Offering

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by shaylea

Summary

Jensen is straight, thank you very much, and set on his conservative Texan future with the girl of his dreams. But after accidentally seeing his college roommate naked, his straightness comes into serious question. As for Jared, what is a gay boy supposed to do when someone as hot as Jensen decides to experiment with him? Definitely not fall in love.
Jensen is straight. Jensen has always been straight, never even considered looking at other men, until his second year of college when he starts rooming with Jared.

Jared is gay. Jared is out and proud and thinks everybody should be having as much sex as he is. Yeah, that’s easy when you’re gay and you go to gay bars where all everyone else wants to do is have a quick fuck in the bathroom or in the alley behind. Not so easy when you’re your high school’s valedictorian, the pride of your Texan hometown, and expected to come home and marry the chaste pretty girl you grew up with as soon as you get your business degree in the big city before you join your father’s firm.

Jensen works hard on his body, not because he wants to attract people with it but because it is part of being healthy, doing the right thing, looking after himself. He’s tall and builds muscle easily, but if he doesn’t watch it, it could turn to fat and that wouldn’t be acceptable so he jogs every morning and spends an hour lifting weights on alternate days and drinks protein blends and green juices and plans his meals with a focus on white meat and vegetables.

Jared doesn’t care what he looks like. He’s even taller than Jensen, with a slender, gangly body that shows his lack of clean food and workouts, but for some reason Jared doesn’t think it matters and the reason, Jensen discovers one morning when he cuts short his morning run because of a nagging shin splint, is what lies between his legs.

Before this moment, Jensen has never checked out other men’s packages. Sure, they’re visible in the showers and in the locker room, but he’s always politely averted his eyes. (Okay, maybe when he was about fourteen he surreptitiously peeked, but that was only to make sure he was developing normally, and yes, he was, thank you very much, and no, he’s never thought about those other dicks again.) Jared quickly picked up on Jensen’s modesty, although he uses a different word to describe it, and because they are roommates and Jared is a nice guy and he knows Jensen is straight and is pleased that Jensen doesn’t have an issue rooming with an openly gay guy, he respects that and changes in the bathroom and never walks around nude.

But this morning Jared expects Jensen to still be on his run for another half an hour so he comes whistling out of the bathroom rubbing his towel over his hair as water droplets trickle down the rest of his body.

All of the rest of his body.

Jensen, bending over to remove his running shoes, freezes in position, his eyes directly level with a cock larger than he could have imagined possible on a human-sized man.

Because the towel is covering Jared’s face, he doesn’t see Jensen for a moment and just stands there, two feet away, casually mopping his hair and his face as Jensen’s life comes to a roaring halt.

He’s never understood why anyone would want to suck a dick. It seems so…distasteful, so unhygienic. But now, as he bends over in front of his naked roommate, his mouth starts to water. Jared’s dick is so fat he knows he’d never be able to get it into his mouth, it would stretch his lips so far they’d split, but he could certainly lick it, could run his tongue up that vivid vein, following the water droplets, and twirl it around that bulging dark head.
What would it taste like?

“Shit, man!” Jared’s voice slams through him. “I didn’t know you were back. Sorry.”

Jensen swallows hard, praying he hasn’t started drooling, as he forces himself to stand and not keep looking down where the bright blue towel is being wrapped over that life-changing dick. “H-hey,” he manages. Is he blushing? Please don’t let him be blushing. “No big deal.” Now he feels the flush spread down his chest. No big deal indeed. “I mean - I - my run - the shin splints - “

“Oh yeah.” Now decently covered, Jared turns his back to him as he rummages for his clothes. “You’re still feeling them?”

What he wants to feel is Jared’s dick. Oh God, he thinks with frantic realisation, Jared has talked about being a top, which means he regularly slides that gigantic thing into other men. He slides it up men’s asses.

“You want some?”

“No!” The denial bursts from him before he realises Jared is facing him again, holding out some muscle gel. “Oh. I mean, it’s okay, I’ve got my own.” This is a disaster. “I’m, uh, gonna shower now.”

“Oh.” Jared puts the gel back in the closet and shakes out a t-shirt. “If you need anything, just let me know.”

Jensen slams the bathroom door behind him and falls against it, breathing hard. He still only has one shoe off. Jared must think he’s demented. Jared is fucking huge and Jensen wants to taste him and he wants to know what it would feel like to be split in half by that thing.

This can’t be happening to him. This is just - it could be - but why has he never - he really has never - why won’t his mouth stop watering, damn it? He leans over the basin and splashes icy water over his sweaty face then stares at himself in the mirror. His pupils are blown, he looks like he’s on drugs. His mother would call the doctor if she saw him looking like this.

Did Jared notice?

But Jared knows Jensen is straight, so he’d never attribute such a response to Jensen seeing his dick for the first time.

Jensen wants to see it again.

This is madness. Unacceptable. Just a brief frenzy of insanity brought about by studying too late last night. He knows he needs a full eight hours every night, and this is what he gets for skimping on that. Tonight he’ll be in bed by nine, even though it’s Friday night.

On Friday nights Jared goes to the gay club and has sex. Jensen’s never thought about it before beyond a vague disdain for such weakness of the flesh but as he moves through his classes for the day the lecturers fade into the background behind the far more pressing contemplation of what Jared will do tonight.

Jensen scans the other guys around him. Is one of them also planning to go to that club tonight? Is he the one who will bend over for Jared while Jensen is tucked soberly up in bed? What does Jared go for in a man? Does he like cute, effeminate guys like that that twink over there in the lacy tee and skinny jeans? Nothing about Jared is effeminate, so maybe that’s what attracts him in a partner. Jared talked about twinks in their early days of rooming together, which is why Jensen knows what
Jensen is too big and too overtly masculine to ever be called a twink.

But that giant cock would destroy that cute, pretty guy. He is way too small for it. Jensen checks out his ass as he turns around in his seat to talk to the girl behind him. Yes, Jared’s cock would rip him to pieces.

No, Jared must go for bigger guys. What about that one over there, looks like he’s a swimmer, or perhaps an athlete, and he has the widest mouth Jensen has ever seen. That mouth could easily wrap itself around Jared’s cock.

Would the guy be on his knees for it? An image of the scene flashes into his mind, the swimmer kneeling on the tarmac behind the club while Jared lounges against the wall, jeans open, rubbing his cock all over this guy’s face, teasing him, taunting him with what he’s longing for until finally the guy captures it and swallows it down. What does Jared look like when he comes?

That guy might know.

What does come taste like?

Jensen shivers. He’s in class, damn it, he needs to be focusing on international taxation laws instead of eyeing up Jared’s potential partners for tonight. Ruthlessly he supresses all thoughts of Jared and his dick and who gets to taste it and feel it for the rest of the day, but later that night, as he dutifully lies in bed with the light out, his mind slips down the road to where he knows right now Jared has that dick inside some other man.

It gets worse.

He’s able to discipline himself enough to concentrate in class and get his assignments written, but every moment spent in Jared’s company feels like torture. He keeps catching himself trying to scope out how much he can see in each new outfit Jared wears and it’s so obvious that he wonders how he’s missed it for the past seven months. But then he didn’t think to look, did he? It never entered his head to perve on other guys; why would it? Since he is straight and all.

Is he?

That’s the thought that stills his hand and keeps him from allowing himself to find release with the image of that cock in his mind. If he doesn’t jerk off to the thought of men, then maybe he can still have a hope of convincing himself he doesn’t think about them that way.

But he’s started checking out more than just Jared. He tells himself it’s to see if other men are as obvious as Jared about their equipment, but if they are, they’re sadly lacking. That’s all he’s finding out, he assures himself. There’s no sexual interest in them. He doesn’t want to discover what any of their cocks taste like.

That’s true. There’s only one he can’t stop himself thinking about.

Inevitably comes the Friday night he leaves the library late and just so happens to take a different course back to the dorms. It isn’t anything unusual to remember they need coffee and to go via the all-night supermarket in town. Jared will be very grateful in the morning because he was pissed off this morning to discover it was finished, so Jensen is just being a nice roommate since he knows Jared will be otherwise occupied this evening.
Yes, indeed. Occupied exactly where Jensen suspected he might be, doing exactly what Jensen suspected he would be. The man with him is big, well-built and muscular, and he’s bent over, hands on the wall, his jeans around his ankles as Jared drives that huge cock into his ass. He grunts with every thrust as though the cock forces the sound out of his lungs with its sheer size. Jensen hides in the shadows, spellbound. This is what someone looks like on the end of Jared’s cock.

He jerks away before they’re finished, too terrified of Jared spotting him to take the risk of watching their completion, and he’s rigid in bed by the time Jared gets back an hour later. He hears him go into the bathroom, hears the shower switch on. Jared is naked in there now, washing that man off him. If only Jensen were brave enough to fake a half-asleep toilet trip, pretending he’s too out of it to realise Jared is back. He just wants one more glimpse of that cock.

But on some level Jared must sense his need, because he comes out without his towel. Only the bathroom light is on so he’s backlit, but there is sufficient light for Jensen to crack open an eye and watch as Jared rubs the towel over his head and shoulders just like before. Oh yes.

“I know you’re watching me,” Jared says.

Jensen’s cataclysmic jolt gives him away; there is no way he can feign innocence now. “I didn’t mean to,” he mutters.

“It’s okay, you know.”

“It’s invasive and I’m sorry.”

“Yeah,” Jared slings the towel around his neck and takes a step forward, bringing that cock nearer to Jensen. “It’s a little invasive to watch someone else fuck, but we were in a public place after all so don’t sweat it.”

Bile rises at the back of Jensen’s throat. “I didn’t - I mean, I wasn’t - you saw me?”

“It’s okay,” Jared says again, smiling now. “It’s normal to be curious.”

“I’m not curious!”

“No?”

“No.” Sitting up so that cock is no longer just above his face, Jensen pulls his blanket up to cover him to the neck. “I’m straight.”

To his relief, Jared perches on the edge of his bed. “There’s not just straight and gay, you know. There are all kinds of shades in between. A lot of the guys who go to that club, they’re mostly straight but some of them just like to feel a cock in their ass sometimes. It doesn’t mean anything.”

Jensen’s own ass clenches around nothing at Jared’s words. “I don’t.”

“Have you ever tried?”

“What? No! Why would I do something like that?”

Jared shrugs. “Curiosity. A lot of guys do. How else are you gonna know for sure what you like if you don’t try?”

“I know for sure I’m straight. I always have been. I don’t need to try anything.”

“Okay, sure, buddy.” Jared meets his eyes. “But then why can’t you keep your eyes off my dick?”
He isn’t going to faint, Jensen warns himself grimly. This is nothing, just a late-night conversation with his roommate about a risqué topic, that’s all. It isn’t the cracking of his foundations.

“If you don’t want to talk about it with me,” Jared continues, “that’s fine, you don’t have to. Just don’t lie to yourself. Don’t pretend you’re not what you might be without finding out. You don’t wanna be one of those guys with a wife and three kids who puts himself at risk of blackmail by finally being unable to resist the need for a cock in their ass. I know what your life is like at home. From what you’ve told me, that kind of thing could ruin everything for you.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Jensen mumbles into his blanket, but if he is this desperate after just a couple of weeks, what will he be like fifteen, twenty years from now?

“You could at least find out now, though, what you like. Now, while it wouldn’t cost you anything. You’re in college after all, you’re expected to experiment. And what you do here no one at home ever has to find out about.”

“I can’t go to that club.”

“I’m not saying you have to.” Jared leans across the space between their beds. “Jensen, look at me.” He waits until Jensen does, then says, “I’m offering myself.”

Jensen can’t help it. His eyes leap down to the darkness between Jared’s legs. Jared’s cock swells as he speaks and Jared chuckles ruefully.

“Okay, I’m not all that altruistic, you happen to be my type and I’ve had to work very hard not to try and seduce you all this time, so, yeah, I really want to slide my dick into you. Since that day you came home early from your run and looked at it with such wide eyes I’ve been having constant fantasies about it, I’ll admit that. But what I’m saying is true. Why not use me now, experiment with me now. Maybe you’ll get it out of your system, maybe you’ll discover it’s not for you after all, or maybe you’ll love my dick so much you’ll want to make the most of it while you can.” He spreads his legs to give Jensen a better view. “I’m up for anything you wanna do, buddy. No pressure, if you say no we’ll never talk about it again, but think about it, okay? I’m offering.”

He is Jared’s type. Jensen’s thoughts first hook on that, then stutter further when Jared admits to fantasising about him.

“Did you - “ He clears his throat. “Do you jerk off thinking about me?”

“I’ve tried not to out of respect for you,” Jared says seriously, “because I knew you wouldn’t like it.”

“But you have?”

“Yeah.” Jared sounds embarrassed. “Sorry.”

“Wh-what was I doing, in your fantasies?”

Leaning back on his bed, back to the wall, Jared lets his legs fall open so Jensen has an unrestricted view if he chooses to look. He takes a deep breath. “You have the best ass I’ve ever seen,” he says softly. “In my fantasy, you bare it, just for me. You bend over the bed and spread your legs for me and let me lick you right there on your hole.”

Jensen shudders. “You - do that? Lick people there?”

“Oh yeah. I’d lick you for hours, lick you and kiss you and draw my tongue around your hole until it starts to open up for me and I can slide it deep inside.”
This should revolt him but beneath the duvet Jensen is already leaking. His hole prickles with ferocious need to know what that feels like, having Jared’s hot tongue slipping inside it. “Would you expect me to do it too?”

“Only if you want to.” Jared’s hand moves over his cock now and he gives it a slow, strong stroke. “Some guys hate giving it, but everyone loves getting it. Also, it’s the best way to prepare someone for their first time.”

“Does it hurt?” Jensen asks. He wonders if he dares slide his hand beneath the duvet to copy Jared. “The first time.”

“It hurts if you don’t do it right. You always have to prepare first, even after the first time. Guys aren’t like girls. They don’t get wet on their own and they need to be opened up. Some don’t like that, some get off on the pain of being fucked dry or without much preparation, or sometimes there’s not much time to do it right, but with a cock like mine I always open a guy up first.”

Jensen surrenders to the temptation and the first touch of his hand to his cock nearly makes him groan. “You always do it with your tongue?”

A grin flashes across Jared’s face. “If I can I like to start with that, but fingers work too.”

“You stick your fingers up a guy’s butt?”

“I’d start with one, just circle your hole for a little bit until you got used to the sensation, then gently slide it inside. If you’ve never felt that before, it would feel a little strange. Have you ever put your fingers inside yourself?”

“No!”

“You ever wondered what it would feel like having anything push up inside you there?”

Clutching for his courage, Jensen meets Jared’s eyes. “Your dick.”

“Yeah?” Jared’s voice roughens and his eyes turn dark. “You thought about my dick in your ass?”

“I tried not to.” Jensen clenches his fist around the base of his cock to stop from coming from Jared’s words alone. “I knew it wasn’t right.”

“It’s okay, I don’t mind you thinking about my dick. I like it, in fact. I like it a whole lot, even more if you’re imagining what it would feel like inside your ass.”

“I might hate it.” Jensen blurts.

He is relieved when Jared chuckles. “You might love it.”

“I want to try.” He needs to get this said before he loses his nerve. “If you want to, if you don’t mind if I hate it and want to stop along the way. But what you said about finding out, I need to do that. And if you’re willing…”

“I’m definitely willing.” Jared’s hand stills on his cock. “Do you wanna do it tonight? Now?”

“Please. I - I might not be brave enough if we wait.”

Jared actually licks his lips. “Oh Jensen, I am so gonna blow your mind, buddy.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Jared is gay and happy with his life of casual college hookups, but why can't he get his mind off his straight Texan roommate?

Jared is gay.

He knows he is gay from the moment he first finds out about sex, never gives a girl a second glance, and falls in love for the first time when he is 15 years old with his chem lab partner, Stephen. Fortunately it turns out that Stephen is also gay and together they fool around, learn how to kiss, then how to jerk each other off and have just graduated to awkward blow jobs when Stephen’s little brother sees them through the window and all hell breaks loose.

Jared knows he should be grateful that Tommy didn’t recognise him so he is safe from exposure to his ultra conservative parents. Unfortunately, Stephen isn’t safe, and his equally conservative parents dispatch him off to a camp promising to return him efficiently de-gayed.

It works.

That is to say, his experience there scares the life out of Stephen and when he finally returns to San Antonio, he is traumatised and pale and refuses to have anything to do with Jared. After spending six months frantic with desperation and worry about what was happening to Stephen, Jared discovers what it’s like to have his heart broken. And he doesn’t like it.

He goes a little wild in response, especially after watching Stephen join the football team and start dating one of the cheerleaders, and maybe it’s the contrariness in him or maybe he wants to make a point, but eventually he takes one risk too many and he’s caught behind the bicycle sheds with his mouth wrapped around the dick of one of the teachers (he’s returning the favour; Mr Morgan gives awesome blow jobs and has taught him everything he hadn’t learned with Stephen) and when he is given the choice by his parents between the same ex-gay camp as Stephen or to leave home, he picks the latter.

It’s easier than staying to watch Stephen become prom king and propose to Meredith on the same night.

One of the other guys Jared experimented with during the summer has moved back to New York and he is happy to offer Jared a place to stay. The experimentation doesn’t resume, since Matt is now in a committed relationship, but that is fine with Jared. He isn’t in love with Matt. In fact, he is pretty certain he’ll never let himself fall in love again. It simply isn’t an option. Not when the memory of Stephen still hurts so much. He is determined to never give any other person that much power over him again.

Instead, he throws himself into everything New York has to offer in terms of boys and men, while finishing school by correspondence and applying to colleges to study mathematics, the only thing that captures his attention to the same degree that sex does. Life is good. Freed from the strictures of Texan society, he focuses on figuring out who he wants to be and how he wants to live in the world. It turns out that he’s attractive to other men, and he takes full advantage of that. He learns how to be
safe, unlike in San Antonio when he hadn’t given a damn, allows himself to have fun and to make the most of everything that comes his way, all while meticulously keeping his heart out of it.

Now in his second year of college, nothing has changed. Nothing, that is, except for the roommate he’s fiercely spent seven months trying not to notice.

It happens the first moment he sees Jensen. It is downstairs in the quad on moving-in day. Golden rays from the sun illuminate him as he stands laughing with two older people who have to be his parents and a pretty girl who is likely his girlfriend, and Jared’s heart jumps. He isn’t used to feeling anything there. He hasn’t for years. Not since the morning Stephen got back from the camp and avoided his eyes and mumbled about disgusting and sickening and delusional, words Jared eventually worked out were referring to him, to them.

Delusional. He remembers that word particularly strongly as he stands on the steps watching the most beautiful boy he’s ever seen laugh in the sunshine.

Two hours later he returns to his room to find the same boy carefully lining up economics books on the shelf above his bed. The bed that is six feet away from Jared’s.

They introduce themselves. The boy is Texan, and Jared’s misbehaving heart sinks even before the name Dianne is mentioned in connection to future plans of marriage. He has a very annoying weakness for Texan accents, rigidly avoids them, as a matter of fact, and not only is the boy named Jensen from Texas but his father used to be a deacon in their church and he’s going into the family business once he’s completed his degree and, yes, he’s planning to marry pretty, sweet Dianne as soon as he graduates year after next.

Awesome. This is just the perfect fucking person for Jared’s heart to wake up for.

So he ruthlessly smothers it. Goes out more often for the kind of mindless sex he thought he’d gotten out of his system in San Antonio. Needs to. Needs to wear his body out before getting into bed to the sound of Jensen’s soft, rhythmic breathing. Needs to not wake up raging with desire at the sight of Jensen studying in bed with the lamp light highlighting the cute little freckles dusting his nose. Needs to not let images of a compact, lithely muscled body fill his mind when he’s jerking off in the shower or emptying himself into another man.

Seriously. He needs to stop doing that. Stephen was right. Jared is disgusting as well as delusional.

When avoiding Jensen doesn’t work on account of their going to bed together every night, Jared decides to try to get to know him, to humanise him, to find all the faults that will crush the flame flickering in his heart. Jensen’s from Texas, after all. He’s religious and traditional and everything that Jared left behind long ago.

He’s also crazy smart, has a mind for numbers that doesn’t exceed Jared’s but can certainly keep up with him, and he’s ethical, he thinks deeply about things and tries to understand them, and is surprisingly open-minded and tolerant. From the start he isn’t bothered by Jared being gay, something Jared makes sure to be vocal about just in case, after a couple of bad experiences with freshman roommates.

“No problem, man,” he says when Jared brings it up outright. “Just, could we make a pact not to bring people back to our room? My roommate last year had his girlfriend basically living with us, and it got a bit awkward after a while.”

Sure, because Jensen is straight and living far away from his own girlfriend, who couldn’t have been happy that he’d had another woman sleeping in the same room as him, even if she wasn’t actually
sleeping with him. Jared can understand that. He’s never brought his hook-ups back to his room anyway, and he certainly wouldn’t make Jensen suffer through gay sex in his immediate proximity.

He doesn’t let his mind jump to the immediate fantasies it conjures up at the thought. What if Jensen watched them. What if he lay in his bed pretending to sleep but slitted his eyes open to watch Jared strip off, to watch Jared go down on his guy for the night, to watch Jared open the guy up and slide deep inside him. What if watching made him hot, not in a wanting-to-participate way but just in an oh-God-hot-sex way. What if he sneaked his hand down beneath his covers and into those soft, loose sleep pants of his to wrap it around the sizeable cock Jared totally hasn’t noticed he has and silently jerked off to the sight of Jared fucking right beside him. What if their eyes were to meet right at the critical moment, sending them both into orbit right at the same fucking time---and this is why Jared does not let his delusions run wild. No. Most definitely not.

Because Jensen is straight, and Jared respects that. He respects him enough to never strip off in front of him, the same way Jensen doesn’t. At first Jared wonders if it’s because Jensen is worried about giving Jared the wrong impression if he displays his naked body in the room, worried Jared might not be able to control himself, but as time passes he realises it’s just the way Jensen is. Considerate. Modest. Virtuous.

Yes, Jensen is fucking virtuous in the old-fashioned gentleman kind of way. He opens doors for women, he lifts heavy things for anyone smaller, he appears to live by Jared’s mother’s favourite admonishment not to say anything if he has nothing good to say, he’s unfailingly kind and helpful and altogether too perfect for Jared to bear if he wasn’t just so earnest about it all.

He truly believes in the best of people, and Jared doesn’t know what to do with that, having experienced so much of the worst. He finds himself wanting to protect Jensen from the ugliness of what people can do, and when the subject of their pasts comes up one night as they’re sharing beers while watching a game on Jensen’s massive parent-financed computer screen, he glosses over why he left home to move to New York as a teenager, something he’d already let slip. He makes it sound like it was a choice – it was – in order to pursue better opportunities – like being free to be gay – and turns the discussion to music clubs in New York since he’s discovered Jensen’s secret love for the kinds of music Texas has never heard of.

For their first Christmas together, he gets Jensen a guitar and some links to YouTube tutorials. Even if it were a problem to listen to Jensen practise while he studies – it seriously isn’t – the way Jensen’s face lights up does Jared in completely.

Everything about the man is too beautiful for Jared to bear.

Jensen’s gift to him is equally thoughtful: a subscription to Jared’s favourite gay porn site that Jared can’t afford right now after losing his bar tending job (he made the mistake of fucking the manager, who decided he wanted more and got mad when Jared wasn’t interested) and while he’s gradually picking up the difference by tutoring more, he has to cut out all nonessentials. He didn’t realise Jensen was listening to his rant one evening when he had to fork out extra money for a new winter coat after his old one split (no, he didn’t start working out at the gym to watch Jensen with the weights, of course not, but fuck if it didn’t make muscles grow where he hasn’t had to worry about them before) and when he opens the card Jensen gives him to see the printed screenshot of a year’s subscription paid in advance, he thinks he might cry. Jensen looks horribly awkward, worried he’s been inappropriate, and Jared can’t stop himself from throwing his arms around him.

It’s the first time they’ve touched.

Jensen feels just as good as he looks, and Jared wants to stay pressed up against him so badly he pulls back instantly. “Thanks, man.”
Jensen’s face is crimson. “Just don’t use it when I’m in the room.”

“Course not.”

They have a system. They know each other’s schedules in detail, and if anything ever varies, they text before unexpectedly returning to the room. It works.

Jared presumes Jensen jerks off to porn (straight porn, obviously). Being away from his girlfriend must be hellish, and he’s not the type to get laid behind his girld’s back, not even just for physical relief purposes, so Jared instituted the system to make sure Jensen feels comfortable enough to meet his own needs without needing to worry about Jared secretly watching him and getting off on him. Because, no, that would be unacceptable and wrong and Jared would never even be tempted to do such a thing, not ever.

Yes, he’s disgusting, he knows that already, and their system makes sure he can’t take advantage of Jensen at all.

Altogether, Jensen is the best roommate Jared’s ever had, and as school resumes in the new year, he realises he’s happier than he’s been since those first furtive weeks with Stephen as they learned each other and became more together than either had been alone.

And then comes the morning that Jensen returns from his run early without warning. Actually, Jared discovers later, Jensen did send a text but he was in the shower so didn’t receive it, and being in the shower was the entire problem, it turns out, because, thinking he’s alone, he doesn’t bother to cover up as he strolls out into their room.

It’s Jensen’s ass he sees first, the ass he manfully tries to avert his eyes from every time Jensen bends over because it is everything Jared dreams about in an ass. Jensen has just started wearing his summer running sweats, soft, flimsy material that clings to his curves, and Jared’s eyes rivet on that round, high ass and for a second he forgets where he is, who he’s with, and it’s only when his hand is about to touch – atlastatlastatlast – that he manages to catch himself.

“Shit, man. I didn’t know you were back.” Don’t get hard, damn it. “Sorry.”

Now instead of looking at Jensen’s ass, he’s faced with enormous green eyes gone dark with….no way, Jensen’s eyes are fucking blown and he looks like he’s turned on as hell and Jared isn’t equipped to deal with this. Snatching the towel from his hair, he scrabbles to wrap as much as he can around his hips although why should he cover himself up when apparently the sight of his semi-hard dick has turned Jensen – straight, wholesome Jensen – into a flushing, stammering wreck who can’t seem to lift his eyes above Jared’s waistline?

This can NOT be happening.

Shin splints. Jensen’s blabbering something about shin splints, so Jared tries to wrench his frantically inappropriate thoughts down more noble pathways. Jensen’s in pain. Is that the explanation for his huge eyes and – no, Jared realises when he pulls himself together sufficiently to pull on some pants and respond with an offer of muscle gel. No, that’s not the explanation at all, because shin splints, whatever the fuck they are, do not make men hard. And Jensen is. Jensen is vividly rock hard in his damp sweats.

He’s rock hard because he just saw Jared naked.

Shit.

Jensen doesn’t deal with it well. He leaps into the bathroom and doesn’t come out, forcing Jared to
forgo brushing his teeth before heading to class.

What is Jared supposed to do with this?

Is Jensen gay?

Is Jensen gay and hiding it?

Or has he just been oblivious until this moment?

Jared knows he’s okay to look at, even though he doesn’t make much of an effort, but it’s not his shaggy hair or sparkling eyes that have caught Jensen’s attention, because Jensen’s been looking at those for months. No, it’s his dick. And, yes, Jared knows he’s big. But, fuck, he’s big all over so he never gets why it’s such a surprise for some people. Isn’t it obvious that he’d be big there too? He’s never thought that much about it, other than making sure to open his partners up sufficiently to make it good for them instead of agonising, and it can be a right pain sometimes since a lot of men can’t adequately swallow him down, unlike Mr Morgan who is still Jared’s pinnacle for blow jobs.

Maybe Jensen was just shocked. Despite signing Jared up for that website (he definitely wouldn’t have watched it, Jared knows), he’s probably never seen another man naked. Maybe those stunned eyes were filled with disgust, with revulsion. That’s no more than Jared deserves for unknowingly flaunting himself, after all.

But revulsion doesn’t cause erections.

And Jensen was erect as hell before his dash into the bathroom.

Shit, shit, shit, what is Jared supposed to do?

He stays out drinking that night, even though he can’t afford it. It’s his custom to fuck around on Friday nights, letting Jensen have their room for his own version of sexual release, but tonight he can’t make himself touch another man. He should, he should fuck himself empty before heading back to their shared bedroom. How is he supposed to sleep next to Jensen when Jensen reacted like that to Jared’s cock?

It can’t be easy for Jensen, he tells himself morosely as he finishes his fourth beer. If he truly believed he was straight until this morning, he must be in crisis mode right now. Jared has to be sensitive, considerate.

Maybe Jensen will move directly to denial. If that’s the course he chooses, Jared has to respect that. Has to let him make his decision and not try to influence him in any way. Being gay would be devastating for Jensen’s chosen future.

Maybe Jensen is bi. Maybe he just has to get over the shock of finding men attractive too before he goes back to his precious Dianne who he finds just as attractive and can be happy with as they forge the rest of their lives together.

Jared certainly can’t threaten Jensen’s future. He has no right to even think about it.

What if Jensen is gay. What if Jared is the one he wants. What if Jared could get to feel, after all, what it would be like to ease himself into Jensen’s very core, to meld their bodies into one and watch Jensen melt around him and finally get to see what Jensen looks like when he comes. To be the one to blow Jensen’s mind with ecstasy. To be the one to fulfil Jensen’s deepest fantasies. To be the one to capture Jensen’s heart.
Jensen is not his. Jensen can never be his.

But, oh, how is Jared supposed to contain his delusions now? Now, when he knows how big Jensen’s eyes can get, the way his tongue flickers out to wet those puffy pink lips when he starts panting with desire, when Jared’s fucking seen him get hard while staring at Jared’s exposed cock.

Jensen’s asleep when Jared finally gets back to their room. The window is cracked open despite the rain outside. Is that because Jensen jerked off to the memory of what he saw this morning?

When Jared wakes up on Saturday, Jensen is out running again. Jared jumps into the shower to deal with his pressing erection, making sure to leave his phone on the counter in case Jensen texts. Because it would be unthinkable for Jensen to return early a second day in a row and blunder into the bathroom, stripping off his running clothes because they’re cold and wet from the rain that’s still coming down, so desperate for a warm shower that he doesn’t care that it’s already on and that Jared is right there naked and hard and wanting.

Imagine Jensen on his knees beneath the water, those rosy lips lips open, stretched wide around Jared’s cock, taking him deep—

Annnnnnd it’s too late to stop himself from coming to the image.

Fuck.

This is not the way to deal with this.

Jared goes out to get laid that night, after Jensen can’t stop flushing and stuttering around him. The signs are pointing too strongly to what he wants and he can’t let them tempt him. That takes the edge off it, and he’s able to join Jensen in the gym on Sunday and not ogle his ass too drastically. Except keeping his eyes above waist level means he keeps noticing where Jensen’s eyes repeatedly focus.

He’s still riveted on Jared’s cock.

Maybe they should talk about it, Jared thinks during the next few days as he watches Jensen start checking other men out too. He can’t deny Jensen is obviously having a gay crisis, and nobody should go through that alone if they don’t have to. Since Jared inadvertently sparked it, he owes it to Jensen to be a confidante. Who better than Jared, after all, to understand in this eastern liberal part of their country exactly how disastrous this is for a good Texan boy.

It takes him another week to build up his courage. Jensen’s managed to stop blushing around him and things are almost back to normal between them….except for Jensen’s constant attempts to surreptitiously check Jared out. He isn’t stopping. In fact, it’s getting worse. On Thursday night while they’re both studying Jensen can’t keep his eyes to himself and Jared’s horribly aware that he’s getting hard beneath the scrutiny, which puts him in an impossible position to bring the subject up. That’s it, he decides. Tomorrow night he’ll fuck it out of his system so that he can tackle Jensen on the subject in the morning when he can breathe more easily around him.

It’s an abnormally warm spring night, so he doesn’t bother to make the effort to go home with someone. Instead he bumps into a regular casual fuck buddy who is happy to make use of the alleyway outside the bar, which is Jared’s preferred hook-up spot anyway, since he doesn’t later have to extricate himself to leave. He fucks Chad hard and fast, giving up on his attempts not to pretend it’s Jensen beneath him, except it’s not his imagination when he glimpses through his hair the ass he’s imagining he’s inside of.

It’s Jensen. Standing in the shadows on the other side of the road.
Watching Jared fuck Chad.

Jared walks around town for an hour after the most explosive climax he’s had in far too long. He needs to get his head together before he faces Jensen, who ran just as Jared lost control. This is it, this is his excuse to bring up the subject, but he has to make sure he does it right. He doesn’t want to panic Jensen, nor does he want to pressure him, but if Jensen’s got to the point of spying on him having sex, the situation is drastic.

And he is all Jensen has to confide in.

He creates and discards various strategies, trying to take into account everything he knows about Jensen and his life at home and the future he wants. When he thinks he’s identified the best way to approach him, he steels himself and heads for the dorms.

The light is out, Jensen’s in bed, but his taut breathing gives him away. He’s still awake.

Jared slips into the bathroom, strips and takes a quick shower. His cock is getting excited again and he’s tempted to deal with it, but it’s a part of his plan, offering it to Jensen. And if this backfires on him, it’ll be no more than he deserves to spend the rest of the night in discomfort.

It takes courage to step out naked, replaying the moment that began all of this, but it pays off when he sees the light from the bathroom reflect in Jensen’s open eyes.

“I know you’re watching me,” Jared says.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

After Jensen agrees to his proposal, Jared sets about introducing him to the delights of sex with guys, only to discover that Jensen is not the only one having new experiences.

Jensen is willing to go for it.

That floors Jared the most, because while he hoped this would be the outcome, he never dared let himself count on it, and now Jensen’s sitting up, pushing his covers back, showing Jared just how big and hard their conversation has made him. Their conversation about him letting Jared spread his legs apart and lick him open and fuck him.

Oh shit, Jared should have got off in the shower after all because he doesn’t know how he’s going to get through this. Turned-on Jensen is mouthwatering, all huge eyes and wet lips and trembling hands as he reaches for the waistband of his pants.

“Shall I just pull these down or take them off entirely? What about my shirt? Do you want me to take that off?”

He’s never had a virgin, Jared remembers far too late. Sure, he and Stephen were both virgins but they fumbled along equally clueless and didn’t get very far. Neither dreamed of what Jared’s about to do to Jensen, and since then Jared’s only been with experienced guys, guys who know what they want and how they want it. No one’s ever looked up at him the way Jensen is, with such apprehension tempered with resolute trust.

“What would make you comfortable?” Of course Jared wants him bare, but this isn’t about what Jared wants. “Are you okay with taking them off?”

“That guy didn’t.” Jensen’s mouth pulls back in a slight grimace as he obviously replays the memory of what he saw tonight. “But you were in public, and we’re not so I’m guessing it’s okay if I strip?”

Yes, please, please strip. “It’s easier,” is all Jared allows himself to say, but he doesn’t need to continue because Jensen is standing up to pull off his shirt.

Jared has never seen Jensen topless. He’s never even seen his upper arms bared. At the gym, where he wears the least clothes, he never has on less than a loose t-shirt and always returns to their room to shower and comes out fully dressed.

His stomach emerges first. It’s smooth, no visible six pack, but Jared’s seen what he does in the gym and knows there are some serious muscles hiding beneath the soft-looking firm flesh. There’s a spot he already wants to bite. If Jensen’s willing, he’s going to leave his mark right there just above Jensen’s left hip bone.

Or, wait, look at that chest, so broad and solid, almost hairless but naturally so, decorated by puffy pink nipples. He needs to bite them too. Is Jensen sensitive there? They’re already erect in the warm room, they’ve responded either to the conversation or to the fact that Jensen is baring himself.
for Jared, and he needs to test them. Hold Jensen down and lick them until he squirms, suck them swollen and tender then explore them with his teeth to see what makes Jensen gasp, what makes him moan, what makes him sob. Can Jared make him cry with pleasure? Can he make him come, just by playing with those nipples?

“I’m, um, not as built as that guy,” Jensen says, crossing his arms self-consciously over his chest, cutting off Jared’s view.

What the fuck? Jared jerks his eyes up to meet Jensen’s. “I got distracted trying to decide which part of you I want to lick first.”

Honesty works, because Jensen’s eyes flare. “Any conclusions?”

“I’m kinda greedy. So far I want it all.”

“Yeah?” The word falls between them as they stare at each other. “You can have me, Jared. Any of me you want.”

He really shouldn’t say such things. Jared bites down very hard on his own lip to try and keep some semblance of control, digging his nails into the palm of his hand. He’s the experienced one, damn it, not the one about to erupt just because of a bare chest and a far-too-open offer. When he can breathe again, he swallows, attempting to centre himself.

“Right then. Yeah. I’m gonna hold you to that.”

Jensen gives him a shy little smile as he unfolds his arms and reaches for the tie at his waist. “Might you want to lick me here?” he asks, dropping his pants to pool around his feet on the floor, and this time Jared does moan out loud.

“God, Jensen.”

Jensen has the most ridiculously pretty cock Jared has ever seen. It figures, since he’s gorgeous everywhere else, but Jared didn’t expect this. It’s as rosy as his lips, leaking precome already, reaching out to Jared in an invitation he can’t resist. Very slowly he slides off the bed onto his knees. It jumps at his proximity as Jensen’s stomach tightens.

“Can I touch you?” Jared whispers.

“Yes, please.”

Jensen sounds so ardent that Jared rips his focus away from that lovely cock to look straight up into his eyes. Jensen’s smiling again, still that tremulous little smile that Jared’s not seen on his face before. He had no idea Jensen could look so adorable.

“I’m not as big as you,” Jensen says softly.

“You’re plenty big.”

“I want to touch you too. If you’ll let me.”

His cock is screaming for Jensen’s touch, but he’s going to come, he’s going to come far too soon. “I’ll let you, I just—right now I’m—“ Gently he wraps his hand around Jensen’s cock. “Can I suck you?”

The pulse in his hand is answer enough and he doesn’t wait for Jensen’s groaned, “Please,” before
he’s leaning forward to take him into his mouth.

Jensen’s hands tear at his hair. “Fuck, Jared.”

It’s the first curse word he’s heard from Jensen’s lips and it makes him ease back enough to speak. “Feel good?”

“So good it should be illegal.”

Jensen should be illegal, every bit of him, Jared thinks as he licks around the head of his cock. It tastes delicious and he goes after more. Would Jensen mind if Jared reaches around to steady himself with a grip on his ass? God, he’s going to touch that bare ass before seeing it, his hands are already moving and Jensen doesn’t stop him, no, instead he arches his ass back into Jared’s hands, but his fingers force Jared’s head to follow and Jared should remind him it’s not considerate to hold someone down on your cock like that before you’ve checked how they are about deep-throating but it’s already too late and it doesn’t matter anyway because Jared can take anyone, even someone as big as Jensen, and he swallows and squeezes and ignores the fact he can’t breathe because Jensen’s coming down his throat and Jared’s coming all over the floor without even being touched and it feels so good everywhere that he doesn’t even care that he’s never done that before.

*

“I’m sorry, Jared, fuck.” Jensen pulls out as soon as he regains sufficient awareness to realise what he’s doing. He may have no experience but even he knows he’s gone further than he should have, especially for a first time.

Jared kneels back on his heels, running his tongue over his glistening lips. “Jesus.”

“I’m really sorry.” Not certain what to do with himself, Jensen sits down on the edge of his bed. His dick feels cold outside of Jared’s mouth, it’s wet and throbbing and he immediately wants to put it back, wants that blazing heat to wrap around it again. Should he pull up his pants, cover it up? Is their experiment now over because he ruined it by coming too quickly? Jared doesn’t move, continuing to kneel there at Jensen’s feet as though he’s still available for Jensen despite Jensen’s callous use of him. “I didn’t mean to do that.” Why isn’t he responding? “It’s just I’ve never – fuck, are you okay?”

Jared slowly lifts dazed eyes to Jensen. “You just said fuck three times.

Has he? It’s a word he meticulously keeps only in his thoughts after his mother washed his mouth out with soap when he was twelve for using it. His mother would wash his mouth out with a lot worse than soap if she knew how badly he wants to use it to do to Jared what Jared’s just done to him.

“Are you okay?” he asks. “I didn’t mean to choke you like that. Or to come so fast. That was—“ Shifting uneasily, he wishes he had covered himself after all. But it’s Jared, and they won’t get anywhere with this if he tries to hide from him, so he makes himself confess, “I’m seriously embarrassed right now.”

“Dude.” Jared huffs a chuckle and motions down at Jensen’s blue pants on the floor between them. They have come all over them. But Jensen came in Jared’s mouth, deep down his throat, in fact. He didn’t notice him spit it out after—oh. Oh.
“You too?”

“Yeah.” A grin lights Jared’s face and he looks more like himself as he ostentatiously licks his lips again. “You taste too good, Jensen. That’s the first time I’ve come untouched, I’ll have you know.”

“Firsts for both of us then,” Jensen says faintly, trying to take it in. Jared, who has sex all the time, no doubt in all kinds of ways, came just from blowing him.

“You’ve never had someone swallow you down?”

“Never been in someone’s mouth.”

“A guy’s mouth, you mean.”

“Anyone’s.”

“Wait, what?” Jared looks astounded, which isn’t fair because hasn’t he noticed Jensen doesn’t sleep around? “Your girl never sucked you?”

“We’re waiting for marriage. I told you.”

“You said…” Jared’s voice trails off. “Fuck, Jensen, you’re a virgin? I mean, in every way?”

“Not any more. Clearly.”

“I just took your virginity?”

“You’re going to get most of them.” This is excruciatingly awkward. He shouldn’t have said anything. “That is, unless you’ve changed your mind because I was too quick and now you’re done too.”

“Oh, I’m not done.”

“But you came.”

“Jensen.” It’s Jared’s tutoring voice. “You and I are young and healthy. Maybe a bit too healthy, given how eager we were, but coming once does not end this. Unless you want to, of course. If you’ve had enough—“

“No!”

Jared laughs. “You have no idea how relieved I am to hear that.”

Jensen laughs too. It’s funny, because on the rare occasions he let himself imagine what sex would be like he didn’t anticipate laughter, but this is Jared, who’s frequently laughing, so he probably shouldn’t be surprised.

“This might sound like a strange question,” Jared says after a moment, “but do you cuddle?”

“I…don’t know.” Jensen fiddles with the blanket and considers. His family isn’t particularly tactile beyond perfunctory hugs, and he’s accustomed to very little touch. He had a dog as a kid, though, and enjoyed it when she curled up illicitly against him on his bed. “I might. I’m not sure.”

“You don’t cuddle your girlfriend?”

His girlfriend needs to stay out of what’s happening here since he’s currently cheating on her and he
never intended to be that man. Sure, Jared dressed it up in terms of protecting his long-term future with her, but cheating is what it boils down to and he’s not going to think about her while he’s doing it. “Do you cuddle all your hookups, Jared?”

Jared flinches. “You’re not a hookup, Jensen.”

“ Aren’t you hooking up with me tonight? You’re going to fuck me, right?”

“If you still want me to.”

“So isn’t that a hookup?”

Jared now looks as uncomfortable as Jensen feels. “It’s not the same. We live together. I’m not gonna sneak out in the morning to go home. We have a date to watch the game tomorrow and I don’t normally watch football with people I’m fucking.”

“Do you cuddle people you fuck?”

“That’s five times.”

“Stop counting!”

“I just never heard you say that before.”

“Jared.”

“Jensen.”

Fine. “Do you want to come get in bed with me?” Jensen scoots back, pushing aside the blanket he’s playing with. “There’s not much space for two of us.”

“We can push the beds together.”

“Good thinking.”

As Jared finally gets up from his knees, Jensen takes charge of his soiled discarded pants that still lie between them. Is it terrible that he so badly wants to taste? Jared got to taste him, but Jared’s no doubt tasted lots of men. Jensen hasn’t, and he really wants the flavour of Jared on his tongue.

Dropping them into his hamper in the closet, he turns to watch Jared rearrange the beds into the centre of their small room. “I want to blow you too,” he says, and has the satisfaction of watching Jared trip over nothing and land heavily on one of the beds. “Can I? Will you let me?”

Jared tosses his wet towel onto the floor and stays on the bed. “Jensen, like you said to me earlier, you can have me any way you want me. I’m here for you to experiment with and that means literally anything you want to do.”

“Anything?” Too many thoughts cram into his brain at once, a barrage of vivid images he’s never permitted to reach his consciousness in the past, and looking into Jared’s bright eyes with the knowledge that he can make those images a reality sends a roar of need blasting through him. Too turned on to speak, he retrieves the towel to hang up in the bathroom. “That’s a pretty broad offer to make,” he says unsteadily when he comes out.

“It’s up to you. I’m game for all of it.”

“What if I want to tie you up?”


Jared blinks. “Do you?”

“I don’t know yet,” Jensen says seriously. “I never thought about it before.”

“So why are you bringing it up?”

“Just checking the parameters.”

“There are no parameters. I said anything; I meant it.”

“There have to be some things you don’t want to do.”

“We’re experimenting. There’s a lot I haven’t done, so if you want to try something that’s new to me then I’m up for it. And everything I have done, I’ve liked. And, yeah, I haven’t done it for a long time, but I like cuddling so if you wanna get your little pretty ass over here any time soon....”

Jared trails off but the invitation is clear so Jensen moves onto the bed beside him. It’s complicated for a moment as they sort out limbs, but he lets Jared turn him so his back is pressed up against Jared’s front. As he adjusts to the unfamiliar warmth, it occurs to him that this is how he always imagined marriage to be, going to bed wrapped around each other, synchronising breathing, this comfortable kind of intimacy that he’s been craving but stoically waiting for.

“Can I touch you?” Jared asks, husky voice soft right in Jensen’s ear.

“I think you already are.”

He feels Jared’s chuckle more than hears it. “I mean in sexy ways.”

“Yes, please.”

“So polite, Jensen.”

“My mama raised me to be.”

Luckily Jared doesn’t ask the obvious follow-up: did his mama raise him to get naked in bed with another man, wriggling his bare ass against that man’s rapidly hardening cock as strong fingers brush tentatively over his nipples? Jensen shivers at the contact.

“Feel good?” Jared inquires, his fingers less hesitant this time, and Jensen shivers again.

“I thought this only felt good for women.”

“Did you do this with her?”

Jensen’s not going there. Instead he thrusts his chest forward into Jared’s hands. “Do it again. Harder this time.”

He’s rewarded with sharp pinches that streak heat through him.

“Again.”

“Would you let me bite you?”

It only takes a moment of contemplating Jared’s teeth replacing his fingers for Jensen to twist over onto his back. Their eyes meet, and he feels a tug low in his belly at the intensity on Jared’s face. Jared’s eyes are usually bouncing all over the place but they’re trained on Jensen as though nothing
else exists and Jensen could get used to this fierce focus.

“Please bite me, Jared.”

Jared’s eyes flame, then he dips his head to stroke his tongue over Jensen’s right nipple. Oh yes, Jensen likes this for sure. *Fuck,* he likes it, even more when Jared does as he asked and closes his teeth over Jensen’s throbbing flesh. Jensen squeaks. He honestly squeaks, and he doesn’t even care.

“Harder. Please.”

Jared’s fingers catch his other nipple and he alternates pressure, biting down on one then pinching hard on the other, and within minutes Jensen is writhing beneath him.

“Wait, Jared, stop!”

Jared lifts his head, but keeps his fingers firmly in place. “Jensen? You okay?”

“I’m gonna come again if you keep doing that.”

“Yeah?” Delighted, Jared pinches down again. “Can I?”

“I don’t want to come yet. Not so soon.”

“One day I want to see how many times I can make you come.”

Jared’s already thinking about doing this again. That eases something deep inside Jensen and he gives him a soft smile despite the pressing urgency between his legs. “What’s your record for coming?”


“I want to make you break your record. Whatever it is.”

“Yes, please.” Jared parrots Jensen earlier, and they both laugh.

“You’re right,” Jensen says, “that does sound too polite for the circumstances.”

“The circumstances being that my tongue is about to go up your ass.”

He thought he’d been calming down, but Jared’s sentence fires him right up again. It’s not the words, though, so much as the thought of what they mean, what’s about to happen to him. He wants it, oh God, he wants it. “You have to tell me what to do. And don’t let me come. I don’t want to come until you’re inside me.”

“Jeez, Jensen, you’re killing me.”

“Can we do it now?”

“Yes. Turn over.” Jared scrambles up and pushes the covers right off the bed to give Jensen space. “Get on your knees for me, ass up, and rest your chest on the bed. Yes, like that.”

It feels obscene. That’s the point, Jensen reminds himself. He’s bent over like this precisely so Jared can do obscene things to him. Even so, self-consciousness seeps through his buzz of excitement. What if he isn’t clean? He showered after his extra gym session this afternoon and washed thoroughly, but not with the expectation that someone would be licking his asshole a few hours
later. Maybe he should go clean himself, but Jared’s already spreading his legs apart, easing his ass higher.

“This feel okay? Can you hold this position for me?”

Fuck. His hole is tingling with excitement already, he can feel it clench against the air as Jared parts his cheeks. Jared’s looking at him. Jared’s staring straight at his asshole and Jensen can’t breathe. Nobody’s ever meant to look at him here. This is his private, secret place. His most shameful place. And shameful is right, because when Jared’s blows gently across it, it flutters frantically, keeping no secrets, exposing the depth of his need to have it touched, to have it filled.

By Jared.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Jared takes Jensen's virginity and then has to face the aftermath.

Jensen convulses the moment Jared’s tongue touches him. He jerks away so fast Jared loses his grip on him.

“Jen?” It’s gonna hurt him bad if Jensen didn’t like it and needs him to stop.

“It’s too much,” Jensen pants. He twists his head to look over his shoulder. “Jared, I’m gonna come again.”

This, Jared can work with. “It’s okay if you do.”

“Only when you’re in me.”

“I will be.” Jared pokes his tongue out and wiggles it. “You coming doesn’t stop me from fucking you. Me coming is what you need to worry about.”

Jensen looks more reassured, but he bites his lip (exactly how Jared wants to but he has no idea if Jensen will ever allow such a thing). “I don’t want to do it wrong.”

“You can’t.” Dragging his attention away from that puffy lower lip, Jared surveys the naked body spread out before him and comes to a decision. “Look, lie down completely.”

“But—“

“Didn’t you want me to tell you what to do?”

“But that’s not what you said—“

“It’s what I’m saying now.”

Jensen gazes at him searchingly, as if trying to read Jared’s thoughts (“wanna eat you now, so get down there and give yourself to me”), then abruptly decides to comply and lies down, all taut muscle dusted with tiny golden hairs that definitely need licking one day. Jared takes a moment to appreciate the view before stretching over him from behind. There is so much here he wants to investigate. “Rest your head on your hands and just feel, Jen. Stop worrying. I’ve got you, I’ll make sure everything goes exactly the way it’s supposed to. Yeah?”

Jensen’s head twists around again. “But I want to please you, Jared. Not just me, I want you to like this too.”

“I’m gonna like it, all right.” How does demure little Jensen come up with these lines that devastate Jared inside? “Believe me, you please me.”

“I do?”

How can he sound so fucking innocent? Because he’s a virgin, remember? He’s not jaded like
Jared from too many meaningless men, too many faceless fucks. When Jared was virginal, he too
cared deeply about the effect of what he did on his partner.

But then he was in love with his partner at the time.

And Jensen, obviously, is not in love with him.

He starts with kisses, kisses he’d never dare suggest sharing mouth to mouth. Pressing his lips
between Jensen’s shoulder blades, he runs his tongue down the freckled spine, thumbs following the
smooth skin along barely noticeable ribs. Jensen’s no skinny teenager, that’s for sure, he’s strong,
 thick muscle, and Jared helps himself to it, sinking his teeth in until Jensen hisses then moving on to
 the next morsel. As he goes, he can feel Jensen moving out of his head and into his body,
 abandoning himself to the pleasure Jared’s giving him. There’s no reticence in him. He offered
 himself to Jared earlier (“You can have me, Jared, any of me you want” – how the fuck is he
 supposed to stop hearing that in his head?) and Jared’s gonna take him, gonna take everything he can
 get while Jensen will still give it.

By the time he makes his way back to Jensen’s ass, Jensen’s moaning continuously beneath his
mouth, no words, just broken little needy sounds that flicker heat through Jared’s veins. When his
 teeth close over the crest of Jensen’s round ass, Jensen yelps. Jared holds, tightens, lets go, only for
 Jensen to thrust his ass back for more. He likes that, does he? Excellent. Aiming for a concentration
 of freckles (one day he’s going to kiss every single freckle on Jensen’s body, make a study of them
 and find his favourites, the ones Jensen’s most sensitive beneath, and then he’s going to set about
 keeping a permanent mark over them), Jared bites harder this time, sucking on the salty skin before
 soothing the livid marks with his tongue.

Time now. Time for his reward.

This time Jensen doesn’t jerk away at the touch of Jared’s tongue. Jared starts tentatively just in case,
then as Jensen relaxes beneath him he loosens his control and lets himself take what he wants.
Jensen opens up delectably, muscles soft and giving beneath Jared’s demand, and Jared can’t wait to
find out what he’ll feel like around his cock.

He keeps track of the frantic whimpers as he urges Jensen back into his earlier position. Monitoring
Jensen’s arousal levels helps him keep a semblance of control over his own body; no way is he going
off again before he’s inside Jensen. Once was quite enough. To his relief, Jensen’s taking it well.
Even when Jared finally enters him with his tongue, he just pushes back harder, enticing Jared
deeper. (Focus, damn it. This is for Jensen, not for your own overexciteable cock. Ignore the heady
musky flavour of him, don’t get distracted by all that smooth skin and all the ways you want to test it,
dig your teeth into it, suck colours into it. Don’t let those desperate little moans quiver through your
veins straight to your cock.)

Instead of letting himself play, he concentrates on the ring of muscle that ought to be trying to keep
him out. When he judges Jensen’s wet and loose enough, Jared tells him to turn over. He needs to
see his face for the first penetration with his fingers, needs to know for certain that he’s making it
good for him.

Yet again he has to grit his teeth against the surge of desperation to come when he see Jensen’s face.
He’s smiling that fucking smile again. How is it possible that a man he’s always seen as repressed
and upright can look so sweet when he’s about to have his ass invaded for the first time? Jensen’s
legs fall open at Jared’s command, his strong body lax with trust.

“Are you going to fuck me now?”
“In a minute. First gotta get you all the way open.” He reaches for the lube he placed beside the bed and uncaps it. “I’m big and I don’t want to hurt you, so we need to take it slow.”

“I need you in me, Jared.”

“Gimme a sec.” There, finger coated, he teases it around the softened edges of Jensen’s hole before pushing gently in. “How’s that?”

“You’re inside me.”

Oh fuck, yes, he is. He is indeed, and Jared pushes further, up to his second knuckle. It’s too much too fast and Jensen’s back arches.

“More,” he begs.

It goes quickly after that. Jensen’s ass was made for being fucked, it swallows Jared’s fingers ravenously and his luminous smile never dims. Jared knows he needs to turn Jensen over again for the next stage to make it easier for him, but that smile is intoxicating and he can’t give it up. It takes a bit more manoeuvring, but far sooner than he anticipated he has the condom on and he’s lining himself up for the big moment.

This, too, is easier than he expected. Just as with his fingers, Jensen’s ass welcomes his cock and instead of having to force his way through tight, resisting muscle, Jared fights to hold himself back and to sink slowly into what feels like his new home. He bottoms out, shit, he’s all the way inside Jensen, and Jensen’s eyes sparkle up at him.

“Fuck me, Jared.”

That’s it. That’s the end of Jared’s control. He feels the snap as a physical sensation and he lets loose on Jensen’s body. The constraints of Jensen’s virginal delicacy evaporate beneath the roaring need to thrust, to pound, to claim.

“Fuck me harder.”

The voice winds through the screaming in his blood and he hears himself shout Jensen’s name before his vision whites out and his muscles collapse.

*

Jared wakes alone.

It takes him a moment to comprehend his surroundings, to figure out the situation. He’s in a big bed, his body is replete and has the warmth memory of another body pressed up against it, which should mean he’s in a stranger’s room and has to get out—except, no, this is his room. His and Jensen’s.

Jensen.

Jensen is gone.

He fucked Jensen and Jensen is gone.

No, no, don’t panic. Look for clues.
His stuff is still here. There’s his guitar and over there is his laptop, two of his most precious possessions. He wouldn’t leave them behind. Jared stumbles out of bed and opens Jensen’s closet, a violation he would never normally consider, but it’s worth it because all of Jensen’s clothes are still there.

Okay, so what’s missing? Besides Jensen, that is. He scans the room. Jensen’s phone. He checks the closet again. Jensen’s running shoes.

Of course. He’s an idiot. Jensen’s gone running, just like he does every morning when he wakes up. He hasn’t left Jared after all.

The relief he feels drops him back onto the bed, breathing hard. The bed that smells like both of them. The bed where he took Jensen’s virginity last night.

How is Jensen going to react today? Sure, he seemed relaxed and into it while it was happening, but lust can do crazy things, and Jared can’t even imagine what it must feel like to have sex for the first time after living such a restricted life that he didn’t even get oral from his childhood sweetheart girlfriend. It makes sense for him to have temporarily lost all restraint in the heat of it all, but what about now it’s all over?

Stomping over to the shower, Jared blasts it on, not patient enough to wait for it to heat up. The cold will do his body good, annihilate certain parts of it that don’t understand that they don’t get free range on Jensen perpetually. As it pounds down on his head, blinding him, he works some scenarios.

One. Jensen will creep back in avoiding his eyes and blatantly try to pretend his lapse of good manly behaviour didn’t happen now that his curiosity has been satisfied.

Two. Jensen could return prickly and resentful, turning his shame on Jared, blaming him for seducing him against his will and undermining his manhood.

Three. Jensen might burst through the door with that unexpected glowing smile of his, slam Jared up against the wall then get on his knees to take what they never got around to last night because they both passed out.

Four, more likely. Jensen will stagger in, shaky and distraught that his life has been rent apart, his identity shattered, and desperate for reassurance and comfort and support.

Jared needs to be prepared for all of these (except perhaps three, since the odds on that are lower than his ego likes to consider). Running them and several variations through his mind, he washes quickly, includes his hair since Jensen’s hands wrecked it last night, and makes sure he’s decently covered when he leaves the bathroom just in case Jensen has come home early.

He hasn’t.

Once Jared’s dressed (in typical Saturday clothing, nothing fancy, but definitely clean even though he has to root around for several minutes to ensure it), he’s not sure what to do with himself. He should make the bed. The beds. Should he separate them again?

Of course, otherwise think how Jensen will feel when he comes through the door, possibly falling apart beneath the horror of discovering just how much he likes to be fucked by a man. The last thing he’ll want is a reminder of his transgression, or the implied pressure that Jared wants to do it to him again. (Nevermind that Jared can’t stop thinking about the way Jensen sucked his cock straight into his body like it was made to be there, to be a part of him.)
Quickly he separates the beds and straightens their covers. They should be washed. Jensen
normally does his laundry on Saturday mornings anyway. But how presumptive is it of Jared to strip
Jensen’s bed. No, he can’t do that. He has no rights to Jensen’s bed.

The condom. He had the presence of mind last night to toss it in the direction of the wastepaper
basket, he even made it, impressively, but that should go out right now. Yes, he can take the trash
out. He often does it, since Jensen’s too prissy to like touching the handle for the chute down the
hallway, so that won’t be invasive, that’ll be some normality for Jensen.

There’s a comfort for himself in the familiar task, and when he gets back to their room he’s feeling
less off balance. Continuing routine, he turns the kettle on to make coffee the way he usually does
on weekend mornings so it’s hot for Jensen after his run. It’s nearly 9, so Jensen should be back any
moment if he’s doing his usual route.

He drinks the coffee too hot, gulps it down because the burn helps centre him, yanks him out of the
panic spiral that’s forming again at the knowledge that Jensen is about to walk in through the door.

What if Jensen hates him for it? It’s not Jared’s fault if Jensen’s gay, but it is his fault for alerting him
to the fact and for proving it to him, and it wouldn’t be at all surprising for Jensen to turn on the
messenger. What if Jensen wants to move out? What if he’s gone to find out if he can live with
someone else for the remainder of the school year so he doesn’t have to suffer Jared’s presence
reminding him of the sickening, disgusting truth?

What if Jensen never wants to talk to him again?

He’s onto his third scalding cup of coffee when he hears the door open and his hand jerks so
violently that it spills all over the dynamical systems textbook he’s pretending to study.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The aftermath continues.

“Sorry if I startled you.” Jensen closes the door behind him more carefully than the way he banged it open and darts to the bathroom to fetch a towel since Jared isn’t moving, is just sitting there at his desk watching spilled coffee drip off his book onto his thigh. He grabs their hand towel and tosses it to Jared. “Here.”

The slap of it seems to rouse Jared, who starts mopping his book. “Good run?”

“Yeah. Hurts a little, you know, from last night.” Jensen feels shy mentioning it, but Jared did ask. “Not badly, just...I can feel it. I didn’t expect that.”

“I’m sorry.”

Why won’t Jared look at him? Please don’t say Jared regrets it. Jensen shrugs out of his hoodie and kicks off his shoes, trying to figure out what’s going on with his roommate and first lover. “You okay?”

“Fine.” Jared’s eyes meet his for a split second before he goes into the bathroom to rinse the towel. They aren’t rimmed with red, he doesn’t look upset, but they dart away too quickly and Jared’s shoulders are rigid with tension.

He does regret it. What did he say? He normally fucks someone then leaves them. He has hookups, not live-in lovers. But here he’s trapped with Jensen, he can’t leave without losing his housing, and that can’t be easy for him.

Right, okay. How best to deal with this? Jensen spent his run figuring out a lot of stuff but he didn’t take into account the possibility that Jared might regret fucking him and want to escape. It makes sense, though, given Jared’s devotion to freedom.

Jensen wants more, and the most likely way to get it is to ensure Jared knows he’s not going to turn clingy and needy like a teenage girl with her first boyfriend. Jensen’s in a relationship, he has been for nearly four years, and Jared doesn’t need to worry that he’s going to start, whatever, composing odes to Jared’s hair or planning couple outings or thinking he has any claim to Jared beyond casual, experimental fucking.

“I have some errands to run this morning,” he calls since Jared hasn’t come out of the bathroom, “laundry, stuff like that. The game’s at three, right? I’ll be back by then. You want me to pick up some chips and beer? I think we ran out last time.”

“I'll get them.”

Good, he’s talking at least. “No, it’s my turn. You got them last time.” Jensen tries to take two or three turns in a row without Jared noticing, but it really is his turn this time. “There’s a new flavour of Pringles. You want to try it?”
“Okay.”

“Great.”

Now what? He needs to shower before he can go out but Jared’s still in the bathroom. All right, he can get his laundry together so long. Sliding open his closet, he takes out the hamper to transfer his clothing into the bag he takes to the laundry. He should do his sheets too, especially after last night. “You want me to add your sheets to mine?” he asks, because that only makes sense given his role in soiling them.

“It’s okay.” Jared’s voice sounds closer.

Jensen looks up to see he’s back beside his desk, fidgeting with the towel he brought with him even though all the mess has been cleaned. “It’s no problem.”

“I can do it, Jensen.”

“Sure, I just thought that since I’m doing mine—“

“You don’t owe me anything.”

What? “I know. It was just an offer.”

“I can do it.”

“Fine. Forget it.”

Jensen rushes his shower and Jared remains buried in his textbook until he leaves. Best to give him some space, assure him Jensen doesn’t think he has the right to make any claims on his time or his body. He gets withdrawn like this sometimes and Jensen’s learned it’s best to wait it out because eventually Jared works through whatever’s bothering him and starts laughing and being himself again. Hopefully that’ll happen before this afternoon or it’s going to be one long game.

Jared seems calmer when Jensen returns a few minutes before the start. He’s still not really meeting Jensen’s eyes, but he’s no longer sidling away and they settle on their respective beds, snacks on the table between them, and gradually things return to normal. Jensen works hard not to look at Jared’s body, to keep his eyes only on his face when he glances at him, and he doggedly keeps up the normal game-related banter until Jared is provoked into joining in if only to rebut him. Halfway through, they’re shouting at the screen and laughing and joking as if it were any other game day and the new Pringle flavour is a roaring success judging by the way Jared demolishes them! This is a good sign, hopefully meaning he’s fundamentally okay, and Jensen just has to contrive a way to bring up the possibility of further experimentation without freaking him out.

Sometimes on Saturday nights they head out together to investigate the college music scene, there are a few places with live music that they like, one that Jensen hopes he can get good enough to play at for one of their scratch nights by next year, but that might seem too date-like to Jared in the context of last night so that’s not an option. Other times they have a paper to write or studying to do, but despite Jared’s show of studying earlier, neither of them has anything urgent coming up.

What if Jared wants to go out by himself?

What if he wants to go out and fuck someone else to make it okay again in his head?

Jensen considers it while Jared throws chocolate-covered raisins at the screen in protest at a referee decision. Should Jensen suggest it? Would that be weird? How does he let Jared know that he’s
not going to kick up a fuss if that’s what Jared wants to do? The last thing he wants is for Jared to feel obligated to stay in with him out of a misplaced sensitivity to Jensen’s perceived delicate feelings.

If Jared went out to fuck one of his normal guys at the club, would he mind letting Jensen suck him afterwards? He himself said—and proved—that he can come more than once in an evening, so maybe he’d consider it because Jensen really doesn’t know how he’s going to keep waiting to get his mouth on that thing now that he’s seen it. Now that he’s felt it inside of him.

God. Jared was inside him. Jared’s cock, that enormous beautiful massive cock was inside Jensen last night.

He’s still astounded by the fact that it didn’t hurt. His research said it probably would, especially the first time when he was still tight and his muscles hadn’t learned how to relax around penetration, but it didn’t happen like that at all. Should he be worried about that? Might something be wrong with him, wrong with his body, that he opened up so easily? And it felt fantastic from the first touch of Jared’s tongue. In fact, the memory of it has him shifting on the bed as his hole tingles all over again. It’s still so hungry, so needy. He could have spent all day with parts of Jared buried inside him. Wouldn’t that be a delightful weekend activity, seeing how many hours they can go with some part of Jared inside some part of Jensen.

He’s read about cock warming. Could he do that? Could he last an entire football game, say, with Jared’s cock in his mouth? Always assuming, of course, he can get it in his mouth in the first place, but if it could so easily glide through the tiny opening in his ass then surely his mouth and throat can be just as cooperative?

He needs to test it. He needs to find out.

But not at the risk of alienating Jared. Rather ease him into the thought of an ongoing phase of experiments since he seems to be conflicted about having a recurring partner. Jensen has waited this long to discover what he grew up thinking of as the sins of the flesh; he doesn’t know if he can keep waiting. Please, please, let Jared want to continue.

*  

Shit. The game’s almost over and Jared still doesn’t know how to approach Jensen. He’s been acting strange all day. No, he’s been acting normal all day, exactly as he always does, as though last night Jared wasn’t inside him and they hadn’t offered themselves to each other. This was not one of his scenarios.

Does this mean Jensen had enough experimentation to answer his curiosity and he doesn’t need to do any more and Jared is therefore superfluous? Is that it? So does he want Jared to just pick up where they left off, being roommates and friends who share a room for another few months before they go their separate ways for the summer and find new people to live with next year?

It would have been easier if Jensen had been organising new accommodation this morning, because Jared doesn’t know how he’s supposed to sleep every night with six feet between them after a night wound together? How is he meant to look at Jensen again without yearning to explore all that skin he never got to last night? How can he go back to fucking strangers with the memory of Jensen’s tight, warm hole wrapped so eagerly around his dick?
Maybe he could beg. Jensen liked it, that much was obvious, so he might be willing to make an arrangement to allow Jared to pleasure him. He doesn’t have to do anything back, he doesn’t even have to touch Jared, just so long as he lets Jared touch him, please him.

(“I want to please you, Jared.” Fuck, he can’t think about that.)

On the screen, the game has come to an end. Jared has no idea who won or even how long it’s been since it finished.

“I was wondering,” Jensen says, still focused on the screen, “whether you were planning to go out tonight.”

Usually they go out together on Saturday nights unless one of them has to study. Is that what he’s referring to? “There’s live music at Red’s tonight,” he recalls. “You wanna go?”

Jensen’s head snaps towards him. “You want to?”

“I could go for some more beer.”

“Great.”

Before he’s had time to think, they’re ensconced at their usual table in the corner and Jensen’s blissing out to a particularly good guitarist. Jared catches him more than once trying to figure out the fingering the guy’s using and he gives a wry grin when he notices Jared’s attention on his fingers.

“I know, I’m nowhere near ready for this, but a guy can dream.”

A guy certainly can. “You’ll get there,” he says. “You’re quick at picking up new things.”

“You think I could be quick at learning how to blow you?”

Jared freezes.

“I’m still not sure if I can fit you in my mouth because you’re so big, but I want to at least try. Other guys have, right? And my mouth’s not small.”

Jensen’s mouth. Jensen’s mouth with those sinful lips that, no, Jared has never ever ever imagined wrapped around his cock and is certainly not thinking about right now in public wearing jeans that are far too tight.

Jensen, the fucker, doesn’t shut up. “I don’t know about my throat, though. I know that was bad form of me to push you down like I did but you were amazing, dude, you just opened up and I was so out of it I couldn’t stop myself. Does it take a lot of practise to be able to do that? To take someone down your throat?”

Now, of course, he stops, and he’s expecting a response. A verbal response that makes sense. “Yes,” Jared manages.

“Figures.” Jensen seems satisfied with that. “I have a long way to go, dude, before I can catch up with you. But like I practise with my guitar, I can practise with your dick, whenever you happen to be in the mood. It’s a skill I really want to develop.”

_It’s not exactly a skill you’ll need with your future wife_, Jared wants to say snarkily, but he bites down the words since Jensen didn’t appreciate discussing her last night in the midst of sex. But what the hell?
“You don’t mind, do you?” Jensen continues. “I mean, you like it, right? Getting a blow job?”

“Who doesn’t?”

Jensen nods. “God, yeah. I was seeing stars, Jared, literal stars, when you did me. Now I get why you do it all the time. I can’t believe I didn’t realise how good sex feels.”

 Fucking hell, how is Jared supposed to survive this conversation?

“Can I ask you a question?”

*Now* he asks? “Sure.”

“I know you do it outside a lot.” How can Jensen look shy now, *now*, after all he’s been saying? And why does shyness have to be so entrancing on him? Jensen’s eyelids flutter up a few times before he settles for focusing on one of the beer mats. “Is that because you have exhibitionist tendencies?”

“Do I have *exhibitionist tendencies*? That’s your question?”

“I just wondered. You don’t have to answer. It’s just—”

“Just what?”

“That’s something I can’t do. So if you want that—”

“It’s convenient. It’s not a kink or anything.” God forbid Jensen be put off further experimentation because of his fear of discovery. He’s not out and never likely to be, so obviously Jared would protect him from being seen. “A blow job in our room is just as good as one in an alley. Better, actually.”

Jensen looks up at him. “Better?”

“You can take more time that way. Use better positions.”

“What position do you like best?”

“If you wanna learn to take someone down your throat, lying on a bed is best, with your head dropped back over the edge. It straightens your throat out that way so it’s easier.”

“See, this is why you’re such a great tutor. I want to try it like that.”

“Deep throating isn’t easy, Jensen.”

“I can learn. There’s so much I want to learn from you.”

So this answers Jared’s question from earlier: Jensen isn’t satisfied yet. He wants more and he still wants Jared to be the one to give it to him. Jared slants a grin across the table, suddenly feeling much better about life. “You want a lesson tonight?”

Jensen grins back. “Are you going to tease me if I say yes, please?”

“Every time, man.”

They race each other back to their room, laughing when Jared trips over a fire hydrant and when Jensen nearly collides with a cyclist. Inside, Jensen doesn’t intend to waste any time because the
moment he’s locked the door behind them he says, “Do you want me on the bed?”

“Let’s start slower,” Jared advises, scrabbling for logical thoughts now that he’s about to get his dick inside Jensen’s mouth, “more traditionally.”

“Me on my knees?”

The other week Jared was reading about tantric sex practices that help stave off climaxes. This is something he’s going to have to investigate, although, really, he needed to do that before tonight, before he had Jensen Ackles looking like a wet dream dropping to his knees in front of him. “Over there,” he gestures to his bed. “Let me sit down and you can kneel between my legs.”

Five seconds later they’re in position and fuck if Jensen isn’t visibly salivating as he stares at the bulge in Jared’s jeans. Leaning back, Jared flips open the button and eases his zipper down. There’s a short cut-off sound from Jensen as his dick springs out.

“You were going commando? All day?”

“I didn’t do laundry like you did.” Is he really sitting here talking about laundry with Jensen between his thighs? “Okay, so do you want to experiment yourself, get a feel for it, or do you want me to give you some pointers?”

Jensen’s eyes are glued to his dick. “Can I lick you?”

“Dude, you can do anything you want.”

At least this time Jensen doesn’t snap back a smart answer about parameters. Instead he leans slowly forward and the cute pink tongue Jared’s never imagined stroking his skin darts out for a quick lick right on the head of his cock. Dark eyes flick up. “Tastes good.”

“Feels good.”

“Can I use my hands?”

“Sure.”

Reaching up, Jensen wraps his fingers around the base of Jared’s cock. He shakes his head as it pulses. “You are so fucking big, man.”

All the better to fuck you with, Jared doesn’t say. Instead he lets himself groan, letting Jensen know the effects he’s having as he begins his investigation of Jared’s cock with his mouth. He’s certainly inventive, mixing little kitten licks and nibbles with long firm strokes of his tongue, experimenting with pressure in different places, and it’s lucky that Jared likes a bit of pain with his blow jobs—or else he’s lucky that Jensen picks up on it and decides to test how far he can push, see if he can find where Jared’s limits are.

Jared’s limits turn out to be a lot more extensive than he knew. After a while he lies back, lets his legs fall open and just feels. Jensen seems happy with inarticulate sounds for feedback, quickly learning Jared’s nonverbal language, and Jared clutches at the covers and stares fiercely at the ceiling as he does his best not to end Jensen’s fun too soon. He had no idea, though, that blow jobs could be so creative. Not even Mr Morgan, for all his skill, took him to such peaks, building him up and up and up until he’s gasping Jensen’s name in warning—only to ease him back down—only to force him up again higher. Jensen is way too fucking good at this, even if he can’t take much of Jared’s cock into his mouth at once and certainly can’t get it anywhere near his throat. He’s using his hands too, finding pressure points high on Jared’s thighs, mixing tender caresses with sharp tugs at his balls,
even inching around to Jared’s ass, which he rarely lets anyone touch. It’s the combination of kneading fingers there and tightening pressure from Jensen’s mouth that finally does him in.

“Jen—can’t stop—now!”

But Jensen doesn’t pull back, just forces him further into his hot, eager mouth, and Jared shoots off inside him.

He’s still catching his breath when Jensen gets to his feet. “Would you mind if I jack off onto you?”

“Jen...” He looks so sparky and pleased with himself. It’s a fucking good look on him. “...yeah.”

“You taste so good, Jared,” Jensen says as he lowers his hand to his own dick, which is nearly crimson and gorgeous in its excitement.

It got like that purely from Jensen sucking his cock and that’s more gratifying than it should be.

Jensen works efficiently, still talking. “Look at you all spread out and beautiful for me. I want to taste all your skin. I want to bite you, like you did to me. I want to find all your sensitive places and find out what drives you crazy. I want to play with your body. Will you let me, Jared? Will you let me use your body to play with?”

“Yes.”

“I’m gonna come on you, gonna come all over your cock and your stomach. Want me to?”

“Come on, Jensen!”

And Jensen does.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Jensen has a chance to reflect, and then it’s time for more experimentation with Jared.

Sundays are Jensen’s day off from running. Jared usually spends Sunday mornings playing basketball with some of his friends, giving Jensen a chance to catch up with his girlfriend, and Jensen knows he thinks they have phone sex. Before this weekend, Jensen would have said he was incapable of talking dirty, the mere thought of saying sexy things on the phone appalled him, but after hearing some of the things that gush out of his mouth when he’s with Jared he has to re-evaluate that.

But that’s only for when he’s with Jared. He’d never disrespect Dianne enough to say things like that to her. Not that he disrespects Jared, but that’s different; to Jared it’s not disrespect, it’s arousing, exciting. Just like Jensen would never dream of asking Dianne to lick his asshole—oh God, just thinking about it makes his hole clench and he squirms in his bed at the memory of how good it feels.

He glances at the clock. Still half an hour before it’s time to call Dianne. Is it tasteless of him to jerk off minutes before talking to her?

It’s not like she’ll know.

He’s so hard it hurts. It’s stupid, because before Jared he rarely needed to jerk off, in fact he prided himself on his self-control. He was ignorant, that’s what. That’s why. He didn’t know. Rubbing himself to a few faceless fantasies of female bodies could be resisted and it never occurred to him to think about men before.

Before he saw Jared’s dick and his world changed.

His own dick surges as he recalls the sight of it splayed before him last night, all his to play with. Frustratingly, his mouth wasn’t as cooperative as he’d hoped, but he’s going to learn how to get that thing inside if it kills him. How often will Jared let him practise?

How often will Jared do it to him?

That’s not as important, though. Dianne might be willing to do that in future, maybe, but she doesn’t have a dick for him to suck so this is his only opportunity for that. There’s so much that this is his only opportunity for, damn it. The more things he tries, the more ideas he comes up with.

More than anything, he wants to be fucked again. By the time Jared finally entered him, he was too spaced out on pleasure to fully take in the experience. The memory is just a haze of overwhelming fullness and pressure and right. And Jared’s ferocious eyes boring down at him as he possessed every inch of Jensen’s body. He’d never imagined Jared could look so savage.

Jared was inside him. He keeps coming back to that astounding thought. And he wants it again. Wants it so badly again.

Imagine Jared coming back early from his game. “Jensen, you’re still in bed. Right where you
should be, waiting for me.”

Yes, he’s waiting for Jared. Waiting to serve Jared’s cock, to open up around it and be hot and wet and tight to bring him pleasure.

Imagine Jared keeping him here. “No more classes for you. You don’t need them, they’re not what make you useful to me. You just stay here, available for me whenever I want to take you.”

Always available for Jared. Whenever Jared wants. Whatever he wants. Being here for Jared to let loose on, learning how to take it hard and deep for him. How long can Jared go? How long can he keep fucking Jensen without stopping?

Imagine a whole day of it, Jensen strung out, maybe tied to the bed by Jared so he can’t go anywhere, can’t do anything except get fucked. That’s it. All day.

His hand tightens around the base of his cock. No. Not yet. He still has more than 20 minutes.

Positions. What kind of positions does Jared like? Jensen hadn’t realised before that men could fuck face to face. It’s so intimate and losing his virginity like that was perfect. But what’s it like to do it standing, braced against the wall, to be used briefly and impersonally, just because Jared wants to get off and then go on his way? There’s something coarsely appealing about that.

Or Jared coming home from class while Jensen’s at his desk studying. “Get up and bend over. Pull down your pants.” Taking Jensen hard while he’s bent over his financial management textbooks, then, once he’s come, pulling Jensen’s pants back up—“Thanks, dude”—and going on his way, leaving Jensen to his studies.

Or on his hands and knees on the floor, pushed down the moment they enter the room. “Make yourself ready for me.” Never seeing Jared’s face, just feeling him huge and heavy over him, being fucked like an animal on the ground.

Okay, STOP. Stop, stop, stop, or he’s going to come. Too soon, damn it. Take it down a notch.

He wants to lick Jared’s ass. He remembers what Jared did to him, all that biting first, and he definitely wants to try that but most of all he wants to see what Jared tastes like there. It’s an obscene version of a kiss. When Jared did it, it felt like he was making out with Jensen’s hole and since Jared doesn’t seem the kissing type, this might be the only way they can exchange kisses.

He definitely can’t think about kissing Jared. Kissing is what he does with Dianne. He’s got to keep something for her, something sacred. He can live without kissing Jared on the lips as long as he can kiss him everywhere else. Now there’s a thought. Would Jared let him do that, let him explore that big, long body with nothing but his tongue? Would Jared like to be served by Jensen’s mouth?

Especially Jared’s hole. Jared doesn’t bottom, so it’s unlikely he’ll let Jensen fuck him there, but that’s okay, Jensen can fuck his mouth, just please let Jared want to get his hole licked.

A buzz from his phone jolts him.

It’s Dianne, a message wondering if he’s planning to call at the usual time since he missed the last couple of weeks because, if not, she’s going to go to church early.

Church. Jensen hasn’t let her know that he doesn’t go to church here. He didn’t intend to stop going when he started college, he just didn’t get around to finding a local church to go to and then Sundays became about other things and this year he hasn’t even considered it. He definitely won’t now, not while he’s violating everything he grew up believing in.
The thought is sobering enough that he’s breathing normally by the time he calls her.

“Hi, Jensen!”

She’s always called him Jensen. Everyone does. Except for Jared, who apparently during sex calls him Jen. “Hey. How are things back home?”

“We miss you.”

“I miss you too.” It’s how almost every Sunday call begins. “How’s your mother?”

Dianne’s mother’s long-term chronic illness is the reason Dianne stayed behind to go to college in Dallas instead of joining Jensen here. “She’s doing well at the moment, not as much pain. I think we’ve found a therapy that eases her symptoms.”

“That’s great.”

“You know how busy things can be.” He helped his father pick the perfect Mediterranean cruise for his mother’s 50th birthday. He really should have emailed them to find out how it’s going but it’s been hard to even think about his parents during the past few weeks of conflicted hell. “I’ve had a lot of work lately,” he says lamely.

“I missed talking to you last week.”

“I’m sorry. I’ll organise my time better. It won’t happen again.”

“It better not.” She laughs, that sunny high laugh that entranced him in high school. “Or I’ll start thinking you love your studies more than you love me.”

“Never. You know I love you best.”

“I know. I do know, Jensen. And I love you.”

This is his future, everything he’s committed himself to. He lets himself picture her, her delicate face with soft dark eyes surrounded by sleek blonde waves that always smell really good. She was the prettiest girl in school and he felt blessed when she made it clear in their junior year that he was the one she favoured. His father was so proud when they started going steady. “She’ll make you an admirable wife, son,” he beamed after first meeting her, and it was one of the most gratifying moments of Jensen’s life. He has so much to do to live up to his father, a self-made, highly successful businessman with his own company that guarantees Jensen a job for life, especially after his older brother was such a disappointment when he insisted on studying classical literature and moving to the west coast. Jensen’s going to be everything he grew up vowing to be, and Dianne is a large part of it. His father’s approval of her was vital.

His father wouldn’t approve of what he’s doing with Jared.

But his father will never know, neither will his mother, nor will Dianne. It’s college. He’s allowed to experiment. He’s not falling in love with another girl, not getting anyone pregnant, not abandoning business to study something artsy and unacceptable, nor is he descending into drugs or dropping out.

It’s like Jared said, he’s protecting his future. He’s getting it out of his system now, with someone who’s safe, satisfying all his curiosity and satiating his perverted desires so that twenty years from
now he doesn’t devastate all their lives by no longer being able to hold out.

“So what’s new with you?” Dianne asks, and instead of going into detail about discoveries of how good a man’s cock feels inside him, he tells her about his classes and a research project he has coming up and listens when she reciprocates with similar stories.

By the time the call finishes, he has just enough time to shower before going to meet Jared for their usual Sunday coffee after Jared’s game. With Dianne’s voice still ringing in his ear, he resists temptation and briskly soaps his cock and does no more with it. If he has his way, it’ll get plenty of attention later.

Jared looks surprised to see him outside the gym, which shouldn’t be unexpected considering Jensen skipped their coffee dates while he was panicking himself to pieces over seeing Jared’s cock.

“Hey, dude, you came!”

“Not yet, but I plan to later.”

To his relief, Jared bursts out laughing. “Man, I did not know you had this in you. Where’ve you been hiding all this time?”

“I guess you released something inside me.”

“I certainly released something inside you.”

It takes Jensen a second to get Jared’s double meaning, and instead of laughing he has to catch his breath at the memory of what Jared’s release tasted like as he caught it in his mouth and swallowed it down.

“Think you might be up to releasing a bit more later?” he asks casually as he follows Jared through the door into their favourite coffee shop.

Jared spins around, his eyes alight. “You have any specific experiments in mind?”

“What you did to me.” The bustling environment and fear of being overheard returns Jensen to his usual reticence and he gestures Jared over to their favourite table, which is just being cleared. “Grab that and I’ll get our drinks. You want your usual?”

When he returns, Jared’s playing on his phone, but he puts it away in his pocket when Jensen pulls a chair out and reaches for his beloved iced coffee. “Mmm, this is heaven.”

Watching Jared savour his drink feels pretty close as far as Jensen’s concerned. But they’re in public and it’s the middle of the day and he shouldn’t let himself get too turned on by the way Jared’s tongue plays with the straw, so he focuses on his own latte.

They sit in companionable silence for a few minutes enjoying their coffees, then Jared says quietly, “Which thing I did to you do you mean?”

He wants to discuss it here? Now? “The, uh…” Jensen casts a glance around to see how likely they are to be overheard. “The licking thing.”

“Ah.” The little crease in Jared’s brow clears. “I thought maybe you meant when I fucked you.”

His voice drops to soundless as he mouths the last two words, but it still has Jensen tensing up. “Dude!”
“Sorry. I just wanted to be clear. ‘Cause, Jen, the thing is—I should have told you this before when I was promising you anything—I, um, don’t bottom.”

He looks so uncomfortable that Jensen wants to laugh. “I know that, Jared.”

“You do?” Now he looks startled, and Jensen gives in to the urge to chuckle. “I’ve listened to you enough over the months to pick that much up. And it’s okay.”

“It is?”

“Of course. Not that I wouldn’t want to if you wanted that, but I’m only interested in doing things that you want to do too.”

“But…” Jared plays with his straw, his eyes fixed on the way he’s stabbing his ice with it. “Jen, if you’re going to experiment, then you should get to try everything you want.”

“Believe me, there’s enough already, even if we don’t do anything other than what we’ve already done. Although I’d really like to—to lick you too. You know. There.” Jensen takes another swallow of coffee, wishing he felt as comfortable saying dirty things now as he does when they’re in the midst of doing them. “You said everyone likes getting it. Does that include you?”

To his amazement, a dark red flush rises across Jared’s cheekbones. “I’ve never been on that side,” he mumbles to his cup.

“You’re kidding.”

“No.” Jared squares himself up and puts his coffee down, looking up at last to meet Jensen’s eyes. “It’s, uh, often seen as a prelude to bottoming and since I’m not gonna do that, I don’t like to be a tease.”

From Jared’s discomfort it seems a bit more complicated than that, but Jensen’s willing to let it go. For now. “I’m not going to expect you to bottom, okay? I knew that going in.”

“But I told you that you could do anything and now I’m taking it back.”

“We’ll each have boundaries, Jared. I don’t know what mine are yet, but no doubt there’ll be some things that I’ll hate and not want to do again. You’re allowed to, too.”

“I thought maybe I could let you, if you wanted to.”

Jensen doesn’t want to do anything Jared only tolerates for his sake, let alone anything that makes him look so distressed. “I can fuck—“ he drops his voice on the word “—women for the rest of my life. I can’t get fucked by them—“ it’s easier to say the second time, but he still hopes no one around them is tuning into their conversation “—or suck them off, and that’s really what I want to do with you. I really want to suck you again. I practised this morning with my toothbrush—damn gag reflex, you know? Apparently, though, you can train it away. Like you have? Or was it easier for you?”

By the end of his speech, Jared’s giving him that little crooked grin that always sparks warmth through him. “You practised with your toothbrush?”

“Hey, the internet said it would help.”

“You’ve been googling this?”
“I’ve been googling a lot.”

“Yeah?” Jared leans back in his chair, legs spread, fully back in his comfort zone. “Tell me, Jensen, just what you’ve been googling.”

*  

After a gym workout, they spend the afternoon exploring the practicalities of some of Jensen’s research.

Jensen demonstrates the toothbrush trick and, after much laughter, Jared takes over control of the toothbrush, thrusting it gently down Jensen’s throat while he sits on the toilet cover, just in case gagging has an unfortunate effect. There’s nothing remotely romantic about it nor is it the kind of thing Jensen would have thought could ever turn him on, but it does. He’s not sure what does it. Is it the stimulation of his mouth, feeling the repeated sliding down the back of his tongue right to the point where his belly tightens and he almost convulses but not quite, because Jared catches it and withdraws the pressure just in time? Is it sitting there so passively with his mouth stretched wide, giving Jared full control over his airway like that? He should feel scarily helpless but whenever uneasiness threatens, his eyes meet Jared’s, so warm and watchful, and a thrill shivers down his spine each time. This is Jared doing this to him, and he’s doing it so that later, hopefully tonight, he can replicate it with that beautiful cock.

“You’re doing great, Jen,” Jared murmurs several times. “So good for me.”

It should sound condescending, but the words soothe Jensen, calm his breathing so he doesn’t choke, and once or twice he manages to smile back. He wants to be good for Jared. He wants to be the best for Jared, wants to be everything Jared goes out looking for so that he can stay in and slake all his desires on Jensen’s body. That’s why he needs to learn how to do this, how to take him.

He watched some surreptitious videos while waiting for his laundry yesterday, videos of men slamming themselves down the throats of other men. He wants that. He wants to be that for Jared, a wide open, hot, wet hole for Jared to fuck into as hard as he likes. He wants to give Jared both sides of himself and being able to take a face fucking like that is his goal. He shares it with Jared when they take a break from the toothbrush for him to catch his breath.

“Do you think I can get there?”

Jared grins at him from where he’s sprawled against the opposite wall on the floor. “Even if you don’t, we’ll have fun trying.”

“I’m so fucking hungry for you, Jared.”

Jared punches his leg. “Don’t say shit like that if you want me to last here, dude.”

“Do you want to come on me like I came on you last night?”

“Jensen!” Jared hits him again, then leaves his hand, warm and heavy, resting on Jensen’s thigh. “I know you were a virgin, so I’m tryin’ to make allowances, but, fuck, do you have a clue what you’re doin’ to me?”

He hasn’t detected Jared’s original Texan accent so clearly before, and it slides through him, low and
“Do you want to come on my face?”

“Right, that’s it.” Jared scrambles to his feet, hands fumbling to undo the tie of his sweats. “We’re graduating to the real thing now. Get that mouth of yours open for me.”

Jensen takes him easier this time, the muscles of his jaw loosened from their practice. He knows how to let it drop open and he’s rewarded with the glide of Jared’s cock straight into his mouth. It’s a stretch, for a moment he forgets to cover his teeth but Jared’s sharp hiss reminds him, and he beams up at him over his mouthful of cock. He’s doing it! It’s barely reaching his throat but it’s in his mouth, several inches of it, and it’s the headiest feeling in the world.

“Thought you were so clever,” Jared drawls, glinting down at him through slitted eyes, the colour high on his cheeks a sign Jensen is coming to recognise, “coming all over me like that, hittin’ me with all your fancy words when I couldn’t do anything about it. I’m gonna do somethin’, Jen. I’m gonna fuck your mouth just like this—fuck, you look good with your mouth stuffed full of me like that—does it feel good? Huh? Do you like my cock drivin’ into you like this? Can’t wait ‘til I can go deeper, ‘til I can fill up your throat, make you take it, make you choke on me.”

Jensen’s got his hands wrapped around the rest of Jared’s cock, imagining how he would like it in Jared’s place.

“You’re gonna look so pretty with my come all over your face.”

Jared’s breath’s coming faster. He’s close. He’s close and while Jensen wants to taste him again, the thought of being covered in Jared’s come has him achingly hard.

“Close your eyes,” Jared orders as he pulls out of Jensen’s mouth and grabs his cock with his hand. Jensen obeys and a few seconds later Jared spatters his face with come.

As Jared collects himself afterwards, Jensen remains still, letting Jared look his fill.

“Just look at you.” A finger smears it across his lips. “So fuckin’ pretty, Jen, like that. All covered with me. It suits you, baby.”

*Baby.* Jensen’s cock jerks embarrassingly at the word in Jared’s husky Texan.

Luckily Jared doesn’t seem to notice. His finger forces its way into Jensen’s mouth, feeding him the come denied him when Jared pulled out and he licks and swallows eagerly. “You like that?” Jared laughs. “Want more?”

Eyes still clenched shut, Jensen nods. “Mmm.”

“Here you go.” Removing his finger, Jared brings it back with more cooling come, and they keep going until he’s cleaned most of Jensen’s face. A towel replaces his fingers to cleanse Jensen’s eyelids and eyelashes, then he orders, “Open.”

It’s bright and Jensen blinks a few times to adjust. Jared’s down in a crouch in front of him.

“You doing okay?”

“Can we do that often?”

“Fuck yeah.”
They move to the bedroom for more. Jared pushes the beds back together, laying his duvet across both to create one bed, and tossing Jensen’s blankets onto the floor. Hey, at least he cleaned it yesterday while Jensen was off doing laundry and dirty googling.

He still can’t believe Jensen’s so into this. Where’s all the good little Texas boy misgivings he should be experiencing? Where’s the regret? The upheaval? Why isn’t Jensen suffering a crisis of manhood and identity? What the hell is wrong with him that it’s this easy for him to turn into an eager cockslut for Jared? Not that Jared’s objecting, not in the slightest, but what’s going on?

He called his precious girlfriend this morning, he admitted it over coffee, so he’s still with her—he’s just fucking Jared too?

Well, that’s what Jared suggested, isn’t it? Let me fuck you and get your curiosity out of your system before it’s too late. Is it really that easy, though? He can just keep being Mr Perfect while sluttig around with Jared on the side?

Apparently.

Maybe he’ll come to his senses, but for now there’s no girlfriend, there’s no Texas, there’s just Jensen and Jared and the haven of their dorm room and the bed Jared plans to share for as long as Jensen will let him.

Jensen emerges shyly from the bathroom, his hands fiddling with the hem of his t-shirt. Fuck, how can he look so angelically pure when he’s only just washed the remnants of Jared’s come off his flushed face?

“Do you want me to take this off?”

“Depends what we’re gonna do next.”

“I, uh, had an idea.”

“What?”

“If you could do anything to me, anything at all that you know I’d be capable of, what would you most want to do?”

Jared sits down abruptly. “Define anything.”

“We don’t have to do it immediately unless you want to, but I just—“ Jensen stops in front of him. “I’d just like to know, so anything means literally anything. What would you most like to do to me right at this moment?”

The spot Jared’s had his eye on from the beginning of this is directly in front of him, revealed by Jensen’s tugging on his shirt. “There.” Jared points, touching it lightly with his forefinger. “I’d like to bite you there. Bite you and suck you hard enough to leave a bruise, to turn your skin crimson, purple even. I’d like to know for the rest of the week that you’re walking around with my mark on you, to be able to brush past you between classes and press my fingers against it for just a second and make you feel it. Feel me.” Leaning back on his hands, he meets Jensen’s eyes frankly. “That’s what I’d most like to do.”
“Yes, please,” Jensen says with a sparkling grin, and soon Jared’s teeth are digging in to that soft, pale flesh, making Jensen gasp and moan as Jared holds him down with both hands to make him take it.

