The Scent Of You

by ImanAngel_YouAss

Summary

In one night, at the age of six, omega Jared Padalecki's entire existence is turned upside down when rogue wolves slaughter his family, his pack and leave him scarred, blind in one eye and tainted by silver.

Taken in by another pack, Jared grows up telling himself he's lucky to be given the second chance his family was denied, to have his friends, his home, his work. Telling himself he doesn't need - and doesn't want - anything more in his life.

Until, that is, Jensen Ackles enters the picture, like a goddamn tornado, with charming smiles and green eyes, spouting things like “true mates” and “meant to be”, turning Jared’s entire life upside down.

And in the background of it all, unbeknownst to Jared, there are whispers of a re-emergence of the rogue wolf pack that tore his life apart eighteen years ago slowly, steadily brewing...

Notes

Hi everyone! So! This is my second fic (which for some reason feels infinitely more terrifying to post than my first fic?? Go figure...) and also first venture in the world of A/B/O dynamics, so forgive me any mistakes and, uh, be gentle I guess?

As always, my work is unbeta'd and also, I'm from Australia and I have limited understanding of American geography, so I tend to avoid mentioning specific states or places
because maps confuse me and I'm bound to get it wrong anyway...

The usual disclaimer - no harm intended, work of fiction, I own nothing, literally nothing, not even my car, and please no one sue me.
The scent of blood, death, fire and ash hung on the air.

It prickled at Jeffrey Dean Morgan’s skin, raised the hairs on the back of his neck, set his teeth on edge, made his inner wolf growl and flex.

And he knew, before he’d even emerged from the car, that they’d been too late.

He stopped, straightened, and stood beside the car, gazing around at the small town. At the fires that licked and flickered, that consumed and ate at houses and shops, at the broken windows and shattered glass.

At the bodies.

The town had once been home to the wolves of the Padalecki pack, led by the alpha Gerald Padalecki. They’d been a small pack, kept mostly to themselves, peaceful and unassuming. A pack of Were’s who didn’t harm anyone, or cause any trouble.

JD wondered if they were all dead now.

He started to walk down the street, and as he did, his eyes flickered over the body of a Were on the sidewalk, at the blonde hair and sightless blue eyes, the gaping wound across her stomach, and his mind transposed another face, another blonde-blue eyed beauty over the body, his stomach lurching at the thought, twisting.

He looked away quickly.

He met Jim Beaver seated out the front of Gerald Padalecki’s house, atop the hood of his car. The house was largish, but understated, not flash nor fancy, open and welcome. And now – the door torn from the hinges, windows shattered and broken. There was a body half in, half out of the broken doorway and when JD inhaled the scent his nose flared a little, mouth twisting. The scent wasn’t of the Padalecki Pack, he could tell instantly.

Jim noted his gaze and his expression. He gave a rueful smile. ‘Looks like Gerry took some of ‘em out before they overpowered him’ he said, gesturing to the body.

‘Good’ JD said, eyes flashing, a snarl on his lips.

Jim’s smile faded. ‘Yeah’ he said dully.

‘Any… anyone survive?’ JD asked. ’Not just...' he gestured at the house. 'But I mean... the pack... was there any survivors, any at all?’

It was a pointless question, JD knew, but he couldn’t help asking anyway. Even if the dullness of Jim’s voice had already clued him in, already given him the answer.

Jim looked away. ‘Not that we’ve seen,’ his voice was flat, ‘took a few of ‘em with them though. The whole pack put up a helluva fight.’

JD’s shoulders slumped. He looked at Jim, saw the lines etched into his face, the tiredness, the age more pronounced now than ever. Jim had been Alpha of JD’s pack as far back as he could remember. They were one of the largest packs, much larger than the Padalecki’s, and the town they
resided in was fully integrated – humans and Weres, living together. That was rare, but Jim Beaver was a progressive alpha. Knew the way of the future for Weres and humans was uniting them, not dividing them. It had been hard, at first, when Weres had first come to light as, well, not being things that just existed in fictional stories. And not only that, but also humans having to come to grips with how they differed from those fictional ideals. The fact that Weres shifting was not tied intrinsically to a full moon (although, to be fair, it was a time when it was enjoyable to shift), that they could shift anytime, could even shift partially. The fact that Weres had types - alphas, betas and omegas. The alphas, born leaders, stronger physically, powerful, with an inbuilt level of control they could exert over others, but also an inbuilt desire to protect, to provide. The betas, the more "normal" and common type of Were, nothing particularly unusual about them aside from, well, the fact that they were werewolves. And omega, rarest out of all three, fertile in both males and females, and they inspired an inbuilt desire to protect in alphas, mostly, but even in betas. Gentler, softer, more nurturing than the others. With all this newness, this information, there’d, of course, been the period of adjustment – "adjustment"; the term made JD snort. It had been a hundred years before his time, of course, but he’d learnt enough to know that "chaos" was a more accurate term. There had been killings, on both sides, and wars, and division. Then things had settled, laws passed, treaties signed. The packs had their towns, their jurisdictions, the humans had theirs, and some packs and humans mingled, some didn’t. It worked. Things were, aside from the odd bad egg on either side, peaceful between them.

So it figured, JD thought, that the biggest threat that had emerged over the past year came from within themselves.

It had started with smaller packs, smaller than the Padalecki’s, and isolated, all being wiped out. They came in the night, the rogue wolves, with fire, and human weapons, guns and knives on top of their own ability to shift. They descended in a whirlwind of death and viciousness. Killed the pack, stole some omegas, burnt places to the ground. They fashioned thick leather gloves to handle silver against their own, something unconscionable, unheard of, unthinkable amongst wolves. There were about twenty five of them, they had figured out by now, all alphas. All wolves who’d never really belonged to a proper pack – there were a fair share of wandering lone wolves out there, keeping to themselves, not answerable to any alpha. But these had banded together to create their own sort of pack. “Sort of” because no pack consisted of just alphas – no real pack. A real pack was made up of alphas, betas, omegas. All alpha was just… was just a recipe for disaster.

Like this.

It had taken a bit for them to catch-on, to realise that something was happening. Two packs died at the hands of these alpha wolves before the other, larger packs cottoned on. It was, JD thought, at this point that all packs should’ve united, joined together to seek out these wolves, to prevent them from killing again. Instead, the packs turned against each other. Instead, packs became paranoid that each other were to blame for the deaths. Instead, packs became more isolated, shut out outside wolves. Which is why it had taken another entire pack being wiped from existence before they’d been shaken out of this, in JD’s opinion, stupid behavior. Invested time in figuring out who these wolves were, what they wanted, how to stop them.

As it turned out, this pack of savage Weres wanted nothing.

‘Some people,’ Jim had said tiredly, ‘just want to watch the world burn.’

They’d tried to track them, using remnants of scents leave at the past crime scenes. Had tracked them, Jim Beaver’s pack and another nearby one. Had tracked them to the Padalecki’s.

Had arrived too late, it would seem.
‘Did they get away?’ JD asked, jaw tight. ‘Did those sons of bitches escape?’

Jim straightened a little. ‘The Padalecki pack, between ‘em all, managed ta knock out about ten that we counted,’ he answered and he briefly look sadly proud, ‘put up a helluva fight, the lot of ‘em. I’ve got the pack spread out, trackin’ the remaining. Everythin’… bodies are still warm. Fires are still burnin.’ They won’t be far away. We’ll track ‘em down. It ends tonight, JD.’

JD nodded slowly. He didn’t voice what they were both thinking, that it might end tonight, but it still ended that moment too late for the Padalecki pack.

‘We got here as fast as we could’ he said aloud.

Jim nodded but didn’t reply. He didn’t look appeased and JD couldn’t blame him. It was hard, he thought, being the Alpha. He didn’t let himself think about the hints Jim dropped about naming him the successor when he retired. Wondered if the old man had hit his head too many times to even be thinking that.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ Samantha had told him with a roll of those grey-blue eyes, ‘everyone knows you’d make an amazing Alpha.’

He felt his heart swell a little, as it always did, at the thought of his mate. Then he looked to the house and the feeling died once more. He inclined his head towards it.

‘Can I…?’ he asked.

To repay his respects to a fallen Alpha, as much as he just wanted to turn and leave the broken town, never think of it again.

Jim nodded. ‘Go ahead,’ he answered. ‘It ain’t pretty. I covered ‘em up, and their kid, best as I could.’

JD nodded and walked to the house, stepped over the sprawled body of one of the rogue alphas and resisted the urge to kick at the body. The house was a mess of overturned tables, smashed objects, sprays and splatters of blood. Another rogue alpha wolf, fully shifted, was at the base of the stairs, throat ripped out, blood splattered across the hardwood floor. At the top of the stairs there was another figure, sprawled, a single hand dangling, hooked wolf claws signifying a partial shift. The rest of the body was covered in a sheet, dots of blood soaking through the thin fabric. JD swallowed hard, wondered who lay beneath the cover, whether it was Gerald, his mate or their kid. The thought maybe JD suddenly pause.

Kid. Their kid. But… he cast his mind, thought hard.

Kid. **Singular.** But the Padalecki’s had more than *one* kid. JD grapsed at the memory. Yes. They’d had… three. They’d had **three**. Two sons, a daughter. He felt something flutter in his stomach. It was a little like hope.

Surely, he tried to shake the thought away, surely Jim had just slipped up. *Meant* to say kids. **Surely.**

But still.

JD started to walk up the stairs, carefully, quietly, listening, scenting, trying to capture anything beyond the scent of blood and sweat. Another body beneath a sheet in the master bedroom, another, fully shifted into a wolf, down the hallway. He kept walking, carefully, peering into each room, scanning, looking. There was blood – a lot of blood. Splattered on walls, soaked into carpets. Footprints. Paw prints. He followed, ducked into another room, the door smashed, torn from hinges.
It was a kid’s room – a girl’s – all pink paint, unicorns. The sight of the blood in that room, in that setting, made JD’s stomach turn.

He made to back out, but paused, hesitated. He stepped into the room, slowly looking, paused before he crouched down, looked up the bed. He started to stand, started to feel a little foolish in his search, in his vain hope. Then he saw the cupboard. Saw the tiny gap of the door, the way it was the tiniest bit ajar. Barely noticeable unless someone was searching, was really looking. He walked towards it, slowly, carefully, reached out, tugged the door open.

His stomach lurched.

The little girl was curled, eyes open, wide, unseeing, throat ripped out. Bile rose in JD’s mouth. The boy, a few year older, probably only six, half sprawled over his sister, as if shielding her, valiantly, desperately. The side of his face a bloodied mess, a wound in his abdomen dripping blood, the reek of silver in the air. JD made to step out, to leave, gagging.

Then.

Then he saw the tiniest movements.

Then he heard – he listened – really listened, with all wolf senses.

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Jim was fingering the cigarette packet in his pocket, the pack he kept for emergencies, thought for only a moment before he slid one out, because damn if this wasn’t a cigarette occasion.

And that was when JD, wild eyes and grasping a tiny, limp, bloodied figure, came lurching through the broken door, stumbling over the body of the alpha there, shouting wildly, desperately.

Shouting and Jim caught one word, only one word, and it was all he needed before he was galvanizing into action, leaping from the hood of the car.

‘– alive!!’
Chapter 1

Blood.

So much blood.

Blood, and panic, and fear, and Jeff – Jeff yelling, pushing – “go! Go! Take Megan! Hide, Jared, hide!” – and running, running, so much screaming, shouts outside, oh god, oh god, and then the cupboard, the darkness, huddling, holding –

The door opening – the stench of alpha – the leering grinning face – the smell - and Megan – have to protect – Megan – the flash of silver, pain, Megan, have to protect Megan – Megan – Megan – MEGAN –

Jared Padalecki woke with a jolt, eyes wrenching open, breath sucking in in a huge shuddering gasp, heart thundering in his chest, panic clawing at his throat, drenched in sweat. It took a moment of disorientation, of pure panic, before he managed to come back to himself, managed to blink and register his surroundings, remember he where he was.

He was at home, in his bed, and he was twenty four years old and it was eighteen years since the night that his entire life had been irrevocably changed and still, the nightmares – no, not nightmares, he thought grimly, memories - lingered, hovered, ready to pounce, ready to torment him. He wondered if there’d ever come a time when he wouldn’t be haunted by that night.

He doubted it.

With a groan, Jared reached up, rubbed at his face, dropped his hands and rolled to look at his alarm clock. It was at least another hour until his alarm was due to go off, but he could tell there’d be no more sleep for him. Jared gusted an annoyed sigh.

‘Great’ he muttered.

He lay for a moment, before sighing again and rolling from his bed, standing in one movement and stretching long and tall. And by long and tall, he meant, long and tall, because tall was one thing Jared had in spades. 6 ft 4, he stood, and all lanky long limbs and a lean frame. 6 ft 4 and, Jared figured, pulling a face, he was probably the tallest damn omega in the world.

And didn’t that just add to his problems.

Being born an omega was so rare, so damn rare, and of course, of course Jared had been born one. A male omega, even rarer! How special of him! If, that is, he looked anything like how a damn omega was supposed to look. Omegas, usually, mostly, were small, delicate, petite and graceful. Not tall, gangly and akin to, as his best friend Gen put it, a “bull in a china shop.”

Doesn’t matter, he told himself sternly, wouldn’t matter if he was small and delicate.

He flicked the light on in his en-suite bathroom, glanced in the mirror.

Yeah it, definitely wouldn’t matter if he was the smallest, most delicate omega in the whole damn world. Any Were would take one look at his face and run for the hills.

The alpha pack that had slaughtered, had killed his family, his pack, left him alive. They probably thought he was dead – a stab to the gut will tend to make people think that. But he’d survived,
somehow. Not unscathed. Of course, not unscathed. One scar, white and prominent, curved downwards across his cheek, another from under his chin down his throat, and the worst, the worst from the top of his head, all the way down his forehead, splitting through one eyebrow and curving into towards his left eye.

His useless, useless left eye.

Whatever they’d hit him with, cut him with to leave that scar, essentially damaged the eye as well, left it blind, sightless, and a milky white that made other Weres when he was growing up scream and cry and call him a “freak.” His other eye? Fine. 20/20 vision, hazel and bright. Jared wondered if it made it worse, having the stark contrast between the two.

And then there’d been the wound to his abdomen.

The wound that had been made with silver, and caused silver to leech into his bloodstream, forever poisoning him, blocking, for the most part, his wolf. He couldn’t shift, the silver blocked it, even the usually heightened sense of smell other Weres had had was dampened.

"Barely a werewolf at all" snidely whispered behind his back had followed him all his life, all his damn life. And the wound… the wound had taken something else from him, on top of his wolf. Taken away the one thing that still might have made him useful as an omega to another Were.

His ability to carry children.

It stung less, to think about it now, then in the past. He’d largely accepted his lot by now – he was a scarred, broken omega tainted with silver, who couldn't shift, could barely scent, who was barely a Were at all. He wouldn't ever have someone interested in him, and Jared was ok with that now, he was. Oh, other Weres spouted things like "true mates" - that rare, rare thing when two Weres were made for each other, where they found each other and lived happily ever after. It was a nice fantasy, Jared acknowledged, but he wouldn't be surprised if his true mate did show up, took one look at him, turned tail and ran. God knows Jared probably wouldn't even be able to scent them anyway.

But.

But, he knew his entire family had lost their lives, his entire pack had – and Jared wouldn’t ever want to dishonour their memory by being ungrateful that he’d survived, by wasting the second chance he’d been given. JD had adopted him – the gruff alpha had taken him as a son, with his own mate Samantha, had never treated him any different even when Samantha had given birth to two kids of their own. When JD became Alpha he still made time for them all, and to this day he still did. Jared had been lucky, so lucky to have been embraced by JD, to have been embraced by, for the most part, his entire pack. And he had his best friends – betas, Felicia and Genevieve. Felicia, the tiny, petite redhead who worked at the local electronics store and who could recite the name of every single Buffy the Vampire Slayer episode off the top of her head. Gen, the equally tiny and more-fierce-than-anyone-he’d-ever-met brunette, who’d become his best friend after she’d punched an alpha twice her size for taunting Jared about his eye and scars. He had a career – his own business, the only bookshop in town, fuelled by his passion and love of reading.

He was lucky, he thought, every day, to himself, at least once, so very lucky.

He nodded at his own reflection, snagging a hair tie from the bathroom and looping his long, shaggy hair into a ponytail at the nape of his neck. He kept his hair long to help to hide the scars, shield his eye from view, spent most of his time ducking beneath the overly-long bangs, but he wore it back off
his face when he was exercising. He and Gen shared a house, a small, modest place that backed onto the surrounding forest and Jared liked to take advantage of the shielded backyard.

He’d set up a workout station with a punching bag, weights and mats, had a running route through the largely isolated forest mapped out. He couldn’t shift, couldn’t turn into a wolf anymore to defend himself with claws, teeth and four legs. But he refused to be helpless. He refused to be like that night, when he couldn’t save his sister, when he couldn’t defend her. So he boxed, he learnt self-defence, he built up as much strength in his ropey, gangly body as he could, and he ran, ran for miles and miles. He wouldn’t ever be able to match the speed of four legs, but he tried his hardest to match the distance. He wouldn’t be helpless, he’d sworn to himself, he wouldn’t be helpless ever again.

He worked out hard for an hour and a half, then added extra on because he’d woken earlier, and by the time he wrapped up he was drenched in sweat and the sun was steadily rising, weak rays filtering sunlight across the forest treetops. He showered briskly, tugged on his jeans and shirt for work, shook his hair into his face and padded down to the kitchen. A messy-haired, fluffy white-robe clad zombie was hunched over the kitchen table, a cup clutched between two small hands.

‘You didn’t start the coffee,’ a voice beneath the mess of dark hair whined mournfully. ‘I had to do it myself.’

Jared chuckled, rolled his eyes and patted the head as he passed by. ‘Oh you poor thing,’ he teased. ‘What a difficult life you lead.’

Genevieve Cortese peeped between the tangles of her hair and glared at Jared. ‘Just because you’re a disgusting morning person’ she grumbled.

Jared poured himself a coffee with a smile and slid into the seat opposite Gen, tugging a section of the paper over to his side of the table.

‘Not a morning person, Gen,’ he answered her as he flicked the page open, ‘just not a total zombie like you.’

‘Not a morning person’,; Gen repeated in a sarcastic tone, then snorted, ‘s’if. I bet you’ve already worked out and everything. You disgusting exerciser you.’

‘You’re such a delight in the mornings, Gen’ Jared commented.

‘I’m a delight always, jerk,’ Gen muttered, then promptly, tilted the coffee back and sculled the remaining half of her mug in a few large gulps.

She gave a satisfied sigh as she put the cup back down. Jared raised an eyebrow.

‘Better now?’ he asked, amused.

Gen squinted at her cup, then up at him. ‘Think I’ll need another cup’ she decided.

Jared chuckled, sipping his own cup. Gen rose and clumsily stumbled to the pot, pouring another cup.

‘You are coming tonight, aren’t you?’ she asked over her shoulder.

‘You mean to our weekly Friday night at Rob and Rich’s that we have every week, hence the word weekly?’ Jared answered.

‘It’s too early for you to be a smart-ass.’
'Yes Gen, I am coming, as always, as usual' Jared answered with a roll of his eyes.

'Nu-uh,' Gen objected in a voice that made her sound about five years old, slumping back to her seat, ‘nu-uh, you don’t come every week. You didn’t last week – you bailed on us. On us. Felicia was devastated.’

Jared looked up from the paper to make an exasperated noise. ‘Once! I bail once!’

‘The trust has been broken,’ Gen informed him solemnly.

Jared rolled his eyes. ‘It wasn’t even – I was busy last week’ he muttered.

‘Busy, s’if,’ Gen snorted, ‘you were just chicken because of a certain someone who might’ve been there – ’

Jared felt his face pinken, promptly sweeping to his feet and heading for the sink. ‘I have no idea what you’re talking about’ he said, dumping his coffee in the sink.

Gen grinned at him, the added affect of her rat’s nest hair making her look semi-deranged. ‘Don’t play coy with me Padalecki! I see right through you mister, you just wanted to avoid – ’

‘I have to get to work now, Gen,’ Jared headed for the door, calling over his shoulder.

Gen dissolved into laughter. It sounded a little like a cackle, which went well with the crazy hair.

‘You can’t hide from him forever, Jared!’ her voiced sing-songed after him as he grabbed his jacket and keys and ducked from the house.

‘Goodbye Gen!’ he shouted back.

The sound of laughter followed him. Jared rolled his eyes, flipped his keys in his hand as he headed for his car. He stopped at the door, puffed a little sigh. They meant well, his friends, with what they were doing, he knew they did.

‘I don’t understand,’ Gen had told him, countless times, ‘you’re a goddamn catch, a total hottie, you could have anyone.’

Jared gazed a little at his reflection, distorted in the window of his car. Gen had to say that, she was his best friend. That was her duty.

He gave himself a shake, unlocked the door. What his friends were trying to do was sweet, but he didn’t need it. Didn’t want it. He was happy. He was lucky, and he was happy. And he didn’t - very definitely did not – need anyone else in his life.

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‘JD?’ Bel peered around the door at the Alpha at his computer, giving a little nervous wave of her hand. ‘Alpha Ackles is here.’

JD glanced from his computer screen, startling a little, lost as he’d been in a report, and smiled at his beta receptionist.
‘No worries, Bel,’ he said, ‘show him in.’

He minimized the report, turned to face the door as it reopened, this time with Alan Ackles at the doorway, Bel gesturing him in.

‘Did you want any coffee?’ she asked, ‘tea?’

JD raised an eyebrow questioningly at the other alpha as he reached his seat and Alan shook his head, giving the beta a kind smile.

‘I’m all good, thanks’ he told her.

JD dismissed her with a nod and waited until she’d left before he reached across and grasped Alan’s hand, giving it a firm shake.

‘Good to see you again, Alan,’ he said. ‘Not too bad a trip down?’

‘Pleasant enough,’ Alan answered, settling into his seat. ‘And good to see you too. Just,’ the alpha gave a shrug, pulled a face, ‘wish it was under better circumstances, I guess.’

JD sighed, sitting back down. ‘Yeah,’ he gave a rueful laugh, ‘that would be nice.’

Alan watched him a moment. ‘So… how much do you know?’ he asked finally.

JD leant back in his chair. ‘I…’ he started, then paused, ‘how about we just pretend I know nothing and you tell me everything you have?’

Alan nodded slowly. ‘Ok. Sounds good,’ he took a breath, ‘it started a few months back. Coupla rumours we heard. A couple of attacks by wolves on other lone wolves. Didn’t really think too much about it – that kind of thing happens, you know? One Were annoys another Were, they go at it. It’s not unusual. But then…’ he paused. ‘Then the McKinney Pack – they got attacked, in the middle of the night. They’re a real small pack, really quiet and peaceful – luckily though, they underestimated them. They’re peaceful, oh yeah, but… when you’re protecting the ones you love? A Were will fight harder, faster then. They fought off the attackers, lost a few of their pack though. That was about two months ago.’

‘And nothing since?’ JD clarified.

‘Nothing since,’ Alan confirmed.

JD drummed his fingers. ‘I heard… about the McKinney pack. I… just… what makes you think it’s the same as… as what happened eighteen years ago?’

Alan rubbed his chin. ‘I don’t know for sure, obviously, but… these lone wolves, they’re all alphas. Like before. Preying on smaller packs – it just… it just made me uneasy, made me think of back then.’

JD nodded slowly. The Ackles pack had been the ones to assist when JD and Jim Beaver had gone to the Padalecki territory that night. It had been before Alan was Alpha – he hadn’t even been present – but JD was sure the previous Alpha would’ve filled him in on the details.

‘I was told,’ Alan started slowly, ‘though, by my father – he was Alpha back then – he said you guys got all of them. All twenty five of those wolves who were massacring packs.’

JD sighed, closed his eyes a moment. ‘We… there… one got away,’ he admitted finally. ‘Just the
one. We didn’t say anything – kept it quiet. It was just one alpha, you know? We didn’t think anything of it. I mean, we were vigilant, for the years after, but… you know… it gets to be ten, fifteen years later and you start – you relax? You don’t think anymore that it could be an issue.’

‘But there’s a possibility it could be… a re-emergence of that same alpha? Maybe they’re trying to re-rally troops? Re-group again? Try it all over again? Or even just… just a copycat group?’

‘If I didn’t consider that a possibility, I wouldn’t have invited you over, now would I?’ JD pointed out wryly.

Alan inclined his head. ‘True, true…’ he nodded his head. ‘And… and now I’ve given you all my information. You have any to add?’

JD shrugged. ‘Wish I did. But, like I said, I heard about the McKinney pack attack, knew you guys were vital in quashing this last time, thought it might be good if we met to discuss. And… of course… the surviving alpha. The one we let get away. I… I think it’s best we keep our ear to the ground, maybe send some people to investigate around the McKinney pack lands, talk to some of the Were of that pack. Just… you know. Be prepared. But… quiet. Quiet. Last time… last time, packs got freaked, got insular, distrusted each other. We don’t need that this time. You and I – we’ve got the larger of the packs. If it is a re-emergence of these rogue wolves, we can handle it between us.’

Alan nodded slowly. ‘Sounds good. I… I’ve booked a local hotel. Booked for a few months. Figured it’d be best for us to talk together, figured I’d stick around until we sort this…’ he hesitated a moment. ‘And… I… just, we also heard… there was a survivor last time. From the Padalecki pack.’

JD stiffened. ‘He… that isn’t something to concern yourself with.’

Alan tilted his head. ‘Really? Isn’t it? If this is the same group, that alpha, then if there is a survivor, they could help, maybe send them to the McKinney pack, see if they can trace a scent, they might be able to – ’

‘No, they can’t,’ JD cut across sharply, voice loud.

Alan raised an eyebrow.

JD sighed, rubbed his face. ‘Just… just trust me ok? Jared… he doesn’t… everything he knows, he’s told me. There’s nothing new he can offer. He was six years old at the time, Alan, and it was eighteen years ago. He can’t help us any further with this. I want… I need to keep him out of this, ok? He’s… Christ, the kid has been through enough. I don’t want to be bringing this shit back up for him, ok?’

Alan softened. ‘Right, of course, I… I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have mentioned it.’

JD shook his head. ‘It’s not – don’t be sorry. I’m just – I get…’ he huffed a laugh. ‘He’s like a son, ok? We took him in – I’ve been lookin’ after the kid since he was six years old and I found him half dead in a cupboard. I get a little… protective.’

Alan held up both hands. ‘No need to explain to me,’ he said. ‘I get it. I’m a father too. I get it.’

JD smiled a little. ‘Thanks’ he said.

Alan nodded, lowered his hands, and suddenly looked a little uncomfortable. ‘Actually, I, uh,’ he cleared his throat, shifted a little. ‘There’s. That… it reminds me. I did. I, uh, my son, Jensen, he, uh, joined me on this trip. He’s going to be staying here with me.’
JD couldn’t stop a little smirk curling up his lips. ‘Oh yes. Jensen, huh? I,’ he coughed a little, ‘I may have heard about him.’

Alan groaned, rubbed his face. ‘Christ, hasn’t everyone?’ he half-laughed, shaking his head. ‘God, I love the kid, but… he’s a wild one.’

‘Young alphas,’ JD grinned. ‘Aren’t they all?’

‘Yeah, but some more than others,’ Alan rolled his eyes. ‘I’m waiting for the crying omega or beta holding a green-eyed pup and demanding marriage.’

JD smothered a laugh. ‘So, ah, you bought him with you to corrupt my betas and omegas then?’

Alan sat up straight. ‘God, no, god, JD, that’s not – I won’t allow him – ’

JD couldn’t stop the laugh escaping this time. ‘Relax, Alan, it’s fine,’ he chuckled. ‘I was kidding. Though I would’ve thought – you being off pack lands, you’d have left Jensen in charge?’

‘God no,’ Alan laughed. ‘That’s – that’s laughable. My eldest – Josh – he’ll be the next in line. Mature. Sensible. Got a good head on his shoulders. I left him in charge – be good practice for him. I – just – thought I might spare him having to keep his younger brother in check at the same time,’

Alan pulled a face. ‘Thought it might be better to bring Jensen with me, so I can keep an eye on him. He’s got – I mean, I’ve got a trusted alpha, who keeps him in check – or tries to, but, God help him, Misha has his hands full.’

He sighed a little. ‘Anyway, just thought – change of scenery for him, different setting, he might… calm down a bit, who knows?’ he gave a shrug. ‘Lord knows it’s time for him to start thinking about settling down. And, you know, for all his… wildness… he can have some good insight sometimes. Maybe, if we let him in on this, he can help.’

JD nodded. ‘Maybe,’ he agreed. ‘We’ll send some Weres to McKinney’s first, see what they scrounge up before we start bringing in other people though.’

Alan nodded, started to rise. ‘Sounds good,’ he held out a hand, ‘I’ll let you get back to it. Get on the phone myself and see how Josh is going, see who he can spare for me to send scouting.’

JD shook his head. ‘Feel free to any of my office out there,’ he gestured vaguely beyond the door, ‘and Bel’s a sweetie, she’ll be happy to show you how to log on the computers, the phone’s and such.’

Alan nodded once more, waving his thanks as he headed to leave the room. He paused at the door a moment, turned back.

‘Back then… did you ever find out, you know… why they did what they did? Those alphas?’

JD’s face darkened. ‘My old Alpha, Jim, said they just liked the chaos. The fear, panic. Packs against packs. They lived for it. But… we caught one, alive, that night, at the Padaleckis... they asked him. Why,’ his hand closed to a fist, ‘he said "because it's fun." That's all. "Because it's fun."'

Alan’s jaw tightened, anger flaring in his eyes. He nodded slowly, silently, before he left, closing the office door behind him. JD let out a long breath of air after his departure, leant back in his chair.

His eyes moved to the framed photo on his desk, his gorgeous mate, their two children, but his eyes zeroed in on the shaggy hair little boy in the photo, hiding behind his bangs.
“Because it's fun.”

He thought of a little girl, of sightless eyes and a torn out throat. Of bloodied faces and torn abdomens.

He wouldn’t let this touch Jared this time, he wouldn't.
Chapter 2

‘… listen, I’m telling you, that book is rubbish – *rubbish* – sparkly vampires? And the representation of werewolves is just insulting to us – *insulting*. This is what you want to read. It’s a classic. A *classic*.’

Jared hid a smile as he pulled back from rounding the corner into the Young Adult section of his bookstore, "The Blank Page", inclining his head to listen to his youngest salesperson, sixteen year old alpha Kathryn Newton, passionately talking to a rather intimidated and very lost looking younger human teenage girl.

‘I don’t – ’ the girl bit her lip. ‘I like *Twilight* though. And isn’t this an adult book?’

Jared peeked between the shelves to watch, amused, as Kat waved a hand.

‘It’s an *everyone* book – it’s a *classic,*’ Kat said passionately. *Interview with the Vampire*. The *original* vampire book. Trust me. I work here. *Trust me.*’

The girl hesitated, then finally took the book Kat was waving in her face. ‘Uh… I. Ok. Ok. I’ll buy it.’

Kat clapped her hands and promptly began all but shoving the girl towards the counter. ‘Awesome! *Awesome,* I’ll ring it up – ’

Jared gave a little chuckle, waiting a moment before he rounded the corner and slid the two books he’d been holding back into the shelf. He heard Kat ring up the purchase and headed to the front counter, watching as the slightly-dazed looking girl purchased the book, then headed for the door, the bell ringing behind her. He grinned at Kat.

‘Still on the anti-*Twilight* crusade, Kat?’ he teased.

Kat crossed her arms over her chest, shaking her blonde hair ferociously. ‘Kids these days, Mr P,’ she said, ‘they have no taste. *No* taste! Know *nothing* about classic literature.’

Jared couldn’t hide a smile at the fact that Kat would happily refer to teens probably only a year younger than her as “kids,” whilst simultaneously always referring to him as “Mr. P” as if he were so much older than her.

‘You *are* old though,’ she’d said, when he pointed it out, gently suggested she call him Jared, ‘you’re like *old* twenties!’

Jared had briefly wondered what “young twenties” was if twenty four was considered “old twenties” before deciding not to bother attempting to clarify.

‘I seem to remember when you first started working for me, you thought *Twilight* was pretty good’ he teased her.

Kat rolled her eyes. ‘Like, *years* ago’ she said.

It was actually months, but Jared held his tongue.

‘And anyway, you set me straight,’ and she grinned up at him, ‘put me on the right reading track.’

It made a little flutter of warmth pool in Jared’s chest at that. Because he loved reading, loved books
and one of his favourite things was recommending someone a novel and having them enjoy it. And Kat – Kat was a veracious reader, absorbed everything, took every recommendation he had. He’d had a soft spot for the teen ever since she’d sauntered in with a resume, gone to hand it to him and exclaimed, excitedly, ‘holy shit, cool eye man!’

Among the many reactions he’d had to his eye, it was up there with the best.

‘I’m just spreading the wisdom,’ Kat continued, ‘as is my duty as a "Blank Page" employee.’

She tapped her name-badge, decorated with a smiley face sticker, with a sense of importance. Jared ducked his head to hide his smile, caught the eye of his other employee, and second in charge, a young man named Osric Chau, who was also grinning. There was a tinkle as the door swung open.

‘Closing time,’ Felicia sang as she bounced in, ‘time for you to go out into the world, closing time …’

At the sight of the tiny red head Osric’s grin vanished, his face went bright red and he gave a squeak and vanished into the bookcases.

Still not over his crush yet then, Jared decided.

Felicia was oblivious, taking bounding steps towards Jared, still singing as she went.

‘ – turn the lights up over every boy and every girl,’ she reached him, grabbed his hand and a looped another around his waist, attempting to swing him into dancing, ‘closing – goddamn you’re heavy Padalecki – time, one last call for alcohol so finish your whiskey - you know you could help me a little with the dancing – ’

Jared pulled free. ‘Let go, you menace,’ he swatted at her, ‘coming in here, disrupting my customers.’

‘I think you mean “entertaining your customers”,’ Felicia protested, then swung to face the empty store, mock bowing with sweeping arm gestures, ‘yes, yes! Thank you! I love your applause! Thank you, thank you all!’

‘I don’t know why I let you in this store’ Jared feigned annoyance.

‘Because you lo-vee me’ Felicia sung, turning back around to bat her eyes lashes at him.

Jared gave her a light push. ‘Hardly’ he scoffed.

Felicia gave an exaggerated stagger at the push. ‘You see that – the way he treats his friends? So abusive!’ she turned wide-eyed to an enthralled Kat. ‘I hope he doesn’t treat his employees like that. You should strike.’

‘Stop!’ Jared threw up his hands, pretended to cover Kat’s ears. ‘Don’t corrupt my employees!’

‘Fine, I’ll settle for corrupting you then,’ Felicia conceded, reaching out and grabbing his shirt. ‘With copious amounts of alcohol. Like I said, it’s closing time bab-y, time to get our drink on at the pub.’

Jared pulled free, turned to make his way around the front counter. ‘I know, ok, Friday drinks – geez, you’re just as bad as Gen this morning,’ he rolled his eyes. ‘I’ll come – I will. I’ve got to close up first though. I can meet you guys there.’

‘Uh-uh,’ Felicia waggled a finger. ‘Nosiree. I won’t fall for that one. You’ll come now, Mister,’ she
turned, gestured, ‘Osric can close up.’

Osric, who’d been peering around the bookcase, startled at her gesture, gave another squeak and vanished again. Felicia squinted after him, then turned back.

‘See, I’m pretty sure that meant “sure go ahead boss, go get drunk with your lady friends!”’

‘Felicia’ Jared started with a sigh.

‘Look, I promise –I swear on Sarah Michelle Gellar’s beautiful blonde hair, that there is a hundred percent, no setups happening tonight – promise’ Felicia interrupted.

‘Setups?’ Kat perked up, turned to Jared. ‘Mr. P, are you getting a boyfriend?’

Jared felt his face flame. ‘I – no – I’m not –’

‘We wish’ Felicia said mournfully.

‘Maybe he’s holding out for his true mate,’ Kat said conspiratorially to Felicia, as if Jared wasn’t standing there. ‘All the girls at my school blather on about that. True mate this, true mate that.’

‘Kat, how about you knock off early today?’ Jared interrupted.

‘How about you knock off early today, Mr. P?’ Kat shot back. ‘Me and Osric will close up!’

‘I like this girl,’ Felicia grinned. ‘She’s smart.’

‘Cheeky more like’ Jared muttered.

‘I’m happy to close up’ Osric’s voice called out faintly.

‘Hah! That’s it! Three against one! Let’s rock and roll!’ Felicia crowed triumphantly.

Jared threw both hands, looked to the roof. ‘God, you’re all impossible!’ he sighed. ‘Fine, you alcoholics, I’ll go to the damn pub now.’

Felicia cheered, starting to skip to the door, bursting back into her rendition of “Closing Time” as she went. Kat tugged his shirt.

‘S’ok if you are waiting for your true mate, Mr. P,’ she said confidentially, ‘but I totally think you should get some in the meantime.’

Jared’s face went bright red, and he ducked hurriedly towards his back office. He was, he decided, surrounded by lunatics.

**

Misha Collins held a bag of two burgers and two lots of fries loosely in one hand as he made his way down the corridor of the hotel. The tantalizing scent of meat and fries wafted to his nose and he all but drooled at the smell. Damn, but he was hungry. The tall, dark-haired alpha reached his destination and lifted one hand to rap on the door in front of him.
‘Jensen!’ he called through the wood. ‘Jensen, open up!’

There were noises on the other side, shuffling and movement and Misha swung the bag of food impatiently, shifted in his position. The door swung in and he rolled his eyes.

‘What took you so…’ the words died.

The beta Were on the other side, small, pretty, brunette, hair slightly mussed, looked him up and down.

‘You’re not Jensen’ Misha said dumbly.

The beta blinked, raised an eyebrow as she shrugged on a jacket. ‘Well spotted,’ she said, before she turned and called over her shoulder, ‘my number’s on the table. Call me!’

Then she turned and trotted down the hallway. Misha stared dumbly after her, turned back and stared dumbly inside the hotel room.

Then he strode inside.

‘I left you alone for two hours – two hours! How? How?’ Misha burst out.

Sprawled on the bed, Jensen Ackles gave his longest friend, longest companion and incredibly long-suffering self-appointed “babysitter” a cocky grin.

‘Right?’ he said. ‘Impressive, hey?’

Misha resisted the urge to throw the food at him.

Jensen stretched out, yawned and wriggled on the bed. Tall, well-muscled, lean, a smattering of freckles across his bare-chest, shoulders, across his face, chiseled jaw, perfect cheekbones, bright green eyes, and mussed blonde hair, the twenty eight year old alpha was pure fantasy for many a Were. And, oh boy, did he know it.

Misha looked at the food, tried to think how much he’d really miss it if he did throw it.

‘That for me?’ Jensen perked at the food, sitting up and making grabbing hands.

Misha squawked, spun around. ‘Clothes, Jensen, god dammit. Clothes!’

‘Oh please, like you haven’t seen it before’ Jensen scoffed behind him.

‘And each time, each time I beg for it to be the last’ Misha said.

There was scuffling and movement behind him and then Jensen appeared, clad in boxers. ‘Happy?’ he said with a roll of his eyes, grabbing for the bag and tugging it from Misha’s hands.

‘With you around? Very rarely’ Misha muttered.

Jensen gave him a wolfish grin over his shoulder as he headed for the table in the hotel room. ‘Thank god for food man, ‘m starving,’ he said as he plunked down on the seat and began rifling through the bag, grabbing a handful of fries and jamming them into his mouth.

‘Yeah, me too’ Misha answered, heading for the other seat.

He reached for the bag, but before he could get it Jensen was leaning away, winking over his
shoulder.

‘Worked up an appetite, if you know what I mean’ he said, reaching for a pair of jeans with one free hand, the other still holding the bag just out of reach for Misha.

‘Yeah, about that – two hours, Jensen,’ Misha scowled. ‘I was gone for two hours. How in the hell did you manage that?’

‘My pure animal magnetism,’ Jensen leered.

‘Well, the pure animal part is right’ Misha muttered.

‘She’s staying at the hotel, was down at the bar, we got talking, and,’ Jensen shrugged, ‘one thing led to another.’

‘As usual’ Misha rolled his eyes.

Jensen straightened in his seat again, dropping the jeans, and Misha reached for the bag of food once more, got inches from it, before Jensen suddenly got to his feet, a frown appearing on his face, the bag instantly out of reach.

‘S’weird though,’ he muttered.

‘What’s weird?’ Misha raised an eyebrow.

Jensen stopped, rubbed a hand through his hair. ‘Dunno, just… weird,’ he said, giving a shrug. ‘She was good – she was. I just feel… it was weird.’

Misha got to his feet, headed for Jensen. ‘You’ve been saying that a lot’ he pointed out, reaching for the bag.

Jensen’s brow crinkled, he turned and paced to the door. Misha sighed as the bag whisked from under his fingertips once more.

‘Yeah,’ Jensen murmured, ‘guess I have.’

Misha backed up, sat back down. Jensen had been saying it more often, less satisfied with each omega, beta or alpha that fell into his bed, less soothed by each drink. Misha had an inkling he knew why. He’d talked with Alan Ackles about it - it was part of the reason why they’d decided to bring Jensen here, a change of scenery, a hope that a new setting might break old patterns.

Well, maybe not, he reflected, thinking of the beta Were exasperatedly.

But Jensen was getting older, reaching twenty eight, and he should be looking at settling down. If not with his true mate – because not everyone found them, Misha knew, he himself was thirty four and hadn’t found his – but with someone. The restlessness, the dissatisfaction, Misha thought maybe it was because Jensen was still partying, still sleeping around like he was twenty one, and the alpha within him, the part that wanted to provide for a mate, for anyone, the innate, inbuilt need an alpha had to protect, to love, to provide, was getting antsy, getting anxious and pushy.

Jensen took a seat on the bed, munched thoughtfully on a fry. Misha got to his feet.

‘I have a theory,’ he ventured. ‘About this…’

He reached for the bag of food. Jensen flopped back and the food pulled out of his reach again. Misha resisted the urge to scream.
'Yeah?' Jensen arched an eyebrow expectantly.

Misha nodded. ‘I think, maybe you’re bored,’ he started. ‘Of this – ’

Jensen sat back up. ‘Bored,’ he interrupted, and clicked his fingers. ‘You’re right!’

Misha blinked. ‘I didn’t even finish –’

‘I’m bored,’ Jensen continued, ‘and the best cure is to go out! Brand new town, new people. It’s perfect.’

‘That’s kind of the exact opposite of what I was trying to say’ Misha said, reached for the food again.

‘Its perfect,’ Jensen jumped to his feet, whirled to his suitcase.

‘For the love of –’ Misha cursed, fingers grasping thin air.

‘Coupla beers,’ Jensen carried on enthusiastically, ‘some new company.’

Misha turned. ‘It’s a terrible idea.’

‘It’s a perfect idea!’ Jensen didn’t seem to be listening.

‘Can I please have the food now?’ Misha sighed.

‘Hmm?’ Jensen turned, blinked at him. ‘Food? Oh no, I’m ok for food, I’m done with it now.’

