be starving, kiddo. There’s all the toppings and hot sauce if it’s too bland. Hold this with your left and I’ll scoop. Keep that right hand immobile for another day.” Jared went through the buffet style line to prepare his dinner with Mike’s assistance. He ended up with cheese and onions piled on top of a generous portion.

Mike heated some of the homemade rolls from the restaurant. Jared went nuts over them, “Can I have two?” Mike grabbed three and carried them to the table for Jared. “What’d you want to drink? Beer, soda?” Mike waited for the younger man to think it over. Jared finally blurted out, “Sprite please.” Mike grabbed it from the refrigerator and returned to the table. The three men ooh’d and awe’d over the rich chili, until Jensen arrived, “It’s awful quiet in here...must be good.” Everyone hummed their approval and nodded. The mood at the table was enjoyable and entertaining. He hadn’t even realized it was Halloween. The men wound up telling jokes they remembered from their military days, one after the other. After laughing between themselves for the next thirty minutes, Dave reminded everyone it would soon be dangerous gas hazmat time. “Stay away from the fire,” Jensen advised. Mike exclaimed, “Hate to have to explain the third degree blisters on my ass to the first responders. Well, gentlemen, you see I pointed my ass toward the fire and that was ‘after’ I ate a bucket of chili. Lit the whole neighborhood up.”

Everyone at the table giggled, except Jared. Something about the scenario didn’t sit well with him. He knew it was funny, but he just couldn’t laugh. Jared offered more of a soft smile, trying to be a polite part of the group, but his heart wasn’t that carefree about fires. Jensen put a hand on the younger man’s arm to gain his attention, “I’m sorry, buddy. I know that’s not something we should be joking about.” Jared rushed to ease their worry, “No, it’s okay. Please don’t stop, this is a blast.” Jensen tightened his grip on Jared’s arm, “Jare, it’s,” Jared argued, “It’s ‘okay,’ really. It’s fine.” The younger man looked like he was lost in thought, while his three protectors exchanged a knowing look of concern. Mike felt lower than pond scum. ‘Fuck, I forgot about the fire when he was a kid.’ He felt it was his doing since he’d made the joke first, so he thought he would attempt to get the young genius distracted by another subject, “So Jared, which ninja moves should I teach you first?” Jared looked up at Mike, thrown off guard, then smiled when he heard Jensen’s sputtering from his left side, “There will be no ninja moves taught.”

Mike snickered to Jensen, “You’re just worried he’ll use them on ‘you’ when you’re getting too fresh.” Jared’s mouth opened and he laughed when Jensen jumped up and took off running after an evading Mike. The two started wrestling near the fireplace, which made Jared laugh harder. “You’re gonna make me fart, Ackles!” Mike yelled out. Jensen grappled the younger man on the ground for a few minutes while Dave grinned. He glanced at Jared, seeing the happy glow on the engineer’s face. It was good to see the younger man like this. Dave realized they’d gotten Jared out of a painful memory and back to a happy place, for now. The wrestling match was over within minutes, the two men helping each other up off the ground, and hobbling back to the table. Jensen was breathing hard, “Jesus, you’re a heavy SOB.” Mike countered, “You’re just getting old.” Dave asked Jared, “Do you have an idea of what you’d like to do, Jared? Play a game, watch more movies?” Jared thought about it for a moment, then surprised them, “Would it be okay if we looked through Jensen’s pictures
of all of you? Maybe you guys could explain them to me.” Jared looked hopeful, then the light in his eyes started to fade because he thought maybe he’d said the wrong thing. He had seen the binders of military pictures and a couple stacks of loose ones, but he’d never asked Jensen to go through them.

Jared gave them a minute to think about it. If he wasn’t welcome to share that with them, he would certainly respect that and ask to do something else. Before he could speak up, Jensen glanced at his friends, “He wants to see them...sound fun?” Dave looked agreeable, “Sounds good to me,” then he looked at Jared with concern, “It might not be very interesting, are you sure?” Jared questioned, “Why wouldn’t it be interesting? I’m sure you guys have tons of stories.” He looked suddenly apprehensive, “Not, of course, the ones you don’t want to tell. Just the ones you do.” Mike grinned at his friends, first, then turned to Jared, “Let’s do it, Jared. Come on.” Everyone moved into the living room to sit by the blazing hearth. Dave and Mike put the dirty dishes in the sink, vowing to take care of them in the morning. They brought beer and water bottles to the living room and made themselves comfortable around the coffee table. Jensen grabbed the stacks of photos and albums that were sitting on his corner stand. He plopped them between everyone.

The group of men spent the next few hours going through pictures of much younger versions of themselves. They had done this before. Mike and Dave had brought their memories over and the men had formerly compared photos from each of their basic training’s. Except for Jared, the three special ops veterans poked fun at one another’s scrawny legs in their p.t. clothes and the serious intent looks in their hairless faces. Jared felt bad for them because they looked bald in the photo’s.

“Nah, we had some hair...but the first thing they do off the bus is file you into the barber for ‘high and tight’...and there are NO exceptions. The commander picks the hairdo and we all look the same.” Jensen smiled in approval at the pleasure in his lover’s eyes. Jared was glued to their explanations and short stories. He was looking at the new stack of photo’s Jensen had just slid over to him. He remembered what Jensen had told him in the hospital about being sent away from the friends he’d made in basic. Dave explained, “This is where we finally met. We landed from different units and met getting off a bus, AGAIN, to start special forces training. It’s the same hairdo process again, new equipment, new fatigues...then they start beating the shit out of you.”

Jared looked mortified, but Mike interjected, “It’s part of the breaking in...you’ve been through basic and you’ve got experience, but if your performances in combat were rated high, then they sent you to special forces.” Jared ‘thought’ he was beginning to understand. Dave continued, “This is where you either get placed on one of the various special operations teams, or they scare the hell out of you and you get kicked out. ‘If’ you exceed their expectations and they see some kind of unique maturity and propensity for going beyond, then they talk amongst themselves and sort of push you another direction. That’s where it gets dark and secret.” Jared was enthralled. He listened intently to their stories of training and hardships. They told him about their seven day lone man test, staying alive in the woods with no food or water. They told him of the knives they’d learned to use, how they cut their hands until they learned to throw them and disarm them correctly. Jensen showed him pictures of the three covered in mud and smiling like madmen. Jared giggled, “What’s this of?” Jensen smiled, remembering, “We passed. We all came back from our seven day stint in the woods and met at base camp. Day four it started pouring rain and we basically lived in mud the rest of the damn week. When we got to camp, there were dry bologna sandwiches and Clif bars waiting. I was so goddamned tired of bark, sap and bugs, I didn’t fuckin’ care. It was good.”

Dave added, “Amen to that.” Mike laughed, “We look like dumb asses...but we made it.” Jared smiled, then looked concerned when Mike added, “Not everybody did.” The three ex-soldiers contemplated that in silence. Jared looked back down at the picture, not sure if he should interrupt their thoughts. Jensen touched him on the back, which caused Jared to look up. The older man explained, “We felt guilty for being ecstatic in that moment. A couple people had to be searched for and air lifted out. Others had snuck items in they weren’t supposed to have and failed.” Jared remained silent with a sad look of understanding on his face. He was just beginning to visualize what
being on these teams meant. ‘No wonder they became brothers,’ he thought. Jensen explained further. “So, the photo’s end just before our commencement from special forces training. When they secretly select you for where ‘we’ went, they pluck you out the morning of the ceremony of graduation. You never see the others again.” Jared did a double take at his lover. He was trying to imagine being ‘owned’ like that. The three military experts waited in silence for him to absorb what they had shared. Jared had questions, but he knew they wouldn’t be able to answer much after the point where the photo’s ended, “So...there’s you three, then two more...is that one of them you had lunch with yesterday?”

Jared looked at Mike who nodded, “Yep, that was Pete. The last one is Arnie and he lives in Minnesota with a buttload of relatives so we never see him.” Jensen explained, “We were the closest. The second team in this one,” Jensen handed Jared another photo with a large group, “was our combined team of ten when we needed it.” Jared looked between the other men, “Do they live close too?” Jensen answered him, “A few of ‘em, but most are all spread out. One guy lives in the UK, the others are on the west coast, except for that one there,” Jensen pointed to a smiling smaller statured officer, “he was from Ohio...he emails us back and forth, like the others.” Jared stared at the photo for a few minutes. This had been absolutely fascinating to see all the colored and black and white photos of Jensen’s group and hear their stories. He was on cloud nine, that is until he made the mistake of asking the wrong question. He looked up innocently at Jensen, “When was the last time you saw them all?” Jensen’s mood changed to darker and pensive, though it was subtle. Jared was learning to read him better. Jared’s gentle smile faded as he glanced at the other two and back to Jensen. “I’m sorry...whatever I said, I’m sor,” Jensen touched Jared on the shoulder to stop him, “Don’t be...it’s okay.” Jared was confused but he waited, not knowing what to say.

Jensen shared a knowing look with Dave and Mike first, seeming to ask for agreement that it was okay to share something. “Remember the stuff I told you about decommissioning, working for a year on a sort of ‘regular’ assignment while doing the counseling?” Jared nodded silently. Jensen continued, “So, we all had hardships, as you know. The bad dreams, the standoffish ways we had with other people. We were unsure about ourselves for almost a year.” Jensen looked at the other two and sighed, then he looked back at Jared, “Some people don’t come back like us.” Jared stared a Jensen. He looked nervously between the men, looking for some reassuring explanation. “What does that mean? What happens if they don’t come back?” ‘Why am I asking this? Fuck, I don’t want to know,’ Jared’s mind kept repeating. Dave leaned forward patiently, “It means everything they’ve tried isn’t working. Dodie didn’t respond to the program and when he came home, he wasn’t able to tell the difference between the two realities.” Jared concentrated on Dave’s words, “Two realities?” Mike piped in, “The before situations we were in, and the now. Dodie was still back there and then here. He had no control over bouncing back and forth. Kind of like my dream?” Jared finally understood. He shook his head in sympathy, “You mean living in your dream, in the middle of the day? Having it just suddenly appear, like a flashback?”

“Yep,” Jensen took a swig of his beer, “that’s exactly what we mean.” Jared felt his insides twist up in knots at the thought of a person suffering like that. He looked back at Jensen, “Is he back in the military, then? What do they do when that happens?” There was a delayed period of silence before anyone said anything. Jensen stared at the coffee table and the other two men seemed to be far off for a moment. Jared waited until Jensen sighed and looked at him, “He went to the VA for several months. They wouldn’t admit him. Said they didn’t have room and they delayed his appointments multiple times. So, they gave him some antidepressants while they searched for some kind of program to get him into. We had him over. Went to see him. He spent too much time alone, so we tried to keep him talking.” Jensen peeled at the label on his beer while he tried to find the courage to voice what happened, “The last time we saw everybody together, Jare, was at his funeral last year. We piled into Mike’s truck one day, because Dodie wasn’t answering his phone. When we got to his place, we found him.” Jensen looked into Jared’s eyes, “He shot himself earlier that day.”
Jared’s eyes pooled, immediately, as he looked between the three men. “I’m so sorry,” Jared’s soft heart was in anguish for the man who had ended his life and for the three veterans sitting before him. His hurt for them bled into resentment that no one had helped the suffering soldier more. “I’m so damn sorry for all of you,” Jared repeated, while looking down at the picture again. He couldn’t imagine how all of them felt about losing one of their own. Jared became pissed on their behalf, thinking it would be damn easy to take on the upward fight, get on a publicized crusade to get these former soldiers better support when they got out. The VA ignoring or delaying Dodie’s serious need for help was unforgivable. No way to treat a hero, that’s for damn sure. Jensen cleared his throat, causing Jared to look at him. The older man was grinned softly, “Your brilliant wheels are turning.” Jared realized Jensen had probably read the sadness, sympathy, and blatant anger on his face. Jensen sipped his beer, while watching Jared, “You were angry.” Jared started to speak a couple times, then looked at the other two men, then back at Jensen. He wasn’t sure if it was okay with them to be angry on their behalf. He wasn’t a soldier. He’d never done any of that and he wasn’t part of their elite group. “I,” he started, “I mean I,” Jared was kind of tongue tied. He wasn’t feeling that spark that usually fueled his angry tirade about defending some just cause. Maybe he was out of line.

Jared helped him along, “It’s okay. We were angry too.” Mike nodded, “Violently angry, Jared. I wanted to sail into that VA office and break bones.” Dave added, “Definitely. He could have been saved. Or at least it would have felt better if they had given it their all.” Jared agreed wholeheartedly. “Well, what the fuck did they have to say for themselves? Are they at least fuckin’ sorry? Jesus, what is there even a VA for if it’s not doing anything?” Jensen responded, “We pitched a bitch...made reports, filed ‘em. The pentagon comes out and does an investigation on things like this. They told us there were several questionable failures being investigated all over the nation. The program is definitely failing, but they have to be willing to fund an overhaul.” Jared had no idea that veterans were lacking in help like this. “So, the VA sucks. That’s what I’ve learned tonight. I had no idea.” Jared looked between three faces who were grinning at him. “What?” He asked all three of them, wondering what the hell they were smiling at. Jensen caught his attention, “Does this mean you’ll be taking on the government next, on behalf of all veterans, to do a complete upgrade of the after care system?”

Jared looked nervously between them, “Well I,” he chewed his lip, “I know I’m not a soldier and I’ve never done anything like that, but,” he paused, “I was kind of thinking...something should be done.” Jensen rubbed Jared’s shoulder, “Of course you were.” He leaned forward and kissed the young engineer right in front of everyone. When he pulled back, his lover was adorably distracted. Jensen grinned at him, “Because that’s who you are.” The kid looked at him confused, so Jensen clarified, “Thank you for caring so much about it...and for caring about the friend we lost.” Jared looked at him in disbelief, like it should be common for anyone to be concerned about this. “Jensen continued, “It’s something other people are championing, but there’s been a lack of powerful publicity. I’m sure they would love your brainiac legal help...we get calls and go to meetings sometimes. They would love you. You have a knack for presentation and reaching people. It’s the most amazing I’ve ever seen.” Dave added, “Agreed. They would listen to you. I bet that SPCA ordinance was a lost cause until you took hold of it.” Jared’s cheeks flushed and he looked at the fire, too shy about their perusal to keep eye contact. After a few seconds, he thought of something and looked up with renewed torment in his eyes, “It could have been any one of you. What if it was...the thought of any of you not being here,” Jensen interrupted him, “We’re past that point. We made it...we’re okay.” Mike interrupted from the other side of the table, “I wasn’t. I was kind of stuck, like Dodie.” Jared looked at Mike, alarmed, because he couldn’t imagine not having Mike in his life now, and he also couldn’t imagine what it would have done to Jensen and Dave if they’d lost him.

Jensen glanced at Dave, the two men sharing their silent approval at Mike finally feeling safe enough to share his difficulties with another person. The youngest soldier continued, “These two helped me back. Everything’s been good for the last nine months.” When Jared still looked worried, Mike
assured him, “Really. The dream was triggered by the shooting, but it’s not like I carry it all the time. I feel good now...but I’m just sayin’ that I didn’t. There was a time when I thought about ending it...but these two idiots wouldn’t leave me alone.” Dave interjected, “That’s because I needed you to be around to change my diaper when I’m eighty five.” Mike laughed, “Dude, that’s next week. And you’ll get your girly friend to do that, chump. I’ll do the fun stuff like put nitro in your scooter.” Jared was still feeling the deep sadness at the thought of Mike almost giving up, but obviously these men had gotten through it by sticking together. He looked at Jensen, who had been watching him.

The older man gently smoothed his lover’s hair back from his face, “It’s okay. We’re all alright now. Dodie was a tough blow and we took it hard, but after discussing it for months, we realized we was in a different place. Even with intense counseling and medication, it might have ended the same, but we were pissed that nothing was tried by the professionals...and we were pissed at ourselves for not keeping him under lock and key twenty four hours a day.” Jared argued, “But you couldn’t...there’s no way you guys could,” Jensen interrupted, “I know. We realized that after awhile. It’s just we were a brotherhood. NO one gets left behind. NO one is left alone like that...and it was hard to accept that we failed him.” Jared silently absorbed everything he had learned tonight. He was honored that they had told him. His problems seemed so light compared to the struggles these men had endured...’and dealing with my current problem can’t be good for them,’ Jared fell into his old guilt routine. Mike seemed to feel they needed to lighten the mood, so he brought up other things, “It’s not all bad, Jared. Remember the pictures. We played cards, intense volleyball games...even baseball games. We had R&R, sometimes. And hey, you got no bills to pay, everything’s automatic. If you get hurt, they patch you up and get you going again. And there’s booze...sometimes people’s mom’s and girlfriends would ship us treats.”

Jared started to grin, realizing Mike was trying to uplift everybody’s mood. He looked at Jensen, who was still watching him. When the older man winked at him, Jared almost melted into a puddle of goo. Jensen was looking at him with so much love and adoration, Jared was speechless. He still wasn’t used to those beautiful green beauties looking at him like that. The engineer came out of his trance when the guys started discussing their families. Dave’s parents apparently lived on the opposite side of Denver, not far. He had three brothers and a sister all spread out over the country. Mike’s mother died when he was three and he had no memory of her, but his dad and two sisters raised him in Iowa. Apparently, they still lived there. Mike had only visited once since he’d been back. They threw him a huge surprise party, having no idea what they were doing, which put Mike on extreme edge around all those people. He ran to Denver and looked at housing to be closed to Jensen and Dave. He didn’t feel he could blend with regular family anymore, so he decided to land close to people he trusted and understood him.

“So here we are,” Jensen told his lover, “So, tell us why you chose Austin out of college.” Jared looked at him, in surprise, then seemed grateful Jensen had asked something simple, completely avoiding his family life. “Um...well, during my last year at Stanford, I had internships at some firms. It was considered lab work. The companies wrote recommendations to other places, without my knowing.” He shrugged a shoulder, like it was no big deal, “I wasn’t sure where to start...except that I grew up in Euless and already knew Texas pretty well. I knew Austin was big and probably had lots of prospects. So, I looked through the offers and,” Dave interrupted, “Wait, how many offers did you have, Jared?” The kid looked uncertain, like he wasn’t quite sure why Dave asked that, “I don’t remember, maybe twelve?” Dave and Mike made a sigh of amazement, then Mike blurted out, “Jesus, dude, you know that’s not really ‘normal’, right?” Mike waited for Jared to understand what he meant, but the kid was kind of clueless about his own advanced brain. Jensen rubbed his hand on the back of Jared’s shoulder, while looking at his two friends, “He doesn’t see it, guys.” Both men nodded, “We know,” they chimed in, simultaneously.

Jared looked at the three of them and rolled his eyes at their ridiculous over reaction, “So, I took the job with a smaller firm called Greenstone, thinking I’d get my feet wet and go for larger firms later.
Skyward was after that.” Mike asked, “So, what’d you think of Austin?” Jared inhaled deeply, “I only experienced a few places. It’s supposed to be a known art and music focused city, with great concerts and exhibits...but I focused so hard on my work that...I never went out unless Manny or Jeff dragged me.” Jared shrugged a shoulder and sipped his beer. Jensen knew they’d hit a deflection, at this point. The guys didn’t know Jared’s former lover had died tragically just after college, but Jensen did, and he knew that Jared was avoiding any further discussion of that time period, if he could. Jensen glanced at the other two men, and shook his head very slightly. The perceptive warriors had noticed Jared’s evasion, but been silenced about any further questions. Jensen looked around and announced, “I think we’re ready to introduce our genius to the PS4, gentleman...what’d ya think?”

Mike looked disbelieving, “I don’t fucking think so, Ackles...what the fuck are you thinking? We’ll have nothing left we can beat the guy at.” Jensen laughed, as Jared looked confusedly between them. Dave got up to put all the pictures back. Jensen told Mike, “Set it up, ding dong, he can play with us.” Mike feigned being very put out at letting Jared play such a sacred game with them. The engineer wasn’t sure what to think yet. He watched the youngest veteran hook up a black box to the television, while Dave unwound the controllers.

‘Oh God,’ Jared panicked. “Uh...I’ve never played this, you guys...I don’t think I should.” Jensen answered from the kitchen, “Don’t worry, you’ll be great. We’ll help you.” Jared wasn’t reassured, at all. He watched Mike scroll through several choices, then he landed on something awfully tactical looking. Jared looked directly at Mike, “You realize I don’t know what I’m doing, right?” Dave answered, “You’re on our team, Jared. We’ll help you.” Mike added cheerily, “You’ll love it once you get used to it, Jared.” Jared looked at the man, disbelievingly. He seriously doubted this was going to be fun. Jensen returned with a bowl of pretzels and some melted cheese, “Here boys...add a little more gas to that digestive system.” Jensen sat next to Jared on the couch and handed him a controller. Before taking it, Jared looked at it like it was going to burn his hands. “This isn’t a good idea,” Jared said, as he reluctantly took the device. Jensen helped Jared with the selections and then the four played their first team round of Rainbow Six.

Poor Jared got killed in the first twenty seconds. He tried, but he kept getting killed and having to wait for the recharge before he could rejoin. The others came to his rescue over and over, and gradually the kid started to get the hang of it. The game moved fast, and once Jared figured out the scenarios and remembered where some of the bad guys were hidden, he started to actually be a helpful member of the team. That was where the fun began. “Nooooo...oh my God, fucker!” Mike was intense about getting ambushed, but Jared brought him a medical pack and recharged him. “Jared, dude, you are getting ‘good’! Thanks buddy!” Mike encouraged him. Jared stuck close to Jensen most of the game, but the older man couldn’t always protect him. Once he got better, Jared’s false bravado had him venturing out and getting into fire fights on his own. Dave advised, “Remember, Jared...it’s better to wait for one or all of us, so they don’t come up behind you.” “Aahh, DAMMIT,” Jared blurted out. “Like that,” Dave admonished, but grinned. Jared was now having a blast. They continued their pretend missions with intensity for the next hour. By the time Jensen suggested something different, Jared was actually worn out from all the tension. ‘Jesus, these games must give people high blood pressure,’ Jared thought, as he tried to come down.

The men grabbed some snacks and gulped their water bottles, then started a new game. The next game involved a group of international spies, looking for clues and trying to get into places or rescue the dignitary. Jared loved it. This game was more about thinking and strategy. It was addicting, for sure. Jared wound up helping them figure out some of the clues and actually beat some of the timed puzzles for them. “Jared, Jensen, the kid’s a gold mine. We’re taking him to Vegas,” Mike commented. Jared was too into the game to pay much attention. Jensen piped in, “You know damn well they’ll escort him out when they figure out how his brain works.” Dave added, “It’s like having Dr. Xavier in the casino.” Jared stopped and looked at Dave. What the hell was he talking about? “Who?” Jared asked. Jensen looked at Jared, “It’s this brainiac doctor that was in charge of the
Xmen. He had ESP and could control things, read minds...super powerful noggin.” Jared stared at him for a second, “Oh,” not really sure who the Xmen actually were. He looked at the others, “Is that a good thing? I mean he’s a good guy?” Each of the men paused and looked at Jared. “Dude,” Mike began, “Xmen? You’ve never seen Xmen?” Jared looked worried between them, then his eyes landed on Jensen. The older man smirked, while he answered for him, “He was probably working guys...and yes, Jare, he’s a good guy...a ‘very’ good guy.” Jensen looked at Mike and Dave, “Maybe that’ll be the next round of movies for him.” Both friends nodded in agreement, “Sweet,” Mike said.

After the lengthy mission was completed successfully, the four men cheered at their accomplishment. Jared couldn’t stop smiling. He thought to himself how ironic it was to be sitting here playing hours of mindless video games after all the college and additional law classes. He never would have thought he’d wind up having the time of his life. Jensen cleaned up the snacks, Jared straightened the couch and table, while the others went to the kitchen to do the dishes from dinner. Jensen texted the security team about tomorrow’s breakfast plans, then returned and tended to the fire. Jared stood next to him sipping his water. The younger man was quiet. Jensen squatted to adjust the logs he’d just added, then looked up at his lover, “What’cha thinkin’?” Jared hadn’t realized he was trailing off in thought. He smiled down at his lover, “Actually I was just thinking about the last two days and how good they’ve been.” Jensen studied him for a few seconds, then he turned to the fire, closed the gate and stood up. He slipped his hands around the kid’s waist. He kissed Jared softly and searched his eyes. His genius definitely looked happy. Jared wasn’t carrying the stress, the fear and the guilt that Jensen had seen far too much of in his beautiful eyes...the kid was right, it had been two good days. ‘Except for the wrist and bruised back,’ Jensen reminded himself.

“You ready to turn in?” Jensen rubbed Jared’s back while he waited for his answer. The soothing gesture, the heat of the fire and the fact that it was almost eleven were convincing Jared it was definitely time for bed. Even though he had an almost three hour nap today, he was still feeling the sluggish effects from his body’s recovery efforts. “Yeah,” the younger man answered, but Jensen noticed a slight delay in Jared’s answer. When Jared kissed him and turned to walk away, Jensen gently pulled him back by his waist, “Hey.” Jared looked at him innocently, “Huh?” Jensen have Jared a suspicious stare, “You okay?” Jared shrugged, “I’m fine...I just don’t want today to end.” Jensen studied Jared for a few seconds. “It’s not really ending,” he said, then kissed Jared and slid his lips over to whisper in his ear, “There’s always snuggling.” The engineer giggled that magical sound Jensen couldn’t resist. He found himself mesmerized for the moment. The kid was goddamned gorgeous and that giggle always went straight to Jensen’s soul.

Jared slid his arms around Jensen’s shoulders. There was a sudden suggestive coyness in Jared’s eyes just before he kissed him. When he pulled back, Jared asked him, “We going to bed now?” Jensen’s eyebrow perked up. “If that’s what you’re wanting...sure,” he mumbled. His dick tingled when Jared spoke against his lips, their mouths barely touching, “Are you gonna ‘come’ with me?” Jensen’s libido skyrocketed, “Hell yes, I’m ‘coming’ with you, Jesus Christ,” he adjusted himself as he followed the beautiful kid, who was pulling him toward the hallway. Jensen was sure his dick had already gone ahead to the bedroom and was starting without them. The lovers said goodnight to Mike and Dave, as they passed by. When they entered the dark bedroom, Jensen flicked on the electric fireplace, giving the cold room some blessed heat and lighting. Jared asked, “Would you mind setting that thing on high so it will be warmer?” Jensen did so immediately, “Of course.” He wasn’t sure why but he didn’t care. Maybe Jared was cold tonight. Jared gets what Jared wants was his motto.

Each man spent a little time in the bathroom, washing up and preparing for bed. Jared took a bit longer in the restroom because he was looking for something. He came out and showed a tube to Jensen, “Alright if I use this on you?” Jensen read the tube and raised an eyebrow, “Vitamin E lotion with coconut oil.” When he looked up, the younger man smiled, “It won’t hurt.” Jensen looked a bit unsure but made a quick decision to not give a damn. Seeing Jared walking and talking, happy and
healing was the greatest feeling. He wasn’t going to refuse him anything. “So,” Jensen started out. Jared loved the shy curiosity on his hard bodied hero. Jensen was relaxed and open tonight. It was perfect for what Jared wanted. He cleared his throat, “I wanted to rub this on you...have you lay on your stomach.” Jensen paused for a few seconds, then thought, “You mean like a massage?” Jared nodded, “Mmhmm,” then he shrugged a shoulder, “to start, anyway.” Jensen raised an eyebrow. His interest was definitely peaked. “I’m not really sure how to get a massage. I’ve never,” Jared interrupted him with a kiss, “It’s okay. You don’t have to do anything but just lay there.” Jensen looked unsure, “Isn’t that going to hurt your wrist?”

Jared sighed, looking at Jensen with loving understanding for his protector’s inability to let him do something like this without worrying. He touched Jensen’s cheek, “It’s okay. I’m really much better, thanks to you. Just take everything off and lay down.” Jensen looked up at Jared, “Okay. You want me to lay on my stomach?” The younger man leaned over and kissed Jensen beautifully because he couldn’t resist the full lips and willing expression. The older man was lost for a moment, completely at the young man’s mercy. When he ended the kiss, Jared could see the dreamy look on his bad ass special forces veteran. He pulled Jensen’s shirt off to help him along. The older man finally got with the program and pulled his pajama bottoms off. This was nothing like he’d ever experienced. A massage? Holy crap, Jensen wasn’t sure how to handle this. “I’m not sure how I’m supposed to lay, or...” Jared put a finger over Jensen’s lips, then kissed him to soften the interruption, “You don’t have to do anything but just feel. Let me take care of you for awhile. Can you do that?”

Jensen’s insides were racing with panic at letting go, arousal at the thought of Jared’s hands on him, anticipation at the unknown. “Well...sure...uhm,” he cleared his throat while Jared grinned softly at the adorable nervousness, “What about your sore wrist? Maybe this should wait, I,” Jared ‘shushed’ him again, then softened it with another loving kiss. He pulled back and looked into Jensen’s enlarged pupils, “My wrist is fine...and I’m so looking forward to this.” Jensen finally pulled his underwear down, keeping his eye contact with Jared. Both men glanced down at Jensen’s impressive half hardness, then their eyes met. Jared slid his hands around the older man’s waist and kissed him again, “Don’t worry...I’ll be taking care of that beauty too.” Jensen’s heart rate increased. Before he let Jared guide him onto his stomach, Jensen tried once more, “Baby, don’t have to do this. I don’t want you to hurt yourself.” Jared studied his lover for a moment. Jensen was an endless pool of loving concern and protectiveness over him. Jared suddenly wanted to send him to the moon and beyond with as much pleasure as he could give him. He asked, “Remember the beautiful rapture you spoiled me with that first time we....went all the way?” When Jensen didn’t react, the younger man added, “The morning with the deer outside the window?” Jensen smiled and nodded, “Oooh, yeah.” He stayed still for a moment, smiling at Jared, then a lightbulb suddenly flickered on and his eyes widened, “OH.”

Jared smiled, as Jensen finally understood. Jensen had no idea how damn cute he was when he was like this. The older man cleared his throat, “So...you’re wanting to do that...to me?” The seasoned war veteran thought about Jared’s tongue in places where he’d never had one before and he pretty much knew that he wasn’t going to be able to keep quiet about it. He figured he’d probably cum the second Jared touched him. ‘Jesus,’ Jensen’s cock was filling with anticipation. Jared asked, “So...are you okay with that?” He glanced down at the cock that had filled even more from the shared memory. Jensen answered instantly, “Hell, yes. Jesus, you can do anything you damn well want to me.” Jensen meant it. Jared smiled softly and kissed him again, “Then lay down...and remember, just feel.” Jensen laid on his stomach, completely naked, except for his socks. Jared rubbed his hands all over him, feeling the smooth golden skin. “God, you’re beautiful,” he commented. Jensen was thick and muscular, from top to bottom. He was gorgeously sculpted, with wide muscular shoulders, tapering down to a perfectly firm waist. Jared smoothed his hands over Jensen’s round globes, feeling the gluteus muscle twitch slightly.

“You’re perfect everywhere, Jensen,” Jared said. He slid his hands further down Jensen’s legs,
feeling the muscle definition all the way down to his calves. Jared smoothed his hands up to Jensen’s shoulders and kneaded them lightly. Truth be told, he was actually testing his wrist out, just to see how much pressure he could get away with. He straddled his lover, then sat on his butt while he pulled his shirt off. Jensen grinned, “I like feeling your weight on me.” Jared snickered, “Well good, ‘cuz it’s the best angle for me to get your whole back. I’m not to heavy?” Jensen giggled into his bent arm, “M-m, not heavy. I like it.” Jared glanced at Jensen’s face. The ex-soldier was snuggled into a pillow with his head turned to the side, his arm’s were bent and laying loose around the pillow. “Are you comfortable?” Jared asked, to which he got, “Mhm.” Jared asked, “Are you too cold like this?” Jensen snickered again, “Not with you around.” Jared grinned. The engineer leaned over and laid his bare chest on top of Jensen’s back. He rested on his elbows and kissed the older man on his nape. Jensen moaned in pleasure, feeling Jared’s light kisses going toward his ear. “I want you to let me take care of you for awhile,” Jared whispered into Jensen’s ear, “You’re always taking care of ‘me’, and this is for ‘you’. Just let it happen.”

Jared’s hot breath sent chills down Jensen’s spine. His body was reacting to Jared’s closeness, but his comfort zone of in control tried desperately to take over, “We have to be careful...your ribs.” “Shush,” Jared soothed him, “I’ll be careful...I’m okay.” Jared kissed him down his neck, “You put me back together in more ways than one, ya know. Try to stop worrying.” Jensen snickered, “Like that’s gonna happen.” After a pause, he added, “I’ll never stop worrying...you’re too important to me.” Jared paused, as his heart melted, but he countered Jensen’s comment with determination, “Well, I guess I’ll have to distract you, then.” Jensen felt Jared sit up on his haunches. He grinned when he heard the squirt of the lotion, “Well...distract away, kiddo.” Jared shook his head and grinned at his playful bodyguard. He loved this side of Jensen. He held his coated hands together to warm the lotion first, then he began with a slow penetrative massage to Jensen’s neck. He rubbed and kneaded the taught tendons, applying pressure until the felt the tissues respond. His wrist was a little irritated, but Jared realized when he held it in a certain position, there wasn’t any pain. Jensen moaned loudly. He was tight and knotted from a lifetime of physical strain. Jared pushed and kneaded and rubbed, loving when he started to feel the older man’s tension leave him. Jensen couldn’t control his reactions to the overwhelming pleasure, “Mmmmm, God...God, Jare,” he kept repeating like a mantra into the pillow.

Holy fuck, Jensen was sure he wasn’t going to survive Jared doing this to his whole back. The pleasure was unimaginable. Jared worked his way down his neck, working on releasing every piece of tension. Jensen’s need for this was obvious. He had never had this done, his body responding to it like a starving man. He groaned and growled in released pain as Jared attacked huge knots. He worked them and worked them, until finally the knots started to let go. “Aaah,” Jensen moaned, “Aaah,” over and over in ecstasy. Jensen was melting into a puddle of goo. If there was some kind of emergency right now, he would be absolutely useless. His lifetime of training was nagging him ‘you shouldn’t do this, you shouldn’t do this,’ while the mushy relaxed part of his brain was soaring with endorphins. Jared worked his way to both shoulders, receiving the loud wondrous reactions to his ministrations. When he stopped for a moment to reapply more lotion to his hands, Jensen didn’t move, nor make a sound. After warming the lotion, Jared started between Jensen’s shoulder blades and pushed outward. “Uuuhhhhh,” Jensen groaned, the pleasure filled painful sounds continued, as Jared pushed hard into more knots. “God.” Jensen couldn’t even describe the feeling. His nerve endings were on fire, melting into Jared’s touch.

Jensen felt complete numbing peace from the places Jared had finished with, and utter desperate begging coming from the other tense places he hadn’t reached yet. The older man admitted to himself that his body belonged to Jared now and was no longer his own. The talented hands worked Jensen’s shoulder blades until they relaxed, then he took his thumbs and pushed outward all the way down Jensen’s spine. Jensen had never felt anything like it. Fuck, he was even further lost. As Jared rubbed and kneaded the older man’s back, he closed his eyes during some of it, trying to connect
with Jensen through touch. He felt when the muscles resisted the pressure, then gradually released. Jensen’s reactions were like music to his ears. Jared reached Jensen’s lower back and took his time working that area too. He rubbed his hands lower, reaching the top of Jensen’s butt. People didn’t usually get this in a regular massage, but Chris had a book for couples. Even though they hadn’t gotten around to trying everything, Jared remembered some of the information. The gluteus was often an overworked ignored muscle. Massaging it brought incredible pleasure to most people.

Jared kneaded and rubbed the muscle on both sides. He worked his way under the half moons and pushed in to relieve the ignored part of the muscle there too. He massaged down Jensen’s thigh’s, hearing loud satisfied moans of appreciation, loving that he was causing that. When Jared finished with Jensen’s calves, he slid his hands back upward. As he kneaded Jensen’s beautiful ass again, Jared took inventory on himself. Nothing hurt too bad. His wrist was getting sore, but he was still able to get around severe pain by holding it a certain way. His chest was fine. It wasn’t painful, just sore. He leaned over to brace himself on his elbows. He placed light kisses on Jensen’s back, rubbed his hands lovingly over the hot muscles, soothing them. He kissed his way down to Jensen’s ass cheeks, then readjusted himself to support his weight between his hips and elbows. Jensen had gotten quiet. He had turned his head to the side, so he could breathe, after loudly moaning and groaning into the pillow for the last forty minutes. Jared wondered if he’d fallen asleep, at first, then his eyes moved to Jensen’s back. He could see the rapid rise and fall of the older man’s breathing.

Jared called to him, “How do you feel?” He leaned up enough to watch his lover grin lazily, “Mmm...like I can’t move. S’so fuckin’ amazing.” Jared smiled and kissed Jensen’s cheeks again, “Well, I’m not done, baby.” Jensen snickered softly at Jared’s pet name. The kid never used that word and it caught him off guard. Jared took a second to get situated again, then looked over his area of interest. ‘Jensen must have the most perfect ass on the planet,’ he thought. The special ops veteran started to ask, “Baby, are you hurting or,” then he inhaled loudly and groaned, “Oooh, my God,” as Jared’s tongued swiped his crack front to back. He licked the path once more and Jensen lost his train of thought, “Ooooooh....fucking Christ.”

Jared was going to kill him with pleasure, he was sure of it. Jensen moaned louder as Jared’s tongue became insatiable. He licked the inside of Jensen’s cheeks, then spread them apart and licked more aggressively up and down the crevasse. Jensen gripped the pillow tight and shoved part of it into his mouth to keep his vocal reactions muffled. Jared’s wet hot tongue was driving him crazy. The younger man stopped for a second to blow on Jensen’s wrinkled hole. Jensen’s voice went up an octave. He pushed backward, lifting off the bed to push against the absolute pleasure. “Fuck!” Jensen yelled into the pillow. “Fuck, Jare,” he added. “OhmyGod, that feels so fucking good.” Jared kept the cheeks spread and focused on his lover’s sparkling hole. He licked the muscle ring wiggling his tongue around it. “Mmohgod...fuck,” Jensen was losing it.

Jared enjoyed the hell out of Jensen’s reactions, so he decided to up the ante. He pushed his tongue just inside, wiggled it, then pumped the tip of his tongue in and out. Jensen went wild, moaning loudly into his pillow. He bit into his pillow, trying desperately to hide his own noise from their house guests. Jared sucked on the ring, letting his teeth lightly graze the sensitive tissue. Jensen wanted to scream. His hips started gyrating. The pleasure was unimaginable. Jensen’s climb to orgasm seemed to skip a few levels as he felt himself quickly rising to the top. The desperate tension in Jensen’s groans were obvious. Jared doubled his efforts, totally rock hard and leaking at the thought of making Jensen cum like this. He licked and sucked on Jensen’s perineum, inducing even louder reactions. He knew he was running out of time, but he wanted Jensen to experience every sensation he could give him. Jared slid his hand underneath to feel Jensen’s dick. ‘Jesus’, it was hard as concrete with a lake of precum under him. Jared took Jensen’s dick in his hand, and the older man screamed into the pillow and pumped his hips. “Aaah, God!” His grunts and cries were laced with emotional desperation. “Jared...feellsogood,” Jensen was at that crucial moment where he was experiencing so much pleasure, his internal wall of control was panicking. He was losing it. Jared
knew it was scaring him to feel this open.

He stopped for a second and encouraged him, “Let it go, Jen...cum for me. I’m with you.” Jared’s words infiltrated Jensen’s madness. He was so fucking turned on at these new feelings, he could do nothing but ride the pleasure until he exploded with it. Jared would catch him...Jared would catch him, he had to repeat to himself. Jared stiffened his tongue and shoved it into Jensen’s hole. He began pumping it in and out mercilessly. Jensen screamed from the instant pleasure, “JARED!” His dick fucked through Jared’s sopping wet fist, while his asshole was fucked by Jared’s tongue, and the double stimulation was the only thing he knew. Jensen grunted and screamed “JARED,” into his pillow, then he clenched down hard on Jared’s tongue, and came, “Mmmmmmmnnnngh!”

“Nnnnnngghhh,” he grunted and growled into his pillow, while the intensity of his orgasm owned him. His cries and clenching body pushed Jared right into his own orgasm. There was nothing he could do to stop it, as Jared groaned into Jensen’s ass, “Nnnnnnggggh,” his eyes rolled up and the pleasure consumed him. The vibrations stimulated Jensen’s aftershocks even more. He cried into his pillow, then continued to moan at different levels. He grunted and moaned softly, as his orgasm finally started to taper off. Jared eased his hand off Jensen’s dick, as soon as he was able to concentrate. Fuck, the pleasure was still thrumming through him, too.

Jared panted into the older man’s wet crevasse. He’d never done that before. He licked down Jensen’s perineum and wound up lightly licking the vibrating balls, but he was still trying to catch his breath from cumming like that. Jensen was still moaning. Even after the hardest spasms had passed, the older man was still experiencing the powerful endorphins being released throughout his body. Jared took a moment to kiss Jensen’s cheeks before slowly crawled up Jensen’s back. His limbs were shaky, but he felt amazing that he’d been able to give this to Jensen. Jared hadn’t meant to blow his load like that, but Jensen was just too fucking hot. When he laid over his lover’s body and blanketed him, he noticed the beautiful ex-soldier had turned his head to the side to breathe, but his eyes were closed. After breathing together for the next few minutes, Jared kissed his lover between the shoulder blades and forced himself to crawl off the bed. He remembered to use the elbow instead of the wrist, at least. His wrist was already sore so he was sure it would have been an ugly move.

The engineer got towels from the bathroom and cleaned Jensen’s pool of cum from underneath him. Jared pushed the second towel in from the side to leave it there underneath the man’s crotch so he wouldn’t have to feel the damp spot. Jensen was still buck naked and he wasn’t moving. Jared contemplated for a moment, about how to get the covers over the heavier muscular soldier for the night. It didn’t seem like Jensen was going to be moving any time soon. Jared realized he was going to have to maneuver the thick bedding out from under Jensen to cover them both.

The young genius was out of breath and sore as hell when he finally got the thick covers pulled down past Jensen’s feet. The military retiree hadn’t budged. Jared had never seen him out like this. Once he got Jensen covered, Jared decided he was too much of a disgusting sticky mess to lay close to his lover without a hot shower. In addition to that, he looked in the mirror and practically barked at himself. He’d been laying around for two days and needed a shave. Jared took care of business, then returned to bed clean and less sore after the hot water beaded his muscles. The lovers slept like the dead until morning. Their house guests were up and around early, but tried to keep quiet. Dave had worked out in the spare room with weights and elastic bands, while Mike ran on the treadmill. The two played around with some martial arts kata’s in the living room before finally taking turns in the shower. Jared sluggishly dragged his ass from the warm bed to pee and wash his hands. When he returned to the bed, he managed to squint an eye at the clock and noticed the time, “Holy fuck.” This was the first time Jared remembered ‘ever’ waking before Jensen. He looked at his lover and smiled sleepily. It was good to know he’d relaxed the older man into that peaceful of a sleep.

Jared scooted back over to Jensen’s warmth. He kissed the ex-soldier on the shoulder and closed his eyes with his hand on Jensen’s back. Jared hadn’t realized he’d fallen back asleep until he felt his
lover move. Jensen started to moan in blissful relaxation, then he rolled onto his back. He rubbed his face and yawned, working his way to awareness. He was sure it was his internal alarm that had waken him up. Even though he was sluggish, he thought he would grab a weights workout and shower before Jared even stirred. When Jensen opened his eyes, he turned his head toward his lover. ‘What the hell,’ Jensen’s mind struggled with the fact that Jared was actually awake this early, “What’s up? You okay?” Jared smiled wider at the very sleepy drawl to his lover’s voice. Jensen rolled toward him, as he slipped his arm around Jared’s waist. The younger man answered, “I’ve never seen you sleep. I like it...it’s nice to see you rest.” Jensen yawned away from Jared’s face, then laid his head back down to face him, “I rest all the time.” Jared said, “I mean ‘really’ rest. Without worrying about being the first to respond to something. Relaxed. REM, ya know? It’s nice to see you finally do that.” Jensen studied his lover quietly. He still wasn’t quite sure what the hell Jared was on about, but he felt pretty damned comfortable and relaxed at the moment...better than he had in over twenty years.

Jensen assessed Jared’s every detail, “How are you doin’? Is anything hurting after you totally blew my circuits last night?” Jared realized the protector in Jensen had fully woken up now and was suitting up for the day. “Everything’s fine. It’s okay,” Jared answered. He grinned softly when his lover gave him a disbelieving look, “Really...I admit the wrist is sore, but everything else is pretty damn good.” Jensen took his ace bandage off and looked at the wrist while they laid together. “It’s swollen, babe. I think if you try and not use it today, it might start to heal.” Jensen replaced the ace bandage and seemed to just notice something, “Hey...you’re laying on your left side.” Jared nodded, “I can do this as long as it’s not all my weight on that side. I’ve got it figured out now.” Jensen seemed to accept that after studying Jared further. The veteran shook his head, “Jesus, I’ve ‘never’ felt anything like what you did last night...I mean both, the massage and then your tongue, fuck it was so hot.” Jensen slid his naked body half over Jared’s, which forced Jared to lay flat. He kissed the younger man thoroughly, inspecting the inside of his delicious mouth and soft lips.