Jensen’s desperate by the time Jared is satisfied and Jared keeps holding him down while he traces his tongue down the groove of Jensen’s thigh to his cock, straining for attention, and spends the rest of the evening teasing it, taunting it, trying out some of the creative ideas Jensen used on him until Jensen’s a frantic, writhing wreck.

Jared’s never seen anything more beautiful, and once he finally releases Jensen, he pushes his cock back into that slack, welcoming mouth, further this time, harder and faster than he should with someone so inexperienced, not pulling out this time but flooding Jensen’s mouth with his come.

They ought to clean themselves up, they’re both a mess, but when Jared moves to get out of bed, Jensen huffs an objection and pulls him back down again.

“Stay.”

“Let me get the blankets at least, Jen.”

He does, then they curl up beneath them, Jensen’s head tucked into Jared’s chest, their legs tangled together.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Jared and Jensen grow closer in ways they didn't expect.

It’s Friday again. The week has passed in a rush of classes and a heavier workload than normal. Jensen practises every morning with the toothbrush, determined to eliminate his persistent gag reflex, and every evening with Jared’s cock. To his delight, Jared has no problem with Jensen’s training regime, actively encourages it, in fact, and he seems just as eager to reciprocate. Not that Jared needs training. It blows Jensen’s mind every time the way he just sucks Jensen straight down and the way it feels—damn, but he has to be able to give that to Jared.

Most other experimentation has been put on hold by tacit agreement since they both have stuff to catch up on that languished during the previous weeks of turmoil for Jensen and confusion for Jared at Jensen’s strange behaviour, but they haven’t separated the beds again. Jensen never expected that sleeping in someone’s arms would be so easy. He doesn’t tend to sleep deeply and a niggling worry about getting married in the future was how he would manage to sleep with another body tossing and turning right next to his, but with the furnace of Jared’s big body clamped around his, it’s like he can let go of whatever’s been disturbing his sleep for his entire life and just sink into blissful unconsciousness. And waking to Jared on top of him, sleepily grinding their morning erections together, starts every day off right. He’s been shaving time down on his runs—useful, since he gets going later and later each morning.

But now it’s Friday and he’s uncertain. Friday is Jared’s night for going to the club. Will he want to go tonight? He told Jared originally that he can’t go there with him, but is he really supposed to go to bed alone while Jared’s off with someone else?

“Dude!” Jared bounces up to him in the coffee shop where Jensen spends the free hour between his Friday classes. “Here!”

He drops an envelope on the table and looks at Jensen expectantly, so Jensen picks it up and opens it. It takes him a moment to fathom.

“I’m clean!” Dropping into the chair opposite, Jared grabs Jensen’s latte for a sip. “I was pretty sure I was since I got tested not too long ago, but I wanted to make sure for you. So there you go: proof!”

This is not something Jensen even considered. Shit, he should have. What was he thinking?

Jared passes his latte back and takes a bite out of Jensen’s wheat germ muffin. “Jesus, Jensen, what the hell is this?”

“Something healthy.” Jensen snatches it back. “Get your own if you want to judge.”

“I don’t have much time.” He snags it out of Jensen’s hand and takes a second bite. “No, seriously, this should be banned.”

“So stop eating it!”

The idiot takes a third bite. “I’m hungry,” he says with his mouth full. “But I wanted to come show
you that and I figured I’d find you here. Next time get something nice.”

“Next time warn me that you’re joining me and I’ll get you something you like.”

“Okay.” Jared polishes off the muffin that was meant to be Jensen’s lunch with a grin. “Hey, I’ll get you another one, don’t worry. I just couldn’t wait. More coffee too?”

He prances off to the short queue that he could totally have joined when he first came in and got himself food he likes and Jensen forgets the macroeconomics book he’s making notes from and lets himself watch. Jared’s like sunshine when he’s in this happy mood. People all over the coffee shop abandon their conversations, distracted by his joyous smile and pealing laughter. He says hi to a baby, dazzles her mother, high fives a guy he knows from basketball, and flirts with the girl behind the counter.

This man. This is the man who was inside Jensen a week ago. The man in whose arms he sleeps every night. This glorious, shining beauty of a man.

“Got you two.” Jared’s back, dumping muffins on the table in front of Jensen. “Your one and what I think you should be eating instead.”

It’s chocolate chip. How does he know Jensen’s weakness for chocolate when he’s hasn’t let himself indulge for more than five years? “You have it.”

“No, it’s for you. Since I ate yours.”

Jensen picks up the second wheat germ muffin. “This replaces it. You have that one.”

“C’mon, one bite won’t hurt you,” Jared cajoles, holding it out.

“As I recall,” Jensen says before he can stop himself, “one bite can hurt quite a lot.”

They’ve been monitoring the progress of the bruise on his hip. Jared asked last night if, when it turns yellow, Jensen will let him renew it. In just a few days it’s become a part of him, something to touch whenever he second-guesses what they’re doing, and keeping it permanent appeals to him.

Jared’s eyes gleam. “Wanna let me prove that tonight?”

“Tonight?”

“Friday night, no classes tomorrow, you can take a break, right? I know you usually like to get a head start on homework or whatever, but we’ve been good all week and, fuck, Jensen, I wanna get inside you again.”

Jensen has class in 12 minutes and he’s just gone hard and hot and breathless. “I want that too.”

Jared lights up to incandescence. “Yeah? You gonna skip the library tonight?”

“If you take that muffin with you, I’ll skip it.”

“So I get to eat you AND the muffin?”

“You get to eat anything you desire, Jared, if you just get out of here and let me finish preparing for my macroeconomics class.”

“I’ll be back by six. Be ready, Jen, because I am going to devour you.”
Should Jared be proud of himself that Jensen forgoes his run altogether on Saturday morning? Not that he’s meaning to corrupt him away from his pursuit of healthy living, but to know that he fucked Jensen so hard that Jensen can hardly walk this morning is intensely satisfying.

“You asked for it.” He’s lounging in bed watching Jensen peel off his running shorts after realising they won’t be needed after all. “You’re the one who kept saying: harder, Jared, fuck me harder.”

Jensen shoots him a glare, but it quickly dissolves into the cute little blush Jared’s only recently discovered his roommate is capable of. “It felt good at the time.”

“You felt good.” And he looks good too, so good that Jared wants to drag him back to bed despite the hours of fucking last night. “For your second time, Jen, you were fuckin’ amazing.”

“I think that qualifies as second and third.”

After coming the first time, Jared stayed buried inside Jensen, using his fingers on Jensen’s cock from behind to tease him and keep him on the edge until he was almost in tears with desperation to come before Jared finally relented and, hard again, fucked the climax out of him untouched. “True,” he says, remembering it in all its delicious detail. All those frenzied gasps and moans, the furious demands, the disintegrating surrender to whatever Jared wanted to do with his body followed by helpless little cries and sobs. Oh yes, Jensen’s a noisy one. Just imagine what he might sound like if Jared could get them somewhere private. Imagine the sounds of Jensen’s screams.

Naked again, Jensen returns to the bed, not self-conscious about letting Jared see his semi hard on. “Since my ass is definitely out of commission today, what about yours?”

Jared’s breath catches.

“As I said before, I don’t expect you to bottom. That’s not what this is about. But would you consider letting me lick you? You’ve done it to me twice now, Jared, and I really, really, want to return the favour.” He crouches down beside the bed, eyes intent. “Just rimming, that’s it. I won’t use my fingers. Won’t even use my tongue if you don’t want me to.”

Swallowing hard, Jared nods. “You can use your tongue.”

“Yeah?” Jensen glows at him.

It’s better than Jared imagined it would be. He’s on his back, legs pulled back to his chest, because he didn’t want to be face down for this and soon he’s gasping worse than Jensen last night, his hips thrashing, prompting Jensen to grip his thighs.

“Are you going to be good for me?”

“Jen—I can’t—“

“Yes, you can.”

“It feels.....” He has no words.

“I know,” Jensen soothes. “All you have to do is stay still and feel it. Let me give this to you, Jay.
Let me pleasure you like this with my mouth on your asshole. Don’t you want that?”

Jensen’s mouth is like magic. It’s like fire, flames that are engulfing Jared everywhere. It’s too good and he feels helpless beneath the inferno. “Jen,” he sobs. “Jen, please.”

Jensen licks a stripe from his hole up to his balls then swirls his tongue around them. “Want me to lick you here instead?”

“’s good!” It is, both the break from where he’s too sensitive and the warmth around his tightened balls. “More.”

Jensen meets his eyes from between Jared’s legs and engulfs one of his balls in his mouth. Jared nearly screams.

“Yes! Like that.”

No one’s done this to him before Jensen and his cock strains into the air, jealous of the attention his balls are getting, but fucking hell it’s good. Jared’s hands leave their position wrapped around his ankles—Jensen’s holding his thighs down firmly anyway—and clutch at Jensen’s short hair. Jensen moans, the sound vibrating ecstatically through Jared’s balls, so he tugs again to produce a second moan.

It’s too much.

“Suck me,” he orders, pulling Jensen up by the hair to his cock. Jensen comes eagerly, lets Jared force him down, and fuck but all that practice is paying off because he rams his cock into the back of Jensen’s mouth and although Jensen still gags, he doesn’t pull off but pushes further and suddenly Jared is encased in Jensen’s throat.

Jensen’s eyes go wide and sparkly. *I’m doing it, Jared!*

Yes, yes, he fucking is.

He’s done this for Jared and the thought itself is enough to make Jared come.

* 

He gets his revenge on Jensen for all that overwhelming pleasure. Jensen insists they have a productive day despite losing out on his run and drags Jared to do laundry with him, making him carry both their stuff so Jensen can concentrate on moving normally.

At the laundry he swiped some clothes pegs, and as they walk back to their room after dinner, having followed Jensen’s plan to spend the afternoon studying, he tells Jensen he has a surprise for him.

“What is it?” Jensen asks seriously.

Jared pushes at his shoulder. “It’s not a surprise if I tell you.”

“Good surprise?”

“Of course it’s a good surprise. At least I think it will be. If it’s not we can stop, but I think you’ll like it.”
Unlocking their door, Jensen stands aside and ushers him to go in first. “Okay, show me.”

“Jensen.” Jared pulls a face at him. “We have to do it right. You gonna trust me?”

Jensen looks like he wants to say he’s not sure, but he nods. “I’ll trust you.”

“Great!” He can’t wait to find out Jensen’s response. “You need to get on the bed. Lie down on your back and take your shirt off.”

“Just my shirt?”

“Aren’t you the one who said your ass is out of commission?”

“Doesn’t mean my dick is,” Jensen grumbles, but he follows instructions and Jared takes pleasure in watching him slowly strip off his shirt. One day he wants Jensen to give him a striptease, see how all-out he might go in an attempt to turn Jared on, but for now he just wants access to that broad chest and those adorable, oversensitive nipples.

Yes, there they are, already tightening, so pink and pretty and perfect. He’s played with them a little during the week, usually just gentle strumming or pinching in addition to other things, but tonight is gonna be all about them and if he’s right, Jensen will lose his mind.

Oh yeah. This’ll be fantastic.

“Hands behind your head. Put them right beneath the pillow so you’re not tempted to move them. No moving, got that? They stay right there or everything stops.”

“You’re not doing anything yet.”

“Because I’m still preparing you,” he says with exaggerated patience.

Jensen rolls his eyes. “What are you planning to do?”

“You’ll find out.”

“Give me a hint?”

Laughing, Jared flicks one of those eager, excited nipples. “I’m gonna play with these.”

There’s a gratifying hitch in Jensen’s breath and he whips his hands into place. The position thrusts his chest out as though he’s presenting himself to Jared like an offering on an altar. He’s Jared’s right now, giving himself over to whatever Jared wants to do to him, and that is fucking satisfying.

Jared joins him on the bed, planting one knee on either side of Jensen’s hips, and when he has Jensen’s attention fixed on him he slowly peels his t-shirt up, revealing his skin strip by strip. His own nipples harden beneath Jensen’s piercing eyes.

“Do you like nipple play?” Jensen asks roughly, his cute little tongue darting out to wet his parted lips. Fuck, but Jared wants to kiss them.

“I like playing with yours,” he says. “And I’m gonna play with them a lot tonight, Jensen. I’m gonna test them, see how much you can take. You want to take a lot, don’t you? You wanna take everything I give you?”

Jensen’s breathing stutters again. “How much will you give me?”
“More than you can stand. That okay? I’m gonna keep going until you can’t bear it any more and I won’t stop. I’ll just keep giving you more and you’ll take it for me, won’t you?”

“Oh God, Jared.” Jensen’s hips shift beneath him, pushing up, into him. “I want to. But what—what if I can’t? What if it really is too much?”

Jared’s prepared for this. “Say my last name. Okay? That’s your safeword. Just say my last name and everything stops instantly, but until you say it I’m just gonna keep going.” Jensen nods, but warily, and Jared can’t help cupping a gentle hand around his face. “You’ll like this. I promise. And if you don’t, you can stop it any time. Yeah?”

The mouth he’s steadfastly not kissing manages a hesitant little smile. “Yeah.”

“Good boy.”

He shouldn’t call Jensen that, it sounds so condescending, but Jensen’s being such a good boy, lying there so sweetly and passively for Jared to play with despite his nerves about what Jared might do, his eyes wide and trusting, and he deserves a reward for that. Jared diverts his kiss to the tip of Jensen’s left nipple. Scraping his tongue over it, he watches Jensen shiver. Oh yes, this is going to be amazing.

He takes his time, mixing little loving kisses with sharper bites, delicate caresses with crueler pinches, keeping a constant eye on Jensen’s reactions, what makes him relax, what makes him tense or gasp or start peppering Jared with curses that sound so foreign in his soft Texan accent, which always gets stronger when Jared’s taking him apart. Perfect precious boy that he is, he keeps his arms obediently locked behind his head even at his wildest. This is better than if Jared had tied him, knowing how hard it must be for him but he’s doing it anyway, just because Jared told him to.

Finally he judges Jensen ready for the next step. “Okay, baby, close your eyes for me.”

He winces at the endearment the moment he hears it leave his lips, but Jensen’s face melts into a hazy smile and he does as Jared asks.

It’s heady, and Jared has to squeeze his cock hard to regain a sense of control. It’s not time yet for him to come, damn it, but how is he supposed to resist Jensen being so sweetly compliant?

In retaliation he snaps the first peg onto Jensen’s rosy nipple a bit more harshly than he intended. Jensen’s entire body jolts. But his arms don’t move. His eyes don’t open. His mouth does, rigid on a soundless scream, then he collapses back with rapid pants. “Fuck, Jared. What is that?”

“Do you like it?”

Instead of demanding Jared answer his question, Jensen visibly evaluates. He tries to calm his breathing and his brows draw together the way they do when he’s wrestling with formulating a complicated paper. “It’s—it hurts.”

“Good hurt?”

Jensen draws several slow, tremulous breaths before answering. “Yes,” he says at last, voice unsteady. “Good hurt.”

That’s a relief. “You’re doing so well for me,” Jared says and leans down to lick the sweat off Jensen’s temple. “So good for me.” He forces his tongue away before it can head places it’s not allowed and brings it down to lave Jensen’s other nipple. “Want some more? Want the same on this
one?” He sucks gently, soothingly. “Want some icy pain in this pretty little pink nipple too?”

“Don’t—know if—I can.”

Jensen’s hips are shuddering nonstop. He should have stripped them both before beginning this. Oh well, laundry exists for a reason and he slides his own hardness over Jensen’s through their jeans. “For me, Jen? Do you think you could take it because I want you to?”

From the way Jensen screws up his eyes, it’s obvious he wants to open them and look at Jared. “I don’t—yes. Yes, Jared, for you. Quickly. Before I—I can’t.”

The words are barely out of his mouth when Jared attaches the second peg to the nipple he’s been treating so lovingly.

Jensen shrieks. “OhGodohGodohGod, Jared!”

“Breathe, baby.” Jared’s done this before. He knows the worst is yet to come, so he trails his fingers down Jensen’s sides then spreads his hands across his trembling belly. “C’mon, breathe for me.”

“I’ll scream.”

“No, you won’t. It’s okay, you’re doing wonderfully. Just take a breath for me, Jen.”

Jensen makes a tiny little broken noise that sounds so wrecked Jared’s heart twists.

“Open your eyes, babe, look at me.”

His eyes are wet and wild and they grasp for Jared’s. “H-hurts.”

“I know. But it’s good hurt, right? Let yourself feel it, Jen, stop resisting it. Let it wash over you.”

“Like—like fire.”

“Let it burn you. I’m here, you’re safe. Just let go and let it take you. Yeah, good boy, like that. Take another breath. Slowly. Yeah, you can do it. Just like that.”

Jensen looks nearly unhinged but his hips are thrusting hard against Jared. He’s in distress but in a good way, he just doesn’t know how to process what he’s feeling.

Jared licks a stripe up the centre of Jensen’s chest between his two burning nipples and hovers over Jensen, their faces so close he can feel the flutter of Jensen’s hot breath against his lips. “I’m gonna tell you to close your eyes again, just close your eyes and open yourself completely up to what you’re feeling. Do you trust me?”

It’s reassuring to see Jensen nod instantly, without thought.

“Good. Now close your eyes.”

Jensen does, and as soon as he releases his next breath, Jared pulls both pegs off.

*
Jensen feels like fireworks are erupting throughout his body. He can’t contain it, can’t contain himself. He’s exploding, bit of him splashing everywhere, and as he promised Jared he lets it happen, doesn’t try to scramble for control. He might be screaming. He has no idea. It doesn’t matter. Nothing matters except letting the blast claim him entirely.

Awareness seeps back gradually. First he’s aware of a hot heaviness weighing him down everywhere, like he sank deep inside the earth and he’s covered by molten layers. It’s hard to breathe, but that’s okay. Too much air is overwhelming right now.

Jared’s cheek is pressed to his. Jared’s hair is in his eyes.

Can he just stay here? Never move again. Never leave this refuge of simmering satiety buried beneath Jared.

Jared’s hips make little constant jerks against his and he realises that somewhere in that conflagration he came. In his jeans.

“Did you come too?”

His voice emerges as a hoarse whisper, but Jared hears him. Lifting his upper body up a fraction, he turns his head so their eyes can meet. “Yeah. You were so hot, Jensen, I couldn’t help it.”

“I did what you said.” Why does he feel so stupidly shy at the thought of Jared watching him while he flew apart? “I let myself feel it.”

“Was it good?”

He nods. He has no words for what just happened to him. He knows he goes wild when Jared fucks him, but that’s different. Or maybe he’s never let go this much.

“Want me to move off you?”

“No.” It’s only when he goes to hold Jared down on top of him that he realises his arms are still wound tight behind his head. “Oh. Can I…?”

“Shit, your arms, yes, you can move them.”

Jared keeps his lower body firmly pressed to Jensen’s as he helps him carefully ease his arms forward to stretch them out. The fierce prickle of pins and needles sends flickers of the remnants of fire through him and he lets the sound come straight out his mouth, low and splintered. “Ah-hhh-hhhh.”

“You’re okay. Keep breathing.”

Jensen does, giving himself over to Jared just as he did before, letting Jared massage the pain out. Jared’s the reason it’s there and he’s the reason it’s ebbing away.

Jared’s the reason for all of this.

“Jare’?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you for doing this. For giving this to me.”
“Any time.”

“I mean…” Jensen struggles to find the words. “For offering yourself. ‘Cause this is—this is—“ What is he trying to say? “I wouldn’t’ve wanted to go through the rest of my life not knowing I could feel like this.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

In which there's chocolate, awkward text messages, and misunderstandings.

Jensen’s mouth is full of Jared’s cock when his phone rings.

They both freeze.

It’s Sunday morning. Jared skipped his basketball game to stay in bed with Jensen and they’ve lost track of time. That’s obviously Dianne calling.

They stare at each other as the ring tone plays over and over again.

At last it stops.

“You should, maybe, get that,” Jared says at last, long after such a thing is possible.

Jensen nods, mouth still full.

The phone doesn’t ring again.

And Jensen doesn’t call her back.

*

By Wednesday he manages to compose a text message: “Sorry, got held up at the gym and figured you’d gone to church by the time I was free. Next Sunday, usual time?”

There’s no reason they can’t talk at other times, but Dianne has a busy life between her own studies, taking care of her mother, and playing the organ and singing in the church choir, and he’s never liked having phone calls when someone else can overhear him, so they picked early Sunday mornings right from his first month away and have rarely deviated from it.

She texts back agreeing in the evening, while he’s watching a movie wrapped in Jared’s arms on their bed. Jared passes him the phone and Jensen knows he can see the exchange of messages when Jensen opens up her message.

“I won’t skip basketball again,” is all he says when Jensen turns his phone off and tosses it back to the table beside the bed.

*
Jared slides into his mathematical logic class ten minutes late. He and Jensen stayed up far too late last night after Dianne’s text. Jared swears he was only trying to make Jensen feel better, which is why he let his hands start wandering over Jensen’s chest for the remainder of the movie, which led to Jensen wanting to exact a little payback on Jared’s chest with the pegs, but Jared’s nipples were too sensitive to take much beyond gentle nips of Jensen’s teeth so Jensen abandoned that idea and spent more than three hours testing every part of Jared’s body with those teeth, conducting what appeared to be a scientific analysis of Jared’s most sensitive places.

He has a lot.

He’s far more sensitive than Jensen, in fact, which he’s not sure how to take. Jensen likes pain almost everywhere, he likes pressure and pinching and biting and bruising to various degrees (which overjoys Jared because he loves to mete it out), but they discover together that Jared responds better to teasing licks and soft nibbles, that pain jerks him out of his happy place—unless, strangely, it’s on his cock, then he thrills to whatever Jensen wants to dish out. Jensen found this enchanting for some reason and kept coming up with new combinations to try until Jared couldn’t bear it any longer and turned the tables to explore Jensen’s body on a similar quest.

By the time they eventually lazily jerked each other off because neither could move much any more it was after 2am and Jensen slept through his running alarm this morning, which meant Jared didn’t wake up either and now he’s late for class.

How is he supposed to concentrate on axiomatic set theory when he can still feel how the supple flesh of Jensen’s ass gives way beneath his teeth?

As the professor’s voice drones on in the background, his mind wanders. Why didn’t Jensen call her back? Jared gets the lie about the gym, obviously he couldn’t tell her the truth about why he didn’t answer her call, but why the fuck didn’t he call her back like a proper boyfriend should?

It has nothing to do with Jared. It’s none of his business.

*How* is it not his business when it was *his* cock that was inside Jensen’s mouth when she called?

Because Jensen’s only experimenting with him. Remember?

Jensen’s never slept in *her* arms.

But he will for the rest of his life after he’s done with Jared and Jared has to remember that.

There’s a reason Jensen is so hellbent on sucking his cock whenever possible and that’s because what they have has a time limit. There are only a few weeks left to the end of the year, when they will cease being roommates and Jensen will return to Texas for the summer to work in his father’s company and take his girlfriend on dates and no doubt start putting some of his newly acquired sexual knowledge to good use.

Except they’re waiting, aren’t they?

What the hell is that about? Jared’s never understood the concept of waiting until after you’re married to find out whether you’re sexually compatible. What if you’re not?

Jensen likes to cuddle, he likes to have his hair stroked, he likes to have his prostate teased for hours, to be kept teetering on the edge without knowing when he’ll be permitted to fall off. What if she won’t do any of that for him? What if she’s like the rest of Jensen’s family and doesn’t go in for touching beyond polite formalities? What if she never even tries to stroke Jensen’s hair to discover the way it makes him go soft like a kitten and almost start purring? And Jensen has to be kidding
himself if he thinks for a second she’s going to stick so much as a finger up his ass.

Jensen will have to forget his prostate exists.

And he’ll probably take up overeating to keep his mouth satisfactorily full without a cock to suck every day.

Jared’s mind darts off on a tangent of a plump Jensen with all that extra flesh to bite. What if she hates it and rejects him; then where will he be?

No. The truth is he knows what Jensen will do. He’ll retreat into his overdisciplined habits. He’ll run an extra two miles every morning to work his morning erection off, and if that doesn’t work he’ll take cold showers and refuse to jerk himself off until he’s all buttoned up back in the box Jared’s been unwrapping. He’ll stop eating chocolate again (Jared’s still not sure whether he should feel jealous that the chocolate chip cookie he fed Jensen on Sunday while he had him too strung out to object elicited just as ecstatic moans from him as Jared’s cock does), he’ll bring work home with him from the office and keep at it until he’s tired enough to drop off even without the comfort of a warm body wrapped around him, and he’ll have a heart attack by the time he’s 40 because he’s working so hard to forget that once when he was young he spent a few precious weeks in a different world, one where he could come alive and indulge his senses and drop his rigid barriers and feel and be and live.

“Mr Padalecki?”

Shit, the lecturer has just asked him to define separation schemes and he hasn’t a clue.

He ignores the mocking looks he gets from his classmates as he bumbles through an answer and slouches further down in his seat.

Separation schemes.

He’s going to need one for Jensen.

Or maybe for himself.

How is he supposed to separate himself from Jensen when it feels like Jensen has wound himself around Jared’s very bones?

*

Jensen lingers at the coffee shop between classes on Friday in the hopes that Jared will join him again today. He even buys two muffins, one chocolate, just in case. But the person who slides into the seat next to him isn’t his roommate.

“Hey, Jensen, haven’t seen you around for a while.”

It’s tough, but Jensen manages to keep his eyes from sliding to the left when the little bell above the door rings. “Steve, hi. How’re things?”

“Great. I’d ask you but it’s obvious that you’re even better.”

“It is?”
“You finally get that girl of yours to come and visit you?”

“What?” Jensen tries to focus properly on his friend. “Who?”

“Your girlfriend back home? What was her name, Diana? Oh no.” Steve’s face turns wary. “You haven’t broken up, have you? Have I just put my foot in it?”

It’s already time for Jared’s tutorial to start, so obviously he isn’t coming. Jensen shoves away his disappointment and concentrates on the man who was his closest friend last year. “No, sorry. I was just miles away. We’re still good. And, no, I haven’t managed to persuade her to come.” He hasn’t even tried.

Steve grins. "Luckily it’s not long until summer now and you can be reunited. But if not her, what’s got you looking so charmed with life?"

Not long until summer. Not long left with Jared. Jensen can’t think about that right now. “I didn’t tell you,” he says, “but I started playing the guitar at last.”

“No kidding!” Steve slaps him on the back. He was the only person who knew of Jensen’s secret desire before Jared turned up, and that was only because Jensen’s roommate last year dated the female percussionist in Steve’s band and used to drag Jensen along to gigs, where he became fascinated watching Steve play. “That’s great. We’ll have you jamming with us in no time.”

“Yeah, no, I’m not very good yet. But I love playing so you never know, maybe next year.”

Next year, when Jared will no longer be his roommate.

“What made you start?” Steve asks. “Your girl give it to you for a birthday present?”

“Uh.” Jensen picks up the chocolate muffin and breaks the corner off it. “My roommate, actually. For Christmas.”

“Yeah? Cool roommate. He plays, then?”

The muffin tastes wonderful and he breaks off a larger piece. “No, he just found out I wanted to, so…” He trails off, popping the next bit of lush chocolate into his mouth. If this is what Jared usually gets, no wonder he loathed the wheat germ. “So how’ve you been?” he asks once he’s swallowed. “Any gigs coming up?”

Steve lights up. “Got one tomorrow night actually. You wanna come? It’s at the Blackbird. Bring your roommate. We’d love to meet him. Can’t believe how fast this year’s gone by and we’ve hardly seen you. Don’t even know his name.”

“Jared.” He’s missed two runs in the past week and he has no right to eat another mouthful of this muffin. It’s all Jared’s fault for not coming in like he said he would. Jensen realises he’s glaring at the muffin and hastily rearranges his features to smile at Steve. “That would be great. I’ll ask him. Not sure if he’s free, but I’ll see. Either way, I’ll be there. I’ve missed your music, man.”

“Great!” Steve lands another slap on Jensen’s shoulder right where Jared left another one of his livid purple marks. “See you then, mate. Gotta get to class now.”

“Yeah, same.”

But Jensen doesn’t move after Steve leaves. He sits staring at the remnants of the chocolate muffin as his strategic management class goes on without him.
Will it be weird if he invites Jared to the gig? Will it sound too much like a date? Will Jared even want to spend another Saturday night in a row with him? What about all his friends at the club, aren’t they missing him? Is he missing them?

Jensen should insist on going to the library tonight, tell Jared he’s free to go meet up with them since there’s no way Jensen can visit that club. Then maybe he can slip in the reference to the gig, and if Jared’s had tonight off from him then he might be cool with joining him tomorrow.

He finishes the muffin.

Then he goes for a 6-mile run since it’s too late to go to class.

*

“If you want to go out tonight, don’t worry about me. I need to work so I’ll be at the library.”

Jared stares at the text message that’s been sitting on his phone for the last few hours. What the fuck?

Okay, true, that’s how their Friday nights usually play out, but aren’t things different now? And wasn’t Jared a good boy, studying with Jensen all of Saturday afternoon last weekend and even joining him in the library for most of Sunday? Why should they study separately suddenly? Does Jensen not want company? And what is he implying by ‘if you want to go out tonight’? The only place Jared ever went out to without Jensen was to the club, but with his motivation for that removed, why would he want to go?

As The Lord of the Rings trilogy plays out in front of him keeping him company, he lies on their bed trying not to panic. At first he worries about why Jensen thinks he might want to go fuck someone else, but as the Ents storm Isengard another far more chilling thought occurs.

What if Jensen isn’t at the library.

What if he’s met up with someone else to experiment with.

Someone who’ll let him fuck them.

The battle onscreen goes unnoticed as Jared considers this. He’s never had a problem with only topping in the past. If anyone didn’t like it they could just find someone else. But this is Jensen. Jensen, who is exploring his gay side (does he actually have a straight side? at all?) and needs to do it with someone safe, someone who’ll look out for him.

Why didn’t he just ask if it’s this important to him to try gay sex from both sides? Jared can do it if he has to, he’s certain. He’s too sensitive and hasn’t liked any attempts at it in the past, but he doesn’t need to like it in order to give it to Jensen, he just has to be able to take it. And he can. He absolutely can if that’s what Jensen needs.

He should have thought of this before, that Jensen’s desires would evolve. It was one thing for him to blithely say it was fine if Jared never bottoms right at the start, but Jared’s seen how curious he is, how insatiable he is about trying new things. He should have been prepared.

Should have been preparing himself.
He checks the time. It’s nearly 10pm, too late to give it a go before Jensen gets back after the library closes. If indeed he’s at the library.

What if he met another guy?

There’s a rustle at the door and he jerks up because that must be Jensen. Sure enough, Jensen slips into the room then does a double take.

“You’re here!”

Jared’s hand moves automatically to smooth his hair back before he diverts it to point at the screen. “Thought I’d rewatch *The Lord of the Rings* while you were out since I know it’s not your kind of thing.” He fumbles to stop the movie. “Get lots of work done?”

“I—yeah. Yeah, I did.”

Not meeting Jared’s eyes, Jensen crosses to his desk to put down his bag. He’s wearing his tightest jeans today, the ones that hug his ass every time he moves. Jared lets himself enjoy the view until Jensen turns around and leans back against the desk.

“You can keep watching,” he says. “I don’t mind.”


“Ohkay.”

Why does he look so uncomfortable? He hasn’t looked like this since those weeks between when he first saw Jared naked and when they finally did something about it.

“I can bottom if you—”

“I’m going to Steve’s—”

They speak at the same time. Jared stops when he hears the name Steve. Steve. Isn’t that Jensen’s musician friend who he was such pals with last year?

“You can—what?” Jensen says.

“Steve?”

“I bumped into him today. Jared, what do you mean about—”

“I didn’t know he was gay.”

“Who, Steve? He’s not. Why did you say—”

“You weren’t with him?”

“I was, at lunch. Which you didn’t come to, by the way. I even got you a muffin.”

Jared pulls a face. “More wheat germ?”

“What do you think? I got you chocolate. But you didn’t come so I ate it.”

Good, Jared thinks. Jensen can do with more chocolate in his life. “I got held up after my class since we had to get a group together for a project and the others kept arguing about what topic they
wanted and by the time I got out of there it was too late to get all the way to the coffee shop before you left.” He’s got to find a way to lessen this horrible tension between them. “I can’t believe you ate my muffin, dude.”

“I’ll get you one on Sunday, after your game.”

“You’d better.” Awkwardly, Jared arranges his too-long legs on the bed. “So, um, you bumped into Steve?” At least Jensen hadn’t given Steve his muffin. “Did you go to his place to—jam?”

Jensen looks at him like he’s an idiot. “I was at the library, I told you. Didn’t you get my message?”

“Sorry. Yeah. I just—”

“And my guitar is right there next to the bed. I’m not good enough, anyway.”

“What? You’re getting really good!”

“Steve’s professional level, Jared. I’ll never be that.”

Okay, he knows Jensen is touchy about his lack of skill with the guitar. He likes to be perfect at things, which Jared has been the happy beneficiary of lately so he can’t complain. But that makes him think of what he’d been about to say, and what Jensen had started to say at the same time. “Wait a second, you said something about going to Steve’s?”

“Yeah.” Jensen shifts against the desk looking uptight again, but Jared notices his hand stray to his hip bone where Jared renewed his mark last night. “He has a gig tomorrow night. At the Blackbird.”

The Blackbird’s another of their frequent Saturday night hangouts, and it’s known for the quality of its live music. “Sounds good. We like going there.”

Jensen looks surprised. “You want to come?”

Wait, that hadn’t been an invitation? Suddenly uncertain, Jared slides to the side of the bed so his feet are on the floor and he’s sitting upright. “I don’t have to.”

“I just thought…” Jensen’s words die out and he flails a hand in Jared’s direction. “You haven’t been to the club for a few weeks.”

“You said it’s not a place you can go to, and I get that. It’s fine.”

“No, I mean—” Jensen stops.

“You mean what?”

“I thought you’d go tonight.”

“I only go there to hook up, Jensen.”

“I know.”

“So why would I go…” Shit. Maybe he’s been mistaking this all along. “You—you’re done with your experimenting?” he asks carefully.

Jensen’s eyes widen, then he frowns. “What did you say about bottoming?”
This conversation is a catastrophe and because he has no idea how to rescue it he just says flatly, “If you want to try topping, I’ll do it. I’ll bottom for you.”

“Jared.” Why does Jensen look so fucking incredulous? “We decided not to do that, remember?”

“I can’t change my mind?”

“Do you want to bottom?”

Of course he doesn’t. But that’s not the point. “I’m just saying. You don’t have to look for someone else. You can fuck me.”

“I’m not looking—what the hell are you talking about?”

Oh great, he’s made Jensen swear and they’re not even having sex. “Are you meeting someone at the Blackbird tomorrow? Is that it? Why you don’t want me to come?”

Jensen shoves his hand through his spiky hair, looking thoroughly pissed off. “I do want you to come! I’m just trying to be considerate, damn it, and not tie you down to me. You used to go fucking a different man each week, Jared. You’ve been fucking only me for two weeks now and I thought—I wanted you to—you’re not stuck with me.”

“Stuck?” Maybe something’s going on in this conversation that Jared is unaware of. He’s breathing just as hard as Jensen but he tries to rein it in, tries to logically sort through what’s being said. “Okay,” he says after a moment of replaying the last few minutes in his mind. “First of all, if you want me to come to Steve’s gig, of course I’ll come. I’d love to. It’s what we do on Saturday nights usually anyway.”

“I just thought—” Jensen begins, but Jared holds up a hand.

“Let me finish, okay?”

Jensen’s eyes are hard, but he gives a short nod.

“Second,” Jared says, counting it off on his fingers, “I’m not gonna put you at risk by fucking anyone else while we’re together. It didn’t matter so much when it was just me, but you have a future that neither of us wants to wreck, so I’m yours exclusively while we do this.”

“But—”

“Third,” Jared says over him, “is kinda related to the second, because I think it’s safest for you to be exclusive with me too, since we know I’m clean and I get your home situation. A lot of guys wouldn’t. Or they wouldn’t respect it. I do, okay? And that’s why I offered to bottom, because if you want to top you should do it with me.”

“I don’t want to top,” Jensen says when Jared finally falls silent. “We discussed this already. You let me fuck your mouth and I don’t need more than that.”

“I just want you to know.”

“I’ll keep it in mind.”

“Good.”

“And I do want you to come tomorrow.”
“Good. “What about tonight?”

“There’s no—” Oh yeah, there’s the flash of Jensen’s cheeky grin. “You want to come tonight, do you?”

“I very badly want to come tonight.”

Jensen swivels slightly so he can jut out his hip, sending his ass into sharp relief. “That could probably be arranged. Just don’t let me make you fuck me so hard I can’t walk tomorrow. We can do that tomorrow night, after the gig.”

*

They follow what’s become their new Saturday routine, doing their laundry together then hitting the books for several hours. Jensen makes it on his run, but only because Jared ignored all his pleas and fucked him achingly slowly for what felt like hours, expertly keeping Jensen just on the edge. It was so good it hurt, not his ass but somewhere inside his chest where he was feeling more than his body seemed able to contain.

The Blackbird is buzzing when they arrive. They’re early and Jensen introduces Jared to Steve and the rest of the band with some trepidation, but Jared’s in his sunshine mood and charms all of them, which frees Jensen to sit back and observe without having to partake. When the band leave to take to the stage, Jared grins across at Jensen, knocking their knees together.

“Your friends are great!”

“They liked you.”

“Yeah?” Jared’s brightness fades into the soft smile he kept giving Jensen last night in bed. “Thanks for introducing me.”

Jensen is glad that their legs are pressed together because otherwise he’d feel driven to reach for Jared’s hand or something inappropriate like that, because his chest is hurting again. He’s never seen such softness on Jared’s face before. Jared’s lips are slightly pursed, no longer stretched wide in their earlier grin. Jensen knows what they feel like on his skin. On all of his skin. Except against his own lips. “Let’s see how you enjoy their music now,” he says.

Jensen loves Steve’s music and he regrets not hanging out much with the band this year. Why didn’t he bring Jared to hear them earlier? As the first song starts, Jared shifts his chair closer under cover of reaching for his beer and Jensen’s body automatically strains towards it. He wants to lean back against Jared’s chest, feel the arm that’s lightly touching his wrapped around his shoulders while he gives himself over to the music.

But they’re in public.

He can’t do that.

Even though apparently they’re now “exclusive” with each other, to use Jared’s word.

He’s still surprised Jared didn’t take the opportunity to go to the club last night, but his reasoning makes sense, even if it’s unfairly biased in Jensen’s favour.
Jared is a good guy. One of the best people he’s ever known.

As the second song begins, he rests his arm on the table in front of them. A few minutes later, Jared sets down his beer and leaves his arm there too. The back of their hands touch.

Jensen’s never held hands with his girlfriend. She considers it too intimate, the first step down a slippery slope neither intend to go down, so why take the risk? He gets that, because if Jared were to take his hand now, Jensen doesn’t know if he could let go.

But he doesn’t have to let go later when they’re back in their room and he’s flat on his back while Jared concentrates on opening him up. This is one of his favourite parts of being fucked, whether Jared uses his mouth or his fingers. There’s something...sacred about it, about the way Jared focuses on him like nothing else exists. He’ll never rush this part, no matter how Jensen urges. He seems to get as much pleasure from preparing Jensen to take him as actually pounding into him.

Instead of trying to force him to hurry, Jensen closes his eyes and shifts his legs further apart, giving Jared better access to his hole. Jared’s just added a third finger and the stretch is delicious, shivering through Jensen’s nerve-endings across his entire body. When he gasps, needing to make some kind of sound just to release some of the exquisite pleasure, Jared closes his free hand over one of Jensen’s.

“Hold onto me, baby.”

He shouldn’t like that. Shouldn’t like to be called that by another man. Instead he obeys and clings, and once Jared’s lined himself up a few minutes later, he takes both of Jensen’s hands, pushing them down beside his shoulders as he carefully eases inside.

This is the moment that gets Jensen every time, the moment their bodies join, Jared’s becoming a part of his. He catches his breath, holding onto Jared’s soft hazel gaze as his body adjusts, loosens, opens.

“Fuck me hard,” he whispers against Jared’s jaw. *Fuck me so hard I can’t tell where you end and I begin, so it’s just both of us together as one, the way we belong.*
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Jared plans a surprise for Jensen, but there's a different surprise in store for both of them.

It’s a tough week, school-wise, as Jensen has his research paper and Jared struggles to coordinate his classmates for their group project. Their arguing hasn’t stopped and he’s started to dread every moment spent in their company. Jensen buries himself in the library every evening and gets home too late to do anything but take off his clothes and fall into bed beside Jared. They sleep naked now, whether they have sex or not, and Jared’s got used to Jensen’s solid body pressed up against his. The skin-to-skin contact soothes him almost as much as sex would, and he catches himself waking up in the middle of the night just to stroke Jensen’s hair and rubsoftly against his thigh, not leading anywhere, just for the reassurance that he’s still there. He’s still Jared’s.

For the moment.

Saturday, Jensen keeps promising. He will take Saturday off work completely and put himself in Jared’s hands for whatever Jared wants to experiment with next. “Your last surprise was very good,” he murmurs on Thursday night as he stretches in bed before curling up in Jared’s arms. “I want to see what else you can come up with.”

“Another surprise?” Jared asks, letting his fingers dance down Jensen’s side until they reach the bruise he renewed last week. He presses hard, relishing Jensen’s intake of breath.

“Yes.” Jensen sounds dazed. It could be from tiredness but Jared prefers to think it’s because Jared’s mark on him turns him on. “I like your surprises.”

He’s pleased to hear that and makes intricate plans on Friday night while Jensen’s at the library. He buys supplies, researches online, formulates several variations on his theme depending on Jensen’s reactions, and performs a couple of tests on himself, just to be sure.

Jensen staggers into the room just after 10pm. “It’s done!” he proclaims. “It’s done, proofread and emailed, so I am yours for the entire weekend.”

“Excellent.” Tossing him a beer, Jared pats the bed beside him. “Come here and drink this and watch Bruce Willis blow shit up with me.”

“Excellent.” Tossing him a beer, Jared pats the bed beside him. “Come here and drink this and watch Bruce Willis blow shit up with me.”

Jensen’s tired face lights up with a smile. “Now that sounds good.”

They settle into what’s become their standard movie-watching position, with Jensen between Jared’s splayed legs, leaning back against his chest. They’ve both seen this one before so Jared doesn’t bother restarting it. Not that they’re paying that much attention to it, anyway, because his hands get busy toying with Jensen’s nipples through his t-shirt and soon Jensen’s digging his fingers into Jared’s thighs and Jared slides his hand down to open Jensen’s jeans. He loves jerking Jensen off in this position, loves feeling him jump and shudder against him, that gorgeous ass of his bouncing against Jared’s cock in the most delightful way. Sometimes they do it when he’s inside Jensen, which is delicious in its own way, but he likes this too, being denied, all his focus on pleasing Jensen.
When Jensen falls asleep in the aftermath, Jared doesn’t even mind, just cleans him up, eases off his jeans, underwear and t-shirt, and manages to get him under the covers without waking him. Jensen looks so young when he’s asleep, young and endlessly beautiful. How is it possible that Jared has got lucky enough to sleep every night with a man this angelic yet who has a mind dirty enough to rival Jared’s own? Whatever’s coming for them, he’ll always have these memories of Jensen in his arms, nuzzling up against him, sighing Jared’s name in his sleep.

If everything had to happen the way it did for him to be here, right now, with Jensen, then he’s grateful for it. If his parents hadn’t rejected him, if he’d stayed in San Antonio, he wouldn’t have met Jensen. If he ever sees them again, he acknowledges, he’ll have to thank them.

The part of him that’s been grimly clinging on to resentment against them shifts a little. Yes, it sucked, it fucking sucked—there are still certain moments of his teenage years that he can’t let himself remember for self-preservation reasons—but each of those moments was a step further along the pathway that led him here.

And he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I love you,” he whispers into Jensen’s hair when the rhythm of Jensen’s breathing assures him he’s deeply asleep. “I know you can’t love me, but I love you.”

* * *

Considering the rough work week he’s just completed, Jensen feels surprisingly chipper on his Saturday morning run. He makes his best time so far and bounds into the room where Jared’s still asleep. He tosses his balled-up t-shirt at him. “Come shower with me, Jared.”

“Ugh.” Jared pulls the covers up over his head. “Why are you awake?”

“Awake and been for a run and it’s a beautiful day and I want your surprise.”

The covers move down just enough for Jared to see over them. “It’s too early for my surprise.”

“What, it’s on a schedule?” Kicking off his shoes and socks, Jensen shimmies out of his running shorts, swivelling his hips suggestively. “Come shower with me anyway.”

“You’re still gonna make us go do laundry and grocery shopping first, aren’t you?”

“All the more reason to join me now. C’mon, Jay. Last one in the shower sucks the other one off.”

But because he’s hungry for Jared’s cock in his mouth, he purposefully dawdles, fiddling with his toothbrush, so that Jared makes it in first. He looks so delighted with himself that Jensen laughs.

Jared chuckles too as he tests the temperature of the water. “I know you did that deliberately, you greedy boy.”

“Always greedy for you,” Jensen agrees, and gets on his knees.

Several hours later they’re heading back to their room after a morning filled with practical tasks to get them out of the way so they have the rest of the weekend to play. Jensen can’t wait to find out what Jared’s latest surprise is. He’s certainly been very smug all morning in anticipation.
“As soon as we get back, dude,” Jensen says as they turn the corner on the street their dorm is on. “The moment we’re through that door, you’re telling me.”

“Showing you,” Jared corrects with a laugh. “Like last time, this is something you have to experience. But don’t you wanna put the milk away first? I don’t want you getting distracted at the crucial moment because you suddenly remember we left the milk on the floor by the door because you couldn’t wait any longer.”

Jared has been teasing him about his dedication to practicalities all morning and Jensen shifts the grocery bags he’s carrying into one hand and punches him on the arm. “You put it away. You put it away immediately, but I’m stripping, yeah? You do want me stripped for this, right?”

“Every inch of your body is going to be involved,” Jared says, nodding solemnly, “so yeah, I want you naked. I want you—shit.”

“Jared?” Seeing Jared turn pale, Jensen turns to follow his gaze. “Oh fuck.”

*

“Jensen!” The woman Jared recognises as Jensen’s mother turns away from the entryway to their dorm building and rushes towards them. “We were just about to go up and knock on your door!”

Jensen’s parents are here.

And, he notices following in their wake, so is his girlfriend.

Jensen looks shellshocked. Swiftly putting down the bag of laundry, Jared grabs the groceries before Jensen can drop them and gives him a nudge. “It’s okay,” he murmurs just as Jensen’s mother reaches them. “Smile, Jen.”

Jensen doesn’t smile, but he does manage to get the overt horror off his face. “Mom, what are you doing here?”

She pulls him in for a brief hug and European kisses on both cheeks. “Surprise! Are you surprised?”

Nodding blankly, he exchanges a handshake with his father. “Dad.”

“Son.” The older Ackles looks very much like Jensen did before he started experimenting with Jared and letting down his guard. “Your mother’s been on at me since we got back from that cruise to come and see you.”

“Well, we missed your birthday, so we’ve come to take you out for an impromptu birthday dinner tonight.”

“Tonight?”

“And we brought someone special for you.”

It’s only when Jensen flinches that Jared realises he hadn’t seen Dianne lurking behind his father. Jared gives him a push in her direction and rearranges the bags so that he can stretch one hand out. “Hi, I’m Jared. Jensen’s roommate.”
Jensen’s parents turn to him as one, taking their focus off the stilted reunion between their son and his girlfriend. Jensen’s father reaches out to take his hand. “Alan.”

His wife follows suit. “Donna. Nice to meet you, Jared.”

“You too.” Shit, Jensen and Dianne aren’t saying anything after their initial greeting (not even a kiss on the cheek; seriously, Jensen?) so he gives her a brilliant smile. “And this must be the lovely Dianne that I’ve heard so much about.”

She really is very pretty and she looks up at him gratefully. “And you’re the mathematics genius.”

Jensen told her about him? “I don’t know about genius,” he jokes, taking the opportunity to elbow Jensen as if in rebuke. “Jensen’s not bad himself with numbers.”

“Did you get your research project finished?” She looks back at Jensen, sweetly worried. “I told your parents that you might need to work on it and we should probably warn you we were coming —”

“He finished it last night,” Jared says cheerfully, “so he’s free to spend the rest of the day with you.” Some warning would have been enormously appreciated.

Donna beams at him. “Why don’t we walk you boys up to your room so we can see where you live and you can put your groceries away, then we can all go out for coffee and get to know Jared.”

Their room.

With its one bed.

Jensen looks like he’s on the verge of throwing up and Jared feels much the same. Why didn’t they ever consider such an eventuality as parents making surprise visits? Not that Jared’s parents even know where he is, but Jensen has parents, yes, Jensen has parents and they’re fucking here right in front of them and something is about to go very badly wrong if Jared doesn’t figure out a way to rescue it.

“Tell you what.” His voice sounds strong and hearty, nothing like he feels inside. “I’ll take the stuff up. The elevator is broken and we’re on the fifth floor, so you don’t want to head up there. Besides, we hadn’t got to the cleaning part of our Saturday yet so I’m sure Jensen doesn’t want you to see the state of it. You know what he’s like.” It’s a gamble, but Donna nods with a little grin.

“His first roommate asked to be reassigned because Jensen wanted everything spotless all the time. Has he mellowed or are you the same?”

“Hey, I’m a typical college boy, but we have an agreement. I ignore him when he yells at me and he’s free to throw my stuff in the closet if he doesn’t want it around. Works well.”

“Jensen,” Donna says reprovingly. “You yell at Jared?”

“Only when he deserves it,” Jensen mutters. The colour is returning to his cheeks at least, now he knows their sleeping arrangements are safe from discovery.

Donna shakes her head at him. “You’d better not be planning to yell at Dianne when she’s the one sharing your home.”

“Oh, I like spotless too,” Dianne puts in.
Of course she does. Jensen’s perfect little mate. Jared keeps smiling, even though the corners of his mouth are starting to hurt. “Right, so I’ll take all this upstairs and clean up. Jensen, why don’t you take them to the Leaf and Bean. They do the best coffee,” he tells Donna, “and Jensen’s there every day. If you want to see where he lives, that’s the place to go. That and the library, where he spends all the rest of his time.”

“Glad to hear you’re focusing on your studies,” Alan says approvingly.

Jensen shifts closer to Jared so that their arms brush behind the paper bags Jared’s holding. “Yes, sir.”

“He’s an excellent influence,” Jared assures them. “My grades have improved dramatically rooming with him.”

“Your grades are fine,” Jensen says, glancing up at him for the first time since his family appeared. His eyes still look panicky and Jared surreptitiously rubs their arms together again. Jensen leans in to maintain the contact. “He’s here on a full ride,” he tells his parents. “Straight A’s all the way.”

“You get A’s too.”

“Jared’s graduating next year,” Jensen says, ignoring that. “He’s doing his undergrad in three years, so I feel slow next to him.”

“Dude, math is easy for me. What you’re studying is far more complex. Don’t listen to him. That research project of his was so complicated I couldn’t even understand the concept behind it and he’s still done it with a week to spare. You guys have a very impressive son, don’t let him tell you otherwise.”

Donna gives him a warm smile. “Jared, won’t you join us for dinner later then? We’ll probably bore you telling Jensen all about our cruise, but we’d love the opportunity to get to know you better.”

Jensen’s arm pushes against his. Is that supposed to mean please come or don’t you dare?

“I don’t know,” he prevaricates. “I wouldn’t want to intrude on your family reunion.”

“It would be nice to get to know the person Jensen spends most time with,” Dianne says.

For now, Jared thinks. Only for now and then he’ll be spending the rest of his life with you. “If Jensen wants me,” he starts—oops, he didn’t meant to say it like that. He forces a laugh. “It’s his belated birthday dinner, after all, so it should be up to him.”

Jensen looks a bit calmer when he meets Jared’s eyes this time. “I want you,” he says. “To come.”

Jesus, Jensen. He said that deliberately, didn’t he? He picked up on Jared’s slip and this is his revenge. “Okay! Okay, I’ll come.”

Everyone else seems oblivious to what just occurred. “Excellent,” says Donna. “Does Jensen have a favourite restaurant here? We can book a table.”

“No problem, I’ll take care of it.”

“Which one?” Jensen asks him.

“It’ll be a surprise.”

Ha, that got Jensen back. Jared surveys the high colour on Jensen’s cheeks with satisfaction.
Hopefully the reminder of their earlier plans has made Jensen just as uncomfortable in his jeans as Jared is now.

“Go have coffee with your family,” he says, poking Jensen’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, you can trust me to put the milk away.” Another gotcha. Jensen’s eyes narrow, he’s picked up that Jared’s doing it on purpose, and Jared grins at him innocently, restraining himself from sticking out his tongue because Jensen has very specific reactions to Jared’s tongue these days and that would just be cruel.

“I’ll get Jensen to text you my number,” Donna tells him, “and you can let me know the address of the restaurant. “When we send him back to your room to get ready, just bring him along with you.”

“Sure thing.”

“I’m so happy we’ve met you at last,” she says as he bends to pick up the laundry in addition to the groceries. “I’ve been wanting to know Jensen’s Jared for a while, so I’m glad you’re free tonight and able to join us.”

Jensen’s Jared. He feels the effect of the words shiver through Jensen. “Wouldn’t wanna miss it,” he says brightly. “Enjoy your coffee. Jensen, get them chocolate muffins, okay? Don’t force your wheat germ on them.”

“What’s wrong with wheat germ?”

Of course Dianne likes wheat germ. Match made in heaven, those two. Which he already knew. And he needs to get away from them before he grabs Jensen and runs off with him and never gives him back. “Or try the blueberry,” he says, edging away. “Their blueberry’s great.”

*

He can do this, Jensen thinks as he leads his parents and Dianne toward his and Jared’s coffee shop. He’s spent years hanging out with the three of them, literal years. He has precedent. He knows how to behave around them, what to say, how to smile and talk and be normal.

Except his normal is different now.

Thank God for Jared’s quick thinking about the room. What if they’d got back just a few minutes earlier and there’d been the knock on the door and he’d opened it wide and they’d seen the bed—fuck, what if he’d been naked and Jared was doing whatever delicious thing he had planned and his parents and girlfriend walked in!

No, he has to stop thinking about what Jared could be doing to him right this moment. His body needs to get the message and calm right down. That’s a different life. This is his Texas life, even if it’s suddenly here at school, and he needs to get back into being Texas Jensen.

Real Jensen, damn it. What he’s doing here with Jared isn’t real. The Jensen planning to marry Dianne and join his father’s business and make his mother happy is what’s real.

“Jared seems nice,” his mother says once they’re settled at a table on the opposite side to his and Jared’s and he’s picked up coffee and blueberry muffins for all of them. “I’m so glad he’s able to join us tonight.”
“You didn’t tell us how gorgeous he is.” Dianne’s eyes twinkle and he knows she’s teasing him, but it hits too close to home.

“He’s a guy,” he says sharply. “That’s not exactly what I notice.”

“She’s right,” his mother agrees. “Gorgeous and lovely, it’s a killer combination.”

Dianne takes a sip of her coffee. “Does he have a girlfriend?”

“He’s—” They like Jared. If he tells them he’s gay, they’ll change their attitude about him and probably be cold to him at dinner and Jensen’s not having that. “No, no girlfriend.”

“A guy like that is available? You’ll have to bring him home one day so he can meet my friends. They’ll go crazy for him.”

*No. Jared isn’t available. Obviously not for Dianne’s friends but not for anybody.*

The rush of possessiveness takes him by surprise. Jared isn’t his despite their current exclusive arrangement and he has to remember that. He summons up the easy smile that got him through most of high school. “That’s enough about Jared. Now catch me up on what you’ve been up to.”

As the conversation progresses, Jensen adjusts back into the person he used to be. He gets his mother onto the topic of their cruise and laughs in the right places and exchanges knowing grins with Dianne and empathises with his father’s rolled eyes at some of his mother’s excesses. It’s good to know they had such a great time while he was busy betraying everything they brought him up to be.

By mid-afternoon he can see his mother’s energy is flagging after their early start, so he walks them the couple of blocks to their hotel so she can have a rest before dinner. Dianne is in the room next to his parents and she pauses in the doorway. “I’d invite you in,” she says, looking serious, “but it’s probably inappropriate.”

He nods. “I understand.”

“It’s really good to see you.” She fiddles with the strap of her purse. “We could go for a walk?”

She looks so hopeful that he can’t find it within himself to say, “No, actually, I want to get back to my gay roommate and let him fuck me really hard so I can get through what’s coming tonight,” so instead he summons up his best charming smile. “Sure, that would be great.”

“You can show me where all your classes are this year.”

Oh, that’ll be fun. “Sure,” he says again.

*It’s nearly 6 o’clock before Jensen returns. Jared has spent the afternoon going slowly out of his mind. First he went to the gym where he worked on some of the exercises Jensen showed him last week, then he finished the majority of his group research project (and fuck those who wanted to go in the other direction because, really, they’re not doing the work), and now he’s finishing off *The Lord of the Rings* in the hope he can lose himself sufficiently in his favourite childhood fantasy so as not to imagine what Jensen’s doing right now with his exceptionally lovely little girlfriend.*
This would be an excellent time for him to start planning his separation strategy, as he keeps thinking
of it. It’s good this happened. It’s the reminder he needed that Jensen isn’t actually his and won’t
even be on loan to him for much longer.

He needs to start protecting himself.

But first they have to get through tonight.

When the door opens, Jared’s not sure what version of Jensen he’ll get. He’s tried to strategise but
Jensen’s reactions keep surprising him and he honestly can’t predict how Jensen is going to be
dealing with this.

Better than Jared feared, it seems, because when he comes in his eyes are serene and there’s no
tension in his brow. He even smiles. “Hey, Jared.”

“Hey.”

“Man, I’ve got to take a shower before dinner. It’s warm out there.”

Warm because he decided to throw chastity to the wind and finally fuck Dianne? “The booking’s
not until 7,” he says, “so you have plenty of time.”

“My mom wouldn’t tell me where you booked.” Jensen tosses his phone and wallet on his desk and
starts unbuttoning his shirt. “Any clues?”

Donna seemed delighted, via text, with the whole surprise idea and thoroughly approved of the
restaurant Jared chose. “We go there often,” he says.

“But.” Jensen stops with his shirt half off and glares. “We go lots of places often.”

Jared tries very hard not to look at the expanse of golden chest. Or at the purpling bruises that mar it
in several places. “No music.” What did Dianne think of those when she saw them?

“Carluccio’s!”

“No telling ‘til we get there.” Jensen has a weakness for Italian food, although he only lets himself
indulge when Jared says he’s craving pizza but doesn’t want to order in. It’s where he took Jensen
for his actual birthday and persuaded him that birthday calories don’t count. Might Jensen fall for
that again and consume another double bowl of his favourite pasta? Or will the presence of his
family keep him on his version of the straight and narrow?

Jensen goes into the bathroom with his jeans still on. He hasn’t done that for weeks. Does he have
something to hide from Jared, like evidence of extremely recent sexual activity? Just this morning
Jensen was begging him to join him in the shower and sucking him off and now he’s closed the
door. Maybe the separation’s already begun without him having to do anything.

As he listens to Jensen shower, Jared evaluates. If he hadn’t seen and felt the panic in Jensen this
morning, he’d have thought he was unbothered by his family’s arrival. Has he really calmed down
or is this an act? Or—and he does have to consider this even though he doesn’t want to—is Jensen
this relaxed because he just lost his virginity to his girlfriend and is feeling too good to be uptight?

It’s a strong possibility, not just his own paranoia. It’s one thing for Jensen to resist sex before he
experienced it, but quite another now his sexual appetite has been woken and he’s confronted by the
girl he loves and plans to spend his life with, looking all soft and sweet with pretty curls and
sparkling eyes. She doesn’t seem the assertive sort, so probably couldn’t hold out for very long if
Jensen decided to seduce her, and Jared knows from texting with Donna that they all returned to their hotel several hours ago. He’s had plenty of time to tease away her inhibitions and introduce her to the wonderful new world Jared showed him.

And Jared has no right to be jealous.

Yeah, okay, this is it. The separation has started earlier than he anticipated, but if this is what’s happening then he has to deal. He has to go to dinner with them and Jensen’s parents tonight and be Jensen’s gregarious platonic friend and roommate and not betray a single hint of their illicit activities during the past few weeks.

He can do this.

For Jensen, he can do it.
Dinner with the Ackles family gives Jared a lot of insights into Jensen, and he lets slip a couple of things about himself.

Jensen keeps up his jovial attitude on the walk over to Carluccio’s and Jared follows his lead. It’s better this way, he tells himself as he holds open the door for Jensen to enter ahead of him, better than if Jensen were traumatised and panic-stricken. It will make for a much easier evening and a happier belated birthday celebration.

“Jared!” Donna waves them over from where she’s already perusing the menu at the table he booked. “This is an inspired choice, so many options I can’t decide what to have.”

“You’ll have to come and visit us again,” he says, “and try them all.”

“Now that’s a good idea.”

The seating arrangement leaves them in no doubt of where they’re supposed to sit, with Alan at the head of the table, Donna on his left and Dianne on his right. For some reason Jensen doesn’t spot this and heads towards the side of the table where his mother is sitting. Babbling about the wine options, Jared surreptitiously turns him around and slides in behind him under guise of handing Donna the wine list. “Are you going to have something to drink, sir?” he asks Alan to stop himself from watching the interplay between Jensen and Dianne as Jensen takes his seat beside her.

“You can call me Alan, son. What recommendations do you have?”

Alan, of course. He grew up calling his own father sir and something about being around a father figure again triggered that old conditioning.

“They have an excellent house red,” Jensen says. “That’s what we normally get, right, Jared?”

“Right.”

The conversation moves on to the choice between pasta and pizza. Jared knows the pizza he’s getting so he contributes where he’s consulted, reminds Jensen of the pasta he had on his actual birthday, and otherwise takes the opportunity to observe the dynamic.

Jensen didn’t fuck Dianne. It’s hard, but he manages to keep glee off his face as he confirms it. They’re not touching any more than they did earlier; in fact, Jensen’s not even looking at her. Instead Jared keeps catching his eyes on his own chest where his V-neck black t-shirt dips low (okay, sue him for wearing the shirt he knows is Jensen’s favourite of his). Jensen learned the other night that the spot at the very tip of the V is one of Jared’s most sensitive places and Jared can feel it tingle beneath Jensen’s regard.

Not. Appropriate.

After placing their orders, he turns the conversation to the Ackles’ Mediterranean cruise. He managed a few weeks of backpacking through Europe with his musician friends in New York, so
he’s been to some of the places Donna and Alan visited, which delights Donna and inspires her to go into further detail. Jensen frowns when Jared reveals they funded their trip by busking.

“You sing?”

Jared laughs. “Believe me, you don’t want to hear me sing.”

“You already told me you don’t play guitar, so…?”

“They sang. I, um, am pretty good with cards.”

“You gambled your way around Europe?”

“It’s math.” No need to confess that a single win of his in Monte Carlo had financed the majority of their travel, let alone mention the blackjack game in Atlantic City that paid for their airline tickets in the first place. “I don’t do it often.” It feels like cheating even when he doesn’t; he can’t help what his mind observes. “It was the only skill I could offer since my musical abilities are sorely lacking, unlike yours.”

Dianne’s been quiet up until now, but that makes her look up from her drink. “Jensen has musical abilities?”

Shit, did Jensen not want them to know?

“Jensen,” Donna shakes her wine glass reprovingly at him, “have you been holding out on us? Just what are you getting up to here at college? Are you learning new skills?”

For a split second Jensen’s smiling façade falters and his eyes flick to Jared’s before he gives a careless shrug. “Isn’t that what college is for?”

“If you sing now,” Dianne looks more animated than she has all evening, “you’ll have to join the choir when you get back home. We’re always needing new men.”

“The choir?” Jared asks.

“The church choir. Jensen always refused to have anything to do with it before.”

“Footballers don’t sing in choirs,” Jensen says lightly. “I don’t sing. I just—I’ve been learning to play the guitar, just a hobby, nothing serious.”

Jensen has a mesmerising singing voice. He doesn’t sing often, but sometimes he gets so into the music that he forgets Jared is there and he starts singing along to the chords he’s practising. When that happens, Jared gives up on trying to get anything done and lets himself soak in the sound.

“He’s pretty good.” He figures that’s safe enough to say.

“It’s nice to know he’s developing extracurricular skills.” Donna looks like she’d like to pursue the topic further, but she glances at her husband, who isn’t looking very delighted. “I’m sure he’s not letting them distract him from his studies, though.”

The conversation returns to extracurricular skills a short while later when Alan asks Jared if he golfs.

“Do I golf?” Golf can be used as a verb? “Uh, no, not really.”

“That’s a pity. I’d wondered if you’d like to join Jensen and me for a round tomorrow morning.”
Jensen? Seriously?

Jensen catches his eye. “We can teach you.”

He isn’t supposed to be missing any more basketball games on Sunday mornings—except the reason for that is sitting right beside Jensen. “Do you play?” he asks her.

“Oh no.” She looks aghast at the thought. “Donna and I have a spa day planned.”

“The club here has a wonderful spa attached,” Donna puts in, “so we’ll pamper ourselves while you men are out on the course. Do join us, Jared.”

With a final check to make sure Jensen’s okay with this, he agrees.

*

The two of them walk Alan, Donna and Dianne back to their hotel after dinner. Jensen has maintained his smiles throughout the meal and Jared is starting to admit they have to be genuine. He really is thrilled that his parents and girlfriend surprised him and he’s apparently perfectly at ease dining with his future wife and his gay male lover at the same table. As they walk, Jensen falls behind with his father, leaving Jared between Donna and Dianne who regale him with stories of Jensen in high school.

He was just as popular as Jared suspected, the golden boy, as good at academics as he was on the football field, the one all the girls were in love with and Dianne is vividly still fierce with pride over winning. It was quite a feat, he picks up, since Jensen dated very widely before she managed to snag him when they were sixteen.

“And we’ve been together ever since,” she finishes. “We’ll get married as soon as he finishes his studies and joins his father in the firm.”

He briefly takes her arm to steer her around an uneven hump in the sidewalk. “That’s great, Dianne.”

“You’ll have to come—won’t he, Donna?”

“Come?”

“To the wedding.”

“Oh definitely,” Donna agrees. “From the way Jensen’s talked about you this school year, I’m pretty sure he’ll want you there.”

Jared has a ridiculous flash to himself standing up for Jensen at the wedding then tagging along on the honeymoon to give him a hard fuck on the side after he’s done his duty to his wife. It’s sickening and deeply disrespectful to the woman walking right beside him and he shuts it down immediately. But then, is what he’s been doing any less respectful? She has the claim on Jensen. Jensen belongs to her by prior agreement and nothing he does in bed with Jared can nullify that.

“What about you, Jared?” Donna continues. “Jensen said you’re single. Any girls on the horizon?”

Girls. Jensen hasn’t told them he’s gay.
Of course he hasn’t.

Jared left home because he wasn’t going to lie about it. He is gay and he wasn’t about to let them persuade him to pretend he isn’t. He’s been overtly gay ever since and the reply springs to his lips, “Guys, actually,” but he clamps his teeth down into his lip before he says it out loud.

If Jensen lied, it’s because he knew his family wouldn’t accept Jared if they were aware of the truth. And he obviously wanted them to accept him.

“I’m focusing on my studies at the moment,” he sidesteps, loathing himself for the lie by implication. “As Jensen said earlier, I’m here on a scholarship so I can’t afford to get distracted and let my grades slip. There’s plenty of time for that kind of thing in the future, I guess."

“That’s one of the reasons I said Jensen should still study here, even after my mother’s illness meant I couldn’t join him.” Dianne turns to glance back at Jensen, who seems deep in conversation with his father. “We spent a lot of our free time hanging out in high school and I knew we probably wouldn’t be any more disciplined in college so we’d both get a better education if we went to different schools.”

He’s not quite sure how to take that. “Jensen’s a pretty disciplined guy,” he manages after it becomes clear she’s waiting for a response.

“It took me a while to train him,” she says, wrinkling her nose. “He was really wild in high school.”

“Best thing he ever did was ask you out,” Donna adds.

Jensen was wild. Jensen was wild? Like…eating chocolate wild? Or…skipping workouts wild? He obviously didn’t sleep around since he was a self-proclaimed virgin before Jared got his hands on him.

“It made my heart very happy as a mother to have him rededicate himself to the church with you the way he did. I was worried for a moment we were going to have a repeat of Josh.”

Josh. Jensen’s wayward older brother. For the first time it occurs to Jared to wonder just when exactly in the Josh timeline did Jensen settle down with Dianne. Was it possibly his response to his brother being cast out of the family? Jensen has never said much about Josh, just enough for Jared to pick up that he rebelled in some way unacceptable to the Ackles and headed west, never to be heard from again.

Both women are silent for a moment, seemingly in memory of the absent Josh, and Jared doesn’t dare say anything. Then Donna shakes it off and smiles up at him. “So tell me, Jared, are you religious at all?”

Oh great. “I grew up Catholic, but I don’t really practise any more.”

Fortunately she doesn’t pursue it. “Jensen said you grew up in Texas, but I don’t hear much of it in your voice.”

Not really an easier topic, but he concentrates on making his voice sound casual. “I moved to New York when I was a teenager,” he gives them a sheepish grin, “and my friends there kept pretending they couldn’t understand me so I lost the accent.”

“Whereabouts in Texas do you come from?” Dianne asks. “Don’t say you grew up just around the corner from us in Dallas!”
“No, San Antonio.”

“When you come for the wedding you’ll have to take us down there and show us around,” she says, flipping her hair the way he’s noticed she always does when talking about her future wedding. “It’s somewhere I’ve always wanted to go. I think Jensen might have had a school trip down there once but I’ve never been.”

“Maybe you could come visit us during the summer,” Donna suggests. “I’m sure Jensen would love to have you and we have a spare bedroom you’d be welcome to use.”

This is not something he can even think about right now and he avoids glancing back at Jensen to see if he overheard his mother’s happy invitation on his behalf. “I believe Jensen will be working in the firm,” he says awkwardly, “and I have work too, in New York.”

“Oh? What will you do there?”

“I’m a math tutor and there’s a summer school I usually tutor at.”

“That’s a shame.” Looking like she seriously means it, Donna lays a hand on his arm. “The invitation stands, though, Jared. Just let us know at any time if you have a few days off. We’d love you to pay us a visit, and you can get a good shot of Texas before heading east again.”

She’d rescind that invitation in a heartbeat if she had a clue about the truth, he thinks a little wildly. Maybe he should tell her, break the news now about being gay so they stop holding out hopes for a lifelong platonic friendship between him and Jensen and throw him out of their lives before they get too attached to the man they think he is. But when he looks back at Jensen, no longer able to resist, Jensen’s staring straight at him and the frantic desire to ruin everything evaporates. He can’t do that to him.

“That’s a great invitation,” he says instead. “I appreciate it and I’ll keep it in mind.”

Thankfully they’ve arrived outside the hotel and Jared steps forward to get the door. Jensen enters last, his arm brushing against Jared’s chest as he walks through. “Thanks, man.”

Jared can feel his face doing complicated things in reply but right now the ability to smile is beyond him and he gives up, following Jensen inside.

Alan steps up, hand out. “So we’ll see you tomorrow on the golf course, son?”

A short check with Jensen, who still seems on board with the idea, makes him nod. “Sure,” he says, shaking the man’s hand. “I’ll probably be a horrible embarrassment to you both, but if you don’t mind that, I’ll be there.”

“Jared’s as quick as I am at picking up new things,” Jensen puts in. “He’ll be fine.”

Jared smothers his choke at Jensen’s words. Is Jensen using them deliberately or was it just an accident that he chose those exact words? Looking at Jensen, he can’t tell. “I’ll do my best,” he manages, trying to keep from punching him.

Alan nods approvingly. “That’s all anyone can ask.”

“Maybe we can meet for a quick lunch once you’re done,” Donna says, squeezing his arm for a second time, “before we have to leave. If we don’t see you, Jared, it’s been an absolute pleasure getting to know you.”
“Likewise.” Why the fuck do Jensen’s parents have to be so nice? “Dianne, you too.”

“Oh, Jared.” She surprises him by surging up on her toes and pulling him down for a kiss on his cheek. “It’s so reassuring to know Jensen’s in such good hands here. I worried about him a lot last year but I can see that he’s very happy with you.”

Behind him, Jensen coughs loudly. “Thanks, everyone, for an awesome belated birthday surprise, but now we’ll let you get some rest. See you all in the morning.”

He doesn’t kiss Dianne goodnight. He stays riveted in his spot beside Jared, their arms almost touching but not quite, and gives a little wave. She doesn’t appear to think it odd, returns the wave and heads off in front of his parents towards their rooms. Donna gives Jared a final warm smile, Alan a not unfriendly nod, and then they’re gone.

And he and Jensen are alone.

*

Jensen wonders if he can go throw up now. There are restrooms in the corner of the lobby, he can see them. Would Jared think him out of his mind if he excused himself quickly?

“Give me a minute,” he says, not allowing himself time to think. “I had too much to drink at dinner.”

He manages not to run but it’s close and he only just makes it into a stall when he loses control of his stomach. After fighting it all day, it’s a relief to let it come out and wring him dry, and he slumps on the floor once it’s over, sweat streaming down his face. He can’t seem to stop trembling.

“Uh, Jen?”

It’s Jared. Of course.

“I’m okay,” he croaks.

But Jared doesn’t pay any attention to that and the next thing Jensen sees his face peering down over the top of the cubicle. “Is it something you ate?”

“Must be.” Acutely aware of how awful he looks, Jensen wipes his hand across his mouth. “Just give me a minute.”

“I did, but you didn’t come back and then I came in here and heard you throwing up. Do you want me to get your parents?”

“God, no.”

“Dianne?”

Jensen shudders. “Leave it, Jared.”

But he can see from Jared’s face that that’s not an option. “Some water? If you open the door, I can help you to the basin where you can rinse your mouth out and wash your face, and then if you need to throw up again I can quickly get you back to—’"
“No!” He’s not going to throw up again. He’s been through this before, back when he was a teenager when everything was so chaotic and falling to pieces. It’s a pathetic response to have to stress, but at least he knows once he’s thrown up it’s over. At least for now. “I’m okay, I told you. Just a bit shaky from the aftermath, that’s all, but I can walk by myself.”

“Okay.” Jared nods seriously. “You gonna open the door then?”

“I said, give me a—”

“A minute, yes. Sorry.” Jared’s face disappears from above him. “I’ll be here but take as long as you need.”

The smell is hideous, nearly enough to have Jensen retching again, so he flushes the toilet and pats his face with toilet paper. This is mortifying enough without having Jared witness to it all, but he doesn’t have the strength to order him away. No one’s ever been with him after one of his nausea attacks and he’s horrified by how badly he wants to open that door and scurry into the comfort of Jared’s arms. Patting down his arms and his chest as well, he does his face a second time then flushes the toilet again before hesitantly opening the door.

Jared’s leaning against the wall opposite. At the sound of the door, he surges upright. “Can I help you? I know when I throw up I feel really weak and sick afterwards. Do you need—”

“I’m fine.” He surveys the eight feet to the row of sinks. As soon as he lets go of the door he can get to them. He just has to let go.

“Let me help you, Jensen. Please.”

It’s weakness to surrender but he can’t help it. He’s barely lifted his head to nod when Jared’s there, curling an arm protectively around him and moving him carefully across the floor so he can lean against the fake marble countertop. Jensen stands dumbly while Jared turns on the tap and wets one of the little towels rolled up in a basket and doesn’t argue when Jared gently wipes it across his brow.

“How’s your stomach feel? Sometimes, if you ate something bad, moving can make you need to be sick again.”

“’m fine. I think I threw it up.” How else can he explain what will be a miraculous recovery in the next few minutes as his nerves settle?

Jared next fills his hand with water, bringing it up to Jensen’s mouth. “Drink.”

“Jared—”

“Drink, or it’ll all drain out.”

Now he feels worse than pathetic. That little ache inside his chest has no right to feel warmed by Jared treating him like a helpless toddler unable to take care of itself, but he lets Jared feed him several handfuls of water before the dizziness in his head eases enough for him to shake him off.

“I can do it.”

Fortunately Jared listens this time and steps back, giving Jensen space to bend over the sink, splash the running water over his face and rinse his mouth out properly.

“I’m okay,” he says again, and this time he really is. He stands up to prove it and the room no longer
lurches around him. “I’m fine.”

“Good.” Jared regards him. “You want me to call a cab back to the dorm?”

“No. A walk will help. The fresh air. I’m—I think the worst is over. I don’t feel sick any more.”

Jared nods. “Right. Okay. Want some more water before we go?”

A dry swallow indicates the wisdom in that suggestion, so Jensen bends to drink a bit more. He’s still shaking a little, his customary physical reaction to an attack like this, but now that the worst is over, shame starts to slither through him. As he wipes off his mouth yet again, he meets Jared’s eyes in the mirror. “I’m sorry.”

“Fuck, Jensen, don’t be sorry. I’m sorry that I took you to a restaurant that poisoned you.”

Oh God, no. He can’t let Jared blame himself for Jensen’s stupidity. “It wasn’t the restaurant.” He rushes out the words before he can think better of it. “I—I lied. It was—I used to get this when I was younger.”

Now Jared looks even more concerned. “Get what? Get sick?”

“It’s just a nervous reaction. Hits me sometimes. Used to, at any rate. But it wasn’t anything you did, Jay, believe me. It’s just me being dumb.”

“Don’t say that, you’re not dumb. Do you mean like a panic attack or something?”

Jensen’s never let himself think much about it, usually blanking it from his memory as soon as it’s over, and he shrugs. “Don’t panic attacks make it so you can’t breathe?”

“They can have different symptoms. I got them a bit when I first moved to New York. I didn’t throw up, but I often felt like I was going to and I’d start sweating and shaking.” Jared gives a little laugh. “It terrified me until I did enough research to figure out what was going on.”

Gathering his courage, Jensen lets go of the counter and turns around to meet Jared’s gaze head on. “Do you still get them?”

Jared shakes his head. “I learned some breathing exercises. I even did some yoga, can you believe it? One of my flatmates was a yoga teacher and he taught me. I used to do it a lot, every morning and every evening. Probably why I’m so flexible now.”

As he’s meant to, Jensen chuckles. Jared does too, but their laughter gradually fades as they stand staring at each other. There’s so much Jensen wants to ask about that little revelation, not least about why Jared, as a teenage boy, had flatmates. It confirms something he’s been suspicious of for a while now, but this doesn’t feel like the right time to bring it up. “I—I think I’m ready to go home now.”

Putting aside his pride, he lets Jared help him, steadying himself against the powerful lean body when remnants of dizziness return, clinging to Jared’s arm when he’s able to walk. It takes a while, but they make it back to their room.

Where they have separate beds.

He must have seen that when he came back earlier to prepare for dinner but he’s not been aware of much today and it obviously didn’t penetrate. As Jared helps him to sit down on his bed, Jensen suppresses the urge to ask him to put them back the way they were. It’s clever thinking. What if his
mother decides to get up early tomorrow and surprise them in their room? What if Dianne does? They have to sleep apart tonight just in case.

Or what if Jared separated them because he longer wants to sleep with Jensen after the way he’s behaved today? Jensen could hardly blame him.

Hesitant now after being a pillar of strength all the way home, Jared retreats to his own bed. He gestures towards the bathroom. “You can take the first shower. I’ll probably help you feel better. Just don’t let the water get too hot, okay? Because it might make you dizzy again.”

He puts clothes on after his shower because it would feel too awkward to walk naked into the room after all that’s happened today and scrambles into bed. When the bathroom door closes behind Jared, he starts to shake again. It’s stupid. The threat is over for the moment, he’s safe in his bed, but his body hasn’t got the message and is coming apart again. But Jared’s in the bathroom and he can’t cope with throwing up in front of him a second time, so he curls his body into a tight little ball and bites the pillow to muffle his uncontrollable pathetic sobs.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

What is Jensen supposed to do after the surprise intrusion of his Texas life into his haven at school with Jared?

Chapter Notes

I felt bad about the last chapter so here's the next one a day early for you. Thanks again for caring about these boys so much!

Jensen looks better in the morning, Jared thinks. The colour is back in his face and his easy smiles have returned. His eyes are still puffy from the crying session he probably thinks he managed to conceal from Jared, but they’re clear and it just looks like he didn’t get much sleep. (Neither of them did, both lying there, breathing, too far apart.) If Jared hadn’t watched the way Jensen broke down last night as soon as they were alone, the casual, good-humoured façade would have fooled him but he knows better now. Jensen is quite the accomplished actor and that’s something Jared hasn’t been factoring into his calculations.

How many panic attacks has Jensen hidden from him during the past few weeks? Is this something he does, act like everything’s okay and he’s fine, when in reality he’s falling to bits?

He needs time to reflect on this, but right now he has to focus on *golfing* and on keeping his body from betraying to Jensen’s father what Jensen is keeping secret so well. He’s hard-pressed from the beginning because Alan seems content to leave Jensen to do all the instruction, part of which apparently requires him wrapping himself around Jared’s body to teach him how to grip his club and how to swing it and connect with the tiny white ball.

Jared could probably concentrate better if it were anyone teaching him but Jensen. After a night apart, he melts back into Jensen’s arms the moment they first touch. Surely Jensen is holding him more tightly than a proper instructor should? Certainly an instructor shouldn’t rub himself against his student’s ass or lay a cheek on his shoulder or compulsively tangle their fingers together? He’s hardly going to object, although he does worry about just how much Alan is picking up from observation.

After the initial stance and swing instruction, they start making their way around the course. Alan is clearly an expert at this and Jensen’s not far behind. Jared, no matter how diligently he applies himself, is rubbish, so bad that he and Jensen start betting on just how terrible his performance will be at each hole. It’s a joy to see true laughter on Jensen’s face, the kind where he screws up his eyes and literally bends double from it, and Jared catches Alan appreciating it just as much as he is.

Jensen’s parents love him very much, that’s unmistakable. His mother adores him and his father not only respects him but has a deep, abiding affection for his sole remaining son as well. And Jensen is equally fond of them. He glowed in conversation with his mother last night, beamed when she teased him, and he thrives under his father’s attention, vividly wanting to please yet also secure in
knowing that he *is* pleasing at the same time. Even before the gay revelation Jared didn’t have this kind of relationship with his parents. How can he blame Jensen for not wanting to lose this?

They’re at the second-last hole (thank God) when Alan comes to stand beside him as Jensen heads off to deal with an unusually errant ball that ended up in the little sandy area. He’s been pleasant company, remarkably tolerant of Jared and Jensen’s shenanigans, joining in the laughter, offering casual coaching instruction for Jared and thoughtful commendations of Jensen’s game. In any other circumstances Jared would like the man a lot.

As they watch, Jensen makes a mess of getting the ball out.

“You’re as bad as me!” Jared calls.

Jensen smirks. “No, *this* is you. Watch.”

He starts imitating Jared with the club, even though it’s going to totally wreck his score, and Jared lets himself drink in the beauty of Jensen laughing in the morning sunshine. He may not be won over to the joys of golf but he’ll always treasure the memory of Jensen playing, eyes extra green against the fairways.

“He hasn’t been this happy for a long time,” Alan murmurs beside him. “It’s good to see.”

“He obviously loves golf,” Jared says because he doesn’t know what to do with that information.

“It’s not the golf, son.”

*No, it’s probably all the vigorous sex he’s been having with me.* But he can’t say that, so he bites his lip and keeps his eyes on Jensen, who has been waylaid by a pretty girl who’s hit her ball even more ineptly than Jared and seems to have lost it.

“Jensen’s been different, living with you,” Alan muses. “He was very unhappy at school last year, his first time away from home and he had some trouble with roommates, and his mother and I were worried about what would happen this year. But you’ve been good for him, Jared. You’ve brought him out of the shell he developed after—well, after he went through a tough time in high school.”

Is *a tough time* code for Jensen’s wild patch before Dianne trained it out of him? All the more Jared wants to know what went down when Josh left, but he’s certainly not going to ask the formidable man beside him

“Hey, Jay, catch!” Jensen’s jogging towards them and hurls his cap towards Jared like a frisbee.

Automatically Jared leaps to the side to catch it. “You all done being a knight in shining armour?”

“Far be it from me to deny a lady help.” With a lascivious wink, Jensen reaches out to snatch his cap back. “Dad, you’re up next.”

Alan wins the game and declares his prize is treating them to lunch at the club with Donna and Dianne. Jensen seems up for it so Jared agrees and soon they’re ensconced in an ornate booth with a host of tasty treats on offer. Jensen’s full of suggestions for Jared to try, and although he’s faintly embarrassed by ordering so much Jared can’t resist. It’s been a long time since he’s eaten like this.

He’s also horribly aware that he’s dominating the conversation. He doesn’t mean to, but Donna wants to hear details about how he fared at golf and he can’t help turning it into an entertaining story of his hopelessness. Jensen chimes in with teasing digs at him, but they’re delivered with such sparkling eyes that he feels no offense. Between them they keep Donna and Dianne in stitches
throughout the meal, even eliciting several outright laughs from Alan, and considering what a mess this surprise visit made of their weekend plans, he has to admit he’s thoroughly enjoying himself.

After the meal it’s time to say goodbye. It’s assumed that he’ll accompany them back to the hotel, where Alan and Jensen fetch the bags and load them into the rental car.

“It’s been truly wonderful to meet you,” Donna says as she gives Jared a European kiss goodbye, something she told him she picked up on the cruise and has no intention to give up just because she’s back in the States. She pulls him a little closer so she can whisper in his ear. “And thank you for taking care of my boy.” Letting go of him, she gives him a little wink. “Remember, you’re welcome in Texas any time during the summer. We’d love to have you.”

Such sincerity rings in her voice that he has to fight a prickle at the back of his throat. She doesn’t know you’re gay, he reminds himself harshly as Jensen submits to her European kisses. If she knew, she’d reject you exactly the same as your own mother did. Jensen has made that clear enough.

Bending down, he takes the cue from last night and gives Dianne a kiss on the cheek, returning her soft hug. “It’s been awesome getting to know you.” It’s not entirely true, but she turned out to be a lot nicer than he’d imagined and she really does seem to love Jensen. She’ll make him a devoted wife, keep a perfect house, give him sweet little babies with his green eyes and her pale curls, and maybe his life won’t be as dire as Jared has feared. He’ll have a loving community around him at the very least, which is more than Jared can say for himself.

“Look after him for me,” she says. “I’m trusting you, Jared.”

He carefully doesn’t look at Jensen. “Sure. Absolutely.”

Jensen does kiss her goodbye, just a peck on the lips and half a hug before he sidles back to join Jared on the sidewalk. “Have a safe trip back,” he calls. “Let me know when you’re home tonight.”

“We will.” Donna waves out her window. “Bye, boys.”

*

“I need to hit something,” Jensen says as they watch the car turn the corner out of sight. “Mind if we go to the gym?”

If Jared’s surprised, he doesn’t show it. “Sure. This is the time we normally go anyway.”

They swing into step side by side, following the same route that last night Jensen staggered along in Jared’s arms. He’s still so mortified about it that he can’t look at Jared. That’s why he needs to go to the gym, in the hopes that violence will work the agitation out of his body before it can erupt again in what obviously must be a panic attack, even if he never thought about it in those terms before.

“You have great parents, dude,” Jared says as they pass the third block. “Your mom especially. Is she always that friendly?”

“When she likes people.” If she doesn’t, she freezes them with politeness, but there was none of that in her attitude towards Jared. “They both liked you.”

Except for the fact you didn’t tell them I’m gay.
Jensen hears the words as clearly as if Jared had said them. Should he respond? How does he explain why he so badly needed them to like and approve of Jared?

Jensen’s Jared. He still can’t believe his mother phrased it like that. She meant it innocently, as a shorthand for Jensen’s friend Jared, but if only it could mean more. If only it could be true and Jared really could be his.

“I can’t believe you didn’t tell me about gambling your way through Europe,” he says instead.
“That’s insane.”

“It was a crazy experience. Have you been there?”

“Haven’t been many places, man. My dad used to take my brother and I fishing on holidays when I was a kid, but only close to home. It was my mother’s big dream to see Europe and I’m glad she’s done it now.”

“It’s a really cool gift you guys gave her.”

“I didn’t pay for it or anything.” He knows Jared has to work for every penny he has and feels embarrassed that he doesn’t. “I just helped pick out the cruise I thought she’d enjoy most based on what she’s talked about wanting to see over the years.”

“It sounded like you picked right.”

“Yeah.” He’s never seen his mother looking this relaxed and happy before. Europe obviously suited her—or was it the joy of making dreams come true?

Like he’s been doing with Jared.

Will Jared still want to do any of that with him?

Because he’s too scared to find out, he says nothing about the beds while they grab their gym kit and pummels out his growing terror on the punchbag. Despite the sweat half blinding him, he still keeps an eye on Jared over by the bikes and then doing some complicated stretches by the mirrors. Is that yoga? Some of them look vaguely familiar. Didn’t Jared say yoga was one of his techniques to fight panic?

Is it possible that Jared feels as disturbed by the surprise visit as Jensen does? He seemed to take it all in stride and he’s been in his outgoing happy mood all weekend, charming everyone, but why is he doing yoga when Jensen hasn’t seen him do it before?

And is he still willing to continue with their…experiment…now that he’s met the person Jensen is cheating on?

Jensen can’t let himself think about her. He can’t remember this time yesterday as they walked around campus together and she innocently updated him on her mother’s condition and shared stories from church and her current studies and mentioned a house she saw recently that’s the kind she’d like them to buy when it’s time. No, he hasn’t formally proposed but it’s been a given since their prom night and their entire community is looking forward to the nuptials of Mr and Mrs Jensen Ackles.

The very thought of that Mrs sends his fists flying at the bag again.

He’d be willing to take Jared’s name if that’s what Jared wanted.
“Hey, dude.”

A hand grasps his wrist from behind and he swivels, snarling, only to find his other wrist captured as well in a steely grip.

“Jensen. It’s okay.”

It’s Jared. Jared’s holding him so firmly he can’t move. He tries to break the hold but Jared’s fingers tighten and fuck if that doesn’t go straight to his groin. “Jay....”

“You’re okay, babe. Just breathe with me. Come on, in, hold, out, hold, in—”

“I know how to breathe, Jared.”

“Show me.”

It’s that gravelly voice he uses in bed and what is Jensen supposed to do with that? “Quit holding me.”

“I need you to breathe first.”

“I am breathing. Let go of me!”

“Jen, look at me. Look at me.”

Jared’s tone will brook no disobedience and Jensen tries to corral his jumpy eyes to converge on Jared’s face. On those soft hazel eyes that are gazing into his with such love.

Jared loves him.

Gathering all his energy he jerks away as hard as he can. He can hear Jared behind him but he’s the one who goes running every morning and he flies out of the gym and down along the path towards the river he brought Dianne to yesterday. His future wife. The one he’s going to pledge his life to and give his name to and make love to for the rest of his life.

He can’t love Jared. That isn’t permitted. There’s no place in his world for tall men with flyaway curls and infectious chuckles and brilliant minds, no room for gentle hands providing water or scorching kisses that bring him alive or thick cocks sliding home deep inside of him.

It wasn’t supposed to happen like this.

It was only meant to be an experiment, an opportunity for him to explore other possibilities in a safe scenario. Jared said he was safe, damn it. Jared promised Jensen would be safe with him.

He was doing this to protect his future, not to annihilate it.

Not to destroy himself, his family, his entire world.

He can’t let this happen.

Have his parents reached the airport? Maybe he can go home with them and never have to see Jared again. He can finish his degree at the same place as Dianne and they can be married by the 4th of July and buy that exact house she was dreaming of. That will keep him safe. That will preserve everything the way it needs to be.
Not yet.
Not yet.
Not yet.
Not yet.

* 

Every pound of his feet against the dirt path echoes the words. Not yet. He isn’t ready to lose Jared yet.

* 

It’s the rest of his life. Another, what, 50, 60 years? Surely he can have five more weeks?

* 

And if Jared loves him, that’s just too damn bad. Jared knows he’s promised to Dianne, he was aware of the situation going in, and if he’s broken the rules then that’s on him. It isn’t Jensen’s problem.

* 

No emotion.
There can be no emotion between them.

Just lust. Just passion.

*

With an end date.

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It’s dark when he gets back to find Jared sitting cross-legged on his bed studying. He doesn’t look up when Jensen enters.

Jensen knows he’s sweaty and horrible and needs to get in the shower but he sits down on the edge of his bed. “I’m sorry,” he says.

“It’s okay.” Jared’s gaze stays on the textbook. It’s full of complicated equations, the equivalent of comfort food for Jared.

“I know this weekend went beyond our agreement,” Jensen continues doggedly. “I didn’t factor in a meet-the-parents situation and you gave up all your free time and charmed them and relieved their worries about me being so far away, and I’m grateful for that.”

“It’s fine. I didn’t mind.”

“I just—I wanted to say that—” He practised how to put this, damn it. “Nothing has changed. For me, at least. I still want to experiment. I’m not—not done yet. Unless you want to stop, which I understand if you do, but I don’t want to. There are only five weeks left of this year and then—I—I don’t want to waste them. But it’s up to you.”

No glib reassurance this time. But Jared’s eyes aren’t moving on the page and he holds his breath.

“There’s the little matter of your surprise,” Jared says at last. Finally he looks up and that softness
from earlier is gone and he looks like regular happy Jared again. “I bought supplies. It would be a
shame to let them go to waste.”

Jensen wants that surprise appallingly badly. “It would be.”

“I think you should go take a shower. Then come back here. Naked.”

Their eyes meet and hold, then Jensen bobs his head in a nod. “I can do that.”

Jared gives him a little smile. “You have three and a half minutes.”

*

Jensen came back.

Jensen came back and he wants to continue and it isn’t over yet.

Moving rapidly, Jared pushes the beds back together and remakes them then gets out his supplies,
 draping his jacket over them so Jensen won’t see what he has planned. He’s timing on the clock and
it takes Jensen four minutes and ten seconds to step through the door he left half open while he
showered.

“How’d I do?” Although he stands tall, hands casually at his sides, his voice is apprehensive.

“Forty seconds out.”

“Too many?”

“Yep.”

“Ah.” Jensen shifts on his feet and tries to look apologetic but Jared doesn’t miss the eager
hardening of his exposed cock. “Are you, um, gonna do something about that?”

“What do you think?”

“I think you will.”