He tossed the bag into the bin, and reached for his suitcase, dragging a shirt out. Misha stared mournfully at the bag in the bin.

‘It must be nice,’ he sighed, ‘the little world you live in.’

‘Huh?’ Jensen looked up, getting to his feet. Misha sighed. Resigned himself.

‘Never mind.’

**

‘This place,’ Jensen said decisively.

He squinted through the car window. Nodded his head.

‘Yep, definitely this place.’

Misha rolled his eyes, slid from the car. ‘I find it amusing that you put more effort into choosing a bar for the night than you do into…’ he paused, thought for a moment. ‘Well, anything else.’

‘It’s all about setting, Mish,’ Jensen told him, ‘a bad location can make or break the night.’

‘I thought it was about company’ Misha said.

Jensen got from the car. ‘Well, that’s tied into setting,’ he explained, ‘a terrible setting, it’ll attract terrible people. It’s all intertwined.’
Misha stopped mid-step. Jensen looked at him.

‘What?’

‘Nothing it… it just occurred to me that I’m having a discussion about choosing a bar like… like it’s the most important thing in the universe. Like there’s actually science behind it. And I’m kind of wondering how my life led to this point.’

Jensen clapped him on the back, grinning. ‘Just perks of being best friends with me.’

Misha expelled a long sigh and Jensen ignored it in favour of tugging on the back of his shirt, leading him towards the front door of the unassuming bar they’d arrived at. “R&R” the sign proclaimed it – and it looked nice, homely, all bricks, low-key decorations and nothing flashy. The local, Jensen decided, looking at it. It had a local feel to it. And everyone knew the local bars were usually the best

‘Come on,’ he said, ‘let’s get to know the local pack.’

‘I love how you say ‘get to know the local pack’,’ Misha grumbled, ‘like this isn’t just an excuse to get drunk and hook up with all the pretty betas and omegas.’

Jensen grinned wolfishly at him. ‘Hey, that’s one way to get to know the locals technically.’

Misha rolled his eyes as he pushed the bar’s door open. ‘I feel like this is entirely counter-intuitive to the reason your father – why we dragged you here in the first place…’

Jensen only chuckled as he followed Misha into the bar’s dark interior. ‘You both should know better than to –’

His words cut off abruptly as he stopped dead in his tracks with a gasp.

He’d scented Were before, of course, everyone had a distinct scent. But this - this was on another level - overwhelming, all consuming, like nothing he’d ever scented - ever even experienced before.

It hit him like a sucker punch to the gut – the scent, so strong and heady, causing a wave of dizziness to wash over him – cinnamon, vanilla, cloves, sweet and musky at the same time, smelling like comfort and home and safe rolled all into one. He stumbled a little, grabbed a hold of the nearest table to steady himself, his heart pounding in his ribs.

Misha was at his side in an instant. ‘Jensen? What’s the matter?’ he asked urgently.

‘That – you can’t – the scent –’ Jensen managed to stutter out. ‘Can’t you smell it?’

Misha straightened up, breathed in deeply, paused for a moment, thinking, then said, ‘uh, alcohol? Sweat? The usual stench of wolf? The smell of bad decisions? Help me out here, Jensen.’

Jensen shook his head. ‘No, no – it’s sweet,’ he said. ‘Cinnamon, vanilla and strong – so fucking strong - you seriously can’t smell it?’

‘I seriously am concerned for your sanity’ Misha replied.

Jensen straightened up and breathed in deeply. The scent washed over him in a wave of contentment, curling through his body, spreading from head to toe. He closed his eyes a moment to revel in it. When he opened them, Misha was staring at him.

Jensen gusted out a huge breath. ‘Mish,’ he said. ‘I think I’m in trouble.’
Felicia was chattering a mile a minute about a heated discussion she’d had at the electronics store that she worked in when something tickled at Jared’s nose, made it twitch. He shifted uncomfortably, rubbed at his face. He wasn’t used to smelling things beyond what a normal human would, but this – this – it was faint, but it was different, it was weird. The hairs on the back of his neck started to rise. The scent reminded him of – it reminded him of -

‘ – and I was like, buddy, you’re insane if you think that it’s not canon they’re soulmates – ’

...earth, rain...

‘Wait, wait,’ Gen interrupted, wrinkling her nose. ‘What’s a canon got to do with anything?’

... freshwater, moss... ...

Felicia rolled her eyes. ‘Not a canon, but canon’ she said.

... campfires, smoke...

Gen arched an eyebrow. ‘Yeah, that cleared up absolutely nothing.’

Before Felicia could answer, Jared gave a loud sneeze, almost doubling up on the bench.

‘Whoa, geez, watch it,’ Gen pouted, tugging her beer out of the way.

‘Gesundheit’ Felicia said.

‘Well, now you’re just making words up’ Gen grumbled.

Felicia grinned at her, but declined to answer, turning to Jared. ‘You ok there, Sasquatch?’

Jared blinked a few times, breathing deep a moment. ‘Yeah I – can you guys smell that?’ he wrinkled his nose.

‘Oh no, I’m not falling for that prank,’ Gen said. ‘My brothers pulled that one on me all the time.’

‘What?’ Jared blinked at her, then shook his head. ‘No, I’m not – jeez, Gen, that’s gross, by the way – I can smell – it’s sort of... earthy? And nice.’

‘Earthy?’ Gen echoed. ‘What?’

‘This isn’t a sign of a stroke is it?’ Felicia squeaked. ‘Quick, Jay, is your left arm tingling??’

‘That’s smelling burnt toast, doofus,’ Gen rolled her eyes at Felicia, before turning to Jared and raising an eyebrow. ‘And I can’t smell anything...?’

Jared blinked. ‘Oh, I... it’s probably nothing, just... imagining things,’ he nodded quickly at Felicia. ‘Anyway, you were saying ‘Licia?’

‘Huh? Oh right! Anyway, so this dude was all like – ’ Felicia carried on with a gusto.

Jared, meanwhile, gave himself a little shake.
Don’t be stupid, he told himself, you can’t smell anything because… well you can’t smell anything. Stop imagining things.

He shifted, took a sip of beer, and refocused, trying to ignore the niggling feeling prickling along his skin.

***

‘Your what?’

‘I already, said, my true mate,’ Jensen hissed, standing next to Misha at the bar, bobbing on his tiptoes as he scanned over the heads of the bar patrons as they waited to be served. ‘Somewhere in this bar.’

‘I – your “true” mate? Really, Jensen?’ Misha rubbed a hand across his face and briefly contemplated the life choices that led him to basically be Jensen’s babysitter.

(A farm, he thought, I could’ve owned a farm. Bred bees. Sold lemons. But no.)

He looked at the younger alpha. ‘I mean, I’m just trying to work out if this is a new pickup line your trying out – cause I gotta say, I don’t think it’ll work too well to be honest. It’s a bit too heavy on the cheese factor.’

Jensen turned from his searching to glare at Misha. ‘I’m not joking around, Misha,’ he growled. ‘Think about it – why else can I smell… whoever this is, so powerfully and you can’t? You know what they say about true mates.’

Misha sighed and waved a hand. ‘Yeah, yeah, I know,’ he said. ‘They can scent each other strongly, overwhelmingly, made for each other, yada yada yada.’

Jensen huffed. ‘I’m so glad you’re taking this so seriously.’

Misha arched an eyebrow. ‘May I point out that no more than a few hours ago you were literally having sex with a random beta?’

Jensen’s face flushed. ‘That was – well, I mean – ’

‘And,’ Misha overrode him, ‘I mean… what are the odds, really? Of running into your mate at some random bar in a random state on the random pack lands of a random pack?’

‘First of all, too many “randoms” in there dude, get a new adjective,’ Jensen said. ‘Second of all, where the hell else are you supposed to meet your mate if not out at a bar? Running towards each other in a field of daisies? Trapped in a tower waiting for a prince to rescue them? And doesn't this make sense? Why I've been feeling so antsy, so... unsatisfied lately? You said yourself something seemed off!’

Misha conceded Jensen’s point as he signalled the bartender. ‘Yeah, I guess, still though…’

But Jensen wasn’t listening – a burst of laughter caught his attention from one of the booths towards the back of the bar. Something thrummed in his stomach – a fluttering of excitement and anticipation that he couldn’t explain - he maneuvered around Misha, raising up on his tiptoes and caught a
glimpse of the back of a head, with dark, shaggy hair, long limbs splayed out beneath a table - and he just knew. Jensen just knew.

‘How can I help you fellas?’ the bartender, a shorter, handsome man with slightly curled blonde hair and a mischievous glint to his eyes, stood at the bar before him.

‘I’ll have a Corona,’ Misha said. ‘Jensen, you?’

Jensen didn’t answer. ‘Mish,’ he croaked. ‘Him, that’s him.’

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Felicia had finished up her story with a mad giggle, when Jared glanced at Gen and saw she was looking at the bar and pulling a face. He poked her in the ribs, causing her to squeal and then glare at him.

‘What’s got you making that face?’

‘I wasn’t making a face’ Gen huffed.

‘You were,’ Felicia said. ‘It was your “this person is walking too slow in front of me face” –’

‘- and your “did you call me cute?” face –’

‘- and your “you are extremely stupid” face –’

‘-and –’

‘Ok, ok,’ Gen cut in. ‘Apparently I look disgusted a lot. Thanks guys. Way to make me feel like a bitch.’

‘But you’re our bitch,’ Felicia beamed at her. ‘That’s why we love you.’

‘Also because we’re thankful you’re on our side’ Jared finished, then yelped as Gen elbowed him in the side.

‘Anyway,’ Gen said, ‘guess who’s over there – actually, wait, no, don’t try and guess, I’m just opening myself up for you guys to be dicks if I do that –’

Felicia and Jared couldn’t help but exchange grins.

‘– it’s,’ Gen paused dramatically, ‘Jensen Ackles.’

There was a pause.

‘Um, who?’ Jared asked.

Gen huffed. ‘Honestly, you are both hopeless when it comes to Were pack gossip!’ she crossed her arms over her chest and glared at them both. ‘If it doesn’t involve 50 year old literature,’ she scowled at Jared, ‘or nerdy pop culture,’ she scowled at Felicia, ‘then you’re both clueless! So uncultured.’

Jared couldn’t help chuckling. ‘I love how we’re the uncultured ones because we don’t participate in
‘Jensen Ackles,’ Gen carried on like he hadn’t spoken, ‘is part of the Ackles pack – you know, the Alpha who came to meet with JD today? That’s his son. Apparently he bought him along here because he was getting too much of a reputation in his pack. The guy is a total manwhore.’

‘Jeez, don’t sugar-coat it Gen’ Jared said sarcastically.

‘That is sugar-coating it,’ Gen insisted. ‘He’ll literally screw anything that moves – guy, girl, omega, beta, alpha – I bet there’s barely anyone left in his pack who he hasn’t slept with.’

Felicia was peering over Jared’s shoulder at the bar. ‘Well, I can see why,’ she commented. ‘That dude is smokin’.’

‘Felicia!’ Gen admonished.

‘What? You can’t deny, that is a hot piece of man,’ Felicia defended herself. ‘I’d climb him like a tree.’

A startled, loud burst of laughter escaped Jared’s lips along with a spray of beer at her words. He couldn’t help himself twisting around a little to peer through his bangs at the figure at the bar. And, dear God, Felicia was right – the guy was seriously hot. Blonde hair gelled into spiked, killer cheekbones, big green eyes, perfect bow lips – the guy looked like a model, he was seriously -

- he was seriously turning to look in their direction.

Jared swung his head back around as fast as he could, cheeks burning red. ‘Crap, he’s looking over here!’ he hissed.

‘Yeah, probably to check out the doofus spitting beer all over the table’ Gen commented drily as she mopped up the spray with a napkin.

‘Maybe he’s checking one of us out’ Felicia said a little dreamily.

Gen pointed a soggy napkin at the red head. ‘Don’t even think about it,’ she ordered sternly. ‘I will drag you out of here with my bare hands if I have to. No one, I repeat, no one is sleeping with Jensen Ackles, are we all clear?’

Jared gave a humourless laugh. ‘Not sure you’d really have to worry much about that with me Gen’ he muttered.

Gen shot him a look and opened her mouth when Felicia gave a remorseful sigh, eyes still fixed over Jared’s shoulders.

‘Well, we definitely won’t be,’ she said, ‘but I think Mia might. I think it’s a new record – took her a full five minutes before she zeroed in on him.’

She nodded over Jared’s shoulder. Jared felt his jaw tighten at the mention of Mia, one of the less than friendly betas of the pack. He didn’t bother to turn around, not particularly interested in watching Mia drape herself all over the alpha. It made his stomach churn unpleasantly just thinking about it. Which was stupid, because it’s not like a half blind, useless omega would’ve stood a chance with a pack alpha’s son anyway. Or anyone’s son really.

And wasn’t that just the story of his life.
‘That’s nice,’ Misha said patiently in response to Jensen’s declaration. ‘But I actually asked what beer you wanted?’

‘Huh?’ Jensen turned to look at Misha almost dazedly. ‘What beer? Oh right. Beer. Uh, yeah, I’ll have a beer – uh I mean, a – whatever he’s having is good. Ok? Ok, good.’

Misha looked at Jensen, then looked to the bartender, who was smirking a bit. ‘You get all that?’

‘Crystal clear’ the bartender chuckled as he went to fetch their beers.

‘I’m going to go over there’ Jensen muttered, starting forward.

Misha drew in a sharp breath. ‘Oh boy’ he murmured.

Jensen had barely taken a step in the direction before a petite figure appeared suddenly in his space, blocking his way. He stopped and blinked, finding himself gazing down at a small, blonde beta Were, with big brown eyes rimmed with thick eyeliner and expertly applied makeup, the layers almost concealing the smattering of freckles across her cheeks. She was pretty, absolutely, with curves to die for, and for the first time in his life, Jensen could not care less.

‘Hi,’ the beta said breathlessly, beaming up at him. ‘I’m Mia.’

‘Um,’ Jensen shifted a little, wanting to tell the girl to leave, but at the same time not wanting to appear that rude. ‘Jensen. This is Misha.’

‘Well, that “true mate” thing lasted a whole five minutes,’ he heard Misha mutter behind him as he paid for the two beers that had appeared on the bar. ‘Really had me going there Jensen.’

Jensen resisted the urge to turn and glare at him. He focused on the girl. ‘Uh, look, listen – ’ he started.

‘You must be new here,’ Mia cut across him. ‘Because I’m sure I would have remembered seeing you around before.’

She gave him a sultry, completely unsubtle once over.

‘Maybe you’re lookin’ for someone to show you around while in town? I know all the good places.’

There was a hint of a leer in her voice. Jensen bit back a sigh.

‘Listen, I’m flattered but – ’ he paused. ‘Wait, you’re a local then?’

‘Born and raised baby’ Mia winked at him.

Jensen’s eyes lit up. ‘Awesome, so you know everyone right?’ he caught her arm and turned her, pointing at the corner booth. ‘Can you tell me who that is?’

Whatever Mia had expected sauntering over here, this was not it. She stared, then looked up at Jensen, lips thinning a little.
‘Who?’ she said, her voice a touch abrasive. ‘You mean Genevieve or Felicia? They’re both horrible,’ she rushed to say, ‘so stuck up and snobby. You don’t want to hang with them, trust me, they’re – ’

‘No, no,’ Jensen interrupted. ‘The guy.’

‘The guy?’ Mia squinted, then burst out laughing.

The fear of competition was gone in an instant, her face instantly relaxing. ‘Oh, you mean Jared.’ She said his name with a snicker and Jensen looked at her.

‘Jared?’

Mia turned to face him, still giggling. ‘Oh god, he’s such a disgusting freak,’ she told him. ‘Like I know from a distance he looks ok, but up close he’s awful. His face is a scarred mess, honestly I don’t even know how he can look at himself in the mirror – ‘

Jensen felt his jaw tightening a little at her sneering words. He clenched his fists.

‘ – I swear, I’ve told him so many times to wear a paper bag over his head when he comes outside, spare the rest of us the sight,’ Mia giggled to herself. ‘He’s got this eye – it’s so gross – it’s like icky white and - and he’s supposed to be an omega right, but he’s huge. And everyone says he’s not a real Were, he can’t even shift –’

Jensen sucked in a surprised breath, looked to the table.

‘ – can you imagine it? What kind of Were can’t shift? He’s a total freak, and some people even say he can’t have –’

‘Mia.’

A strong voice suddenly interrupted, level and calm and both Jensen and Mia jumped, turning. Another bartender was standing at the bar, different to the longer haired one from before. He was short, with dark brown, scruffy hair and a thick, brown beard to match. His mouth was set in a hard line, glaring at the chattering beta.

‘Pretty sure I’ve told you more than once not to badmouth people in my bar’ the guy said. Mia pouted. ‘I wasn’t "badmouthing", Rob, I was just telling the – ‘

‘Especially,’ the bartender overrode her, ‘not people who are my friends. Like Jared.’

Mia stopped talking, her lips tight.

‘I think it’s time you were leaving, yeah?’ the bartender nodded to the door, his voice indicating it was not a question, but an order. ‘Think you’ve had enough for tonight.’

Mia looked ready to protest, then huffed. ‘Whatever,’ she flicked her hair over her shoulder, then turned to smile up at Jensen. ‘How about we go find somewhere else to drink, huh?’

Jensen was already turning away from her towards the bar. ‘No thank you,’ he said dismissively, not sparing her a second glance.

He moved to the bar to stand in front of the bartender, locking eyes with him, only vaguely aware of the irritated and indignant squawk from Mia behind him before she stormed out of the bar.
'You know that Jared guy then?' he asked.

The guy regarded him with no small amount of suspicion on his face. ‘Yeah, he’s a good pal of mine,’ he answered slowly. ‘Who’s asking?’

‘Jensen Ackles,’ Jensen introduced himself promptly.

‘Ah, you’re the alpha’s son,’ the bartender nodded. ‘I’ve heard about you.’

Jensen winced. For the first time he found himself regretting the reputation that preceded him.

‘I’m Rob Benedict,’ the bartender continued. ‘I run this joint with my mate, Rich,’ he jerked his head in the direction of the longer haired bartender that had served them earlier. ‘Look,’ he gave a little sigh, ‘Jared’s a… he’s a real good kid, a lot of us are real protective of him, you get my drift?’

‘Protective?’ Jensen echoed. ‘Is that because… is what Mia was saying…?’

Rob eyed him. ‘What Mia was saying was thoughtless and cruel’ he said.

Jensen back tracked. ‘Oh – I – yeah, of course, I just mean – I didn’t mean – ’

Rob sighed again. People seemed to do that a lot around Jensen. Like Misha. And his father.

‘Look, you heard of the Padalecki pack?’

Jensen blinked, confused at the change in direction of the conversation. ‘The Padalecki pack? Uh, yeah, I mean, I think so – they were wiped out years ago though…’

Rob gave a little one-shouldered shrug. ‘Not entirely’ he said pointedly.

Jensen caught on fast. ‘Jared?’ his eyebrows raised.

Rob leant forward. ‘Look, years ago, there was a lot of bad going on – a lot of packs got slaughtered by some bad Weres. Jared’s pack was one of them. He was the only survivor and… and they didn’t leave him unscathed, y’know? JD took him in, raised him and… he’s… he’s one of us now.’ He leveled a stare at Jensen’s face. ‘And we take care of our own, you got that?’

He maintained eye contact for a moment, then turned and moved to serve another customer. Misha blew out a breath.

‘Well that was a thinly veiled threat if I ever heard one’ he muttered.

‘Hmm’ Jensen hummed, already turning back to look in Jared’s direction.

‘You’re not going to listen to it though, are you?’ Misha continued.

‘Hmm’ Jensen hummed again, peering through the crowd.

He stiffened instantly. If he’d been in wolf form, he had no doubt that his hackles would be rising right now. There was a new alpha Were at the table, standing close – too goddamn close for Jensen, thank you very much – to where Jared was sitting, leering (in Jensen’s opinion) down at the omega.

He growled low in his throat, grabbed his beer and made his way purposefully through the crowd.

‘Yep, didn’t think so’ Misha sighed, before trailing after him dutifully.
Gen had immediately launched into a detailed and passionate explanation of why Mia and Jensen Ackles deserved each other and were welcome to each other, with a look of disdain wrinkling her pretty features, when Felicia’s gaze transferred from watching the interaction between Mia and Jensen to the front door instead. Instantly, her features brightened and she gave Jared a big grin.

‘Oooh, guess who just walked in’ she sing-songed.

Gen stopped mid-rant, looked over Jared’s shoulder, and her face split into an identical grin.

‘Ooh, it’s your lucky day, Jay-Bird’ she cackled.

Jared instantly stiffened at the sly looks on his friend’s face. ‘It’s Jared,’ he said pointedly to Gen, ‘and what are you talking about?’

‘Stephen just walked in’ Felicia beamed.

Instantly, Jared sunk down in his seat as much as his height would allow. ‘Oh crap,’ he muttered. ‘Has he spotted me?’

Gen arched an eyebrow. ‘No not yet,’ she answered, then promptly stood up and waved a hand. ‘Hey, Stephen, over here!!’ she winked down at Jared. ‘Now he has.’

‘Gen, what the hell?’ Jared hissed. ‘You promised – tonight – you promised you wouldn’t again – ’

Gen shrugged as she sat back down gracefully. ‘I said I wouldn’t set you up,’ she objected. ‘Nothing about not taking advantage if he came along…’ she suddenly blew out a frustrated sight. ‘I don’t understand what your problem is with the guy, Jared. He’s smoking hot, eligible, an alpha and totally into you!’

Jared’s jaw clenched in frustration as he dragged a hand across his face. ‘Yes, that’s exactly the point!’ he gritted out.

Felicia and Gen looked at him with identical quizzical expressions and Jared blew out a sigh of frustration. His friends just didn’t get it, they didn’t see what he did. Stephen Amell was a strong, capable, handsome alpha – and he was going for a scarred omega who couldn’t even bear pups? Didn’t they see how it didn’t add up?

‘It’s – it’s pity, or feeling sorry for me,’ he hissed. ‘That’s all. Or he thinks I’ll be easy – just grab what I can get.’

Gen’s face crumpled a little. ‘Oh, Jay,’ she said softly, sadly.

She didn’t get any further, because suddenly Stephen was suddenly at the table, looming over them. He smiled down at Jared.

‘Hey, Jared, how’s it going?’ he said.

Jared was suddenly acutely aware that he was borderline slumped under the table in an effort to hide, and immediately tried to wriggle his way up, which was both difficult and awkward and by the time he’d straightened up, his face was bright red.
‘Good’ he mumbled, not looking up, although it came out more like "gumf."

Stephen tilted his head to the two girls. ‘Ladies,’ he smiled with a nod.

Gen inclined her drink in his direction in response.

Stephen transferred his gaze back to Jared. ‘So, Jared, can I buy – ’

Suddenly, another shadow fell across Jared – and with it, the sudden tickling of his nose again, the faint... scent, almost, or... something. It caught him off guard, and he glanced up. Jensen Ackles was wedging himself between Stephen and Jared, a grin on his face.

Another Were, an alpha with dark hair and startling blue eyes and an expression of long-suffering on his face appeared in the background, tugging an empty chair up beside Felicia and sitting down.

‘Brace yourself,’ he said to the two girls. ‘This is probably going to be messy.’

‘Hi, Jared is it?’ Jensen said brightly, turning to look at Jared and effectively blocking Stephen with his back. ‘I’m Jensen, Jensen Ackles.’

Jared stared at the outstretched hand the alpha was offering. ‘Uh, yeah, I – um hi?’ he blinked.

‘Excuse me,’ Stephen said frostily. ‘I was just in the middle of asking Jared if he wanted a drink.’

Jensen tossed a careless glance over his shoulder. ‘A drink? Yeah that’d be awesome – make it two Coronas will you?’ he grinned down at Jared. ‘You’re ok with Corona’s yeah?’


‘Awesome,’ Jensen said, then turned and clapped Stephen on the back heartily. ‘Thanks, buddy.’

He grabbed a chair in one swift movement and pulled it to be alongside Jared, no room for anyone to wedge in between, and promptly sat down, straddling the chair backwards, still grinning. Stephen stood awkwardly, anger emanating of him in waves, before he turned stiffly and headed to the bar.

Jared had absolutely no idea what the hell was going on.

He tossed a confused, helpless look at Gen and Felicia, and was met by raised eyebrows.

‘I’m sorry,’ Gen said finally. ‘Did you want something, Mr Ackles?’

‘It’s Jensen,’ the alpha corrected easily, not put out in the slightest by her tense tone. ‘Just thought I’d come over and say hi – get to know the locals, y’know?’ he instantly transferred his gaze to Jared. ‘So, Jared, tell me about yourself?’

Jared had never felt more out of his depth in his life, which was saying something because “out of his depth” was basically his default setting. It didn’t help that Jensen was even more gorgeous up close, with intense, bright green eyes that were boring straight into his, perfect cheekbones, pouting lips, chiselled features and - and suddenly Jared was more aware than ever of the scars along his face, his stark white blind eye, and he ducked his head instantly, letting his bangs fall into his face.

‘I – uh – there’s not – there’s really nothing – ’ he stammered, feeling his cheeks flush, which was just awesome because the redder he was, the whiter his scars seemed.

Thankfully, his pathetic attempt at answering the question was cut off with the squeal of a chair being dragged over as Stephen arrived back at the table, sitting himself next to Jensen, too close to be
anything less than intimidating. He purposefully reached across the other alpha to place a beer in front of Jared, then settled back in his chair, sipping his own. Jensen eyed him icily.

‘So, Ackles,’ Stephen started, his voice hard as flint, ‘any reason you’re over here bothering these people? Looking for your next hook-up? Because I gotta say, you’re barkin’ up the wrong tree. These guys have much more brain cells than you’d be used to.’

Jensen smiled back thinly. ‘Actually, I was just getting to know Jared over here,’ he replied. ‘Not that it’s any of your business… sorry, I didn’t catch your name?’

Stephen thrust his hand forward. ‘Stephen Amell.’

Jensen grabbed the hand. ‘Jensen Ackles.’

It looked like the two of them were trying to break each other hands, the grip turning their knuckles white.

‘What the hell is going on?’ Gen whispered to Felicia.

‘I’m not entirely sure,’ Felicia answered, ‘but I’m pretty sure in layman’s terms it’s a massive pissing contest.’

‘Thing is, Ackles,’ Stephan spat, not loosening his grip. ‘I don’t think Jared wants your company.’

‘Well, Amell,’ Jensen shot back, ‘I think that’s for Jared to say, not you. Right Jared?’

‘I – ‘ Jared started, anxiety creeping up his spine.

‘Listen, you,’ Stephen snarled, getting to his feet, dragging Jensen up by the hand he still had gripped, ‘we all know all about you. Why don’t you just crawl back into whatever cesspit you came from – ‘

‘Guys – ‘ Jared tried to say, tensing up, the swirl of anger and aggression in the air, setting his teeth on edge.

‘Watch yourself, boy,’ Jensen snarled, pushing right into Stephen’s space. ‘I can tear you limb from limb – ‘

Stephen growled. ‘I’d like to see you try, you pathetic excuse for – ‘

Jared half struggled to his feet, every nerve on edge, unable to withstand the onslaught of anger in the air. ‘I think I’m just going to – ‘ he mumbled.

Both Jensen and Stephen turned instantly in his direction.

‘I’ll walk you out’ Jensen said immediately.

‘Excuse me, I’ll walk him- ‘ Stephen started.

Jensen whirled on him. ‘You lay a goddamn hand – ‘

‘Guys! Guys! Enough!’ Gen slammed both hands on the table and got to her feet. ‘Jesus Christ! Neither of you are walking him out, so back the hell off!’

She shoved her way past the two alphas – undeterred that they were easily twice her size – glaring heavily up at them.
'Christ, you’re like little children! Go have a cold shower, both of you, Jesus!'

Shaking her head in disgust, she grabbed Jared’s arm, balancing him as he stood. ‘C’mon, Jare’ she murmured, tugging him away.

Felicia looked to Misha. ‘Wow, you weren’t kidding’ she commented.

‘Actually, this was tamer than what I expected’ Misha answered truthfully.

Felicia shook her head as she clambered to her feet and brushed past the two alphas, following her friends out.

Stephen turned to glower at Jensen.

‘Nice one, Ackles’ he spat.

‘Fuck you, Amell’ Jensen snapped.

The other alpha snorted at him and shoved roughly past.

‘Well, that went well’ Misha commented cheerfully.

‘Fuck you too, Mish’ Jensen grumbled, sitting back in his chair.

But he knew Misha was right. However he’d envisioned the first meeting with his true mate, that wasn’t even close to how it was supposed to go down. But he couldn’t help himself – the instant Jared had looked up at his arrival, bangs sliding from his face, it was like a sucker punch to Jensen’s gut – his stomach swooped like he’d missed a stair, flip-flopping inside him. Jared was beautiful – Christ, he was perfect, all cheekbones and strong jaw lines and soft hair. His eyes had ghosted over the fine scars on his face, the milky white eye, and barely paid them second thought. His only conscious thought regarding them was that if he ever ran into the one who’d inflicted pain on Jared, he’d rip them apart.

And then that other alpha had been there – Stephen fucking Amell – muscling in on his mate and his inner wolf had taken control, making him aggressive, angry and rearing for a fight. All of which had very effectively served to simply drive Jared from the pub.

Just great.

‘May I make a suggestion?” Misha piped up.

‘No’ Jensen mumbled.

‘Next time you approach him,’ Misha continued like he hadn’t spoken, ‘try not getting involved in a dick measuring contest with another alpha – ’

‘Yes, thank you, I get that now’ Jensen growled.

‘ – I mean, two alphas sizing each other up, are you even surprised he bolted out of here?’ Misha kept on, ignoring Jensen’s comments. ‘He’s an omega – you would’ve freaked the hell outta him.’

Jensen glared at him. ‘Are you done?’

Misha took a sip of his beer, thought for a moment, then nodded. ‘Yes, I think so.’

‘Right,’ Jensen drummed his fingers on his arm. ‘Right. So. Our next move.’
‘If you're really serious about this - really, truly think this is your true mate, then I’d suggest backing off a bit,’ Misha said. ‘So you don’t come on too strong and scare him away.’

‘I’ll find out where he works,’ Jensen said suddenly, decisively, as if he hadn’t heard Misha. ‘And surprise him there! I hope he's working tomorrow.’

He jumped to his feet instantly and started to head out of the pub. Misha sighed.

‘Yeah, or just ignore me, that works too’ he said, getting up slowly and following his friend.
Chapter 3

Jared didn’t often work Saturdays, usually preferred to leave Osric and Kat to handle things, and take the day to relax, do things around the house, read, spent time with Gen and Felicia or JD and Samantha. On top of that was the fact that Gen was continually on his case about ‘working too hard’ and tended to lecture him if he didn’t take what she deemed as an appropriate amount of leisure time off.

Which is why Osric probably looked a little startled that Saturday when he went to open the shop and found everything already unlocked and set up, Jared sitting at the front counter.

‘Jared?’ he said, blinking. ‘I didn’t – you’re working today?’

Jared looked up. ‘Oh, hey, yeah – uh – Kat. She wanted – she has an assignment due. So I said I’d cover for her today. All good. Didn’t have anything else on today.’

Osric nodded, accepted the reasoning, smiled and headed to drop his stuff in the backroom. Jared was glad, mostly because everything he’d said was a big fat lie.

Well, Kat might have had homework – she was a teenager after all, and wasn’t that a core part of being a teenager, being perpetually dogged down with homework? – but she hadn’t requested the day off. Jared had texted her last night telling her he was going to work the shift. He’d sent the text probably midway through the second bottle of wine Gen and Felicia were drinking. It was lucky his employee was awake so late; she’d responded instantly to his near-midnight text with, “No worries, Mr. P, hope u had fun & got laid tonight.”

Jared had kind of wanted to hit his head against the counter once he’d read it.

It hadn’t been just Kat’s message – it had been the whole night. The intense weirdness at the bar, Stephen Amell and Jensen Ackles practically fighting over him for some completely unknown reason. He had half a mind to call Rob or Rich and ask if they’d put something weird in the booze last night.

It didn’t make sense.

The best Jared could figure was that maybe, maybe Jensen Ackles had seen Stephen hitting on him, presumed the alpha was hitting on some actually, you know, worth hitting on, and that’s why he’d headed over. After all, from a distance, didn’t Jared just look like everyone else? And then once Ackles had been there, it had simply been alpha rivalry that had kept him trying for Jared.

Yes, that had to be it.

Gen and Felicia had different ideas. Gen and Felicia had, in fact, probably been more excited about the entire night than he had. He’d have been happy to return home and forget all about the whole weird situation, shake off the tension and move on. The two girls however, promptly cracked into a bottle of wine and began discussing every little detail. At length. Over and over. Whilst comparing both alpha’s looks.

By the time the second bottle was opened and Jared had realised Felicia was likely to be spending the night, and therefore this conversation was likely to continue the following morning, he’d made the decision that he was definitely working the next day. Anything to avoid more discussion.

So he’d gotten up ridiculously early, slipped out before Gen or Felicia had woken and gotten to work
when the sun was barely rising. Then he’d switched his mobile off, slid it into a draw and let the power of his bookshop – the peace, the calm, the satisfaction he always felt in there – wash over him and soothe his soul.

It was quiet – Saturday mornings usually were – Weres and humans alike drifting in in small groups, with long intervals of nothing. Jared utilised the time to log onto the computer at the front counter, trawl through his inventory, see if there were any upcoming releases he needed to get in, have a look through Kat’s “YOU MUST ORDER THESE BOOKS MR. P” list she always left on the counter. He felt the tension and weirdness from the night before drift away, slowly but surely.

Then, before lunch, the door open and a flurry of red-hair bounced in energetically.

‘Coffee delivery for Sneaky McSneakerson!’ Felicia sung out as she skipped towards the counter, clutching a tray in her hand of takeaway coffees.

Osric, who’d been hovering behind Jared, gave a squeak and vanished into the back.

‘Dude, I think your second in command hates me’ Felicia frowned, squinting after him.

‘Actually, I think it’s the exact opposite’ Jared chuckled.

Felicia wrinkled her nose. ‘Huh?’

‘Nothing,’ Jared waved a hand. ‘What are you doing here? And how are you so…’ he gestured to her, ‘chirpy. And awake. I went to bed at 1am and you and Gen were opening a third bottle of wine.’

‘It’s my secret power,’ Felicia smiled as she came around behind the counter, handing him a coffee, ‘I was once bitten by a radioactive drunk and now I’m immune to hangovers.’

‘You’re such a weirdo’ Jared smiled affectionately.

‘You know it,’ Felicia winked, and peered over his shoulder. ‘Oooh, are you ordering books? I have a whole bunch of manga to recommend.’

‘No, you need to stop recommending me gay porn manga’ Jared shot back.

‘Spoilsport,’ Felicia huffed, then poked him in the side. ‘And don’t think I’m not onto you – sneaking out all early this morning, coming to work. Avoidance much.’

Jared rolled his eyes. ‘I’m not avoiding anything’ he muttered, clicking his mouse.

‘Except us,’ Felicia said. ‘And everything to do with what happened last night.’

Jared sighed exasperatedly. ‘I’m not avoiding it, god Felicia, it’s just it has been discussed to death and it’s really not even that big a deal! Forgive me for wanting to get on with more important things. God.’

Felicia held up her hands. ‘Ok, ok, geez. Calm your farm, dude.’

Jared rubbed his face. ‘Sorry, I just…’ he shook his head. ‘Doesn’t matter. Anyway. It was weird, it’s over. Enough said. No more mention of Ackles or Amell, ok?’

‘Ok’ Felicia agreed.

‘Ok’ Jared said.
There was a tinkle of the bell and they both turned to look at the shop door the exact moment that Jensen Ackles and Misha Collins walked in.

Felicia made a high pitched squeaking noise and almost dropped her coffee.

Jensen’s eyes scanned over the shop searchingly, before landing on the front counter. He broke into one of those blinding, eye-crinkling smiles and walked towards them, Misha trailing behind.

‘Good, we got the right place! We were looking for you! How are you guys?’ he greeted.

‘Uh’ Jared said, staring.

‘Erfh’ Felicia squeaked.

Jensen blinked, a little bemused. ‘Uh, right,’ he focused his attention on Jared. ‘Uh, listen I – um – I – I was wondering if we – if I could ask you something Jared? In private?’

‘Uh’ was all Jared could say.

‘Mrg’ Felicia gurgled.

Jensen looked between the two of them. ‘Ok. Ok. Or I guess. Guess I’ll just ask you here then.’

Jared stared. If he didn’t know better he could’ve sworn there was a nervous air around Jensen. But that couldn’t be right. Why would the alpha be nervous? More importantly, why was the alpha even here? Did alpha rivalry really go this far? Was this just because Stephen had hit on Jared? What was going on?

It took a moment before Jared realised Jensen had spoken, had asked him something. He blinked, gave himself a shake.

‘Uh – you – what?’ Jared stumbled over his words, blinking at the alpha. ‘Sorry – I wasn’t – what?’

Jensen smiled. ‘Dinner,’ he repeated. ‘I was asking you to dinner. With me.’

Jared stared blankly.

Jensen’s smile faltered a little. ‘Uh. Yeah. You and me? You do eat dinner right?’ he gave a nervous chuckle.

Jared opened his mouth, shut it, opened it, then his brain kicked into gear.

‘No’ he said forcefully.

He winced instantly at the harshness of the word – he hadn’t exactly meant it to sound so… well, loud.

Jensen looked a little dumbfounded. Jared suspected the word “no” being shouted at him didn’t happened often.

‘No?’ he echoed.

Jared straightened up in his chair, squared his shoulders a little. Now he’d rejected the alpha he felt a little more in control, a little more… well, actually, just little less brain dead. Gen’s warnings from the night before were at the forefront of his mind – if any alpha would be looking for an easy lay, it would be Jensen Ackles.
‘Sorry, but no,’ he repeated firmly. ‘I’m, uh, busy.’

‘Busy,’ Jensen said. ‘I didn’t even say what night.’

‘Oh,’ Jared blinked, flushed a little. ‘Well… I… uh… I’m just, like, busy. Y’know, in general.’

“Like” busy? Jared thought. Since when did he say “like”? Was he sixteen years old? And a girl?

Jensen seemed to take a moment to collect himself, then he leant a little over the counter towards Jared. ‘Listen, Jared, I – ’

Felicia finally found her voice. ‘He said no, dude’ she chimed in.

She might not have understood Jared’s aversion to alpha’s hitting on him, Jared knew, but she’d always have his back, and he gave her a grateful smile. Jensen, meanwhile, shot her a look.

‘I wasn’t askin’ you, Red’ he said.

‘No,’ Jared interrupted, ‘you were asking me. And I said no.’

Jensen’s eyes swivelled back to Jared’s face and for a split second Jared wavered because – Christ – the alpha looked so sincere, so open and vulnerable like he really, actually wanted to date Jared.

Which was just ridiculous.

Wasn’t it…?

‘Jared, please,’ Jensen said, his voice low, ‘I’m just talkin’ one date here, man. One dinner.’

Jared swallowed, avoiding Jensen’s pleading look. He needed to nip this in the bud – between those stupid, gorgeous green eyes and Jensen’s apparent sincerity, he was about five seconds from caving – and he could not do that.

‘Look, I – I’m working right now, ok?’ he said. ‘You guys need to – buy something or – I – I just need to get back to work, ok?’

‘I think what Jay’s trying to say is, buy something or get out, dude’ Felicia chimed in again, folding her arms across her chest and positioning herself next to Jared in what she undoubtedly hoped was an intimidating fashion.

As much as a tiny, slim, pixie-faced red-head could look intimidating.

Jensen shot Felicia a glare, then looked to Jared. The omega was purposefully avoiding looking at him, jaw tight and expression unyielding. Jensen opened his mouth to say something - most likely something smooth and suave to would stop Jared from kicking him out of the store – the words were there, right there in his brain and –

- Instead what blurted out was, ‘you’re my true mate.’

Whatever Jared had been expecting Jensen to say – mentally preparing himself for a smooth line delivered with the sole purpose of making him swoon – it had not been that.

He took a moment to process it – then burst out laughing.

Jensen looked mildly confused, then a little bit hurt. But Jared couldn’t help himself.
‘Seriously dude?’ he laughed. ‘That’s your line? That’s what you’re going with?’

Jensen bristled a little. ‘It’s not – ’

‘I mean, has that ever worked? Like, ever?’ Jared continued, shaking his head in disbelief. ‘And I mean on someone with an IQ above 10.’

Jensen leant across the counter, latched his eyes onto Jared. ‘It’s not a line,’ he ground out. ‘And you know it – don’t tell me you haven’t scented it – ’

Jared froze a moment. ‘What?’

Felicia flared up. ‘He can’t scent anything, you asshole’ she snapped without thinking, then clapped a hand across her mouth, looking aghast.

Confusion creased Jensen’s face. ‘What – that’s impossible - what kind of Were can’t –’ he stopped, looking suddenly horrified at the words that had slipped out.

But it was too late to take them back. Jared’s face flushed, a hot, sickening wave of embarrassment crashing over him. *What kind of Were couldn’t scent another Were.*

The broken kind.

‘You need to leave’ he was happy when his voice didn’t shake.

Jensen swallowed. ‘I didn’t – sorry – Jared – ’

He reached across the counter to grab Jared’s hand, desperate apologies bubbling on his tongue – but the words broke off in a gasp. The instant his hand touched Jared’s bare bicep it was like an electric shot through his entire body, flaring every one of his senses, sending rippling goose bumps all over his body. Jared gave a half gasp, half moan as he felt it to – the connection, shooting across his skin, overwhelming him and *all he could see, all he could focus on was Jensen and –*

He wrenched his arm from Jensen’s grip, lurching backwards, lost his balance on the chair, toppling off it sideways and tumbling to the ground. Felicia yelped in alarm at the same time that Jensen shouted his name and vaulted over the counter in one swift, smooth move.

‘Jay!’ Felicia dropped to her feet next to where he was sprawled on the ground.

‘Jared! Jesus!’ Jensen fell down beside him, reaching instantly towards the omega.

Jared saw Jensen reach for him and made a strangled noise in his throat, before scrabbling backwards out of his range.

‘Don’t – don’t touch me!’ he gasped out.

Jensen pulled back a little, feeling a stab of hurt go through his chest. ‘Jared…’

Felicia shot Jensen an angry look. ‘You heard him, back off dude’ she snapped.

‘I just –’ Jensen’s jaw tightened, feeling angry, lost and hurt. ‘I just want to see if he’s ok for Christ’s sake.’

Jared used Felicia’s steadying grip and the wall he’d scrambled back against to lever himself back up to standing.
‘I’m fine,’ he got out. ‘I’m fine.’

Jensen rose to his feet as well. Every single instinct within him screamed to go to Jared, to check him over properly and make sure he was okay – the protective nature of an alpha intensified by the knowledge that this was his mate.

‘Jensen,’ Misha’s soft voice spoke behind him. ‘We should go.’

Jensen turned his head to argue with his friend, before catching sight of the expression on his face. The expression that basically said, "you’re fucking this up – we need to leave now" – and Jensen couldn’t really argue with that. He turned back to see Felicia glaring at him, a hand still on Jared’s arm (and Jensen didn’t want to admit he kind of wanted to hit the girl’s hand away for daring to touch his mate, goddammit) and Jared staring at the ground.