Jensen pulled back and eyed Jared in wonder, “I had no idea what that was gonna feel like.” Jared smiled, his eyes full of intensity, “You were so hot, I came, you know.” Jensen’s interest peaked, “Really?” He started to grin, “I’m sorry I missed that. I think you should do it again.” Jared giggled, which made Jensen smile wider. He started kissing Jared’s neck, while the younger man added, “You didn’t really miss all of it. My tongue was inside your ass at the time.” Jensen practically growled in appreciation, “That beautiful mouth of yours is quite talented. Just like the rest of you.” He kissed behind Jared’s ear, “Which I’d like to stay in bed and play with all day.” Jared giggled softly, his eyes rolling up suddenly when Jensen’s tongue licked his ear. “Jen,” Jared tried again, “Oh,” his thoughts were interrupted when Jensen sucked on his collar bone. Jensen kissed his way back to Jared’s mouth, then planted a deep passionate kiss on his beautiful engineer. Jared was lost in it and forgot the reason he was trying to get Jensen’s attention a moment ago. “Oh yeah,” the younger man remembered, as Jensen ended the kiss, “It’s uh...uhm,” Jared was melting into Jensen’s open mouth, hovering right over his, “What is it, baby?” The older man was frying his brain cells.

When Jensen finally paused in his delectable buffet of tasting every piece of Jared, he focused on the enlarged pupils and kiss swollen lips with a soft grin. Jared forced himself to speak, even though his toes were curling from the hunger in Jensen’s eyes, “I think...it’s late. What time are we going?” Jared glanced toward the bedside clock but he couldn’t see it because his special forces master was laying over him. Jensen looked over at the device, “What the fuck?” He blurted out. Jensen pushed himself up off of Jared and looked down at the man like he had surely changed time somehow or drugged him. He looked so disbelieving about it, Jared sat up and put his arm around his neck. He grinned at the boyish confusion on his military expert, “You fell asleep...you slept hard. It was good for you.” Jensen didn’t know whether to be embarrassed, panicked or pissed off. He marveled, “I’ve
never done that before.” Jared watched his lover internally chastise himself for having just one night of letting his guard down. It upset Jared that Jensen had never been able to relax like that. There were times when he ‘seemed’ relaxed, but it wasn’t to his core. The Black Ops veteran was ‘always’ alert and ready, even in his sleep. Obviously, Jared had found a way to break that pattern.

Jensen cleared his throat, “Uhm...so, you’re half dressed...I’m still buck naked. There’s a couple crusty looking hand towels laying on the floor by me and...okay, and so how the hell did I...wait...fuck, did I fall asleep?” Jared bit his bottom lip while nodding. Jensen looked concerned, “So how the hell did you get the covers around us both? How did you do that with your injuries? Please tell me you did ‘not’ have those two bone heads come in here and move me...” Jared shook his head, laughing when Jensen said that. “No, I wouldn’t do that.” He kissed Jensen to soothe him, “I pulled the covers out from under you. It’s okay. It wasn’t easy peasy, but I did it. Course, then I was gross because I hadn’t had a shower in two days, plus I’d just blown my wad because you were so fucking sexy...so I took a shower before I laid with you.” Jensen looked admonishingly at his lover, “I missed all that?” He sighed, “Jesus Jare, I’m not supposed to be unaware like that.” Jared looked concerned, “Maybe something inside of you knows it’s okay with me. And maybe you needed it. I’m certainly not gonna hurt you. I’m head over heels in love with you.” Jensen breathed a deep sigh. His whole demeanor softened because he felt Jared’s words to his very core. He rubbed his face with one hand, then sighed, “I know. I know I’m safe with you, baby. This is a new concept for me, that’s all.” Jensen looked at the clock again, then got out of bed and started gathering clothing for the day. He sort of effectively ended the conversation, but Jared felt uneasy about leaving it like that.

The young engineering expert got out of bed and walked toward him. The older man was distracted by the strikingly gorgeous shirtless kid in low riding pajama bottoms. ‘Jesus,’ he knew that sight would stop anyone in their tracks. Jared’s cluelessness to his own beauty just made him even hotter. Jared slid his arms around Jensen’s shoulders to cup the back of his neck, “So, you don’t like when you let go with me?” Jared’s gaze was searching...looking for anything that would tell him how to make Jensen feel better about this. “All I want is to reach you...make you feel amazing.” Jensen kissed him, sliding his arms around the younger man’s waist. He paused for a few seconds, “Oh I like...I like it very much, baby,” then devoured his lover’s mouth, throwing everything he had into the kiss. When he pulled back, he eyed Jared’s face, which was beautifully dreamy. Jensen could get lost watching this kid, “You’re just too goddamned addicting...I’ll never get enough. And you ‘do’ reach me. You’re the ‘only’ one that does...and ‘amazing’ doesn’t even cover it.” Jared felt more at peace now, definitely reacting to Jensen’s reassurances. The older man cupped his face, “That’s why when I wake up late and I don’t know what the Hell has happened between last night and now, it terrifies me to think that something could have happened to you during that time.” Jared opened his mouth to speak but Jensen wasn’t finished, “THAT will never change. It’s just something I have to deal with. It’s like taking my eyes off the most important piece of my soul and leaving it unprotected.” Jensen smiled because he had rendered his lover speechless. He kissed the kid because he was just too adorable not to. When he pulled back, he announced, “Now, I need to get in that shower because if I stand here any longer I’m gonna fuck you into that mattress until you scream with pleasure...which will bring Tweedle Dee and Dum in here if they think I’m hurting you.” Jared would have grinned, but that kiss earlier and Jensen’s words had him spinning. He pulled his hands away, realizing he was still hanging onto Jensen. The ex-soldier turned and entered the bathroom, leaving the door open so Jared had a perfect view of his sculpted physique. When the shower started, Jared finally turned to go get dressed and straighten up the bedroom. He decided to pull the sheets and cover off and get them started in the wash. When Jared went down the hall with a heavy bundle of bedding, he ran into Dave...literally. The older man steadied him, “What the hell are you doing carrying that?” Jared rolled his eyes and sighed as the other six foot four person in the house took the bundle from his arms and carried it to the machines. Jared was sure a pile of laundry
wasn’t gonna pull his chest but he didn’t argue.

Jared helped Dave sort the load and poured the soap in, while Mike came up behind them, “Ewww...imagine all the baby Ackles and Padalecki’s that are on those.” Dave raised his hands up and sighed in disgust, “Fuck, Mike, really?” He walked toward the guest bathroom. ‘Probably to wash his hands,’ Jared thought. While Jared stood there trying not to be embarrassed as fuck, Mike slapped him on the shoulder, “So where’s that old man of yours? I’m fucking starving.” Before Jared mustered up an answer for Mike, Jensen came down the hall. The older man looked sinfully handsome in his faded torn jeans, white t-shirt and flannel. Jared could see his hair was barely damp. Jensen slipped his hand around Jared’s shoulder, “Thanks for washing everything.” He planted a quick kiss on him then shared a silent knowing grin over their similar outfits. Mike broke the moment by balking, “Get a room or come on, lovebirds, we’re all slipping into malnutrition here. Let’s go.” Jensen laughed, as he walked off, while Jared thought to himself he might not ‘ever’ get used to Mike’s outbursts. Dave returned from the bathroom and held up the security phone, “Convoy’s ready.” The three veterans went into their rooms and came back pushing something into their back waistbands. Dave asked, “We taking the truck?” Jensen answered, “Yep. Be nice to have our own wheels this time. They can follow.”

Everyone was acting like things were status quo, ‘But they’re bringing guns,’ Jared’s mind deduced. ‘They’re bringing guns.’ Jared had been so relaxed the last couple days, he’d managed to forget there was even a threat out there that was after him. Obviously, his house mates didn’t. Jared was looking forward to breakfast, wholeheartedly. He couldn’t wait to see Dani and Steve again...but...Jensen held the front door open, while his two friends put on their jackets and went out front to greet Phil and Frank. Apparently, they were their escorts to the restaurant. Jensen put his own jacket on, while quickly assessing Jared out of the corner of his eye. The kid was too quiet. When Jared realized he was being watched, he quickly went to the front door and took the offered jacket from Jensen. Jensen waited until Jared was zipped up, then put his hand on Jared’s face, “What’s wrong?” Jared feigned a smile that didn’t reach his eyes, “Nothing,” but Jensen wasn’t buying it. “Hey,” the older man tried again, “this is me...what’s wrong?” Jared looked outside first, noticing the chase car and additional security. He saw the men talking with Dave and Mike.

His internal anxiety shot up a few notches and he suddenly felt unsure about even going. He turned back to Jensen and said, “I’m sorry. I just...I think maybe I shouldn’t go.” Jensen studied him closely. Jared had been excited about this morning. “Why?” Jensen searched his gaze. Jared tried to explain, “I don’t mean you guys can’t. I’m just...thinking that,” he looked toward the men outside, “we shouldn’t be putting anyone else in harm’s way.” Jensen started to argue, but Jared interrupted, “I forgot.” Jensen asked, “What?” Jared looked back at his lover, “I forgot...about it all. For almost three days. It’s been amazing.” Jensen rubbed his thumb back and forth on the younger man’s cheek and smiled, “That’s what you were supposed to do, buddy.” Jensen argued, “But...it’s still out there, and these people shouldn’t be risking their safety just so I can go eat breakfast.” Jensen sighed, now he understood. Jared was worried about everyone ‘else’. “Jared...it doesn’t mean anything’s ‘going’ to happen just because we’re ‘ready’ for it to happen. We’re in our own area...Price says there’s been no sighting. Furthermore that’s what the guys are talking about right now out front. Nothing has them spooked or we wouldn’t be going. Okay?”

Jared thought about what Jensen told him. He still looked worried, but finally nodded, “Okay.” Maybe he was over reacting. Jensen walked him to the truck and the others joined them. “You ride in back with Dave, okay?” Jared looked alarmed, “Why?” Jensen said, “Just precaution.” Jared sighed, perturbed about having to mix this crap with what was supposed to be a fun morning, but he didn’t argue and got into the back seat. When they were in the car, Jensen waited until everyone had their seatbelts on before pulling out. He made sure the chase car was close behind, then began the trip to everybody’s favorite restaurant. Jared barely recognized any of the roads. He thought the curve just before the restaurant looked vaguely familiar, but the day of the accident four weeks ago
had been such a blur. Jensen pulled into the gravel parking lot and turned the engine off. Jared looked out the window and saw Frank and Phil get out of another car and go into the restaurant first. Then he saw a second car with Lance and another man he didn’t know park a few spaces away. When those men got out, Jensen finally got out of the truck and went to talk with them. Jared was going to get out, but something told him not to. Dave and Mike hadn’t exited yet, so Jared got the message he was probably supposed to stay with them. He thought this was an awful lot of trouble for not having any concerns in the area, but kept his thoughts to himself. These were the experts, after all.

Within a couple minutes, Jensen came back to the truck and opened Jared’s door, “Breakfast is served, young paddiwan.” Jared climbed out of the truck, grinning at Jensen’s Star Wars reference. He looked around the parking lot, as Dave and Mike came around to join them. When Jared looked between them, he noticed the three men were surrounding him, just as they had on the day of his testimony. Jared’s nervous concern showed as his eyes met Jensen’s, “I thought there wasn’t anything to worry about today.” Jensen took Jared’s hand and squeezed it, “There isn’t. It’s just ‘really’ busy today...lots of people inside. It’s the best place for miles, but on top of that, it’s the weekend.” Jensen nodded, trying to force himself to relax, while Jensen glanced at his two friends, “It’s packed.” Dave and Mike nodded, knowing their mission to keep Jared safe in the middle of a busy crowd of unknown’s was a bit more challenging. The group walked toward the door. Jared’s stomach was growling and he was sure everyone else’s was too. “Mmmm, smell that?” Mike asked the group. Dave answered, “Oh yeah.” “Smells like bacon...lots of bacon,” Jensen said dreamily.

Jared started to relax, looking forward to seeing Jensen’s friends again. When they got to the old redwood veranda style deck, Jared could hear the crowd inside. He stepped on the first board to follow Jensen up the old worn stairs and suddenly froze. Something about the loud creak and soft give of the old boards stunned him into another time. His breathing increased. He looked down and his hands were covered in blood. There was a blinding pain coming from his chest and he couldn’t breathe. Jensen turned back, immediately, when he felt Jared stop. Dave and Mike put their hands under the kid’s arms, sensing there was something immediate that had caused him to freeze up.

Jensen noticed Jared’s gaze was fixated on the wooden steps. He asked, “Jared?” Mike asked, “Is this his first time back here?” Jensen glanced at Mike and nodded, “Yeah. Jared?” Jensen tried again. Dave asked, “This is where it happened?” Jensen looked at his friend, guiltily and nodded, “He walked from that crevice over there. A good two hundred feet. Damn, I didn’t even think about that.”

Mike and Dave both glanced down the road to look at the distance. They knew the story, but seeing the distance in person gave them even more respect for Jared’s tenacity. Jensen moved himself into Jared’s vision, blocking his view of the steps. “Jare, hey...you’re not back there, buddy. You’re right here, with me. You’re safe and what you’re seeing is not happening right now.” “I tripped,” the engineer said softly. Jensen studied him for a second, “Jare?” Jared repeated, “I tripped and I couldn’t figure out why, I mean...there was only two steps and it should’ve been easy.” Jensen talked to him softly, “Jare, please look at me.” The younger man looked confused. First he looked down at his hands and turned them over and back. Then, he turned his head and looked back down the road. ‘He’s remembering,’ Jensen glanced quickly at the other two. They looked poised in case Jared took a dive.

“Jare?” Jensen called him softly and the younger man finally looked at him. “Hey,” Jensen said, “Do you know where you are?” Jared nodded, but still looked spooked. He was absently rubbing his hand over his chest. Jensen continued, “It’s okay. This is a flashback. You’re remembering, and it feels like it’s happening right now, but it’s not.” Jensen looked down at his chest and hands before putting them down and looking back at Jensen. “It was so real,” he said, then looked at the other two men, “sorry.” Jensen knew his friends hated it when the kid apologized for something he didn’t need to. Mike sighed loudly, “Jesus,” but Dave spoke softly, “It’s normal, Jared, when you’ve been
through something traumatic.”

Jensen touched Jared’s cheek, “I think they want you to stop apologizing.” The three protectors waited with concern in their eyes, while Jared took a minute to regroup. The other security team had been hovering in the parking lot, waiting for a sign from Jensen’s team on whether they were going in, or leaving. Frank came out of the restaurant to see what was taking so long, and paused when Jensen held up his hand. Jensen studied his lover. Jared seemed to be back with him now and was starting to relax. He put his hand out for Jared to take, “You ready to come in and enjoy this place the right way?” Jared nodded and took Jensen’s hand. As they stepped through the double doors, Jared barely got his coat off when he heard a screeching from the cash register. Dani slammed the machine drawer shut and rushed over to Jensen, Dave and Mike with her arms wide open. After hugging all of them, the woman turned to Jared and grabbed him by the biceps, “Just look at you.” She was smiling at Jared, but talked to the other men, “He looks amazing, boys. Great job, Jensen!” Jared smirked, feeling a slight blush coming on but, “ugh,” he grunted as he found himself grabbed into a fiercely tight hug. The woman was only about five foot six but strong. Jensen laughed, “Careful Dani, he’s still got some healing to do.” The older woman pulled back and held Jared’s cheeks between her palms, “It is so good to see you, Jared.”

Jared tried to recover quickly for her benefit and smiled, “It’s really good to see you too.” As she pulled him along, his three bodyguards trailed him. Dani looked back, “I’m assuming you want the usual back table?” Jensen smiled, “You’re right on, darlin’.” He thought it was cute how his friend didn’t seem to want to let go of Jared. Dani seated them all at a large oval table with one side blocked by a wooden separator and another against the wall. There were only two open sides to the table. It was easy to see the front door and near the back hallway with the restroom. Jensen thanked her as they all got comfortable. Soon, Dani returned with coffee and water for everyone. “Now, do you want menu’s or do you all want your favorites?” Then she looked at Jared, “All their favorites are good, sweetie. You pick what you want, though, and it’s on the house.” Jared tried to argue, “Oh no, you don’t have to do that,” but Dani held up her hand, “I’m so glad to see you, it’s ‘always’ gonna be free for you, sweetie.” Jared opened his mouth to argue again, but Jensen told him, “Just roll with it, Jare, she won’t listen.”

Jared sighed resignedly. Jensen asked for a menu for Jared. The guys each pointed out their favorites and what they were going to get. Jared thought it over for awhile, then decided on something called ‘The Ridge.’ “Ooooh,” three special forces masters reacted to Jared’s choice. He looked between them, “What?” Mike smiled at him, “I knew it. I knew you were brave as all fuck, Jared.” Dave smiled at him. Jensen touched him on the shoulder, “It’s everything you want...eggs, sausage, bacon, mushrooms and potatoes...but then there’s the gravy.” “Mmmmm,” Dave and Mike both hummed simultaneously. Jensen continued, “It’s awesome but it’s homemade and it’s heart stopping fantastic shit.”

Jared smiled, “Sounds perfect.”
CHAPTER TWENTY SEVEN

Jared groaned in agony. He was so full, he couldn’t move. The over stuffed engineer laid his head
down on the table and avoided looking at the half eaten monstrosity on his plate. “What’s wrong, Jared,” Mike snickered, “Can’t finish?” Jared moaned from his muffled face in his elbow, unable to
do anything other than shake his head. Dani came over, just as Jensen leaned down to where he
could look up into his lover’s face. “We have a quitter?” Dani asked everyone. Jensen sat up and
smirked, “Yeah, he’s done.” Dani touched Jared on the back, “Don’t worry, sweetheart, these three
did the same thing. It’s delicious, but it’s deadly.” Jared moaned into his arm again, so Dani patted
him once more and took the plate. Dave put his hand on Jared’s back, “It’s happened to all of us,
Jared. The Ridge isn’t for sissies.” Jared had been in such a great frame of mind thirty minutes ago.
He eagerly watched Jensen get his eggs and bacon, Dave get his Southwest omelet, and Mike get his
Denver scramble. There was a second waitress carrying Jared’s entree with two hands. That was his
first clue.

Jared’s meal was a pile of homemade biscuits, covered with bacon and sausage, scrambled eggs,
peppers and mushrooms, covered with a layer of cheese, then topped with old fashioned home made
gravy. When the mountainous masterpiece was put before him, Jared’s mouth dropped open in
stunned silence, while his mind tried to grasp the reason why he’d actually ordered this. Jensen
grinned at the adorable reaction, “Enjoy it, buddy. You’ll never taste anything like it.” Jared glanced
at him, looking worried, before he finally picked up his fork. On his first bite, Jared’s taste buds
exploded with pleasure. “Ohmygod,” he mumbled around his fork, spending the next fifteen minutes
indulging himself. Except for the occasional comment about how good everything was, the four men
were quiet for most of their meal. Jared was focused on his food, but the ex-soldiers balanced their
focus between eating and scanning everything around them. Frank was near the front entrance, Phil
was at the back, and there were still a few more security outside. Jared was definitely safe, for the
moment.

About half way through, Steve came out to greet them. He brought with him four small china cups
with dark expresso, and sat them on the table. “Fresh, boys...made it myself when Dani said you
were here.” Steve proudly looked between them, waiting for someone to be his first guinea pig.
“Sweet,” Mike commented. Jared peered into the small cup and studied the mud colored contents.
Everyone picked up their cups, but Jared was the first to take a sip. “Mmmm,” was his first reaction,
then he took a second sip. “Holyfuckingshit that’s good,” Jared commented into the tiny cup. Steve
laughed, “Just the reaction I needed, Jared. It’s a new blend. Good then?” Jared nodded, while taking
his third sip and rolling his eyes up in pleasure. The other men joined in and complimented the
fantastic holy bean Steve had gifted them with. Steve smiled at them all, “I’m glad you guys like it.
There’s three different blends in there. I brought you small amounts because it’ll probably peel the
lining off your intestines and clear your sinuses at the same time.” Jared giggled, along with everyone else. The restaurant owner looked closer at Jared and shook his head in wonder, “I don’t want to embarrass you, but my wife is right. You look fantastic.” “Thank you,” Jared grinned shyly. He really hated the attention, but before he was too embarrassed, Steve excused himself at the sound of crashing dishes, “Be back, fellas,” and darted back to the kitchen.

The rest of breakfast continued in silence until everyone finished their plates...except Jared, of course. The young engineer had stuffed himself until he couldn’t handle anymore. Now, he lay face down, waiting for his ‘to go’ box, wondering why the hell he needed one since he was never eating again. The group at the table discussed the upcoming holidays, while sipping espresso and giving Jared some ‘me’ time with his over stretched gut. Apparently, there was an annual feast served at the restaurant on Thanksgiving for people in the community who didn’t have anyone to be with, nor any place to go. Dani and Steve had started it four years ago, and it was now a big deal. Jared lifted his head enough to prop his elbow on the table and rested his chin in his hand. He felt sluggish from all that gravy, but the espresso was helping and he was beginning to feel a bit better. He listened closely, learning more and more about Jensen and his friends, and how big their hearts were. Jensen, Mike and Dave were apparently the helpers who set up the restaurants buffet style holiday feast last year. It was their first season in Cedar Ridge, so Steve and Dani had roped them in. They wound up doing set up, clean up and some of the food preparations. They got to meet some surrounding neighbors who lived alone, for whatever reason, and decided it was something they wanted to do again.

“A lot more fun than spending time with the family.” Dave admitted. Mike hummed and nodded in agreement. Jared looked at them in question, so Mike hurried to explain, “It’s just the awkwardness. We’ve visited, as you know. We’ll go visit this time, too, but we just don’t have anything in common, so once we get through the family visits...then we meet here and have a real blast.” Dave added, “It’s us, it’s not them...we know that. But, after we see them all and checking on everyone, we meet back here and work together on something that feels a lot more comfortable. We get to see other people we would never see, otherwise.” Jared looked at Jensen, who smiled at him, “It’s more like home here...relaxed...no dressing up required, just good conversation and lots of laughs. Especially when one of us drops a turkey.” Jared smiled at the mental picture. Jensen continued, “It’s open to you, too, Jare, if you want to try it with us...it’s not like you have to work, either, just enjoy yourself.” Jared smiled softly, “It sounds like a great time.” ‘Because you’re there,’ Jensen’s mind finished for him. Jensen asked curiously, “So, what have you usually done on Thanksgiving?” Jared thought for a second, “Manny’s parents or Jeff’s once. A couple times, my aunt dragged me back to Euless with a bunch of her friends. She fed us, then we worked at a food kitchen, serving meals. It was cool, but I stopped going when my asshole of an uncle showed up the second time. Last year, I was working.”

Everyone balked disbelievingly, but Jared shrugged his shoulder and explained, “Actually, it was kind of nice not to deal with it. There was this huge project due by the end of November and this outside engineer fucked it up so I had to fix it. We had a deadline and no one else was willing to give up their holiday.” He took a moment to reflect, then added, “Sometimes, it’s nice to just work through the holidays...avoid all the hustle. I got invited to some work parties for singles, but ‘eww’,” Jared shook his shoulders and head with distaste, which had all the men grinning. Jensen imagined his gorgeous lover showing up innocently at a singles gathering. Jared was probably the eye candy of the century. He asked, “Lemme guess, meat market?” Jared nodded, “God yeah, it was gross. Didn’t do that one again.” Jensen’s friends hadn’t missed the comment about the asshole uncle, but a glance from Jensen warned them to refrain from asking, for now. Jensen’s protective anger was obvious about that subject, which made them curious as hell.

Dave took it upon himself to further the invitation to the engineer, “Jared I hope you’ll consider it. We’d love to have you with us this year.” “Hell yes,” Mike added, “it would be so much more fun if you were here.” Jensen watched the adorable kid try and handle being accepted so easily by his
former team mates. They really wanted him to come. Jared was definitely touched and overwhelmed. Jensen laid his hand over one of Jared’s, “I think they want you to say ‘yes’ to spending Thanksgiving here...so do I, buddy. Are you game?”

Jared’s few seconds of indecisiveness showed in his eyes. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to, it was quite the opposite. He wanted it so bad, he was afraid of it. He smiled softly at his lover, then looked at the other two, “Yes, definitely. I look forward to it, you guys. Thank you.” “Awesome!” Mike slapped his hands together in glee. Dave smiled, “Good. It’ll be fun, you’ll see.” Jared responded, “I have no doubt with you guys around.” Jensen studied his lover. Jared seemed happy and relaxed, but there was a slight nervous apprehension in his eyes. It was almost as if Jared had just committed to something that scared the hell out of him. Jensen would bring it up later when they were alone. As Jared listened to the three veterans discuss their ideas for set up and clean up of the future event, his mind wandered to what would happen at the end of the case when he no longer needed protection. He hadn’t discussed any future plans with Jensen, and he still worried about where he would work. Jared’s house in Austin was empty and silent. There was no one waiting for him. He had bought that damn house because Manny and Jeff convinced him to...but had he really made it a home? No. All he ever cared about was work. His work had kept him busy, distracted, and on a constant workaholic quest to make himself better at what he did. The house was just a place to sleep, and keep his things. Jared hadn’t seen Jensen coming. He could be happy here. He ‘was’ happy here. In actuality, he could be happy living in a shack in the yard, if it meant Jensen was near him. Being with Jensen had opened up feelings he’d completely given up on. He felt renewed, reborn, and now he was craving this to his very soul. Jared wondered how he was supposed to just walk away from something this powerful, if Jensen decided he didn’t want the permanence. The older man had only known him four weeks. Would he change his mind? Would he want to live together? What about work prospects? Jared felt his engineering prospects were most likely in the bigger city, but God, he loved Jensen’s house. Maybe Denver had openings. Maybe he could get a town house in the city, if Jensen didn’t want to live together. That way he would still be close by and still work somewhere. Jared was wired to work hard and his soul was craving it. This laying low recovering crap was taking forever. Maybe this over abundance of love and happiness was still overwhelming him and causing him to worry about things too much. Jared sighed, because he hadn’t meant to think about all of this right now, dammit. Jensen noticed, since he pretty much noticed everything about the younger man. He watched Jared’s face for a few seconds, noting the kid didn’t seem unhappy, but had definitely been lost in thought. Now Jensen worried about what the younger man had been stressing over.

Steve came back over and sat with them for awhile. The morning rush had slowed and tables were now clearing. “We were just talking about Thanksgiving,” Jensen explained. Steve looked hopefully between them, “Are you guys in again?” The three veterans answered him, in agreement. “That’s wonderful, boys,” Steve smiled. Jensen nodded toward Jared, “This one’s joining us too.” Steve joyfully slapped Jared on the back, “Delightful! We’re lucky to have you. Dani will go nuts when I tell her.” Steve looked at Jensen, becoming serious, “Did you ask him yet?” Jensen looked apologetic, “I’m sorry, Steve. No, I didn’t. He was kind of in need of a break with everything that’s happened and I forgot to tell him.” Jared suddenly caught on to the fact that they were talking about him. “What?” He asked curiously. Jensen motioned for Steve to take the floor, so the restaurant owner turned toward Jared, “Now, feel free to say ‘no’, Jared, you’ve certainly got other things on your mind, but...” “Yes,” Jared wasted no time. Steve paused a second, “You don’t even know what I’m...” “Yes,” Jared repeated with a grin. Steve paused again, “Okay, but I haven’t even explained what I’m gonna need from you.” Jared shook his head, “I don’t care. Your wife helped save my life and I’m dying to work. What do you guys need?” Steve sighed, then looked at Jensen, who put his hands up and made a hopeless gesture, while smiling.

Steve turned back to the young genius, “I’m paying you.” Jared argued in disbelief, “No, you’re not.” Steve grew stern, “Yes, I am.” Jared said, “No.” Steve looked at Jensen and sighed in
frustration, “I’ll pay ‘you’, Jensen, and then you pay him.” Jared said, “No.” Jensen grinned and shook his head, “Steve, he’s not gonna take it...and he’s anxious to work...you might as well just tell the genius about the counter.” Jared glanced at Jensen, rolling his eyes at the genius comment, then turned back to Steve, “Counter?” Steve turned his back to the table, so he could show Jared the counter, in question. He explained they used to serve people at the bar, but stopped because it was leaning and he wasn’t sure who to trust to fix it. He had a guy come by and draw some decent plans, but they weren’t professional and Steve was worried about passing inspection. Jared interjected, “No problem. What do you want it to look like?” Steve paused and looked at Jared concerned, “I don’t want you to go all crazy and wear yourself out, Jared. I was just thinking we’d fix it. See how it leans?” Both men studied the forty five foot counter for a minute, then Jared commented, “Yeah, I see it, but I also see that the floor isn’t level.” Jared’s quick assessment impressed Jensen and when he glanced at the other two veterans, they grinned too. Everyone knew Jared’s work. Steve, on the other hand, looked at the younger man in alarm, “It’s not level?” The young engineer shook his head, “No, it’s not level, which means there’s a failure underneath. How old is this building?”

Steve looked around at his restaurant, “Well, it was built in the eighties. The countertop was put in by the bar owner who sold it to me eight years ago, so...I would say the counter is the newest piece, probably ten-ish years. The flooring maybe twenty, or so.” Jared contemplated in silence for awhile. He’d really like to do a lot more than just the counter for Steve. This whole place was due for refurbishment. Steve glanced back at Jensen, who grinned knowingly. Jared’s thinking cap was on and no one interrupted the magical process, but the restaurant owner couldn’t help be worried. Jared finally rubbed his face and sighed in frustration, “I wish you had more time.” Steve asked worriedly, “Why...what are you picturing?” Jared glanced at the man, “Aside from gutting the whole thing and redesigning something more open and replacing all the wood flooring? Well, since you’ve got three weeks, I would say replace the flooring under and around the counter base, first, then build up a new counter. Hopefully, it’s just old wood failure underneath, but if it’s ground erosion, then we might have to compensate with extra concrete and footings.” Jared thought more, then shook his head, “It’s all I can do before the holidays. After though...when you’re ready, we need to do this whole floor, and whatever else you want. It isn’t stable.” Steve looked at Jared with his mouth open for a few seconds. Dave, Mike and Jensen grinned at the restaurant owner’s reaction to Jared’s ‘simple’ idea.

Jared looked between everyone who was staring at him, including Steve, “What,” he asked cluelessly. Dave answered, “He’s just not used to you yet.” Jared looked at Dave like he’d grown horns, “What?” Jensen shook his head, smiling, ‘He really doesn’t get it...and he’s cute as hell.’ Mike added, “It’s just a lot more detail than Steve was thinking, Jared.” Mike looked at Steve, “It’s okay, buddy. We’ve been around him awhile now, and we’re still floored by that brain of his, sometimes. You’ll get used to it.” Jared sighed irritably. He growled, “Knock it off,” then turned back around to face the counter again. All of the veterans giggled when the kid turned his back. They knew he hated too many compliments. Steve finally sighed, “Well...I guess we’ll do like you suggested. The bar and countertop, and the foundation if we have to. Might as well plan for the rest of it after the new year is over. Actually, I’m excited now, Jared. Other than forking out major dough for the improvements, it’s going to feel amazing to know it’s all new and solid under there.” Jared smiled, “Yes it will...and you won’t feel that give, either, like in the front steps. Do you know if you have termites?” Steve answered, “Well, we were inspected last year and they told me it was too cold here and rare. He didn’t find any damage...he did tell me the lumber was rotting under there, but it wasn’t bad yet.” Jared got quiet. It was kind of an uncomfortable quiet, so Steve asked, “You’re wondering about the inspection, aren’t you.” Jared looked apologetic, “I’m sorry. The fact that he didn’t mention the floor is a red flag. Some people rush through things and don’t care about the results.”

Steve patted Jared’s shoulder, “You’re a gift, Jared. I trust you, implicitly. When did you want to look at it all? We’re about five feet off the ground, but there’s a way to get under there from inside. I’m sure you’re not well enough to crawl around under there, but you can at least look, if you want.”
Jared looked at him eagerly, “Now?” Steve smiled, “Come on.” Jared jumped up to follow the restaurant owner. Jensen’s team jumped out of their chairs to catch him. Jensen put a restraining hand on the younger man’s arm before he could get too many steps ahead of them, “Hold on there, Sparky.” Jared turned to looked down at the hand and then at Jensen with innocent surprise. As he realized his mistake, the sparkle in Jared’s eyes turned to guilt, “I’m sorry...I’m so sorry, I forgot,” the young man repeated to the group of men surrounding him. Jensen sighed, “It’s okay...just stopped my heart for a second. You absolutely can’t be out in the open by yourself, buddy.” Jared nodded, “I know...I guess it just feels safe in here...I’m sorry.” He looked between them, worriedly, the men all knowing he was beating himself up. “It’s okay, Jared,” Dave offered, but he wasn’t quite feeling it. That sudden move had definitely rattled him, but it was more out of fear for Jared than anything else. There was still a crowd in here.

Mike blurted out, “Don’t be hard on yourself, Jared, but I think I just peed a little, so don’t do that again.” Jared smirked, even though he tried hard not to, then nodded in compliance to the three protectors. ‘Leave it to Mike,’ Jensen mentally thanked his friend. The group continued into the back room and down into the cellar, with Jared between them. They followed Steve to a shorter door that opened underneath the restaurant. The owner handed Jared a huge flashlight and invited him to look at whatever he wanted. “That’s an LED, so you can see from the door. I don’t think you should go in there. It’s uneven ground and there are some heavy pieces of debris.” Jared started look from the doorway, but became so intently focused on something he saw that he grabbed the door frame and lifted his right leg to step over. Jensen’s arm came across his chest, “Uh, you’re not thinking you’re going in there, are you?” Jared looked sheepish, like he’d just realized what he was doing, “I...no.” Jensen raised an eyebrow. Jared added, “I mean I wasn’t...that far.” Mike sighed from behind the lovers. He held out his hand for Jared to give him the flashlight, “I got this, Jared, just direct me.” The younger man held Jensen’s stare for a moment, then reluctantly gave Mike the flashlight. Mike stepped into the low area, as he spoke to Jared, “Hey...you’re gonna be teaching me...so teach me something.” Jared softened at Mike’s attempt to make him feel better. He got down on his knees to watch from the doorway. Mike had to stay hunched and be careful not to bash his shins on the rocks and pieces of wood.

“See the holes there?” Jared pointed to an area for Mike to light up, “That’s a termite problem. The little canals and alleyways are definitely long term. Those darker areas under the kitchen and bathrooms is dry rot. You can see there’s some under where the bar is...probably from the sink up there.” Mike was fascinated. It was like a huge puzzle to solve underneath the business. Jared pointed out more differences in appearance and how to identify what the problem was, “If you look at the soil...it looks like riverbed. I can smell moisture and mold. The wood is definitely rotting and it’s density isn’t sound anymore.” Jared directed Mike to shine the light around a few more areas, trying to get as close to the countertop’s position, as possible. “There,” Jared pointed to something, “see the hanging boards?” Mike followed Jared’s line of sight and spotted the dangling wood, “Yeah, I see them.” Jared explained, “Those came loose and gave away. The floor is failing badly there and that’s why the counter is sagging.” Mike now fully understood the younger man’s concern. The restaurant’s flooring was a mess. “So,” Mike began, “you were suggesting replacing this area here now, then we build up a new counter on top of it. Save all the rest of this for after the holidays?” Jared nodded, “Yes...then the part he needs now will be solid. We can continue outward and do the rest of the floor later without going back to this area.”

Mike thought it over and absorbed everything Jared was saying. “I get it. Damn good ideas, Jared...what do we do first?” Mike turned to the young engineer and started to climb back out. Jared said, “I have to come back and measure first, then design it. ‘We’ can design it. One of our first concerns will be the footings.” Jared pointed into the darkness again, so Mike clicked on the light, “That damp ground should have footings that are at least six inches about the ground. I’m seeing footings that aren’t viable anymore and definitely have to be replaced. They’ve sunken down. It’s
probably standard cement for the time it was built, the old shit that powders in twenty years.” “Jesus, that’s a terrible thought,” Mike blurted out. Jared continued, “It happens a lot in buildings that are twenty plus years old. I have a tool that tests the ground content and based on the findings, there are formulas that will calculate rates of erosion.” Steve complained from behind them, “What the hell was up with that idiot inspector who passed me then?” Jared looked at Steve in sympathy, “It’s not your fault. He was lazy, or just inexperienced. I’m sorry, there’s more that needs to be done than just that counter. This wouldn’t even pass a formal inspection and would be enough to shut you down.” Steve sighed, rubbing his face. “It’s okay, Jared, I want it to be right...especially safe. There’s a ton of people coming through here...and my staff too...damn.”

Jared moved aside a couple feet so Mike could crawl out of the space. The ex-soldier stood up straight while Jensen helped Jared to stand. The kid was a little stiff and needed a counter balance. Mike brushed off his pants and looked at Jared, “Now, that formula process you mentioned...you’ll be doing that part, right?” Jared looked confused, “I’ll do it with you. We’ll figure out how solid, how deep and how high the footings and posts need to be in order to counter the natural deterioration.” Everyone was smiling at Mike’s dumbfounded expression. Mike glanced at Dave and Jensen, “He makes it sound so damn easy.” Jared argued, “It is...you’ll see.” Mike shook his head, “Jared, I’m not the math whiz you are, so just be prepared, is all I’m sayin’.” Jared gave a ‘pfft’ sound of disbelief, “You’ll be fine.” All of the men went up to the kitchen and ran into Dani, “There you are! Well, what’s the verdict?” Dani looked between them so Steve filled her in, “It’s more than we thought, honey. Jared’s on it, though, and we will have a level countertop for the holidays.” Dani rose up and kissed the engineer on the cheek, “I knew you’d know how to fix it, sweetie.” She stood back a few inches and surveyed the younger man again, “God, I still can’t believe you look this good, kiddo.” Jared’s cheeks flushed, as he smoothed his hair back, nervously. Dani looked at Jensen, “It’s only been four weeks, is he well enough to be doing this kind of work?” Jared opened his mouth to interrupt, but Jensen cut him off, “Don’t worry, he’s doing the brain work and ordering us around. We’re not gonna let him hurt himself.” Jared sighed in irritation, while Jensen slapped him on the back. He was still perturbed that they wouldn’t let him do anything, but eagerly turned to Jensen, “Do you think we could run get my tools to measure?” Jensen grinned at the determined puppy dog eyes, “Yes, we can certainly do that.” Dave spoke up, “Why don’t I run get ‘em, and you guys stay here?” Jensen dug his keys out of his pocket and tossed them to the older veteran, “Sounds good to me.” Jared added, “Thank you so much, Dave.” The ex-soldier grinned at him, “It’s no problem. Be right back.”

Dani spoke to the remaining group, “Well, gentlemen, are you ready to test out my coconut cream or chocolate chip pie while you’re waiting?” Jared groaned, but the others in the group perked up. Jensen rubbed his stomach, “Oh, there’s always room for pie.” Jensen nudged the younger man, “Right, Jare?” Jared shook his head, miserably, as they left the kitchen, “No...no there is not always room.” Jared just couldn’t do it. While the others indulged themselves in small pieces of both pies, Jared threw darts at an old target board on the wall. Jensen and Mike sat at a table between the younger man and the rest of the dining area, so he was free to entertain himself while they scanned and ate dessert.

The restaurant crowd had thinned considerably. Dani and Steve were helping their cook and another waitress clean off empty tables. Dave returned in twenty minutes. When he pulled up outside, his senses immediately went on alert. He parked in the same space, then sat in Jensen’s truck for a moment. As he scanned the parking lot and front door, he realized what was bothering him. The two security men who had been in the parking lot were missing. He sent a text, ‘Smthn not rite.’ When Jensen checked his text message from Dave, he instantly jumped up and grabbed Jared by the waist and arm. Without a word, Mike copied Jensen’s lead, grabbing Jared from the opposite side. The two special forces experts quickly corralled their charge into a back office before he knew what was happening. Jared whispered in confusion, “What is it?” feeling quite sandwiched with his bundle of
darts held up against his chest. He trusted his handlers, but still wondering what the hell had them on edge. “I’m not sure yet,” Jensen’s mumbled, watching the office and back door from an angle.

Frank radio’d Phil to come in the back door and stay with the military experts and Jared, while he went out front to check things out. Jensen and Mike waited in silence until Phil joined them. No one spoke, as each man pulled a gun out and held them close to their body. Jensen’s phone went off again, while Jared’s insides churned with tension. ‘Frt team of two gone. Talkin to Frank,’ Jensen read. He looked at Phil, “Where the hell is the front parking lot team?” “What?!” Phil was shocked. He called Frank on his cell, “What’s going on?” There was a pause while Phil listened. “Yeah, I’ve got my back guys...why the fuck would the front team leave?” Frank answered loud enough for the others to hear, “They’re not answering the radio. Chuck’s on it. Until we know, stay put and keep the target out of sight.” Jared anxiety scrambled, ‘Target...that’s me. Fuck.’ Phil continued to watch the front and back doors, from his position just outside the office. He could still see the car out back with the two security inside of it. “Shit,” Phil’s expletive barely registered, as the two Black Ops veterans shoved Jared down under a large desk. “Mpf,” Jared’s sore chest complained loudly at squishing against the hardwood. He was tall and being crunched under a desk like this wasn’t quite meant for his size. That didn’t matter to his bodyguards. Jared was pushed forcefully into the cramped space, with Jensen’s muscular back right against him. Mike was close, too, both veterans had their guns pointed toward the office door. Phil glanced down and nodded once, before inching out into the hallway. Something was wrong, but Jared still had no idea what, beyond the front security team missing.

Mike shuffled into Phil’s former space, as Phil checked out the hallway. There were still customers in the dining room. Jared’s thoughts went immediately to Steve and Dani’s safety, and to all the innocent people. ‘God, please don’t let this be another shooting,’ his mind ranted. Dave and Frank flanked the restaurant building, each man taking a corner. The fact that the security team was gone and not responding wasn’t their only concern. Frank wasn’t getting any answer from the back team when he asked for assistance. Frank called Phil, “Can you see them in the car?” Phil answered, “Yeah...they’re only a hundred feet from me. I see ‘em.” Frank argued, “Then why aren’t they answering their fucking phone? I can’t leave the front, I’m out here with Dave. It’s too quiet.” Phil studied the back car for a few seconds, then glanced back at Mike, “I have to go out there.” “Uh...no...you don’t. You wait for backup,” Mike demanded. Phil understood the skill level of his special ops partners, but it made no sense that he could see the team from here and they weren’t answering. He really needed to check them out, but he listened to Mike, for now, and stayed put. The security expert called Frank on the radio, “ETA on some backup from Chuck?” Frank responded immediately, “Fifteen minutes.”

Phil looked at Mike, “That’s fifteen minutes.” Mike shook his head, silently, telling Phil not to go outside. If his senses were doing him justice, Mike sensed this could be a trap. He turned to Jensen, “Idea’s?” Jensen said, “Hold until we don’t have a reason to. When backup’s here, we’ll form a gauntlet and get him the hell out of here. For now, there’s no reason for us to move and risk getting picked off, one by one.” Mike agreed wholeheartedly. He looked back at Phil, who nodded. Jared remained silent. The tension was emanating from all three of his protectors and he knew better than to distract them, in any way. ‘Picked off?’ His fear for Jensen and the others skyrocketed, as his brain tried to make sense of what he just heard. Why weren’t the outside teams answering? Jared’s bent up legs and hunched position were starting to weigh on him. He certainly wasn’t going to complain. When he laid his head back against the desk with a ‘thump’, Jensen turned his head, “I’m gonna let you ease your legs out a bit, okay?” Jared was going to argue that Jensen didn’t have to do that, but then Jensen moved a foot out and it was pure Heaven. He sighed in relief, as he stretched out his legs. They were loosely bent now, right behind Jensen’s back, still leaving Jensen between he and the door. “Better?” Jensen glanced at him with concern in his eyes. Jared nodded, “Yeah.” Jensen assured him, “Okay...just hang tight. We’re gonna getcha outta here.”
Jared nodded, silently. He trusted Jensen, implicitly, but he was beyond terrified and fighting to keep his cool. Jensen certainly didn’t need him to be a pain in the ass basket case right now. Jensen’s cell phone vibrated silently with a text alert. Jensen checked the screen and cursed. He slammed the phone back into his pocket. ‘Shit,’ Jared’s mind screamed. Dave had alerted Jensen the second he saw trouble. Driving into the parking lot was a huge sedan, with four occupants in dark clothing and skull caps. Something about them screamed ‘asshole’ to Dave and he was damn sure this was ‘not’ the backup they were waiting for. Whatever happened to the security team was planned. The older man mentally bitched, as he crouched down and ran to the back of the building. Frank paralleled Dave, the two met at the back door behind the business. Phil covered their travels as they barreled in the back door. Dave met Mike first, Jensen behind him. “We need to get out the back, now. Four coming in the front,” Dave’s command was no nonsense.