“Come over here.”

He has full rights to touch Jensen’s body again. After a weekend of denying himself, he feels like he
should work back up to it. He wants to jump him, plunge inside him, fuck him so hard he drives all
thoughts of people from Texas out of Jensen’s mind forever, but that’s not what Jensen needs right
now. He’s still shaky from what happened. He’s pulled himself back from whatever panic attack
was building in the gym and although he seems normal again, now that Jared knows what to look for
he can see the signs. Jensen, the fucker, has been lying to him all this time.

He’s terrified shitless.

But Jared can see through him now and he’s not going to continue to get away with it.

As Jensen comes to a halt directly in front of where he’s sitting on the bed, Jared reaches out to the
fading blue mark on his hip. Jensen’s stomach tightens when he touches it. “I’m going to renew

this,” Jared says, “and you’re gonna wear it on you the whole time you’re mine. That okay with you?”

Jensen’s eyes are dark as he nods.

“But first I’m going to tie you down.” Jensen has talked about that in the past so it’s something Jared knows he wants to try. “Like before, your safeword is my last name. So you’re in ultimate control, all right? Remember that. You can stop this at any time if you need to.” He lets his fingers wander across Jensen’s stomach and down through the fine light hairs to his cock, which seems very enthusiastic at the suggestion of bondage. He dances his fingers over it, making Jensen shiver, then closes his hand hard around the base of it to tug Jensen closer. “How do you feel about being blindfolded?”

The surge of Jensen’s cock answers before his voice does, low and breathless. “Really good.”

“Awesome. Same safeword rules apply. And you use it, Jensen, if you need to for any reason, even if you just want to pause for a moment to catch your breath. This is essential. Do you understand?”

“I got it.”

“It doesn’t mean the scene is over, but it means I’ll stop and check in with you. If you don’t say it, though, your body is mine to do with as I please.”

Another surge, and he squeezes extra hard until Jensen gasps. “There are some other rules. First, you may not come until I tell you to. If you feel like you will, tell me. Tell me and I’ll stop you. Yeah?”

Nodding, Jensen runs his tongue over his parted lips, obviously liking that idea. Good to know.

“If you come without warning me, I’ll punish you.”

Ooh, Jensen really likes that. “J-Jared…”

Jared tightens his grip again. This is gonna be fun because Jensen’s desperate to come already and he pants as Jared forces his body down from the edge. “Good boy.”

There it is, that shy little hesitant smile. Fuck, how he loves that smile.

“Second, you are not allowed to hide any of your reactions from me. I don’t want you to try and control yourself or hold back. I want to see. I’m gonna be doing a lot of things to you and I want to see the effect of each one on you.” He needs Jensen to stop thinking and start feeling as quickly as possible. “Understand?”

“No hiding,” Jensen nods again. “Jared…when you say lots of things…will they hurt?”

Any normal person would sound wary asking such a question. Not Jensen. He sounds so eager that Jared needs to press a hand against his own cock and catch his breath. “Yes,” he says, when he can talk. “Yeah, some of them are definitely gonna hurt.”

“I like this surprise already.”

As the two of them grin stupidly at each other it’s like the time has been wound back to yesterday afternoon and they’ve just got back from doing laundry and none of the other surprise has happened. It’s them, and Jared longs to lean forward and press a line of kisses up Jensen’s chest all the way to his mouth but that’s an arbitrary line he’s drawn in the sand and he’s not going to violate it. He
needs something, after all, to remind him that Jensen won’t be his forever.

Instead of kissing him, he stands up. “Lie down on your back with your hands above your head.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

After their traumatic weekend, Jared is finally able to give Jensen his surprise.

Jensen has never been tied up before. Until Jared, he had no idea it was something he wanted to experience and now he can’t wait. Keeping his hands behind his head while Jared hurt his nipples was exciting enough, but now he won’t be able to move even if he wants to. Not unless Jared lets him.

Jared’s going to tie him up and hurt him and punish him for coming and this fucking awful weekend has just been saved.

Obediently he wraps his hands around the metal struts between the bed posts and watches Jared fetch some silky looking ropes from his desk. Jared is still fully dressed and Jensen should probably feel exposed or uncomfortable lying here naked and spread out, but all he can feel is excitement pulsing through his belly at the vulnerability of it all. He is placing himself entirely into Jared’s control.

Jared smells good as he leans over Jensen to wrap the rope around his wrists and fasten them to the bed, and Jensen breathes the familiar scent in. Yes. This. This is all he needs.

“Doing okay there?”

“Awesome.” He forgot how pretty Jared’s eyes are from up close, like sunflowers opening up into a green field, and he loses himself in them for a moment. “You got me rope.”

“Yeah.” Jared’s mouth that’s so talented when it plays with Jensen’s cock twists into a smirk. “And a few other things, Jen, just wait. How does that feel? Are your arms okay in that position for a while?”

“I’m real comfortable like this.” No. That’s not quite true. When he tugs at the knots and feels no give, can’t pull his arms towards him at all, a blaze of heat shimmers through him. “Jared, shit, I’m gonna come.”

“From that?” Jared’s eyes widen theatrically then crinkle into a grin as he grabs at the base of Jensen’s cock again.

Several seconds pass.

Jensen’s not too clear on what happens during them.

Gradually Jared’s face swims back into focus.

“You still with me, babe?”

“I didn’t—please tell me I didn’t come.”

“Not quite.”
“You know I’m not gonna last.”

“But, Jensen, what’s the rule?”

“I’m gonna break it!”

Jared smacks his hand down hard on one of Jensen’s thighs. “That kind of defeatist attitude will get you nowhere.”

Thigh smarting—Jared has fucking big, strong hands—Jensen watches him return to his desk. “What will my punishment be?”

“Will?” Jared turns before he gets there and he’s trying to look fierce but his eyes are laughing. “Will, Jensen?”

“C’mon.” Trying to point to his rock hard cock, Jensen is caught by the rope and oh God that is not helpful in this situation, feeling that harsh inflexibility. Enthralled, he pulls again and is denied again. “Jared. Jared, get over here, I’m serious, right this second. Now, Jared, or I’m gonna—” It’s already too late because the fucker didn’t move and Jensen is overcome by the rush of pleasure he can’t control.

He’s gasping when he returns and fixes Jared with a glare. “Don’t blame me for that. I warned you. I warned you and you did nothing so that one’s on you.”

“Did I tell you to come?” Jared is now on his knees on the bed between Jensen’s legs cleaning him up with a soft cloth. If he’d just been there in the first place this wouldn’t have happened.

“You said without warning you.”

“I also said you need permission. Did you have permission?”

“You didn’t stop me!”

“Did you have my permission to come, Jensen?”

Oh fuck if that doesn’t go straight to his very disobedient dick.

Jared looks at it in disbelief. “Are you serious?”

“Apparently.”

They both watch as it does its best to let Jared know he’s very serious indeed.

“My God, Jen, you’re something else.”

But Jared breathes it as though he’s witnessing something holy and Jensen’s breath catches in his throat. He didn’t know his body could do any of these things. It’s Jared, not him at all.

“I see I’ll have to get you a cock ring,” Jared says at last.

“What’s that?”

“It’ll make you stay hard but keep you from coming, since evidently you can’t do that yourself.”

Jared can forcibly prevent him from coming. He can keep Jensen hard and turned on and desperate and denied for as long as he wants and there’d be nothing Jensen can do about it.
“Aw, Jensen, look at you. You like me talking about not letting you come?”

“Damn thing doesn’t know what’s good for it.”

Jared chuckles as he tosses the cloth to the floor. “You got that right. Don’t worry, it’ll learn in a minute.”

“Why?” Jensen asks suspiciously. “What are you planning?”

“Your punishment.”

Why does that word do it so strongly for him as well? He wants to laugh but at the same time he wants to cry because it feels so fucking good he doesn’t know what to do with it. Jared must pick up on his distress because he stretches his long, lean body over Jensen’s, pressing hard down on his cock and wrapping his hands around Jensen’s bound wrists. Jensen is entirely helpless beneath him as Jared lowers his head until their noses almost touch.

“You want me to punish you, babe?”

“Yes,” Jensen whispers back. “Jared…”

“You won’t like it.”

That’s the point. He knows he won’t but he can’t stop Jared doing it and irrationally that’s what makes him crave it. “Punish me, Jay. Please.”

*

Ice.

Jared has fucking ice and he plans to use it on Jensen’s cock.

He’s tied down firmly now on both ends, can wriggle a little from side to side but that’s it. Having his ankles secured got him hard again and that’s when Jared produced his first instrument of punishment. A bowl of ice.

Jensen thought he liked pain. He doesn’t like this. It hurts in a bad way, ruining his pleasure instead of enhancing it and it’s all he can do not to howl aloud as Jared ices him down.

“How’re ya doin’, baby?”

“Fuck. You.”

“This is what happens when you’re not a good boy. I warned you, but you didn’t listen and now this is what you get.”

“It hurts, damn it.”

“Yeah?” Jared makes it worse. “Like this?”

“Jared, please—please—”
“Please what, babe? Please stop?”

“Jay....”

“If you need to, remember you can.”

What does it say about him that he’s hating this but has no desire to make Jared stop? “No,” he whimpers, feeling as pathetic as he sounds. “I deserve it and I want it.”

“Yeah?” Jared takes the ice away for a moment, not that the pain eases any, and leans over him, holding his eyes. “Why do you deserve this?”

“Because I disobeyed you. I came without permission.”

“That’s right.” Satisfied, Jared sits back again. “Just wanted to make sure you know that’s all this is about.”

All? What else could it possibly—oh. It hits him in a rush that Jared might worry that Jensen’s using this to alleviate other guilt, guilt that is so far removed from this situation he couldn’t conflate them if he tried. “I was bad because I broke your rule,” he makes himself say clearly even as Jared applies more ice and he wants to scream. “That’s it, that’s why you’re punishing me.”

“And there’s the little matter of those extra 40 seconds you took in the shower.” Reassured, Jared’s straight back into punishment mode.

“I get punished for those too?”

“Oh yeah.”

“More ice?”

“We’re almost done with the ice for the moment. No, I have something else planned for you for that.”

Something else apparently requires for him to be blindfolded first. His dick and balls are still burning fiercely from cold so it takes a while for the reality to filter through of what it’s like to be deprived of his sight.

He can’t see Jared. That hurts, because watching Jared’s delight in playing with him is one of his biggest pleasures, but gradually he realises that the blindfold makes him filter sensations differently. There’s less distraction away from the pain in his groin and his bonds seem to grow more restrictive. He aches to cover his dick with a warm, soothing hand and feels himself start twitching because he can’t stop from constantly trying.

“Settle down, Jensen.”

Jared’s voice helps, deep and sure, right beside him.

“Will you—Jay, will you touch me?” His own voice sounds ridiculously small and timid in comparison. “I need to feel you, just your hand. Please?”

Cool fingers cup his cheek. “I’m right here. You okay?”

“This is very...disorienting.”

“Do you need me to take it off?”
"No. I just—don’t leave me alone. Either talk or touch me so I know you’re there."

"I’m not going anywhere, Jen. Not when you’re all spread out for me like that, naked and tied down and helpless. How does it feel, knowing I can do anything I want with you and you can’t stop me?"

"So good!"

They both laugh at his fervent reply and the laughter is grounding. This is Jared, and Jared won’t let anything bad happen to him.

"I thought you’d like this," Jared says, his hands stroking over Jensen’s chest as though Jensen’s a cat being petted. "I’ve been fantasising about it all week, about having you at my mercy. Fuck, there are so many things I want to do to you."

"Do them all."

"I’d have to keep you tied up here a lot longer than an evening for that."

"I want that." Jensen arches into the firm strokes. "Not now, ‘cause we have class tomorrow, but one weekend when we don’t have to go anywhere. Would you keep me tied up the whole time?"

Jared’s hands stutter. "You’d like that, huh?"

"I can’t stop thinking about it. Being just a thing for you to play with the whole weekend. You just ignoring me whenever you’re done, studying, playing games, watching a movie, getting on with your life while I’m tied up waiting for you. Waiting to be of use to you again."

"Oh fuck, Jensen. I’m gonna have to use the ice on myself if you keep talkin’ like this."

It’s good to know he can affect Jared just as strongly as Jared affects him. "I really want to do that. Not just a fantasy. I have plenty other fantasies."

"Yeah?" Hard fingers press down on the bruise at his hip while others flick gently at his nipple. "Tell me some."

"Want you to hurt me. Test how much I can take and then make me take more, just ‘cause you like it. You like to see me cry, don’t you, Jared?"

"You’re beautiful when you cry."

A much harder flick makes him gasp. "How about scream? Would you like to hear me scream?"

"You have no idea." Jared flicks his other nipple just as hard. "How about we try a bit of that, see how you hold out under your next punishment?"

Oh yes, how Jensen wants that. "What is my punishment?"

"It starts like this."

It starts with pleasure, apparently, with Jared’s tongue swirling around his nipples, sending little shivers down Jensen’s body straight to his recovering dick. Then Jared moves on to sucking them deep into his mouth, teasing the tips with his teeth until they’re hot and swollen and throbbing.

"Some, uh, punishment," Jensen manages to say when Jared lifts his head a good while later. "You do realise this is one of my favourite things ever?"
“Just getting you ready.” Jared sounds serene, but he’s breathing nearly as hard as Jensen. “I’m gonna leave you for a second but I’m just going to the desk to fetch something for you. Okay, I’ve got it and I’m coming back now.” The back of his hand brushes Jensen’s sweaty cheek. “How’re you doing, Jen? Your pretty little nipples feeling good?”

“Very good.”

“How’s that enthusiastic cock of yours? Have you learned your lesson or might it give us problems again?”

“No more ice!”

“No? Sure?” Jared teases him a bit with his fingers, but the memory of the ice is still too vivid and Jensen is able to control himself. Jared gives him a squeeze. “You’re being such a good boy for me now it seems almost a pity that I have to punish you some more.” He lets go. “Now tell me, Jensen, what is this punishment for?”

“I took 40 seconds too long in the shower.”

“That’s right. So you’re gonna pay for every one of those seconds.”

“How?”

Something like fire whips across his left nipple. “Like this.”

“Jared!” Oh God, what the fuck? “What is that?”

“It’s a ruler. The ruler you keep in your desk, to be specific.” The ruler slams down on his right nipple. “You’ll get 20 of these on each side to teach you to take me seriously when I give you a time limit.”

He has to clench his teeth not to shriek through the third and fourth. 18 more on each side? He’s supposed to endure 18 more? “Give me something,” he gasps after the sixth. “Like a gag. I can’t keep quiet for this.”

“And if I tell you that you have to?”

“I can’t. Please, Jared, help me.”

“You’ll have to pay a penalty for that.”

“Please, anything, just…what penalty?”

“The last two will be on your balls?”

“Fuck, no.”

“Your choice.” The ruler traces a line down his stomach and taps gently against his balls. “Right here or no gag.”

For the first time since Jared tied him, he tries frantically to wriggle away but he’s held fast, captive to Jared’s punishment. “What if I can’t take it?”

“It’s just two. I’ll make them quick. Or you can keep your mouth shut and control yourself. But we know you have trouble controlling yourself, don’t we, Jensen?”
There’s not a chance of him coming now. He’s too scared. That’s a blessing, at least.

“Make up your mind. You still want that gag?”

“Yes.” His mouth is a fucking traitor, since it’s what won’t keep quiet in the first place.

Jared laughs as if he was hoping he’d choose that option and produces what feels like one of his summer scarves, which he proceeds to stuff partially into Jensen’s mouth and then winds it round his head several times. It feels ridiculous, but when Jensen tries to make a sound he realises just how effective it is. Except now he feels extra cut off from Jared.

“Hey, shh,” Jared says, his lips right beside Jensen’s ear. “Just give it a second and listen to me. We have a couple of options here. If you need me to, I can take off the blindfold so you can see me. Will that make it easier?”

He wants to see Jared. He desperately wants to see Jared. But Jared put the blindfold on him as part of his punishment and how is it acceptable for him to demand its removal? As he tries to think, he hears little frantic squeaks. What the hell?

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” Jared says, tugging at the blindfold. “Give me one second and I’ll have it off. Careful opening your eyes, it’ll be bright.”

Jensen opens them instantly, screws them closed again then carefully peers through tiny slits until Jared’s face takes shape. He looks worried.

“There you are. Can you breathe with the gag?”

He hadn’t even thought about breathing, so obviously it’s okay. He tries. Yes, he can.

“Good boy.” Jared places his hand firmly on Jensen’s chest right between his burning nipples. “That’s good. Next thing, which we should’ve discussed before I put the gag on you, is your safeword. Obviously you can’t say it with a gag on. If you need me to stop, or to get my attention, just bang your hand against the bed, either one. I’ll keep an eye on them. Can you do that for me now?”

The ropes around his wrists have sufficient length that he can, easily.

“That’s great. Will you remember to do that if you want me to stop?”

Jensen nods.

“Now I’ve got the blindfold off you so you can use your eyes to communicate and we can check in with each other, but I want you to close your eyes while I punish you. Open them whenever you need to, but see if you can keep them closed. You okay with that?”

It’s a different kind of blindfold, he thinks. Not a physical one but it’s Jared’s desire that he not see and a thrill shivers through him at the thought that that’s all that’s required to deprive him of sight. He’s already hard again, ice be damned, and it’s difficult to say which is the most pressing reason for it, the gag, the ropes, the easy control Jared has over him or the calm reassurance in Jared’s eyes.

As Jared smiles down at him and he does his best to smile back through his eyes, his phone pings with a message.

That’ll be his parents, letting him know they made it home safely.
God. Imagine if his parents had walked in on this scene, Jensen all tied up and naked and about to be beaten by Jared.

That would have put paid to his life in a single second.

But they’re not here. They’re in Texas and he’s safe here where he belongs and he can’t stop the words from erupting after being buried for so long. “Love you, Jared.”

“What’s that, babe? Do you need to tell me something?”

No. No, he doesn’t dare say the words without a gag in his mouth deadening the sound, but there’s a sense of relief in saying them. He’s not in denial any longer. He’s not going to pretend. He loves Jared and he has five weeks left with him and he’s going to make them the best five weeks of both of their lives.

Shaking his head, he lets his eyes smile again. Jared, staring searchingly at him for a moment, gives him a little nod. It’s as if he’s heard, as if he’s understood. Jensen knows he hasn’t but somehow they’re on the same wavelength anyway.

Jared’s hand slides down his chest, pats his stomach several times. “You ready to resume your punishment?”

Jensen nods vehemently.

“Yeah? You want me to hurt you again?”

He repeats the movement, even more vehemently.

“Then close your eyes and we’ll continue.

* 

There’s something different about Jensen when they resume. There’s a serenity to him Jared has never seen before and he’s not sure what brought it about. Is it the fact that he’s tied down? The pain? The gag? Whatever it is, something has set Jensen free and he is exquisite in his response to the ruler against his pretty pink nipples. He obviously remembers Jared’s instruction about showing his reactions because he does, freely. He squirms and yelps into the gag, his hips constantly thrusting up in desperate need as his nipples turn crimson beneath the ruler, and he doesn’t open his eyes once.

Jared isn’t hitting hard, just enough to sting, really, but for someone as inexperienced at this as Jensen is, it must feel overwhelming. Constant checks of his hands, though, indicate that as far as Jensen’s concerned he’s okay to continue, so Jared does.

It’s such a disappointment when there are only two more to go. Jensen is still straining against the ropes when Jared bends down to lap at nipples that are now blazing hot. Oh poor Jensen, he has so much further to go tonight. He tastes delicious, his chest covered in a thin sheen of sweat from his exertions, and Jared takes his time licking along his ribs and down to the softness of his belly. Oh yes, so much more to come.

As for his cock, apparently it’s forgotten that ice exists because it’s fully recovered and demanding,
Jared closes his mouth around it and takes it all the way down his throat in a single swallow.

Jensen screams.

And comes.

When Jared lifts his head, Jensen is mumbling continuously into his gag, his fists beating at the bed.

Shit. Is that him trying to safeword? It takes three seconds for Jared to jerk the scarf away.

“—’m sorry, Jared, I tried to tell you but I couldn’t—I wasn’t expecting—you didn’t—I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to—”

“Open your eyes, Jensen.”

Wet green eyes fly open to meet his. Jensen looks distraught. “I didn’t mean to come! You just—I didn’t have time to—I couldn’t warn you—please don’t punish me again, Jared, please, I can’t take ice again. I’m so fucking sorry!”

Oh, that’s all. He’s okay. Jared feels his racing heartbeat start to ease as he places a gentle finger over Jensen’s babbling lips. “Shh, baby, it’s okay. It’s okay, I know I took you by surprise. I didn’t expect you’d come but I should have known, that greedy little cock of yours that you can’t control.”

Jensen’s eyes plead with him, but he remains obediently silent and Jared’s lips twitch.

“Those two on your balls are really gonna hurt now.”

A high keening sound escapes Jensen and his eyes scream no! But the sweet boy doesn’t fight him, doesn’t try to argue his way out of his punishment. Just for that, Jared gives his balls a soft little pat. Even that makes Jensen flinch.

“Don’t worry, babe, I wouldn’t do that to you. You’re not getting out of them, but I’ll defer them for a little bit, let you recover. How’s that? Does that idea meet with your approval?”

Jensen nods uncertainly. He looks like he wants to say something so Jared removes his finger.

“Talk to me. Tell me how you’re doing. You okay?”

“God, Jared.” He shakes his head against the pillow. “You are driving me insane, you know that?”

“Yeah? And we haven’t even gotten to my surprise yet.”

Jensen’s eyes widen. “You mean there’s more?”

“So much more, if you think you’re up to it.”

“I’m definitely up to it.” There’s no hesitation there. “I just have a question.”

“Ask.”

“Are you going to punish me for coming the second time?”

He looks truly worried and Jared leans one arm across his chest so that he can look directly down at him. “Do you want me to?”

“I—fuck.”
“I’m afraid I don’t understand that answer.”

Jensen rolls his eyes. “I want to say no, but at the same time I broke the rules and I should get what I deserve. I’ll feel—shit—disappointed if you don’t.”

Is that right? It takes all of Jared’s self-control not to kiss him for being so preciously adorable. He settles for tracing a finger down Jensen’s flushed cheek. “How about we play a game?” he suggests. “Let’s see if we can get you to beg for the ice again. If you do, I’ll give it to you. If you don’t—well, it’s up to you.”

“Nothing could make me beg for the ice,” Jensen says with feeling.

Jared gives his cheek a hard little pinch. “Did you really just challenge me?”

“Oops?”

Fuck, how he loves the way Jensen can look so sweet and so naughty at the same time. “Yeah, oops indeed. Game’s on now, sweetheart.”

Jensen gives him a grin. “Bring it, big boy.”

*

The gag stays off but Jared restores the blindfold since it’s apparently part of the surprise, not just for punishment. He feeds Jensen some water before it goes on, checks that his arms are okay and his wrists don’t hurt, and Jensen loses himself to the darkness with pleasure this time, welcoming it as a familiar friend. Jared took such good care of him during his punishment that he eagerly abandons himself back to his control. He can hear Jared moving about the room but he doesn’t even try to figure out what he’s doing. It doesn’t matter. He’ll find out exactly what Jared wants him to know when Jared wants him to know it and that’s good with him.

This is all good with him.

He wants to laugh because it’s so good. How did he live for twenty years and never learn just how wonderful life can be?

Suddenly there’s a flash of fire across his ribs.

“Fuck!”

“Shh, Jensen, you have to control yourself this time, you’re not getting the gag back.”

“What the fuck did you do to me?” It feels like Jared cut him. Did he hit him with something? There was no sound of an impact.

Another flash of fire slices across his lower belly.

“Jared, what the fuck!” He manages to keep his voice lower this time. “Jared, what are you doing?”

“I’m not damaging you, I promise. Just lie back and let me hurt you.”

More fire, this time just above his nipples and he feels a faint sensation of heat pass his face.
“You’re burning me?”

Little drops of fire dance down his chest, then his stomach—

“Don’t you fucking dare—OW!” Jared did dare, right on the head of his cock! “Jared? Jared, you stop that this instant and tell me what you’re doing or so help me God—”

“You’ll what? You wanna safeword, Jensen?”

“No! Just tell me—”

“Settle down and take some deep breaths,” Jared advises as he drops another splattering of fire across Jensen’s cock. “Trust me.”

It’s hard. It’s killing him not to scream Jared’s surname and make him stop and enlighten Jensen as to what the fuck is burning him up. Is he dropping lighted matches? No, because Jensen would hear them being lit. It’s not water, even though it feels like drops. It’s only when what feels like a river runs down his chest to pool in the hollow of his stomach that he suddenly gets it.

Candle wax.

Of course.

Nothing harmful, just like Jared promised.

Oh fucking God, how can candle wax hurt this much?

Jared’s playing with him, though, scattering droplets all over Jensen’s body, a few down his inner thigh, then along his upper arm, more across his stomach, a very fierce little burst over one of his aching nipples, back down to his groin, and Jensen’s losing his mind trying to predict where the next flurry will land.

“Jensen?”

“Yeah?”

“Stop thinking. I can hear you.”

Jared’s right. That’s not the point of this. He’s supposed to be surrendering, after all. What happened to that sense of peace he felt earlier? Why has he jolted out of it?

Trust Jared.

That’s all he needs to do.

And so he does. He literally feels the tension flow out of his muscles and he opens himself up to whatever pain Jared wishes to give him. Jared drowns both of his nipples in wax to the point where they feel like they’re going to explode and Jensen lets the fire of it wash through his veins with pleasure. Of course, pleasure leads to gradually getting hard again, a fact which doesn’t escape Jared and pretty soon he focuses all his attention and his liquid candle wax on Jensen’s poor, abused cock and it doesn’t take very long for it to dawn on Jensen exactly why Jared was so certain he’d beg for the ice again.

He’s determined to prove Jared wrong.

He doesn’t succeed.
Before he gets the ice, though, he gets the final two strokes of his punishment to his balls.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

In which Jensen wants to do something extreme and Jared wants to protect them both.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jensen feels luxuriously relaxed when he wakes up for his run the next morning. Before they eventually went to sleep, Jared carefully cleaned all the wax off Jensen’s body, something he’s grateful for this morning because that would not be fun to deal with. He also fucked him long and slow, the kind of fucking that drives Jensen demented with need but that he loves almost as much as he loves being fucked hard and savagely, as though Jared will burst if he doesn’t thoroughly claim Jensen as his right this second.

There’s no residual pain this morning, not from his well-fucked ass nor from the “beating”. As Jensen jogs through the early dawn streets he lets his thoughts play back the night before. Jared didn’t hit him very hard, he knows that rationally, but he was so sensitive and hyped up at the time that it felt overwhelming. It was the whole mindfuck of being punished for something and being tied down—seriously, he needs to experience that again. Soon. There’s something magical about it, the way it turns off his brain and sets him free.

As for the candle wax, he knew people did that kind of thing but he’d never imagined it could hurt so much. It’s something he wants to try again when he’s expecting it and when he feels calmer, less overwrought. Like he’d been on Saturday afternoon when they originally planned for it.

No. He still can’t think about the weekend and all its implications.

Instead he finishes his run in by far his fastest time to date, which means it’s time to add an extra mile or two, and hurries into the shower while Jared’s still sound asleep in the room. He’s still turned on from last night despite the amount of times he came, and he’s tempted to jerk off. The water’s warm on his back and his hand wraps around his cock in preparation....then something stops him. Jared. Jared told him to ask permission before he comes.

But that was part of last night’s game.

Still. Jared told him to.

He didn’t mean it for today.

But what if he did?

That thought surges right through Jensen and his cock pulses in his hand. Stupid thing. Why is it so excited at the thought of being denied? Doesn’t it get what that means?

He wants to jerk off now, damn it.

But his hand won’t move.
It’s not the memory of the ice that stops him, it’s not because Jared punished him, because they both knew that was just for fun, but it’s the steady throb of heat low in his stomach at the thought of not doing it until he’s asked Jared that keeps him still.

What if, for these next five weeks, he lets Jared be in charge of that side of him. Completely. Would Jared go for that?

Turning his shower cold, he finishes it efficiently and returns to their room where Jared stirs at the smell of coffee being made.

“Mornin’.”

“Good morning,” Jensen says cheerily. “Shall I make you some too or are you going to sleep some more?”

Jared’s first class isn’t until 10am on Mondays and usually he sleeps in. “Make me some,” he says, wiping his knuckles over his eyes in a way that makes him look like a sleepy little boy. “I need to print off that group project so I can check it.”

“You finished it?”

“Yeah. While you were—um, on Saturday.”

Yes, let’s not go into where Jensen was on Saturday or who he was with.

Jared pushes himself up in bed. “How are you today? Are you sore?”

“Not really.” Picking up both mugs, Jensen hands one over and perches on the chair beside his desk with the other. “My nipples hurt a bit rubbing against my shirt when I ran, but it wasn’t too bad. Otherwise, there’s nothing at all.”

Jared gives him a little grin before burying it in his coffee. “I have a question,” he says once he’s drunk deeply. “You can tell me if it’s inappropriate, but I’m curious.”

“Sure.”

“Does it turn you on, the pain from your nipples rubbing against your shirt when you run? It’s just—I know pain there turns you on in bed and I was wondering if it has the same effect out of context or if it’s just annoying.”

That’s really not something that occurred to Jensen and he takes a couple of sips while he considers it. “I don’t think it turns me on. It’s not just pain, as such, that I like. It’s more...you. You giving it to me.” He shouldn’t be so embarrassed by talking about it. Nor should he be getting so turned on, considering he’s only wearing a pair of boxers and Jared will notice any minute what’s going on. He tries to remember the feeling of the ice.

Jared looks fascinated. “So you mean if you pinched your own nipples, it wouldn’t have the same effect?”

Jared’s words on their own are having too much of an effect and Jensen’s nipples tingle. He tries to shrug it off. “Not really.”

“You don’t play with them when you jerk off?”

“No. It doesn’t do it for me the way you hurting them does.” It’s that predatory look in Jared’s eyes.
when he hurts Jensen, that delicious glee that Jensen is taking it, is letting him. Yes, Jensen obviously has parts of his body that are more responsive than other parts, but it’s because it’s coming from Jared that the effect is so intense. Since Jared’s brought up the subject, though, Jensen pulls his courage together. Does he dare broach something so extreme? “It’s like you forbidding me to come is much more powerful than me deciding I shouldn’t.”

“Yeah, I noticed you liked that.” A gleam of last night shows in Jared’s eyes as they slide down Jensen’s chest to his cock. “Mm,” he says appreciatively as it swells beneath his consideration, “you like talking about it too?”

He can do this. Jensen doesn’t let himself shift awkwardly, doesn’t try to hide his response. Instead he stays still to let Jared look. “I like it a lot,” he says barely above a whisper.

Jared’s eyes flick back to his face. “Did you jerk off in the shower just now?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because you told me not to come without asking permission. I know that was just for last night,” he adds quickly, “but I kept thinking about it and I just couldn’t...you know.”

“Disobey?”

Fuck how that word explodes through his veins. “Yeah.” He bites his lip, trying to figure out how to continue. “I wanted to ask you if...” His rush of bravery fizzles beneath Jared’s frank regard and suddenly he feels stupid. “Never mind. It’s not important.”

“Finish that sentence, Jensen. You wanted to ask me what?”

Jensen looks down at his erection, straining against his white underwear as if wanting to be called upon by the teacher to answer the question. Except the question is meant to be his, isn’t it?

“No.” That word comes out. Good. Maybe he can manage a few more. “I am, though. Very much. Like, not just for a night.”

There. He’s said it. Will Jared get what he means?

“Ahh.” He has, judging by the way he blinks very rapidly and darts his eyes up and down between Jensen’s face and his cock, then swallows visibly. “That’s pretty hardcore, Jen.”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to,” Jensen says hastily. “We don’t need to do it, it’s just something I was thinking about in the shower and I didn’t—but you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”
“Oh, I want to.” Jared’s eyes are burning now. “If that’s something you’re into, doing that on a more extended basis, I definitely want to. I’m just pointing out that—fuck, what am I saying? Yes, I want to do that. I’d love to do that. It’s harder than you think, though, and we’d need to talk about it.”

“I have pretty good self-control,” Jensen says, stung by the insinuation that he couldn’t cope.

“Yeah?” Jared’s eyebrows fly up. “I have some ice that would beg to differ.”

“You had some ice,” Jensen shoots back. “You used it up on me, remember?”

“I certainly do. Which is why I’m aware of just how little self-control you had going there.”

“I was tied up. It was different. You can’t hold me responsible for things that happen when I’m tied up.”

“Is that a fact?” Setting aside his coffee, Jared reaches out to brush a finger over the wet spot on Jensen’s underwear. “So we learned two very useful facts last night, did we?”

Jensen shivers. “Just give me a chance. I’m not saying don’t let me come at all, I really don’t want that, it’s not not coming that I want. It’s only coming when you let me. It’s you being in charge of it instead of me. That’s what I want.” Suddenly it seems really easy to say. “Can we try that for the rest of the week? I only get to come with your permission?”

Contemplating, Jared taps his finger several times on the end of Jensen’s needy cock. “Okay,” he says at last. “But I’m not gonna be mean about it. Like, right now, do you have enough time for me to blow you?”

“It’s really not going to require that much time at all,” Jensen says wryly. “Are you telling me I can come?”

Jared checks out the clock. “You need to leave in fifteen minutes. You have five of those to come in my mouth or not at all until tonight.”

“I can do that,” Jensen says.

He shouldn’t be proud, quite the opposite, but it only takes him three.

*

Jensen responds remarkably well to Jared controlling his orgasms. He texts him twice during that first day to say all he can think about is coming and it’s distracting him from his work, and in the evening Jared teases him by bringing him to the brink several times and then refusing permission before finally granting it.

By Wednesday night he informs Jensen that it’s time he stopped being so greedy and put some work into orgasms for Jared instead. Taking his assigned task very seriously, Jensen uses the opportunity to practise his deep-throating skills, which have been neglected of late. Jared doesn’t think he’ll ever get enough of Jensen’s mouth, or of his enthusiasm. He’s a man who loves sucking cock and isn’t ashamed to show it. He’s content to spend hours with his mouth full of Jared, loves to suck him while Jared watches one of the movies he likes but Jensen doesn’t, keeping him comfortably aroused.
but not desperate to come, ramping it up a bit, then repeating the cycle. He makes Jared come at last, but instead of then getting up and demanding some reciprocation, he settles back down with Jared’s limp cock held loosely in his mouth.

“Jen?”

Silently, his eyes plead with Jared not to make him stop, and who is Jared to demand Jensen take his mouth off him? Instead he leans back against the pillows to keep watching tonight’s choice and sinks his hand in Jensen’s hair. They both drift off like that, and Jensen gives him a much raunchier blowjob when they wake up in the early hours.

“You want some too?” Jared asks when Jensen comes up for air, licking his wet lips as though searching for any tiny remaining droplet of Jared’s come.

He shakes his head. “I’m good. Just you tonight, if that’s okay.”

A check confirms that it’s not because he’s not turned on. “You sure?”

“I like tonight being about you. Not me.”

“That doesn’t mean—”

“I know.” Jensen stretches out in bed beside him. “Still. Is that okay with you?”

“Of course it’s okay with me.” Fuck, it’s hot as hell. He never knew before Jensen just how much fun an ongoing game like this could be. “But what if I don’t let you come tomorrow?”

“Then you don’t,” Jensen says as if it’s that simple.

Perhaps it is. “We need to talk about this more,” he says, because what if he’s fucking Jensen up in some way without either of them realising it.

“On the weekend.” Curling up, Jensen lays his head on Jared’s chest the way he’s taken to doing recently. “I want to sleep now.”

So Jared lets him, but he stays awake for another couple of hours thinking about things. About what they can do with their remaining time so he can give as much to Jensen as possible before it ends.

*

Jensen makes Thursday night about Jared again, this time demanding to be fucked, and when Jared asks if he wants to come, he says, “You said you wouldn’t let me,” and Jared takes that as a declaration of his desires and so denies him, even when he starts begging later.

“I thought you said it wasn’t about not coming,” Jared says the next afternoon as they share muffins in the café (by promising to eat half Jensen’s wheat germ, Jared gets Jensen to eat half his chocolate and considers that a win). “But you haven’t come since Tuesday. Not that I’m complaining, because I’ve had a really good time, but I want to know how it’s been for you.”

As usual when asked something like this, Jensen takes his time in considering his answer, chewing on his half of the chocolate muffin as he thinks. “It turns out I like it not being about me sometimes,” he says at last, licking bits of chocolate off his fingers, which distracts Jared a tiny bit from the
conversation. “I like it when it is about me, like on Sunday when you made everything about me and made me come so many times, but it’s nice when me coming isn’t an option and I’m just focused on you. It’s....different. I feel less like me and more like....” He meets Jared’s eyes with an embarrassed little laugh. “I feel free.”

Free. That’s something Jensen’s never had, at least not since the end of his wild child times. If Jared gives him that, even the illusion of that, it’s more than he’s got from anyone else or ever will again. Before he can respond, however, Jensen’s friend Steve comes over to their table.

“Jensen, Jared, good to see you!”

“Hey,” Jared says, and as Jensen and Steve chat about Steve’s show tomorrow night that he’s come to invite them to, Jared remembers how free Jensen looks when he’s playing the guitar. That’s something else he’s been able to give him, and he wants to give him more. “Steve,” he interjects at an appropriate moment, “is there a song you can teach Jensen to perform with you guys before the summer break?”

“I’m not good enough for that,” Jensen objects. “That’s absurd.”

“Sure, there’s a few,” Steve says, ignoring him and taking Jared gratifyingly seriously. “If he wants to put in the time during finals, of course. We have a show the weekend school finishes, Jensen, not a big one, and you could totally join us if you like.”

“I couldn’t.”

“Why not? We’re having a party afterwards that you two are definitely invited to, so if it all goes wrong you can drown your sorrows in alcohol, and if it goes right we can celebrate. Win-win.”

“It’ll be fun,” Jared puts in. “You’ve been practising every day all year. I’d love to watch you perform.”

“If it goes wrong I’m blaming you,” Jensen tells him darkly, but it’s a capitulation and they all know it, which means he wants to do it because otherwise he’d have flat out refused. Jared supresses the urge to crow with delight.

“You free any time this weekend to get started?” Steve asks.

“Sunday morning.” Jensen looks across at Jared. “You’ll be at basketball, right?”

“Sure.” But isn’t he only going to basketball to give Jensen time to talk to Dianne? Wasn’t that the plan?

Steve and Jensen make the arrangements while Jared tries not to think about what this might mean. Did something happen between Jensen and Dianne on Saturday afternoon? No, but she invited Jared to their fucking wedding on Saturday afternoon? The evening, so he obviously didn’t end it with her. Does he not plan to talk to her for very long then? Come to think of it, how long does he usually spend on that call? Jared has no idea, being gone for several hours every Sunday. All this time he thought he was being a considerate roommate, giving Jensen the chance to have phone sex with his girlfriend, but that obviously hasn’t been happening. He can’t imagine that sweet girl uttering a single sexy word. For that matter, he can’t imagine her in bed. She’s so....tidy. Worse even than Jensen. But the thing with Jensen is he loves to get down and dirty in the right circumstances. Would any circumstances be right for that girl? Or is Jensen looking at a lifetime of dutiful, clinical sex over in a handful of minutes with the light off?

“I’ll still call her,” Jensen mutters when Steve has taken his leave. He’s staring at the table, fidgeting
with his paper napkin. “I have to. Otherwise it’ll seem suspicious.”

Suspicious. Like the other week when he’d ignored her call and taken three days to text her back. “You don’t have permission to get off with her,” Jared says tightly. He has no rights in that regard, but he feels ugly. Selfish. He deserves to have Jensen scoff in his face, especially since they both know he knows that Jensen never has and has no intention of doing so now, but instead that gets him vulnerable, open eyes solemnly meeting his.

“I’m yours, Jared,” Jensen says quietly. “For what’s left of this school year, I’m entirely yours. You could tell me I don’t have permission to get off once in the next month and I’d do it.”

That’s scarcely heady. “You know I won’t do that.”

“But you could. And I would.”

And he wants to, just to make Jensen prove it. “No jerking off,” he says instead. “Ever. For the rest of the year. Only I can make you come.”

Nodding, Jensen abandons the napkin and wraps his hands around the remains of his coffee. “I like that.”

“Good.” There’s so little time. Already a week has raced by and finals will be upon them before they know it. “Are you hitting the library tonight?”

“I do have to study.”

That’s good, because it gives Jared the opportunity to make another purchase. “Come to the bathroom with me,” he says. “Finish your coffee then come after me. I want to renew your bruise.”

“What, now? In the middle of classes?”

“Yes.”

When he gets Jensen’s nod of affirmation, he slips out of his seat and grabs his bag. “Two minutes, Jen. The bathroom in the back.”

It’s small, a unisex one, that locks from the inside. Jared pushes Jensen up against the door as soon as the lock is flipped. “Keep your hands up above your head. Don’t move them.” Unbuckling Jensen’s jeans makes it easier to get to his spot. The bruise is fading again, it’s fading too much and he attacks it with his teeth more sharply than he has before. He knows he’s hurting Jensen but it feels so good and he lets his hand massage Jensen’s cock through his jeans as he works on the injured flesh.


Jared obliges. And then he moves his mouth to Jensen’s dick. Afterwards, as they put themselves back together sufficiently to return to classes and normality, he says, “You just came because I decided you would, Jensen. You get that, right? That it’s not only you not coming that I get to decide now but I can choose to make you come just because I feel like it.”

“I’m yours,” Jensen says again. He’s still flushed and sweating and a little bit shaky, and he’s that way because Jared made him so. “Any time. Any place.”

And doesn’t that do crazy things to Jared? “Can you be five minutes late to your next class?” he asks.
Jensen’s nod is immediate.

“Get down on your knees. I want to come on your face.”

*

While Jensen’s at the library, Jared makes himself study. He’s good at taking tests so he’s not that worried about his upcoming finals, but it can’t hurt to refamiliarise himself with all the material. Jensen is seriously good for his work ethic because he wouldn’t have considered staying in on a Friday night to study before. He does make one quick trip out, knowing exactly where he needs to go and what he wants.

It’s a month, he realises as he thinks back on Jensen’s developing experience on his way home. Tonight marks their one-month anniversary of being together—or sleeping together, rather. Has Jensen noticed? Is he aware of such things? Would Jared freak him out by mentioning it?

Of course he would. It’s not as though they have a relationship. (Would Jensen want to celebrate anniversaries in a relationship? Would he be pleased if Jared planned a special dinner or presented him with a kinky gift?) So Jared isn’t going to bring it up, but he’s allowed to commemorate it for himself, isn’t he? This is the longest he’s been with anyone and is pretty much the only sustained relationship he’s ever had.

After all his years of promiscuity, he’s got to admit it’s pretty nice. It’s not just the regular access to sex, but also the learning each other, figuring out what presses each of their buttons, not only physically but emotionally too. Who would ever have guessed that control freak Jensen would like handing over that rigid control of his to Jared? What he said about being free this afternoon, this is his only chance to experience that.

Jared knows he’s always preferred to be the dominant one in bed but in the past that’s mostly meant manhandling and maybe a hand over a mouth, a bit of infliction of pain. It’s never been luminous wet eyes gazing up into his or needy begging for an arbitrary punishment or a warm mouth wrapped around his cock while he lazily watches a movie. Sure, he’s been with submissive men who liked to be pushed around or held down, but none for whom it was the fact that it was him in particular doing it to them that made them get off, that meant anything. But would Jensen feel like this with whoever introduced him to sex, though? Is it a merely a kind of transference, since Jared is the one who’s made him feel all these amazing things so he attributes them to Jared when it’s not him at all but solely Jensen and the wonderful way he’s made, so open and responsive and fearless in going for it, in giving his all?

Would Jensen be like this with any man who’d released his sexuality?

Jared kicks at the grass of the park he’s crossing. He needs to stop thinking about Jensen with other men. But his mind rushes ahead, picturing Jensen in Texas years from now, at breaking point with sexual need after denying himself for so long, meeting up with someone who can—

Stop.

Jensen’s future isn’t for Jared to worry about. Jared has no rights to Jensen at all come four weeks from tomorrow.

He silences the rebellious little thought that keeps trying to raise its voice asking what about next
year. What about next year when Jensen isn’t married yet and will be back here and might be willing to give Jared one more year of himself before their future separation. He can’t go there. He can’t give himself that kind of hope.

More importantly, he can’t subject himself to that kind of pain. If he feels so distraught at the thought of losing Jensen after merely a month, how would he react after an entire year?

He wouldn’t recover.

It’s going to be hard enough getting over these two months, but at least he’ll have the summer to figure out how to live without Jensen by his side while still knowing that he’ll see Jensen again. Maybe they can retain their friendship. They made good friends before they started sleeping together, after all. Maybe they can hang out at the coffee shop on the occasional Friday next year, share a muffin or two, still listen to Steve’s band. Not living together will help. Jared has applied to be an RA so he’ll get his own room and that means he’ll be able to bring other men home with him, instead of having to find places for quick fucks. Maybe he can find someone else to have a relationship with, a real one, while he’s not completely deprived of Jensen yet. That way, when they part this time next year, he’ll be able to say goodbye with a smile instead of grabbing Jensen into a hug and just never letting him go.

He also has to silence the other little voice that always accompanies this one: what if Jensen asks if they can continue this next year?

Will Jared be strong enough to say no?

He has to be. For both their sakes he has to be, because he’s seen hints in Jensen’s eyes recently that this might be more than the sexual experimentation he’s claiming it is and if that’s the case, if parting is going to break Jensen’s heart as well as Jared’s...he can’t let it go on.

He has to protect them both.

They’ve had a month, they can have another month, and that’s it. That’s where it has to end, because a future of following Jensen back to Texas to be his dirty secret on the side of his otherwise exemplary life as a pillar of Dallas community cannot be entertained. Jared left Texas in the first place because he wasn’t going to hide who he was. Being gay, being out, cost him everything and it was a price he was happy to pay because it was worth it. It was worth it to be true to himself.

And he can’t violate himself in that way just because he doesn’t want to let go of Jensen.

Fuck. So much for trying to silence wayward thoughts; he’s gone there anyway.

Enough of that. Tonight is for celebrating, even if he doesn’t intend to let Jensen in on the occasion (unless he brings it up himself, then Jared will happily celebrate overtly). He has a gift for Jensen and they’re going to use it and enjoy it and fuck themselves stupid all weekend because they’re young and (semi)free and very likely in love, and for all he wants to rage at the universe for the limitation of his relationship with Jensen, at least they get to have this, at least he knows for sure that he can bury his body deep within Jensen’s tonight and he can play with him tomorrow and he can fall asleep for another 28 nights with Jensen curled tightly into his chest.

He does get to have this and it’s more than he ever dreamed, so he’s going to be fiercely grateful and take every single aspect of Jensen that he can for this sliver of time that Jensen is his.

Chapter End Notes
I'll be travelling across half the world and changing time zones drastically during the next few days but I'll try to get chapter 14 up on Sunday UK time.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Jared's latest gift for Jensen is a success, but playing with it sparks some unexpected revelations.

Chapter Notes

So it's technically Monday in the UK now, but it's still Sunday in part of the world so I guess I made it? Sort of?
Also, this chapter holds the distinction of having been written on three separate continents.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“What is that?” Jensen looks dubiously at the object Jared has just produced.

“It’s a butt plug.”

“You mean....” Processing the shape and the name, he clicks. That’s for going inside him. “For me?”

“Yeah, I got it for you.” Jared grins as he hands it over for Jensen to examine. “I thought since you like stuff up your ass so much, this might go down well with you. You wanna try it?”

“Now?”

“We can at least see if you like the feel of it.”

It’s not nearly the size of Jared’s cock, which is disappointing, but then the point of it isn’t to fuck him. The point is to fill him secretly, possibly even while he’s out in public. That means it has to be small enough to be comfortable while he walks around and does normal everyday things that having something enormous like Jared’s cock would prohibit.

His own cock stirs at the thought of walking around the campus wearing this. Nobody would know. No one would have a clue that Jared had put something up inside him.

“Yes,” he declares. Yes, he wants this and he wants it inside him now. Giving it back to Jared, he makes quick work of stripping off his clothes and gets on the bed. “How do you want me?”

“Chest down, ass up,” Jared decides after thinking about it.

Jensen gets into position as Jared takes out their lube and sets up. There’s something intrinsically humiliating about this position. Should he despair of himself that that just makes his cock harder? He loves the intimacy when Jared opens him up when he’s lying on his back and they can keep eye contact and Jared can play with his cock as well. In this position, it’s like his ass is all that matters of him. He’s just something to get fucked, and that gets him harder than ever.
“I cleaned up earlier in case you wanted to do something tonight,” he says into the covers as Jared slides big hands over his ass and parts his cheeks with his thumbs. He’s not going to admit he was hoping for something special. It’s stupid, but tonight marks one month since they started this and he wants to commemorate it in some way. It’s not like they’re going to have a lot of anniversaries to celebrate, after all.

He’s rewarded with a kiss directly on his hole. “You’re such a good boy for me, Jensen.” Another kiss, this one with a little tongue. “Making yourself all clean and tasty for me.”

Little flicks of Jared’s tongue, just how he likes it best, draw the first whimper out of him. “Am I allowed to come?” he asks while he still has a chance of stopping it. “You have to tell me now.”

“No,” Jared says between more flicks. He knows exactly how to pace them for maximum effect. “No coming until I fuck you later. Much later.”

A deep lick along his entire crack makes him shiver. “What if I can’t help it?”

“You can. You can be good for me. Obey me.”

Jared’s words are as arousing as his actions and Jensen bites his lip hard as he fights the response of his body to the double-pronged attack.

“C’mon, Jen.” When Jensen can’t stop wriggling, Jared sits back and gives him a hard slap across his ass. “I let you come just a few hours ago. Control yourself.”

“You’re doing your best to make that impossible, you bastard.” A second slap makes it even worse. It doesn’t hurt so much as it sets up a steady little burn that goes straight to his cock. “Is this supposed to be a punishment?”

Jared laughs as he aims the next slap right over Jensen’s spread hole. “We could pretend it is.” His left hand sneaks around to brush the already leaking tip of Jensen’s cock. “But I’m thinking you’re enjoying it a little too much.”

“Do it harder,” Jensen asks since his secret is out and he might as well. “I like this a lot.”

He continues liking it as Jared’s heavy hand keeps up a stream of smacks all over his ass. He’s good at this, seeming to know exactly how hard to hit so that it intensifies the burn without becoming unpleasantly painful, and all too soon Jensen is too close to coming.

“Jared, stop.”

He gets another one right where his ass meets his thighs and it rockets heat through him.

“Jared, seriously, stop! I’m gonna come!”

“No, you’re not.” Another one in the same place.

“Stop!”

“Control yourself, Jensen.”

“I’m trying.”

“No, you’re being greedy. Where’s all that self-control you talked about?”

“You smacked it out of me.”
That gets another laugh and an extra hard smack over his hole. “Okay, your choice. Either I rim you a bit more to get you nice and open for your plug, but you have to keep still and control yourself, or I’m just gonna shove it straight up your tight hole. It’s up to you.”

He wants both, he thinks as Jared gives him a spatter of quick spanks all over his ass from top to bottom. If Jared shoves it in without more prep, it’ll hurt but he likes it when it hurts, likes it when Jared switches to three fingers too quickly, even when it’s Jared’s cock after not quite enough stretching. He loves the way it feels like it’s ripping him open but he knows his body can take it, that he won’t be damaged, and he can lose himself in the pain knowing how soon it’ll start feeling good. On the other hand, he loves the sensation of Jared’s tongue. They don’t do that nearly often enough for his liking because he’s too shy to ask for it and here Jared is offering and all Jensen has to do is not come.

“Rim me,” he gasps when Jared pauses the flurry of spanks. He can do this. He can hold out. He can be obedient.

This is for Jared, he reminds himself as Jared’s tongue returns to his eager hole. It’s like the last couple of nights when it was just about Jared’s pleasure and not his. This is what Jared wants to do to him and he just has to be still and good and let it happen. It’s easier when he thinks of it like that. It’s a different head space, not one that’s focused on his own gratification but focuses on Jared instead. Jared wants to lick deeply along his crack, long, wet licks, so Jensen lies there and lets him. Jared wants to flick his tongue back and forth between his cheeks, and instead of feeling the stimulus shoot through to his cock, Jensen concentrates on keeping his back flexed so his hole is at the most accessible angle. And when Jared wants to slide his tongue inside, Jensen stretches his thighs further apart to open up for him.

“So good for me,” Jared murmurs with a final twirl of his tongue around the edges of Jensen’s hole. “You’re delicious.”

All that effort is worth it to hear Jared sound so pleased.

Hard fingers dig into his hot cheeks. “How’re these doing? Still sore?”

“S’good.”

“You like getting your ass spanked, I should’ve guessed. You’re just a slut for anything I wanna do to your ass, aren’t you?”

It sounds so degrading and he ought to be ashamed. He isn’t. “Yes.”

“So, you ready for me to try the plug?”

“I really am.”

It goes in easily. He’s wet from Jared’s mouth and the plug is well-lubed and slides straight into him. There’s a little bit of a stretch over the base of it, then it’s snug inside him. Jared taps the protruding end of it. “How’s that feel?”

Jensen evaluates. “It’s not very big.”

“No?”

“Considering I’m used to you.”

“Flattery will get you everywhere, babe.” It actually gets him a hard smack directly over the plug
and he feels that, a hard jolt deep inside him. “I got you a bigger one than I thought maybe was wise, but I guess it was a good choice after all. Now get up, because that’s the real test. I want you to walk across the room to the bathroom and back.”

Okay, now he feels it. It’s strange, hard and unforgiving as he moves, nothing like feeling Jared’s cock inside him. Possibly because he’s never walked around while Jared’s fucking him. The thought makes him laugh.

“You like it?”

“I like it.” He’s standing in front of Jared now, naked and utterly unself-conscious about it. Jared’s eyes shine up at him. His lips are still rosy and wet from licking Jensen’s hole and Jensen wants to kiss them. “Can I blow you while I wear it?”

“You don’t want me to blow you?”

“Maybe after. I want to get used to it. How long can I keep it in? Can I go outside with it?”

“We can experiment and see what you can tolerate. Do you like the idea of going outside while you have it in you?”

Jensen nods. “I really want to do that tomorrow.”

“Maybe you can wear it while we study and then, if you think you can, you can keep it in when we go to Steve’s gig. I like the idea of you sitting there beside me for several hours all plugged up. Maybe I could fuck you before we go, fill you with my come and then keep it inside you with the plug. Do you want to go to Steve’s gig with my come plugged inside you?”

How can his cock throb with need without even being touched? “I do.”

“I can see.” Reaching out a finger, Jared traces it along the top of Jensen’s straining cock. “Sure you don’t want me to blow you?”

Jensen’s sure. He kneels on the floor between Jared’s legs and it feels like a position of worship. Every time he kneels down at church in the future he’s going to remember this moment, on his knees for Jared, plugged by Jared, stuffing Jared’s cock into his mouth. It still hurts, the stretch of his lips around that cock, but he loves the sensation of being overwhelmed by it. Yes, it’s too much but he can take it. His throat is still a little raw from earlier in the week but he loves that too. His gag reflex is mostly gone now, his throat well trained to open up the moment it feels Jared’s cock prod at it. He takes it deep, swallowing the way he learned makes it easier, then pulls all the way off.

“Fuck me,” he says, looking straight up into Jared’s eyes. “I can take it now. Hold my head down and I’ll fuck my throat however hard you want. Real hard, Jay. Don’t worry about hurting me, I’ll hit your arm twice if I need to as a safeword, but I want you to go for it.”

Jared’s hands come up to tangle in his hair. “If you can’t breathe——”

“I’ve been practising holding my breath. I can hold it for more than a minute without a problem. I really want this.”

And Jared gives it to him.
“How d’you feel?”

It’s Saturday night and they’re at the gig. Jared did as he said after Jensen was comfortable wearing the plug for most of the afternoon while they worked and fucked him then plugged his come into him. He hasn’t let Jensen come yet today, although he had to use the threat of ice earlier. Not that he’d have used it, but he loves seeing how desperate Jensen gets at the mention of it.

Strung-out, frantic-to-come Jensen is his favourite and now he gets to manipulate circumstances to get him whenever he likes and then keep him like that. Life is great sometimes.

Jensen’s already fidgeting beside him and they’re only one song in. “I’m okay,” he says, stilling. “You enjoying the music?”

Jared doubts he’ll hear much of it, too attuned to the minute little breathy moans Jensen is making. “Sure.”

“Good.”

Jensen manages to keep still for the rest of the song, but when the next one begins he shifts on his chair with a little gasp. Ah yes, that’s the music Jared’s listening out for.

“Behave yourself,” he says mildly.

“I am.”

“I think you want everyone to know that you’re sitting there with a big fat plug stuffed up your hole.”

Jensen jerks his eyes away from the stage where Steve is really going for it. “Don’t.”

“No one else can hear me. But they can certainly see you.” They’re off to the side and the room is dark, lit mostly by candles and the lights on the stage, but Jensen looks around guiltily.

“I’m not moving deliberately.”

All the better. “If you don’t stop moving, I’ll tie you to your chair.”

The light is sufficient for him to see Jensen’s face go bright red. “You wouldn’t. Not in public like this.”

“Does the thought of it make you hard?”

“You know it does.”

“The thought of me using my scarf—” It’s the one he used as a gag before. “—to tie your wrists behind you around the back of your chair? You’re sitting against the wall. They wouldn’t see.”

“They might.”

“Put your hands on the table, Jensen.”

“Jared—”

“Are you playing with yourself?”
Jensen whips his hands up from beneath the table and places them flat on its surface. “No.”

“Were you? Be honest now.”

“I’m trying, Jay.”

“Keep your hands there for the rest of this song.”

It’s only another couple of minutes but he can see it’s driving Jensen crazy. It’s a different form of bondage, he realises, and this does it for him nearly as much as Jared literally tying him up.

When the song ends, Jensen looks to him for further instruction.

“Are you gonna behave yourself this time?”

Jensen’s mouth quirks. “Probably not.”

As the next song begins, Jared reaches for their empty glasses. “I’m going to get us some more beer. Since I can’t trust you while I’m gone, keep your hands there so I can see them.”

He takes his time at the bar, chats to a guy he knows from a class he took last year, leans against it to taste his drink. Throughout, Jensen sits obediently in position, face still flushed. How did Jared get so lucky? Jensen is so fucking responsive and he loves everything Jared thinks of to do to him, he just wants more, harder, deeper. It’s Jared’s turn to shift uncomfortably as he remembers last night. He’s never lost control while fucking someone’s face like that, but Jensen begged him to and he couldn’t stop himself from taking him at his word and fucking the shit out of his throat. Even when Jensen gagged, a rare occurrence these days, Jared just held him down and refused to let him breathe. The sound of his strangled chokes just made it better and that was the only reason Jared gave him air again, so he could produce more sounds like that. Afterwards, he was horrified at himself but Jensen smiled peacefully and said how good it had been, despite the fact his voice was barely a rasp and is still husky this evening, and then curled up in his arms, plug still in him, and went to sleep as though he’d attained full satisfaction, even though—when Jared checked—he hadn’t.

Jensen keeps his eyes trained on the band when Jared returns. “This feels awfully unnatural, you know, sitting like this.”

“You look pretty, blushing like that.”

“People are going to notice.”

They probably won’t, but he likes Jensen thinking they will. “Want an alternative?”

“Yes, please.”

“You can take a couple of sips, then I want you to wrap your arms around the back of your chair and hold onto your wrists.”

“You’re going to tie me?” Jensen looks at him, alarmed.

“Not with rope,” Jared says.

“Oh.” Jensen gets it. Visibly. “I think I might be getting my jeans wet because I’m so turned on.”

“Yeah? You like being bound by my will?”
“When you put it like that....” Jensen literally shudders before distracting himself by taking the sips Jared allowed him. “I don’t know if I can last.”

“Put your hands behind your back.”

He does. “Fuck, Jared, the plug!”

“You okay?”

“This position, it’s....I can feel it a lot more. How long must I stay like this?”

“Until you come.”

“What?” Jensen looks horrified. “I can’t come like this.”

“You can’t? You just said you—”

“You want me to come in my jeans? In front of everyone?”

“Your choice. Either you come or you stay like that for the rest of the night.”

Satisfied he has Jensen right where he wants him, Jared eases back in his own seat to enjoy both shows, the one on the stage and the one beside him. He does like Steve’s music and he makes a big deal of appearing to ignore Jensen’s predicament while he focuses on the band. Jensen’s eyes are fixed on the band too, but Jared can see how glassy they are; his attention is on the plug Jared put inside him and on the entrapment of his arms behind his back and on his needy, demanding cock in jeans that are way too tight right now. Oh yes, this is how Jared loves him. And he honestly doesn’t know which option Jensen is going to pick.

“Do you think Steve can see you?” he asks a couple of songs later to give him a nudge. “And the rest of the band, they keep looking over in our direction. Do you think they’ve noticed where your hands are? Do you think they suspect I might have tied you to your chair?”

Jensen shoots him a pained glare. “But you didn’t.”

“As I said, not with ropes. But they can’t see that.” He knows it’s unfair to taunt Jensen like this in public and he doesn’t for a moment think the band can even see what Jensen’s arms are doing, but although Jensen needs to keep his sexual proclivities secret, he seems to really get off on surreptitious play in public. Jared watches as he squirms on his chair. “How’s that plug feeling?”

“You sure you didn’t swap it for a bigger one when I wasn’t looking?”

“You’re feeling it now?”

“Fuck, yeah.” Flushed and panting, he’s exquisitely beautiful. His lower lip is dark red where he keeps biting it and his eyes glitter in the candlelight when he looks over at Jared. “Touch me,” he says, tongue flickering out over his lips. “If you want me to come in public, if you want me to humiliate myself by coming in my jeans right here in front of everybody, touch me. Put your hand on me and make me come.”

That’s it. How is Jared supposed to resist such a decadent request? With a careful glance around, he slides his chair nearer to Jensen’s under cover of the applause for the end of a song. The band might notice now how odd their position is, but they’re launching into their finale, which means Jared only has a few more minutes to get Jensen there. Slipping his hand below the table, he brushes the back of it softly against Jensen’s denim-covered cock, eliciting a helpless shudder from Jensen. Oh yeah,
he’s not going to need long. He turns his hand around to squeeze.

“Can I come, Jared?” The words burst out, low and hoarse, just a few squeezes later.

“Let everyone see you, baby. Let everyone see you come for me.”

*

Jensen’s Sunday call with Dianne goes more easily than he expected, especially since he’s still feeling shaky in the aftermath of what Jared made him do last night. After coming in his pants, he was so suffused with shame that he could hardly take in much of the rest of the evening, leaving Jared to carry the burden of socialising with Steve and the rest of the band when they joined them for a drink. His hands felt awkward. He didn’t know what to do with them without Jared’s orders, which was stupid because he’s never struggled before and half an hour of Jared controlling them shouldn’t strip him of his ability to revert to normal. Thanks to the crush around the table of fitting in the extra chairs, he was pressed right up against Jared and it was a relief when Jared sneaked the hands of their touching arms beneath the table and wound their fingers together. They sat there just holding hands and it felt so nice it made his head spin. He wanted to lay it down on Jared’s shoulder but Steve kept looking at him funny and he knew he wasn’t drunk enough to get away with it.

Because he can’t get the memory out of his mind, he’s grateful that Dianne’s in a chatty mood, not requiring much more than the occasional sound of agreement or interest from him as she talks. He tried holding hands with her last Saturday while they walked by the river. It was awkward and horrible, and she looked relieved when he gave up the attempt. What was he thinking? She’s not a physical kind of person, especially not with him. Ironically, she seemed more comfortable with Jared than with him. For the first time it occurs to him that the physical side of their marriage might be a lot more difficult than he’s anticipated.

He likes sex. What if she doesn’t?

He also likes men. She’s not a man. She has girl parts that he doesn’t really know what to do with and has nothing she can fuck him with. Obviously. Given the way she didn’t even want to hold his hand, she’s not going to want to get experimental with him. He can imagine her reaction only too clearly if he were to ask her to use a dildo on him. No, he’s going to have to be the one to fuck her, but she’s small and delicate and he’ll have to be so careful, so restrained. But she probably won’t want it to last very long, so it’s a good thing he can come quickly—but will he be able to come at all, with her?

Shit. These are problems he hasn’t let himself think about before. Who’d have expected that it would be a little hand-holding by Jared that would make him face it?

She wants children, they’ve talked about it. She wants three and already has their names picked out. To get children he’ll have to come inside her.

He tries not to think about the come Jared left inside him this morning before heading for basketball. He already doesn’t want to clean it out when he showers but wants to wear that torturous plug again just to keep it inside him. Keep Jared inside him.

“So I told old Mrs Ellison that of course she can do the flowers for our wedding,” Dianne’s voice cuts into his preoccupation. “You don’t mind, do you? I know she can be hard to take, but it’s
better to stay on the right side of her or she can get nasty with her gossip. I try very hard to love her as we’re supposed to, Jensen, but she is so trying sometimes, and ever since she decided she has to accompany the choir on the piano I can’t seem to get away from her. It’s okay about the flowers, right? She does them for the church every week and they’re beautiful, so I’m sure it’ll be okay even if she might not listen too clearly about the colours we want.”

For fuck’s sake, their wedding is still two years away. “Maybe she’ll have forgotten when the time comes,” he says for the sake of something to say. “But it’s fine, I don’t mind.”

He has two years to prepare himself for sex with her. Hopefully by then his body will have readjusted, learned to live without being fucked. Without having Jared inside him.

Dianne is still talking about the wedding. She has it planned in intricate detail and is making her dress herself. She is a talented dressmaker and an excellent cook and a devout Christian and a very decent human being. He is so lucky that she wants to be with him, to share the rest of her life with him. He couldn’t ask for a better wife.

His mind flashes to an image of Jared waiting at the end of the aisle for him.

No. It doesn’t matter if it’s legal now. It’s still not acceptable by the church or by his parents or by Texas in general. It’s not permissible for him.

Feeling unsettled by the call, he forces himself to clean thoroughly during his shower so no trace of Jared remains when he heads to meet Steve with his guitar. Steve has rented a house with the rest of the band this year and greets Jensen with coffee and a smile.

“Don’t look so terrified,” he says as Jensen takes a sip to realise Steve has remembered how he likes it. “If you don’t feel comfortable enough, you don’t have to do this. But I’m glad you’re here to give it a try.”

“No, I want to.” He does, embarrassingly badly. “I just don’t know if I’ll be good enough.”

“Let’s give it a go and find out.”

Jensen’s nerves relax under Steve’s patient tutelage and gradually he starts to believe that maybe he can do it after all. He wants to perform for Jared. It feels like that would be an appropriate thank you, not only for the gift of the guitar and introductory lessons but for everything Jared has given him this year.

“Is there a specific song you’d like to play?” Steve asks after they’ve run through the basics and he’s illustrated a few songs for Jensen. “I can pick some simple ones, but is there anything with meaning for you?”

“Can I think about that?”

“Sure. I’ll give you a couple to practise during the week, but have a think and let me know if there’s something else you’d like.”

“Okay.” This might be the only way he’s able to express some form of the truth to Jared, so he wants to choose carefully. “Thanks, Steve. I appreciate you doing this for me.”

Steve strums a couple of chords. “I’m glad you’re playing at last. It was a thoughtful gift from that roommate of yours.”

“Yeah.” Jensen tries not to react to the mention of Jared or to remember the way he almost cried
when he opened his present, and instead he focuses on copying the chords. “I know you brought it up a few times last year but I was too scared to try.”

“Not so scared now?”

“Fucking terrified.” He gives a little laugh to downplay the admission. “But after Jared went to the trouble of getting this for me, it felt like I’d be rude not to give it a go. And I liked it.”

“He’s a good guy.”

“Yeah, he is.”

“You still planning to marry that girl of yours back home?”

Jensen’s fingers slip on the instrument with a horrible sound. “Uh, yeah. Yeah, of course. Why wouldn’t I?”

Fixing him with a direct look, Steve stops playing too. “You want to talk about it?”

No. “About what?”

“What’s going on between you and Jared.”

There’s a roar drowning out Steve’s voice. Why is there a roar? Why can’t he hear clearly? And why is his skin prickling all over while his vision turns hazy?

This is shock, he thinks faintly. This is shock because somebody knows. Steve saw enough last night to know.

Somebody knows.

Chapter End Notes

Btw, I'm taking suggestions for which song Jensen should choose! My musical knowledge tends towards the classical so any and all assistance would be greatly appreciated.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Confrontations, revelations and surprises.

As Jensen’s body panics, Steve keeps his level gaze on him. “What’s going on with the two of you?” he asks again.

“Nothing’s going on.” Jensen hears his own voice coming from a long way away. It sounds wrong, but he has to speak, has to convince Steve he’s wrong. “We’re just friends.”

“Nobody looks at their friends like that, Jensen.”

Why didn’t he learn some breathing exercises from Jared? They’d be useful right around now when it feels like Steve’s wrapped his fist around Jensen’s lungs so they can’t take in any air. Looking down, he notices his own fists are clenched so tightly his hands have turned white and he deliberately opens them, pressing his violently trembling fingers against the guitar Jared gave him. “How do I look at him?” he asks, forcing himself to face Steve’s concern.

Steve’s eyes are kind as he says quietly, “As though you’re in love with him.”

Shit. Shit. “I’m not.” He is, but that will remain a secret for the rest of his life, curled tightly deep within his heart to get him through. “It’s not like that.”

“What is it like?”

“It’s not—we’re not—” He doesn’t know how to finish that sentence. “I’m still getting married.”

“Does Jared know that?”

“Of course he does.” Jensen’s horrified at the insinuation. “She was here last week with my parents and he met her and she invited him to our wedding. I’m not cheating on him.”

Not cheating on him. The reverberation of his words rings through the room, emphasising the way Jensen phrased it. Jared is the one he isn’t cheating on. Which means Jared is the one.

“It was his idea.” If he’s going to confess to Steve, then he might as well be clear. “He suggested it, that we take the opportunity to—” Oh God, however he puts this, it’s going to sound bad. “He thought maybe I was—not straight—so suggested that I use him to find out for sure.”

“Use him?”

“It’s not like that,” he says again. “He likes a lot of sex. Now he gets it every day. He’s getting something out of this too.”

“Every day?”

Jensen can’t meet his eyes anymore and looks down at where his thumb is compulsively rubbing back and forth against the bright wood of his guitar. He just told his oldest friend at school that he’s
having sex with another man every fucking day.

“How long has this been going on, Jensen?”

“A month. And it’s going to stop in another month,” he adds, glancing up again. “It’s just an experiment, that’s it. Then it will stop and I’ll go back to my real life.”

His real life.

As if.

“And Jared?”

“What about Jared?”

“What’s he going to do when it stops?”

“Go back to his own life. He’ll be in New York for the summer, where I’m sure he has old flames to look up. He doesn’t do relationships. Just sex.”

“Jensen.”

“He doesn’t! I know him. He likes casual sex with strangers.”

“You’re not a stranger and what he’s doing with you isn’t casual.”

“He’s helping me out. That’s all. It’s no big deal, Steve.”

“Then why do you look like you’re on the verge of passing out just talking about it?”

Did he? “I didn’t sleep much last night.”

“Too much casual sex with Jared?”

There was nothing casual about the way Jared fucked him when they got home from the gig, making the most of how open Jensen was from the plug to slam straight into him the moment they were inside, pushing Jensen up against the wall and whispering fiercely into his ear about how badly he’d wanted to do this in public, in front of everyone, to make sure they all knew that Jensen belonged to him. And then this morning Jensen woke up with Jared already inside him, moving achingly slowly, scattering soft little kisses across his neck and shoulders. Kisses Jensen longed to turn around and capture with his mouth.

“I didn’t come here to discuss my sex life with you,” he says stiffly, because the memory is too raw.

Steve gives him a pitying look. “No, you came because Jared wants you to perform for him and even though it terrifies you, you’re going to do it. For him.”

“That’s not—”

“Isn’t it?”

“It’s a goodbye present,” he mutters. “You don’t need to read anything into it.”

“So you’re going to play for him and then, what, it’s over? Just like that?”

Ignoring the way his lungs tighten again, Jensen shrugs. “Sure. I go home for the summer, he goes
to New York. We couldn’t continue even if we wanted to.”

“And in September?”

This conversation needs to end. Now. “I have a life to live.” He makes his voice uncompromising. “It doesn’t include Jared.”

“It could.”

“No, it couldn’t,” he snaps. He’s breathing too fast now, the opposite problem to earlier, but it’s making him feel just as dizzy. “The entire rest of my life depends upon me being straight, Steve, and Jared’s male. Even if I could break my girlfriend’s heart and the promises I’ve made her, I couldn’t take him home. I’d lose everything. *Everything.* Do you get that? I come from a conservative family in Texas. I’d lose my family, I’d lose my career, I’d lose my home.”

“And Jared isn’t worth that?”

“That’s not the point!”

“Seems like it’s the only point to me.” Steve sets aside his guitar and leans forward. “You love him, Jensen.”

How does Steve know that? How can he, when even Jared doesn’t know?

“He doesn’t love me.” The words come out of Jensen’s mouth before he’s thought them through and, stricken, he stares at Steve. “He doesn’t love me,” he says again, and the words reverberate through his body. “That’s not what this is about for him. He was very clear. It’s just an experiment. Turns out we’re really compatible in bed, but it’s no more than that. And yes, maybe I’m using him to get as much sex as possible with someone who’s the gender I’m attracted to, but he’s the one who offered and he’s getting plenty out of it too, so don’t try to make me feel bad about him. He’s not involved emotionally. It’s just physical.”

“Is it?” Steve shakes his head. “Because it looked like a lot more than that to me last night.”

Last night when Jared made him come in public. Jensen tries not to flush at the memory of what he let Jared do. “Just sex.”

“That boy cares about you.”

“We’re friends. That has nothing to do with sleeping together.” He can’t think about this right now. Certainly not here with Steve watching him and seeing too much and putting things together and interpreting them in ways they shouldn’t be. “I came to learn guitar from you,” he says, brandishing his guitar between them. It shakes in his hand, damn it. “So teach me.”

But when he leaves half an hour later to meet Jared for lunch, Steve’s words continue to echo through his mind.

*That boy cares about you.*

He doesn’t, though. Not in the way Steve means. Jensen thought he saw something in his eyes once, but he was probably mistaken because it’s never been there again. And why would it be, because that is not what this is about. It’s just Jared letting him make the most of gay sex for a couple of months. And yes, they’re good friends as well, but that’s what they were before any of this started and it hasn’t changed, and that’s what they’ll go back to being when they stop.
Preoccupied, he pushes open the door to the café. Jared is in their usual spot, laughing with a girl who’s walking back to her own table with her coffee but seems too mesmerised to move on.

Jared’s eyes light up when he spots Jensen’s guitar. “How’d it go? Did you pick a song? What song did you choose?”

He’s excited because of the guitar and Jensen playing it, not because he’s seeing Jensen. Right? With a nod to the departing girl, Jensen stows the guitar away beneath the table and reaches for the coffee Jared’s already ordered for him. “God, that’s good, thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now tell me about the song.”

Jensen rolls his eyes. “He gave me a few to try. I’m not going to tell you, it’ll be a surprise on the night, so you’ll have to wait.”

“But I don’t want a surprise. You’re the one who likes surprises.”

“I love your surprises.” Jensen grasps the opportunity for a diversion. “I want more of your latest one tonight, in fact.”

“Yeah?” Attention successfully diverted, Jared raises his eyebrows. “You wanna wear it again while we study?”

Should Jensen feel embarrassed by how much he loves wearing that plug? “If I can’t have you in me all the time,” he says without even bothering to look around to check nobody can hear them, “then it’s the next best thing.”

That gets to Jared, he’s pleased to see, and he watches smugly as Jared has to take a moment with his iced coffee to collect himself. It’s good to know he has such a vivid physical effect on him, but that brings up Steve’s words again. He shouldn’t say anything, but what if Steve is right? What if Jared does feel something more than just friendship? What if what he saw in Jared’s eyes in the gym that day is real and Jared’s just been hiding it ever since?

It’s probably better not to know, but he needs to.

“Jay.” His voice comes out helpfully steady, almost unconcerned. “I need to ask you something.”

“Sure.”

He knows the answer. He knows the answer but it’s still fucking terrifying to ask, because what if Jared says the wrong thing?

“Jen?”

“This is just sex for us, what’s between us, right?”

For a charged moment he thinks Jared is going to disagree. Their eyes hold, but then Jared says easily, “Of course. We’re just fooling around until the end of the year so you can experiment.”

Right.

Yes.

Exactly.

Just as he thought.
What he saw that day was wrong.

Wishful thinking.

No. That isn’t anything he can wish for.

This is better.

The way it needs to be.

And if he’s broken the rules by falling in love, that’s his own stupid fault.

Jared is looking at him searchingly, and he makes himself smile. “Just checking.” Now his voice sounds hoarse, damn it. It’s from the singing he did with Steve. Not because his throat is clamping around his breath. “Needed to make sure we’re on the same page and all, and that you’re still good with experimenting.”

“I love the experimenting.” Jared sounds fine, no turmoil of emotion evident in his eyes as they meet Jensen’s. “I’m getting to try a lot of new things too, so it’s great.

“Good.” Yes. It’s good. It has to be.

He clings to that thought while they work out together and later when they return to their room and Jared eases the plug back into his ass. It feels like an extension of Jared’s body inside him and he never wants to take it out. If only he could keep Jared inside him always.

He insists on blowing Jared after several hours of studying. “I wish I could have you in me both sides at once,” he says from his position between Jared’s legs on the floor. “The plug is good, but it’s not quite the same.”

Jared regards him through half-lidded eyes, already going languid from Jensen’s mouth pleasing him. “You wanna try something new?”

“Always.”

“The plug will have to come out, but don’t worry, I won’t leave you empty.”

Jensen’s heard of a sixty nine, but the technicalities are somewhat more complicated than he anticipated. It’s a little awkward getting them both into comfortable positions, but once they sort themselves out, he swallows Jared down from this very different direction. Jared lets him get a good rhythm going before he flicks his tongue against Jensen’s open, needy hole.

“That okay?”

It’s going to blow his mind, he already knows. The test will be how long he can hold out. Raising his head to free his mouth, he says, “Don’t let me come. Don’t let me come until after you do, until you want me to. Make me wait for it, Jared.”

Jared does.
Something has changed about Jensen. As their final week of full-time classes speeds by, Jared tries to figure out what it is. He’s….softer somehow. More open with his affection. He used to let Jared take the lead outside of sex, but now he does things like ruffle his fingers through Jared’s hair when he walks by, pass a hand across Jared’s lower back when they’re out and about, press their arms together when they sit somewhere. It’s as though he feels the same magnetic pull that Jared feels, that overpowering need to touch, to keep close. To not let go.

Jared wonders if Steve said something, if he was the reason for Jensen’s awkward question on Sunday about it just being sex between them. It was obvious that the answer mattered immensely to Jensen, and Jared honestly hadn’t known which answer Jensen wanted. Apparently, though, he’d given the right answer, hard as it had been.

“We’re just fooling around…..”

Fooling is right, because he’s fooling himself that suddenly Jensen is going to have a revelation that he doesn’t care how much it costs but Jared is too important to him to give up.

That’s never going to happen and he knows it.

Jensen doesn’t say anything about Steve confronting him. Jared definitely shouldn’t have pushed him so far in public as he did at the gig, but he’s still certain none of the band had any idea what they’d done. It was most likely afterwards, when they held hands beneath the table. Jared thought he was surreptitious enough for no one to notice, but possibly not. Jensen just gets so soft and cuddly after he comes, and Jared couldn’t bring himself to abandon him.

“I’ve got plans for you tomorrow afternoon,” Jensen announces as they do their final catch-up between classes over muffins on Friday. “It’s my turn to plan a surprise. Are you available?”

As if they spend any free time apart these days. He ignores the warmth kindling inside him at the thought of Jensen planning something for him. “I’m all yours. Any hints?”

“It won’t be anything you’re expecting, but afterwards you can be in charge of our evening activities. How about that?”

Nothing he’s expecting? Does that mean no sex? He watches Jensen savour his half of their chocolate muffin, but he’s giving nothing away. How is Jared supposed to wait! It’s hard enough not getting impatient about what song Jensen is preparing to perform. He’ll only work on it when Jared is out at class or tutoring, won’t even practise it amongst the rest of the songs he plays in case Jared guesses, and it’s driving Jared nuts.

“Can I plan a surprise too?”

Jensen gives him a drop-dead flirtatious smirk over his muffin. “You can always plan a surprise for me, Jared.” He grins when Jared literally drops his wheat germ half onto the table and it bounces away. “What, did you think I can’t flirt?”

No. Yes. He’s never seen a look like that on Jensen’s face for all that he knows exactly how Jensen’s eyes flutter closed when he’s about to come and is intimately familiar with the way his mouth forms Jared’s name, usually soundlessly, as he goes over the edge. It’s gone straight to his dick, which means he can’t chase after the muffin he dropped.

Jensen’s smirk turns dirtier. “Your brain is going places, isn’t it?”

“Uh huh.” He wants Jensen to look at him like this always, broadcasting to the world the fact that they’re together.
It gets worse when Jensen slips out of his seat to retrieve the piece of muffin. His body flows, the way it moves under Jared’s in bed but never in public, and the way he bends over with his ass thrust straight at Jared is almost too much.

“Jensen, get back here,” he hisses when Jensen draws it out with a little shimmy of his hips, but he’s disappointed when Jensen obligingly straightens.

“You’re such a delight to tease,” Jensen says as he neatly wraps the spoiled muffin in a napkin. “I’m going to get you a replacement—don’t worry, I’ll make it chocolate. Or do you want to be adventurous and try something else?” The way he glides his tongue around the circle of his lips hits Jared like a blow.

“When you get back from the library tonight,” he says with effort as his brain goes exactly to the place Jensen intends, “you’re gonna pay for that.”

“I might come back early.” Jensen purses his wet lips to blow Jared a kiss. “You’d better be ready for me.”

“I’m ready for you right now,” Jared says darkly.

Jensen’s overt flirtation dissolves into a deceptively innocent sweet smile. “And I can’t be late for class today. You’ll have to wait for me, big boy.”

“Jen—” Jared can’t even speak because he has so many retorts spluttering together out of his mouth, and Jensen’s smile turns even sweeter.

“Remember this feeling. I want you to take it out on my ass later.”

Okay, that’s it. Jared goes to the gym after he gets through his demanding tutorial list for the afternoon and sweats it out on several machines because everything inside him is screaming to head for the library and drag Jensen away by his hair to give him what he deserves. But there’s no way he can be mad, because seeing Jensen so open about what he wants makes his heart hurt. It’s as though, now that somebody else knows and obviously hasn’t rejected him for it, he wants to make the most of it. It’s enough for Jared to want to track Steve down to give him a big kiss.

On that thought, he remembers that Steve mentioned he’d be at an open mic night tonight so he detours on his way back from the gym since it’s still a while before Jensen will come home, even early, and tracks down where it’s being held. Steve is without his bandmates, which is helpful, and heralds Jared with a friendly wave.

“Jensen’s not with you?”

“He likes to spend his Friday nights at the library.”

Steve grimaces. “Still? I was hoping you might have corrupted him, since I never managed to.”

“Nope. Friday nights are inexplicably sacred study nights for him.” Jared gestures to the empty chair opposite Steve. “I’m just passing through, but mind if I join you for a moment?”

“Sure. I’m only here to check out possible upcoming talent. It’s not going well.”

Taking a seat, Jared evaluates the slender girl currently wailing into the microphone. “Jensen is so much better than that. I keep telling him he needs to give one of these a try.”

“You got him a step further than I did by getting him that guitar. Thoughtful gift.”
Oh yes, Steve definitely knows, judging by the way he’s studying Jared. The only question is will he bring it up or should Jared? “No more than you giving him the opportunity to perform. Thanks for that.”

Nodding, Steve turns back to the wailing girl. They both watch her in silence until the end of her song and applaud politely before Steve says, “So did he tell you I know?”

Jared wonders if Jensen felt this same thud when he realised that Steve knew. It’s stupid, everybody already knows he’s gay, but the thought that someone knows that Jensen is, that Jensen’s with him, that’s what feels like the gut punch. “I figured.” The next performer heads for the microphone. “You gonna give me the talk?”

Steve slants a look out of the corner of his eye. “Actually, I kinda gave it to him.”

Oh. Wait, what? Isn’t Steve supposed to be Jensen’s friend?

“You’re good for him, Jared.”

That seems to be something everyone who knew Jensen before Jared agrees on. But if he’s so good for Jensen, then why do they have to part? If he’s so fucking good for Jensen, why would being with him have to cost Jensen every other good thing in his life? “I’m assuming he told you it’s temporary,” he says, keeping his eyes trained on the solemn Asian singer fumbling with his guitar.

“Does it have to be?”

“You’ll be here next year, right?”

“Sure.”

Good. Because suddenly Jared is doubting whether he can be. It would only take a single flirtatious smile from Jensen like the one in the coffee shop this afternoon for Jared to abandon all his lofty intentions and be back in Jensen’s bed for another year and he couldn’t survive losing him after that. It was hard enough this morning pulling out of Jensen’s body to leave him to talk to his girlfriend. “He’ll need you,” he tells Steve. “Make sure he keeps playing.”

“Thought you have another year left.”

“Things can change.”

That gets him a sharp look. “You’re leaving him?”

“Not first.”

It takes a moment, but Steve follows his meaning. “He’s a different person with you,” he says.

“A gay person. Which he can’t be. And I get it.”

“I don’t know his family, I don’t know his background in detail, but maybe it’s not as bad as you both think.”

“He wouldn’t even tell them I was gay when they visited last week.”

“He mentioned his girl invited you to their wedding.”

It sounds like Jensen did open up to Steve, which is a relief to know. “She wants to introduce me to all her friends as an eligible bachelor.”
Steve doesn’t laugh as Jared hoped he would. “Can you really stand there and watch him marry her?”

“She’s nice.” That was one of the killers of this situation. “And she loves him. She really does.”

“But does he love her?”

“He wants to.”

Draining his glass, Steve gets up. “I can’t tell you what to do, Jared, nor can I tell him. But you two talk to each other. Don’t end this for the wrong reasons.” He holds up his glass. “You want a drink?”

“No, I’m good.” Jared pushes back his chair. “I’m gonna go, Jensen will be home soon.”

Steve claps him on the shoulder. “You’re a good guy. And so is he.”

And so is Steve, Jared thinks as he continues his walk home. If Jared really can’t face coming back next year to be without Jensen, then at least Jensen will have Steve for support, someone who’ll understand what he’s going through and be there for him.

*

Leaving the grocery store where he picked up a few necessities for Jared’s surprise tomorrow, Jensen hurries on his way home to him from the library. It took every ounce of discipline he has, but he managed to stick it out until closing time. God knows he needed to since he’s taking tomorrow off entirely. He really shouldn’t, but if it’s studying for a degree in a subject he’s not even interested in or being with Jared, he knows which one matters to him more.

He won’t fail, he knows that much, so he’s giving himself this.

Turning the corner, he catches sight of Jared in front of him. He’s leaning against one of the trees opposite their building, gazing up at their darkened window, a cigarette in his hand.

Since when does Jared smoke?

“Jay?”

Jolting, Jared whips the cigarette behind his back. “Jen! You’re early.”

“I’m not. You okay?”

“Yeah.” But he looks pensive, his eyes shadowed. “Yeah, no, I’m fine. Get a lot of work done?”

“I didn’t know you smoke.”

Since Jensen’s brought the subject out into the open, Jared stops trying to hide the cigarette. He glances down at it ruefully then stubs it out against the bark. “I don’t. I used to. Sorry if I stink of smoke now.”

“It’s okay. I used to, too.”
“You’re kidding.” Reaching for the grocery bag, Jared heads towards their building. “Wait, you are kidding, right?”

Glad to see him looking more cheerful, Jensen shoots him a cheeky grin. “Oh, the tales I could tell you of a misspent youth.”

“Yeah, ’cause you’re so ancient now.” They both laugh as Jared holds open the door and gestures for Jensen to go through first. “Seriously, though, you smoked? Come on. You mean once you took a couple of puffs on a dare?”

For a moment Jensen lets himself remember how good it felt, the high he got, the comfort from knowing he was making his own choices, even if they were bad for him. A bit like he feels now, except this time he knows it’s only temporary, unlike when he was 15 and thought he had the world at his disposal. “A bit more than that,” he says lightly. The elevator door closes behind them and he breathes in deeply. A tinge of smoke clings to Jared’s shirt and he leans closer. “You smell good.”

“I have a whole pack,” Jared confides. “I was sure you’d make me destroy them out of concern for my health.”

Jensen nods seriously. “They’re very bad for you.”

“I figured you’d say that.”

“And you should destroy them.”

“If you want me to, I will.”

“I was on the track team in high school. When I gave up smoking, you wouldn’t believe how my times improved.”

“You smoked enough to have to give them up?”

This really isn’t a topic he wants to get into. “I’m just saying, they’re not healthy.”

The elevator door opens but Jared just stands there. “If you want me to take them back downstairs and throw them out so you’re not tempted, I can do that.”

Is that what he’s trying to say? Because, truth be told, he wants to grab them out of Jared’s pocket and recreate those few short months in his youth when he thought he could be whoever he wanted to be. Feeling small and a little pathetic, he nods.

There’s no judgment on Jared’s face as he says, “I’ll be right back.”

Letting Jared push him out of the elevator, Jensen takes the grocery bag. While Jared’s downstairs, he focuses on putting away the supplies he bought, then jumps into the shower.

“Come join me,” he calls when he hears Jared return.

They’re too large to fit in the shower comfortably together, but he pulls Jared hard against him, pressing their cocks together.

“Wanna feel you,” he says. “Like this.”

Jared seems to get it, because he wraps his arms around Jensen to take hold of his ass, pushing them closer. “You don’t want me to fuck you?”
“Later. After. Fuck me, play with me, spank me, maybe, if you want.”

Jared squeezes. “I do want.”

“Good.” Jensen lets him see the shiver of pleasure that goes through him. He’s been anticipating this all evening. “I want lots from you tonight, Jared, but first I want this.” Pulsing his hips back and forth between Jared’s hard hands and his even harder cock, Jensen looks up into his eyes. “May I come?”

The water drips off Jared’s hair but he doesn’t seem to notice. “If you come now, I might not let you come later.”

Jensen’s cock between them confirms that Jensen really doesn’t have a problem with that.

Leaning down, Jared rests his forehead against Jensen’s. “I’ll make you cry for it,” he murmurs. “I’m gonna play with you and drive you crazy and you’ll beg me.”

“I want to come here with you now. Like this.”

Jared seems equally eager for that to happen if the urgency of his hips is anything to go by, and Jensen lets his eyes drift closed and loses himself to the warmth of the water and Jared and pleasure.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

It's Jensen's turn to plan a surprise for Jared.

“Where are you taking me?”

“Just follow me and wait. You’ll see.” Jensen holds some stray branches back for Jared to pass under, then takes the lead again through the cool forest. “You’re really not good with surprises, are you?”

“I wanna know!”

“You’re lucky I didn’t blindfold you to bring you here.”

“We could do that one day the other way around,” Jared says with interest. “Would you trust me?”

Jensen imagines what it would be like being led through the outside world deprived of sight, having no idea of their destination, completely dependent on Jared to get there safely. He’d be scared shitless, but that’s exactly what attracts him to the idea. “Maybe one night,” he says. “Not in the woods, but around the streets a bit.”

“Seriously?” Grabbing his arm, Jared stops him. “You’d let me do that?”

“I want to know what it would be like. I think I’d like it. So far I’ve liked pretty much everything we’ve experimented with.”

Yes. He needs to remember this is only about experimentation, but it’s hard when Jared’s staring at him as though Jensen is some exotic god and he wants to bow down and worship him.

Shaking off the image of Jared on his knees out here in the forest, he pulls away. “Come on, we’re nearly there. Stop distracting me with sexy fantasies.”

“We’re gonna do it.” Jared sounds resolute. “We can do it tonight, when we get back. I don’t want you to change your mind.”

“I won’t change my mind. I want to try it. It just hadn’t occurred to me before that we could do something like that.” He slows, searching for the right little gap between the trees. “There, it’s down that way.”

“How did you find this place?” Jared asks as they come to a stop in a pretty little clearing beside a flowing river. Enough sunshine makes its way through the treetops to bring light, but the air is cool and refreshing.

Jensen sets down the backpack he’s brought their supplies in. “I run along that track every morning and one day I heard the river and came to investigate. I come here quite a lot when I want some space.”

“It’s beautiful.”
It is. This has been Jensen’s haven during the past two years. When Dianne visited the thought of bringing her here horrified him, so he took her to the main stretch of the river instead closer to town, but having Jared here feels right. This clearing is a part of him and it’s only right that Jared know it, that Jared see him here.

“I’m not going to ask you to close your eyes,” he says, “but I’d like you to turn around, maybe walk down the river a bit, until I’m ready for you.”

Jared’s eyebrows shoot up. “Ready for me? Sounds ominous. Should I be worried?”

Jensen is the worried one, worried that Jared will misunderstand what he’s about to do, or will object or be angry or laugh at him. “I only need a couple of minutes. I’ll call when you can turn around again.”

His hands shake as he starts about emptying the backpack. Stupid, so stupid to be nervous. Ultimately this means nothing. It’s merely something he wants to do. He wants to experience this, just once. Shaking the blanket out that he bought this morning, he spends more time than he probably should smoothing it down in a mixture of shade and sun so they don’t have too much of either, then sets out the containers of food. He’s catered for both of their tastes, a combination of vegetables, some cold meats, the kind of nutritionless white rolls Jared likes best and a variety of fruits as well as Jared’s favourite chocolate bars. There are both sodas and beers, plus a bottle of water for them each. When everything looks ready, he goes to the little outcrop of rocks where he hid his guitar on this morning’s run. Sneaking it out of the room wasn’t easy, he had to wear Jared out first with a morning blowjob so he was no longer aware of much when Jensen left for his run, and he worried about its safety here, but he’s never seen another person this far off the trail and it was worth the risk for Jared. Fortunately it’s still snugly between the rocks where he left it.

“Y-you can turn around now.”

At first Jared’s face goes totally blank. Jensen feels sick. He shouldn’t have done this. This isn’t the kind of relationship they have, it’s just supposed to be about sex, not romance or about experiencing couple norms outside of bed. He’s presumed too much and he’s going to lose Jared three weeks before he has to and it’s going to happen here, here in his haven, and he’ll never be able to come back—

“Jen.” Jared lifts his eyes from the picnic spread out before them.

Wait a second. Why are they—what’s in his—he can’t be—is he crying? That’s impossible.