‘We’ll just – ’ he swallowed, then moved around the two to exit from around the corner. ‘We’ll just be going then. I – I’m sorry, Jay.’

Jared’s head jolted up at Jensen using his nickname, his heart doing a weird twisting thing inside his chest. He caught the alpha’s green-eyed gaze and swallowed hard at the intensity of it. There was a tug in his chest, pulling him towards the alpha, begging him to go to him. But then Jensen was turning away and leaving the shop, the bell signifying his exit.

And Jared had never felt more empty, more lonely, his chest aching, heart twisting.

‘What,’ Felicia started, snapping him from his thoughts, ‘the hell was that?’

Jared swallowed.

You’re my true mate…

His mind cast back to the tickle in his nose, last night, he’d thought, he could’ve sworn he did scent…

But it couldn’t be… could it?

‘I have no idea’ he lied.

***

‘Next time I come up with a stupid idea like that and make a complete ass of myself, why don’t you actually tell me beforehand and try to talk me out of it!’ Jensen ground out to Misha.

Misha’s mouth fell open. ‘I – you’re kidding right?’

‘What?’ Jensen snapped.

‘Never mind’ Misha sighed.

The two Weres were currently sitting at a small, cosy café that they’d come across after the disastrous run-in at Jared’s bookshop. They’d taken seats at a table out the front, under the shelter of an umbrella, the cooling breeze drifting over them. It wasn’t exactly “sitting outside weather” – but Misha thought that the cooler temperature might help soothe Jensen’s temper. When he’d said as much to Jensen, the other alpha had muttered something along the lines of ‘I’ll soothe your temper”
which, in Misha’s opinion, only further proved his theory that Jensen needed to take some time to collect himself.

Currently, Jensen’s face was like a thundercloud, brooding and angry as he glared out at the world. There was the sound of footsteps as the pretty beta waitress approached, placing a plain black coffee in front of Jensen and a massively elaborate concoction in front of Misha that was topped with vast quantities of whipped cream and adorned with chocolate chunks. She slid a slice of strawberry cheesecake next to it, smiled at the two Weres and took her leave.

Jensen eyed Misha’s feast with distaste.

‘That,’ he said flatly, indicating the drink, ‘is an abomination.’

‘That,’ Misha countered in the same tone of voice, indicating Jensen’s own drink, ‘is paint stripper.’

Jensen snorted and took a huge gulp of his black coffee, relishing the scald of the liquid down his throat. Misha took a huge spoonful of the cheesecake and made an appreciative noise, before scooping another spoonful and waving it in Jensen’s face.

‘W’aaa s’mmmmm?’ he burbled around a mouthful.

Jensen reared back a little from the flying spoon of cheesecake. ‘I’ll pass’ he declined flatly.

Misha shrugged. ‘Y’rr l’sssff’ he mumbled.

Jensen sighed. ‘How are you an adult? Honestly.’

Misha rolled his eyes, scooping another spoonful and adding cream from his drink to it before cramming it into his mouth. ‘Y’r ‘n t’tlk.’

‘Jesus, Misha, swallow, then talk’ Jensen grumbled.

Misha swallowed, then grinned. ‘That’s what he said’ he quipped.

Jensen threw a napkin at his friend. ‘You’re disgusting.’ he grumbled, but more good-naturedly this time. Then he sat back in his chair and gusted out a sigh. ‘Seriously though, what am I gonna do?’

Misha shrugged again. ‘I dunno. Order better coffee next time?’

Jensen glowered. ‘I’m serious Misha.’

It was Misha’s turn to sigh. He put his spoon down and scrutinized the young alpha in front of him.

‘Jensen, look, this omega – ’

‘Jared’ Jensen corrected instantly with a growl.

‘– sorry, Jared,’ Misha hastily corrected. ‘Jared… he’s not like your usual prey – ’

‘Because he’s my mate,’ Jensen interrupted. ‘Not prey.’

Misha made a frustrated noise. ‘Are you going to let me finish a sentence?’

Jensen rolled his eyes. ‘Fine, fine, go on,’ he grumped. ‘Just watch what you say. That is my true mate we’re talking about remember.’
'I’m not sure you’d let me forget,’ Misha muttered. ‘Anyway – like I was saying, Jared’s not like your usual conquests – firstly, because you’re – I presume – serious about him –’

Jensen opened his mouth, probably automatically to emphatically state just how serious he was, but then caught Misha’s look and closed it, settling for nodding his head furiously instead.

‘ – and secondly because… well, you heard that girl. He can’t… he can’t scent. He can’t – he can’t scent that you’re his mate. It’s… I mean. I’ve never heard of a Were who can’t scent, and I’m going to guess it has something to do with those scars, to do with what happened to his pack. So… so we know he’s been through a lot. Therefore he’s going to be cautious and wary as hell – he’s going to question your motive, your every move. You’re going to have to go the soft approach – gradually, slowly. Not go busting in demanding dinner and dates and proclaiming him your mate straight off the bat. It’s going to take time.’

Jensen deflated a little. ‘But… he’s my mate,’ he said in a small voice. ‘And now that I know that, I just… I just want to be with him. That’s all I can think about.’

Misha looked sympathetic. ‘I know Jen,’ he said softly. ‘And normally… I mean normally it probably would be that easy. It’s just… this is just an unusual situation.’

‘So… what do I do then?’ Jensen asked again.

Misha took a sip of his drink, earning himself a cream moustache in the process. ‘You woo him,’ he said confidently, the matter-of-fact, knowledgeable tone of voice slightly diminished by the cream adorning his upper lip. ‘Court him. Get to know him.’

'"Court him"? "Woo" him?’ Jensen echoed. ‘Jesus, what century are you living in Misha.’

Misha glared at him. Again, the effort was sort of diminished by the cream moustache.

Jensen deflated a little. ‘Ok, woo him… What does that mean exactly? Flowers, chocolates? Candy love-hearts and teddy bears?’

Misha sighed and rolled his eyes. ‘I don’t know Jensen. It means you gotta make an effort I guess. Prove to him that he means something to you. Hell, even make friends with him first, get to actually know him.’

‘Ok,’ Jensen sighed and then nodded. ‘Ok, you’re right. Slow and steady wins the race and all that. Thanks, Mish.’

‘I am always right,’ Misha said solemnly. ‘It comes with being so wise.’

‘You have cream on your upper lip’ Jensen deadpanned.

‘That doesn’t make me any less wise’ Misha replied easily.
Jared held out hope that Gen wouldn’t hear about the run-in with Jensen at his shop, wanted to keep from having to rehash it, analyse it, talk it over. He successfully avoided her for a while; he worked late on Saturday, spent Sunday with JD, left for work early on Monday and really thought he’d managed to dodge talking about it, only to then promptly have all hope vanish the instant she walked into the kitchen where he was preparing their dinner on the Monday night, dropped her bag onto the chair with a thud and said, loudly, ‘what the hell?!’

‘Hello to you too, Gen,’ Jared rolled his eyes as he chopped up tomato to add to his pasta sauce.

Gen slid into one of the chairs at the kitchen table. ‘Seriously, Jay, what the hell?’ she repeated.

Jared sighed and wandered to the fridge. He pulled out a bottle of white wine and waggled it at Gen. ‘Wine?’

Gen simply glared at him and crossed her arms across her chest.

Jared tugged out two glasses and poured them both a glass. ‘I’m guessing you talked to Felicia?’

Gen tugged her glass over. ‘Damn straight I did,’ she replied. ‘And she told me some craziness about Jensen Ackles crashing your bookstore demanding dinner and then spouting some crap about you guys being true mates on Saturday!’

‘He didn’t demand dinner,’ Jared found himself defending the alpha. ‘That’s a bit harsh.’

Gen’s eyebrows shot up. ‘But did he start sounding off about you guys being true mates?’

‘Well, yeah,’ Jared admitted. ‘That part is true.’

‘God!’ Gen exclaimed. ‘Where does that guy get off! The nerve of him to try and use that line!’

‘Mmm’ Jared hummed vaguely, taking a gulp of wine.

Gen narrowed her eyes at him. ‘Wait, do you believe him? About being mates?’

‘No, of course not!’ Jared said hurriedly, ignoring the fact that it wasn’t exactly the whole truth. ‘It’s just… you know, he seemed… sincere? He didn’t come across as a sleaze using a line, you know?’

Gen blew out a breath and closed her eyes for a beat. ‘Jay, baby,’ she said finally, opening her eyes. ‘That’s what he does. He seems sincere to suck you in, and then you uses you and discards you. It’s what he does. A hundred omegas and betas can’t be wrong.’

‘I highly doubt he’s slept with a hundred Weres’ Jared grumbled.

Gen raised an eyebrow. ‘You’d be surprised.’

Jared sighed. ‘Ok, ok. You’re right,’ he conceded. ‘Jensen Ackles is a sleaze and was trying to get into my pants.’

He took another sip of wine and turned to scrape the tomatoes into the sauce.
‘It’s not a big deal anyway,’ he continued. ‘It’s not like I said yes. I basically kicked him out of my store.’

‘Right on!’ Gen cheered, raising a glass to him. ‘I would have loved to see that.’

She gave an evil cackle and Jared couldn’t help chuckling at her.

‘You’re terrible’ he grinned.

Gen smirked. ‘You love me.’

Jared tossed her a fond look. ‘That I do’ he murmured.

They were interrupted by the sound of their phone ringing loudly. Jared, still stirring the sauce, nodded at Gen.

‘You mind grabbing that?’ he asked.

Gen, midway through a sip of wine, choked and spluttered a little. ‘Uh, I – um – actually, can you get it?’ she said.

Jared stared at her. ‘Gen, I’m cooking dinner.’

There was a shifty look on Gen’s face and she avoided his eyes. ‘I can stir the sauce – you – can you answer it?’

Jared stared hard at her. ‘Gen,’ he said slowly. ‘What’s going on?’

Gen hopped from her chair and bustled to the stove-top, grabbing the spoon and hustling Jared out of the way.

‘Just get the phone, ok Jay?’ she said. ‘Quickly, before it rings out!’

Jared stared at her, eyes narrowed, before giving in and heading to answer the phone, a sense of trepidation settling in his stomach.

‘Hello, this is Jared Padalecki speaking’ he said warily.

‘Jared!’ a familiar voice chirped down the line. ‘Hello! It’s Stephen. Stephen Amell.’

Jared's mouth fell open and he spun to glare at Gen who’d appeared in the hallway.

‘Stephen,’ he said stiffly. ‘This is… a surprise.’

I’m going to kill you, he mouthed at Gen. She simply beamed in response.

‘Yeah, sorry, I ran into your charming friend Gen today and we got chatting,’ Stephen said. ‘And, well, she gave me your number. Hope that’s ok?’

‘Yeah, that’s… that’s fine’ Jared said.

You’re so dead, he mouthed at Gen. She giggled.

‘So, I was just wondering if you were free this Friday night?’ Stephen said. ‘Maybe we could go out for dinner?’

Jared closed his eyes briefly. He opened them to see Gen’s smirk had vanished, replaced by a
pleading, hopeful look.

‘Jared?’ Stephen said. ‘You still there?’

Jared breathed out slowly. ‘Friday?’ he repeated. ‘I – uh – I think I’m - ’

Gen made a squeaking noise. ‘Jayyyyy’ she hissed.

‘I think… I’m free,’ Jared sighed, resigning himself. ‘Yeah, I’m free. Dinner sounds great, Stephen.’

‘Really?’ Stephen sounded surprised, but he recovered quickly. ‘That’s excellent. I’ll pick you up at seven?’

‘Yeah, sure, seven sounds great’ Jared couldn’t help smiling a little. After all, Stephen did sound genuinely excited to see him, to go on a date with him. Right?

‘Ok, awesome! I’ll see you then, Jared’ Stephen said warmly.

‘Yeah, see you then’ Jared said softly as he hung up.

The instant the phone was back in the cradle Gen gave a high-pitched squeal that almost burst Jared’s eardrums.

‘Jesus, Gen, calm down’ he said good-naturedly, rolling his eyes.

Gen bounced up and down in the spot. ‘How can I? You have a date, Jared! You actually agreed to go on a real live date! Ohmygod ohmygod ohmygod!’ she danced in circles for a moment.

Jared laughed aloud, caught up in her excitement. ‘Yeah, yeah, all right,’ he tried to roll his eyes as he headed back into the kitchen. ‘It’s just a date, Gen.’

‘Just a date!’ Gen squawked, throwing a hand to her brow dramatically. ‘Just a date he says! A date with, like the hottest alpha in town you mean! And a date that you agreed to go on! It’s a goddamn miracle! I have to call Felicia! Like now!’

She dashed to her bag to drag her mobile out and Jared chuckled as he resumed stirring the sauce.

But the smile died down as he stared into the red sauce. Because he’d agreed to a date with Stephen, sure, but all he could think of was piercing green eyes and an eye-crinkling smile…

Jared closed his eyes and sighed, that ache in his chest swelling, still there ever since Jensen had left his shop days ago.

You’re my mate…

He was so screwed.

**

Prior to the past week, Jensen wouldn’t have given his internet history much thought. While most people might fret about people using their laptop and seeing less-than-savoury websites in the browser history, Jensen had no such qualms about that. It was just porn. Everyone watched it, Jensen
figured. Nothing to be all embarrassed about.

Now, however.

Now his internet history was littered with queries and websites that predominantly seemed to feature the colour pink, all centred around the same topics – “How to Woo Your Man”, “Getting him to like you back”, “Romance 101” etc.

Now, he’d never not clear his browsing history after using his laptop.

And the worst thing was that the majority of the websites were practically useless. Filled with nauseating and pathetic advice that pandered to simpering pushovers, half the articles geared towards changing your entire persona just to suit the person you were chasing. It was decidedly not what Jensen was looking for.

There was, of course, nothing online about a Were wooing his mate, because it was practically unheard of that a mate needed to be wooed. Finding your mate was… well, that was it. You both felt the connection, you scented each other, knew it to be so, knew it to be true and that was it. It was what every Were deep down longed for – finding their mate, the other part of their soul. It was supposed to be a mutual thing. Only Jensen could be so lucky as to find his mate and have his mate not want him back.

But no, Jensen shook those thoughts from his head. Because the problem wasn’t Jared, it was the shitty, horrible things that Jared had been put through that left him unable to scent, left him damaged. Things that other Weres couldn’t imagine going through – losing their entire pack, having their family slaughtered. No, the problem wasn’t Jared. Jared, Jensen thought, was wonderful. He figured he might be a little biased, considering it was his mate, but the general consensus (if the level of overprotectiveness over the omega was anything to go by) seemed to be that Jared was amazing. He was gorgeous and tall and smart and kind and had dimples that made Jensen want to kiss him senseless.

He was damn lucky to have snagged such an amazing mate, so what if he had to work a little harder to get him?

Jared, he figured, was worth it.

He abandoned the websites after a few days however and instead decided to “woo” with the tried-and-true favourites. Flowers. He’d send Jared some flowers at his bookshop. He told Misha and – after his friend had stopped laughing hysterically and calling Jensen “whipped” – he’d calmed down and asked what type of flowers.

‘Uh, the… nice kind?’ Jensen blinked.

He shrugged and gestured to the florist website he had up on his laptop (another website that would shortly be cleared from his browsing history forever). ‘I’ll choose one from the options that looks nice I guess.’

Misha pursed his lips and folded his arms. ‘Oh, I’m sorry, I thought you were serious about Jared?’ he said harshly.

Jensen blinked at his friend. ‘I am! That’s why I’m getting flowers!’

Misha rolled his eyes. ‘Yeah, flowers – generic flowers – that’s hopeless Jensen,’ he sighed. ‘Anyone can get someone flowers. You have to make it special.’

Jensen shrugged helplessly. ‘How in the hell do I make flowers special? Do you want me to grow
the damn things myself or something?’

Misha gave a heavy sigh that Jensen thought was a little over the top for the situation, and tugged a chair alongside Jensen, hustling him away from the front of the laptop.

‘Scoot,’ he said, ‘and let me show you how it’s done.’

‘How what’s done?’ Jensen grumbled. ‘How to order flowers? Seems pretty straightforward to me.’

Misha gestured to the screen. ‘You have to order something that means something,’ he explained. ‘You ever heard of flowers having meanings?’

Jensen scratched his head. ‘Uh… what, like roses are love or something?’

Misha gave half a nod. ‘Yeah, kinda like that. But there are other flowers with more complex meanings. You need to create a bouquet for Jared that means something, using flowers that say something. I can guarantee he’d appreciate that a lot more than just a generic bouquet that anyone could order.’

‘How do we even know if he knows about these… flower… personalities, or whatever’ Jensen pointed out.

Misha was clicking through the website. ‘Doesn’t matter, this is all about effort, remember? We’re putting in effort. Now – what do you want to say with your bouquet?’

Jensen blinked a little. ‘What do I… I’m sorry… I’m just still just trying to wrap my head around how you know all about this. This "flowers have meanings" thing.’

Misha clucked his tongue. ‘I am very wise and knowledgeable’

‘You realize that you knowing about flower meanings is like, legit fodder for me to tease you for, basically, the rest of your life?’

‘Jensen,’ Misha sighed, and tapped the screen. ‘Focus.’

‘All right, all right,’ Jensen held up both hands. ‘I was just giving you a heads up. Um… I dunno… I want to say… you’re my mate? I guess?’

Misha rolled his eyes. ‘God, you really are hopeless at this romance stuff,’ he grumbled, and turned back to the screen. ‘Ok, how about… for a bit of colour, we use magenta ranunculus and some hot pink peonies.’

‘Ponies? You want ponies in the bouquet?’

‘Peonies, Jensen,’ Misha corrected patiently. ‘They represent bashfulness, and the ranunculus is, "dazzled by your charm." Hmm, we’ll balance the bright colours with some pale flowers – some sweet peas and bells of Ireland – which is basically, “meet me” and “whimsy” and… to top it off, we’ll use some fern fronds for “fascination.” Presto! What do you think?’

Misha turned, beaming to Jensen.

Jensen stared blankly at him. ‘I’m gonna be totally honest man, I have no idea what you just said.’

Misha scowled.

‘But hey, if you say it’s good, then I trust your judgment,’ Jensen hurried to add. ‘Go ahead and
order it and we’ll get the thing delivered to Jared tomorrow.’

Misha bobbed his head and went to work making the arrangements. Jensen leaned back in his chair and gazed unseeingly at the computer screen.

‘I really hope this all works, Mish’ he said softly.

Misha paused and turned his head to meet Jensen’s gaze. He gave a soft, sad smile. ‘Me too, Jen. Me too.’

**

Jensen decided that Thursday night that they needed to go out and have drinks to celebrate his first step in wooing Jared. Well, celebrate and calm the cacophony of nerves that were currently roiling in his stomach, making him feel faintly queasy and nauseous and simultaneously twitchy and restless. Not to mention the constant ache in his chest and the itch under his skin that made up his longing, his need to be with his mate. There was a reason why mates didn’t need to be wooed, why they just fell together straight away – because the longing and ache when they were apart and still unmated bordered on unbearable. Jensen wondered how Jared stood it – if he even felt it at all. He was torn between hoping that Jared felt the pull, and not wanting his mate to be feeling as aching and miserable as he was.

So, with all those emotions clanging around inside him – yeah, Jensen needed alcohol. Preferably in excessively large quantities.

They went to Rob and Rich’s bar, where they’d been that fateful night Jensen had first scented Jared. Jensen reasoned that they had been there once and had liked it, so it made sense to stick with what they knew.

The underlying thought that maybe, just maybe, Jared might be there again was totally not a factor in his decision, no matter how much Misha insisted it was.

Of course, he didn’t particularly help his denial when, upon entering, he instantly breathed deep, trying to scent the omega as his eyes anxiously scanned the entire pub. Jensen deflated a little when it was apparent that Jared wasn’t there tonight, feeling his face fall in disappointment as they made their way to the bar.

‘It is a work night,’ Misha commented. ‘He probably doesn’t go out drinking on a work night.’

‘I have no idea who you’re talking about’ Jensen sniffed.

‘Of course you don’t’ Misha rolled his eyes.

They approached the bar and ordered themselves two beers before settling at a table in a comfortable silence. They fell into their usual easy camaraderie of chatter, talking about everything and anything and Jensen finally felt himself relax, the tension from the past week unravelling slowly.

Until he felt, scented and heard someone approach behind him. The scent was unmistakably alpha, the footsteps heavy and purposeful and every inch of Jensen tensed right back up again.

‘Ackles!’ a voice called out. ‘Fancy seeing you here again.’
Jensen turned, jaw tightening as he glared up at Stephen Amell, who had sauntered to their table, a cocky smile on his face.

‘Do you mind, Amell?’ Jensen said stiffly. ‘We’re trying to have an enjoyable drink here.’

Stephen sneered a little. ‘Sure you are, Ackles,’ he responded.

Misha gave a sigh. ‘Run along, little doggy,’ he said dismissively, and tugged on Jensen’s shoulder to get him to turn back to him. ‘Ignore him, Jen.’

Jensen turned reluctantly away from Stephen. But the other alpha simply strolled around until he was standing over the both of them at their table.

‘He’s not going to come here tonight, you know’ Stephen announced.

Jensen felt himself tense, his grip on his beer tightening. He refused to respond, keeping his eyes fixed on the tabletop.

Stephen was undeterred. ‘He’ll be resting up, see,’ he continued loudly. ‘He’ll be having a late night tomorrow night after all.’

Jensen couldn’t help it. His head snapped up to glare at the other alpha. ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ he spat.

‘Jensen, ignore him’ Misha tried.

But it was too late. Stephen locked eyes with Jensen and gave a leer. ‘Oh, you didn’t know? Jared’s going on a date with me tomorrow night.’

Jensen’s grip tightened so intensely on his bottle that the glass began to crack. ‘You’re lying,’ he said flatly. ‘Jared wouldn’t be seen dead with you.’

Stephen gave a shrug, eyes gleaming. ‘Ask him yourself, if you don’t believe me,’ he responded. ‘He’ll tell you about how he went out of his way to get my number and called me up begging for a date – ’

Jensen was on his feet in an instant. ‘You’re lying’ he repeated again.

Stephen carried on like he hadn’t heard. ‘Guess he recognized the better alpha when he saw it,’ he bragged. ‘Heard about how he shot you down in flames at the shop. Must have been embarrassing for you. Knowing that even Jared would – ’

‘What the fuck,’ the words exploded from Jensen’s mouth, and he was in Stephen’s face in an instant, grabbing the other alpha’s shirt front, ‘what the fuck is that supposed to mean – ”even Jared”?!’

Misha leapt to his feet. ‘Jensen!’ he shouted.

Stephen snarled in Jensen’s face. ‘What it means, Ackles,’ he spat, ‘is that you’re a pathetic excuse for an alpha, and I hope you think about me tomorrow night, ploughing that sweet a – ’

A terrific snarl exploded from Jensen’s mouth and he saw nothing but red, forcefully propelling Stephen backwards, smashing the other alpha into a table behind them, hauling him up and ramming him down onto the table top. He raised his fist to punch, to hit, to claw - when Misha was suddenly there, grabbing his arm and dragging him backwards. Rob appeared in front of him, hands on
Jensen’s chest, pushing him.

‘Let go!’ Jensen snarled. ‘Let the fuck go! Son of a – ’

‘Jensen! For Christ’s sake, Jensen, calm down!’ Misha shouted, using his full strength to pull Jensen back.

Between him and Rob, they both hustled Jensen out of the pub, all but shoving him away into the fresh air. Jensen whirled on both of them.

‘What the hell was that for?’ he roared. ‘Did you hear what he was saying? Did you hear that shit?’

‘Yes, Jensen, we did – now will you just calm down?’ Misha snapped. ‘You think beating up Amell and getting thrown in jail for it is going to endear you to Jared? The guy is an a-grade asshole but he’s not worth it.’

‘He said - ’ rage was thrumming through Jensen, 'that fucker said - '

‘Your friend is right,’ Rob interrupted softly. ‘Amell’s not worth getting in trouble over,’ he huffed a bitter laugh, ‘I’ve seen him work his magic in the bar loads of time before. He’s smooth and slick and subtle. Gets away with it because of his charming persona... and you know, like, I said, he’s subtle. Maybe it's a bartender thing, that I've noticed. Hazard of the trade; seeing more than other people. Noticing things,’ he sighed. ‘Still though. Just... gotta say, never thought Jared would have been suckered in by it.’

‘Well, he fucking was, wasn't he?!’ Jensen roared. ‘He fucking - that - fucking - fucking god dammit!’

Then he spun and delivered a punch to the wall with an ear-splitting and painful sounding crunch.

'Son of a bitch!' he exploded.

Rob eyed Jensen a moment, then looked to Misha. 'I think might take this as my cue to exit,' he said.

'I don't blame you' Misha responded with a sigh. 'Thanks for helping out anyways.'

Rob tipped his head and then padded back into the bar.

Jensen gazed down at his bruised, bloodied knuckles, chest heaving. Misha approached a tad cautiously, trying to gauge his friend’s state of mind. Jensen turned to him, his face looking wrecked, twisted in despair.

‘Why’s this so hard, Mish?” he said softly. ‘Why is this so goddamn hard? It shouldn’t be this hard.’

Misha sighed sympathetically. ‘I know, Jen,’ he answered, laying a gentle hand on the fellow alpha’s shoulder. ‘He’ll come round, you know he will.’

Jensen sucked in a breath and scrubbed a hand across his face. ‘He’s going on a date, Misha,’ he said flatly. ‘With another alpha. How...’

‘Jensen, listen to me, everything is going to work out, ok?’ Misha tightened his grip on Jensen’s shoulder, catching his friend’s gaze. ‘Jared’s going to go on this date and he’s going to realize how much of a douche Stephen is and that’ll be it. And you know what, tomorrow he’ll get those flowers and I’m willing to bet he’ll spend the whole stupid date thinking about you instead.’

Jensen’s lips twitched in a little smile at that.
Encouraged, Misha went on. ‘It’s just a date, Jen,’ he insisted forcefully. ‘Just one, stupid date that means nothing. You’re his true mate, Jensen, and there’s no way Stephen can compete with that. Everything is going to work out just fine. You hear me?’

Jensen sighed a little. ‘Yeah, I hear you, Misha,’ he said softly.

Misha squeezed Jensen's shoulder once, then released. 'Let's say we head back to the hotel yeah? Drink some beers, watch TV?'

Jensen looked at the bar, tightened his jaw, contemplated going in, one last time, breaking Stephen's jaw, wiping the smarmy look from his face... then he sighed, shoulders slumping, nodded and let his friend lead him away to the car.

Chapter End Notes

Note - the flowers thing: I spent like an hour online trying to find definitive meanings for flowers and it all confused me so I decided on one florist website to use as my go-to and stop looking at others. Sooo... if it's wrong, please forgive me :P
Most days, Jared spent the majority of his work out on the floor, working the counter, helping Osric organize the shelves and in general chatting with customers, recommending books and discussing novels. He liked to be a part of everything – he would never be the sort of manager who’d work purely behind the scenes. He had a deep passion for books and loved to share it with the customers, hoping just some of the love he felt for the novels would rub off on the people around him.

On that Friday, however, late in the afternoon, Jared put Osric in charge of everything, went into his rarely used back office, closed the door, sat in his chair and stared at the object on his desk for about two hours straight. It wasn’t so much as an “object” and it was “objects” really.

It was flowers.

A bouquet to be exact. A bouquet of beautiful flowers that had been delivered to him at lunch time with a tiny little card nestled amongst the petals and leaves. Osric’s eyes had all but bulged from his head and the delivery man had had the unfortunate timing to make his delivery in front of at least seven customers, three of which who were teenage girls who squealed like they were the ones getting the flowers.

Jared thought his face might explode in flames he went so red.

Hurriedly, he’d signed for the flowers and all but shoved the delivery man from the shop, before whisking the huge bouquet into his back office, plunking it onto his desk and then scuttling out as fast as his could. He’d fielded the customer’s queries with an awkward laugh and a stuttered explanation about a “prank” and “silly friends” which sounded weak and pathetic to his own ears.

When they’d left and Osric had approached, Jared had simply pointed a finger at him and said, “not a word” and it was enough that his employee closed the mouth he’d opened, stepped back and nodded. Jared could only thank God that Kat hadn’t been working that Friday. The teenager would have probably self-combusted and there was literally no way in hell that she’d have backed off as quickly as Osric had.

He put off confronting the flowers the entire day, trying to pretend to himself that he wasn’t basically thinking about them constantly. He finally caved in the late afternoon, close enough to closing time that the flow of customers had died to a trickle, and had headed to the back room.

Which bought him to where he was now, sitting at his desk, staring at the flowers.

His eyes roved over the vibrant colours, the magenta of the ranunculus and the bright peonies, interspersed with the pale pinks of the sweet peas and the flecks of green from the fern fronds. It was beautiful, there was no denying that. And what made it even more beautiful, Jared thought, was that someone had evidently put a lot of effort and thought into the bouquet construction, blending the colours and the meanings to create something that actually spoke to him.

It was more than anyone had ever done for him before. It was almost a little overwhelming.

His first thought had been fleeting – a thought that maybe it was Stephen, sending flowers as a prelude to their date that night. But he’d dismissed the thought almost the instant he’d had it. Flowers did not seem to be Stephen Amell’s style.

Then he’d found the little note.
He’d opened it and, penned in what was most likely the florist’s amazing penmanship, were the words, “Forever Yours.” And that definitely did not scream Stephen Amell. That screamed green eyes and a deep, gravelly voice saying “you’re my mate.”

Jensen Ackles.

Reading the words, Jared had felt a shiver pass through him. The itch beneath his skin, the ache in his chest that he’d been trying to ignore all week suddenly came to the forefront of his mind and he had the uncontrollable urge to run from his shop, to run to Jensen, throw himself at the alpha and without realizing, he half rose from his chair to do that, his mind suddenly unable to think beyond Jensen and mate and mine and yours and –

The door opened with a bang, bouncing off the wall as the bundle of energy that was Genevieve burst into the room. Jared was half out of his chair, his mind totally preoccupied with Jensen and the sudden intrusion made him jump violently, snapping him from his thoughts.

‘Gen’ he gasped, suddenly feeling dizzy, breathless and out of it.

‘Jared!’ Gen apparently hadn’t noticed his out-of-sorts state. ‘What are you still doing here? We need to get ready for your date! We need to chose an outfit and do your hair and –’

Her eyes suddenly zeroed in on the flowers on the desk and she let out a high pitched squeal.

‘Are those flowers? Oh my god, Jared, they’re stunning! Where did you get those?’ Her hands flew to his mouth. ‘Oh my god, are those from Stephen? Did he send you flowers?’

Jared took a deep breath, settling his nerves and held a hand up to halt Gen’s babbling. ‘No, they’re not from Stephen, Gen, they’re…’

He paused. He wasn’t in the mood to hear Gen’s anti-Jensen tirade, not when his body was still thrumming with a longing for the green-eyed alpha.

‘They’re… just… a thank you,’ he decided on finally. ‘From a customer.’

Gen’s eyebrow raised. ‘That’s a hell of a thank you for recommending a book’ she said sceptically, crossing her arms over her chest.

Jared shook his head and tried to smile as he moved out from behind the desk and started to head to the door.

‘Hey, what can I say? Books are life changing, you know? I always tell you that.’

‘Jared…’ Gen started.

Jared hustled her from the room, shutting the door behind him, shutting the flowers from sight.

‘Anyway, you were saying we should get going, right?’

Gen gave him a look, but allowed herself to be distracted. ‘Yeah, we need to get you ready for your date!’ she said, breaking into a huge smile. ‘Felicia and I were discussing outfit options and we have a few we think would look amazing on you –’

Jared felt himself sigh as he waved a hand to Osric, who was closing the store up that night. Right. The date with Stephen Amell. There was an uncomfortable feeling swirling in his stomach at the thought of going on the date with the alpha, and he wasn’t sure if he could entirely blame it on
nerves. The whole thing just felt… wrong.

‘Jared!’

Jared jumped, startled, snapping out of his thoughts. Gen was glaring at him, foot tapping on the floor.

‘Sorry, uh, just zoned out a moment,’ Jared apologized. ‘Look, I’m sure whatever you choose for me to wear will be fine, Gen. I really don’t care either way to be honest.’

Gen’s face fell a little. ‘Geez, Jay, you could at least try to be a little more excited about the date,’ she sighed. ‘You’re acting like you’re going to an execution or something. Like you’ve been forced into this.’

It had been a long day and a long week of feeling achy and lonely and wanting, and Jared felt his frayed nerves snap.

‘Well, you kind of have forced me into it, Gen!’ he snapped. ‘You practically ambushed me with this date, giving my number to Stephen and having him call me at home! I said I didn’t want to go out with him, I told you that! I don’t want to go out with anyone!’

Which wasn’t exactly the truth, but Gen didn’t need to know that.

Gen deflated and her faced looked sad. ‘I…I’m sorry, Jay,’ she said softly. ‘I didn’t mean… I didn’t mean to be pushy. I just… I get so worried about you, you know? You’re this amazing, kind hearted and, might I add, super hot guy and you just… you don’t see it yourself. I just… I just wanted you to see yourself how we all see you. And then Stephen – these past weeks, he’s always buying you drinks, paying you attention – then I ran into him and he was so nice, apologising for that crazy night with Ackles, like a gentlemen and – and I – everyone always says he’s a gentleman – and I just thought, I just thought, Jared deserves a gentleman, you know? Even for one date. I just wanted you to be happy.’

Jared felt his anger dissipate instantly. ‘Oh, Gen,’ he sighed softly, drawing the petite Were into a hug. ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to yell. I know you mean well.’

Gen hugged him back tightly. ‘You don’t have to go on the date if you don’t want to, Jay,’ she murmured. ‘We can cancel it if you like.’

Jared thought of green eyes. Longing welled in his chest, his skin tingling. Then he looked down and saw Gen peering up at him with a hopeful expression and sighed.

‘I’ll go on the date Gen,’ he replied. ‘It’s all good, I’ll go on the date.’

Even as the words left his mouth, he felt the wrongness swirl in his stomach, his body tensing up. But he focused on the big, beaming smile on Gen’s face and the excited babble that once again started to stream from her mouth and it made it just that little bit easier.

**

The time for the date came round, in Jared’s opinion, altogether far too quickly. Felicia and Gen had spent the remaining hours after he’d left work treating him like a dress-up doll, hurling different
outfits at him, tugging and pulling at his unruly hair (he’d drawn the line when Gen had tried to sweep it back so that Stephen could see his face – exposing his scars and eye for all the world? *No thank you.*.) When they were finally satisfied that he looked acceptable they promptly doused him in a fancy new cologne that Gen had bought especially for him (he, personally, never wore the stuff – far too froufrou for him) and then he had time to draw what felt like just one deep breath before there was a knocking on the door.

Felicia and Gen both burst into simultaneous high-pitched squeals that pierced Jared’s eardrums and both bounced immediately towards the front door. Jared moved as quick as he could, blocking them in the kitchen.

‘*Uh-uh,*’ he said. ‘You two are *not* answering the door. You two are staying in this kitchen and not coming out until I left, understand me?’

Gen made a whining noise. ‘But *Jay* –’

‘*Nope,*’ Jared interrupted. ‘No whining, no pleading, no puppy-dog eyes. I let you dress me up and spray with weird smells –’

‘It’s Calvin Klein!’ Gen protested.

‘ – I have no idea who that is,’ Jared continued. ‘And the point remains that I’m answering the door and leaving *without* you two squealing and embarrassing me. Ok?’

Gen pouted. ‘Fine’ she muttered.

‘We wouldn’t have embarrassed you’ Felicia grumbled.

Jared arched an eyebrow at her.

‘Ok, maybe a little’ Felicia allowed.

There was another knock, this one a little more impatient, and Jared gave both the girls a quick hug, before he hurried to the door. His stomach rolled and clenched a little as he reached for the door, and he knew it wasn’t 100% due to nerves, that pervading feeling of *wrongness* still settling in his gut. He shoved it aside and opened the door.

Stephen stood on the other side, dressed in a fitted black button-up, with tight black jeans, his hair perfectly styled. He looked handsome as usual, even with his lips twisted in a frown as he stared at his watch. His head jerked up from the watch as Jared opened the door.

‘Sorry, sorry,’ Jared said instantly. ‘I was just – upstairs – sorry, didn’t mean to make you wait.’

The frown smoothed its way off Stephen’s face, morphing into a smile. ‘That’s perfectly all right.’

‘Right,’ Jared bobbed his head.

There was a pause.

‘Uh, you, uh, look great’ Jared hurried to say, feeling slightly awkward.

Stephen smiled. ‘Thanks.’

There was a beat and Jared half-waited for Stephen to return the compliment. Instead, the alpha cleared his throat and stepped to one side, gesturing towards his car.
‘You ready to go then?’

‘Oh, uh, yeah, totally,’ Jared babbled, hurrying out the door and shutting it behind him.

He headed to Stephen’s car, a sleek, sports model, and slid into the passenger seat.

*Jensen would have opened the car door for you,* a voice whispered in his head. *He would have said you look amazing. He would have bought you flowers.*

Jared, very firmly, told the voice to shut it.

‘So,’ he said, as Stephen started the car and began to pull out of the driveway. ‘Uh, where are we off to tonight?’

‘Just to a place I know of,’ Stephen answered. ‘Don’t worry. I’ve got it all sorted.’

It was a decidedly *non*-answer sort of answer, which grated a little on Jared, and he opened his mouth to ask for more details when Stephen turned and flashed a blinding smile. It was a nice smile, he thought. There were no eye crinkles, but it was a *nice* smile. And he was *supposed* to be trying, to be making an effort to have a good time. He closed his mouth, smiled back.

‘That sounds great’ he told the alpha.

The “place” Stephen was referring to, it turned out, was actually out of town, and was a small Italian restaurant. Jared was a little bemused by that – there were plenty of nice restaurants in town, that were a lot closer, and that didn’t involve an almost 45 minutes drive in awkward silence and half-hearted attempts at nervous chit-chat. But he figured it must mean this restaurant was really good, to be worth the trek out there. And Stephen would be far more likely to know about that stuff than Jared, whose idea of going out to eat usually meant ducking to Rob and Rich’s bar for fries and a burger with a pitcher of beer.

Only, when they got out of the car and approached the restaurant, it didn’t *seem* all that fancy. It seemed more like a generic Italian restaurant, the sign was even faded and peeling a bit, and the décor, once they got inside, was incredibly dated.

The instant these thoughts crossed his mind, Jared instantly reprimanded himself. How selfish and conceited of him to judge the choice of restaurant – did it really matter where they ate? A nice, handsome alpha was taking him out to dinner and he was complaining because the restaurant wasn’t *fancy* enough?

He told himself to stop being so damn picky, and waited as the waitress showed them to their table. Their table, which was in the darkest corner of the restaurant, away from everyone else. Despite the abundance of free tables that were amongst the general public.

*He wants it to be romantic, that’s all,* Jared told himself, as he slid into his seat.

The waitress handed them the menus and told them she’d be back to take their drink orders shortly. Stephen flipped his open and gave Jared a smile over the top.

‘I hope you don’t mind the location,’ he said. ‘I just figured we’d go somewhere out of the way, to avoid attention. You know how much our town gossips. I didn’t want to subject you to the rumour mill.’

*See?* Jared told himself triumphantly. *He was being nice!*
‘Thanks,’ he said, meaning it. ‘That’s very considerate of you.’

Stephen nodded, smiling. ‘I’ve been here a few times before. It’s where I usually bring people. You know how it is. And there’s a nice hotel nearby. Quiet, anonymous’ he continued.

Jared’s smile faded. Did Stephen just reference previous dates? Wasn’t that a real big no-no on dates? And why did he mention a hotel?


Before Stephen could reply, however, the waitress appeared, smiling, asking if they were ready to order drinks.

‘Oh,’ Jared blinked, quickly looking at his menu and scanning the beer list.

‘We’ll both have a glass of the house red,’ Stephen said, smiling up at the waitress. ‘And I think the spaghetti aglio e olio for main courses. How does that sound Jared?’

Jared blinked, a little taken aback. Firstly, because while he did enjoy a glass of red wine, what he didn’t enjoy was someone deciding it for him. And secondly because, spaghetti whatever? Probably the cheapest option on the menu and the one least appealing to him.

‘Excellent,’ Stephen said happily, taking Jared’s stunned silence for agreement.

He folded his menu up, grabbed the one from Jared’s hands and passed them both to the waitress with a big smile. She bobbed her head and left to pass on their orders. Jared blinked after her, then looked to Stephen, in time to see him blatantly checking out her ass.

Ok. Not off to a good start, his brain unhelpfully supplied.

But still salvageable, Jared determined. Maybe Stephen was just bad at dates. He might have an amazing personality. They’d never really had a chance to chat one-on-one, what with Jared’s relentless avoidance of the alpha, and the fact that Jared was usually flanked by Gen and Felicia.

‘So,’ he started, scrubbing the back of his neck. ‘Um, what do you do then, Stephen?’

Stephen beamed that blinding smile and launched instantly into a long-winded description of his business position. The wine got delivered and Jared had never been more grateful for alcohol in his life. He’d assumed, once Stephen had answered his question (answered and then some) that he would return the question back to Jared, as per… well, the normal convention of conversations. In truth, Jared was kind of looking forward to it. He was more than a little proud of owning his own business, and his little bookshop was his baby. Not to mention, any discussion that connected in some way to books was always a good one in his opinion.

But Stephen didn’t ask.

Stephen, as the dinner progressed, barely asked anything. Jared asked – he asked many questions, because, he figured, that was what you did on dates. Apparently Stephen didn’t get the memo regarding this however, and Jared found his spirits plummeting as the date went on. The food was sub-par, and Jared thought mournfully of what he could have cooked and eaten at home, which would have been much better tasting. He took solace in the glasses of wine being poured, and when he glanced in the mirror during a bathroom break and saw the red wine had stained his teeth and lips a little black, he couldn’t even find it in himself to care.

Mercifully, Stephen declined dessert (on behalf of both of them, of course, without consulting Jared,
and paid their bill (Jared was at least thankful he hadn’t had to pay for the abysmal dinner) and they both headed out into the car park. As they walked towards the car, Jared wondered miserably if there was any chance at all that Gen and Felicia weren’t waiting up for him to hear about his date. All he wanted to do when he got home was curl up in bed and feel sorry for himself, not relive the terrible night he’d had.

He made his way to the passenger door and reached for the handle, only to find Stephen was right his side. Jared thought for a second that maybe the alpha was going to open his door for him in some belated attempt at being a gentleman, but he leant against the passenger door instead and smiled up at him.

‘So…’ Stephen smirked.
‘So?’ Jared echoed, feeling confused.

Stephen laid a hand on Jared’s hip, leaned in. Jared felt himself tense and automatically leant back.
‘Listen, Stephen –’ he started.

And didn’t get time to finish, because the alpha was swooping in, too quickly for Jared to react, and promptly sticking his tongue down Jared’s semi-open mouth. There was a split second and every instinct, every part of Jared screamed wrong, wrong, wrong – and then he was putting his hands up and pushing Stephen in the chest, hard. The alpha stumbled back, blinking, looking a little startled.