Jensen didn’t waste time with questions. The three special forces experts had previously agreed that whomever saw a threat first would take the lead. The five men helped Jared up and surrounded him. “Stay between us,” Jensen said, as everyone started moving before Jared even had a chance to panic. Frank used his cell, as all five men walked briskly to an overhang, blocked by a row of cars. “Where the fuck is the team?” Frank barked at Chuck. The other man’s voice could be heard over the speaker, “Lance is leading. There’s two SUV’s nine minutes out, Frank. What’s going on?” Frank responded, “Four shitheads just came in the front and we’re holed up in back. There’s something wrong with the back team. They’re just sitting there in the car and not responding. Tell Lance to step the fuck on it.” When Frank hung up, Jared looked at Jensen, “How did they know we were here?” Jensen looked at the other’s, “That’s a good question.” He focused on Phil, who glanced at Frank. Jensen saw the exchange and was instantly pissed, “WHAT?” Frank looked at Jensen, guiltily, “I only found out earlier today and I assumed Chuck already told you.”

Jensen stepped so close to Frank he could feel his breath on his face. He was seething at being left in the dark about ‘anything’ that could jeopardize Jared’s safety, “What did you think Chuck already told me?” Frank sighed, “A nurse from the hospital called Price’s office. Name was Darcy. We left cards there to call us if they had anyone come around asking about Jared.” Jensen’s insides twisted, as Frank continued, “She told us there was a man asking questions of the staff. After talking to the staff, she said the man wanted to know all the visitor’s who visited Jared. He was also trying to find out who drove him out of there. We assumed he probably pegged you as being with Jared that early on, instead of becoming some kind of security for him later.” Jensen’s jaw tightened as his anger rose, “My brother knows. When we were in court, he wasn’t sure yet...but he suspects...and damn, my name was on the emergency paper as bringing him in. This man who came snooping...does he fit the description of our heater?” Frank said, “No. That’s the confusing part.” Dave interjected, “Not really. You said there was another unknown trying the bank accounts. And our hired professional wouldn’t come looking, himself, since he knows we’re looking for him.” Mike blurted out, “Well, he’s not afraid to hire a bunch of fucks to do his work for him, that’s for sure. Maybe it was one of them in front.” Jensen thought for a second, “Still, my address is unlisted, and Price said my cell was blocked. They know the accident sight...they could have been waiting for us to come here.”

Phil considered it, “Maybe someone in the crowd this morning was watching...could have been coming here every day, waiting to spot Jared and tipped them off when we got here.” Frank checked his watch, “Five minutes til backup.” Mike said, “We need to see what the fuck’s happened with those security fucks. We need that car in case we don’t have five minutes.” Jensen said, “Agreed.” Mike added, “We also need to see what they’re doing inside.” Jensen said, “Agreed again.” Dave and Jensen took Jared’s arms and stood on either side of him. They pushed him back into an alcove under the overhang. There was a locked shed against the building and by placing Jared where he was, someone coming out the back door wouldn’t see him. Phil and Mike approached the security vehicle stealthily with their guns ready, while Frank inched himself toward the back door.

When Mike scooted up the length of the car in a crouch, he quickly raised up, back down, then
inched up again to make sure no one was pointing a gun at him. So far, the two men in the front seat hadn’t moved. The car wasn’t running and there was no radio on. Mike met Phil’s eyes, who was on the opposite side of the car, in the same crouch. Simultaneously, Mike and Phil opened the front doors while keeping their guns trained on the individuals in the front seat. When Mike was close to the driver, he noticed the man’s eyes were still opened. A wave in front of the man’s face indicated he wasn’t aware. Mike felt for a pulse and noticed Phil doing the same thing. They were dead.

Mike turned back to Jensen and Dave, shaking his head. The two veterans with Jared cursed under their breath. Jared noticed their tension increase, as both men’s eyes darted around the area non-stop. “What is it,” Jared whispered. Jensen answered him softly without turning around, “Someone killed them. Stay put.” Other than his whispered “Jesus,” Jared stayed perfectly still, frozen to his spot out of fear.
Bare down and take cover, this chapter is full of anxious scary moments. Someone has lost their patience and comes after Jared with a vengeance. Jensen’s team is put to the test.

Lots of action, intense moments. Some shooting. Some dead guys.

CHAPTER TWENTY EIGHT

Dave and Jensen kept their eyes on Mike, while scanning the area for other threats. Mike finished his short exam on the deceased driver, then crawled to the back of the car to meet Phil. Using other cars for cover, both men started to creep their way toward Jensen, Dave and Jared. When they were two cars away, everyone froze. Two men in receded skull caps came out the back door. The first one lit a cigarette and looked around. The second man took out his cell phone and made a call. A family of four came out the back door just after the men and made their way to one of the vans in the parking lot. It took them a few minutes to buckle in their two children and leave. Jensen’s phone vibrated, so he reached into his pocket and pulled it out. He and Dave were still squished behind the small shed, flattening Jared behind them. The text was from Frank, ‘Two in here w/coffee. Two out back. One couple leaving frnt, family back. No more patrons. Dani & Steve advised to stay in kitchen. Lance two min.’ Frank had played it off like a relaxed customer, until now. He assumed he’d been unrecognizable, but something cue’d him in when the duo at another table split up. One of the perpetrators went into the restroom, the other got up and stood near the front door. Within seconds, another sedan pulled up in front of the restaurant, Frank able to see them through one of the windows.

As he text Jensen again, ‘More unknowns, get J away’, the man at the front door turned around and pointed a gun at him. Frank heard the second asshole come out of the bathroom and knew the man was coming up behind him. He stood and put his hands up, still playing along, “What do you want, guys...my wallet’s only got thirty bucks in it.” “Shut up,” Frank felt the rough bump of a gun nuzzle from behind. “You know goddamn well what we’re lookin’ for...where’s the kid?” Frank feigned disbelief, “Kid? I don’t have any kids.” Two men came in the front door and Frank saw the newest arriving vehicle drive toward the side of the building. ‘Fuck,’ he wished he could warn Jensen. “Fuck,” Jensen’s reaction to the text was not what Dave was hoping for. He looked at Dave, “We need to get him out, now, more bad guys in front.” Dave said, “Might as well go for the one car we got.” Jared looked alarmed, “With the dead guys?” Both veterans glanced at him, expressionless, but Jared saw the worry in their eyes. Jensen looked at Mike and made hand signals Jared had never seen before. Jensen made a half fist over the side of his head, then did a little walking thing with his fingers, then he nodded toward the security vehicle. Mike responded with nothing but a nod. He seemed to relay something to Phil, who nodded. The two men quickly ran out from the car they were behind and took off toward the opposite side of the parking lot.

The men out back instantly drew out their guns and ran toward the two, while Jensen and Dave ran with Jared between them to the security vehicle. Jared found he could still run. Even though it wasn’t
as easy, after his four week break, his legs seemed to remember what to do. Maybe it was adrenaline keeping him going. They were now behind the two men who had come out the back. The men were so focused on chasing Mike and Phil, they didn’t even look back. Dave pulled open the front driver’s door and silently dragged out the first dead man. Jared tried not to wince when he heard the thud of the poor security man’s body hit the gravel. Dave jerked open the back door, then he and Jensen pushed Jared into the back seat to lay down. Dave got into the driver’s seat, as Jensen ran around to the passenger side and pulled the second dead man out. As he jumped in, he Jensen bitched to Dave, “Start the fucking car.” Dave argued, “No fucking keys.” He pulled wires from the ignition and proceeded to spark the two ends together, finally starting the car. Suddenly, another sedan came from the side of the restaurant with two more men inside. They drove at high speed right for Dave’s side of the car. Dave floored the gas pedal and took off a second before they could ram them. By driving forward, Dave had caused the pursuers to have to make a u-turn before they could follow. This gave Dave and Jensen a few seconds lead.

When the second car had come toward Dave and Jensen, the two men chasing Mike and Phil turned around. They started to run that way with their guns out. Mike and Phil ran after them. When they almost caught their suspects, the two men in skull caps turned and fired while running. Mike ducked just in time and grabbed the shooter’s legs, forcing him to the ground. Phil did the same, but only after feeling the sting of a bullet in his right shoulder. ‘Fucker shot me,’ his mind ranted, as Phil struggled to overtake the suspect. Mike moved his hands at lightning speed, disarming his suspect and leaving the gun flying off to the side. He punched the man in his sternum. While the man struggled for air, Mike flipped him over onto his stomach. He quickly wrenched up the man’s hands behind him, bending his wrists for control. The man cried out, struggling for air and in pain at the same time. While resting his knees on the suspect’s ass, Mike looked over and realized Phil wasn’t in control of his suspect quite yet. He saw the blood on the security expert’s shoulder and realized Phil may not be winning his fight. Phil got the gun from his suspect’s hand, but he had trouble flipping him over with that weak shoulder. Mike raised his left foot and gave a strong side kick to Phil’s suspect’s head. “Umpf” man went limp. Phil lay there for a second, catching his breath, then flipped his suspect over to take control of his wrists. Still breathing hard, he looked at Mike, “Thank you,” then proceeded to pull handcuffs from his pants and secure them.

“Any time,” Mike commented, taking the second set of cuffs Phil offered him. After securing them on his own prisoner, Mike looked up to see two huge black SUV’s flying round the corner of the restaurant toward him. “Fucking finally,” the special forces expert bitched, as the two vehicles slid to a stop. Mike wasted no time. He jumped up and into one of the SUV’s, “Go! Jared’s in the first car, the fuckers are chasing them.” Lance ordered two of his team to stay in the SUV with him, then took off with Mike at breakneck speed. Just as they took off, the four men from inside the restaurant ran out back, pulling a wounded Frank with them. Mike saw blood on Frank’s face, but that’s all he could see from their increasing distance. Frank was thrown to the ground, but Mike thought he witnessed Lance’s team from the other SUV, pointing guns at the group. ‘Fuck, I hope that ends well,’ Mike thought. He turned back to the road and cursed when he saw Jensen and Dave holed up at their vehicle. They were barricaded behind it, shooting back at the pursuing vehicle, which was now parked cockeyed, liked it had slid to an instant stop. Mike could see the flat tires and shattered windows of his friend’s car, so he figured that’s why they had to stop. The assholes from inside it were shooting huge AK-47’s, spraying bullets all over the dirt.

“Fucking ram them,” Mike yelled, pissed off. Lance floored the SUV and crashed into the vehicle from the back, pushing it against the shooters and knocking them flat. Mike jumped out shooting, nailed one, who screamed and rolled to his side, completely letting go of his gun. Jensen ran forward, his gun trained on the second shooter, with Dave right behind. They approached step by step. When the gunman started to get up, Dave and Jensen yelled, “STOP.” Lance added, “Not a good idea, asshole,” but the gunman looked determined. Even though frozen, he stared hard at Jensen, waiting
for the Black Ops expert to flinch or look away. Jensen watched the man slowly move his hand for the trigger. He thought he wasn’t noticeable, but to both special forces operatives, it was plain as day. Lance saw it too. While he kept his gun trained on the first suspect who was currently being cuffed, Lance watched Dave and Jensen inch their way closer to the second gunman. These were the worst guns on the planet for the law to deal with, and first priority would always be to get the damn thing away from the criminal. Jensen and Dave were ready to kill him, should he go for the automatic rifle again. Jensen had a fraction of a second’s thought, ‘he really ‘is’ that stupid,’ when the man suddenly raised his gun and pointed it at them with a shrill cry.

Jensen and Dave fired three shots each, two to the body, one to the head, repeating muscle memory from years of training and skill. As the second gunman lay dead, Mike came toward them from behind the SUV, his gun smoking. Apparently, he had shot at the same time. The three former team mates exchanged a look of understanding, then Lance caught their attention, “Where’s Jared?” Mike looked at Dave and Jensen, knowing damn well they wouldn’t have risked a shoot out with Jared in the car. Jensen answered, “I told him to run and I’d find him. He ran toward the woods. He’s got the security phone with him.” Mike nodded. Dave said, “Let’s go, it’s freezing and he’s a little banged up.” Jensen took out his personal cell phone and punched in the security phone number. At the same time, the three Black Ops experts grabbed some first aid bags and a coat out of the SUV. Lance ended a quick phone call and got their attention again, “Guys, none of these punks is our hitman. He’s still out there.”

When Jensen tried the security phone three times, with no answer, his internal panic skyrocketed. Jared would know he was coming to get him, so why the hell wasn’t he answering? “Lance, ping the security phone fast...he should be answering.” Lance took out a small mini laptop and put in the security phone number. A grid showed up and rocked back and forth before zero’ing in on a location less than a quarter mile away. Everyone marked the GPS location on their personal cell’s, then Jensen confirmed with Lance, “You got this all here, right?” The security lead nodded, “Yeah, go get our boy.” Jensen turned instantly to join his friends. “We’ll find him, Jensen,” Mike said when he noticed the fear in Jensen’s eyes. It was a rare occurrence for any of the ex-soldiers to show it, but Jensen wasn’t bothering to hide it anymore. Jared was the best part of him now and the kid wasn’t well and God knew where the fucking hitman was.

When Jared felt the car slide sideways to a stop, he braced himself for a second. The world was spinning, and he couldn’t see anything. Within seconds, Jensen jerked the back door open and practically wrenched Jared from the car, feet first. He gentled when he sat Jared on the ground and held his chin between tense fingers. Jensen looked into his eyes. Jared saw the fear for him there. “Listen, baby. I know it’s gonna be hard and I know it’s cold out here, but I need you to take off toward those trees and do ‘not’ look back.” Jared’s panic increased, “But,” as Jensen interrupted, “Take this.” He shoved the security phone in Jared’s jeans’s pocket. Jared’s fear for them escalated, as he panicked at leaving them behind, “Jensen, what...” The older man interrupted, “Hey,” touching Jared’s cheek, “We’ll take these assholes out and then I’m gonna be right behind you. If I can’t find you, I’ll use the phone.” Jared’s fear for everyone showed in his eyes. Jensen kissed him quick and lovingly, then looked into his eyes, “Go, Jare...NOW,” Jensen raised his voice as the other car that was chasing them slid to a stop. Jared heard gunfire start as he ran for his life at the most breakneck speed he could accomplish in his state. He tried to control his emotions that were threatening to pour out of him. He ran and ran, until he was forced to duck behind a huge bolder and catch his breath. He could feel his breakfast threatening to make an appearance, even though it had been a couple hours since he ate.

Jared wasn’t in the best of shape right now and he hated it. After a short breather, he continued further, at a slower pace, just to make sure he was way beyond sight of the road. He heard the sound of a stream and noticed several icy areas that hadn’t melted from overnight. When he reached a crevice and climbed down to keep lower than the road, he felt that maybe he could hide here until
Jensen called. He looked around. It was definitely fucking cold. The ground was damp, the rocks had a light frost on them. He prayed Jensen came for him soon. Jared knelt into a crouch and rubbed his arms. He knew he would have to move around every few minutes, just too keep warm enough. Within seconds, Jared felt the vibration from his pocket and almost cried out in relief. “Thank God,” he said as he pulled the device from his pocket with shaking hands. He pushed the code to answer, but never finished it as something blunt hit him so hard on the side of his head, he fell over and dropped the phone. He lay there stunned for a few seconds, as blinding pain made itself known. Jared held his hand to his head, “Mmmm,” wincing with pain. He felt himself roughly pulled up by his shirts, shaken hard, then a deep voice bitched, “Man, you are hard to get a hold of, kid.” Jared was dragged by his shirts, forcing him to crawl forward with his knees to keep up with the momentum, as the man griped, “Fucking pain in my ass worst job ever.” After being dragged through the rocks and dirt for about ten feet, Jared was dropped on his stomach. “Mm,” he grunted in pain as his injured ribs landed on a rock.

“Stay down, you little shit,” the voice ordered. Jared didn’t have much choice. The man put his weight on him, grinding his knees into Jared’s back. The weight was pushing Jared’s painful ribs harder into the rock. He cried out, at first, then tried to breathe through it as he felt his wrists wrapped tightly with something thin, wiry and stiff. “Good,” the pissed off man said, “I hope it hurts, for all the trouble you’ve caused me.” “Aah,” Jared’s wrists were cut by whatever it was the man was using on him. He thought it must be some kind of wire. He was roughly pulled to his feet and forced to walk forward before he steadied. Jared tripped several times, trying to get his footing while being manhandled by the back of his shirt collar. The man had a tight grip on his flannel and the t-shirt underneath, guiding Jared like a rudder. He pulled him left and right, then pushed him forward. Jared saw drops of blood hit the rocks in front of him. By the stinging of his face, he figured it was coming from his nose or his lip. ‘Great, the left side heals and now it’s the right,’ he mentally bitched. Jared really wasn’t feeling well. He thought to himself, ‘hey, maybe if I puke, he’ll leave me here, not wanting to deal with me.’ The loose rocks were a pain in the ass, especially with his arms tied behind him. He was roughly pulled up a slight incline, then saw where they were headed. ‘Oh no, I’m not getting in that,’ was his first thought, as he was roughly pushed toward the old Bronco in front of him.

Jared landed on his knees hard, grunting in pain. He kept still for the moment, not sure what to do. He really wasn’t able to get up like this and running wouldn’t get him anywhere fast. Jared realized to himself, ‘All I’ve got is my legs,’ so he planned in his mind when and how could best use them. His abductor threw something in the front seat, then opened the back. He turned to pull Jared toward the door, but the engineer fell away from him and scooted backward. He pulled away, as the pissed off kidnapper grabbed his shirt double fisted. “Get in the car, you fucking little shit,” he yelled, as Jared pulled away, “No.” He tried to use his weight distribution to his favor pulling the opposite way. He gave the man as much trouble as he could. Jared finally noticed something, which raised his internal alarm that he was about to die if he got in that car. This was the man in the photo he had seen at Jensen’s in that picture, and from the car during the SPCA event. This was the hitman.

Jensen, Dave and Mike were no nonsense as they jogged a steady pace through the woods. Within five minutes, they were about fifty feet from the last known location of the security phone. Jensen checked his phone grid and directed them down into a ravine. The grid wasn’t precise enough to get closer than fifty feet so when they got close to an overhang with a cave, they began searching the ground for footprints or the phone. Jensen saw something that worried the shit out of him, “There’s blood on this rock.” He looked up at Dave and Mike, who walked over to him, “It’s fresh.” Each of the men looked at their friend with renewed worry. “We’ll find him,” Dave announced. Mike sighed, and returned to his search. He was too worried to say anything constructive, at the moment. Dave and Jensen searched a few more minutes, until Dave saw the phone. “Here,” he yelled out. He picked it up while the other two rushed over to him. He touched the light up screen. Jensen spoke first, “The code’s half done. FUCK,” Jensen jerked away with his hands on his head, “I fucking
‘promised’ to keep him safe.” Mike stepped close to him, “We all did. Let’s go kill someone and get him back.” The three veterans immediately took up following Jared’s tracks and another man’s. They could see the places where someone slid and stepped heavily, like they had almost lost their footing and had to catch themselves. They could also see drops of blood on various rocks.

Jared lost his battle when the hitman slapped him hard, rattling his vision. While he was stunned, his abductor tied a scarf around his mouth tight, blocking Jared’s ability to cry out or yell for help. He dragged Jared over to the Bronco and lifted him into the back seat. He pushed the engineer back hard, Jared landing on his back. Jared regained a fraction of his senses enough to realize he was about to be taken away and probably killed before Jensen could find him. He would never see Jensen again and that thought alone had him drawing on that reserve of anger he usually held at bay nowadays. When the hitman bent over to lift Jared’s legs and push him further into the seat, Jared coiled his right leg and ‘WHAM’. The satisfying crunch of bone and glasses was one of the best rewards Jared had felt in a long time. “Aaah,” the asshole grabbed his face and pulled away from the car. He took some extra seconds to pull pieces of broken glass out of his skin, then felt his nose for breakage. The assailant returned with a vengeance. “You’re gonna pay for that, you little fuck,” he threatened. Jared had about two seconds to enjoy the bloody mess he’d made of the man’s face before he was punched in the stomach. Jared instantly curled up in pain. He struggled to breathe...in or out, he didn’t care...just to get the air going would be nice. His vision greyed out while he waited for his diaphragm to recover and give him the ability to breathe again. The hitman took the opportunity to push him the rest of the way into the car by his legs. The car door slammed shut after Jared’s shoes were pulled off of his feet and tossed on the ground.

The hitman heard footsteps coming up the incline. He ran around to the driver’s seat and hopped in to start the car. ‘Fuck,’ he couldn’t believe this shit. If it hadn’t been for the bonus pay, he would have dumped this stupid job long ago. This kid had some kind of bad ass former military protecting him and he really was tired of dealing with it. The footprint traces led Jensen and his team to a slight incline, where the sound of a vehicle’s wheels spinning had them bolting into an instant sprint. “NO,” Jensen yelled, as all three veterans reached the top of the short incline and shot every bullet they had into the tires of the escaping vehicle. Jared was in the car, Jensen knew it. He hadn’t missed his lover’s new tennis shoes, laying on the ground, as they ran after the car. The spinning tires spit gravel and dirt in their faces, but the three men never stopped running. They knew if they let this car go, Jared would die. The Bronco sped off, and the team ran after it, shooting until their guns were empty. The driver looked in his rearview mirror the unmistakable ‘ping’ of several bullets hit the Bronco’s fenders and hubcaps. The assailant felt his tires popping but he kept his foot on the gas. The muscle toned killers shooting at him looked pissed and determined, and very capable of killing him. He couldn’t imagine where a scholarly engineer like the Padalecki kid had found these three to protect him.

Sparks began to fly as the driver increased his speed as fast as the vehicle would go on steel rims only. The tires had flown off and all he had left was the screeching metal against asphalt. The hitman only had to go down the road a few hundred yards to get to his meeting point. Fortunately, the road turned downward and he could coast fast down to the meeting car. The hitman slid his Bronco into the car of his employer, barely stopping in time to keep from smashing into it. Out of the car, stepped a tall lean man with dark hair. He was sort of scholarly looking, himself, kind of attractive, but had an emotionless darkness in his eyes. Jared’s abductor had been paid well by the man, but recently a ten thousand dollar bonus had been added to delay the hit and bring Jared to him alive. The hitman jumped out of his seat and hurried to drag Jared out of Bronco’s back seat.

The engineer was still stunned from the blows to his stomach and head, at this point, so he was compliant. “Help me...they’re following us,” the hitman spit out at his employer. The other man helped drag Jared to his car, asking, “Who?” As they shoved Jared into the back seat of another car, the hitman barked, “Who do you think? It’s those fuckers from the court...they don’t give up. Some
kind of hot shot special forces background.” The employer commented, “I sent enough people to take care of them.” The hitman balked, “You don’t take care of those guys. They don’t go down.”

Jensen never stopped running. His closest friends were right beside him. The thought of Jared at the hands of killers and suffering in any way because they failed him would have brought them to their knees if they weren’t convinced they could catch that Bronco. The three military experts were sweating and breathing hard, but when they saw Jared’s limp form being dragged from the Bronco to another vehicle, the adrenaline pumping through their veins skyrocketed.
CHAPTER TWENTY NINE. REVISED APRIL 2019

Chapter Summary

This is a no holds barred kick ass continuation where the ex-military specialists race to save their favorite genius. Jared suffers quite a bit. The hurt/comfort and emotional scenes are plenty, as our engineer is rescued. He’s almost ALMOST out of danger and done with this horrible ordeal, but not quite...but at least his team gets him back.

Thank you for the sweet feedback.

CHAPTER TWENTY NINE

The realization that he was yet, in another car, and about to be taken God knows where to be killed, or maybe tortured and then killed, hit Jared like a bolt of lightning from the inside. He was going to die. He had to fight, just a little bit more. He could hear bits and pieces of them bitching...Jensen was chasing them. ‘He’s coming for me,’ Jared’s abused body automatically found some minuscule ounce of strength at that thought. Jared’s stockinged feet weren’t effective weapons, and his wrists were wound so tightly together, there was no give to move his arms. His right eye wasn’t focusing, and Jared’s insides were twisting and throbbing from that punch. He knew he wasn’t much to fight against, but in a fraction of a second, he reminded himself that all he had to do was delay them...’just delay them, Jared.’ Desperation catapulted him into some kind of action. He lifted his throbbing head and looked at the door by his feet. He used his toes to pull and push every little button he could feel, trying to see if he could open the damn door, at least, and then the pain would be horrible when he jumped out, but that’s the only plan he could see as a remote possibility. He had to believe Jensen, Dave and Mike would get there in time before the assholes in the front seat could retaliate. The car started moving. ‘No,’ Jared’s desperate mind screamed, as he fidgeted with the one piece of the door that seemed to give. It was a pull handle, he’d found it.

“Flank wide,” Jensen yelled, as the second vehicle containing their kidnapped genius started to pull out. The team of experts immediately gained ground on the car, spreading wide in a strategic fashion. They caught up to the moving vehicle before it gained speed. Jensen ran up to the driver’s side, Mike the passenger’s side, and Dave jumped on the hood and ran over the top without breaking stride. “Goddammit!” The hitman screamed, as he immediately slammed on the brakes when Jensen grabbed his door handle, Mike grabbing the other side. The driver jarred the men off with his quick move for a few seconds. He pulled his gun out, while both the men outside recovered. “Fuckin GO,” his employer ordered, noticing the men outside grabbing for their door handles again. The hitman wrenched the car into reverse and slammed on the accelerator. He had effectively managed to keep the two outside men off, but the man on top was still hanging on. They backed up fast, the man on their glass ‘not’ letting go. The driver slammed on the brakes. He cranked the gear into drive and pointed his gun at the relentless determined man on the windshield, but before he could fire, the other one came at him from the side. It was the main one, the one he’d studied and watched all this time, the team leader, so to speak. ‘Fuck,’’ he thought, when he saw the man pull back his fist with a gun in his hand. Jensen bashed the gun against the driver’s side window. He bashed it twice in rapid
succession, the window shattered enough for him to get his arm through it. Jensen didn’t even feel the splinters of glass when he hit the driver hard with the gun. “Ugh,” the hitman grunted in pain. Jensen caught a glimpse of long legs in dirty jeans laying in the backseat. It was just a glimpse, but he noted the bloody stains on one pant leg and tightly tied wrists.

He grabbed the steering wheel with a vengeance, wrenching it hard to the left. He could only see red at the treatment of his innocent lover in the back seat, as he shoved his right hand into the window and pushed the hitman’s face hard to the right. The hitman fought with his fists, punching at Jensen’s arms and face, while pushing harder on the gas pedal. Mike was dealing with his own battle on the passenger side of the car. He’d tried the door handle and couldn’t get in, so he bashed his own weapon against the window, much like Jensen had done. As Mike shattered the window, his target inside pointed a gun at him and fired. Mike rolled away from the line of fire quickly to avoid getting hit. When the car veered left, Jensen hung onto the wheel, while he used his right hand to shove four fingers into the driver’s eye sockets. The man screamed as Jensen’s fingers pushed hard enough to draw blood. The driver was blind and unable to focus on anything but the terror and pain. The hitman began blindly beating Jensen’s arm with his own gun, using anything within his reach to force Jensen’s hands off his face. Dave rolled off the car, landing next to Mike. Because of the abrupt left turn, the passenger lost his line of sight to shoot at the men. The car crashed into an embankment of manzanita and everything stopped for half a second while everyone realized what happened.

Jensen renewed his assault. He pulled the door open, using the inside handle and tried to manhandle the driver out of the car. Mike and Dave were instantly on their feet and moving toward the passenger side of the car. They ran wide, trying to deflect the gunman’s attention, concerned he would react to his lack of escape by shooting Jared. The passenger got out quickly, and pointed at both men with a gun in each hand. One fired successive rounds and automatic sprayed a slew of bullets. Dave and Mike managed dove for the back of the car, shielding themselves momentarily. They peeked around the fender and saw the back passenger side door fly open. Jared’s stockinged foot could barely been as the force of the door pushed the shooter backward and off balance. It was enough. Mike slid under the open door to get behind it and grabbed the gunman by the shins. Dave threw his own empty gun into the man’s face before he could get to him. The passenger fell backward to the ground, landing on his ass. He quickly recovered, but it wasn’t quick enough. The two special forces experts were on him fast, jerking the guns from his reach and locking him on the ground. Dave punched the man in the face, just for good measure, the two friends forced him over onto his stomach and held him down. Mike shoved the man’s face into the dirt, “Don’t you fucking move, you son of a bitch, or I’ll fucking kill you...happily.”

With Mike holding the passenger secure, Dave went for the open backseat door. Just as he leaned in help Jared, a shot rang out from Jensen’s side of the car and ricocheted off the door frame. It flew right past him. Dave’s mind screamed, ‘NO,’ when he heard the unmistakable muffled scream of pain coming from the innocent man in the back seat. Jared’s leg exploded in sudden pain. Jensen had been struggling with the hitman after forcing him out of the car. The fight was on the ground. Jensen delivered blows fast to multiple areas, forcing the man to release his grip on the gun. The perpetrator wasn’t a match for Jensen’s expertise, but as he released the gun he fired off one round toward the back seat. Jensen’s rage exploded at the thought of that shot hitting Jared. He quickly blinded the man with broken nose and cheekbones, punched him unconscious until the man went limp. Jensen stood and swayed for a second, then kicked the man in the head to make sure he was unconscious. He unloaded the gun, tossed it under the car and hurried toward the back seat.

Dave was just leaning in the opposite door when Jensen jerked the back door open. He dropped to his knees. The depth of emotion that poured through him was beyond anything he was prepared for. He’d never loved someone to this degree, never been in love...to see this piece of his heart afraid and in pain sparked an inferno of protective rage. Jensen could barely keep his eyes from running over
with tears. An immediate visual inspection of Jared showed the gag, the tight bindings of wire around his wrists, the condition of the jeans that had been dragged through dirt and mud, and the fresh gunshot wound spurting a steady stream of blood. Dave was quickly opening a bag of first aid supplies, already addressing it. Jensen touched Jared on the shoulder, causing the younger man to cringe in fear. “Easy, buddy, it’s me,” the older man soothed. He climbed partially into the floorboard so he could lean over Jared’s shoulder. He exchanged a worried look with Dave when Jared remained still and tense. Dave needed to apply pressure fast but wasn’t able to touch him yet. Jensen spoke close to his ear, “Hey it’s me...I’m here...and Dave’s here too...you’re safe now. It’s alright, those assholes are not gonna hurt you. Dave’s gotta stop the bleeding on your leg, kiddo, and I’m gonna get this damn thing off your mouth, okay?”

When he kicked the door open a couple minutes ago, Jared expected retaliation. The explosion of pain in his leg just amplified the fact that they were about to kill him. He thought this was surely the end until he heard Jensen’s voice. He struggled through his fear as he nodded, showing Jensen he understood. His mind was still warring with ‘was this really real’. Jensen touched his head, lightly smoothed the hair back, “It’s okay...remember it’s just me and Dave, okay?” He didn’t feel Jared flinch this time, so he started to work the knot loose on the scarf. Dave applied pressure to the leg wound with heavy gauze pads, causing Jared to flinch and cry out. Jensen put his hands on Jared’s head and shoulder, “I’m sorry,” then rubbed his hair for a second. Jared’s breathing was rapid and choppy. Jensen knew he needed to hurry to keep Jared from falling into shock. He untied the scarf and gently pushed the material around to the front of Jared’s mouth. He couldn’t see Jared’s face, but if there were any wounds there, he was sure that tight gag had been aggravating them.

“I’m gonna work on your wrists, Jay. Just hang tight, buddy, it’s gonna be okay.” Jensen moved down to Jared’s hands. He inspected the bindings, then dug into his pocket and pulled out his knife. He clicked it open and began cutting the first layer of wire. Jared flinched when the wire moved inside the raw open skin. Jensen immediately held his knife away from him. Dave got Jensen’s attention, “I can’t stop this. We’re gonna have to close it and I’ll need you or Mike.” Jensen nodded, “No problem, but fucking look at this,” Jensen held up Jared’s wrists a bit so his friend could see. Dave’s eyes filled with guilt and sympathy that they’d taken so long to get to Jared. The kid’s wrists had dried and fresh blood mixed between the bindings, some dripping down his hands. Jensen went back to cutting off the wires. He carefully pulled the embedded wire from Jared’s skin, pausing when Jared whimpered in pain a few times. “I’m sorry, Jare, I know. I’m almost done,” he soothed, then grabbed the iodine out of the bag. He saturated the wounds then wrapped them with sterile gauze. He touched Jared’s shoulder, “We’re gonna turn you over now, then we’re gonna fix up your leg. When we turn you, you’ll be able to bring your other hand up, and I can get that scarf off your mouth. You understand?”

Jared nodded. He released an emotional sigh. Jensen knew it was probably just hitting Jared he wasn’t going to die. He slipped his arms around Jared’s torso. As he did, Jensen could feel the shaking. “I gotcha, just don’t try and move and let us do the work, okay?” He lifted Jared’s torso a few inches so he could get his right hand out from under him, then slowly rotated his body while Dave held the leg tight. After Jensen lowered him onto his back, he hurried and covered Jared’s upper body with an emergency blanket. Jared’s shaking was pronounced now. Jensen hurried and grabbed a pen light from the bag. He checked Jared’s pupils, then pulled the scarf a bit more from his face. “Jesusfuckingchrist,” he bitched. “Who hit you, was it the driver, the hitman?” he asked. When Jared nodded, Jensen swore to himself that he’d find a way to finish off that unconscious bastard outside. He pulled the scarf slowly, feeling a resistance as Jared whimpered in pain. Jensen grabbed the iodine again and doused a piece of gauze. He squirted a generous amount on Jared’s injured lips as he worked the scarf completely free. He dabbed at the tender area, cleaning some of the open cuts. The sound of vehicles pulling up caused both veterans to look out Jensen’s side of the car. Lance had arrived with his team. This would relieve Mike and allow him to help.
Jensen touched Jared’s cheek, “You stay awake for us, Jare. I’m gonna lift your shirt, just checking your ribs.” Jared nodded, still too emotionally raw to say anything. Jensen rolled Jared’s t-shirt up. He cursed at the dark red fresh bruising forming in the soft tissue between the bottom of Jared’s rib cage. He felt the area for heat, “He hit you here with his fist?” Jared found his voice, though raw and gravelly, “Yeah,” he nodded. Jensen asked, “How many times?” Jared shook his head sluggishly, “I don’t remember, I was fighting not to get in the car and it pissed him off.” Jensen glanced at Dave, the two men keeping their murderous feelings at bay for Jared’s sake. Lance yelled from outside, “You guys need help in there?” Jensen yelled out, “We need Mike. Jared’s gonna need scans and x-rays after we stop the bleeding.” Lance responded, “I’m on it. Chopper’s almost here. We’ve got the assholes in custody, running the unknown.” Mike soon climbed in the front seat and saw Jared, “Fucking son of a bitch!” He quickly moved to the back seat, crowding himself in with Dave. Dave remarked, “Grab the scissors and cut his pant leg, we’re gonna have to stop this before we can move him.” Mike wasted no time. “I can’t fucking believe this shit...we should’ve ‘killed’ the motherfuckers,” he bitched while he dug things out.

Jensen felt gently around Jared’s ribs for swelling or any give to the bone. He laid his ear on Jared’s rib cage, then took an offered stethoscope Mike handed him and listened more closely. Mike put a lit pen light between his teeth and stuck another in Dave’s mouth. He went to work on Jared’s pant leg. When the denim was peeled back, Dave barely lifted the thick gauze to test things out. Blood flow started immediately so he reapplied pressure. Jared winced in pain. Mike sighed, “Shit,” then grabbed alcohol wipes and sterilized his hands. He put on gloves, then took over pressure on the wound while Dave copied his procedure. Jared winced again when they changed hands. Mike quickly assured him, “Sorry, Jared, I know it hurts, man. We’re gonna fix it up soon, buddy.” Dave felt under the knee for the entry wound. He squeezed iodine on gauze and taped it to the sight to keep it clean. Jensen lowered Jared’s shirt, then covered him as he could with the blanket. He noticed the borderline signs of shock, “Jared, stay with me, okay?” He brushed the hair back from his face to watch his eyes closely. Dave pulled out another kit from the bag. He pulled two syringes out, then spoke to Jared, “Jared, I’m gonna numb you so we can work on your leg. You’re just gonna feel a few stings.” He proceeded to inject the analgesic in several points around the wound, working around Dave’s hands. Jared didn’t react. Jensen glanced at their progress, then back to his lover, who seemed to be in pain but holding his own.

Jensen smoothed the hair back from his face, “Just stay with me, okay? I don’t want you going into shock. Your system’s been through hell and it’s gonna try, so I need you to stay with me.” Jensen tucked the blanket more snugly around Jared and rubbed his arms up and down through the material. Jared felt the pull of darkness fighting to drag him under, but he struggled to stay focused. Jensen’s eyes were filled with worry and concern. The last thing Jared wanted to do was give in and fail him by falling unconscious. He was frustrated that he couldn’t seem to stop shaking. His self control was gone. He felt raw and open, completely vulnerable. Jensen was there, thank god Jensen was there. Jared felt four stings around his painful wound, then within seconds, the pain started to dissipate. Dave and Mike worked fast. When Mike let go, blood filled the wound. He pulled it apart to give Dave access to see and work. Both field surgeons held the pen lights between their teeth. Dave stuffed fresh gauze into the wound, which saturated quickly, but he needed clarity to find the leaking vein. Mike used his fingers to push down on either side of what looked like the most troublesome area.

Dave quickly identified the nicked artery. He tore open a sterile binding clamp and placed it over the vein. Both men waited a few seconds to see if the vein had stopped leaking. It worked. “Good job, brother,” Mike commented, as the two men looked up at Jensen. Everyone had felt Jared flinch when they’d clamped the vein. Apparently, the kid wasn’t feeling the effects of the lidocaine as much in the deeper parts of the wound. They worked fast. Mike held fast, as Dave stitched a few torn areas close to the vein that had been damaged by the bullet. When Jared closed his eyes and whimpered
softly, Jensen turned to his friends, “You done?” Mike answered, “Closing up. Less than two minutes, Jared, we’re almost done, buddy. Just hold tight, big guy.”

Jared had been trying to hide the pain, but it was pretty damned unbearable deep inside. Now that they seemed to be stitching the outer wound, things were better. There wasn’t any pain. Jensen rubbed his head, “They stopped the bleeding. I know it hurts, but we’re gonna find you some awesome pain meds when the chopper gets here, okay? Just keep those eyes open for me, Jared, you’re doing great.” Jensen watched his eyes closely to make sure he wasn’t losing him to shock. He called to his friend, “Mike, when your hands are free, can you activate a couple cold packs and hand ‘em to me?” Dave had just closed up Jared’s wound, so Mike could let go. He peeled his gloves off and dug for the cold packs. After snapping the activation, he handed them to Jensen, “Here, boss.” Jensen reached back, without looking away from Jared. He gently placed the cold packs against Jared’s injured lip and cheek. Jensen could tell these injuries hadn’t been from a punch. The damage seemed to be from some type of blunt object. It pissed him off.

Jared’s eyes blinked, dreamily, when he felt the icy cold against his throbbing mouth and cheek. God, it was instant relief. Dave pulled off his bloody gloves and threw them aside. Mike handed him several gauze pads, which Dave tore open and placed on top of the surgical site. Mike handed Dave a roll of gauze, then placed his hands under Jared’s leg to lift it. Jared winced in pain when his leg was lifted. Dave spoke up, “We’re almost done little brother. Just wrapping a bandage on.” Jensen kept his eyes on Jared. “It’s okay,” he soothed, “we’re gonna get you outta here and this’ll all be over.” Dave wrapped the gauze completely around the leg then tied the ends secure. Mike let the leg down gently. Dave pulled the medical bags out of the car and dumped them on the hood. He grabbed a second emergency blanket and took it out of the package. Mike came out of the front seat and helped Dave to unfold the blanket. He leaned in the back seat and covered Jared from his hips to his feet. While Mike was wrapping the blanket around Jared’s stockinged feet, he thought to ask, “Anybody know what happened to his shoes?” Dave looked at Jensen in question. Jensen looked at Jared, “Why’d they take your shoes, buddy?” Jared took a few seconds to gather his thoughts, then answered, “I kicked his face, made him mad.” Jared’s speech was a little skewed, his painful swollen mouth obvious. Jensen smiled with pride, “Nice job kiddo. You might be happy to know I finished the rest of his face off for you. I’m glad you made his nose bleed first.” Jensen turned back to his friends with a proudful smirk. Dave grinned, “That’s our boy.” Mike added, “Yeah, and that door you kicked open was prime timing, Jared. The fucker was shootin’ at us and you knocked him off balance. Fuckin’ sweet, dude.”

Jared heard the reassurances, even if he didn’t answer. Truthfully, it was the sound of their voices that touched him the most. They hadn’t stopped until they saved him. They were here. Jared was finding incredible comfort from that. Dave asked Jensen, “How’s the rest of him?” Jensen looked back at Jared, “He took a hard punch to the midriff. It isn’t pretty but I can’t detect any abnormal sounds. His bad ribs are bruised again, but I don’t hear any problems.” Jensen looked back at his friends, “His face is bad. Somebody pegged him hard with something...looks like a couple fractures.” All of the former team mates shared a mutual look of concern. Dave asked, “Concussion?” Jensen shook his head, “His pupils look good, but he’s shocky.” Jensen looked back at his friends, “His face is bad. Somebody pegged him hard with something...looks like a couple fractures.” Jensen nodded, as Mike and Lance stepped into the open doorway. Lance asked, “Is he awake?” Jensen nodded, “Yep, he’s kickin’ ass, you get an id on the asshole who hired our hitman?” Lance answered, “Yeah, but I need to ask Jared if he knows him. The name on file isn’t coming up with anything.”

Jensen sighed unhappily, then turned back to his lover. He carefully removed the cold packs and inspected Jared’s face. The swelling was coming in, slowed by the ice but not reduced completely.
Jensen smoothed Jared’s hair back, “Lance is here. He needs to ask you something, you feel up to it?” When Jared nodded, Jensen scooted aside enough to let the investigator squeeze in closer, “Jared, we’ve id’d the passenger with his fingerprints. Do you know an Aaron Maurice Thomas?” Jared blinked heavily, then shook his head after thinking for a few seconds. He didn’t recall ever meeting anyone by that name. Lance pursued his question, “Are you sure you never worked with him? Maybe on a job or met him in a business meeting?” Jared gave it another few seconds, but he couldn’t recall anyone by that name. He shook his head again, “No.” Everything hurt. He squinted in pain, not quite convinced he was capable of remembering shit at the moment. Lance and Jensen exchanged a look of concern. Lance sighed, because he really hated to suggest this, or even ask it of the poor kid. He looked at Jensen guiltily. Jensen responded in pissed off disbelief, “Don’t even. That’s not an option.” Lance sighed guiltily, “I know.” The two men stared at one another for a minute until Jensen looked away. He tried to contain his murderous rage at anyone causing his innocent lover any further anxiety.

When Jensen looked into Jared’s eyes, he smoothed Jared’s hair back again, processing his own turmoil that Jared was still here and alive. The last thing Jensen could even fathom right now was subjecting Jared to more trauma. He was feeling protective and possessive, but also defeated because he knew this had to be done. Jared surprised him by asking in a gravelly voice, “What’s wrong?” Jensen grinned helplessly, “I forget how well you’ve learned to read me.” Jared studied him in silence as Jensen sighed again before answering, “Lance needs you to id the passenger, and I’m trying not to go over there and snap his neck so you don’t have to.” Jared searched Jensen’s eyes. He saw the unnecessary guilt and loving concern there. Jensen was fighting his intense need to protect him. If Jared said he didn’t want this, he knew Jensen would defend him and mow everybody down getting Jared the hell out of there. “It’s okay,” he offered. When Jensen looked doubtful, Jared assured him, “I can do it. I wanna know who he is, anyway.” Jensen searched Jared’s eyes for a moment before conceding, “He can’t touch you every again, baby, okay?” Jared nodded, “S’okay. I’m okay.” Jensen sighed. He knew damn well Jared was ‘not’ okay, but he also understood how strong Jared was. Dave came back to the car on Jensen’s side, “They’re ready to pack him up and transport. Other than an iv, they’ll monitor and assess…and they’ve got all the cocktails for his pain. Hospital’s only ten minutes.” Jensen glanced at the stretcher team, then told Dave, “Bit of a problem first. Lance needs him to id the unknown.”