“Jen,” Jared says again, then digs his teeth into his lower lip until it turns white. Shaking his head, he steps forward until he reaches the blanket. “You—you did this for me?”

“I don’t have to,” Jensen says quickly. “We don’t have to do any of this. I just—I thought it would be nice, just once, just to see—but we can go home.”

“No! No, Jensen, I like it.”

Jensen scrutinises him. He still looks upset. “If you hate it, you can tell me. I know it’s not part of our deal—”

“I love it.”

“You….do?”
Sinking to his knees on the blanket, Jared gestures for Jensen to join him. “Nobody’s ever planned a picnic for me before.”

“I’ve never planned a picnic for anyone before.” It’s not an admission he intended to make, so he hurries on. “I tried to get food I know you like. I got your favourite beer, too. It’s not that cold anymore, but it’s not too hot today so I hope you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind.” Jared is surveying the spread, still blinking hard. “You were right when you said it wouldn’t be anything I expected. I didn’t—this is—thank you.” Reaching out, he pats Jensen’s thigh. His movement is awkward, like he’s not sure he’s allowed to. “This is fuckin’ amazing.” And then he spots the guitar. “Shit, are you gonna play me your song?”

“Don’t be so impatient.” Busying himself with opening their drinks, Jensen tries to laugh. “You don’t get to hear that one until I perform it, but you said you like listening to me play and I thought maybe after we eat I could play a bit and you can read or go for a paddle in the water or take a nap. We’re heading into finals and I thought it would be a good idea to have an afternoon of total relaxation to recharge.”

Jared takes the can of soda he holds out and leans over to clink it against the can in Jensen’s other hand. “That is an excellent idea.”

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This might just be the most perfect afternoon of his life.

His stomach satisfyingly full, Jared sips his lukewarm beer that should taste crappy but doesn’t because Jensen bought it for him, Jensen carried it here for him, and now Jensen’s playing the guitar for him while he drinks it. He’s leaning back against a rock warm from sunshine, sprawled comfortably on the blanket Jensen brought, watching the sun play across Jensen’s face as he concentrates on his guitar.

“I wanted to ask you something,” Jensen says over his soft strumming.

Jared’s stomach tightens at the apprehension in Jensen’s voice. What if there’s more going on here than he realised. Has Jensen set this up in order to confess the truth and ask Jared if they can be more, if they can be together? “Sure.”

The music continues. Jensen seems to be building his courage.

Could it really be this easy?

Can Jared actually have what he accepted he never would?

“I, uh, I wondered if….” Jensen’s voice stops.

“Yeah?”

“You said you learned some strategies to cope with panic and I wondered if you’d teach me some.”

Oh.

Of course.
Stupid, stupid Jared.

Of course Jensen isn’t going to throw away his life to be with him.

So much for accepting it, because now he feels like his body is going to collapse in on itself from the overwhelming disappointment crashing through him.

But it’s not. He’s lived through moments like this before and he’s still standing; he’ll get through this one as well.

“Sure.” Putting aside his own selfish feelings, he acknowledges this is a big step for Jensen. He’s not only admitting his weakness, but he’s asking for help. Jared’s help. Jared won’t be able to be there for him when he goes back to his life in Texas to be who he isn’t meant to be, but he can do this much for him. “Can you tell me what it feels like, how you experience it?

Although he doesn’t let go of the guitar, Jensen stops playing. “It’s like I stop being very aware of things,” he says slowly, visibly thinking it through. “People are talking and I can’t hear their words, and my vision goes funny. Not like I can’t see, but like I can’t take in what I’m seeing. My mind is racing and it feels like it’s screaming at me. My skin feels prickly, hot and cold at the same time, and I feel like I’m shaking but I don’t know if I actually am. I think maybe I’m not. I think maybe I go really still when it happens. Like I’m shaking inside only, like the screaming is happening inside.”

That’s scarily graphic. And Jensen’s right, he does go still. That’s one of his tells, except Jared took far too long to realise that. “How about your breathing?”

At least Jensen is moving now, fiddling with the end of the guitar as he says, “That changes. Sometimes it’s too fast, too much, and other times I can’t, like my lungs are being crushed. Or my throat.” He looks down at his lap, then raises vulnerable eyes to Jared’s. “I have it bad, don’t I? When I hear myself talk it sounds so obvious that it’s panic attacks, but I’ve always tried not to think about it.”

“How long have you experienced things like this?”

“It started a while ago.” Jensen turns towards the river. “I was fifteen or so.”

Fifteen. Right before he settled down with Dianne and reformed. Jared itches to ask about Josh, but he has no right. This isn’t a therapy session, although that’s what Jensen needs. He needs professional help because this is way beyond Jared’s self-educated expertise, but knowing Jensen, there’s no way he’d consider going to see one of the campus counsellors, which means Jared is all he has.

“Breathing strategies are your best bet to interrupt the panic cycle,” he says instead of pressing further. “The one I found works most effectively for me is to breathe in for four counts, hold for six, then breathe out for eight.”

That gets him a brief smile. “Kinda mathematical.”

“If you stick to a rhythm of four, it can too easily become automatic but adding the six means you have to think about it and that draws your thoughts away from whatever is causing the panic. Just focus on the numbers, on the counting.”

“How many times do I need to do that?”

Jared shrugs. “A few. You can practise when you’re feeling calm, get used to it, then it’s easier to use because your body is accustomed to the pattern and associates it with being calm. Practise a few
times once or twice a day, then if you feel panic coming on start doing it and keep going until you feel better. You’ll know when you’re okay to stop. And if you need to start again, then do.”

“Can I practise now?”

“Sure. Try breathing in through your nose then out through your mouth, see how that feels for you.”

“Do I count in my head?”

“Yeah.”

“Okay.” Jensen lays the guitar down on the blanket. “Don’t watch me, because I feel silly.”

“I’ll practise with you.”

Their eyes hold. Jensen’s look like thank you and this is terrifying and I really fucking love you. How have they come to this, Jared teaching Jensen how to cope with life without him when they’re so right together?

They breathe. In. Hold. Out. Jared can’t look away. What can Jensen see in his eyes, he wonders. Is it obvious how much Jared loves him back? Does that make it harder for him to leave? Or does it offer comfort?

He’s not counting, he’s just following Jensen as they breathe together.

They should always breathe together.

Be together.

It isn’t right that they can’t be.

Jensen’s eyes look extra green surrounded by the forest. They don’t waver.

I love you, Jared.

He can hear the words. He can fucking hear the words.

Their rhythm isn’t right. Jensen isn’t counting either.

No. It’s not numbers he’s saying in his head.

I love you too, Jared says back silently.

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He works through several more techniques, gets Jensen to practise them, then semi-snoozes while Jensen returns to playing the guitar. The sun drops too low to filter through the trees but external heat isn’t required because he feels like he’s burning up inside. He wants this forever. He wants Jensen in his life, wants his soft green eyes, wants his raw honesty, wants his music and his laughter, his enthusiasm and his sleek muscles. Most of all, though, Jared wants his love.

Which he has. He knows he has it, damn it. He loves Jensen and Jensen loves him and isn’t that a
formula that is meant to end with them together?

He puts a stop to that line of thinking before it can ruin this precious afternoon and just lets himself watch Jensen greedily. Jensen’s aware of his gaze, flickers his own over now and again between his focus on the guitar, and he seems to like it if his faint flush and soft smile are anything to go by. He starts humming along to his playing, which gradually turns into low singing, and his voice winds through Jared’s veins, filling him up where he’s feeling empty and raw.

He’ll always have this memory, this moment.

He’ll always know that Jensen loved him.

At last, it’s too dark to ignore the coming night and they need to get out of the forest. They pack up in silence and Jared uses his phone torch to guide the way back to the trail, the backpack slung over his shoulder while Jensen brings the guitar. All too soon they’re back in town, neither walking as quickly as usual as if they both want to prolong the magic.

“We could, um—do you want to go for pizza?” Jensen asks as they reach the main road.

Considering his bank balance and his new plans for the future, Jared hesitates.

“My treat.” Jensen seems to read his mind.

It stings, but he’s had to swallow his pride several times in the past and he badly wants to say yes.

“You’ve been buying me stuff, surprise stuff. Let me at least say thank you, Jay.”

“You don’t have to,” he manages.

“I know.” Jensen meets his eyes with the shy little smile Jared never saw before they started sleeping together. “I want to. Please, let me.”

With the terms agreed in advance, it feels like a date. Jensen even darts ahead to hold the door of Carluccio’s open for Jared to walk in first. It’s nice. No one’s ever done something like this for him before Jensen.

“You want your usual?” Jensen checks once they’ve sat down, early enough to not have to wait for a table.

“Yeah. You?”

“For pizza, yeah. We’re way too boring.” But Jensen’s eyes are shining and Jared gets lost in their happiness, barely registering that Jensen is placing the orders for both of them.

Just like a real date.

“I thought it would be nice, just once, just to see.” Jensen’s words earlier were about the picnic, but do they apply now too? Is this Jensen playing out the fantasy of what it would be like to be boyfriends, to be a couple, to do couple things?

It feels like it is, so Jared plays along, lets himself pretend too. This is what they could have had in a different world, in a kinder world, and they deserve it, even it’s just a single little taste.

Their server lights a candle between them and it reminds him of red wax dripping across Jensen’s pale skin. Please let Jensen allow him to do that again before summer and goodbye. He responded so beautifully, all those little whimpers and moans and flinches and outright screams, and it got him
so hard and needy and frantic—and, shit, now Jared is getting hard and that’s not helpful here in the same Italian restaurant where they sat only a couple of weeks ago with the woman Jensen’s going to give himself to for the rest of his life.

“I liked the wax,” Jensen says suddenly.

The candle obviously sent his thoughts in the same direction, and Jared looks at him consideringly. “I maybe should’ve warned you first.”

“No. I liked the shock of it. I mean, I thought you were burning me at first, but when I realised what it was I really enjoyed it.”

“Enough to want to do again?”

“Yes, please.”

“Tonight?”

“Aren’t you going to lead me home as if I’m blindfolded?”

Jensen really meant that? “If you’re okay with that. We don’t have to.”

“I want to.” There’s that shy, sweet eagerness that leaves Jared defenceless. “I like putting myself in your hands, Jared. I like trusting you with me.”

Fuck, how does he find the exact right words to ravage Jared entirely? It’s a relief that their pizzas arrive just then, saving him from having to respond. Thankfully Jensen sticks to non-sexual topics while they eat and gradually Jared manages to pull himself together. He can fall apart when this is all over, but right now he still has Jensen and he has no time for emotional breakdowns, not if he wants to leave Jensen with enough good memories to see him through the long years ahead.

When he makes no attempt to pick up the bill but sits silently as Jensen pays it, their server, a cute young girl with freckles like Jensen, gives him a surreptitious wink. She’s figured out that they’re together, they’re on a date, and she approves. Just look at the beaming smile she gives Jensen as he puts his wallet away.

“Have a great night,” she says with a twinkle, a heavy emphasis on great.

Jensen beams back. “Oh, we will.”

“I bet.” She doesn’t say that out loud, but her smirk does, and Jared finds himself returning her wink as he follows Jensen outside. Even if it’s only someone who doesn’t know their names, it feels good to be recognised for what they are: together.

Once they step outside into the streets filling up with Saturday night revellers, Jensen stops.

“Jen?”

“I have my sunglasses,” Jensen says, fumbling in his shirt pocket. “If I put them on, then no one will see that my eyes are closed. You can lead me all the way home.”

Shit, they’re doing this. They’re actually doing it. Settling the backpack more securely on his back, he reaches for Jensen’s guitar. “Let me carry this so you don’t have to worry about it. I’ll take care of it, I promise.”

Jensen surrenders it easily. “I know you will.”
Such unwavering trust. What did he do to deserve this?

It should be a 15-minute walk but it takes them that long just to go a couple of blocks. Okay, so maybe Jared takes a diversion or two, but they’re tall men with long legs and usually power through the streets. Not tonight. Tonight Jensen is slow, hesitant.

“This is fucking terrifying,” he says after another block of unsteady progress.

Glancing around, Jared draws him into an alcove, the doorway of a stationery store. “Keep your eyes closed,” he instructs, positioning Jensen with his back to the door so Jared’s body blocks him from the view of anyone passing by. He yearns to bend down and steal a kiss from Jensen’s mouth, but instead he presses hard on the bruise, his bruise, on Jensen’s hip. “Tell me what it’s like.”

Jensen shivers as Jared’s fingers dig in harder. “Can people see me?”

“Don’t think about people. Just me.”

“I’m so fucking hard, Jared.”

Leaving the bruise, Jared investigates. He’s not kidding. “You like pretending I’ve blindfolded you in public?”

“I wish you really could. I feel so…” Jensen catches his breath as Jared fondles him through his jeans. “Vulnerable. Like I did when you did it in bed, only worse, because we’re outside. Because people are around and I can’t see them. I don’t know what they’re doing.”

“They’re looking at you, Jen. They’re looking at you clinging to me, at you needing me. They can all see just how vulnerable you are.”

Oh yeah, Jensen likes that. His cock surges against Jared’s hand. “Are they looking now?”

“Does it matter? Do you think I’m gonna stop feeling you up just because a bunch of strangers are watching the way you respond to me?”

“Don’t let me come!” Jensen gasps. “Fuck, Jared, not yet.”

“Don’t come.” Jared says it dismissively, as though a casual instruction is all that’s required to control Jensen’s rampant body.

It is.

It is because Jensen has chosen to make it that way.

And, fuck, if that isn’t hot. His own jeans are uncomfortably tight now and he shifts so he can grind his hips against Jensen.

“You like this too,” Jensen breathes.

Jared presses harder. “I like you being vulnerable. I like that you have no idea how many people are watching us.” There aren’t any, he’s keeping an eye on the reflection in the glass, but Jensen doesn’t have to know that. He slides his hand around to squeeze Jensen’s ass. “I like that they know you belong to me and only me, that I’m the only one who gets to touch you like this and all they can do is watch.”

Dropping his head against Jared’s shoulder, Jensen’s body shakes with a shuddery moan. “Stop trying to make me come when you told me not to.”
“I could make you come for them.” Jensen’s ass feels so fucking good in his hand as he continues to squeeze it in time with his grinding their dicks together. “Would you like that, letting them see you lose control like that?”

“I won’t. No, stop, Jared. I can’t—don’t let me—I only want to come for you. Only you get to see me. Please, only you.”

He needs to stop. Jensen asked not to come yet and Jared has to honour that, but fuck how he wants to force it on him right here where anyone could see if they just looked. Reluctantly, he pulls away.

Jensen slumps against the door, breathing hard. “Jared?”

Shit, Jared moved too far away to touch and he knows that disconcerts Jensen when he’s blindfolded. Instantly he places his hand on Jensen’s chest, right over his pounding heart. “I’m here.”

“Don’t leave me.”

“I won’t.” He’s such an adorably good boy, still keeping his eyes closed as per their agreement, despite his momentary panic, that Jared rewards him with a hard pinch of his nipple. “You ready to keep walking?”

He loves the way Jensen arches up into the pinch as though asking for more. “The other one too.”

“Ask me properly.”

The corners of Jensen’s mouth twitch. “Please, Jared, pinch my other nipple.”

“Yeah? Even if people are watching?”

“They’re not watching.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I know you.” The statement is simple. “But even if they were, please do it, please pinch my other nipple too.”

Placing the guitar between his legs, Jared reaches out to oblige. It’s harder than maybe he should, since Jensen hasn’t had any warm up, but from the broken little gasps he’s trying to suppress he obviously doesn’t mind.

“W-when we get home,” he grits out through his teeth, “will you do this again? Will you pinch them and bite them and then cover them with candle wax?”

Jared gives a sharp tug upwards, drawing Jensen up onto his toes. “You can count on it.”

“And d-don’t let me c-come until you want me to.”

Jensen’s already starting to lose it, can hardly get the words out, and this time Jared can’t resist. He bends his head to brush his lips across Jensen’s cheek. “You don’t get to come tonight until after I do. Got it?”

“Oh yeah.”

Jensen’s head turns. Their mouths almost graze.
But Jared pulls away. He can’t. He can’t go there.

Instead he abruptly lets go of Jensen’s nipples. “Come on, babe. Let’s get you home so I can play with you properly.”
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Time is running out.

After their conversation on Saturday about panic attacks, Jared institutes a policy of yoga every morning when Jensen returns from his run. He admits, slightly embarrassed, that he’s been doing it during Jensen’s runs and suggests that maybe it would help both with keeping them calm and focused through finals as well as giving Jensen a foundation for the future.

Their future apart, neither of them says out loud.

“Also,” he adds, expression lightening, “extra flexibility is always a bonus in bed.”

They have their first session in the gym, where Jensen feels awkward and ungainly next to Jared’s fluid grace, and he’s certain he’ll never get the hang of it, but as the days pass the routine Jared put together for him flows more easily and he starts to look forward to that daily half hour of stretching and centring himself.

In the past, he’s viewed his body as a tool, an instrument, that he needs to keep in functional order so he can get on with his life. Having sex with Jared introduced him to his body’s capacity for pleasure, its hungers, its demands. Now when he washes it in the shower he remembers Jared scattering reverent kisses down the length of his spine, easing the tension out of his tired feet with his strong hands or sucking his cock with such urgency that Jensen is helpless to control it. His body has acquired a life he didn’t know was possible and his relationship with it changes.

He eats differently now. Before Jared, he followed a rigidly meticulous diet carefully calculated for maximum nutrition. It didn’t really bother him if he liked the taste of the food or not, but now he finds himself gravitating towards food that makes him feel good. He even allows himself chocolate, although to be honest, part of that is the bizarre fetish Jared seems to have for watching him consume it. It reminds him, though, just how much he used to like that, back when he lived a different life. For the first time in years, he starts ranking food by flavour as well as nutritional value, and mealtimes become enjoyable.

It’s the same with clothes. He’s started wearing some of Jared’s because the material is soft, gentle against his skin, unlike his own, and suddenly that matters. Jared’s skin isn’t as sensitive and he happily takes some of Jensen’s in exchange—and doesn’t that just do something to Jensen’s insides, watching Jared prance about campus wearing his clothes.

And it’s remarkable what a difference sleeping well makes to his quality of life. Has he really spent the past five years existing in a haze of sleep deprivation? Because it feels like it. He can no longer remember what it felt like to lie awake as the hours of the night ticked by, or to jolt out of light slumber every few minutes with his heart pounding. Now he curls up against Jared’s big, warm body, closes his eyes, and he’s out until morning.

How is he going to sleep without Jared? That’s a severe problem that alarms him on a daily basis.

Maybe he should ask Dianne if they can bring their wedding forward. Maybe it’s just about having
another body beside him.

Maybe.

He enjoys his runs more now that he has so much more energy in the mornings. They become a source of pleasure rather than obligation, filling his lungs with clear forest air, glancing down at the stream beside which he spent that glorious afternoon with Jared.

And it feels good to stretch his muscles out through Jared’s yoga poses afterwards. At first he feels incompetent compared to Jared but when he can feel a marked improvement after just a couple of days, it spurs him on. Not to mention the delightful view of Jared contorting his body into some of the more complicated poses, which he’s never strong enough to resist relishing.

After yoga, they do breathing practice. Jared introduces the concept of mindful meditation, which Jensen would have scoffed at before but he knows Jared’s researched this stuff and wouldn’t teach him anything useless, so there has to be something to it. He feels a little dumb at first, just sitting there, legs folded beneath him, breathing and trying to think about nothing but the feel of the air moving in and out of his body, but it rapidly becomes addictive. There’s a serenity he can achieve in those few minutes that he’s not felt any time else except straight after Jared’s blown his mind with an explosive climax. When he loses both Jared and those climaxes next month he’s going to need something to hold onto and hopefully this will be it.

Jared seems pleased that Jensen takes so well to his suggestions. Jensen can tell he’s worried about him, and several times he appears to want to bring something up and visibly stops himself. Whatever it is, it doesn’t look like something good, so Jensen lets it go. He’d rather not know if there’s further bad news.

Instead, he cherishes every moment they have together. His contribution to their new daily routine is an insistence that Jared join him for breakfasts in the dining hall. It’s easier without class schedules to worry about, and he doesn’t let himself worry about the fact that they draw it out for up to an hour a day because they can’t seem to stop talking. He knows they’ll have plenty of time to talk next year, that will be all they’ll be able to do, in fact, as per their agreement, but somehow it doesn’t feel like it, it feels like they’re running out of time and these last few weeks are all they’ll ever have.

There’s so much he wants to know about Jared. Jared still avoids talking about his parents, but he begins to open up about his childhood, which doesn’t sound like it was easy even before New York. In return, Jensen feels uncomfortable sharing his own idyllic childhood memories, but he’s still not in a place where he can talk about what happened when he was fifteen, so instead he does his best to keep Jared as their main topic of conversation. He gets Jared to tell him about his European trip, which sounds like nonstop insanity. What must that be like, to disappear off to another continent away from everything and everyone? How blissful would that be, to lose himself in a country where he can’t speak the language and nobody would have a single expectation of him. Even better if he could be there with Jared. He’d bet no one would care in Europe if they were gay together. They could kiss openly on the street and walk along holding hands and maybe they should run away to Europe and never come back again. He can busk to support them, like Jared’s friends did, Jared can play the odd game of cards when they need a bit extra, and he’ll never need to try and sleep without Jared’s arms again.

The thought of this gives him the first flicker of excitement about his future he’s ever felt.

A future with Jared. A true future with Jared.

Yes, he’d basically be in exile, he could never go home again, but....
He’d be with Jared.

And disgrace Dianne and break his mother’s heart and disappoint his father and deprive both of them of their sole remaining child.

He can’t do that, damn it. If it was only him he’d be hurting, he could face it. If it was only his loss. He could live with missing them for the rest of his life if it didn’t mean that they’d miss him too, they’d hurt over losing him just as much. His mother barely survived losing Josh, he still can’t let himself remember how dicey it got for a while back then, and he can’t take her second son away from her.

He can’t.

These are the thoughts that sitting focusing on his breath helps keep at bay.

And he practises for all he’s worth.

*

Jared has taken to counting each time he’s inside Jensen, marking it off in his mind as a separate memory to be carefully filed for the future, when that’s all he’ll have.

How many more times is he likely to experience this?

How many more chances will he have to spread Jensen open beneath him, to lick into him and watch him squirm and wriggle and go all loose and pliable? He loves that moment when Jensen switches from trying to retain control to abruptly surrendering to pleasure. His whole body shudders with the release of it and Jared often wonders what it feels like to him, giving in like that. Is it a moment he treasures for himself or does it happen without his consciously being aware of it? Since it’s the moment his fierce control collapses, perhaps he’s not.

What about the feeling of Jensen’s tight walls clamped around his fingers, the way they gradually loosen, so easily, so trustingly, as though once they realise it’s Jared invading them they quickly welcome him in. He loves how Jensen always begs him to hurry, to add more, to go harder, his voice urgent with need. One night he draws the process out, refusing to move on, just slowly fucking his fingers in and out of Jensen’s body, teasing his prostate but never quite giving him what he wants no matter how desperately Jensen pleads.

“You’re going to come like this,” Jared informs him. “Just this, on my fingers.”

He builds up to four fingers, and he has big hands so that’s a massive stretch, especially when he sinks all the way in, past his knuckles, but it’s the stretch that does it for Jensen and he howls as thick ropes of come shoot all over Jared’s face and arm.

“That was so fucking good,” he murmurs into Jared’s chest a few minutes later as he starts to come down. “Love you stretching me open.”

“Love you stretching so wide for me.”

“For you,” Jensen agrees, snuggling closer. “You, Jay.”
Jared hasn’t come but he feels more satisfaction than any climax could give him as Jensen falls asleep in his arms.

And then there’s that moment his cock first enters Jensen’s body. No matter how loose and sloppy Jensen is, there’s still a clench of resistance at the crucial moment, and Jared holds his breath every time, waiting for it. Here is the moment when Jensen’s body doesn’t want to let him in...instantly followed by the moment it sucks him in ravenously, as though he’s supposed to belong there, buried balls deep inside Jensen’s ass. How many more times will he get to experience that? Or the way Jensen clamps down around him, impossibly tight no matter how long Jared’s been fucking him for, like he can’t bear for Jared to pull out again?

It’s not only fucking Jensen’s ass, though, but his mouth, his throat. It’s hard to remember those early days when Jensen could barely wrap his lips around Jared’s cock and gagged helplessly at the slightest movement towards his throat. Endearingly, he still calls it practising when he asks Jared if he can suck him, as though he needs to work at improving for the future when they both know they’ve done it in the past far more times than they have yet to do it.

He can’t figure out which Jensen prefers, having his ass or his throat fucked, because he seems equally eager for either. And he’s as thrilled to do all the work with his lips, his tongue, his strengthening throat muscles, as he is if Jared just wants to pound into him. Jensen loves gay sex, fuck it all to hell, he loves it so fucking much and how fucking unfair is the fucking universe that he has to give that up as well as Jared?

Maybe he won’t. Maybe he’ll break, if not in the next year or two, certainly in the next decade or two, and he’ll find some guy in Texas to fuck him and Jared already wants to smash that guy’s face in with his fist because Jensen is his, HIS, and nobody else has any right to him. Maybe he should tell Jensen he can call him, if that ever happens, if he gets close to breaking point, and let it be Jared again.

What if Jensen calls immediately?

He won’t.

There’s a reason this is coming to an end and Jared is leaving.

He’s making his plans surreptitiously, and is deliberately vague about the topic of the next school year. He got his acceptance for being an RA and he turns it down, investigating what he’ll need to do in order to transfer to a school in New York. He won’t have the scholarship, but he can break his vow to himself about not relying on gambling to earn money and if he’s clever over the summer he can win enough to finance his final year.

(Don’t think about the summer, about being in New York once again bereft and distraught and alone. Don’t think about where you might end up when you stop caring about your future because you can’t share it with the one you love. Don’t think about the dangers that threaten of potential addiction and self-destruction and annihilation. It’s just a love affair. You’ll get over it. You just have to get through it.)

But first, before that, there are these final days and nights with Jensen to revel in.

*
By unspoken agreement, Jensen abandons his habit of studying in the library and they spend most of every day working together in their room. When Jared goes out to tutor, Jensen takes the opportunity to work on his secret song. It took him a while to choose, and he’s still not certain he’ll be able to go through with it, but he wants to.

One evening when he’s panicking about his first approaching final, Jared swivels around on his chair, where for once he’s working at his desk. “Jensen, come here.”

“But I still have so much—”

“Come here.”

Sex things usually wait until they go to bed and it’s not even 8pm yet, but Jensen’s body instinctively responds to that tone of Jared’s voice and he crosses the room before he’s even made the decision to obey.

“On your knees.”

“Jared, I don’t have time—”

“Now.”

Jensen drops.

“Good boy.” Flicking open his jeans with one hand, Jared cups Jensen’s cheek with the other. Jensen can’t stop from nuzzling into it.

“That’s right,” Jared says with warm approval as his dick springs free. It’s only semi hard, still bigger than Jensen can believe fits inside of him, and Jared strokes it a couple of times. “Now tell me the truth. You know your stuff for tomorrow. You’ve been working hard all year and you’re prepared. Right?”

“But I—”

“Right?”

Jared knows him too well, and the sense of urgency that was driving him to make sure he went through every single thing at least one more time is losing its potency. “Yeah,” he admits.

“Yeah.” Smiling, Jared rubs his thumb over Jensen’s lips. “So you’re gonna take a break now. You’re gonna stop worrying about what’s coming and you’re going to make yourself useful. Do you know how?”

From the combination of Jared stroking both his own dick and Jensen’s mouth, Jensen has a pretty good idea. “I’m gonna blow you?”

“That’s right. See, you know the answers.”

He should feel insulted by Jared’s condescending tone, and would in any other circumstances, but with Jared’s cock inches away from his mouth and the promise that he can keep it inside him, he just
feels safe and happy and eager.

“You have a mission, though,” Jared continues.

“What’s that?”

“Don’t let me get hard.”

“But you’re already halfway there!”

“So you’d better do something about it.”

Jensen doesn’t understand. “How?”

“You’re not here to give me sexual pleasure, Jensen, you’re here to be useful in a practical way, to keep me warm.”

He refrains from pointing out to Jared that it’s so warm tonight that they have both their windows open and are still in t-shirts, because that’s not the point. The point is that he’s already half hard himself from the way Jared’s talking to him. “All right,” he says, giving the agreement Jared always waits for before they do something like this. “I’ll be useful. I’ll keep you warm.”

The gentle smile Jared gives him is worth this confusion. “You’re gonna do it until I’m ready for bed. Do you need the bathroom first?”

“No.”

“Okay. Come here.”

It’s awkward at first, as Jensen has discovered so many sexual games are, when you’re still in the mindset of functioning like a normal human being with ideas about propriety and comfort and shame. Shuffling forward on his knees, he tries to find a position he’ll be able to hold for however long Jared plans for this to last. He has to grip onto Jared’s spread thighs while he manoeuvres his legs fully beneath the chair, but then what should he do with his hands?

Fortunately Jared understands his mute plea.

“Want me to tie them?”

Oh God, yes. He nods.

“Put your hands behind your back and take my belt off.”

Shouldn’t that happen the other way around?

“With your mouth, Jensen.”

Of course. It’s not easy. He feels clumsy and graceless, ugly even, as he fights to free the leather and jerk it out with his teeth. When he looks up, Jared is watching him, a fond smile on his face as though he’s never seen anything so cute.

“Doin’ well, baby.”

As always, Jensen feels both resentment and delight in response to being called that.

Whatever his face shows, Jared winks at him.
God, how he loves this man.

Successful at last, he lifts his face, belt held securely between his teeth, offering it to Jared, who takes it carefully. “Lean forward so I can bend over you to reach your wrists.”

It’s been far too long since Jared last tied him up and Jensen welcomes the rush of heat as his freedom of movement is stripped from him. He’s at Jared’s mercy now. He can’t get out of this by himself, and Jared could keep him bound all night if he so chose. He won’t, but the fact that he could is enough to get Jensen so hard he hurts.

This is not going to be easy, kneeling here, his dick restricted by his jeans, with that gorgeous cock in his mouth. And how on earth is he supposed to ensure Jared doesn’t get hard when–the bastard–he’s almost all the way hard now?

Dropping Jensen’s wrists, Jared sits back up. “Check your arms. That okay?”

Very okay. He should probably speak, but words don’t want to form. That’s not what he’s for right now. His mouth is for cradling Jared’s cock, not for talking. Instead he nods, and Jared accepts that.

“If something’s wrong, if something hurts or you have trouble breathing or you need me for any other reason, I want you to take your mouth off my cock and sit back. Don’t try and tough it out, this isn’t to stress you out or try and push your limits. I want you to relax, okay? Just relax and think about how full your mouth is and how good you’re making me feel. Yeah?”

Jensen nods again.

“Usual safeword of my last name if you need everything to stop immediately.” Jared waits for another nod before wrapping his hands around the back of Jensen’s neck. “C’mere, babe, and keep me warm.”

To Jensen’s relief, after an initial surge when it first enters his mouth, Jared manages to subdue his cock. He has no idea how, since if they were the other way around he knows he couldn’t, but as he kneels there submissively holding as much of Jared’s cock as he can get into his mouth, no sucking, no licking, just holding, it starts to deflate. He’s got to ask Jared how he did it, but that’s for later. For now, all he has to worry about is trying to get more of it inside. It’s a good thing his gag reflex has been worn away and all his practice at swallowing Jared’s cock down while continuing to breathe through his nose pays off. He has a couple of difficult moments when his body panics and tries to insist he’s making it do something it can’t, but then he feels the back of his throat release and manages to get even more of Jared inside. There’s no way he can get everything, not for a prolonged period of time, and Jared doesn’t want any form of stimulation so he reluctantly leaves it there.

He’s full. He’s unbelievably full and it’s his favourite feeling, being filled by Jared. His lips are stretched past the point of comfort and his jaw will start aching soon, not to mention the fact his legs are starting to cramp from being crammed under the small chair, but none of that matters. All that matters is that Jared is in his mouth and they’re together.

Time passes.

His legs go numb, then prick with pins and needles. It doesn’t occur to him to object. They’ll survive. It’s just discomfort.

Using Jared’s breathing techniques helps soothe the distressed muscles of his jaw. They settle down as though this is their new status quo.
His arms might be going numb too. He’s not sure. He’s barely aware of his body now. Only Jared’s.

Jared’s breathing is unsteady. That’s the first thing that captures his attention.

He feels a hand caress the back of his head, fingers gliding through his hair then down his neck, across his shoulders, then up again.

Jared’s cock is growing in his mouth.

“I need to fuck you,” Jared says suddenly. “I need to fuck your throat. Is that okay?”

Jensen nods as best he can. He flicks his eyes upwards, but he can’t quite manage to see Jared’s face, he’s too close.

“Do you need to breathe first?”

“Mm-mm.” He makes the negative sound around Jared’s cock, which flares.

“It’s gonna be brutal. Can you handle that?”

He craves it. Pulling back just enough to see Jared’s eyes, he lets the answer show on his face.

They’ve done it like this before, Jared slamming into his throat with seemingly no regard for Jensen, it’s one of Jensen’s favourite things to do now that he’s mastered it, proving to Jared that he can take it, but Jared is extra rough tonight. Jensen revels in it. How many more times is he going to get Jared’s cock down his throat? This might be the last time they ever do it like this.

Usually when they do this, Jared comes quite quickly but not this time. Every now and then he pauses, so deep that Jensen can’t breathe at all, pressing the back of Jensen’s head against him as though he’s trying to get deeper, trying to get all the way in. It feels so good and Jensen concentrates on trying to open further, to give more. After holding it so long Jensen almost passes out from lack of air, he pulls out entirely.

“Want your ass,” he says, but even as he speaks he’s hauling Jensen up and he literally throws him onto the bed.

Stupefied, Jensen bounces, lies there, sprawled.

“Ass up.”

But Jared doesn’t wait for him to comply, just wraps his hands around Jensen's hips and jerks them up into position. Jensen’s wearing the plug. He forgot about that since he wears it frequently now, especially in the evenings, and Jared rips it out. Before Jensen can cry out for its loss, Jared’s heavily lubed cock slides in to replace it.

“Oh, babe?”

“Yes.” His throat doesn’t work very well after its abuse but he manages to be clear enough. “Fuck me, Jay. Fuck me hard.”

With no prep, despite being stretched for hours by the plug, it still hurts, but he loves it. This is Jared inside him, obliterating him. His body quickly adjusts, accustomed to making way for Jared’s size by now, and he wants this to last forever, lost in the turbulence of their bodies becoming one.

When he comes, Jared hunches down over Jensen’s back, pressing scorching kisses against the back
of his neck, across his shoulders, sucking down on his skin, pushing his cock even further into
Jensen until the pressure becomes too much and just as Jensen gasps his name on a plea, he whispers
fiercely, “Come for me.”

The next morning, Jensen knows by the time he finishes that he’s aced his first final.

*

All of a sudden it’s their last weekend together. This time next week, the school year will be over;
there’ll be Jensen’s performance, the party, and the next morning Jensen will leave.

Leave Jared.

Without knowing that Jared isn’t coming back.

He knows he should tell him. He has to. But he can’t. If he does, Jensen will be upset and in the
face of that Jared will crumble. He’ll give in.

Another year of Jensen in his bed, Jensen in his arms, Jensen’s throat, Jensen’s ass, Jensen’s love.

He owes it to himself not to.

If he did, would this time next year find him looking for a job here instead of in New York so he can
spend Jensen’s final year with him, giving them three years of happiness together and then—
nothing. That’s it. Over.

Three years with Jensen.

He could have them.

He could.

He can’t.

Jensen hasn’t said a word about next year lately. They’re not even talking about the summer, just
acting as though these final weeks will last forever.

Eight days left.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

It's their final full weekend together, and Jensen has a fantasy he wants fulfilled.

“Jay, are you okay?”

It’s Friday night. On top of a throbbing headache, Jared had two finals today plus a bunch of last-minute tutor sessions and by the time he staggers back to their room he’s a wreck. He knows this is their last weekend together and he hasn’t had a chance to plan anything special and the countdown clock in his head is driving him mad and all he wants is to collapse into bed with Jensen and wrap himself around him and pass out. He falls backwards against the door to close it and can’t seem to get up the energy to move away.

“Jay?” Jensen gets up from his desk to approach him.

He’s sacrificing his library Friday night to spend it with Jared and Jared should appreciate it. He would, if he could just manage to stop wanting to fall over.

Stopping in front of him, Jensen removes the heavy backpack of books from his shoulder. “Come sit down.”

Jared lets him guide him over to the bed, where he slumps down at Jensen’s push. “I’m okay.”

“Yeah, I can see.” Jensen’s laugh is low and soft. “You need to sleep.”

“Wanna be with you.” He shouldn’t say things like that but he can’t help it. They have so little time left; how can he waste it with sleep? Which is partly what’s led them to this, since he’s been spending most nights awake to savour every moment of Jensen in his arms. Not clever.

“I’m here. Look, lie down. Wait, let me get your shoes off first.”

Jared should feel weak, letting Jensen take care of him to the point of crouching on the floor in front of him to take off his shoes, but it’s nice. When last did he have somebody worry about him getting into bed with his shoes still on? He moves when Jensen manoeuvres him so he’s lying on his back on the bed, his body too worn out to even get excited when Jensen’s hands move to his jeans. Their eyes meet in acknowledgement of the other night as Jensen undoes his belt. Jensen was so fucking amazing that night, so eager and willing and precious. Jared owes him so much for that and now he can’t deliver a thing.

Once his jeans are off, Jensen says, “Roll over. I want you on your stomach.”

“What’re you gonna do to me?” he asks as he complies.

“Make you feel good. Don’t worry, you don’t have to do anything but lie there.”

Jared isn’t sure what to expect, but it sure as hell isn’t Jensen perching across his thighs, his hands strong and sure as he strokes firmly along Jared’s spine.
“Jen?”

“Shh.”

More sweeps up either side of his spine, thumbs pressing hard between his shoulder blades, and Jared wants to cry from the relief of it. He doesn’t, but it feels too good to bear.

“Where’d you learn how to do this?”

“My mother swears by these, and she’s taken me along with her a few times. God, you’re tense, Jay. I should’ve been doing this for you all along.”

Jared’s re-evaluating his plans to leave. Maybe Jensen would agree to keep doing this for him next year, fully clothed of course, leading to nothing but the blissful release of overwrought muscles. So much for all his yoga. It’s got nothing on this. He lets out a moan when Jensen focuses on his neck. This is where his headaches are coming from and he can literally feel the pain ease by the moment.

“Don’t fight it,” Jensen whispers. “Let me, Jay. Let me give you this.”

He loses track. Hands are everywhere—in his hair, between his ribs, every inch around his shoulder blades, over his ass, down the backs of his thighs—and everywhere they go, they leave warm bliss in their place. He floats in and out of awareness. Sometimes Jensen’s talking, soothing murmurs Jared can’t quite make out. Sometimes he replaces his fingers with his mouth, soft little licks and kisses following in his wake. Jensen even sees to his feet, using his knuckles against Jared’s soles, and somewhere there is where Jared eventually loses consciousness.

Much later, he wakes. The room is dark, and Jensen’s pulled the covers up over both of them. He’s naked, wrapped around Jared in his usual fashion, but he left Jared’s shirt and underwear on. That wasn’t about sex, that massage. That’s the clear message. It was purely Jensen taking care of Jared.

Feeling Jared move away slightly to pull off his shirt, Jensen lifts his head, making a cross little noise. “Don’t go.”

“I’m not going anywhere.” He needs the bathroom, but that can wait. It’s too far away from Jensen. “C’mere.”

Jensen blinks sleepily up at him, more aware now. “How d’you feel?”

“Good, thanks to you.”

“Your head’s been hurting for days. You must tell me these things, Jared, so I can do something.”

There’s no future in which to keep it, but Jared promises, “I will.”

“Don’t like you in pain.”

He’s not hurting now. There’ll be plenty of time for that, far too soon, but not now. “’m good.”

“You hungry? I went and got some stuff for you while you were sleeping. It’s on your desk.”

Only hungry for this, for Jensen in his arms, worrying about him. “It’s okay. I’m okay. Just sleep.”

“I’m awake now.” Propping himself up on an arm, Jensen studies him through the moonlight pouring in their open window. “You look better.”

“I am. I told you. What about you? I didn’t ask about your day.”
“It was fine. Spent all day preparing for next week so I can take some time off tomorrow, if you can.”

“Yeah?” This is why Jared needed to be planning, damn it. “I have two tutor sessions, but otherwise I’m free.” Most of his finals were this week, only a couple to worry about at the end of next week, so he can take a break. “You have any ideas about what you want us to do?”

Jensen lies down again, resting his head on Jared’s shoulder. “I’ve been thinking.”

Has he now? “And?”

“It’s not very practical, I know that.”

“What isn’t?”

“I mentioned it before.” Jensen’s playing with the hair on Jared’s chest as he speaks, tangling their legs together. “I want my day to be about you. I know I said before about the fantasy of it, of maybe being tied up all day and just being used by you whenever you want. I get that it’s not practical, not here, and it’d probably be boring and horrible lying there helpless for hours in between, I get that, Jared, but I still want it. In some way.” His voice gets tinier as he goes on. “Do you think we could do something like that?”

Jared’s mind races. He’s fantasised about it too, since Jensen first mentioned it, fantasised about it to the extremes of turning Jensen into nothing more than an object for his pleasure, although that’s a lot hotter in fantasy than it would be in reality, like Jensen says. But the fact Jensen’s thought about it in such detail means he’s serious, he’s imagined himself in that situation, realised what it would be like, and he still wants it. Some form of it.

“We definitely can,” he says slowly, trying to visualise their options.

“Yeah?” Jensen perks up. “Really? You don’t mind?”

“Why would I mind?” He shifts onto his side so he can see Jensen, leaving Jensen’s head pillowed on his upper arm. “I want it too. You know how much I love you being at my mercy. Talk to me, though. Tell me what kinds of things you’ve been imagining. I want to make this good for both of us.”

Turns out Jensen’s imagination has been very busy, and a long time later he falls back to sleep still mumbling things that he wants Jared to do to him.

So many things.

So little time.

*

Jensen wakes up slowly. The morning sunshine is warm on his face, not something he’s accustomed to. Must be Sunday and he’s slept in.

He stretches.

Wait.
Something’s wrong.

He can’t stretch. He can’t move from his spreadeagled position on the bed.

“Morning, sleeping beauty.”

Jared’s face appears above him and Jensen blinks, trying to figure out what’s happening. “I can’t move,” he says. “Why can’t I move?”

“Because I decided not to let you.”

The words hit him in the gut, hard and deep. Vaguely, the memory of their pre-dawn conversation filters back to him. Jared took him at his word. “Fuck,” he breathes. “Jay—really?”

“You know your safeword, use it any time you need to. Other than that, you don’t get a say in what I do with you today.”

“Can I talk?”

“When you’re not gagged, yes.”

Imagine if he’d woken up gagged as well as tied to the bed, or blindfolded. It’s an electrifying thought, but he knows he’s not ready for that yet, he’d have panicked. One day, though, he wants that.

Ruthlessly he cuts off the part of his brain that tries to leap in with the reminder that there is no one day for them.

“Can I ask you things?”

“You can ask.” Jared’s tone makes it clear there might not always be answers.

Jensen thinks about it a bit, but certain practical matters are competing for his attention. “What if I need the bathroom?”

“Do you?”

“Yes.”

Jared turns back to where he’s fiddling with something at his desk. “I’ll take you when it’s convenient.”

Convenient. Convenient for Jared. And he’ll take Jensen? Wait a second, does that mean.... Jensen’s head swims with all the possibilities racing around his head. He can’t clearly remember all the things he said to Jared last night, he was half asleep and not censoring himself. What did he tell Jared about wanting?

He tugs at the ropes around his ankles and wrists. Jared’s tied him firmly, not too tight, but no give for movement at all. How did he manage to do it without waking Jensen up? The thought of Jared restricting his sleeping body like this is hotter than he’d have expected. He is literally helpless. He can’t move, at all. He can’t brush his hair out of his eyes, can’t scratch his cheek, can’t relieve himself—can’t do anything without Jared.

Jared continues to ignore him. When it’s convenient, he said. The words are so dismissive, and Jensen loves it. He lies there obediently, not bothering Jared. Jared knows his need and has decided it isn’t important right now. He’s not bursting, so he can wait. Just so long as Jared doesn’t make
him wait for hours, because he wouldn’t be able to last and he’s really not into the mess that would result in. It’s one of things that might be hot in theory but the reality would be gross and awful. Being made to wait, however, while his discomfort grows, works for him.

“What about my run?” it occurs to him to ask.

“You’re not running today.” Jared doesn’t turn around. “You can get up early tomorrow to make up for it, if you want, but not today. I want you here.”

So here Jensen is.

Maybe half an hour passes before Jared approaches him. He’s smiling warmly and Jensen thinks he’d do just about anything to put that approval on Jared’s face. “You’ve been really good for me, Jensen, waiting where I put you, not complaining. Because of that, you get a reward.”

“Yeah?”

Leaning over Jensen’s body, Jared unties one of his arms. “You were gonna get a cold shower if you made a nuisance of yourself.” He makes quick work of the remaining ropes and helps Jensen sit up. “Shake your arms and legs. Pins and needles?”

Jensen experiments. “No, I’m good.”

“Great. Arms behind your back.” A couple of quick winds with the rope and Jensen is secured once again. “Let’s get you to the bathroom.”

Jared doesn’t allow him walk on his own but guides him by a grasp on his upper arm. Jensen lets himself be led all the way to the toilet, where Jared stands him in position. “Uh, Jay, I’m going to need my hands here.”

“Your hands are not for your own use today.”

“So...?”

Jared’s grin is cheeky as he reaches down and casually takes hold of Jensen’s cock. “So I’m gonna do it for you.”

No. No way. Jensen stares at him, dumbfounded. How the hell is he supposed to go like this, with Jared’s hand on him, angling him in the right direction? “Jay.”

“Thought you needed to go.”

“I can’t believe you’re doing this.”

“You’re the one getting hard, Jensen. You’d better go quick, because you have no idea when I’ll let you go again.”

Jared’s right, he is threatening to get hard. Oh God, this is mortifying—but it shouldn’t be. Jared’s held his cock numerous times before, jerked him off, sucked him off even more often, so why should this seem so strange? It takes some concentration but at least Jensen manages to release his locked muscles. The relief is immediate, but he feels waves of embarrassment roll up through his chest and knows he’s blushing horribly.

He’s looking forward to seeking relief in the shower, but of course Jared joins him there too. Sex isn’t on the agenda, despite how vividly turned on Jensen now is. Instead Jared soaps him up
dispassionately, shampoos his hair, makes him close his eyes to be rinsed, then gives his ass a thorough clean. By the time he’s done, Jensen is so hard it hurts.

“Don’t you want me to wash you?” he asks.

“Not today. Stand on the mat there so I can dry you.”

This is harder to take. Jared’s taking care not to make it erotic and somehow that turns him on even more. He has no idea why, but that’s something to consider another day, when he’s halfway across the country from Jared and needing to wallow in memories. Right now is about creating those memories and extracting every bit of delight he can get to store up for the future.

Once he’s dry, Jared gets the lube and slips the plug up inside him, but doesn’t dress him. “I’m keeping you naked for most of today,” he says, “because you’re pretty to look at and I want to enjoy you.” He covers his own body, though, with some loose jeans and one of Jensen’s t-shirts. It’s black and hugs his shoulders, and it’s going to help this summer knowing that his clothes are with Jared, against his skin, keeping him warm and protected when Jensen can’t.

He follows Jared back into the bedroom. It’s starting to feel normal now, not having the use of his hands, and he doesn’t balk when Jared pushes him to his knees beside the desk. Trusting Jared not to let him fall, he goes down easily into a position that’s fast becoming familiar. It’s one of his safest places, on his knees at Jared’s feet.

He’s not so sure once it becomes clear that Jared intends to feed him breakfast, but this time Jared lets it turn erotic, leaving Jensen to suck on his fingers in between bites of the fruit and rolls that Jensen brought home last night. When it’s evident that Jared doesn’t mind, he turns his sucking from passive to active, hoping to be rewarded, as indeed he is when Jared finishes eating and leans back, opening his jeans.

“This is the rest of your breakfast,” he says, and Jensen wastes no time going after it.

He can read Jared pretty well by now, and it’s clear Jared isn’t interested in anything fast, there’s no rush on this, so now that he has Jared in his mouth he settles down to enjoy it. Jared’s fingers play with his hair, never pushing, letting him take it at his own pace. Jensen loves knowing that he’s naked on the floor while Jared is fully dressed on the chair. It makes him feel more what he wants to be, here purely to pleasure Jared. Every time he imagines what they must look like, desire shivers through him.

Pictures. He wants pictures of this.

Even better, videos.

But no. He can’t. Just in case.

His memory is going to have to suffice.

To his delight, Jared pulls out and comes all over his face and chest.

“You look beautiful with my come on you.” Leaning forward, Jared rubs some of it into Jensen’s cheek with his thumb. “It’s a good look for you.”

He leaves Jensen kneeling there while he prepares for his first tutor session of the day. It’s a pleasant way to spend a Saturday morning, his dick hard but not desperate, come drying on his skin, doing not much more than gaze at Jared. Jared doesn’t tell him to avert his eyes, so he obviously doesn’t mind. In fact, he frequently gazes back and they stare at each other without speaking as outside
people rush around to start their weekends.

“When do you have to leave for your first student?” Jensen asks during one such moment.

“I’ve arranged for them to come here.”

“Here!” Where he’s naked? “What about me?”

“Oh, you’ll be here too.”

“Where? Locked in the bathroom?”

That makes Jared laugh. “No. You’ll find out.”

He starts to worry about it, but quickly abandons the effort. Jared is in charge, these are his students, it’s his problem. Right now, the way he’s feeling, Jensen wouldn’t mind if they came in while he stayed kneeling exactly like this. In fact, he wishes they could. They could ask Jared who he was, and Jared could say something like, “Oh, he’s mine,” and that would be that.

Half an hour before the first student is due to arrive, Jared orders him to bend over the bed. Jensen complies eagerly because he knows what this position means, and sure enough he’s soon feeling the impact of Jared’s hand all over his ass. It feels good, a nice release of the tension that has been building between them all morning. “Spank me hard,” he remembers muttering to Jared during the night, and Jared takes him at his word. Where has this been all his life? It’s glorious.

Too soon, Jared stops. No, probably not too soon, because Jensen becomes aware that his ass is blazing and throbbing and is probably bright red. If only he could see it.

“Sasha’s going to be here in a few minutes,” Jared says, “so pull on the jeans and t-shirt I put out for you over there.”

There’s no underwear, just the denim rough against his burning skin. He’s sorry to have his hands free again, but doesn’t know if he could have coped with Jared dressing him too.

It turns out that Jared’s plan is for him to sit at his desk on the other side of the room during Sasha’s session. The jeans are Jared’s, long on him, and Jared takes advantage of the fact to disguise the rope where he attaches Jensen’s ankle to his chair.

Jensen stares, dumbfounded. “I’m going to be tied while she’s here?”

“Yes.”

“What if she sees?”

“She won’t.”

“But....”

“You wanna safeword?”

“No!” That’s not even a contemplation. He’s just trying to process it, being tied in the presence of someone else.

“Okay then. You comfortable?”

Not really. It’s a fucking hard chair. He gives Jared a meaningful look and Jared laughs.
“That’s my boy.”

“What must I do while she’s here?”

“I have a project for you to work on.” Jared places a notebook and a couple of pens in front of him. “While they’re here, I want you to write about this, Jen. I want you to write about everything as you’ve experienced it since we first got—since we first did this.”

“What, like a diary?”

“No, like a record.”

Sweat pricks across the back of his neck as he thinks about what he might write. “Jay, you know I can’t keep anything like that around.”

Jared nods. “I know. But it’s not for you.”

It’s for....Jared. He’s writing it for Jared. Okay, yes. “I can do that.”

“Good.”

Just then there’s the knock on their door that heralds Sasha’s arrival. Jensen tenses as she enters, acutely aware of the rope around his ankle, but of course she doesn’t look down. She barely even glances at him in her agitation for Jared to teach her fractal geometry and teach her now! Turning back to his desk, he tries to tune out their voices to think about what he wants to write. This is something Jared will take with him to read during the summer while he’s alone. Jensen could make it a dry recitation of events, or....he can spice it up and give Jared something worth reading. Something that’ll make Jared hot and hard and needy for Jensen the way Jensen’s going to spend the summer needy for him.

* 

This wasn’t the greatest idea he ever had. Spending an hour pretending to concentrate on fractals while Jensen’s 15 feet away with a red ass and tied to a chair is making Jared crazy. He should have thought about this better. That’s why he had Jensen suck him off first, damn it. He shouldn’t be so wild for him already. Fortunately Sasha actually knows her shit and he mostly just needs to calm her down and remind her, so it’s not very taxing and he can devote most of his awareness to Jensen.

Who’s writing away very industriously.

Fuck. Jensen. Jensen who’s entered into this bizarre day Jared planned overnight with such joy Jared feels he can hardly do him justice. He wants to do so much for him but he’s had to pare it down to the most basic essentials, using everything he’s learned Jensen likes to gain the maximum effect. Jensen was so sweet in the shower, obviously taken aback but giving himself completely into Jared’s hands. Where does he find that degree of trust in another person? How can he give himself so entirely, not holding anything back? Doesn’t he worry about how much it’s going to hurt this time next week?

He wants to know what Jensen is writing. He looks so intent, pen flying across the pages. What is he revealing?
How does he feel about being tied while Sasha is here? It’s the closest Jared can give him to public play and still be safe. Is he nervous? Is he turned on? Is he enjoying it or too on edge?

If only he could see straight into Jensen’s mind.

But he gets his answers after he’s able to kick Sasha out. The moment he closes the door behind her he rushes across the room to where Jensen’s turning to face him, eyes enormous, luminous.

“That was fucking awesome, Jared.”

He drops to his knees and scrabbles for the rope. “Yeah?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Then you won’t mind if I fuck you now?”

Jensen grins. “You liked it too?”

“I need to be inside you rather badly. Strip.”

When Jensen stands up after removing the jeans, his wrists move automatically to the small of his back. Jared’s eyes shoot to the rope and Jensen blushes but nods. “Please.”

Jensen’s ass is still deeply red, and he burnishes it off with a few more slaps while he removes the plug. He knows he should still use his fingers to make sure Jensen’s as open as he needs to be, but he can’t wait any longer and he fucking loves the stifled scream that rips from Jensen as he thrusts in.

It’s hard, fast, the fever in his brain driving him on. Jensen told him last night how much he loves rough fucks like this and Jared gives it to him until, at last, he erupts and only just manages to pull out in time to cover Jensen’s rosy ass the way he covered his face and chest earlier.

He leaves Jensen there, sprawled over the edge of the bed, ass on display, while he prepares for Matt. Jensen likes this, he’s noticed, being on display. If only they lived in a world where he could remain like that throughout Matt’s session.

But he can’t, and far sooner than he’d like, Jared goes over to help him up. Jensen sags against him, burying his face in Jared’s chest. “I didn’t come,” he says, as though it’s urgent information. “You didn’t tell me if I could, so I didn’t.”

Jared’s only just emptied himself, but he feels a tug in his belly at Jensen’s words, and he gathers Jensen into his arms. “You did well for me, babe. So well. I’m so pleased with you.”

Jensen looks up, eyes blazing. “Always want to please you, Jared.”

Jared does not let himself think: So fucking come with me to New York then.

Instead he cuddles Jensen closer, knowing they only have a couple more minutes, and presses his lips to his temple. “You ready to write some more?”

“You’re gonna like it,” Jensen says into his neck.

“Can’t wait to read it.”

“Only after. When you’re in New York. Wait to read it until then. Please?”
He’s not sure he can make that promise, but if that’s what Jensen wants, then how can he say no? “All right.”

He should have waited to fuck Jensen until after Matt because all he wants to do is curl up on the bed with him, but he forces himself to step away, to pull Jensen’s jeans back on over his come-spattered ass.

Matt’s hour drags by unbearably. Across the room, Jensen squirms and wriggles on his seat distracting Jared from any hope of concentration, but Matt is focused and intent on learning and Jared needs to do little more than guide him and help out with a couple of thorny issues. When they finish and Matt is packing up to go, he gestures over at Jensen’s guitar on the floor by the bed.

“You play?”

“My, uh, roommate does.” It registers on all three of them at the same time that there’s only one bed. Fuck. How did Jared forget that little detail? It’s become so normal to him that it never occurred to him it would jump out to somebody else. Jensen’s back goes equally rigid. “I mean—”

“It’s okay, man. I am too. And I won’t tell anyone if you don’t want it known.”

Surprise and relief fight for dominance. “You’re gay?”

“Bi, actually, but I’ve got a boyfriend at the moment.” Matt surveys the bed. “I’d give anything to be roommates with him and be able to share like that.”

Jensen swivels around on his chair as much as he can. “We got lucky.”

“I can see.” The way his eyes flick back and forth between them shows he means with each other. “Robin and I play too. Maybe next year we can get together, jam a little.”

“Jensen’s going to be playing next weekend with The Darkness,” Jared tells him. “You should come.”

Matt’s eyebrows raise. “Cool. Rob loves them. He knows the lead singer, Steve, isn’t it?”

“Yeah.” Jensen, fortunately, doesn’t look annoyed with Jared for issuing the invitation. “Wait, I think I know Robin. He and I shared a world history class last semester.”

“You’re that Jensen? He mentioned you a couple times, I should have guessed. That’s great. We’d love to come watch you next week. Saturday?”

“At Red’s,” Jensen confirms.

Excellent, Jared thinks. Some more friends to support Jensen next year. This is a good development. It will help for when he’s gone.

But he’s not gone yet.

As soon as Matt leaves, Jensen turns to him. “Two people know I’m gay now.”

Jared kneels to untie his ankle. “I think the waitress last weekend knew too.”

“Three. Three people know.”

“And me.”
Jensen gives him a meltingly soft smile. “And you.”

“How’s it feel to have people know?” Jared looks down at the rope, finding it hard to cope with the radiance in Jensen’s eyes. He shouldn’t look so fucking happy when he has no intention of anyone knowing he’s gay for the rest of his life after next weekend.

“It’s scary,” Jensen says. “But each one of them who knows, they also know that I’m with you. And that, I like. I like it a lot.”

And this is a conversation Jared can’t continue. Fortunately Jensen’s ankle is free now and he gives it a light massage, relieved that there’s only a slight indentation on Jensen’s skin from the rope. “You need the bathroom yet? You’re not gonna get a chance to go for a while after this, so I’d recommend it.”

Jensen nods. “Are you going to…hold my dick again?”

“Yes.”

“It makes me feel really weird.”

“Good weird or bad weird?”

“I’m not sure,” Jensen says as he stands up. “Shirt off?”

“Shirt off, hands behind your back like before.”

They take care of business, Jared making Jensen wait beside him while he relieves himself too. To his amusement, Jensen blushes and looks away. Considering how much time Jensen spends with Jared’s cock in his mouth, his shyness is adorable.

“What’s the plan now?” Jensen asks as Jared leads him back into the bedroom.

“I’m gonna watch basketball.”

“And me?”

“You’re gonna take off those jeans and let me play with you while I watch.”
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

In which secrets come out and Jared has a fantasy of his own to explore with Jensen.

The afternoon passes in a haze of pleasure for Jensen. There’s nothing he likes better than having Jared play with him. Yes, he likes it when he gets to play with Jared, to explore that long, beautiful body, to nibble at it and lick and suck and find out where to press to get that little surprised sound out of him, and he also loves it when they go at each other equally, but there’s something enthralling about being forced to remain passive while Jared does things to him.

To his delight, Jared produces the blindfold again and that makes everything more intense. Because he can’t rely on his eyes for information, he has to read Jared from his unsteady breathing, from the tremor of his hands, from the desperation of his teeth on Jensen’s skin. It’s easy to forget where he is and let all his reactions show. When his cries get too loud, Jared gags him with a scarf and then Jensen can really let loose. He howls his response to Jared suckling on his balls while his fingers torment Jensen’s nipples, he thrashes wildly, loving it when Jared forcibly subdues him, and roars when Jared prevents him from coming. Over and over again Jared drives him to the edge then stops him, and being denied does crazy things to Jensen’s head. He starts babbling, wildly grateful for the gag because it allows him to say all the things he can’t say out loud, proclaiming the love he feels that Jared must never hear, venting dreams for the future that can never come true.

When they come, it’s with Jared inside him. Jared takes his time, preparing Jensen, easing into him, rocking agonisingly slowly in and out. He removes the blindfold and they gaze at each other, speechless, soundless but for the gentle sounds of their bodies sliding together. For all Jared’s tenderness, this feels like the most wrenching fuck they’ve had.

Jensen flinches to feel Jared’s hand wrap around his frantic cock.

“I’m about to come,” Jared whispers. “Come with me.”

And he does.

* 

Jared orders pizza. His turn, he announces, and Jensen keeps quiet. Today is not up to him, after all. Settling back on the bed with Jensen in his arms, Jared finds a movie they’re both likely to enjoy and spends it feeding slices of pizza to Jensen. Being fed like this is even more disconcerting than it was this morning and Jensen still isn’t sure if he likes it, but he can’t deny the helplessness of it does things to him. He wouldn’t permit anyone but Jared to do this. With anyone else it would feel like a violation, but somehow because it’s Jared it’s not. He can’t deny how much he likes being denied autonomy when it’s Jared taking care of him. He also can’t deny how much he enjoys doing things for Jared in return, whether it’s planning special occasions (has no one ever done something like that for him before, that his reaction was so strong last week?) or massaging his headaches away or, to be
honest, anything at all that eases the stress or sadness of Jared’s life in any way.

He’s worrying about Jared this summer. He talks about going to “New York”, not “home”. He never mentions his parents, and Jensen knows he’s hoarding money.

The movie is coming to an explosive climax on the screen when he says, “Jared, will you answer me one question tonight?”

“That depends. What are you offering?”

He thinks. “The answer in return to any one question you want to ask me.”

Jared’s body tenses beneath him. “That could be dangerous.”

“You can say no if you need to, but I’ll tell you my question then you can decide.”

“You don’t want to hear mine too?”

He shakes his head against Jared’s chest. “If you answer mine, I’ll answer anything you want. Honestly.”

If only he could see Jared’s face—but the fact that he can’t is all that’s giving him sufficient courage to go through with this.

“Okay,” Jared says as an aeroplane smashes into an oil truck on the screen, turning both into a fireball. “Ask me.”

“What happened with your parents?”

Jared goes rigid.

Jensen shouldn’t have asked. He knew he shouldn’t have—but Jared’s response is enough to confirm that it is just as bad as Jensen fears. He’s about to reassure him that he doesn’t need to reply, that Jensen’s the only one who committed himself here, when Jared speaks.

“They found out I was gay.” His voice can scarcely be heard over the explosions on screen.

“They didn’t react well?”

It’s a long while before Jared continues. “My boyfriend—former boyfriend—when his parents found out, they sent him to a camp. A de-gaying camp. He came back a wreck. Insisted he was straight. My parents wanted to do the same with me. I wouldn’t go. So I left.”

It is worse than he thought. “You went to New York?”

“I had a friend there. Ex-hookup. He let me crash for a few months.”

“How old were you?”

“Sixteen.”

God. At sixteen, Jared refused to compromise himself and he lost everything. At sixteen, Jensen did the exact opposite. “H-have you ever been back?”

“No.”
“Had any contact?”
“I emailed my sister once. The email bounced back.”
“You have a sister?”
“Megan.”
“Is she....older? Younger?”
“She’s just turned seventeen.”

Jared has a little sister. Jensen turns that fact over in his mind. From the strain in Jared’s voice, he suspects they were close, and knowing how Jared loves to take care of people, he must have spoiled his sister like crazy. Jensen knows what it’s like to lose a sibling. She’d have been, what, about twelve when Jared left? A lot younger than Jensen was when he lost Josh. How has she coped? Has she been brainwashed by her parents into believing her brother is evil? Does she hate him? Or, given her age, are her parents the ones who changed her email address so Jared couldn’t contact her? Might she feel like Jensen does and still miss him every day? It’s obvious Jared misses her, misses her so much he can hardly say her name. His voice was flat when he mentioned his parents, but it trembles talking about Megan.

“I’m sorry that happened to you, Jared,” he says. Jared’s hands are linked over Jensen’s bare stomach and he covers them with his own.

Jared turns one of his hands over to link their fingers. “It was a long time ago.”

Not really. Not when he still lives with the consequences of it every day. “You must despise me,” Jensen says. Fuck, he despises himself.


“But I rejected myself. I wasn’t brave, like you. I’m still not.”

“Jen—”

“When my brother left, I wrote to him. He didn’t reply. He got the email, but he didn’t reply. That’s when I knew he wasn’t coming back.”

“Will you tell me what happened?”

He’s never spoken about it. Not once. “Is that your question?”

“Yeah.” Jared’s hand tightens over his. “You don’t have to tell me, just—I know he’s an important part of your life and I’ve—wondered. Your mother and—they said you changed after he left.”

Changed. Yes. “He’s not gay,” Jensen says, then wonders why this is where he chose to start. “I mean, that’s not why he left. I’m pretty certain he’s straight. He was....” How does one explain Josh? “....everything that I wasn’t, growing up. He was big, built, excelled at every sport he tried, all the girls were in love with him, all the boys wanted to be him. He got straight A’s without trying, unlike me, and he led a charmed life. Literally. I used to wonder how we could be brothers since I was scrawny, was terrible at tests, and my coordination was so awful that I always got chosen last for teams.”
“Did you get on?”

“Not really. I hero worshipped him when I was little, but I started to resent him later. Everything came so easy to him, he always fitted in.”

“You didn’t fit in?”

Jensen smiles wryly at the memory of his past self. “Remember my mentions of my misbegotten youth? I hung out with the rejects at school, the potheads. I smoked, drank, fooled around with girls who’d been sleeping around since middle school.”

“Girls?”

“I didn’t fuck them, if that’s what you’re asking. That was part of the problem, because they were up for it and I never was. I didn’t know what to do about that so I made out with them and got good at getting them off, and they liked that I made it about them and not me so they kept coming back for more. And as long as I was seen with them, I knew I was safe.”

“Jen....” Jared starts as if he means to ask a question, but then he falls silent.

“I knew I was gay then,” Jensen says starkly. “I didn’t let myself actually think the word, but inside me, I knew. I knew and it terrified me shitless so I buried it. I never let myself look at boys, I learned how to pleasure girls and make them happy so I quickly developed a reputation for being a ladies’ man. And then when Dianne came along, she wanted to remain pure and it was such a relief to me that I could hide without having to do anything other than be her attentive boyfriend and I managed to bury it so deep that it began to seem like some other person was the one who’d been so afraid of looking at other boys and wanting them. And church, they went on about the body being a temple and the sins of the flesh and rising above it, and somehow that worked for me. I could be that person. I could deny myself. You know I like being denied.” This is something he’s thought about a lot recently. “There’s something in my brain that derives satisfaction from not getting what I want.”

“I’ve noticed that.”

Jensen laughs. “Yeah, it kind of has a different effect when it’s with you, but it’s the same principle. For myself, I want to sleep in so I make myself get up early. I want to laze around so I make myself run every day. I want to eat chocolate so—did you know that before you I hadn’t eaten chocolate in years? Years, Jared. Because I loved it so much. I honestly forgot what it tasted like.”

“How does it feel for you now, not being so strict with yourself? I know I kinda forced the chocolate onto you. Did that feel bad?”

“No. Well, not bad, but....” Terrifying. He doesn’t even know what he’s trying to say anymore and he’s supposed to be talking about Josh and how is this even related? “I feel like a new person with you,” he says, trying to sort through words so he doesn’t accidentally use the wrong ones. “When I—when I saw you that morning, naked, something changed inside me. It was like all the walls I’d built started falling down. Some collapsed immediately, others took a little longer. But I couldn’t deny myself you. And that’s when I realised I hadn’t had to work very hard to deny myself any of the other things because I didn’t care enough for it to be a challenge. Even chocolate.”

Luckily that gets a little laugh from Jared, as he’d hoped.

“So maybe I’m not as good at self-denial as I thought,” he says ruefully. “At least not when it comes to you—to sex with you.” Careful, don’t give too much away. “But you were asking me about
Josh,” he hurries on. “It was kind of my fault he left.”

“Your fault?” Jared sounds shocked.

“Yeah. I—well, I realised later that I gave him the idea. See, he was the perfect son in every way, planning to study finance to go into my dad’s company, with the view of eventually taking it over. My dad was already talking about changing the name to Ackles & Son, and Josh seemed into it. I had no reason to think he wasn’t.”

“What happened?”

Fires are being put out on the screen now. The hero’s about to get the girl. Why is getting the girl always seen as the great reward? “He got wind of a drug raid on the place I used to hang out, stormed in there ahead of the police and got me out. I yelled at him, said we couldn’t all be so perfect, Daddy’s little clone. It was the first time I ever saw him lose his temper. ‘You think I want to be?’ he yelled back at me. ‘You think I want any of this?’ How was I supposed to know he didn’t? ‘What do you want then?’ I asked, and he told me. He told me he wanted to be an English professor, focusing on the classics—I had no idea he even read classics, Jared. Or read anything. I’d never seen him with a book, and it turned out he was reading them on his phone when he pretended to be playing games. He wanted to move to California, to live by the beach and be a vegan—yeah, he actually said that to me. I didn’t even know what it was, I had to look it up later. And my response to that, after he poured out his heart to his stupid, stoned little brother was, ‘Why don’t you do that then?’”

“So he did?” Jared’s voice is calm in comparison to how heated Jensen’s has become, and he’s started ever-so-gently rubbing his thumb over the constant bruise at Jensen’s hip.

“Yeah,” Jensen says, trying not to remember the night his childhood ended. “It was months later. During the summer. He’d just graduated and was supposed to send his downpayment here for the course I’m doing. That’s when he told my dad he’d got into Berkeley and that’s where he wanted to go instead. To study literature. There was a huge fight and my dad said he’d cut him off if he did that. Josh said he didn’t care. He left that night, took his girlfriend with him. Apparently she was the vegan one and she grew up in California, and he decided he wanted that life instead of life with us.” The memories roll through him regardless of his attempt to only relay dry facts, and he grips onto Jared’s hand. “After he’d gone, when we heard he’d left with Melissa, my dad said to my mom, ‘At least he’s not gay. At least there’s that.’”

“Shit,” Jared exclaims softly. “Jen—”

“I already knew I couldn’t be, but that—it kind of confirmed it.”

“Fuck, I’m sorry.”

He blinks hard at the compassion in Jared’s voice. “Neither of my parents took it well. My dad started drinking, secretly, he thought, but we all knew. And my mother, she stopped getting out of bed. For weeks. She quit her job as secretary at the church—well, lost it, really, since she just stopped going. She didn’t do anything, just laid in bed saying she didn’t feel well, but she never went to the doctor. At least it was the summer and I was home and I was able to take care of her, but when it was time for school to start again I was worried, so one Sunday I managed to persuade her to get up and go to church with me. She eventually agreed, and it was good for her. She talked to people again, and I even heard her laughing. That was the day she introduced me to Dianne, since Dianne’s mother was an old friend of hers and Dianne and I had apparently played together as kids. So, uh, there you have it. What happened to Josh and how I ended up with Dianne.”
Jared has no idea what to say.

He wants to cry for the poor lost boy Jensen was, caught between so many things he didn’t want and unable to have the one thing he did. And he’s still there now, still just as trapped.

“Have I made it harder for you?” he asks. “Bringing the gay thing back into your life?”

“No!” Sitting up, Jensen scrambles around so he’s on his knees between Jared’s legs. “No, Jay, I wouldn’t trade this for anything, what we’ve had.”

“But I’ve made you acknowledge that you’re gay. And shown you what you’ll be missing once you marry Dianne.”

“I don’t see it like that at all.”

“You don’t?”

Jensen’s fingers dig into the sides of Jared’s thighs. “No,” he says urgently. “Please don’t think that. It’s the opposite. What you’ve given me, it’s more than I thought I’d ever have. It’s meant—everything. Dianne’s not—I don’t think she likes sex very much, which is a good thing since it means I won’t have to have it often with her, because, honestly, Jared, I don’t think I can. I don’t know if I’ll even be able to...you know. And I’d hate to have gone through the rest of my life not knowing what it could be like, how amazing it can be. And you’ve given me that.”

It shouldn’t help, hearing that Jensen’s not even sure he can get up for Dianne, since Jensen’s still talking about a life apart from him, but it does. At least Jensen’s not leaving him for somebody else.

“So this has been—good—for you? What we’ve done?”

“Yes,” Jensen says emphatically. His eyes implore Jared to believe him. “Like I said, it’s been everything.”

“Not quite.”

“What do you mean?”

Jared’s more sure than ever that he wants to do this. “It’s time for what I have planned for this evening.”

“There’s more?”

“If you’re still up for it.”

“Of course I’m up for it.” The haunted look is gone and Jensen’s eyes are already gleaming with anticipation. “What’s the plan?”

Jared takes a deep breath. “You’re gonna fuck me.”

“You mean....ride you?”

“I mean top me.”
Jensen’s face clouds over. “You said you didn’t want to do that, Jared. I don’t want you doing it just for me.”

“I’m not.” If he’d done it then, it would have been, but it isn’t like that any longer. “I want this, Jensen. For me.”

“You said you don’t like it.”

“I’ve never done it. Not all the way.”

“Because you’re too sensitive and it didn’t feel good.”

Because he’s never been with anyone he wanted inside him. “I never said that.”

“It’s obvious. I know you, Jared, and you don’t feel comfortable even letting me rim you because it’s too much for you to take.”

“I want to know, okay? I want to know what it’s like and you’re the only person I’d ever let do it to me, so I’m asking you. Please. Fuck me.”

“You’ll hate it.”

“I won’t.”

“Jared, you’re so tight—”

“I’ve been working on that.”

“You—have?” Jensen looks stunned.

Embarrassed, Jared nods. “I got another butt plug. Mine’s a bit smaller than yours, but I’ve been desensitising myself and I’m a lot better now. Does that tell you how badly I want this? I want to feel you inside me, Jensen. I want it.”

Jensen takes a moment to process. “Right,” he says. “If we do this, you have to promise me something.”

“What?”

“That if you don’t like it, if you want to stop, you’ll tell me. Immediately. No gritting your teeth and seeing it through for my sake. You understand?”

“Jen—”

“That’s non-negotiable. I won’t do it any other way.” Despite being on his knees, Jensen looks fierce, eyes blazing, and Jared nods.

“Okay.”

“Promise.”

“I promise.”

“And I’ve never done this before, so you have to talk to me, tell me what to do so I don’t hurt you.”

“The same way I do it to you. It’s not complicated.”
“It doesn’t hurt me, and I love it, I love everything about it. It’s not the same, Jared.”

That’s true, but Jared doesn’t care. He’s desperate for this, especially now that it looks like he’s going to get it.

They clean up the mess from the afternoon, the pizza boxes, the remainder of the fruit, their beer cans. It doesn’t seem to occur to Jensen to get dressed, although Jared would have let him, so Jared enjoys the sight of the beautiful body that still belongs to him for another week. If only he could always keep Jensen naked in their room, on display for Jared’s pleasure. His own pleasure too, by the looks of things, since he’s semi-hard throughout—or maybe that’s in anticipation of fucking Jared.

Jared is about to get fucked. To lose his final virginity. That’s one of the reasons he wants to do this with Jensen, so Jensen can have a part of him that no one else has ever had nor will ever have. And, more selfishly, he wants to be Jensen’s first as well, the first person Jensen penetrates. He won’t be the last, since that will be Dianne, but he needs to be the first. It would kill him to know that the first time Jensen slides himself up between somebody’s legs, it’ll be Dianne’s. That’s just not an option.

By the time they’re ready, Jared is shaking a little. He didn’t lie to Jensen, he has been trying to stretch himself, but it hasn’t felt anything but awkward and weird. He can’t fathom how Jensen voluntarily wears his plug for hours at a time, even overnight, because he’s hyper uncomfortable with it inside. This probably won’t be much fun, but he’s determined to do it anyway.

Jensen wants to start by eating him out. Jared thinks it’ll make him too sensitive and he won’t be able to tolerate everything else to come afterwards. They compromise on just a few minutes of it, and he folds himself into position on the bed, face down, ass up. When Jensen gets in this position he looks hot as fuck, that round ass sticking out so invitingly it makes Jared’s mouth water every time. It feels vastly different to be in it himself, nerve-wracking and lewd.

“Damn, you look good like this,” Jensen says softly. “No wonder you like me in this position.”

“It feels fucking weird,” Jared says.

“I know. But now I know how good it looks, I’m not going to feel nearly so awkward.”

The bed dips beneath Jensen’s weight, then warm hands stroke over Jared’s cheeks before easing them apart. It feels excruciatingly embarrassing.

“You like this, remember?” Jensen’s hot breath fans across his exposed asshole as he speaks. “And we can do only this, if it gets too much for you. We don’t have to go all the way. Keep talking to me, okay? Are you good?”

“I’m good.”

Taking that as the green light it is, Jensen touches the tip of his tongue to Jared’s hole.

Jared shudders.

The tongue lightly circles the puckered skin then licks a hard stripe directly across it.

That feels better, sending a flash of arousal down his spine, and he wriggles, wanting more.

Several more licks, then Jensen presses a kiss right in the centre of his hole.

Jensen’s kissed parts of his body before, but this feels different. As Jensen kisses him there again,
Jared strains to get closer, and the kiss turns open mouth and wet. Like a French kiss. Like Jensen is making out with his hole the way they’ve never dared let themselves do with their mouths.

The thought distracts him for long enough to not tense up again when Jensen’s tongue starts to thrust inside his body. Jared’s so busy thinking of it as a kiss that it doesn’t occur to him as penetration and he arches his back to give Jensen better access. Heat pulses now from his hole to his cock, and Jensen’s fingers join in the action, lightly caressing his balls in the way he’s discovered Jared likes.

“Are you ready for my finger inside you?” Jensen asks.

He’ll never be ready for that. “Yes.”

The finger slides into him easily, well-lubed and much warmer than the plug. His muscles still seize up around it.

“Fuck, you’re tight.”

“Don’t stop.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m good. Keep going.” Compared to his forefinger, Jensen’s huge. How in all hell is Jared going to stretch enough to take him in?

The in/out motion is making him dizzy.

“Next one.”

“Jay—”

“Next finger. I’m ready.”

He’s not, not completely, and his flinch gives him away.

Jensen pulls out. “Jared, I’m hurting you.”

“I want this. Please.”

“I’m not going to hurt you.”

“I want you in me!”

“I’m too big and you’re too tight.”

“So stretch me, damn it.”

There’s silence behind him; Jensen’s obviously thinking it over. “Why don’t you turn around and we can try it that way.”

He really doesn’t want Jensen seeing his face through this. “I’m good.”

“Well, I’m not. I have an idea.”

“What idea?”

Jensen sighs. “I’m going to suck you while I open you up, give you something else to think about, something that you love. See if that helps you relax enough.”
If Jensen’s sucking him, then he won’t be able to see his face. “Okay.” He immediately feels more comfortable on his back, Jensen between his legs. How many evenings have they whiled away in this position, his dick in Jensen’s mouth? It restores a sense of normality to proceedings, enough that he’s able to smile. “You okay?”

“I’m fine.” Jensen’s tone makes it clear he doesn’t think Jared is. “You ready?”

“Fire away.”

It’s instant relief to plunge into Jensen’s mouth. This is where he belongs, and he concentrates on how perfect it feels. Jensen gives him some grace, total dedication to Jared’s cock and that alone until Jared relaxes back on the pillows and stops worrying about what is to come. Jensen starts with Jared’s balls, fondling them, playing with them, and between that and the hot mouth on his cock, Jared barely notices when the first finger slips back inside him.

The second follows relatively soon. It doesn’t hurt this time. The stretching as Jensen scissors his fingers feels odd, but not uncomfortable, and he reaches above his head to grip the bars of the bed.

“It’s good, Jen, it’s working. Keep going.”

Jensen’s careful, gliding his fingers slowly through Jared’s opening with tiny little back and forth movements, each one going a little further in. Just as it reaches the verge of painful, Jensen finds his prostate.

Jared’s never experimented with that before for himself. Others love it, he believes them, but he’s never had the courage to feel for it inside his own body.

He didn’t know anything was possible to feel this good.

“There we go,” Jensen murmurs around his cock. “Like that, do you?”

“Fuck,” Jared breathes. “Again. Do it again.”

Now he’s getting pleasure from two places, his cock and his ass, and that’s something he never expected.

“I’m gonna come,” he says as the realisation hits him. “Shit, Jen, I’m gonna come!”

Jensen doesn’t stop. He maybe adds a third finger, Jared isn’t sure, but between the stretching are those lightning bolts of ecstasy and Jensen’s mouth tightening around Jared’s cock, and he’s helplessly coming before he can stop it.

He’s only vaguely aware of Jensen’s hand replacing his mouth through the haze of euphoria that shivers through him and then there’s a deeper stretch at his hole and......holy fuck......Jensen is inside of him.

When he opens his eyes, Jensen stills. “How’s that?”

“You’re in me.”

There’s that smile of his sweet, sexy Jensen. “I am. How does it feel?”

“You’re inside me.” He can’t get over it. It’s not very far, only a couple of inches, he suspects, but he hadn’t dared hope they’d get even this far. “That was cheating.”

“It worked.”
“It did.” Belatedly he realises he’s smiling, smiling so hard his mouth hurts. “More.”

“Yeah?”

“More.”

They’ve learned from previous experiments that Jared likes having his cock played with after he comes. He’s sensitive and it hurts, but in good ways, ways that draw out the pleasure, and Jensen uses his hand to keep Jared distracted while he eases further into his ass. For his part, Jared keeps gazing up into Jensen’s eyes, no longer caring what he’s revealing on his face. Jensen is beautiful like this, skin damp from the effort of restraining himself, cheekbones flushed, his freckles standing out across his nose. If Jared had the energy he’d be unable to refrain from kissing him, so it’s a good thing all he can do is lie here while Jensen penetrates his body.

“You’re gorgeous, Jared,” Jensen says. “Look at you lying there for me, opening up for my cock, letting me all the way inside you. You’re so fucking gorgeous I can’t stand it. I’m going to remember this moment forever, the way you look as I take your virginity. This is my first time too, we’re sharing it, together. I’m taking yours and you’re taking mine.”

The stretch is becoming unbearable again and Jared raises his legs. “Let me put them on your shoulders. Easier that way. Better angle.”

It is, oh, fuck, it is, because Jensen slides deeper even as Jared moves but his body opens for it, accepts it. His thighs are bent back against his chest and something about this position works for him because it feels like the final barrier inside him dissolves and pulls Jensen all the way home.

“Oh my God.” Jensen’s words are a reverent whisper. “Jay, I’m all the way in.”

He’s overwhelmingly full, stretched to his limit. “You are.”

“You’re okay?”

“Yeah. This position, it works.”

“Good.” Jensen’s arms tremble where they’re supporting him. “Tell me when I can move. If I can. If this is all you can take, that’s fine too.”

Now that the worst is over, Jared’s definitely not backing out. “I’m good. You can move. Not too fast, though.”

It feels wrong having Jensen pull out, so much so that when he reverses directions Jared welcomes him back in. Yes, there we go, that’s what he’s been wanting all along, that sense of rightness. It happens every time, no relief in being emptied, just the need to be filled again by Jensen.

“You can move faster now.”

It takes Jensen a couple of minutes to find his rhythm, visibly afraid of hurting Jared, but as Jared keeps whispering, “Yes, yes, yes,” he stops worrying so much and pays more attention to what he’s doing. “Fuck, yeah,” Jared shouts when Jensen hits his prostate.

“Yeah?” Jensen grins. “Yeah, that’s it? You like that?”

“Again!”

Always a quick learner, Jensen doesn’t take long to be hitting it with every stroke. Jared’s hard
again, how the hell did that happen? He’s hard and Jensen’s not even touching his cock, he’s got hard from the anal stimulation alone, just like Jensen does, and that is fucking wonderful. Jensen’s slamming into him now and he’s slamming back, forcing Jensen to go harder, faster. Their eyes don’t waver from each other’s, until suddenly Jensen throws his head back, thrusting extra far inside Jared, his entire body convulsing as he comes. The sight of it, of Jensen getting off inside his body, sets Jared off and he reaches down to pump himself, spraying all over his face and chest.

Jensen is still inside him as he comes down from it. When he goes to pull out, Jared stops him.

“Not yet.”

Jensen gives him a shaky smile. “You’ve got come on your face.”

“Wipe it off for me.”

Instead of using his fingers, Jensen bends down between Jared’s legs and uses his tongue. First on Jared’s cheek. Then his chin. Then....

It’s a lick, that’s all, across his lips.

But Jensen doesn’t move on.

His mouth stays, hovers over Jared’s.

Their eyes meet—

And then they’re kissing, hard and deep the way Jensen just fucked him, the dirtiest, hottest kiss of Jared’s life. At some stage Jensen slips out of him, Jared’s legs drop down, and he rolls them over so he’s on top, licking into Jensen’s mouth frantic for all of it, everything he’s been denying himself so far, and Jensen’s just as eager and they kiss......

......and kiss......

......and kiss.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

It's the morning after the night before, and time is running out.

They fell asleep.

He kissed Jared and they fell asleep.

Jensen’s heart races from how fast he woke up, but Jared remains sound asleep beside him despite the morning sun starting to light the room.

It’s Sunday.

Next Sunday morning he’ll be finishing off his packing to leave for the airport at lunchtime. He has exactly one week left with Jared and then....

And then what?

A lifetime of unhappiness?

Is he seriously going to make that decision?

Slipping out of bed, he heads for the bathroom, picking up his running clothes along the way. As he relieves himself, he remembers the way Jared held him yesterday. Yesterday feels like a dream. Did he really fuck Jared? And spend most of the day naked and get tied up around other people and tell Jared everything about his past?

And hear about Jared’s. Jensen knows about those anti-gay camps, and as he heads for the forest he thinks about the kids at his school who were sent to them. One never came back and they found out later he’d killed himself there. Another returned as a shadow of himself and was bullied viciously. He tried to kill himself, but didn’t succeed. There were some others who there were rumours about, but no one ever knew for sure. Those kids were one of the reasons that Jensen knew he could never be gay.

Except he is.

He is and there’s no doubting it. Much as he enjoyed fucking Jared last night, he prefers it to be the other way around. He wants to be the one getting fucked. There is nothing a woman has to offer him, and almost nothing he has to offer her. Will his dick even work with Dianne? Especially now that he has Jared for comparison? The thought of sinking his dick into any body that’s not Jared’s makes him feel nauseous.

Jared isn’t in love with him, though. True, Jensen’s earlier fears about Jared feeling trapped, tied down to only one person, haven’t played out in reality and Jared obviously cares about him, but he hasn’t ever argued that Jensen shouldn’t go back to Texas, shouldn’t marry Dianne, shouldn’t return to pretending to be straight. Even last night when Jensen told him how it came to be, he continued to be the supportive friend, understanding how hard it is for Jensen but not questioning that this is how it has to be. Look how well he played along when Jensen’s parents came to visit after all, pretending
to be straight himself so his parents wouldn’t even suspect.

For all Jensen wants a future with Jared, that isn’t what Jared wants. He’s not the type to hold back so he’d have said something by now if he wanted that. This has just been about sex for him, he even confirmed it. Jensen’s been the obvious one, taking them on dates and being romantic and kissing Jared, for God’s sake, after Jared made it perfectly clear that kissing wasn’t to be a thing between them. It’s a wonder Jared puts up with it. Maybe he’s counting down the days until next weekend with relief that he’ll be rid of Jensen at last, that while he was fun to fuck, the rest of it was too much, especially the part where Jensen’s too chicken to even come out.

Jared preferred to lose everything rather than lie about who he was. He was sixteen and all alone in New York and he’s been alone ever since. How he must despise Jensen for not being brave enough to do the same, for choosing instead to go home and live a lie. No wonder he can’t fall in love with Jensen. What is there to love?

Shit, Jensen’s breathing is going overboard now. He’s deep in the forest and he’s hyperventilating. Jared taught him tricks, damn it, tricks to cope with this, but the thought of Jared makes it worse and his brain blanks on the memory. His head pounding, he staggers to a stop against a tree. It’s too late. His skin’s prickling again, icy cold and steaming hot at the same time. He can’t stop it now. He’s not breathing at all. Or there’s too much air. It’s impossible to tell. He’s fallen over. No, he hasn’t. He’s upright. Everything’s whirling around him. He’s on the ground. He can’t feel anything. Can’t see anything. He can, but it’s not recognisable. Shapes. Colours. Brown. The tree. He can’t feel the bark. His hand is scraping on it back and forth from the shaking. His palm is bleeding. Red. Blood.

And now he’s throwing up.

Fuck.

Again.

As usual, once he’s done, the symptoms recede. He lies there on the forest floor, trembling violently in the aftermath. It takes too long to remember the flask of water attached to his belt.

It helps.

Just like when Jared gave him—don’t think about Jared.

Okay, that’s better. The thoughts are cut off. He lies on his back, watching the way the morning light flickers between the treetops. He’s breathing again. Slowly. Evenly. According to the pattern that J—that he learned.

It’s working. A bit late, but it’s working.

*  

When Jared wakes up, Jensen is gone. It shouldn’t be a surprise, since Jensen has often left for his run before Jared wakes, but something feels different. It feels like that first morning when he woke to an empty room after taking Jensen’s virginity.

He tells himself it’s silly and gets up to take a quick shower. There’s a definite twinge from his ass,
not fiery pain, but his body knows it was violated last night and isn’t happy. Tough. It cooperated long enough for him to get what he wanted, so it can just fuck off now.

Why is he so edgy? Why does Jensen being gone feel wrong?

Because they kissed last night, he belatedly remembers. After Jensen fucked him, they kissed.

Shit.

Closing his eyes, he leans forward so the hot water pounds down over his head. He kissed Jensen despite vowing not to and all he wants is to do it again.

He’s getting dressed in his basketball gear when Jensen comes in the door. He stops, taken aback. “I thought you’d be gone.”

“I overslept.”

“Oh.”

Jared studies him. He’s paler than he should be, no flush on his face from running, and his energy seems off. He sidles inside and over to his desk where he unclips his water bottle. It’s empty, and Jared knows for a fact he never usually drinks even half of it on his runs.

“You okay?”

“I’m fine.”

Definitely not okay then, considering he won’t meet Jared’s eyes. Nor is he returning the question. “Sure,” Jared says easily, trying not to spook him any further. “I’m going to basketball, so you can —” Talk to your girlfriend. Does he still do that? “I have a bunch of tutor sessions afterwards, so I’ll see you tonight?”

Jensen nods, fiddling with the bottle. “Yeah, I’ll be studying, so....”

This is awful. Jared grabs his phone and his bag. “I’ll see you later then.”

“Okay.”

It shouldn’t hurt that Jensen is withdrawing. He should have expected it, braced for it. He just...didn’t, because nothing else has fazed Jensen before, he’s taken everything in his stride, so why the fuck couldn’t he cope with a single (scorching, endless) kiss?

Despite dressing for basketball, Jared has no desire to go. His ass hurts too much anyway for him to get excited about jumping around, so instead he follows the path to the forest that Jensen led him down last week and ends up beside the river. This is why he has to leave. He’s too compromised.

But, oh, fuck, Jensen’s story. It all makes so much sense, why he’s the way he is. He reformed to save his parents and he has precedent for believing they’ll kick him out if he doesn’t toe the line.

Jared doesn’t blame him for a heartbeat.

He needs to make it as easy as he can for Jensen to go. Jensen loves him, he’s certain, and it’s going to hurt him when they part, which is why Jared can’t make it harder.

The kiss was an aberration. How does he prove that to Jensen?
Jensen spends most of the day lying in bed with the curtains closed. He can’t stop shaking. Maybe he’s ill. What a waste of his last week with Jared if he is. He should be studying but he can’t seem to care. Whatever grades he gets, he’s still going to lose Jared. This time next week he’ll be at the airport, he’ll be on the plane, he’ll soon be arriving home.

Without Jared.

It’ll be over.

He has to get himself together.

Instead he rolls over, clutching Jared’s pillow.

“Jen?”

He hears the voice first, then feels the hand on his shoulder. He was asleep and blinks blearily up.

“Jay.”

“Why are you in bed? Is something wrong?”

He should’ve been coming up with an excuse all this time. “I’m not feeling well.”

“Oh no. What can I get you?” Jared places his hand on Jensen’s forehead. “You’re really hot. Is it the flu?”

“No—I don’t know.” He can’t tell. All he does know is that he wants to be in Jared’s arms. “What time is it?”

“It’s almost five. Have you been in bed all day? Did you eat?”

“I’m not hungry.” He’s shaking again, damn it. “Jared....”

“Hey. Hey, baby, can I—” Jared doesn’t finish the sentence, just kicks off his pants, lifts the duvet and slips beneath it.

Jensen moves eagerly into his arms. This is it. This is what he’s needed all day.

“Shh,” Jared soothes, stroking his back gently. “It’s okay, you’re okay. Can you breathe for me?”

To his horror, Jensen realises he’s crying. His breath keeps hitching, cutting out.

“C’mon, Jen, breathe with me.”

But he can’t, and he buries his face in Jared’s chest and pretends none of the world is real except the safety here in their bed.
It’s more than the kiss, Jared realises as Jensen sobs and shakes against him. Of course, he’s been stupid, making it about him when obviously it’s not. Last night he forced Jensen to relive what happened with Josh, the time when his panic attacks started, and it’s hardly surprising that bringing up everything he buried is triggering him again.

While Jensen cries, he rubs his back, keeping the rhythm slow and even. He doesn’t know how else to help. Feeling shaky himself, he’s glad for the contact. He worried all day about what would happen when he got home, and although Jensen is a wreck, at least they’re back together again and the awkward barrier from this morning is gone.

It takes a long time for Jensen’s breathing to calm, giving Jared a chance to think. Now that he’s no longer panicking, it occurs to him there’s probably a third element to Jensen’s meltdown. Yesterday Jared kept him in a prolonged scene and didn’t bring him out of it properly. Instead of giving him aftercare, he pushed him into facing his worst memories then demanded Jensen take care of him while fucking him. He did everything wrong and it’s no wonder Jensen’s in such a state.

“D-do you think I could b-blow you?”

He almost misses the request, Jensen’s voice is so small. Since he doesn’t believe Jensen is physically sick, maybe sex might help. He could be making the wrong call, but he doesn’t know what else to do and Jensen’s asking for this. “I wouldn’t say no if you want to.”

“I do.”