‘What the hell Jared?’ he snapped, like he hadn’t been the one forcibly sticking his tongue down Jared’s mouth.

Jared wiped at his mouth. ‘Stephen, I don’t – this dinner. It was… nice,’ he lied. ‘But I don’t think… I just don’t think we’d make a good couple. I don’t think… you know. We’d make a good match.’

Stephen stared at him. ‘A good – what are you talking about?’

Jared shifted. ‘Look,’ he said awkwardly, ‘I mean, I know – ’

‘A good cou - what has that even got to do with anything?’ Stephen interrupted, looking incredulous. ‘That’s not what we’re here for and you know it.’

Jared stopped, mouth open. He felt uneasiness prickle down his spine. ‘I – I’m sorry? What’s – what’s that supposed to mean?’

Stephen huffed, rolled his eyes. ‘Don’t play stupid. We got the niceties out of the way; I bought you dinner and everything. But we both know what we’re here for.’

Jared blinked, slowly. ‘And what exactly do we both know what we’re here for?’

Stephen looked impatient. ‘I don’t know why you’re being like this, Jared. I,’ he looked at his watch, ‘look I booked the hotel room, it’s only paid up until ten, we really don’t have time for this.’

Something was tightening in Jared’s chest, making it hard to breath.

‘Hotel – hotel room,’ he managed to get out. ‘I – hotel room – I’m not – I’m not here to – to – do that!’

Stephen stared at him. ‘What are you… then what did you think this was?’

‘A - dinner,’ Jared burst out. ‘This was dinner – not a – not a –’
Stephen chuckled breezily. ‘Well, yeah, but we both knew what “dinner” meant, Jared’ he said, condescendingly, a hint of a leer on his face.

Jared felt very cold.

‘I want you to take me home’ he said quietly.

Stephen chortled. ‘Seriously?’

Jared glared at him, jaw tight, said nothing.

The laugh died away and something started to dawn on Stephen’s face. ‘You are serious,’ and he laughed again. ‘Good god. I mean, I was surprised when you said yes because,’ he chuckled, ‘well, you’re the frigid omega, but I honestly didn’t think it was because you didn’t realise –’

‘I want,’ Jared repeated, stiffly, ‘you to take me home.’

There was a little smile on Stephen’s face, condescending, pitying. It made Jared want to hit him.

‘How did you think this was going to go, Jared?’ he said, amused. ‘Did you think we’d have dinner together and then – what – actually start a relationship? Is that honestly what you thought this would turn in to?’

Jared’s eyes flashed. ‘Shut up’ he spat.

Stephen laughed spitefully. ‘How stupid are you? Honestly, you think I would actually want to have a relationship with you? You’re not even a proper Were.’

‘Shut up’ Jared snapped again, louder.

‘You can’t shift, you can even have pups – what would be the point of dating you?’ Stephen sneered. ‘The only thing you’re good for is for fucking. Omegas – they’re the best fucks in town. Why do you think I go after them? And you – Jared Frigid Padalecki. What a challenge. The other alphas said I couldn’t do it. "Virgin Padalecki spreads his legs for no one." I wanted to prove them wrong. The only reason we’re here, the only thing you’re here for, you stupid freak, is for a quick fuck.’

‘I said shut up!’ Jared shouted, hands balling into fists. ‘Shut up!’

He stepped forward, feeling himself shake, tremble all over. ‘You’re an asshole,’ his breathing was harsh, uneven and his eyes were prickling but he wouldn’t cry, he wouldn’t give Stephen the satisfaction dammit, ‘you’re an asshole.’

Stephen locked gaze with him for a moment, then snorted, shaking his head. ‘Whatever,’ he said. ‘Fuck this anyway. You’re not worth it. Not even worth the measly amount I paid for dinner,’ he started to walk around Jared, heading for the other side of the car, ‘I should’ve just let Ackles fuck you.’

The anger, rage was hot and quick. ‘He’s twice the alpha you are’ Jared snapped out before he could stop himself.

And it was a mistake – it was, because Stephen was an alpha, and they were quick to rage, quick to anger and didn’t everyone always say not to provoke them? And Stephen, he was on Jared’s left side – his blind side – so Jared didn’t see, couldn’t see, when he moved – there was just a swish of noise and then suddenly there was pain – hot white, sharp, slicing, tearing across his cheek, and his
balance was thrown and Jared tumbled to the ground, hitting with a thud and a gasp.

His hand flew to his cheek, hot and wet with blood, sliced open and he rolled over to see Stephen looming over him, hands partially shifted, wolf claws curving wickedly, dripping blood from the claws on his right hand.

‘You forget your place, omega freak’ the alpha spat.

But Jared was angry, still so angry, and he acted instinctively, long legs kicking out from the ground, slamming into Stephen’s knee. The alpha cried out, his leg buckled and went down, hard hitting the ground.

‘Son of a – ’ Stephen grunted.

Jared scrambled to get up but Stephen – with wolf reflexes inbuilt in him – was quicker and he lunged from the ground, swiped out and his clawed hand sliced through Jared’s shirt, cut shallowly across his ribs. Jared cried out in pain and instinctively curled in over himself, hand going to his ribs. Then Stephen was moving, slamming into him, pushing him to the ground, face first, the alpha pinning him, heavy on his back. Jared tried to gasp for air, his face ground into the bitumen of the car park, painfully grating against his skin.

‘Let go of me!’ he managed to get out. ‘Get the fuck off me!’

‘You pathetic, weak freak,’ Stephen spat, breath hot and heavy on the back of Jared’s neck, ‘I’m gonna take you anyway – gonna make you my bitch – put you in your place – ’

And there was claws scraping at the back of Jared’s jeans, tugging and pulling and panic, fear, thick and overwhelming, washed through Jared, his brain spiralling, repeating a mantra of no, no, no, no over and over again. He struggled, wriggling, desperately, breath coming in short, sharp pants because oh god, this couldn’t happen, this couldn’t happen, he couldn’t be helpless, not again, not like then, when he couldn’t save his sister, his family, no –

He reared his head back, hard, fast and got lucky – felt it connect, smash into Stephen’s face, heard the crunch of bone. Pain exploded on the back of his head and he heard Stephen howl, felt the alpha rear back, push away from him. The instant Jared felt the weight lift he scrabbled forward, crawled away from Stephen, before rolling back over, panting, chest heaving.

Stephen was half crouched, blood streaming from his nose, breathily heavily. He lifted a clawed hand to swipe at the blood, then looked to Jared, eyes practically glowing wolf-yellow. He rose slowly to his feet, every inch of him radiating alpha rage, and Jared tensed, coiled, ready to spring to his feet.

Then Stephen took one step towards him, cleared his throat and spat down at him, the glob of saliva splattering across his face.

‘I’ve changed my mind,’ the alpha’s voice was low, harsh, contemptuous. ‘I wouldn’t lower myself to touch you. You’re nothing.’

Then he spun on his heel, marched around the car and slid into the driver seat, slamming the door shut.

The car started up as Jared lay sprawled on the ground, cheek bleeding heavily, sluggishly, shirt ripped, a line of shallow cuts across his ribs, face stinging from being pushed into the ground, his chest heaving. He watched as the car reversed, then, tyres spinning, drove from the car park, leaving him behind.
Jared lifted a trembling hand, wiped the saliva from his face slowly, let his hand fall back down and couldn’t stop, couldn’t help the hoarse sob that forced itself out of his mouth.

‘God,’ he pushed forward, hunched over himself. ‘God.’

He squeezed his eyes shut, tight, felt tears force their way out, another sob breaking free. He lifted his hand, covered his mouth, pressed hard.

Don’t, he thought roughly, harshly, don’t goddammit. Don’t fucking cry you pussy.

It took a few minutes, curled over himself in the car park, to get himself under control, to pull back the overwhelming urge to curl up and cry himself hoarse. Finally, he lowered his trembling hand, blinking wet eyes rapidly, and pushed to his feet. He swallowed hard, slowly, and reached into his pocket, fished out his cell, only to stare dismally as the cracked screen, the phone having been broken in the struggle.

He stared for a moment, jaw tight, then turned and threw the useless thing away, hard as he could, watching it vanish into the night.

He turned back slowly, stared at the restaurant. He could go in, ask to use a phone, phone for a taxi, or even Gen or Felicia or JD.

He could go in, and have them see his bleeding face, torn shirt, cut ribs. Face the pitying sad looks of his friends.

Jared ducked his head, turned away. Started to walk down the street. The town was miles away, miles, he knew. This was stupid and it was stubborn and Jared didn’t care, didn’t fucking care at that moment. He’d walk, he’d walk the whole way back because he didn’t fucking care anymore. About anything.

It started to rain.

After ten minutes, the rain started to fall, softly at first, then heavier, harder, icy sheets that soaked through his shirt, stung his cuts.

Jared drew in a deep shuddering breath and released it into a cracked sob.

May as well, he figured, the rain would hide the tears and no one would see, no one would see the weak omega break.

It was like the floodgates were opened then, the sobs forcing their way out of his lungs in heavy gasps. He walked, shoulders hunched and shaking and sobbed, the tears mingling with the heavy rain sliding down his face.

**

Friday night Jensen decided that he very definitely needed to go out. Misha had bobbed his head in agreement.

‘Fair enough,’ he’d agreed, ‘where shall we go?’

And Jensen had glanced at his friend, bit his lip. ‘No, Mish, I mean… just me, ok?’ he said. ‘I just
want to be alone for a bit.’

‘Oh,’ Misha deflated a little, then nodded. ‘Yeah, ok. I’ll just… wait here I guess?’

Jensen had felt bad, leaving his friend behind, but he wanted to be alone that night, wanted it to just be him and his old pal alcohol to ease the pain. Misha had watched him leave, and Jensen thought it showed great restraint that his friend only cautioned him “don’t do anything stupid, for the love of god, please Jensen don’t do anything stupid” once.

He was sure that Misha probably thought (prayed) it a fair few more times though.

Not wanting to run into anyone he knew (or, worst of all, into Jared and Stephen on their date) Jensen had decided to head out of the town in search of somewhere to drown his sorrows. He’d managed to eventually find a run-down, dive of a bar/roadhouse, about an hour or so outside of town, which met his criteria for the night – which was basically “serves alcohol.” He wasn’t in the mood to be picky.

There weren’t many patrons there – a few older men, most likely regulars by the looks of them, parked by the bar nursing their whiskies and beers, eyes focused either on the rough wood of the bar top, lost to their own thoughts, or at the flickering television set mounted on the wall. There was even a group of younger Weres – betas, he recognised – giggling in the corner. They were pretty, Jensen supposed, and time was that he would have been all over that. In fact, less than a few weeks ago he would have been all over that.

Until he’d met a 6 ft 4 giant of a man with floppy hair and hazel eyes who smelled like vanilla, cinnamon and home.

His intent to get his mind off Jared was clearly not working. Two whiskies in and he was still brooding, and the giggling betas were not helping, with their blatant flirting, growing bolder with each champagne glass they knocked back, tossing him come-hither looks, brushing against him as they passed.

It all just served to remind him that he couldn’t feel a damn thing for any of them, felt sick to the stomach at the thought of touching any of them.

Because they weren’t his mate.

They weren’t Jared.

He gave up after finishing the second whisky, figured that he could brood just as well back home anyway, and that way he could imbibe copious amounts of alcohol without the worry of having to drive or find a means to get home. Plus no giggling groupies to deal with. He might even knock on Misha’s motel door and wake him up, start hashing out more of the details about the plan to woo Jared (he’d given up by this point in not thinking about the omega. It was a lesson in futility anyway).

He paid up his tab, left the bar and headed for his car, ignoring the pouts being thrown his way at his exit. He cranked the tunes on his stereo as he pulled away from the bar and turned back towards the town. It started raining about ten minutes in to his drive, and he rolled his eyes as he flicked on the windscreen wipers. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel, humming along to the tunes as he slowed the car down a little, the roads rapidly becoming wet and dangerous. It was a hell of a downpour, getting heavier as he drove.

His eyes flicked to the side of the road, spotting movement and he saw a hunched figure up ahead,
slogging slowly through the rain. He had time to snort and think to himself that that was one stupid person to be out in this weather, right before it hit him in an instant, in a rush, who it was, who was out in the rain – he just knew, instantly, instinctively and he was slamming the brakes on with a screech and a squeal alongside the figure, the wheels spinning somewhat on the wet tar.

The figure jumped and spun around just as Jensen shoved the door open and half scrambled out.

‘What the fu - ’

‘Jared!’ Jensen burst out.

And Jared blinked through the rain, mouth open slightly in surprise. ‘Jensen…?’

‘Jared, Jesus Christ, what the hell are you doing out in this?!’ Jensen snarled. ‘Are you absolutely crazy?’


Jensen didn’t let him finish, grabbing him by the arm and yanking him into the car, bundling him across the bench seats into the passenger side. Before Jared could register that, Jensen was leaping from the car once more, dashing the boot and hurriedly opening it up. He yanked out a bundle of blankets, all but flew back to the door and slid into the car next to Jared. He instantly shoved the blankets at Jared.

‘Here, quick, dry yourself off, warm yourself up,’ he said. ‘You must be freezing! Christ, you’ll catch your death – what the hell were you thinking? Not to mention we’re miles out of town! It would have taken you hours to get back – Christ – ’

Despite everything that had happened that night, despite the total and utter crap-fest that had been his date, Jared couldn’t help his lips twitching into a smile at Jensen’s continuous stream of overbearing mutterings that gave him literally no chance to reply.

The older Were was fiddling with the car’s controls, cranking the heater as he rambled. He turned to face Jared, opened his mouth - and froze, something akin to a dark cloud shuttering over his face.

His eyes shot straight to the cuts on Jared’s cheek, the trickle of red down his face. His hand shot out and grabbed Jared’s chin, holding his head in place. His breath was coming out in short, sharp gasps as he struggled to contain the rising anger that was clawing in his chest.

‘Son of a bitch,’ he rasped out. ‘What the fuck – what the fuck happened Jared?’

Jared tried to tug his head free. ‘Nothin’… I’m fine’ he muttered, his eyes pointedly avoiding Jensen’s face.

‘My ass it’s nothing!’ Jensen growled.

Then his eyes fell to the ripped shirt, the shallow cuts and Jensen saw red, literally red, his eyes flickering to wolf gold.

‘Fucking – fucking fuck – Jared – fuck – that - son of a – did he do this? Was this fucking Amell?’

Jared sighed, pulled his head free and dropped his gaze to his lap. It was all the confirmation Jensen needed. Hot white rage pulsed through his body, electrifying him, his teeth and claws elongating without him even meaning to, the wolf inside, the alpha inside, practically howling with anger, baying for blood, to claw, to hit, to punish.
‘Are you fucking kidding me? I’ll kill the son of a bitch! I’ll rip his goddamn lungs out!’ he roared.

‘He attacked you? He fucking attacked you?’

Something horrible occurred to him.

‘Did he – your shirt – did he – ’

Jared’s head shot up. ‘No! No he – no,’ he burst out emphatically. ‘He didn’t. I swear.’

‘But he tried’ Jensen’s voice was a low growl.

Jared’s jaw clenched and he looked away.

‘I fought him off’ was all he said.

‘Son of a bitch!’ Jensen exploded again.

His fist hit the dashboard of his car, for lack of anything else to hit, claws digging in, scraping, and Jared jumped a little.

‘I’m gonna tear him apart,’ he growled, jaw tight and clenched. ‘I’m gonna rip him limb from limb.’

‘Jensen,’ Jared said softly, reaching out a hand to lay it on Jensen’s shoulder. ‘It doesn’t… it doesn’t matter, ok? He’s not worth the trouble.’

Jensen took a deep breath, attempting to relax his muscles as he turned to Jared. He gave him a pained smile.

‘I know he isn’t,’ he answered, ‘but you are.’

Jared swallowed and ducked his head, letting his hand slide from Jensen’s shoulder as he turned to look out of the window. Jensen took a moment to release the last of his anger, felt his teeth and claws shift back to human and then he reached across to tuck the blankets more securely around Jared.

‘You should… report this. To your alpha, at least, he shouldn’t - ’ he started.

‘No,’ Jared said forcefully, shaking his head. ‘No. I don’t - no. I don’t want. I don’t want him to - it’s not worth it.’

‘Jared...’ Jensen sighed.

‘I'm not going to...’ Jared rubbed his undamaged cheek. ‘Can we just - can we just drop it, please?’

Jensen opened his mouth, then closed it and sighed. He resisted the urge to reach out and draw the omega to him, to hold him tightly, the vulnerability that practically oozed off Jared calling to his inner alpha.

‘Ok. Ok, I... ok,’ he paused a moment. ‘How about I take you home?’

Jared drew in a sharp breath. ‘Oh God,’ he said, closing his eyes tightly. ‘Gen and Felicia. They’ll be there, waiting up – they’ll want to know – God – I just don’t want…’

Jensen hesitated a moment. ‘You could… you could always come to mine? Stay the night?’

Jared’s head shot around to look at him and Jensen instantly raced to babble on.
‘Not – not in that way – God, no – not – I just mean – I can clean up your cuts, get you some clothes and you can sleep over – just sleep, I swear – and you can just – just take a night, before you have to face them, y’know? Just - nothing sleazy I swear – I just –’

‘Jensen,’ Jared interrupted, halting the flow of words. ‘That sounds great.’

Jensen expelled a long breath and smiled tentatively. ‘Yeah? O-okay then. Awesome.’

He started the car up, pulled back onto the street and began to drive back to town. The drive was spent in relative silence – exhaustion over the night’s events made Jared want to do little more than lean his head against the window and stare listlessly out of the window. Jensen meanwhile, was caught in an internal war with his inner alpha torn between screaming for Stephen Amell’s blood for hurting his mate and doing a happy dance that his mate was coming home with him.

It doesn’t mean that, he told himself sternly. You coming onto him is the very last thing he needs tonight, got it?

Once they reached the hotel, Jensen led Jared to his room, ushering the omega inside.

‘You want to take a shower?’ he asked. ‘I can give you some clothes to wear? And then afterwards I can take a look at some of those cuts.’

Jared bobbed a head and Jensen tugged a pair of sweats and a hoodie from his suitcase and offered them to Jared with a cautious smile. Jared accepted the clothes before padding into the bathroom. The shower was quick, and the omega emerged shortly, the sweat pants a little short on him, swishing about his ankles.

Jensen’s breath snagged, caught, stuttered in his chest because – god – because Jared hadn’t put the hoodie on and was shirtless – goddamn shirtless, in his room. There were tendrils of water running down the omega’s long, lean torso and Jensen had to bite his lip to keep from moaning aloud, tightening his fists to restrain himself from pouncing on the omega, chasing those goddamn droplets with his tongue.

‘I – ’ Jared’s face was red, the omega was blushing – blushing, and Christ, wasn’t that just adorable, Jensen thought.

‘I just – with the cuts – I thought – shouldn’t put this on yet’ Jared stuttered, waggling the hoodie.

Jensen found his voice. ‘Yeah,’ he coughed, swallowed, ‘yeah, good idea. Uh. I. Here sit and I’ll – I’ll take a look. At the cuts. I’ll take a look at the cuts. I mean. Uh. Yeah.’

Jared nodded again as went to sit as Jensen ducked into the steamy bathroom, rifling under the sink to dig out the medi-kit he remembered seeing there. He walked back in, flickering his eyes over Jared. Less flustered now, he took a moment to see, to look, his gaze landing on the heavy scar tissue across Jared’s abdomen and his brows drew together sharply.

Jared glanced over, noted his gaze and looked away. He tugged the hoodie and hugged it to his stomach, covering the scars.

Jensen flushed. ‘I wasn’t – don’t – I’m sorry –’

‘It’s fine’ Jared’s tone was a little flat.

Jensen sighed, cursing himself, then sat down next to the omega. ‘Let’s uh, let’s take a look at the cuts then,’ he said. ‘If – if that’s ok?’
Jared nodded and Jensen ducked his head, lifted his hands and hesitated a moment before gently laying them on Jared’s chest, turning him to look at the shallow cuts on his ribs. Jared sucked in a breath as tingles instantly rippled out from Jensen’s touch, goosebumps rising on his skin, his stomach flipping, twisting.

‘You ok?’ Jensen’s voice was gruff.

Jared forced a nod, not trusting himself to speak. He was pretty sure if he opened his mouth a moan would come out. Jensen’s touch – his skin on Jared’s – it was electrifying, like nothing he’d ever felt, his entire body tingling.

‘It’s not too bad,’ Jensen said finally, pulling back. ‘Not really too deep. He just skimmed you.’

He reached for Jared’s face, caught his cheek gently and squinted at the cuts there. Jared felt his face flush, realising that was his bad side – his goddamn blind eye – and he fought the urge to duck, to pull away, to hide.

‘Not too bad either,’ Jensen said, releasing him. ‘Well, neither will need stitches anyway. Shouldn’t scar either.’

Jared couldn’t stop a laugh escaping his lips, bitter and harsh. ‘Don’t worry, scarring doesn’t bother me that much. That ship has sailed if you hadn’t noticed.’

Jensen paused reaching into the medi-kit. He studied Jared a moment.

‘They’re not – I – ’ he started.

‘So, Band-Aids then?’ Jared interrupted, overriding him, not wanting to hear what he had to say.

Jensen sighed. He reached out to stroke a thumb across Jared’s uncut cheek, fingers touching the scar there and Jared jolted, jumped, startled at the unexpected touch.

‘I don’t even see them, Jared’ he said softly. ‘I don’t.’

Jared didn’t know what to say. But Jensen was already pulled away, digging in the kit and taking out some antiseptic.

‘We’ll clean the cuts up with antiseptic, then put some strips on them’ he said.

He poured some antiseptic on patch of gauze and moved to dab it on the cuts on his ribs.

‘This might sting a bit’ Jensen cautioned.

He dabbed it on gently and Jared sucked in a sharp breath, wincing slightly.

‘Sorry’ Jensen said.

Jared closed his eyes a moment. ‘Don’t be,’ his voice was flat. ‘It’s… God. I just. This whole night,’ Jared felt his resolve, his control start to crumple. ‘God, it’s.. it was my fault. My stupid fault.’

Jensen sat back, blinking at the omega. ‘Come again?’

Jared gusted out a breath that dissolved into a half-sob. ‘I was so stupid – so fucking stupid to think that someone – someone would’ve wanted to go out with me,’ the words tumbled out of his mouth in a rush. ‘Such a fucking idiot.’
‘Jared’ Jensen said.

Jared shook his head viciously, squeezing his eyes shut against tears. ‘He- god – I mean – I’m not even – I’m not even a fucking Were – not really – I can’t – he was right, I’m just good for a fuck, that’s all - I’m a freak – ’

‘Jared!’ Jensen interrupted sharply, halting his words.

He grabbed a hold of the omega’s chin and turned his face towards him. Jared’s eyes were still squeezed shut.

‘Don’t – don’t ever say that again, you hear me? Don’t ever say that again. Whatever Amell said – whatever shit he told you, none of it is true, ok, not a single fucking word is true,’ Jensen said forcefully, and Jared’s damp eyes fluttered open. ‘You are not a freak –’

‘I am – ’ the words tripped off Jared’s tongue tearfully. ‘I’m not a proper Were, I’m – ’

‘What – because you can’t shift? Can’t scent? That doesn’t mean shit, Jared’ Jensen interrupted forcefully. ‘It doesn’t mean shit, you hear me.’

Jared tried to shake his head. Because Jensen didn’t know all of it, didn’t know the truth, that he couldn’t have pups, couldn’t even give someone pups like a real omega -

Jensen locked his gaze on the omega’s. ‘Listen to me - that guy – that fucker – is an asshole, ok, nothing but a piece of shit asshole and believe you me he will get what’s coming for what he did to you tonight – ’

‘Jensen – ’

‘No, shut up, I’m not finished,’ Jensen growled. ‘As for thinking no one would ever want you? That’s bullshit. Anyone would be lucky to have you – Christ, Jared, half the people here adore you when I talk to them about you –’

‘Feel sorry for me more like,’ Jared muttered. ‘Pity friendships.’

Jensen’s face softened. ‘You can’t possibly believe that, Jay,’ he said softly. ‘You’re amazing, everyone can see that.’

Jared’s hand went automatically to his face. ‘I know what everyone can “see.”’

Jensen tilted his head to one side, then reached out and brushed the bangs from Jared’s face. ‘The scars you mean? Your eye? Christ, Jared, all they mean is you’re a goddamn survivor. You should be proud of them, they mean you’re strong.’

Jared felt his lips pull into a trembling smile, and he blinked again, rapidly. ‘Thanks Jensen’ he whispered softly.

And Jared was so close, and was looking at him with that one hazel eye, one milky white, tears clinging, clumping his eyelashes, soft lips turned in a trembling smile and all Jensen wanted to do was pull the omega to him and kiss him senseless, clutch him to his chest.

But he steeled himself, merely allowed himself to cup Jared’s cheek again, stroke a thumb along his cheekbone, then dropped his hand back down. It wasn’t what Jared needed tonight – he’d be taking advantage of someone who was vulnerable, and that’s not how he wanted his first kiss with his mate to go.
'Come on,' he said gently. ‘Let’s get the rest of the cuts cleaned up and then what do you say we watch some crap TV until we fall asleep?’

Jared let out a breath and his smile strengthened, the tiniest hint of dimples appearing. ‘That sounds perfect’ he agreed.

Jensen made quick work out of cleaning and covering the remaining cuts and after all his mother-henning was complete he took a shower himself and emerged in his own sweat pants and a baggy tshirt. Jared had pulled on the hoodie now, and was already under the covers of the bed, propped up against the headboard, the television that was on a pedestal opposite the bed on, volume down low. Jared was clicking the remote, flicking through the channels. He glanced up as Jensen entered and his face flushed a little.

‘Uh, sorry I just sorta – uh – made myself comfortable? Hope that’s ok?’ he ducked his head, cheeks burning.

Seeing Jared curled up in his bed, in his clothes no less, was more than “ok” with Jensen, but he tamped down on desire to nod eagerly and just smiled gently.

‘That’s what I invited you around for, remember? To relax and forget about certain douchebags for the night.’

Jared snorted. Jensen smiled a little, then gazed around the room and realized the very obvious problem with the room.

There was only one bed.

And Jared was currently huddled beneath the blankets of that one. Jensen instantly looked for a couch, or a chair he could attempt to sleep comfortably in. Jared must have noticed his wandering gaze because he cleared his throat awkwardly.

‘You can – uh – you can sleep in the bed with me, if you like?’ he said, his cheeks starting to heat up. ‘I mean, it’s big enough for two.’

‘Yeah – it – I – yeah, ok’ Jensen said awkwardly, before he slid under the covers beside Jared.

There was a small pause as Jared chewed his lip, still flicking through the channels, not daring to glance over at Jensen.

‘Anything on?’ Jensen asked finally.

Jared shrugged. ‘I, um, wasn’t sure what you might want to watch?’

Jensen smiled. ‘Anything you want, Jay,’ he answered. ‘Trust me, I’m not picky when it comes to my entertainment. I’ve got half a lifetime with a younger sister forcing me to watch all sorts of shameful, trashy programs and another half a lifetime spent with Misha, and if you wanna talk about obscure shows, you should see what he watches…’

He paused a moment. ‘Obscure shows or boring documentaries… did you know he once watched a two hour special on lemon farming? We don’t even have lemon trees on our land. I swear he almost looked wistful through it.’

Jared gave a chuckle, and, skimming a few channels, settled on a repeat of the movie Die Hard. Jensen made an agreeable noise and Jared glanced his way to catch the alpha’s approving nod.
‘Nice choice Padalecki’ he grinned.

It didn’t take long, after they’d settled into the covers, for Jared’s eyes to start to droop, the energy draining from his body. Jensen wasn’t surprised when, less than ten minutes after they started watching Jared had already dropped off to sleep. He smiled down at the omega, Jared’s dark hair splayed out across the white of the pillow, off his face, so Jensen could drink in his entire face — the sharp edges of his cheekbones, the slant of his eyes, the soft lips, and even the thin white scars that marred his flesh. In sleep, Jared looked even younger, his face smoothed of worry lines, relaxed, and his lips parted slightly. Jensen’s finger twitched, and before he could help himself, he was reaching out and gently tracing his fingers down the side of Jared’s face.

Jared shifted and Jensen almost had a heart attack, before the still-asleep omega simply rolled in his direction and promptly snuggled into his side with a contended snuffle.

‘Shoulda guessed you’d be a cuddler’ he chuckled softly.

He hesitated a moment, then thought, fuck it, and slid an arm around Jared, nestling down next to him, relishing the warmth of his long, lean form against his. His fingers fond the soft, silky strands of his hair and he gently carded them through the omega’s hair. Jensen let out a soft sigh, the feeling of something that had previously been empty in his chest filling up perfectly to the brim with Jared’s warm presence next to him.

He turned his head slowly and ghosted his lips over the top of Jared’s head, inhaling the heady scent of vanilla and cinnamon as he did so.

‘Gonna make you mine, sweetheart,’ he murmured. ‘You’ll see. It’s you and me, sweetheart, you and me.’
Jensen didn’t know at what point he fell asleep, but he must have done, because the next thing he knew he was gradually waking up, the sound of the television on low still thrumming through the room. The first thing that he registered was the heavy warmth, the faint tickling of hair strands underneath his chin, the soft puffs of air across his chest, coinciding with the sounds of deep, rhythmic breathing. The second thing he noticed was how completely, utterly and totally content he was feeling. He opened his eyes slowly and felt a smile curl onto his lips as he gazed down at the top of Jared’s head, the omega’s mop of dark hair sleep-mussed. He was sprawled across Jensen’s chest, head buried just below Jensen’s chin, and arm loosely draped around Jensen’s hips, the bare flesh of Jared’s arm feeling like it was burning a brand where it touched the space where Jensen’s tshirt had ridden up.

He tried to keep still, wanting to revel a little longer in having the omega so relaxed and so close, but within minutes Jared was stirring, his fingers twitching and his head moving slowly. His eyes fluttered open and he blinked blearily a moment, raising his head a little. He lifted a hand and scrubbed it across his face as his brain struggled to wake up. Then it clicked – he was in Jensen’s bed, and, more than that, he was currently half draped over the alpha.

With a jolt, Jared jerked back and scooted away from Jensen, who instantly lamented the loss.

‘Sorry – I didn’t mean to smother you,’ Jared stuttered out. ‘I’m a – sleep cuddler – or something – Gen says I’m like an octopus in my sleep – sorry – ’

A jolt of jealousy stabbed through Jensen at the thought of exactly how Gen might have learned that particular titbit of information, but he forced it down before his alpha could override his mouth and start demanding answers. Instead he smiled at the blushing omega.

‘No worries, man,’ he stretched his limbs out. ‘You were like my own personal heater.’

Jared rolled his eyes, then ran a hand through his sleep-mussed hair. Jensen thought that he had probably never seen something so adorable – the omega was all sleep-soft, his hair a messy mop, sticking up this way and that, clothes rumpled and creased.

‘So… you ready to face the music?’ he said, wriggling to sit up in the bed. ‘And by music, I do mean those two vaguely terrifying betas you hang around with.’

Jared winced. ‘If I say no, does that mean I never have to?’ he said, a hand straying subconsciously to the cuts on his face.

‘Nope, if you say no it just gives them more hours to freak out and get even more worked up’ Jensen answered.

Jared cringed. ‘Good point. Guess I better shower then.’
He slid from the bed and grabbed the discarded jeans from the night before, slinging them over his arm, then picked up his torn t-shirt and inspected it, chewing his lip.

‘I can lend you a shirt’ Jensen offered.

Jared smiled at him. ‘That would be great, thanks.’

Jensen jumped from the bed, rustled around in his suitcase and produced one of his larger shirts, handing it to Jared. The omega took it and gave a little snort, shaking his head.

‘What? No good?’ Jensen said. ‘I can find you another?’

‘No, no, it’s not that – it’s just,’ Jared smiled a little sardonically, ‘I can just imagine what this’ll look like to the girls – me rocking up after being out all night, face cut up, and wearing another alpha’s tshirt.’

Jensen laughed. ‘Oh Christ, they’re probably gonna kill me on sight, aren’t they?’

Jared chuckled. ‘Probably,’ he agreed, and bumped shoulders with the alpha as he passed by towards the shower. ‘Don’t worry though, I’ll protect you.’

He tipped a wink before he ducked into the shower and shut the door behind him. Jensen stared a moment, a goofy smile on his face, and thought that maybe Jared agreeing to go on a date with Stephen Amell was actually the best thing to ever happen to him.

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Jensen offered to drive Jared to his house, and refused to take no for an answer. He swung by the local bakery, treating them both to coffees and sticky cinnamon rolls first (ignoring Jared’s stuttered pleas to pay for his own – like that was going to happen), before they set off back to the omega’s house with Jared directing the way. Jensen wasn’t too proud to admit that he was purposefully going several miles under the speed limit to draw the trip out, not yet ready to give up Jared’s company. If they omega noticed – which he most likely did – he didn’t say anything.

There was a companionable silence between them – so different to the awkward tension in the car with Stephen, Jared noted as he tore into the cinnamon roll, relishing in the sticky sweetness. He hesitated a moment, then spoke.

‘So, uh, I… I kinda guessed, but… to be clear, it – it was you who sent the flowers to me, right?’ he said cautiously.

Jensen gave him a glance and noted a smear of glaze on Jared’s lips and melted (in a manly way of course) at the adorableness of it, resisting the urge to lean forward and wipe it off. Or lick it off, his brain whispered and didn’t that just conjure all sorts of images that –

He realised with a jolt and a flush of his cheeks that Jared was still waiting for an answer.

‘Uh, yeah, I – yeah that was me’ he replied.

Jared smiled. ‘Well, um, thank you, for that,’ he ducked his head shyly. ‘They were really beautiful. And I – I got the meanings too. It was a nice touch. No one’s… no one’s ever gone to that much…
Anyway. They were just. Really gorgeous. Thank you.’

Jensen struggled a moment, before he gusted a huge sigh. ‘Oh, Christ, I can’t do this Jared – ’

For a split second Jared’s stomach plunged, his blood turning to ice –

‘ – it was Misha,’ Jensen blurted. ‘God dammit. Misha chose the flowers. Not me. I just – you – I’m not good at the romance thing – the flowers idea was mine, I swear, it was – but then Misha was like, they need to mean something – so he chose the flowers. Not me. I’m so sorry. I just – I don’t want to lie to you. I’m sorry.’

Jared stared for a moment at Jensen’s twisted, anguished expression. Then promptly burst out laughing.

Jensen blinked. ‘Um…’ he said.

‘Sorry, sorry,’ Jared giggled, covering his mouth with his hand, trying to smother the laughter. ‘It’s just – I’m sorry, that’s kind of hilarious. You look like someone killed a puppy.’

Jensen felt his lips twitch, tried to hide the smile. ‘I’m glad my inner turmoil is so amusing to you’ he shot Jared a mock glower out the corner of his eye.

Jared laughed again, really laughed, and Jensen felt his stomach swoop at the dimples etched into his face, the straight white teeth, the sheer happiness sparkling in his one good eye.

‘Well, I guess then, tell Misha thanks for the flowers,’ Jared grinned. ‘They were very nice. He could almost be a florist, actually.’

He glanced out of the window, started a little, then turned back to give the alpha a little nudge.

‘Just, uh, pull over here’ he directed.

Jensen looked around. ‘This isn’t your house though?’ he said.

‘Yeah, I – ’ Jared stopped, squinted. ‘How do you know which one is my house?’

Jensen’s face flared red and he pointedly looked everywhere but Jared as he pulled the car over. ‘I – uh – it –’ he stuttered, then deflated. ‘There’s no chance I can blame Misha for this one can I?’

Jared couldn’t help the grin on his face. ‘You been stalkin’ me Ackles?’ he teased.

‘Stalki – no,’ Jensen objected. ‘That’s such – that’s such a harsh word. I was just – I was just finding out about you. Information. And… stuff.’

‘So, stalking’ Jared nodded.

Jensen flushed. ‘That’s – you – ’ he caught the grin on Jared’s face and rolled his eyes. ‘Whatever. You suck.’

Jared laughed.

‘And my point still remains,’ Jensen continued, wanting to move the subject along, ‘this isn’t your house.’

Jared shrugged a little awkwardly. ‘Yeah I just – I don’t know if they’ll be waiting on the porch or inside, but I just – if they see the car, if they see you… well, Gen and Felicia can be scary. Just
Jensen inclined his head. ‘Trying to keep me a dirty secret, Jared?’

It was the omega’s turn to go bright red. ‘What – Jensen, no – I wouldn’t. It’s just – ’

‘Relax, Jay, I was kidding’ Jensen grinned.

Jared’s shoulders relaxed. ‘I just – on top of having to explain why my face has been clawed and how bad the date was, I really don’t want them jumping all over you and demanding answers about us too.’

‘Us, eh?’ Jensen arched an eyebrow. ‘There’s an us?’

‘I – well, I don’t – that’s not – I didn’t mean,’ Jared stammered, then rubbed at his face. ‘I… um… well. Maybe. I. I wouldn’t mind… hanging out again. Maybe.’

Hope and happiness bloomed in Jensen’s chest, and he couldn’t stop the smile that broke out over his face, large, all encompassing, eyes crinkling at the edges. ‘I’d like that.’

Jared smiled back, then suddenly his face dropped. ‘Oh, dammit.’

Jensen was on alert immediately. ‘What? What is it?’

‘Oh – no, nothing – it’s just,’ Jared pulled a face, ‘I was going to – I broke my mobile last night and, uh, maybe threw it away as well. I was going to give you my number but – ’

Jensen relaxed, chuckled. ‘I’m sure we’ll figure something out.’

‘Well, I mean, you know where I work… and where I live apparently,’ Jared couldn’t help a teasing grin, ‘so I guess. Maybe. Just… come by and we can… do lunch or something. Maybe.’

‘Ok, sounds good to me’ Jensen agreed.

‘Right,’ Jared suddenly felt awkward, rubbed at his face, and reached for the handle, ‘right, well, I should – I should – ’

He stopped, then turned back. ‘I didn’t – I never said thank you. For last night. It was – just. Thank you. It was a shit night, and you… you made it better.’

Jensen ducked his head, felt his face flush, felt his inner alpha whine because he hadn’t helped, not really, hadn’t been there when Stephen had attacked, had tried to… His jaw tightened.

‘I didn’t really do -’

‘You made it better,’ Jared repeated. ‘So thank you.’

Jensen lifted his head, met Jared’s mismatched eyes and some of the guilt eased away at the sincerity that he saw there.

‘Any time’ he said softly, seriously.

Jared nodded, then opened the car door and slid his long, lean body out gracefully. He ducked down once more to smile at Jensen.

‘See you later, Jen’ he said.
Jensen felt a jolt of warmth at the nickname, at the smile – at everything.

‘See you later, Jay’ he replied.

Then the door was shutting and Jensen sat and watched the omega walk away in long easy strides. He waited until Jared had walked a little way down the street to a front yard, up the front steps, vanished into the house before he finally, finally, gave a loud whoop, punched the air and performed a mini happy dance in the front seat of his car.

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Jared crept quietly into the silent house, shutting the door softly behind himself and peering around. There had been no irate betas waiting on the porch with loud screeches, nor anyone waiting in the hallway with folded arms and tapping feet. It was weirdly unsettling, because he’d expected to be engulfed the moment he arrived home, and when he started down the hallway he almost thought that maybe he’d gotten in early enough that Gen and Felicia hadn’t even known he’d been out all night and –

‘Where have you been?!’

Jared jumped at Felicia’s loud voice from the kitchen.

‘Beds empty, no note, car gone! You could have died! You could have been seen!’

Jared started to turn, bewildered. ‘Felicia – what are you on about?’

Felicia grinned. ‘Sorry, Mrs. Weasley moment – I’ve always wanted to do that – but seriously though, Jared, you didn’t come home last night, you sly dog, I don’t know whether to be proud or –’

Felicia stopped mid-sentence as Jared turned fully to face her front on and she saw the cuts marring his cheek. All colour drained from her face.

‘Tell me that’s just the result of a kinky sex game where you forgot the safe word’ she whispered.

Jared winced. ‘Uh –’

‘Is that Jay?!’ Gen’s voice shrieked, followed by the sound of footsteps. ‘Oh my god – Jay – you have to tell us –’

The beta Were barrelled in from the back door into the kitchen, a cup of coffee clutched in one hand, stopped dead in her tracks at the sight of Jared, words dying on her lips and promptly dropped the cup with a resounding smash, shattering it on the ground.

‘Uh, morning guys’ Jared said.

'Lucy, you got some 'splaining to do' was all Felicia said.

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' – gonna kill him! I am! I’m gonna rip his lungs out!' Felicia roared.

Jared couldn’t help a little smile at the memory that bought of green eyes and a low gravelly voice, before he sighed and directed his attention to the tiny redhead. They were in the lounge, he was seated, half curled up, Gen sitting perfectly still next to him, staring at her hands, as she had been throughout the entire time he’d told them about the disastrous night. Felicia was on her feet, pacing wildly, hands swinging at thin air, crackling anger and fury.

‘You’re like half his size, Felicia,’ he told her patiently. ‘I really don’t think that’s actually possible.’

Felicia spun to point angrily at him. ‘Don’t underestimate me, bucko!’ she snapped, then swung back around, gesticulating wildly as she resumed pacing. ‘That foul, loathsome, evil little cockroach!’

‘I’m going to go ahead and guess you had a Harry Potter marathon recently’ Jared commented mildly.

Felicia rolled her eyes. ‘Well, duh, it’s the six month anniversary of the last time I marathoned them – every half year, Jay, you know this – ’ she stopped, caught herself, and glared at him. ‘Hey, don’t try to distract me! I will not be derailed in my righteous fury!’

Jared held up his hands, placating. ‘I would never. By all means, righteously fury on.’

Felicia deflated a little. ‘I don’t – why aren’t you angry?’ she threw up her hands. ‘Why aren’t you yelling or crying? What he did – he attacked you, Jared! How are you – how are you so calm?!’

Jared hadn’t told them Jensen had picked him up, had taken him in the for night. Had only said he’d caught a lift with a friend, and the two betas had been too preoccupied with the tale itself to press further. So he couldn't explain, couldn't really tell Felicia why he wasn't curled in a crying ball. It had surprised him as well, when he'd woken up feeling so… well calm. Calmer, anyway, than the night before. But he knew why. Because he’d had the best night sleep he’d ever had, wrapped safely and warmly in Jensen’s arms. Because of green eyes and eye wrinkles. Because of a low gravelly voice, careful touches and someone sincerely telling him all the things he had trouble believing about himself. That he was strong. That he was, despite his scars, his eye, his broken inner wolf, he was still worth something.

He gave himself a little mental shake, shrugged his shoulders and avoided her eyes. ‘I don’t – I don’t know. I guess… it… look, it happened, and it sucked and it was awful, but…’ and he looked at her now. ‘But I fought him off, Felicia. And… I’m proud that I could do that. And… and… dwelling on it, it’s not gonna change what happened. Its only gonna make me feel worse,’ he couldn’t help a little half smile, ‘if everything that has happened to me has taught me anything, it's that.’