Jensen didn’t have to wait long for Dave’s angry response, “You’re fuckin’ shittin’ me.” Dave walked up to them, so Dave turned to him, “You’re fuckin’ shittin’ me.” Lance held up his hands and shook his head, “Please, I know. Guys, believe me, I do ‘not’ want this and I’m sorry...Jared doesn’t know the name we’re getting from prints. I just need to see if he recognizes him under another name. It’ll help us pin the son of a bitch to everything, not just the kidnapping today.” Dave was pissed, just like Jensen was. Lance glanced over to see Mike walking up, ‘Oh christ here we go.’ Mike asked, “We gonna lift the kid out, or what?” Dave exchanged a look with Jensen, then turned to Mike, “Jared has to do a visual on the fuckstick.” Mike was stunned. He turned to Lance, “There’s no fucking way.” Lance sighed, as Mike continued, “He’s finished, Lance. The kid’s barely conscious, what the fuck is wrong with the guy’s thumb?” Lance glanced between them all, “We don’t have any record on the name that came back. His prints aren’t registering. He’s probably got multiple id’s and Jared might know him by a visual. Just like Brad, this guy might have been operating under another identity all this time.”

Mike stared at the inspector for a moment, then looked at Jensen in disbelief. Jensen understood. He finally commented, “Jared wants to do it.” Mike sighed, “Well, of course he does,” his bitterness showing. He moved closer to the car, “Alright, is he going on the stretcher first?” Jensen nodded, “I think that’s best...he can look without being too close.” He looked pointedly at Lance, “One fucking minute and we’re taking him out of here.” Lance nodded in understanding. He went back to his SUV while the medical team rolled their gurney closer to the car. Jensen knelt over Jared again,
“We’re gonna move you now...put you on a bed, and then you’re going for a chopper ride. You don’t have to do anything, okay? Don’t try to move. We’ll do all the work.” Jared said, “Okay.” Jensen studied his eyes for a second. He noticed the renewed fear. He touched the younger man’s good cheek, “You alright?” Jared nodded, but was still shaking, his lower lip trembling. “It’s okay,” Jensen soothed, “we’re not letting anyone touch you and you’re not going anywhere without us, alright?” Something relaxed in Jared’s eyes. He really hated himself for being such a baby, but something was still raw and terrified at being more than a few feet from his protectors, at the moment. It was silly. He guessed it would take some time to feel safe again.

Jensen stood and shared a look of concern with his two closest friends while he kept a hand on Jared’s shoulder. Dave asked the silent question with a raised eyebrow. Jensen spoke in a hushed voice, “He’s just really raw right now...afraid. He’s trying like he always does, but he doesn’t feel safe yet. I just wanna get him the fuck out of here.” The three men shared their unspoken guilt and protective concern. Mike stepped closer, “He strong as fuck. He’s gonna be fine...we’ll make sure of it.” Jensen nodded, “I know.”
CHAPTER THIRTY

Jensen and Dave slid their arms under Jared’s upper torso and pulled him until Mike could get his arms under Jared’s midsection. Dave moved to Jared’s legs and lifted them without jolting the injury. They placed Jared gently on the gurney and held him secure while the medics strapped him in with velcro. They placed a pillow under Jared’s left knee before Dave lowered his legs. Jared clenched when moved, feeling sparks of pain throughout his body. His head, his chest, stomach and leg were definitely complaining. He knew the guys were trying their best to be careful, so he busted his ass not to say anything. When they were done, Jared laid there breathing hard, trying to control the pain. Jensen kept his eye on him, watching his face for changes. He knew Jared was hurting and holding back. The engineer’s eyes were filled with pain, but it started to dissipate now that he was stationary. Jared realized he’d rather be at an incline so he tapped Jensen’s arm, “Can I please sit up?” Jensen relayed the request to the rest of the team. The rescuers knew damn well it probably had to do with feeling too vulnerable, after what Jared had been through. They lifted Jared’s bed so he could sit up at an incline.

Jensen touched his shoulder, “Better?” Jared nodded. He offered Jensen a half smile, letting him know he was holding his own, but the older man wasn’t fooled by the attempted mask. He brushed the hair back from Jared’s face, noting the barely quivering lower lip, “Hey...we’re not letting anyone hurt you anymore. We’re right here, okay.” Jensen leaned in closer, “I love you more than anything, Jare.” Jared released an emotional sounding sigh as he nodded. He couldn’t control the emotional release at Jensen’s words, “M’sorry...I dn’t know what’s wrong with me.” “It’s okay,” Jensen soothed, “it’s okay...you’re in shock and you’re doing just fine. We’re gonna get you home after this and it’ll all be over.” Jared couldn’t answer him right now. Jensen could see the engineer was still borderline shock. He knew the man needed comfort and reassurance right now. The rest of the team stood close, touching Jared’s bed in some way. Jensen grinned inwardly at the natural protectiveness they showed. Jared didn’t get it yet. He’d been adopted as Mike and Dave’s little brother. The three men felt pretty shitty, as did Lance’s team, for what Jared had been through today under their watch. There definitely wasn’t going to be a skinned knee in the future if they had anything to say about it. Jensen could see Dave and Mike were watching the paramedics closely. Jared was covered with a sheet and the two security blankets, but he was still shivering. The medics took preliminary vitals, then started an iv drip.
When they had wheeled the gurney to within twenty feet of Lance’s SUV, the investigator looked at Jensen in question. Jensen nodded, then leaned in close to Jared, “Hey. You still feel like taking a look at the bad guy for Lance? If you don’t, we are so outta here, just say the word.” Jared looked between Jensen and his other two protectors, who all seemed to be watching him. He had a sudden feeling of warmth wash over him. These men wouldn’t let anything happen to him. He could do this. Jared nodded, “Yeah...I wanna know who the bastard is.” Jensen touched him on the shoulder, then turned to Lance and nodded. While Lance was coordinating two of his partners to drag the unwilling suspect from the back seat, Jensen exchanged a look of understanding with Dave and Mike. Jared thought he saw a dark murderous tone to their expressions, but he didn’t have more than a couple seconds to identify it. The team turned back to Lance. Each man put a hand on Jared, in some way. Dave’s was on Jared’s thigh, Mike’s was on his arm, and Jensen’s was still on the younger man’s shoulder. No one was letting Jared feel exposed without reinforcing their wall of protection around him. The medics stood by and waited.

Jared watched Lance hold the back door of his SUV. Two men struggled with a resistive person to get him out of the car. The suspect obviously didn’t want to cooperate. When he was dragged a few feet from the door and forced to stand still, Lance stepped up and said something to him. The man tried to struggle away, but Lance’s team held him steady. The suspect wouldn’t turn Jared’s way, willingly, so Lance grabbed the man’s unruly hair and forced his head up so Jared could see him. With a few markings on the man’s face, Jared could only make out a slight familiarity. Jared knew this was extremely important, so he asked Jensen, “Can they bring him closer?” Jensen told Lance, “Bring him closer.” Lance’s team forced the stiff suspect to walk forward while Lance pulled his hair tight to keep his head up. The killer had a strained pissed off look on his face, knowing damn well Jared would know him. This whole fuckin’ day had gone to Hell because of Jared’s team of G.I. Joe’s. He would have been on a plane by now, with Jared dead and all the money to himself. When Lance’s team got to within ten feet of Jared, Jensen’s team tensed up. Dave held his hand up, “That’s close enough.”

Jared stared at the man, then surprised Jensen by pushing himself up with his hands. Jared couldn’t believe he was seeing what he was seeing. “Jare,” Jensen tried to stop the kid, but when Jared continued to push up, Jensen put his hands underneath his upper back and helped him sit up higher. Jared’s eyes darted back and forth, taking in every aspect of the son of a bitch who tried to have him killed. Then his expression changed from shock to anger, his breathing sped up. “WHY?!” He screamed, “WHY DID YOU DO THIS TO ME? TO EVERYONE?” The suspect looked like he wasn’t going to answer, but his anger took over and he shouted at Jared, “WHAT DO YOU FUCKING KNOW? YOU...YOU AND YOUR FUCKING GOODIE TWO SHOES SELF RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDE ABOUT EVERYTHING!” Jared paused in shock for a few seconds, then yelled, “YOU KILLED PEOPLE!” The suspect spat out, “HA! You don’t know the half of it. And YOU, you little prick, you should have been gone a long time ago! I FUCKING LET YOU LIVE!” Jared was stunned. He couldn’t believe this. He never would have guessed this in a hundred years.

“Jare,” Jensen softly tried to get Jared’s attention, but the suspect continued, “I had a weak moment for you, kid...even after your little stunt in court with your gang of little secret service assholes. I thought maybe...just maybe I’ll get one last chance to actually talk to you, explain it. Maybe if I could just come clean and get you to understand.” Jared interrupted, “I WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND!” Both men paused. Jared added, “You’re SICK! You are SO FUCKING SICK!” The man in custody seemed to explode at that comment and began struggling toward Jared. Lance’s team controlled him, but not without difficulty. Jared’s team tightened even more around him, ready to snap the man’s neck if he got loose and came at Jared. They welcomed it, actually. The suspect growled angrily, pissed beyond belief, “UUUGHIIHHH, YOU FUCKING PRICK. YOU COULDN’T LEAVE IT ALONE! You just kept ‘picking’ at it and ‘finding’ things and ‘reporting’,
‘reporting’. I COULD HAVE HAD YOU KILLED A LONG TIME AGO!” Then he lowered his voice to a snide tone, “I didn’t want to kill you, Jared, and you know why, don’tcha? You remember, don’tcha? Mmmmm...you were a nice piece of ass...the best. I was hopin’ to get you back, sort things out with the video’s...ya know...ease you back into it. God, you were hot. I would haveshown you my bank accounts and we could fly around the world in style...join the mile high club and tape you screaming, like I know you’re capable of...”

“Ugh,” the man grunted in pain as Lance couldn’t stand it anymore and punched him in the gut. “Shut the fuck up,” he ordered, then turned back to Jared, “I take it you know this asshole?” Jared appeared frozen, his breathing almost to the point of hyperventilating. Jensen saw the liquid pooling, the pleading for this to not be true. Jared had been incredibly strong through this whole thing, but Jensen could see this had been the final tear to his soul. He grabbed Jared’s face between his hands, “Jare, look at me. He’s done hurting you. Just give me his name.” Jared swallowed to avoid bawling like a baby in front of everyone. He focused on Jensen, his emotional exhale telling about his state of mind, “He’s...he’s the one I...the one I told you...about. I can’t believe this.” Jensen suddenly had a flashback of Jared’s horrible experience in the courtroom, something his brother said...something Jared told him in private. He tightened his hold, “It’s Tom, right?” Jared nodded, mindlessly, looking like he was about to break. He blinked his eyes trying to rid them of the stinging tears. He swiped at them angrily, looking completely wrecked, “Gallagher. His name is Tom Gallagher.” More liquid pooled, as Jared tried to hold it at bay. He looked utterly miserable, “I mean, I think it’s Gallagher. That’s what he told me. I thought he was an engineer.” Jensen rubbed his thumbs on Jared’s cheeks, “I’ll take care of it from here. You did it. It’s over and he can’t hurt you anymore. He’s going down for it all. It’s over.”

Jared nodded, now too emotional to hold back his release, but he believed Jensen above all. Jensen quickly grabbed him into his chest, squeezing him as tightly as possible without hurting him. The engineer automatically hid his face in Jensen’s chest. His hands twisted in Jensen’s t-shirt and hung on. He wanted nothing to do with the outside world anymore. Mike loosely held Jared’s iv line, making sure the lead stayed secure in Jared’s hand. Jensen yelled over to Lance, “His name’s Tom Gallagher. Jared thought he was an engineer a few years back. He was a complete dick so he told him to take a hike.” Lance turned back and helped his associates lead the sputtering suspect back to the car. Lance knew there was more to the story between Jared and this guy, but at least he had a name and the rest he would find out later. Jared’s tears came. They were quiet sobs, not audible to anyone else but the man who held him. Jensen’s team glanced at one another. Jared wouldn’t see it, but the warriors had their own traces of moisture in their eyes. Jared was a piece of their family now. Watching him be hurt wasn’t easy for any of them.

Jensen could feel the engineer shaking. He rubbed his back and rested his cheek on top of the younger man’s head, “We need to get you inside, Jared, okay? You’re freezing.” Jared didn’t move. He didn’t want to. This was the only thing he needed. He did manage to at least respond, “I don’t want to be in the hospital. Please, can we just go home? To your house?” Jensen sighed. He ‘so’ wanted to give Jared anything he wanted, but he couldn’t. The hospital was a must. “I’m sorry, we have to at least get you X-rayed and scanned before we go to my house. You might have internal injuries. Once we rule that out, we’ll go right home, I swear it.” Jensen didn’t respond. He was busy coming down from his emotional release and he wasn’t really in the mood to face anyone. He knew they were right about getting inside, but he just wanted another minute to absorb this feeling. Mike and Dave watched Tom being manhandled into the car. They were sizing the man up, planning numerous torturous procedures in their minds. Jensen secretly hoped the man got free and ran their way. ‘Wouldn’t that be glorious,’ he thought.

Jensen gently eased Jared to lay back against the gurney. Everyone tucked blankets back around him. Jensen smoothed the hair back from his face, “Try to stay awake a little longer, okay? We’re gonna take you home soon.” Jared nodded, still visibly trembling. At least he’d stopped blubbery
like an idiot. He was berating himself for being such a basket case, but Jensen didn’t seem to mind. As they wheeled Jared to the helicopter, Jensen was in a pensive mood. The others kept to themselves, also. Each man was introspectively trying to process what had happened today. Their hearts went out to the younger man they were protecting, their internal sense of brotherhood dealing with the self blame that Jared had gotten hurt. None of the Black Ops veterans seemed to want to be more than an inch away from him at the moment. The paramedics seemed to sense this. After they hoisted Jared’s gurney into the chopper, they worked around the military experts, taking Jared’s vitals again and adjusting his iv. One of the medics mentioned a slight wheezing sound to Jensen, who immediately sighed with concern. He explained the patient’s recent history so they could relate the wheeze to his existing injuries.

Jared’s bp was falling again. His pulse was strong and his pupils were still normal. They hooked him up to a heart monitor and prepared him for the short flight. Before taking off, Jensen leaned in close to get Jared’s attention, “I’m going over to talk to Lance for a minute. I’ll be back and Mike and Dave are gonna stay right here.” Jared looked confused, but he was too exhausted to question or argue. When Jensen touched him on the cheek, he spoke softly, “Don’t take off without me, love.” Jared nodded with a soft grin. The medics were shooting his iv with something so Jensen knew his lover would be pain free in a matter of minutes. He glanced at his two friends, then hopped out of the chopper. The look Jensen shared with his friends wasn’t anything close to the look he’d had for Jared. As he walked off with determined purpose, Dave and Mike exchanged a knowing look. They knew damn well Jensen was going to get a piece of Tom, and he didn’t want Jared to know. Lance was just about to order his team to convoy out of the area when he spotted Jensen approaching his SUV. ‘What the hell,’ he thought, as he got out of the driver’s seat and walked around to greet the man. Jensen bypassed him and went straight for the back seat.

“Jensen, what?” Lance started to ask, but Jensen wasn’t in the mood. He wrenched open the back door, held out his hand to Lance, “Give me a handcuff key.” Lance stepped closer, “What?” Jensen looked at Lance and the investigator began digging a key out of his pocket before he was even sure of what he was doing. The look in Jensen’s eyes was nothing to argue with. Lance handed him the key, as Jensen ordered, “Five minutes. Alone. Then he’s all yours.” Lance stood motionless. He stared hard at Jensen wondering if he was going to lose his damn job for this. After a minute’s hesitation and a sigh of acceptance, Lance turned to bark orders at his team. “Everybody out, move out,” Lance waved the other SUV to take off. There were two men with Lance and he ushered both of them to a clearing away from the vehicle and ordered them to turn their backs. ‘I hope I don’t get fired for this,’ he thought to himself, but in his heart he knew damn well the son of a bitch would be sitting pretty in a cell with cable television, commissary and the best medical on the planet. ‘Go for it, Jensen,’ Lance thought further. He prepared himself to need to put towels on the back seat for the blood when he got his perpetrator back.

Jensen spared no time in pulling Tom out of the car. The man’s struggles meant nothing. He slammed him against the SUV and took off the cuffs, speaking in threatening tones behind Tom’s ear, “Oh, please fight me, asshole, I welcome it.” Jensen pulled him roughly backward and turned Tom toward the forest. Tom’s natural instinct was to fight, but every time he barely resisted, Jensen countered him with painful compliance moves. He screamed each time, ‘like the coward he is,’ Jensen thought. The killer resorted to screaming meaningless weak threats, as they walked, “YOU CAN’T DO THIS.” Jensen smoothly asked him from behind, “Can’t do what?” As he slammed him against a tree, Tom screamed out, “YOU CAN’T KILL ME. IT’S NOT LEGAL. THIS ISN’T EVEN LEGAL. YOU CAN’T DO THIS.” Jensen answered him smoothly again, “I’m not gonna kill you, Tom.” He whispered into the man’s ear, “I’m just gonna hurt you.” He pulled Tom away from the tree and pushed him forward a few more feet. Tom tried to struggle, but it was no good. Jensen slammed him against another tree, “Oh, I’ll let you get your digs in...give you a head start, even. A coward like you? You’re used to running. You hire people to do your dirty work, don’t you.
You hide, while you order nasty things to be done to innocent people. You enjoy it, right? You just keep on playing with people’s lives, like they’re little game pieces. Sit back and rake in your millions. How much money did you make in all this time? Twenty? Twenty five? How many millions are worth killing people, Tom?"

Tom was pulled away from the second tree and forced to walk forward more. Jensen pushed him hard against a giant redwood, the sharp bark digging into his face. “FUCKING PRICK,” the killer screamed against the tree. Jensen spoke to him from behind, in a deceivingly calm voice, “Do you know why we’re out here, Tom? You know why I wanted you out here, all alone?” Tom screamed, “NO! I DON’T FUCKING KNOW WHO YOU ARE!” Jensen slammed him hard, once again, against the sharp bark, “Cuz, you picked the wrong person to hurt. You hurt someone very dear to me and I just can’t let that pass. We’re out here so I can get my few minutes with you. Whatever happens out here? It’s for Jared...the nicest, most caring, smartest and most capable human being on the planet. That’s who we’re out here for...and you’re going to hurt for that one, Tom. So, you take your best shot at me, cuz that’s the only shot you’ve got at getting out of this.” Tom was screaming profanities in all his panic, “YOU’RE FUCKING CRAZY!” He was a coward, just like Jensen knew he was. But when he backed away a few steps and allowed Tom to turn around, the man sputtered out snidely, “What are you, the new boyfriend?”

Jensen’s jaw tightened. He slapped Tom, like the weak little bastard he was, just enough to split his lip and keep his attention. Tom spit the blood out, then he faced Jensen with insolence, “He was a fine piece of ass. Goddamn, he was fine. Except for all that expectation crap. Wondering where we’re headed, what does this mean, all that bullshit about maybe we aren’t right for each other. He’s so fucking hot...but then he tries that fucking nice feelings crap and my dick falls.” Jensen punched the mouthy asshole in the solar plex, forcing the wind out of him and forcing him to fall on his ass against the tree. Tom struggled to regain his breath for a minute, while Jensen watched him suffer. As soon as he could talk, Jensen leaned over and slapped him again. Tom was a bit rattled from that one, but he spit on the ground. Jensen couldn’t believe the gall of this soon to be broken and bleeding asshole. He never shut up. Tom stupidly kept going, “He told me he broke your nose,” Jensen growled, “I can see why.” He slammed the man against the rock once more then dragged him over to a huge thorn bush. “NO,” Tom screamed as Jensen threw him head first into the thorny bush. “AAAAAHHHHH!” Jensen smiled internally at the terror filled scream from the man who struggled to get out of the bush and bat the huge red creatures that had smelled him. Jensen knew these giant thorn bushes were a favorite haven for fire ants. They were currently biting Tom and his struggling just provided more fresh blood. From inside the open chopper, the paramedics and veterans looked toward the forest. They thought they heard a man screaming several hundred feet away. The medics looked at Dave and Mike in question, but the two former team mates feigned confusion and shrugged a shoulder. After a few more screams, the two paramedics exited the chopper and watched for anything they might be needed for...if someone was hurt, maybe they would have to respond. Dave and Mike simply grinned knowingly at one another, ecstatic about Jensen getting his digs in. They looked back at Jared, who was currently feeling the effects of some demerol and looking more relaxed. He wasn’t hearing ‘anything’. The poor kid was in pretty painful shape, and very shocky, but the medication had been a tremendous help.

After Jensen let Tom struggle enough to give him sufficient painful wounds all over his body, he grabbed the back of his collar and pulled him out of the bush. Jensen dragged him over to the stream and threw him hard into the water against painful little razor sharp rocks. He gave the man ten seconds to roll and swat anything off him that was crawling then lifted him again by his collar, “You
still didn’t take a swing at me and I’m sorely disappointed.” Jensen pushed Tom backward to land on
his ass again. “AAAH,” the killer screamed and rolled away from the painful rocks. He scooted
sluggishly away from Jensen, then turned back to hold his hand up, “Please,” he begged. Tom
crawled backward, inching away from Jensen, as the murderous looking military expert stepped
toward him. “Look,” Tom held up his hand to Jensen, “I don’t know what your beef is, I mean…if
you’re Jared’s new man and all, I’m...I’m good with that.” Jensen countered with feigned
pleasantries, “Really? I’m so glad you’re good with that. That just makes me feel so warm and fuzzy
inside.” “UNGH,” Tom cried out in explosive pain as Jensen’s boot hit him hard on the right side of
his face. The satisfying crunch of the man’s cheek bones helped to elevate Jensen’s mood. The
cowardice killer curled up on his side and sobbed.

Jensen was sickened that someone this weak could be in charge of a ring that powerful...this sobbing
idiot had ordered Jared’s hit and paid for it. He’d ordered the killing of those two investigators at the
restaurant. Jensen looked back toward the chopper, knowing he was out of time. Jared’s health was a
priority, and this needed to be over. Just when Jensen planned to lift the coward and drag him back
to Lance, he started rambling, “Look, I have a problem. It isn’t my fault. It was this sick fantasy thing
of Daniel’s and I...well, I know it was wrong but I...showed the videos to him and we...we got off on
it and...one thing led to another and,” Jensen interrupted, “You mean you were sleeping with
Daniel?” Tom nodded, so Jensen confirmed, “You were screwing around with Daniel Ackles and
you showed him the videos of you and Jared.” Tom nodded, “Yes. I did it.” Jensen added, “Without
Jared’s consent.” Tom nodded, “He didn’t know. I know it was wrong,” he continued, “Daniel told
me to get as much video as I could. I thought it was just to give us some hot porn to play around with
but...but then it hit me that...Daniel wasn’t interested in me...he had a thing for Jared. I did it to make
Daniel happy with me. I guess Jared wouldn’t give him the time of day, so this was his way of
getting a piece of the kid. Daniel just USED me.”

Jensen shook his head, disgusted, “So you and Daniel were in charge of all this? The fraud, the
embezzlement? Was that all you using Jared to plant your fake reports?” Tom hesitated, suddenly not
knowing if he should answer, but Jensen was out of patience with this idiot. He grabbed the man by
his collar and punched him in the nose. Blood spattered from Tom’s nostrils, as he cried out in pain,
spitting blood on the ground. “Mm, that was easier than it should have been,” Jensen smoothly
commented, “Jared must have loosened it up when he broke it the first time.” Tom sputtered through
the blood running over his mouth, “You fucking asshole, who are you!” He held his nose for few
seconds, then stood up and lost his temper, swinging loose angry punches at Jensen. The special
forces veteran easily deflected Tom’s chaotic attack. He stopped each punch with an effortlessly
block. When Tom had missed several times, Jensen pushed him on his ass again. The man fell flat
and before he could get up, Jensen stepped on his sternum. The Black Ops specialist pushed down
slowly on Tom’s chest with his boot, forcing the sternum to give painfully enough and block Tom of
doing anything but screaming in agony. He couldn’t move without excruciating punishment. This
was a painful pressure point and Jensen knew exactly how much pressure was needed to use it
effectively without killing him. “Who ordered the hits...was it you, or was it Daniel? Or any of those
other fucking losers who are in jail? And who ordered the false reports?” Tom cried and sobbed, it
hurt so bad. He was dying, slowing dying and no one was out here to save him from this crazy
lunatic. “I did...Daniel did,” he sobbed more, “Brad had this idea and Robert organized us. He said
he wanted no problems, so Daniel and I took care of the messes.”

Jensen waited, then applied just a bit more pressure, “Aaaahhhhh...stooopppp! Please stop,” the
coward cried, so Jensen stopped pushing down. “Finish it...who got rich from this?” Jensen ordered.
Tom sobbed, “I had it all off shore. Daniel was going to come with me. Brad was only interested in
quick money and then he was out. Robert and I...Robert and Daniel and I...it was us. We all did
it...ordered everything.” Jensen had one more question before he let the man up, “How much did you
pay the hired gun?” Tom sobbed in pain, “Daniel found him. Brought him to Robert. They paid him
first...after he failed at the court, I met with him, upped the ante to a hundred thousand. Then, I added
ten k’s to bring Jared to me and try and get him to drop everything before we had to kill him.” Jensen
took his boot off the man’s chest. He stood there watching the sack of shit sob in ridiculous self pity
for a half minute, then grabbed the man by the hair and pulled. “Aaaaahh,” Tom screamed while he
scrambled to follow Jensen’s lead.

As they reached the black SUV, Lance and his partners hurried over to them. Jensen dropped the
crying babbling idiot on the ground next to the back seat. Jensen pulled a cell phone from his pocket
and pointed the screen toward Lance. “It’s all recorded. I think it’ll help you, because if he ever gets
out, I’ll go to prison for fucking killing him.”

Lance took the phone in amazement. He quickly realized it was the security phone they had given to
he and Jared when the whole protective detail started. He looked at the bleeding criminal on the
ground and then up at Jensen, “I’m damn impressed you let him live ‘this’ time, Ackles...especially
considering the condition of our favorite genius.” Jensen gave Lance a half grin, “Speaking of said
genius, I’ll talk to ya later.” Jensen started to leave, but when he heard the man on the ground
mumble something about “should’ve killed him after I fucked him” Jensen just couldn’t let it lie.
‘Goddamn son of a bitch,’ he thought to himself, as he stepped over to the piece of shit on the
ground and slammed his boot hard on the squirming criminal’s knee. “Aaaaaaaaaahhhhh,” Tom
screamed at the top of his lungs as his knee was instantly snapped out of place. Jensen felt further
justified at the satisfying crunch of the complex joint as it shattered under his boot. He told Lance,
“That feels better than killing him.” Jensen jogged back to the chopper, hearing pitiful cries and
sobbing behind him. He hopped in the open bay with the rest of his team. Jared looked exhausted
and sluggish, but pain free. Jensen touched him on the cheek, “How’s it going, kiddo?” The younger
man blinked heavily while offering a faint smile. Jensen smoothed the hair back from Jared’s face,
then leaned back against the padded walls of the chopper next to Jared’s gurney. He was feeling the
exhaustion setting in. He leaned his head back and sighed to himself, then noticed Dave and Mike
were staring at him.

The medics shut the bay door. As the helicopter began to rise, Jared’s bed began to shimmy slightly.
Each special forces expert quickly put a hand on the gurney to stop it from moving. Jensen grinned at
his protective friends. Dave and Mike rolled their eyes, then sat back against the walls, refusing to
discuss such an open display of emotions toward their young charge. The flight would only take ten
minutes, so everyone relaxed and let the medic in back keep an eye on Jared’s vitals. Every few
minutes, Jared would look around until he saw one of them. They realized he was searching for
them, and relaxed as soon as he had one of them in his sight. Jensen began to wonder who had
adopted who. When the helicopter landed at Denver General, the veterans walked next to Jared’s
gurney all the way to E.R. The young genius was still awake, even though sluggish. They were glad
he hadn’t fallen asleep before they could confirm there was no concussion. Jared seemed to panic
slightly when he first saw the bright lights and plethora of hanging equipment being pulled down in
the busy emergency room. It really hadn’t been that long since he’d been here and it all came pouring
back in his mind. His breathing became rapid and he started to try and move. Jensen leaned close to
him, “Hey, you’re okay. We’re right here with you, Jay. Don’t try and move yet.” He squeezed the
younger man’s hand and stayed in his line of sight. Jared tried to focus on Jensen’s words, but the
multitude of hospital staff rushing to do a trauma assessment of him was overwhelming. It was quite
different being awake this time. The last time he’d been here, he was unconscious and missed all this.
Everyone was touching him at once. Jensen kept an eye on him, as did Dave and Mike. The three
weren’t budging, therefore the understanding trauma team who remembered Jensen worked quickly
around them.

Jared was poked with needles and hooked to machines. He went through bright pen lights being
shone on his split lip and inside his mouth. It hurt to open it too far, but the nurse insisted he at least
open it an inch for her to see the damages. Jensen cringed in sympathy at Jared’s pained look, as he
held his mouth open for the nurse to inspect the painful cuts and raw bruising. Jensen kept squeezing his hand until he had to let go, so the staff could inspect Jared’s wrists. They were a raw mess, but not infected yet, thanks to Jensen’s preliminary work. They cleaned them again, while using a portable scanner to X-ray Jared’s chest and leg. The doctor on duty just happened to be the same surgeon who had worked on Jared’s lung and chest. He recognized Jensen and the patient on his table right away. “I can’t say it’s good to see you again. What happened,” the surgeon asked Jensen right away. Jensen explained, as the doctor took out his own light and began assessing Jared, “He’s been under witness protection and today he went through an attack...a kidnapping. We got to him but he was roughed up pretty bad and shot in the leg. He told me he was punched in the stomach and there’s a prominent fist mark there. They hit him hard with something on the right side of his head and his cheek bone is slightly greenish. My two partners over there clamped a nicked artery and stitched his leg to keep it stable. I didn’t hear any wheezing, but the medics on the chopper did and I think his ribs are bruised again from the rough treatment.”

The doctor glanced at Jensen, then continued to focus on Jared. He wholeheartedly loved dealing with Jensen. The man knew damn well what he was talking about and it helped him to help Jared much quicker. While the staff quickly rushed Jared’s labs through, they developed the X-rays and put them up on the light board. The surgeon ordered another X-ray on Jared’s cheek, then went to look under his shirt. When he slid Jared’s shirt up, the three veterans cringed. The bruising had gotten darker. The doctor was gentle, but Jared winced each time he pushed on a painful spot. The surgeon closed his eyes, much as Jensen had done earlier, and felt down Jared’s ribcage, gently pushing down to feel for any give. He hit painful raw bruising, but he didn’t feel any give. “Good,” the doc commented, as Jared looked like he disagreed that there had been anything ‘good’ about that exam. Jensen would have laughed, if weren’t so damn worried about the kid. The doc proceeded to listen to the patient’s breathing. He nodded after a minute, “Yeah, I hear a bit of a wheeze too. We’ll have to treat that now, nip it in the butt early.” Jensen nodded, but Jared displayed a sour look. He obviously didn’t think much of that idea. His gut was still throbbing too, from being pushed on over and over, and he really didn’t like being here anyway. The doctor inspected Jared’s wrists, while ordering a chest X-ray. He wasn’t fooling around with the possibility that Jared had some new damage to his ribs.

“Stitch these here and here,” he ordered the nurse, pointing to some of the deepest cuts. He looked at Jared, “You don’t need a tetanus, at least. We’ve got your file on hand and we gave you one last time.” Jared half smiled in response with sort of a ‘oh, joy’ sarcastic look. The doc went on to inspect his gun shot wound, admiring the surgical prowess. “This is clean. Excellent work, especially for the field.” The doc looked up at Jensen, who nodded his head over toward Dave and Mike, “Their work this time.” The surgeon looked at both men above his glasses, “Nice job,” then turned to Jensen, “Like you?” Jensen nodded again, “Former team.” The doctor immediately nodded in understanding, “Ah,” then stepped over to look at the X-rays. He looked them over for a few minutes, then ordered a portable ultra sound of the leg wound and left chest. “I want to see the inside of that leg and our former surgical site. If there’s no leakage in either place, or leftover tearing in that leg, we’ll leave it alone and we won’t need to reopen anything,” he explained to Jensen. Jensen had to remain perfectly still while the trauma team took an X-ray of his cheek. He held his leg still, while a nurse rolled around the ultra sound wand painfully close to his stitched up incision. She didn’t push down, feeling his tension. Within minutes, the procedure was over and she moved the machine up to his left chest. This area was pretty sore, but it wasn’t excruciating like the leg.

The surgical nurse finished both Jared’s wrists and bandaged them up, while the ultra sounds were completed. Jared flopped his head over at Jensen and sighed with an anguished look. He really wanted to go home. The older man stepped closer and gently rubbed his head, something he’d done for Jared since day one which seemed to soothe both of them. “I know you wanna go home and I’m dyin’ to get you there, myself. Just hang in there, okay? They’re almost done.” Jared nodded, feeling
physically and emotionally exhausted, but determined to stay awake and not miss anything. He especially wasn’t giving anyone ‘any’ reason to keep him here. They better not keep him here for that stupid little wheeze, either. Jensen watched Jared’s face. He could see the tired wheels turning. The kid looked like he was contemplating his escape. In his condition, he certainly wouldn’t get very far, but Jared looked pretty damn determined to try it. Jensen glanced up at his friends, who seemed to be just as bored and impatient as Jared with this whole thing. They wanted to get the kid home, too, Jensen could see that.

Luckily, the doctor finished perusing the results of all X-rays, scans and lab work very quickly. His findings were enough to let Jared loose with pain killers, muscle relaxants and a round of antibiotics again. He ordered Jared to let Jensen give him breathing treatments, morning and night for two days, then they could stop. He also brought up the low bp again. He numbed Jared’s damaged lip and put some dissolving stitches there. He put a couple more on a deep cut over Jared’s damaged cheek bone. He explained there were two hairline fractures in the cheek, but was confident they would heal quickly. The doc then explained the good old restrictions of minimal moving around and lots of rest. Jared’s leg was especially in need of a few days to fuse before it was subjected to too much movement. They would give Jared some crutches, and he could stop using them in a week, but even those weren’t recommended for the first couple days. No weight on the leg for three days. ‘There goes the treadmill,’ Jared thought.

Jared was still cold, after being layered with three blankets, and even though he hadn’t openly complained, everyone in the room could plainly see him shaking. Dave and Jensen tucked him in tighter as the doc explained that his low bp was making it worse and wasn’t helping his body to deal with the trauma. He definitely needed to stay warm. He warned the veterans to get Jared back to ER fast if his bp became dangerously low. Other than that, just watch him for the usual dizziness or weakness. ‘It probably isn’t even necessary for me to tell them that,’ the surgeon thought to himself. Jared rolled his eyes, internally, because it meant Jensen, Dave and Mike were going to watch him closer than they ever had before, ‘if that’s even possible,’ he mentally sighed. The nurses went to fill his prescriptions, while the veterans prepared to take him home. Jared laid there shivering, wondering if he was ever going to feel warm again. Jensen rubbed his arms through the blankets, trying to warm him while the guys figured out the transportation. Since no one had a vehicle with them, Mike called Dani and Steve. If one of them could come to the hospital, they could drive them back to Jensen’s truck and make it home from there. Steve was instantly on his way.

Before they helped Jared into a wheelchair, the veterans were pretty much ordered by the doctor to have their knuckles tended to...each man shot looks of defensive disbelief at the man before they looked down and realized that they had open sores and cuts on their knuckles. After feigning ‘thank you’s’ to the nursing staff, the special forces retirees continued to focus on Jared. Getting him from the bed to the wheelchair wasn’t too bad of an ordeal. Jared was sure he could have managed, if he’d been allowed to do it himself, but he wasn’t. Six muscular arms lifted him, then gently lowered him into the chair. All the blankets were tucked around him again, and the foot pegs were snapped in place. Steve sent a text to Mike that he was pulling up to the ER entrance, so the team wheeled Jared out into the hall. A nurse stopped them with a bag of medication. A second nurse handed Jensen the crutches, explaining, “They’re the tallest ones we’ve got.” She patted Jared on the shoulder, “You take it easy.” Jared thanked her. He was still feeling the sluggish effects of that painkiller, plus his lips were a little numb from when they stitched him up. Everything seemed muffled. He prayed he was responding to people appropriately because right now, he didn’t feel that coherent.

When they wheeled him out front, Jared immediately shivered from the icy Denver air. It was only about four thirty in the afternoon but this time of year brought icy evenings with threats of snow. Jensen knew, as did his counterparts, that they needed to get the kid home with a huge fire blazing, as soon as possible. Jared was going to be much worse in about twelve hours...the bruising at it’s peak tomorrow and the next day. Getting food, fluids and medication into him was a priority. The
soldiers lifted Jared into the dual truck, much like they had done for the wheelchair. Jensen sat in the front passenger seat with Steve. Jared sat in back, sandwiched by Dave and Mike. He was right in the direct path of Steve’s blazing heater. The drive back was under twenty five minutes but Jared’s position of security between his two big brothers, the heat and the silence in the car threatened to put him to sleep. When Jensen looked back to check on him, he smiled at the heavily blinking lids struggling to stay open. Jensen turned toward the road to answer a call from Price.

After a brief conversation, he hung up and filled the others in. The recording was usable evidence. They found a slew of other crimes and aliases under Tom’s name. Dave asked quietly, since Jared seemed to be zoning out and unaware, “Does he have to testify?” Jensen sighed, “Maybe, but Price is arranging an ‘if’ scenario. He’s using the video from today with the Grand Jury testimony. He’ll need to add Jared’s account of the kidnapping to layer another sentence, but he’s going to handle it all without him. If they insist he has to go in, he’ll arrange private testimony with no one but attorneys and the judge. The security detail will stay until he’s comfortable with things.” Neither Dave nor Mike commented, but Jensen knew damn well the AG security didn’t matter to them. Jared belonged to ‘them’. They weren’t relying on another soul, at this point. When they got to the restaurant parking lot, Steve pulled very close to Jensen’s truck. He turned to him, “Jensen, why don’t you drive your truck back and I’ll follow with these three? Then you don’t have to move the poor kid?” Jensen asked, “You sure you don’t mind?” Steve made a stuttered sound of disbelief, “You kidding?” He turned to look at Jared, “Look at him. Who wants to move him if they don’t have to?” Jensen looked at his lover again. The adorable victim was sound asleep, his mouth hanging partially open, pain free peace showing on his face. He was propped up between two firm bookends on either side, ensconced with layers of blankets. Jensen had to smile at the sight, “I see what you mean.” He slapped Steve affectionately on the shoulder, “See you in a few,” then exited the truck.

Once they reached the house, Jensen parked on the side of the driveway so Steve could park closest to Jensen’s walkway. He trotted up to unlock the door, turned on a few lights, then headed back to Steve’s truck. Mike held onto Jared while Dave got out first. They gently lowered Jared to lay in the seat, then pulled him out like they had done earlier. Jensen helped them carry Jared into the house, then laid him on the couch. Mike went to work on the fire while Jensen straightened out the layers of blankets over the sleeping man. They shook hands with Steve and thanked him. Dave locked up the house after the man left. He threw together a crock pot of stew with some of the biscuits they all loved, hoping Jared would be able to get some of it down.

As the men gathered by the fireplace, Mike handed them each a beer, “I’ll take mine first, just let me drink off my fuckin’ anxiety for a minute.” The others nodded. They clinked bottles then swallowed several gulps. Dave piped in, “I’ll go after you.” Jensen nodded, “I’ll go last.” He stared at Jared for a moment. The silence might have been deafening to anyone else, but the screaming protective rage in their minds hadn’t dissipated. This was something they would have to deal with. The assignment to keep one civilian safe today had almost gone to shit. It ‘had’ gone to shit for about an hour and a half. Jared could have been killed before they’d reached him. He could have bled out in the car before they’d taken down that shooter. Each man had to deal with the aftermath of their own inability to keep someone they cared about out of harm’s way.

Jensen finally turned to his friends. He snickered mockingly, “Well, we’re quite a bunch.” Mike snorted, “Ain’t that the truth.” Dave said, “This isn’t something we’re used to.” Jensen sipped his beer, “No...no, it sure the fuck isn’t.” Mike snorted again, “Guess this is what it’s like to actually ‘like’ someone you’re rescuing...someone you care about.” Everyone quietly processed that. Dave finally looked at Mike, “You know we’re gonna piss him off, right?” When Mike looked confused, Dave added, “While we work through this. We’re gonna piss him off if we hover.” Jensen smirked.
at the exchange. His former team mates were actually kind of cute, realizing their natural tendency was going to be to mother hen the Hell out of Jared. Jensen cleared his throat, “Well,” he rubbed his face and his short hairs, “I think some part of him will understand...as long as it doesn’t go on ‘too’ long.” He smirked again when his friends sighed heavily. They were going to have to hold themselves back, or Jared would probably wind up throttling them both. Jensen admitted, “It’s okay. I’ll be worse. If he’s gonna get pissed, it’ll probably be at me first.” Dave and Mike thought for a moment, realizing Jensen was probably right. He was in love with the man on the couch and it had to be eating at him even deeper than it was at them.

“So,” Mike started, “entertain us with what happened in the woods.” Jensen relayed his experience with satisfying details. “I’d still like to line them all up and have a go at ‘em...just line ‘em up, you know?” Dave nodded, “I do know.” Mike added, “Me too. If there was a legal way, put them all in a dark room for me, they wouldn’t be walking out.” He continued, “So, we’ve got the news going crazy, then a trial, unless they plead, then this is over, for good. Overall, it’s a successful mission...with a couple horrifying bumps along the way, but still successful.” The three ex-soldiers clicked beer bottles together, still highly perturbed at the ‘bumps’ Mike had referred to. The subject of said bumps stirred on the couch. His painful moans had the three men instantly helping him to sit up. Jared woke slowly. His body felt like he’d been run over. He blinked his eyes open and forced himself to focus on the three concerned faces staring at him. “How do you feel?” Jensen asked. Jared yawned with a painful wince, “Like shit.” He dropped his head back on the couch with a grumble, “So much for the great workout plans.” Jared’s three protectors shared a grin, glad to have their genius firing on at least a few good cylinders. Jensen tried to say something positive, “Hey, just enjoy your personal maids and cooks for awhile, okay? Dave’s got his laced up maid outfit...Mike his reindeer apron...and we’re all at your beck and call. Enjoy it while it lasts and before Mike cons you into remodeling his house.” Jared seemed to catch most of that banter, but he was still a little sluggish. The last part caught his attention and he looked at Mike, “Remodel?”

Mike groaned and looked at Jensen, “Nice job, Ackles. What did you say that for?” Jensen held up his hand innocently, “I know, I’m sorry. I was just looking for that spark we know and love.” Jared looked between them, wondering what the fuck they were talking about. “I’m starving, is there any food?” Jensen smiled, “Yep,” and went to prepare a bowl for him, while Mike and Dave took turns taking their showers. “You build that?” Jared indicated the fire while sitting with Mike. The ex-soldier responded proudly, “Yep. It’s a doozy, isn’t it?” Jared nodded, “Mmhmm, s’really nice.” Mike asked concerned, “You hurting right now? We’ve got pain pills for you.” Jared thought about it while the veteran felt his forehead for fever. “Everything hurts, but not if I stay still. It was really just the damn wrists that hurt bad. They were burning.”

Mike explained, “Jensen had to be careful getting that shitty wire off you. Fucker wrapped it too tight and it was embedded.” Mike stared at Jared for a few seconds, then added, “I’m so damn sorry Jared.” The younger man looked innocently at Mike, “Sorry for what? You saved me. You saved my life.” Mike sighed, “You never should have had to go through that. We all feel the same way. We’re pissed at ourselves for letting them get to you.” Jared studied him for a few seconds, then argued, “Well you all need to stop that. You saved my life, and I’m still here because of you. Just knock it off and accept my gratitude, will you?” Mike considered himself lectured and decided to shut the hell up, for now. He smiled at the spunk that came to the surface, even after the trauma Jared had just been through. He nodded to Jared, just as Jensen walked in with a tray of warm stew and rolls with melted butter. Jensen made sure the stew wasn’t hot, so it didn’t burn Jared’s tender mouth. He placed the tray in front of Jared on the coffee table, complete with a large glass of Sprite. “God, that looks good, thank you,” the engineer blurted out, attempting to smile at Jensen until one side of his mouth stopped him.

Jared started to lean forward, but the painful bruises to his gut stopped him and he cried out. Mike slipped his hands quickly around Jared from the side, Jensen from the front. As Jared was calming
his breathing, Jensen reminded him, “Let us lift and pull you. Don’t try that again, okay?” Jared nodded, “Yes, not again, definitely,” he agreed, now knowing full well how much it hurt to do that. Jensen warned him softly, “It’s gonna get worse before it gets better, Jare, so you have to remember not to move suddenly for a few days, okay?” Jared nodded, more upset at the thought that he was going to be immobile again than he was at the pain. The two special ops experts pulled him into a sitting up position, sliding him toward the coffee table. As Jared adjusted to the new position and relaxed, Jensen and Mike carefully let him go. Jensen helped him stretch out his injured leg under the table, then inched the tray closer so Jared could reach the food. Jared seemed to completely forget about his injuries while he focused on his dinner. He had to take very small bites of the roll and stew, since he couldn’t open his mouth too far. As it was, he could feel the tender cuts and bruises straining against the few stitches he had. Jared couldn’t understand why ‘anyone’ would undertake prize fighting or boxing for a living, if this was what they went through on a regular basis.