Jensen burrows under the duvet instead of throwing it back and makes short work of Jared’s underwear and then his hot, eager mouth is on him as Jared hardens rapidly. Jensen doesn’t hurry, in one of his moods to savour Jared’s cock, to draw it out for as long as he can, and Jared goes with it. It’s full dark outside by the time he comes down Jensen’s throat, and when Jensen re-emerges, he wraps himself around Jared.

“Not me tonight.”

Okay. If that’s what he needs, to make Jared come and not come himself, Jared is content to give it to him. He’s also very happy to lie here all night watching over Jensen while he sleeps.

*

The week passes. Too fast.

They don’t talk about anything that matters.

On Monday night Jensen asks Jared how his ass is doing.

“I’m still aware of it,” Jared says. It’s been the weirdest feeling all day, not hurting but...something. They’re in bed, Jensen snuggling in his arms again as though he’ll be there always. “What did you think of it?” he asks shyly. “I should have asked you yesterday. I’m sorry, I’m not very good at being on that side of things. Did I make it okay for you?”

“You did.” Is it inappropriate for him to kiss Jensen’s hair, the way he always does when they’re in this position? He does, regardless. “Honestly, Jen, I didn’t know if I’d be able to go through with it,
I just knew I wanted it, and you made it okay—more than okay, in fact. It was really good by the end. What about you, though? Did you like it?"

Moving slightly, Jensen turns his face up to Jared’s. “It was awesome. But not as awesome as when you fuck me. I liked fucking you, and if you ever want to try it again then I’d be happy to, but I prefer it the other way around. I like being filled up by you and that—that was missing for me.”

The world should make it so that a part of Jared can constantly be inside Jensen. That’s how it should work. “What about the rest of it?” he asks. “The other stuff we did that day. I know it wasn’t exactly what you wanted, but was it enough?”

There’s that smile, that shy, sexy, melting smile that he loves best on Jensen. “Oh God, Jared,” he says, his tongue nipping out to wet his lips as he remembers. “That was—it was fucking awesome. I loved it!”

There isn’t any point in debriefing this way since there’s no opportunity for more in the future, but Jared can’t help himself. “What about in the bathroom? Even that?”

“Even that. It freaked me out, it did, but in a good way. And being tied when Sasha and Matt were here. I know they couldn’t see but I kept thinking what if something happened and I had to move and I couldn’t and then they discovered. It was driving me crazy, hearing you being all solemn and teacity while I was on the brink of potential discovery and there was nothing I could do about it.”

“It wasn’t too much for you?”

“I wish it could be more.” Jensen’s voice drops. “I wish you could have tied me up there naked with the plug so they could see exactly what I am, what you do to me. What I let you do.”

There are clubs in New York, clubs where he could take Jensen and do exactly that.

But he’ll never have Jensen in New York.

They’re both turned on from talking about it, and he distracts himself by gliding his hand down Jensen’s body to his cock, which turns into Jensen begging for Jared’s cock inside him, which turns into a very extended fucking session where he whispers fantasies into Jensen’s ear about all the things he’d love to do to him in public.

On Wednesday, waking up to Jensen’s mouth hot on his cock, he realises Jensen hasn’t gone running since Sunday. No time, Jensen says later when they’re at breakfast and he brings it up, but that’s not true. Jensen actually has more time this week for running than he usually does.

“I’d rather stay in bed with you,” Jensen adds, flushing slightly as he concentrates on his omelette.

Right. Jared would rather that too.

His last final is on Thursday afternoon. He comes out of it feeling dazed with the relief of the school year being over to find Jensen leaning against the wall in the corridor.

“Hey!” He surges upwards when he sees Jared. “You’re done!”

It would be so natural to kiss now, if they were real boyfriends. Jared holds it back by act of will and settles for high-fiving Jensen instead. “Your turn tomorrow.”

“Ugh, I need this over so bad.”
He knows Jensen means school, but his heart clenches. “What are you doing here?”

“I’ve been rehearsing with Steve and the others,” Jensen raises his guitar in his other hand, “and it was just around the corner so I thought I’d meet you and treat you to a celebratory chocolate muffin. Interested?”

“Only if you have chocolate with me.”

Jensen grins. “It’s my week for being unhealthy, so I might as well.”

It’s only been a couple of weeks since they were last at the coffee shop, but it feels familiar and cozy. On Jensen’s direction, Jared grabs their favourite table while Jensen goes up to the counter. This is the last time they’ll come here. He looks around, suddenly needing to memorise it—but at that moment Jensen turns his head and gives him a bright smile and a wink, and he’s all Jared can see.

Fuck, he’s beautiful.

And Jared’s had access to every inch of that body.

It belongs to him, damn it. It fucking belongs to him and he shouldn’t have to relinquish it in less than 72 hours. He should be taking Jensen with him to New York on Monday to look for a new home to share together, to create the beginning of the life they both deserve.

It shouldn’t be happening like this.

“I got us four,” Jensen announces as he deposits his armload of food and coffee on the table between them. “Chocolate chip, caramel and banana, apple and cinnamon, and double chocolate.”

“Ooh, Jensen, living on the wild side!”

“We’re going to share each one and vote.”

“I know which one’s winning for me.”

“You haven’t tried them all yet.”

“Don’t need to.”

“You just know, do you?”

“Oh yeah.” He can’t do this. He can’t sit here and pretend to be normal. “Let’s take them home. Get our drinks to go. I have an idea.”

Emma, the barista, looks at them as though they’re crazy when he goes to exchange their glasses for takeaway containers, and he says something to her, he knows he does, but his words don’t penetrate through the need rushing through him to get Jensen in private. Jensen laughs at him because Jared’s walking so fast he has to run to keep up with him, and maybe Jared laughs back, or maybe he just lets Jensen see the look on his face because all of a sudden Jensen’s the one leading and it’s all he can do not to spill their drinks before they tumble through their door and he dumps everything on the desk nearest the door.

“Strip.”

“Strip?” Jensen blinks at him as though he doesn’t understand the word.
“I want you naked and blindfolded for this test.”

“Test?”

“You’re the one who wanted to vote.”

Understanding brightens Jensen’s confused face. “Seriously?”

“Strip, Jensen.”

In barely two minutes he has Jensen naked and tied spreadeagled to the bed, blindfold wrapped around his eyes, and the urgent need relents a little. This is better. More accurate. Jensen is his again.

He tries to make it fun, to keep Jensen laughing as he feeds him bits of different muffins and lets him drink his coffee through a straw. He wants this to be a joyful memory, but it’s hard when he’s feeling so desperate. Jensen’s vote goes to double chocolate in the end, but the caramel and banana comes a close second. Jared wants to eat caramel off Jensen’s body. Why didn’t he do that before? Or eat anything off Jensen’s body? There are so many things he didn’t think of trying and now it’s too late.

To make up for it, he uses his mouth to drive Jensen just as crazy as he feels. He hasn’t done this with Jensen entirely tied down before, and he bites and sucks and licks—and maybe it’s not so bad that he doesn’t have caramel or cream or whatever he might want to squeeze over Jensen’s body because he loves the taste of Jensen’s skin and anything else would detract from that. This way it’s purely Jensen. Midway through, he rearranges Jensen’s position and the yoga has paid off already because he’s flexible enough for Jared to push his legs back over his head and tie his ankles to his wrists.

“How’s this?”

“I feel....obscene,” Jensen mutters. “What does it look like?”

Like heaven. “I could take a picture to show you afterwards.”

Jensen catches his breath audibly. “Jay....”

“I’ll delete it. You can delete it yourself. Just so I can show you how delectable you look all spread out for me like this.”

“Take it,” Jensen says. “Take anything you want and you can keep them.”

Much later, after Jared has feasted on Jensen’s ass with both his mouth and his dick, and untied Jensen and massaged the strain out of his muscles, they look through the pictures together. With the blindfold obscuring much of his face, it’s not immediately obvious they’re Jensen.

“It doesn’t look like me,” Jensen observes with wonder in his voice. “I never knew I could look like that.”

“They don’t do you justice,” Jared says honestly. “You’re fucking gorgeous, Jen.”

Jensen shakes his head. “Not like you. You’re the one....” He trails off, biting his lip. “I wish I could have pictures like this of you.”

Jared wishes that too, but he understands the danger it would place Jensen in if the wrong person got
“Take more of me,” Jensen says. “I want pictures of me right now to exist, even if I don’t have them. I want there to be a record. Please, Jared.”

Jared has been meticulous about not recording anything, but with this kind of permission he can no longer resist. He photographs Jensen blissed out in bed, before he wakes up, while he’s blowing Jared in the morning, in the shower, laughing as he gets dressed, at his desk doing last-minute cramming, and coming out of his final exam.

“Are you sure you shouldn’t be a photographer?” Jensen asks as he strikes a pose of victory in the doorway. “You’re good at this.”

“Only as good as my subject.” He’s taken over 100 since Jensen gave him permission last night and he’s going to hoard every single one. He focuses a close-up on Jensen’s freckles. “You’re ridiculously photogenic.”

They’re going out to dinner to celebrate the end of the year. It’s a plan they’ve made in a roundabout sort of way without really talking about it. Tomorrow night will be the party with the others after the gig, but tonight is for them alone and they’ve both turned down other invitations and reserved it for each other.

“I need to shower before we go tonight,” Jensen says as they leave the building and head out into the late afternoon sunshine. “I need to get everything to do with school off of me.”

He looks perfect as he is, but Jared gets it. Also, knowing Jensen, he was counting on it.

They talk about nothing as they amble back to the dorm. If the alarm bell of time passing is ringing as loudly in Jensen’s head as it is in Jared’s, he gives no sign of it and appears relaxed, happy even, while Jared’s getting ever more wound up. After Jensen’s shower, Jared orders him to kneel on the floor while Jared jerks off on the bed.

“I want you in my mouth,” Jensen says as he drops to his knees, perfectly comfortable in his nakedness while Jared is fully clothed. “You’re evil.”

“Watch me.”

“I am. And I want you.”

Lazily fisting his cock, Jared uses his free hand to snap another picture of Jensen, on his knees at Jared’s request. “Tell me what you want.”

“I want your cock in my mouth. I want you to make me gag on it. It’s the first thing I wanted, did I tell you that? When I saw you naked that day. I never before understood why anyone would want to do that, to suck another man’s cock. It seemed—the thought was repulsive to me.”

“Too unhygienic for you, Jensen?”

Jensen gives a little laugh, “You know me. It was something I tried not to think about, but I did, secretly. Pretended I was above such things. I’d never stoop to that level.”

“And now you’re begging for it,” Jared says, zooming up on Jensen’s cock, which is straining towards him as though demanding to be a part of whatever’s going on.

Jensen looks down at it. “Yeah, that’s exactly what happened the first time I saw your cock. That,
and my mouth watered. Literally. I didn’t know that was a real thing, but it was. I wanted to lick it. It looked so big I didn’t think I could get it in my mouth, but I wanted to know what it would taste like."

“That’s what you were thinking as you stared at me that day?”

“Soon after, I remembered you’re a top and it hit me that you put that thing up men’s asses and then I wanted to know what that felt like, how I’d feel if it was my ass being penetrated by it.”

“Fuck.” Jared remembers how stunned Jensen looked that day and how hard he got so fucking quickly. This was why?

“I looked at other men,” Jensen continues. His hands are locked behind his back, being good, even without orders. “I wanted to see if any of them made me feel the way you did.”

“And did they?”

“No.” Jensen meets his eyes boldly. “Whenever I looked at them, all I could do was wonder which one was your type. If you liked cute little twinks. If you like them big and muscular. If—if there was any possibility you might like....me.”

“I do like you,” Jared says. “Look at how much I like you.”

His cock surges when Jensen’s eyes drop to it.

Jensen licks his lips.

“You want some of this, babe?”

“All of it. I want all of it.”

Jared gives it to him, hard and deep the way Jensen likes best, but pulls out at the end so he can come all over Jensen’s stomach and chest.

“Let it dry while I have a shower,” he instructs. “Stay there and wait for me while my come dries on your skin, then I’ll take you out to dinner like that.”
Chapter Summary

This is it, their final weekend together, and time for Jensen's song.

Going out for dinner with Jared didn’t used to be so charged.

Is it a date again?

Jared said *I’ll take you out*. Does that mean he intends to pay? But how can Jensen let him when he knows Jared can’t afford it, when he’s going home to eat his parents’ food and live in his parents’ house all summer and earn pocket money for next year in his father’s firm, while Jared will have to buy his own food, pay his own rent, and save what he earns to live off in the future? The difference between them makes him feel sick, sick with disgust at himself.

This is what he’s too scared to give up.

He’s not thought about it before, not seriously. He’s always had money and assumed he always would. He’s never had to pay a single bill. What does Jared do when he gets sick?

The nauseous feeling inside his stomach grows. Jared’s been dealing with this since he was still a kid, and here’s Jensen compromising everything because he doesn’t feel equal to the task.

“How’s your pasta?” Jared asks, looking down at where Jensen’s twirling spaghetti around his fork. “Not so good tonight?”

If Jared does insist on paying for this, then Jensen’s not going to make him waste his money, so he takes a big bite. “It’s great,” he says with his mouth full.

Jared relaxes once Jensen starts eating, and Jensen makes an effort to not betray his turmoil and instead enjoy their final dinner together.

No. It’s not their final dinner. Final dinner when they’ll go home and fuck afterwards, maybe, but not final dinner. They’ll come here again next year. They have to.

They have to.

As Jared finishes off his pizza, Jensen gives in to the temptation he’s been fighting and pulls out his phone. “Smile!”

He catches Jared just as he’s crammed the final slice into his mouth and laughs as Jared splutters and chews and then demands a retake. Dessert dissolves into a competition of who can take the most ridiculous photo of the other and he takes as many as he can. These are safe pictures to have on his phone. No one can suspect him for having pictures of his best friend, fully clothed, in a restaurant.

They’re breathless with laughter as they make their way home afterwards. Jensen forced himself to say nothing when Jared declared he would pay, even though it hurt, and if his laughter has a touch of hysteria about it, well, rather spend their second-last night together laughing than humiliating himself by crying all over Jared again.
Halfway home, Jared pushes Jensen into an alleyway. It’s dark, mostly shadows, and before Jensen realises what’s happening, Jared’s got him on his knees and is gripping his hands up behind his back.

“J-Jay?”

“I’m gonna take you here,” Jared announces. “I’m gonna fuck you, Jensen, right here against the wall, and you can’t stop me.”

Although he knows he could use his safeword, Jensen has zero desire to stop him. A blaze of heat banishes the nerves that have been tremoring through him all evening. “Someone could see us.”

“Like you watched me that night?”

Oh God. Jared is replaying it, the night they got together, only this time it’s Jensen he’ll be driving into for all the world to see.

Jensen wants this fiercely.

It’s good. It’s nerve-wracking and uncomfortable and they don’t have lube, which means Jared didn’t plan this beforehand and that makes it all the hotter, like Jared couldn’t contain himself, couldn’t wait the extra minutes to get home, and Jensen likes the burn and the streaky pain and the lack of decent prep. He’s accustomed to taking Jared now, though, so a couple of rough fingers and some spit is enough, and he muffles any cries in Jared’s arm, digging his teeth in when he needs to. Jared’s going to be marked there, viciously, and Jensen likes that. Every time he looks at his arm for the next couple of weeks he’ll see Jensen there.

He keeps an eye on the entrance to the alley throughout. Nobody comes in, no one even glances their way as they pass on the street, but the knowledge that they could is intoxicating. Anyone could see Jared taking him, claiming him.

That shouldn’t be so appealing.

Later, back in their room, Jared makes up to him for the roughness in the alley and spends hours rimming him. He even lets Jensen return the favour for a while, and Jensen makes the most of it. He loves doing this nearly as much as he loves having it done to him, but he monitors Jared’s reactions carefully and as soon as his squirms seem to move towards discomfort, Jensen switches to his balls and eventually back to the cock he loves so very much.

“You feel so good on my cock,” Jared mutters as his hand clutches Jensen’s hair to hold him down. “You’re so fucking good at this, Jensen.”

It’s hard not to laugh when Jensen remembers their first attempts at this and how afraid he’d been that he’d never progress. Now his throat is well-trained and opens easily. He still gags from time to time, still chokes on Jared’s cock when Jared wants him to, but now he prides himself on being able to take it any way Jared chooses to give it to him.

Once Jared’s come for the third time that evening, he turns his attention to Jensen.

“Not me,” Jensen says.

“But—”

“I already came tonight, in the alley.”
“Jen, you’re so hard you’re leaking.”

How does he explain to Jared what he can’t even understand himself? “If you want to force me to come, then that’s up to you, you can, I’ll let you. But I don’t want to.”

“Why not? If that was me, I’d kill you if you denied me.”

Jensen looks away from Jared’s searching gaze. “I know, and part of me feels the same. But the other part—I told you, I like being denied things. And there’s not much longer that you can deny me, this is probably the last time, and I-I want it.”

“You want me to just leave you like this?”

It’s scary to say, but he forces himself, meeting Jared’s eyes squarely. “What I really want is for you to take me right to the edge, deny me, and keep doing it until I’m going out of my mind with the need to come—and you still deny me. And then, since we’re talking about what I really want, I want you to fuck my mouth and come again, come on my face maybe, or even come on my cock, your come all over it and none of mine.”

“Shit, that’s hot.” Jared still looks intent, though. “Is that a fantasy or do you want me to actually do that tonight?”

“Both?”

“Yeah?”

“Please, Jay.”

*

It’s their second-last morning waking up together. After the debaucheries of last night, they lie quietly in each other’s arms, Jared trailing his hand back and forth across Jensen’s chest, lightly grazing his nipples.

Jensen has no words today, and nor, it seems, does Jared.

This is the last time he’ll wake up knowing he will go back to bed again tonight with Jared.

He has a thousand things to do today but he cuddles into Jared’s hot, sweaty body. He knows just the spot to lay his cheek so that he can feel the reverberation of Jared’s heart beating.

He will never feel this again, after tomorrow.

24 hours. They have barely 24 hours left.

How is he going to pull himself out of this bed tomorrow?

“What time are you meeting Steve and the band for your final rehearsal?” Jared murmurs.

“Ten.”

“Jensen, it’s nine-thirty.”
Is it? How can it possibly be? It was seven just a few minutes ago. They’ve lain silently together for two and a half hours?

He has to get up. Right now. This moment. It takes fifteen minutes to get there and he still has to shower last night off him. Shower Jared off him.

“You’re still hard, babe.” Jared’s hand, that’s stayed firmly above his waist, strays down, making Jensen flinch. “Want me to get you off quickly before you go?”

It’s not fair, his answer should be yes, yes, damn it, please, but he can’t find the words. “No,” he whispers.

“Still not?”

It’s not like Jared will be able to get him off ever again after tomorrow, so why isn’t he taking full advantage? “Stroke yourself while I shower,” he says instead, “fast, because I won’t be long, and then I want you to come in me when I get out. I’ll open myself up. Then come in me and plug me for the rest of the day and tonight you can do whatever you want with me.”

Twenty minutes later he’s on his way with his guitar, ass throbbing. It wasn’t enough, wasn’t long enough. They should be spending the whole day today with Jared inside him.

The ringing of his phone interrupts that thought.

It’s Dianne.

“Good morning, Jensen!” She sounds cheery and bright and altogether too happy. “I’m so glad I caught you. Congratulations on finishing yesterday. How was your last final?”

He doesn’t even know when hers is. “Fine.”

“Great. I wanted to wish you good luck for tonight. I can’t believe it’s your first singing performance and I can’t be there for it. I’m sure you’ll be fantastic, though. Are you nervous?”

“Uh, yeah.” He hasn’t even thought about being nervous yet.

“You’ll be great. I’m so proud of you.”

He can’t do this. Not right now.

“You know, you’re going to have to join the church choir after this. We always need men and everyone will love having you. I was talking about it with your mother just last night. Did you know she joined us? She has a rich alto voice and she’s kept it a secret all this time. It was when I told her about you singing that she decided if you could do it then she should be brave enough to try too, and she’s a real asset. Just like you will be.”

“Yeah.” Breathe in, two, three, four, hold, two, three, four, five, six, out, two, three—

“You must tell Jared to video it for me, then you can show us when you come home tomorrow. What time are you arriving? It’s in the afternoon, right? I’m going to meet you at the airport and I don’t want to be late.”

He doesn’t even know how he’s going to board that flight; he can’t contemplate what’s going to happen when he arrives. “I’ll forward you the flight confirmation.” His voice sounds like him. How is that possible when his head is screaming? “Then you’ll have it so you can’t forget.”
“Thank you. I’m looking forward to you coming home, Jensen.” She sounds soft and wistful and he is an appalling human being. “Just one more day.”

One more day.

“Yeah.”

“I love you.”

“You t-too.” He never stutters around her. What’s wrong with him. “How’s your mother?”

“Still doing real well. It’s going to be a good summer, Jensen, I just know it. I’m so excited.”

“Same.”

“I can hear how nervous you are. Don’t be. You’ll be amazing. You’re awesome, you know that? And if I was there I’d be cheering you on all the way. Tell Jared he must clap and cheer for me too.”

“Sure.”

“Okay, I won’t take up any more of your time now, you must be frantically busy, but I just wanted to say good luck and I love you.”

He can’t say it back a second time. “Thanks.”

“See you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.”

“Bye.”

He can’t throw up. He doesn’t have time. Breathe.

Breathe again.

And again.

Okay.

Better.

He can do this.

*

In Jensen’s absence, Jared gets busy. He has a lot of stuff to sort in preparation for leaving for good on Monday, and he’s put it off for far too long. If he focuses hard enough on choosing what to do with each item he unearths from his closet he doesn’t need to think about other choices, such as....is he wrong to let Jensen go without a fight?

He has no right to wreck Jensen’s life. He knows that. There is no point thinking about it again.

If Jensen wanted him, he’d have said. But he doesn’t. He wants the life he chose when his brother
left. He sacrificed everything then to set it up and he’s not going to annihilate what he’s so painstakingly built just because of Jared.

He has too much to lose. What does Jared have to offer him? Nothing. He’d take him away from his parents, from the girl he plans to marry, from his comfortable, happy life in Texas and—what, make him live in a shoebox apartment in New York with no money and no prospect of finishing his education? Jensen loves Texas. He’d be miserable in New York. Jared knows, because he misses Texas every day despite how stupid that is, despite knowing Texas would despise him for who he is.

But what if Jensen loves him enough to choose him anyway?

He wouldn’t.

Life doesn’t happen like that.

Jared’s own parents didn’t love him enough, so why would Jensen?

*

The rehearsal with the band goes well. Jensen is ready to make this his declaration and whatever comes of it......will come.

“You still planning to leave him?” Steve asks him afterwards as they pack up.

Straightening, Jensen meets his eyes. “I’m not sure.”

Steve nods. “Talk to him.”

*

They meet for a late lunch. As they eat, Jared scrutinises Jensen, trying to figure out what he’s thinking. He looks calm, relaxed.

Is this the thing where he’s lying like hell?

Or is that really how he feels?

“How’s the plug?” Jared asks as they’re finishing off.

Jensen shifts a little on his seat as though checking it’s still there. “Hurting a little.”

It doesn’t usually hurt him. Is that because he’s tense? Is he tense?

Their eyes meet fleetingly. “But it’s okay,” Jensen continues. “I like feeling it.”

Jared wants to touch him. It would be acceptable for him to reach out and trail his finger down Jensen’s cheek—wouldn’t it? Hell, last night he pushed him into an alley and fucked him there for
anyone to see and Jensen didn’t mind, Jensen got off on it. So why does it feel like he has no right to just gently touch Jensen’s skin today?

*

Jensen doesn’t have much left to pack since he took care of most of it during the week, not wanting to trust that he’d have time for it today. Jared is still busily running around so he sorts through a few things to appear similarly occupied. He wants to ask Jared if they can just lie down on the bed together, but what felt comfortable and right this morning no longer does. This isn’t a breakup, after all. It’s just the end of a mutual agreement that’s been fun.

But what if he’s wrong.

What if, against all odds, he can persuade Jared to give him a chance?

That’s not part of their agreement.

But next year, maybe he can get Jared to agree to give it another go after the summer. They’ll no longer live together but they can still have the odd night.

Surely?

*

They amble slowly through the summer evening. It’s almost time for Jensen to reveal his song and Jared feels like he can no longer fit into his skin. It’s silly to put such store in a single song, especially since it has to be a simple one, easy for Jensen to perform, but with how secretive Jensen has been about it, it’s hard not to expect......something.

Jensen isn’t meeting his eyes. He’s gone all shifty and Jared hasn’t seen this side of him before. He looks as agitated as Jared feels.

“Nervous?” he asks lightly.

Jensen’s eyes brush his then dart away. “A little.” He’s carrying his guitar and he swings it up. “If this goes horribly wrong, I’m blaming you. Just so you know.”

“It won’t.”

“It might.”

“It’s okay. If it does, I accept all the blame.”

“I know I said thank you before, but—” Jensen looks up and holds his eyes this time. “Thank you, Jared. For this. You have no idea how much it means to me.”

“You’re the one who’s done all the work,” Jared says uncomfortably. “I’m—you should be proud.”
“Well, let’s see what happens later.”

“You’ll be great, Jen.”

A tiny smile crosses Jensen’s lips then his expression turns serious. “I forgot. D-Dianne asked me if you’d video it for her. I, uh, I said—you don’t have to, not for her, but I wondered if you’d—if you’d film it on my phone for me.”

“Of course.” Jared can’t believe it hadn’t occurred to him. “As long as you let me send it to myself afterwards.”

“If it’s okay,” Jensen says. “If it’s not...a disaster.”

“It won’t be.”

“We’ll see.”

“It won’t be.”

*

They sit pushed up against each other. Jensen’s shaking now, with nerves and with something else. Something eager. He wants to do this.

His turn will come later, about halfway through. He didn’t want to start off with it and Steve was kind enough not to make him wait until the end, so he has about twenty minutes to wait.

He’s twitchy. He should’ve started. Then it would be over.

Jared’s hand lands heavily on his upper thigh. “Settle down, Jen.”

How is it that nothing more than a touch can calm him so quickly? All his awareness zooms to that hot hand and he wishes he could vanish his jeans and feel it on his bare skin. It takes only a minute or two of trying to resist before he covers Jared’s hand with his own.

They don’t look at each other. As the next song begins, Jared casually turns his hand over and links their fingers together. Anyone could see them. It’s blatant. Not hidden beneath a table.

Too soon it’s time. Jared gives his hand a tight squeeze then slides the phone out of Jensen’s pocket. “You’ll be great,” he whispers beneath Steve’s introduction, and then Jensen is walking to the front and picking up his guitar and it’s happening.

*

Jared knows Jensen is terrified, but it doesn’t show on his face. Instead he flashes his bashful smile to the crowd and says something about this being his first live performance and they all love him. How could they not?
He knows Jensen’s lock screen code, but he pauses when he sees the background photo is one from last night of Jared eating dessert. Jensen changed it sometime during today, knowing that Jared would see it. He’ll have to change it again tomorrow but for now it’s Jared on his phone and that is fucking awesome.

The rest of the band fade back and it’s just Jensen sitting in the spotlight with Steve beside him, both with their guitars.

Jared doesn’t recognise the opening chords. His hand is trembling and he concentrates on finding something to balance the phone on so the video doesn’t give him away.

And then Jensen starts to sing.

“She’s a good girl, loves her mama....”

No. Oh no, he’s not singing this song. He’s not singing this song to Jared. Not now. Not here. Not when he’s about to fucking leave him.

“....loves horses, and her boyfriend too.”

Her boyfriend. *Her* boyfriend. *Not* Jared’s.

Jensen’s voice breaks on the word, and he seems to lose his place in the music for a second, but Steve keeps going and Jensen quickly gets back into it.

His eyes don’t leave Jared’s as he reaches the end of the second verse: “And I’m a bad boy, ‘cause I don’t even miss her, I’m a bad boy for breaking her heart.”

*Is* Jensen going to break her heart?

Fucking hell, what is Jensen thinking? Dianne can never see this video!

Jensen’s voice soars up into the chorus: “Now I’m free, free fallin’, yeah, I’m free....”

No. He’s not. He’s not free. He can’t be doing this to Jared, he can’t be insinuating this, not in front of everybody, not without context, not when he’s still fucking planning to get on the plane tomorrow and go back to that girlfriend whose heart he refuses to break, damn it, he’s not breaking her heart, he’s not being a bad boy. He’s going home tomorrow to be a *good* boy, and it’s Jared’s heart he’s going to break.

The rest of the band is joining in now, and Steve harmonises with Jensen on the third verse. All Jared can see is Jensen’s face, which seems to be promising....promising what, exactly? What message is Jared supposed to be taking away from this song?

“....all the bad boys are standing in the shadows....”

Just like Jared was that first night, and where Jared took Jensen last night, into the shadows with him and out of the light of his chosen life.

“....and the good girls are home with broken hearts....”

What is he *saying*?

The problem is, Jensen looks as though he’s on the verge of tears as he heads into the chorus again. He doesn’t look like someone who’s free at all.
He can’t tell what Jared is thinking.

This was a stupid song choice. Ridiculously stupid. Never mind that it was easy and within his range, he should have chosen something less obvious.

Just….when he saw those lyrics....

Stupid.

So stupid.

It’s an old song but the crowd seems into it, some are even waving their hands in the air. Jensen focuses on them instead of Jared’s blank face. They’re enjoying it and he should be too. This is his first musical performance and playing in front of people, watching them enjoy it, is amazing. No wonder Dianne is so enthusiastic about her choir. He should maybe join after all, because he could get used to this.

Steve beams at him when Jensen looks across. The song is obviously going well. Jensen can’t hear particularly clearly over the roaring in his ears, but they’ve practised enough that it’s automatic and he doesn’t have to think about it.

The applause at the end is overwhelming. He’s too chicken to look at Jared, to see how he’s responding. He has to stay up here and accompany the band for several more songs, not singing this time, and he won’t be able to hold it together if Jared still has that emotionless expression on his face. He’ll fall apart and now is not the time for that. That can come tomorrow. Not now. Not while Steve is launching them into the next song and his big, failed statement is over. He can relax now, just let the music take over his body. It’s good. It’s glorious. Maybe next year Steve will let him play with them more often. That will be something to look forward to.

The next time he looks back at Jared, he’s no longer there.
The third time Jensen’s phone lights up with a call from his mother, Jared can’t ignore it any longer. She wouldn’t keep calling back if it wasn’t an emergency, so, with a last long look at Jensen, who is now avoiding him assiduously, he slips outside.

“Hello? This is Jensen’s phone.”

“Jen—Jared?”

“Donna, hi, yes, it’s me.”

“Oh, thank God. Is Jensen all right? He wasn’t answering and I thought—”

“He’s fine. He’s on stage right now. What about you?” She doesn’t sound all right at all.

“On stage? Still? I thought he’d be finished by now.”

“No, he’s still up there, but he’ll be done soon. Do you need him?”

“Oh, Jared.” Her voice collapses. “Dianne does. She didn’t want me to call, didn’t want me to interrupt him on his big night, but I know he’d want to know. Her mother took an unexpected turn for the worse tonight, they think she might have had a stroke, and we’re at the hospital waiting for news and Dianne really needs Jensen.”

Around him, people are emerging into the night, laughing, high-spirited. Jared watches them swirl around him and wonders if this is how Jensen feels when he’s about to throw up. Because he thinks he might.

Whatever Jensen maybe meant by that song has been annihilated now.

“Flights,” he says. “Jensen’s flying tomorrow afternoon. Is there one tonight?” Their last night and they won’t even have it.

“The next flight we can find isn’t until 7am. Jared, do you think Jensen can get to the airport for 7 if we change his ticket?”

Not tonight then. “Yes,” he assures her. “I’ll make sure he does.”
“Will you tell him? Tell him to call Dianne when he’s finished. She didn’t want to disturb him, so I’m glad I got you. Tell him that, whatever Dianne says, it’s bad. Very bad. And we’re with her, we’ll be with her all the way, she’s already like a daughter to us, but he’s the one she needs right now.”

“Of course. I know he’ll want to be there as soon as he can.” That’s the thing, Jensen will. And Jensen _should_. That’s what’s right and he’s known that all along.

“Thank you, Jared. I’m glad my boy has you tonight.”

She wouldn’t be glad if she had any idea what he had planned to do to her boy tonight, but he swallows down his instinctive scoff. She means well and she’s desperately worried about her friend and her future daughter-in-law. “I’ll make sure he’s on that flight, Donna. He’ll be with you all just as soon as he can be.”

“Don’t you forget about that invitation,” she says when he’s about to hang up, thinking she ended the call without saying goodbye. “Any time this summer, Jared. We have a room just waiting for you.”

“Thanks.” He can hardly get the word out.

When he ends the call, he finds himself clutching Jensen’s phone so tightly it hurts. How does he approach going inside to break the news? If only he had a clue what Jensen is thinking, what he meant by that song. Jared doesn’t think he can take it if Jensen meant it the way it sounded and now this has to happen.

Better if Jensen didn’t mean it. If the words were just a coincidence and he only picked it because it’s easy for a beginner to perform.

Because if Jensen meant it....

He couldn’t have. If he meant it, he’d have said something already and not left it until the last second when he’s already planning to get on the plane tomorrow and fly away from Jared back to his life in Texas.

* 

Jensen feels numb as he packs up his guitar. There’s the high of the adrenalin rush from a successful performance, and his body buzzes with it, but his brain keeps shorting out every time he thinks about Jared.

The other members of the band congratulate him and he exchanges high fives with them. They have been a valued support and he’s pleased when several of them mention that they hope he plays with them again.


“Thanks.” He manages a smile.

“Did you enjoy it?”
“Loved it.”

“Yeah, it’s addictive. You up for some more next year?”

“Definitely.”

Steve nods, then glances around. “Where’s your boy? He was here, wasn’t he?”

“I—I’ll have to go find him.”

“Jensen—”

He can’t say more, and is grateful when Steve seems to read his face.

“Talk to him,” he says again. “You two need to talk.”

That’s the very last thing Jensen wants to do now. “Yeah,” he says. “Thanks, Steve.”

“See you guys at the party later?”

“Sure.” Maybe he’ll go by himself if Jared doesn’t want him any longer, and get drunk. It’s the last chance he has for behaviour like that until September. “See you there.”

As Steve leaves, Jensen zips up his guitar case. It’s fine. Even if Jared doesn’t want him, it’s fine. He can deal. He hasn’t lost anything he didn’t already know wasn’t his, after all. It’s hardly unexpected. It was always going to end today.

“Jensen.”

Jared’s come back. He’s come back and he’s standing right behind Jensen. Jensen needs to turn around, but his muscles are so tight it feels like moving will snap them to pieces.

“Jen?”

He can do this. He can face Jared and pretend that nothing happened, that Jared didn’t just walk out on him declaring himself, that they’re no more than the friends they always used to be and will be so soon again. It takes a couple of the deep breaths that Jared taught him, but he’s even able to put a smile on his face when he turns around. “Hey, Jared. Did you enjoy the show?”

Jared looks stricken. “Jen, I need to tell you something.”

Oh God, no, don’t say it. “It’s okay if you didn’t—”

“It’s not about the show.”

“It’s not?”

Shaking his head, Jared lifts his hand between them. He’s holding Jensen’s phone. “Your mother called. I wasn’t going to answer but she kept calling back, so eventually I took it outside. I’m sorry, but there’s bad news.”

For several seconds Jensen can’t make sense of Jared’s words. They’re not remotely what he was expecting, his mother is the last person who should be involved with tonight and with Jared, and absurdly he thinks she called Jared to warn him off Jensen. And then the words bad news penetrate. “Is it my dad?” he asks urgently.
“No. Jen, it’s Dianne’s mother. She’s in the hospital.”

It’s not his dad, it’s not his mom. That’s what rockets through Jensen first. His own family is safe. But Elena? “No,” he says stupidly, “she’s fine. She’s doing well, Dianne told me this morning. She’s on a new treatment and she’s doing better than—”

“They think she had a stroke earlier this evening.”

“A stroke?”

“They think. They’re not sure. But it’s bad, Jen. I think she’s dying.”

Dying. Dianne is her mother’s carer and they’re closer than most mothers and daughters since it’s been only the two of them since Dianne was nine. “How’s Dianne?”

“She needs you. She didn’t want to call because you were performing, but your mother thought you’d want to know. You need to call her. I told Donna you would.”

“Of course.” He has to call her, he has to get home. “I need to change my flight. Is there one tonight, do you think? What time is it? Is it too late?”

“Donna rebooked you for 7am. She said that’s the first flight she could find.”

“7am? Okay. Okay, that’s....” Good. How can anything be good when Elena is dying? She’s never been anything but kind to him and she’s his mother’s close friend and now Dianne needs him and—Dianne needs him.

Suddenly dizzy, he sits down on the side of the stage.

Dianne needs him now more than ever. Even if Elena doesn’t die, a stroke can be bad, really bad. Either way, Dianne’s going to need help and support and there’s no way he can abandon her now. He’s been a terrible boyfriend all year and maybe this is his punishment. God knows he deserves it. He’s spent the last few months indulging in wicked sins of the flesh but his time is up. If he’d wanted a sign, he’s had two now, first Jared’s lack of response to the song and now this.

Real life has come knocking and he can no longer hide in happy fantasyland.

He’s not going to run away like his brother. He’s not going to abandon his responsibilities or the people who love him.

Jared is talking, but Jensen can’t hear him. He holds onto his phone when Jared presses it into his hand, and accepts a bottle of water but does nothing with it as his mind whirls. Taking it back, Jared twists off the cap and shoves it towards him again.

“....drink....” Jensen hears, so he does. The water burns. His throat is constricted. His muscles hurt to swallow. He wouldn’t be able to deepthroat Jared right now, he thinks absurdly.

He’ll never be able to deepthroat Jared again.

Which is nothing less than he deserves.

“Thank you,” he says, possibly interrupting whatever it is Jared’s saying now. “I’m, uh, going to call her.”

“There’s a door at the side here.” Jared indicates. “You can get outside easily to where it’s quiet.”
“Thanks.”

“I’ll wait here for you.”

“Okay.” His eyes skitter across Jared’s. Jared looks concerned, it’s his caring look when he’s empathising with someone and offering them support and strength. There’s none of the devastation that Jensen currently feels, which can only mean one thing: this doesn’t change anything for him. He doesn’t feel like he’s lost anything.

Of course he hasn’t. It was over tonight anyway and he’s fine with that, just worried about Dianne and her mother and everyone who loves her. Because Jared is kind that way. He cares about everyone. And that’s exactly how he cared about Jensen.

Dianne is crying when he gets through to her. She’s undergoing the worst night of her life and he should be there. She tries to reassure him, even asks him about his performance, but that only makes it worse.

“I’ll be there soon,” he promises her, feeling impotent so far away, unable to start being a good boyfriend immediately. “Call me tonight, any time. Yeah? No matter what time. Try and get some sleep if you can, but if you can’t and you need me, just call.”

Her tears start up again. “I’m sorry, Jensen,” she sobs. “I’m trying to be strong, I am, but I’m just so scared.”

“I know, sweetheart.” He’s never called her that before, has he? Jared called him that once. “And it’s okay not to be strong. Cry as much as you need to and before you know it, I’ll be there with you.”

“I’m real glad you’re coming home. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

She blows her nose and her voice returns a little steadier. “Your mother’s being such a support. I’m so grateful for both of you. She told me she called you. I didn’t want to distract you before you sang.”

“It was okay, I didn’t have my phone on me anyway.”

“Yes, she said she got Jared. I’m glad you were able to do your performance.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t come home today. I should have.”

“No, your song was important, and you weren’t to know. None of us could have known. She was perfectly normal when we had dinner. Donna was over and we were laughing and they were telling me stories of when they were young. We were all so happy, Jensen! We were so happy. And then—thank goodness Donna was there because suddenly Mama got a bit strange and then—and then she—oh Jensen, it was horrible. I just froze and I couldn’t do anything and it was so awful!”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

“Thank you.” She sniffs. “Just hearing your voice is helping.”

“I’m here for as long as you need me.”

“Where are you? Outdoors?”
"I’m just outside the venue where I sang.

“Is Jared still there too?”

“I think he’s inside, I’m not sure.”

“Thank him for answering your phone.”

“I will.”

“Oh, Donna wants to talk to you. Can I put her on?”

“Are you going to be okay?”

“Yes, I, um, I’m going to go sit with Mama. They’re letting me do that. I don’t like to be away from her for too long.”

“Give her my love and my best wishes, yeah?”

“I will. Thank you, Jensen. I love you.”

“You too.”

“Here’s Donna. Bye.”

“Bye.”

“Jensen? Oh Jensen, baby.”

“Mom?” Oh God, now she’s crying too. “Where’s Dad? Is he there with you?”

“He’s gone home to feed the dogs, we’re looking after Paul and Sheila's dogs this weekend, but he’ll be back. Oh Jensen, you’re coming home on the 7am flight, did Jared tell you?”

“Yes, he told me. I’ll be on it, don’t you worry.”

“It’ll be better when you’re here. You’re always so calm and strong and reassuring. I know your dad’s uncomfortable with all the crying so I’m trying to keep it together when he’s here and to keep Dianne together, but it’ll be good when you’re here.”

That’s the way she sees him? Truly? “I’m sure Dad won’t mind if you need to cry, Mom.”

“Oh, you know your father, he never likes displays of emotion. But don’t worry about me. Are you all right there by yourself? Jared will be with you tonight, right?”

“Um....” Whether he will be or not, there’s only one answer to give. “Of course. Don’t worry about me at all, I’ll be fine. And I’ll be on that plane first thing.”

She cries a little more and he continues to reassure her, trying not to remember how much she cried that summer Josh left. Is that why she thinks he’s calm and strong, because he didn’t cry then? She should’ve seen him crying his pathetic, pitiful eyes out last weekend in Jared’s arms. God, he wants to cringe just thinking about it. How can Jared possibly respect him after that embarrassing display?

At last she sees his father returning so she quickly hangs up to pull herself together for him. With one last assurance that he’ll be on that 7am flight, Jensen ends the call and leans back against the wall.
So.

This is it.

His real life.

And this is how he and Jared end, eight weeks and one day after they began.

Two months. At least he had these two months, they were his and nobody can ever take them away from him, no matter what happens now.

“Dude.”

He’s stayed out here long enough that Jared has come to find him. “Hey.”

“Is she okay?”

“Yeah—no, not really.”

“I figured as much.”

They stand there in silence as people flow past on the street in celebratory end-of-year high spirits.

“I’ll go find Steve,” Jared says at last, “tell him we’re not coming.”

“Coming?”

“To the party?”

“Oh.” Oh yeah, they were supposed to go to Steve’s party tonight and get drunk and meet up with Matt and Robin and be gay together. “We should still go.”

“I’m sure you’re not in the mood—”

“I want to.” Because if they don’t go, they’ll return to their room and Jensen doesn’t think he can see out seven hours alone with Jared right now. “This is my last chance to drink this summer, you know? And tomorrow’s going to suck, so—we may as well.” It takes courage, but he holds Jared’s eyes as Jared studies him. Jared is clearly dubious, and Jensen straightens his shoulders and pulls away from the wall. “Well, I’m going. If you don’t want to—”

“Of course I do. It’s just—”

“Okay, great. Let’s go.”

*

It’s not a long walk to the house Steve shares with his band. Jared keeps watch on Jensen but he looks okay, a little serious given the nature of what’s going on in Texas, but otherwise fine. But is it the kind of fine where he’s lying? He’s not stiff, he’s not unnaturally still, his breathing is normal and his eyes look clear. He’s not showing any of his usual tells, so does that mean....

*What, precisely, does it mean?
That his song earlier meant nothing?

That it wasn’t any kind of grand declaration?

Because he couldn’t have sung about breaking his girlfriend’s heart in order to stay with Jared and now be totally okay about running back to her side. Yes, Jared gets that she’s in a bad place and of course Jensen should go to her now, but if he was in the slightest bit upset about his plans being forcibly changed, something in Jensen would reflect that. And there’s nothing.

“You’re all packed, right?” he double checks.

“Yeah.” Jensen waves at a couple approaching Steve’s house from the opposite direction. “Hey, Matt, Robin. Robin, this is my roommate, Jared.”

“Hey, man.” Robin is short with fluffy hair and big, soft blue eyes. “Heard a lot about you from Matty. It’s great to meet you.”

“Yeah, you too. Hey, Matt.”

Matt reaches out to punch his shoulder. “Pretty sure I aced that final, thanks to you.”

“That’s great.”

It’s surreal. They’re acting like two couples as they head indoors to find alcohol, only Jared no longer has the right to touch Jensen the way Matt and Robin touch. He can’t sling his arm around Jensen’s shoulders or hang onto his hand. He can’t pull him to stand in front of him the way Matt does Robin, and Robin settles into the V of Matt’s long legs quite happily and tips his head backwards for a kiss. It’s so easy for them. Why couldn’t he have had that with Jensen?

Instead Jensen lurks about a foot away from him. He’s obviously comfortable with Matt and Robin, which should make Jared happy because he’s not usually so at ease in a social situation. True, he’s also knocking back drinks in a way Jared hasn’t seen before. Jared could say something, but it’s not his business. Nothing about Jensen is his business any longer. Tomorrow Jensen flies back to his old life without Jared, seemingly without a qualm, and it’s gonna be a tough few days or weeks for him, depending on what happens with Dianne’s mother, so who is Jared to deny him a last few hours of carefree happiness?

This just isn’t the way he saw their last few hours together. Sure, he knew they’d be at the party, but he thought it would be their only opportunity to act like a couple for real, to give Jensen a taste of what they could have, what they could be, if only he’d take the chance. Of course he’s not going to take the chance now, is he? Not after what’s happened.

Fuck, Jensen is beautiful when he relaxes and opens up a bit. He’s enthusing with Robin about some country musician that they both like, someone Jared’s never heard of, and his eyes sparkle as he argues about which song is the best on the singer’s new album.

“Not into country then?” Matt asks him, leaning away from Robin a bit.

“Nah.” Jared is physically sitting on his hands to keep from reaching for Jensen. This is why he can’t come back next year and just be friends. His body still thinks Jensen belongs to him and wants to claim public ownership. No. That’s not it—well, not all. Honestly? It just misses Jensen being in touching distance. “You aren’t either?”

“Can’t stand the stuff.”
He and Matt discover they have some alternative musical tastes in common and that makes conversation easy to keep up while he surreptitiously soaks in Jensen’s beauty for the last time. How did he never realise just how exquisite he is?

He’s never going to see that mouth wrapped adoringly around his dick again. Shit, he’s going to miss Jensen’s mouth. Not to mention Jensen’s ass, so hot and enticing and greedy and like heaven to sink into. Jensen has ruined him by being so fucking wonderful. No one ever came close to him before, but at least Jared didn’t know what he was missing. Now he knows, how the fuck is he meant to be satisfied with less?

He should’ve left Jensen alone. This ending was obvious before they began given that the first time he saw Jensen he was with Dianne. No matter how attractive he is, at least it would’ve been no more than a crush and a bit of harmless fantasy, and tonight they could’ve been enjoying themselves and being normal and he wouldn’t feel like the walls are caving in on him and are about to crush him, leaving him alone in the rubble.

Thinking like this isn’t going to help, though. He learned that early enough. Feeling sorry for himself is just going to make it harder to get through each moment and he needs to snap out of it.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” he excuses himself to Matt, and Jensen doesn’t even notice him leave.

Jared wanders through the house. Everywhere he looks, people are drinking. Laughing. Having a fucking fantastic time. Maybe he should drink more—but no, someone has to remain sober to make sure they get home and that Jensen reaches the airport on time with all his stuff. Jensen has obviously abdicated all responsibility.

“Hey, Jared!” A drunken body knocks into his and reflexively he grabs onto it.

“Hey, uh—Chad?”

“You ‘member me. Thought you forgot. Haven’t seen you for f’ever. Where you been?”

Chad, shit. He’s the guy Jared used to fuck more often than not at the club because he was happy to do it in the alley instead of insisting Jared go home with him. “Around,” he says, trying to disentangle himself from Chad’s groping hands. “You okay, man?”

“Missed you.” Chad plasters himself against Jared’s groin. “No one fucks me like you do, Jared. Miss that dick.”

“This isn’t the place for this, Chad.”

“But you never come to the club any more,” Chad pouts, but his mouth isn’t a touch on Jensen’s. Not nearly as talented, either. He swivels around to wriggle his ass against the part of Jared he wants. “’s go upstairs. Jus’ quick. Need you in me.”

“I don’t do that any more.”

“Why th’ fuck not?” Chad blinks up at him and wriggles again. “Feels so good, Jare’.”

“No.”

His tone finally gets through to Chad, who pulls ever-so-slightly away. “You with someone?”

“Ye—” No. No, he’s not. He’s not with fucking anyone. “I’m here with my roommate and he has an early flight to catch and it’s on me to make sure he does.” Make sure Jensen’s in the right place to
fly out of his life forever. How did he sign up for that one?

“So you’re not with someone?” Chad’s ass finds its way back to Jared’s cock, which is being fucking annoying in its lack of realisation about who exactly is rubbing against it. “It’s still early. There’re bedrooms upstairs. Won’t take long, you can do it quickly if you want. Your roommate won’t even know you’re gone.”

He’s got that one right, since Jensen indeed didn’t notice when he left. “I can’t.”

“C’mon.” Chad’s fingers fumble at his buckle. “Jus’ a quick one. Please, Jared, I want you. You always make it so good, do me so hard. No one else does it like you. I need you.”

Jensen doesn’t need him. Jensen doesn’t even want him. He wasn’t enough to tear Jensen away from the shitty little mundane life he’s going to lead in Texas with his pretty orphaned wife and his adoring family and guaranteed job with great medical cover and his fucking—his fucking church choir. He’s going to sing in that choir for the woman who gets to have him in her bed every night and no longer for Jared. Tonight was the only time it was for Jared and it made no fucking sense and even if it meant what it sounded like it could mean, none of that matters any more. It’s over, regardless. It’s over and he’s lost and seven hours from now he’ll be on his own.

Again.

He’s not aware of moving away from the wall or of climbing the stairs. All he can feel is Chad’s hand pulling at his belt. Pulling, pulling, and then opening and unzipping and stroking and squeezing.

It’s all wrong—but nothing else is allowed for him now. This is all he’ll ever have, quick fucks in the dark with men he barely knows. He jolts when he feels Chad roll the condom onto him; he hadn’t given it a thought. When was the last time he used one?

With Chad.

With Chad that fucking night in the fucking alley when Jensen fucking watched them.

The night it began.

Fuck Jensen. No, seriously, fuck him.

Jared never will again.

Chad feels wrong. He’s tight in the wrong ways, it’s the wrong angle, he moves in the wrong rhythm. Jesus, why did Jared used to like fucking him?

It wasn’t that he liked it; he just didn’t care. He didn’t know better.

But this is all he has now.

His hips are still moving without his consent. Has he consented to any of this? He hasn’t objected, so he obviously has.

Good thing Jensen isn’t watching this time.

Fuck, just the thought of him, of that night, speeds Jared up. His body doesn’t seem to care that he’s inside the wrong man. The mere thought of the right man fires his blood and memories crash through his head of that first night, how responsive Jensen was, how responsive he always is, so wild.
for anything Jared wants to do with him, wanton despite his outward inhibitions, and he fucks into Chad harder, vicious now. He had all that. He had it and he’s lost it and he was stupid to dream of the impossible, as stupid as when he’d hoped just maybe his parents would accept him when they found out he was gay. He’s delusional and this is what he gets for it, balls deep in a man he can’t stand, at a party he’s hating, responsible for sending the man who’s breaking his heart back home to the woman he belongs to in the morning.

He comes, despising himself.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry for not replying to notes on the last two chapters. I will. I just couldn't face it right now while writing this section. Thank you to all of you for loving these two so much. I hope you still love them after this and you stick with them. It will be worth it.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

This is it, the day they’ve both been dreading.

Jensen has no idea how long they’ve been at the party. Nor does he have any idea, it occurs to him in the middle of another debate with Robin about the merits of a country singer he’s not even sure he knows, how long it’s been since Jared disappeared.

At first he was relieved when Jared slipped away, but it’s too much now, he needs to come back. Jensen needs him back.

Where the hell is he?

“Must find Jay,” he says, interrupting himself and getting to his feet. “I’ll come back but—he’s gone.”

“You okay, Jensen?” Matt asks.

Hm, yeah, he’s not so sure. Why is everything moving? His hand closes over the back of Jared’s chair from earlier. It doesn’t feel like it’s moving. It feels reassuringly solid. Like Jared would. If he were here.

Where is he?

“Gotta find him.” He focuses on Matt and Robin, who don’t seem very steadfastly where they should be. “I’ll bring him back.”

One of them laughs, but he’s already turned away. Someone passes him a drink and he takes it automatically. A hazy awareness tries to sound a warning about accepting a drink from strangers but it’s easy to ignore, even easier once he’s gulped it down.

Where’s Jared?

He asks some people but none of them know. One mentions something about seeing him with someone called Chad. “You know, big blonde guy? Pre-law?”

No, Jensen doesn’t know. Jared has never mentioned a Chad. But then, has Jared mentioned anybody? Although he seems to know most people on campus, Jared never singles any of them out. Maybe he did in his pre-Jensen life. In his club life.

Is Chad someone Jared knows from the club?

Leaning against a rolling wall, Jensen considers. Is that Jared’s response, then, to Jensen’s song? Guess that clears things up. It sucks a bit for him to do it here, to rub Jensen’s face in it—but then, isn’t that the point? Coward. He could at least’ve said. But then, it’s not like Jensen said either. Maybe if he’d been brave enough to say, “Jared, I want to be with you,” then Jared would have answered him in words: “Jensen, I don’t want to be with you.”
Okay.
Okay. So that’s....

....a lot easier to take in theory than to watch Jared come down the stairs with a fucking attractive blonde half hanging off him.

Chad.

That’s Chad.

That’s....

Wait a second. Jensen knows him.

Has seen him.

He knows those muscles and oh God it’s the guy, the guy from that night, the guy he watched Jared with when all of this started.

It’s a good thing the wall is there, unsteady as it is, because otherwise he’d be humiliating himself right now in front of them by collapsing at their feet.

Jared hasn’t seen him. That’s something, at least. Jared doesn’t know he knows and Jensen’s not going to give him the satisfaction. Fuck Jared anyway. Fuck him and Chad. They can both go to hell with Jensen’s blessing.

As a girl starts taking off her top, gathering a crowd, Jensen stumbles to a chair in the corner to sit down. He’s not feeling so good now. Why won’t things just stay still? That would really help on this night when everything is going so wrong. Why does he feel nauseous? He’s not having a panic attack, he can breathe just fine. He just needs this to stop.

He needs—

No. He doesn’t. There’s no point in needing someone he can’t have.

Someone who blatantly doesn’t need him back.

“Jensen?”

The relief of hearing that voice makes him slump with defeat. This is so not fair. “You disappeared.”

“Are you okay?”

Screwing up his courage, he opens his eyes and turns to look. Jared’s crouched in front of him, not looking at all the way he’s supposed to after sex. “Are you okay?”

“I haven’t been drinking the way you were. You’re not used to it. How are you feeling?”

Like shit. That’s how he feels. But damned if he’s telling Jared that. “This is a good party. We should come to more.”

Jared’s face tightens. “You ready to go home now?”

Home. Going home usually means sexy times with Jared. Last night going home involved fucking
in an alley—like Jared did with Chad.

Why doesn’t Jared look satisfied? He usually has this really annoying air of repletion after sex and it’s not there. Fucking Chad. Jared needs to find somebody better if he wants to replace Jensen. “You can do better,” he tells him firmly. “You should. You deserve that.”

Jared scowls at him. Oh yeah, for sure Chad’s not done the job right. Maybe Jensen should offer him one last go, just for old times’ sake.

“We should get you to bed since you have to be up early for your flight.”

Flight? No, his flight’s not until afternoon. On the other hand, bed would be good. Bed is the best place for sexy times, and then Jensen can put the correct expression on Jared’s face. Make him see what he’s turning down. He needs to know.

“How,” he says easily. “Home and bed.”

“Can you stand up?”

“’course.” He demonstrates, but his point is somewhat undermined when he staggers and Jared has to catch him. “Floor keeps moving.”

“Definitely home,” Jared mutters. “’C’mon, Jensen, you can hold onto my arm.”

Jared’s arm is warm and strong and Jensen wants to wrap it around him where it belongs. He takes advantage of the pretext of squeezing through the mass of people so by the time they reach the front door he’s pressed up against Jared’s chest, large arm wrapped securely around him. This is more like it.

The quiet of outside is a shock. It clears his mind sufficiently to remember that his place no longer is in Jared’s arms, so he pulls away under the guise of needing to retie his laces. Bending over, though, revives the nausea.

“Jen?”

He drops onto his hands and knees, desperately trying to regain equilibrium. “Gimme a minute.”

“You okay?”

“No, Jared, I’m drunk and I feel sick.”

“Do you need to throw up?”

“No!” There’s no chance in hell he’s doing that in front of Jared a second time. “Just give me a minute.”

A warm hand lands hesitantly on his lower back. “Take your time. I’ve got you.”

No, Jared had him. He doesn’t have him now. He wants to snap at Jared to get his hand off him, but the words don’t come. Instead he breathes, just like Jared taught him. It helps. It’s helping a lot today, just like it’ll help tomorrow when he lands in Texas and—

And Dianne won’t meet him, as planned, because her mother’s in the hospital and how the hell did he manage to forget all about that?

“My flight?” He rears back onto his knees and looks at Jared, who’s kneeling beside him. “What’s
time is my flight? Is it soon?"

“It’s at seven. It’s just after one now.”

“Did Dianne call?” Where’s his phone? Why can’t he find it in his pocket? “I told her to call me if
she needed me. Fuck, where’s my phone!”

“Let me.” Leaning across, Jared pushes his hand aside and slides his own into the pocket of Jensen’s
jeans, successfully retrieving the phone. “Here.”

No calls. No calls, that’s good, right? It means Elena hasn’t died while he was getting shit-faced
and his lover was fucking someone else.

God, what has become of his life?

“Did she call?”

“No.” Okay. The snap of reality returning has overwhelmed his nausea and he feels a lot less drunk
all of a sudden. Standing up doesn’t worsen the situation, nor does walking. Good. It helps not
having to hang onto Jared to stay upright.

They walk home in silence. He tries to speak several times, but the wrong words keep coming to his
lips, words like, “What the fuck were you doing with him?” and “Do you really not want me?” and
“How can I make us all right again?” Maybe it’ll be easier in September. He’ll have had time to
calm down, his body will be accustomed to being without Jared, his heart won’t ache so ferociously,
and he’ll be able to smile and be normal again.

Thank God this isn’t the absolute end of them, because he doesn’t think he could stand it. They may
be fucked right now, but it won’t end like this. September will come and it will bring a resumption
of shared muffins and football season and gym together, maybe they can even try a yoga class or
something. Jensen can play other songs for Jared, more appropriate songs, and Jared can enjoy them
without feeling the need to rush off and fuck someone to re-assert his fucking freedom. They’ll be
okay. Eventually. Jensen has to believe that.

*

He can’t read Jensen. He hasn’t been able to read him all day and after weeks of being fluent in him,
it’s distressing to lose that clarity right when it matters most.

Or maybe he hasn’t lost it and Jensen really is fine, other than being extremely drunk. Shit, Jared
should never have left him alone because tomorrow’s gonna suck even worse for him with the
hangover he’s bound to have. Has Jensen even had a hangover in his life before?

Yeah, remember, he used to run with a wild crowd, back before he settled down to do the right
thing. He can handle it. And even if he can’t, it’s no longer Jared’s business.

At least Jensen didn’t see him with Chad. Not that it makes what he did any better, but at least
Jensen doesn’t know.

Although if he knew, would he even care?
“I’m going to shower,” Jensen says when they reach the room, and it’s clear he means alone, even more so when he firmly closes the door between them.

That leaves Jared with the terrible debate: should he separate their beds? Would that annoy Jensen or relieve him? Not that Jared has any right to share a bed with him tonight or even that he has a hope of sleeping, not when they have to be up again so soon for Jensen to make his plane. Practically it won’t make any difference, so he may as well leave them. If Jensen wants them separated to make a point, he can separate them himself.

The sounds coming from the bathroom reveal why Jensen rushed for the shower: he’s throwing up. Again. And damned if Jared knows why. Is it just because of alcohol?

When Jensen emerges more than twenty minutes later, Jared leaps up from his desk. “I’m going to shower too.”

Eyes glazed, Jensen nods. “How long do I have to crash?”

“I ordered you a cab for six, and you’re all packed, right? So about three and a half hours.”

“God. Okay. Thanks.”

Jared makes his shower quick. He could shower equally well in the morning, but he can’t be in the room when Jensen goes to bed. As he hoped, when he comes out Jensen is asleep, neatly arranged on his side, one arm cradling his pillow the way it normally would cradle Jared.

Jared doesn’t join him. Instead he sits back down on his desk chair and tries not to feel creepy as he watches Jensen sleep. These are their final minutes together. He was supposed to spend them with Jensen in his arms, buried deep inside Jensen’s body.

He cuts off the thought before he can remember whose body he was inside a couple of hours ago. He has the rest of his life to hate himself for that, but only three hours left with Jensen.

Jensen’s phone jolts him out of his trance, not the alarm but the ring tone, and he grabs it from where Jensen left it on the table beside the bed. In his zeal for it not to awaken Jensen, he accidentally answers it.

Shit.

“Uh, hello? Jensen?”

“Hey, Dianne, it’s Jared.”

“Jared? Is Jensen all right?”

“He’s asleep but I can wake him. He said he told you to call.” Fuck, this is awkward. “How is your mother?”

There’s a little sniffle from the other end of the line. “No, don’t wake him. It’s okay, I just—I didn’t want to be alone and I made Donna and Alan go home because Donna needs her rest. Nothing has changed, which is good, right? They said the first 24 hours are critical, and she’s still here. I know she’s fighting. I know she is.”

“I’m sure she is.” What the hell is he supposed to say? “What about you? Don’t you need your rest as well?”
“How can I? Not when Mama needs me. I’ve always been there for her and I’m not going to abandon her now. Jared....if she dies and I’m not there....I could never live with myself.”

He knows she’s been her mother’s carer for many years, even though he can’t remember what Elena’s illness is, and he can’t blame her. If it were him, he’d feel the same. “I’m sure she can feel you there and it’s helping.”

“You think so? I hope so. I wish I could do more.”

“You’re doing all you can.”

She sighs deeply. “Thank you, Jared. It helps to hear that. The nurses keep telling me to get some sleep and I can’t. I can’t.”

“You do what you need to.” Like he’s doing what he needs to, staring at her boyfriend while he sleeps.

“What about you?” she asks as though she can see him. “Why are you still awake?”

If only he had the decency to look away from Jensen while he talks to her. “I woke up to go to the bathroom and was just coming back when I heard the phone. Are you sure you don’t want me to wake him?”

“Would you mind talking to me for just a few minutes since you’re already awake?”

“Sure.”

“Tell me about him. How was his show? Does he have a great voice? Was he good?”

Not taking his eyes off Jensen, Jared tips his chair back and tells her what he thinks will make her feel better. She’s sweet and enthusiastic and supportive and he feels even more of a dick. What right did he have to barge into her relationship and try to claim her man as his own?

What right does he have to still want to tie Jensen to the bed and prevent him from catching his flight?

None. He has none.

Jensen isn’t his.

They talk for nearly an hour. He learns about her life, about her arts major, about the way she’s cared for her mother since her father left, and about how close she is to Jensen’s family. He still doesn’t think she’s right for Jensen, but at least she has the best of intentions and she loves him. He’s not sending Jensen back to some bitch who will destroy him.

And fuck the way his belly clenches in resistance. It still doesn’t trust her or believe that Jensen will thrive.

Tough.

This is the way it’s happening.

By the time he ends the call, it’s nearly time to wake Jensen. Their last night is over.
“Jensen?”

Jared’s voice filters into Jensen’s consciousness. He’s dreaming. Jared isn’t here, he lost Jared and he’s been alone for far too long. “Jay?”

“Jen, wake up.”

“No.” Not now that Jared has come to his dreams. “Stay with me.”

“I’m not the one going.”

Jensen gropes for him. “Stay.”

“Jen, you need to wake up.” Jared catches his hand. “You have a flight to catch.”

A flight? Oh. Oh yes. Oh no. He snatches back his hand as his eyes fully open. “I’m awake.”

Jared lets go. “There’s water and advil beside the bed for you.”

“Advil?” Sitting up, he instantly falls back again as pain rockets through his head. Damn, he’s hungover.

“Drink. It’ll help.”

It doesn’t, really, but he trusts the pills will take the edge off it if he gives them enough time. Fortunately he left out the clothes he planned to wear today so he doesn’t have to think, just pulls them on. It’s only after he’s dressed that he remembers he shouldn’t do things like that in front of Jared any longer.

Tough. Jared won’t have to put up with him after this.

“Dianne called,” Jared says behind him as he crams his clothes from last night into his bag.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“I talked to her. She just didn’t want to be alone.”

“You should have woken me.”

“She said not to.”

“You should have woken me.”

“Well, sorry for listening to the girl whose mother is dying.”

Jensen swallows down his instinctive retort. “Is she really dying?”

“She’s not responding to treatment. I googled a bit while we talked. It doesn’t look good and I think Dianne knows that, but she’s trying hard to be positive.”

“Sounds like her.”

This is it. It’s almost time for his cab to arrive and he’s all ready. There’s nothing left to do.
Nothing except say goodbye to Jared.

Jared holds out his phone. “Sorry, we talked on your phone, but I recharged it for you.”

Their hands carefully don’t brush as he takes it. “You shouldn’t have answered my phone.”

“I said sorry.”

“Why were you even awake?”

“Couldn’t sleep.”

Right. Sure. “I’d better go downstairs.”

“I’ll help you with your bags.”

“I can do it.”

“I’ll help you.”

“I can—” His voice shakes too much to complete the sentence, so he shrugs, turning away to pick up his backpack. “Fine.”

The elevator comes quickly at this hour of the morning and Jensen stands back to let Jared manhandle his large suitcase into it, then steps inside, making sure to keep it between them.

The cab is already waiting.

This is it.

Opening the door of the cab, he watches as Jared and the driver wrestle the suitcase into the trunk. In the elevator he prepared a speech and now is the time to give it, but when Jared turns back to him the words vanish. Instead they stare at each other. Jared looks tired as fuck and Jensen wants to make him smile. He hates the wariness they both have now. Please let this be gone by September so they can get back their former friendship. He needs it.

“Text me when you land so I know you got there,” Jared says at last. “And keep me updated on Elena.”

So at least Jared expects them to keep in communication. That’s good. That’s—Jensen was worrying about that, but this is reassuring. “I will. You too, tomorrow. Say hi to New York from me.”

“You’ll have to visit one day.”

“Yeah.”

“If you want to make that plane, we need to leave,” the cabbie calls from inside.

“I’m coming.” He turns back to Jared. “Have a good summer.”

“You too.”

“See you in September.”

Jared nods jerkily. “Fly safely.”
Just before Jensen gets in the cab, he pushes up on his toes and presses a quick kiss against Jared’s cheek. “Thank you,” he says. “For—you know.” It’s not the elegant speech he planned, but it covers the basics.

Jared’s hand comes up to cover his cheek where Jensen kissed him and that’s the last view of him that Jensen has.

*

Jared sleeps for the rest of the day in the bed that Jensen just left.

*

Jensen spends most of his flight looking at the pictures on his phone that he took of Jared in Carluccio’s. He can’t think about what lies ahead of him. Not yet.

*

Jared wakes up when his phone beeps. He managed to sleep through all other notifications but something tells his unconscious brain that this one matters and he grabs it before he’s even fully awake.

“Just landed. Flight good.”

He falls asleep again clutching his phone.

*

The hospital is worse than Jensen imagined. Dianne is tight-lipped and in denial that her mother is dying. His own mother isn’t in denial but is already in mourning and struggling to hold it together. His father escapes back home with the excuse of taking the dogs out for a run, and while Jensen would very dearly love to join them and avail himself of canine happy affection and comfort, he stays at the hospital for the rest of the day, being cried on by his mother and clung to by Dianne.

It’s a distraction, at least.
It’s dark outside when Jared finally opens his eyes and feels vaguely normal. The first thing he does is check his phone. There’s another message from Jensen, sent just a few minutes ago.

“She’s dying, you were right.”

Before answering, he uses the bathroom and splashes some water on his face, then dives back into his and Jensen’s bed. “I’m sorry.”

There’s a long wait. Several times he sees the little dots appear. Jensen is struggling to answer. Shit. Jensen doesn’t even know everything he’s apologising for.

Eventually the words appear: “Me too.”
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Is this the way life is going to be for them apart?

It’s the second time Jared has fled to New York in distress. This time, however, it’s familiar and he has a place where he belongs, people he knows, a life to resume.

Because he can’t find the words, he snaps a picture of a yellow cab out his bedroom window and sends that to Jensen as proof of safe arrival.

Friends arrive for an impromptu welcome-home party. He smiles and laughs and can barely tell one from the other except that his body signals several were former sexual partners. He can’t remember what the sex with any of them was like.

One approaches him, asks if he can suck Jared off.

He needs to say yes, say yes and stick his cock in another man’s mouth the way he did in another man’s ass the night before last. He needs to annihilate Jensen from his body. Cleanse himself.

But he can’t.

Instead he sidles away and slips into his bedroom alone. He’s weak, he knows, but instead of finding release and purging himself of Jensen, he lies back on the bed and takes his phone out of his pocket. He’s held out for longer than he expected against opening the folder containing the pictures of Jensen from last week, but now he’s admitting defeat.

Before he can access the folder, however, a message comes in.

"Elena died tonight."

Oh Jensen. Before he can think better of it, he presses the Call button.

"Hey," Jensen says quietly.

"You okay?"

"It’s pretty shit here."

Yeah, he can imagine. "How’s Dianne?"

"Not good. She’s asleep now. I don’t think she’s slept since it happened."

"Where are you?"

"At home. I didn’t sleep last night either, so I’m about to crash."

Because Jensen, now that he’s resumed being a good boyfriend, stayed at the hospital with her, of course he did. "How’s your mom?"
“She was expecting it, so it wasn’t so bad for her. She’s holding up well, taking care of all the
details. There’s an awful lot of details involved when someone dies, Jay.”

“When is the funeral?”

“Friday, probably.” Jensen’s quiet for a moment then says, “Dianne wants me to sing.”

“At the funeral?”

“Yeah.”

“With her choir?”

“No, alone. A church song Elena loved.”

“Are you going to do it?”

“I should.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to.” He knows the moment the words leave his mouth that he
shouldn’t have said that, and he can imagine the look on Jensen’s face at Jared assuming rights to
Jensen’s life that he no longer has.

But instead of flaring up, Jensen asks, “So where are you tonight?”

Fair enough; he doesn’t push. “At home too. A bunch of people came over to welcome me back
but I—I’m in bed now.”

“Like me.”

“Yeah.” Will Jensen continue to sleep naked now that he’s back in Texas? Is he lying there naked
right now?

Shit. He cannot have phone sex with Jensen. He has no business even thinking about it, especially
not mere hours after Jensen’s watched his future mother-in-law die.

“Uh, can you pass on my sympathies to Dianne? I don’t have her number.”

“Sure.”

They don’t hang up, but nor do they speak again. Jared reaches across to turn off the light and lies
there in the dark listening to Jensen breathe, letting Jensen hear him.

He’s not sure who falls asleep first.

*

“How was the funeral?”

“A lot of crying people.”

“Did you sing?”
“With the choir. A solo of one verse.”

A compromise. That’s something. “Are you going to keep singing in the choir?”

“People are friendly. It’s good practice.”

“And the guitar?”

“Still playing. What do you have planned for your last weekend of freedom?”

Jared’s summer school job starts on Monday. Honestly, he can’t wait because he’s been going out of his mind trying to keep busy so he doesn’t tumble down a dangerous slope. “It’s Roger’s 21st, so party time.”

No response from Jensen. Is he also trying not to think about the party last weekend? Eventually, “Have a good time.”

Jared doesn’t know how to reply to that. “How about you?”

“Dianne wants to sort through her mother’s things tomorrow, then church on Sunday.”

And Jensen starts work on Monday, same as Jared, at his father’s firm. “Did she get the flowers I sent?”

They cost him a week of grocery money, so he’s relieved when Jensen says, “Yes. She asked me to thank you.” Three dots, so Jared waits. “And to thank you for the talk you had. She said both meant a lot.”

“It’s a tough time for her.”

“Yeah.”

No dots on either side.

*

Dianne has dinner with them every night. She’s still living in the house she shared with Elena two blocks away, but Jensen’s mother insists she come for at least one meal a day. Jensen is surprised by how easily he’s slipped back into home mode, laying the table and washing the dishes, reading the papers on his phone to discuss current events with his father, listening attentively to Dianne and his mother talk about events at the church. Now he’s singing with the choir he knows a lot more of the people involved so he has intelligent comments to slot in, and they seem very pleased with him.

At least someone is pleased with him.

Work at the firm is how it always is: boring and a little intimidating because he still doesn’t fit into this world of numbers and finance. He’s only a couple of years from having to work here full time, though, so he tries to diligently apply himself. At least the effort of intense concentration all day keeps his mind off what Jared might be doing in New York with his summer school kids.

After that first night Jared was home, they don’t call each other again. Jensen aches to call the following night, but he knows if he does it will set a precedent neither of them can afford, so he turns
his phone off and lies rigid and awake through the night, cold despite the hot air drifting through his open windows. He’s become too accustomed to sleeping beside a living furnace.

Text messages are uncomfortable. He needs to see Jared’s face, his eyes. He needs the truth, not just polite words on a phone screen.

Is Jared okay?

Of course he is. Why wouldn’t he be? He’s gone back to his exciting life in New York with the clubs and the bars and the men, so many men out and proud instead of quivering in the shadows. He can make up for the past two months of only Jensen.

Meanwhile, Jensen is left with nothing. Nothing except a good woman who loves him and wants him and trusts him, even when she shouldn’t.

At the hospital she let him hold her through those endless awful hours, but since then she’s withdrawn. It’s as though she feels they crossed an unacceptable barrier so she has to make up for it by going to the opposite extreme, greeting him with smiles, not even accepting a hug when packing up her mother’s clothing made her cry. The distance between them is a relief, but his body has become accustomed to constant physical affection and it doesn’t understand that Jared is gone now and that things are different with Dianne.

In his most needy moments, he pulls out his phone to text Jared and then sits there unable to press a single key because all the words that come are words that he can’t say.

_I miss you._

_I need you._

_I can’t sleep without you._

_Even breathing hurts sometimes._

*

“You’re no fun this year, Mr P.”

The words echo over and over again through Jared’s head as he makes his way home a week after his last contact with Jensen. He knows he’s not. He knows he’s failing his kids miserably. What he doesn’t know is how to fix it.

Fix himself.

It’s all he can do to get the words out that are absolutely necessary. His usual ability to joke and laugh and kid around has vanished, and his classes have become endurance events for both him and the children who depend on him helping them get through a summer of work instead of play.

It’s unacceptable.

It’s Friday night and he should be waiting for Jensen to come home from the library for the start of another weekend of sexual delights. It shouldn’t be two weeks since he was last inside Jensen. He shouldn’t be consumed by wondering if Jensen has come since the last time Jared made him. Or
trying not to think about the fact that he and Dianne might have finally done the deed. Has her mother’s death altered anything about their marriage plans? Now that Dianne is alone in the world, might they decide to bring their wedding forward? There’s no reason they have to wait for the end of college to marry, after all.

This is why he doesn’t text Jensen. He can’t risk what words will come out.

But it’s Friday and Friday means Jensen more than any other day. Friday was the day it began, the day Jensen first looked at him with lust, and the day they consummated it. Friday was muffins and laughter. Friday was planning all the things he wanted to spend the weekend doing to Jensen and getting started on them when Jensen got home.

This Friday is Jared all alone and starting to lose his mind.

Because he can’t face his lonely bedroom or his flatmates, who are starting to ask questions, he detours into a coffee shop. It’s only when he gets to his table that he realises he ordered a wheat germ muffin. What the hell is wrong with him?

It tastes like Jensen.

Without letting himself think about it, he snaps a photo with the half-eaten muffin in the foreground and sends it without commentary.

Two hours later, he gets a picture in return: an uneaten slice of chocolate cake on what’s clearly a dining room table, and if he jerks off in the dark while imagining tying Jensen up and feeding him chocolate cake, well, Jensen doesn’t have to know.

Sunday brings a picture of a church hymnal on a wooden pew. Jared sends back a group of guys playing with a frisbee in the park, most of them shirtless.

Monday is a neat workstation in a corporate office, so he replies with his messy desk, piled high with marking he can’t seem to get around to doing.

Tuesday he gets in first with a close-up of red ticks in an exercise book, and receives in return a close-up of the top of an email marked urgent. It’s to Jensen at his work email address, and Jared wonders what it’s about and if Jensen is enjoying dealing with it. Maybe Jared was wrong in his supposition that Jensen had no interest in working at the firm. Maybe.

He wakes Wednesday to a picture of a spectacular Texas sunrise. Is this Jensen’s view out of his bedroom window? Where else would he have been at sunrise? It’s raining in New York today, he discovers when he opens his curtains, so he takes a photo from halfway across his room to show the dismal grey through the window pane, and if there’s a corner of his bed caught at the side, he can’t be blamed. There’s no space in his tiny room to rearrange the furniture any other way.

He sends a shot of his crowded subway platform on his way home from work on Thursday, and Jensen replies immediately with an emptying office car park.

In the morning, there’s a picture of Jensen’s bedroom, his bed rumpled and messy. What is he supposed to do with that other than immediately jerk off to images of Jensen lying in it, naked and needy, and then, although he knows he shouldn’t, he photographs the steam billowing out of his shower.

But that goes nowhere, because Saturday afternoon he gets an exquisite shot of Donna’s garden.
She’s in it, bending over tackling some weeds, her back to the camera. Has Jensen been working with her in it all day? But wait, look. There’s a t-shirt crumpled on the lawn beside her. A blue and white t-shirt Jared knows intimately because he once spent hours teasing and chewing on Jensen’s nipples right through it. Jensen is shirtless in the Texan sun, no doubt with sweat trickling down his back. Is he turning brown like Jared or just getting a thousand new freckles? Jared never did get around to picking a favourite freckle. Are they different now?

And what about Jared’s mark on his hip? It would be visible if he’s wearing low-slung pants. Has it finally disappeared? Jared planned to renew it on their final night together, only they didn’t get their final night.

Because he’s too panicked about what intention Jensen had in sending him a picture that implied he was shirtless, he doesn’t reply with anything suggestive. It reminds him that he hasn’t done laundry since he got home, though, so he heads off to the laundromat and takes a picture of his clothes sorted into colour piles (something Jensen drummed into him as necessary, even though Jared had never bothered before). This way Jensen will see that Jared noted the stripped-off shirt, but Jared isn’t being inappropriate just in case Jensen didn’t mean it that way.

The pictures return to casual during the following week, so he probably didn’t. They exchange the views from their desks at work, their local grocery stores, Jared’s apartment block and the impressive house that Jensen lives in. Is this their new normal, then? Sharing daily snippets of their vanilla lives? Thursday night is a picture of what looks like a bible study group, given the religious books scattered on the low coffee table between the sofas and armchairs. Is this in Jensen’s house or in Dianne’s? Or someone else’s altogether? Why did Jensen send it? It’s in reply to Jared’s of a busy basketball court (because now he plays basketball on Thursday nights instead of Sunday mornings), so is it just that this is what occupied Jensen’s evening?

There’s no way he’d have been there without Dianne, though. At least Jared isn’t thrusting other men in Jensen’s face.

Although, come to think of it, Jensen did seem awfully eager in the beginning for Jared to go off with other men in addition to him, so maybe he wouldn’t care?

After working himself up into a righteous stew all day, Jared gives in to his friends’ pleas and agrees to join them at a gay club on Friday night. As he dresses up appropriately, he tries not to feel guilty. He has every right to do this. He’s single and he hasn’t had sex for weeks. It’s the longest he’s gone without since he started having it. No wonder he’s still so obsessed with Jensen. All he needs to do is get back into his old habits and obliterate the memory of Jensen from his body and then maybe he’ll start feeling better.

He doesn’t mean to take a picture inside of all the dancing, sweaty men.

Or to send it.

*

Jensen can’t sleep at the best of times, but Friday nights are the worst. Friday nights are when he goes to the gym and lifts weights until his muscles shake uncontrollably and then runs on the treadmill until he literally can’t take another step, but it’s not helping tonight. He’s still lying in bed wide awake, his body vibrating with energy and need and desperation.
He needs to get off. It’s been three weeks since he last came, that’s what’s wrong. Yeah, maybe he used to go months without it in the past, but his body works differently now. He taught it a new way to exist and he can’t just ignore it the way he used to.

He doesn’t need to be elaborate about it; just a few twists of his hand should do the trick. It’s that easy. So why isn’t he doing it?

Because Jared hasn’t told him he can.

Stupid! Muffling his groan in his pillow, he slams his fist into the mattress. Jared has nothing to do with this anymore. Why won’t his body get the damn message? Jared is no longer in charge of it. Jared isn’t here. Jared is gone. Jared will never have any say over his orgasms ever again.

It’s over.

It’s over.

God, how pathetic can he be that he actually composes a text message in his mind asking Jared for permission.

How would Jared react if he sent it?

He’d probably be annoyed, irritated that the cowardly little virgin he wasted two months of his life on was pestering him again.

Or....

No. Jensen can’t let himself go there. It’s bad enough what he did at college, but he can’t bring that here. He and Jared can’t continue from afar.

It’s over.

A ping from his phone interrupts another mattress-punching session and he flops onto his back as he grabs the phone to check the message.

It’s from Jared.

He’s out, in a club somewhere. The lights are hazy, unclear, but sufficient to make out people dancing.

Right. Jensen’s here writhing with need and Jared’s out having fun.

With men.

Every single person Jensen can see in the picture is a man.

It’s a gay club.

Of course it is, you idiot. That’s what Jared does. He goes to gay clubs and fucks men.

Has he already picked his man for the night? Is the man one of those in the picture? Jensen tries to scrutinise them. Do any of them look like Jared’s type? At least this time, unlike last time he undertook this exercise, he knows what Jared’s type is: Jensen.

But Jared’s finished with him, remember.
He doesn’t sleep. Instead he lies there torturing himself imagining what Jared might be doing. Is it a quick blowjob in the bathroom? Is he going home with the guy to fuck him in a bed all night? Or what about bringing the guy to his own bed, now that he no longer has a roommate to worry about, that bed that Jensen glimpsed to the side of one of the pictures? Is Jared right there with this guy?

What if Jared sends him a picture in the morning of his bed strewn with condoms, lube bottle prominent?

At about 3am, when he can’t take it any longer, he remembers a picture he took of a choir practice last week for the church bulletin. It’s petty and pathetic and he hates himself for it, but he sends it to Jared and only then can he sleep.

*

Jared supposes he deserves it, sending Jensen a picture insinuating it’s of men he intends to fuck, but getting in return one of the woman Jensen plans to marry still hurts.

It hurts too much. So much, in fact, considering no fucking actually took place, that he’s tempted to call him and set him straight.

Oh, what a joke, set Jensen straight. Mr So Gay He Never Even Considered Fucking His Girlfriend Of Four Years. Mr I’m Completely Gay But I’m Marrying A Woman Anyway. Mr I’m Going To Break Her Heart But Oh No Sorry I Won’t After All, I’ll Break Yours Instead.

He spends the day coaching kids at basketball, ignoring Jensen’s picture, then goes home to dress up. If Jensen can play dirty, so can he.

*

It’s a sign.

Just a sign, semi-obscured by darkness, bearing a name.

Is this supposed to mean something? Should Jensen recognise it?

They’re having a church social night and he’s playing board games with Dianne and some of her friends, laughing and pretending he’s having the time of his life while hiding the part of him that’s been on tenterhooks all day waiting for Jared’s response, but this? What kind of response is this?

Surreptitiously during the next few moves, he googles the name on the sign.

Oh.

Oh, fuck you, Jared.

Surreptitious is not enough, so he excuses himself to the bathroom and sinks down on the edge of the bathtub as he clicks through the website Google presents him with.
Apparently a gay club wasn’t enough for Jared.

Tonight he is tying people up, possibly whipping them, definitely fucking them, probably in public.

Jensen’s dick throbs at the sight of the possibilities on offer.

Jared could do all that kind of stuff to him. In public. In front of everyone.

Except, no. Jared is doing it to somebody else tonight.

He’s doing it to somebody else and he wants Jensen to know it.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Jared finally reads the letter Jensen wrote him during their last weekend together, while Jensen struggles to balance his two lives.

He can’t go through with it.

Just like last night at the club, Jared leaves after less than half an hour, thoroughly turned off by the men surrounding him and disgusted with himself.

What’s wrong with him? He used to love this place.

And why does it make him feel dirty that Jensen knows he was here?

The feeling doesn’t ease until he snaps a shot of the deserted road outside and forwards it along to Jensen as well.

But it’s not enough. Jensen might not get the implicit message of: Understand me. Get that this means I’m leaving. Alone.

Just in case, Jared takes another picture on the subway, taking care to catch his reflection in the window opposite to clearly show that he is alone.

He is going home alone.

*

Still hidden in the bathroom, Jensen concentrates on breathing the way Jared taught him and he’s just given in and pressed his hand against his aching dick when his phone beeps again.

This time it’s a street. It’s dark and grotty, not much more than an alleyway.

An alleyway.

Is Jared sending him a picture of where he’s about to fuck someone?

Is he really that cruel?

“Jensen, are you in there?”

He jumps at Dianne’s voice and drops his phone into the bathtub with a clatter.

“Jensen?”

“Yes! Yes, I’m here. I’m coming.” Ironic words since his dick just shrivelled up.
“Are you all right?”

“I’m fine. Just give me a second.”

He flushes the toilet and retrieves his phone, taking a single last glance at the incriminating street before opening the door. Dianne is waiting right outside. “Hey,” he says, trying not to sound like he’s just run a race—and lost. “Are you okay?”

She shakes her head, arms wrapped around her waist in a gesture he’s become very familiar with lately. “I need to go home.”

“Right now?”

She nods.

“Sure, no problem. I’ll take you.”

Relieved he doesn’t have to return to the game and fake having fun, he calls goodbye to the others and follows Dianne out to his car. This has been happening since her mother’s death, her sudden need to withdraw from social situations, and he tries not to feel guilty for the escape it gives him too. They drive in silence as she struggles to keep from crying. He knows by now that she refuses to cry in front of him, in front of anyone. God knows she ought to, she shouldn’t be alone in the depths of her grief, but she’s shut him out and he’s not decent enough to force his way in as he would if she were—no. He’s not thinking that name right now.

Just as he pulls into her driveway, he feels his phone buzz against his thigh.

What is it this time? Jared’s post-orgasmic face?

Seriously, fuck him.

Dianne’s out the car the moment he stops and he makes himself go after her, standing by awkwardly as she lets herself into the dark house.

“I can stay if you want me to,” he says.

Tightly, she shakes her head. “I’m fine.”

“You don’t have to do this alone—”

“I am alone, Jensen.” She looks as surprised as he is by her outburst and her voice is quieter when she continues. “My mother is gone and I’m alone and I need to get used to that.”

That’s more than she’s said about it in two weeks and he reaches out to take her hand. “You know my mom and I are here for you. I can take you home with me, you don’t have to stay here by yourself.”

Turning her hand over, she disconnects it from his. “Thank you for your offer.”

“Dianne—”

“You’ve never lost your mother, Jensen. You still have both your parents. Let me do this my way, okay? I need to do it my way.”

Her voice breaks on the last words and he steps forward automatically but she flinches back, arms hugging her waist again. “Okay,” he says, retreating. “I’m sorry.” He pulls back all the way to the
door. “I just want you to know that you’re not alone, even if it feels like it.”

All she gives him is a curt nod, so after a moment or two of hovering in the doorway he admits defeat and closes the door behind him. He has no idea how to do this, how to support her in the way a true life partner would. She’s right that he doesn’t know what it’s like to lose his parents, but he lost his brother and he would have welcomed support from anybody that summer if only it had been forthcoming. But Dianne is her own person so he has to respect her right to grieve as she sees fit. It’s his own fault if being excluded by her magnifies his guilt. It’s as though she knows he doesn’t have the right to support her through this.

Back in the car, he braces himself. Either he can check his phone now to see if that was Jared sending another photograph, or he can drive home first. If it’s bad, it might be better not to have to drive afterwards, but on the other hand he might need to go out and commit violence on something. His parents might not react well to the sight of Jensen slamming his fists into a tree or the side of the house.

Except if it really is that bad there’s no way he can safely drive, so he makes himself wait out the five-minute journey home. Fortunately it seems like his parents have taken advantage of his absence to have an early night and he makes it all the way to his bedroom before fishing his phone out of his pocket.

With trepidation, he swipes the screen.

It is a picture of Jared, but he certainly isn’t post-orgasmic. He’s on a train from the looks of things, must be the subway, not that Jensen would know, and from the reflection in the window he seems to be alone, with only a group of Japanese tourists beside him.

It’s the first time he’s seen Jared since he left and he enlarges the picture to study his face. Jared doesn’t look happy, nor does he look satisfied.

Again.

What the hell? Why is he choosing all the wrong men? If he’s going to do these things, if he’s going to be with other men, then he should at least be with ones who make him feel good.

Forget a tree, Jensen wants to hit him. He can’t bear that look on Jared’s face.

Lying back, he imagines getting on a plane to New York and turning up at Jared’s door.

“This is just sex,” he’d say, “because you’re obviously with people who are doing it wrong so I’m here to do it right. Just let me do that and I’ll leave.”

Instead of arguing, Jared would let him in.

He’d pull Jared into his bedroom, push him down onto the bed and then service him the way he deserves, making him scream with so much pleasure that it reduces him to a boneless puddle of mush.

Then he’d leave, all without saying another word, job done, and the right fucking expression left on Jared’s face.

As awareness of his own bedroom in Texas slowly filters back to him, Jensen registers the wet mess in his jeans.

He just made himself come, from a fantasy that was purely about making Jared come.
He’s come in his pants without permission.

Without letting himself think about what it means, he feels for his phone and takes a picture. The room is dark, just a lamp burning in the corner, so it’s not very clear but it shows his face and the top half of his body. He’s obviously on his bed and it won’t take much for Jared to infer what’s just happened.

He sends it.

*  

Jared has just reached home when his phone buzzes.

Jensen.

At last.

What the fuck?

He’s in bed and he’s just come. He’s just fucking come and he’s lying there with that blissed-out expression on his face that only Jared is supposed to fucking put there.

Did he not get that Jared left alone? No sex, damn it. Jared has had no sex in three weeks and what the fuck right does Jensen have sending him a picture like this?

Studying the photograph in detail, he tries to make sense of it. Jensen is in bed, that’s definitely his bed according to the picture from the other day, but the big question is: is he alone? Did he just jerk himself off or did he just fuck his girlfriend? Given that he sent a picture of her in response to the men in the gay club, Jared wouldn’t put it past him.

It’s a selfie, at least, so she didn’t take it, but what if she went to clean up so Jensen grabbed the opportunity to take the picture and send it? Was that what he was doing while Jared was feeling sick at the thought of touching someone who wasn’t Jensen?

It’s his own fault, he decides after an hour of pacing up and down his tiny bedroom floor. He’s the one who started it by sending pictures of men and insinuating sex. What did he expect Jensen to do in return, come running to New York to stop him? Jensen has every right to be fucking his girlfriend, his wife-to-be, and Jared should not, should not, be interfering with it.

The problem is, in the morning he sends Jensen a picture featuring in the centre the scarf he once used to gag him.

*  

Jensen’s reply comes late on Sunday night. It’s a picture of a piece of paper on a desk, blank, with Jensen’s hand poised over it holding a pen as if about to start writing. But there are no words, so, Jensen, what the fuck is that supposed to mean?
Exhausted from not sleeping much the past two nights, Jared drifts off with his phone still in his hand and dreams of scarily blank walls as he runs around, increasingly frantic, trying to find Jensen. It’s only in the middle of classes the next day that it suddenly hits him.

The document he had Jensen handwrite for him. Those two sheets of paper that he carefully folded up and promised Jensen he wouldn’t read until after they parted.

That’s what Jensen is referring to.

The moment he gets home, he grabs them.

Jared.

_In another world, I’d be sitting here naked. Naked and bound visibly to this chair, legs held apart so I’m completely on display. As yours._

_I have your come on my face. You rubbed it into my skin earlier as I knelt at your feet, and when your student arrived it burned as she looked at me to say hello. Was it still visible? Could she see it?_

_In another world, she would. It would be blatantly visible, marking me unmistakably as yours._

_I sit here with a blazing, sore ass because you spanked me before she arrived. Hard. It feels so good, Jared. Have you ever experienced it? Would it be different for you than it is for me? For me it feels like glory. Why don’t we do this more often? Why don’t we try other implements beyond your hand? I want to see what I can take. How hard would still feel good to me? Could you make me cry? Would I want you to?_

_In another world, I’d have no choice. You could hurt me at will._

_You can anyway._

_You can do anything you want with me, you know._

_The other thing I can feel is the bruise you keep current on my hip. I’ve never told you how often my fingers find their way there to press it, to feel you. To feel your claim on my body._

_In another world, it would be visible to all. There are options, I’ve done research. I’d wear a collar for you, if that’s what you wanted. I’d wear bruises or welts. I’d wear a ring. Anything to proclaim to the world who has rights to my body._

_You._

_Only you._

_You have given me the world. I had no idea any of this existed. I thought I was so strong, so righteous in my ability to deny myself the ‘sins of the flesh’. Yeah, that’s what I grew up hearing about and how I thought about it. I wasn’t going to be weak. I prided myself on my self-control. I thought that was all it took._

_I didn’t know._
I didn’t know.

And then one day I came back to our room early.

And then I knew.

It wasn’t a slow awakening, there was nothing gentle about it. One minute my life was normal and then I looked at you and everything was different. I was different.

You’re beautiful, you know that? I still look at you in awe (and not just certain parts of you, don’t be so dirty-minded).

My awakening might not have been gentle, but you, Jared, you were gentle with me. You didn’t need to be. You could have been brutal, you could have taken advantage, you could have just used me for your pleasure. I’d have let you. But that’s not you.

I have loved everything you’ve done to me. Every single thing. I need you to know that.

And the more you do, the more I want.

You’re wrapping up your lesson on the other side of the room. She’s going to be gone in a minute and then I’ll have you to myself. I really hope you’ll fuck me. I’m plugged open and ready for you and I hope you throw me onto the bed and slam into me the moment the door closes behind her.