Felicia's face softened. 'Oh Jay...' she said, then rubbed at her face. 'We should - you should tell JD, though. He shouldn't get away with this. He shouldn't.'

Jared pulled a face. 'I - I - I know. Ok. I know. Because I don't want - he shouldn't have the chance to pull this shit on someone else but... just. Can we leave it a moment? I just...’ he ran a hand through his hair. 'It's... I don't want to tell him. Just yet. Tell anyone really. Just for a bit.'

Felicia sighed. 'Ok... ok...' she bit her lip. 'And... and you know he's an asshole right? Stephen? If I haven't said it yet, he's a total, complete and utter asshole and he didn't deserve you. And... and just, you know. It's not you. You know? He's probably tried that crap with loads of omegas - that hook up shit. Not just you. Ok? Not just you.'

Jared thought briefly of the words Stephen had spat at him. You're not even a real Were...
His mouth twisted in a bitter smile. 'Yeah. Yeah... guess it just. Felt personal. A bit.'

'It wasn't,' Gen spoke suddenly, softly, 'he is an asshole, like Felicia said. And - and he didn’t deserve you, and you didn’t even want to go on a date with him and I made you. I made you.'

Jared started at her suddenly speaking, head whipping to look at Gen. His heart leapt to his throat when he saw the beta crumple, her face dissolving into tears. In an instant he was sitting up, grabbing her, pulling her to him.

‘Hey – whoa – hey, Gen –’

‘It’s my fault – it’s my fault, and I’m so sorry, I’m so sorry Jared!’ Gen sobbed, throwing her arms around him, burrowing into his chest. ‘I’m so sorry – I should never – I shouldn’t have –’

‘Hey, hey, stop, stop,’ Jared moved to stroke the back of her head, tilted a little to catch the watery brown eyes. ‘Stop, you didn’t know. Ok. You didn’t know it was going to happen, Gen. It’s not your fault.’

‘It is,’ Gen insisted, shaking her head, tears scattering. ‘It is! I should’ve known – I should’ve –’

‘Gen, sweetheart, stop,’ Jared cupped her face, swiped a thumb at her tears. ‘There was no way – Stephen said it himself, he took his hook-ups out of town, precisely to avoid the gossip. You couldn’t have known.’

Gen sucked in a breath. ‘It’s not – I – it’s not an excuse – you could’ve – he could’ve –’

‘But he didn’t,’ Jared said firmly, holding her gaze. ‘He didn’t, and I’m fine. I’m fine.’

Gen hiccupped, pulling away and scrubbing at her face. ‘God – I – god, look at me, you shouldn’t be comforting me!’ she flailed her free hand. ‘I – I should be comforting you – you should be the one breaking down!’

Jared shifted closer, slung an arm around her shoulders as Felicia moved to slide in on the other side of Gen.

‘I can breakdown now, if it’ll help?’ he offered with a smile.

‘Or me?’ Felicia chimed in.

Gen huffed a wet laugh. ‘No, god, no, no one breakdown, ok?’

She wiped at her face a little, and then Felicia prodded her in the side.

‘Hey, you know what?’ she said. ‘This totally means you can’t call us the uncultured ones anymore. Now that you totally missed a huge hunk of gossip like the fact that Stephen Amell is a sleazebag. Now you’re just as uncultured as us. One of usssss.’

Gen rolled her eyes. ‘Oh God, does that mean I have to start watching than blonde woman with the stick and reading one hundred year old novels?’

‘Blonde woman with a stick?’ Felicia squawked indignantly.

‘I tell you what though,’ Gen continued, her mouth setting in a grim line. ‘I’m going to tell everyone about this. Everyone. See if Amell ever gets away with being a sleaze again.’

'Gen...' Jared started.
Gen waved a hand. 'Not - I won't - not names. I won't. But. But. I can't... I don't want anyone to ever think that asshole is a gentleman ever again. I am,' she bared her teeth like a wolf, 'I am going to destroy his reputation.'

Jared couldn't stop the soft laugh escaping him. 'There was go. That's the Gen we know, love and fear.'

Gen huffed a little, then turned to nuzzle into Jared’s chest. 'I really am sorry, Jay,’ she mumbled. ‘And I’m glad you’re ok.’

Jared kissed the top of her head lightly.

‘All right, enough of all this,’ Felicia said decisively. ‘I’m pretty sure the only logical thing to do right now is lock ourselves in the house for the remainder of the day with icecream, pizza and watch the remaining three Harry Potter movies.’

‘I don’t really like Harry Potter’ Gen mumbled offhandedly, still pressed into Jared’s chest.

Felicia sucked in a horrified breath, shrieked something like "blasphemy!” and promptly began to batter at Gen with a pillow, while Jared dissolved into laughter. It was chaos, for a bit, after that, with the two shrieking betas, and the events of the night before faded slowly from Jared's mind as he thought, not for the first time, how lucky he was to have his friends.

Even if they were total lunatics.

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There were many times in Misha’s life that he sincerely regretted decisions he had made - agreeing to become Jensen's best friends/assistant/caretaker sprang instantly to mind, then there was that time with the thing and the guy…

But at that particular moment, the one he regretted the most was giving Jensen a copy of his key to his motel room.

It had been a nice morning – peaceful and relaxing. The type of morning that generally didn’t happen if Jensen was around. It had even been a peaceful night. He'd watched television, made an attempt to start up crocheting, because people said it was a good way to relax, and because god knows he needed all the stress relief he could get. He’d made a start on a beanie and it looked good, even if he did say so himself.

Then that morning, when Jensen hadn’t immediately come and woken him up at 8am with some new drama or just because he could, Misha thought he might treat himself. He had time, it appeared, to do so. So he perused the hotel room service menu, ordered the most elaborate bacon-egg-steak-cheese sandwich on the menu, eagerly awaited it being delivered.

Then he gathered the plate up from the room service cart, headed to the table to eat it and –

And the door burst open with a violent bang as Jensen shouted, ‘MISHA!’ at the top of his lungs.

Misha jumped, startled, the plate slipped from his hand and smashed to the ground, sending the sandwich scattering across the floor.

Misha thought he might cry.

‘Mish! Misha! Misha!’ Jensen was still shouting even as he bounced into the room, oblivious to the
food on the ground or the devastated expression on Misha’s face.

You had to give him a key, Misha thought. You just had to.

‘Misha! You’ll never guess! You’ll never guess what happened!’ Jensen had reached him, was grabbing his arm eagerly, beaming from ear to ear.

‘Your father found a new babysitter?’ Misha said mournfully.

‘What?’ Jensen blinked.

‘Nothing,’ Misha sighed. ‘What’s the big news, Jensen?’

‘Jared! Jared! And – last night – the date – Amell- that asshole, that fucker – I’m gonna kill him – just FYI – I am – but also – also – best thing, best thing, Misha, best thing!

‘I literally have no idea what you’re talking about Jensen’ Misha said slowly, trying to tug his arm from the aggressive shaking.

Jensen rolled his eyes impatiently, gave Misha’s arm another shake. ‘Jared, Misha! Jared!’ he said.

‘Well, that clarifies it, thank you.’

‘I saw him last night,’ Jensen finally explained. ‘I – that date, that stupid date – went horrible. Thank God. But, I mean, not thank God, because – that fucker, you won’t believe what he tried to do. I’m going to kill him. I am. But – but – then Jared, we spent the night together –’

Misha’s eyebrows shot up.

‘No – not like that! Jesus, Misha, get your mind out of the gutter!’ Jensen snapped.

‘Well, I mean, it is you’ Misha defended himself.

Jensen’s face flushed. ‘That – I – whatever. Just – let me finish, ok? God. You can be so frustrating sometimes –’

‘I can be – ’ Misha started to squawk.

‘Anyway – so I picked Jared up, and we hung out and it was nice – it was so nice, Mish, so good to be near him – and – and I think, even though he can’t scent it, I think he knows there’s something between us? You know? I think he gets it. And, and,’ he shook Misha’s arm again, ‘he wants to hang out again. He wants to hang out, Misha!’

‘That’s good, Jen, it is,’ Misha smiled genuinely. ‘I’m happy. But also, if I could have my arm ba –’

‘How long do you think I should wait before I see him again?’ Jensen wondered.

‘Maybe a few days,’ Misha answered, ‘and if you could let go of my –’

‘Tomorrow is too soon, right? Tomorrow would be too soon’ Jensen continued.

‘Yes, and my arm –’

‘A few days,’ Jensen said decisively, and shook Misha’s arm again. ‘A few days. I think a few days.’
'Do you ever feel like you’re having a conversation with yourself?’ Misha sighed.

‘Huh?’ Jensen looked at him. ‘What are you on about?’

He looked to the ground and pulled a face. ‘Geez, Mish, way to be messy. There’s food all over the ground. Think about the poor maid who has to clean this up!’

Then he turned and still holding Misha’s arm, started to pull him towards the door. ‘C’mon, let’s get coffee – we’ve got planning to do.’

Misha sighed resignedly as he let himself be pulled from the room.

‘Oh, and hey, Jay said he liked the flowers!’ Jensen continued. ‘He said to tell you thank you and you could be a florist.’

*A florist*, Misha mused. *Not a lemon farmer, not a beekeeper, but a florist. It was an idea.*
The weekend passed for Jared in a blur of movies and the attentions of two rather over-bearing betas. By the time Monday rolled around, he felt like he’d been well and truly coddled to death. It was nice, even if it was a little bit of a relief to escape from the smothering and come to work on Monday.

He opted to stay in his back office on the Monday – the cuts on his cheek were still healing, scabbing over, and rather than having to field questions or deal with staring (well more staring than usual, he supposed, wryly thinking of his milky white eye) he figured it would be easier to just stay behind the scenes until the cuts were less… well, obvious.

He was tapping away on his computer, trawling through inventory and accounts when the door opened and Kat bounded in, a bundle of energy.

‘Mr. P!’ she crowed. ‘Oh my god, there’s – and, I mean, like I don’t usually got for alphas right? Cause I am an alpha, right? But like, Mr. P, this dude is fucking hot!’

‘Language, Kat’ Jared said mildly.

Kat stopped, pouted. ‘Felicia swears’ she objected.

Jared sighed, rolled his eyes. ‘If Felicia jumped off a cliff, would you?’

Kat thought for a moment. ‘I might consider it…’

Jared huffed. ‘Does everyone in this store have a crush on her?’

‘She is totally crushable,’ Kat informed him. ‘She’s so small. I just wanna smooshhh her and –’

Jared waved a hand, clicked his fingers. ‘Focus, Kat, focus – you came in here for a reason, remember?’

‘Oh yeah!’ Kat brightened. ‘Mr.P there’s a totally smokin’ alpha here for you!’

For a second there was a clench of anxiety, his mind jumping to thoughts of Stephen – but he wouldn’t would he? He wouldn’t come round?

‘Is it your boyfriend Mr. P?’ Kat interrupted his thoughts.


‘I’m gonna ask him!’

‘Wait – Kat – no –’

Jared scrambled to his feet as the young alpha vanished out of the door in a flash. He tripped over his chair, stubbed his toe, knocked his knee, tripped a few more times in his hurry and finally, finally managed to hobble out of the door, in time to see Kat bounce up to a patiently waiting Jensen Ackles and ask, loudly, ‘are you Mr. P’s boyfriend?’

Jensen blinked, looking taken aback. Jared scrambled to the counter.
'Kat – don’t you have customers to be attending to?’ he said sharply.

Kat looked at him, opened her mouth, then caught his stern look and sighed, rolling her eyes.

‘Fine’ she said theatrically, flouncing away.

Jared looked to Jensen, feeling his cheeks flame. ‘Sorry – she’s just –’ he waved a hand helplessly.

Jensen’s green eyes were sparkling with amusement. ‘Teenagers, right?’ he grinned.

Jared sighed, rolled his eyes. ‘Yeah, something like that.’

He took a moment to realise, to really realise, that it was Jensen – Jensen had showed up at his store. And – and of course, the alpha looked incredible, all green eyes and perfectly styled hair. And there was that tingle, that thrumming in Jared whenever he saw the alpha, the swoop of his stomach. Jensen smiled, drummed his fingers on the counter.

‘So…’ he started.

‘So…’ Jared shifted a little.

‘Uh, well,’ Jensen rubbed the back of his head, ‘you said – to drop by… for lunch one day. So, I just. I figured, maybe today? If you were free? We could have lunch together?’

‘Yeah, ok’ Jared said, too fast, too loud.

He felt his face heat up, wondered how it was even possible that he could go any redder, but Jensen simply perked up, eyes lighting up.

‘Awesome – I, yeah, awesome! I’ve – I was – I’ve got some food, and there’s a park nearby, if you wanted – if you wanted to go? When – I mean when’s your break?’

‘Well, I kinda own the place, so, anytime,’ Jared smiled. ‘I’ll – I’ll just let Osric know I’m heading out.’

He ducked to find his second in command, passing Kat as he did, who gave him a huge smile and thumbs up, then an exaggerated wink, leer and some sort of hand gesture that made the woman nearby make a scandalised noise.

Jared decided he wouldn’t try to find out exactly what the gesture meant.

Once he’d let Osric know he was heading out, he joined Jensen at the front counter, and the alpha led him outside.

‘I, uh,’ Jensen rubbed the back of his head, ‘I wasn’t sure what you liked. To eat. So I uh, I got a couple of different things, just in case.’

He stopped next to his car, unlocked the passenger and waved vaguely, almost embarrassedly at the seat. Jared peered in and his eyebrows shot up at the sight of the salad, a bag he recognised as the local burger joint, two different types of sandwiches, some sushi in a small container and, balanced on the ground, a small tub of soup. He looked at the food, straightened and stared at the alpha.

‘I… uh, wanted to make sure there was something you liked?’ Jensen shrugged helplessly.

Jared’s lips twitched. ‘Anyone ever tell you you’re a dork?’
‘Mostly,’ Jensen’s eyes sparkled, ‘the term they use is ‘pain in the ass’.’

And Jared threw back his head and laughed.

**

The week continued and Jensen came by twice more to have lunch with Jared, his lunchbreaks steadily increasing in length each time, so by the third time they hung out he was gone almost two hours. It was... it was nice. It was more than nice, it was fantastic. They got along, clicked almost straight away, like they –

*Like they were mates.*

Of course.

Which, with each time Jared was around Jensen, he started to believe more and more. Even if he couldn’t scent it like a normal Were, there was no denying there was something between he and Jensen. It simultaneously terrified and thrilled him. A part of him couldn’t help but be frightened, terrified that this whole “true mates” thing meant that Jensen was being saddled with him, through simple biology, when he could have anyone else.

He hadn’t told Jensen the full extent of how much the silver had damaged him – it wasn’t exactly something you blurted in a conversation – “how about that crazy weather lately? So you know how I can’t shift or scent, well I also can’t have pups.” But that would be something he’d had to tell the alpha, he felt, before they could... well progress beyond the friendship, or whatever it was, that they had now.

There was no denying every inch of him thrummed to touch, to kiss, to be with Jensen, and it was a battle every time they were together to not jump the alpha. And that was with his lack of an inner wolf, so he wondered how Jensen, with full alpha influence, was coping. If he was feeling the same.

If so, Jared had to commend him – the alpha had excellent self control.

When Friday rolled around, Jared decided to come clean to Gen and Felicia about Jensen, and them spending time together. He even invited the alpha, tentatively, to join them on the Friday night at Rob and Rich’s bar. Jensen had eagerly accepted, which led Jared to beg his two beta friends to behave.

‘I can’t promise I won’t drool on him,’ Felicia had said, ‘I mean, he is a hot piece of ass.’

As far as promises went, Jared was pretty happy with it.

When Friday rolled around, Jensen was, admittedly, a little nervous for that night, for meeting Jared’s friends, which he felt was a big step in the right direction. *Everything*, as a matter of fact, seemed to be stepping in the right direction with Jared. They were talking, hanging out, connecting. It was hard, to be around the omega, and not kiss him senseless, not claim him, but he was forcing himself to go slow. Misha had been right – slow and steady was the way to go.

‘Listen this – I want this to go well,’ Jensen told his friend as they entered the bar, ‘with Jared’s friends. So don’t… be weird.’
Misha looked affronted. ‘I’m never weird.’

‘You’re weird,’ Jensen objected. ‘I saw that thing you’re crocheting. The weird blob.’

‘It’s a beanie’ Misha said, looking somewhat hurt.

Jensen waved a hand. ‘Just – ’ he started.

There was sudden movement and someone caught his arm, tugging it. Jensen blinked startled, and turned to see Mia. She gave him a big, beaming smile.

‘Hi!’ she said. ‘I wondered if I might see you again. I looked for you last week and you weren’t here.’

She pouted a little. Jensen extracted his arm from her grip, took a step back.

‘Uh, right, listen – ’

‘I think we got off on the wrong foot last time,’ Mia overrode him confidently. ‘So I was thinking – I was thinking we could have a drink, get to know each other better?’

Jensen glanced to the bar and saw a familiar shaggy head, felt his heart do a leap in his chest at the sight of Jared leaning against the bar, currently chatting to Rich. He tore his gaze away, looked back to Mia.

‘Sorry, I - not tonight’ he tried to be polite.

Not any night, he thought.

Mia’s eyes slid to where Jensen had been staring and her lips thinned.

‘Oh’ her voice was flat.

‘Right, well,’ Jensen bobbed his head awkwardly, turning to leave, ‘I better be – ’

Mia reached out, grabbed Jensen’s sleeve, pulling him to a halt. ‘You know he went out with Stephen Amell right’ she burst out, an edge of desperation to her tone.

Jensen stopped, turned a little.

‘Yeah – he’s – I mean, talk about getting round, right? Stephen said – he said that Jared gave it up that first date too,’ Mia babbled. ‘Didn’t even blink an eyelid. Practically begged for it. And then – then Stephen said he went feral or something. Punched Stephen in the face – I saw the bruising, it was really bad. But it’s like – it’s not surprising right? I mean, you’ve seen his freaky eye right? Like, you don’t get that deformed without it damaging something else, right? Bet it screwed with his brain too.’

There was tightness in Jensen’s gut, a feeling of nausea as he looked to the beta, her eyes big and eager and smug. Was this what Jared had to endure from ignorant Weres? Was this the type of shit that had plagued the omega his whole life? He pulled his arm free from Mia’s grip.

‘I have to be going’ he said stiffly, tightly.

He turned away, because if he stayed any longer, if he listened to any more of what she was spouting, he was worried he’d hurt her, would do something stupid and reckless. He heard a noise behind him, anger and frustration, and ignored it.
Jared was still at the bar, and Jensen stop for a moment to look – to look at this amazing omega, with his long, lean form, a smile on his lips, dimples appearing, who’d been through hell, and was treated badly because of it and Jensen felt the surge of love and protectiveness like he’d never felt before.

His mate.

His goddamn mate.

He was lucky.

He sidled alongside Jared and the omega glanced down and smiled, suddenly looking a bit shy.

‘Hey, Jen,’ he greeted softly, ‘I – um. Glad you could make it.’

Jensen grinned up at him. ‘Wouldn’t have missed it for the world’ he answered.

So goddamn lucky, he thought, as he breathed in and inhaled the scent of vanilla, of Jared, of home.

**

‘… I like ‘im…’ Gen slurred from the back seat. ‘I didn’t th’nk I would, but I do. I do.’


Jared couldn’t help chuckling as he glanced up to his rear view mirror, watching the two very drunk betas in the back. He’d volunteered to be designated driver for the night. Mostly because he was terrified of getting tipsy and embarrassing himself in front of Jensen. The night had gone well though, and they’d all gotten along, and Jared couldn’t be happier. Gen had challenged Jensen to a round of shots, Felicia had split of bottle of wine with Misha, whilst having a deep discussion about crocheting for some unknown reason, and Jared… Jared had just felt happy. Content. And at the end, when they’d all gone their separate ways, Jensen had pulled Jared in for a hug, and he’d all but melted into the alpha’s arms, wanted to never leave them, had tingled all over when they had separated.

It had been a good night.

‘Do y’think…’ Gen shuffled and pushed up so she was leaning over the backseat near to Jared’s head. ‘Dy’think… y’think he’s your mate? Like he,’ she hiccupped, ‘like he said?’

Jared felt a blush creep onto his cheeks. He gave a little shrug.

‘I don’t…’ he hesitated. ‘I…’

‘I th’nk he is,’ Felicia said. ‘’S’obvious. S’much ch’mstry. S’like… s’like…’ she clicked her fingers, searched for the words. ‘S’like… those… that couple. That show… chemistry!’

Gen nuzzled into the side of Jared’s head from the back. ‘Be nice if he was,’ she said, a little dreamily. ‘S’romantic… true mates… s’romantic. Plus…plus…’

‘Plus he’s hot’ Felicia added.
‘An’ an’ and alpha,’ Gen nodded. ‘An alpha, Jayyy. Know what tha’ means?’ she suddenly giggled. ‘Means he’s got a knot and a big – ’

‘Ok,’ Jared sound loudly, face flushing. ‘This conversation is over now, ok?’

Both betas dissolved into hysterics. Jared shook his head, feeling his cheeks and ears burn. He pulled into their house, parking up and spending the next ten minutes bundling the drunken betas inside and into bed, before he ducked into his own room. He flopped back on the mattress, stared at the ceiling. Thought of Gen’s words.

A knot and a big…

Jared felt a flash of heat, warm and low in his belly, an urge of want and need, felt his cock twitch in his jeans, felt something wet between his cheeks and he swallowed hard, rolled onto his stomach and closed his eyes tight, trying to push the feeling down.

Damn drunken betas, he thought grumpily. Damn drunken betas and damn their ramblings...

**

‘Ok, so…’ Jensen leant over the wicker basket, peering into the contents. ‘We’ve got sandwiches, cheese, meats, fruit and chocolate…’

He straightened up, squinting at Jared. ‘That’s all you need for a picnic right?’

Jared couldn’t help smiling at the genuine worry in Jensen’s voice, like the picnic needed to be perfect, needed to be flawless. It was Sunday, and a sunny day, and Jensen had swung by the house mid morning, asking if Jared wanted to go for a picnic in the park. It was romantic, sweet, completely goofy and Jared had teased the alpha for ten minutes straight before he’d put him out of his misery and agreed to it.

They’d swung by the local shops, stocked up on food and Jensen had packed it into the basket he’d bought especially for the day. They were currently in the car park, Jensen reviewing the contents with a careful eye.

‘Maybe something to drink?’ Jared suggested.

Jensen snapped his fingers. ‘Right! Of course!’ he glanced around, spotting the nearby liquor store. ‘I’ll go get – ’

‘Let me’ Jared interrupted.

‘Jared – ’ Jensen started.

‘Jared – ’ Jensen started.

‘No, no, Jen, you’ve paid for everything every time we’ve hung out,’ Jared objected. ‘At least let me pick up some beer?’

It looked like it was a terribly conflicting decision for Jensen, but he finally relented, throwing up both hands.

‘Fine, fine, stubborn omega,’ he grumbled. ‘Go get the booze. I want wine, not beer.’
Jared grinned. ‘Your wish is my command’ he said, trotting off towards the liquor store.

He took his time, once inside, scanning over the shelves, squinting at the wine bottles, eventually settling on a bottle of red. He grabbed the bottle, turned, and bumped straight into a solid figure that had been looming on his blind side. Jared stumbled back a little, blinking.

‘Hi, Jared.’

Jared felt his body tense up. ‘Stephen’ he said shortly, tightly.

He hadn’t seen the alpha since their date, and he supposed – looking at Stephen – that it was because he had been lying low, the bruising across his nose and eyes still evident even now. The alpha probably hadn’t wanted to be seen when the bruising had been bad. It gave Jared a little thrill of satisfaction, seeing the bruising. He’d done that. He had.

*Not helpless,* he thought, firmly.

‘Excuse me’ he said, moving to duck around the alpha.

Stephen stepped to that side, blocking his way again. ‘What’s the hurry, Jared? Stay, chat with me.’

Jared clenched his jaw. ‘I’d rather not,’ he said shortly. ‘Now move out of the way, Stephen.’

‘I’ve been hearing things,’ Stephen said, like Jared hadn’t spoken, ‘around town. *Everyone’s* been talking about how you’ve been hanging out with Ackles.’

‘That’s none of your business’ Jared tightened his grip on the wine.

‘So, what?’ Stephen sneered. ‘I reject you and you decide to give it up to Ackles instead? This some sort of revenge?’

Jared couldn’t help a short bark of laughter. ‘Jesus, you think highly of yourself, don’t you?’ he shook his head. ‘It’s *nothing* to do with you, Stephen. Now, if you’ll excuse me – ’

He made to move past him again and the alpha’s hand shot out, grabbing his arm tightly.

‘I’m not done talking with you yet, omega’ Stephen hissed.

‘Let go of me, Stephen’ Jared said, keeping his voice steady, calm.

Stephen stepped forward, stepped into Jared’s space, face contorting. ‘Listen, you little *bitch*, you think you’re *special* or something? You’re just one in a *hundred* omegas Ackles has bedded – like I said, you’re nothi – urghhh!’

It happened in an instant, one second Stephen was in Jared’s face, spitting venomous words into his face, the next someone had grabbed the back of his head, yanking it backwards and Stephen went staggering backwards with a gurgle, releasing Jared, then in a flash, Jensen was in front of the omega, face like thunder.

‘You *don’t,*’ the growl from Jensen’s mouth was pure alpha, ‘*fucking touch* him? Do you hear me? *You don’t fucking touch him.*’

Stephen straightened up, took a step forwards. ‘Or what? You’ll fight me? You wanna go, Ackles?’ he challenged.

Jensen’s body tensed, his eyes flashed gold and a growl escaped his lips. Jared grabbed out, caught
Jensen’s arm. He could see the other Weres in the shop were looking, staring, anxious looks on their face, saw the cashier had reached for the phone, hand hovering over the cradle.

‘Jen, don’t,’ he tugged a little. ‘It’s not – not here, ok? He’s not worth it. Let’s just go, ok?’

Jensen didn’t move, gaze fixed on Stephen.

‘Jen, please’ Jared whispered.

Jensen’s jaw tightened and he swallowed down the rage, the inner alpha with difficulty, the pleading in Jared’s voice reaching him, cutting through the haze of anger. He shot Stephen one last glare, then turned to face Jared.

Jared let out a sigh of relief. ‘Ok, ok, let’s – ’ he started to move.

‘Yeah, that’s right, Ackles, listen to your bitch’ Stephen jeered.

Jensen paused, tensed.

‘Ignore him’ Jared tugged on his sleeve again.

‘How does it feel to be fucking sloppy seconds?’ Stephen spat. ‘God you’re a pathetic excuse for an alpha – ’

‘Jensen – ’ Jared pleaded.

‘ – not only do you have to settle for someone’s reject,’ Stephen barrelled on, ‘but you can’t even get yourself a real Were, gotta settle for some mutated freak – ’

And Jensen snapped.

In a second he’d whirled back, lunged for Stephen.

‘Don’t you fucking dare talk about him like that!’ he roared.

He slammed into Stephen, sending them both sprawling onto the ground.

‘Jensen!’ Jared cried.

Jensen reared back, arm thrown back, to deliver a punch to Stephen’s face, but the other alpha was quicker, grabbing the arm, halting the punch, rearing up and head-buttin Jensen in the nose. Jensen half fell back, and then Stephen was grabbing, hauling, shoving, and Jensen slammed into the shelves of booze, which teetered, tottered and went over, crashing to the floor, taking the alpha with it, a cacophony of broken bottles and glass.

‘Jensen!’ Jared leapt forward, tried to grab Stephen by the back of his shirt.

The alpha swung around, delivered a blow that sent Jared reeling, tumbling to land with an grunt on his back. Jensen gave a terrific snarl, lurched up from the ground and in a split second, a tearing of clothes, snapping of bones, he was gone – shifted and there was a wolf, sleek, white and speckled with brown flecks, snarling and snapping, lunging for Stephen.

Oh shit, Jared had time to think, before Stephen hit the ground in a blur of jaws, Jensen latching onto his arm, biting, tearing.

Stephen howled, clothes tore and there was a black wolf where Stephen had been, twisting and
lunging, snagging Jensen’s ear in his teeth, biting and tearing. The other Were in the shop were bolting, the cashier was yelling down the phone and Jared scrambled to his feet, trying to think of something to do, anything.

The two wolves lunged and tore, a flurry of fur, fangs and claws, snarling and snapping jaws. Jensen caught Stephen by the side of his neck, dragged the other alpha to the ground, pinning him, snarling, Stephen struggling, claws skittering and –

‘THAT IS ENOUGH!’

The voice was like a thunderous roar through the shop, the alpha inflection enough to have even Jared flinching, quailing. The two shifted wolves froze, and in a few short strides JD was upon them, one of the local policemen, a Were named Matt, striding grimly alongside him. JD reached down and in one swift movement he had grabbed Jensen by the scruff of his neck, hauled him off Stephen and dropped him unceremoniously to one side.

‘I will not tolerate fighting in my town,’ JD thundered, face dark with rage. ‘Now both of you will change back – now.’

Within moments, the white wolf was gone and Jensen was there, panting a little, blood down the side of his face, chest and arm littered with bites and cuts. Jared made a choked off noise when he saw the wounds, taking half a step forward. Jensen caught the movement and gave him a reassuring, cocky smile, tried to communicate wordlessly that he was ok.

‘You too, Stephen’ JD growled.

Wolf-Stephen growled low, before slowly changing back. Blood coated the side of his neck, his chest heaving, eyes glowering pure hatred at Jensen.

‘Right,’ JD took a breath. ‘Right, Matt – if you would please cuff Mr Ackles,’ he said, pulling his own cuffs from his belt.

‘JD – ’ Jared protested.

‘Both of you will be spending the night in jail’ JD snapped, hauling Stephen to his feet, turning the alpha roughly around and clipping the handcuffs on.

‘JD! It wasn’t – Jensen – Stephen provoked him!’ Jared objected. ‘It wasn’t Jensen’s fault!’

‘I will not tolerate fighting, Jared,’ JD said firmly. ‘Regardless of the circumstances. No exceptions.’

Jared deflated, shoulders slumping, and he turned to Jensen, whose arms were now being cuffed behind his back. Jensen gave him a crooked smile.

‘Picnic tomorrow maybe?’ he joked weakly.

And Jared swallowed, looking at the alpha, bleeding, cut, naked, bruised, soaked in the remnant of broken wine bottles – because of him. No. Not because of him, for him. Defending him. Because - because he was - because they were -

And, in two swift strides, Jared marched straight up to Jensen, reached for his face and pulled him up into a kiss.

The instant their lips touched it was electrifying, tingles swooping along Jared’s skin, down his spine, all through his body. Jensen tasted like sweat, blood, alcohol and – and Jensen. And then Jensen’s
tongue swept along his bottom lip and Jared’s mouth was parting instantly, willingly, surrendering to the alpha, melting into the feel, the taste. Jensen kissed softly, sweetly and Jared moved closer, pressed closer, tried to deepen the kiss, suddenly hungry, desperate for more, to be closer, to be devoured, to –

‘Ahem’ JD cleared his throat awkwardly.

Jared broke the kiss, coming back to himself, dizzy, light-headed and flushed. Jensen was grinning, all cocky and glowing green eyes, Jared’s fingers tight in his hair and – Jared’s eyes dropped without him thinking – apparently quite interested in what had just happened.

‘Uh – ’ a hot wave of embarrassment swept over Jared and he dropped his hands, face bright red. ‘I’ll just – I – ’

JD looked vaguely amused, Stephen looked disgusted and Matt, hovering behind Jensen was very pointedly looking everywhere else but them.

‘See you tomorrow, then, sweetheart?’ Jensen said softly.

Jared met his eyes, smiled. ‘Yeah – I- yeah.’

‘Good’ Jensen smiled, then leant forward, capturing Jared’s lip in one last, soft kiss, before Matt was sighing, theatrically, good-naturedly, and tugging him away.

Jensen tipped Jared one last wink, before he turned and followed the police officer.

And Jared stood, trembling all over, watching him go, lips tingling and every one of his senses alive, electrified.

Chapter End Notes

P.S. Sorry if the chapter count keeps changing - I promise the story is entirely planned out and mostly written, I just keep changing my mind on where I’m going to end chapters! So just bear with me with regards to that... sorry!
Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

So sorry this took so long! Blame my university for giving me far too many readings these past two weeks!

Anyway - once again, thank you all so much for the comments and kudos – honestly they make my day! :)
(Although I apologize for my cringe-y attempts to reply to them *hides face*I reread over my responses and I’m like, “way to be socially inept!” I’m basically an awkward turtle, so apologies for that. But I honestly do love and appreciate every one of them! <3)

Also, fair warning. Things get a bit schmoopy in this chapter. I have no idea what came over me. Rest assured I'll be returning to angst in the next chapter :P

Jensen sat on the low bunk in the holding cell, back to the wall, legs outstretched, shifting a little in the uncomfortable loaned sweat pants and shirt that JD had given him at the jail. The clothes smelt faintly musty, and Jensen was fairly sure there were remnants of mould clinging to them, indicating they’d probably been sitting in a damp closet somewhere for quite some time, but hey, it was better than sitting stark naked in a jail cell, he supposed.

He was aching little, experiencing twinges of pain from the fight. They’d patched him up during processing, and the bites were superficial, irritations at best, so it wasn’t unbearable. After all, alphas on a whole were built to heal faster, quicker than others, and hold high pain thresholds.

‘I’ll tell you what,’ JD had commented, after Jensen had settled into his cell, the older alpha leaning against the bars, watching him carefully, ‘think you got him better than he got you.’

Jensen couldn’t help himself grinning. ‘Glad to hear it.’

‘Hmm…’ JD had hummed.

Jensen had squirmed a little under the scrutiny.

‘So… you and Jared, huh?’ JD had said.

His question had been casual, face neutral, but Jensen had heard the undercurrent of threat, seen the intensity in his eyes. He’d remembered other Weres mentioning that JD had taken Jared in like a son after the death of his family, recalled them saying he was fiercely protective of the omega.

The truth, Jensen had decided, was the best way to go.

‘I hope so,’ he’d answered. ‘I…’ he paused, straightened up, ‘he’s my true mate.’

Then he’d added, respectfully, for good measure, ‘sir.’

JD’s eyebrows had risen. ‘That’s a big call to make, son. You sure about that?’
'I wouldn’t be saying it if I wasn’t sure, sir.’

JD had gazed at him in silence for a moment, face inscrutable.

Then he’d slowly nodded, and without another word, turned and left.

Jensen wasn’t sure whether it was a good thing or whether he’d basically just guaranteed he’d never leave this cell to see Jared ever again.

Misha had shown up, a little while later, stood in front of the cell, told him he was an idiot, and then left.

Jensen wasn’t entirely sure it was a better visit than JD’s.

Amell, he was thankful to hear from Matt, was in a cell elsewhere, very much not nearby, and Jensen thought it was probably a smart move for JD to keep them separated. There was still a low thrum of rage prickling under his skin, his fingers twitching with the desire to hit and to hurt the other alpha. It wasn’t just the cruel words he’d thrown in the liquor store, but the lingering memory of what Amell had done – had tried to do – to Jared, that fuelled Jensen’s hatred, his desire for revenge.

He took a breath, shifting on the bed, and calmed himself. No point in getting worked up. Least of all if the alpha in question wasn’t even there for him to vent this frustration on.

It was… boring. Being stuck in the cell. Especially when, and he closed his eyes in frustration, especially when he could be with Jared. Having a picnic. Getting to know the omega even more. And…

And that kiss.

Holy Christ, that kiss.

Eyes still closed, Jensen let a smile curve onto his lips. Even thinking about it sent shivers down the alpha’s spine, made heat pool low in his stomach. Jared had kissed him. He had kissed him. As in initiated the kiss.

Talk about a step in the right direction.

But now.

Now he was stuck in some stupid goddamn cell because of stupid goddamn Amell, when he could be with Jared, could be with his omega, his mate, could be having more of those kisses, could be inhaling that sweet, cinnamon scent – he could almost smell it right there, he could –

He could actually smell it.

Jensen’s eyes snapped open.

There was the sound of footsteps, the waft of the scent, and Jensen half scrambled to the edge of the bed as Jared appeared out the front of the cell.

‘Jared!’ Jensen couldn’t stop the goofy smile splitting his features. ‘Hey! You didn’t – you didn’t have to come down – ’

There was a clinking of metal and Jared smirked back as he lifted something and inserted it into the lock.
‘Kinda hard to let you out if I didn’t come down, don’t you think?’ he teased.


There was a click and the door swung in, Jared pocketing the keys again and smiling at Jensen. Jensen thought of JD, of the stern gaze and hesitated.

‘Jay, you – JD said – you shouldn’t – ’

‘I talked to JD, Jensen,’ Jared interrupted, and rubbed at his forehead. ‘Perks of being the alpha’s surrogate son I guess, managing to get him to listen to me. Anyway, I…’ he sighed a little, ‘I told him. About Stephen. The date,’ he pulled a face, ‘and he… he was not too pleased to say the least.’

He gave a little nervous chuckle, leaning against the bars.

‘It was actually almost… well. I thought he was just about ready to tear Stephen apart to be honest. Anyway. I convinced him it wasn’t worth it but… let’s just say I’m pretty sure Stephen will be spending more than just one night here. And… and well, JD was less inclined to keep you here after he heard everything. As a matter of fact, I think he wanted to come and high-five you or something.’

He gave a little laugh, then shifted. He shrugged, gestured.

‘Which, ah, brings me to… this. Um. You’re free to go, basically.’

Jensen rose and stepped towards the omega.

‘Jay,’ he said softly, ‘you didn’t have to… I mean, it would've been just one night…’

Jared hesitated a moment. ‘Well – I. Well, I mean, firstly, he – Stephen – I needed to tell JD anyway… and. And. It wasn’t your fault. He provoked you and…’ Jared lifted his chin. ‘And you were defending me. I… I should thank you for that. Thank you. You didn’t have to, but thank you.’

‘Doesn’t matter if I didn’t have to,’ Jensen smiled, ‘I wanted to. Always got your back, Jay.’

A blush crept into Jared’s cheeks and he coughed, cleared his throat and looked away.

‘Also. Um. I was thinking… was wondering. We had plans. I know – I mean it’s night now – so a picnic is out of the question. But, Misha – he dropped the food at mine if – if you wanted to come round? Gen’s at Felicia’s so… you know. It’d… it’d just be us. We can… talk. We can talk.’

Jared swallowed hard, face bright red by the time he’d managed to get his stuttered invitation out. Jensen smiled, stepped forward even closer and slid a hand to the omega’s slim waist.

‘That sounds great, Jay’ he said softly.

They were close – so close, and Jared, Jensen could smell the omega, his mate – the scent – so good – and the memory of the kiss still lingered – and Jensen half tilted his head, moved to kiss the omega again, and for a second Jared wavered towards him, their lips brushed, tiny sparks tingled at the touch – and then Jared sucked in a breath and ducked out of his grip.

‘Ah, ok – ok,’ the omega stuttered out. ‘That’s – ok. I’ve – my car’s outside, if you just – if you wanna follow me.’

Then he turned and darted down the hallway, leaving a thoroughly confused – and more than a little disconcerted – Jensen staring with lips still parted, hand still hovering.
Uh oh, Jensen thought, and his stomach clenched.

**

The nervousness Jared displayed on the drive to his place would have been adorable if Jensen hadn’t been so worried, so tangled in his own nerves at the omega’s apparent rejection at his attempt to kiss him at the jail.

He… he hadn’t imagined Jared kissing him before Matt had dragged him away, had he? Hadsn’t been hit so hard on the head by Stephen that he’d started hallucinating?

No. There was no way he could’ve possibly imagined the flood of heat, the electrifying tingles, the sheer want that he’d felt at the first taste of his mate, his omega. And… and surely, blocked inner wolf or not, surely Jared had felt that too? Surely now he could no longer deny what was between them? And if he had felt it too, if he had been equally as affected… why had he then deflected Jensen’s attempt to kiss him again? And why, why was Jared vibrating with so much skittish nerves the seat of his car was practically shaking?

Jensen swallowed with a little difficulty. Looked out the window. He wasn’t used to… any of this. This short amount of time with Jared had thrown him off kilter – he was used to being confident, to knowing what to do, what to say, how to act. Jared… Jared just threw all of that off. Jensen found himself constantly questioning himself, second-guessing, unsure and awkward. Feeling like he never quite had his feet on steady ground.

That’s what it feels like when you finally have something to lose, Misha probably would have told him smugly.

His alpha friend always was too damn wise for his own good.

That kiss though – that kiss, Jensen had finally felt like yes, yes he and Jared were on the same page, that everything was settling into place, as it should for true mates, as it normally did for other Weres.

And now.

Now he was feeling more lost than ever.

They parked at Jared’s in silence and Jared let them both inside. He wafted a hand towards the living room.

‘The, uh, the longue is through there – if you wanted to sit?’ the omega said awkwardly. ‘I can – I can get us both a drink?’

Jensen nodded. ‘A drink would be great’ he answered.

Preferably alcoholic, his brain chimed in.

He settled on the couch to wait for the omega, plucked a little at the uncomfortably sweat pants, the itchy fabric. Jared emerged shortly after, two glasses of red wine (alcohol thank god, Jensen thought gratefully) in his hands. He carefully set them on the table and Jensen’s had barely settled there
before he grabbed it and took a gulp.

Jared arched an eyebrow. ‘Thirsty?’ he chuckled.

Jensen opened his mouth, shut it, then sighed. ‘More like nervous’ he admitted truthfully.

Jared seemed a little startled by his honesty. ‘I – oh.’

Jensen shrugged. ‘It’s – well I’m starting to think nervous is just my default setting around you to be honest.’

Jared ducked his head, looked away. ‘I’m sorry’ he said softly.

Jensen sighed. ‘I don’t – I’m not trying to make you feel I…’ he stopped, rubbed at his face. ‘God, I just – ’

‘No, I get it,’ Jared’s voice was still quiet. ‘And I… I’m sorry. I am. That it’s… it’s so hard. I can see – I can tell, it’s hard. Everything,’ there was a bitter edge to his voice, ‘everything is always hard with me.’

Jensen put his glass down, reached to lightly touch Jared’s arm. ‘It… but it doesn’t have to be hard, Jay,’ he said, and an edge of his frustration leaked through. ‘I just… maybe you’re just making it hard?’

Jared opened his mouth, but Jensen wasn’t finished.

‘You kissed me,’ he said. ‘You kissed me at the liquor store. And then you pulled away, just before. That’s making things hard. Why? Did you… did you mean to kiss me at the liquor store? Did you want to? What… I mean… Was it…’

A little feeling trickled into Jensen’s stomach, made him uncomfortable. It was… insecurity.

That was a new one for the books. He was feeling insecure.

‘I mean… did you kiss me… was it… was it because of Amell being there or…?’

‘What?’ Jared’s head shot up. ‘God, no! Jensen, no. I wasn’t – I wouldn’t use you for some sort of petty revenge – god no. I – ‘ he swallowed, turned to face the alpha. ‘I kissed you because I wanted to. I kissed you because I’ve wanted to kiss you probably… probably since the first moment you came into my shop demanding dinner and spouting stuff about mates. Or maybe…’ he hesitated. ‘Maybe since I was in a bar and for the first time since I was six years old I… I’m pretty sure I scented someone. Or something.’