Mike and Jensen retrieved their own meals, one at a time, enjoying the same stew at a hotter temperature. They agreed with Jared on how delicious it was. Dave came out to join them with his own plate. Jensen answered some of Jared’s questions about what was going to happen with the case. Jensen filled him in on what Price told him. They discussed the continued need for security, but agreed that it was good the hitman and Tom were now in custody. Jared didn’t focus on the bad guys. He asked no questions about them. No one brought up the specifics about what transpired between when Jared ran, and when they rescued him, either. The veterans waited for Jared to lead the conversation. Jared was grateful. He still felt raw about almost getting killed. He had already cried like an infant in Jensen’s arms and he really was done with that kind of thing. The hitman’s treatment, the threats were very real in his mind. Jared could still feel the killer’s hands on him. ‘Tom,’ his inner voice reminded him, ‘Tom hired him.’ Jared really thought he was going to die when he kicked that car door open. He picked up his Sprite and sipped it, after being on pause for a good minute. He had been lost in thought, and completely unaware of being watched by three sets of knowing eyes. When he started drinking his soda, the pairs of eyes glanced between one another. The warriors were highly experienced with this kind of thing. Jensen was prepared for Jared to have trouble sleeping for a while. He knew this kid very well. Even when Jared might seem chipper and back to normal on the surface, intense trauma like this didn’t just go away. Jared would try and quash it, push himself...avoid bringing it out in the open, but it was going to haunt him for awhile. Jensen was ready for that. They all would be.

When their meals were finished, Jensen took everything to the kitchen and left it in the sink. He came back to the living room and added more wood to the fire. Jared seemed relaxed for the moment. Jensen hated to ruin it but he needed to get Jared through a breathing treatment before the kid conked out. He started to unpack the machine when the engineer blurted out a disgusted, “Blech.” Dave offered to do the dishes, then left with Mike following him. They realized Jared didn’t need everyone staring at him while he struggled to get through the hated procedure. Jensen held out the mask for Jared to take. The engineer hesitated. He tried to find his nerves of steel that he usually reserved for times like this but he felt so empty. When Jensen saw the fear in Jared’s eyes that maybe he wasn’t going to be able to do this, he put the mask back on the machine and waited patiently. Jensen sat next to Jared and rubbed his back, offering silent comfort. Jensen knew controlling emotions wasn’t going to come easy right now. When Jared finally picked up the mask, on his own, Jensen turned the machine back on and started the medication. They got through the procedure with Jared completely leading the way. He still had a couple hiccups on the first breath, but the rest went well.

When they finished, Jensen silently put the machine back. He kept glancing at Jared for clues. Jensen wanted to make sure Jared felt in charge this evening, like there was nothing he didn’t get to decide for himself. He gently asked if Jared felt like taking his medication. Jared nodded, then stopped Jensen before he stood up, “But nothing that makes me sleepy, okay? Please, I’m not ready to sleep yet.” Jared said that a little bit defensive, like he was testing the waters out to see if Jensen would
force the issue. Jensen looked into his eyes, “You don’t have to sleep if you don’t want to. In fact, you don’t have to do anything you don’t want to, alright? I think you’ve had enough of being forced today and it’s not gonna happen here.” Jared looked at him with loving gratitude, “Thank you.” Jensen saw raw emotion coming from Jared’s beautiful hazel grey orbs. They were haunted with turmoil and deep emotions tonight. They were also filled with a bit of shock, perhaps from trying to process that it was over and he was safe. He kissed his forehead, then touched his cheek lightly, “I love you...and you feeling better is my top priority, young paddiwan.” Jared grinned softly at the nickname. Jensen couldn’t see the dimples right now, because his lover’s mouth was too sore to smile that wide. Jared rubbed his good cheek into Jensen’s palm, “I love you too...more than I ever thought possible. Thank you for saving my life today.” Jared rolled his eyes, “again.” Jensen grinned affectionately at Jared’s spunky side, trying to valiantly make an appearance after today. He kissed him very soft on his sore lips, “You don’t need to thank anybody, baby. You’re worth any effort, no matter how great...and you certainly didn’t deserve that today. You don’t deserve any of this shit that’s happened to you. The other people in this house and I would take on any army to get you back.”

Jared looked down for a second to avoid the intensity in Jensen’s piercing gaze. When he looked up, he realized Jensen was assessing him...studying and watching everything. “What?” Jared asked softly with a smirk, wondering what the hell Jensen was on about. The older man answered, “I’m proud of you, you know.” Jared looked at him in disbelief, so Jensen argued his point, “No, today was terrifying, but you fought and you kicked that guy in the face...and then you even kicked that door open. You’re amazing Jare, and even under that kind of duress, you kept fighting.” He smoothed the younger man’s hair back, waiting to see what Jared thought of ‘that’ one. Jared glanced at the kitchen, responding to the sounds of the two men talking at the sink. He didn’t seem to be able to look Jensen in the eye. Jared really hadn’t wanted to go here, but he couldn’t seem to step back from it now that Jensen had said that. A few tears were pooling in Jared’s eyes and he refused to look up, just yet. Jensen sat down next to him again and watched him closely until Jared spoke, “I wasn’t brave. I was afraid. I thought I was going to die and,” Jared shrugged his shoulder. Jensen laid his hand on Jared’s back and waited patiently. Jared wiped away a few tears, angrily, then finally looked at Jensen, “I thought I was going to be killed if I got in that car...and I didn’t want to just make it easy for him. I didn’t want you to think I would just ‘lay’ there and,” Jared looked down at his hands.

Jensen had to control his own waterworks threatening to make an appearance. He glanced quickly at the two men who had come around the corner, but the look in his eyes had them instantly turning around and going back in the kitchen. This was an important moment for Jared’s recovery. It needed to be uninterrupted. Jensen knew they could probably hear Jared from the kitchen, or at least some of it. Jared finally continued, “So...don’t be too proud, cuz I was pretty terrified.” He wiped his eyes again and looked at Jensen, “And that door was just my last resort. I didn’t knock anybody off balance on purpose. It took me that long just to work the stupid handle with my foot.” Jensen grinned, “It was still a nice move, Sparky. Chuck Norris would have been impressed.” Jared snickered once, appreciating Jensen’s attempt at calming him. He pulled his sore lip a little, so he quickly corrected his threatening smile. He continued while looking down, “I could hear them talking about you...bitching about you following us...not giving up. They called you three mother fucking military something or other and I knew it was you.” Jared wiped his face, “It was nice to know they were afraid of you.” Jared closed his eyes and sighed, “And that you were that close.”

Jensen hadn’t realized this. He thought Jared had most likely been pretty out of it from that blow to the head. Jared continued, “When I knew you were coming, I knew I needed to try...I couldn’t move, except for my feet. That’s all I had to use. When I felt the give of the handle, I knew I was going to have to jump out. If I died, it wasn’t gonna be wherever they were taking me. It would have to be right there.” Jared released an emotional sigh, “I wasn’t sure if you would make it...and I was
so sorry to think...to think that you were trying that hard and I had to at least try. I’m sorry...I’m sorry I was afraid and I almost let them,” Jensen placed his hand on Jared’s cheek, “Jare,” the older man could see that Jared was becoming too upset. It was good for him to share, but this he needed to stop. “Jare,” he repeated. Jared spasmed, trying to control his emotional overload that was threatening to break free. “Jare, look at me,” Jensen pulled the kid’s face toward him. “Hey,” Jensen soothed when Jared looked at him, “you stay with me, alright?” He brushed the hair back from Jared’s badly bruised face. Even injured like this, Jared was absolutely beautiful...every single part of the man was exquisite. Jensen spoke softly, “I want you to understand that everyone gets scared...everyone fears things...but what you’ve been through, last month and everything since...the things that have happened to you are terrifying things. They never quite go away completely...and when they are happening, sometimes our instincts kick in. Our instincts tell us to fight, flee or go into denial. What you’ve done, baby...what you’ve done every time is a fight response. You’re a fighter, Jare...a survivor. That isn’t anything to be ashamed of...it’s definitely something to be proud of for. You kicked ass today, and the fact that you were damned terrified just makes it even more so.”

When Jared looked like he didn’t quite agree, Jensen reiterated, “Hey,” he held Jared’s chin between his thumb and fingers, “You did better than good. If you hadn’t fought and given him a hard time getting into that car, we might have been seconds too late. As it was, that damn car was just pulling away when we got there. So, next time you wanna berate yourself for being afraid, I’ll be reminding you of what you accomplished ‘while’ you were afraid.” When Jensen let Jared’s face go, the younger man looked down in thought. Jensen continued, “And just so you know, it scared the Hell out of my special ops ass when I found that damn phone you dropped. The whole time we ran after you, every one of us was terrified for you. Don’t think I wasn’t panicking inside when I saw you being shoved into that second car, knowing I might not get there. Jesus, I don’t even wanna think about it,” Jensen admitted. After a minute, Jensen shook his head and looked at Jared again, “And seeing you hurt like this, and my not being able to stop it?” Jared looked up at him, hearing an emotional hitch in Jensen’s voice. The older man shook his head and swiped at his eyes, “Well, let’s just say it’s not a picnic, okay?” Jared watched Jensen with wonder in his expression and then concern. He hadn’t realized how scared Jensen had been, or how it would have felt to be the protector in all this and have your protegee almost taken away and killed. Jensen’s team probably felt like they’d failed him, which was ‘NOT’ true. What Mike said earlier was just the surface, Jared realized. Jensen was in love with him, and Jared couldn’t imagine the blame he was putting on himself.

Jared realized this horrible traumatic ordeal that happened to ‘him’ had actually happened to ‘all’ of them. He would have to remember that. As he took a few seconds to take Jensen’s hand in his, he spotted the slight cuts and red marks on Jensen’s knuckles. Jared smoothed over them tenderly, deeply touched by the determination from this man to save him. Jared looked up into Jensen’s eyes, just as they heard footsteps and shuffling going into the spare room. Jensen turned and yelled out, “You two puttin’ your Barbie jammies on?” Jared laughed, then grabbed his lip in pain, “Uh.” Jensen made a sympathetic sound and rubbed his hair, “I’m sorry.” He looked into Jared’s mouth at the raw and abused lips and gums, “Let me get some ice, okay? It’ll help.” Jared nodded, thinking anything to reduce the burning and throbbing would be welcomed. Mike came into the room first, “Hey kid.” He sat down on the other piece of the sectional as Jared greeted him. Mike wore a pin striped pair of pajama bottoms and a thin white t-shirt with a Marine’s hoodie over it. Mike instantly noticed Jared’s pain, “What’s wrong?” Jared responded without lifting his head up or using his lip too much, “Jensen made me laugh, it just hurts.” Mike snorted, as Jensen returned with ice, “What an asshole.” Jensen ignored the comment and went right to Jared. He gently placed the ice bag on the painful side of Jared’s mouth. “Nngggnn,” Jared’s moan of relief was telling. The ice felt good.

“What are you making the kid laugh for, numnuts?” Mike’s question was priceless timing. Jensen sighed, “I was trying to cheer him up. The thought of you in pajamas was making him nauseous.”
Jared shook his head and tried to argue with muffled speech, “Thas not twue, Mike.” Jensen grinned, pleased that his lover was trying to banter with him. “Hey Jared,” Mike started in, “you think ‘my’ jammies are dumb, you should see Dave’s...little soldiers and tanks on ‘em.” Jared tried helplessly to keep himself from grinning at the visual, “Thtop,” he ordered but Mike wouldn’t stop, “I’m serious...he’s got little tanks and camo dudes and little grenades and fox holes. Like a bunch of little Lego soldiers all over his pants. I have to share a room with that shit, you know.” Jensen winced in frustration, trying to laugh without stretching his lip. His badly bruised diaphragm muscle hurt like hell. Jensen smoothed his hair back, “I’m sorry, love. He’s got nowhere else to go so we have to keep him now.” Jared whined, now Jensen was doing it.

Dave came back to see Jared suffering and barked at them all, “What the fuck? Why is he hurting?” Jared managed to glance over at Dave and instantly his mind cried, ‘No’, as he saw what Dave was wearing. ‘No,’ Jared’s mind cried again, as Jensen’s expression turned to worried panic when he saw Dave’s outfit. The taller man was in a white t-shirt and sweatshirt, but he also wore a pair of dark green pajama bottoms with little army soldiers, tanks and grenades. Jared’s attempt not to laugh failed, as he immediately curled in on himself away from Dave. Mike had been telling the truth. The older man looked confused, as hell, which made it even funnier. Mike barreled out laughing, but Jensen tried desperately to help Jared before he hurt too badly. He put a pillow against the kid’s stomach to keep the bruised area cushioned, while Jared struggled. Jared was completely miserable, laughing in between painful moans. Dave asked, “What,” which just made him laugh more. Jensen struggled not to giggle at the whole situation but failed. Poor Jared.

Mike pointed to Dave’s pajama bottoms. Dave looked irritated, “These? I’ve had these for years, who cares?” Mike said, “Well, I’m sorry, but Jared thinks they’re funny.” Dave sighed, “Well, they were the only damn things they had at that base in Cairo. My other ones ripped.” Jensen snickered at Jared’s renewed fit of painful giggles. He turned to Dave, “Would you please stop trying to kill the kid? Shut the fuck up, you pricks...and one of you go get the heating pad and nuke it...the other go grab all his meds.” Jensen turned back to his suffering lover and kept rubbing his hair as he held the ice pack. Jared was finally able to recover by the time the other two men returned with the items. He lay completely spent, slightly on his side, still favoring his sore midriff. Mike set a glass of apple juice down with two canisters of pills. Dave got down on his knees in front of the couch with the heated pad. Jensen lifted Jared’s folded arms away from his gut while Mike lifted his shirt. Jensen reassured him, “You’re gonna feel a warm pad on your stomach, okay? It’ll help loosen up that tight diaphragm.”

Dave gently placed the heated pad on Jared’s stomach. Jared’s moan of ecstasy let them know it was working. The men watched some of the pain lines disappear from Jared’s face. Mike carefully returned the pillow to Jared’s stomach, firmly pushing against the heating pad. Jensen let Jared’s arms lay back against his stomach again. He brushed the hair off his forehead. “Can we sit you up so you can take your pills?” Jared nodded, then stayed lax as they lifted him into a sitting up position again. He moaned, miserably, as his sore body adjusted. “God,” he bitched. Mike held out the pills and apple juice. After Jared swallowed the medication, he drank almost the whole glass of sweet liquid before he stopped to catch his breath, “That’s good.” Jensen asked him, “Do you want more?” Jared shook his head, drank the rest of the glass and held it out, “Thank you.” Mike took the glass, as Jensen and Dave gently laid Jared back against the couch. The engineer sighed in peace, as his sore body adjusted to the new position and the pain started to lessen. After Jensen surrounded him with the two blankets, Jared felt himself drifting. He was barely aware, but still able to hear the low hum of voices. It lulled him in and out of a light doze. Jensen was right next to him, the others very close by. He didn’t pay attention to the words, he simply absorbed the feelings of safety, the warm fire and the cozy feeling of being part of something permanent.

“I hate to say this...especially in front of this dickwad,” Dave announced, nodding at Mike, “but I’m gonna have to pop some Motrin, myself.” Mike nodded, “Me too, but I wasn’t gonna admit it until
you did.” Jensen smiled at his friends, as Dave forced himself up, painfully, to go get his own stash of the pills. When he returned, he handed everyone a dose, including Jensen. “You should be the worst,” Mike stated, looking at his former team leader. Jensen shrugged a shoulder, as he took the pills, “Well, it seemed okay for awhile, but sitting here comin’ down, it’s becoming very apparent that my ass is ‘not’ twenty five anymore. Jesus.” Jensen sipped his remaining warm beer. It had been a long day. The three ex-soldiers decided to turn the t.v on very low. They chose an old western to watch for awhile, glancing at Jared off and on. The younger man was still in his upright position, but turned slightly to the right and hugging the pillow. His legs were curled in a bit, his face peacefully lax. Jensen would like to get him into some comfortable sweats but having him this calm and pain free wasn’t something he wanted to mess with right now. The warriors zoned in their own worlds for awhile, until Jensen heard snoring. He grinned at the sight of his friends sprawled out and sound asleep. Dave was in the big lazy back chair, completely unfolded and comfortable, as Hell. Mike was laying curled up on the other end of the couch.

Jensen stared at the beautiful lax face, the darkening horrific bruises on the right side. He got up and added enough wood to the fire so it would last longer, then returned to slide his arms around Jared and lower him onto his side. He lifted the engineer’s legs very gently and put them on the couch, then adjusted the blankets over him. He pulled a soft pillow from the end of the couch and slid it under Jared’s head without waking him. Jensen felt the younger man’s forehead, glad it was only slightly warm to the touch. He figured ‘what the hell,’ everyone was exhausted, so a team slumber party was definitely in order. He slid himself under the blankets with Jared, secured his arm around the younger man’s waist and rested his head on the same pillow. Jensen would be right here, able to deal with any nightmares quickly, not to mention the ugly soreness that was going to be worse for Jared by morning.
Chapter Summary

This chapter is considerably long compared to the others. Jared’s recovery finally happens and the nasty case finally comes to a conclusion. The three protectors have to learn to ease off a bit, as the engineer plans to get his life back. The holidays are coming and everyone plans some happy events. Dani and Steve get a great gift from Jared and his new lover and brothers. There is sex. Jensen bottoms for his first time ever!

There is some fearful separation anxiety when Jared takes a two day trip to take care of some business, and a lovely sweet conclusion that hopefully warms the reader’s heart.

I have become attached to these characters and think a sequel would be great fun. I have some ideas and will get on it.

FINAL CHAPTER - THIRTY ONE

Jared made it until midnight before his subconscious ran away with him. The blankets had fallen down to his waist, for one, and he was pushing against Jensen’s chest like he was trying to get away. Jensen pulled the blankets back up and rubbed the younger man’s back. Within a few minutes, Jared started to calm. Jensen wanted to follow Jared back into sleep but the fact that the kid was still cold bothered him. He started to ease back out of the blanket when a hand touched him on his shoulder. “Stay. I’m on it,” Dave whispered, then went over to build back up the fire. Jensen laid back down, grateful he didn’t have to move. Jensen let himself fall back asleep. The next time he woke, he had to pee. He carefully backed out of the blankets, stood up and stretched, then checked his watch. It was close to five a.m. and still dark outside. Jared was sleeping soundly, but the chill in the air was back, due to the fire burning low again. Dave and Mike were still out, so Jensen took a minute to throw some extra wood in the fireplace. As he headed for the restroom, Dave roused, “What’s up?” Jensen glanced back at his lover, “Only one nightmare, so far. He’s sleeping a lot better than I expected.” Dave nodded, “Good, shower?” Jensen answered, “I was just going to the bathroom, but if you can keep an eye I’ll get my shower, yeah.”

Mike grumbled from the other end of the couch, “What the fuck time is it?” Jensen and Dave grinned. “It’s five,” Jensen said. “Jesus fuck,” Mike bitched, forcing himself into a sitting position, “Why didn’t somebody wake me?” He rubbed his face and ran his hands through his hair. Jensen argued, “Because, dumb ass, we just woke up, ourselves.” Dave chuckled, “I guess we’re a bunch of old farts.” Jensen patted him on the shoulder, “That, or we’re just catching up from years of ‘no’ sleep.” Dave nodded, “Mmm, that could be.” Mike nodded at Jensen, “Get your shower, dude, we’ve got him.” Jensen gave in, “Okay, back in fifteen,” then left the room. Dave yawned, “I’m gonna start some coffee, You still sore?” Mike yawned before answering with a nod, “Yeah, I’m sore as fuck.” He looked at Jared, “I can imagine how he’s gonna feel.” Dave went to the kitchen and put together a strong pot of coffee, then rummaged through the refrigerator and freezer to consider what they would make for breakfast. He called to Mike, “Hey, if he wants coffee, we’ll just give him his fix lukewarm.” Mike answered, “Sweet.” He moved over to sit on the end of the couch near Jared’s head, just to keep a closer watch.

The fire felt wonderful. Mike put his head back and relaxed with his stockinged feet on the coffee
He let the quietness and warmth lull him into a light doze. Dave returned and poked around in the fire for a few minutes. He went to sit on the shorter end of the sectional and put his own feet on the table. Both men relaxed in silence until Jared stirred. Mike noticed his distress right away and got on his knees in front of the younger man. “Hey, buddy, wake up,” he put his hand on Jared’s shoulder, “Jared, buddy, wake up.” Jared had people coming at him. Robert, Tom, and Daniel were wrapping him in thick wire from his neck to his toes and Tom’s voice kept taunting him, “You’re on video, Jared. You gonna scream for me, now?” Daniel and Robert were laughing as the wire cut through his skin and he was tousled around like a rag doll. Tom was undressing. Jared knew he had no way to get out of this. ‘No,’ he cried, knowing there was pain coming, more humiliation. He was trapped.

Jared started weakly sobbing and pushing against some unforeseen force only he could see. His condition was escalating. Mike looked at Dave, who joined Mike in putting arms around Jared’s torso to lift him. They were as gentle as possible. Jared’s head lobbed enough to startle him awake, but he was emotional and confused, at first. Dave spoke to him, “It’s okay Jared, it’s us. You’re okay, it was just a dream, buddy.” Jared’s hands clenched Mike’s shirt, the closest solid thing he could grasp to ground himself. Mike continued to soothe him, “We’re right here, big guy, you’re alright.” Jared glanced around the room, not quite ready to look at anyone yet. He wiped the moisture from his eyes and sighed deeply. Mike asked, “You with us now?” Jared nodded, still looking down. He looked utterly devastated. They guessed their young friend was probably beating himself up for doing this in front of them, but in reality they both had done it, themselves, and it wasn’t anything to be embarrassed about. Just then, Jensen returned, his eyes immediately going to Jared. He sat on the coffee table in front of him, touching his knees, “Hey, you okay?” Jared didn’t answer right away, so Jensen looked between Dave and Mike, “Was it bad?” Dave nodded, while Mike answered, “We had to sit him up...it was the only way to break him out of it.” Jensen rubbed his hand up and down one of Jared arms. Jared finally glanced up, looking miserable, “Sorry, it was so real.” He wiped his eyes again, then dropped his hands loosely in his lap and looked down. Mike and Dave eased him back to lean against the back of the couch. It wasn’t necessary for their suffering engineer to apologize, but they knew it would be pointless to tell him to stop. Jared laid his head on the back of the couch and sighed with his eyes closed. Jensen looked at his friends conveying a silent ‘thank you’. Dave quickly announced, “I made coffee, any takers?” The others answered with zest, including the youngest. Dave found himself victimized by the pleading puppy dog eyes. ‘Please don’t say no,’ the eyes begged. With Jared’s battered face, the look was even more pitiful. “Jesus, guy, I’ll get it for you, I’ll just cool it off,” Dave’s brow furrowed. Jensen smiled, “Effective, isn’t it?” Dave shook his head and bitched, “Fuckin’ powerful,” as he went to retrieve everyone’s morning espresso. He hoped Jared wasn’t too disappointed over his lukewarm drink. Dave didn’t think he could take it, if he was.

Jensen asked his lover, “How do you feel?” Jared sputtered, “Like a pile of shit that’s been run over.” Mike looked at Jensen, “That was honest.” He turned to Jared, “Don’t be refusing those pain meds today, my friend...it’s gonna be rough today and maybe tomorrow too.” Jensen and Mike waited for Jared to respond. He seemed to think it over, then started to move his upper torso, but quickly gave up with a miserable cry, “Fuck...here we go again where I just sit around and do ‘nothing’...fucking hate this.” Mike looked at Jensen, “More honesty,” then back to Jared, “At least he’s not holding back.” Jared shot disgusted look at both of them. “No, he’s not,” Jensen grinned. His lover was adorable. It didn’t matter if he was pissed, sad, hurting, happy, or whatever...even with the ugly bruising that was coming in horribly dark on the kid’s face, he was absolutely cute and charming... ‘and alive,’ Jensen added that thought. Mike stood up as Dave returned. He accepted the steaming cup and took a sip, “Mmmm...will you marry me?” Dave spit out, “You’re too short, fucker,” then handed Jensen his cup. “Thanks,” Jensen took his coffee, sipped the hot liquid and
hummed appreciatively while Dave handed Jared his mug.

The younger man’s eyes lit up, “God, yes,” but dimmed a bit at Dave’s warning, “I had to tone it
down for your sore mouth, sorry in advance.” Jared sipped the lukewarm liquid. He made a partial
gross face, then gave it another shot, “S’strong, thanks.” After a few more sips, Jared’s mouth hurt
too much to keep going. He held the cup out toward the coffee table, knowing damn well he
couldn’t lean forward. Jensen grabbed it and set it down. Jared held his hand against his sore mouth
for a few seconds, then laid his head back and turned toward the fire, miserably. He really felt like
shit today. Jensen figured they were probably all wondering the same thing, ‘How was Jared going
to eat?’ He brushed the hair off the swollen face, “Do you wanna sleep some more?” Jared rolled his
head back to face them. The right side of his face was terribly dark blue and purple now. It was
slightly green up by the cheek bone. All of the veterans cringed, internally, at the mess the hitman
had caused to their favorite genius.

Jared looked between them and noticed they were all staring at him like they were waiting for him to
fall apart or grow horns, one of the two. ‘They’re worried,’ he reminded himself. He actually thought
it was kind of sweet. He could imagine their faces if he said that out loud... ‘especially Mike’. Jared
giggled, then grabbed his gut in pain, “Ow.” Jensen put his hand on Jared’s arm, “What’s so funny?”
Jared confessed, “You’re all damn cute.” Mike balked, looking the most put out, just like Jared had
imagined. Mike looked at Jensen, “Dude, concussion, for sure. I think he needs a re-scan.” Dave
chuckled, as he got up to refill everyone’s coffee, “Jared, you want anymore?” Jared shook his head,
“No thank you.” Jensen sighed. Jared refusing coffee wasn’t good. He asked, “I’m wondering how
we can get some food into you. Are you hungry, at all?” Jared made a sour face. Jensen sighed
again, “I know...your mouth probably hurts like hell. How about you take the Motrin and antibiotic?
It’ll kick in while we get the dreaded breathing treatment over with and maybe you’ll feel up to
something soft. That sound okay?” Jared thought about it too long for Mike’s liking, “I’ve got some
feeding tubes in one of my bags...we can hook up some MRE’s and squeeze ‘em into the tube for
ya’.”

Jensen bitched at Mike, “Really?” The other man said, “What? I’m just trying to get the kid to eat for
you.” Jared shook his head and rolled his eyes, knowing damn well they wouldn’t force a damn
feeding tube down him. Finally, he nodded with a soft “Ok”, willing to give it a shot. He was feeling
hungry, but the bruising in his gut was making him a little nauseous. Dave returned with the coffee
refills while Jensen pulled out pills for Jared and the breathing machine. He went to grab Jared a cup
of chocolate milk to drink with his meds. On his way back, Jensen heard Dave bitching, “I don’t
think he thinks you’re cute anymore, idiot.” Mike whined, “I really wanted to try that tube
out...we’ve never done that in the field.” Jensen shook his head, barely grinning. He was truly starting
to feel like a little brother. As he sipped his milk and took his pills, Dave asked, “Jared, what do you
think about scrambled eggs with a little cheese?” The younger man nodded so Dave grabbed Mike’s
sleeve and dragged him into the kitchen. When Dave and Mike returned fifteen minutes later, Jensen
was zipping the bag closed on the breathing machine. Jared was laying against the back of the couch,
looking quite listless and zoned out. He had faced the breathing treatment like a trooper, but felt even
worse than he had before. It seemed like the pain reliever was taking it’s sweet time.

Dave handed Jared a bowl of loosely scrambled eggs and melted cheese. Jared smiled up at him, as
well as his face could manage, “Thank you.” Jensen and Dave slipped their arms behind him and
pulled him into a more upright position. Jared waited a couple minutes for his sore body to settle,
then partook in his breakfast. Everyone noticed the sluggishness in the younger man, but didn’t voice
anything in front of him. Dave commented to Jensen, “We brought a glass of water. He’s gonna be
dry from the fire and meds.” Jared focused on chewing small pieces of the soft eggs, while his lover
nodded his agreement at Dave. The rest of the men ate their own meals and tried not to noticeably
stare at their charge. As Jared ate, he realized he was starting to feel better. Maybe the food was
doing the trick, or his meds were kicking in. He took awhile to finish his bowl, taking small bites and
only chewing on the left side. Everyone else finished their meals long ago, but no one said anything while Jared struggled to eat his own. Once he was done, Jared reached for the table, meaning to set the bowl down, but Mike grabbed it for him. Jensen asked, “You thirsty?” Jared nodded, “Yeah.” He drank all the water Jensen handed him, then gave the glass back. Jensen rubbed his back while Jared melted into the touch. It was good to be alive, and to be here with these men. He looked surprised when Jensen wrap a blanket loosely around his shoulders. The older man looked at him closely, “You’re shivering, are you cold?” Jared shrugged, “Not really,” but didn’t sound that convincing. Mike speculated, “Maybe his bp is still low.” Jensen and Dave agreed, watching their charge with concern. Jared wondered if they were all going to stare at him when he peed too. After a few minutes, Jared realized he definitely felt more spunky. The soreness was dissipating too. He looked between them, “Do you think I could take a shower? Get rid of these disgusting clothes?” His question got all of their attention. Jensen considered it, “You’ve got wrists, a cheek and a leg that can’t get wet. That’s gonna be tricky but I don’t see why we can’t manage it.” Mike offered, “Why don’t we get him to the shower for you...take the shit clothes away. You can take it after that, so he doesn’t have to deal with us hovering.” Jared looked hopeful. Jensen said, “Okay, I just want to be careful. No sudden moves, alright?” Jared rebutted in disbelief, “I can guarantee there won’t be any sudden moves from me.” Jensen grinned, along with the other men.

They got Jared up as a united force, then carried him in a chair carry. He was put down in the bathroom to hold the shower frame while Dave and Mike pulled the cut open dirty jeans off. Jared balked, “Yuck, can you just throw ‘em out?” Dave responded, “No problem.” Mike pulled the two shirts off, forcing himself not to stare at the horrible bruising. The last thing Jared needed was them gawking at him. Jensen stacked towels and clean clothing for Jared on a stool. Dave grabbed plastic and tape from the hall closet. Jensen nodded, “Sweet, that’ll work,” as he knelt to get Jared’s socks off. Mike took all the dirty clothing out while Jensen stripped to his boxers. Dave and Jensen covered Jared’s wrists with plastic and secured them, then covered the leg wound. They lowered him onto the bench inside the shower before Dave stepped out. Jensen tried not to stare at the horrid fist shaped bruise on Jared’s stomach. It pissed him off too much. He started the shower to warm it up, then leaned over Jared, “Push up with your good leg and I’ll slip off your underwear, okay?” Jared smirked coyly. Jensen kissed him on his uninjured cheek, “I’m not molesting you in this state, so don’t start. You know I can’t resist you.” Jensen pulled off his own underwear and threw it over the shower door. He helped Jared out of his, shaking his head at the beautiful pout. He figured Jared’s Motrin must working well for him to have this much spunk.

Jared glanced at the beautiful cock in front of him, but sighed. Jensen leaned over again, “Just because your mouth’s broken doesn’t mean mine is, baby. Don’t worry.” Jared’s pout lessened as the gleam of interest returned. Jensen smiled, as he got the soapy rag ready. After they were done with his body, Jensen washed his lover’s hair while Jared held a dry towel over his cheek. He shut the water off and carefully dried some of Jared’s hair and upper body before he helped the younger man stand. “Let me do the work for that leg, okay? Just lean on me and watch those bad wrists too. I got this.” When Jared nodded, Jensen took him in his arms and backed slowly to allow Jared to step over the shower rim. Jensen supported his weight until he had him standing on the dry mat outside. He dried him the rest of the way while Jared hung onto a nearby countertop. Jensen removed the plastic over Jared’s wrists and leg wound, then patted them dry. Jared only winced slightly. Jensen figured he was trying not to complain but they probably hurt more than he let on. He slipped Jared’s clean underwear on, then a pair of socks, lifting the bad leg for him. He quickly dressed himself in his own clothing, then helped Jared into a pair of sweats and a long sleeve t-shirt. He stood with his hands on the younger man’s hips, “How do you feel?” Jared smiled dreamily, “Clean. Thank you.” Jensen kissed him lightly again, “You’re welcome. Any damn time I get to touch you like this, I’m in.” He smoothed the freshly cleaned hair back from Jared’s face, as Jared looked down with a shy grin.
Jensen asked, “Can we dry this to avoid you running around with a fever?” Jared smiled, “Okay...not that there’s any running going on.”

They hobbled Jared over to face the mirror while Jensen dried his hair. By the time they were finished, the engineer was feeling pretty good. He balked at the ugly bruises on his face. “It’ll heal,” Jensen encouraged. Jared said, “I know...but it’s just like starting all over again, you know?” Jensen kissed the side of his temple, eyeing him in the mirror, “At least it’s the other side this time.” Jared grinned back at Jensen, feeling relaxed...feeling home...at peace. How he could feel so good after being almost killed, Jared had no idea. He turned in Jensen’s arms and kissed him again. He pushed a little too hard and winced, but continued anyway. After enjoying the gentlest kisses with tongues barely touching, Jensen wrapped his arms around him. Jared immediately laid his head on the older man’s shoulder. “Thank you for saving my life,” he mumbled. Jensen closed his eyes and sighed in relief, “I was terrified I wouldn’t get to you in time. Jared, I’ve never felt like that before.” Jensen’s admission tore through Jared’s soul. His eyes teared, though he explicitly ordered them not to. He tightened his arms around the older man’s shoulders. Jensen rubbed his back, concerned, “Are you alright?” Jared smiled, nodding, “Yes. I’m okay.” He wiped his eyes, “I’m just...it’s so good you know? You...everything, it’s just...not what I’m used to yet. Jensen, I just...” He sighed with his eyes closed, “I know it’s not normal...it’s dumb to feel this way, I just...I almost lost you. Lost this. I mean I was trying to be grateful for it, even though it wasn’t long enough. When I thought I was gonna die, I was telling myself to be grateful.”

Jensen kissed the side of Jared’s head, then held his face between his palms, “Hey, yes is normal and very understandable. With all the shit that’s happened to you, baby, and all the times the rug’s been pulled out from under you, it’s a wonder you can even trust anyone again, or anything. And you do trust me...you trust us...and that means everything, love. Everything.” Jensen rubbed his thumbs back and forth on the soft cheeks, “You know I’m not going anywhere right? And it’s obvious I’m not gonna let anyone ‘else’ take you from me, either.” Jared nodded. Jensen moved a few loose stands of hair back and teased him a bit, “Now you might regret that in ten years when I’m wearing glasses and you have to take care of me after a double knee replacement.” Jared guffawed. Jensen smirked, “Then in twenty years when my crinkly balls drop to my ankles, and thirty when I change the tv channel with my pacemaker.” Jared ordered “Stop,” then giggled uncontrollably. He knew what the older man was doing and it was working. He loved this man more than life. Jensen enjoyed the gorgeous view for a few moments before he hugged Jared to him again. He pulled back and kissed his forehead, “Come on. Your abused parts need to be resting on the couch...and watching that beautiful mouth of yours strain those stitches is hurting mine.”

Jensen supported most of Jared’s weight, as they made their way down the hall. Jared bitched about being unable to stand or walk, smile or bend over, and about being totally useless, “once a-fucking-gain”, were his exact words. Jensen actually loved that Jared was bitching, because it meant he was on the mend. When Mike saw them coming, he hurried over to take the opposite side of Jared. They carried the engineer like a chair again, over to the couch. He was deposited like an ancient Pharaoh, which would have been embarrassing if Jared hadn’t been immediately sucked into the fire’s heat like a tractor beam. ‘God,’ it felt so good. Jensen and Mike watched the young genius hum appreciatively and snuggle into the couch. “Well, that was easy,” Mike teased. The veterans spent the next couple hours watching sitcoms. Jensen and Dave changed Jared’s dressing’s without much of a response. Price called and talked to Mike. The hospital called for a follow up. People were concerned about Jared. They their eyes on the engineer for any signs of fever, pain or illness, but so far the kid seemed to be resting peacefully. Jensen sat next to him, his feet up on the coffee table. Jared finally turned to his left and faced him with his eyes closed. The kid’s mouth hung slightly loose, his legs barely bent. Jensen smiled at the picture. This is exactly what Jared needed to do, Jensen just hadn’t expected it to be so easy.

Dave and Mike made sandwiches for lunch. They brought them to the coffee table and stoked up the
fire. Jared wasn’t really coherent enough to eat. He was dozing in and out of sleep while they ate. It was supposed to snow tomorrow after freezing tonight. Jensen was sure they wouldn’t be going anywhere for at least a couple days. Lance stopped by with Jared’s shoes. They’d retrieved them from the scene after a search. It was close to three in the afternoon when Jared finally stirred.

“Are those your shoes?” the sleepy engineer noticed them right away. He rubbed his eyes and yawned, having no idea he was being watched. Jensen was reclined next to him with his legs crossed on the coffee table. He couldn’t help grinning at the adorable display of innocent groggy genius next to him. “How do you feel?” He finally asked. He waited for Jared to rub his eyes and yawn a couple more times before he laid against the back of the couch again and pulled one of the blankets over his shoulder. Jensen thought he was the cutest thing since baby kittens. The younger man snuggled against the puffy couch, blinked heavily for a second, then opened his eyes with a sweet half smile at Jensen, “Hi.”

Jensen giggled helplessly. Jared was too groggy and relaxed to even know he’d been asked a question. Jensen announced, “Dude, ‘major’ and I do mean MAJOR cute overload.” Jared stared at him for a few seconds, blinking, then he seemed to realize Jensen said something, “What?” Jensen shook his head, smiling. He turned on his right side so he could face his adorable young genius, “Is anything hurting?” Jared said innocently, “No,” then he asked, “Am I sleeping too much?” Jensen brushed the unruly hair back from his lover’s face, “No, it’s what you’re supposed to be doing. How’s your mouth feeling?” Jared sighed, “S’alot better now. Everything’s better. Except my stomach, that hurts. It’s tightening up.” Jensen was just thinking he’d go and grab that heating pad when he heard Mike get out of the recliner, “I’ll heat up the pad.” Dave asked, “Jared, are you hungry? We saved some potato salad in the fridge for you, or there’s some rice pilaf...unless you’d like chocolate ice cream.” Jared yawned again, wincing painfully at the pull of his sore mouth. He was too sluggish to deal with anything other than just laying here at the moment, but man that ice cream sounded good. He asked, “Can I have some ice cream, please?” Dave responded, “No problem,” and took off to go get it. Mike returned with the hot pad. He waited for Jensen to lift Jared’s shirt, then laid the pad right over the diaphragm.

“Mmmm,” the feeling was absolute bliss. Jared breathed through the sudden overwhelming peace that the heat was bringing to his painful abdomen. Jensen rubbed his head for awhile. Mike put the blanket back on him and went back to the recliner, pleased he could help the kid. In the next instant, Jared blinked his eyes open and started to adjust his position. He looked around, confused, until he felt people touching him and looked down. “It’s okay, Jared, we’re taking your blood pressure,” Mike greeted him. Jared yawned, then blinked sluggishly, “What time is it?” Mike said, “It’s a little after six.” Jared looked at Mike in disbelief, “Really? How long did I sleep?” Mike answered him, “About three more hours. We’re all proud of you, big guy, you needed it, we’re just a little concerned.” Dave removed a beeping thermometer from Jared’s ear and read the results, “Ninety nine.” He looked at Jared, “When I brought your ice cream back, you were out cold.” Jared looked at the older man, confused, then back down at what Jensen was doing. Jensen pulled the velcro cuff off in silence. He stared concernedly at his lover and sighed, “It’s low. I want you to eat, okay?” When Jared looked pained at that suggestion, Jensen gently pushed, “I know but it’s getting too low and we have to get you to eat something, okay? It’s been about seven hours since you ate something. It’ll help with your energy level too. You wanna try some rice and maybe that ice cream?” Jared knew Jensen was worried about this and it was the look in the older man’s eyes that convinced him he would do whatever Jensen wanted him to. He finally nodded, “Okay, anything’s ok.” It didn’t sound as eager or enthusiastic as they were hoping for, but they would take it. Mike and Dave went to retrieve a makeshift meal for him while Jensen looked closely at his pupils, “You’re due for an antibiotic, love. Do you need any pain meds?” Jared shook his head, “Mm-mm, I don’t need them,” then looked toward Dave, who was walking toward him with two bowls. Mike trailed after the older man with a glass of apple juice. Jared was tired, but his insides perked up when he saw the
apple juice. His stomach growled angrily, too. He realized he really was starving. Jared eagerly drank several sips of the sweet liquid while the other men sat down and tried to look like they weren’t watching him. Jensen handed him the bowl of lukewarm rice first, waiting patiently while Jared ate several bites. It took quite awhile, but damn it was good, and it actually felt good to have something solid in his stomach. After he ate most of the bowl, he downed the rest of the apple juice, along with his antibiotic.

Jensen unzipped the bag for the breathing machine and glanced at Jared to assess his mood. The kid sighed in acceptance when he saw the machine and waited for Jensen to hand him the mask. Jared didn’t hesitate, at all, this time. He had finally mastered enough control over the memory trigger in order to get through this process. They finished the treatment, without any problems, and Jensen put the machine away. Jared cleared his throat, like he usually did after inhaling the foggy medicine, then he laid his head on the back of the couch and turned toward Jensen. The older man grinned,

“Whatcha lookin’ at, buddy?” Jared whined, “I think I’m spoiled.” Jensen looked at him in disbelief, “Huh?” Jared repeated, “You do ‘everything,’ and I just lay here and take it.” Jared waved a hand in the air when he said that last part. Jensen countered, “I think Mike might be onto something, Jare, you do need another head scan.” At Jared’s pissy look, Jensen leaned over to look closer at Jared’s eyes, “Hey...being injured is not being spoiled...and what are you feeling right now?” Jensen held his fingers over Jared’s pulse and mentally counted while he observed him and checked the seconds on his watch. The younger man shrugged his shoulders, then looked perturbed, “I don’t know...can I have ice cream now?”

Jensen wasn’t too unhappy with the kid’s pulse. It wasn’t great, but it wasn’t alarming. He sighed, while watching Jared for a few seconds more, “Of course you can have ice cream. Do you need to go to the bathroom?” Jared shook his head, “No,” which concerned Jensen. “It’s been hours since you’ve gone, so I think you’re a bit dehydrated. The apple juice was great, but I’m getting you some more water, okay?” Jared nodded. Jensen went to the kitchen and brought back water and a bowl of chocolate ice cream. He gave Jared the bowl first and sat next to him. Mike and Dave were in the kitchen putting soft tacos together for their own dinner. When they returned, Mike nodded past Jensen at the engineer, “He okay?” Jensen glanced at Mike, “Yeah...he’s off, but I think he’s just a little dehydrated.”

Jared savored the delicious chocolate treat. He didn’t seem to be having any trouble eating the ice cream at normal speed. Jensen figured the icy cold relief was welcome inside Jared’s swollen gums and cheek. He waited until the kid was finished, then handed Jared the glass of water. Jared sipped it slowly, at first. It was delicious, so he drank it down until the glass was empty. Jensen went and got a second glass, which Jared happily accepted. He hadn’t realized how thirsty he was. The ex-soldiers handed Jensen a plate of taco’s, then ate their dinner while Jared sipped the rest of his water. By the time they finished their own dinner, Jared seemed a tad bit perkier. Jensen took that as a win. He nudged Jared’s arm, “The guys were wondering if you would want to watch some movies with us?” Jared was game so Mike and Dave scrolled through some choices and finally arrived on some old fashioned westerns. After the first one, Jared announced he had to go to the bathroom. He moaned painfully, as Jensen and Dave helped him stand. Mike slid the coffee table out of the way as they lifted him and carried him to the bathroom. As they put him down, Jared asked, “Do you think maybe I can get those measurements at the restaurant this week? Steve needs that counter fixed before Thanksgiving.” Dave sighed as he walked out, shaking his head. Jared looked at Jensen innocently confused, “Did I say something wrong?” Jensen smirked because Jared trying to do things too soon meant he was better, but of course the veterans all understood he was going to push the envelope. He touched the younger man’s cheek, “Baby, you aren’t quite ready for a trip yet, and you really aren’t ready to crawl around and measure at the moment. You know that, right?”

Jared opened his mouth to speak, then looked defeated, “Well yeah, I know that but maybe tomorrow...?” At Jensen’s look of disapproval, he tried again, “The day after?” Then Jared perked
up as something new occurred to him, “Maybe Mike can do the measuring part. I can lead him and calculate everything.” Jensen thought about it for a few seconds, then offered, “We’ll see how you’re doing tomorrow. If we’re happy with your condition, then yes, okay?” Jared looked pleased. He turned to the toilet and took care of business while Jensen waited outside the door. He warned, “No weight on that left leg!” Jared rolled his eyes, “I know!” The older man said, “I know you rolled your eyes, I could hear it.” Jared giggled, while finishing, “You did not.” Jensen smiled, hearing Jared’s giggle. When the toilet flushed, Jensen went back in and supported Jared over to the sink where he could wash his hands and face. He waited patiently for Jared to brush his teeth. It wasn’t an easy feat with the painful wounds. When they returned to the living room, Mike had cleaned things up and put the dishes away. Dave came to help Jensen by taking Jared’s other side.