I love that feeling, you filling me up, so huge, my God, you’re so huge inside of me. I feel empty all the time without you in me. Wrong. The plug helps a little, in that it reminds me that you’re real, that what we’re doing together is real, that you really have been inside me and will be again. But it has nothing on you. When I feel you slide into me, when I feel my flesh stretching and straining around you, rearranging itself to welcome you, that is the best feeling of all.

You did fuck me, Jay. It was as though you knew what I’d written and you did exactly what I wanted, then you left me there, sprawled over the bed, your come drying on my skin, for your viewing pleasure.

I wish I could still be there now. In front of Matt. I wish you could have let him into our room and gone about your tutoring with me naked and on display as yours.

Hey, I just realised. Way back at the beginning, I accused you of having exhibitionist tendencies. I think that’s actually me. I is, isn’t it?

Or maybe….maybe I just want people to know.

Sorry, I’m going down an unintended tangent. I meant to write a steamy fantasy for you to read when you’re in NY this summer, and okay, yeah, for you to jerk off to. You said once that you jerked off to thoughts of me. Do you still? Will you? Will you, when I’m no longer yours, when we’re no longer together, when this experiment is over?

Will you lie on your bed in NY and remember the time you used those pegs on my nipples? I didn’t know anything could feel like that. I didn’t know I could come just from that. You did that to me. Will you remember it and jerk yourself off to the memory of my screams? How about the first time you tied me up. Fuck, Jay, I love being tied up. I’m tied right now to this chair and I keep moving my ankle slightly to feel it. Each time it rockets heat through me. The first time you tied me, I came, just from the ropes holding me down, denying me.
You did so many things to me that night. My memory is hazy. There was so much and maybe my brain melted. What was it like from your point of view? I often wonder about that. I’m the one getting stuff done to me, but what about you? Do you like doing those things? Do you like the way I look when you do them to me?

What is it from our time together that you’re going to remember most? Which memory will be the main one you use for jerking off?

I don’t know what mine will be. There are so many options.

I know which one I’ll use a lot, me on my knees in front of you while you fuck my mouth, fuck my throat, hard and violent, making me choke and gag, obliterating every thought out of my head except of you, of your cock, of your pleasure. Just you, Jay. All you.

Yeah, that will probably be my main one.

You’ve given so much to me.

I know what’s going to happen next weekend, I know this is going to end and being gay with you will stop. I know I’m going home to live a very different life and you’re going back to New York to continue the life you were brave enough to choose, despite everything it’s cost you. But, Jared, know this. When I’m no longer with you, I’ll still be loving you. That isn’t going to change just because we’re not together, we’re no longer a couple.

And I will always be yours.

Your Jensen.

I’ll still be loving you.

Shit, Jensen.

Jared stares at the words at the end of what he never dreamed would be a love letter. Jensen wrote this? This is what he sat there at that desk writing while Jared tutored Matt and Sasha?

I’ll still be loving you.

Jensen told him.

Jensen told him and he hasn’t even said anything. Is that how Jensen knew he hadn’t read it yet?

He’s been too scared to read it, too scared of how much it will hurt to be reminded of that precious day they shared, but if he’d had any idea that this is what it contained—fuck.

He grabs his phone, but Jensen doesn’t pick up.
“That was great, Dianne.” Jensen pats his stomach, because she truly is a good cook, and leans back in his seat. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” She gives him a little smile from her seat on the other side of the small dining room table that she used to share with her mother. “Would you like some dessert? I know you’re not much of a fan of dessert, but I made some just in case.”

“No, I’m good, thanks.” Sweet things have connotations now that are best not brought into his girlfriend’s home. “Maybe some coffee before I do the dishes?”

She jumps up. “Don’t be silly, Jensen, you’re not doing the dishes in my house.”

“Hey, you cook, I clean,” he calls after her through the double doors that lead into the kitchen. “It’s always been that way.”

“At your house, yes, but not mine. Besides,” she leans around the door with two mugs in her hands, “I like to clean, so I’m afraid you’ll just have to live with it.”

Such a contrast to Jared, who is the messiest person Jensen has ever encountered. It never bothered him to leave his bed unmade or his clothes all over the floor. Jensen’s amazed by the fact he’s actually continued to sort them for washing. Does he make his bed now too?

Jared.

Has he read Jensen’s note yet?

Or maybe he already did and had no response, that’s why he made no mention of it. Maybe Jensen’s big confession meant nothing to him.

Which is probably a good thing.

It means that indefatigable part inside Jensen that won’t let go of him can give up now. At least now he knows for certain.

“Would you like to have coffee in the living room?” Dianne appears in the doorway with their drinks, already moving towards the living room as though his response is a foregone conclusion.

“Sure.”

Obligingly he follows her and they take seats across from each other. The coffee is good, it always is when she makes it, unlike Jared who made horrible coffee no matter how hard Jensen tried to teach him. It’s a little too hot, but he gulps it down welcoming the burn in his throat.

Dianne takes delicate sips. She keeps glancing at him as though she’s about to start talking but then loses her nerve, so he remains silent, giving her space. He’s almost finished his coffee when she speaks.

“You must be wondering why I asked you here tonight.”

It appears that’s all she’s going to say, however, so he nods. “You had enough of my mom’s cooking?”

“No!” She looks horrified. “I love Donna’s cooking, and I love coming over to your house every evening so I don’t have to sit here alone. But that’s why I invited you, what you said the other night about me not being alone. I was thinking about it all day and I realised you’re right.”
“I am?”

“I’m not good at being a burden, Jensen.”

“You’re never a burden.”

“I know.” She twists her fingers around her cup, staring down at it. “I try very hard not to be. I’ve never wanted to be that person. I’ve never wanted to demand or complain. I always try to behave well and, if I feel like I can’t, I pull away. I keep it to myself so no one else has to witness it.”

He’s often wondered how she manages to maintain such perfect poise and control. Has she been struggling all this time but too proud to let him see? “Dianne—”

“It was Jared,” she bursts out. “When I talked to him the night Mama went into hospital. You told me to call you if I needed you and I hated to do that, and I was so relieved when he answered, that it wasn’t you, that you were sleeping so you didn’t have to know how weak I was. It didn’t seem to matter so much that he knew because he doesn’t know me—but then he was so kind. There he is in the middle of the night surprised by his roommate’s hysterical girlfriend and he could have hung up, he could have insisted on getting you, but instead he let me fall apart all over him and it scared me how good it felt. He’s the one who got me through that awful, awful night, but I realised last night after what you said that I haven’t been letting you do that for me, and I should. I shouldn’t lean on your roommate but then freeze you out just because I’m embarrassed to let you see what a bad state I’m in. I realise that’s not the way a relationship works. You have to be honest with each other and that includes not hiding what you feel. And I thought about it and I realised I told him a lot of things about me that even you don’t know and that’s wrong. I shouldn’t be telling Jared, I should be telling you. So I asked you to come over tonight so I could tell you that. So I could be honest with you, instead of him.”

Jensen has never seen Dianne show so much passion before. Did she really unload like that onto Jared? He tries to remember what Jared said about the phone call but his main memory of that morning is of desperately trying not to throw himself at Jared and their conversation is a blur.

“He, uh, he did tell you that we talked, didn’t he?” A concerned frown clouds her earnest eyes. “Or I told you, I know I told you. Didn’t I? I haven’t been trying to hide it, Jensen. It wasn’t—you don’t need to worry, it wasn’t anything—I haven’t been, you know, with Jared behind your back, I wouldn’t do that.”

Oh God. “I know.” Springing up, he asks, “Can I get you more coffee?”

“I can get it—”

“No!”

As his roar echoes between them, she sinks back down on her seat. “Okay,” she says quietly. “I don’t want any more, but you are welcome to get yourself more if that’s what you’d like.”

“I would.”

He needs to get away from her, away from this conversation. Burning his finger while re-boiling the kettle helps because it gives him something to focus on, something that’s not Jared and cheating and the innocent, sweet girl waiting for him in the living room. While he’s running it under cold water, he feels his phone buzz.

Seven missed calls from Jared during the past hour. How did he not feel them? Is that how uptight he’s been? He desperately needs to call him back because this is obviously about the note, but he
can’t, no way can he call him back while he’s here with Dianne.

He’s about to text something telling Jared to just hang on when she appears in the doorway. “Is everything okay?”

“It’s fine.”

She doesn’t look like she believes him. “If it’s what I said about Jared—”

“I burned my finger.” He sticks it out. “That’s why I was taking a long time. Sorry. I should have let you make it after all.”

“Yes, you should.” Her smile is watery, but real. “Do you want something for it?”

“It’s okay, it’s not too bad. I put it in cold water right away. That’s what you’re meant to do, right?”

“That helps. Does it still hurt?”

“Not much.”

She gestures at his cup. “Is it done?”

“Yeah.” She’s obviously not going to leave him alone again, so he follows her back to the living room trying to think of how he can end this as quickly as possible. The trouble is, it seems like she wants to confide in him, may even want some cuddling now that she’s opening up, and he has no right not to give her every single thing she needs.

It takes two hours. Two hours of being patient and understanding and supportive, all things he genuinely feels because he can’t imagine how destroyed he’d be if he lost both his parents, and he turns off his phone entirely so he’s not tempted by any fresh buzzing. Unfortunately she brings Jared up quite a lot. How is it that it’s Jared who opened her up and drew her out of her stiff control? How did he manage to have that effect on both of them?

She even lets him hold her for a little bit. She’s rigid in his arms, but gradually she softens and even cries a little. In front of him. Without running away to hide herself. This is good, it’s progress, and he needs to make sure she keeps it up and doesn’t withdraw again.

“Thank you,” she says as she puts herself back to rights after pulling away, because God forbid that her blouse be slightly untucked or her mascara have run. “I know I’m not good at this, but thank you for being here for me anyway.”

“It’s not something anyone is good at.” God knows he’s not, and all the lies he’s living scorch the lining of his stomach. “All we can do is the best we can.”

She gives him a little smile. “Facing ourselves and being honest is not easy.”

“It takes a lot of courage.” Oh, how he knows. “You should be proud of yourself.”

“I’m not, I still feel too embarrassed. I want to be someone you can be proud of.”

“I am. I really am.” He’s just not in the least bit proud of himself.

“Thank you, Jensen.”

“Any time.” He gets to his feet. “And you know where I live, so you can come around whenever you want to, or you can call. It’s not weak to ask for help. It’s brave. And remember there’s no
right way to do this. You deal with it in whatever way feels right for you, okay?"

She comes over to him for a goodbye hug at the door, feeling frail and tiny in his arms. She’s probably lost weight over this and what kind of boyfriend is he that he hasn’t even noticed? “Are you going to be all right tonight?”

“Yes.” Her smile is stronger now. “I’m good. I may cry a bit more, but it feels different now. Not like something I have to be ashamed of.”

“Definitely not.” As he’s about to step through the door he remembers something that occurred to him earlier. “By the way, you know what you said about a job, needing something to keep you occupied now? My dad wants you to come and work for us. You don’t have to commit to anything, but our office manager quit a couple of weeks ago and we’re having trouble finding a new one, and he keeps asking me if it’s too soon to ask you if you’d be interested in helping us out.”

“He wants me?”

“He says you’re so good at organising that you’d have the place whipped into shape in no time. There’s no pressure, it’s only if you want to, but you could come around in the morning to the office if you’re interested and I know he’d be happy to see you.”

She bites her lip, then nods decisively. “I’d like to do that.”

“He’ll be thrilled.”

“Thanks, Jensen.” Rising on her toes, she pulls him down so she can kiss his cheek. “I’ll see you tomorrow then.”

“See you there.”

She stays on the porch watching him, so like the other night he ignores his phone and starts the car, but this time he can’t make himself go home. His parents will still be up and they’ll want to know why Dianne invited him over instead of coming to their house and he can’t waste any more time before contacting Jared, so he drives down to a nearby park that’s still open at this time of the evening in summer. He leaves the car, finds a bench beside some water, and then holds his breath while he turns on his phone.

Among a few more missed calls, there’s a text message: “Jensen, call me. Please.”

Okay. Okay, maybe Jared doesn’t hate him for what he wrote. Or maybe, maybe he wants to say they can no longer be friends since Jensen’s feelings are so inappropriate. Whatever it is, Jensen needs to take inspiration from Dianne and face up to it. There’s an awful lot he needs to face up to and this is the start of it, right here. Whatever happens now will determine all the rest.

He hits Jared’s name and then the call button.
“Jensen?” Jared grabs his phone the moment it rings. “You called me back!”

“You asked me to.” Jensen sounds strangely subdued. “I’m sorry I couldn’t answer earlier. I was—I wasn’t ignoring you, I just couldn’t answer. This is the first moment I could.”

That’s good to hear and Jared takes a deep, calming breath. He needs this to go well and shouting at Jensen for making him wait for three hours won’t help. “I read your, um, letter. The one I told you to write. That is what you meant, right, by your last picture?”

“It was.”

“Jensen....” Now that he has him on the phone at last, words desert him. “I didn’t do it.”

“Didn’t do what?”

“At the club. Either one. I didn’t. I—I couldn’t.”

“Jared—”

“I couldn’t. I’m sorry for implying otherwise, but I need you to know that I didn’t.”

Jensen is silent. It doesn’t even sound as though he’s breathing. After a long moment he says quietly, “You can do whatever you want, Jared. It’s your life.”

Oh. Right. “So, uh, is that what you’re doing?”

“Living my life?”

“Doing whatever you want.”

“I even managed to come without your permission.”

Jensen sounds snarky now, and Jared feels much the same. “Yeah, I noticed. So much for being mine then, huh.”

“We’re not together any more.”

“Yeah, I noticed that too.”

“So you don’t owe me fidelity.”

“No. I don’t. Apparently I’m giving it to you anyway.”

Jensen snorts. “Hardly.”
“I told you I didn’t sleep with anyone this weekend. I haven’t since you left.”

“You really expect me to believe that?”

“It’s true.”

“You couldn’t even wait for me to leave, Jared.”

There’s enough venom in that sentence to make its meaning clear and Jared’s heart seizes. Surely not. How the hell does Jensen know? “I don’t know what you—”

“Chad.”

Fuck.

“I saw you, okay? And it’s fine, you have every right, just don’t lie to me about it. Don’t pretend you’re being faithful to me when we both know you fucked someone else before you and I were even over.”

“Jen....”

“You didn’t even fuck me for the last time, Jay, you just—” His voice cuts off. “No, you know what? I’m not doing this. Why did you call me?”

Right now Jared has no idea. “Because I read your letter.”

“It didn’t require a response.”

“You told me to read it.”

“I didn’t say call me.”

“So what did you expect?”

“I expected you to read it and—I thought—I thought you’d have read it already by now, to be honest.”

“You thought I’d read something like that and not say anything?”

“What is there to say? I know I broke the rules of our agreement—”

“What rules?”

“It was an experiment. Not a love affair.”

“Jensen—”

“I’m sorry I fell in love with you, okay? That’s why I only told you in the letter and told you to read it afterwards. I wanted—I wanted there to be honesty between us because that’s—I have to lie to everybody else and I didn’t want to lie to you. Not about that.”

*
Jensen feels like the air around him is constricting, crushing him. Pushing up from his bench, he strides along the edge of the river, forcing his body to move so it doesn’t rebel against him. Dianne’s words from earlier keep pounding through his head about honesty, about facing things. *This*, this is why he doesn’t. This is why he didn’t tell Jared and why he shouldn’t have even in that godforsaken letter.

There’s no sound from the other end of the line. See? Jared doesn’t want to know.

“Apparently you don’t have a problem lying to me,” he says bitterly, unable to hide it. “So, whatever. Go to whatever clubs you like, fuck whatever men you want to. It has nothing to do with me now. If you were waiting for my blessing, here it is. Don’t let me stop you. Like I said, I’m living my own life. I have Dianne, and she loves me and she needs me, and I’m going to be the best boyfriend and husband to her that I can. God knows I’ve been crap so far, but tonight we talked and —oh, guess what, ironically you were the one who inspired her to be all open and honest and sharing, did you know that? Must’ve been quite some talk you two had that night while I slept.”

“Jensen.”

“Guess I can be glad you’re not bisexual because you’d probably try—”

“*Jensen.*”

He’s glad for the interruption because he couldn’t stomach finishing that sentence. Bending over, he picks up a handful of rocks and skims them viciously over the surface of the water. “Look,” he says when it becomes clear that Jared isn’t going to continue. “I’m grateful to you and I meant every word I said in that letter. But it’s over, Jared. We both know that. We always knew it would be. We always knew I’d come back to Texas and be with Dianne. So don’t let me stop you from doing your thing in New York. And it’ll be the same when we get back to school in the fall, you can fuck whoever you want without a word from me. It’ll be like it was before—”

“It won’t be.”

Something is off about Jared’s tone. “What do you mean? I won’t act like you owe me anything. I won’t make demands on you and you can—”

“I can’t.”

“Can’t what?”

“Whatever you were going to say. I can’t.”

“Jared. Can’t what?”

“I won’t be there.”

It’s not what it sounds like, Jensen tells himself as his body freezes in place. Jared doesn’t mean it the way it sounds. “You….don’t want to hang out with me when we return to school?”

“I won’t. Return.”

No. No, no, no. “You’d better explain that to me real quick.”

“I won’t be coming back in the fall. I won’t be there. I’m staying in New York.”

Oh God. Jensen’s knees buckle and he thuds heavily into the mud beside the river. The lights
reflecting in the water whirl before his eyes and he has to put the phone down to balance himself with both hands to keep from toppling in.

*

“Jensen? Jensen, damn it, say something. Jensen!”

There’s nothing. No sound at all after the strange crackle a couple of minutes ago. Jared checks his phone and the call is still connected.

“Jensen?”

There’s another crackle and then finally Jensen’s voice, tiny and hard. “When, exactly, did that become the plan?”

Honesty. Jensen wants honesty between them. “For a while now.”

“A while.” At least Jensen’s not yelling. “So, not because of today then?”

“Today? You mean your—the letter? No. It has nothing to do with that.”

“So when then?”

This is why honesty sucks. “A few weeks ago.”

“Weeks.”

“Yeah.”

“Weeks, Jared? You decided a few weeks ago that you weren’t going to come back? And, what, you just forgot to tell me?”

“I didn’t forget.”

“You didn’t—oh.”

This is why he never told him, damn it, because he knew Jensen would sound like this.

“So, uh, when were you going to tell me? Or were you just not going to show up in the fall? What about your RA appointment?”

“I turned it down.”

“And your scholarship?”

“I can transfer somewhere here.” He probably won’t, but he could.

“So that was it then, huh? When you put me in the cab? That was the last time you were gonna see me?”

“Yes.”

“And you didn’t think I might like to know it was the last time I’d see you?”
“Jensen.”

“Tell me.” Jensen’s voice falls apart and Jared can hear him draw a deep shuddering breath. “Tell me, Jared. Did you think I wouldn’t want to know?”

He’s crying at the brokenness in Jensen’s voice and he digs his teeth into his lower lip to keep from giving it away. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, you know what? I don’t think I believe you.”

He deserves that.

“So wait, Chad. You gave him a goodbye fuck but not me?”

“No. Jen, it wasn’t like that.”

“Sure seems like it was from where I’m sitting.”

“No,” he says again. “No.”

“Then what? God, you must have laughed, reading my letter.”

“No, Jensen, I didn’t laugh.”

“Do me a favour and rip it up. And delete those pictures you took of me.”

“No!”

Maybe I’m selfish, but I don’t want you looking at them any more.”

“I haven’t—”

“No?” Jensen scoffs. “Right, then all the more reason to delete them. And don’t just rip it. Burn it.”

This is so much worse than he imagined it would be and he can’t think of any way to salvage it. It would help if his voice would work right, if he could think of words, words that wouldn’t make it worse. Words that wouldn’t be I love you, Jensen, I love you back and I want you and I only decided to leave because I couldn’t be with you every day next year and not have you.

There’s another shuddery breath on the other side of the phone. Jensen’s crying. Jensen’s crying and Jared should be there to hold him, to comfort him. “You’re the one with the girlfriend, Jensen.” Suddenly words rush through him. “You’re the one who isn’t gay. You’re the one who just wanted to experiment for a few months behind your girlfriend’s back with me.”

“So, what, if there’s no sex you don’t want to be around me at all? I thought we were friends, Jared. I thought we were best friends who’d continue being friends even when we stopped sleeping together. I thought our friendship mattered to you, because fuck knows it matters to me.”

“It does matter.”

“Apparently not. Not if you were going to leave me without even telling me.”

“You’re the one who left!”

“For the summer. Not forever!”
Not forever. Except it was forever because he was never going to be Jared’s again. “I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. I thought you might not take it well so—”

“So you just didn’t bother?”

“I thought maybe it would be easier by phone.”

“Easier for you, maybe. You’re a fucking coward, Jared.”

“Yeah?” He knows he is, but it stings coming from Jensen. “What does that make you, planning to live a lie all your life because you don’t have the guts to come out?”

“I have my reasons, and you know what they are.”

“Thought you were a believer in honesty now. Does that extend to your future wife? Are you gonna let her know you’re actually gay and you probably won’t be able to get it up for her without fantasising about the days your ex-boyfriend used to tie you up and wouldn’t let you come?”

“You’re not my ex-boyfriend. We both know that.”

He’s not? “What am I, then?”

“You’re my friend. Or—you were.”

“I still am.”

“Doesn’t look like it to me.”

“Of course I’m still your friend.” This isn’t how it was meant to go. What if Jensen cuts him out of his life entirely? How is Jared supposed to live with that? “Just because I’m living in a different city it doesn’t mean we can’t still be friends.”

“You lied to me.”

“I didn’t tell you everything.”

“The truth. You didn’t tell me the truth. You didn’t tell me you turned down being an RA. You didn’t tell me you decided to abandon your scholarship. You didn’t tell me I would never see you again after you fucked someone else and spent the night talking to my girlfriend.”

“Okay, I didn’t, you’re right, but—”

“But what? There’s no but. You lied to me and you left me and—God, I hate you right now.” Jared’s stomach clenches. “Don’t. Please.”

“I think this conversation is over.”

“Jensen, no.”

There’s a little click, and the line goes dead.

*
Jensen has no idea how long he sits there on the damp grass beside the river.

Jared keeps calling back.

He can’t make himself answer.

* 

After 45 minutes, Jared stops. Jensen obviously isn’t going to answer his call, although it’s a little odd he hasn’t switched his phone off if he’s so adamantly going to ignore him.

Maybe it’s better to give him some time to calm down. Will that help?

How can it, when nothing can change the fact that Jared lied to him. He has every right to be upset about that. How did Jared ever think this was a better option? What was wrong with him? Of course Jensen was going to take it badly.

But his voice was so small and so trembly. So….hurt.

Jared didn’t know he was able to hurt Jensen that much.

Jensen’s the one who left him, damn it. He doesn’t get to be all broken-hearted when he could be with Jared right fucking now in New York.

Except he does have his reasons, and Jared can’t blame him for them.

Even when he wants to.

But it’s shit to know that Jensen is hurting so badly right now and there’s nothing he can do about it. He should be there. What if Jensen is crying? He was crying during the call, what if he still is? Jensen should not be crying alone.

Maybe he’s with his girlfriend. She can take care of him then.

What if he’s not?

What if he’s alone and hurting and—

Fuck, why won’t he answer his fucking phone so Jared can at least know he’s all right.

What if he isn’t?

Oh shit, seriously though, what if he isn’t?

There’s absolutely nothing Jared can do about it. There’s no way he can check up on him, he can’t even ask someone else to because he doesn’t have—wait a second. He has Donna’s phone number. He’d forgotten clean about it, but he has it!

He drops his phone twice in his flurry to open his address book and call up her number, but now that he’s realised he has a way of making contact he’s desperate. It rings several times before going to voicemail. What is it with this Ackles family and not answering their phones? Impatiently he hangs up and dials again.
“Jared? Is that you?”

“Donna!”

“Yes. Jared, are you all right? Isn’t it the middle of the night where you are?”

He hadn’t given the time a thought. “I’m sorry, did I wake you?”

“No, we were still up. What’s wrong?”

“I—um—is Jensen there?”

“He does have his own phone, you know,” she says drily.

“I know.” How the hell does he explain without...explaining? “I was just talking to him and—is he at home?”

“No, he went to Dianne’s for dinner and isn’t back yet. He should be back any minute, but, Jared, if you were just talking to him you should know that. What’s going on? Is Jensen all right?”

“I don’t know.” The motherly concern in her voice buckles his legs and he sits down on his bed with a bump. “I—we had a—I’m not sure if—he might be—”

“Jared, calm down. Now, take a deep breath and start again.”

Stupidly he’s starting to cry again and he can’t possibly let her hear it. He tries to follow her advice but the breath gets stuck in his throat and chokes him. What if Jensen’s not breathing? What if he’s having panic attacks and throwing up and he’s all alone somewhere, because surely he wouldn’t have had that conversation at his girlfriend’s house, and what if he’s choking and sick and Jared should be there with him.

“Jared?”

“Please can you call him?” he blurs out, dispensing with explanations. “He won’t answer when I call and I just need to know if he’s okay.”

“I thought you said you were just talking to him,” she says suspiciously.

“No, I was. I mean, I was 45 minutes ago before he hung up on me and refused to pick up again. We had a fight—” that seems like the easiest option “—and I don’t need him to talk to me, I just need to know if he’s okay.”

Donna doesn’t say anything, and Jared bites his lip to keep from repeating himself, this time in a shout.

“Please, Donna,” he says when he can trust himself to hold an even tone. “You don’t even have to tell me, then. Just make sure that he’s all right.”

“I’ll call him,” she says. “And I will let you know.”

*
When his phone rings again after a lengthy break, Jensen can’t help glancing down at it to torture himself further.

But it isn’t Jared, this time. It’s his mother.

He’s about to let it go to voicemail, but she’s as persistent as Jared and she’ll just call back and then worry if he doesn’t answer, so he reluctantly accepts the call. “Hello?”

“Jensen?”

She sounds worried. “Is everything okay?”

“You tell me.”

What? “You’re the one who called me.”

“Because I got a call from a very distressed friend of yours. Where are you, Jensen? Are you still at Dianne’s?”

“I’m by the river.”

“With Dianne?”

“No. Mom, who called you?”

“Jared.”

He hadn’t even considered the possibility, but of course Jared has his mother’s number. Persistent bastard.

“Jensen? He seemed to think you might not be all right. Are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“Jens—”

“I’m fine, Mom. We just got in a fight, I’m mad, but I’m fine.”

“He said he was trying to call you for 45 minutes. Will you call him back and set his mind at rest?”

45 minutes? It’s not even been an hour since Jared broke his heart? “Okay,” he says to make her stop talking. “I’m sorry he bothered you.”

“Oh Jensen, it’s no bother. He was very worried, and to be honest, so am I. You don’t sound fine.”

He swallows hard, concentrates on keeping his voice light. “I’m just mad. I’ll be fine.”

“Promise you’ll call him?”

“Sure.”

“And come home soon, you have work tomorrow.”

“I know. I will.”

“I’m not going to bed until I see you with my own eyes.”
“I’ll leave as soon as I talk to him.”

After his mother finally lets him go, Jensen stares down at Jared’s name on his phone. He can’t. He can’t hear Jared’s voice right now. If he does, he’ll humiliate himself beyond acceptability.

Eventually he opens a text message.

“Stop calling my mother.”

*

“Stop calling my mother.”

Donna got hold of him. She got hold of him and she knows he’s not okay, and that’s the best Jared can do. At least his family will take care of him.

Which is more than Jared can do right now.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

After all that was said, and wasn’t said, neither Jared nor Jensen copes particularly well but someone unexpected just might be coming to their aid.

“Jensen, what are you doing?”

Jensen scrabbles to minimise the page at the sound of Dianne’s voice. “N-nothing. What are you doing? Here, I mean. I thought you were reorganising the filing system today.”

“I am.” With an uncertain smile, Dianne drops a paper bag on his desk. It’s her sixth day at the office and she’s already created a routine for them. “But it’s lunchtime and I made you something special today. I didn’t know you were already on your lunch break.”

“I’m not.” His stomach twists at the thought of eating. “I didn’t realise it was so late.”

Pulling herself up to sit on his desk, she looks curiously at his computer screen, now displaying lists of numbers. “What were you doing on Facebook then?”

Stupid, he knew he shouldn’t have done that here, but he was curious after his phone got the notification of a reply to his message from two weeks ago. “Nothing.” He reaches for the bag. “What did you make me?”

“Your favourite chicken salad. I also made blueberry muffins. I know you’re on a health kick, and they’re healthy, I promise. I found a new recipe I think you’ll like.”

A health kick has been his excuse for barely eating recently, but he takes out the muffin. Maybe he’ll be able to keep this down. Thank God it’s blueberry and not wheat germ or some variation of chocolate. Arranging his face in what he hopes is a smile, he says, “This looks delicious.”

“I have more, but I didn’t want to overwhelm you. Tell me what you think.”

She’s going to make him eat it in front of her, isn’t she? Steeling himself, he takes a large bite. It’s good, not too rich, and he’s able to swallow it. “Thanks, Dianne, it’s great.”

“You like it?”

“Sure.” A second bite goes down as well. “What about your lunch?”

“I brought it with me.”

Sure enough, it’s in her other hand, chicken salad just like she’s given him. And just like every other day that she’s worked here, she intends to eat it in here with him, which means he can’t get back to Megan’s message and see what her response is.

He works on finishing the muffin while Dianne chatters about the anarchy of the filing system she’s inherited and her plans to sort it out, complete with anecdotes about various colleagues who have all welcomed her with enthusiasm. Already she seems a lot more comfortable here than he’s ever felt.
and having something to focus on has helped pull her out of the depths of her grief. Yesterday was
the one-month anniversary of her mother’s death and she told him at dinner that she feels like she’s
turned a corner and the worst of it is behind her. It still hurts, she clarified, almost unbearably, but
she’s starting to feel like maybe she’ll get through this after all.

Which is more than he currently feels.

But he’s determinedly not thinking about that.

He manages to finish the muffin and even most of the salad and he’s starting to relax when she says,
in the middle of talking about the duet she wants them to perform for church next weekend, “So
who’s Megan?”

“She glances meaningfully at his computer screen. “Are you cheating on me with a blonde called
Megan, Jensen?”

No. Her brother, in fact. The chicken in his stomach threatens him for a moment before he’s able to
breathe through it. “I’d never cheat on you with another woman.”

“That’s good.” Her smile sparkles and he can see she never thought for a moment that he was. “So
you won’t mind showing me then?”

“It’s just a—the sister of a friend I was checking up on.”

Finishing off her salad, she puts the empty container away in the bag she brought and reaches for his,
which he relinquishes gladly for her to put away as well. “Why can’t your friend check up on his
sister himself?”

“He, um—it’s complicated.”

“Can I help?”

“No! I mean, I shouldn’t even be interfering. It’s none of my business.”

“Is it Jared’s sister?”

“Why would you ask that?”

“Because isn’t his surname also something long and confusing starting with a P?” She shifts closer
to him. “Can I see?”

He instinctively wants to shout “no” again, but she’s already manipulating his mouse to bring up the
page and he’s too curious to read Megan’s message to minimise it again.

Dianne starts with his original message, written back when he still wanted to do nice things for Jared,
and reads it aloud. “Hi Megan. My name is Jensen and this past year I’ve been your brother’s
roommate and friend at college. A little while ago he told me about the circumstances in which he
left home and he mentioned you. I know you were very young when it happened, but he said he
tried to email you and the email bounced back, and I wondered if there’s any chance you might
want to be in contact with him again. He doesn’t know I’m writing this, but he’s having a tough
time this summer and if you’re at all interested then I would love to talk to you. Jared lives in New
York now and I know he misses you very much and worries about you. If you message me back, I’ll
send you my phone number and we can talk. I’ve attached a recent picture of him, taken the week
before last. Jensen Ackles.”

He screws up his eyes as she finishes. He spent three hours composing it and eventually just pressed send because he couldn’t bear to look at the words any longer, but hearing his message read aloud makes him feel ridiculous. What was he thinking, butting into Jared’s life like that? He’d given up on ever getting a reply from Megan. Surely it can’t be positive.

But Dianne continues with Megan’s reply: “What kind of name is Jensen? It looks like you’re real from your profile, though, and that looked like a real picture of my brother so I’m giving you a chance. My brother ran away when I was 12 and he never tried to contact me, not once, so I don’t know what story he’s fed you. He’s the one who chose to leave. He knows where I am. I still live in the same house. If he wanted to see me, he could find me easily, so I don’t know why he’s going through you.”

Her voice stops and he opens his eyes again. “That’s it?”

“That’s all she wrote. Jensen, what is she talking about? Jared ran away from home?”

It’s not his story to tell but he finds it hard to care anymore. “It didn’t happen the way she thinks. He got kicked out.” He leans forward to scan Megan’s message. “It looks like their parents lied to her about what happened. She thinks he abandoned her.”

“Why did he get kicked out? Gosh, that’s terrible. How old was he?”

“Sixteen. It’s a long story.”

“There’s still half an hour of lunch left, I have time.”

He looks back at Megan’s message. She’s hurting, just like he is about Josh’s departure and at least he knew the truth about why Josh left and he was a lot older when it happened. If Josh’s girlfriend were to contact him now with a similar message to the one he wrote Megan, he’d jump at the chance to get in contact again. Is this just Megan trying to protect herself?

He shouldn’t care. It’s none of his business, especially since he’s apparently never going to see Jared again. But on the other hand, given that even their friendship is over, pursuing this a little bit further can’t hurt matters. Jared can’t lose more than he’s already lost, but there’s a chance he may gain something if Jensen pushes.

“Jen?”

His attention snaps away from the message. “Don’t call me that!”

“I’m sorry.” Dianne recoils back from the computer and he feels like shit.

“Sorry, it’s just—you never call me that.”

“It’s okay.” She fiddles with the bag containing the remnants of their lunch, avoiding his eyes. “Jared called you that when we were talking and I thought—it sounded nice.”

She can’t start calling him that now. No way. “I don’t like it.”

“I’m sorry.”

Great, now he’s upset her. She’s working hard not to show it, but her ease of a few moments earlier has gone and what if this sets her on a downward spiral again? “Look,” he says as a peace offering,
“let’s go get some coffee and I’ll tell you what happened with Jared.” It’s not like he’ll ever find out she knows.

Instead of going to the kitchen, they head to the tiny coffee shop across the road. Despite their good coffee, it’s a place he’s avoided this summer because the scent of coffee that hovers in the air reminds him too strongly of somewhere else, but that probably makes it an appropriate venue for the last conversation he intends to have about Jared.

Once they’re installed at a minute table in the corner, a corner that could never have contained both him and Jared at the same time, he takes a deep drink of his coffee. Best to start with the most pertinent fact and get it over with. “Jared’s gay,” he says flatly.

Dianne’s coffee sloshes over as she puts it down on the table. “He is? Jared?”

“Yes.”

“Oh my goodness.” Her face goes soft and compassionate, spilled coffee forgotten. “That’s why his parents kicked him out?”

Okay, this isn’t the reaction he expected. “You know those anti-gay camps where they send kids to try and cure them? His boyfriend was sent to one and it went badly. He refused to go. His parents said it was that or leave.”

“So he left?”

“Yeah.”

“What an awful thing to happen to him. And so young. I can’t imagine how hard that must have been for him. Is that when he went to New York?”

“He had a friend there.”

“I’m glad he had someplace to go.” Belatedly she starts mopping up the coffee on the table. “And his parents lied to his sister?”

“Looks like.”

“So I’m guessing she doesn’t know he’s gay.”

Hearing that word from her is horribly disconcerting. “Doesn’t seem like it.” Why is she taking this so well? “You, uh, don’t mind the fact that he’s gay?”

“Why should I mind?” She looks up in astonishment. “I’m a modern woman, Jensen. I know people are gay.”

“But it’s not—except—” What the hell? “What about church?”

“We’re taught to love people the way they are.”

“It’s a sin!”

Instead of reprimanding him for shouting, she suddenly looks shocked. “Jensen Ackles, is this the reason you two fought? I expected better from you, I really did.”

“What?” He’s so confused now that he can’t follow.
“Is this why you’re not talking to him right now, because you discovered he was gay?”

“I knew he was gay.”

“You did?” she asks sceptically. “That wasn’t what he revealed the other night? You’re not mad
because you only just found out?”

“No, he told me when we first moved in together. He wouldn’t lie about something like—”
Something like that. But Jared lied about something so much bigger, so maybe Jared isn’t quite the
man Jensen thought he was. “I knew all along,” he says, forcibly cutting off where that thought is
leading. “It has nothing to do with it.”

“So you knew when we visited you?”
He nods.

“When I was talking about setting him up with girls?”
He nods again.

“And you didn’t say anything?”
This is too surreal. “I wanted you to like him,” he mutters.

“I did like him. In fact, this probably explains a lot about why.”

“What do you mean?”
Her mouth twists into a slight grimace, not an expression he’s used to seeing on her face. “Oh, just
—I’ve had some trouble with guys in the past and this explains why I was—why I felt comfortable
with Jared. Safe.”

“Safe? Dianne, what’s been going on? Has someone threatened you? What happened?”
She shrinks back a little at his vehemence. “Nothing, it’s okay, nothing big. Just, you know men.
They can be a bit, well, forceful. And Jared wasn’t like that. You know, he didn’t stare at my—at
my chest, didn’t try to touch me in places he shouldn’t. This explains why.”

“Who’s been trying to touch you? Dianne, what the hell?”

“This is why I don’t tell you these things. You don’t need to go beat up anyone, Jensen. It’s mostly
fine because people know we’re together and they respect that. It’s quite helpful, really.” She lays a
placating hand on his wrist. “See? You’re protecting me even when we’re apart.”

“I didn’t know you needed protecting.” Is this what she’s had to endure while he’s been off
experimenting with Jared? “I should transfer back here for next year.”

“Don’t be silly. You’re happy there and Jared is there—”

“He’s not.”

“Well, no, he’s in New York now but in September—”

“He’s not coming back.”

“I don’t understand. You said he had another year to go, didn’t you?”
“He’s finishing his degree in New York.” He slams his chair backwards into the wall and gets up.
“We’d better get back to work. We’re already five minutes late.”

*

He applies himself to his work more diligently than usual all afternoon. Not thinking about Megan’s reply. Not thinking about Dianne’s response to Jared being gay. Not thinking about Jared at all. The strategy works, gets him an approving smile from his father when he submits the reports that were meant to keep him occupied for the whole week, and keeps him sane enough to stop and laugh with some of the guys on his way out. He’s never really bonded with them, which is a mistake on his part and something he needs to rectify if he plans on becoming permanent around here. Which he does.

Dianne is already waiting at his car. That’s another habit they established from the second day of her employment here, that he’d pick her up in the morning on his way past her house and then take her back to his house afterwards for dinner. Normally he doesn’t mind because listening to her talk about her day keeps his mind off other things, but after their conversation at lunchtime he braces himself.

She doesn’t disappoint. “I was thinking about Jared and Megan,” she announces before he’s even cleared the car park, “and I have an idea.”

“We should just let it alone,” he says as he merges into the traffic. “You saw what she said.”

“I did, and that’s a hurting young girl who we can’t ignore. And you said Jared misses her too, so we should at least try to reunite them, which is why I want to invite Jared to come next weekend.”

“You want—” Swerving, he bites off a curse as he narrowly misses another vehicle. “What?”

“It’s the 4th of July, so he should have a long weekend off, right? And either we can arrange to drive down to San Antonio or we can try persuade Megan to come up here to see him.”

“We’re not inviting Jared.”

“I know you’re upset with him right now,” she says, using the soothing voice she uses at church to speak to crotchety old ladies, “and that’s the other reason I think this is a good idea, especially after what you said about September. I thought you’d have to make it up then, but since that won’t happen, I’m not letting you sulk here while he sulks in New York, both of you too stubborn to make the first move to make up. Honestly, Jensen, you’re not twelve.”

“I’m not sulking.”

“Oh, you are. Did you forget that I know you?”

“I’m not going to invite him, Dianne.”

“That’s okay, I will. I just need to get his number from you.”

“No.”

“All right, I’ll get it from Donna then.”
He ought to have remembered how relentless she is. He slings the car around a corner. “He won’t agree.”

“We’ll see.”

*  

“Well done, man.” Richard slides the 500 dollars Jared just won across the table. “You’ve been outta this so long I thought I had it in the bag for sure.”

Pocketing the money, Jared finishes off his whiskey. “Wanna go again?”

“Be careful what you offer, ’cause I’m not likely to say no.”

An hour later, he’s tripled it and Richard’s had enough. Jared hasn’t, however, it’s only 9pm and far too early to go home and face his obnoxious friends or his bedroom’s four walls and the temptation of the photographs of Jensen he took off his phone and downloaded onto his computer so he wouldn’t keep gazing at them at work. And since his body won’t cooperate with him going to a club and losing himself in some random guy, gambling is going to have to do the trick.

Others have been watching him, however, and no one is willing to take him on in this mood, even out of practice. He’s still too well remembered from before. Fucking cowards. With a scowl at the lot of them, he stumbles outside. Maybe a cigarette will help, give people a chance to rethink the likelihood of his luck running out.

After lighting his cigarette, he takes his phone out of his pocket from habit despite knowing the pictures are gone. There might be one hidden away in a remote folder that he forgot about. He knows there isn’t, but swiping through folders gives him something to do and he’s so focused on it that he almost drops his phone when it unexpectedly rings.

It isn’t Jensen.

It hasn’t been Jensen for nine days and it’s not likely to be Jensen ever again.

Jared screwed that one up good.

Seems to be what he does best, turning people against him.

Even Jensen.

*I’ll still be loving you.*

Yeah, right.

That sure lasted long.

The fucking phone rings again.

Still not Jensen.

The third time isn’t either, but it’s the same unidentified number so whoever it is seems to want him pretty bad. Stubbing out his cigarette, he takes the call.
“Yeah?”

“Jared, is that you?”

It’s a girl, fancy that. “Hey, sweetheart,” he drawls.

“It’s okay, I know that you’re gay now. Jensen told me.”

What the fuck? “Jensen?” What’s he going around telling women that for? And Texan women too, from the sounds of it. “So what else has Jensen been tellin’ you?”

“Jared, are you drunk?”

“Maybe. That a problem?”

“It’s Wednesday night! Don’t you have classes to teach tomorrow?”

“Wait, how’d you know about my classes?”

“Your summer school, right? You told me, me and Donna, when we visited you, remember? Why are you drunk on a school night?”

Because he always drinks when he gambles, otherwise he doesn’t have the guts to make the big bets. And who the hell is Donna, anyway? What girls visited him recently? His students are too young and certainly none of them come from Texas. Oh fuck, did he get so drunk over the weekend that he forgot he was gay and took girls home? Actually that’s not such a bad idea. Maybe he should stop being gay because girls can’t possibly fuck him up like Jensen did. Or is that fuck him like Jensen did? He let Jensen fuck him, didn’t he? He really did that, let Jensen deep inside him, and now Jensen won’t talk to him and what the hell is mystery girl chattering on about Texas for?

“Sweetheart,” he interjects over something about flight times, “I’m not from Dallas.”

“I know. I didn’t—Jared, are you actually listening to me?”

“I’ve never even been to Dallas.”

“You are so drunk.” She laughs, but it doesn’t sound happy. “This is not what I expected. You’re as bad as he is.”

“Who?”

“Jensen!”

“What do you know about Jensen?”

“I know he’s upset over the fight you two had, just as upset as you appear to be, but I also know him well enough to know he won’t make the first move. So, as I said before, that’s why I’m calling, to ask you to do it.”

“Do what?” he asks. Something isn’t right here but damned if he can figure out what it is.

“Come to Dallas for the weekend of the 4th. It’s next weekend, in case you lost track.”

“Why would I come to Dallas?”

“Because you and Jensen need to make up.”
This fucking girl doesn’t know shit about him and Jensen. “He’s not talking to me.”

“I know, which is why you need to come here.”

“He won’t talk to me.” Jesus, he can’t cry on the phone to some unknown girl.

“If you come here he will. Jared, please. Whatever it is you fought about, I know he’s sorry. I’ve never seen him in such a state before. He won’t even eat.”

Jensen isn’t eating? “How the fuck d’you know that?”

“Because I’m with him for two meals a day and I’ve seen how he fakes it. He’s miserable and you sound equally miserable and if you’d just come to Dallas—”

“Wait, hang on.” His brain is finally kicking into gear. “Who is this?”

“It’s Dianne. Jensen’s girlfriend? Jared, who did you think you’ve been talking to all this time?”

Dianne. Shit! Sliding down the wall behind him until he’s sitting securely on the ground, he mentally replays what he can recall of their conversation. Jensen is miserable and his girlfriend is inviting Jared to join them for the long weekend to....what, cheer him up? Yeah, that’ll go down well. “Does Jensen know you’re asking me to come?”

She must realise from his voice that he’s now fully focused because she doesn’t press her question. “He said you’ll say no. He wouldn’t give me your number, but he was there when I asked Donna for it and he didn’t stop me.”

Jensen knows this invitation is happening and didn’t prevent it. Jared’s pulverised heart gives a little shudder, the first spark of life he’s felt in nine eternal days. “He told you we fought?”

“He won’t talk about it, but yes. He might not have, though, if you hadn’t called Donna to check up on him. Thank you for that.”

Jensen is far too good at hiding things. Although apparently he’s not hiding his misery. Leaning his head back against the wall, Jared closes his eyes while he tries to think.

Except, no.

He doesn’t need to think.

It’s not like there’s even a choice here.

If there’s the slightest sliver of hope that Jensen might be willing to see him face to face, that that awful phone call isn’t the end of them forever, then Jared is there for it.

Of course he’s there.

“I’ll come,” he says.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

It's time for Jared to face Texas - and Jensen - again.

Chapter Notes

Sorry about the delay, everyone, but I had no internet in Shanghai - who knew? We should be back on a more frequent schedule now.

Jared will be here tomorrow.

Jensen still can’t believe he agreed to come; he was certain Jared would refuse when Dianne asked him, and rather let him be the one to disappoint her since God knows Jensen’s done enough of that. But the idiot said yes, Dianne was delighted to tell him, and she eagerly set about taking over his correspondence with Megan, insisting that Megan would feel more comfortable dealing with another woman instead of an unknown man. Turns out she was right and Megan has agreed to come up for the 4th and stay overnight. Enlisting Donna, they decided to book Megan a hotel in town so as not to put any pressure on her, but Dianne is hoping Megan will end up staying at Jensen’s house with Jared when it comes to it.

As for Jensen.

Well.

He feels like he has entered a twilight zone where he’s encased inside an icy bubble that keeps everything on the other side, away from him. He goes to work. He works. He comes home. He pretends to eat. He pretends to sleep. He goes for a run. And the cycle begins again.

It’s easy to live in the moment. That’s something Jared talked about, with the yoga poses and the breathing, something about just existing in the single moment with nothing else mattering. He’d be proud if he knew how well Jensen has mastered that lesson.

Except Jensen won’t be telling him, will he?

Jensen has no intention of saying a single word to him. He can come, have a happy reunion with his sister engineered by Dianne, celebrate with picnics and fireworks and whatever else has been planned, then go away again and this time stay away.

It’s better like that.

Jensen just needs the ice to stay for five more days.

*
Jared doesn’t fully let himself believe it’s happening until he boards the aeroplane. He got lucky at the airport and snagged himself a seat at the front of a section with extra leg room, and he helps a single mother put her bags up top and settle her toddler between them before taking his seat. Stretching out his legs, he tries to get comfortable, but how is he supposed to feel comfortable when he’ll see Jensen less than four hours from now?

He’s going to see Jensen!

And Jensen must obviously be willing to see him, otherwise he’d have stopped Dianne from making the phone call. Jared gets that Jensen is angry, and he has every right to be, of course he has, but this has to mean that he’s willing to give Jared a chance to make it up to him.

For his part, Jared is willing to do absolutely whatever Jensen wants.

Even if all Jensen wants is the chance to yell at him in person.

He’s prepared for that. He thinks. He’s trying to be. Prepared for Jensen to attack him, possibly even hit him—and given the way Jensen works out, he can definitely take Jared—and he’ll accept it, whatever it is he’ll accept it with grace.

Please.

Please let him not humiliate himself by breaking down and crying and begging Jensen not to send him away.

Jensen wanted to be friends, he left intending to continue being friends, and Jared will do whatever is necessary to enable that to happen. Even go back to school with Jensen. Even be his roommate again, platonically, while Dianne joins them, free now that her mother has died, and fucks Jensen in the bed six feet away from Jared’s.

Has Jensen fucked her by now? In the wake of her mother’s death, Dianne might have changed her stance on waiting for marriage; grief does crazy things to people. Or maybe Jensen was so mad after his phone call with Jared that he went to her and persuaded her to do it so he could wipe Jared off his body, replace Jared by bonding with the person he intends to spend the rest of his life with.

Who isn’t Jared.

Who will never be Jared.

Jared has to stop thinking of this weekend as being a contest between him and Dianne. It’s not. There’s no contest because Dianne won before Jensen knew Jared existed and she’ll continue to win because she’s female and Jared is male and there’s nothing he can fucking do about that.

Even if he knows he’s the one Jensen loves.

He went about this all wrong, didn’t he? He should have pushed to room together again next year, pushed to keep their experiment going. If he could hurt Jensen this badly after a mere two months of sleeping together, would Jensen really have been able to leave him after another year in Jared’s bed? They could have got a house off campus together (which Jared can certainly afford now after all his winnings from last week despite his strict rule never to use gambling wins for living purposes) and he could’ve shown Jensen what it would be like to live together and made him so happy that he would find the courage to choose that life and be true to who he is, honest about what he is.
Except he didn’t. He wasn’t brave enough to do that, just in case he lost, so instead he set himself up to lose by never even entering the game. By telling himself he had Jensen’s best interests at heart, he made sure Jensen knew all along that there was an end date, even to sleeping with someone else virtually in front of Jensen when that date came to reinforce it, to make sure Jensen left him.

He never even told Jensen he loves him.

As the plane’s engines signal the start of their descent, he tugs Jensen’s letter out of his pocket and smooths it open for the thousandth time.

_But, Jared, know this. When I’m no longer with you, I’ll still be loving you. That isn’t going to change just because we’re not together, we’re no longer a couple._

_And I will always be yours._

_Your Jensen._

Here he’s been thinking he’s the courageous one but which of the two of them was the one brave enough to tell the other the truth?

It wasn’t him.

Whatever else happens this weekend, he is not going to leave until he’s been honest in return.

*

According to the flight information board, Jared’s plane is on time. He’s about to land on Texan soil for the first time since he fled. He’s about to be on Jensen’s turf.

He’s about to be right in front of Jensen.

In the car on the way to the airport Jensen worried about having a panic attack while they waited, but he needn’t have bothered because the icy bubble is still enthusiastically doing its job and he doesn’t think he could feel something if he tried. He knows Dianne is talking, enthuising about the patriotic decorations everywhere, chatting to the lady waiting beside them, who is apparently a client of theirs and is waiting for her grandchildren, and wondering if Jared might want coffee when he arrives, even though it’s 9 o’clock at night, or maybe some cookies in case he didn’t eat on the plane.

Jensen doesn’t much care about providing coffee or cookies or whatever else catches Dianne’s fancy, but it’s hard not to think that a punch to the face might be most appropriate in the circumstances. He could go for that. Watch Jared reel backwards, watch blood, maybe, start to flow from his nose. Could Jensen break it with a single blow? Or should he aim to give him a black eye? That would be a thing, him being the one to put a bruise on Jared for a change. His own bruise has faded now—he’s definitely not admitting to checking on its progress every morning in the shower—so maybe it would be fitting for him to return the favour. On Jared’s face.

Yeah.

Maybe he’s not quite as emotionless as he thinks he is.

Dianne wouldn’t be pleased if he punched Jared. She hates the sight of blood and hates causing a
public commotion even more, so perhaps he should desist on her behalf.

Maybe he can do it later. In the privacy of the bedroom next to his where Jared will be sleeping for the next three nights.

Right on the other side of the wall from Jensen.

Maybe Jensen should move out and go and stay at Dianne’s until this weekend is over. Damn. So stupid, he should have done that already, made it clear that he and Dianne are a couple now and happy together and Jared is utterly unwanted and unneeded and unwelcome.

If Jared wants to rub his men in Jensen’s face then Jensen can certainly use his future wife to do the same.

Why didn’t he already marry Dianne? He should have convinced her to get married straight after her mother’s death when she felt most alone and abandoned and afraid. Then he could brandish the ring on his finger and Jared would be defeated.

What a shame they don’t live in Vegas where Jensen could rush Dianne out to do that right now before Jared disembarks.

The flight has landed. Jared is here, only a matter of feet away. He’s going to walk through that doorway any minute now and Jensen will not be able to punch him.

He should have insisted on meeting Jared alone instead of accepting Dianne’s offer to be a buffer, then he could hit him as much as he wants—oh no, except then he’d be arrested for assault. Would Jared press charges?

Would Jared have him arrested if Jensen hit him in private?

He is not going to hit Jared.

Not.

Not going to.

Not going to hit him.

Not going to hit Jared.

Hit Jared.

Who is standing right in front of him.

*

Fierce.

That’s what Jensen looks like, Jared thinks as he bends down to return Dianne’s welcoming hug. With the shield of hiding his face in her hair, he studies Jensen’s face. His skin is pale despite the Texan summer sun, other than a faint flush that Jared only recognises because he’s so well acquainted with all the colours Jensen can turn, and his eyes glitter like sharpened stones.
No conciliatory smiles here, that’s for sure. Jared was more accurate with the suspicion of getting hit. Quelling the shiver that slides down his spine, he lets go of Dianne and extends a polite hand. *Friends*, Jensen said. So, fine, Jared’ll give him friendship.

Jensen glowers at the hand.

Forcibly keeping it from shaking, Jared refuses to withdraw it.

“The car’s this way,” Jensen says, and Jesus his voice sounds rough. Not even hours of deep throating Jared made it sound like this.

Giving Jared a sympathetic look, Dianne takes hold of his dangling hand. “Sorry,” she mouths as they follow Jensen towards the exit.

He’s moving wrong. No, his clothes fit wrong, that’s the problem. Shit, he’s lost weight and lots of it. It wasn’t immediately obvious with the baggy overshirt he has on, but watching him walk from the back Jared sees it in painful detail. Between his careful eating and his running and time in the gym, Jensen didn’t have much spare flesh to begin with but now instead of looking robust and healthy he looks almost skinny. Shrunken.

It’s only been six weeks.

Surely this can’t be because of Jared.

He hasn’t been eating, Dianne said on the phone. That’s blatant. He looks like he hasn’t eaten a single thing since Jared put him in that cab.

Isn’t Jensen’s thing meant to be stoic endurance and pretence that everything is going swimmingly? What the hell is this?

He lets his glance at Dianne say, *This is not okay.*

*I know,* she says in response as they reach the car park. *You need to fix it.*

How? That’s the question. How in all creation does he fix a Jensen who is so drastically broken?

Not to mention a Jensen who won’t talk to him. When they reach the car, Jensen makes it clear that Dianne is to sit in the front seat beside him, leaving the back for Jared. Considerately, Dianne scoots her seat as far forward as she can to make room for his legs, while Jensen, the bastard, deliberately shifts his further back.

Oh, he’s asking for it. He is so fucking asking for it.

But that’s not up to Jared, is it? He came here knowing Jensen was angry and he has to let this play out. It’s Jensen’s call.

Dianne passes the drive by pointing out various Dallas landmarks, or as much as Jared can see of them in the dark, and he appreciates the gesture. Her easy chatter eases the godawful tension and gives him the space to get over the shock of being so close to Jensen and of how horrible Jensen looks. Jared could swear the driver’s seat is vibrating from Jensen’s seething as he roughly flings the car around corners in a very un-Jensen-like manner. This is Jensen acting out. This is Jensen no longer pretending. This is Jensen letting his emotions show and being open and....honest.

*Is this the legacy of his time with Jared?*
At last they turn into the drive of a house much like the one Jared grew up in. He knew Jensen came from money, and this confirms what the photo Jensen sent him suggested. Their similar backgrounds seem almost ironic given the situation. They should be so perfect for each other.

They are.

Except both of them are male.

Jensen stalks straight into the house while Jared is still slinging his bag out of the back. Both he and Dianne watch him go, and she sighs.

“You see why I needed you to come?”

Shoving a hand through his loose hair, he shakes his head. “I don't know if I can do anything, Dianne.”

“You can,” she says. “You have to, Jared, because I am at my wit’s end with him. I’m ready to strangle him, and goodness knows I never feel like that about anyone.”

“He’s still too mad at me.”

That slumps her shoulders. “I know,” she admits. “I hoped maybe his anger would calm during the past week but it hasn’t. It seems to have worsened. Become more violent. Did you know he’s taken up kickboxing? One of the guys in the choir goes and invited Jensen to join him. He says he’s good, so I’d avoid his fists if I were you.”

Jared has no idea what to do with this information. “So I’m not the only one thinking he’s likely to hit me.”

“Don’t let him.” She steps forward to grasp his arm anxiously. “Promise me you won’t let him hit you. I know how much Jensen cares for you and he’ll never forgive himself once he comes out of this tantrum he’s having if he hurt you.”

Bit late for that. “I can’t promise, Dianne.”

She nods. “Is this a guy thing?”

“Yeah.” If by guy thing she means a guy male lover spurned thing. Shit. Jensen sure as hell doesn’t deserve someone as sweet as Dianne is. Maybe what Jared should do over this holiday is persuade her to leave him for her own sake because she’s definitely better off without him.

Or is that Jared just being selfish?

Donna comes hurrying out of the house before they reach the front door. “Jared!” She fairly throws herself at him. “You made it!” Pulling back in his arms, she doesn’t let go entirely as she surveys him. “Have you grown even more since I saw you?”

“I don’t know, maybe?” It warms his chest to feel her motherly interest, and he bends down to kiss her cheeks European style.

“You remembered!”

“Of course.”

“It’s real good to have you here, Jared,” she says seriously. “We’ve missed you.”
“I missed you too.” It’s true, and it hurts. If he were a girl Jensen had fallen in love with, Donna would be his mother-in-law and he’d love her. He loves her anyway, even knowing she would turn against him if she knew the truth of his relationship with her son. “It’s good to see you.”

“Not so good to see Jensen, I imagine.” Linking arms with him, she guides him into the house. “I swear I don’t know what’s got into him. None of us have ever seen him like this before over anything. But come inside. I kept some dinner for you in case you were hungry after your flight.”

Jensen is nowhere to be seen, but Alan emerges from the living room to shake Jared’s hand in greeting. It feels strangely like a homecoming, despite the fact that this isn’t his home and never will be, and he lets himself soak in the feeling. It’s not something he’s likely to ever feel again. Soon he’s installed at the kitchen table while Donna bustles around him and Dianne catches him up on everything that’s happened since they last saw him. She gets a little teary when he offers his condolences on the loss of her mother, but she seems to be dealing well with it, under no illusions that it’ll be easy but not in denial, nor showing any anger. Jensen could do well to learn from her about how to cope with loss.

Jensen.

He must be upstairs, but there’s no sound from him. Everything in Jared’s body clamours to run after him, to pin him down and confront him and have it out, but they don’t have the freedom here that they had when they were alone. It has to be enough that they’re in the same house instead of halfway across the country from each other.

Apparently Dianne now works with Jensen. That’s good, he tells himself while she explains how her job started as managing the office but seems to be branching out to include all manner of extra things, including double checking financial reports such as the ones Jensen works on. She glows as she talks about it in a way Jensen never has. Alan pops in to add his support, clearly enjoying having her there, and isn’t this the way it’s supposed to be? The happy Ackles family business, including the Ackles-to-be.

He offers to walk her home afterwards when it becomes clear that’s usually Jensen’s job but Jensen is still nowhere in evidence. The family seem to accept his sulking—or are they just putting on a brave face in front of Jared when actually they’re mortified? Donna looks relieved when he makes the offer and Dianne lights up. “Oh Jared, would you?”

It’s a very warm night and sweat breaks out across his body before they leave the driveway.

“Jensen sometimes drives me,” she says, gesturing back at the car they arrived in. “I have a key to his car. We can do that if you prefer?”

“I’m good if you are.” He tips his head back. “It feels good to breathe Texan air again.”

“Yes, I’m great. I like to walk in the evening after dinner. It’s the only time of day that’s bearable. I don’t know why Jensen insists on going for runs in the morning in full sunlight.” She waits only a beat before launching into what’s obviously on her mind. “In case you were worried, I didn’t tell Alan or Donna your secret. I realise you no doubt told Jensen in confidence and he shouldn’t have told me, so we can pretend I don’t know, if you prefer, but I want you to know that I support you and if you want to talk about it, I’m here.”

So he hadn’t been wrong in having a vague memory from that embarrassing phone call that she knew about his homosexuality. While he’s well-accustomed to being out by now, it still feels jarring to hear someone with a Texan accent mention it. “I’m—uh, thank you. It’s okay that you know. I didn’t think you’d be so cool about it?”
She gives a little laugh. “As I told Jensen, that’s probably why I feel so comfortable with you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not the type to go off beating people up, are you?”

“Huh?”

Studying him through squinted eyes, she reconsiders. “Okay, maybe you are, but you don’t need to, okay?”

“Dianne....” Surely she’s not saying what it sounds like she’s saying.

“It’s no big deal.” The rigidity of her shoulders undermines her statement. “It’s just, well—I don’t mean to brag, but men tend to—they look at me and see something they interpret a certain way, they think I’m something I’m not, and they try to—I normally have to be real careful around men, that’s all, but I didn’t feel like I needed to with you. I felt—feel safe.”

Safe. Oh Dianne.

“And I guess this is why, because you don’t look at me like you’re imagining me naked.”

He chokes at her last word. “No, I’m really not imagining that.”

“I know.” She smiles her pretty smile up at him and he can see that if he were straight and she smiled at him like that he might be extremely tempted to want to take what wasn’t his.

“It sucks that you have to endure that, though.”

She shrugs. “I’m used to it by now. It’s been going on for almost ten years and I have ways to deal with it. Again, like I told Jensen, just being his girlfriend helps. It’s archaic, but a lot of men, knowing I belong to him, back off and respect that. They know if they try anything and I tell him, he’ll flatten them. He did that a couple of times in high school when he saw boys trying things with me and word spread. So, like I told him when he got mad after I brought this up, he’s still protecting me even when he’s away.”

The fact that she even needs such protection is sickening. It shouldn’t take the threat of a beating by a boyfriend to make men accept no for an answer. But is this why she’s been so content in a mostly platonic relationship with Jensen for so long? Is it why she’s with him in the first place, because he never looked at her with lust in his eyes? Questions race through his mind. Could this mean she’s not actually in love with Jensen, he’s just her safe place while she finishes growing up, and because she’s had such negative experiences with men she thinks he’s what she wants?

Dianne is too lovely to be wasted in a sexless marriage like that. She’s genuinely kind and funny and caring and she deserves someone who loves her for all those qualities as well as for her attractive body, someone who respects her physical autonomy but who would cherish her decision to share herself with him.

She deserves so much more than a husband who’ll have to fantasise about another man in order to get it up in bed with her.

Or is this just him being selfish again?

How is he supposed to make decisions around here when his judgement is so fucking compromised?
“Can I ask you a question? You can tell me if it’s out of place, but I’ve been wondering lately.”

“Sure.” Does he need to brace himself?

“Is it the same for gay men? Do gay men look at other gay men the same way that straight men look at women? I mean, you’re gorgeous,” she actually blushes as she says it, “and I wondered if you get hit on the same way I do.”

“It’s not quite the same,” he says, thinking about it, “because I’m a lot bigger than you, and bigger than most other men as well, so I don’t have the same vulnerabilities that you do. There are predators in the gay community for sure.” Things could have gone very badly for him in his early days in New York if he hadn’t had friends there to teach him the ropes and to look out for him. “But no, in general there’s not the same entitlement that straight men seem to feel towards women’s bodies. I don’t know, maybe it’s because of the physical size similarities?” He meets her eyes as she gestures they need to take a left. “But we have our own threat to face from straight men, so I get you.”

“I thought maybe your fight with Jensen was because he found out you were gay,” she admits. “I know how homophobic Texas is and I thought you came out to him and he reacted in a stereotypical way.”

“Oh, no, that’s not what—”

“I know! Jensen set me straight on that, said you told him when you first roomed together. Which was brave of you, I have to say.”

He can’t accept praise he doesn’t deserve. “I’m out. I only lied to you and his parents because he wanted me to, and I’m sorry about that, by the way. I would have been honest and if you rejected me, so be it. My own parents did, but I wasn’t going to pretend for them. I don’t pretend for anyone.”

“Except Jensen.”

And shit, there it is. “Yeah. Apparently.”

Turning into the driveway of a comfortable small house, she comes to a halt. “I don’t know what you two fought about, Jared. Jensen won’t talk about it, other than to say it wasn’t about you being gay. And I’m sorry he’s being such an ass about it. When I invited you here, I truly thought he’d have calmed down by now but would be too stubborn to make the first move, and if you were here then maybe it would be easier for you to make up. Now it looks like I’ve put you in an uncomfortable position and I’m sorry for that.”

“Hey, it’s okay.” He reaches for her hands and holds onto them. “I knew how angry he was and I chose to come anyway. The truth is, I did something that he finds unforgiveable, I lied to him about something—not being gay but something else—and he has every right to hate me for it. I don’t know if I can get through to him in the few days I have here, but I’m gonna try, and I’ll always be grateful to you for giving me this chance. It’s more than I deserve.”

Her head starts shaking before he’s halfway through and gets more vehement by the end. “Whatever you did, I can’t believe you deserve this from him. I’m on your side, Jared. And if it’s any consolation, he wouldn’t be so mad if he didn’t care. Your friendship means everything to him, I know it does. You’re all he ever talked about when he called me, right from the start of the year, and you made him happier than I’d seen him since before Josh—since before his brother left. Do you know about that?”
“Jensen told me.” And God help him from having flashbacks to the night it happened.

Dianne nods earnestly. “I know he doesn’t want to lose you, none of us want him to lose you. So while I can’t give you any advice on how to deal with him like this because it’s unprecedented, know that you have my support, and the support of Donna and Alan as well.”

“As long as I keep lying to them about being gay.” The words erupt before he can stop them, and he flinches at the bitterness in them.

Dianne’s face softens. “I’d love to tell you that they’d be fine with it like I was, but honestly? I’m afraid you’re right.”

“Of course.” It stings, and it shouldn’t. It’s just a rejection by two random people amongst millions, two people who will no longer be a part of his life once Jensen kicks him out once and for all. But he owes Jensen the opportunity to do that—

Or at least the opportunity to make his decision knowing the full facts of how Jared feels.
Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Jared is here. Jared is here and how is Jensen supposed to keep his hands off him?

Chapter 29

He didn’t expect it would be this hard.

Jensen folds and extends his body slowly through the routine Jared taught him, careful not to speed up and get his pulse racing any more than it already is. He’s been at this for an hour and a half and knows he needs to stop but he’s afraid that if he stops he’ll go racing straight into Jared’s arms, and that is not acceptable.

It hurts too much.

It hurts too much seeing him and not having him, and Jensen doesn’t know how to deal with it.

Three more days, that’s all he has to get through. Three days of Jared being right here within touching distance, three days of Jared’s warm laughter and gentle eyes and unavailable arms. God, Jensen craves being in those arms again. His body physically aches with the need to feel them wrapped around him.

Rising to his feet, he checks again out of the window just as Jared turns into the driveway below. It’s too dark to see his eyes, but when he lifts his head Jensen feels their eyes meet.

They both freeze.

He’s the one who pulls away first, ducking down back into the rhythm of the poses, fighting to contain his breath. He can’t run downstairs and hurl himself at Jared. He can’t, he can’t, he can’t. Jared isn’t his. Jared doesn’t want to be his. Jared didn’t even want to be his friend.

He gets through the routine twice more before he hears firm footsteps making their way up the stairs to the elevated landing that leads to his and Josh’s part of the house. Stilling with one leg stretched out behind him, he waits for them to pass his room on their way to Josh’s bedroom.

Instead they stop outside his door.

“Jensen?”

No.

“Jensen, may I come in?”

“No.”
“Will you open the door?”

“Go away.”

“I’m gonna open the door, okay?”

The door opens before Jared’s sentence finishes and Jensen scrambles up from the floor. “No, not fucking okay. What the hell? Get out!”

But Jared stands there, uncooperative, holding onto the door. His eyes trace their way around Jensen’s body, over the arm muscles his tight t-shirt reveals, down his chest where the damp material clings, along his legs in their soft sweats.

“Are you done?” Jensen asks icily.

Jared’s eyes snap up to his. “You’ve lost weight.”

“Please close the door.”

“You look like hell, Jen.”

“You no longer get to call me that.”

“Jensen.” Jared takes a step forward. “Please, just talk to me.”

“I didn’t invite you here because I didn’t want you here. Why don’t you go stay at Dianne’s house? I’m sure she’ll be happy to talk.”

“Actually, yeah, she was. She said quite a bit.”

Jensen doesn’t want to know what it was. “She has extra space. She’s the one who wants you here.”

“And you know why? Because she’s worried about you, Jensen.”

“Stop saying my name.”

At that, Jared steps more squarely into the room. “Okay,” he says heavily, “I know you’re mad and just—look, just hit me. We both know you want to, so take a shot. I’ll let you.”

“Oh, that’ll be satisfying,” Jensen says with more sarcasm than he knew he had in him.

“You’ll feel better.”

“Really?”

“You can hit me as much as you want. Keep going until you do feel better.”

“While you just stand there and take it?”

“Yes,” Jared says simply.

Jensen shakes his head. “You have no idea how badly I want to take you apart right now.”

“So go ahead.”

“No.” Truth is, he doesn’t dare risk putting his hands on Jared. “You’re the one who likes hitting an
unresisting partner, not me.”

Jared’s flinch is miniscule, but it’s there. “That’s not the same thing and you know it.”

“Do I?” He lets every ounce of his contempt blaze from his eyes. “You always liked hurting me. I should have known this is how it would end.”

“Jensen, no!” Surging forward, Jared stops only when Jensen steps abruptly back. “Sorry, I—I won’t—just—stop conflating two things that have nothing to do with each other. I never wanted to hurt you! I love you—”

“Don’t say that. Don’t lie to me.”

“I love you,” Jared repeats, and Jensen swivels to face the window because those words hurt worse than anything that’s come before them.

“Leave.” The word trembles, barely more than a whisper.

“Jensen.” Jared is right behind him, so close Jensen can feel the shimmer of heat from his body. “Turn around. Please.”

“Leave.” It’s stronger this time but he has nothing left. “You have to leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere.”

Jensen’s shaking so violently that it’s only his grip on the window sill that keeps him upright. “Get out of my room, Jared.”

*

This was a mistake. That’s all Jared can think as he lies so horribly close to Jensen and can’t sleep. He shouldn’t have come here. He should have accepted Jensen’s decision to cut off communications between them and not come blundering in to try to fix what he’s beginning to accept maybe can’t be fixed. What is he even doing this for? It’s not like he can get Jensen back, after all.

The first flight to New York in the morning is looking terribly inviting, and he googles it several times, several options. Anything to get him away from this place where he’s broken Jensen’s heart and isn’t able to put it back together.

He never meant any of this, back on that night he came out the bathroom and offered himself to Jensen. His crush on Jensen aside, he truly thought it would just be some physical fun, but as the experienced one it was on him to have pulled back when he realised they were both getting too emotionally involved. He should have put a stop to it the day Jensen didn’t answer Dianne’s call. That was the first flag that something was wrong and he should have paid attention and realised what it meant. He knew he was in too deep already by then and it was obvious something was going on with Jensen that shouldn’t have been. He could have saved them both this heartache, if only he’d been strong enough to end the best thing that had ever happened to him.

Instead, he’s going to be Jensen’s worst memory.

Okay, plan for the weekend since he made the catastrophic decision to come here: be polite and civil
to Jensen, ignore any bad behaviour from him, be friendly to his family and try to insulate them from 
Jensen’s reaction to heartbreak to give them the best 4th celebration he can, and then on Sunday say 
a respectful goodbye and let it be over.

Three days.

He has three days left with Jensen before a lifetime alone.

*

To Jensen’s chagrin, he sleeps that night, not just little shallow catnaps but actually gets in a good 
several hours of solid slumber. It’s unacceptable that he’s only able to sleep when Jared is there, and 
he vents his fury on a particularly hard run in the morning.

He’s just leaving the bathroom, skimpy towel loose around his waist, when Jared opens Josh’s door.

“Oh, hey, sorry.”

“I used most of the hot water.” Jensen stops, eyes unwillingly caught on the shadow of Jared’s 
morning erection beneath his sleep pants. That used to be his responsibility to take care of. What 
would Jared do if he pushed him into the bathroom, stripped his pants off and went down on him? 
Just like that, hot and fast and overwhelming, because he knows all the tricks to Jared’s pleasure 
now. Would Jared let him? He lets Jared see where he’s looking. “Apparently you could do with a 
cold shower anyway.”

Jared returns the look, gaze hard on the too-small towel Jensen definitely didn’t grab on purpose. 
“You didn’t need one?”

So now they’re discussing both their dicks. Smart move, Jensen. “We were out of ice.”

Jared’s breath catches at the reference. “Pretty sure your mom said she got extra yesterday for the 
picnic later.”

“You want some?” Jensen seriously needs to stop this. “I could fetch it for you.”

“For me?” Jared glances meaningfully at where Jensen’s towel is starting to struggle, thanks to this 
conversation. “Or for you?”

Jared is responding just as strongly and his pants are not equal to the task required of them. It’s 
rapidly degenerating into a competition to see whose containment is going to fail first.

Before that can happen, Jensen breaks. He slams Jared back into Josh’s room, abandoning his towel 
where it falls, battle lost, and drops to his knees, hands jerking Jared’s pants down then clamping 
over the swells of his ass. “Don’t say anything,” he hisses, then his mouth is filled with bliss and 
everything vanishes except the feel of Jared, the taste of Jared, and the gut-wrenching feeling of 
coming home.

Jared maybe tries to resist, but Jensen doesn’t let him. Soon he feels Jared’s hand tangled in his hair 
where it belongs, forcing him closer, Jared’s cock sliding back into his throat as though it never left. 
This is where it belongs.
This is where he belongs.

In the second before Jared comes, just as Jensen grabs a final breath of air to prepare, he says, “Jensen, come,” and Jensen is so on the edge that the order tips him over and the world around him whites out in pulsating bursts of light.

*

“Fuck,” Jared says as awareness seeps back into his sated body. “Oh fuck, Jensen—”

But Jensen’s already scrambling back on his knees. He looks stricken.

“Jen—”

“This didn’t happen.” Jensen makes it to his feet, seemingly oblivious to his lack of towel and the streaks of come across his skin. His hands curl into fists at his sides and he brings one up to wipe across the remnants of Jared’s come around his mouth that he didn’t manage to swallow. He looks down at his hand in horror. “It doesn’t mean anything. I still hate you. I still don’t want you here.”

“But, fuck, it did. He sinks back down onto the bed as Jensen slams the door behind him and palms his spent, sensitive cock. Jensen just sucked him off and let Jared make him come.

Jensen just sucked him off and let Jared make him come.

Jensen did that. Jared didn’t force him, didn’t coerce him, didn’t even suggest it, it was all Jensen’s idea and something inside Jared is celebrating.

There’s hope.

There’s still hope.

*

The scent of frying bacon draws him downstairs after his mostly cold shower. Jensen’s at the table eating a slice of toast, and Jared doublechecks, yes, he’s swallowing it.

After swallowing Jared’s come half an hour ago.

“Jared, good morning!”

Shit, fuck, holy hell, he forgot about Dianne. Jensen’s fucking girlfriend. The only one with rights to sex with Jensen. Shame washes through him so violently that he chokes on his response and starts coughing.
"There’s coffee by the window,” Jensen says from the table, “if you need to soothe your throat.”

Jensen’s an evil-minded bastard. When Jared glares at him, he traces his tongue in a circle around his still-puffy lips.

Right.

That’s it.

Dianne deserves so much better than Jensen. That he would do this right in front of her fills Jared with revulsion at them both. What if she’s been here all morning? What if they did that upstairs while she was here making coffee and cooking breakfast for them?

Whatever else he accomplishes this weekend he needs to find a way to get her to break up with Jensen. Whether Jensen wants Jared or not, Dianne doesn’t deserve a boyfriend or husband who can’t keep his dick in his pants—or, more appropriately, his mouth off other dicks. Jensen is too gay to even pretend, and maybe that’s partly Jared’s fault, so he’s gonna suck it up and see what he can do to free Dianne.

As he crosses back to the table with his coffee, he pinches the back of Jensen’s upper arm. Hard.

“Ow—what the hell—uh—time is it?” Jensen bursts out.

Dianne glances up at the big clock over the oven. “We still have an hour.”

“An hour?” Jared settles down at the table and successfully hides a wince when Jensen grinds his boot into Jared’s bare foot beneath it. “What is happening in an hour?” Fuck, that hurt.

“We have to pick someone up from the bus station.”

“Jensen—” Dianne starts.

“Someone else Dianne invited.”

Someone else? Oh joy, someone else to have this shitshow forced upon them? He kicks the side of his foot hard into Jensen’s calf. “It’s shaping up to be a hell of a day.”

“I hope it will be.” Dianne brings a plate heaped high with scrambled eggs and bacon to put in front of Jared. “This one said no, but can I interest you in some pancakes?”

“She can put chocolate chips in them for you,” Jensen offers. “Then they’ll reach your levels of unhealthiness.”

“Do you like chocolate, Jared?”

“I’ll have one if you do,” he says to Jensen. “Half plain, half chocolate.”

To his satisfaction, the reference makes Jensen splutter on his mouthful of coffee. “No,” he says when he can talk again. “I’ve had enough to eat.”

“You’ve only had that one piece of toast. Have some protein, then.” Jared holds out a rasher of bacon on his fork.

Jensen’s eyes narrow. “I’m quite all right in the protein department this morning, thanks.”

Oh, good one. Jared wants to applaud.
“Did you have one of your shakes?” Dianne asks innocently, and Jared can’t do this.

“I’ll have all the pancakes you can make,” he says loudly to change the subject. “I’m still a growing boy and home-cooked food is a rare and wonderful treat for me.”

After breakfast, Dianne hurries them into the car. It’s apparently important that Jared join them on their bus station pick-up mission, so he shoves on some shoes and grabs his sunglasses.

“I’ll sit in the back,” Dianne announces before Jensen can say anything and slips in behind the driver’s seat, leaving the other side free for Jared to slide the passenger seat back to create room for his legs. Jensen adjusts his seat several inches forward, Jared notes, and looks embarrassed when he catches Jared watching. Good. Fucker.

Jensen’s driving is far more sedate this morning, the way Jared expected it to be. He’s a good driver, laid back about the holiday traffic, and Jared turns his attention to the new crop of Dallas tourist attractions Dianne points out. How on earth is he going to convince her that she’d be better off without Jensen? He spent half the night thinking about their conversation when he walked her home and it’s evident she’s not in love with him. They seem companionable, comfortable together in the way of old friends, or perhaps siblings. Yes, that’s how Jensen treats her, like a little sister he’s fond of, and she treats Jensen like a beloved, if occasionally infuriating, older brother.

She deserves to be with someone who’ll ravish her (willingly, of course) in the morning like Jensen ravished him in Josh’s bedroom. Someone whose sole focus of desire is her, not the man with the biggest cock he can find to satiate himself with. Someone who respects her enough not to fuck around behind her back.

This isn’t him being selfish. It has nothing to do with whether Jensen will be with him or not, but Jensen has no right to do this to a woman whose only crime is caring about him and needing his protection. She is way too good for him, and Jared acknowledges that as someone who loves Jensen beyond any rationality. She’s too good for both of them.

At the bus station, Jensen finds somewhere to park then Dianne insists both of them come along to meet her friend, just in case the bus is late and she has to wait. But the bus isn’t late and Jared stops at the edge of the heaving crowd of people retrieving baggage and excitedly reuniting with loved ones. He can wait over here while Dianne goes to find her—

Oh.

Oh shit.

What the fuck were the odds of this happening?

His sister emerges from the crowd and everything else fades away and Jared wonders if this is how Jensen feels when he’s about to throw up.

* *

“Catch him, Jensen!”

Jensen springs into action at Dianne’s order, because she’s right, Jared does look as though he’s about to topple over. Squeezing Jared’s arm, he whispers, “It’s okay. Just breathe. Like you taught
me, remember?"

“It’s Megan,” Jared says blankly. “Jen, that’s my sister.”

“I know.” It has to be obvious, as Dianne hurries over to her and they smile and embrace, that this was deliberate. “Jay, it’s okay. She’s here to see you.”

“Me?” Jared turns to him, blinking rapidly but not fast enough to clear the tears threatening his eyes. He clutches Jensen’s hand. “She....knew I’d be here?”

“I traced her.”

“You....” Roughly, Jared wipes his eyes. “She’s here because of you?”

“And Dianne. But I found her for you.”

“Jared?” Megan is standing in front of them now, eyes large and uncertain. “I was too scared to believe them when they said you’d be here. But you are.”

“I am. And—you are. You’re here. How...?”

“On the early bus. You didn’t know?”

“We didn’t tell him,” Dianne says, “just in case you changed your mind. Jensen didn’t want to get his hopes up.”

The uncertain eyes turn to him, narrowing as they flit down to take in their joined hands. “You’re the guy who wrote to me?”

“Yeah.”

“I thought you said you were Jared’s best friend, not his boyfriend.”

Jared jerks away. “He is. I don’t have a boyfriend. Well, not right now. I mean—”

“You’re gay?”

The horror in her tone has Jensen jumping back in front of Jared, and squeezing his arm again where she can’t see. “If you have a problem with that, then you can get right back on that bus.”

“Jensen.” Jared eases away. “It’s okay.”

Jared isn’t his to protect, he needs to remember that. Reluctantly, Jensen steps back.

“Yeah, I’m gay,” Jared says softly, aware of their surroundings. “That’s why I left. Why they wouldn’t let me stay. I’m sorry, I thought they”—he gestures to Jensen and Dianne—“might have warned you.”

“We thought it was your decision to make,” Dianne says. “It’s your secret.”

“It’s not a secret. I’m gay and I’m out,” he tells Megan. “Where we go to school, everyone knows. If I’d stayed at home, I’d have had to pretend not to be, and I couldn’t do that. I wouldn’t.”

“So you left me?”

“Megan—”
“You left me with them?” Her voice rises and Jensen looks around to make sure they’re not attracting too much attention. “Why didn’t you take me with you?”

“I couldn’t, Megs, you were too young.”

“I cried every night.” She’s crying now, openly, and so is Jared. “I cried every night because I was so scared that something bad was happening to you, that you were sleeping on the street and cold and lonely and—tell me you didn’t end up on the street, Jared.”

“I didn’t. I had a friend in New York and I stayed with him.”

“Why didn’t you contact me to tell me you were all right?”

“I did. I tried, but the email bounced back. They must have changed your email address. I tried several times just in case. I even called the house a couple times just to hear you answer the phone so I could know you were okay.”

“I wasn’t.” she says fiercely. “I wasn’t at all okay. Not without you. Why didn’t you say something on the phone?”

“I thought they’d told you the truth and you hated me too and that was why you changed your email. It never occurred to me then that they were the ones who changed it. I’m sorry, Megs, fuck, I’m sorry.”

With that, they both move, falling into each other, Megan’s face buried in Jared’s shirt as she clings to him. Jensen glances at Dianne and they take several steps away, giving the reunited siblings some privacy now that they know it’ll be okay. She’s not going to break Jared’s heart.

*

Two hours later they’re at the picnic in the park with all Dianne and Donna’s church people. Megan and Jared haven’t stopped talking and it soothes the ravages in Jensen’s heart to see him look so happy. There’s a light in his eyes Jensen hasn’t seen before, and he knows tracking down Megan was the right thing to do. Jared needs this. Jensen can’t give him much (beyond illicit, wonderful blow jobs), but he can give him his sister back.

Jared’s happiness is contagious and Jensen finds himself smiling as he helps build temporary tables for the church ladies to lay the food on with some of the guys he knows from the choir. Assured he’d be called upon if needed, Jared agreed to stay with Megan and the two of them are sitting under a tree on the grass engrossed in earnest conversation.

“I’m so glad you did this for him.” Dianne stops beside him, an enormous tub of potato salad in her arms. “Look how happy he is.”

“I was just thinking that.” Taking the salad, he leans over to put it at the back behind the fried chicken. “You’re the one who convinced her I wasn’t a crackpot, so thank you for that.”

She gives him a teasing pout. “Have you forgiven me for inviting him here?”

“I’m sorry I’ve been such an ass lately.”
“You have been.”

“I know.”

“I’d very nearly reached my limit with you, Jensen Ackles.”

“Oh? And what were you planning to do when you did?”

A whack on the back of his jeans makes him jump and he whirls around to find his mother brandishing a wooden serving spoon for the salad. She waves it at Dianne. “When he was little, I always found this worked to keep him in line.”

Grinning, Dianne takes it from her and smacks the back of it against her palm. “I think he’s a bit too big now to turn over my knee, Donna.”

This is not a conversation he wants any part of, and his eyes instinctively seek out Jared, whose attention has been caught by the spoon. Oh God, did he see Jensen just get whacked by his mother?

Imagine this conversation taking place between his mother and Jared. Imagine it was Jared standing there right now tapping that spoon consideringly against his palm while eyeing up Jensen’s ass. Imagine a world where he’d have the right to pull down Jensen’s pants, turn him over his knee and give him a sound spanking in front of the entire church congregation for the attitude Jensen’s been giving him since he got here.

From the look on Jared’s face, his thoughts have raced off in the same direction. Less than a minute later, he and Megan saunter over.

“We’ve come to see if anyone needs help,” he says, turning his most innocent smile on everyone but Jensen. “Dianne? Donna?”

“More chairs need to be unloaded from the van,” Jensen blurts. “We could do that.”

Jared’s eyes meet his and singe right through to Jensen’s bones. “Sure. Megan, you okay to help the ladies with the food?”

She nods. “Don’t go far.”

“I won’t. I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Jensen knows this park well, and just before they reach the car park he veers off to a thick clump of trees in a deserted corner.

“We have no right to do this,” Jared says as he pushes Jensen face first into a tree and digs his fingers into his ass through his jeans.

“I know.”

“It’s disgusting.”

“I know.”

But neither of them stop what they’re doing.

“I saw her spank you,” Jared mutters into his ear as he grinds against him. “Right there in public. It looked like she was instructing Dianne about the best way to keep you in line—”
“She was.”

“Fuck,” Jared groans. “I wanna spank you right here. Did she hit you hard?”

“I barely felt it. I need to feel it.”

“What if we’re discovered?”

“We won’t be. I come here and play music sometimes and no one’s ever come.”

“It’s busy today.” Jared’s hand slides inside his jeans and his underwear and his nails dig into Jensen’s flesh, making him whimper.

“Don’t care. Need it, Jay.”

“It’s wrong.”

“So punish me.”

“You’re killing me, Jensen.”

“Jen. I know. Do something about it.”

“You’re not mine—”

“I am right now.” He is, always, always, but now isn’t the time for that conversation and he wriggles his hand between the tree and his hips to undo his belt, not caring as the bark scrapes the back of his hand. “Use this.”

“If someone—”

“I’ll keep a lookout. Hard, Jay, we don’t have much time.”

He’s lost so much weight he doesn’t need to undo his jeans, just starts tugging them down. Jared takes over, yanks them and Jensen’s briefs down together, baring him.

“Stick your ass out and hang onto the tree. Wrap both your arms around it. Don’t scream.”

It hurts in all the right ways and Jensen feels the pain sear straight through him. Jared doesn’t grant him a warm up, gives him no time to adjust, just slices the doubled-up belt across the crest of his ass as hard and fast as he can. The first flurry shakes something loose deep in Jensen’s belly and he gasps.

“Same safeword,” Jared bites out.

“Harder,” Jensen orders.

Jared complies.

Now it’s his chest. How can his chest hurt when it’s his ass getting beaten?

“Breathe, Jen.”

Oh. Breathe. Important. But the first breath shivers with tears, the second is an outright sob.

“Cry if you need to. I'll keep watch.”
He can’t cry. Not here at the 4th of July church picnic with his family and Dianne and Jared’s sister waiting for them, not when Jared isn’t his—but right now Jared is, he’s Jensen’s the same way Jensen is his and he surrenders and lets the sobs rip through him.

*  

Jared watches Jensen fall apart and he thought he’d cried enough today with Megan but his body thinks differently. Furiously he blinks the tears away. He has to see what he’s doing, make sure he’s not damaging Jensen, make sure they’re both safe from discovery. He can’t lose control too. One of them has to keep it together.

“I’m gonna come,” Jensen gasps. “Jay, tell me, tell me quick, yes or no.”

“Yes!” Jared says. “Yes, Jen, come for me, come for me now while I spank you the way you deserve for acting like a spoiled brat. I wish I could do it in front of everyone, pull down your pants and punish you like a naughty child for everyone to see as I put you in your place and give you what you deserve.”

Come stripes the bark in front of Jensen and Jared gives a final lash to the bright red ass before him.

“Get down on your hands and knees and lick up your mess,” he orders.

Jensen drops instantly, tongue flashing out to obey, and he arches his back as though he knows exactly what Jared intends. Jared barely manages to get his cock free before his climax erupts and he leans forward to rest one hand against the tree to keep him upright while the other roughly angles his cock down to direct the spray of come all over Jensen’s beaten ass.

Oh. Shit.

Jared is thoroughly fucked.

“Let it dry on you,” he says when Jensen moves to get up.

“If someone comes—”

“Someone did come. Me. On your ass. Let it dry.”

He doesn’t expect Jensen to obey now that the frenzy of need is over, but Jensen sinks back into position on all fours, head submissively lowered, the tree bark in front of him scrupulously clean.

“Good boy.” The words come unintentionally, but he sees the ripple of reaction down Jensen’s spine.

How can he let Jensen go after this?

“You told your sister you’d only be a few minutes,” Jensen says after more than a few minutes have passed. “She’ll be worried, you’d better go back.”

Go back. He doesn’t want to. Thrilled as he is to see Megan again, he wants to collapse onto the soft, thick grass right here and pull Jensen over him to inspect his ass, maybe rub the come into his skin because it’s not gonna dry in this humidity, and then learn what it’s like to kiss Jensen when he hasn’t just been fucked by him.
He can’t do most of that, but he does get down on his knees to inspect Jensen’s welts. They’re turning crimson, shit, he really went for it. “How’s this feel?” he asks, rubbing his thumb over the darkest one.

“You keep doing that, I’ll come again.”

“Jensen—”

“We have to get back. It won’t dry, smear it into my skin or something.”

“I can clean it off—”

“No!” Jensen’s head snaps around, wet, reddened eyes blazing. “I’ll wait if you want, but we don’t have time. At least you have to get back.”

“I love you.”

“Don’t say that. This is sex, Jared. That’s all it’s ever been.”

“You said—”

“I was wrong. This is just physical.” His voice is flat, hard. It has none of the soft warmth that Jensen’s voice usually has after a scene when he’s sleepily curling up in Jared’s arms. “Don’t mistake it for what it’s not.”
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

It had to happen.

As the picnic progresses, Jensen realises it’s a good thing he had some practice trying to walk normally after a spanking back at college. It hurts so much that before dessert he sneaks off to the restrooms to ensure there’s no blood, because how would he explain that one?

But then, how can he explain any of this?

Jared hasn’t even been here for 24 hours and they’ve made each other come twice. This morning, okay, maybe that was excusable, pent-up need after six weeks apart, but this afternoon? And not just sex, but a belt spanking like that? In public?

What is wrong with him?

Jared. Jared fucking Padalecki. He seems to be built from everything Jensen can least resist and it would appear Jensen’s the same for him. They can’t resist each other, which is why Jensen’s original plan to break off all contact was the correct one.

No. That was Jared’s original plan, remember?

Is this why?

Did Jared know they wouldn’t be able to return to being platonic friends and that’s why he plotted his clandestine departure?

Loath as Jensen is to admit it, he had a point. It would’ve been preferable if he could have let Jensen in on the deal—but then would Jensen have accepted it without the knowledge he has now, after today? It hurts, but Jared was right. They can’t be anywhere near each other and be apart.

So what the hell does he do now?

Accept these three days as a goodbye gift, an unexpected extension to their experiment, and then spend the rest of his life making sure he’s nowhere near Jared?

They move on to the outdoor concert part of the evening. There’s a group of them now, various members of the church’s youth that Megan hit it off with during his and Jared’s lengthy absence, and Jensen concentrates on socialising with them, leaving Jared to do the same at Megan’s side. Every now and then he feels a knowing hand pinch at his welts in passing and he fights the fantasy that it repeatedly invokes of him being kept naked amongst the group, his punishment on vivid display for Jared to show off to the others.

Did Jared really mean that as a punishment? Or did he just use those words at the end knowing they’d push Jensen’s buttons to enhance his climax? Does he feel the beating made up for Jensen’s atrocious behaviour last night? Or was it just sex?

Just sex.
He didn’t know he was capable of lying to Jared’s face like that, lying about something so monumental.

Why does Jared keep saying he loves him? No, seriously, why? Why now? Why now when it’s almost over and he’s about to be free of Jensen for good?

(He sounded so honest last night.)

No.

No, Jensen does not need this. Not when he’s so close to ending it.

(What if Jared loved him all along?)

No.

He’d have said so.

Wouldn’t he?

(Jensen didn’t.)

But—no, that’s not fair, Jensen did, in that stupid, embarrassing letter that led to this moment right here tonight, dancing at a 4th of July concert in his hometown with both his gay lover and his future wife. If Jensen hadn’t written that, Jared wouldn’t have called him, they wouldn’t have fought and Dianne wouldn’t have felt duty-bound to invite him this weekend.

(But he’s here and the world feels right again and if Jared loves him, actually loves him—)

Stop.

Just.

Stop.

His choice is made. He chose Texas, he chose his parents, he chose Dianne.

(Jared loves him.)

Please don’t. Oh God, please, please don’t.

He can’t have a panic attack here, with the fireworks due to start at any moment. C’mon, breathe. He knows how to do this, Jared taught him—

(Jared loves him.)

A wave of prickly heat floods through him. Oh fuck, he’s going to be sick. Amongst hundreds of people out in the open where he can’t find any privacy, in front of his family and the church and Jared—

(Jared loves him.)

“I’ll be back in a moment,” he shouts over the music to Dianne.

“But the fireworks are about to start!”

“I’ll be back. I just need—I’ll be back.”
He jerks out from her grasp, lets the crowd swirl him away, not caring where he’s going as long as it’s away from everyone he knows. It’s quieter over here, further from the music, less people. More space.

Trees.

He’s just reached the shelter of the first one when he hears the one voice he desperately doesn’t want to hear.

“Jen?”