Jensen sucked in a breath. ‘You…’

‘I know what we are, Jensen, I do – the true m… I just. I know, and I believe you – ’

‘Then why -?’ Jensen couldn’t stop himself starting to ask, reaching out, grabbing Jared’s hands eagerly, tightly.

‘Because – because – because it’s not fair!’ Jared’s voice cracked, broke, his eyes blinking rapidly, furiously. ‘It’s not fair.’

Jensen was bewildered. ‘It’s – what’s not fair? I don’t – do you not want – ’

‘No, no, not me – it’s not fair for you!’ Jared cried. ‘It’s not – it’s… this… this mate thing. It’s your
biology, screwing you over – saddling you with… with me. And it’s not fair to you.’

Jensen felt his heart break, just a little, inside his chest, and he wanted to drag Jared to his chest, wanted to hold the omega tight. But he kept perfectly still, gazed at Jared intently.

‘What – why do you say saddled? How is it not fair to me, Jared?’ he asked quietly.

Jared pulled his hands free. ‘How – how? I mean – ’ he waved a hand wildly. ‘Look at me, Jensen! And I can’t – I’m not a real Were. I can’t shift – I can’t scent – ’

‘I already told you – ’ Jensen started patiently.

‘And I can’t have pups!’ Jared burst out, and his body deflated, head and shoulder’s dropping, hands falling to his lap. ‘I can’t even give you pups – what sort of omega can’t give someone pups? There’s nothing… there’s nothing I can even offer you.’

And Jensen started to understand a little, more than he had before. Everything building to form a picture – everything from Mia’s little whispers, Amell’s belittlement, a lifetime of having that, a lifetime of these insecurities being drilled into Jared’s brain. And maybe he got what Misha was trying to say – had being trying to explain – about Jared being cautious, being scared. Not of Jensen, but of his own emotions, his own vulnerability. Opening up to someone after a lifetime of being told he wasn’t good enough to ever deserve having that.

‘You know,’ Jensen started carefully, thinking each word thoroughly before he spoke, ‘you know Rich and Rob are mates?’

Jared looked up, eyes wet, blinking through tears, and pulled a face, confused. ‘I don’t – of course – what has that got to do with anything, Jensen? Did you even hear what I said?’

‘They’re true mates,’ Jensen carried on, like Jared hadn’t spoken. ‘And the both of them are betas. And male.’

He locked eyes with Jared’s, holding his gaze steady. ‘Two beta males, true mates. Which, if you don’t know, means that neither of them can give the other pups. Funny, how it didn’t stop them being together.’

Jared opened his mouth, throat working silently.

‘There are female humans out there too, who can’t have children, for some reason or another,’ Jensen continued. ‘And they still get married, find love. Funny, how you say that you don’t to be with someone just because you can’t give them pups.’

‘Alphas…’ Jared started, voice a little weak, ‘all alphas, they all want – ’

‘Well, that’s a little stereotypical of you to say, isn’t it, Jay?’ Jensen pursed his lips, arched an eyebrow. ‘For someone who doesn’t fit the omega mould himself, I wouldn’t have thought you’d buy into the stereotype that all alphas need to breed pups. And anyway – anyway, if I - no, we wanted pups, if we wanted kids, there are other ways. So many other options available.’

‘I…’ Jared blinked, looked a little lost. ‘But… it’s more than that too… I… the shifting and…’

‘You ask me what you can offer me as a mate, Jared?’ Jensen’s voice was firm, strong.

Jared blinked, watery, didn’t say anything. Jensen reached out, gently thumbed a tear from under Jared’s one good eye, then cupped his cheek.
‘You,’ he said softly, and smiled. ‘You. Just you. That’s all I want. I just want you, all of you, Jared. I do. It’s not just biology, or whatever you think it is. It’s you and me. True mates. I just want you, Jared.’

Jared sucked in a deep, shuddering breath, leant into Jensen’s hand.

‘I want you too’ he whispered.

‘Good,’ Jensen nodded. ‘Good. Because I... I’m going to kiss you now. Ok?’

A smile curved on Jared’s lips. ‘I’d like that’ he murmured.

Jensen moved forward, still cupping Jared’s face, angled his head and started the kiss slow, deep, the omega’s lips parting willingly, eagerly, his tongue mapping Jared’s mouth. It didn’t take long for it to get deeper, hungrier and Jensen eased Jared back against the couch, lowered his weight atop of the omega, one hand buried in Jared’s hair, tangled in the curls. He felt the omega’s hand clutching at his side, at his back, fingers digging in. The kiss deepened and Jensen felt himself start to harden, felt Jared’s own length again his hip. The scent of Jared grew heavier, thicker, sweeter in the air, tainted with his arousal. He could feel his hips start to grind, to push against Jared’s, felt his answering movements against him.

He broke the kiss, mouthed along Jared’s jaw, to his neck, biting, sucking heard the omega moan, arch into the touch. He slid one hand down Jared’s side, slid under the omega, clutched at the small of his back, fingers slipping beneath the waistband of his jeans, skimming the top of his briefs. Jared’s breath stuttered, hitched.

‘Jen – ’

He felt the omega’s hand move, slide between then, clutch at his chest, then lower, skimming over the bulge of his crotch, pressing down. Jensen groaned into the crook of Jared’s neck, ground into the palm of his hand.

‘Fucking hell – ’ he rasped out.

Jared’s hips shifted, raised, and Jensen slid his hand lower, palmed his ass, felt the wetness, the slick of the omega’s natural lubrication, and the feel of it soaking through the back of Jared’s briefs, the intoxicating scent – his cock twitched, he pushed harder into Jared’s hand, felt the blurt of pre-come in his briefs.

‘Jared – ’

He moved, caught Jared’s lips again in a kiss, fucking his tongue into the omega’s mouth, sliding his fingers, pressing at the omega’s hole though the briefs, at the same time pressing them closing, pushing their hips together.

‘Jen – ‘ Jared broke the kiss, pulled his hand back from Jensen’s crotch. ‘Jen – stop – ’

And Jensen came back to himself abruptly, yanked his hand from Jared’s jeans quickly, tried to pull back.

‘Oh fuck – yeah – I – sorry, carried away – shit, Jay – ’ he rambled, still heady, drunk from the scent of Jared’s arousal, from his own.

‘Jensen – stop – wait -stop,’ Jared clutched at his shoulders, halting his movement. ‘I just – no, I just… thought maybe we should take this elsewhere. Not the couch. Like. Uh. You know,’ the
omega’s cheeks, already flushed with arousal, reddened further and he ducked his head a little shyly, ‘you know. My bedroom.’

There was nothing – nothing – Jensen wanted more than that. Nothing. He made a choked-off noise at the suggestion, paused to take a breath.

‘We don’t – ’ he huffed a laugh, a little strained. ‘I don’t think it’s a good idea.’

Jared recoiled back a little. ‘I – you don’t want – ’

Jensen instantly reached to grab his arms. ‘No – no, Christ – Jared. God no. Me not wanting is not the issue. It’s more me wanting too much,’ he swallowed. ‘We – I – you know, if we take this into the bedroom. I just… you smell so fucking good. You have no idea – Christ. It’s fucking with me, Jay. And with the mates thing – the pull. It’s intense, is all. I just – ’

‘I want it’ Jared interrupted.

Jensen stopped, mouth open. ‘I – you what? I don’t – ’

‘Jensen,’ there was a hint of impatience in Jared’s tone, ‘I’m twenty four. I’m not a teenage girl on prom night. I want – I want you to knot me.’

Jensen’s breath stuttered, hitched and his cock twitched in his jeans. ‘I – ’

Jared shifted leaned up a little, moved to brush his lips across Jensen’s lips as he spoke. ‘Don’t you want that?’ his voice was a husky whisper.

Christ, his omega was trying to seduce him, Jensen realised. And fuck if it wasn't the hottest thing. He instantly caught Jared’s lips in a kiss, reached up and grabbed the back of the omega's head roughly, tilting it to kiss deep, hungry. He broke the kiss, satisfied to see Jared panting a little, eyes blown.

‘Fuck yes I do sweetheart’ he growled.

‘Bedroom’ Jared’s voice was breathless.

It was a hurried and entirely undignified stumble for the two of them to Jared’s bedroom. The instant Jared shut the door behind them, Jensen was slamming the omega against the wood of the door, kissing hard, tongue pushing insistently into his mouth. Jared moaned into the kiss and Jensen pushed his knee between the omega’s legs, pushed roughly, hard against him. Felt Jared’s hips start to move, hump and grind at his leg, felt the slick of his natural lubrication start to seep through the back of the jeans. Jensen broke the kiss, pulled back, grabbed at Jared's shirt and yanked it roughly off, then grabbed at his jeans, unbuttoning them quickly and swiftly, pulling both the jeans and boxers off. As Jared moved, stumbling a little, to step out of his jeans, he jerked his head at Jensen.

‘You – you too – ’

Jensen had never undressed so quickly in his life. By the time he’d finished, Jared was naked, perched a little awkwardly, a little self-consciously on the edge of the bed, body flushed, cock hard against his stomach. He looked a little nervous, shifting, as if wanting to hide and – well – Jensen couldn’t have that. He strode to the omega, gently pushed him back flat on the bed, crawled up his length and resumed their kissing. The feel of the omega’s long, lean form naked, hot beneath Jensen was incredible, overwhelming, and he couldn’t stop himself rolling his hips, feeling his cock slide against the omegas. Jared gave a moan.
‘Fuck – Jensen –’

Jensen slid a hand between them, wrapped his hand around both their lengths, using the pre-come oozing to lubricate the slide as he moved his hand up and down. Jared gave a little choked out noise, hips thrusting, back arching off the bed. Jensen was torn between looking at their cocks sliding together or watching the omega’s flushed face, arched neck, blown pupils.

‘Fuck you look so fucking hot,’ he panted. ‘So fucking hot – ’

He quickened the slide of his hand, and Jared grabbed out, dragged him down for a kiss, pushing his tongue insistently into his mouth. His hand joined Jensen’s, enveloped his, squeezed, tightened the grip, moved faster. Jensen could feel the heat, hot and thick, coiling in his gut, felt the tingle of his knot and broke the kiss.

‘Sweetheart we gotta slow this down or I’ll come before I’m even inside you.’

Jared head shook for side to side even as he mouthed at Jensen’s neck, kissed and bit at the flesh. ‘No, no – want you in me – wan’ you to knot me’ he muttered against the skin.

Jensen drew in a shuddering breath, managed to disentangle his grip from Jared’s and pull back.

‘Ok – ok – need you – need you to turn over’ he managed to get out.

Jared rolled over almost automatically and Jensen groaned aloud at the obedience of his omega, felt the alpha within him flare. His eyes roved the length of Jared’s back, the smooth skin, watched the little thrusts Jared made against the sheets for relief, snagged on the shine of the natural slick across his cheeks, down the backs of his thighs.

‘Fuccckkkkkk’ the word drew out his mouth in a ragged moan.

He wanted to delve his head, to lick and taste Jared, to tease and to draw every moan, every gasp – but he was on the edge already, the scent, the desire to take his mate, the heady need to be inside his mate, to be with his mate that had been almost consuming him since the moment he scented Jared. He stroked at Jared’s ass, palmed the cheeks, revelled in the noise it drew from Jared, then parted them, heard himself swallow audibly, breathing harshly at the sight of the omega’s hole, already oozing slick. He had wondered at that – if the effects of what had happened to Jared altered his body in… in well this way as well, but it appeared it was one part that was unaffected.

His first finger went in smoothly, no resistance, the wet, hot heat clutching at his finger, a loud drawn out moan escaping Jared, the omega’s hips twitching, torn between pushing back, or against the sheets. Jensen made short work out of sliding in his other fingers, two, then three, scissoring and stretching, the preparation not taking as long due to Jared’s omega nature.

‘Jen – Jen – I’m ready – ‘m good’ Jared’s voice was wrecked, a drawn out begging.

Jensen swallowed, throat dry, bobbed his head, pulled his fingers free. He couldn’t resist, couldn’t help himself putting them to his mouth, tongue flicking out, tasting Jared, lapping at the slick of him.

‘Taste so good, sweetheart – so fucking – ’

He used the last of the slick on his fingers to lube up his cock. Jared slid up a little, to his knees, on all fours, and the sight – the sight almost did Jensen in on the spot, but he caught himself, grasped for control. Then he was lining up at Jared’s entrance and pushing, slowly, gradually, and – fuck- Jared was so tight, so hot, the best fucking thing Jensen had ever felt –
‘Feel so good – feel so fucking good – ’ his words were stuttered, groaned.

Then he was bottoming out, pressed against Jared and his breath coming out in harsh, heavy gasps. He took a moment – for him, for Jared, before Jared was rolling his hips, moving back against him and Jensen gave a groan at it.


Jensen needed no second urging, pulled back, sliding a little out of Jared, before pushing back in, once, twice – then Jared was pushing back faster, and his alpha was clawing to get to the surface – to take control. And Jensen start to fuck in earnest, harder, faster, was rewarded in Jared’s stuttering loud moans, the slap of flesh, squelch of slick. Jensen reached around, pulled Jared up as he sat back on his haunches, pulling the omega’s back against his chest, went impossibly deeper at the angle, was rewarded when Jared cried out at the sensation. He fucked up into Jared, the omega helping, their flesh sliding together, sweat pooling between them.


He could feel his knot started to swell, catch on Jared’s rim. Couldn’t control the release building in him. Felt it coiling hot, thick in his stomach, balls drawing tight. He reached around, grasped at Jared’s hard cock and started to jack him hard and fast.

‘C’mon – come for me sweetheart, come for me – ’

It didn’t take long, a few more strokes and Jared was arching, coming with a cry, and Jensen fucked up harder, faster, felt his knot swell, felt it catch, stop and then a loud, long drawn out moan was spilling from his lips as his release rushed through him, his orgasm hitting him, making him momentarily see white. He felt Jared fall forward and couldn’t stop himself collapsing atop the omega, feeling his come spurt inside the omega waves, continuous, little pulses of pleasure still rippling up his spine.

‘Fuck…’ he couldn’t stop his hips twitching, hitching a few more times, chasing the last little bursts.

For a minute they lay there, Jared a sprawled, panting heap beneath him, Jensen’s face buried in the back of Jared’s neck. The omega finally shifted.

‘Jen’ he said. ‘Heavy.’

Jensen lifted his head. ‘Shit – sorry – sorry.’

He carefully manoeuvred them, knot still inflated, joining them together, rolling himself to one side, tugging Jared, and spooned around his omega, Jared’s back still against his chest. He looped his arms around the omega, rested his head in the crook of Jared’s neck and breathed in the heady scent of Jared, of mate, of love.

‘How long…’ Jared asked.

‘Bout twenty minutes, maybe’ Jensen murmured.

He nuzzled into Jared’s neck. ‘You ok?’ he asked softly.

Jared hummed, shifted a little and angled his head so he could gently brush his lips across Jensen’s forehead.

‘M good. Better than good.’
Jensen pulled back so he could catch the omega’s eye, could see the sincerity, the happiness and contentment shining from the one hazel orb.

‘My mate’ he said, felt love and happiness bloom in his chest. ‘My mate.’

Jared laughed softly and Jensen nuzzled back into him. They lay for a moment, and Jensen revelled in it, before Jared spoke again.

‘Not yet though,’ he said.

‘Mmm?’ Jensen blinked.

‘The mate thing…’ Jared elaborated. ‘You didn’t… I was expecting you too… you didn’t claim me.’

Jensen was silent a moment, formulating his response carefully, wanted to make sure Jared understood his words. ‘Because,’ he started slowly, ‘because you only asked me to knot you. I want to claim you – god, of course I do Jared. But I want you to ask me to. I want you to want it too. This… mate’s thing… I know it’s been… weirder for you.’

‘Because I’m not a rea – ’ Jared started, a little frustration in his voice.

‘Nu-uh,’ Jensen pinched his side, halting his words. ‘No being negative. Not in our sex bed. Not allowed.’

Jared gave a bark of laughter. ‘Sex bed?’

Jensen grinned. ‘What? You don’t like it?’

Jared shook his head, laughing. ‘You really are such a dork.’

He was silent a moment, then turned his head, kissing Jensen softly.

‘Thank you,’ he said. ‘For not… just taking. Thank you. I do… I do want to be your mate, be claimed, I just…’

He stopped, hesitated and Jensen smiled, kindly, fondly, and kissed the tip of Jared’s nose.

‘I get it, don’t worry’ he said.

And he did – even if his inner alpha had screamed to bite, to claim Jared as he’d come, even as his alpha wanted so much to have Jared in every way, to have the world see his mark on the omega, have the world know that Jared was his. That’s how it would’ve happened, for most true mates, the omega claimed during the first knotting. But they weren’t ”most true mates.”

And Jensen… Jensen was ok with that.

He held his omega, felt the rhythmic rise and fall of Jared’s chest, breathed the scent of his mate, and knew he was ok with everything. Because Jared was, would always be, worth it.

‘Love you’ he murmured softly.

Jared’s breath stopped a moment, stuttered. Then there was a long exhale and Jared relaxed fully, completely against his form.

‘Love you too’ the omega whispered back.
The next morning Jensen woke slowly, gradually, feeling sleep-warm and heavy, blissed out and contented in a way that he hadn’t felt in a long time. Every inch of his body was relaxed, sated, comfortable. There was a long line of heat at his side, and he opened his eyes slowly, blinking a bit, before rolling his head to peer at the figure curled up alongside him. The tanned flesh, lean muscles, soft dark curls, sleep-lax face, slightly parted lips, hell even the tiny bit of drool pooling on the pillow – the entire sight made an extremely goofy smile curl up on Jensen’s face.

He was really glad there was no one around to witness it.

He stretched out on the bed, contemplating rolling back over and cuddling up to the omega and attempting to get a few more hours of shut-eye, but, it had been a long… strenuous night (a little smirk crossed his face at the memory) and there was a terrible thirst clawing at his throat. He rolled from the bed carefully, not wanting to disturb Jared, grabbed his boxers from the floor and tugged them on, then padded to the door, slipping out from the room.

He trotted into the kitchen – and promptly started, jumping a little at the sight of Gen and Misha sitting at the kitchen table, both of them sipping on coffees.

‘Uh – ’ Jensen blinked. ‘Hi – I didn’t – ’

‘Ssssh!’ Gen held up one hand, halting him.

‘Um’ Jensen opened his mouth.

‘I said, ssshhh!’ Gen overrode him.

Jensen closed his mouth, hovered awkwardly, thoroughly confused, watching as Gen tilted back the coffee, drained the whole mug in several deep pulls, and then put it back on the table with a satisfying smack of her lips.

‘Ok,’ she gave a sigh. ‘Ok, now you can talk.’

‘Gen doesn’t allow talking before coffee’ Misha explained.

‘Ah, I see’ Jensen said, when he really didn’t.

‘She hit me this morning when she let me in because I said good morning’ Misha continued.

‘I apologised for that’ Gen protested.

‘You grunted’ Misha countered.

‘An apology grunt,’ Gen maintained.

‘Ah, obviously’ Misha nodded.

Jensen slipped past them, heading for the sink for water. Misha inclined his coffee cup to the alpha.
‘It’s funny seeing you here, considering you’re supposed to be in jail,’ he commented, arching an eyebrow. ‘I went to see you there this morning and lo and behold, an empty cell.’

Jensen winced as he tugged a glass from the cupboard. ‘Oh, right. I… probably should have told you I wasn’t still there, huh?’

Misha pursed his lips. ‘I might have found it helpful.’

Jensen filled his glass and turned, sipping the water. ‘Sorry, Mish. Slipped my mind,’ he apologised. ‘It was – I mean I didn’t even really expect it. Jared got me off.’

‘I’ll bet he did’ Gen leered.

Jensen, mid swallow, spluttered a little. ‘Jesus, Gen, that’s not…’ he shook his head. ‘I. Anyway. I meant, Jared talked to JD. He got me released.’

‘Oh, I’m sure there was a release of some kind’ Gen snickered.

Jensen’s face flushed. ‘I – is this a morning thing? Is this what you’re like in the morning?’

‘Consider it payback’ Gen informed him.


‘Felicia cancelled on me last night’ Gen said.

‘So… shouldn’t… the payback be for Felicia?’ Jensen’s brow furrowed. ‘Why am I being paid back for Felicia cancelling?’

Gen squinted, levelled a stare at him. ‘Felicia cancelled on me last night,’ she repeated slowly. ‘So I was at home all night.’

Jensen was still confused. ‘So, I – ’

Then it clicked.

‘Oh.’

His face started to flush.

‘Oh.’

‘You were very loud’ Gen told him.

His face was bright red by now.

‘Oh.’

‘Very, very loud,’ Gen reiterated. ‘I had headphones in. Still loud. You guys might wanna work on that.’

Jensen’s mouth worked silently a moment. ‘Oh’ was all that came out again.

‘Jensen has always been very vocal’ Misha commented thoughtfully.

‘You speaking from experience?’ Gen arched an eyebrow.
'Not in the way that you’re thinking’ Misha gave a little shudder.

‘Try “the way I’m imagining”,’ Gen corrected, and her eyes went unfocused a moment. ‘Yeah. Yeah that’d be hot.’

‘Jesus Christ’ Jensen said faintly.

‘I’ve just had to be in adjoining rooms before,’ Misha explained. ‘Or, once, in the same room, banished to the couch. Very vocal.’

‘Jesus Christ’ Jensen groaned.

‘You got sexiled to a couch? That’s… like sorta kinky?’ Gen mused.

‘Mostly it was extremely awkward’ Misha replied.

‘I think I’m going to leave now’ Jensen said.

‘But you guys have never done the nasty?’ Gen clarified.

Jensen made for the door as fast as his feet would carry him.

‘I’ll be honest, I would probably rather swim in piranha infested waters’ Misha answered solemnly.

‘And what about you Jensen?’ Gen turned.

‘I can’t hear you’ Jensen called back, hurrying towards Jared’s room

‘If you’re going back to bed do we need to turn the TV on loudly?’ Gen shouted after him. ‘Whilst wearing noise cancelling headphones?’

‘Always remember to wear protection!’ Misha added in a yell.

Jensen ignored them, almost sprinted for Jared’s door and ducked inside, shutting it with a sharp click behind him. At the noise, Jared stirred a little on the bed, rolling slightly, eyelids fluttering.

‘Jen?’ he muttered.

Jensen took a moment to recoup from what felt like the two-pronged attack from Gen and Misha, gave himself a little shake, and then walked to the bed and slide in under the covers. Jared rolled instantly towards him and Jensen wriggled close, sliding a leg between his, looping an arm over the omega’s slim waist. Jared smiled sleepily up at him, then wrinkled his nose a little.

‘You ok?’ he said. ‘Your face is all red.’


‘Uh huh’ Jared squinted, crinkled his brow.

Jensen squeezed the omega with the hand cupped around his waist. ‘Seriously, it’s nothing. How’d you sleep? How…” he paused a little, ‘I mean… everything ok? You don’t hurt… or anything?’

Jared’s face flushed a little at the implication and he ducked his head, gave an awkward shrug. ‘No, no I… feel good, actually,’ he titled his head up, gave a shy smile. ‘Real good.’

Jensen moved to nuzzle into Jared’s cheek. ‘M glad’ he murmured into his skin, lips brushing across
the soft flesh.

He kissed softly, gently, then ducked to kiss Jared’s jaw, along the sharp lines, mouthing up to his earlobe, biting, rewarded with the hitch of the omega’s breath, the subtle shift of his hips into Jensen. Jensen smirked, kissed down, bit at Jared’s neck, felt the omega arch into him, the quickening breath and –

And then the booming sound of music reverberated through the house, the song loud, undeniable –

“This bed is on fire with passionate love, the neighbours complain about the noises above, but she only comes when she’s on top – ”

Jared half shoved Jensen off, sitting up, startled. ‘What the - ?’ he blurted, wide eyed.

And Jensen flopped back down, covered his eyes and groaned.

‘I’m going to kill Gen and Misha.’

**

A frowned marred Alan Ackles’s features as he read through the email on the computer screen. One finger tapped on the tabletop anxiously, his knee jiggling beneath the table. He could feel his shoulders rising in tension with each word he read, so when the coffee plunked down on the table next to him, he all but leapt from his chair.

JD startled a little, took a step back, lifted his hands, one clutching his own hands. ‘Easy, tiger’ he said, arching an eyebrow.

‘Sorry,’ Alan blew out a breath, deflated a little. ‘Sorry. I was just…’

He looked to the computer screen, ran a hand through his hair. ‘Reading an email…’ he finished, sitting back down. ‘Actually… I need to talk to you – ’

‘Great!’ JD interrupted cheerfully, pulling a chair up. ‘Need to talk to you too.’

Suddenly distracted from the email, Alan glanced at JD, a thought occurring to him, and he winced a little. ‘Is this… this about the fight last week? Jensen and the other alpha?’

‘Hmm?’ JD blinked a moment. ‘What? No. Oh no. No. Not about that.’

‘Because I talked to Jensen the other day,’ Alan rushed to say, ‘told him that kind of behaviour is unacceptable in this town. He was very s… well, I mean. Ok, he wasn’t actually sorry, or altogether apologetic, but –’

‘Alan,’ JD held up a hand. ‘Alan, honestly – that. That’s not what I wanted to talk about. To be perfectly straight with you… Jensen doesn’t really need to apologise for that. The other alpha he… he was a bad egg,’ JD’s expression darkened a moment, ‘a real bad egg.’

‘Oh?’ Alan arched an eyebrow.
‘But that’s… that’s something I’m going to deal with,’ JD said gruffly. ‘That I am dealing with. What I wanted to talk about – see, I’m not sure if you’ve noticed but you’re son seems to be… for lack of a better word, courting Jared Padalecki.’

‘Jared Pad… that’s the…oh… oh,’ Alan paused, gusted out a long breath and closed his eyes. ‘Only my son. God dammit Jensen. Of all the omegas. He chooses your adopted son. Figures. Figures.’

JD couldn’t help a smile twitching his lips. ‘I had a chat with him when he was in jail.’

‘Always good place to meet your adopted son’s admirer’ Alan said dryly.

JD huffed a laugh. ‘Well. I asked him about it and… he said Jared is his mate.’

Alan stopped midway reaching for his coffee. ‘Oh… oh. That’s… oh. Well,’ he sat back. ‘I mean, Jensen – he’s never been… he’s not got the best reputation, I’ll grant you that. But that – JD, he wouldn’t… he wouldn’t pull a line like that on someone. I swear. Not even him. So if he said it – if that’s what he said, he would have a reason to believe that was true. I swear.’

‘I know,’ JD said slowly. ‘I know. And even if it was a line, Jared would have been too smart to fall for it, trust me. And the thing is… Jared… Jared seems to feel the same way. Or at least feel something. So I… I’m pretty sure it’s not a line. It’s the real deal.’

Alan let out a low whistler, then rubbed his face. ‘Christ,’ he laughed, shook his head. ‘Christ, I mean, what are the odds? I know I bought the kid here thinking a change of scenery might calm him down, but I didn’t expect…’

‘Well… the true mates thing,’ JD gave a one-shouldered shrug. ‘I think sometimes Fate has a hand in dragging them together.’

He took a sip of his coffee. ‘And… I was thinking… you mentioned you wanted to bring Jensen in on this… this rogue alpha thing. I was thinking maybe we should. If for no other reason than because if he is Jared’s true mate then this… this is something he should know about, should be involved in. If this entire situation turns out to be the same alpha from years ago then… then it’s something that might effect Jared, if he finds out. And,’ JD shrugged, ‘and I know, with my mate, I like to know about everything that could possibly effect my mate even the tiniest bit.’

The email came back to Alan in a rush. ‘Funny you should mention the alpha situation’ he said, a sudden grim look on his face.

JD tensed. ‘You’ve heard something.’

Alan nodded. ‘Got an email from one of my Weres, Chris. He got wind of something.’

‘Not another attack?’ JD tightened his grip on his coffee cup.

‘Not exactly,’ Alan replied. ‘It was a brawl, in a pub. A group of alphas – about ten of them – all together. Started a fight with a few other patrons, it ended… well. It ended messy. Two betas in hospital, both critical. An alpha not in that group got his head bashed in – dead. And the group vanished before law enforcement could catch them. They tried to track the scent and came up with a dead end. Probably used some kind of masking technique because they knew the police would be after them.’

‘Brawls happen,’ JD said carefully, ‘what made Chris think it was related?’

‘Well, ten alphas in a group all together, for one,’ Alan pointed out. ‘All males too.’
JD still looked a little sceptical. ‘You’d get the same thing on a boy’s night out. Group of male alphas together. I mean, the fighting… well. You know. Some alphas are like that.’

‘Chris just said he had a feeling,’ Alan said, chewing his lip. ‘Said some of the witnesses talked about how something felt… off about the alphas. Like they were just there to fight. And… and well,’ he took a breath, ‘the other thing is, it wasn’t too far from here. Maybe two or three hours away. That was… that was mostly why Chris wanted to mention it. Group of ten alphas, near to your border. He thought you might want to know.’

JD was silent, staring at the table top.

‘If… if that alpha survived that night,’ Alan ventured, ‘he might’ve been able to identify what packs came after them. What if he knows it was your pack? What if he’s looking for a little payback? Surely it’s worth us investigating, looking into. It’s so close – too close, JD.’

JD tightened his jaw. ‘Ok,’ he said finally. ‘Ok, you’re right. That’s… you’re right. We should look into this.’

‘I’ll get Jensen to come by tomorrow, we’ll give him the run-down and work out our next move?’ Alan suggested.

JD nodded slowly. ‘Tell him to meet us at midday’ he said, getting to his feet.

He half turned, then stopped, sighed and turned back. ‘I’ll get some extra Weres to work the beat tonight, just… just in case.’

‘For what it’s worth, I hope it’s nothing to do with the rogue alphas’ Alan said.

‘Me too, Alan,’ JD sighed. ‘Me too.’

**

Jensen had been with a lot of Weres.

Ok, he backtracked, that sounded bad.

But it was true. Technically. He had been with a lot of Weres – betas, omegas, alphas, male, female. Jensen didn’t discriminate. He was attracted to who he was attracted to. So he’d had a lot of sex. Some good, some bad, some mediocre, some he couldn’t recall because tequila was the devil. But he could confidently, surely, one hundred percent say he’d never had a lover quite as responsive as Jared.

A damn if it wasn’t the hottest thing in the universe.

Every single touch, every caress, every brush of his lips, of his tongue, had the omega arching, moans spilling from his lips unbidden, face flushing, body writhing. It was incredible. Take that moment, for example. They were in Jensen’s hotel room, because Gen was home at Jared’s and neither of them wanted a repeat of the other day. Jared was laid out beneath him, and Jensen’s tongue flicked out, across Jared’s nipple, the tiny touch causing the omega’s breath to hitch, his back to arch a little into the touch. Jensen grinned cockily, lapped at the bud again, bit gently, used his other hand to roll the other nipple between two fingers. A moan escaped Jared’s lips, the omega
spread beneath Jensen, face flushed, eyes blown, hair a mess, cock hard and leaking against his stomach, his sweet scent amplified by arousal. Jensen moved up his chest, kissing, mouthing, biting, reaching Jared’s neck, latching on, biting, sucking lightly the place where his claim would go, where he’d claim Jared when the time came. His hand slid down, brushed past Jared’s cock, slipped lower to cup and fondle his balls.

‘Jen – ‘ Jared managed to get out. ‘God – ‘

Jensen released his neck, moved to capture Jared’s mouth in a kiss, deep, hungry, tongue fucking into the omega’s mouth as his hand moved to loosely curl around the omega’s shaft, starting a slow, barely there rhythm. The omega’s hips, twitched, thrust, tried to move his hand faster, one hand fisted in the sheets, the other came to clutch at the back of Jensen’s head, fingers digging into the short strands of his hair.

‘Jensen – please – ‘ Jared broke the kiss, gasped, hot and heavy into his mouth.

Jensen caught the omega’s lower lip between his teeth, bit gently, tightened his grip minutely on Jared's cock.

‘Please what’ he murmured as he released the lip.

Jared gave a little moan, hips pushing into his hand. ‘Please – ‘

Then there was a knock on the door.

Both of them jumped a little, startled, Jared blinking a bit blearily. His head rolled to the door. ‘What – ‘

Jensen shot the door a narrow-eyed glare. ‘Ignore it’ he said.

Then he turned his head and caught Jared’s lips in another kiss before the omega could protest, shifted so he was half atop him, released his cock to slid his hand around, slipping to palm at his ass promisingly, fingers moving between the cheeks –

There was another, louder knock at the door.

‘Son of a…’ Jensen broke the kiss.

‘Jensen’ Jared half panted.

‘I’m busy, go away!’ Jensen shouted at the door.

He slipped his fingers between Jared’s cheeks, let out a long, low groan at the slick there, the natural lubricant that oozed, felt his own hard cock twitch in response.

‘Jen – the door – ‘ Jared’s voice was strangled.

‘Ignore it’ Jensen heaved out, pushed one finger to Jared’s rim, slipping easily through the slick, sliding in, hot and tight.

‘Fuck – ‘ Jared moaned, eyes fluttering, body arching.

There was a loud, long, repeated knock on the door.

‘Fuck!’ Jensen cursed.
He slid his hand free, rolled to one side. ‘*For the love of –* coming! I’m coming god dammit!’

*Not in the way he wanted to be coming though,* he thought bitterly, angrily yanking on a pair of discarded boxers. They tented obscenely, but Jensen thought, *fuck it,* whoever it was could just deal with it. He pulled the door open roughly.

It was Misha.

Jensen’s jaw clenched. ‘I’m kind of busy right now, Mish’ Jensen ground out, well aware of his dishevelled appearance, hair in disarray, face flushed, bare chested, bulging boxers.

‘You left your phone in my room’ Misha said, lifting it.

Jensen stared. Opened his mouth. Closed it. Resisted the urge to scream.

‘You seriously continuously knocked on my door to tell me that?’

‘It kept going off – your dad is trying to get a hold of you’ Misha held it out.

‘Ok, *fine,* I’ll call him back later, thank you, goodbye’ Jensen grabbed the phone, stepped back and slammed the door in Misha’s face.

‘Jen? Everything ok?’ Jared called cautiously from the bed.

‘Fine, everything’s fine,’ Jensen clicked the phone to silent, tossed it to the ground and in two short strides he’d reached the bed, practically leaping back onto it. ‘Now, where were we…?’

He wasted no time in literally crawling atop Jared, capturing the omega in a rough kiss, sliding one hand back to where it had been before, sliding one finger in, no resistance.

‘Jesus – *fuck – ’ Jared groaned into the kiss.

Jensen ground his own hard cock against Jared’s hip, worked his finger in and out a few times before adding a second, harsh breath stuttering at the hot, wet grip.

‘So good – so fucking good – Jay – *Jared – ’

There was a knock on the door.

Jensen froze, sucked in a breath.

‘Wassat someone knocking again?’ Jared said groggily.

‘Ignore it’ Jensen said.

To punctuate the point he located that sensitive bundle of nerves, brushed his fingers over it and Jared cried out, body arching off the bed.

The knocked sounded again.

Jensen let out a groan of frustration. ‘*Seriously?*’

He rolled from the bed, scrambled to the door. He yanked it open.

‘What?’ he snarled furiously.

Misha stood on the other side. ‘Did you guys want to get dinner together tonight?’
For a second Jensen couldn’t speak. He stared.

‘I just thought I’d ask while I’m here’ Misha added.

Jensen stepped back, slammed the door shut and turned away.

‘Jen, is…’

‘It’s fine,’ Jensen strode back to the bed, clambered back on. ‘Now, back to – ’

There was a knock on the door. Jensen spun on his heel, marched back, yanked the door open.

‘I will kill you’ he said to Misha.

‘It’s rude to slam doors in people’s faces,’ Misha informed him.

‘Literally kill you’ Jensen said.

‘And it’s rude not to reply to an invitation’ Misha continued.

‘Dead – literally kill you dead.’

‘It’s a yes or no question,’ Misha carried on. ‘Did you want to get dinner tonight?’

‘I – ’ Jensen stopped, clenched his teeth. ‘No. No we do not.’

‘Ok,’ Misha bobbed his head, smiled. ‘Was that so hard?’

Jensen’s reply was to slam the door in his face.

Misha turned, headed down the hallway and waited an appropriate distance away from the door before he let himself burst into laughter.

It was the little moments of payback he lived for.

**

The room service they’d ordered was steadily cooling, half-eaten, sitting on the table when Jensen passed by on his way back from the bathroom. He paused to snag a fry from the plate, popping it into his mouth and chewing.

‘Ew, cold fries – really?’ Jared wrinkled his nose.

The omega was sprawled in the bed, back up against the headboard, sheets tangled around his waist, the television remote in one hand, half watching the television, half watching the alpha. It was after sunset now and Jensen had to chuckle at the fact that they hadn’t left the room the entire day, had ordered in food and spent the day, for the most part, in bed, watching the television or doing… other things.

He grinned to himself at the memory.

‘Nothin’ wrong with cold fries’ Jensen answered as he sauntered towards the bed.
‘Yeah, except everything’ Jared objected.

‘Note to self, my mate is a picky sonofabitch’ Jensen teased.

Jared rolled his eyes, then huffed a little laugh as he flicked through the channels. Jensen slid beneath the covers next to him.

‘What’s so funny?’ he asked.

Jared shrugged. ‘Nothing… just… you know. It’s funny. Being true mates, and the whole “forever” thing and… you know. We’ve only really known each other like two weeks.’

Jensen wriggled close, nuzzled at Jared’s neck. ‘Plenty of time to get to know each other more, Jay’ he said.

Jared turned his head a little to smile fondly. Jensen pulled back a little, reached to brush some of the tangled curls of Jared’s hair from his forehead.

‘Seriously, though, we have all the time in the world,’ Jensen continued. ‘It’s why – you know, we said. I wouldn’t claim you until you’re ready. If you want to date for a bit, get to know each other first – like I said, I’m ok with that.’

Jared tilted his head. ‘I… you know, I think you’re one of the few alphas who’d be okay with that. Most would’ve just… that first time…’ he shook his head, smiled a little. ‘You’re not really… like other alphas.’

‘Well, goes well with you, don’t you think?’ Jensen shrugged. ‘Seeing as how you’re not exactly like other omegas?’

Jared frowned, looked at the television. ‘Yeah…’

Jensen instantly reached out, grasped his arm. ‘Hey, no, not like that. God, Jay. You know I don’t mean like that,’ he said quickly. ‘I just meant – you’re independent, fierce and snarky as all hell. Not exactly a delicate little flower, right?’

Jared relaxed a little. ‘Yeah. Yeah… sorry I…’ he rubbed his face. ‘I guess I still have insecurity issues to work on.’

Jensen tugged him to a soft kiss. ‘That’s what I’m here for’ he smiled.

Jared nodded, kissed him again, then settled back against the headboard. As he flicked through the channels, a sudden thought occurred to him.

‘Oh, hey, I forgot to ask – what as that with Misha earlier?’

‘You mean where I decided I’m going to murder him slowly?’ Jensen answered, and then remembered. ‘Shit.’

‘What?’ Jared blinked.

Jensen slid from the bed. ‘He was – my dad’s trying to get a hold of me. Or, at least,’ he winced a little, ‘he was uh, a fair few hours ago.’

He hunted through the discarded clothes on the ground until he located his phone he’d tossed onto the ground, unlocking it in a quick swipe. Jared watched as Jensen flicked through the messages.
‘Everything ok?’ he asked.

‘Yeah…’ Jensen spoke slowly, moving to the bed and perching on the end. ‘Yeah… I mean… I think so? He just – he wants to meet for lunch tomorrow or something. At your alpha’s office.’

Jared rolled towards him. ‘Maybe… I mean, maybe it’s about why you guys are here in the first place? You told me your dad never really told you much. Maybe he’s going to tell you now..’

Jensen rubbed his chin. ‘Probably.’

Jared toyed with the sheets a little. ‘Maybe… maybe whatever bought him here… maybe the situation’s resolved itself.’

Jensen tossed the phone onto the bedside table. ‘Could be’ he agreed, moving to settle back on the bed.

Jared bit his lip, drew circles on the sheets. ‘Would that… I mean…. Would that mean you’d go home?’

Jensen looked at him, arched an eyebrow and chuckled. ‘You really think I’m gonna up and leave?’

Jared shrugged awkwardly. Jensen sighed, rolled his eyes and reached to snag the omega’s shoulders, pull him close.

‘I’m stayin’ here as long as you want to stay here,’ he informed him. ‘An’ if you never want to leave, then I’m never going to leave. It’s you and me, now, Jay. Ok? You an’ me. Death do us part an’ all that.’

Jared titled his head up, smiled and kissed him gently. ‘Death do us part’ he agreed softly.

Then Jensen was pulled him in for a deeper, hungrier kiss, and he melted into the alpha, the rest of the world, everything else, simply fading away.
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

First of all: so, so, SO sorry this took so long. I’ve been in the process of moving house and between packing and cleaning my old apartment, all spare time became virtually non-existent. BUT, the stress of moving is now over so hopefully I can go back to more regular posting from here on :) Second of all: as always, thank you so much for all your comments and kudos, and for your patience!

The next day, mid-morning, Jensen met Misha just outside the hotel. He sauntered towards his alpha friend, feeling loose limbed and happy, content in a way that he hadn’t been in a very long time. He revelled in the sunshine, the morning breeze, the faint scent of his omega that still clung to his skin, to his clothes. He reached Misha, noting the alpha was simply standing and staring into the distance, and arched an eyebrow.

‘Is this what you do with your spare time? Just… wait around for me?’ he gestured vaguely with his hand.

Misha scowled, folded his arms, glared, then ducked his head. ‘…usually’ he muttered.

Jensen gave him a once over. ‘And what? No coffee?’

‘Is this how you greet – good morning to you too, Jensen’ Misha said exasperatedly.

‘I mean there are loads of coffee places around,’ Jensen continued, ‘I’m just saying it wouldn’t have been hard to get me one.’

‘Why yes, I slept wonderfully, thank you for asking’ Misha continued pointedly.

‘What? I didn’t ask anything about your sleeping’ Jensen blinked.

‘Yes, that’s my – ’ Misha stopped, sighed. ‘Never mind.’

Jensen raised an eyebrow at him, shrugged, then gestured for Misha to follow as he set off down the street. JD’s offices were only a short distance away, and Jensen was feeling energetic, thrumming with liveliness, happy to walk the distance. And Misha… well Misha resigned himself to walking because Jensen was walking. As was the general theme of his life.

‘So where’s your better half this morning?’ he asked as they walked.

A goofy smile spread across Jensen’s face. ‘Jared? He had to get up early and leave. Work or something,’ he gave a sigh. ‘I couldn’t convince him to stay. For some reason he just had to go.’

‘Maybe because he runs his own business?’ Misha arched an eyebrow.

‘So?’ Jensen frowned.

‘Right. I forgot how difficult it would be for you to understand the concepts of work and
responsibility’ Misha rolled his eyes.

‘What?’

‘Nothing’ Misha waved a hand.