When the engineer was deposited comfortably on the couch, Jensen asked him, “How you doing? You hurting?” Jared answered, “No, doing good. Thank you,” he looked at the other two, “thank you guys too. I owe you guys everything.” Dave responded, “You don’t owe us shit, Jared, and it’s our pleasure to help you get better.” Mike ruffled the younger man’s hair annoyingly, “Yeah, it’s our win, dude, we got a cool little brother out of all this.” Jared smiled. Everyone got comfortable again and finished the next movie. Jared was out cold by the end of it. “Well,” Mike announced, “we managed to get him through an entire day without hurting himself, or anybody trying to kidnap him or kill him. I’d say it’s been a successful day, boys.” Mike got up and went to change into his sleeping apparel. Dave picked up the beer bottles the three veterans had been drinking and threw them out. He came back to ask Jensen, “You gonna need to carry him back to bed?” Jensen said, “Honestly, there’s something about being out here that calm’s him. I think I’ll wait for him to suggest going to bed and let him stay, for now.”

Dave nodded, “Sounds good. Come get us if you need anything, my back’s using the spare bed tonight.” Jensen smiled at him, “Sleep well, friend.” Dave went to bed and Mike came back, yawning, to double check that Jensen didn’t need anything, “You gonna stay out here with him?” Jensen answered, “Yeah,” so Mike said good night and went to bunk on the floor with his layers of foam and sleeping bags. Jensen took a few minutes to brush his teeth and wash his hands and face. He returned to the living room and turned the light down, built up the fire, then gently moved Jared to lay length wise. Jensen lay facing Jared, just like he’d done the previous night. He supposed he would stop acting like an over protective ass soon, but not on this night. Next thing Jensen knew, it was damn cold and dark. He looked over and realized the fire was almost completely out. This meant it had been several hours. He slipped out of the blankets and looked at his watch. “Good,” Jensen mumbled quietly when he realized Jared hadn’t had a nightmare and it had been six hours. He fixed up the fire and stretched, then returned to the couch. The next time Jensen woke it was barely light. He checked his watch, but stayed under the blankets. It was seven. Jared was a picture of adorable sleepy genius, tousled hair all over his face and pillow. Jensen wanted to fix it and kiss him, but he certainly wasn’t going to wake him. He pushed himself to get out of the warm covers and go fix up the fire.

Jensen peeked out his back curtain to see a fine layer of snow throughout his property. It was beautiful. These early snows were pretty, with only a few inches to deal with. The higher levels and freezing temps in late December and January were ‘not’ so easy to manage. He looked back at the couch and watched his lover roll over and settle again. Jensen left to use the bathroom, then returned and got back under the covers with Jared. He slipped his arm around Jared’s waist, careful to rest his hand on the kid’s hip, not on his stomach. Jared was breathing even and deep, which was a very good sign. Jensen had no trouble getting back to sleep. Later in the morning, Jensen woke to the sound of his friends making breakfast. Jared was just yawning and turning in his arms. Jensen waited until he stilled, then moved the hair out of his face and grinned, “Hello, sleepyhead.” Jared nestled into Jensen’s warmth and slipped his arm around him. “Good morning,” the younger man mumbled into Jensen’s chest and sighed happily.
Jensen kissed the top of his head. “How do you feel?” Jared sighed and yawned again, “Mmm...better.” Jensen propped his head up by his elbow and rubbed Jared’s back. “You slept good,” he commented. Jared took his time enjoying the closeness, then he turned his face up, lazily, to look at his lover, “Mmmm...I’m ruined, now. I don’t think I could sleep without you now.” Jensen said, “Good. You’ll just have to keep me around, then.” Jared stared into the older man’s beautiful green eyes for a moment, enjoying the connection. A clanging pan and some bitching came from the kitchen, forcing a knowing grin between the two lovers. “What are we gonna do without our cooks when they leave?” Jared asked. Jensen giggled, “Hmmm...it’ll be tough when we have to fend for ourselves.” Mike came toward them and yelled back to Dave, “Lovebirds are awake.” Jensen turned to him, “How could we not be? Jesus, it’s like a fucking fire drill in there.” Mike said eagerly, “Jared, we didn’t think you’d want some pasty half warm oatmeal so we’ve got more scrambled eggs going again, but this time it’s got little sausage pieces, peppers and tomatoes in it. Are you game?”

Jared smiled at the man, “It’s perfect, thank you Mike.” Jensen looked at Jared with a feigned sad look, “See? They don’t care about me. They only care about you. What if I didn’t want eggs?” Mike barked, “Shut up, 0840 hours of embarrassment,” then set down a steaming cup of espresso and a slightly cooler one for Jared. “Sorry, Jared, it’s the cooler stuff again.” Jensen sat up and pulled Jared up carefully to partake in the offered drinks. “I take it back,” Jensen yelled out to Mike’s retreating back, as he sipped his piping hot espresso. The two lovers sipped their drinks. Jared realized he felt ‘much’ better today. ‘Wow,’ he thought to himself, then remembered the possibility that they were going to let him go to the diner. When breakfast was served, Jared moaned eagerly over it. He ate around the edges first, and avoided any parts that were too hot. When he finished his whole plate, his surrounding group of protectors let him know they were quite pleased. “His coloring is much better,” Dave announced to the room and the other observers nodded.

Mike added, “He drank all his coffee today.” Jensen grinned, “He’s moving quicker too. Definitely perkier. I think he’s probably about to get dangerous, so we’ve got our hands full.” All the men nodded and hummed in agreement, as Jared sputtered, “HE is sitting right here,” then sighed. It seemed hopeless until Jensen stood up and asked one of his friends to help him, “Well, let’s get him to the bathroom so he can clean up. I’ll call Steve and let him know we’re coming in a few.” Jared looked like a five year old on Christmas morning, instantly forgetting about his snarkiness, “Really? We can go? Now?” Jensen grinned, “We’re going, yes.” Jared let out a sigh and partial laugh at the same time. He was so happy. Getting the dishes cleaned up and Jared cleaned up took only a few minutes, especially since Jared was able to move faster today. Jensen convinced Jared he could just stay in sweats for the day, so they left pretty quickly.

When they first carried the kid outside, Jared noticed the crutches being brought with them. He couldn’t wait to actually try them and stop being carried like an infant. They made it to the restaurant, Jared especially enjoying the beautiful views of the freshly fallen snow as they passed by the truck windows. It snowed once in awhile in Austin, but it wasn’t anything this pretty. Soon, they were trekking their way into Steve’s place and depositing Jared on a chair. Dani made a huge deal over the young engineer, wanting to spoil him and dote over him, like usual. Jared wasted little time putting Mike to work. The measuring had to be done under the building, then all around the existing counter. The guys helped Jared move so he could have a visual on Mike at all times and be able to direct him. Mike enjoyed himself, thoroughly. Jared tried out his crutches and even though he felt the bruising in his gut, he could still manage for a little while before his soreness took over. At least it was a weekday and the morning crowd wasn’t very thick. They had room for him to inch around things until he seemed capable. When he tired out and got too sore, the veterans started lifting him again. Jared sat in Jensen’s old regular section, with his bad leg propped on a bench. He worked on his laptop until he finally finished exactly what he wanted. After he’d used all of Mike’s measurements and spent an hour on calculations, he proudly looked up at his friends, “It’s ready.” Then he looked worried, “But it’s gonna take some rushing, you guys. Are you still okay with getting the supplies
and doing this in the next,” Jared looked at the date on his laptop, then back up, “eight days?” Steve looked between them, not wanting to beg for them to give up their time if they didn’t want to, but the three special ops veterans were wholeheartedly ready to jump in on this one.

Jensen put his hand on the owner’s shoulder, “Two of us will go to the store with you, one will stay here with ‘this’ one.” Jensen indicated toward Jared, who gave an irritated sigh, like he couldn’t be left without a babysitter. While Steve, Mike and Jensen went to the nearest hardware store, Jared sat with Dave. The older man sipped some coffee and enjoyed a piece of Dani’s fresh berry pie. “Jesus, it’s incredible,” the older man mumbled, then he looked up at Jared, “You know, you could eat this. Just take it slow.” Jared finally succumbed and let Dani bring him a piece. “Ohmygod,” Jared’s words mumbled together as he enjoyed the hell out of the sticky sweet dessert. “Jesus, Dani, it’s amazing,” Jared continued, taking the smaller bites slower than usual.

Dani smiled knowingly, and patted him on the shoulder. Jared had never been a pie person, but Goddamn this was fantastic shit. He was thankful he’d let Dave talk him into it. When the rest of the group returned, they propped the front door open and unloaded all of the lumber and footings. Dave went to help while Jared sat at the table, feeling pretty useless. He sighed, ‘not forever, Jared,’ and tried to keep positive, as he watched the group go back and forth with several items. Jared was getting excited about the thought of doing something like this. He absolutely craved making differences and seeing his designs take form. He couldn’t wait to finish the whole foundation and new flooring for Steve and Dani. At least he’d feel like he paid them back, in some way, for helping him so much. Jared’s thoughts went to Christmas, which was only a few weeks after Thanksgiving. He’d never been a gift sort of person, and his friends usually just agreed to spend time together and go out for a nice evening. That was their tradition. His aunt always got him things like after shaves and nice shirts...he visited her, but he still never went crazy about the holiday.

Jared was needed for the next few hours to keep the project organized. Old crumbling footings had to be removed, in the correct order, so as not to cause any further damages. Jensen and his friends worked like clockwork with each other. Jared watched the way they each filled in and shared something heavy, then backed off to do things independently, without even a word. They were a well oiled machine, so to speak, from years of working closely together. He suddenly felt that warmth again, down in his gut. This was ‘his’ team now. He hadn’t shared their history, but he was part of them. He was their family. He smiled and soaked it in. Steve and Dani were the cutest couple he’d ever met. He wished his aunt and uncle had been that happy. ‘Maybe things would have been different,’ Jared thought. He couldn’t believe the progress they’d made. These guys were non-stop. They weren’t paid by the hour workers who had to stop for their breaks and lunch. Jensen’s team worked three hours straight before they stopped. At this point, they’d replaced all the fittings, poured concrete and inserted new support beams, fasteners and clamps. They would let it set for two days and harden, then come back and build up. The part was Steve and Dani would be using their new counter to feed people by Thanksgiving.

Jared didn’t realize he was being looked at by the three veterans. Jensen grinned at Jared’s obvious pleased expression. Dave piped in, “I think we earned a beer,” while Mike said, “The genius is happy. I’d say that’s a few beer’s worth.” Jared just then realized they were looking at him, then his brain caught up to Mike’s comment and he sighed, “I’m not a genius.” He then looked at their handiwork, “But you guys are awesome. This is amazing to get so far,” Jared complimented. Mike stepped over the doorframe first, “Goddamn right we’re awesome...and good looking too.” Jared giggled, as the mouthy veteran headed for the bathroom to clean up. Steve went for the kitchen and yelled back, “Goin’ to get the well deserved beer,” then he stopped and turned back, “Can Jared have one?” Jared looked at Jensen who nodded, “Yeah, he can...no painkillers, he’s good.”

Jared grinned happily at Jensen’s agreement. Dave and Jensen lifted Jared up to the ground floor and sat him at a table, then went for the restroom with Mike, to spend some minutes cleaning up their
hands and faces. Even though it was freezing in the basement, they’d worked up a sheen of sweat and gotten dirty. Jared waited until they returned. Dani brought a full pie with four plates, while Steve put down two beers for each of them. “I’m goin’ to the house to clean up, boys, I can’t thank you enough for this.” Steve patted Mike and Jensen’s shoulders and waved at Dave as he walked off. The veterans shook their heads and sipped their beers, mentally shrugging off their friend’s thanks. It wasn’t necessary. They were enjoying this.

“How do you feel,” Jensen asked Jared from beside him. The younger man grinned happily, “Amazing. I’m so amazed at you guys.” Jensen grinned and exchanged a look with the other two from his team. Dave asked again, “I think what we wanna know is...how do ‘feel’, buddy? Are you hurting? Dizzy?” Jared seemed to get it, “Oh,” then thought it over and smiled again, “Nope, everything’s great.” Jensen rubbed Jared’s back for a few seconds, then felt his head for fever. Jared didn’t even roll his eyes, which he thought was quite commendable, on his part. Jensen looked between Mike and Dave and shook his head, indicating the kid was fever free. Jared wouldn’t even be able to lie, if he even wanted to...they weren’t going to take their eyes off of him. He decided to enjoy his beer in silence for awhile and skip the complaint. When Jensen started to load the little plates with pie, Dave stopped him, “Not me...we had some earlier.” Jensen looked at his lover, who grinned knowingly. The older man smiled to himself that Jared was doing so well, and cut pieces for he and Mike.

Steve returned and helped his wife clean up after the lunch crowd. Jared realized that running a business like this was a never ending process, and the two probably didn’t have much time to themselves, at all. He was lost in thought after that, since his brain had drifted to ‘what the hell was he going to do for money.’ Jensen nudged him and Jared turned to his lover, “Hmm?” Jensen asked, “What were you thinking?” Jared sighed, “I was actually thinking about when I’m going to work again. Where I’m going to work...how it’s going to work with A.E. and all that stuff. I mean, do I still work there? Am I fired? I have no idea how to find out.” Jared looked off in thought, as Jensen glanced at the other two and then cleared his throat, “Well, I’ve been thinking.” Everyone at the table waited in silence, as Jared finally looked at Jensen, “What.” Jensen took a swig of beer, then set it down, like he was formulating his words, carefully, “Well, A.E. is going to need to be restructured. Price said we’re looking at a guilty plea or a trial very soon. This’ll all be over before Christmas. After that, the leftover bits and pieces will have to be counted up and organized in some way to start fresh or carry on under new leadership.”

Jared continued to listen, looking completely intrigued at Jensen’s insight. He had almost forgotten that Jensen was a natural to all this. He finally commented, “So, the rest of the employees will be looking for direction, just like me.” Jensen nodded. Jared thought about it, “I wonder how they’ll feel...how the company will be able to take care of them with what’s left.” Jensen looked down for a minute. He rubbed his face and looked at the other two veterans. They sat quietly, pretty much knowing where this was going. They knew Jensen ‘very’ well...they also knew how much Jensen loved Jared. Jensen looked at Jared, “You can work anywhere...or on your own. Any of us knows that. You could even run your own business, Jare. With your success and qualifications, you can do whatever you want.” Jensen lovingly smiled at his clueless lover who was clearly shy about receiving such a compliment from his lover. ‘He shouldn’t be,’ Jensen sighed.

“But,” Jensen added, “but...and here comes the big ‘but’ for you to consider.” Jared looked confused as Jensen kept talking, “A.E. will be under new leadership. It’s going to someone who absolutely ‘hates’ big business and doesn’t want anything to do with it. However, that person ‘will’ want the business to change it’s face, head another direction...maybe be involved in helping charities or building things like housing for people who need it and can’t afford it. I suspect A.E. will run another course and it will be a good one. If you decide to stay with them, I’m sure you’ll be a huge part of that.” Jensen sipped his beer while the young genius stared at him with his wheels turning. Jared had listened with no idea where Jensen was headed until now. Suddenly, his eyes widened,
“YOU are taking over?” The others had known Jensen was given the company by his father, but Jensen hadn’t had time to tell Jared this. “Wait,” Jared continued, “YOU are going to be the new head honcho? Really?” Jensen didn’t look too displeased about this, at all. His mind went right to how nice and caring of a boss Jensen would be and how much he would take care of the employees. “That’s wonderful for them,” Jared added, now excited, “that’s going to be incredible for ‘all’ of them.”

Jensen rolled his eyes and sighed, which made the other veterans laugh. Jared looked between them, “What?” Jensen turned to him, “As usual, you’re thinking of everyone ‘else.’ You’re not thinking about where that puts ‘you’.” Jensen waited for the darting eyes to finally show signs of figuring it out, then Jared suddenly looked disbelievingly at Jensen, “No. You can’t give me some high fallutin position, Jensen. What would they think with me being the bosses boyfriend.” Jensen grinned at his lover, “Well, I don’t really ‘have’ to care what they think, do I...and you wouldn’t be getting the job because you were with ‘me’, you’d have it because you’re incomparable to anyone else on the integrity and skills meter.” Jensen waited for the put out look to give away to thinking it over. Jared still looked worried, “I’d have to go out in the field with them, hear the shitty gossip and...and get the snide remarks,” Jensen interrupted, suddenly angry, “You bring those people to me.”

Jared opened his mouth to speak, then thought better of it. He tried to imagine what it would be like working in his favorite field, but being disrespected as a bosses boy toy. He was so in love with Jensen, and this wouldn’t change his work ethic, one bit, but to have people misunderstand him? To be labeled? He sighed, “I need to be respected for my work...I couldn’t take people thinking I was getting something just because of my relationship with you.” Mike piped in, “Well, I wouldn’t think that...and I’m sure there are several others who wouldn’t either. You were at the company long before Jensen was, Jared.” He pointed his beer at Jensen, “And of course, you’ll be hiring ‘me’ when I get my license.” Jensen grinned, “Fuck yes, no application required either, you idiot...and my background investigator and head of security doesn’t need to wait for a license.” Dave sipped his beer, “Maybe you’ll need an editor...for announcements, releases, articles, or whatever. Maybe a backup security person.” Jensen looked between his friends, “Back up security? Employment backgrounds...potential client backgrounds?” Both men nodded in agreement without hesitation. Jared couldn’t believe this. He’d had no idea this was coming. Jensen was taking over that shitty ass company and this was the best piece of news he’d heard in a very long time.

Jensen turned to his friends, “This has wonderful potential. Plus, you can keep an eye on ‘this’ one for me when he goes to the tougher assignments...maybe dealing with an asshole client.” Jared did a double take at that, then at Mike and Dave when they agreed without even looking at Jared. The men were talking about him like this was already a done deal. ‘Fuck,’ Jared sighed, ‘it probably is, anyway.’ Mike had a thought, “Jared...you could run a training program. You’re so good with people, and obviously an excellent teacher if you can get ‘my’ grunt ass to soar through this course. Aside from being the lead engineer, maybe you could manage the training for new prospects...doing the hiring and firing, so to speak.” Jared’s mouth dropped open, in silence. He was still trying to process all this. Jensen knew the kid was kind of stuck at the moment, so he said, “Well, I think for now, we need to get our stumped genius home to rest, get cleaned up and let him process what the hell just happened.”

The group made it to the truck and drove home in comfortable silence. Jared’s mind was still spinning. Was this his new life? His wonderful fantastic new life that had just been handed to him on a platter? He had to admit it would be a great job and he’d be ecstatically happy to be close to Jensen. He tried to let all the good sink in as they reached the house. Later, in Jensen’s bedroom, the lovers laid in bed with the glow of the electric fireplace lighting the room. It had been a relaxing evening with the three veterans taking turns showering and putting together some stew for dinner. Jared’s was a little cooler, but he ate it happily. He was feeling loads better now. Jensen played with his hair for awhile, enjoying the feeling of having such a good day. Jared finally turned to him,
“Jensen, would you really be happy running the company? Are you just doing it because you think you have to?” Jensen answered, “I had to really delve deep and think about that. If we’re doing good things, I might be okay with it but it’s not my first choice. The thought of meetings and business dealings churning my stomach. I’d actually like to stay home and let the business run itself, but I know that’s not how you succeed.”

Jared thought for a minute, then offered a suggestion, “If you had good management you could trust, it would be that way.” Jensen looked thoughtfully at him, “Someone you have in mind?” Jared nodded, “Yeah. I want you to be happy. What if you hired my old owners...the ones from Skyward that I used to work for. They’re honest and they love their employees. They’d never do you wrong. Jensen, I can guarantee you that.” Jensen thought for a few seconds then decided he loved the idea. “You have good ideas, young paddiwan.” Jared giggled at the nickname again, as Jensen started to move over to lay on top of him. “I love that sound, you know,” Jensen commented, then kissed the younger man very lightly on his sore mouth. Jared rubbed his hands up and down Jensen’s chest. Jensen started kissing Jared’s neck and mumbled, “I seem to recall wanting to make you feel even better if you had a good day today.” He started to kiss his way down the younger man’s exposed collar bone, “And I think you had a really good day.” Jared’s heart began to speed up, “Oh...I remember that too, but you don’t have to,” Jared’s quick intake of breath followed his lover pushing up the sweatshirt and kissing his stomach. “Oh,” Jared’s libido skyrocketed.

Jensen wouldn’t be deterred. His incredibly soft moist lips were trailing their way down Jared’s abdomen, passing his belly button and now kissing him just above his pants waistline. Jared got hard real quick, knowing damn well what was going to happen and how it was going to feel. ‘Jesus,’ he wondered how he ever was going to be quiet so their other house guests didn’t hear them. Jensen pulled the sweatpants down just below Jared’s beautiful cock and balls. He hummed appreciatively at the welcome sight and proceeded to lick the beautiful member in front of him. Jared exhaled loudly, dropping his hands on either side of him and grabbing the sheets. “Oh my God,” he groaned quietly, barely able to keep his voice down. Jensen’s tongue sent sparks of pleasure through his whole body, “Ohmygod,” Jared’s head turned back and forth as his breathing increased.

“Jensen,” he breathed, “Jensen, ohmygod,” Jared continued to rant in response to the incredible sensations he felt from Jensen’s hot tongue. “Mmm,” Jensen moaned, “Man, you have a gorgeous dick, baby,” he said and proceeded to lick the rock hard member again. Jared was beside himself and Jensen could tell the kid was trying to be quiet, unsuccessfully. “Don’t worry, love. I happen to know they’re watching Gunsmoke reruns right now. If they hear anything, they can just turn up the volume.” Jared couldn’t even respond, as Jensen enveloped his dick completely with his hot wet mouth after he said that. Jensen sucked on the head, then slid his mouth down slowly, until he had covered Jared’s length as much as he could. Jared was loudly moaning in ecstasy. Jensen thought to himself, ‘Oh, this is gonna be fun.’

‘Jesus Christ,’ Jared thought as he moaned even louder and his hips pumped on their own. This was fucking ecstasy. Jensen was no nonsense, as he slid his mouth up and down on the engorged cock and kept up the rhythm. Jared was completely out of control. He couldn’t stand it. He clenched the sheets in his hands, then moved them restlessly to different areas on the bed and clenched them again. His head moved back and forth and he cried out endlessly in absolute rapture. “Oh God, Jensen, yes,” he had no control over his body’s reactions. Jensen loved this. Jared was completely at his mercy and he kept up the steady rhythm until Jared’s body began to tighten up, as if coiled to explode.

Jensen scooted suddenly closer without breaking his suction. He slipped his right shoulder under Jared’s injured leg to ensure that Jared didn’t lose so much control that he pushed off the bed with it. “Ooooh,” Jared was climbing...his voice was raising in timbre. Jensen knew he was rising toward orgasm. “Oh my God, Jensen,” he cried, sounding overwhelmed at the pleasure. Jared tensed up
more. He lifted his head and shoulders off the bed. His eyes were closed and concentrating, his breathing rapid and tense. His hips were trying to pump his dick up into Jensen’s mouth even faster. Jensen knew his sexy lover was about to blow his load. ‘Come on, Jared,’ Jensen thought, as he increased the speed of his mouth. “Aaah, God,” Jared cried in response, “Aaah, God, Jensen yes,” he pumped his hips faster up into the pleasure. Jesus Christ, Jensen’s mouth was driving him crazy. “Fuck, I’m cumming,” Jared growled and pumped faster, “Fuck Jensen, I’m cumming,” Jared panted, “Oh my God...fuck...oh fuck, yes,” Jared pushed up hard and tensed, “Nnnnnnngggghhhhh,” he grunted hard and spasmed, then panted again and clenched again, “Nnnnnngggghhh,” Jared grunted again, “Fuck,” he blurted out, then spasmed once more, “Nnnnnngggghh,” Jared’s third wave had him straining and shaking, just like the first two.

Jensen kept sucking hard and moved when he knew it would be perfect, following Jared’s need. The younger man was groaning over and over, enjoying shorter follow up spasms of absolute pleasure as they kept coming. Finally, Jared dropped his head and shoulders, little after shocks causing weaker spasms to continue the ecstasy as Jensen took in all the fluid and swallowed it. Jensen moaned and hummed in pleasure, feeling his body come down from his incredible orgasm, while the heat of Jensen’s mouth gently took every drop of his essence. He was floating in a sea of post orgasmic bliss, not even knowing which way was up. ‘Jesus,’ Jared could barely think that he’d probably never move again...but what a way to go. Jensen kissed the softening member, after letting it gently glide out of his mouth. He pulled Jared’s pants back up and climbed back up to lay next to Jared and watch him. Jensen grinned at his handiwork. The younger man was laying in disarray, his limbs completely loose and useless, Jared’s face the look of absolute peace and wonder. Jensen pulled the covers up over them both and laid on the pillow next to the kid, watching him for awhile. Jared started to breathe deeply and Jensen smiled, knowing the younger man had fallen fast asleep. ‘Good,’ he thought, though he knew Jared would be pissed at himself in the morning.

Jensen forced himself out of bed at seven thirty the next morning. His bedmate was breathing deeply and beautifully cocooned between the bed covers. Jensen showered and shaved, brushed his teeth and got dressed in an old pair of sweatpants and a pair of socks. He came out of the bathroom, followed by a cloud of rolling steam. Jensen was greeted by the gorgeous sight of Jared stirring and brushing the hair off his face. Jared struggled a bit to move the covers, but then looked down at himself with a look of definite distaste. Jensen wasn’t sure what the hell that meant, at first. He stepped over to the bed as Jared plopped his head back on the pillow and glanced at Jensen, looking alarmed before he looked away. Jensen thought Jared was embarrassed. ‘Was it about last night?’ He crawled over and laid close to him, brushing the adorable disheveled hair out the younger man’s eyes. “Good morning,” Jensen said. Jared’s cheeks flushed as he answered Jensen in a forced voice, while looking a bit nervous. Jensen grinned, while he slipped his hand under the covers and over to Jared’s waistband. Jared glanced down and his eyes widened, then he glanced nervously at Jensen, “What?” Jensen slid his hand into Jared’s pants and onto the rock hard cement dick that Jared had been sporting.

“Is this what’s bothering you?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid his hand smoothly up and down and paused to thumb the bit of liquid pooling at Jared’s tip. “Were you dreaming?” Jensen asked him. After a seconds look from his slightly mortified younger lover, Jensen started to slide his hand up and down the organ. Jared’s eyes rolled up at the instant pleasure, his mouth dropped open with an uncontrolled moan. Jensen’s eyes darkened, as he slid
kissed him on the left side of his mouth, then he licked Jared’s lips until they opened slightly, pushing his tongue inside.

Jared moaned, as Jensen licked and slid tongue around gently, attempting to keep from aggravating the hurt side. He licked Jared’s lips and increased the speed of his hand, watching Jared with darkening pupils. “You’re so fucking beautiful, Jare. I want you to cum for me...let me see you, cum for me right now.” Jensen moaned, his mouth open so he could breathe and pant his way to the top. Jesus Christ, it felt so good, but he was concerned about being so selfish, “What...what about you...oh, God, Jensen, what about you?” Jared had trouble even getting a sentence out. He was already at the edge. “Jensen,” he cried out, as the older man wouldn’t stop. “You’re so fucking hot, Jare. Cum for me, I’ve got you.” Jared couldn’t refuse, as his lover tightened his grip and sped up his hand. “Ah...ah...ah,” Jared cried out loud. He threw his head back and came, “Aaaaaaaaaahhhhh.” God it was good, “Mmmmmmmmmmm,” his second wave hit and then the third, “Nnnnghh,” he barely caught his breath, and fuck it was so goddamned good as follow up waves rolled through him.

Jensen watched the wondrous sight as his lover came gloriously for him and shared the ecstasy all over his face. He was openly spasming and grunting, panting and it was all for Jensen. “Christ, that’s beautiful,” Jensen commented, watching Jared deal with the continued spasms and waves of followup pleasure. Jensen realized he was gonna have to do something about himself now. The sight of Jared was too much. He quickly unzipped his pants and pushed them down, then started fisting his own cock. When he grunted in pleasure, Jared sluggishly turned his head and looked over.

“Mmmmm,” He immediately took an interest and forced his post orgasmic rubber body to roll toward his lover. “Let me do this,” he ordered, then pushed Jensen’s hand aside and took over.

“Aaah,” Jensen’s head fell back, his eyes rolled up, “Ah, god, you’re so fucking hot...oh Jare, I can’t even watch you without...ah, god yes, oh god yes.” Jared hummed in appreciation, “I haven’t seen your beautiful dick in too long. Goddamn it’s gorgeous. Are you gonna cum for me?”

“Fuck yes,” Jensen managed, fucking his dick into Jared’s hand. “Fuck,” he warned, as he sped up, “Fuck...I’m cumming.” “Jensen, that’s it, give it to me,” Jared ordered. Jensen obeyed instantly, trying his hardest to be quiet, as he exploded with a guttural growl, “Mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm...mmmmmmmmgghhhhhhh...mmmmmmmmgghhhhh.” Jensen’s dick pumped it’s load as he strained and growled helplessly from the pleasure, over and over. Waves of immense pleasure were bursting through his body, as Jared’s hand expertly milked him to make it last. Jensen groaned loudly as aftershocks rolled through him. After the orgasm released him, Jensen finally calmed and stilled, feeling Jared’s hand still on his happily throbbing dick. He groaned softly, while he took a moment to control his breathing and open his eyes. He saw the mess he’d left all over his engineer’s sweatshirt sleeve and some of the bedding. “Damn,” he commented, more concerned about getting some on Jared’s wrist than anything else. He took the saturated hand and examined the cuts, while feeling a bit shaky. Jensen was grinning, knowing damn well his lover was trying his hardest to be efficient and in control, when he really wasn’t. Jensen could see that orgasm had taken a lot out of Jensen. “I’m sure it’s fine,” Jared pushed himself up to meet Jensen face to face, “it has healing properties, doesn’t it? Filled with all that protein and vitamins.” Jensen sighed...he had to grin at the sight of Jared getting up without any problems from his sore abdomen, and at the added realization that Jared looked absolutely well today. Except for his injured face, he looked so much better. Jensen kissed the younger man, carefully, then sighed, “Can I just say you are the sexiest thing I could ever imagine waking up to...and I’d still really like to know in detail what you were dreaming about.”

Jensen held Jared’s face close up, as he waited for explanation. Jared’s shy embarrassment forced him to look down with a soft grin, “It was definitely hot,” was all he explained. Jensen raised an eyebrow then kissed his lover, carefully again, and pulled back to look him over more closely. He shook his head, “Man, it is so good to see you feeling better.” Jared leaned forward and kissed Jensen this time, “It’s good to feel better. Maybe you can fuck me through the mattress soon.” He
grinned at Jensen’s instant guffawed response. Jared loved it when he could catch the older man off guard. Jensen countered, “Well, fucking you through just about anything sounds like a plan in my book.” Jared kissed him again. When he pulled back, he gazed at Jensen with love and adoration for a moment, then it was Jensen’s turn to surprise ‘him’. “And let me know when you want to return the favor.” Jared studied him, then realized what he was saying... “Jesus, Jen, when do you want me to do ‘that’, ‘cuz I don’t need any coaxing...I’m ready when you are.”

Jensen smiled, “How about when your leg works?” Jared sighed, now pissy, “Well, that’s just depressing.” Jensen smiled and kissed him, “Nah...it’ll come, baby.” Jared turned coy again, “Damn right it’ll cum...I’ll make it cum,” then he licked his lips. Jensen laughed at Jared’s sexy playfulness. He pulled a few inches away from him so he could think straight, then softened the blow with a follow up kiss, “I need to clean up the bed, and definitely need to feed and medicate you. Plus the others are probably worried about your virtue and we really should make an appearance.” Jared laughed. After a few seconds, he realized how good it felt to really laugh again. His gut felt much better today too. Maybe this horrible shit with A.E. was really behind him. He started move himself to the edge of the bed. The older man moved around to that side to help him. He handed him the crutches with a warning, “Promise you’re going to be careful, because if you’re not, you’re going to have three medics on your ass.” Jared rolled his eyes, then smirked knowingly, “There’s one med I’d like on my ass at all times.” At Jensen’s threatening look, Jared sighed in agreement, “Okay.” Jensen kissed him on his cheek, then went to work stripping the bed while Jared hobbled to the bathroom. He left the door cracked open, so Jensen could still hear him. The older man took all the soiled bedding to the laundry machines in the hall, then came back with fresh sheets. While outfitting the bed, Jensen heard the sounds of shaving cream, running water and a tiny whisper of “ow” and “ow” once in awhile. He wasn’t sure if Jared was touching his painful face or trying out that leg...which he wasn’t supposed to be doing, of course.

He grinned to himself, still feeling silly and giddy over the fact that Jared was even up this point today. It was incredible to have him doing this well. He suddenly turned to see Dave and Mike leaning on the door frame. He sighed and rolled his eyes, knowing immediately there was a snarky comment coming. “I hate to think why you have to change the bedding, Ackles,” Mike looked pissy, “Tell me he’s alright.” Jensen sighed once more, “Of course he’s alright. He’s great. Wait ‘til you guys see him, compared to yesterday.” Jensen knew his friends were quite protective over Jared, at this point, and weren’t gonna be convinced the lovers hadn’t done too much until they saw the kid for themselves. “What’s he doing in there?” Mike asked, so Jensen nodded toward the bathroom with a grin, “He’s shaving and doing an easy clean up. He’s trying to be careful and I know he’s probably sore as hell, but I can hear him.” Jensen watched them think that over. Maybe it was hard for them to accept that their little brother really ‘was’ doing better on his own and wouldn’t need them as much. Jensen looked down and kept busy to avoid smirking at that thought. His two friends were priceless for the big strong killer warriors that they were.

Jared finished his ministrations. He actually felt quite pleased with his clean shaven face, pleasantly scented under arms. He successfully peed without falling over, too. He patted his wrists with a dry towel, just to make sure he hadn’t gotten any moisture on them, then ran a brush through his locks. When he opened the door and hobbled out with his crutches, Dave and Mike zero’d in on him. Jared looked up, uncertain, “What?” Mike and Dave finally caught themselves. Dave spoke up, “Sorry, it’s justdamn good to see you looking better.” Jared glanced at Jensen, but the older man seemed to be paying too close attention to straightening his pillows. Jared hobbled toward the veterans in the doorway, “Please tell me there’s food, I’m fucking starving.” The warriors stepped aside to let Jared pass, with a quick glance at their smirking comrade who was finishing the bed. They followed the engineer down the hall, lifting their hands to catch Jared every time he looked like he was going to stumble.

Jared hobbled to the table and ungracefully plopped down in a chair. He was breathing hard and
thoroughly annoyed for being so. Dave grabbed the crutches and leaned them against the wall. Soon, four full plates appeared on the table full of an enchilada casserole type ensemble with eggs, cheese and sausage. “Aah,” Jared winced, forgetting the inside of his mouth with his eagerness to taste the hot food. Dave quickly handed him some cold juice. Jared gratefully drank it down while Mike grabbed Jared’s plate and put it in the freezer to cool it down. He looked guiltily back, “Dannn, Jared, I thought we cooled it off enough, sorry bud.” Dave set Jared’s antibiotic in front of him, as Jared quickly swallowed to correct Mike, “Hey, I’m the dumb ass who forgot. Don’t blame yourself.” Dave asked, “You want some luke warm coffee today?” Jared nodded, “I’ll take it any way I can get it, thank you.” By the time Jensen came out, his lover had taken his antibiotic for the morning, drank half his apple juice, and was enjoying some luke warm coffee with a cooled plate of tortilla casserole in front of him. He grinned at the picture of a very well taken care of genius. His friends were marshmallow’s, just like he was. Jared seemed no longer embarrassed about the attention, at least.

The group played board games most of the day, then after refusing a nap for the second time, Jared opened his laptop to work on his programs. He thought he had figured out a Christmas gift for Jensen, so he worked on that for awhile. Mike researched engineering courses, then compared them with Jared. Dave and Jensen played chess for awhile. Price called just as the group was finishing lunch. Jared ate the tuna mix out of his sandwich, then picked at small pieces of the bread until his lunch was gone. He missed the sympathetic looks he was getting from his counterparts when he found out he couldn’t stretch his hurt mouth open far enough to accommodate a sandwich. Price explained the trial schedule and that it would start the Monday after Thanksgiving. They would need Jared, but only for depositions in private chambers. Jensen vowed he wouldn’t be going in without his personal security, anyway, to which Price said he expected nothing different. The security on Jared and his friends and aunt had been lightened, though still remained on alert should they need to reactivate. Jared was quiet after the attorney’s call. Jensen kept an eye on him, but it seemed as though the kid was simply processing everything. He didn’t look afraid or nervous, so nothing was said. It was cold but clear outside, so the veterans discussed a barbecue for the evening. They put on an oldies rock station and started to put things together.

There was a fine layer of leftover snow on the ground, but Jensen and Dave decided to play chef on the back patio for over an hour. Jared wrote Mike a reference letter and helped him submit his application to one of the schools. Dinner was ready by seven. It was dark and cold as hell outside. Jared shook his head and grinned at his lover and Dave coming back in the house shivering and giggling like lunatics. They plopped plates of food on the coffee table and went straight for the fire Mike had just built up. The smell of barbecued chicken and tri-tip permeated the living room. Everyone washed up and ate by the fire. Jared’s body had tightened up with all the sitting around, so it took him awhile to get down the hall and back. The veterans shadowed him everywhere he went, but tried not to offer more than a supportive hand or arm. Their inclination to just carry him was kept to themselves.

Dinner was delicious. Jared ate very slow, pulling off chunks chicken and tri-tip that he could chew. The seasoning was incredible. His mind wandered to Jensen’s new version of A.E. and how great the direction of the company would go with him leading it, then his thoughts drifted to Jensen bent over a bosses huge ornate oak desk, being pounded from behind. Obviously, Jensen’s announcement earlier of being ready to try bottoming had been quite distracting. Jensen cleared his throat and got Jared’s attention. “Penny for your thoughts,” he said with a grin. Jared looked down shyly and started picking at his chicken, “No...no, I don’t need any pennies.” Jensen’s eyebrow perked up, vowing to find out later where Jared’s mind had been. He looked at his friends, “The more I think about A.E., the better it sounds. Last night, Jared reminded me of his former owners...they might still be looking for a management job. They’re reliable and honest...and I’m thinking they would be perfect to manage day to day processes.” Jared was pleased to the core that he might have found a solution for Jensen. He couldn’t wait to contact his former bosses to arrange a meeting. The fact that
Jensen trusted his opinion meant a lot, but Jared felt the old nagging feelings working it’s way back in...wondering if this was too good to be true...or what the hell was going to ruin it. He kept his insecurities quiet.

After awhile, everyone cleaned up the table. Jared wasn’t allowed to help, of course. Jensen cheered him up when he reminded him tonight was the last breathing treatment. As Jensen took out the machine, the Jared asked, “So, tomorrow can we go back and start working at the restaurant?” Jensen’s eye flickered up to Jared’s face. He slowly grinned as he studied him for a second. “Yeah...I think we can do that.” Jared exhaled the breath he was holding offering a brilliant smile until he winced from his sore mouth. Jensen finished with the machine, as he spoke, “You can boss us around and we’ll see how far we get.” Jared was excited, “Sweet.” Jensen handed him the mask and as Mike and Dave came back with beers, they turned to leave them alone. Jared stopped them, “No wait...it’s okay.” The two men looked at him, unsure, but Jared repeated, “Really...it’s okay. Thank you for being so nice about it, but it’s easier now.”

Jensen watched his lover, pleased at this new level of comfortableness, then glanced at the other two men and nodded subtly so they knew it was ‘very’ okay to be in here. Jensen took the mask and as he waited for him to put it over his face, he noticed Dave and Mike take a careful seat adjacent to them. They were watching, even though they were pretending ‘not’ to watch. The younger man completed the process with his eyes closed most of the time, only coughing in the beginning. After ten minutes, Jared handed the mask back and rubbed his face while Jensen put the mask back on the machine. He looked Jared over to make sure he was okay, then sat on the coffee table and faced him, “I want to talk about something.” Jared looked at him with innocent concern. Jensen continued, “Price told me about the case finally hitting the news in more depth this morning.” Dave piped in, “How much?” Jensen sighed. He answered Dave while keeping his eyes on Jared, “They posted Jared’s picture, some of the other employees have short interviews, the bad guys’s pictures are out, and it’s all over about A.E. and the things they’ve been accused of. Former clients are being interviewed. The circus is finally open.”

Jared’s concern went immediately to Jensen’s life, his company, his father and the image of Jensen’s family, which Jensen knew it would. His intention was to talk about Jared’s safety and keeping him out of interviews, but Jared of course wasn’t thinking of himself. Mike blurted out, “The kid’s not following you, boss.” Jensen grinned, “I know.” Jared looked between the men, as Jensen rubbed his face. “What!” Jared blurted out, confused. Jensen explained, “I’m talking about ‘you’, Jay. ‘Your’ face is on the news and the press will be dying to talk to the brilliant engineering expert who was brave enough to blow the whistle and save all the employees and innocent bystanders of fraud.” Jensen let that sink in while Jared stared at him. It was a long minute before he seemed to finally understand what Jensen meant. “Oh,” the genius remarked. Did this mean he couldn’t go in public? He waited for someone to explain. Jensen continued, “So, when we go work on Steve and Dani’s counter, we might still be hovering and watching our surroundings, okay? The last thing Price or any of his security team needs is for you to be swarmed by look-ee-loo’s or pushy reporters. You’ve still got some security hanging around for stuff like this, but we’re around too.”

Jared hadn’t expected this. He looked at Jensen, “Do you think I shouldn’t go?” He looked between the guys, “I mean...you’ve all done so much and I don’t need to be causing problems if someone recognizes me, right?” Mike and Dave looked at Jensen, who sighed, “No...we can handle it if it comes to that. I just need you to understand so you still don’t go traipsing off by yourself yet. We want to keep you protected from camera’s. You can do interviews later, if you decide,” “Nono...god no,” Jared interrupted. He was shaking his head, “I’m not ever gonna wanna do that. Yuck.” Just the thought of being on national television brought on all kinds of nausea. Jared’s hatred for being the center of attention would never be comfortable with an interview. The rest of the evening was filled with movies and video games. After watching another terminator movie, Jared opted to read some old books of Jensen’s while the special ops experts battled through a video game. When they went to
bed, Jared moved instantly into his favorite spot, his head on Jensen’s chest. Jensen kissed the top of his head and fell asleep with his lover safe in his arms. The next few days, the four showed up at the restaurant after breakfast and worked until late afternoon. They finished the solid foundation and base of the new countertop. The smell of the fresh new wood drifted through the whole restaurant and people who were aware of their annual feast kept stopping to give Steve and Dani their encouragement.

Jared had become quite coordinated with his crutches. He stepped on his left leg when using the restroom, and sometimes in between that, but still used the crutches most of the time. The soldiers were adamant about how much weight he could put on his leg. Jared still wasn’t aloud to do physical work, so he hobbled around and checked things out, re-measured and calculated things, but mostly sat on his ass and enjoyed the bantering between his lover and his friends. There had been a few reporters around the restaurant, asking if they’d seen Jared, but so far, it had only been when Jared wasn’t there, so they hadn’t had to deal with them. On the fourth day, Jared cheered as the team of men lowered the flat new surface onto the top of the counter base. This was the revealing moment. When they backed up and studied the masterpiece, Steve actually looked teary eyed. “Dani!” He yelled for her to come and look. When she joined him, they stood with their arms around each other and admired their new countertop.

“Look at it,” she cried emotionally. Steve nodded, wiping at his eyes. They both turned to Jared and the younger man prepared himself for way too much attention and gratitude for this... ‘oh shit,’ Jared thought as both of them hugged him tight. “Oof,” Jared grunted. Apparently, they wholeheartedly ‘loved’ their new countertop. This was the part of design that he’d been missing. The joy of creating something, making it right, and making things that will last for people. Jared looked over at Jensen, helplessly speaking volumes with his eyes about being overwhelmed that they were thanking him way too much. Jensen started over to them, grinning, but Dani and Steve backed away before Jensen had to help Jared out of it, somehow. Steve shook Jared’s hand, “I never ‘ever’ imagined actually getting this done.” Dani added, “Yes, it’s so busy in here, we never had time to just dig in and have someone measure it and build it. We would have surely hired someone, in haste, who screwed it up.” Steve patted Jared’s shoulders, as he shouted, “It’s level!” Jared smiled at the man’s excitement. He couldn’t think of anything to say except, “I’m glad you guys like it.” They hugged him again hard again. “Ugh,” he grunted, feeling a little soreness at the gesture. Jensen pulled them slightly off of the kid, giggling, “Easy you guys, he’s still kind of bruised up. He rubbed Jared’s back when they finally let go.