*

Even seen only through the pulsating lights from the concert, Jensen looks ghastly. Jared rushes up to him, relieved to have tracked him down after watching him disappear from Dianne’s side.

“Jensen, what’s wrong? Are you sick? Did I hurt you too badly? Are you bleeding?”

It’s the second tree Jensen’s hung onto today, but this time he seems to needs it to stand. “Don’t.” His voice is so quiet Jared can hardly hear it beneath the distant music.

“Don’t what? Jen, you’re scaring me. Talk to me. Look at me, at least.”

“I think. I might. Throw up.”

Oh fuck, he’s given Jensen a panic attack. Telegraphing his movements, he steps forward and lays a hand on Jensen’s stomach. “Breathe into my hand.”

Jensen gives him a confused look. Oh, right, he didn’t teach him this one.

“When you breathe in, make sure you push my hand out with your stomach. Come on, breathe in.”

“I’ll—be sick.”

“No, you feel like that because you’re not breathing, that’s all. You’re fine, Jen, you’re safe.”

“’m not.”

“You are, I promise you. Just take a breath, slow and easy. Make my hand move. That’s it, good boy, just like that. Breathe in again. See? You can do it. You’re fine. And another one? Yes, good boy.” That familiar term seems to soothe Jensen the most. “Again, c’mon, Jen. Be good for me, breathe for me, yeah, like that. Feel any better now?”

Jensen still looks dazed, but he no longer looks shocky.

“Keep breathing, that’s a good boy. Put your hand over mine, feel them move. Yeah, babe, feel that? That’s you breathing. That’s you being okay, being good. Keep going, not too fast. Perfect, so good, Jen. Yeah? See? I told you you’re safe.”

Jensen’s stomach tenses. “I’m not safe.”

“Sure you are. Breathe for me, Jensen.”
“No!”

Shit, he’s losing him. “Jen—okay, tell me why aren’t you safe? Tell me and I’ll fix it.”

Jensen’s stomach turns rigid beneath Jared’s hand as he grits out, “You—love—me.”

“Yeah. Yeah, I do.” Wait, is that what’s sent him into a tailspin? “Jen, for the love of God, please keep breathing. I do love you. Why aren’t you safe?”

Jensen looks up at him with desperate eyes. “Because I love you. And I’m fucked if you love me too.”

His hand curls around Jared’s against his stomach and Jared lets him because he’s breathing properly again now that the fear that’s terrorising him has finally been expressed.

“I want this,” Jensen continues. “I want you, I want us. But you not wanting me back kept me safe because I couldn’t have it.”

“I’ve always wanted you!”

“Want, sure.” Jensen rolls his eyes. “For sex while it was convenient.”

“No—”

“I thought that’s all I was to you. That was your offer, Jared, remember? You offered yourself to let me experiment with you, to let me use you. Not for love. Not for forever. It was to find out if I was gay or not. And yeah, it worked, I’m gay. Experiment completed.”

“Just because it began like that doesn’t mean—”

“You slept with Chad!”

Shit. “Because I was scared!”

“Scared?”

“You were leaving me. Fuck, Jensen, I know it’s been awful for you, but do you think it’s been easy for me? I was in love with you before we even slept together, did you know that? I fell for you the day we met, when not only were you my physical dream come true but you smiled so sweetly at me when I confessed I was gay and assured me it wouldn’t be a problem and I was gone, done for.”

“You’re lying.”

“My offering to you was selfish as hell. I wanted you any way I could get you, but as long as I believed you were straight you were off limits to me. Then you looked at me naked that day and it was obvious you weren’t nearly as straight as we both thought, and I couldn’t resist.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

The most important question. Jared forces a deep breath into his own lungs and doesn’t let himself look away from Jensen’s eyes. “I thought it was because I didn’t want to pressure you. I wanted you to be free to make your own mind up about what you wanted to do about being gay.”

“You thought? So why was it really?”

“Because I was too afraid of losing you.”
Biting his lip, Jensen looks away, over Jared’s shoulder. “So you left me instead.”

“Yeah.”

“You broke my heart.”

“And mine. If it’s any consolation.”

Above their heads, the fireworks begin, explosions of light reflecting off Jensen’s pale skin, lighting up his distraught eyes.

“Would it have made a difference,” Jared asks, “if I’d told you sooner? If I’d fought to keep you instead of letting you come back here?”

Jensen looks down, his hand tightening again around Jared’s.

“Because the thing is, Jen, you left me too. You were always planning to leave me. To choose someone else above me.”

Raising his head, Jensen’s eyes flash. “There is nobody above you, Jared,” he says fiercely. “Nobody.”

“Jen—”

“You’re my everything, don’t you get that?”

It’s the words he’s longed to hear, but not said with such despair. “But I’m not enough. I’m not enough to make up for what choosing me would cost you.”

“You’re everything,” Jensen repeats, and then he’s plastered against Jared’s body, hands reaching up to pull Jared’s face down. “Never think you’re not enough for me. You’re everything.”

For all Jared thought he couldn’t have this today, here he is with Jensen’s tongue in his mouth, Jensen frantic and insistent in his arms. Whatever Jensen’s lack of sexual experience, he certainly learned how to kiss and Jared lets him take control, opens when Jensen demands, and gives him everything he asks for.

Jensen tastes like coffee and marshmallows and sin and heaven rolled into one and for the first time since he discovered he was gay, Jared feels entirely at peace.

Until a soft gasp jerks him out of it.

A gasp that isn’t Jensen’s.

*

Jensen doesn’t get why Jared’s pulled away. “You’re mine,” he emphasises, turning Jared’s head back towards him and pulling it down—

“Jen.”

There’s a warning in Jared’s voice, and he’s not looking at Jensen. Instead his eyes are trained over
his shoulder, so Jensen swivels around.

To see Dianne standing ten feet away.

*

Several different fireworks explode in the sky above them as he stares at her, so time must be passing. He needs to move. Say something. Pull out of Jared’s arms.

Shit, she just caught him kissing Jared and he hasn’t even had the decency to let go of him.

It takes two more explosions to remedy that.

To make himself let go.

“Dianne,” Jared starts.

“Don’t.” Her voice is unsteady as her eyes flick back and forth between them. “I don’t want to hear anything you have to say right now.”

Jensen’s the one she’s waiting for to speak. He can’t, though. The only words he can think of to say are, “I love him,” and he can’t say that.

“This.” Her hand gestures jerkily between them. “All along?”

“No.” That he can say, at least.

“You can’t tell me it’s just this weekend.”

“No.”

“Dianne—” Jared tries again, but she cuts him off.

“Did you fuck him?”

The word sends a flinch through Jensen. “Yes.”

“Last night?”

“No.”

“At school?”

Jensen can’t bring himself to say yes.

“Yes,” Jared says. “Dianne, if you’ll—”

“I trusted you.” She turns to him. “I actually told you I was on your side. How you must have laughed at me.”

“No! It wasn’t like that.”

“It wasn’t like what, you stealing my boyfriend?”
“You deserve better than him.”

“Oh, because you’re the one who deserves him, right?”

“I’m sorry,” Jensen interjects. “Dianne, I’m sorry.”

“Yeah, you looked it, with your tongue down his throat. You’ve never kissed me like that, Jensen.”

“I didn’t think you wanted me to!”

She cocks her head on one side and rakes her scornful gaze over him. “Tell me one thing. Did you ever want to?”

And there’s the rub. He never did. Not once.

She reads the answer on his face. “Yet you planned to marry me? How were we going to have children, artificial insemination?”

“I didn’t know,” he bursts out. “I thought I was straight. I didn’t know I wasn’t, not until—”

“Until Jared?”

“Yes. Until Jared.”

The fireworks blaze out their exultant conclusion in the sky above them, drowning out any hope of conversation. Despite himself, Jensen looks up, imagines himself lost among the colours and lights, bursting into fragments, no longer being this person who has done this to one of the best people he knows.

The music comes to an end with the last of the fireworks, and sudden silence falls like the residual smoke drifting down over them.

“Your sister is looking for you, Jared.” Dianne breaks it. “I told her I’d find you. I also suggested that maybe you should drive her back to San Antonio in the morning so you can have extra time with her. Jensen,” her eyes are cold as she turns to him, “I suggest you go with them so you can figure out what you want to do. I take it you two broke up and you were planning to marry me anyway and pretend you weren’t gay to keep your parents happy?”

She’s far too insightful and he cringes inside. “I’m sorry—”

“I don’t care how you feel right now. I just want to know. If you knew you were gay after Jared, there was obviously some reason you still intended to marry me.”

“I love you, Dianne.”

It’s meaningless in the context and she knows it. “You love your parents,” she corrects, “and you didn’t want to be kicked out like Jared was if you told them the truth.”

*

Jensen looks like he can’t breathe again and Jared’s not having that. Stepping forward, he places a reassuring hand on Jensen’s lower back, his little finger just grazing the edge of Jensen’s welts.
“Thank you for looking for me,” he interjects gently. “I’ll go and find Megan now.”

Jensen makes a muffled sound of protest and tries to turn.

Jared grips his belt and pulls him back to face Dianne, not letting go. “Are you going to tell Alan and Donna?” he asks her.

“What? No!” She looks appalled. “That’s for Jensen to do. Or not do, if he chooses not to, but I won’t be a part of his cover-up. I won’t cover for either of you.”

“We understand.” He shouldn’t be talking for both of them like this, but Jensen is in distress and Jared needs to take care of him. “And we’re sorry, Dianne. Both of us.”

Her scorn is gone and now she just looks at them both with pity. “A lot makes sense now that didn’t before. If Jensen’s gay, I get it, he can’t do anything about that, but he—you could have had the decency to break up with me if you fell in love with Jared, Jensen.”

Jensen just nods, incapable of speech.

Giving up on him, she fixes her eyes on Jared. “Don’t hurt him. Take care of him.”

Her generosity strips him of words as well. Dumbly, he nods.

“I’ll get a lift home with someone else. Please tell Megan I said goodbye and it was a pleasure meeting her.”

She reunited him with his sister and in return he shattered her world. He nods again.

“Jensen, I’ll leave it to you to tell your parents why we broke up. If you don’t want them to know the truth, then it’s on you to come up with a reason they’ll accept.”

With that, she leaves them, head high, walking straight and sure like her life isn’t in splinters around her.
Jared and Jensen watch Dianne leave in silence.

All around them, people are milling towards the car parks, the show over, celebrations completed for another year. Megan is somewhere among them and Jared needs to find her before she panics that he’s disappeared again.

He can’t let go of Jensen’s belt.

“Sh-she broke up with me,” Jensen says at last. “Didn’t she? Dianne and I are over?”

“Yeah.”

“She knows.”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think she meant it about not telling my parents?”

Shit, does that mean Jensen is staying in the closet regardless? “Yeah, she meant it.” Jared lets go. “I need to find my sister.”

“Oh. Of course.” Jensen undoes the death grip he had on Jared’s other hand that Jared hadn’t even noticed until the pins and needles sweep in at the sudden release. “Yes, sure. Let’s find Megan.”

So much for being Jensen’s *everything*. The relief on Jensen’s face means Jared has still lost.

As they pass the temporary restroom facilities, empty now that everyone is streaming home, he gestures at an outdoor cubicle. “I’m just gonna—I need—”

“Sure. Same.”

They separate into individual cubicles. Jared’s too tall for it, but he braces his hands on the back wall and lets his body slump in defeat. He has less than a minute to pull himself together to be bright and cheerful for Megan, for Jensen’s parents when they get home and continue the pretence.

Fuck. It seems like his intention happened, to have Dianne break up with Jensen, but if only she hadn’t had to discover the full extent of their betrayal. Right now she has nobody to turn to for comfort and Jared knows how that feels but there’s nothing he can do. After Jensen, he’s the very last person she’d want to see now.

He knew Jensen was taken from the moment he first saw him, golden and laughing in the quad beside his lovely girlfriend, and he should have been better than that, should never have offered his body, his heart, to a man who didn’t belong to him. He’s every bit as disgusting as his parents made out.
Well. Karma’s a bitch because he’s not getting Jensen anyway. If Jensen wants to stay in the closet now that he’s free, Jared’s not going to stay there with him. He’s done with sneaking around, with pretending. Look at where it’s led them.

He hears the flush from the next cubicle. Jensen is done. Jared needs to leave too. Squeezing his eyes closed, he takes three deep, measured breaths.

Okay. Time to go.

They walk in silence through the crowd, searching faces in the darkness. In the end, it’s Megan who finds them.

“Jared? Jared!” She taps his shoulder from behind. “Good thing you’re so tall. What the hell happened to you? You just disappeared.”

“I’m—” Jensen waves his arm in the general direction of the car park. “I’ll get the car and meet you on the road on the other side of those trees from earlier.”

Earlier when he told Jared it was only sex. “Sure.” It’s obvious he needs a few minutes alone, even though everything in Jared’s body is crying to not let him out of his sight. “We’ll go and wait there for you.”

Megan watches Jensen disappear, then turns back to Jared with a frown. “That makes no sense,” she says. “It’s just as quick for us to go with him.”

Taking her arm, he starts walking across the crowd in the direction of the trees. “He needs some space.”

“Space?” She looks behind her. “Is he okay?”

“Not really.”

“Jared. What happened?”

There’s no way he can keep this from her, is there? “He and Dianne broke up tonight.”

“They did?” She sounds sceptical. “Why?”

“It’s their business, Megan, not ours.”

“Did it have anything to do with the way you and he couldn’t keep your eyes off each other all day?”

Shit. “Megan—”

“You can’t expect me not to see what’s right in front of me, Jared. You two are obvious as hell.”

“We’re not.” Are they?

She fixes him with the scathing look she’s had since she was a toddler. “First off, all that clinging together at the bus station? Not typical best friend behaviour. Secondly, you hardly looked at me for two seconds straight all afternoon because you were too busy ogling him, and when I watched him too, he was just as bad. Thirdly, did you think I didn’t notice you two disappeared for nearly an hour when you went to get chairs, and then came back without them? Or that he was walking funny for the rest of the day?”
“It’s not—we didn’t—” He can’t tell his little sister the real reason Jensen was walking funny. “You can’t tell anyone.”

“Who’m I gonna tell?”

“Jensen’s parents. They don’t know.”

“They don’t know he’s gay?”

“They don’t even know that I am. You can’t say anything, Megan.”

“I won’t.” They’ve reached the road and she leans back against a rail as cars snake slowly by. “I thought you were out.”

“I am.” He mirrors her pose, minus the crossed arms. “Just not in Texas. Well, not to Jensen’s family.”

“They wouldn’t react well?”

“He says not.”

“I don’t know them very well, but they seem nice. And they both like you a lot.”

“Yeah.” And given how badly he doesn’t want to lose their regard, it’s hard to blame Jensen who has so much more to lose.

*

Megan fills the ride home with bright, casual chatter about the day. Jared is grateful because it enables him to reply without needing to pay much attention, leaving him free to concentrate on Jensen in the driver’s seat beside him. Jensen doesn’t speak, nor does he meet Jared’s eyes. For a few minutes Jared allows himself to believe in the hope that maybe he’s gearing himself up to come out to his parents when they get home, but if that were true wouldn’t Jensen want him to be a part of it? Wouldn’t Jensen turn to him for support? The fact that Jensen is shutting him out instead confirms what Jared doesn’t want to know.

It’s not enough. Dianne breaking up with him is still not enough for him to choose Jared, no matter the crap he spouted about Jared being everything to him.

It’s still over.

Should he despise himself for hoping Jensen will give him one last fuck before they part?

The lights are still on when they arrive home, which means Jensen’s parents are up. The stupid part of Jared that refuses to give up clings to his vain hope all the way until they go inside and Jensen meets his mother’s greeting with a muttered, “I’m going to take a shower,” and disappears up the stairs.

Yeah. No coming out happening here.

Donna blinks after him for a second then turns to Jared. “What’s going on with him? And where’s Dianne? I thought you were bringing her back for a nightcap.”
No, please. It can’t possibly be left to him to break the news. A glance at Megan doesn’t help. She looks as panicked as he feels. “Um,” he says.

“Jared?”

Jensen must know Donna would question him. What the hell does he want Jared to say? It would serve him fucking right if Jared outed him. “She and Jensen broke up this evening.”

“Oh.” Hand flying to her mouth, Donna looks back up the stairs. “Is he all right?”

“No really.” What else can he answer?

Her gaze returns to him, unreadable. Does she suspect? Does she have any clue that he’s been fucking her son for months and ruined his future marriage? “And Dianne?”

“No.” He feels like a naughty child beneath her inquisition. “She, uh, went home with another friend. Christopher, I think?” He and Megan saw them drive by in the traffic.

Donna must approve of Christopher, because she eases slightly. “I see.”

He’s terrified her next question will be a demand to know what happened and he has no way to answer that.

Instead, she gestures them towards the kitchen. “When Jensen was young,” she says conversationally as they reluctantly follow, “I used to make him lemon and honey tea when he was upset. Would you take it up to him, Jared? I already have the kettle on.”

“Sure.” He perches awkwardly on the edge of the table. “I didn’t know he drank tea.”

“Only in circumstances like this. Megan, be a dear and get me the mug right at the back there, the one with the bear face on it.”

A bear? Jared shudders at the vicious roaring face when Megan produces it. “Don’t tell me that’s Jensen’s favourite mug.”

“He chose it when we went on a hiking trip once.” Donna’s face softens as she takes the mug from Megan. “He’d been having some trouble with bullying at school and he said that’s what he wished he could be like.” She gives the mug a little pat before filling it with water. “I’ve kept it safe for him ever since for when he needs it.”

Megan twists around to look at him and he reads on her face exactly what he’s thinking: their mother would never permit such an indulgence in the first place, let alone keep it for future moments of vulnerability.

“There you go.” Donna finishes squeezing in the fresh lemon and holds the mug out to Jared. “Megan and I will be in the living room with Alan when you’re ready to join us.”

“Thanks.” Her instruction makes no sense. When he’s ready? When both he and Jensen are? It sounds so formal and his stomach clenches. “I’ll just take this up to him.”

He doesn’t know what to expect as he makes his way up the stairs. There’s no sound of the shower running. Jensen’s door is half open and since he must have heard Jared coming and didn’t close it, Jared pokes his head in. “Your mom sent you something.”

Jensen’s on the edge of the bed, shirt stripped off, his belt coiled in his hands. He looks up from it at
Jared’s voice. “I want us,” he says. “I want us, Jay, but I’m so fucking scared.”

Jared freezes in the doorway. “I thought you’d changed your mind.”

“No.” With a despairing laugh, Jensen snaps the belt. “You’re it for me. Only you.”

Why does he look so distraught? Easing inside, Jared sets the mug down on the desk before kneeling down in front of Jensen. “Do you believe me now that you’re it for me too?”

Jensen jerks his head. “What if I’m not enough for you, though?” he says in a small voice. “You’re used to having anybody. Everybody.”

“That was before you.”

“Chad—”

“Was because you were leaving me. Not because I wanted him.”

“In New York—”

“I told you, I didn’t fuck anyone there.”

“But those pictures you sent....”

“Yeah, I wanted to hurt you, I admit it. It was stupid. But, Jen, I made sure you knew I went home alone. I didn’t touch anyone the whole time I was there, I swear.”

Jensen bites his lower lip and fiddles with the belt some more. “What if you get tired of me?”

“Never.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes, I do. You ruined me for anyone else, don’t you get that?”

“You ruined me too,” Jensen says with a glimmer of a smile. Setting aside the belt, he reaches for Jared’s hands. “I want to be yours so badly, Jared.”

“You are.” Tears prick the corners of his eyes. Can this really be happening? “I’m scared, though. I’m sorry, you must think I’m pathetic.”

“No.” He pours all of his soul into the word, desperate for Jensen to understand. “I get it, I do. Listen to me. If you need time, that’s fine. We don’t need to say anything yet. You’re still in shock from Dianne finding out, it was horrible, and it’s okay if you’re shaken. I’m not going to pressure you. Please don’t think that I expect you to march downstairs and come out right this moment. If you want to do that, I’m all for it and I’ll be there to support you, but if you need some time then I’ll support you in that too. I just need to know we’re on the same page, that it’s going to happen.”

“It will.” Jensen rests his forehead against Jared’s for a moment, letting the ramifications of his decision sink in for both of them, then he sits back up. “I know you’re out and I know you can’t be with someone who’s not. I do understand that. I just—I can’t tonight.”

“It’s okay.” Everything is okay, more than okay. Jared is still too afraid to believe it’s true, but he
can feel the little bubble of excitement start in his heart. “Look, let’s take Megan back to San Antonio tomorrow, like Dianne suggested. I think it’ll help you to get away from here for a day. Plus, I’d kinda like to show you where I come from.”

There’s Jensen’s shy little smile that Jared loves so much. It’s watery and nervous, but it’s there. “I’d like to see.”

“So there’s a plan.” Extracting one hand from Jensen’s grip, he curls it gently around Jensen’s cheek. “Do you still want to take a shower?”

“I want to take a shower with you,” Jensen says frankly. “But I’m guessing you’re going to say no.”

“Your parents are waiting for us downstairs with Megan. They said something about a nightcap.”

“4th of July tradition.” Jensen’s mouth twists, but his soft smile returns. “I know the timing isn’t right, it’s okay. I need a couple of moments to get myself together so maybe I’ll take the shower anyway before coming down to join you.” He glances at the bear mug. “What did you tell my mom?”

“That you and Dianne broke up. No more than that. I had to tell her something to explain why Dianne wasn’t here and I didn’t want to lie in case she called her. I know they’re close.”

“It’s all right. Thank you. I’m sorry I left you to do that. I shouldn’t have.”

“Whatever you need, Jen. It’s fine.”

“I need you inside me.”

Jared’s cock pulses at the words. It wants the same. “Maybe tomorrow we can stop somewhere on the way home.” At Jensen’s disappointed look, he says, “When I get you naked and spread open beneath me in bed, I’m not gonna be able to hold back. And you’re loud, Jensen, you’re fucking loud and I don’t want to try and keep us both quiet. We can’t do it here. Especially not tonight.”

“I know.” Jensen’s voice is resigned, but his eyes sparkle. “You’re sleeping with me, though. Promise.”

“Of course. Megan’s taking my room. I have no choice.”

*

To Jensen’s surprise, it turns into an enjoyable evening. He lets the shower wash away the remnants of his shaky trauma from earlier, and if some rough, wild crying happens too, well, swollen eyes fit with what his parents know took place with Dianne. Afterwards, dressed in some sweats and a t-shirt he filches from Jared’s bag in the next room, he makes his way downstairs to find photo albums spread all over the coffee table in the living room and his mother regaling Jared and Megan with stories of when he and Josh were little.

It’s the first time he’s heard her talk like this about Josh since he left, and she sounds fond and happy, no shadows in her eyes. Even so, he curls up on the sofa beside her with his reheated tea instead of going to sit with Jared in the armchair he’s claimed beside Jensen’s father. His position gives him a perfect view of Jared’s face, and he focuses on that while the conversation and laughter whirl around
him. This might be his last night so happily at home with his parents, with Jared, even with Megan, who already feels like a sister to him, and he soaks it in. His mother pats his knee every now and then, and his father keeps a concerned eye on him, so he tries to keep what he’s feeling off his face, and when he can’t, he hides behind his mug and the tea of his childhood.

When it’s time for bed, his father says goodnight and the rest of them traipse upstairs to remake Jared’s bed for Megan. His mother takes it for granted that Jared will bunk in with him, and he’s grateful there’s no requirement for a conversation about it.

Just before his mother heads back downstairs, she pulls him aside. “Jared told me what happened,” she says. “I’m not going to ask you about it because I can see you’re not up to talking yet, but when you want to, I’m here.”

She’s right. He’s hardly said a word and even now feels a constriction in his throat that makes words impossible. Finding a smile, he nods, hoping it conveys everything he needs it to.

“I’ll make you some sandwiches to take with you in the morning. Jared said you’re leaving early?”

Are they? It makes sense, so he nods again.

“I’ll make them tonight then. Don’t forget to take them.”

He wants to fall into the love in her eyes and wrap himself up in it. “We won’t.”

Her smile is the one she always gave him when he was a little boy running to mother to fix his woes. “Let Jared share the driving. It’s a long way there and back.”

“I will.”

“I told him that too.” Patting his arm, she looks through into Josh’s room where Jared and Megan are laughing about something. “They’re great kids. You did a good thing in bringing them back together.”

She doesn’t know the details of Jared’s estrangement from his family, she was sensitive enough not to press for details, and he feels so full of gratitude for how lucky he’s been to have her as a mother that he reaches out and pulls her into his arms. She startles, not accustomed to hugs outside of greetings or departures, then hugs him back tightly.

“I love you,” he whispers into her ear, then has to bury his face in her shoulder at the threat of tears when she whispers it back. Have they ever said it before?

When she pulls away, she keeps her hand on his arm and he sees a reflection of his tears in her eyes too. “Drive safely tomorrow,” she says, then raises her voice to call goodnight to Jared and Megan.

They emerge from Josh’s room. Megan has her own goodbye hug to give and he’s sure Jared wants to as well, given his predilection for hugging, but he hangs back and Jensen suspects it’s out of guilt. Behind his back he reaches for Jared's hand, careful not to let his mother see, and Jared squeezes his fingers hard. The three of them watch her make her way down the stairs and into the kitchen.

“You can hold hands openly now,” Megan says once she’s gone. “It’s okay, I know.”

“She figured it out,” Jared says when Jensen turns to him. “She said we’re obvious.”

“You are.” She looks meaningfully down at their linked hands. “I don’t know how they haven’t guessed.”
Jensen tried so hard downstairs earlier to keep from showing anything, but this isn’t the time to think about that. Not yet.

“Just don’t be loud tonight,” she continues. “A girl needs her beauty sleep.” With that, she swivels on her heel and closes Josh’s door behind her.

*

“I, uh, I’m gonna take a shower,” Jared says once they’re left alone. He’s sticky with sweat from the day.

Jensen’s eyes, shadowed from worry after discovering how obvious they’ve been, light up. “I’m not invited to join you, am I?”

“You’ve had your turn.” Truth be told, there’s nothing Jared wants more, but it feels wrong. It’s stupid, it’s too late, but he feels they owe Dianne that much respect at least. “I’ll be two minutes.”

“Am I allowed to at least share the bathroom with you so I can brush my teeth?”

It’s not in him to say no to that, so they enter the bathroom together. Turning on the water, Jared tugs off his shirt. “Hey, you’re not here to stare at me.”

“Sure I am.” Jensen grins as he squeezes toothpaste onto his toothbrush. “C’mon, keep going.”

“You’re going to destroy my good intentions.”

“I’m being a good boy. You’re the one with dirty thoughts.”

“Hard not to have those when I’m stripping around you.” The feel of his belt in his hands when he pulls it off reminds him of Jensen’s welts. Was that really only today? “Bend over, Jen.”

About to put his toothbrush into his mouth, Jensen pauses. “That sounds suggestive.”

“I want to check you.” He indicates the belt. “Did you put some cream on earlier?”

Jensen puts the toothbrush down with alacrity. “I didn’t think about it.” He leans down, resting his forearms on the counter. “You’d better take care of me, Jay.”

Their eyes meet in the mirror as Jared moves up behind him. Heat radiates through the soft material of Jensen’s thin sweats and Jared palms his cheeks through them, making Jensen hiss. “Sore?”

“Yeah.” But he thrusts his ass back into Jared’s hands. “I’m out of practice.”

Jared squeezes, just for the pleasure of hearing that hiss of pain again. “I should have given you a warm up, I’m sorry.”

“It was perfect. It helped me get through the day.” Jensen keeps hold of his gaze in the mirror. “It felt like you were with me, touching me, nonstop.”

“I’m touching you now.” He never wants to stop, wants his hands on Jensen eternally. “Arch your back for me.”
Jensen obeys and Jared carefully lifts the material up so that it won’t scrape over his sore skin as he lowers the pants to Jensen’s thighs. “Shit.” Jensen’s entire ass is a dull, puffy purple now that it’s had time to bruise, with several darker streaks from particularly hard blows. “I didn’t mean to do it this hard.” How was he sitting downstairs without screaming?

“Feels good,” Jensen says. “I like it. We must do it more.”

“Not till you’re better.” Is it wrong of him that he wants to scrape his nails over the welts?

“There’s cream below the basin. That’ll help, if you insist.”

“I do insist. I hurt you—”

“I asked for it.”

“Not like this.”

Twisting, Jensen looks over his shoulder to meet Jared’s eyes directly. “You know what I wished?”

“What?”

“That you could do it in public, in front of everyone, just like you said. I know it was fantasy, but I wanted it to be true. After all, I was rude to you in public. It would only be right if you punished me so everyone could see.”

Jared’s hands close over the fierce heat of the beaten skin. “Jen, you know I wasn’t doing that for punishment, though, right? I would never do something like that, not for real.”

“I wish you could,” Jensen says. “I wish you could show everyone that I belong to you.”

“You do belong to me.” He squeezes, digging his fingers into injured flesh. “Only I get to do this to you.”

“Only you.”

Jensen is his. Jensen is truly his. Getting down on his knees, Jared reaches around him to find the tub of cold cream. He applies a scoop without warning for the fun of hearing Jensen yelp. The cream melts on impact, unequal to the blaze Jared created. He still can’t believe he did this, that he hurt Jensen so visibly. Nothing they did before was this intense.

“Drivin’ is gonna be tough for you tomorrow.”

“Yeah.” Jensen sounds inappropriately happy about that. “How’s it looking?”

“Bad.” He applies more cream. “This just about sizzles on you.”

“Feels nice. Soothing.”

“Don’t let me do this to you again.”

“I’m gonna beg you to do it to me again. I’ve missed it. This and so much else. There’s so much I want to try, Jay. So many things I wanna know how they feel.”

“You sound like you have a list.”

“I do.” Jensen twists again so he can grin down at him. “I can write it out for you.”
“You do that.” He thought Jensen’s body was denied to him forever and suddenly here he is being offered everything. It’s too good to be true and he presses a kiss against one of the hot cheeks in front of him.

Jensen moans, thrusting backwards. “You too.”

“Me too?”

“A list. I want to see yours. All of yours. Every single thing you can imagine wanting to do to me, try with me, inflict on me.”

Jared kisses his other cheek. “I don’t wanna scare you.”

“I’ll do mine first then. It’s extensive. Then you can tell me how many items on it are also on yours.”

So many possibilities flash through his mind they make him shiver with need, but he contents himself with a light slap across the centre of Jensen’s ass. “You wait here for me, while I shower, like this.”

“There’s a mirror, you know. I can still watch you.”

Standing up, he smirks. “I know.”
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

The return to San Antonio.

Jared meant it about not having sex. In bed, they snuggle up against each other, naked bodies wound together, and Jensen’s relieved to feel Jared hard against him. At least it’s not for lack of desire. When Jensen slips his hand back between them to wrap around Jared’s cock, Jared immediately removes it.

“I’m too close.”

“So let me.” Jensen wriggles around so that he’s facing Jared. “I’m not asking you to fuck me, but I want you to come. Let me suck you.”

“Jensen.”

“I know what you said. I get it. But that doesn’t mean you have to suffer.”

“I already came twice today.”

It’s guilt speaking, Jensen knows it, and he doesn’t want Jared to feel that. He did nothing wrong, it was all Jensen. Jensen was the one who wasn’t free, Jensen’s the one who cheated. Dianne’s pain tonight is all on him, solely on him, and he’s not forgetting that. “Tell me no for me, but let me do this for you. I—I need to.” Because kissing is something they do now, he brushes his lips over Jared’s. “Let me, Jay.”

“You’re a menace,” Jared says, but he’s laughing. He pulls Jensen closer with a firm hand behind his neck and kisses him properly. Damn, but they were missing out all this time they both avoided this.

Taking charge, Jensen rolls on top of him, straddling his hips so their cocks rub together while they kiss. He keeps it going for as long as he can, until he knows the next thrust will push him over, then he wrenches his mouth away. “Let me.”

Eyes wild with desire, Jared pants, “Fuck, Jensen, okay. But you—”

“Tell me no,” Jensen says again, and slides down Jared’s body, littering his chest with kisses as he goes. “This is for you. It’s my gift to you.”

It’s him saying sorry, and I love you, and I want you, and I forgive you, and he knows exactly how to torment Jared’s cock to hold him on the verge of coming but drawing it out, backing him away from it just enough, then pushing him up again. Jared’s hands clench in his hair, shooting sparks of pain through his scalp. Jensen moans around his cock, knowing just how much Jared likes that, and gets his reward, Jared’s come. Savouring it in his mouth, he makes sure Jared is completely finished before he swallows it down. God, how he’s missed that.

As for himself, he’s so hard he hurts. “Jay,” he murmurs, rubbing himself against Jared’s leg as he moves up the bed again. “Wanna come.”
“No.”

The word itself nearly pushes him over. Desperately he presses against Jared’s spent cock. “Need to.”

“No, baby.” Turning over, Jared dumps him onto his side. He fits himself against Jensen’s back and captures his hands in his, pulling them up, away from his cock. “No, no, behave yourself.”

How is it that getting what he wants drives him so insane with need? “Changed my mind.” He bites down on Jared’s hand and wiggles his ass—but, oh God, the rasp of Jared’s body hair against his raw skin is enough to spark off the start of his climax. “Jared—fuck—help!”

Instantly understanding, Jared grabs Jensen’s cock, squeezing his fingers around the base. Jensen buries his howl in Jared’s forearm, shuddering violently as though he’s coming, except he’s not. He’s not, Jared got to him in time.

“Love you,” he says as his body shivers its way back to normal.

Jared’s lips find his for a sweetly chaste goodnight kiss. “I love you too.”

*

Jensen wakes feeling hungry. Instructing Jared to drive, he polishes off two of his mother’s sandwiches before they’ve left Dallas behind, and he gets Jared to stop twice in the next couple of hours, once for burgers and a second time for pastries and muffins.

“You’re gonna make yourself sick,” Jared says, but he’s grinning.

Savouring the remaining fruity pastry, Jensen points out, “I fed you half of my muffins.” It’s fun having Jared eat from his fingers, but he wants to do it the other way around again. Maybe on the return journey.

“You two are disgusting,” Megan remarks from the back seat.

She’s been joking about that off and on all morning, so Jensen happily ignores her.

It’s not a particularly scenic trip, but the sky is cloudless and Megan’s music blasting from the car stereo, while not his and Jared’s style, is entertaining, and he has Jared right beside him to gaze at to his heart’s content without having to worry about what he’s giving away since Megan knows all about them. She’s great company too, divulging Jared’s embarrassing childhood secrets—fair play after all his mother’s stories last night—and teasing both of them with sarcastic comments that Jensen loves.

He also loves her for her joyful welcoming of Jared back in her life, as well as her easy acceptance of what caused him to leave it. Frequently yesterday he caught Jared staring at her as though looking at a miracle. It took him a while to stop doubting, stop bracing himself for a sudden about-face and rejection from her. Jensen was worried too, because she obviously took Jared’s seeming abandonment of her hard. Maybe it’s the understanding of just how impossible it was for him to be gay in their hometown that’s sparked such gracious forgiveness from her.

But thoughts of that stray too close to what Jensen doesn’t want to think about right now. He’s left
all that behind him in Dallas. Today is for celebrating and rejoicing and revelling in being in love with Jared.

Jared loves him back.

It’s hard to believe, but it’s true. Jared loves him and wants to be with him, regardless of Jensen’s cowardly behaviour.

Jared loves him.

As if sensing what he’s thinking about, Jared glances across. His hand slides onto Jensen’s thigh and squeezes. Hard.

“Do you two need to stop for a make-out break?” Megan asks. “Because we’re nearly in Austin and you could probably get away with it there.”

*

Jared never dreamed that the next time he’d enter San Antonio’s city limits would be with the man he loved beside him. Truthfully, when he left, he never expected to be back at all.

He’s grateful Jensen lets him drive even after their brief stop in Austin. It helps to have something to concentrate on instead of just the flood of memories. Everywhere he looks, that’s where a part of his life happened, a life he’s left so far behind him now that he usually manages to pretend it never existed at all. But it did. And right now it’s all around him.

As they drive past his old high school, he nods towards it with his head. “You go there?” he asks his sister.

“Yeah.”

She’s become strangely quiet since they reached San Antonio, as if sensitive to his mood. Jensen hasn’t said a word either, just rests his hand casually high on Jared’s thigh as if to ensure he knows he’s not facing this alone.

It helps.

Jensen watches the school go by. “Has it changed?”

“Doesn’t look like it.” There are the steps where he and Stephen used to hang out. There’s the geography building where he got his first blow job. There’s the football field, where he used to watch Stephen train once he joined the football team, where he watched him start eyeing up the cheerleaders and eventually, one day, saw him with one of them beneath the bleachers, Meredith going down on him the way Jared had longed to. The bleachers look new. Shinier and higher. As though they needed to be replaced after what they witnessed.

Is Stephen still with her today?

“The bike sheds haven’t changed,” he remarks as they turn the corner and he can see them in the distance. He glances at Jensen, unable to remember if he told him this much detail about his past. “That’s where I got caught with Mr Morgan the day I—I left.”
“You got caught?” Megan echoes.

He certainly didn’t go into any of the details with her. “Yeah.” He looks at Jensen again. “What you call my exhibitionist tendencies are actually more a product of nowhere private to go around here.”

Jensen’s lips twitch. “Mr Morgan, huh?”

“My geography teacher.”

“That’s what gets you going? Jared, you should’ve told me. I’d let you call me Mr Ackles—”

“I’m still here!” Megan interjects. “Wait until you drop me off then you two can roleplay all you want. I can tell you the code to the gate on the north side and you can replay that on location, if you like. That’s still where kids go.”

Smiling, when he felt like smiles were annihilated, Jared looks back over his shoulder at her. “I hope you don’t know that from experience, young lady.”

“Hey,” she sticks out her tongue, “I’m older than you were back then.”

“And a lot more innocent, I hope.”

He knows she is, from a conversation they had in the park yesterday when she confessed to him that she’s never had a boyfriend and isn’t fully certain she wants one because she has so many other, more exciting plans for her life once she’s old enough to escape their parents. She made him tell her all about his trip to Europe and berated him for not going further, not seeing more. Forbidden from doing what most normal kids get to do during high school, she spends her time dreaming and scheming and researching, and she’s already mapped out an elaborate plan for a round-the-world trip as soon as she can earn the money. It starts with hiking to Machu Picchu and takes in penguins in Antarctica, caving in New Zealand, diving in the South Pacific, culminates in a full moon party in Thailand, preferably for her 21st birthday, before chilling out with the wildlife of Africa and taking in a museum or two in Europe. The details of her research, even down to places to stay and how best to get around each country, convince him that she’s serious and he’s already making plans to add to her funds as best he can. He couldn’t take her with him when he left, but he can help her make her own version of escape. College can wait, especially for someone who has no clear career passion yet. Not everyone is born with a love of a subject that means they want to make it their lifelong occupation.

Like Jensen. He’s supposed to be majoring in finance, and it’s obvious that he has little interest in it. But when Jared asked him about it in the past, he declared he doesn’t have much interest in anything else either, so he may as well get a degree in that. That’s something to think about too, helping Jensen find his true passions. It makes sense that if he’s spent the past four years denying himself everything he wants, he’s lost touch with his own desires.

Jensen and denial is something else to contemplate. Last night he was desperate to climax but then looked so gratified when Jared didn’t allow it that Jared was overwhelmed with relief that he hadn’t gone with his own desire to see Jensen come. He needs to figure that out, make sure it’s not about Jensen trying to punish himself but it’s truly something he enjoys for its own sake.

Oh, so many delightful experiments lie ahead for them. The more they try, the more ideas spark in Jared’s mind, and Jensen’s not short on them either. Just as soon as Jared stops being too afraid to believe that Jensen really is his now, he’s going to write that list Jensen asked for. It’s already forming in his mind.
Delectable thoughts of Jensen’s naked body and the pleasures he can inflict upon it keep him happily occupied as the car turns the corners of his childhood until it comes to stop at the kerb opposite their house.

“We’re here,” he says unnecessarily.

All three of them stare at the house. It’s very similar to Jensen’s, but he won’t be seeing all the memories Jared can see, the strongest of which is the way he slumped against the front door after storming out of it, wondering if he dared take his bicycle to get into town or if they’d send the police after him.

He walked.

“It’s okay,” Jensen says. He’s looking at Jared, not at the house, and his left hand finds Jared’s right. His eyes say *I’m here* and *you’re safe* and *I love you*, and Jared squeezes his hand gratefully.

“They’re out this morning,” Megan interrupts. “They always do brunch on Saturdays at Cappy’s.”

It’s strange to think that their lives have gone on just the way they did before his departure.

“It’s barely eleven,” she continues, “and you know they’re never back until after midday. Do you want to come in?”

He shouldn’t. He shouldn’t take that risk. He glances at Jensen, who squeezes his hand again. “It’s up to you.”

“I have some of your stuff,” Megan says, “from before. When they got rid of everything, I saved some of it. Just in case you ever came back.”

Trying not to let that get to him, he takes a deep breath. He can’t cry, not in front of his sister. “Just for a moment,” he hears himself say, even though he hasn’t fully decided it’s a good idea. “Just to show Jensen.”

There’s a new kitchen, but otherwise the house is identical to when he left it. Everywhere, that is, except what used to be his bedroom.

“It’s her sewing room,” Megan tells him from the doorway as he swivels around inside it. There’s new paint, covering up the holes left from his posters, no doubt. The curtains at the window are delicate cherry stripes instead of bright blue, and the carpet is white instead of pale grey. Looking around, you’d never know that a teenage boy once lived here and despared here.

Jensen still has tight hold of his hand. He’s probably hurting Jensen with how tight his own grip is, but he can’t make himself ease up. His body feels so rigid he can hardly breathe.

“I’ll get your things,” Megan says.

Once they’re alone, Jensen brings their joined hands up and presses his lips to the back of Jared’s hand. “Thank you for bringing me here.”

Wrenching his attention away from the obliteration of his identity as the son of this household, he tries to smile. “I should have expected this.”

The contrast between his old room and Josh’s old room is stark. It’s still called Josh’s room, it still looks like it belongs to a young man who could return to reinhabit it at any moment. This isn’t even a bedroom.
“We can leave as soon as you want to,” Jensen says.

Megan’s room has been redecorated as well, no longer the pink frills of her girlhood but now elegant sleek lines of cream and crimson. She still has the same bed, though, where he used to curl up with her to read her stories when she was little, and the same desk where he helped her with her maths homework and she shared with him the tales she spent her spare time concocting about adventures in far-off lands. He should have guessed she’d grow up wanting to go and experience those adventures for herself.

It’s not surprising that it’s mostly books she kept for him. His tattered copies of The Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter, his beloved The Hobbit, several other fantasy books he was just getting started on, and the detective series he’s never finished because he was in the middle of the second-last book when everything happened and he couldn’t even think about those characters without being reminded of that catastrophic time. There’s also his telescope, a prize for coming first in his class age fourteen, which Mr Morgan taught him how to use in between teaching him other delights, and his precious pocketknife that he really could have done with on the streets of New York during his first scary days there. Finally, there’s a teddy bear, a gift from his grandmother when he was three. He called it Sam and Sam was the recipient of all his boyhood tears and frustrations, always there for him when he needed to share what couldn’t be said aloud, kept in pride of place in the centre of the bed despite the teasing he got from his friends, Stephen in particular.

“It’s Sam,” he says to Jensen, taking the ragged little bear. “This is Sam.”

Solemnly, Jensen reaches out to stroke a finger over Sam’s remaining fluff. “Hello, Sam.”

Jared giggles despite himself. Jensen looks so cute, so serious, as though he’s meeting an important person from Jared’s past (which he kinda is, but still), and Jared can’t resist bending down to kiss him.

“In my room?” Megan complains. “Seriously?”

If he thought she truly objected, he wouldn’t subject her to this, but he knows she likes being dramatic and she’s actually thrilled for him and Jensen. He winks at her over Jensen’s head, then kisses him again, more intently this time.

Jensen helps him carry the books and telescope downstairs. Jared slides the pocketknife into his jeans where it belongs and can’t make himself let go of Sam quite yet. Megan accompanies them to the car and laughs when Jensen takes Sam and sets him up on top of the books in the back seat so he can look out of the window.

“Thank you,” Jared says to her. “You have no idea how much it means that you kept all of this, even though you thought I’d left you.”

She pokes his arm. “You did leave me. But I forgive you.” Looking across at Jensen, she bites her lip. “I get it, why you had to go, why you couldn’t stay. And I’ve been okay, more or less. Or I will be. Just one more year and I’ll be free. Can I come and stay with you guys in New York?”

“You’re welcome to stay wherever I am, whenever you want to come. And I’m just a phone call or email away.”

“I’ll bombard you with all my plans. You can be my research assistant.”

Good, because he needs to make sure she’s as safe as possible when she sets out on her travels. “Any help you need, Megan. Always.”
“You too,” she says to Jensen. “We’re friends on Facebook now so I expect to see lots of updates about my brother. You can badger him to get back on Facebook too. I want pictures.”

Jensen grins at her. “Maybe not of everything.”

“Both of you have such dirty minds,” she grumbles, but she’s grinning too as she throws her arms around Jensen. “Thank you for finding me and writing to me. And I’m sorry I wasn’t very nice when I first replied.”

This is definitely a story Jared needs details about.

“That’s okay,” Jensen says. “Thank you for not just ignoring me.”

“It was the picture. He looked so happy, laughing like I didn’t remember ever seeing him laugh, and if you were the one who made him look like that, I couldn’t ignore it. I had to reply.”

“You sent her a picture?” Jared asks.

“One of those from the restaurant. I’ll show you.”

“You see, pictures get you good things,” Megan says. “Like sisters back in your life.” She pulls Jared down so she can kiss his cheek then she clings tightly, arms wrapped around his chest. “I need to know you’re not gone again, okay?”

“I won’t ever be gone,” he says into her hair. “Not from you.”

“You just wanted Sam back.” She pretends to pout, but her eyes are bright. “I should have held him hostage.”

“I’m not gone,” he re-emphasises. “You have my phone number, you have my email address and you have Jensen’s Facebook. You won’t lose us.”

“I better not. I also know where you live in New York now, so I can track you down.”

He’s made sure she has complete access to his current life, and he loves that she wants it. That she wants him, still accepts him as her brother.

“Drive safely,” she says as they walk her back across the road to the house. “Let me know when you get there.”

“We will.”

“And thank you for the lift home. It was much better than the bus.”

“It’s our pleasure,” Jensen says. “This way I get to see where you both come from.”

“You should have lunch in town before you leave. Show him some of the sights, Jared. There’s plenty to see here.”

“I don’t know if I could eat more right now,” Jensen jokes, patting his still worryingly flat stomach. “But maybe we should save the sights for another trip when we don’t have to worry about your parents and you can join us.”

Jared hears it before he sees it, they haven’t changed their car in the years that he’s been gone, but it takes several seconds too long for him to process what his sense are screaming in warning about, and by the time he looks down the road it’s too late.
Jensen feels Jared go rigid beside him. “Jay?”

“Shit,” Megan says. “Go!” She pushes at them. “Go quickly.”

But Jared doesn’t move. He’s watching a car pull up and when Jensen clicks who must be in it, he tries to pull but Jared’s too big to be moved if he doesn’t help.

“You have to get out of here,” Megan says frantically, pushing him again.

“Jay, come on—”

But it’s too late. The vehicle has stopped in the driveway and the man at the wheel, who looks scarily like Jared might look if he were filled with icy hatred, slowly opens his door, eyes riveted on his son.

“Jared,” Megan tries again, “leave!”

He’s obviously decided he isn’t going to run, so who is Jensen to force him? He ought to let go of him, having another man clutching his arm can’t possibly help the situation, but he can’t leave Jared to face this alone. After all, isn’t this about Jared being out, visibly and blatantly so? So Jensen keeps hold of his arm as it becomes clear there’s about to be a confrontation.

“Megan,” says Jared’s father as he approaches them, “get in the house.”

“She didn’t let me in.” Jared’s voice is high but clear. “She told me to leave.”

“Megan, now.”

Obediently she turns away from them, her eyes reflecting her apology for abandoning them. It’s okay, Jensen tries to reply silently. It’s better this way. Let her parents think she’s on their side and hopefully she’ll be safe.

Jared doesn’t take his eyes off his father.

“You are not welcome here,” the man says coldly.

“I’m on the sidewalk. It’s a free country.”

“You are not welcome anywhere in this town. Especially not with that—” He breaks off but both Jensen and Jared know what word he was about to say as he looked at Jensen. “—person hanging off you. Neither of you are welcome here.”

Jared’s arm slides around Jensen’s back, anchoring their bodies together. He’s trembling—or maybe that’s Jensen.

“You leave my daughter alone!” A very polished, elegant woman rounds the vehicle. She shares Megan and Jared’s colouring, but her face is pinched, her expression chilly. “I will not have you corrupting her.” She stops short when she sees Jensen, who was previous hidden from her by Jared’s bulk, and her eyes flash. “You dare to bring that here, to our home, to our family. You’re disgusting.”
It’s the same word that Megan’s been teasing them with all day, but while Megan’s voice was fond and accepting, her mother’s voice rips like a jagged knife down Jensen’s spine. It must have the same effect on Jared, because he flinches, and his fingers dig deep into Jensen’s side.

“You’re the d-disgusting ones,” Jensen says when it becomes evident that Jared can’t reply. “He’s your son and you should l-love him no matter what.”

“Like your parents do?” Scathing eyes rake across to him and see straight through him. She picked up his Texan accent and she knows.

She knows.

If his parents ever find out the truth, this is what they will do to him. This is how they will look at him. How they’ll talk to him. How they’ll treat him.

His throat constricts, strangling any further hope of words, and she reads his acknowledgement on his face.

“Get out,” she says quietly. “Get off this property, get out of this town, and don’t come back. Either of you. There are places you belong, and you should be grateful we’re letting you go.”

The de-gaying places, she means. Jensen did deeper research about those after Jared told him what happened to Stephen, and they made him sick to his stomach. Boys just like him, like Jared, have been forced there against their will and abused and tortured, just for loving the wrong kind of person. It’s only Jared’s strength and courage that saved him from that, and Jensen is fiercely proud of him.

“He made the right choice, leaving you,” he snaps. “You don’t deserve him.”

This time Jared moves when Jensen pulls, and he doesn’t look back. Jensen bundles him into the passenger seat, secures his seatbelt, then walks slowly and deliberately around to the driver’s side. He looks back at Jared’s parents, who seethe with ill will as they watch him.

“You won’t see him again,” he says.

That’s what they say they want, but he’s their son and some part of them must surely feel a wrench as Jensen joins him in the car and takes him away from them.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

On their way back to Dallas, Jared and Jensen seek solace in Austin.

It’s barely midday. All around San Antonio, people are going about their Saturdays, secure in their lives, in their place in the world. Jensen focuses on them as he finds his way out of the city and back to the interstate northwards again. He zeros in on individual faces, on smiles, on laughter, on animated chatter—anything to wipe away the ugliness of the faces that won’t leave his mind.

That’s who Jared grew up with.

That poisonous, malicious couple with ice in their eyes and fury in their veins.

They are Jared’s parents, the people who should love him the most.

No wonder Jared left.

On the other side of the car, Jared is hunched back in his seat, long arms wrapped around his body as though in protection, as though he still feels the attack no matter how many miles Jensen puts between him and those monsters. He’s staring at the road in front of them, but his eyes are glazed. Blank.

Empty.

He doesn’t even stir when Jensen pulls over to the side of the road for a few minutes, and Jensen knows he’s made the right decision.

The next time he stops, Jared rouses, looking around them in confusion. “Where are we?”

“Austin. I booked us a hotel.”

“We’re staying here?”

Maybe it’s too much, but Jensen wanted it to be somewhere nice. “Yeah.”

“Jensen—”

“Let me.”

He knows Jared is proud and doesn’t like to accept anything financially, but after a moment of looking dubious, he nods. “Okay.”

“Come on.”

They leave the valet to take care of the car, and Jensen settles Jared on one of the soft white sofas in the foyer while he checks them in, then leads him up to their room. One wall is entirely glass, looking out across the city, offering glimpses of the lake between the buildings.

“This is nice,” Jared says, taking it in.
“Yeah.” After all Jared’s been through, Jensen wants to give him everything of the best. “Listen, you want to lay down on the bed for a bit?”

“Lay down?”

“I’m going to give you a massage. Of course, this is the kind of hotel that has a spa and you could probably go downstairs and find some professionals to do it, but—”

“No, you give great massages.”

Yes, he does, and if Jared is remembering that then he’s not still stuck in San Antonio. “Take off your shirt,” he instructs, “but leave on your jeans.”

“This isn’t a massage with a happy ending?”

There’s a glimmer of a smile on Jared’s face and Jensen beams at him. “Oh, don’t worry, there’ll be a lot of happy endings in this room before we’re done.”

Jared strips off both his loose cotton shirt and his t-shirt in one move. Taking them from him, Jensen folds them neatly and gestures to the bed.

“On your stomach first.”

It feels good to get his hands on Jared again. As he suspected, Jared’s shoulders in particular are tight and knotted, and Jensen lets thought drift away as he concentrates on warm flesh and rigid muscle. Jared grunts a couple of times when Jensen has to dig deep into the tension, but the last-minute decision to bring lube along, just in case, pays off and soon he’s able to move down the sleek curve of Jared’s spine, seeking out other tender places that need soothing.

“You have magic hands,” Jared murmurs sleepily as Jensen works the small of his back. “I thought that last time.”

“They’re all yours.”

Turning Jared over, he eases the stress out of the muscles of his chest and arms before undoing his jeans. As slender as Jared is, his thighs are strong and firm. Jensen starts with them, getting Jared to flip over again so he can get to his tight calves before devoting several minutes to each foot. He knows from past experience of reflexology how pleasurable that can be.

“I should carry you around with me,” Jared says into the pillow, “everywhere I go, just for this.”

Jensen licks a stripe along Jared’s sole. “You have to make a decision now.”

“I do?”

“Yeah. I’m gonna do the next bit with my mouth, but you get to choose where you want it.” Sliding his hands up through the hair on the back of Jared’s legs, he closes them around the ass he’s been resolutely ignoring. “Either here, or round the front. Which do you prefer?”

Jared twists to look back over his shoulder. “Is this the happy ending part?”

“It can be. Or I can just play a bit.”

“Play a bit first.”

“Which side?”
“Where you are.”

Jensen was hoping Jared would pick that, even as he doubted he’d get so lucky. “My tongue okay?” He means for penetration, and Jared gets his meaning.

“Yeah, just your tongue, though.”

He’s longed to do this again and wants to dive straight in, but he restrains himself, first using his thumbs on the taut muscles on either side of the part he wants most. Jared moans when Jensen pulls his cheeks apart.

“That feels so exposing.”

Jensen loves that feeling, but he can accept that it’s uncomfortable for Jared. “How about if I do this?”

The first flick of his tongue elicits a surprised little gasp.

“That okay?”

“More, please,”

He takes it easy, aware of Jared’s extreme sensitivity here, interspersing nibbling and licking with nips to the swells of his cheeks and short explorations with his tongue up Jared’s spine. Soon Jared is writhing beneath him, moaning continuously, hips humping the bed in a way that gets Jensen’s blood raging.

“Want you to come on me,” Jared says suddenly. “Like you always want me to do, I want that. Want your come all over me.” Reaching back, he pulls his cheeks apart, baring his pink, wet hole for Jensen’s view.

Jensen knows fucking Jared is not on the table, indeed it might never be again, but the vivid memory of that tight heat surrounding him makes undoing his jeans a struggle. It’s only because of the weight he’s lost that he’s able to ease them over his bulging erection and he kicks them off, leaving them on the floor while he scrambles back onto the bed between Jared’s spread legs. On his knees, he takes over the grip from Jared on his right cheek so he can use his hand for the same purpose as Jensen is, his ass thrust high, enticing, demanding. It doesn’t take long for Jensen to reach the edge.

“’m ready,” he gasps.

“Me too—Jen, please!”

Just a single final pull and the climax feels ripped out of him, savage and violent. As the first blast streaks across Jared’s exposed hole, Jared gives a shout, convulsing beneath Jensen with the same explosiveness, roaring into the pillow as Jensen empties himself all over him.

*

Jared’s warm. Cosy even. Stretching out, he rolls over—only to discover he can’t.

“Don’ go.” Half on top of him, Jensen clings.
Jensen. He’s in bed with Jensen. “I’m not going anywhere.” Pulling out his left hand, he strokes the sweaty hair off Jensen’s forehead. “I’m just hot.”

“Me too. ‘S nice. Missed this.”

Jared has too. But if he can believe Jensen, this is their new normal. This is what he has to look forward to every morning.

He pushes the blankets down—how did Jensen get them into bed from on top of it?—and snuggles Jensen into his chest. There are so many practicalities they need to discuss, logistics of where they’ll live, how they’ll make this work. He should probably see if he can get his scholarship back; he can’t remember now what he told them. Something about a family emergency, maybe?

But, of course, all this depends on Jensen coming out. On Jensen being willing to make a life with him. He says he wants to, sure, but will he actually do it? Especially after the calamity he witnessed in San Antonio. Fuck, Jared can’t even think about that—and he was expecting it. What about sweet, naïve Jensen who has only experienced love from his family? It has to frighten him, knowing that he might have to face something similar when he comes clean with the truth about who he is.

What if he’s lost his nerve?

Jared has to be prepared for that. What if Jensen booked this fancy hotel to give them one last night together before telling Jared goodbye in the morning?

How can Jared blame him?

He can’t. If that’s Jensen’s decision, then Jared has to let him make it. What he can’t do, however, is let himself be strung along for weeks or months, possibly even years, with Jensen promising to come out and then never doing so. Nor can he be Jensen’s dirty secret, hidden away behind some fake relationship with a woman who Jensen might convince to help them. He knows that happens and he won’t be a part of something like that.

Not even for Jensen.

Yes, he loves Jensen, yes, he wants Jensen, but he has to honour himself first. If he compromises himself, makes allowances, violates his integrity—he might as well have stayed in San Antonio with his parents, pretending to be straight.

And the same goes for Jensen. He has to do what he can live with, and if he devastates his life and his family in order to be with Jared, how long before he starts resenting him for it? After Josh left, he was afraid for both his mother’s health and her sanity. Heaven forbid, but what if, after finding out the truth about Jensen, she goes into a decline and doesn’t recover? Jensen would never forgive himself, let alone Jared.

Beneath Jared’s hands, Jensen’s stomach rumbles.

“You’re hungry? Again?”

Jensen lifts Jared’s arm to check his watch. “It’s almost six. Definitely time for food. C’mon, get up. Let’s go find something to eat.”

Jared wouldn’t mind ordering something from room service and staying right here with Jensen in his arms, but it’s not a bad idea to get outdoors for a bit of exploration and fresh air. And he knows Jensen likes to move when he’s dealing with shit.
They end up getting Italian, of course. Jensen orders pizza and eats half of Jared’s risotto as well. Jared snags a slice of pizza, picking the pineapple off with outrage, and Jensen laughs loud and unfettered. He’s glowing tonight, which certainly isn’t the reaction Jared expected after San Antonio.

Fuck, but Jensen is beautiful.

What if this is their last night together?

He can’t think like that.

But he has to. He has to be prepared.

“You’d better have another slice,” Jensen says, holding one out, already denuded of pineapple.

“I have plenty here.” Jared indicates his risotto and Jensen smirks.

“You need all the energy you can get because I have plans for you tonight.”

“Plans, huh?”

“Big plans.”

He takes the pizza.

“See,” Jensen continues, “it’s been a really long time for me and I’m tight. It’s gonna take you a while to open me up, loosen me, get me ready to take you.”

“Jensen!”

“No one’s listening to us. It’s safe.”

“I’m listening. I’m listening while I eat and you don’t want your plans demolished by a trip to the ER because I’ve choked on your pizza.”

Jensen’s eyes gleam. “Are my words disturbing you, then?”

“Disturbing, fuck. You know what they’re doing to me.”

Nodding, Jensen adds, “I have some welts you might want to reacquaint yourself with, in that case.”

Jensen’s welts. He forgot all about them and Jensen’s spent hours sitting in the car all day without complaint. “How’re they doing? Still sore?”

Wiggling back and forth on his chair, Jensen considers. “In a very good way. But they could do with some attention. A bit of rubbing, maybe some pinching, a bit of pressure here and there.”

Jared is going to strangle him. “Wait, fuck, Jensen, please.”

“Fuck Jensen,” Jensen echoes. “I like that plan.”

Jared can’t help quickly checking their vicinity again. This may be Austin, but it’s still Texas. But no one is paying them the slightest attention—although how everyone’s attention isn’t riveted on Jensen’s flushed face and red lips and erotic squirming on that chair, Jared will never know. “Finish your pizza,” he says, his voice sounding as strained as he feels. “You have five minutes. Then I’m leaving and you’re coming with me.”
Obediently, Jensen reaches for his remaining slice. Giving up on his risotto, Jared signals their server. He’s paying for this meal, no matter what objections Jensen might make.

But Jensen remains quiet, focused on his pizza other than a cheeky wink at the server when she brings Jared’s change. She blushes and giggles, and Jensen sparkles happily at her.

“You’re incorrigible,” Jared says when she’s gone.

“She was nice.”

“You’re still gonna pay for that.”

And, yeah, there it is, the glint that proves Jared was right in thinking Jensen did that deliberately to elicit this response. That seals it. He literally hustles Jensen out of there, leaving a bigger tip than he’d intended to make up for the fact Jensen’s friendliness was for Jared and not for the server at all. Jensen comes easily, letting himself be manhandled out of the restaurant and down the sidewalk. Jared had thought of going for a walk along the water after they ate but that’s not happening because he needs Jensen all to himself right this moment.

“Kiss me,” Jensen says suddenly.

“Jen—”

“Here.” Jensen pulls him into a dark corner where Jared’s size can easily block the identity of the person he’s kissing. “Wanna kiss you in public, in front of people.”

Kissing Jensen is just as euphoric as he remembers it. Jensen’s alive in his arms, rolling his hips against Jared’s the way he does in bed, and he lets it go on longer than he intended because it feels too fucking good to stop.

“Need you in me,” Jensen mutters into his mouth. “Soon, Jay.”

The urgency in his voice gives Jared the impetus to pull away. “Don’t touch me again until we’re in our room. Walk in front of me so I can keep an eye on you.” If only they could hold hands as openly as the couple half a block ahead of them.

“You just want to stare at my ass,” Jensen accuses.

“Why would I ever deprive myself of that view?”

That gets him a flashing grin, then Jensen starts running and they burst into the foyer of the hotel horribly inelegantly, Jensen dancing just ahead into the elevator. Finally they’re in their room, door locked securely behind them.

“Strip,” Jared orders.

A week ago he thought he’d never see this again. Truth is, he may not after tonight. This could be the last time Jensen strips for him. Jensen makes the most of it, swirling his hips as though he’s on stage with a pole and Jared laughs and lusts and loves all at the same time. After what happened this morning, he revels in the warm happiness that is him and Jensen together. He has this. Right now Jensen is his and he’s about to be inside Jensen and he wouldn’t trade anything, not one single moment of all that crappiness back when he was sixteen and again this morning, because it’s brought him here to this opulent hotel room high above Austin with this beautiful, wonderful man who loves him.
He tries to talk to Jensen in the morning as they head northwards back to Dallas. Jensen woke him up with a blow job and then entreated him to renew the bruise that’s completely faded from his hip. He looks wrong without it and it’s good to know it’s back in place, Jared’s claim set deeply into his skin. As he drives, Jensen’s hand frequently strays to press against it and it’s obvious he missed having it.

But he won’t talk about the future other than to say, somewhat tersely, that he’s going to “do it” when they get home. He seems impatient, as if annoyed Jared would even question him, and that alarms Jared all the more.

Is he really going to do it?

Ten miles out of Dallas, Jensen suddenly says, “If they kick me out, can I come back to New York with you?”

It takes a second for Jared to quell the surge in his heart rate. “Yes,” he says, trying to sound casual. “I only have one room, but the guys wouldn’t mind.”

Jensen flicks a glance across. “We’ve been okay with just one room before.”

“And I do have a big bed. It takes up most of the room, but...” He shrugs. “We could manage.”

Another couple of miles pass, traffic beginning to build up.

“You wouldn’t mind?” Jensen asks. “Sharing with me, I mean.”

He can’t think of anything he’d like more. So much so that it takes a couple of attempts to clear his throat before he can say, “I’d love it.”

“Yeah,” Jensen says after a deft lane change to get around some slow vehicles, “I’d love it too.”

They’ve made good time after their delayed start this morning. It’s still hours until his mid-evening flight, but it’s a relief to know they’re back in Dallas where, hopefully, soon he’ll have the confirmation he needs that Jensen really means it.

Last night while Jared was deep inside him, Jensen kept repeating, “I love you, I love you, I love you, Jay, I love you.” He seemed to forget that any other words existed, just I love you and Jared’s name. The fervent repetition helped drive out the memory of words from earlier yesterday, words that will continue to wound Jared for the rest of his life no matter how hard he tries to excise them.

At least now his memory of the day after the 4th of July this year will be of burying himself inside Jensen’s extra tight heat and hearing those words, over and over again.

He said them too, afterwards, when they were cleaned up and wound together, breathing the same air, skin touching in as many places as possible. He said them and Jensen’s eyes got huge and luminous and he kissed Jared with the same reverence that Jared felt.

At least they said it.

At least they had last night.
“If they’re okay about it,” Jared says, as he starts to recognise some of the Dallas landmarks, “we can still—”

“We can discuss that then.”

Shit. It’s clear that Jensen isn’t expecting this to go well. On the other hand, despite expecting that, he’s still intending to go ahead with it.

That’s something.

“I love you,” he says, because he can, he’s allowed to, for this afternoon at any rate.

Jensen slows for a traffic light and his hand squeezes high on Jared’s thigh. “I love you too.” His eyes meet Jared’s, dark and turbulent. “Never doubt that.”

Jared doesn’t. He believes Jensen.

It’s just that he doesn’t know if Jensen loves him enough.
Chapter Summary

The time has come for Jensen to face his parents.

He should do it soon. Immediately. But maybe it would be better to wait until later so they don’t have to hang around the airport for hours before the flight to New York. He’s already checked that it has plenty of seats still available.

He’s also double-checked his savings account. There’s enough there, plus the money he’s earned during the past month working at the firm, to get him through several months. That’ll give him some time to find a new job without having to take the first crappy place that will hire him. Or it will give him a cushion to start at the bottom somewhere, fast food, if he has to, in order to get experience and references if his father refuses to give him even that.

While driving, Jensen has mentally gone through his belongings, sorting them into what he doesn’t mind abandoning and what he’d like to have time to cram into the single suitcase he’ll be able to take with him. Jared doesn’t have much space anyway, so he needs to take as little as possible.

Maybe he should pack first, have the bag ready for him to grab before they’re hustled out of there. At least he drew enough cash last night in Austin that he’ll be able to call a cab to fetch them and take them to the airport.

As for school, well, Jared’s already left and Jensen can’t afford the fees on his own. It’s no great loss. He can take night classes in New York, earn a degree that way, even it takes longer, or maybe put it off for a couple of years while he saves up.

It feels good to know he can survive independently—well, as independent as he can be living with Jared and using savings from both the salary and allowance over the years from his father. Why was he so afraid of this before? He can do this. No matter what it takes, no matter how menial or demeaning the job is that he’s able to get, he can do this.

After all, he’s in a vastly better position than Jared was, thrown out by those people at sixteen with no skills, no money, and no boyfriend’s love to depend on.

He can do this.

Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad to never be able to come back to Texas. Texas sucks in so many ways if you’re gay. And it’s not like he has a lot of friends here. He lost touch with his high school friends after leaving for university, and the new friends he was making at Dianne’s church obviously won’t want to have anything to do with him now. Outside of his parents, there no person here that he will miss.

And doesn’t that say a lot about the state of his life.

His mother comes out to greet them when she hears his car in the driveway. “Welcome back, boys,” she calls as they stretch their bodies out after several cramped hours of driving. “I have some lunch ready for you.”
He texted her just before leaving Austin, and he should have known to expect this. Her smile cuts through him. Will she ever smile again after he devastates her world?

Jared smiles back at her. God, he has a gorgeous smile. Jensen gets lost in the beauty of it, the beauty of this man in general, this man who inexplicably loves him and wants him just as much as Jensen loves and wants him in return. This man who woke Jensen up from the mindless tedium of the life he’d resigned himself to living, severely repressing the truth he couldn’t bear to admit.

No matter how badly this turns out, Jensen will always be grateful to him for that.

*  

It’s clear that Donna can see Jensen is preoccupied. Jared is extra lively to make up for it as they discuss the wonders of Austin over lunch, trying to keep her attention on him to give Jensen space to wrestle with his decision. At least the breakup with Dianne gives him a good excuse for his distraction, and Donna is sensitive enough not to press him.

Poor woman.

She has no idea what may be coming her way.

Alan, it seems, is out golfing. This could be a good thing, having Donna on her own for the rest of the day. Jensen might not be able to cope with breaking both their hearts at once, so maybe he should tell her alone first. Alan is the one likely to take it worse, but the depth of Donna’s love for Jensen means that maybe, just maybe, she won’t instantly reject him and she might intercede with his father on his behalf.

Do they dare hope for that?

He brings it up to Jensen when they go upstairs after eating. Jensen is shuffling through the contents of his desk drawer while Jared sprawls on the bed, and he shakes his head.

“I couldn’t go through it twice.”

“Not even if it gets you the better result?”

Jensen shakes his head again. For some reason he’s making two piles of stuff, and when he’s emptied out the desk drawer, he moves on to the closet and starts taking out clothes.

“Jen.” Jared waits until Jensen looks at him. “What are you doing?”

“I have to pack.”

“Why?”

“So I can come with you.” Jensen’s hands twist in the denim jacket he’s holding. “Unless you’ve changed your mind and you don’t want me to.”

“Of course I want you to.” Holy shit, does this mean he’s really going to do it? Even though he’s obviously convinced it will end badly? Sitting very still, Jared tries not to let excitement overwhelm him. “Can I help you with anything?”
“My bag’s under the bed. Get it out?”

“Sure.”

As Jensen dumps the things he’s chosen to keep on the bed, Jared folds them neatly the way he knows Jensen likes and starts filling the bag. There’s no hesitation in Jensen’s movements, no contemplation about any item.

He’s already picked them out, Jared realises.

This is pre-planned. Typical Jensen style.

He may not have been talking about it, but he’s been figuring things out in his own mind.

He’s going to do this.

After they’ve worked in silence for half an hour, Jensen drops onto the bed, picking up Jared’s teddy bear, Sam, from where he’d placed him earlier in the middle of the pillows. “Do you really think it would be better?”

“To tell your mom first?” Jared sits back on his heels on the floor. “Yeah, I do.”

“But if it’s bad, she doesn’t have my dad here with her.”

That’s something Jared hadn’t thought of. “What time does your dad usually get back from golf?”

“About five.”

A glance at the clock on the desk tells him that’s still a few hours away. “We could do it just before he gets back, so she won’t be alone for long. If it’s bad.”

As he fiddles with Sam’s floppy ears, Jensen chews on his lip so hard Jared’s surprised it’s not bleeding. “You really think I should?”

“I can’t tell you what to do, Jen, because it has to be your decision, but I’ve seen how much she loves you. And she already lost Josh and I just—I find it hard to believe that she’d reject you.”

“But she could.”

“Yeah,” he agrees heavily. “She could.” He doesn’t think she will, but by no means can he assure Jensen that she won’t. Unfortunately, he can’t say the same for Alan, and that’s why he wants Donna to find out without Alan there so she doesn’t feel the need to hide her genuine reaction, which she might in front of her stern husband.

“You were so fucking brave,” Jensen says softly.

He’s referring to when Jared came out, but that was different. He didn’t have nearly as much to lose as Jensen has, and the only thing he’s regretted is his sister. He hadn’t realised how much worry for her weighed on him until he saw her again for himself and made sure that she’s okay. Last night at the restaurant he texted her to make sure she didn’t suffer any repercussions from his presence, and it feels like a gift to be able to contact her now whenever he wants to. She’s been a hole in his life that he tried to ignore and pretend didn’t exist, but finally it’s starting to heal.

“I had no choice,” he says. “They found out. And I always knew it would be bad. They didn’t—” It’s hard to say out loud, but it’s true. “They didn’t love me the way yours love you.”
“What, even before?”

“Yeah. I was never close to them. They always disapproved of me and found me a trial, and I knew it was only a matter of time until everything exploded. It was still a shock when it happened, but it wasn’t a surprise."

Now Jensen’s combing his fingers through Sam’s soft fur the way Jared spent so many hours doing back during those terrible days when Stephen was in that place and Jared was powerless to help him. “Parents should love their kids no matter what,” he says fiercely, not looking up. “They should never be allowed to speak to them like—like yours did.”

_Or like mine will._ Jared hears the words even though Jensen doesn’t say them. He reaches out and rests his palm gently on Jensen’s leg. “Thank you for what you said. In San Antonio. I’m sorry I froze like that.”

Jensen’s eyes, still stormy like they were on the road earlier, meet his. “I didn’t mean to speak out of place.”

“I’m glad you did. And you got me away from there before I could do something I’d regret. Thank you for that, too.”

“They had no right to say what they did.”

“They think they do. They believe I’m an abomination.”

“You’re not.” Jensen’s voice is implacable. “You’re the best person I know. And I love you. Even if they don’t, I do.”

Jared has no answer to that because any words he thinks of threaten to bring tears along with them, so he leans forward and gently touches his lips to Jensen’s. Setting Sam down, Jensen pulls Jared up, leaning back on the bed with his legs spread on either side of Jared’s hips. Jared follows him down, aware of how heavy he must be on top of him, but Jensen doesn’t seem to mind, just wraps his arms around Jared’s back and licks his way into Jared’s mouth.

* 

A long time later, they’re cuddling on the bed. Jared didn’t let it get too heavy and Jensen gets it, he does—his mother could tap on the door at any moment, and wouldn’t that be a way to come out—but he’s not ready to let go of Jared yet. They’re both hard and Jensen really wants to get Jared off, at least with his hands if not his mouth, but he respects Jared’s decision not to do that here. As for himself, being so hard he hurts and also being wrapped up in Jared’s arms, able to feel his heartbeat against his cheek, feeling his breath ruffling his hair, is the most perfect pleasure. Can he please just stay here in this moment, warm and close with Jared in his childhood bed, Jared’s bear Sam tangled up with them, still beloved by his parents, still safe in his own home.

But no.

A glance at Jared’s watch tells him his dad will be home in less than an hour. If he’s going to tell his mother first, it needs to be soon.

“Will you come with me?” he mumbles into Jared’s chest.
“Where to, babe?”

“To tell her.”

“You want me there with you?”

“Yeah.” He’d want Jared there and holding his hand, if that wouldn’t give it away too soon. “Will you?”

“Of course.” Jared’s fingers play over the precious renewed bruise at his hip. “You wanna do it now?”

“In a minute.” He has to get up, let go of Jared, move away from touching him.

It takes less than ten minutes to check that his bag has everything he plans to take and to splash cold water on his face so he doesn’t look so flushed. How does Jared manage to look so normal? His heart is pounding so loud he can hear it.

“Breathe, Jen.” Jared comes up behind him in the bathroom and lays his hands on Jensen’s shoulders. “Remember, like I taught you. Count.”

Numbers escape him right now, but he remembers the vague pattern and follows it well enough to satisfy Jared. It helps. A bit.

“The cab number is on my phone under C,” he says. “If I’m—if I need you t-to call them.”

“Got it.”

“Oh shit, my charger!”

“I packed it already.”

“You did?”

“Yeah, it’s in the outer pocket of your laptop bag.”

Okay. His passport is there too, and his wallet. Those are the only things he needs, really. If they won’t let him take his other stuff.

“Ready?” Jared asks, meeting his eyes in the mirror.

“No.”

“Jen—”

Doesn’t matter. He won’t ever be. “Let’s go do this.”

Jared guides him down the stairs, his hand warm and sure on Jensen’s arm. It helps, because Jensen can barely see. That would be a fine thing, telling his mother he’s gay in an ambulance after breaking his back falling down the stairs. Maybe she wouldn’t mind so much in the face of his impending paralysis.

Hearing them, she calls out that she’s in the living room. She’s working on one of the intricate tapestry pictures that she creates for people in the church. This one involves a scene at the cross. It leaps out at him in reproach, vivid and dark. Ominous. This isn’t just a cultural belief of his mother’s that he’s violating, but in her mind he’ll be putting his soul in jeopardy. What if she cries,
begs him to change his mind, begs him to at least try to live a God-fearing, righteous life in practice even if he can’t be that inside?

How does he hold out against that?

Isn’t that what he was trying to do with Dianne?

Except he wasn’t, was he, fucking Jared on the side and being a reprehensible, lying bastard.

This is better. At least he’s being honest.

Jared exclaims over the tapestry. His mother tells him about how she got started with them when Jensen was little. His biggest worry over her when Josh left was because she stopped doing them, she left the one she’d been working on untouched. For as long as he could remember she’d always had one in her hands if she wasn’t doing something else, but that summer after Josh she just sat there empty-handed, eyes glazed, focused on nothing.

What if that happens to her again?

He can’t do that to her. He can’t damage her like that.

But what if, just what if, Jared is right. What if she understands that this isn’t something he chose, it’s something he is, and she’s able to accept that. Accept him.

What if.

But.

What if she can’t.

What if he breaks her?

“I need to tell you something,” he bursts out, interrupting her demonstration to Jared of how she’s able to create the picture without even drawing it out first.

She looks up, the enthusiasm in her eyes fading as she takes in how rigid he is. “Why don’t you boys take a seat.” Gesturing to the sofa nearest her armchair, she lays the tapestry down on the little table between them.

Jensen moves when Jared discreetly pulls him, sits when Jared pushes him down. Is he shaking? He feels still. Deathly still. So still it hurts to fill his lungs with air and expand his tight chest. Jared sits beside him, angling both of them to face Jensen’s mother. The back of his right hand, blocked from her view by Jensen’s body, brushes gently against Jensen’s side.

I’m gay.

Two such tiny little words. Hardly difficult to say.

Mom. Maybe he should add that in front. Remind her he’s still her son. Her gay son.

Mom, I’m gay.

Say it, damn it.

“Mom....”
Jared’s hand presses harder. Holding him up.

I’m gay.

“Mom, I’m....”

Gay, damn it. Just say it.

One word.

One goddamn little word.

Three letters.

Maybe he should write it down.

Hand her a note.

Fucking coward.

“Mom, I’m—wondering if we should contact Josh.”

*

It takes a moment for Jared to comprehend Jensen’s words. He registers the shock on Donna’s face, thinks it isn’t as bad as they feared it might be, and then the words play back through his head and gay wasn’t one of them. Wasn’t even implied.

What the hell?

Jensen continues talking. “Seeing how well it worked with J-Jared’s sister, I thought m-maybe we could contact—could try to contact him. It’s been t-two years and he could want to come home again, or want to talk to us, but he’s afraid w-we’ll reject him if he tries.”

Is this Jensen trying to ease into his big confession?

Donna nods slowly as she listens. “I’ve been thinking something similar,” she admits. “We might not get the happy ending Jared did with Megan, but maybe it’s time to try.”

Jared has thought about it too. Has done more than just think about it, in fact. He hadn’t planned to bring this up in the midst of everything else, was going to break it to Jensen later, but if this is what the topic under discussion is, he might as well contribute what he knows. “I called his university,” he says. “He’s working there over the summer. If you want to call him, I can give you the number.”

“Oh, Jared.” As Donna turns to face him, tears well up in her eyes. “You did that for us?”

He shrugs. “I kinda had the same idea Jensen had. He just beat me to it.”

Jensen says nothing. He doesn’t turn around to look at Jared. He just sits there, staring at his hands, which are clenched into fists on his lap.

As reassurance, Jared rubs his hand along Jensen’s back.
Jensen flinches away.

Shit.

This isn’t easing into anything.

He can’t do it.

He won’t do it.

Jared was right.

*

No words will come.

Jared is saying something. Touching him. Why is Jared still touching him?

Jensen can’t make his mouth open from where his teeth slice into his bottom lip.

Why are lights flashing?

Sparks.

Blinding.

What is roaring in his ears?

Is it Jared yelling at him?

Maybe Jared’s told his mom since Jensen didn’t.

Maybe she’s yelling too.

He can’t see her any more.

He can no longer feel Jared.

There’s nothing.

Just a howling black wind.

He can’t—

He can’t be here in it.

It will annihilate him.

What’s left of him.

He can’t hold on.

Not like this.
Not without—

Without—

He runs.
Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of Jensen's decision.

The slam of the front door reverberates through Jared and Donna.
They both stare in its direction as if Jensen will bounce back inside, as though he isn’t gone.
He doesn’t reappear.
This is it.
It’s over.
Jensen lost his nerve.
He made his choice.

“Jared,” Donna says gently, and he wrenches his eyes away from the door that isn’t going to give Jensen back. “Is Josh really what Jensen wanted to talk to me about?”

No. But he can’t tell her the truth. He can’t out Jensen when Jensen refused to out himself. “Um,” he says, frantically grasping for the best strategy of how to deal with this. “He, uh—that is—I can’t really answer for him.”

The confusion on her face dissolves into soft compassion as she looks at him.

Shit.

She knows.
He’s almost certain she knows what Jensen meant to say.

But if he won’t out Jensen, she isn’t going to either. Instead they sit there in silence.

Maybe Jensen will return.

Maybe, once he’s run out of his system the initial panic that evidently overwhelmed him, he’ll come home, sidle sheepishly through the door, and tell the truth.

Or.

He won’t.

And Jared has to face his own truth.

Not yet.

Not while there’s still time.
At Donna’s invitation, he helps her with the preparation for an early dinner. In the space of a single weekend, the kitchen has come to feel like home to him. He knows which the good knives are, can empty the dishwasher and put everything in its rightful place, even has a mug that’s designated as his by now. He reaches for items on top shelves so Donna doesn’t need to stand on the handy little wooden step she has, peels carrots and potatoes, and he discovers she was an English major in college after he makes a passing reference to *The Great Gatsby*. That gives them a comfortable, neutral topic of conversation as the time passes and Jensen doesn’t reappear.

Every now and then he catches her studying him and his heart starts to pound because what the fuck does he do if she asks him outright? He *can’t* out Jensen—but does he flatly lie to Jensen’s mother instead?

But she doesn’t ask.

So he never has to make the choice.

Alan arrives home. He had a good day on the course, he won, and he’s in a jovial mood. “Where’s Jensen?” he asks after greeting Jared with a handshake and his wife with a kiss.

Donna looks at Jared like he has a fucking clue.

“Gone running,” he says after hesitating for too long.

Alan exchanges a look with Donna that Jared can’t decipher. “I hope he’s back soon,” he says. “We need to eat before six in order for you to make your flight.”

His flight. That Jensen won’t be joining him on.

He didn’t realise how much he was counting on it until this moment. With a polite nod, he turns back to the onions he’s dicing, grateful for the excuse they provide for his prickling eyes. His misbehaving heart didn’t wait for the outcome of Jensen’s talk with his parents; instead it merrily skipped off to New York with Jensen, reorganising his room there to fit them both, planning which coffee shop to take Jensen to first, figuring out places he can find to run by the water, evaluating which gay bdsm club will give Jensen the best introduction to indulging his exhibitionistic nature.

But none of that is going to happen.

If Jensen doesn’t come back by dinnertime, he’s made his choice clear.

* 

He’s not back.

Jared forces down food, aware this is his last opportunity to indulge in wholesome home cooking. It’s tasteless in his mouth, but his body will thank him for the nutrition.
Please don’t let Jensen stop eating again over this.

It was so good to feel the bulge in his belly last night in bed—no, don’t think about last night. Don’t think about Jensen’s words, repeated and repeated and repeated.

They’re hollow now.

True, but hollow.

Because Jensen hasn’t chosen him.

*

It’s 6.45.

They were supposed to leave for the airport at 6.30.

Donna has been stalling them, given Jensen as many extra seconds as possible to come back and remedy this.

He doesn’t.

*

She stays behind, not wanting Jensen to return to an empty house. Jared doesn’t blame her, would have asked her to if he’d been able to trust his voice.

Instead he buries his face in her soft, greying hair and tries not to cling to this woman who can never be his surrogate mother.

His mother-in-law.

“Thank you for accepting our invitation,” she says to him, her own voice shaky. “I’m very glad you came.”

Pulling back, he jerks a nod. “Thank you for having me.”

“Any time, Jared. You are welcome here any time.”

Does she mean that? Does she know the truth? Is this her trying to reassure him that she does and she accepts it, and him, and Jensen with him? Or did he imagine that sense of shared understanding after Jensen disappeared?

Her hands wind together, pressing over her heart. “I’m sorry he didn’t come back.”

Yeah. Jared is too. But he can’t talk about it. He can’t even nod this time.

At the front door, after scouring the street for Jensen, she pats his arm. “Have a safe flight. Text me when you get there so I don’t worry.”
Other than his sister, she’s the first person besides Jensen to care about his safety while travelling. “I will.”

“And I’ll text you when he comes home. If he doesn’t call you himself.”

Jensen won’t call. Jared knows that already.

*

It doesn’t take too long to reach the airport. The radio is tuned to a news station, which Jared is grateful for because he isn’t capable of making polite small talk. They listen to an in-depth report of the latest hurricane damage in the Caribbean and the forecast that the next one might hit southern Texas.

“You can just drop me at Departures,” he tells Alan as they turn off the highway.

“Nonsense. I’ll take you in, make sure your flight is on time.”

He doesn’t have it in him to argue.

Alan finds a parking space close to the entrance and insists on carrying Jared’s bag inside. It’s only when he takes it back, feeling the weight of all the books, that Jared realises he forgot to slip Sam into it at the last minute.

Maybe that’s not so bad.

Maybe Jensen needs Sam more than he does right now.

No.

Don’t fall apart.

Not yet, damn it.

A glance at his phone confirms that Jensen still isn’t home. At least that means he wasn’t lurking in the bushes waiting for Jared to leave.

But where is he? What is he doing? Is he—

Don’t think about what a bad state Jensen must be in right now. He can’t, otherwise he won’t make it onto the plane.

If Jensen needed him, he knew where Jared was.

He knew what time Jared had to go.

He has Jared’s number.

*
Alan accompanies him to his gate.

Jared’s vibrating now, a tremble starting deep in his bones rippling out to spark goose pimples across his skin. He’s about to leave Texas.

Leave Jensen.

“I don’t know the details of what happened with your parents,” Alan says as they come to a stop, “but, Jared, if you were my son, I’d be proud as hell of you.”

*I’m gay,* he wants to blurt out. Wants to test that assertion, force it to proof. But outing himself will cast suspect light on Jensen and he can’t fucking do that. He can’t.

He tries to nod. Not very successfully.

“And I stand by what I said before,” Alan continues. “You’ve been good for Jensen.”

*I fucked him. I seduced him and fucked him and corrupted him.*

“I’m sorry he’s treated you so badly today.”

Oh no, Alan mustn’t get mad at Jensen. “He’s going through a lot right now,” Jared says. His voice sounds shredded. “He’s had a traumatic weekend. Don’t—don’t blame him.”

“I have to say, sometimes I think it’s a shame he’s too big to turn over my knee.”

The vivid image chokes a painful laugh out of Jared. If Alan had any idea what Jared’s done to his son, any clue that Jensen’s walking around right now with purple bruises from Jared beating his ass —oh shit, the laughter’s shaking loose things that can’t be risked yet. He has to get on the plane right fucking now.

“He’s lucky to have you,” he manages enough control to say. “And he knows it.”

* *

He has a row of seats to himself near the back.

No one disturbs him in his corner by the window.

Hunched sideways to make space for his legs, he pulls the blanket over his head to look like he’s asleep and grants himself permission to cry as much as he needs to all the way home.

* *

It’s nearly midnight by the time Jensen approaches the front door of his house.

Jared won’t be there, he knows.

He’s just landed in New York.
Jensen checked. The flight was on time. Landed 12 minutes ago.

He watched its progress on his phone, tracking the visual confirmation that Jared was leaving him as he deserved. Imagined, half-felt, being on that plane, tangled in a back seat with Jared, both of them cast out but together, in love, never alone again.

That’s what his cowardice has cost him.

There’s no way Jared could forgive him for this.

Damn, the lights are still on downstairs. Pausing outside the door, he drags in a long, shuddery breath—if he has to talk to someone, he needs to be able to do it without shattering into pieces—and then pushes it open.

Both of his parents look up from their seats in the living room. The tapestry is in his mother’s hand, the remote in his father’s, which he uses to instantly mute the news channel that’s playing softly in the background.

“Jared just texted me,” his mother says. “He landed safely.”

He didn’t stay.

That tiny sliver of hope Jensen’s been denying crumples and he grabs the back of the chair nearest him so that he doesn’t crumble with it.

“G-good.”

His father lays the remote down. “Where have you been?”

“Out.”

“You had company.”

It’s like he’s fourteen again, sneaking around with pot and girls and freedom. If only. If only girls were involved in this.

“Your mother called Dianne. You weren’t there.”

Dianne. A girl is involved, a girl he used and betrayed and discarded, just like he’s now done to Jared.

“We broke up.”

“That’s the only reason you have some leeway here, Jensen.”

When he was very young, his mother used to spank him with a wooden spoon. It never really hurt; her censure troubled him more. When he was older, on a very rare occasion, his father used his belt. Instinctively, his cheeks clench together, skin still raw from the belt whipping Jared gave him the day before yesterday. His father certainly never beat him like that, just a few snaps at barely quarter the strength Jared put into it.

For a wild moment, Jensen imagines his father ordering him to bend over now, to rest his hands on the base of the chair Jared sat in on Friday night while they looked at photograph albums, and present his ass for punishment.

He almost wants it.
The pain.

Except only Jared is allowed to do that now.

Jared.

Jared is gone.

When Jared needed him most, Jensen let him down and then ran away, too chicken to face the repercussions.

He could do it now. Say, I'm gay. Then his parents would understand.

Would it be too late? Has he hurt Jared too badly by wimping out and abandoning him?

He opens his mouth—

“Show me your phone.”

“I—what?”

“Your phone. Do you have it on you?”

“Yes.” He palms it in his pocket, but no way is he handing it over to his father when the home screen is him and Jared. “Why?”

“Is it on?”

“Yes.”

“So why couldn’t I or your mother get through to you?”

Because he blocked everything but the wifi of the bar he was in. “I’m sorry if you were worried,” he says stonily.

“Of course we were worried! You disappeared without warning for eight hours. Your mother’s been beside herself. We were just discussing whether we should start calling the hospitals.”

“I’m sorry.”

Sniffing the air, his father studies him. “You’ve been drinking?”

He’s already in trouble; why lie further? “Yeah.”

“You’re not old enough.”

He shrugs.

“Give me the ID you have.”

He doesn’t move.

“Jensen, you may think you’re an adult, but you still live under my roof and you’ve behaved like a child today. You’re lucky I’m not taking my belt to you.”

No, it’s Jared who needs to do that. Who needs to make Jensen hurt the way he must be hurting right now as he makes his way across late-night New York City to his solitary bed.
His father sighs. “Look, I understand that you’ve had a difficult weekend. Believe me, that is the only reason you’re not in serious trouble right now. But you’ve broken the law as well as being selfish and worrying your mother, and this isn’t acceptable behaviour, Jensen. I know you know that, and I can’t let it continue. Give me that ID.”

Better his fake ID than his phone. Fishing it out of his pocket, he leans over to pass it to his father.

“I want your word that you won’t replace this.”

“Dad—”

“Your word, Jensen. At least for the summer while you’re living in my house and working in my company. We’ll have another talk before you go back to college. I have to say, I thought you were better than this. I thought I could trust you. You have the rest of this summer to prove to me that I can, or I’m pulling you out of that school and you can finish your degree here where you can live at home and I can keep an eye on you.”

A laugh threatens to bubble out from his constricted chest. Here he’s been so worried about being kicked out of his home and now he may become a virtual prisoner in it.

Except he could end his sentence instantly with those two little words that he’s unable to say.

Is there a point now, though, when he’s lost Jared?

“I’m sorry,” he says again. He is, because he never wanted to put a look of such distress on his mother’s face, and he truly doesn’t want to disappoint his father. “I’m sorry, Mama.”

His use of his childhood name for her softens the pain in her eyes. “I’m sorry too, Jensen. I expected better from you.”

And they don’t even know how catastrophic his true transgressions are.

“Go to bed now,” his father orders. “You’re behind in your work at the office and I want all of that caught up before the end of the day tomorrow. Is that understood?”

“Yes.” His father’s tone begs for the addition of “sir”, but he knows better than to sound like he’s mocking the seriousness of the situation. “Goodnight.”

He can feel their eyes on him as he heads for the stairs. He could go back. Tell them the truth. They’re already upset with him, disappointed in him. He hasn’t been a good enough son for them despite his years of dedication trying to make up for Josh. He’s failed them in every single way he possibly could have—he might as well confess to all of it now.

I’m gay.

His father’s already mad. What if this discovery pushes him too far? Jensen’s researched people’s coming out experiences and some kids have been beaten almost to death by their parents. That never occurred to him as a possibility he had to worry about, but rage can cause otherwise mild people to explode with violence.

He should have done it when Jared was still here to protect him, just in case.

Jared.

Jared.
Jared.

Jared, who is maybe reaching his apartment now, his room that Jensen won’t be sharing with him.

How is he?

Is he okay?

Reaching the privacy of his bedroom, Jensen locks the door and climbs onto the bed where just a few hours ago he lay safely enveloped by Jared’s large body.

He has no right to want to cry. To miss him. Not after what he did. There’s the final speck of hope still holding out in his heart, and as he curls up in the pillows he enables his phone to receive calls and messages again.

Other than from his parents, there’s nothing.

Jared had time to text his mother confirmation of his safe arrival, so if he wanted to contact Jensen he would have.

But he hasn’t.

He doesn’t.

It’s no more than Jensen deserves, but he feels icy cold slam through his body like an avalanche.

Jared has left him.

It’s over.

This time it’s really over.
Chapter 36

Chapter Summary

While Jared makes necessary decisions about his future in New York, someone unexpected confronts Jensen about the realities of his behaviour.

“Mr P, Mr P, how’d I do?”

Jared stops where he’s walking past the tennis courts when he hears the eager voice of one of his favourite students. “Hey, Andilo, how’s that game coming?”

“It’s great, I won this round and I’m into the final.” Andilo grins, blazing and bright. “But how’d I do this morning in the test?”

“I haven’t graded them yet.” Jared indicates the bag slung over his shoulder. “See? They’re all in here for me to take home to grade.”

Andilo’s smile dims. “Like homework? I didn’t know teachers have homework too.”

“Sure we do.” There’s these tests plus the more intricate papers by the older students from earlier in the week that he hasn’t got to yet, and tomorrow there will be a host more.