Jensen narrowed his eyes a little suspiciously, but let it slide. ‘We’ll stop for coffee before JD’s,’ he announced, then a look came onto his face, lips curving into a leer. He nudged Misha’s shoulder. ‘Bit tired after all, you know how it is.’

Misha’s face flushed and he pursed his lips. ‘Yes, thank you. I don’t need the details.’

‘It was just a tiring night, you feel me?’ Jensen pressed.

‘Yes, Jensen. I understand.’

‘I’m just saying I’m worn out, you know?’ Jensen waggled his eyebrows.

‘Do you revel in torturing me? Is that what it is?’

Jensen snorted, grinning to himself.

Misha hesitated, then spoke. ‘Honestly though… I… I take it that things are going well with Jared then?’

Jensen smiled softly. ‘Awesome. Better than awesome. Things are good, Mish. They’re real good.’

‘So have you… made it official yet? Claimed him?’

Jensen shook his head. ‘No, not yet. We’re… taking it slow. Dating a bit first, you know?’

‘Dating?’ Misha inclined his head.

Jensen shrugged. ‘Well, just… getting to know each other. He wants it, don’t get me wrong. We’ve talked, and he wants it. Just… you know…’

‘And you’re ok with it? Taking it slow?’ Misha asked.

Jensen gave a half smile. ‘I’m ok with anything Jared wants.’

Misha raised an eyebrow.

Jensen met his gaze. ‘Seriously, Mish, I am,’ he reiterated. ‘I… he’s worth it, ok, Mish? I… and you said it yourself. Slow and steady, right? Slow and steady.’

Misha nodded slowly, then smiled, soft and genuine. ‘I’m glad, Jensen. I am. I’m happy for you.’

‘Thanks… and… you know. Thank you for all your help too. It… it meant a lot.’

Misha grinned, revelled in the praise, the rare moment of friendship. ‘Any time.’

Jensen grinned back. ‘You’re a good friend, Mish,’ he stopped walking, reached out, clapped a hand on Misha’s back, squeezed once, then promptly used it to spin the alpha around to face a café entrance. ‘And also, I’ll take a coffee, black, no sugar and two bear claws. Also, I’m outta cash so I’ll pay you back. I’ll wait over there. Thanks, man.’

Then he was turned and walking away.
Misha sighed, staring at the café. ‘And we’re back to normal.’

Jensen meanwhile tugged his phone from his pocket as he walked, telling himself he absolutely, definitely was not checking to see if Jared had texted or contacted him in the mere few hours they’d been apart. He’d bought the omega a brand new phone to replace the broken one, waving off Jared’s protests by pointing out it was partly a selfish reason anyway so he could keep in contact with Jared when they were apart. The phone screen was text-free however, and he tried to quell his disappointment, telling himself Jared was working and couldn’t possibly have time to text him anyway. Head still down, brow furrowed, lost in his thoughts, he moved to shove his phone back into his pocket and, completely distracted, walked straight into a small form, sending them stumbling back.

‘Shit – shit – sorry!’ Jensen reached out instinctively, grabbing the person by the arm, steadying them.

It took a moment of flailing limbs and flurried movement before the person righted themselves and Jensen blinked as he realised it was Mia, the beta Were from the bar. He quickly let go of her arm, took a step back. He tried to smile politely, even as the beta’s venomous words about Jared flitted across his mind.

‘Sorry about that’ he ducked his head, moved to pass the beta.

‘Wait – I – no,’ Mia stepped to halt his movement, looking a little flustered, a little pink in the face. ‘That’s ok – I didn’t even… it’s just. Good to see you again, Jensen.’

Jensen honestly could not say the same for seeing Mia, but he held his tongue. ‘I was just – ’ he waved a hand, half turned, thinking to head into the café, escape from the beta that way.

‘Wait –’ Mia grabbed his arm, surprisingly strong for someone so small. ‘I was – I’ve been meaning to talk to you. I just – haven’t seen you around lately.’

Because Jensen had been wrapped up in Jared, literally and figuratively, the past week. ‘I’ve just… been busy’ he said.

‘Oh, well,’ Mia shifted from foot to foot. ‘Listen, I was just wondering if maybe – if you’re not busy now – if maybe you wanted to get lunch together?’

Jensen barely suppressed a sigh. This beta clearly did not give up lightly.

‘Mia,’ he said, and tried to keep his voice gentle, tugging his arm from her grip. ‘I don’t think… I….’ he rubbed his face. ‘It’s… I’m with Jared, Mia.’

Something twisted on Mia’s face. ‘He’s –’

But Jensen didn’t want to listen, didn’t want to hear anymore poisonous words about his omega, his mate.

‘He’s my true mate, Mia,’ he cut across. ‘So whatever you’re going to say, I’d keep that in the back of your mind, yeah?’

Mia’s mouth worked soundlessly a moment. ‘I – true…’ then she stepped urgently towards Jensen. ‘True mates don’t exist.’

Jensen arched an eyebrow. ‘Sorry?’
‘They don’t,’ there was a hint of desperation to Mia’s voice. ‘They don’t – it’s – whatever you’re thinking – scenting – feeling – it’s not even… it’s just omegas. They have – some sort of pheromones or – or something –’

Jensen stared. ‘Mia –’

‘You don’t have to be saddled with him,’ Mia’s face suddenly transformed, open, eager. ‘You don’t – whatever you think – this true mates thing. It’s a lie, so you don’t have to – tie yourself out of pity, or responsibility or –’

‘Mia, that’s enough’ Jensen said sharply.

Mia stopped, startled. ‘I’m just – I’m trying to –’ she stuttered.

‘I said that’s enough’ Jensen snarled.

The snarl caught the beta off guard, made her take half a step back from him, her face collapsing into a wounded expression.

‘Jensen…” she whimpered.

Jensen took a breath, reigned in the anger and frustration. ‘I think – I think you should go now’ he said, voice cold, tight.

Mia rubbed her hand on her face, made an aborted move towards him. Jensen tensed and -

‘Jensen?’ Misha appeared from the café, clutching two coffees, eyes flickering between Jensen and Mia. ‘Everything ok out here?’

Instantly Mia stopped, stepped back. Jensen eyed her a moment, before he started to turn.

‘It’s fine,’ he said shortly, dismissively. ‘Let’s go Misha.’

Misha cast the beta a wary glance, eyes flickering over the look of devastation on her face, before he turned to follow Jensen as he stalked away.

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‘… and then there’s the new book by Robert Galbraith and I thought we could put that here – and then this book here – like this –’

‘Uh huh’ Jared said.

‘ – because if we balance the storefront with these it’ll direct customers attention to this section of the store and might help to move some of those novels we’ve had since forever –’

‘Uh huh’ Jared said.

Osric paused, squinted at his boss. ‘Then I thought we could hire clowns to prance through the store singing nursery rhymes and transform the back room into a trampoline’ he said.

‘Uh huh’ Jared said.
Osric sighed. ‘You’re not even listening to me.’

‘Uh huh’ Jared said.

The omega had his chin resting on his hand, elbow propped on the front counter, eyes staring into the distance. If anyone had asked, there was no way Jared could’ve said exactly how he’d spent the time that morning at work. He left Jensen around 6am – a feat in itself, the alpha wheedling and pulling out all the stops (and all the tricks… good Christ, the Were could kiss. And his hands… hell, his everything) to try to get him to stay longer. But, he was manager, and Jared prided himself on being a good manager, not an absent one. So he’d managed to extract himself from the alpha’s tempting clutches, arriving at work bright and early.

And had then spent every hour since then with his mind totally and completely preoccupied with thoughts of Jensen, of green eyes, a crinkling smile, strong arms, a lean body and…

And Jared’s face flushed pink as he pulled his thoughts away from that tangent. He didn’t want to start getting worked up at work, of all places.

He blinked a few times and turned his head, realising that Osric was standing next to him and his second in command had a frown on his face, arms folded.

‘I, uh,’ Jared cleared his throat. ‘Sorry were you saying something?’

Osric gusted a huge sigh, threw both hands up. ‘Forget it’ he huffed, turning on his heel and stalking away.

Jared cringed, rubbing his face. He hadn’t meant to upset Osric. He was just… Christ, he was just head over heels in love with his goddamn true mate and it was making him all gooey and stupid.

Get it together, Padalecki, he told himself firmly, giving himself a little shake.

He straightened in his chair, blinking to refocus, glanced back to his computer. He’d find a way to make it up to Osric. What had the kid been talking about? Clowns? Did he want to start selling clown books?

He rubbed his chin, stared at his computer blankly. He wanted... he wanted to text Jensen. Should he text Jensen? Was it too soon to text Jensen? Too clingy? He didn’t want to come across clingy. Normally he’d be seeing the alpha for lunch, but with this meeting with his father, they wouldn’t see each other until...

Well, until tonight.

Which, Jared told himself wryly, wasn’t even that long a time.

Christ, he was so far gone.

Almost as if it had read his thoughts, his phone suddenly vibrated in pocket. Jared jumped, started a little, then rolled his eyes at himself, before tugging his phone from his pocket. One new message. From Jensen.

Jared tried to keep the goofy smile from his face. He wasn’t very successful.

He clicked the message open. “Free 2 meet up this arvo?” it read.

Jared quickly typed a response, clicked send. “Will you be done with your dad by then?”
The reply was quick. “Yes. Do u kno the spot in the forest called the Morning Clearing?”

Jared’s brow furrowed. He knew the place – in the forest, maybe an hour or two walk in. He hadn’t realised Jensen knew it, however, and wondered how the alpha came to know about an area he thought only locals knew of.

“Yes. You want to meet there?” he sent back.

The reply was quick. “Yes. Meet u at 4.”

Jared stared at his phone a moment, bit his lip. Wondered why Jensen wanted to meet there, wondered what the alpha had planned.

Then the bell above the door tinkled, signifying a costumer, pulling him from his thoughts, and he pocketed his phone, refocused and concentrated on getting through the remaining work hours without being distracted by thoughts of his mate.

He didn’t expect he’d be particularly successful.

**

The sombre and serious expressions on both JD and his father’s faces made Jensen’s steps falter a moment before he stepped into JD’s office. JD was behind his desk, hands folded on the tabletop, Alan in one of the chairs opposite him. Both looked up at Jensen’s entrance, faces grim, and Jensen resisted the urge to ask “who died?” because given the circumstances, there may well have been someone who died. The previous happiness, looseness, already eroded from the run-in with Mia, faded away just that little bit more as he moved into the room, and felt the tension instantly. Misha half hovered in the doorway behind him, and Alan waved a hand.

‘Come in, Misha,’ he said. ‘You should hear this too. And Lord knows anything I tell Jensen will be told to you eventually anyway.’

Misha bobbed his head in agreement and followed Jensen in, closing the door behind them. The two slid into the spare seats and Jensen looked between JD and his father.

‘So… what’s this all about?’ he asked.

Alan looked to JD, and the alpha sighed, leaning back in his chair.

‘Do you remember… well you might not, you’d have just been a pup… but, about eighteen years ago, there was a series of attacks on smaller packs, all carried out by rogue alphas?’

Jensen shifted in his chair. ‘I mean… I don’t remember it, personally,’ he started slowly. ‘But I know… a little about it. I know…’ he paused, caught JD’s eye. ‘I know, a few packs got wiped out. Like Jared’s.’

JD nodded. ‘Yes. The Padalecki Pack was the last pack to be wiped out. We…’ he rubbed his face, suddenly looked tired. ‘We arrived… just that bit too late. Probably by moments. By the time… I mean… I just sometimes think…’ he gave himself a shake. ‘Anyway. The alphas… you’re right, they did wipe out a few packs. They were… angry. Strong. Brutal. Merciless. Didn’t care if they killed females, males, pups. Never left anyone alive,’ he paused a moment, thought, ‘well not
intentionally anyway. The only… there were sometimes omegas taken from the packs. Kidnapped. Spirited away with the alphas. Probably for…” JD stopped, his mouth pulled in a thin line. ‘Well, you can imagine.’

Jensen’s stomach twisted, his jaw tightened. Because that had new meaning for him – now, he could only think of his omega, of someone stealing Jared, of someone using him to…

He swallowed the rage down, forced his face to remain calm.

‘But even they… after the alphas had… had their fun,’ JD’s face twisted in distaste, ‘they usually left them for dead somewhere. It was… unpleasant to find their remains.’

Jensen’s hands clenched into a fist.

‘Was there a reason?’ Misha asked. ‘For… what they did? The attacks? The deaths? Did they have a higher goal?’

JD shook his head. ‘Not as far as we know. They just… liked the chaos. The death. They said… they said it was fun.’

‘Fuckers’ Jensen spat, and felt the word tear itself with a savage viciousness from his mouth, half a growl, his inner alpha rumbling in his chest.

‘That about sums them up,’ JD agreed with a humourless chuckle. ‘Anyway. The night Jared’s pack got wiped out, we’d tracked the alphas there. Like I said, we got there too late to save the pack, but we managed to get the alphas, managed to wipe them out. Except… except well, one. One managed to escape, get away.’

Jensen felt the first stirrings of unease in his stomach. ‘What do you mean, got away? Didn’t you track him? Hunt him down?’

‘Jensen, we – I mean, of course we looked for a bit – but… but it was one alpha, just one, and after a while…” JD rubbed his face. ‘After a while it just wasn’t priority anymore.’

‘That alpha killed innocent Weres! How was that not priority?’ Jensen snapped, eyes flaring wolf yellow. ‘How could you let him get away?’

It could have been the alpha that cut up Jared. It could have been the alpha that stabbed the silver into his abdomen. Jensen wouldn’t have stopped, would’ve hunted that sonofabitch to the end of the earth.

‘Jensen, respect,’ Alan said sharply.

Jensen made a snarling noise, shot his father a glare.

JD held up a hand. ‘Look, Jensen, I get it – but it’s easy for you to say "why didn’t we track him down" - but it was one alpha. He could have been anywhere, gone anywhere. It wasn’t that simple. And we had other things to worry about, packs to reassure of safety, general pandemonium to calm down. We did what we could, what we could spare to do.’

Not enough, Jensen thought sourly. You didn’t do enough.

‘I heard,’ Misha piped up carefully, ‘I heard the McKinney pack got attacked a few months back. There were rumours bouncing around.’
Jensen looked at him sharply, then his head spun back to look at JD, things clicking instantly into place. ‘You think – ’

‘It’s more than just the McKinney pack,’ JD said, rubbing at his face. ‘There’s been other attacks. All done by alphas. A group of them, maybe ten or fifteen.’

‘It’s the alpha,’ Jensen said, felt himself tense, poised on the edge of his seat. ‘It’s the alpha you let get away. He’s regrouping, doing the same shit all over again.’

‘We don’t know for sure – ’ Alan corrected.

‘But you think it is’ Jensen insisted.

‘Yes, we do,’ JD confirmed. ‘At the very least even if it isn’t that same alpha, we still think it’s a bunch of alphas who are copying the actions of that group eighteen years ago.’

‘We’ve been keeping an eye on it, trying to get more information,’ Alan added. ‘That’s why JD called me here, to overlook the situation together.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me?’ Jensen demanded. ‘Why didn’t you tell me earlier – tell me why we were coming here, tell me about the – ’

‘Jensen,’ Alan snorted, ‘son, I love you, but you’re hardly the model of discretion and responsibility.’

Jensen made a wounded and offended noise. ‘I – ’ he started, without any idea of how he was going to continue that sentence.

‘We needed to keep this contained, quiet, and managed well,’ Alan continued. ‘I couldn’t risk you blathering about it to impress some beta about a secret mission you were here on.’

‘I wouldn’t have – ’ Jensen started.

‘You would have’ Misha interrupted.

‘You’re supposed to be on my side’ Jensen shot him a glare.

‘If it makes it any better, I would’ve been impressed at that line. It would’ve been one of your more creative ones’ Misha offered.

Jensen scowled, turned back to his father. ‘So what changed? What made you think you could suddenly fill me in on this?’

‘Jared’ JD spoke up.

Jensen glanced at him.

The older alpha met his gaze. ‘If this is the alpha from eighteen years ago, hell, even if this is just a group of alphas imitating that rogue pack, then it’s something that effects Jared,’ JD said. ‘Eighteen years ago his entire life was torn apart – his pack, his family, all killed, and he wasn’t left unscathed. You don’t think hearing about this is going to upset him? If he’s your true mate, like you say he is, I thought you had a right to know about something that could affect your mate, could upset them.’

Jensen let out a long breath, felt his stomach twist. He hadn’t thought… talk of the alphas had only left him with a righteous rage, a deep burning need to attack, to kill, to avenge, his only thoughts about Jared had been about revenging the horrors that had been inflicted on him. He hadn’t thought of the emotional fallout… the affects it might have on Jared mentally. For all that his omega
presented such a strong front, he knew the insecurities that lay beneath the surface, most of them tracing back to that terrible night.

‘You mean to tell Jared then?’ Misha asked.

‘If it comes to it, yes,’ JD said. ‘If we can deal with this quietly, we might not have to. But if push comes to shove and we have to tell him… then I think he’ll need his mate there for him.’

Jensen nodded slowly. ‘Ok…’ he raised his head. ‘Ok… let’s make sure it doesn’t reach that point. Let’s deal with these sonsabitches. Now.’

JD’s lips turned in a wry smile. ‘Funny you should say that. Because we have reason to believe they might not be too far away.’

Alan rose to his feet. ‘Let me grab a water and we’ll fill you in on the latest’ he said, ducking from the room.

Jensen nodded, rubbed his face, then remembered something and reached into his pocket, patting at his jeans. Misha noted his movements.

‘What’s the matter?’ he asked.

‘Hmm?’ Jensen rifled through his pockets. ‘Just looking – my phone. See if – you know.’

Misha rolled his eyes, made a cough that sounded suspiciously like ‘whipped.’

Jensen didn’t seem to notice, making a confused noise, half rising from his seat.

‘What?’ Misha peered up at him.

‘It’s just – I can’t find it – it’s not…’ Jensen glanced around his chair.

‘You probably left it back at the hotel’ Misha shrugged.

Jensen bit his lip.

‘No but… I could’ve sworn I had it… I’m sure I had it.’

‘Jensen,’ Misha said patiently, ‘not to sound insulting but you weren’t exactly all together that focused this morning… or any morning lately. You’ve been a bit preoccupied with the whole mate thing.’

Jensen rubbed at his jeans. ‘Yeah, still…’

There was a click of the door as Alan re-entered, a glass of water in hand, shutting the door behind him.

‘Ready to discuss plans?’ he said, heading for his seat.

Misha tugged at Jensen’s shirt, pulling the alpha back into his seat. Jensen shifted, uneasily, worriedly, tried to think, tried to remember, hands still moving restlessly over his jeans.

Then JD started to relate the details of a brawl that happened not far from the town, and Jensen let himself slowly be distracted and forgot all about his phone.
Jared stretched, long and lean, as he came to a stop in Morning Clearing, revelling in the slight burn of his muscles from walking there. He’d been skimping a bit lately with the exercise, spending more mornings wrapped up with Jensen, curled up in bed, unwilling the leave the warmth and comfort. So it felt good to walk, to stretch his legs out, feel the brisk, cooling air pull through his lungs, surround himself with the calm of nature. The clearing was a small, but open patch of grass, forming a round circle, free from any trees, sunlight filtering down, and Jared walked to the centre, peering around. It was obvious Jensen wasn’t here yet, and Jared checked his watch. It had just gone four o’clock, and he shrugged. Just because he was always punctual to a fault didn’t mean everyone else had to be. Besides, he had no where pressing to be, had already told Gen & Felicia he’d be with Jensen for the night.

He wondered at what Jensen had planned. A picnic maybe, given that their last attempt had been thwarted by Stephen Amell. And it was the perfect location for a picnic. It would be just like Jensen to try to organise a perfect picnic. Jared smiled a little to himself, tilted his head to gaze at the treetops. The alpha was so clueless about romance that all his attempts at “wooing” Jared were so cliché that Jared would’ve found it funny if it wasn’t so endearing – flowers, picnics. It was as if the alpha was reading it straight from a romance how-to book. And Jared wouldn’t put it past Jensen if he was. The alpha was caught up in making each “romantic gesture” perfect as well, not realising that the truly romantic moments, the moments where Jared’s breath caught in his chest, where he melted just that little more, were the unplanned, the tiny moments. The moments like when he hadn’t claimed without asking, the moments when Jensen held just that little tighter in the morning, as if he couldn’t get close enough to Jared, the moments where he touched and caressed so softly, so gently it was as if Jared were made of china.

Those were the moments Jared knew he was in love, that he was with his mate.

He gazed into the trees, seeing nothing, the soft smile on his face, lost to thoughts of Jensen, so when the branch cracked, when the thudding of paws sounded, Jared almost didn’t hear, didn’t realise. Not until the last second, when he snapped back to reality, spun around and had time for one choked cry before the wolf hurtling towards him lunged from the ground and slammed directly into his chest.

He hit the ground with a thud, breath driven from his chest in a giant whoosh, the wolf’s claws dug into his chest, tore through the fabric, the snapping jaws bit, scraped his throat, latched onto the crook between his neck and shoulder. Jared cried out, grabbed at the wolf’s ear, gripped it tight and pulled, yanked, whipped his other hand up and jammed his thumb into the wolf’s eye. The wolf released his shoulder with a howl, rearing upwards. Jared used the momentum, rolling with his body, throwing the wolf off. The wolf stumbled to one side and Jared half got to all fours, panting, chest heaving, looking around, saw a broken tree branch. He lurched, scrabbled, grabbed it, just as, with a terrific growl, the wolf turned back to him, lunged, teeth bared. He swung the branch and it connected with a terrific thwack, scratching across the wolf’s face. The wolf yelped, staggered back, shaking it’s head, blinking, and Jared used the time to scramble to his feet. He held the stick firmly, tightly and the wolf growled, stepped towards him again. He swung and the wolf dodged, dancing out of reach.

‘I don’t know who you are,’ Jared panted out, jaw tight, ‘but if you come near me again, I’ll bash your brains out.’

The wolf snarled, lunged and Jared swung, connected it harshly with the wolf’s chest, sent the wolf tumbling to the ground sideways with a yelp. The wolf skidded across the ground, scrabbling, let out a terrific whimper, shaking it’s head vigorously. Jared braced himself, clutched the stick harder,
tighter, and then the wolf was shuddering, whimpering, there was the cracking of bones, the shedding of skin and where the wolf had been was…

Jared blinked, felt his mouth open a little in shock. ‘Mia?’

A long line of scratches over a red mark adorned the side of Mia’s face where he’d hit, one eye bloodshot and watering, her chest scratched up. She sat on the ground, eyes glittering furiously as she glared at him.

‘What…’ Jared stepped back from her. ‘What the hell Mia?’

‘You!’ Mia burst out, and there were tears in both eyes now. ‘You – goddamn – you fucking freak – goddamn it!’

She lurched to her feet, stumbling a little and Jared instinctively raised the stick again. The beta Were balled up both fists, bared her teeth.

‘Why can’t you just – why can’t you just – go away?! You and your stupid – stupid – whatever it is,’ the words were spilling from the beta’s mouth, harsh, vicious, blurring without thinking, ‘whatever ever it is you do to alphas – I can’t – I don’t understand!’

‘What – what are you talking about, Mia?’ Jared shook his head. ‘What the hell is this about? Listen Jensen will –’

‘It’s about you!’ Mia exploded. ‘I hate you! Do you get it? I hate you! And I don’t understand – you’re disgusting and freaky and all the alphas – all the alphas just fucking love you! Stephen, and JD and now Jensen Ackles! It’s not fair! It’s not fair!’

Jared swallowed, felt the words slice and cut, clenched his jaw against the hurt. ‘Jensen – is that – that’s what this is about? Jensen? You – ’ it dawned on him. ‘Christ, you texted me, how did you get his phone? You texted me, lured me out here to – to – kill me –’

‘Not kill,’ Mia snapped. ‘Just scare you off – just – just make you leave! Drive you away finally! He was supposed to be with me – he was supposed to be mine!’

There was a flare of hot possessiveness in Jared’s chest. ‘He’s my mate’ he snapped.

Mia laughed harshly. ‘’Mate’ – what a load of crap! You can’t be his mate – you can’t do anything! I can give him pups, I can shift with him – what can you do, huh, Jared? Tell me, what can you possibly offer him?’

It was an echo of Jared’s own thoughts, his own words, thrown back in his face, and he tightened his grip on the stick, felt his hands start to tremble, shake.

‘You don’t know anything about me and Jensen,’ he kept his voice controlled, flat. ‘You don’t know anything.’

Mia took a step towards him. ‘I know he hasn’t claimed you,’ she jutted her chin out. ‘Because he doesn’t want to tie himself to such a freak.’

‘Shut up,’ Jared snapped. ‘That’s not –’

‘No alpha can resist claiming,’ Mia overrode him, voice loud, unflinching, taking another step forward. ‘No alpha – if they really want it. They can’t. It’s impossible – which means deep down he doesn’t want you, not really, he’s just using you for a quick f –’
'Shut up!' Jared shouted, and he was moving into her space without thinking, baring down his full height at the tiny beta.

Mia didn’t flinch, didn’t back down, met his eyes with a look of triumph on her face. Jared fought the urge to hit, to push, to shove. He took a deep breath, stepped back.

‘I’m done with this, I – I’m going back,’ he half turned away.

‘Don’t you – ’ Mia reached out and grabbed his arm.

She stopped, mid-sentence, face suddenly confused, nose crinkling.

Jared tugged his arm free. ‘Don’t touch me’ he snapped.

‘Do you scent that?’ Mia said.

There was a hot flush through Jared. ‘I – fuck you, Mia’ he spat.

‘What?’ Mia blinked, then shook her head. ‘No, I can scent it – I –’

Jared clenched his jaw. He didn’t know what she was playing at, toying with his inability to scent. ‘Listen – ’ he started angrily.

‘It smells like alphas,’ Mia didn’t appear to be paying attention to him, had turned away slightly to peer into the forest beyond. ‘Like… a fair few of them. There are alphas nearby.’

And Jared stopped, mid-sentence. Felt something cold creep down his spine, something unpleasant twist in his stomach.

‘Mia, don’t play around’ he growled.

‘I’m not,’ Mia snapped, whirling to glare at him. ‘I’m not – I can scent alphas. And it’s – they’re not – they’re not familiar, they’re not our pack.’

Jared felt a little light-headed suddenly, a little sick.

Don’t jump to conclusions, he told himself firmly. Don’t. It’s not that. It’s not that again.

He searched Mia’s face. Saw a flicker of uneasiness, apprehension in her eyes, the result from smelling the unknown alphas. Then he realised the sudden stillness, the quietness, the lack of birds, as if they’d been scared off, as if something was coming. The chill shuddered down his spine again.

She wasn’t lying. She wasn’t playing around.

Jared stepped forward suddenly, grabbed her arm.

‘Hey – ’ Mia squeaked.

‘Mia, listen to me,’ Jared held her arm tight, ‘listen, you need to shift, you need to shift and run back to the pack. Tell them you scent rogue alphas nearby.’

‘What? Why?’ Mia tugged a little.

‘Mia, I’m serious – you’re faster in wolf form than I am, I can’t – I won’t be able to get there as quickly. Run as hard as you can, go straight to JD, tell him –’
Mia quailed a little under his intensity. ‘What are you – stop fucking around, Padalecki. It’s just a bunch of alphas.’

‘Maybe,’ Jared said quietly. ‘Maybe. It might be something worse.’

‘You’re – you’re freaking me out’ Mia pulled out his grip.

‘Mia, you do this – you run back and…’ Jared took a breath. ‘I won’t tell anyone you tried to... I won’t say anything. And... if this... if it turns out worse then... then you’ll be a hero. You know? To… to all the alphas. JD. Jensen.’

He said the name pointedly, even as it made him physically sick to see the light appear in Mia’s eyes. To know how she thought of Jensen.

My mate, he told himself. Jensen is my mate. It’s ok. He’s mine.

Mia meanwhile nodded. ‘Ok, ok,’ she moved away from him. ‘Ok I’ll run back. I’ll tell them.’

Jared opened his mouth to tell her thank you, automatically, but before he could say anything, she’d transformed in a flash, and then was turning in wolf form, vanishing into the surrounding forest. Jared stood for a moment, watching her go. He should follow her. He should start to walk back. Hell, he should start to run back. But… But he wanted to see, wanted to assure himself that it was just a bunch of rowdy alphas, no more, no less. That it wasn’t anything to be afraid of. He just wanted to look. Just a look.

Decided, he turned and started to head away from the direction of the town, creeping into the forest, careful, cautious, keeping low to the ground, ducking through shadows. He had no real idea how to find the alphas, but if Mia could scent them, then they had to be close, and their scent would’ve carried on the wind, so it all helped to somewhat orientate him. Still, it surprised him, when he heard voices, when he heard the crunch of feet, when he realised he had found the alphas. He felt his body tense, a thrill of fear and apprehension shooting through him. He moved slowly, low to the ground, circled to keep downwind as he moved closer and closer.

There were ten of them, three transformed into wolves, trotting alongside the group. Jared’s breath caught in his chest, and he felt his throat tighten, close.

No, he thought.

And it flashed across his mind – fear, panic, Jeff shouting, blood, pain and Megan screaming – Stop, he drew a shuddering breath, tried to control his shaking body. Stop, it might not be, it might not be the same.

But – but he saw the glint, saw the sunlight catch and he realised, his stomach plunged, they were armed. The ones in human form had gloved hands, clutching at silver blades. He saw the bulge of guns in holsters. This was not just a group of rowdy alphas.

Somehow, somehow, it was happening. It was happening again and suddenly Jared felt sick, dizzy, because how? How? They’d all been killed – JD had said they’d all been killed. It had all been over eighteen years ago – it was supposed to be over. It was supposed to be over but it wasn’t because this was a group of alphas looking to attack, to kill, to inflict pain on his pack – his new pack, on JD, and Gen, and Felicia and Jensen – Jensen.

Mia, he tried to reign his thoughts back, tried to control the mounting panic and fear. Mia would warn them, they wouldn’t be unprepared like his pack had been. History would not repeat itself.
But... but what if she was too late. What if she didn’t take it seriously. What if she didn’t do as he told her to. The alphas were heading straight for the town – like they knew it was there – they were heading **straight there**, would be there in a few hours.

**Unless.**

And Jared straightened, suddenly felt something settle over him – determination, a calm sort of numbness. He hadn't been able to do anything to save his pack, his family, all those years ago – but he could do something **now**, to save this pack, this **new** family. He could.

‘Not helpless’ he whispered to himself.

Then he ducked down, grabbed a stone from the ground, reared back and hurled it with all his strength. It collided with a thud, a crack, with an alpha’s head, and split open their temple in a flash of blood. The alpha dropped soundlessly to the ground, crumpling to a heap.

‘What the fuck – ’ another alpha snarled, spinning around.

Jared grabbed another stone, hurled it. It hit another alpha, connecting with his nose in a sickening crunch and a burst of blood. The alpha roared in pain, grabbed at his face.

‘There’s someone over there!’ an alpha roared.

The alphas started forward, made in Jared’s direction and he sucked in a breath, spun on his heel and started to run – in the opposite direction to the town, crashing heedlessly through the bushes.

*Lead them away*, he repeated, continuously, feet pounding, *lead them away, lead them away*. Lead them away, he repeated, continuously, feet pounding, lead them away, lead them away.

There was the thudding of paws, the hot snarl of a wolf, and an alpha lunged, slammed into his back and sent them both tumbling to the ground in a heap. Jared cried out breathlessly, rolled over onto his back as the wolf lunged for his throat. He grabbed the wolf by the neck, holding it, squeezing it, pushing its snapping jaws away from his face. The wolf wriggled, twisted, Jared threw out a spare hand, grabbed a rock from the ground and bought it hard down on the side of the wolf’s head once, the wolf slackening in his grip, twice, the wolf slumping to the ground, three times, blood running down his hand and forearm.

He swallowed bile, lurched to his feet, dropping the bloodied stone, felt dizzy and sick, heard the other alphas approaching, turned to start to run and –

Then there was a crack, a gunshot, and pain, **white hot, intense**, flared in his thigh, his leg buckled, went out from underneath him and Jared hit the ground. His thigh was a mass of pain, hot, intense, burning and he grabbed at it, felt blood, hot and thick in his hands, felt a sob escape his lips.

An alpha emerged, gun out, pointing at his head, and the alpha’s eyes skimmed to the dead wolf, and he made a snarling noise, cocked the gun and Jared closed his eyes, dizzy with pain, waited for the gunshot, the inevitable –

‘Stop’ another voice said.

Jared opened his eyes, blinked blearily, felt his focus sliding in and out, feeling heady with pain. Another alpha had emerged, had put a hand on the alpha’s arm, stilling him.

‘What do you mean, stop?’ the alpha growled. ‘He fucking – did you see what he did to Bill –’

‘Can’t you smell it? It’s an omega’ the alpha said.
The alpha with the gun turned to peer down at Jared, who was slumped back on the dirt, trying to catch his breath, trying to fight through the pain.

Get up, he told himself, get the fuck up, Padalecki. Fight.

‘Him? He’s the size of a goddamn moose’ the alpha snorted. ‘No way he’s an omega.’

‘Trust me – I can scent him. Pure omega,’ the alpha smiled. ‘We’ll take him back, put him with the others.’

‘Mick, his face though…’ the alpha with the gun grimaced. ‘It’s a fucking wreck.’

‘So fuck him from behind, or use a paper bag,’ the alpha, Mick, snapped. ‘Christ, a hole’s a hole. Besides, who the fuck is in charge here, huh?’

‘We’re taking him back? Thought we were headin’ to the town tonight?’ another voice piped up.

‘So we go tomorrow instead,’ Mick snarled. ‘Any more stupid fucking questions? What difference does a day make anyway? Rod, call the others. Let ‘em know we’re headin’ back.’

He leaned down, came into Jared’s periphery.

‘Mmmm... I kinda like this one. Think we could have some fun. I like ‘em feisty.’

And Jared looked, finally looked at this alpha’s face – aged, weathered, a little beaten and scarred – looming in his vision. And he saw – he saw –

He saw the looming alpha in the closet doorway – he saw the laughing face – heard Megan screaming, crying – the flash of silver – the pain – pain –

‘You!’ the word exploded from Jared’s mouth.

He surged upwards, snarling, hands reaching, grabbing, pure fury, anger running in his veins – but he’d barely risen, barely gotten off the ground before there was movement behind him, the whoosh of something swinging down, an explosion of pain at the back of his head and then –

Then darkness.
Jensen reached for his coffee cup as he rubbed a hand over his face, taking a huge swig and immediately regretting it when he realized the liquid was ice cold. He pulled a face, swallowed and made a gagging noise. Misha looked to him.

‘Coffee’s cold’ Jensen grumbled.

‘Life is so difficult for you, isn’t it’ Misha dead-panned.

‘Shut up’ Jensen muttered.

It was nearing on 7pm now, and he’d been in JD’s office since lunch discussing the rogue alpha issue with JD, Alan and Misha. They’d been talking through the best ways to go about tracking the group down, how to approach the issue once they did find them (his savage suggestion of “rip them all limb from limb and burn the fuckers” was labelled “violent” but JD also didn’t disagree, which he took as a good sign) and how much, if any at all, to tell the pack regarding the issue.

After so many hours of endless talk, of looking at maps until his eyes blurred, of talking over the best Weres to take on the mission, Jensen was now feeling antsy and beyond tired and – and, well, he missed Jared, dammit. He wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around his omega, inhale his sweet scent, relax into Jared’s hold. It was an itch beneath his skin, the desire to be near his mate, growing more intense by the hour.

He rubbed a hand over his face. He’d have to ask to borrow Misha’s phone, he realized, to let Jared know he might not be able to see him until tomorrow. Tomorrow. He groaned internally at the thought.

‘You look like someone kicked a puppy’ JD commented.

Jensen glanced up to see the alpha eyeing him, and he blushed, ducked his head. ‘No – not, just – ’

‘Pining’ Misha supplied.
'Shut it' Jensen shot him a glare.

JD laughed. ‘Hey, I get it, kiddo – I was the same when I first met Sam – she’s my true mate – couldn’t stand to be away from her. I was pathetic really.’

‘Oh yes, Jensen has the pathetic thing down pat’ Misha agreed.

‘I will put laxatives in your coffee’ Jensen warned in a growl.

‘That would imply you, at some point, would actually make me a coffee,’ Misha retorted, ‘and I’m sure that hell would freeze over before that would happen.’

Jensen opened his mouth, closed it. ‘Fair point’ he conceded.

Alan, meanwhile, rose to his feet, stretched. ‘Maybe it is best if we do call it a night for now,’ he said. ‘Pick up early tomorrow morning. We’ll just drive ourselves insane if we stare at these maps any longer tonight.’

Jensen perked up. ‘I like the – ’

There was a sudden, loud crash from outside somewhere, cutting Jensen off mid-sentence. All the alphas glanced instantly to the door. JD half rose from his chair.

‘Bel?’ he called out. ‘Everything ok out there?’

There wasn’t an answer and Jensen turned back around in his chair.

‘Probably dropped something’ he said.

Then there was another crash, the sound of footsteps, skittering claws and frantic movement. They heard Bel’s voice in a shout.

‘You can’t – stop – you can’t just barge in – stop – ’

JD came around the side of his desk swiftly, quickly, making for the door and the other alphas were on their feet in seconds, tensed, poised. Before JD could reach the door, it burst open and a half wolf, half shifted form fell through in a breathless, panting heap, Bel scrambling behind, grabbing and pulling at the figure to haul them back.
'Stop – I said – you can’t just –'

‘What in the hell?’ JD barked.

The figure hit the ground, fully shifted and Jensen recognized it instantly, eyebrows shooting to his forehead.

‘Mia?’

JD stepped back a little. ‘Mia – what’s – what are you –’

‘I’m sorry Alpha, I tried to stop her – ’ Bel was babbling.

‘Alphas!’ Mia burst out in a breathless gasp, from all fours on the ground. ‘JD – alphas – they’re – I scented – ’

All the hairs on the back of Jensen’s neck rose and he was at Mia’s side in a flash, dropping to a crouch.

‘What did you say? Mia, what did you just say?’ JD asked urgently, dropping down next to Jensen.

Mia barely paid attention to him, grabbing instead for Jensen, latching onto his arm and pulling him close.

‘Alphas!’ she said again. ‘A big group of them – it was – oh – I was so scared!’

Her eyes started to fill with tears and she lurched into Jensen, burying her face in his chest. He started a moment and resisted the urge to pull back. Not when the beta was clearly distressed. Instead he gingerly wrapped an arm around her, starting to rise, helping her to her feet.

‘C’mon, Mia, take a seat’ he said gently.

‘Bel, grab some water for Mia, will you?’ JD said.

Bel, unspoken questions and confusion dancing in her eyes, bobbed her head quickly and ducked from the room. Jensen lowered Mia into one of the chairs, extracting himself from her grasp. She sniffled a bit, teary-eyed, and swiped at her eyes. Jensen noted one was bloodshot, and there were scrapes down her face and chest, and her entire body was shaking, vibrating with minute tremors. He shrugged from his jacket and put it over her shoulders.
‘Here’ he said.

Mia immediately snuggled into the jacket. ‘Thank you, Jensen,’ she sniffled.

JD crouched in front of her. ’Mia, what happened?’ he asked gently. ‘Your face… were you attacked?’

Mia blinked a moment, then shook her head. ‘I – no – I – I tripped… I was running and… I tripped.’

Bel appeared in the room, handing the glass of water to JD, before slipping back outside. JD offered the glass to Mia and she sipped gratefully.

‘Start from the beginning, Mia’ he said.

Mia put the glass on the table carefully, tugged Jensen’s jacket a little tighter around herself. ‘I was – I was just out in the woods – just… just for a walk,’ she started, ‘and I – I scented something. Alphas. A group of them. None of them smelt like they were from our pack. And I – I just knew, you know? I just knew something was off. I had a feeling – an instinct. Something about them – something about them scared me. So I – I just ran – as fast as I could – back here – I knew I had to tell you – I knew you had to know – and I just – I hope I’m just being paranoid – but – but – I –’

She broke off, gave a shaky inhale and passed a hand across her face. Jensen couldn’t help a stab of sympathy for her, reached out and squeezed her shoulder. She grabbed his hand the instant it touched her, curling her fingers around and holding tight.

‘You did good, Mia,’ JD said gently, reached to pat her knee. ‘You did really good. Did this pack proud. The… those alphas. They’re bad news. You did the right thing running to tell us.’

Mia gave a tremulous smile. ‘I… you know… I know what people think… of me… but… I always try to do the right thing, I do’ she gave a little sniff, blinked big, watery eyes.

‘I know, Mia,’ JD smiled. ‘Can you tell us how far away you were? And how far away the alphas were?’

‘I was about… maybe a two hour walk away?’ Mia answered. ‘Near Morning Clearing.’

JD sucked in a sharp breath, got to his feet suddenly. Jensen tensed.

‘That’s bad?’ he asked quietly.

‘That’s close, is what that is’ JD replied.
‘They’re coming’ Alan spoke up.

‘Not necessarily, might be scouting,’ JD countered quickly, he peered down at Mia. ‘Is there anything else, Mia? Anything else you can tell us?’

A odd look flickered across Mia’s face for a split second, before she shook her head. ‘No… no. That’s everything. I was alone in the forest and scented the alphas.’

She gave a shuddering breath, tugged Jensen’s hand to pull him closer. She peered up at him, blinking watery eyes. Jensen smiled down at her absently, his mind elsewhere, preoccupied, an idea gradually forming.

‘Is everything going to be all right?’ she whispered.

‘Everything will be fine, Mia’ JD said quickly to assure her.

Mia didn’t seem to hear him, still gazing up at Jensen. He lifted his free hand, ran it through his short spiked hair and started to talk.

‘Mia,’ he said carefully, ‘Mia, do you think you could recognize the scents? Maybe even track them?’

Mia bit her lip. ‘I… I think so. Yes,’ she nodded decidedly, ‘yes, I definitely could.’

‘And they didn’t spot you? See you?’ Jensen asked.

Mia shrugged a little. ‘I don’t… no, I don’t think so.’

‘Ok, OK…’ Jensen looked thoughtful.

‘Jensen?’ JD squinted at him.

‘Mia, listen, you about you ask Bel if she’s got some spare clothes? You must be freezing,’ Jensen tugged her to her feet by the hand she still clutched, walking her carefully towards the door. ‘Then come back in and… and we might have a favour to ask you.’

Mia paused at the door, turned to lock eyes with him and smiled. ‘Anything for you, Jensen’ she said, then, still wearing his jacket, she ducked from the room.
Jensen shut the door behind her, turned to face the others alphas.

‘This is it,’ he said, striding to the centre of the room, ‘this is how we get them!’

‘What’s how we get them?’ Misha raised an eyebrow.

‘You mean to use Mia’ JD said slowly.

‘She knows their scents now, and they don’t know they know, so they won’t be masking themselves – we get her to follow it – we track them down and wipe them all out! Easy as pie’ Jensen grinned triumphanty.

He felt the first stirring of his alpha once more, the thought of action, of doing something causing new energy, new adrenaline to filter into his veins.

‘Hell I mean – hell we can go tonight! They’re obviously coming here – we surprise the fuckers and –’

‘Not tonight’ JD interrupted.