The only thing left was to paint the counter and apply a waterproof clear coat. The new counter would definitely be usable by Thanksgiving, only three days away. Steve announced, “You guys raid the fridge, take some goodies and beer. Go home and rest and I’ll see you at 0500 Thanksgiving, okay? Charlie and I will take care of the finish.” Jensen, Dave and Mike shook the restaurant owner’s hand, then cleaned up some of the area before they raided Steve’s refrigerator and followed a hobbling Jared to the truck. Jensen snatched a whole banana cream pie. Dave had several bottles of beer in a bag. Mike took a forced bag from Dani filled with homemade biscuits and Philly Steak sandwiches. “Get our asses home, Ackles, before I eat this all right here,” Mike growled, as Jensen started the truck and pulled out.

When they got home, Jensen stood by Jared’s car door while he adjusted on his crutches. He knew the kid was tired and even though he’d been doing great on his crutches, the transition from the truck to standing was a bit tricky. Through dinner, the veterans hadn’t failed to notice Jared’s quieter mood. They worried about him, but they trusted it was something Jensen would take the lead on, and let them know if Jared was okay. They broke out some checkers and entertained themselves with several rounds before Jensen pulled out some cards. “Jesus,” Mike bitched, “Why’d you bring those out, Einstein over there is gonna fucking kill us.” Jensen sat next to Mike as he shuffled, “Speak for yourself, dickhead, I’m not bad at this and I’m your partner.” Jared opened his mouth to speak, but
Dave piped in first with a confident smirk, “I’m not worried.” Mike bitched, “Of course you’re fucking not.” Jensen dealt the cards, glancing at his lover often to gauge why he might be a bit off tonight. They played their first hand with Jensen faking confidence. He knew damn well they were going to lose against Jared.

Jared tried to focus on the cards, like he had no idea what they were talking about. It was embarrassing, really, the way they thought about him. Dave grinned as they played, Mike grumbled. First it was Pinnacle, then Poker. Jared and Dave didn’t win every hand, but they won them all toward the end of the game. Jared blushed at Jensen’s pointed knowing grin. Jensen knew Jared had no idea how fucking incredibly sexy he was. The kid was charmingly polite about knowing what cards had already been used and what was left. It wasn’t his fault. His brain was over wired that way. Jensen could see the natural ability in Jared’s focused eyes as he counted cards. He couldn’t help it. The engineer was definitely feeling his body respond as Jensen kept him in his tractor beam throughout the card game. The fact that Jared’s very own special forces master looked like he wanted to fuck him on this table didn’t do much for Jared’s concentration.

It was finally close to midnight, and all the men decided to turn in. Jared hoisted himself up and began his longer trek to the back bedroom. “Good night, guys,” he called back as he went down the hall. Jensen built up the fire, then slapped his two friends on their shoulders, and headed down the hall. Half way down, he turned and advised, “Oh, hey, fellas...I’d watch a movie or turn the radio on,” then smiled knowingly, and continued on while hearing the disbelieving curses and complaints from behind him. Jared made it into the bathroom and peed, cleaned up and brushed his teeth. He hobbled his way to the side of the bed and looked up after setting his crutches against the bedside table. Jensen wasted no time. He took Jared’s face between his hands and brushed the hair aside before his mouth devoured what he’d been craving for days. Jensen’s kiss was hot, his tongue demanded entrance, yet tenderness was shown to the right side of Jared’s sore mouth. Jared could swear his toes were curling. This man wanted him, craved him and he could feel the heat radiating from Jensen’s body. Jared moaned in delicious pleasure, feeling himself lowered onto his back, Jensen’s eagerness taking over.

Jared’s gorgeous mouth had been too off limits while it was healing and Jensen had been pushed beyond his limit waiting. They’d stolen gentle, soft, careful kisses but Jensen’s patience was over. His mouth and body were demanding Jared’s heat. Jensen returned the demand with full force. His mouth was much better now, but it still had another week to be fully functional. They licked and sucked and slid their tongues in and out, sensuous tasting of every reachable corner for several minutes. When they backed off enough to breathe, hands rubbed all over each other’s bodies, Jared whispered in desperation, “I need you inside me.” Jensen moaned, “God yes.” They kissed again, more aggressively, pushing clothing off as they desperately tried to climb into each other’s skin. Jensen let go of Jared, only to flick the fireplace on high. As he stepped back to Jared, he pulled his shirt off, then his pants and underwear. He crawled over the younger man and attacked his mouth again. Jared rubbed his hands over Jensen’s muscular shoulders, while Jensen licked and sucked his tongue. Jared was so turned on he couldn’t think straight. His annoying pants were only partially down because that’s all he could manage and his shirt was half off. Their tongues played and danced together until Jensen raised up enough to tug at Jared’s shirt and pull it off. He decided to lick and suck his way down Jared’s throat while he used one hand to undo Jared’s soft jeans. When he reached Jared’s collarbone, he spent time there sucking on the bone.

Jared was so hot he was losing his mind. Jensen pulled up to look over his gorgeous genius. “God, you’re so beautiful,” he commented, then kissed him sinfully wet and hot once again. Jensen pulled some lube from the bedside table without looking away, then pulled Jared’s pants all the way off. He kissed the tender skin on Jared’s hip bones as he slid the underwear down. Jensen’s mouth watered, as he moaned when the beautiful full cock sprang up, leaking and begging for his attention. He licked up the shaft to the tip, then asked, “You sure I can’t spend time on this first?” Jared grabbed
his head and lifted his bent legs, “God Jensen, please...fuck me. Please fuck me before I lose it.” Jensen’s eyes turned even blacker, as he quickly tossed Jared’s underwear across the room. “I got you, baby,” he coaxed, then lubed his fingers and kissed Jared’s abdomen as he positioned himself. He began a careful slow glide of one finger into Jared’s hole, gently pumping in and out. “Ah...yes,” Jared’s immediate response was of someone receiving something after a long wait. It was absolute gratification and seductive pleasure.

The seasoned war vet had to close his eyes and concentrate in order not to blow his load too soon. Jared was too damn hot for his own good. His responsiveness was killing Jensen’s resolve. “Jesuschrist, look at you,” he grumbled deeply. Jared moaned over and over at the pumping of Jensen’s finger. When he added a second finger, Jared’s louder cries of hot pleasure forced Jensen to grab the base of his dick hard with his free hand. He panted hard, holding back. His gorgeous engineer started to thrust his pelvis back to meet Jensen’s fingers and it was too much. Jensen kept hold of himself as Jared’s eyes closed in rapture. He gyrated his hips, cried out “Yes” and begged Jensen to fuck him. “More...god Jensen yes, more,” his pleaded. Jensen finally added his third finger and pushed in slowly. Jared bore down like he was determined. “Fuck, that feels good,” he growled, looking down at Jensen’s hand.

“Jesus, Jared, you look fucking perfect like this...fucking perfect,” Jensen remarked, pumping his fingers into Jared and gradually increasing his pace. When Jared started pushing back against his thrusts, Jensen knew it was time. He desperately pleaded with himself to NOT cum yet, as he pulled his fingers out and lined his dick up. He sloppily squirt lube all over his raging cock, then tossed the tube aside, not caring about anything other than the tight hot channel waiting for him. Jensen lifted Jared’s legs and placed them over his shoulders to take the pressure off the injured one. He pushed his cock in slowly until the head popped past the rim. “Uuhh,” he grunted hard, feeling waaaayyy too many sizzling sparks of pleasure to be able to hold this out for too long. “Jesuschrist,” Jensen panted and grunted, “you feel too fucking good, baby.” He was barely able to contain himself. That tightness was begging him to push in and rise to orgasm, RIGHT GODDAMNED NOW. Jared encouraged him, “It’s okay...push Jensen, push now.”

Jensen pushed deeper and growled, “Mmm, fuck, I’m not gonna be able to hold this...fuck, it feels too good.” Jared pulled Jensen’s face down to meet his and licked his lips, inviting him in for a heated kiss. Jensen kept pushing in, grunting from the effort, while kissing Jared. He finally landed fully inside Jared, and had to pull his mouth away to catch his breath. “God Jared. You feel fucking amazing.” He closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. If he didn’t, this would be over way too quick. The lovers stared hard into each others eyes for a few seconds, then Jensen started to move. He pulled back slow, then pushed in with a sharp jolt to Jared’s prostate. “Aah,” Jared’s cry egged Jensen on. They cried out in unison as Jensen pushed in over and over. There was nothing like this. Each man drowned in the ecstasy of being connected like this, the bonding of bodies and souls during exquisite passion. Jensen hit Jared’s prostate over and over. He felt himself building toward orgasm, Jared tightening with tension even further. “Jensen,” Jared’s face was filled with desperation and anguish. He couldn’t ever imagine feeling like this with anyone and it overwhelmed his senses. Jared’s face showed everything, as Jensen grunted harder, his face turning redder. He fucked Jared faster, as his body began to coil with tension.

Jared’s ass pushed up to meet each thrust, craving it and begging for it. Jensen fucked him harder, growling, grunting and Jared was taking it. His lover was like an addictive drug, pushing Jensen to pound him harder. There were no more words, only cries increased pressure. They were racing toward the precipice with no way to stop. Jensen fucked Jared hard and fast now, the kid screaming from the pleasure of it. He swore Jared’s channel tightened more. He kissed him, as he reached down and pumped Jared’s cock. Jared screamed into his mouth, the sight and sounds beautiful to Jensen’s ears as his orgasm coiled and exploded with a violent vengeance. He jerked hard right into Jared’s prostate, “Mmmmmmmmmnggggh,” growling fiercely into Jared’s mouth. Jared jerked and tensed in
return, screamed into Jensen’s mouth, “Mmmmmmmmmnnnn,” as together they rode the forces of intense pulsating pleasure. Their eyes rolled up and they spasmed violently for several seconds. Jensen grunted and groaned, helplessly, as spasms massaged Jared’s prostate through unimaginable orgasmic pleasure. They rode the aftershocks together, shaking with tension and endorphins. They broke their mouths apart just to breathe. Neither man spoke, they simply held there poised, trying to catch their breath. Jared had his hands in Jensen’s short hairs, Jensen’s were clenched on the pillows beside Jared’s head. He had quickly let go of the younger man’s dick when he came and grabbed the pillows, completely unaware of his motions.

When Jensen started to recover, he kissed Jared lightly all over his face, even on his closed eye lids until Jared finally moaned and turned his face toward him. “Mmmmmmm,” was all Jared could muster, at the moment. Jensen grinned, watching the beautiful look of post orgasmic wonder on his lover. Jared struggled to open his eyes for a few extra minutes, while Jensen kept kissing him. He was finally rewarded when Jensen forced his eyelids to open, and realized he was being stared at. “Shit,” he grumbled, sporting an adorable all over blush at being slow on the recovery. Jensen grinned with love in his eyes, “That’s the most beautiful post orgasmic blush on the planet...and only I get to see it.” Jared glanced at him, perturbed with his assessment, knowing he was probably turning even redder. This made Jensen laugh. Jared sighed, as Jensen kissed him all over again, coaxing and soothing, “Mmmm...you can’t help it, baby. You’re completely innocent. You were made this beautiful and it’s not your fault.”

Jared rolled his eyes and smirked, “Blushing is not beautiful, I hate it,” trying to roll away and not give in to an actual smile. Jensen stopped him, of course, then looked at Jared with feigned hurt, “It really must be horrible having to live with this gorgeous set of eyes and an all over magnetic blush, and dimples to kill for and that perfectly sculpted face and body. God, it’s so unfair.” Jared had still been trying to squirm away from the attention, but Jensen had him completely under his body weight. “Uh,” Jensen jerked when his ass cheek was kicked with one of Jared’s heels. Jensen smiled, “Then there’s the spunk too...that’s another hot piece.” Jared giggled because he couldn’t help it. “Stop being an idiot,” he said, but then he giggled magically a bit more. Jensen grinned and kissed him again, then brushed the hair back from his face, “You ready to sleep?” Jared nodded, still smiling as he yawned. Jensen kissed him once more. He searched Jared’s eyes for any pain or discomfort, “Are you alright? Does anything hurt?” The younger man shook his head, “No, everything’s numb. I think my nerve endings are all dead...you killed them on overload.”

Jensen kissed him with a knowing grin, “I know what you mean by ‘overload,’ Jesus.” He looked into Jared’s eyes, “Everything about you blows me away. I never dreamed I could feel anything like this.” Jensen slowly descended on Jared’s mouth and kissed him thoroughly. Being mindful of the sore side, Jensen explored every corner of the kid’s delectable hot wet oral cavity, stroking his tongue lovingly against Jared’s, sharing every ounce of heated devotion he had the energy for. Jared was completely swept away. When Jensen backed gently from the kiss, he took a few seconds to stare into Jared’s beautiful eyes, reading the returned love and happiness there. He kissed Jared lightly once more, then gently eased his softened member out of the younger man’s hot channel. Jared waited and watched, as Jensen went into the bathroom for a wet rag. He was feeling lethargic and sleepy, definitely too pleasantly dreamy to even cover himself up. Jensen returned with a very hot wet towel and a dry one. He cleaned them up, ending with his usual push of the hot wet towel up into Jared’s ass, holding it snug against the swollen hole. “Mmmm,” Jared hummed his approval. He had to admit it felt wonderful and instead of being embarrassed, he welcomed it. Jensen was so caring, so careful with him, and the heat on his most sensitive area was penetrating the thin skin and relaxing. Jensen threw the towels into the hamper, then slipped into bed and covered them both. He could tell Jared was wiped out, and he had to admit, he was too. Both men drifted into sleep after snuggling close. “I love you,” Jared whispered dreamily with his eyes closed. Jensen kissed his forehead and sighed, “I love you, too. Sleep well, Jare.” When Jared’s breathing deepened and
became more rhythmic, Jensen was able to let himself follow him into deep slumber.

The next morning proved to be another advance in Jared’s recovery. Jensen woke to the kid yawning and stretching without any discomfort. They shared some delayed time in bed, affectionately kissing and rubbing each other, enjoying the warmth under the covers. Finally, hunger won out and they went to the kitchen in sweats and heavy socks. The fire was huge and there were coffee cups and muffins waiting by a fresh pot of espresso. Jensen grabbed some butter and sat with Jared at the table to enjoy their continental meal. The others traipsed in, carrying bundles of wood, which they stacked next to the fireplace. Both men went back and forth a few times, bringing as much wood in as they could fit. The weather was icy cold, with a northern wind. It wasn’t a desirable day to be outside. The pieces of ice on Mike and Dave’s eyelashes confirmed that for Jared, as they discarded their coats, hats, gloves and boots at the back door. “Toto, we ain’t in Kansas anymore,” Jared said, as the two men came toward them. “Jesus, how much colder does it get here?” Jared looked at Jensen worriedly.

The older man put his coffee down, “Well, it’s only November. December will be more snow, then by January, it’s iced over most of the time. Dangerous, but beautiful. Usually in the teens to upper twenties until February. This year, I’ll be better prepared. Last year was my first winter here and I was quite the opposite.” Jared watched the other men grab fresh cups of coffee, then come sit down. Mike spouted off, “Bout time you two dragged your butts outta bed while Dave and I slaved away.” Jensen continued to drink his coffee, unfazed, while Jared immediately felt guilty for not being able to help with the heavy chores. “Knock it off, love, he’s teasing,” Jensen interrupted his thoughts. Jared mentally bitched at being so apparently obvious. He did a double take at Mike and Dave’s looks, however, suddenly feeling assessed. ‘Jesus, they know what we did last night,’ he blushed, then looked at Jensen for help while he smoothed his hair back, nervously, and sipped his coffee. Dave opened his mouth to speak, but Jensen cut him off, “He’s fine, you guys cut it out.” Jensen eyed Dave and Mike with purpose, determined to protect Jared at all costs, but Dave realized on his own that it would embarrass the Hell out of his new friend if he voiced his concern. “I can plainly see you’re much better, Jared. That’s excellent,” Dave went for something encouraging.

Jared feigned a responding smile and nodded, while still nervously sipping. Mike piped in from the coffee pot, “Well, he does look better. We just wanna make sure he doesn’t need any interventions or anything to keep your hands off him while he’s still injured.” Everyone got quiet. Jensen sighed, loudly, mentally chastising his friend for embarrassing the hell out of Jared. The engineer closed his eyes and sighed. After studying his coffee for a few seconds, he finally risked at nervous glance at Jensen. “I’m sorry,” Jensen said, feeling terrible, “They’re overbearing dickheads.” Jensen grinned, “It’s okay. I’ll get used to it.” He looked up at the ceiling and added, “I hope.” Jensen grinned at Jared’s gesture. “So,” the younger man quickly changed the subject, “0500 tomorrow, yes?” Jensen and the others chirped in “Yep.” Jared asked, “Can I try it without the crutches tomorrow?” Jared waited in hopeful silence while the three medical experts considered that request. His leg was getting better, and he really felt like the bulky crutches were going to interfere with him helping serve. Jensen glanced at the other two, then turned to Jared, “I think you can walk on it, see how it feels. It’s gonna hurt like a bitch if you don’t ease into it. We’ll try it, but it may not cooperate if you’re on it too long.” Dave added, “It’s amazing the damage a bullet can cause to the surrounding tissue and it takes awhile to mend.” “Oh,” Jared’s face fell. Jensen studied him a few seconds, “Is it bothering you that you can’t walk around tomorrow?” Jared shrugged a shoulder, “Kind of. How useful can I be if I can’t carry dishes or trays or something?” Jared looked between them while the silent veterans each warred within their own thoughts about their lovable genius who needed some way to feel useful. Jensen leaned toward him, “We’ll put you on the serving line and you won’t have to walk around. We’ll do the back and forth stuff.” Jared looked pleased, “Oh...yeah that sounds great, thank you.” The rest of the day was spent with a long shower for Jared, still working to keep his wounds dry. The ex-soldiers cleaned up the house, doing separate tasks. Jared worked on some engineering
plans with his laptop, while Mike and Dave went for a long walk outside. The evening was peaceful and relaxed. Everyone went to bed early, and Jensen slept like the dead again with Jared in his arms.

Thanksgiving went off without a hitch. The 0500 temperatures were below freezing and it was slippery as hell outside. The group hung onto Jared on the way to the truck, then again on the way to the restaurant doors. Each of them had slipped more than once and they weren’t messing around with the possibility of Jared getting hurt again. The population of Cedar Ridge turned out to be fantastic. Jared made new acquaintances left and right. He’d met so many people and learned from local families who had been there for generations. It had been a beautiful day. He stood mostly at the serving counter, but filled drinks and picked up a few dishes in between. The crowd was dwindling down around four in the afternoon, and Jared found himself suddenly unable to step on his leg. He leaned on the counter and tried to step on it several times, but it seemed to be completely useless and throbbing painfully.

He closed his eyes and cursed to himself in a quiet voice, trying to be respectful to anyone with children within earshot. He knew he needed to sit down but the empty tables felt miles away. He leaned on the counter heavily, then suddenly felt strong hands lift him under his armpits. “Gotcha buddy,” Jensen’s voice. Jared blinked open his eyes and realized Jensen and Dave had come quickly to his rescue and lifted his weight off the leg. Jared was carried over to the back empty table where he could scoot against a wall and lean his head back. Dave lifted his bad leg and propped it on the bench seat, while Jensen grabbed Jared’s pain pills. He knelt down in front of the kid and held out a large white pill. “Take this, okay,” Jensen coaxed, as he felt Jared’s forehead with the other hand. Jared took a glass of Sprite from Mike, who had suddenly appeared, then downed the pill without argument. Mike leaned over and looked into Jared’s eyes. “He’s fried,” the ex-soldier deduced. Jensen nodded, “Oh yeah,” then took Jared’s pulse.

Mike spoke to Jared, “Dude, you killed it today with that bad leg...we served three hundred and eight people.” Jared finished sipping more Sprite, then responded tiredly, “That’s good.”

His voice sounded gravelly and a bit hoarse to the men. They knew he was exhausted. Jensen absently rubbed his thumb on Jared’s arm, “Make sure you stay put while we clean up, alright? You don’t feel hot, but I think your system’s had it, buddy.” Jared didn’t argue. Jesus, he was bone tired. This had been constant standing and moving all day and he just wasn’t used to it with all the injuries and laying around lately. Fuck, he was too tired to even be pissed at being tired. He simply nodded in acceptance while the three veterans went to clean tables and put chairs and dishes away. After they cleaned up, they sat at the back table and discussed things that could be changed or added next year. Everyone was happy with the successful day and Steve had been ultimately pleased with the larger turnout. “It’s getting out there, people are hearing about it,” he beamed. Jared yawned through the post discussion, trying desperately to pay attention. That Motrin had relaxed all his hurts and now he seemed to be idling, drifting in and out and feeling quite silly. Apparently, there was a private Christmas Eve party being planned now, which he caught bits and pieces of. Jared thought it sounded wonderful but he wasn’t sure if he’d voiced that, or not. His eyelids were now failing.

“I think Manny and Jeff would love it...and any of your other friends you’d like to invite,” Jensen offered to a half comatose Jared. Jensen smiled at the adorable sleepy response, “Yeah,” then eyed his friends that they’d better get the kid home soon. Jared was definitely not firing on all cylinders anymore, they could all see that. Dave grabbed the crutches and some of their things they’d brought, then followed Mike outside. Jensen waited with Jared while they loaded the truck and pulled it up close to the front. When Dave came back in, Jensen and he lifted Jared and practically carried him to the truck. Jared felt the vibration of a moving vehicle and then the soft plush pillows of a bed. ‘Jensen’s bed,’ he realized and nestled himself into the thick covers and pillows. Jensen manhandled the clothes off his lover and got him into pajamas. Jared was compliant and limp, completely unaware, slipping right into a deep sleep. Jensen put things away, took a quick shower to rinse the
day off, then went out to have a beer with his friends.

The group was pleased with their young charge’s progress. Jared was getting well, finally. They discussed the immediate future, what would happen now, and when the case would be over and how they were going to let Jared be a ‘free’ person again. It would be a process, backing off from being Jared’s hovering caretakers, but the successful brainiac was going to need his space while he got back to normal. In the next few days, Jared recovered even more remarkably well. After sleeping over eighteen hours from Thanksgiving, Jared’s leg seemed to perform even better. He began walking on the treadmill in the mornings and doing some limited weights. He was feeling so much stronger. He showered for the first time without worrying about getting his wounds wet, claiming it was heaven to stand freely under the hot water. December was coming and he started to wonder what he should do about his house but he hadn’t brought it up yet. Jensen had been the most amazing addition to his life and Jared couldn’t imagine living that far away from him. He knew he needed seriously to think about his future.

Jared talked with his friends back in Austin and caught up on their lives, then somehow convinced them to come to Cedar Grove for the Christmas Eve party before they visited their own respective families. Price scheduled a meeting with Jared the morning before his testimony. There were the additional charges of attempted murder and kidnapping to add to the existing felonies that were already being prosecuted. The deposition meeting went well. It was lengthy but Price had been the only one in the room except for Jensen and Chuck. The other special ops retirees spent time at their homes while Jensen went with Jared. Security was still around, but tension was lighter with all the perpetrators in jail. Jensen was still pissed off at Chuck for wanting to use Jared as bait, but he left it alone in order to get Jared through the meeting undistracted. Chuck updated the employees on the company’s trial, kept them holding as they were until they were advised on the future of the company. He had tried to keep their spirits positive until decisions were made. He looked at Jared, “Jared...a ton of ‘em asked about you in the Austin office. You’d be surprised how many of them are worried and admire you.” Jared looked at him in disbelief, “They don’t all hate me?” Chuck smiled, “Why would they do that? You’re a hero.” Chuck packed his briefcase, still smiling at the continued dumbfounded look of wonder on Jared’s face. He shared a quick glance with Jensen, but said nothing, knowing damn well the special forces veteran was still pissed at him. Chuck hadn’t done things perfectly and he knew it, so he just walked away. Jensen had left him in one piece, he should feel blessed.

When Jensen got home with Jared, they put an early barbecue together just in time for Mike and Dave to arrive back. They spent the evening talking about the Christmas Eve gathering and what games Dani would probably organize. Jensen had promised the couple he would cook, but he wasn’t wearing any damn antler ears with flashing lights on them. Jared laughed at the ex-soldier’s bantering and bitching about Dani’s annoying desire for party games and costumes. They vowed that none of them would be agreeable to the ugly sweater nonsense, either. Jared’s mind wandered to his house, as they were sipping beer. He also hadn’t really argued with the idea of working for Jensen, nor had he agreed to it. He supposed he was so in love with Jensen, nothing mattered but how it felt to be near him. Jared wanted to be close, no matter what, and Austin definitely wasn’t close. If he could move here and share his life with Jensen, it wouldn’t matter where he worked. “What’re you thinking,” Jensen interrupted his thoughts. He could see Jared’s wheels turning. Jared smiled and shrugged, “About my house...about Austin.” Jensen watched him for a few seconds, then leaned toward him, “Are you planning your escape, cuz I’m gonna follow you if you try and run. I’ve got hog ties in my closet, Padalecki.”

Jensen glanced at his friends, then back at Jared, “I’ve got backup, too, should you put up a fight.” Jared giggled magically, “No, of course not, you ass.” He was so different now. Jensen had done this. Jared’s giggle made Jensen smile. The younger man finally tried to turn more serious, “I was thinking that I probably need to sell my house in Austin and look for a place here. At least I’d stop
wasting an empty house. It makes sense if I’m going to be working for you and be your office boy toy.” Mike spit his beer out and barked out laughing. Dave’s was more of a controlled chuckle. Jared kept his hand over his mouth, grinning behind it. He couldn’t believe he’d said that... ‘maybe it’s the goddamn alcohol,’ he thought. Jensen sighed in annoyance, while shaking his head. He could only muster, “I see,” as he was trying too hard to keep from laughing at being caught off guard by his lover’s wit.

Dave and Mike realized that seeing the kid almost well, like this, was having an effect on all of them. There was a definite uplifted feeling to the whole group. Jared looked like he thought of something else, “I really need to call my aunt. She’s in real estate and I bet she’d love to sell it for me.” Jensen listened, pleased beyond belief to hear Jared talking of moving, then he thought of something, “So, if you moved here, would you be happy jumping in with the SPCA shelters here instead of back in Austin?” Jared agreed wholeheartedly, “Oh yeah...definitely, it’s fun anywhere. I can repeat that ordinance too, getting it going for real. The shelters in Austin will understand.” Jensen grinned happily, then he added, “I think A.E. could move it’s central offices here to Denver...and I happen to know the boss would give you time to work on any extra-curricular endeavors you would want to do.”

Jared was silent, absorbing this, when Jensen added, “No one’s gonna work you round the clock like those assholes did...no skipping meals or losing sleep either. I want my Head of Engineering in prime condition.” Jared’s insides twisted up. It wasn’t a negative response. It was quite the opposite. This was becoming more real by the second. To hear Jensen give him a title like that, to finally have it sink in that he could have everything he needed and wanted right here in Cedar Grove was pretty overwhelming. His propensity to refuse believing in forever was suddenly warring with Jensen convenient building of the perfect wonderful future around him. This was not sinking as easily as the younger man wanted it to and he was angry at himself. Even though he didn’t voice it, Jensen noticed Jared seemed to be dealing with accepting all this. He tried to steer the conversation back to Jared’s house, by nodding his head toward Mike and Dave, “There’s a personal moving committee to get all your furniture here. As soon as you get out of escrow, they’ll be happy to load some U-Hauls.” Mike grumbled unhappily, “Fuck.” Dave grinned at Jared, “He’s right, we got you Jared, how much stuff do you have?”

Jared smiled adoringly at their offer. He knew everyone hated moving, “Well, I don’t actually have that much. I never decorated because I was never home. There’s living room stuff, a small dining set, one bedroom set and some kitchen stuff. Oh, and a t.v. I only slept there, really.” Jensen smiled, “Sounds like an easy job, then...and you don’t have to pay for storage, either. You can put it in my garage until you find a place here.” Jared looked worried, “I don’t need to clog up your garage. I can pay for storage.” Jensen countered, “You’re not. It’s no problem.” Jensen’s mind screamed, ‘Live with me,’ but he wasn’t quite ready to push that kind of permanence on the newly recovered young man. ‘Slow down, Ackles,’ he lectured himself privately, knowing Jared wasn’t going to be comfortable with too much all at once. The kid had been through Hell. Jensen suddenly looked worried, like he’d thought of a drawback, “When are you planning to do this? How soon?” The younger man thought about it for a few seconds, then said, “Well, I have to call her and put it on the market...maybe have it appraised. I have no idea when she’ll need me to come sign anything, but I’ll find out.”

Jensen forced himself to hold back the over protective possessive streak he had for Jared. Oh boy, did it race to the surface. The thought of his lover flying back to Austin and spending time there without him, and without about thirty security officers around him was ‘not’ a comfortable thought. The threats were over, but this was not sitting well. Jared continued, eagerly trying to sort through his new plans, “I’ll schedule an appraisal, talk to my aunt, and schedule things, then I’ll sign any papers she needs and I can meet with my shelters. I’ll bring my own car here too.” Jared smiled, proud of his idea, but his smile wasn’t met with any responding ones. Jensen looked like he was stewing, even
though he was trying not to look that way. He sipped his beer and tried to look supportive. Jared looked between the men and deflated, not entirely sure of what just happened, “What’s the matter? Did I say something wrong?” None of the veterans said anything, at first, so Jared raised an eyebrow and waited.

Jared finally spoke, seeing that his friends had reacted the same way he had, “It’s not your fault. This is hard for me...and hard for them.” Jared looked at Jensen, in confusion, so Jensen continued, “Letting you go.” Jared looked between them, then back at Jensen, “Letting me go?” Jared still looked confused, but he looked between them all and noticed they all had the same depressed look on their faces, like their puppy just died. “I don’t understand,” Jared offered, then jumped to appease them, “I’m not leaving...it’s...it’s just to get rid of my house so I can come here and stay.” Jared thought that was a wonderfully positive profound statement, meant to give the utmost uplifting support, but the three men still looked bothered...especially Jensen, who finally sighed and tried to make sense of it for Jared, “Believe me, you moving here is perfect. We’re ecstatic, especially me. It’s just that, they’ve been protecting you, guarding you, caring for you...and so have I...it’s like letting a family member go out into the shitty jungle for the first time alone.” Jared was silenced, now that he began to understand. Jensen continued, “No one wants to hold you back, or ruin your independence. And believe me, we know damn well how capable you are on your own. It’s just gonna take some getting used to.”

Jared remained silent, while Jensen glanced at the other two men and sighed. He looked at Jared again, “Believe me, it’s going to take every ounce of self control I have in me to not hover every time you go somewhere.” Jared didn’t know quite what to say. He was grateful beyond words for the way they had all watched out for him, and all he wanted at the moment was for them to feel better about this. He cleared his throat, like he was going to say something, but Jensen had more to say, “I know you took care of yourself for a lifetime before my ass came along...and I know it you’re quite capable, as we all do...and when you’re doing your engineering and running around at work, we all realize you’ll be on your own.” Mike cleared his throat and mumbled, “He doesn’t have to be.” Dave looked at Jensen with a smirk, “He could have security with him when he goes in the field.” Jensen grinned at his friends, then glanced back at Jared, who suddenly looked like he was going to argue having bodyguards following him around. “Now wait a minute,” Jared started, but the three veterans were already spouting off feigned plans between them about how they would take turns keeping Jared safe when he went out in the field.

The younger man sighed and shook his head, knowing it was a lost cause. The veterans were completely ignoring his annoyance. He knew when the time came, he knew he would ‘not’ need security, nor would he accept it, goddammit. These mother hens would need to relax. Jensen leaned forward on his elbows to look at Jared, as if he knew exactly what the younger man was thinking, “I can’t even describe what this is gonna take for me to let go, Jare. So, when you do things by yourself, go places without me, will you just bare with me because I have to inch myself back from smothering you?” Jared melted inside. He took Jensen’s hand in his and nodded. He squeezed Jensen’s hand and looked between the ex-soldiers, “I’ll need you all to kind of bare with me, too. I’m not used to having this.” They listened while Jared explained further, “I’ve had Manny...and his family...and then Jeff, too and my aunt, but this is...” Jared wasn’t sure if he was even explaining anything, so he paused. When he sighed in frustration, Jensen helped him out, “A team? Family?” Jared nodded, then felt on the brink of getting emotional so he kept it short, “It’s like I had it...then it was gone. Twenty two years went by and now all of a sudden it’s back.” He stopped there. Anything further and he was going to lose it.

Jared inhaled some fresh air and looked at them, “I’ve always come and gone without anyone really noticing.” He shrugged his shoulder, “Except Blair, or maybe a few people who knew me a little.” Mike interjected, “Uh...I’m sure they noticed, Jared.” Dave piped in, “Yeah, you just didn’t ‘notice’ they noticed. Remember what Chuck said...you’ve got way more fans than you think.” Jared was
just going to rise and start clearing the table when Jensen pulled his vibrating cell phone out of his pocket. “Price,” Jensen grumbled, after he looked at the screen. Jared’s internal anxiety skyrocketed, as Jensen put the cell phone to his ear. It happened every damn time something with the case was mentioned. He was used to things going wrong, and he guessed he just expected it now. The fact that testimony was over and they were waiting on a verdict and sentencing still seemed surreal.

Jensen listened for a few minutes, while the others stayed quiet. Dave and Mike kept glancing at Jared, knowing damn well the kid was on pins and needles. He was staring at the table like he was expecting to hear something horrible had happened such as a jail escape or maybe they’d made a mistake and there were eight others out there they missed. Poor Jared had been put through the ringer and he was afraid to believe things were actually going right, for a change. Jensen hung up after a few minutes. He laid the phone on the table, looked at his friends first, then over at Jared, who was very still, and staring at the table. Jensen took one of his hands in his and squeezed it. Jared closed his eyes with a sigh, “Just tell me. Even if it’s fucked up, tell me everything.” Jensen glanced at Dave and Mike, gave them a quick knowing grin, then scooted closer to Jared and pulled his face toward him. The fear in Jared’s eyes pissed Jensen off and he wanted to drive over to the court holding cells and kill every one of the men who had put that there. Jensen kept that thought to himself. “I know you’re expecting the worse, but you don’t have to anymore.” Jared’s breathing increased, his brain struggling to believe that maybe Jensen was about to say something good happened.

Jensen smiled, “You did it.” Jared asked, “What?” Jensen replied, “Guilty...every goddamned one of ‘em is guilty, Jare. Eighteen counts of felony fraud with over thirty million in embezzlement charges to payback from their winnings.” Jared let out the breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. “Oh my God,” His eyes threatened to tear in relief at the news. ‘Holy shit, this can’t be happening,’ Jared’s exhausted mind kept repeating. Jensen continued, “That’s only the financial part of the case,” Jensen continued, while speaking to all of them, “Robert, Daniel and Hitman-Godfrey, Gethro, so otherwise now named, are guilty on top of that for two attempted murder’s and kidnapping with aggravated assault.” Jared looked stunned, like he couldn’t believe it. “So, they’re not getting out, right?” He was almost afraid to ask that, as his three protectors were pissed that Jared even had to fear that thought. Jensen placed his arm around Jared and rubbed his arm, “No, they’re not getting out. You did it...you put ‘em all where they belong.” Jared tried to comprehend that all of those assholes were getting what they deserved. ‘Holy crap, this is actually happening,’ he thought to himself. Dave tipped his beer toward Jared and spoke to Jensen, “Watch him, Jensen, he looks like he’s going into shock.”

The three Black Ops specialists laughed while Jared finally took a moment to inhale a few cleansing breaths and relax. He blatantly let out his brilliant opinion, “Well shit.” Everyone laughed again. Mike tipped his beer at the engineer, “To our genius.” The military experts clicked their beer bottles together and drank to Jared, and at their success of keeping him in one piece through everything. After that, the group dispersed to clean up and play some video games. Over the next few days, Jared’s leg became stronger and he finally tried jogging on the treadmill. It wasn’t bad. They’d gone back to measure the rest of Steve and Dani’s building, to finish planning for the floor replacement. Jared kept himself pleasantly busy with the design, and taught Mike some advance formulas at the same time. They decided to do the floor after New Year, so Jensen booked a meeting with the lawyers of A.E. and Jared’s former managers. He figured he’d get things moving and lay out a plan with all in charge, so they could hit the ground running after the New Year. He agreed to schedule a live feed appearance from the lawyer’s office for the A.E. employees, explaining everything that was to come.

Price had advised that sentencing for the case would happen a few days after Christmas, so Jared tried to relax about it in the meantime. On December 10th, Jared received an unexpected phone call from his aunt, telling him the house sold quickly and was expected to close a short escrow on the 20th. The buyers were in a hurry. Jared booked a flight to Austin that morning and planned on
driving back in plenty of time to make the Christmas Eve party. His friends in Austin were coming to
the party, anyway, so they offered to drive back in a convey. Jensen was grumbling internally, but
tried to be an adult on the outside. Every fiber of his being told him not to let Jared go alone, but he’d
scheduled the employee live feed meeting on the 20th and it was important to show reliable
leadership, especially now. ‘Let him go, he’s coming back,’ Jensen kept telling himself. He also
realized this would be good practice for him to start letting Jared out of his sight. The younger man
had been with him every day and night since they’d met and this was an entirely new concept. The
threats were in jail, and going to prison. Jensen knew he needed to relax.

The nights had been incredible, but with little privacy to be very loud. They covered themselves
completely, trying to muffle out the noises they made under Jensen’s thick covers. Dave and Mike
had taken breaks and gone home during some days, but they hadn’t spent nights away yet. Jensen
knew they were having trouble weaning themselves off of Jared’s wellbeing, like he was. Ultimately,
one the sentencing was complete, the veterans knew they would have no excuse to crowd Jared and
watch him all the time. Jensen went with Jared on his first walk/jog outside. It was icy and colder
than shit, but Jared didn’t care. It was Heaven to be outside again without being rushed between cars
and buildings. His leg was really good now, but it knotted up sometimes if he overdid the workouts. Jensen was accompanying him in case he couldn’t get back.

Jared loved Jensen’s neighborhood. The houses were far apart, separated by acreage, but the
neighbors could still see each other and the rolling hills were a fabulous cardio opportunity. He
couldn’t wait to go for some runs in this area. Jensen went back to his intense workouts four days a
week. He ran, but only if someone was at the house with Jared. None of the men had left Jared alone
yet and it hadn’t gone unnoticed by the younger man. Someone was always with him. He tried to be
annoyed that the official security had gone and his personal one was still lingering, but he couldn’t.
He loved these people, loved this home, and Jensen was everything he’d ever wanted in his life,
even more. Mike got his engineering classes set up for January and Jared cheered with him when the
‘Congratulations’ letter appeared in his email. Dave had been editing his works but hadn’t been
willing to share anything yet. He promised to show it to them soon. Dave told them he invited the
woman he’d been seeing to the Christmas Eve party, so they were finally going to get to meet her.
As the 20th approached, Dave and Mike promised Jared they would babysit Jensen because they
knew damn well he would be crying in the fetal position after Jared’s plane took off. Jensen rolled
his eyes and sighed at his friends, but secretly wondered if it were true. Shit, this was going to be
awful without Jared for two nights. As it was set, Jared would be leaving Austin the morning of the
22nd to get back to Jensen’s late that evening. He and Manny were driving the group straight
through and planned to be back before the party.

The lovers sent Dave and Mike away for the evening of the 19th for a long night of exploration in
front of the fire. This was their last night together for two nights and they needed it to be perfect.
Jensen brought out the thick plush white blanket they’d used before and added some pillows, while
Jared brought lube from the bedroom. The lovers stripped slowly in front of the fire, rubbing each
other’s skin in between removing their clothing. They took their time kissing, rubbing their hands all
over each other’s skin. There was no one to hear them, no one to interrupt or stop them. They pushed
harder against each other, moaned in abandon as passion built. Jensen thought if there was anything
that could sustain his life, it would be kissing Jared. This was the ultimate life source for him now.
Jesus, the kid tasted better than hot molten honey.

Jared was strong again, there was nothing keeping him from physically doing what he wanted. His
leg barely hurt and his muscular definition was returned. No more of Jensen having to be so careful to
keep from hurting him, although Jensen had already assured him that would never change. Jared was
feeling powerful and the fact that he wouldn’t see Jensen for two nights and almost three days was
really sinking in.

They made it to the blanket and laid down side by side, still kissing. Jensen started to pull a natural
alpha move and roll over Jared’s body to land on top of him, but Jared countered and pushed him back. This resistant feeling caused Jensen to push harder, but Jared wouldn’t give. Not wanting to hurt him, Jensen pulled back and searched Jared’s face, breathing hard and turned on beyond belief. Jared grinned and pushed Jensen onto his back. The older man allowed it, reading the intensity in Jared’s eyes. He let Jared take the lead, sure his own dick just doubled in size at the aggressiveness. Jared devoured Jensen’s mouth, fully exploring every corner of his orifice. He effectively thrust his tongue in and out, basically fucking Jensen’s mouth. They panted together, mouth’s barely allowing room to get air, as Jared’s tongue emulated what he wanted to do with his dick. “Do it to me,” Jensen spoke around their tongues, “I want you to fuck me and show me what you feel like.”

“Jesus Jensen,” Jared growled into Jensen’s mouth. Jared’s eyes seemed to turn black, as he made his way down the gorgeous military expert’s body. He licked and sucked his way down toward Jensen’s beautiful cock, causing Jensen to moan and gyrate with ecstasy. He kneaded his fingers through Jared’s hair, wondering if he would make it through this. Jared stuck his tongue in Jensen’s belly button, and wiggled it, feeling the proud rock hard cock below tapping his chin with pre-cum. Jensen was pushing up, but trying not to. Jared’s mouth was just too damn close to his dick right now. Jared crawled up and kissed Jensen again, then looked into his eyes, which were black with passion, “I don’t want to hurt you. Do you want to flip over this first time?” Jensen said, “No fucking way. This is you and I don’t care if it hurts. I want this with you, now, and I wanna see you.” Jared kissed him again, touched to his soul that Jensen wanted to share this openness with him. He hesitated, searching Jensen’s eyes, “I’ll do anything to make this perfect for you. Please don’t be afraid to stop me if it’s not...” Jensen stopped him by putting fingers over his mouth, “It’s already perfect...everything with you is. Now, would you pop my virgin ass with your beautiful cock please before I turn eighty?”

Jared giggled and made his way downward, mumbling “bossy” as he went back to his intended target. Jensen was about to refute that snotty ‘bossy’ comment when he felt the most shocking and incredible pleasure from Jared’s mouth enveloping his cock. “Oooooohhhh, my fuckingGod,” the older man yelled out, not expecting this. “Aaaaah,” he continued, “Oooh shit, Jare,” Jensen was floored, as Jared slid his mouth down Jensen’s dick and back up. Jared began to slide his mouth up and down, his newly healed mouth in quite working order as Jensen lost his mind. Jared lubed his fingers without taking his mouth away from its task. He introduced a finger to Jensen’s sensitive hole. Jensen moaned loudly, as Jared’s finger circled his rim. The stimulation was fucking intense. Jensen was pleasured beyond reason, his body moving toward that precipice where he knew he couldn’t hold back. Suddenly, Jared’s finger slipped inside and slowly started pumping in and out. Jensen loudly responded, unable to resist his body’s cravings to cum in Jared’s mouth. ‘Fuck,’ he knew he had to stop, but Jared was sliding that hot wet mouth over his most sensitive part and it was just, “Jare, I’m gonna cum.” Jared pushed in two lubed fingers, taking him by surprise. Jensen cried out, “Aaaaahhh,” clenching down, at first, then relaxing as his channel stretched to accommodate. “Oh God yes...Jare, yes,” as he pushed into Jared’s mouth and fucked himself backward onto Jared’s fingers. Jared thrust his fingers to match Jensen’s lead. This was fucking unbelievable. Jensen was immediately climbing to orgasm.

“Fuck!” Jensen growled, “Oh fuck, Jared, if you make me cum, I can’t cum again that soon, aaaaahhh,” he lost his wording as the fingers inside of him touched something and pumped harder. “Fuck, Jared!” Jensen yelled out. “FUCK!” He screamed again, because it felt too goddamned good. He grabbed the blanket hard to keep from pulling Jared’s hair out and came, “Aaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhh,” Jensen emptied his balls, clenching and shaking, and pulsating into Jared’s mouth. Jared sucked and milked Jensen, swallowing every drop of its essence, as Jensen dealt with his inability to hold back his loud moans of ecstasy. Jared moaned at the feeling of making Jensen do this. He loved it when Jensen was at his most vulnerable, open and trusting, allowing Jared to lead him through something so powerful. Jensen grunted through his spasms, tensing and
releasing until his orgasm finally released its hold. He dropped helplessly limp on the blanket, breathing incredibly hard and thrumming with the aftermath. Jesus, he had cum hard. Jared had surely killed him this time. Jensen was barely able to moan as he felt the hot wet mouth gently slide off his dick. Jesus, Jared had such power over him. He was complete putty in the kid’s hands.