“Why’d you wanna be a teacher then? Do homework all your life? That’s not for me, man.”

“Because I get to teach people like you.” Jared ruffles the tight dark curls of the boy even though he’s not strictly allowed to touch the pupils. These kids, though, a lot of them come from homes where they don’t get much affection, often don’t even get an adult being decent to them. He tries to give them as much of that as possible within the bounds of what is permitted, attempting to teach them not just math but that they are worthwhile human beings deserving of love and respect. He may not be with them for long, but he hopes that they remember how he treated them and apply that in the rest of their lives.

Andilo reaches out to bump his knuckles with Jared’s. “Will you know tomorrow how I did? Because I studied real hard for this one. I even looked up that book you talked about in the library. I wanna see if it pays off.”

“I’m proud of you,” Jared says. “I’m sure it has paid off, but even if your grade isn’t as high as you hoped, you’re doing good things with the work, Andilo, and that’s what matters.”

“Tell that to Collins, man.”

The principal of the school that offers this summer programme is harsh, but he’s demanding because he wants the best for these kids, wants them to stretch themselves to the potential their regular school doesn’t bother with. “I will. He’ll be very pleased with your report at the end of the summer if you keep this up.”

“Yeah?”

“Oh yeah. Now go get ‘em on that court.”
“Tell you tomorrow how I do in the final!”

“Can’t wait.”

He watches Andilo rejoin the others before resettling the bag on his shoulder and heading for the gate. This is why he wants to do this job, this is the way his life is going to count for something. Thinking about it on the way home reminds him about the various applications in his desk drawer to finish his degree. That’s what he plunged himself into last weekend when an entire week had passed since the night in Austin, since the night *I love you* seemed like a promise and not like the prelude to goodbye.

He spent that Saturday in a haze. The chaotic demand of daily teaching that had been propping him up all week deserted him and he crashed. Badly. He doesn’t remember too much about that day, but that’s okay. He got through it and he’s still standing. No, make that standing again, because he wasn’t for a while there.

But he is now.

And standing means accepting the situation as it is and dealing with it, not living in a fantasy in his head where one day he’ll open his door and Jensen will be there.

Jensen made his choice.

And made it clear, by not contacting Jared, that he doesn’t plan to change his mind.

There was a time last Saturday when Jared had to turn off his phone so he wouldn’t call Jensen and beg.

But that’s over now and it’s time to move on. He has to move on. He can’t let the obliteration of his relationship with Jensen destroy him indefinitely, and part of that is not allowing it to derail his education. It was a dumb move, leaving the college where he had his scholarship, even though he had excellent reasons which still apply, but it’s time to investigate what other possibilities remain open to him. His grades were good enough that other colleges should be eager to get their hands on him, and Collins will give him whatever references he needs.

This weekend. Instead of going out and getting smashed, he’ll spend his birthday investing in his future.

And deleting the pictures on his phone that he spends half of every night gazing at.

*

The stupid report got sent back for the third time and he can’t find what’s wrong with it and Jensen is ready to scream.

He shouldn’t be here.

He’s supposed to be in New York frying burgers or making cappuccinos, sharing his bed with more than just a stuffed bear that doesn’t belong to him, and living free and open and real.

Not this.
It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

He’s contemplating whether or not he’s likely to get away with hurling his keyboard through the window (not, given that his dad is still annoyed with him), when the very last person on earth he wants to see sashays in.

“Donovan sent me to find out where your report is for the Richardsons. He said you haven’t answered his last three emails and—Jensen, are you crying?”

“No.” He swivels his chair away from Dianne, blinking fiercely. He’s managed to avoid her for almost two weeks and why is it now, when he’s right on the edge, that he’s confronted by her? “I’ll send him the report immediately.” He has no idea whether it’s done.

Dianne doesn’t take that for the dismissal it is. “If you’re snowed under, I can do it for you. Alicia’s been teaching me how to write them up, and Donovan said this one’s pretty basic.”

“I’ve got it.” She needs to leave. Now.

“I’m really enjoying doing them, so I don’t mind.”

“Fine! Do it, then.” Just leave.

“Jensen.”

No, no, don’t come closer, don’t be nice, don’t show kindness when he showed no kindness to her.

Her hand rests gently on his rigid shoulder as he continues glaring out the window. “I’ve been wanting to talk to you. It’s lunchtime. Would you join me across the road?”

He can’t do that—but he owes her. He owes her anything she wants after what he did. “Give me ten minutes. I’ll meet you there.”

“Great.” She pats his shoulder before moving away. “Thank you.”

In the bathroom he douses his face with cold water, pressing his fingers hard against his eyes until the worst threat of tears passes, and spends the remaining six minutes focused on his breathing exercises. It’s too soon, but at least he’s no longer shaking when he heads out of the building and across the street to the coffee shop where it feels like months ago he outed Jared to Dianne. That was the day she conceived her brilliant plan to invite him to Dallas.

She waves to him from the same corner table as before. “I took the liberty of getting your coffee,” she says as he squeezes between two ladies having an exciting reunion, “and some muffins as well.”

Of course she did. He looks down. They’re all chocolate.

Other than messing around with the food on his plate every evening in front of his mother’s watchful eye, he can’t remember the last time he actually ate.

Austin—don’t think about Austin.

That’s twelve days ago. That might be why his vision keeps going blurry and why it hurts to breathe.

This isn’t sustainable.

“Are you going to sit down?”
“Sorry.” It’s awkward, but because he’s so skinny now it’s easier than it would have been to fold himself into the tiny space available. “Thanks.”

“I invited you, so...” She shrugs, looking unsure. “Thank you for coming. I didn’t know if you would.”

“I said I would.”

“You also said you’d marry me.” Her voice is sharp, and she bites her lip. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to say that.”

Taking a sip of the coffee she got for him, he relishes the burn all the way down his throat. It’s good. “No, I’m sorry.” He’s been dreading this conversation, putting it off, but it’s a surprising relief having it forced on him like this. Making himself meet her eyes, he folds his hands on the table. “I’m very sorry, Dianne, for what we—for what I did to you. You were right in everything you said to me. I should have come clean to you the moment I realised what was happening. I never should have lied. And I never should have done anything with him while I was still with you.”

The words fall heavily between them. She looks like she’s analysing them, weighing each one for the veracity that’s been horribly lacking in his communication with her up until now.

“I have some things to say too.”

He bows his head, indicating for her to continue. Whatever it is, he deserves it.

“It’s not that I’m not hurt, not that I’m not angry, because, Jensen, I am, and it’s not that I’m trying to excuse your behaviour, but I’m not sorry that we’re over.”

She’s not?

“Not now that I’ve had some time to reflect.” She gives a little laugh, her delicate fingers playing with one of the muffins. “I mean, obviously a marriage between us wouldn’t have worked, not least because you’re—” She breaks off, glancing around. “—gay and, well, sex between us wasn’t going to be too successful. Especially since I’m not even attracted to you.

“You’re not?” Should he be offended, rather than relieved?

“You’re too—big.”

“Big?”

With a glimmer of amusement she rolls her eyes when he looks down at himself. “Not there, you idiot—although I wouldn’t know, would I? I mean, I liked how big you are because it made me feel safe, like I told you before, but—I’m sorry, I probably shouldn’t be saying these things to you.”

“No, go ahead, by all means. Please tell me why I’m so unattractive.”

“Jensen—”

“Tell me.” He makes his voice soft, his expression, too. “It’s okay, I honestly don’t mind, and I’m curious.”

She studies him as he takes another sip of burning coffee. “I’m not sure how to explain it, just that I think maybe you’re not my type. I picked you in school because you were popular, because all the girls wanted you and, yes, you’re nice to look at, but I never really wanted to sleep with you. But
because I was with you, I never let myself look at anybody else.”

“So you’re looking now?”

“I’m actually realising I don’t want to look.”

“Okay.” He feels like he’s missing something.

“You see, I realised that I’ve been defining myself solely as Jensen’s girlfriend, and defining my future as Jensen’s wife. Once I wasn’t that any more, it was a shock at first, but....”

“But you kinda like it?”

She returns his smile. “Yes. I do. I don’t know what that makes me, who I am without that, but I’m eager to find out. And that’s thanks to you, so I guess I just wanted you to know that.”

“That’s great, Dianne.” He takes the hand she holds out across the table. “I’m still sorry about the way it happened, but I’m glad it’s working out for you.”

“It is.”

When she lets go of his hand, he picks up one of the chocolate muffins. No wonder they say honesty is good for the soul. The muffin tastes fantastic and he savours it as he chews.

Until Dianne says, “You haven’t told your parents, have you?”

No. Please don’t talk about this.

“Your dad told me Jared went back to New York as planned.”

“He did.”

“Jensen—”

“Don’t.”

“Please don’t tell me that you’re not going to come out.”

“Why, because it’s going to go down so well with them?” He rips the rest of the muffin apart, crushing it in annoyingly shaky hands. “Because they’re going to say, ‘That’s lovely, Jensen, we don’t mind at all, you’re still our son, we’re not going to kick you out like Jared’s parents did’?”

“Jensen.” Her hand covers his, stopping him from decimating the muffin completely. “What are you planning, then? To be gay at college with Jared and continue to lie to your parents? What happens when you graduate? Does he pretend he misses Texas so moves to Dallas as your best friend and you find someone to marry who doesn’t mind you having him on the side?”

“No.”

“Do you quit your father’s company and move to New York, to him, and send home stories of a fake girlfriend while you set up home with him?”

“No.”

“Then what?”
“He goes back to New York because he’s disgusted by what a coward I am for not coming out after I promised him I would and never wants to hear from me again.”

She didn’t expect that, and she looks almost as stunned as she did during the fireworks twelve days ago. “You didn’t.”

“I did. Or, rather, yeah, I didn’t. I sat there, him beside me, and blurted out something about Josh and then ran away and didn’t come back until after he’d left.”

“Oh Jensen.”

He can’t stand the compassion in her eyes. “You made a narrow escape with me. Trust me.”

“I can’t believe you did that.”

“He probably couldn’t either.”

“Did you apologise?”

“Apologete?”

“You’ve called him, right? And that’s when he told you he didn’t want to hear from—Jensen Ackles!”

Could he feel more like a worthless little worm? “What?”

“Please tell me you haven’t made the decision for him.”

“What decision?”

“That man loves you, Jensen. Even before I knew what you were to each other, I knew he loved you. What makes you think he would turn against you just because you were too afraid to come out?”

“I promised him. After what happened in San Antonio—”

“What happened in San Antonio?”

“We took Megan home. She’d saved some of his stuff so we went inside, since his parents were out, to get it. But they came back before we were gone and—” The memory shudders through him. “They’re vile people, Dianne. The things they said to him! And he just froze. He made sure they didn’t get mad at Megan for us being there, but then he froze and couldn’t say anything and I had to get him out of there. We stayed over in Austin because he was still in a state of shock and I needed to help him out of it, make him feel better. I promised that when we got back to Dallas on Sunday I’d tell my parents and we packed up my stuff and I checked there was room on his plane so I could go with him if they reacted badly.”

Talking about it takes him back to that moment, sitting in the living room with Jared by his side, facing his mother.

The moment he made the wrong decision.

“I fucked up,” he acknowledges. “I fucked up and Jared—how does he forgive that?”

Dianne’s sat silent through his recounting of what happened, but now she leans forward. “You didn’t give him a chance. You have no idea how he feels about what you did. Jensen, he knew
you’d just witnessed how badly it could go wrong, he knew your parents probably weren’t going to react all that well—although I’m pretty sure they wouldn’t kick you out, they won’t be like his parents were—but the thing is, he loves you. And, yes, you disappointed him, you let him down, but don’t you get that not even giving him the chance to say it’s over is just as bad?”

“He didn’t call me! He has my number. He texted my mom to say he’d landed safely, he could have texted me. But he didn’t. So that means he doesn’t want to hear from me.”

“And that makes it all right not to apologise? Did you at least send him a text?”

Picking up the final muffin, he bites into it. “No,” he says with his mouth full.

“So what if he thinks you’re the one who rejected him?”

He swallows. “I didn’t reject him! I’d never reject him, never.”

“But he doesn’t know that.”

Shit. “You mean I fucked up even more than I realised?”

“Yes, you did.”

He chews aggressively through another bite of chocolate. “So you think I should call him?”

“At the very least, text him.”

Finishing the rest of the muffin, he regrets destroying the previous one. “It’s his birthday the day after tomorrow. Maybe I could use that as an excuse to contact him.”

“It’s his birthday?”

“Yeah.” God, what they could have done for Jared’s birthday. Jensen had so many ideas, so many plans. So many ways he wanted to give himself for Jared to do with exactly as he pleased. “Do you think that would work?”

Dianne’s lips purse as she thinks about it. “I’ll tell you what I think, Jensen. I think you need to figure out who you are. With Jared, without him. Being gay, coming out, or pretending to be straight for the rest of your life. It’s not about how your parents will react, it’s not about whether Jared will take you back. It’s about you. What kind of man do you want to be?”

“Not the kind I have been, obviously.” That answer is easy.

“The closeted kind?”

“The lying kind.” No more lies. Is it that simple? “I have to come out, don’t I?”

“To your parents, yes. I think so.”

“And if it goes wrong?”

“You mean, if Jared will no longer have you?”

What right does he have to even hope Jared would? “Yeah.”

“You could move to New York anyway. See if you can persuade him to change his mind. Prove yourself worthy of him.”
Worthy of Jared. “What if I never am? What if he never takes me back?”

“Honestly? You’ll still be better off. You need to find a way to live your life with integrity. You have choices, Jensen. It’s time you started making the right ones.”

*

There’s still half an hour of his lunchbreak remaining when Dianne leaves him to contemplate his life. Buying two more muffins, he heads for the park down the block, eating them as he goes.

She’s right.

He’s made abysmal choices up until now, purely out of fear. Is that really how he wants to live the rest of his life?

No.

No, it is not.

And he’s been so wrong not to contact Jared. How did he not see that before? Yes, he chickened out, yes, he ran away, but to just leave it at that?

Because he knows all too well how fiercely respectful Jared is of people’s choices. There’s no way Jared would try to pressure him to change his mind. That’s not who Jared is.

It’s worse than that, though, because something else has become clear about Jared. He will never hesitate to fight on someone else’s behalf. Look at how he took over for Jensen when Dianne caught them, the way he stood up to his parents until he’d made sure that Megan was safe, how willing he was to step into the line of fire when Jensen planned to come out to his parents. But now that Jensen thinks about it, the rest of it is obvious: Jared doesn’t fight for himself.

So it’s up to Jensen.

Maybe he’s left it too long, maybe what he did was too much for Jared to forgive, but as Dianne said, Jared deserves to make that decision for himself.

He also deserves the chance to have his say to Jensen the way Dianne just did.

And if Jensen’s going to start telling the truth, he has to tell the truth about everything, and that means coming out to his parents about more than just his sexuality.

Beneath the burning Texan sun, the cold that’s enveloped him since realising that Jared went back to New York without him begins to dissipate.

He’s going to sit his parents down, be honest, and no matter the outcome of the conversation, he’s quitting the job at his father’s firm and moving to New York.

In time for Jared’s birthday.
“Hey, Padalecki!”

Jared looks up from the senior tests he’s spending his free period grading since things didn’t go as well last night as planned. “Hey, Adam.”

The English literature teacher lounges in the doorway with a smug grin. “Someone told me it’s your birthday.”

So much for keeping that to himself. “Tomorrow.”

“You got plans?”

“Tomorrow?” It’s his self-imposed deadline to finalise the next stage of his life. His post-Jensen life. “Yeah.”

“How about tonight? A bunch of us are going out. You want to join us? Get in some early celebrating?”

It’s tempting, because otherwise, on the last night he’s allowed to, he’ll spend it mired in misery over what he’s lost. “Sure, I’d love to.”

It’s a good choice. He hasn’t been wonderfully sociable this year, but his fellow teachers and their assistants are a friendly bunch, and as he drinks he feels himself begin to relax. He doesn’t drink too much, doesn’t want the first day of the rest of his life to be marred by a crushing hangover, but he has enough to take the edge off. As the evening progresses, he and Adam get into an in-depth argument about literary versus fantasy fiction. It’s not the kind of discussion he could ever have with Jensen, since Jensen doesn’t read much, and he’s forgotten what it’s like to hang out with people when sex isn’t on the agenda and only conversation matters. It’s good. It’s fun. He needs to reintegrate this into his life and not think about the fact that he hasn’t so much as jerked off since waking up in Austin, let alone got off with someone else.

As he expounds the virtues of Harry Potter to a man who thinks Charles Dickens is light, frivolous reading, he finds himself casting his eye around the bar they’re in. Normally he’d be eyeing up potential hookups (“You’re not a hook-up, Jensen.” “Aren’t you hooking up with me tonight? You’re going to fuck me, right?”), but his body isn’t interested. It feels like he left it back in Austin, back in bed with Jensen, and didn’t bring it with him when he returned to New York.

Or, maybe, maybe he’s just growing up.

Maybe he used to define himself by sex, since his entire youth was shaped by his sexuality, but it doesn’t have to be that way any longer. “You’re disgusting,” his mother spat at him yet again two
weeks ago, and unlike in the past, this time it didn’t make him want to rush off and fuck someone to spite her.

That’s what’s changed.

In the past, every time he had sex he pictured his parents watching, being appalled, being disgusted by who he was and what it meant he did. The more he did it in front of others, those exhibitionistic tendencies Jensen accused him of having, the more satisfying it was in relation to his mental audience: Look at me, damn you, see me. This is what I am. And I will never change. Nothing will change me. No one will change me.

Except someone has.

He stopped thinking about his parents that night Jensen first bared himself for him. The night Jensen so eagerly offered himself after agreeing to Jared’s audacious suggestion he use Jared’s body to experiment with. There was no thought in his head other than Jensen’s beauty and sweetness, and being overwhelmed with awe and hunger and—

Shit, yes, love.

He was in love with Jensen and that changed everything.

Casual sex? Yes, it’s called meaningless for a reason, and he’s no longer interested in it. That part of his life is over.

Just like the part with Jensen is.

“Hey, man,” Adam says, waving his hand in front of Jared’s face. “You still with me?”

No, Jared is not. Pulling his mind away from the night that started it all, Jared looks around the table, trying to ground himself in the here, the now—except all that’s here and now is: “I broke up with my boyfriend.”

He isn’t overtly out at school, not because he tries to hide it but because it doesn’t come up. To his credit, Adam only blinks a couple of times before he says, “That sucks, man. Do you need to vent? I’m a good ventee.”

“No.” Jared picks up his glass, only to put it down when he realises his hand is shaking too much to get it safely to his mouth. “I just needed to say that out loud. To tell someone.”

“Did it help?”

“Yeah.” Or not, because his whole body is trembling now. “I’m sorry.” He pushes back his chair. “I think I should go home.”

This is the last time he can let this happen. In the sanctuary of his room he can shed his final tears over Jensen and wake to start his new life tomorrow.

“Let me take you,” Adam says, getting to his feet too. He tosses some bills down on the table towards the others. “I’m giving birthday boy here a lift home on my bike. We’ll see you lot on Monday.”

Amidst a chorus of happy birthdays, Jared smiles and nods and digs his thumbnail into his index finger so hard he feels a warm ooze of blood. “Thanks, everyone. See you Monday.” Outside, the hot summer air feels like a relief on his blazing cheeks. “I can make it home by myself,” he assurances
Adam. “You don’t need to go out of your way.”

“It’s the least I can do. Besides, you can lend me one of those Harry Potter books so I can see for myself the case you were making for world-building instead of dealing with the reality around us.”

As raw as he feels right now, the thought of navigating the subway during the chaos of Friday night revellers is daunting. “If you’re sure.”

“Sure I’m sure.” Adam flashes him a grin as he heads them in the direction of his bike.

“Isn’t Teresa expecting you home?”

“I told her I’d be late. She sends you birthday wishes as well.”

Jared likes Adam’s girlfriend. She’s vivacious and friendly and Adam’s planning to ask her to marry him when they go on vacation to the Bahamas at the end of the summer.

Would Jared have planned an elaborate proposal to remember for Jensen?

It doesn’t matter now.

The ride on the bike helps jolt him out of the avalanche of regret that’s suddenly crushing him. It gets his adrenalin pumping and by the time Adam slows down on the approach to Jared’s building, Jared feels like he can breathe again. He needs to do more things like this. He needs to fill his life with exciting activities so he has no time to wallow in memories. No more hanging out at home lost in pictures of someone who no longer belongs to him.

It’s over, and for the first time since he got on the plane in Dallas he feels like maybe he’ll be okay after all.

*

He’s been sitting here for three hours.

At first it was a relief that Jared wasn’t home yet. Jensen was so terrified he couldn’t think of words and was worried he’d just fall at Jared’s feet and hope that said enough. Over the first hour he calmed down, focusing on his breathing and not thinking about the likelihood of disaster approaching. During the second hour he fell into a state of numb, blank waiting, but then the thoughts started up again.

What if Jared isn’t coming home tonight?

It’s Friday night, after all. He probably went to one of his clubs and right at this moment he may be sinking into another man’s body in another man’s bed.

Please, no, Jared, don’t stay over.

Jensen will sit here until morning if he has to, despite the suspicious looks the security guy at the counter keeps giving him, but he doesn’t know what state he’ll be in by the time Jared eventually turns up.

He should probably leave. Go back to the tiny Airbnb apartment he rented for the week and come
back tomorrow morning—Jared’s bound to come home tomorrow, isn’t he?

What if he’s gone away for his birthday weekend? That’s not something Jensen anticipated.

Then, fine, he’ll miss Jared’s birthday, but he’s got to return home at some stage and Jensen will keep coming back until he’s here.

How much longer should he wait tonight? Another hour? Three? How receptive will Jared be at 2 o’clock in the morning after a salacious night out?

Until midnight, he decides. He’ll wait until just after midnight, until the start of Jared’s birthday.

Except he doesn’t need to.

A motorcycle pulls up outside, and he watches idly through the glass as two men climb off it. Then the taller of the men removes his helmet and shakes out shaggy dark curls—

It’s Jared.

It’s Jared, and instead of going to someone else’s place, he’s brought that someone else home with him.

He’s brought home the man he’s replacing Jensen with.

Jensen wants to run, only there’s nowhere to run to except out the door that Jared is opening for his partner.

Okay.

Maybe Jared won’t see him since they’re laughing together, absorbed in each other. He can just sit here in the corner and not move and let Jared have what he’s chosen for the eve of his birthday.

For his post-Jensen life.

Except.

Except.

“Please tell me you haven’t made the decision for him.” Dianne’s words slice through him. She’s right. He has no right to do that. He has to give Jared the choice. Maybe these aren’t ideal circumstances, and he’s probably the last person Jared wants to see on his way upstairs with his fuck of the night, but Jared deserves the right to reject him himself.

“Jared.”

His voice is barely a croak, but Jared, already at the elevators, freezes.

Jensen forces himself up, takes two steps out of the corner, into the light. “Jared?”

Excruciatingly slowly, Jared turns around.

*
He heard right.

It is Jensen.

Jensen is here. In his apartment building. In New York.

Jensen is here.

Jensen.

The name pounds through Jared’s roaring heartbeat: Jensen, Jensen, Jensen, Jensen.

“You know this guy?” Adam asks.

Adam. Shit. One look at Jensen’s hollow eyes shows who he believes Adam is: Jensen’s replacement. He looks stricken, but he’s standing there, on the edge of flight but not running. Not running. Jensen isn’t running away.

“Jensen.” His name feels forbidden on Jared’s tongue. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m sorry to b-bother you. I can come back. T-tomorrow. Or—whenever. Whenever you want—if you want me—I mean.” Jensen stops. His mouth moves as though he means to keep speaking, but no sound comes.

Jared needs to say something. But what? How, when Jensen is here and so distraught and—oh fuck, did he do it? Is he here because he went through with his confession after all and his parents kicked him out? “Why are you here?” The words sound vicious, harsh, but he can’t recall them, not even when Jensen visibly flinches.

“I c-came to tell you something.” He takes another step forward. There’s no bag with him. Did they not let him take anything or is Jared wrong about the reason he’s here?

“What?”

Jensen’s eyes flicker towards Adam. “I can come back another time. When it’s—whenever is convenient for you. I-if you want me to, I mean.”

If he lets Jensen leave, would he ever return?

A part of him wants to test him. Wants to throw Jensen out into the dark, banish him, let him spend the night believing Jared is having wild, fantastic sex with Adam, and see if he returns anyway. See if he means it.

But what if he doesn’t come back?

Then Jared would know—but is it worth taking that risk?

Especially when he’d only be doing it to hurt Jensen. To punish him. To make him feel just a fraction of how Jared’s been feeling for the past two weeks.

“Tomorrow,” Jensen says, coming another step closer. “Would that work for you? Tell me what time and I’ll be here. Or somewhere else, if you prefer. Anywhere. Just tell me. Or—or you can come to me when you choose to—if you choose to. I’ll text you my address and you can—”

“Your address? In New York?”
“Yes.” Jensen looks up from the phone he’s pulled out of his pocket. “I-I live here now.”

“You do.”

“Yes.”

“Since when?”

“This afternoon.”

“Why?”

“Because you do.”

The answer, so short, so stark, zaps a wave of hope through Jared. “What did you come to tell me?”

Jensen glances at Adam again. “I—now?”

“Yes, now. Tell me why you’re here.”

With another look at Adam, Jensen takes several more steps forward. All Jared has to do is take one step of his own and he could touch him.

“I came to give you your birthday present,” Jensen says softly.

Oh. Oh. That’s it? That’s all? “What is it?”

“M-me.”

Jensen looks so uncertain, like he’s sure Jared is about to reject him. But he stands there, shoulders open, arms locked behind his back, offering himself.

“For how long?” Jared demands.

“As long as you want me.”

“If I just want one night?”

A tremor runs through Jensen’s defenceless body. “Whatever you choose. I’ll still be here, though. In New York. If you ever—if you change your mind.”

“And if I don’t want you at all?”

He should hate himself for saying it, for inflicting the possibility on Jensen, especially when he sees the way Jensen bites down into his lower lip to hold back the cry that Jared can see in his eyes.

“I’ll still be here.” Jensen’s voice is barely audible. He takes the final step forward that brings them face to face and unclasps his arms. “I know I don’t deserve anything, Jared, not after what I did. I understand if I made you hate me. I get it. You have every right to feel that way. If you’ve decided I’m too much trouble, I’m not worth it, I understand. But I just ask one thing, that you’ll give me a chance to make it up to you. To prove to you that I can be worthy, that you can trust me.”

“I did trust you,” Jared whispers. “Jen, I trusted you, and you—”

“I know. And I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Jay.” Tears wet Jensen’s lashes, making his eyes look extra green as Jared studies them, trying to reach that place where it feels like they’re looking into each
other’s souls and don’t need words. “I know I don’t deserve it, but, please, just give me—I’m not going to go away. I’m here to stay. However long it takes me to prove to you that I’ll never do anything like that again.”

Unable to hold back any longer, Jared reaches for Jensen’s hand. It’s icy cold and he cradles it between his own. “You broke me,” he admits. “When you didn’t come back. And I had to sit there with your parents and try and explain without telling them why you ran off like that.”

“My mother knew.” Jensen covers their joined hands with his other hand. “She knew what I was going to say, she knew all along.”

“She did?”

“She said she so badly wanted to talk to you about it, but since I hadn’t said it and you wouldn’t say it, she didn’t know if that would help or make it worse.”

“So—wait—you came out to them?”

Jensen nods. “Last night. I know it was too late, but I did, Jared, I told them.”

“And?”

“My dad, he said he’d hoped my mom was wrong when she told him what she suspected about us. He said he didn’t want that for me, he wanted me to have a normal life in Texas, the kind of life I was meant to have with Dianne.”

“But you can’t,” Jared says fiercely. “You can’t have that kind of life, you can’t.”

“I know. And he knows too. He’s not happy, but he’s not—he didn’t kick me out.”

“But why are you—you said you live here now?”

“Because you live here. What is there for me in Texas?”

Jensen is his. Jensen came out to his family and even though they didn’t reject them he still left them and came to Jared. Came to be Jared’s.

“What about the company? Your job?”

“I have a new job. In New York. A client of my dad’s—it’s a long story, I’ll tell you, if you want to hear.”

“Of course I want to hear. I want to hear everything.”

Since his hands are occupied, Jensen doesn’t wipe away the tear that slides down his cheek. He doesn’t even try to blink the others away, lets them fall too as he gazes up at Jared. “Does that mean you’re giving me a chance?”

I’m giving you everything. Forever. “You’re mine,” Jared tells him. “You’re mine and I’m not letting you go again.”

More tears, but they can’t obscure Jensen’s luminous smile. “Yes, I’m yours. Yours to do whatever you want with.”

“Just for my birthday?” Jared tries to joke, and Jensen shakes his head.
“For always. If you’ll have me.”

*

He didn’t expect this.

While gearing up to tell his parents, while packing and flying across the country and setting up the foundations of his new life here in New York, Jensen never dared to imagine it could go this well with Jared.

“We should go upstairs,” Jared says. He’s gazing at Jensen like Jensen will disappear if he blinks, and there’s an expression of wonder on his face. “I need to do things to you.”

His words flare heat in Jensen’s belly—but thinking of sex reminds him of who Jared was intending to have sex with tonight. “What about your friend?”

“My—who?”

“Your, uh—” Jensen breaks eye contact to glance at the guy, but he’s not there. Turning around, he sees the lobby is empty bar the security guard whose back is to them. “The guy you came in with.”

“Oh, Adam?”

Jared knows his name. “Yeah. Adam.”

Reminded now, Jared checks out the lobby for himself. “Guess he left. I’ll text him later, but I think he figured out for himself who you were.”

So he wasn’t random then, not if Jared has his number. Still, Jared doesn’t look particularly disappointed. “Who I am?”

“The boyfriend I mentioned breaking up with.”

Jared wouldn’t discuss private emotional matters with just a casual pick-up. “Do you—do you want to go after him? I don’t want to intrude. I know I showed up without warning and if you want to—”

Jared’s fingers pull out from their joined hands and press firmly over his mouth. Obediently, Jensen stops talking.

“Adam is a friend from work. A colleague. I went out tonight with him and some other colleagues for a drink to celebrate my birthday tomorrow. I told him I broke up with you and I got upset, so he gave me a lift home.”

Jared wasn’t planning to sleep with the guy. The relief is tempered by the pain of knowing that Jensen made him so upset his friends were worried about him. He wants to apologise again but Jared’s hand is still over his mouth.

“There’s something I want you to know, Jen,” Jared says, looking very serious. “Other than Chad, which I regret with everything inside me, I haven’t touched another man since you. Since the night we first got together. I haven’t even looked at another man. I know you have ideas about me being some kind of slut—”
Jensen makes an outraged noise of protest.

Jared’s hand tightens over his mouth. “No, it’s fair. I was. There are reasons, and I’ll tell you all of it. That trip home helped me figure it out. But that’s not who I am naturally. And to be honest, part of the reason I was so profligate while you knew me was because of you.”

“You?”

It’s just a squeak, but Jared understands and amusement sparks in his eyes. “Yes, you. I fell for you the first time I saw you, before I knew you were my roommate. Do you have any idea how hard I worked to sleep by your side every night and not seduce you?”

A fantasy rips through Jensen’s mind of himself innocently sleeping and Jared losing the battle and surreptitiously starting to feel him up, to turn him on in his sleep. That’s another item for his list, and Jared laughs, seeming to read in his eyes where Jensen’s mind just went.

“You know I wouldn’t do that. But because I couldn’t, I tried to slake my—my need for you elsewhere. Even then it was all about you. Even Chad.”

Chad is going to hurt Jensen for a while, which is stupid since he was fully prepared for Jared to be with Adam tonight.

“I’m going to make it up to you about Chad,” Jared says. “About all of them, because, Jensen, as much as you’re mine now, I’m yours. I’ve been yours all along, but now I’m officially yours and I never want to be with somebody else. Not ever again. Only you. The night I offered myself to you, I know it wasn’t our agreement but I gave you all of me. And I think you kinda did the same.”

Jensen nods as vigorously as Jared’s grasp lets him. It’s true, and that’s where they went wrong, pretending for so long that they hadn’t, that it was just casual, temporary. Tugging one of his hands free, he touches his own heart then touches Jared’s.

“Yeah.” Smiling softly, Jared reduces his cover over Jensen’s mouth to just a single finger. “You gonna come upstairs with me now?”

With another nod, Jensen slips his tongue out and flicks it against Jared’s finger.

Jared taps his lips. “You’re gonna have to promise to be a good boy, though. You promise to be a good boy for me, Jensen?”

Jensen can’t help smiling against the finger as he nods again, and Jared takes his finger away.

“Tell me.”

“I’ll be a good boy for you, Jay. Your good boy. Always.”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t worry, this isn’t the end. But it’s the good stuff now.
Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

Jared takes Jensen upstairs.

It’s different, Jared thinks as he leads Jensen into his bedroom, knowing that Jensen is his. It feels momentous. Like he needs to mark this moment with some kind of ceremony.

“Shit, it’s a mess,” he says with dismay as he looks around. “Jensen, I’m sorry. Look, maybe you should go back to the living room, have a drink or something, and let me clean up. If I’d known you were coming—”

“It’s fine.” Going up on tiptoes, Jensen kisses him softly. “I don’t care about the mess.” His hand slides up through Jared’s hair, which is probably just as wrecked. “Just push everything off the bed so there’s space for us, that’s all that matters.”

The bed, yes, but also the floor. Jared needs floor space for what he intends. “What about a shower? You wanna take a shower?”

“Are you telling me I need to?”

“No need to, but—” Suddenly he knows how he wants to do this. “Yes. You need to. You need to because I’ve decided you should take one.”

Jensen’s smile turns sultry. “’S that right?”

“And you just made me a promise downstairs. You planning to keep it, Jensen?”

“I don’t know.” His ‘good boy’ licks his lips, considering. “Will you punish me if I don’t?”

Ah, that’s where he’s going. “There’s punishments and punishments. Some you might want, some you definitely don’t. Remember the ice?”

A satisfying shiver runs through Jensen. “I really didn’t like that.”

“So maybe you should make your way towards the bathroom. It’s the second door on the left. My towel is the green one, you can use that.” As Jensen turns towards the door, Jared adds, “And leave your clothes here.”

“Here? But—” Jensen gestures towards the corridor. “What if your friends come home?”

“I’m sure they won’t turn up in the next 30 seconds. Better strip fast.”

Hands moving to his belt, Jensen obediently starts to unfasten it. “What if they do?”

Jared shrugs, clearing away a bunch of books so he can sit on the bed to watch the show. “What if they do?”

“I don’t think they want to see a naked guy running through their house.”
“Most of them are gay.” Despite Jensen’s weight loss, the chest he reveals as he shrugs out of his shirt is still broad and enticing. His nipples stand out more, hard and erect beneath Jared’s gaze. They’re his now to play with whenever he pleases and his mouth literally waters. “I don’t think they’ll be too bothered by a naked guy. Especially not when he’s as hot as you.”

Unbuttoning his jeans, Jensen pauses. “You think I’m hot?”

Jared flicks an elastic band at him.

He’s too far for it to even sting, but he catches it as it bounces off his stomach. “You could hurt me with this.”

“I could.”

“That would fall under the category of punishments I want.”

“Yeah?”

“Please promise you’re going to hurt me tonight, Jared.”

“Get those jeans off you or I won’t.”

The jeans come off with alacrity, as well as Jensen’s briefs. He stands there unselfconscious about his nakedness, letting Jared look his fill as his cock hardens fully.

“I like it when you look at me,” he confesses.

Jared drags his gaze up to meet soft, shy eyes. “There are positions I can teach you, positions I can put you through so you can display yourself for me and I can inspect you properly. Would you like that?”

“Yes.” No hesitation. “There’s so much I want. So much I want you to teach me, so much I want to try out and test and see if I can do and if I like it and if you like it. Everything. I want to try everything at least once.”

“Everything?”

Jensen’s grin turns rueful. “Maybe not something that would damage me permanently. But everything else. Because how do we know if we like it if we don’t try it?” Parting his legs, he lifts his arms up to clasp his hands behind his neck. “Is this one of your positions?”

“Yes.” The word punches out of Jared. Jensen looks like he’s been studying slaveboy positions all his life, his form perfect, and a thought occurs. “Answer me honestly. Is this something you’ve researched?”

“I haven’t.” Jensen maintains the position. “But I’ve seen pictures, and I liked them. I imagined you making me do this. I imagined what it would feel like to stand like that, to kneel like that, for you.”

For him. So many of Jensen’s fantasies seem to be centred on Jared. It’s heady and exciting and his mouth dries as images flash through his head of a thousand possibilities. “Did you see any pictures about presenting your ass to me?”

“Standing or kneeling?”

“Let’s stay with standing for the moment.”
Fluidly, Jensen lowers his arms and turns around, stepping delicately between the clothes Jared left on the floor during the week. Bending over, legs a couple of feet apart, he reaches behind to pull his ass cheeks apart.

“Jen.” Jared can’t say more as emotion overwhelms him. Sliding to his knees, he crosses the carpet, heedless of impediments, until he’s kneeling directly behind Jensen.

“Is this right?” Jensen asks. His voice is hoarse, strained.

In reply, Jared presses a kiss against his displayed hole. “You’re perfect, babe.” He slaps the cheek closest to him. “Now get this ass in the shower. We actually have a great shower, so make the most of it.”

Taking that for the permission it is, Jensen straightens and turns back around. His straining cock is right in front of Jared’s face.

“And no touching this while you’re in there.” He flicks it hard with his forefinger, enjoying Jensen’s involuntary hiss of pain. “It’s for me tonight, not for you.”

It was the right decision not to give in to the temptation of a hurried blow job despite how hungry he is for Jensen’s pretty cock again, because some of the turbulence in Jensen’s eyes eases at his words. “It’s always for you, Jay.”

“And that’s something we’re gonna discuss later. But for now, into the shower.”

Jensen scampers to the door, pausing to slant gleaming eyes over his shoulder. “Time limit?”

“No less than seven minutes.”

*

It’s hard to ignore his needy cock in the shower, but Jensen’s grateful for the distraction the effort of resisting it provides. He’s also grateful for Jared’s suggestion of the shower, because it turns out that he needs the breather.

Jared took him back.

He didn’t have to wait hours or days or weeks, he didn’t have to repeatedly plead his case—it’s done. Jared said yes and Jensen’s out and they’re together now, in public, everything he dreamed of and believed he’d never have.

Maybe there are tears on his cheeks, but the hot, pounding water will keep his secret, as will the tiles of the shower when he leans against them for support.

He’s with Jared.


Has forgiven him.

That’s not to say Jensen doesn’t have a hell of a lot of making up to do, but the uncertainty is over, uncertainty that began the moment Jared came out of the bathroom so many months ago back at
school and blew Jensen’s life to smithereens.

He left his phone in the bedroom so he has no idea how long he takes, but Jared gave him a minimum time limit, meaning he wanted time to himself as well, so Jensen lets the minutes pass without stressing about them. He finds Jared’s shampoo and uses it, relishing the scent that he’s missed. He also discovers that Jared brought home the peppermint and olive soap Jensen splurged on near the end of the semester and then forgot to pack.

He’s pretty certain Jared didn’t bring it because he couldn’t afford to buy his own soap; he brought it because it was Jensen’s, and that makes his chest tighten. Back when Jared thought he was leaving Jensen for good, he kept Jensen’s soap.

Once his hair is done, he cleans himself as thoroughly as he can for Jared’s use, something he didn’t dare do before coming in case it jinxed his prospects, and then there’s no more excuse to stall. Hopefully Jared is ready for him by now.

The bedroom is transformed. No clothing can be seen other than his own, folded neatly on the tiny desk in the corner, just the way he’d have folded it himself, his wallet and phone left on top, phone plugged in to charge since the battery was nearly dead after his long day. The books that couldn’t fit in the shelves in the wall are piled in neat rows beside the desk, and it’s clear that they’ve been displaced to make way for the precious childhood books Megan saved for Jared, which now have pride of place in the shelves.

Jared’s sitting on the bed, legs folded beneath him, meditation style. His eyes fly open when Jensen knocks softly on the open door and the relief that flares in them twists Jensen’s stomach.

“You’re still stuck with me,” he says, fingering the towel around his hips, trying to make a joke of it, but Jared’s expression is too raw and he rushes forward, dropping to his knees beside the bed.

Jared moves too, catches him in his arms and holds him close. “You smell good.”

“I used your shampoo.”

“And my soap.”

“My soap, actually.”

Jared’s laugh sounds ragged. “Yeah. Wondered if you’d notice.”

“I’m glad you kept it.”

“I’m glad you’re here.”

Jensen clings tighter. “I’m not leaving. I meant it, you’re stuck with me.”

“Never letting you go.” Except a few minutes later, Jared eases back. “I’m gonna take a shower too, and you’ll wait for me here, on your knees. Give me the towel.”

Kneeling up, Jensen unwinds it, baring himself for the second time tonight. “Where do you want me?”

“In the middle of the carpet.” Jared indicates as he gets off the bed and flicks open his belt. “You’re my birthday present, you said, so I’m gonna wrap you up with a bow.”

“I imagined doing that,” Jensen says as he moves into position. “There were several options, but this
was my favourite one, being naked for you.”

“What kind of bow did you have in mind?”

“Something big and ostentatious, probably red.”

“And how were you planning to tie it? Around your dick?”

He looks up as Jared comes around to stand in front of him, now naked himself but holding his belt.
“I’d thought around my wrists, actually.”

Jared’s slow smile makes it clear that his thoughts have gone down a similar road. “It’s not red, or even a bow, but that’s exactly what I plan to do with this belt. Put your arms behind your back and bend over so your face is on the floor.”

He loves this position, so blatantly submissive, demeaning except for the fact he finds glory in it. Jared pulls his arms painfully up over his back to bind his wrists together, and as he feels the leather tighten around them Jensen feels an instant relaxation of the tension that’s scoured through his muscles since he sat beside Jared in his living room back home and said the wrong words to his mother.

He really is Jared’s again.

Lowering his arms, Jared touches one of Jensen’s pulled-back shoulders to make him rise into position. “How does that feel?”

“Like something better than I deserve.”

“Yeah?” Jared’s finger traces a droplet of water trickling down Jensen’s cheek from his wet hair. “I wouldn’t worry about that if I were you. You got plenty comin’.” He stands, but doesn’t move towards the doorway, gazing down at Jensen instead with an unfamiliar expression on his face. “You have no idea how gorgeous you look like that, here in my bedroom. Naked. Mine. I honestly never thought I’d see you here.”

There’s nothing Jensen can say to that.

“Now you stay right there, exactly as you are. Keep your eyes on the door, which I’m going to leave open.”

“Jay—”

“No one will be back, I checked. You’re safe.” And with that, he’s gone.

Jensen shouldn’t think about it, but it’s hard not to imagine Jared’s friends returning early. He’d hear the front door open, hear their voices as they burst into the apartment, probably drunk, none of them expecting to find a naked man bound on his knees in the middle of Jared’s bedroom.

It could happen. It won’t, but it could.

He’s so immersed in the possibility that the sight of Jared suddenly appearing in the doorway makes him jump.

“Jen?”

“Thought you were them.”
“I told you—”

“I know. Just—couldn’t stop thinking about it.”

Jared knew they wouldn’t be back because he hasn’t bothered with the towel. Instead he looms over Jensen, equally naked, skin blotted dry but still damp, steaming a little. He steps forward, bringing his hard cock to just an inch away from Jensen’s face. “Look at me,” he says.

It’s unnecessary because Jensen already is, gazing straight up.

“You’re beautiful,” Jared says, “and you’re mine and I’m going to share you in public, don’t you worry about that, the time will come, and soon. Maybe tomorrow night for my birthday I’ll take you to a club.”

“The one you sent me a picture of?”

“Yeah. Did you look it up?”

“Of course.” Jensen remembers how it hurt to see what he was being denied. “You’ll really take me there?”

“When I went there, all I could think of was picturing you there, how much you’d love it, how much I’d love showing you off and playing with you there in front of everyone, just like you fantasise about. Do you think you’re ready to do that for real?”

His cock pulses and heat streaks through him. “It’s scary,” he admits, “but I do want to. Maybe we could go and I could see what it’s like.”

“Sure.” Reaching out, Jared draws his finger down the line of Jensen’s nose. “But for tonight you’re just for me.”

*

Jared will never get enough of Jensen on his knees, those huge eyes dark with hunger as he licks his lips and tries manfully not to be distracted by the cock bobbing in front of his face. The cock that started all of this.

This is where they began, Jared naked from the shower, Jensen riveted by his cock.

“Look at me,” Jared says again, but this time he means his cock and Jensen gets it. His wet mouth curves up in a little smile as he lowers his gaze.

“Do I get to taste you tonight?”

“What I’m gonna do is fuck your mouth. You’re going to kneel there and take it, open up your throat for me and let me do as I please.”

Jensen’s entire body flushes with pleasure. “I can do that.”

Jared determined his strategy while in the shower and he knew he had to start with this. He’s too needy, barely able to think beyond the rushing of blood through his veins at the thought of Jensen being here, being his. It’s too wonderful, too exciting, and if thinks about it too much he’s liable to
explode, so ramming himself down Jensen’s throat helps take some of the edge off it. Well-trained by now, Jensen keeps still, his mouth stretched so wide it looks painful, as Jared pounds into him. Jared knows how to make him gag and he does, deliberately so. Before Jensen he never dared push anyone this far, but Jensen loves it, relaxes his throat muscles and takes it, takes it, takes it, choking and gargling, involuntary tears spurring down his cheeks, but his eyes never leave Jared’s, sparkling with happiness, and it’s that, rather than the exquisite sensations of Jensen’s tight throat around his cock, that pushes Jared over the edge.

He pulls back just in time, even though he doesn’t want to, because he knows how Jensen loves to wear his come on his face. Jensen doesn’t close his eyes or his mouth, and somehow, despite his vision shorting out, Jared manages to keep his aim low enough so he doesn’t get any in Jensen’s eyes.

As he wrings himself dry, gasping for breath, Jensen doesn’t move. He keeps his mouth open, come striping his tongue as well as his cheeks.

What did Jared ever do to deserve this man?

“Swallow,” he orders hoarsely, when he’s able to.

Closing his mouth at last, Jensen does. His eyes drift shut as he savours the taste. “God, I’ve missed this.”

Jared looks down between his spread legs where Jensen’s cock is almost purple with need. “How’s that feelin’?”

It takes Jensen a moment to understand. He follows Jared’s gaze down. “Oh, this?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s happy.”

“Happy?”

“It’s missed you too.”

Balancing on one leg, Jared traces his foot down the length of it, coming to rest against Jensen’s swollen balls. “You think you can control it by yourself?”

“Nearly didn’t,” Jensen confesses. “It’s a bit wild for you.”

“Wild enough to fuck me?”

Jensen’s body responds before his mind comprehends, his cock thrusting upwards with excitement. “Fuck you?” Jensen says blankly.

“You liked doing it, didn’t you?” Jared prods his cock. “This certainly did.”

“But I thought—you’re not—aren’t you going to fuck me?”

His voice sounds small, like Jared’s rejecting him, and Jared drops to his knees. “Jensen,” he says, cupping Jensen’s face in both hands, “I’m going to fuck you so much your hole will be permanently open for me, don’t worry. You won’t be lacking in the getting-fucked department. But tonight, first, I want you to come inside me.”

Jensen shivers at his words. “I thought you didn’t like it last time.”
“I didn’t like it at first, but you made it so good for me and I want to feel that again. Can you do this for me? Can you open me up and then slide your big, hard cock up my ass, where I’ll be so tight and warm for you?”

Jensen laughs raggedly at Jared’s over-the-top words. “I want to give you whatever you want. Last time—”

“Last time it was goodbye. This time—”

“Is hello?”

It’s Jared’s turn to laugh. “Something like that. This isn’t something I’m going to ask for often, I have to be in the right state of mind for it, but when I am, then I want it real bad. You gonna deny me?”

“How can I when you put it like that? If you’re sure you want it, I definitely want to do it. As long as you do me too.”

“Oh, I will,” Jared says fervently, and Jensen laughs again.

And then he’s blinking tears back.

“Jen?”


A tear escapes, sliding down his cheek and Jared licks it up, tasting his own come mixed with it. “Hey, it’s okay.”

“I need to touch you. Please?”

Shit, his wrists are still bound. Quickly, Jared leans around to undo the belt and the moment his hands are free, Jensen wraps his arms tightly around Jared, burying his face in Jared’s chest. He’s shaking, and Jared lifts him up onto the bed, their legs twining around each other as Jensen pushes closer.

“I’m sorry,” he hiccups. “I can’t stop.”

“It’s okay.” Jared rubs his hand soothingly up and down Jensen’s back. “It’s okay if you need to cry.”

“I feel stupid.”

“Don’t.” He’s hard-pressed to hold back tears himself. “I’m here, Jen. I’m right here with you.”

“Thought you wouldn’t be. Thought you’d hate me. Thought it would take me so long to get you back. If I ever did. Didn’t think it could be this easy.”

“I love you.”

“I don’t deserve it.” Jensen’s full-body tremor shakes through Jared as well.

“How about you let me decide what you deserve.”

His head nods forcefully against Jared’s chest. “Yes, please.”
“We have a lot to talk about.” He didn’t intend to go into this yet, but it seems Jensen needs it. “We’ve both fucked up, both of us, not just you, and we need to figure stuff out, but right now what matters is we’re together. I’m not letting you go again, Jen. You’re mine now, for good. And, sure, we’ll fuck up again, we’ll hurt each other, we’ll have disagreements, maybe even fights. But as long as we know that underneath it all we’re together, that’s all that counts. We can sort everything else out.”

Jensen nods again, calmer. “Can I lick you open now?”

His embarrassment over his tears is palpable and even though Jared wants to cuddle him for longer he says, “Sure.”
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

Jared and Jensen are together, at last, and determined to make the most of it.

Remembering what worked last time, Jensen directs Jared to lie back against the pillows with his legs splayed. Jared seems more relaxed and eager for what’s about to happen than previously, and Jensen has to believe that he really does want it. It helps, knowing that. Jared is tight, but instead of recoiling when Jensen replaces his tongue with a finger, he thrusts his hips upwards into Jensen’s hand.

“Fuck, yeah.”

“You like this?”

“Want you in me.”

Jensen can empathise, since his own ass is aching with the need to be similarly filled by Jared. On the other hand, he gets to fuck Jared again, get to push himself into that searing heat, and he is definitely up for that.

By the time he’s lining himself up, Jared is wild beneath him, moaning and whimpering, even begging incoherently—or maybe Jensen can’t understand the words because of the roaring of the need within him to get inside. The tightness gives him pause. Did he not prepare Jared enough? But then Jared’s hands clamp around his ass and pull, and Jensen slams in to the hilt.

“Jay?”

“Gimme a sec.” He’s breathing hard and Jensen knows the experience of being suddenly rammed into and feeling like you’re splitting apart. “Okay, I’m good.”

Jensen’s not, though. It’s too much, Jared’s heat clenching around his cock while at the same time imagining the sensations Jared’s going through. “Can I come?”

“What, now?”

“In you.” His words are sharp because it’s taking all his strength to hold back, to control himself. “I need to know before I move.”

Jared’s eyes are soft as he smiles, his hand brushing down over Jensen’s hair to cup his cheek. “Yes, I want you to come in me, baby. Not immediately, I’ll tell you when. Yeah?”

“Yeah.” That helps, knowing he can’t come until Jared’s word. “You ready?”

At Jared’s nod, he eases himself outwards. He made sure to use plenty of lube, but Jared is so tight it almost hurts. Jared’s smile doesn’t dim, however. He looks like he’s loving it, even though he gasps as Jensen thrusts back in. “Keep going, just like that. Smooth and slow.”

It’s as slow as he can make it, his muscles trembling beneath the effort of keeping it that way, but
Jared’s bright eyes on his keep him focused. This is Jared beneath him. Jared surrounding him.
Jared, who’s been keeping up with his yoga exercises because he easily lifts his legs up over
Jensen’s shoulders, giving Jensen the perfect angle into him.

The need to pound is overwhelming, but Jared said slow. “You okay?” he grits out between his
clenched teeth.

Jared nods. “You can speed up now.”

It’s like dam walls breaking as Jensen loses control of his hips. Maybe he’s hurting Jared, but Jared’s
pressing up to meet him and he’s still got that smile on his face like Jensen is the most precious thing
he’s ever seen and it’s tearing Jensen apart.

“You’re mine,” he says fiercely as he pushes in as deeply as he can. “I’m not letting you go again,
Jared. This is it. Everybody’s gonna know that you’re mine, you’re mine, you’re mine.” The words
come out as sobs with every thrust. His heart pounds so loudly it drowns out the sound of their
bodies smacking together, but then, through his tears, he sees Jared’s mouth move.

“Come.”

It feels like his heart is exploding, not his dick. His vision whites out but he still sees Jared’s smile
and it’s all that holds him together as everything dissolves and disappears.

Much, much later, awareness returns. Jared’s legs are no longer over his shoulders. He’s not even in
Jared anymore, just wrapped tightly by Jared’s arms, his face pressed into the long hair at Jared’s
neck. He’s shaking convulsively as Jared strokes his hair and murmurs softly to him.

“....okay, Jen, you’re safe, you’re with me, we’re together, you’re okay, you’re safe—”

“I’m not crying,” he says before he knows for certain either way.

Jared laughs. “I know. It’s okay to feel overwhelmed, though.”

“That’s what you get for making me fuck you.”

“Duly noted.”

“It was good, though.” He pulls away enough to see Jared’s face. “Was it good for you? Was I
good for you?”

Jared’s still smiling. Did he ever stop? “You were perfect for me.”

“I didn’t hurt you? You were so tight.”

“You were perfect,” Jared says again. Lifting his head, he kisses Jensen lightly. “That’s just what I
wanted.”

The world gradually rights itself, colours and edges return to his vision beyond Jared’s face, his body
starts to calm. This is what he has now. He gets to spend the rest of his life being good for Jared,
giving Jared whatever he wants, making him smile like this, looking so satisfied and replete.

It’s so good it hurts.
Jared cuddles Jensen a while longer, happy just to hold him in his arms while he comes down. His ass throbs, feels empty and needy in what must be a very familiar situation for Jensen. He likes the feeling, he decides, focusing on it, especially since it’s Jensen who caused it, the loss of Jensen from deep within his body. But there’s no loss of Jensen anywhere else, since he’s here, for good. Jensen is here in New York, offering himself to Jared permanently.

A sudden wave of emotion crashes through him.

Jensen is here.

Jensen is his.

“Jay?” Jensen, alerted by Jared’s muscles contracting around him, lifts his head off Jared’s chest to look at him. “You okay?”

“You’re here,” Jared says stupidly. He screws up his eyes against the tears that burn, wants to rub them away but can’t make himself take his hands off Jensen’s body. “You’re really here.”

“I am.”

“How?”

“I got on a plane,” he says in his serious voice, as though Jared’s really asking, “and I asked your sister for your address. She didn’t want to give it to me, you know. Actually, you should know this.” Pulling away, he scoots up against the wall and pulls at Jared so Jared sits up too, reaching for the water bottles Jared brought in earlier while Jensen was in the shower. “Here, you probably need some of this.”

Jensen’s ready to talk, which is good, because Jared wants to hear everything he has to say. He gives his eyes a quick dab with the back of his hand before opening his bottle. “So you were saying. My sister?” He tries to remember what he told Megan about Jensen after his return to New York. It’s all a bit of a blur. “What did she tell you?”

“That she’d personally come to New York and rip my balls off if I hurt you again.”

Whoa. “Seriously?”

“She was pretty mad.” Jensen plays with the cap of his water bottle, eyes glued to it. “She said she hadn’t let you go with me for me to betray you—”

“You didn’t betray me, Jensen.”

“I kinda did, though.”

“Look at me.”

Obedient despite his reluctance, Jensen raises his eyes.

“Yes, you hurt me. I won’t pretend you didn’t. I was really fucked up over what happened in Dallas, and maybe I sounded off to her, I can’t remember.”

“Can’t remember?”

“A lot of the last two weeks is a bit of a blank for me.”
“Oh God, Jared.”

“No, no, it’s okay—well, it’s not okay—or it wasn’t, but it is now. And please don’t think I blame you for everything. I put a lot of pressure on you and it’s no surprise you couldn’t cope. I shouldn’t have made it seem like you had to come out immediately to your parents. I knew you weren’t ready, I was just too selfish to stop you from trying.”

Putting down his bottle, Jensen places a hand on Jared’s bare thigh. “I really did want to. I thought I was going to. I just got so scared and then I panicked and then I ran, and I didn’t know how to come back. I was scared I’d made you hate me because I was so weak.”

Jared folds his hand over Jensen’s. “You know I couldn’t hate you.”

“You must have hated me a little bit, when I didn’t come back.”

Jared had only hated himself. “Your dad was mad at you,” he says instead, not wanting to go there.

“I know. He took my ID.”

“Your ID?”

“My fake ID,” Jensen rolls his eyes, “whatever. When I got back and he found out I’d been in a bar, he took my ID and made me promise not to get another one, so you’re buying all the alcohol for the next eight months, I’m afraid.”

Jared laughs because Jensen means him to, but his stomach clenches at the thought of Jensen hiding away for hours out of fear and then coming home to a furious father. “You were at a bar all that time?”

“I couldn’t go to the park because that’s where I was when we broke up and I couldn’t be there again. I was scared you’d call me and this time I wouldn’t be strong enough to ignore your calls.”

“I didn’t call you.”

“I know.” Jensen frowns down at their linked hands. “I was so sure you would.”

“I thought you didn’t want to hear from me. I thought you’d made your choice and it wasn’t me, and I was trying to respect that.”

“I was scared, Jared. I didn’t mean for us to break up. I didn’t mean for us to be over.”

It’s the third time Jensen has used the word scared. That’s something else Jared needs to think about. Now isn’t the time for that, though, it’s time for comfort instead. Reaching out, he pulls Jensen back into his arms. “We’re not over. Look at us. You’re here in my bed in New York and it’s my birthday and it’s the best birthday present I could have imagined.” His fingers rub a soothing stripe up and down Jensen’s arm. “You wanna tell me how it went down with your parents? What made you change your mind?”

Shifting, Jensen drops one of his legs over Jared’s, his thigh resting warm and heavy against Jared’s groin. “You won’t believe it, but it was Dianne.”

“I’ve got to send that girl something for being the best fucking matchmaker we could have. What did she say?”

“She caught me at a bad moment. Oh, guess what, she was very eager to tell me all about how
unattractive she finds me.”

Jensen, unattractive?

“Apparently I’m not her type.”

Now that Jared can believe.

“Then she lit into me when she discovered the way I let you go and she made me see how badly I’d fucked up. She asked me what kind of man did I want to be and that’s what did it for me. I didn’t want to be a coward, Jared, and I knew I had to come out, even if you wouldn’t take me back. Before, I’d been making it about you, but it wasn’t, it was about me and who I was and how I was going to live the rest of my life. So I went home and at dinner I told my parents I had something to say. The thing is, I wasn’t scared any more. Compared to losing you, I didn’t care how they reacted. I’d already packed my things, I didn’t unpack after you left, I kept my bag there ready to go as if I was about to get on that plane after all, and since I planned to come directly to you after telling them, regardless of their reaction, I couldn’t feel any dread or fear, only relief.”

When Jensen doesn’t say any more, Jared prompts, “You said your mother already knew?”

“Yeah.” Jensen traces delicate patterns through the hair on Jared’s chest as he talks. “She suspected because of the way I talked about you when I went home for Christmas. Apparently I was all Jared this and Jared that, and she said I had a light in my eyes she’d never seen there. That’s why they came after their cruise. She wanted to see you for herself, and see me around you.”

“And?”

“And she knew. Right from the start. That’s why she brought Dianne, to see how I was with you versus with her, but she said she didn’t even need that because it was obvious immediately.”

“Wait, so she knew I was gay? Even when she was asking me about girls? She was so nice to me, and she knew?”

“She was pretty sure. I think she was trying to push to see if we’d admit it.”

All those lies that weekend, all that stress, and Donna fucking knew. “That wasn’t very nice to Dianne.”

“She said it was better than letting Dianne marry me if I was gay. But then Dianne’s mother died and she didn’t know what to do, especially since I was playing the devoted boyfriend and seemed to have broken up with you. But that’s why she supported Dianne’s idea to get you to come to Texas. She told me it needed to come out, and sooner was better than later after I’d been married for twenty years and maybe had kids and a whole life to ruin. Just like you said right at the beginning.”

“Fuck.” Memories of time spent with Donna skim through Jared’s mind and he can see that it makes sense, especially the way she was the night Jensen and Dianne broke up. “She treated me like a son-in-law,” he says slowly. “I thought it was just because I was your best friend, and that she’d despise me if she knew the truth, but you’re saying she knew all along? She knew I was gay and she still welcomed me into her home like that?”

“I don’t think she minds, Jay. She honestly doesn’t.”

“What about your dad. You said he wasn’t happy?”

“No. He was really not happy.” Jensen’s shivers at the memory, and Jared pulls him closer.
“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want.”

“No, I should. You should know. I’m not actually sure if he was more mad at me for treating both you and Dianne badly or for the fact you were male. He yelled at me a bit. A lot. About lying, mostly.”

“Did he say anything about me being gay?”

“That he should have known.” Jensen slants a grin up from his place snuggled into Jared’s shoulder. “That you made me happier than just a friend should.”

“I made you fucking unhappy, though.”

“No. That was me, being confused and too scared to be honest. You always made me happy, Jared. I didn’t realise how unhappy I was before I met you. I barely cared about my life because none of it felt right but I didn’t know what to do about it. I was trapped. And miserable. Then you came along and reminded me what it was like to feel happy, to feel alive, to be excited and enthusiastic and interested in life again. You know what I was like, man. You saw me, how rigidly I lived, all my rules and my routines. They were all I had, because I was afraid that if I let go of them, everything would fall apart.”

It’s true, Jared knows, but he didn’t expect Jensen to see it so clearly. “I can’t believe your parents are okay with this, though. With...us.”

“I think it’s because they saw the change in me too, and they know it’s because of you.” Jensen’s hand comes up to cover Jared’s heart. “I’m sorry your parents couldn’t be like that.”

Jared shrugs. “I’m used to it by now. I don’t expect any different. And to be honest, I never had with them what you have with your parents. They always acted like Megan and I were a burden, an imposition in their lives. They left us with babysitters a lot, except when we had to show off what a perfect family we were to society. Megan and I learned early on what was expected of us, how we were to behave to be a credit to them.” He covers Jensen’s hand, because he can feel his heart start to pound as he talks about memories he thought he’d stripped out of himself, or at the very least, stripped of their ability to hurt him. “Megan was always better at it than I was. I got too angry, wanted to force them to see me as I was, not as the image they had in their head of the ‘perfect son’. Remember I said I’d had a revelation about why I slept around so much and was so blatant about it? It was to do with this. With them. It wasn’t because I have some kind of insatiable need to be having sex with lots of different people, Jensen, because I don’t. Just you.”

“Lots of sex with me, I hope,” Jensen murmurs, turning his hand over to link fingers with Jared. “Lots and lots.”

“Yeah.” Jared lifts their hands so he can kiss the back of Jensen’s. “You’re gonna be worn out by my demands.”

“Want you to fuck me until I can’t walk. Literally can’t.”

“I can do that.”

“Yeah? One weekend when we’re free. Fuck me so hard, so long, that I can’t stand up, then tie me to the bed and fuck me some more.”

“We have so many of your limits to explore, to see how much you can take, how far I can push you.”
“I want to explore everything. Everything you can imagine, you ever fantasised about. Everything, Jay. Whatever you want.”

“You fantasies too. You said you had a list. Did you write it down?”

“Not yet, but I can. You too.” Jensen pulls their hands up again and licks a stripe from Jared’s wrist all the way down to where their fingers mingle, catching Jared’s middle finger between his teeth and sucking hard on it. “I missed you in my mouth,” he says, letting go. “Can I suck you now? Get you hard so you can fuck me?”

Talking time is over, and that’s okay. They have time to go deeper into things, to work through their individual shit and deal with stuff. Right now is time for other things.

“No,” he says briskly, letting go of Jensen’s hand. “You haven’t earned that yet.”

Fortunately, Jensen takes that in the spirit in which it was meant, his pupils flaring as he registers the change in mood between them. He pushes up from his lounging position on the bed to his knees.

“Is it punishment time?”

“Drape yourself over my lap.”

They haven’t done it like this before, not in traditional punishment position. It takes Jensen a moment to figure it out, to centre himself so his ass is thrust up perfectly for Jared’s hand. His hard cock brushes against Jared’s legs as he wriggles. He likes this, and Jared’s own cock fills with heat. It’s as though Jensen was created especially for him, his personal gift from the universe, maybe to make up for his shitty childhood or perhaps just as a wonderful chance coincidence, he doesn’t care which. What matters is the quivering pale ass over his lap, turning prettily pink beneath his hand as he spanks it, starting gently, rubbing as much as hitting, and then building in strength until Jensen’s skin is bright rosy red and Jared’s palm burns.

“How’re you doin’?”

“More, please.”

Jared gives him a full-strength smack right in the centre of his ass. “Like that?”

“Mmm.” Jensen wriggles again, grinding his cock between Jared’s thighs. “More. So good, Jay.”

“You’re going to take ten more like that.”

“Only ten?”

Insatiable fucker. Anyone else would be sobbing by now, but Jensen’s eyes gleam as he looks back over his shoulder. Unable to resist, Jared bends over to kiss him, hand tightening in Jensen’s short hair to pull his head back.

“I like that,” Jensen whispers between kisses. “Pull harder.”

“You need to grow it longer.”

“I will. If you promise to pull it.”

“I’ll use it like a leash, drag you around by it.”

“Yes, please.”
Jared nips his lower lip. “Such a polite boy you are.”

“Just for you.”

“You’re gonna count these final ten for me, and say thank you every time, got it?”

Jensen grins. “Yes, sir.”

With each spank, Jensen’s voice takes longer to come, it trembles more, and the sadist inside Jared thrills to it. He’s not as untouched by the pain as he made it seem, although to be fair, Jared is really walloping him. His hand aches as he lands the final blow, and he lays it over Jensen’s blazing cheeks, waiting for the word ten.

“Jensen?”

“Shit, Jay.” Strain renders his voice almost unrecognisable. “It fucking hurts!”

“Count, or I’ll give you another one.”

He’s not sure whether that’s a threat or a promise, and Jensen hesitates as though he’s not certain either.

“Be a good boy, this isn’t the end unless you want it to be. But it will be if you don’t count like I told you to.”

“T-ten,” Jensen says at last. “Thank you, Jared.”

“Very good.” He rubs his hand back and forth, heat against heat, then slides it down to cool, pale thighs. “Next time you’ll get it here too. Want me to spank your legs?”

“Try. Want to—want to feel it. How much it hurts.”

He picks Jensen’s left thigh and holds back a little since it’s meant to hurt more. The way Jensen jacknifes over his legs confirms that theory. “How was that?”

“Hurts a lot!”

“Next time,” Jared assures him, already imagining the way he’ll lay Jensen out, legs stretched apart. “Right now, though, it’s time for something else.”

Jensen brightens. “Fucking me?”

“Not yet.” But he slips one of his fingers in between the hot cheeks. It’s dry, doesn’t go in easily, and Jensen moans as he forces it anyway.

“That’s on my list.”

“What is?”

“You taking me dry.”

Jared’s come close to that before, that crazy night in the alley when he thought they were almost over. “Not even spit?”

“No, totally dry.”
“It’ll hurt you.” He shoves a second finger in beside the first, deliberately careless, illustrating his point, but Jensen just thrusts back against the invasion.

“I like it. In public somewhere, like the alley. When you can’t help yourself, you need to fuck me so bad you just grab me, jerk down my pants, and stick it in me because that’s what I’m there for.”

“What are you there for?”

“I’m there for you, for your pleasure, for you to use to get off. Whenever you want, however you want.”

“And if I don’t let you get off too?”

Jensen’s ass clamps down around his stabbing fingers as he stifles a cry. “Even better. Don’t let me. Just your pleasure. Only your pleasure. I’m for your pleasure, not mine. Want to please you, Jared. Want to make you feel so good.”

He’s shifted on Jared’s lap so now their cocks rub together with every little wriggle. He’s doing it deliberately, Jared knows, but doesn’t stop him, can’t, because it feels too good combined with the clench of his muscles around Jared’s scissoring fingers. Jared had other plans for right now, but Jensen feels too good and he’s not going to be able to hold out.

Jensen’s hole resists the third finger. He should lick his fingers at the very least, but it’s too tempting to see if Jensen can take it, if he will, if he’ll let Jared do this to him.

“Push,” Jensen orders. He’s realised what Jared’s doing, and as Jared pushes, he pushes back and Jared’s fingers bulldoze through the taut muscle. “Fuck!”

“Too much?”

“Too good.”

His asshole grips like a vice as Jared tries to pull his fingers back out again. He needs to get the lube, needs to make this easier, doesn’t want to tear the silky smooth skin that clings as though Jared’s ripping it out from Jensen’s insides.

But he doesn’t. Instead he sticks his fingers into his mouth, coating them with saliva, then returns them to the pulsing hole Jensen offers up needily.

“Cheat,” he says, as he feels Jared’s wet fingers slide easily into him.

“’s not enough,” Jared admits. “You need more.”

“I need you. Your cock.” He contracts his muscles, holds, so tight Jared can’t move his fingers at all in either direction. “Let me lick you, get you wet. That’ll be enough.”

Jared dumps him over onto his back as soon as he gets his fingers loose, straddles his chest and slides his cock straight into Jensen’s wide open mouth. This isn’t an easy position for Jensen’s throat, but he doesn’t care, pushes down, deep, grabs Jensen’s wrists when his hands automatically rush to resist. “Take it, baby. Take it and make it wet so I can fuck your ass, so I can use you for what you’re here for. That’s it, good boy, just like that.”

Helpless tears spurt from Jensen’s eyes as he chokes, but those same eyes sparkle and reassure Jared that Jensen’s okay, that he’s revelling in this. He doesn’t force it for too long, just long enough to enjoy the constrictions of Jensen’s throat as he gags, creating extra saliva extra fast.
There, done, enough.

Pulling out, he flips Jensen over again and hauls his ass into the air. Jensen’s working with him, pulls his legs up to support him, hollows out his back, then reaches behind. He hisses as his fingers dig into his sore, spanked cheeks, but keeps hold of them, stretching them apart to present his hole to Jared.

“Fuck me,” he begs. “Please, Jay, need you in me now.”

Jared can’t wait any longer. Slick with Jensen’s spit, his cock sinks home, sucked in by Jensen’s hole faster than he control. Jensen groans, soft and sweet, as Jared bottoms out.

“Finally.”

“I’m here, babe. I’m in you.”

“Where you belong.”

Yes, exactly, this is it, this is the only home he needs. Lowering himself to cover Jensen completely, he starts to fuck him. Their old rhythm takes over, bodies instinctively knowing how to angle themselves for maximum pleasure. He should hold out, take his time, make this good for Jensen, but he can’t. It’s too much too fast, Jensen feels too good and he’s about to lose it within minutes.

“Come in me,” Jensen says, hands flailing around Jared’s thighs, trying to pull him closer. “Want your come in me, Jay.”

That’s it, Jared is lost.
Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

The rest of Jared's birthday and the first day of their new life together.

Chapter Notes

Everyone, thank you so much for reading this and for loving these two boys as I do. When I began this fic seven months ago, I never dreamed it would turn into this. It was just supposed to be a short little piece, nothing serious, but somehow it grew into this giant craziness. Thank you for all your support and your interest and encouragement along the way. This was the first fic I ever wrote like this, posting each chapter as I completed it, and it was terrifying but also one of the most fulfilling things I've ever done. You've all been amazing!

It's morning when Jensen wakes, hot sun slashing across the bed and his bare legs where he's pushed the covers off. He knows instantly where he is because the entire bed smells like Jared and his ass feels satisfied and happy. All of him does, in fact, when he stretches out, relaxed and bubbly with joy.

The only wrong note is Jared’s absence. Stretching again when he stands, Jensen opens the dresser drawer he thinks is most likely to contain underwear. It does, and he snags some blue boxers. They're loose on him, but the elastic at the top is enough to hold them on his hips, keeping him decent as he heads down the hall to the bathroom. Two of the other bedroom doors that were open last night are closed. Does that mean Jared’s roommates are home?

He has to meet Jared’s roommates, Jared’s friends from years back. Will they like him? How much do they know about him, about his history with Jared? Will they be mad at him the way Megan was? That reminds him, he has to send her a message to say all has worked out with Jared. He should take a happy picture of Jared today, it’s his birthday after all, and send that since she said she wanted photos.

There are voices in the kitchen when he ambles back down the hall. He should probably put a shirt on if introductions are to be made, but he hesitates too long and a slender guy in a baggy black t-shirt and skinny jeans opens the remaining closed door.

“Hey,” he says, giving Jensen a quick once-over. “Are you one of Jared’s?”

The words don’t sting like they might have before last night. “I am Jared’s,” Jensen says, returning the look. “And you’re one of his roommates?”

“Zach.” The guy tucks a length of long dark hair behind his ear and closes the door behind him. “Jared usually goes for blonds, but I can see why he’d make an exception for you.”
“You're gay?”

“All of us here are, except for Michael.” Zach gives him an insincere smile. “And obviously you are.”

“I am.” It’s wondrously easy to confirm it. “And it’s nice to meet you.”

“Hey, Zach,” an unfamiliar gruff voice shouts from the kitchen, “your coffee’s getting cold—” It breaks off as a grey-haired man pops his head around the door. “Oh, hello! You must be Jensen.” His once-over is a lot friendlier, coming from twinkling blue eyes rather than hostile grey ones. “And suddenly it all makes sense.”

“It does?” He really should have grabbed one of Jared’s shirts.

“He’s Jensen?” Zach sounds astonished. “Jared’s Jensen?”

Jensen smiles. “Told you I’m his. Listen, I’m just going to—”

“Jeff, is Zach—Jen!” Jared beams at him as he joins them in the hallway. “Good morning!”

“Morning.” Feeling more self-conscious than ever, Jensen slips past Jeff and straight into Jared’s arms. Ignoring the other two, he stands on his tiptoes so he can place a quick kiss on Jared’s lips. “Happy birthday.”

“Very happy.” Jared pulls him in for a more lingering kiss. “You met Zach and Jeff?”

Jeff is obviously the older man. “Yeah.” He’s grateful for Jared’s arm around him, feels a little less naked that way, and manages a smile at Jeff. “Hi.”

“Good to meet you.” Jeff extends a hand, which Jensen shakes without leaving Jared’s arms. “My curiosity has known no bounds since Jared first mentioned you.”

Jared rolls his eyes. “Don’t listen to him, and don’t take him seriously because he loves to tease. You want coffee, babe?”

“Yes, please.”

“I planned to bring you breakfast in bed, but you beat me to it.” Jared shepherds him into the sunlit kitchen and motions at two plates with scrambled eggs and toast. “Coffee’s right there.”

“I should be bringing you breakfast,” Jensen points out, picking up the cup Jared indicates. “It’s your birthday.”

“But it’s your first day here with us and I wanted to welcome you in style. We can still take it to the bedroom, if you like.”

“Or you could stay here and we could get better acquainted.” Jeff reaches for two of the other cups and hands one to Zach, who’s trailed into the kitchen after him. “Zachary here has to head to work in a minute, but I’m free all day.”

“Well, Jensen is not,” Jared says as he takes out the salt and pepper. “He’s very busy today.”


“Doing me,” Jared retorts, and Jensen grins as Zach sputters into his cup.
“Birthday boy’s prerogative,” Jeff says with a laugh. He ruffles Jared’s hair as he passes on his way to the toaster. “But you’ll give him a break from your insatiable needs during breakfast, won’t you?”

Jared wants to say no, Jensen can see, but he’s already got off to a bad start with Zach and he’d rather get Jeff onside at least. “We can eat out here,” he says to Jared, “can’t we?”

“You okay with that?”

“Sure.”

“Excellent.” Jeff fills the toaster and pushes the lever down. “Take a seat, Jensen. No one has assigned seating here, it’s first come, first serve.”

“I’m outta here,” Zach says. He drains his coffee and leaves the cup on the counter. “Later.”

Jeff shakes his head ruefully as they watch him leave. “He’s not good with change,” he tells Jensen. “Give him a few days, maybe a week or two. I’m sure he’ll warm to you.”

“I’m not changing anything,” Jensen says defensively as he takes one of the seats against the wall. “I didn’t mean to annoy him.”

“He came onto me a couple of times.” Jared moves the plates from the counter onto the table, not bothering with placemats. He adds the salt and pepper, then grabs some utensils from a giant mug beside the sink. “I told him he wasn’t my type, that I’m into blonds.”

Ah, hence the comment and the derogatory look. “I’m not blond,” Jensen points out unnecessarily.

“And I’m not into blonds.” Jared’s smile is as bright as the morning sun. “I don’t have a type, honestly. Except you.”

Jensen feels suddenly shy. “I should put a shirt on.”

“Oh honey,” Jeff drawls, “not on my account.”

The man is looking at him with admiration, but there’s no lecherous gleam in his eyes to make Jensen uncomfortable, just frank appreciation. He needs to get used to being looked at by men, and Jeff feels like a safe place to begin. But his body doesn’t only belong to him, it belongs to Jared too. “Jay?”

“Whichever makes you more comfortable.”

Jared clearly understands Jensen’s thoughts and he’s not worried about Jeff looking at Jensen, so Jensen decides he isn’t either. There’s something strangely reassuring about the older man, and his eyes are kind, so Jensen gives him a small smile.

Jeff smiles back. “Welcome to our home, Jensen. We’re a motley crew, but we rub along well enough in general, blond preferences aside. I was just telling Jared before you came in that you’re more than welcome to move in with us, whether it’s just for the summer or if you two decide to stay in New York all year. Jared always has a room here, and that won’t change just because you’re sharing it.”

It must be Jeff’s apartment. Jensen vaguely remembers Jared telling him about his landlord once, something about an older man, also gay, who helped out others where he could. That’s obviously Jeff. “Thank you. Just let me know how much I need to give you each month.”
“Oh, you can work that out with Jared. You’re not taking up an extra room, so it makes no difference to me. Although I do believe we need a bit of a reshuffle.”

“A reshuffle?” Jared looks up from his plateful of eggs. “What do you mean?”

The toast jumps up. Jeff pulls them out and swipes the butter from the other side of the oven where Jared was cooking earlier. “I figure since there’s two of you and only one of me, we should make a swap and you take my room. There’s more closet space, and the bed is bigger. As big as you two are, you’ll need it.”

Jared stares at him, taken aback. “Jeff, we can’t.”

“Sure you can. It won’t take long, just an hour or so to swap everything over. We don’t have to do it today if you’re busy with birthday plans, but how about tomorrow?” He shakes his knife at them. “You’ll thank me for that bed, I’m telling you. Plus there’s the en-suite bathroom that you can have to yourselves.”

“Jeff.”

Because Jared looks like he’s about to cry, Jensen jumps in. “If you’re really offering that, then you have to let me pay you something for rent.”

“I am offering it,” Jeff says, “but I’m not in this for the money. I could live here on my own without a problem. Give me one of your pretty smiles a day, and that’s payment enough, brightening up an old man’s life.”

“You’re not old,” Jared says. Turning on his chair, he takes one of Jeff’s hands in his. “You’re too good to me. If you mean it, I’ll say yes because I want to give that to Jensen, but we owe you.”

“You owe me nothing.” Uncomfortable with Jared’s emotion, Jeff pats his hand then turns back to his toast.

During the remainder of the meal, Jensen finds out that Jeff used to be a musician before his bandmate and lover died in the early ’90s.

“HIV,” Jared mouths, which shocks Jensen because that seems like it should be a long ago piece of history but of course it isn’t, it’s still real and pertinent today, but it would have been a huge part of the gay community when Jeff was young.

He looks at Jared trying to imagine what it would be like if loving each other was a death sentence. Their situation could be so much worse than it is. In fact, their situation’s spectacular in a lot of ways and he needs to start practising gratitude because at the start of this summer he couldn’t have imagined any of this.

Jeff writes advertising jingles now, highly successfully, but he also plays the guitar and Jared neatly sets it up so that Jensen’s guitar-playing is revealed and Jeff invites him to jam any night he’s free.

How much gratitude can he fit inside his body?

This feels like his birthday, not Jared’s.

Jared is up for swapping rooms immediately, since Jeff is sincere in his offer, which takes care of the rest of the morning. Most of Jeff’s stuff is in the little room off the kitchen which he calls his office, so he doesn’t have to move much more than clothes, and Jared doesn’t have much. Jensen has even less, but it’s all at the place he rented, so they head over there in the afternoon to fetch it. A phone
call to the guy he rented it from gets him most of his money back since there have been several more inquiries about it for the rest of the week, and as they head back to Jared’s (their) apartment, he walks beside Jared holding hands.

They can hold hands here and be relatively safe.

Jensen doesn’t miss Texas in the slightest.

It’s exciting, putting his clothes away beside Jared’s, visual confirmation that they’re back together. If Jensen picks up weight again, gets back in the gym to start rebuilding muscle, most of Jared’s clothes will fit him too. He’s loved wearing Jared’s shirt and underwear today along with his own jeans from yesterday, and Jared loves it too. He keeps looking over at Jensen as though he can’t believe he’s really here, and Jensen gets it. He feels the same.

“Since I couldn’t bring you breakfast in bed,” Jared announces once both their unpacking is complete, “it’ll have to be lunch.”

“Jared, it’s almost five o’clock.”

“Late lunch, early dinner.” Jared shrugs. “It’s my birthday, I can call it whatever I want.”

Jensen concedes the point. “So you want me to get back in bed?”

“I want you naked and tied to our new bed, helpless and at my mercy.”

He’s definitely on board for that. “Now?”

“Sure.”

It feels a little awkward, stripping out of his clothes while Jared watches him. He wants to make it sexy, but he feels silly when he tries so he settles for utilitarian instead. Jared doesn’t seem to mind, just leans against the desk in the corner of the room, arms loosely crossed over his chest, eyes avid on Jensen’s every movement.

“Get on the bed,” he directs once Jensen is naked.

Jensen clambers up. As Jeff said, this is a big bed, high and broad, long enough for Jared’s feet not to stick over the end. The best thing about it, however, is the fact it has four solid posts sticking up, one on each corner, with woven metal between the top two and the bottom two. They couldn’t have found a more perfect bed for tying Jensen to if they’d tried, so much flexibility, so many possibilities, and Jensen’s mouth dries at the thought that they’ll get to try all of them.

Jared’s coming to the same conclusion. “This is fucking cool.”

“How do you want me?”

“For now, on your back, spread-eagled.”

One of Jensen’s favourite positions. The mattress is firm beneath him, barely dipping when Jared kneels on it to loop rope around the posts and attach it to Jensen’s wrists. It’s the same rope he used at school and it’s comforting to see it here in their new life, a link between where they began and where they are now. Being tied like this is also familiar, and it settles the slight jumpiness in Jensen’s stomach. This is where he wants to be, bound and displayed for Jared.

“How’s that?”
Jensen tugs experimentally. “It’s good.”

“Not too tight?”

Not tight enough, but he knows Jared will refuse to endanger him by tightening them further. “It’s great.”

“You okay if I add a blindfold?”

“This is very elaborate for breakfast in bed.”

“Hey.” Jared bends over to drop a line of kisses down the centre of Jensen’s chest. “I’m the birthday boy and you’re my present and this is how I want to enjoy you.”

“You mean this isn’t going to be standard operating procedure on Saturday afternoons?”

“Mm,” Jared says as he bites down on Jensen’s nipple, “could be Sunday afternoons too.” He licks his way across to the other nipple. “And Mondays, if we didn’t have to work. Hey.” He raises his head. “You never told me what your job is. You said you have one here, right?”

It’s hard to snap his thoughts back from gliding away with Jared’s tongue. “Assisting a director.”

“A director? Of what?”

“Theatre.”

“Theatre?” Jared pulls away. “Like Broadway theatre?”

“Off-Broadway at the moment, but they’re hoping for a transfer after the limited run.” It’s uncomfortable being naked for this sudden conversation about business, and he can’t even move to cover himself. His arms twitch. “There’s no guarantee, it might not last for more than just these five weeks of rehearsal, but Mark said if I work out, he’d be happy to use me for his next show too.”

“I didn’t know you were interested in theatre.”

His nakedness betrays his blush right the way down his chest. “I was a theatre kid back before—before everything.”

“You?”

“Yeah. Is that so hard to believe?”

“Honestly? I never would’ve guessed.”

If he’s said this much, he might as well make a full confession. “I used to dream about acting, although I probably wasn’t any good at it. It was fun being on stage, though.”

“You liked exhibiting yourself, did you?”

The word, and Jared’s connotation in using it, sends a flash of heat through Jensen. “Can’t say I minded.”

“Like you’re going to exhibit yourself tonight?”

“Are we really going to go?”
“It’s up to you. I’m happy to stay home and play with you here, but if you’re up for it, then I’d love to take you there. We don’t have to do anything, we can just watch for your first time, see what you think.”

Jensen’s body makes clear that he’s very up for it indeed, and Jared bends down again to lick it like an ice cream cone.

“You taste so fucking good, Jensen.”

“Wanna taste you too.” All thoughts of food have vanished. “Feed me.”

“In a minute.” Jared’s mouth moves down to his balls for a heavenly moment, then up across his hip bone to the place where he kept the bruise for so long. “You’re all healed here,” he says between little licks and kisses. “There’s no mark at all.”

“Put it back. Please.”

*

It takes more than two hours before they get around to food, and another hour before Jared brings up the subject of appropriate attire for their outing.

“You mean I can’t just go in jeans?”

“Afraid not. There are a lot of rules at a place like this because they want it to be a safe place for people who’re into this, a place where behaviour that’s unacceptable and outrageous in the outside world is normalised and encouraged. If it’s your first time and you’re not with someone who’s been before, they’ll assign you someone to induct you.”

“Like at a new gym?”

“Kinda.”

They’re christening their new shower, which, like the bed, fits both of them comfortably, promising great delights for the future, but Jared’s determined to keep things business-like for now because otherwise they’ll never make it out of here. He soaps his body quickly and tries not to watch Jensen do the same as he ducks under the water to rinse off.

Jensen makes no bones about watching him. “So you’ll make sure I know what to do and what not to do?”

“Yeah.” He hadn’t planned to wash his hair, but the shower pressure is unexpectedly firm and he can’t resist. “Pass me the shampoo?”

Placing it in his hand, Jensen takes his place beneath the spray. “So what are the basics I need to know?”

“It depends if you want to go as a free agent or as my submissive, because the rules are different.”

“Yours, please.”

“You sure? Even for your first time?”
Jensen steps away from the water, hair wet and standing spikily on end as he takes the shampoo from Jared. “I don’t want anyone to get the wrong idea. I’m not available for anyone else, only for you. So tell me how I need to behave to make that clear.”

Even though Jensen’s hair is so short, Jared loves the feel of it and he brushes Jensen’s hands away once he’s transferred enough shampoo so he can rub it in himself. As soon as he understands Jared’s intention, Jensen drops his hands and bends his knees a little to give Jared easier access.

“First of all,” Jared says, “it’s not only evident via behaviour. This particular club uses collars to indicate ownership.”

Jensen twists around. “But I’m not collared by you yet.”

Of course he knows what collaring is, thank you, Google, but it’s his use of the word yet that flickers through Jared’s belly. Yet implies that he wants to be one day. He wants to be Jared’s visibly to all who know what to look for, and Jared wants that fiercely. But he needs to introduce Jensen to this world first, ease him into it, then maybe they can start the conversation about a formal collar to denote Jared’s ownership of Jensen in a D/s sense.

“They also have cuffs, leather cuffs, that act like temporary collars. They go around your wrist and anyone seeing it will treat you as though you’re collared. Would you like to wear a cuff for me?”

Jensen swivels around again to meet Jared’s eyes. “I would. Tell me what that requires from me while we’re there.”

The explanation and instructions take up the rest of their shower, and while Jensen dries off, Jared searches through the few pairs of leather trousers that he owns. Surely there’s something that can fit Jensen. Yes, there’s the pair he got right at the beginning, when he was presented as a free agent by Jeff when he was still a teenager; they should work.

He’s never much cared for the look of leather, preferring his men naked and exposed, but black leather hugging Jensen’s curved ass is definitely something he wants more of. As punishment for looking so delectable, Jared makes him bend over the bed before adding the belt for several hard strokes across the ass that’s so irresistibly presented.

“More,” Jensen demands when he stops after six.

“I could do this in front of dozens of people later,” Jared says instead, palming Jensen’s cheeks roughly through the leather. “Make you bend over like this for me while they watch.” Jensen’s full-body shudder betrays that he finds that idea as enticing as Jared does. “So how about this. If you decide you want it at the club, I’ll beat you for as long as you want.”

Jensen takes the offer seriously and looks back over his shoulder once he’s considered it. “And if I lose courage about doing it in public?”

“Then I’ll bring you home and do it here.” Just as long as he gets to leave welts on Jensen’s skin by the time the night is over, the final proof that Jensen is his again.

“One more now as a promise,” Jensen asks, agreeing. “Please?”

And who is Jared to deny him with his pretty green eyes so full of anticipation? He makes it a good one, slashes a squeal out of Jensen. “Now be a good boy and wait in the corner for me while I get dressed.”

He gets a kick out of having Jensen stand there, nose against the wall, hands clasped behind his
back, waiting patiently at Jared’s leisure. Midway through shimmying into his own leather trousers, he stops to indulge in another moment of he’s here with me, Jensen’s back with me, here, right here, for good. They’re going to happen frequently, he imagines, such a contrast to all those times at school of counting down their precious special moments before they were gone forever.

Jensen’s here.

Jensen’s back.

For good.

Jeff steps out of his office as they pass the kitchen. “Looking good, boys!” He gives a low whistle. “Where are you headed tonight?”

Jared keeps an eye on how Jensen responds to Jeff’s obvious appreciation of how sexy he looks dressed up in leather. “Steel Rose.”

“Should’ve guessed.”

“It’s my first time,” Jensen offers. “I’m going as Jared’s.”

“Jared’s?”

Jared thrills to the way Jensen phrased it. “He sure is.” Picking up his house keys, he works them into the tight pocket of his trousers. “I’ve got the cuff for him.”

Jeff’s eyebrows raise. “He know what that means?”

“That I’m Jared’s,” Jensen repeats. “And no one else gets to touch me.”

“And?” Jeff prompts.

Jensen meets his eyes squarely. “And I don’t initiate conversation with anyone but Jared, and I stay by his side, and he’s in charge.”

“Well trained.” There’s a flicker of respect on Jeff’s face as he nods his approval to Jensen and turns back to Jared. “Well done, kid.”

“He’s a natural.”

“Seems like. Be safe out there, you two.”

“We will,” Jensen replies. “Have a good evening.”

He’s so cutey serious as he says this that Jeff’s gruff face breaks into a grin. “Undoubtedly not as good as yours will be.”

Jared keeps conversation light as they head for the subway. Even though Jensen’s excited, he’s vibrating with nerves as well. On the train, Jared takes hold of his hand. It’s second nature to cast a surreptitious glance around the carriage as he does so, just in case, but no one’s paying them the slightest attention.

“Remember, we don’t have to do any more than watch tonight,” he says. They’re already going relatively hardcore with Jensen visibly claimed as Jared’s.

“Have you ever done anything there before?”
“It’s where I learned most of what I’ve tried on you. Where I learned how to hit someone safely, and how best to tie people up, that kind of thing. They do demonstrations and there are also volunteers who’ll let you practise on them and give you feedback.”

Jensen’s eyes widen. “They let just anyone hit them?”

“It’s within reason. Others are watching, to make sure they’re safe.”

“I couldn’t do that.”

“You’ve let me practise on you, since I’ve gone a lot further with you than I ever did there.”

“No, I mean let someone else hit me. That’s only for you.”

“Good.” The word is reflexive, but he means it. He doesn’t want anyone else’s hands on Jensen. “How about letting them watch while I hit you?”

“Yes, please.”

“We’ll see how you feel when we get there.”

*

Jensen falls quiet on the approach to Steel Rose. It’s hard for him not to insist on paying for entry, especially since it’s Jared’s birthday, but he quickly subsides before saying a word as he remembers his orders.

“Good boy,” Jared murmurs as he guides Jensen down the stairs to the changing room where they can finalise their outfits.

The familiar words soothe the jitters reviving in his stomach. “Sorry.”

“You’re doing great.”

When they got dressed, Jared told him he could choose when they got here if he wanted to wear the strappy vest or go shirtless. He thought he’d get the chance to see what others were wearing before making the decision, but for the moment they’re the only ones in here. “Do people really go shirtless?”

“No only shirtless. I could have you in just a thong.”

God. That’s more than he can contemplate right now. “Would you like me shirtless tonight, birthday boy?”

“Are you up for that?”

Jared’s preference is clear. “Yeah.” Might as well do this properly from the start. Efficiently, he strips off the t-shirt he wore for the journey. “Like this?”

Jared surveys him. The leather trousers hang low enough that the top of the bruise above his hip is visible, and Jared’s eyes rest there with possessive pleasure. It throbs beneath his regard. “Hold out your wrist.”
It’s time for the leather cuff that will proclaim temporary ownership and Jensen looks down at it in Jared’s hand. It might mean temporary at Steel Rose, but there’s nothing temporary about what he has with Jared. About who he is for Jared.

This is probably breaking all protocols, but they’re just arbitrary for this club. He and Jared can have their own protocols, their own rituals and meanings. He’s been thinking about it for most of the trip here, and now that the moment’s come, he’s certain of what he wants.

Holding Jared’s eyes, he sinks down onto his knees and offers up his wrist. “Like this?”

Jared’s sharply indrawn breath tells him he’s making the right choice.

“It doesn’t just have to be for tonight,” he continues. “If you’re not ready, or you don’t want to, that’s fine, but I’m offering myself to you, Jared. Formally.”

Jared looks stunned. “Jen.”

“I love you and I want to be yours.”

“Do you realise what this means?”

“I did my research. I know it’s not a collar, but I won’t be able to wear a collar all the time, not at work. I can wear this, though.” He worried that it might be too soon, but from the rapturous look on Jared’s face, it’s not.

Leaning forward, Jared wraps the cuff around Jensen’s wrist and snaps it closed. It feels snug, reassuring, as though he is literally bound for Jared. To Jared. Always.

Ready?” Jared asks, linking his hand with Jensen’s to pull him up.

Jensen kisses the back of Jared’s hand, then fluidly rises to his feet. “I’m ready for anything with you. For everything. Together.”

Hand in hand, they walk into the club.

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