Jared kissed the beautiful cock that had just blown its load in his mouth. He sat up on his knees and rubbed his hands up and down Jensen’s thighs. Such power and strength in the hardened muscles, and Jared couldn’t wait to feel them wrapped around his hips. He slipped his arms under Jensen’s legs and lifted, encouraging the older man to bend his legs and open himself more. Jensen finally opened his eyes and held his bent knees, giving Jared full access to his ass. The younger man grinned knowingly as he squirt gobs of lube onto his fingers. Jared balanced himself on his left hand, then looked Jensen in the eyes as his right hand went out of sight, “Are you still on board with this?” Jensen immediately grumbled, “God yes,” in a sexy deep post-orgasmic drawl. Then the older man added, “But I don’t think I can cum again. You fucking killed me.” Jared soothed, “Just try and relax until your body gives,” completely ignoring Jensen’s worry. He was going to send the man to oblivion again shortly. “And stop thinking you’re getting old and can’t cum more than once because you’re damn well about to do.” Jensen grinned sideways, looking at Jared with loving adoration in his beautiful green eyes. God, he loved it when this kid ordered him around.

Jared thought the grin looked a bit roguish, but then he pushed his same two fingers in and Jensen was distracted, “Oh,” he jolted. He moaned as Jared gently began pumping his fingers in and out. He didn’t need to be worked open for this, still loose and relaxed from what they’d done up ‘til this point. Jared watched the older man’s face, kissing his abdomen and rubbing his hand over Jensen’s beautiful body, wherever he could reach. “You’re so beautiful, Jensen,” Jared kissed his legs and licked a stripe up Jensen’s spent dick. Jensen moaned in pleasure, gyrating his hips and fully enjoying the feeling of being fucked by Jared’s fingers. Jensen was tight, Jesus he was tight, and Jared realized this would probably be the end of him trying to keep himself of blowing his load too soon when he pushed his dick in there. Jared noticed Jensen’s dick was barely full, still recovering from its blazing orgasm awhile ago and probably thinking it was done for the night. Jared gently added a third finger and carefully pushed it in, coaxing Jensen’s channel to adjust to the invasion. He pumped his fingers, very slowly at first, then sped up as Jensen responded. The older man still held his legs by their knees, completely open to Jared, and trusting. Jared pumped his stiffened fingers in and out, watching his lover’s face for any pain. Jared barely curled his fingers forward and searched for the raised little gland, then started lightly massaging it to give Jensen the ultimate experience. “Fuck,” Jensen’s breathing instantly increased, “M’god,” he grunted in pleasure, then began fucking himself on Jared’s fingers. “Oh, God, yes,” Jensen moaned uncontrollably. “Oh,” Jensen was beyond himself, groaning beyond his control. What Jared was doing to him was out of this world. “Fuck, Jared you’re gonna make me cum,” Jensen was suddenly pulled by some invisible force to reach orgasm again, NOW. Jared was so close he was about to explode. He pulled his fingers out and applied a huge gob of lube on himself, then leaned over Jensen and lined himself up just right. He took a few seconds to enjoy looking at Jensen in this position, then took note of the renewed raging hard on Jensen was sporting. “God, you look so good like this, soldier...opening yourself for me.” He smoothed his hands all over Jensen’s abdomen and kneaded his ass cheeks. He looked at the wet stretched pink hole and almost came. He was about to stick his dick in that hot wet channel and just the anticipation had him squeezing the base of his dick. Jensen saw Jared struggling, “Mmmmm...that’s fucking hot. You trying to stop yourself from cumming, baby?”

Jared didn’t dare let go, but struggled to answer, “Yes. Dammit Jensen...you look so fucking good and the fact that you’re open like this...letting me do this. Fuck,” Jared looked up and prayed for control. He couldn’t blow this for Jensen. The older man looked at his own dick, noticing it was rock hard again. He looked at Jared with steel resolve, “You don’t have to go slow. Just fuck me and let yourself go.” Jesus, was Jensen trying to kill him? Jared was at his limit here and Jensen goes and
tells him something like ‘that’. “Jensen,” Jared admonished, but Jensen argued, “Do it. I mean it, Jare, fuck me hard.” “Jesus,” Jared closed his eyes and moved carefully, looking like he was trying not to touch his dick to anything. He took a few deep breaths and placed his cock right against Jensen’s hole. Jared met Jensen’s eyes and began to push. He grunted, pushed, had to catch his breath, then grunted and pushed again. “Oh, Jesusfuckingchrist,” Jared blurted out, the pleasure overtaking him. His cock landed just inside Jensen’s tight ring, and both men cried out. Jared panted while Jensen adjusted to the invasion. It wasn’t long before Jensen wrapped his feet around Jared’s back and pulled him closer, “Come on, you won’t hurt me. I know you’re trying to be careful, but trust me. Fuck me Jare.”

Jared looked into his lover’s eyes and finally believed him. He pushed into the impossibly tight channel, his eyes rolling up into his head at the pleasure. “Oh, Jensen,” Jared whispered, barely able to catch his breath. This was unfuckingimaginable. Jared slid out and pushed back in, both men crying out gustily at the sensations. He started to fuck him, steady and slow, grunting and moaning, crying out at the blissful sparks of pleasure shooting through his dick. “Jensen, you feel so good...God, you’re so fucking tight,” Jared tried to concentrate, tried to formulate his thoughts into words but he was rapidly losing it. He sped up. He couldn’t stop himself. He was taken over by need and his body pushed into Jensen faster and harder. Jensen groaned and cried out, saturated with this new sensation of being filled, owned. Jared adjusted to hit toward the front of Jensen’s channel. Jensen let out a guttural cry, “YES, OH FUCK YES,” immediately taken over by powerful sparks of pleasure. Jared kissed Jensen wide open and hot, pushing him harder. He knew he wasn’t going to last. Jensen grabbed Jared’s head and pulled him down harder. He wrapped his legs tighter around Jared’s waist. Jared fucked him harder and Jensen screamed into his mouth from the intensity. He was being taken, vulnerable, at Jared’s mercy.

They broke the kiss, grunted and groaned, pushing their way to orgasm fast. “FUCK, JENSEN, I’M CUMMING,” Jared shouted. He grabbed Jensen’s dick and squeezed but lost any control over a rhythm. Jared slammed into Jensen violently twice more, threw his head back and tensed, “Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh,” he screamed. Jensen locked up and screamed, simultaneously erupting from his very core. He joined Jared as they spasmed hard. Jared clenched his fists tight in the blanket beside Jensen’s head, while his dick pulsed and squirt against Jensen’s gland. Jensen groaned loudly, riding the immense pleasure as it swept through his system. They shook and spasmed for several seconds. Jared struggled to hold himself up on shaky arms, while he fought to catch his breath and stay conscious. Jesus, his ears were ringing. Jensen opened up and hot, pushing into him harder. He felt Jared’s shaking efforts to try and keep his weight off him. “S’okay, baby,” he mumbled, “S’okay to lay on me, let go,” he rubbed Jared’s arms until the kid let go and landed completely on him. “Mmm,” Jensen moaned appreciatively, and kissed his lover on the top of his head while holding him tight. “I love feeling your weight on me,” he soothed, barely able to pronounce words.

Jared couldn’t respond with anything other than a moan yet. He laid there for quite awhile, then finally forced himself up to see if Jensen was okay. He’d kinda gone crazy for the man’s first time. Jesus Christ, the feel of Jensen had set him on fire. Jared supported himself on his elbows. He studied his Jensen’s face, while smoothing the spikey hair with his hand. Jensen’s clear green eyes seemed to be filled with post orgasmic wonder, at the moment. They looked pain free and at peace and they were looking at Jared like he’d hung the moon. “Are you okay or are you hurting?” Jared looked at his lover with concern. Jensen smiled lazily and moaned with genuine approval, “Oh, Hell yes I’m okay. Jesus, baby, you blew my circuits.” Jared snickered at his lover’s excitement. He searched Jensen gaze, looking worried. Jensen pulled his sensitive, sweet and concerned lover down for a kiss. After he fried Jared’s brain with his distracting tongue, Jensen pulled them apart and met Jared’s eyes, “That was the most incredible thing I’ve ever felt in my life...except being inside ‘you’, of course. We’re definitely doing this again,” then he blew Jared’s mind again with another kiss.

Jared slowly pulled out of the lubed up hole, then Jensen rolled them over, landing on top. He kissed
his gorgeous brainiac until Jared’s head spun, then looked into the younger man’s eyes, “I’m gonna miss you so damn much...every second, ya know.” Jensen’s inner voice yelled out, ‘Sap, it’s only two nights.’ Jared realized he’d been avoiding this subject. He’d been busy and distracted, and not entirely ungrateful they didn’t have to talk about this. The pain of loss, leaving Jensen behind, even for a couple days wasn’t something he wanted to address. This was an old habit of his. Keep busy and you won’t have to address it. He finally responded, “I’ve been avoiding thinking about it because I feel the same way. I’m probably not gonna sleep until I get back because I can’t without you next to me.” Jared stared hard into Jensen’s gaze, letting him see the vulnerability there, “I’m so sorry this was a stupid idea to be in such a hurry. I should have delayed the escrow and waited until after the holidays when you could come with me.” Jensen kissed his delicious lover again, then argued softly, “Nothing you do could ever be a stupid idea. You’re doing good things. Anything that brings you back to me permanently is a win in my book. It’s logical, but it’s just going to be hard, that’s all. Don’t think I’ll be sleeping either, baby. We might have to sleep with the phone line open between us, at least, so I can hear you breathing.”

Jensen grinned when he thought of something, “Then you’ll hear me fart in my sleep...and snore.” Jared broke out laughing and Jensen couldn’t keep from smiling at the picture. He’d lightened up the mood and gotten to see that diamond wattage smile, even if only for a minute. That’s what he would be remembering until Jared got back. This was definitely a depressing time, but Jensen reminded Jared, “Focus on the return, and what that’s going to feel like. I’ll be doing that too, okay?” The lovers slept out in the living room, sharing the cozy couch near the blazing fire. They slept in each other’s arms with nothing but socks on. Neither man got cold as they stayed wrapped tightly within each other’s hold. Morning sucked. It was cold and still dark and Jared was leaving. Jensen had nothing good to say about it. They drove to the airport in silence, sipping some of the coffee Jensen had made. Jared wondered why the new rule was to be at the goddamned airport two hours in advance anymore. He’d definitely come sailing in twenty minutes before take off lots of times in the past.

The last kiss before getting on the plane was sweet and loving. Jared was letting Jensen know he would be back and Jensen was letting Jared know he’d be waiting. The last call prompted the lovers to break apart, unwillingly, Jensen fighting himself all the way as he watched his lover board the plane, alone. He went home and dressed for his live feed meeting to all the A.E. offices before heading for Denver. He finished in under an hour, then returned home to take off the offending business attire. Jared called when he landed and Jensen found it had only been about two and a half hours, though his heart insisted it had been fifteen. When he heard Jared’s voice, “I’m here...safe,” Jensen immediately countered with, “Good, then hop on the next return flight and get back here. You’ve been gone too long.” Jared chuckled softly, “I know. Remind me never to do this again.” Jensen agreed, “No problem.” They ended the phone call with Jared promising to call him before he went to bed, and Jensen asking Jared to please not jump into any fires trying to save a chihuahua or something...basically, stay safe. Jensen cleaned up the house with a vengeance, scrubbing corners and emptying out drawers. By the time he turned off his Eminem and AC/DC, what he called his ‘angry’ music, he felt worn out. He took a hot shower and laid in his bedroom with the television on, waiting for Jared’s call. ‘Pathetic,’ Jensen berated himself. If his idiot friends could only see him now. They’d called earlier and he feigned nonchalance, but he knew they weren’t fooled.

Jared had been busy. After letting Jensen know he landed, he heard the unmistakable voice of his long time friend yelling through the airport, “As I live and breathe.” Manny never spared any propriety and Jared thought to himself he was kind of like a shorter non muscular version of Mike. Jared turned to see Manny coming toward him with a huge smile and after a hug, he asked instantly with concern, “Why didn’t you bring beefcake?” Jared knew exactly who Manny was talking about...and he knew exactly what Manny was worried about, too. He quickly dispelled any worries, “He’s at home, his home, and he’s waiting for me.” Jared smiled at Manny’s raised eyebrow, “I’m
serious, Man. I’m making the plunge to be near him...fucking forever, if he’ll keep me that long.”
Manny watched his friend’s face, noticing right away the change in Jared. His friend was in love...and he ‘was’ loved...and he knew it. Jared was happy. ‘Holy shits and giggles,’ Manny thought, as he grinned widely. Jared rolled his eyes, “Stop staring at me, you idiot.” Manny gushed, “I’ve never seen you in love before. Man, it’s a great look on you. I owe that beefcake my 401K for making you this happy.” Jared giggled, as they walked to Manny’s car, “He makes me beyond happy.”

Manny filled Jared in on his mail, some bills he’d paid and Jared’s neighbors. Jeff and Manny hadn’t seen any press at his place, but the neighbors had reported to Jeff that a couple reporters had come by and asked where Jared was. Nobody knew anything so they gave up. Jared apologized, quite unnecessarily, in Manny’s opinion, for all that he’d put his friends through. Manny was really tired of hearing it, “Dude...enough. You’ve apologized already and you didn’t cause any of this. And as for your team of G.I. Joe’s, we all feel like throwing them a party and buying them new cars for what they’ve done. You’re important to us and they got you through this. Thank God, Jared,” Manny shook his head, “I’m still amazed that you’re sitting right next to me.” Jared looked down shyly, knowing he was truly blessed to have friends like this. “It’s over,” he turned to his friend. When Manny glanced at him, Jared continued, “The sentencing is after Christmas, but Price says it’s about fifteen years for the frauds and then their accounts will be liquidated to pay everything they get fined and the employees’ salaries. The other charges are stacked twenty something year sentences. It’s a long time.” Manny commented, “Good. They don’t belong out here anymore where they’d just do that shit to somebody else. You’re a hero, my friend.” Jared responded with a ‘tsk’ sound of disbelief, “Everyone keeps saying that,” he added. Manny rolled his eyes, “Oh yeah, of course ‘you’ don’t think that. Nevermind, we’ll all keep thinking it for you.”

Jared smiled softly to himself, silenced by his friend for any further argument. They pulled up to Jared’s house and everything looked quiet and tranquil, except for the three cars in his driveway and in front. “Crap, did you plan this?” Jared looked at Manny and sighed, in annoyance, then pushed himself to get out of the car. Jared was forced to endure hours of doting attention from Blair, Lisa, Cassie, Jeff and Manny. His aunt was there, too. He hadn’t expected that and Jared found himself once again overwhelmed that he had such good people in his life. They had ordered a huge Chinese food collection and stayed until nine p.m. They’d gone over everything under the sun about Jared’s testimony and the attempts on his life. He found himself exhausted from answering their prodding questions. After they all left, Jared yawned while looking at the multiple stacks of mail on his entry table. “Ugh,” he commented, then headed to take a hot shower. Once under the covers, Jared turned an old western movie on, naturally drawn to the comfort of something Jensen might be watching. He called Jensen’s number and immediately felt peace and warmth permeate his soul when he heard the rich timbre of his lover’s voice.

“You in bed?” Jensen asked after the first ring. Jared sighed, “Mmhmm,” then yawned, “I’ve been prodded and interrogated for the last eight hours from the girls, Manny and Jeff, stuffed with Chinese take out, and finally had a hot shower. I really thought it would make me sleep but I can tell it ain’t in the cards.” Jensen snickered softly, “I’m sorry, love. If I was there, I would get you to sleep.” Jared giggled, “Oh I know that.” He sighed again, “I’m watching an old western movie that I’d ‘never’ watch...thought it would help to watch something you like, ya know?” Jensen’s heart melted, “It’s probably the same one I’m watching. At least we’re in the same time zone.” Jared could hear the grin in Jensen’s voice and he couldn’t stop the one on his face. Jensen’s voice was soothing. Jared filled him in on his plans to be home for some early inspections in the morning, then go visit his shelters. His aunt was coming back in the afternoon and he was going to take her to dinner after he signed all his papers. “Sounds like a good day,” Jensen offered. “Yeah,” Jared sighed, trying to sound positive, but knowing damn well it wasn’t going to be easy getting through another day and night. At least driving on the 22nd would keep him busy and he’d be heading back toward Jensen.
Sleeping still wasn’t easy, even after they’d talked. Jared knew this was going to happen. He finally wound up falling asleep from utter exhaustion around two a.m. then waking up angrily to the blaring alarm at seven. “Fuck,” he bitched. He dragged himself out of bed to get ready for the inspectors. When Jared called the second night, the older man answered immediately, “You doing okay?” Jensen’s voice again bathed Jared’s soul in warm comfort. He could feel the older man right through the phone line and it filled him with all kinds of fluttery feels. Jared smiled, “I love you.” He blurted that out before saying anything else. Jensen answered, “I love you too. Are you okay?” Jensen sounded immediately concerned. Jared responded, “I’m fine. I just can’t wait ’til tomorrow. We’re leaving at six a.m. and hoping to be there in about ten hours.” Jensen was worried about a storm approaching, but it wasn’t supposed to hit until the 24th, so Jared’s group should beat it and be okay. He told Jared he worked out for almost three hours, thinking it would wear him out. Jared asked, “Did it work?” Jensen said, “Of course not,” then sighed. Jensen grinned at Jared’s giggle. “So,” Jensen started, “I get to have any wicked way I want with you the minute you get here, right?” Jared could hear the grin in Jensen’s voice, so he responded, “You don’t even have to ask, just cut my clothes off with that huge field knife of yours and fuck me stupid.”

Silence. Jared smiled, thinking he’d probably stumped the special forces expert into silence for a few seconds. He could envision Jensen’s raised eyebrow. Jensen finally cleared his throat and muttered out, “Jesus Jared. I’ve sure got a visual now to tie me over. Holy fucking shit.” Jared became serious then, “Speaking of fucking, how’s your lovely rear end? Are you sore?” Jensen moaned appreciatively, “Only in a very agreeable way. I did sit on my weight bench a little hard, at first, and was pleasantly reminded that I’d had my cherry popped by a gorgeous hunk recently.” Jensen paused, then he continued, “Course, then he sailed away, left me lonely and missing him. He promised to call me but you know how that is...” Jared giggled again, which made Jensen smile. “Tomorrow night can’t come soon enough,” Jared said with a sigh. Jensen sighed in return, “For me too. Are you gonna be able to sleep?” Jared yawned, “Maybe...now that I’ve talked to you...I’ll try.” Jensen said, “I’ll try too. Just remember your long drive, love. You need to rest as much as you can.” Jared smiled, “Okay,” then both men said their goodbye’s and hung up.

‘Dammit,’ Jared thought when he looked at his phone the next morning. He immediately called Jensen. The older man answered on the first ring, “You looking at the weather?” Jared sighed, “What the fuck does that mean? Are we going to be banned from getting into Denver?” Jensen said, “The airport’s going to close during the blizzard. Now they’ve upped the storm to start later today. The storm is supposed to be nasty and it’ll make the roads too dangerous for travelers. They might close the smaller ones, but I don’t think they’ll close the major highways if you stay on those, but they still get bad.” “Shit, I had no idea it would be this bad,” Jared vented. Jensen said, “They can’t make up their goddammed mind and keep changing the start time and exact areas that’ll be hit. Are you ready to leave?” Jared answered, “Yeah, Manny’s on his way over with Jeff and the girls. Blair and Jeff are riding with me.” Jensen grumbled, “This doesn’t usually happen ’til January, but shit’s freezing early so everything’s off. Jare, you have to promise to stop and stay somewhere if it gets bad, okay? Do ‘not’ drive in any ugly shit. You can hang tight and wait for it to run its course somewhere, if you have to. It’s more important to me that you stay in one piece, baby.” Jared sighed, “I will, Jen, I promise...I just want to get home.” Jensen was damn frustrated, worried sick too, but his ears hadn’t failed to pick up Jared calling Denver ‘home’. Jared was coming home. He sighed, rubbing his face, then thought about his original idea of something to give Jared for the holiday. He decided to keep busy working on it.

After Jensen made it home and boosted up his fire, the most unimaginably frustrating and depressing thing happened at three in the afternoon. The power went out. Not only did the electricity go out, but Jensen’s cell phone went dead. Apparently, cell towers were having issues. Jensen knew the storm had officially taken over everyone’s lives for the next several hours. “Fuck,” he cursed out loud. This was going to be fucking horrible losing contact with Jared. Last he heard, the group had stopped for
After finding a couple beers, Dave and Mike quickly went to the fire to thaw themselves out. “It took us two hours, bro, so it’s not like it was an easy feat to get here,” Mike further explained. “Jesus,” Jensen further chastised them for taking the risk. He grabbed the cold beer Mike offered him and joined them by the fire. ‘Might as well,’ he thought to himself. This was unbelievable. Shit happened and things got in the way of what you wanted in life, but to not be able to ‘talk’ to him or hear his voice? Jensen spent the next couple hours having minimal discussions about anything his friends brought up. They used flashlights to move around and in the bathroom. It was damn cold so everything in the fridge stayed fresh. They nibbled on cold cuts when he got hungry. They finally fell asleep with the fire burning high. Early morning, Jensen was sadly stirring a pot of hot coffee over the fireplace when his cell phone rang. He had purposely set the tone loud for when it worked again. “Jared?” He instantly asked, not even looking at the caller ID first. “Hi,” Jared’s beautiful tenor greeting drifted through Jensen’s soul. “Thank God. Are you alright?” He asked with his eyes closed. Jared answered him in a tired voice, “I tried to call you every hour yesterday and all last night. Finally, the damn phones are working again.”

Jensen felt the horrible fear and longing start to unwind as Jared spoke. He watched his friends wake up groggily and zone in on him. “Baby, where are you?” He questioned. Jared yawned, and it sounded to Jensen like he was laying in bed, “Uhm, first they were forcing us to pull over and put chains on, even though we have SUV’s with mud and snow tires. We wound up losing the argument and had to wait in line to buy some and have them put on. We finally stopped in Alamosa. It’s not the way we planned to go, but everyone was getting detoured like crazy.” Jensen listened in silence, as Jared continued, “The chains delayed us two frickin hours and it was gonna be dark, so we found a Days Inn and got rooms. You couldn’t see a thing by the time we checked in. It was wild. It’s still snowing this morning but the awful wind is gone, so we’re gonna head out when the CHP lets people get on the road.” Jared yawned a couple more times and Jensen sighed in relief, “You must be exhausted. Please don’t push it today if you can’t make it. All that matters is you staying in one piece. Goddamn, it’s good to hear your voice.” Jared lovingly responded, “I’ll be careful...and I can’t wait to see you. Go to the party and if I’m gonna be later than five, I’ll just come there.”

Jensen sighed, “It’ll be hard without you, but if I know you’re coming...but I’m sticking my head in the hot fryer if I have to play any of those damn games.” Jared giggled softly and Jensen could hear the weariness. “I’ll call you if I can,” Jared added. “Okay,” Jensen added and closed his eyes, “I love you.” “I love you too,” Jared said before he hung up. Jensen hung up and took a moment to let the relief wash through him. It was amazing the effect Jared had on him. He glanced over to see his friends watching him with knowing grins. ‘Great,’ Jensen thought, ‘here it comes.’ Of course, Mike was first to speak up, “You need a moment to go pick some flowers or paint your nails, Ackles?” Jensen came at Mike and the man flew out of the recliner at break neck speed. Dave burst out

lunch off the highway and felt they were about six hours out. That was at eleven. Jensen had been prepared with candles and flashlights distributed around the house, but the only warmth was in the living room. Everything else was dead. A pounding on his door around five p.m. had him thinking Jensen had made it. He rushed to open the door. “We lost cell service,” Dave announced, as the two ex-soldiers stomped in and shook themselves free of ice. Jensen looked out at the ice block with wheels on it and yelled out his question, “Why the fuck did you come out in this?” Mike asked Jensen, “What’s going on with Jared, did he make it,” before anyone addressed Jensen’s question. Jensen grumbled, pissed off that his friends had risked themselves, but more pissed that it hadn’t been Jared at his door. “I heard from him at eleven,” Jensen explained, “he was heading this way and said it was clear, but he hadn’t reached Colorado yet. Since then, nothing, and I can’t call him.” Jensen shut the door and walked toward the fire, bitching, “It fucking bites. I can’t talk to him and I don’t know where they are.” Jensen looked at them angrily, “You motherfuckers shouldn’t have come out in this.” Mike guffawed in disbelief, then spouted off as he walked toward the refrigerator, “Whatever you wuss. We braved it.”
laughing, as Jensen chased his friend around the dining table and back into the living room. Just then, the power came back on. All the lights blared at the same time and Jensen’s electric clocks on the oven and microwave beeped. “Finally,” Mike bellowed, “we can take hot showers, at least. What time are we leaving for the restaurant?” Dave answered while folding blankets on the couch, “Probably get there around three so we can help decorate and set up everything.” He went over to the pot Jensen had been perking over the fire and poured himself a steaming cup of coffee. Mike did the same. Dave looked at his former team leader who nodded, “I’m putting the dry rub on the meats and I’ll probably help with the clean up in the kitchen after.”

Mike argued, “Fuck it, Ackles, you’re not getting out of socializing. And I am not playing that pin-the-tail-on-the-Christmas-tree shit or the ‘guess who’, or whatever else the fuck Dani’s got planned out. If I have to play those damn games, ‘you’ have to play them too.” Dave piped in, “My guest is arriving at five thirty, and I don’t want her to feel like a stranger, so I’ll be busy...unless she wants to play the games, and then I’ll be stuck doing them.” Mike and Jensen looked at Dave, smirking knowingly. Jensen said, “Well well...look who’s willing to come out of his shell.” He looked at Mike, “We have to meet this woman,” and Mike nodded, “Yes, we do.” The three veterans got themselves ready and headed for the restaurant after two. Jensen hadn’t heard anything from Jared yet. He tried to call him once but the line went to voicemail. He busied himself with putting decorations up, moving tables and setting up the buffet. He chopped vegetables and applied his special dry rub to all the meats. At five thirty, Dave turned to the sound of the bells on the front door opening and smiled. Jensen immediately followed Dave’s line of sight, a spark of hope that he’d see Jared coming through that door, but it wasn’t him. It was a woman Jensen had never seen before. He turned to his friend and realized he was seeing a look on Dave’s face that he’d never seen before either. “Ah,” Jensen interrupted Dave’s distraction. The older man looked at him, “What.” Jensen smiled knowingly, “That must be her.” Dave sighed and rolled his eyes, “So?” Jensen said, “So, go say ‘hi’.” He grinned at Dave’s perturbed expression that Jensen had noticed something different about him, then walked over to greet his guest.

Jensen continued to set up the buffet. Guests began to arrive and the ambiance was warm and homely, complete with fantastic food. There were sounds of laughter in every corner of the restaurant. Dave’s guest turned out to be a divorcee in her forties who was a nurse. Jensen was impressed. She looked at Dave with great respect and maybe a little bit goo goo eyed. Jensen and Mike couldn’t stop staring at the silly grin on Dave’s face throughout the night. They never even realized the older man had a dimple before. Jensen looked out the restaurant windows now and then, seeing the gentle fall of snow coming down, but no SUV’s coming into the lot. He sighed when it was getting close to eight and decided to go back into the kitchen. He checked his phone and there were no messages. Jensen knew that if Jared was out of service area, he might have been leaving messages or trying to text, but nothing was getting through. He also knew with the cell tower problems, that it could just be a case of no connection. He finally shook his head and bitched, “I can’t fucking believe this.” Mike and Dave had been watching him. They were also concerned about Jared, knowing damn well Jensen’s thoughts were probably imagining all kinds of horrible dangers. Jensen retreated to the kitchen for the next hour, washing pans and cleaning. He really wasn’t in the mood to socialize and he knew he needed to stop staring at the door.

Because Jensen was in back, he missed the latest arrivals coming in the front door. The bells clinged and the two special forces masters instantly headed toward the door. Blair and Jeff came in and were greeted by Steve and Dani, before they made their way into the crowd. Next came Manny, Cassie and Lisa, who barreled through the door, shaking fresh snow off their coats. “Christ, who thinks this is a great place to live?” Manny bitched, while the other friends rolled their eyes and started shaking people’s hands. “If I had ‘any’ manly parts to my name yesterday, they were gone when we got close to this town. If I’m a eunich it’s all Jared’s goddamned fault.” Jeff ignored his friend, as he was focused on two very intent looking thick shouldered individuals who stepped in front of him and
searched his eyes. One of them was as tall as Jeff and Jared. Jeff knew these must be the soldier friends Jared had told them about. They had that same ‘I’m watching you’ look, just like Jensen. Jeff held out his hand to the tallest one, offering a friendly smile, “I’m Jared’s friend, Jeff. The dumb ass eunich behind me is Manny...you must be Dave and Mike. Jared’s told us all about what you did for him and we’re all inherently indebted to you.” Jeff turned and barked, “Manuel, say hello to the hero’s.”

Dave shook the man’s hand saying, “Dave,” and then Mike did the same. “Mike,” was all he offered. Jeff received a soft polite grin, but it wasn’t much of a connection. Manny received a polite nod. At first, Jeff thought they were kind of rude, or maybe angry, but then he noticed they were searching between them all and the door. “Where is Jared?” The taller one asked. Manny grinned because these two were definitely intense, and protective, just as Jared had described them. He opened his mouth to answer when the door ‘clanged’ again and caught their attention.

Mike and Dave immediately stepped passed Jared’s friends to get to the newest arrival. Jared found himself perused from head to toe, then pulled into a double hug, between his two sorely missed very own special ops team. When the three of them pulled back, Mike and Dave inspected the young engineer once again, then finally relaxed when they saw him looking well. Jared’s face was flushed and a bit burnt from the icy weather, but he was sparkling with happiness at finally making it here. Dave asked, “Are you alright?” Jared smiled, “Very, now that I’m seeing you guys. The roads were a pain in the ass and I thought we’d never get here.” Mike and Dave started to smile, realizing they were actually standing in front of Jared and he was in perfectly good health.

Jared finally remembered to introduce his other friends to them. Mike and Dave’s demeanor was totally different this time. They were friendlier and at ease. Jared noticed Mike’s gaze lingering on Lisa, so he whispered into the man’s ear, “I think you’ll like each other.” Mike glanced at Jared, realizing he’d been caught showing an interest, but the encouragement in Jared’s eyes put him at ease. Jared kept glancing around the room, searching for the one person his soul was screaming for, but he didn’t see him. Dave touched him on the shoulder, “He’s in the kitchen.” Mike slapped Jared on the back, “Hurry up, before he locks himself in the walk in freezer because he thinks you’re not gonna make it.” Jared patted them both on the shoulders, and guiltily confessed, “I’m so sorry to all of you. I kept trying to call...nothing was going through.” Jared headed for the kitchen at a fast pace. He wound between guests, with his eyes locked on the kitchen doors. He was desperate, empty, screaming inside to get into Jensen in his arms. When he came through the doors, he spotted Jensen immediately. The older man had his back to him, hunched over the double sink, rinsing out a large tray.

The pull of Jensen’s grey t-shirt as his muscles flexed and shifted underneath was the first thing Jared noticed. Then, he noticed the stance. Jensen was emitting waves of sadness. He wasn’t out there mingling. He was in here, sad, and the pain of it went straight through Jared’s heart like an ice pick.

“Jensen,” Jared spoke, but his voice was soft and gravelly from the unexpected emotion, so Jensen couldn’t hear him. The burning in Jared’s eyes overtook him before he even knew it was happening. His emotion raced to the surface at how much he’d missed this man, how it felt to fall in love and know there was someone waiting for him that loved and missed him in return. Jared stepped closer and Jensen suddenly stopped what he was doing, sensing someone was behind him. He turned off the water and froze with his eyes closed. He wondered if his sixth sense was messing with him, or if it was still in fact accurate from his years in the field, telling him there was someone behind him. He turned around slowly, eyes blatantly revealing the desperate fear that was wasn’t going to see the only person he truly wanted to.

“Jared,” Jensen’s exhaled release matched everything Jared was feeling. He couldn’t take the three steps fast enough to jump into Jensen’s instantly open arms. They kissed hungrily, desperate open mouths tasting and feeling everything at once. They were swept away from everything around them,
in their own cocoon of joined souls. Jensen unzipped Jared’s down jacket without breaking his suction on the delicious mouth. Jared instantly tightened his arms around Jensen’s shoulders and plastered himself against him. Jensen slid his strong arms around Jared’s waist. It felt amazing to have this man in his arms again. Jensen was backed against the sink, roughly, as the lover’s kissed harder and more desperate. They moaned at the contact, the feel of each other like a drug they couldn’t get enough. When they finally were able to back away for a few minutes, they rested their faces against each other’s neck’s and just breathed. Jared lifted his head and looked into Jensen’s eyes with such anguish, “I’m so sorry. I kept calling but it wasn’t working. God, I couldn’t tell you anything.” Jensen rubbed his hands all over him, touching him everywhere he could reach, “It’s not your fault, baby. I knew you would try. I just didn’t know if you were okay and that part was killing me.”

Jensen felt the pent up anguish dissipating, until he noticed Jared’s hands sliding down his chest. “What’s this,” he grabbed Jared’s hands and looked closer. Jared’s knuckles were raw with little open cuts that were a little bloody. Jared hurried to explain, “It’s from putting the chains on. We got sick of waiting so Jeff, Manny and I put them on.” Jensen sighed, then looked Jared over as he smoothed the younger man’s hair back. “Are you hurt anywhere else?” Jared smiled and shook his head, kissing Jensen before he answered, “I’m okay. Believe me, I am ‘so’ okay now that I’m here.” Jensen pulled him to the sink to clean the little wounds and apply some antiseptic cream, then put bandaids over the worst knuckles. They spent a few more minutes in each other’s arms, then forced themselves to go mingle with their friends before they came looking for them.

Jared pulled his Black Ops veteran toward the kitchen door, “Come on...I want to show you off to my friends.” Jensen groaned at feeling on display, but Jared ignored him, “Oh, and I think I saw a spark between Mike and Lisa so I need you to help me with that.” Jensen raised an eyebrow while following Jared’s lead, “Mike? Our Mike? Are you sure you want your friend running around with his big mouth?”

Jared smiled enthusiastically, “She’s outspoken like that too. So maybe...and he’s gonna have a great job soon.” Jensen laughed as they went out into the restaurant. The party was over just after midnight. Jared’s friends had a wonderful time and headed for the hotel, while Dave and Mike drove home with Jared and Jensen. Dave built up the fire while Jensen turned on the electric flames in the bedroom. Mike and Dave stayed out by the fire for awhile, while Jensen and Jared retired to the bedroom. When Jensen turned from the fireplace, he noticed Jared had pulled a large elongated navy blue folder from his backpack and placed it on the dresser. The folder had a red bow on it and nothing else. Jared seemed a little embarrassed that he’d been caught, but Jensen didn’t say anything. He cleaned up and got ready for bed, then Jared did the same. When he came out in pajamas, he sat next to Jensen on the edge of the bed.

Jared happened to glance at the dresser and noticed there was a box placed next to the folder he’d placed there. He was definitely distracted by it. The box was small, like the size of a baseball card and there was a blue bow on the top. Jared had no idea what that could be but there were a zillion thoughts racing through his brain. Jensen grinned, watching Jared’s distracted brilliance noticing the small box and trying to process what it could possibly be. He asked, “Do you want it now?” Jared did a double take at Jensen’s question. He started to answer, then hesitated, not really sure what the ‘it’ was in Jensen’s question. If it was the ‘it’ that included Jensen pumping into him, then ‘yes,’ but...Jared turned to look at the little box again. He guessed ‘it’ would be okay too, since he probably wasn’t going to stop thinking about it, anyway. “I think, yeah,” Jared answered nervously, having no clue what could be in that box. Jensen suddenly stood up and held his hands out. Jared placed his hands in Jensen’s and stood up, letting Jensen guide him over to the dresser. Jared looked down at the box and then up at Jensen. The older man explained, “I wasn’t sure how you felt about gifts. I just wanted you to have something special to me. It’s probably the most telling thing I can give you, so I’m gonna give it to you. If you don’t like it, or you don’t want it, that’s okay...but I’m ready to give it to you.”
Jared looked at Jensen for a few seconds. He was curious, but he wasn’t quite understanding what Jensen was going to give him yet. He looked at the box, then back at Jensen and nodded, “Okay.” Jensen handed him the box and Jared worked the ribbon off of it first, then opened the lid. There was a key inside. It was shiny silver, like it had just been made and on the key was engraved ‘J & J’.

‘Huh,’ Jared thought in wonder. It was pretty, and he knew it meant something important but maybe it was the late hour or that Jared still had trouble with good things happening to him because he was slow on the uptake. Jensen watched him, grinning. His lover wasn’t quite getting it yet. “Here, let me give you a hint,” Jensen said, then moved to the closet and opened it. The huge closet had been reorganized and all of Jensen’s things were moved to one side. It left a huge open space on the other side. Jared zeroed in on the few pieces of clothing he had purchased in Denver when Jensen took him shopping after the accident. Jensen had put his things in here from the spare room, and placed them on one side of the closet.

Jared looked at the key again, inscribed with their two initials, then back at the closet. His mouth opened and Jensen began to smile wider. Jared was getting it but it wasn’t easy for him. “It’s my home,” Jensen offered, “and I want it to be yours, too...to share it with me...for as long as you want...forever, I hope.” He knew this was overwhelming to someone who had been the victim of so much hurt and loss in his life. Jensen waited while Jared continued to process. The younger man’s eyes teared up, so he had to look down and close them for a few seconds. He was speechless. This was just blowing him away. “I’m sorry, it’s just,” Jared glanced up quickly, then wiped his eyes and looked back down. “It’s alright,” Jensen rubbed Jared’s arm, wanting him to feel safe. “It’s perfectly okay to just leave it open for awhile...think about it...you don’t have to decide now.” Jensen’s soothing gestures were interrupted by Jared’s soft “Yes.” Jensen stared at him until he finally looked up and met his stare with reddened watery eyes. “What?” Jensen stupidly asked, thinking he had surely heard something he hadn’t. Jared smiled and nodded, wiping his eyes again, “Yes, I would love to live here with you...it’s just I’ve waited for you for so long, Jensen. I can’t believe this is happening sometimes.”

Jared swiped his eyes again, now unable to keep the tears at bay anymore. Jensen’s grabbed the innocent young man and pulled him tightly into his arms. Jensen pushed his face into Jared’s neck and kissed him, then spoke to him softly, “I know this is hard for you, but it’s gonna be okay. If I’ve learned anything in the last few days it’s been that I can’t live without you. Thank you for saying ‘yes’ to me.” Jared squeezed Jensen in return, the two soaking in the feeling of being safe and loved in each other’s arms. Jensen pulled back and noticed Jared was looking much better and more relaxed. He kissed him once more, then looked into Jared’s eyes with eager curiosity, “So? Can I see what’s in that folder?” Jared suddenly looked surprised, like he’d just remembered he had something for Jensen. He turned Jensen to face the dresser and stood beside him. Jensen started to feel his nerves wake up, “You’ll need this whole space, it’s kinda something you have to spread out a little to see it all.” Jensen glanced at Jared for a second, smiling at the kid’s nervousness. He couldn’t imagine ever not liking anything that the younger man had given him, so Jared really didn’t have to be worried. Jensen looked down at the folder, then slid it over in front of him and opened it. Inside there was a film of clear plastic. The document was legal size and thick. When Jensen turned it lengthwise he realized what it was. “Oh my God,” he exclaimed, suddenly realizing what he was looking at. He stepped sideways to flip on the bedroom light, then went back to the document, now seeing it in its entirety.

Jensen’s mouth dropped open. The drawing was on layers of clear film so you could take details off by lifting the separate pages. It was his house, in precise detail, complete with colors. Well, not his exact house, Jensen further noticed, but his new house, after a few changes. Jared had to have worked tirelessly on this. Jesus Christ this was a huge amount of work. The master bedroom had been enlarged with a walk in closet, a huge increase in square footage and sunk in shelving in the walls. There were added windows and the slider had been moved to another wall. Right outside the
slider was a redwood deck with a spa. Jensen smiled and shook his head. He continued to study it speechless while Jared stood with his arms folded, now biting his nails. He prayed Jensen’s silence didn’t mean he hated it. Jensen was processing. Jared had designed all of this for ‘him’. Every detail was Jensen’s. Jared had listened to all of his personal wants and ideas and incorporated every single one into this beautiful masterpiece before him. ‘Holy shit,’ it was the most perfect plan Jensen had ever imagined in his life. Some hired architect or engineer off the street or out of the phone book wouldn’t get it this perfect. Jared knew him, and he cared deeply enough to pour his heart into this. Jensen looked up at Jared, standing beside him and biting one of his thumb nails. He softened, his heart overflowing with love for this man, and wondered how the Hell Jared could ever have thought he wouldn’t love this. Jesus, how could he doubt himself like that.

Jensen looked back at the design, then followed the next page and realized they were pull outs. Jared offered softly, “Uhm, you have to pull those out...then place ‘em like this. They run together, to connect the other areas. The stuff behind it is all schematics for the permits. I pulled the requirements for this area and that’s what they’ll need.” Jensen glanced at the younger man again, realizing all over again how beautiful Jared was, inside and out. Jared had no idea, of course. Jensen looked back at the plans and placed them side by side, like Jared had told him to. He was now looking at his house, his new master bedroom, the full deck in back, the side deck connecting to his bedroom which held the new jacuzzi, then the sunk in brick barbecue. ‘Jesusfuckingchrist,’ Jensen’s brain had trouble accepting this was going to be his. Jared had run some kind of ornate pipe from the house to the barbecue. Jensen looked confused for a second, as he pointed to the pipe, “Is that propane leading to the barbecue?”

Jared cleared his throat to explain, “No, that’s not a barbecue. The barbecue’s over here.” Jared slid his finger over toward the living room slider more, where there was a huge barbecue with mini fridge in permanent brick. It was incredible. “Jesus, that’s beautiful.” Jensen’s eyes still traced back over to the other area that seemed to have a pipe connecting it to the house. Jared said, “It’s okay...if you don’t like that I’ll take it out. I put it in because you liked the firepit thing outside.” Jensen studied it for a few more seconds then asked, “Is that a propane pipe?” Jared answered, “Yes, it leads to the outdoor fireplace.” Jensen pointed to the brick item, which he originally thought was the barbecue, “That’s an outdoor fireplace?” Jared answered, “Yes. This is a modern idea and it’s controlled by a switch inside the house. It’s facing the spa so you can feel the heat from it there and enjoy it. You also don’t have to keep getting out of the hot tub to add more wood. I’ve noticed how much you have to keep doing that inside.” Jensen was silent for a few minutes. He was having trouble processing that someone who was this talented actually loved him and wanted to hang around him. Jared was a master and every line, every corner, every little detail was down to a ‘t’.

Jensen looked at the follow up documents and saw the perfect lines and measurements, the formulas and perfect keys of explanation. He tried to imagine Jared working on this when he wasn’t looking. How the hell the kid managed it, Jensen wasn’t sure. “Jared,” Jensen shook his head, then looked up at the younger man, “I’ve never seen anything this beautifully done in my life...I mean you did this for ‘me’. You didn’t just whip this together and throw something half assed together, you did this for ‘me’. This has me all over it.” Jared looked relieved, “So, you like it then?” Jensen looked at him disbelievingly, “Do I like it? Jared, it’s incredible. It’s a masterpiece and it’s beyond anything I ever could have come up with on my own...and some whipper snapper off the internet or out of the phone book never would have gone to this much trouble. I just can’t believe how much work you put into this for me.” Jensen looked at the younger man and slid his arms around the engineer, “Did you really think I might not like it?”

Jared looked a little sheepish as he shrugged a shoulder, “Well, I’m not an architect, or a graphic designer, I’m usually the foundations and the guts of it all. Putting the designs in actual pictures and colors is something I started doing just before I met you.” Jared looked down shyly, then looked back up at Jensen, “I changed it about nine times before I printed it and put it all together.” Jensen
grinned at his adorable lover, “I have no idea why the fates suddenly decided to drop you into my life, but I am the luckiest son of a bitch on this planet. Jared, thank you for putting so much work into that for me. You didn’t have to do all that for me, but I’m thrilled.”

Jared smiled and looked down shyly. “Hey,” Jensen pulled his chin up to look him in the eyes, “The best part of those drawings is that you’re gonna be here to share all of that with me. This is your home now.” “Jensen,” Jared looked into Jensen’s eyes, still searching for some adversity, or some ill trick to snap into this precious moment and take all of this away. Jensen could sense that Jared needed reassurance. He smoothed the hair back from his face, like he had done since they first met to provide comfort to them both. Jensen softly kissed him and held his chin between his fingers, “It’s gonna be okay...and it’s not going away.” Jared smiled, “I’m getting there.”

The End...for now.

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