Jensen stopped mid-sentence, then threw up both hands. ‘Why not tonight? Mia has the scent, they’re close, I mean –’

‘We’ll put out extra Weres to patrol,’ JD interrupted. ‘We’ll be on guard tonight, in case they are coming tonight, but – but we wait to track them. We need time to group some Weres, to prepare. To get ourselves together. And look, like you said, Mia has the scent now, most likely they don’t know this, there’s no urgency, Jensen, we don’t have any pressing need to be charging after them now.’

Jensen deflated a bit. ‘But –’

‘JD’s right Jensen – we can’t go running into this half-cocked’ Alan said.

Jensen blew out a frustrated breath, ran a hand through his hair. Couldn’t say why he felt like he needed to act now, needed to charge out there now, some niggling urge he couldn’t shake. But, he could hear the logic in JD’s words, and also the finality of his tone. There would be no arguing this.

‘I want to patrol tonight then’ he said stubbornly, jutting his chin out.

Because he needed to do something, felt jittery with the need for action. JD held up both hands.
‘Hey, it’s an all hands on deck situation – the more the better. You wanna walk the perimeter of the town all night, I’m ok with it’ he said.

‘Good’ Jensen folded his arms across his chest.

There was a click and a creak and Mia re-entered, peering about, now clad in baggy, obviously men-size jeans, an old grey t-shirt and Jensen’s jacket. JD stepped towards her.

‘All right, Mia, we’ve got something to ask of you…’ he began.

Jensen meanwhile, moved to Misha’s side, patting at the Were’s pocket. Misha gave a muffled squeak.

‘Are you – what are you doing?’ he batted at Jensen’s hands.

‘Need your phone, dude,’ Jensen replied, ‘gotta let Jay know I won’t be seeing him tonight. Or tomorrow.’

‘You could have just asked,’ Misha huffed, tugging it from his back pocket, ‘instead of groping me.’

‘You wish I was groping you’ Jensen snorted, grabbing the phone.

‘I very much do not, thank you’ Misha retorted.

Jensen didn’t reply, already dialling Jared’s number, idly listening to the phone ring as he watched Mia nod and agree to JD’s plan. The beta Were was surprising him, that was for sure, showing this new… almost brave side to her. It was unexpected, to say the least.

“Hi this is Jared, leave a message.”

Jensen gave a little sigh, feeling a stab of disappointment that Jared hadn’t picked up. He turned away a little from the group.

‘Uh, hey, babe,’ he said, ‘it’s me, Jensen. Uh, obviously. Anyway, I’ve lost my phone, or left it somewhere… so I’m using Misha’s. Just giving you a heads up I’m probably gonna be tied up with… stuff for a bit; tonight and tomorrow probably…’

He paused, bit his lip. ‘I can’t… look, I won’t go into it just yet. I… I’ll tell you, I will, just once… once it’s over. Just… yeah. Just trust me, ok?’
He sighed a little, rubbed his face. ‘Anyway. Look, um, don’t freak out, but I just wanna… if you could just… stay indoors for a bit, at home, over the next few days… none of your big runs in the woods… that would. It would just be… would make me happier,’ he huffed a laugh. ‘Christ, probably not making sense. Anyway. I better go.’

He gave a little half smile. ‘Love you, Jay’ he said quietly.

He paused for a moment, then hung up the call, turning back to the group. He was startled a little to see Mia right near him, watching with an inscrutable expression on her face.

‘That Jared?’ she asked casually.

‘His voicemail,’ Jensen shrugged, turning to toss the phone back to Misha. ‘He’s probably busy.’

‘Yeah,’ Mia said. ‘Yeah. Probably.’

She stepped towards him, ducked her head, then looked up, eyes big and wide on her pale, scratched up face.

‘Listen… I… can I just…’ she moved in towards him, and he tensed as she ducked into his side, wrapped her tiny arms around him.

‘Mia’ he said with a half-sigh.

‘I’m just… so scared about tomorrow, Jensen,’ Mia’s voice quavered. ‘Just… please…’

Jensen resisted the urge to roll his eyes, but, what the hell, he decided, god knows the beta was helping them out, so he slid an arm around her shoulders and squeezed, rubbing her arm gently.

He could understand her fear, though he felt none himself. Just thrumming anticipation, the energy crackling just beneath the surface. Jared was safely tucked up at home, he told himself, and after tomorrow, after tomorrow the alphas would be taken care of and nothing would ever harm or come near his omega again.

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‘… used to work on the docks, union’s been on strike, he’s down on his luck, it’s tough, so tough…’
Jared’s first thought when he started to come back to himself was that he had clearly drunk too much the night before. His head ached, pounded, his brain a fuzzy mess, unable to recall anything. His leg was throbbing, little pulses of intense pain, and he couldn’t remember – couldn’t remember why, or what he’d been doing. He felt uncomfortable, in a hunched over seated position, throbbing leg outstretched, his arms behind his back and when he tried to shift, tried to move them something pulled, tight, keeping them pinned back…

‘… she says we’ve gotta hold on to what we’ve got…’

And was someone singing?

‘… it doesn’t make a difference if we make it or not, we’ve got each other and that’s a lot for love, we’ll give it a shot, whoooooaa…’

‘Lecia,’ Jared slurred, tongue feeling heavy in his mouth, eyes still shut, ‘Lecia, st’p singin’.

The singing paused. ‘Um, sorry to disappoint you dude, but I’m not “Lecia” a voice said.

And – and things started to tumble, to come back, in flashes – Mia – attacking him – the alphas – the gunshot – the face – the face – it was him - oh god – it was –

Jared’s eyes flew open and his head snapped up. The movement was too quick, too sudden, and his surroundings spun, tilted, bile rose to the back of his throat and he gagged, slumping over.

‘Hey, whoa, dude, no puking,’ the voice said quickly, ‘you start puking, then I’ll start puking and it’ll, y’know, it’ll be unpleasant, is all I’m saying.’

Jared swallowed, repeatedly, blinking, trying to breath through his nose, control his stomach, the throb of his head. He lifted his head again, slower, more carefully, squinted around himself. It was dark, was his first impression, a dark room, the smell of it musty and damp. Wooden floorboards, a low roof, a tiny window the only source of weak light. And – he peered – there was someone seated across from him, the other side of the small room. She looked probably in her late twenties, her hair was matted and dirty, vague hints of blonde beneath the dirt, her face equally dirty, with blossoming bruises, her nose swollen and dried blood crusted beneath. Her legs were sprawled out in front of her, her arms twisted behind her, bound to the metal frame of a bed.

She met his eyes and grinned, a lop-sided sort of smile. ‘Hello, roomie,’ she greeted cheerfully, her voice a distinctive, almost languorous drawl. ‘Welcome to our crib.’

Jared tried to straighten, felt his hands tug, and twisted his head to look. His arms were twisted behind his back, both wrists handcuffed, the cuffs looped around what looked like a thick, metal drainage pipe that went from the roof, down into the floor. He tugged, pulled, felt the cuffs chafe against his skin.
'What…'

His head swivelled back around and he looked to his leg. There was a crude, rough bandage tied tightly around his thigh where the bullet had gone it.

‘Yeah, it isn’t much,’ the girl was still talking, ‘cable reception’s terrible. A bit drafty too.’

Jared lifted his head, licked his lips, stared at her. ‘What…?’

The girl arched an eyebrow. ‘I’m kidding. It was a joke. Do you get jokes? Please tell me you get jokes. It would absolutely suck if I finally get company and they don’t get jokes.’

Jared blinked. ‘No… no. I… I get jokes… I’m just…’ he swallowed. ‘I’m just…’

‘Freaked to hell?’ the girl supplied.

Jared huffed a laugh. ‘Something… something like that.’

‘I’ll help you to fill in the blanks,’ the girl offered. ‘You were out of it when they dragged you in here. I’m guessing they gave you a helluva whack to the head. Plus the whole leg wound thing. Side note: ouch, dude. Anyway. This place is what I’ve affectionately dubbed, the attic from hell.’

‘Attic?’ Jared lifted his head, looked around.

‘Yup,’ the girl nodded. ‘Top floor attic. As for the exact geographic location, beats the hell out of me. I was in and out of it when they dragged me here – managed to get that this is a big-ass two-storey house, on a few acres of land. Coupla sheds. Lots of trees around. So basically could be anywhere. Trees are kinda universal y’know? Oh – and lots of alphas. Do you remember the alphas?’

Jared swallowed, closed his eyes. Saw that face dance across his vision.

‘Yeah, I remember the alphas’ he let out a long breath.

‘Yeah. Figured you’d remember that part,’ the girl said. ‘There’s about thirty of them crawling around this place.’

‘Thirty?’ Jared’s eyes flew open.

Christ, that was more than – than last time. He felt a shudder go down his spine.
‘Mmm,’ the girl hummed. ‘I’m kinda glad they broke my nose and all I can smell is clogged up blood because otherwise the scent of that much alphas would have me on edge. Don’t know how you can stand it dude.’

Jared’s face flushed. He gave an awkward, hand-cuffed-behind-his-back shrug.

‘And… us? What…?’

‘Well… I can’t scent you, but I’m gonna go ahead and guess you’re an omega,’ the girl said. ‘Just like me. And like the other saps I know they have locked in other rooms and in the sheds.’

‘They have a bunch of omegas locked up?’ Jared’s brow burrowed. ‘Why – ’

It hit him, like a punch to the gut, and his stomach lurched again, bile rising to the back of his throat.

‘Yeah, I see you figured that one out,’ the girl said grimly.

‘Jesus Christ’ Jared rasped.

‘I’m also gonna guess you put up a fight when they tried to grab you,’ the girl continued, ‘which would explain why you’ve been shoved up in the attic like me. We’re reserved,’ she gave a smile that was all teeth, cold and flat, ‘apparently Mick likes them feisty. Like us.’

Mick. Jared closed his eyes, clenched his jaw, breathed heavily through his nose. Mick. The alpha. The alpha – the fucking alpha who should be dead, who JD had told him had died, the alpha who’d killed Megan, who’d laughed and killed his sister, who’d laughed and stabbed and poisoned Jared with silver, killed his inner wolf.

Mick.

He swallowed down the rage, the anger clawing at his insides, and slowly opened his eyes.

‘How… how long have I been out?’ he asked.

The girl gave a shrug. ‘Hard to tell in here, not much to go on as far as keeping time,’ she replied. ‘But not too long. I managed to sing about fifteen songs, so probably an hour at least.’

A ghost of a smile hovered on Jared’s lips. ‘You sing?’
'Terribly,' the girl informed him, 'but hell if you don’t need to do something to pass the time in here. A Were will go insane if they don’t. You’ll see soon enough.’

Jared shook his head. ‘No… no,’ he met her eyes. ‘I – I was with a friend – she – she ran back to my pack. She would’ve told them – about the alphas, about everything. My pack is going to come.’

*Jensen is going to come,* he thought.

‘My pack is going to come and rescue us’ he told her confidently.

The girl raised a brow. ‘If you say so, dude’ she said sceptically.

‘What about – what about your pack? How long… I mean, haven’t they…’

‘No pack,’ the girl interrupted. ‘Lone wolf here. All the omegas here are. Probably to prevent the whole “pack retribution” thing. Guess they thought you were one too.’

*You’re a lone wolf?* Jared couldn’t help the surprise in his tone, eye flickering over her petite stature.

The girl frowned. ‘Hey, I might look small, but I’m mighty fierce, ok, buddy?’

Jared couldn’t help a chuckle. ‘Hey, no, I totally believe you.’

The girl grinned back. ‘I’m Rachel, by the way. Rachel Miner. I’d shake your hand, but,’ she rattled her cuffs, ‘you know.’

Jared huffed a laugh. ‘Yeah. I’m Jared Padalecki.’

‘Padalecki,’ Rachel drew out the name as she spoke, a contemplative look on her face, and nodded. ‘Cool name. And, might I add, totally digging the eye too. Does it mean you have cool psychic powers? Like characters with odd eyes in the movies?’

Jared gave a wry smile. ‘Mostly it just means I’m horribly unlucky.’

Rachel laughed. ‘I hear that, Paddles.’

‘Paddles?’ Jared arched an eyebrow.

‘So, as sure as you are that your pack is gonna come rescue you, I still gotta ask…’ Rachel leant forward as far as she could, locked gaze with him.
By late afternoon the next day, Jensen was a bundle of tightly wound anticipation, practically vibrating with energy.

Patrolling the night before had been uneventful, and Jensen didn’t know if he was relieved or disappointed – a part of him had been looking forward to tearing into one of the rogue alphas, venting his anger and frustration out on one of them.

Once the sun had started to rise, he, JD, Misha and Matt from the police force had spent the day with Mia in the woods, carefully and quietly tracking the scent. Back in the town Alan had been organising the Weres, putting out a general caution to the rest of the pack to stay indoors until it was deemed safe.

With Mia’s help, after many hours of walking, they’d managed to track the scent right to the edge of a property, deep in the woods; a two storey, rickety old house, run down, windows broken, wood panels cracked and gaping, with two large sheds nearby, both boarded up tightly. The stench of alpha practically wafted from the building and they knew instantly they’d found the right place.

Alan and the other Weres from the pack had then driven to a spot not too far away, parking up the vehicles and Jensen, JD, Misha, Matt and Mia re-joined them. Jensen cracked his knuckles absently, sniffed at the air. They were downwind, unlikely to tip off the alphas to their approach, but nonetheless they’d all taken the time to douse themselves in scent maskers in an effort to remain undetected. He followed JD and Misha towards his father’s vehicle, as Alan slid from the front seat.

‘Bought along about fifteen Weres,’ Alan said in lieu of a greeting as they approached. ‘How many alphas do you think we’re dealing with?’

‘We weren’t close enough to get a good look at the property, do any real counting,’ JD shrugged. ‘There were ten involved in the brawl nearby though. And last time there were twenty five of the bastards. Shouldn’t be anymore than that to contend with I figure.’

‘And we have the element of surprise on our side this time round’ Jensen added with a grim smile.

‘How’s the beta holding up?’ Alan nodded over their shoulder at Mia, who was hovering with Matt a little way behind them.

‘She did good today,’ JD answered, then shook his head a little. ‘Gotta say, I was a little surprised. She’s always just seemed… but anyway. Guess… well, guess you never really know someone. She
really stepped up.’

‘I figured I’d drive her back, keep her out of harm’s way’ Alan said.

JD nodded. ‘Probably for the best, we don’t want her getting caught in the crossfire.’

Alan ducked past them, heading for Mia. Jensen bit his lip, fighting the urge to ask his father to also check in on Jared when he went back to the town. He still hadn’t heard from his omega, was starting to wonder if Jared was annoyed at him for keeping secrets or being elusive. He’d have liked to have heard his voice, at least once more, before they’d headed into the mess. He sighed a little to himself.

What had Misha said yesterday? Pathetic?

_Yeah, that seemed about accurate_, he thought with a wry smile.

Alan re-joined them, Mia in tow, clapped JD on the back and drew Jensen in for a hug.

‘Don’t lose your cool out there kiddo’ he said into his son’s ear.

He squeezed once then stepped back, nodding. ‘Right, come on then, Miss Mia.’

The beta stepped towards Jensen and, before he could react, had promptly thrown her arms around him. He gave a little awkward pat to her back.

‘Stay safe out there Jensen!’ the beta breathed into his chest.

She drew back and smiled up at him, blinking her big eyes, then promptly rose to her tip-toes and kissed his cheek. She ducked her head quickly, blushing and scuttled into the car. Alan raised an eyebrow, then shook his head and clambered into the car.

‘Think you’ve got yourself an admirer there’ Misha raised an eyebrow.

‘You don’t say’ Jensen said drily, and resisted the urge to wipe at his cheek. At least until the car containing the beta had driven away.

‘Hey, remember, you’re basically mated to my adopted son,’ JD waggled a finger, ‘I’ve got an eye on you.’

Jensen’s face flushed. ‘I – god, no, JD – ’

JD laughed. ‘Relax, kid, I’m just messin’ with ya,’ he clapped Jensen on the shoulder. ‘Now, we ready to get started?’
Thoughts of Mia, all his protests, everything faded instantly from Jensen’s mind as he straightened up, grinned, felt his teeth start to elongate, sharpen, his claws start to sprout.

‘Hell fucking yes. Let’s do this.’

**

Jared knew he was in trouble.

He’d drifted off at some point during the night, despite the discomort of his position, and when he’d woken the next morning he’d known. He’d lifted his head and blinked a few times, feeling woozy, light-headed and... and hot. His leg felt hot, swollen, stiff, his skin tight and stretched, all around the bullet wound. He could feel sweat pooling at the base of his spine, in his hair, down the back of his neck. His head was pounding and his tongue was thick and heavy in his mouth, desperate for water, his stomach tight and nauseous.

‘You look worse than I feel’ Rachel said.

He looked at her, saw the concern dancing in her eyes. He swallowed thickly, with difficulty and tried to smile.

‘M fine’ he mumbled.

‘Sure you are’ Rachel rolled her eyes, but the worry didn’t fade from her face.

By the time a few hours had passed and Jared felt the chills, the shivering, he knew it for sure; the bullet wound was infected.

‘I’m gonna guess that the alphas didn’t give you the full hospital treatment when they patched up your leg’ Rachel said softly.

Jared glanced at her. She made a face.

‘My nose cleared a bit,’ she explained. ‘I can… I can scent the infection.’

Jared let out a breath. ‘It’ll be ok,’ he said. ‘It’ll be ok. My pack is coming.’

*Jensen is coming, he repeated to himself. Jensen is coming. He’s coming for me.*
Rachel nodded slowly, but she didn’t look convinced. ‘Maybe try to get some rest for a bit?’ she suggested gently.

Even if Jared had wanted to argue, he had no energy, felt his head bob in agreement instead. Without conscious thought, his eyes started to slide closed. He felt hot, his skin felt tight, and tremors kept running up and down his spine. His leg was throbbing, pulses of sharp pain, his arms and shoulders ached and he’d never been more desperate for water in his life. He started to fade, in and out, half falling into a restless, sporadic sleep, before a burst of pain would jolt him awake again.

*Jensen is coming*, he kept repeating, fuzzily, hazily, *Jensen is coming*.

The next time he awoke a little more clear-headed, shirt stuck to his chest with sweat, it was dark in the room, the light all but faded from outside. And – and there was *noise*. Crashing, banging, howls and screams. Yelling, shouting.

He blinked, shaking his head, looked to Rachel and saw her entire body was tense, taunt, shifting restlessly on the floor.

‘What’s…’ he coughed a little, tried to swallow away the dryness of his throat. ‘What’s going on?’

‘I don’t know,’ Rachel bit at her lip. ‘I don’t – there’s fighting outside and I can’t… I can’t tell…’

She gave a tug, pulling at her handcuffs and made a frustrated noise.

‘I don’t know what’s happening, dammit!’

Jared shifted, straightened up. ‘It’ll be ok, Rachel,’ he tried to assure her. ‘It’ll be –’

He saw Rachel go rigid, eyes wide. Unease crept up his spine.

‘Rachel?’ he said.

Rachel met his eyes, and in the wan light, beneath the bruises, the dirt, she’d gone very, very pale.

‘I smell smoke’ she whispered.

*Oh yeah*, Jared thought, *he was in trouble.*
Thank you so much for all the nice comments & kudos – sorry I’ve been so horrible at replying to them, I’m so sorry – I really do read & appreciate every single kind comment! I’m just super shy & awkward with interacting with people - which I think I’ve said a million times already but I’m also super paranoid everyone thinks I’m ignoring them so… here I go repeating it anyway. (And I did have to giggle at all the Mia-hate – mostly because as I was writing the last chapter even I was thinking, “holy crap, what a bitch!” :P)

Also fair warning – there’s a bit of violence in this chapter, things get intense, shit goes down… so take a deep breath & let’s go!

It was incredible how spectacularly wrong everything could go in a split second, Jensen thought.

They’d had all the advantages; the element of surprise, they’d waited until the cover of partial darkness, they’d masked their scents. The rogue alphas had been seemingly unaware of their presence – they’d counted fifteen sitting on the patio and front yard of their house, swigging from liquor bottles, a bonfire nicely crackling in a pit. Another few alphas had gone inside, and a few more into the boarded up sheds. It had made Jensen’s brow furrow, wondering what was in the sheds, what they kept squirreled away.

They’d thought, therefore, that they had accounted for all the alphas. They’d approached through the bushes, ten of their Weres shifted into wolf form, Jensen himself included, the others armed with bats and guns. It was… unpleasant, for any of them, to contemplate using silver bullets against their own kind, but… in this case, Jensen figured it was fighting fire with fire.

So they’d been confident in their approach. Maybe too confident. Because they hadn’t accounted for all the alphas – there had been some patrolling the property and in retrospect Jensen wanted to curse, wanted to yell at himself, at JD, for not thinking of that, for not making sure of that. But as it was, fanned out, slowly approaching, they’d literally walked straight into a rogue alpha.

It was hard to tell who was more surprised, the alpha, who was swigging from a liquor bottle, or Jensen and his group. For a split second they all froze, stared at each other. Then the rogue alpha dropped the liquor bottle with a thunk to the ground, whirled around and lunged through the air – there was a tearing of clothes, snapping of bones as he literally shifted as he leapt, and a wild, long howl tore from his throat.

‘Son of a bitch!’ JD, in human form, armed with a gun, cursed.

Jensen launched himself after the rogue alpha, crashing heedlessly through the woods, paws thudding, closing in, even as he knew it was too late, the rogue alpha letting out howls, yelps and yips that there was no doubt the others would have heard. He lunged as they exited the trees, came into view of the house, and caught the rogue alpha with claws and teeth in his hind leg, bringing him down, the both of them hitting the ground, skidding. The rogue alpha yelped, writhed, and Jensen unlatched from his flank, tasting blood, seeing red, and lunged. The rogue alpha had time to roll, to swipe pitifully before Jensen had torn into his throat, teeth latching into blood and flesh, tearing,
ripping. He spat the flesh and blood on the ground, whirled to the house to see the rogue alphas had already gotten to their feet. Some had shifted, others were drawing guns and knives.

In seconds, so it seemed, their stealth attack plan had been dashed to the ground.

JD’s Weres launched from the trees, Jensen fronted the pack, hurtling full speed at the rogue alphas. There was gunfire, he saw one of JD’s wolves go down, a spray of blood, felt his rage build, his inner alpha howl for revenge. The Weres clashed, met in a flurry of fur and fangs, in bullets and fists. Jensen slammed into a Were in wolf form, drove the alpha to the ground and they were instantly rolling, entangled, claws slicing and teeth ripping. He felt jaws tear into his shoulder, rip through the muscles, ignored the burn, the pain, catching the alpha Were by the side of the neck, sinking his teeth in, powerful jaw snapping closed. Claws raked along his back, another rogue alpha leaping into the fray, biting at clawing at his flank, before there was a whoosh of air and a sickening crunch and Misha, having not shifted, was there, batton swinging, a knife in his other hand.

Jensen released the now limp alpha from his jaws, yipped a thanks at Misha, but before his alpha friend could acknowledge him there was a high-pitched howl that made all the hairs on Jensen’s coat stand on edge. They spun around. A rogue alpha had tumbled into the bonfire, was now launching themselves out, aflame, an unearthly noise of sheer agony emitting from it’s mouth. The wolf, blind with pain and panic, ran headlong into the house, the flames leaping and jumping from it’s burning body, catching and grabbing onto panels of wood, sparking and lighting.

Oh shit, Jensen had time to think, that’s probably not going to be good.

Then he was hit from the side by another Were, and his thoughts tumbled away, dissolved into the basic functions of fight – kill – attack – even as the fire bit and ate and spread throughout the house.

**

Any thoughts Jared might have entertained that the smoke Rachel smelt was merely from outside, or from one of the sheds or – well, from anywhere but the house they were currently trapped in, was quickly dispelled.

It didn’t take long for the smoke to start to filter through the gaps in wood slates, through the trapdoor that shut the entrance to the attic, tendrils wafting and curling around the two omegas. Rachel tugged, pulled at her cuffs, twisting a little, already coughing at the smoke.

‘Shit,’ she cursed. ‘Shit. Shit. Shit.’

She pulled harder once more, then slumped back a little. ‘God – dammit – Christ – if this stupid bed wasn’t bolted to the floor – god – ’ she met Jared’s eyes through the smoky haze. ‘I…’ a half hysterical laugh escaped her lips. ‘God, I never thought – by fire – just… didn’t cross my mind. As the end. You know?’

The hysterical laugh turned into a sob and - and Jared felt something swell in his chest, felt something surge through him because; no –

‘No,’ the word burst from his mouth. ‘No – fuck that.’

No god dammit, he thought savagely, wriggling to an upright position, this was not how he was going die, not after everything he’d been through, he was not going to die tied to some pole in the
attic of a house – *it was not going to happen.*

He tugged at the handcuffs, pulled at one hand, felt the metal scrape and dig into skin. An idea formed in his head, horrible, unpleasant – but… but an idea.

Rachel was staring at him. ‘Paddy?’ she ventured.

Jared tried to smile at her. ‘It’s possible I’m going to scream’ he told her.

He braced himself, swallowed, closed his eyes. Couldn’t stop shaking a little. Couldn’t stop the little huff of terrified breath that slipped out.

‘What – ’ Rachel started.

And then Jared pulled – *pulled at one hand and didn’t stop, didn’t stop* – used all of his strength, all the strength he’d gained from working out. And – he felt his skin split and break – and then – then with a strangled cry – felt bones pop out of joint, shatter, his thumb popped out of position in an explosion of white hot pain – and his hand, broken and twisted, lubricated with blood from broken skin, slid from the cuff. He lurched over instantly, free, the cuffs only attached to one wrist now, the other cuff dangling, and his stomach surged at the pain, making him retch, coughing bile up on the ground.


Jared took a moment, trying to breathe, the smoke clogging in his throat. For a moment his vision swam and he thought he might black out, before he clenched his jaw, shook his head and forced himself to uncurl, straighten up. He rose slowly, unsteadily, to his feet, his leg screaming in protest, one hand curled to his chest, useless, and limped to Rachel’s side, slowly lowering down next to her.

‘We’ve got…’ he stopped, swallowed, forced himself to keep talking, ‘we’ve got to get you out of the cuffs.’

‘I pride myself on being pretty bad-ass,’ Rachel said, ‘but I honestly don’t think I can dislocate or break my own thumb like you, just FYI.’

Sweat was beading on Jared’s forehead, the attic becoming uncomfortable and hotter with every passing moment, the smoke thickening. He tried to think, tried to formulate, his brain semi-fuzzy, and suddenly Rachel was making a noise.

‘Oh!’ she twisted to face him. ‘Use my bra!’

For a second Jared thought he’d started hallucinating. He blinked sluggishly a moment. ‘What…?’

‘No, seriously,’ Rachel babbled, ‘it’s – it’s a wire bra – the underwire. You can use the underwire to pick the lock – you know how to pick locks yeah?’

Jared nodded, wiped his face with his free hand and couldn’t stop a cough from escaping. It was getting harder to breathe. He slid lifted Rachel’s shirt, too tired, dizzy and in pain to even feel awkward about it and used his teeth to tear at the fraying fabric and pull the wires out. Then, his one hand was shaking like mad, his body dripping in sweat, his vision swimming, he managed – *somehow* he managed, twisting and fiddling, to undo her cuffs, finally rewarded with the sound of a click, with the cuff falling free from Rachel’s chafed wrists.

Rachel was pulling her arms forward instantly, groaning aloud. ‘I don’t anything has ever felt so good’ she rasped, wriggling both shoulders.
Jared heaved to his feet, swaying a little. ‘C’mon – we gotta – we gotta get outta here.’

Rachel got to her feet quickly, limbs stiff, staggering as circulation restarted. Jared limped and stumbled behind her as she made for the trap door. She grabbed at the handle and pulled the door open. Instantly thick smoke billowed up, swamping the two omegas. Both staggered back, coughing. Jared choked, eyes watering, for a split second unable to even draw a breath, the smoke grating in his throat and lungs. He half fell to one knee, and pain exploded up his thigh. He cried out, almost blacked out – then Rachel grabbed his shoulder.

‘Hey – hey! Stay with me Paddywhack!’ she shouted into his face. ‘C’mon! Stay with me!’

Jared blinked, coughed, nodded. Rachel’s eyes were streaming, bloodshot, her body heaving with effort to try to breathe.

‘No ladder,’ she said. ‘We gotta jump down.’

Jared nodded, shuffled himself to the edge of the attic trap door. ‘I’ll go f-first,’ he coughed out, ‘t-then help you d-down.’

Rachel opened her mouth, most likely to protest, but Jared was already sliding both legs through the hole, gripping the edge with his one good hand, and dropping himself down. His good arm jarred, he felt pain in his shoulder as it jolted, and he dangled a moment from the trapdoor, before bracing himself and letting go to drop to the ground. He tried – Lord how he tried – to take all the weight on his good leg – but the pain still shot, hot and white, up his thigh, his leg giving way and he fell to the ground with a pained grunt. The hallway he’d landed in was thick with smoke, he could barely breathe and the heat was almost unbearable, searing along his skin. The flames licked and leapt, devouring, eating through the bottom story quickly. Too quickly. They were running out of time.

‘You ok?’ Rachel was shouting.

Jared heaved himself to his feet, woozily, squinting through the smoke as he held out his one good arm. ‘C’mon down!’ he called out.

Rachel’s slim, tiny form appeared, sliding legs first, down the trap door, and he looped his good arm around her waist, balancing their weight on one leg as he gently eased her to the ground. The instant her feet touched the ground, she was moving, pulling him behind her.

‘This way – we need to –’

There was an ear-splitting crack, the flooring gave way underneath Rachel and she screamed. Jared reacted instinctively, grabbed her around the waist, hauled her back and the two fell to a heap on the floorboards. The flames roared in front of them, hot, unyielding, a gaping hole where Rachel had been seconds before.

‘Shit – shit –’ Rachel coughed desperately, rolling off Jared.

She scrambled up, grabbing at Jared’s shoulder and pulled, helping him to his feet, tugging them both away from the flames.

‘The doors – the stairs – we can’t –’ Rachel’s face was twisted in anguish, waving a hand wildly at the flames.

Jared blinked desperately through the smoke, searching up and down the hallway, then seized Rachel’s arm.
This way!"

He dragged her away from the broken floorboards and the flames, down the hallway, to the first doorway. He grabbed the handle, twisted and turned. It was locked. He ground his teeth in frustration, then Rachel was pushing him out the way, the wire from her bra appeared in her hand - she'd obviously pocketed it - and she shoved it into the lock, desperately twisting and manoeuvring it. Jared stepped back to let her work and as he did, beyond the sound of the roaring flames, he started to hear something else. Screaming, wailing. Pain-filled, anguished. His stomach plunged.

‘Rach – ’ he croaked, pawing at her shoulder. ‘Rach the other omegas – in the other rooms – ’

There was a click as the door swung in and before either of them could react, an omega was shoving past them wildly, flailing in panic, wrists torn to hell, cuffs dangling, scrambling down the hallway.

‘Wait!’ Jared shouted.

There was a crack, the floorboards gave way and the omega dropped with a scream, plunged into the flames beyond. Jared made a wounded noise, took half a step forward.

‘Stop – ’ Rachel grabbed his arm, started to drag him into the room. ‘We can’t – ’

‘The others – Rach – the other rooms – ’

Rachel spun to face him. ‘There’s no time, Jared – I’m sorry – we can’t – I wish – ’

‘But – ’

‘There’s no time!’ Rachel’s voice was a hoarse shriek, and she was turning to race to the window. ‘If we want to live – if we want to – ’

Jared’s heart twisted, nausea swelling in his throat, but it was suicide – would be suicide to try to unlock all the doors, to go searching, he knew it, and he stumbled after Rachel. He didn’t know if the tears streaming from his eyes were from the smoke, or from the goddamn situation, his nose clogged, a half sob, half moan punching from his lungs raggedly. Rachel grabbed at the window, pushed, ran her hands over it.

‘It’s sealed shut!’ she moaned. ‘Those fuckers – it’s fucking – ’

Fuck it, Jared thought, what was another wound?

He reared back his good hand and punched the window hard, the glass shattering, slicing through his hand, his wrist and arm. He used his elbow roughly, harshly, to smash out the other shards, clear a space. Rachel scrambled onto the sill, leaned out to suck in the slightly fresher air outside. She looked down. They were facing out the back of the house, a wall of trees in front of them and – most importantly, a small outhouse, made of metal, a jumpable distance below – perfect to jump onto, and then go the lower distance to the ground.

‘You go first,’ Jared croaked. ‘You’re lighter – if that thing isn’t stable – if I jump and bring it down –’

‘You do like playing the hero, don’t you?’ Rachel tried to joke, before giving a weak smile. ‘See ya down below Paddington.’

She balanced, took a breath and jumped down. She landed with a thud atop the outhouse, landing in a crouch and tumbling forward a little onto all fours. For a second she caught her breath, heart
pounding, then scrambled to the edge of the tin roof and swung herself over the edge, dropping to the ground below.

As soon as she landed, she stumbled back, moving from the house, her breath catching at the sight of the flames that had engulfed the bottom story, the wall of heat that hit her where she stood. She waved a hand at Jared, urging him to hurry.

Jared took a breath, lifting his good leg onto the sill and using his bloodied hand to haul himself and his bad leg up. He looked down to Rachel, to the outhouse – and a cry burst from his mouth.

There was no time to warn her, no time at all – and the alpha that had crept up promptly grabbed Rachel by the hair, yanked her back off her feet, unbalancing her. She cried out, but before she could struggle or fight, the alpha swung her like a ragdoll, smashing her against the side of the outhouse, once, twice –

No, Jared thought. No – No.

He jumped, awkwardly, stupidly, acting, not thinking, and misjudged entirely; instead of landing on the outhouse, his upper body smacked into it, and he felt an explosion of pain, the rush of air pushed from his chest, the terrible crunch and snap of bones, then he tumbled and hit the ground on his side, gasping, black and white spots dancing across his vision. For a second, the world receded, everything faded and he almost gave into it, the embrace of unconsciousness, a reprieve from the pain, the exhaustion – then he was letting out a sobbing breath, forcing himself to roll over, blinking the spots from his eyes, spitting the coppery taste of blood from his mouth.

Not helpless, he hauled himself to his feet, not helpless.

The alpha turned as he staggered around the side of the outhouse, Rachel dangling from his grip, her face bloodied -

The alpha turned and Jared saw his face –

Mick.

And there was a surge of adrenaline at that sneer, at the amusement in his cruel eyes, the patronizing lilt to the alpha’s lips – Jared gave an almost wolf-like snarl and lunged for Mick, ignoring the pain of his ribs, the pain of his leg, his hands. It caught the alpha off guard – and Jared was sure, weak as he was, that was the only reason he managed to knock them both to the ground in a heap, managed to dislodge Mick’s hold on Rachel so she tumbled down beside them.

But Mick recovered quickly – too quickly – and in a second, snarling, he was rolling them, so Jared was pinned beneath him, his face snarling, morphing into snapping jaws, his fingers elongating into claws. Jared tried to struggle, tried to hit, but the claws dug and tore into his chest, the snapping jaws made for his throat and for a second they almost closed, almost tore his jugular out – then Rachel appeared, leapt onto Mick’s back dug in with her own claws, eyes flaring wolf yellow. Mick cried out, reared up, off Jared, tried to shake the other omega from his back.

For a second Jared was dazed, could think of nothing but giving in to the darkness dancing across his vision, then he heard Rachel give a cry as Mick grabbed her by the arm and hurled her to the ground, where she hit with a audible thud, rolling to one side, gasping.

Get up, Padalecki, Jared growled at himself. Get up.

He rolled, every movement agony, half scrambled up, but Mick was there again, and he lashed out with his claws and Jared felt them rip, tear across his abdomen – the same place, he thought,
dazedly, even as he fell back, *the same goddamn place as* –

Mick loomed over him, face twisted, and laughed – *laughed – laughed like last time, like last time* – and sometime inside Jared *snapped* – some inner strength surged through him and he launched up, threw his entire weight into a punch that shattered the alpha’s nose, sent him reeling and falling to the ground.

And Jared – Jared could see only red – red and *the piece of smouldering timber on the ground that had fallen from the burning house*. He scooped it up, grabbed it in one hand, felt the burn of the hot wood into his flesh, ignored it, and as Mick started to rise up, Jared swung it and smashed it into the alpha’s head –

Once –

*For Jeff, for his parents –*

Twice –

*For Megan, for his little sister –*

Thrice –

*For the pups he’d never give Jensen –*

And again, and *again*, blood splattering, *again*, another hit, *for the omegas trapped in the house*, again, *again* - because all he could see was that laughing face, that sneer, and *everything it had cost him, everything, everything* –

‘Jared!’

Hands were grabbing at him, pulling at his shoulders, but he had to hit – *had to kill – had to save* -

‘Jared – god – stop! Stop! He’s dead! Stop!’

Jared blinked, the haze of fury lifting, felt the half splintered, blood soaked piece of wood drop from his trembling hand. He looked to the ground, to what remained of Mick’s face, his head, and bile rose to the back of his throat – his legs gave way and he dropped to all fours, retching.

Rachel was still tugging at him. ‘Hey – hey – easy, big guy, easy!’ she babbled.

Jared tasted bile and blood in his mouth, the adrenaline surge leaving him, his muscles suddenly feel weak and noodle-like, his head swimming.

‘I killed him’ it seemed important to say that out loud for some reason.

‘He deserved it’ Rachel told him quickly, hands still gripping his shoulders.

‘He was… he was the one an’ … an’ I killed him… s’over. S’over.’

He gave a half hysterical laugh, felt like his head was floating, the world sliding in and out of focus. It was over now. It was *over* now and he could sleep. He could lie down and *sleep*.

‘Hey, hey, no – no – no eyes closing, *no eyes closing!*’ Rachel snapped, hauled at his shoulders as he started to slide to the ground. ‘Up! Up, Paddyshack! Up!’

Jared groaned at the insistent tugging, the pulling and moved sluggishly, slowly, staggering to his
feet. He felt the world tilt, the ground swell and shift beneath him and his vision spun and swum. Then Rachel was in front of him, reaching up and grabbing his chin, forcing his gaze to her.

‘Listen – listen to me ok - there’s still alphas everywhere here – and I can’t tell who’s what or what’s happening so we are getting out of here – ok? We’re gonna get out of here and get you to a hospital and get you all patched up – ok, Paddington?’

Jared nodded his head, wasn’t quite sure what he was nodding to. He could feel a hand on his arm, insistently pulling, and forced his legs to move, one foot after another, one foot after another, his vision swimming, head woozy. Things seemed far away, he could barely focus, and the voice – was someone talking? Someone was talking? It kept dipping in and out, like he was bobbing through water.

‘ – gonna be just fine, s’all gonna be just fine – ’ the voice was saying.

They were walking, Jared knew. He didn’t know why. *Why were they walking? Where were they going?* He tried to remember, tried to focus. Things were slipping away quicker and quicker. Every step felt worse than the last.

Alphas. *Something to do with alphas.* That’s right – Mia –

‘Mia… y’sh’ld… go…’ he tried to talk, felt his words slur and mumble. ‘Sh’d run… shift… Mia…’

The voice faltered a moment, the grip tightened. ‘Not Mia, dude. And not shifting or leaving. Stop being the damn hero, Paddycake.’

Not Mia? Then who? Jared’s thoughts kept slipping and sliding from his grasp. There were things – branches, stones – tugging and tripping him up and he just wanted to rest. *Why wouldn’t they let him rest?*

‘J’nsen…’ he muttered. ‘Pl’s… tired… Jen…’

‘Nope, no rest yet, c’mon, keep on walking,’ the voice insisted. ‘C’mon walk with me – here, pretend we’re marching – left, right, left, right – say it with me – left, right, left, right…’

‘L’ft… r’ght…’ the words tripped from his lips. ‘L’ft… l… r’ht…’

Rachel turned her head as little as they stumbled through the woods, bit her lip, eyes sweeping over the hunched, staggering figure next to her, the silhouette of the fire and smoke rising above the trees behind them, the sounds of gunshots, of screams and howls rending the air.

‘L’ght…’ she heard Jared mutter, words slurred, nonsensical, ‘r’ft… l’r’ht…’

‘Close enough,’ she muttered, and held onto Jared’s arm a little tighter, tried to tamp down on her rising worry and panic.

**

Omegas.

It had been omegas in the boarded up shed. Trembling, terrified, beat to hell, abused omegas.
Jensen felt a little sick.

The fight was over. They’d won, at the cost of four of their own Weres. And in the aftermath, in the panic and hurry to find a source of water to stop the rapidly burning house, the flames jumping to the grass, threatening to reach the trees and spread beyond, they’d smashed into the shed. They’d immediately been hit with the scent of omega, of fear, terror, blood and pain – they’d seen the huddled, terrified mass, chained and bound in the corner, gazing with wide, terrified eyes. It had been horrible, grating against the very innate nature of an alpha to shield, to protect, to force themselves to focus on the immediate fire threat, to not rush to free the omegas, assure them. They’d located hoses, sources of water, buckets and set to work dousing the flames.

When it was more under control, when it seemed less likely to be spreading to the trees, they’d gone back into the shed, freed the omegas, led them blinking, shaking, trembling outside of the shed. And all Jensen could think, staring at the omegas, feeling the remnants of the heat from the fire, the scent of smoke in his nose, the flakes of ash that drifted in the wind gently falling onto his shoulders, into his hair – all he could think was if it had been omegas in the shed, maybe, maybe there had been omegas in the house as well.

The still burning remnants of the house. The smouldering, charred house that their Weres were dousing with water to keep it contained. They’d have been locked up, possibly chained up, like these omegas – they wouldn’t have stood had a chance. They’d have burnt alive.

Jensen willed himself not to be sick.

He looked over the shivering omegas, huddled together, a few of their Weres crouching before them, murmuring quietly. A few of the omegas were youngish male Weres, with dirtied, bruised faces, but more were females, with haunted eyes, and hunched shoulders. They’d whispered, when asked, that there were thirty rogue alphas and JD had set about ordering Weres to drag the bodies into a pile, to count and make sure that they’d gotten every single one. To make sure the job was done this time.

To make sure none got away this time.

Jensen couldn’t help transplanting another face over the top of the omegas – a vision of shaggy hair and dimples. His omega. What if his omega had been taken, used like these, abused like these and…

He shuddered, closed his eyes tightly.

Jared was safe at home, he told himself. Everything was ok. Jared was ok.

‘Jen?’

Jensen opened his eyes to see Misha hovering next to him, a concerned look on his face.

‘You ok?’ his alpha friend asked.

Jensen started to nod, then stopped, shoulders slumping, and shrugged helplessly. ‘I don’t… I don’t know… this… Christ, Mish, this is all… fucking horrible. It’s all fucking horrible.’

‘Yeah’ his friend said quietly.

‘There were probably more in the house’ Jensen said, and his voice sounded hollow to his own ears.

‘We didn’t know’ Misha said.

That’s no excuse, Jensen thought.
‘And the fire… it spread so quickly. And we had the rogue alphas to contend with…’ Misha carried on, and put his hand on Jensen’s shoulder, gripped it. ‘Jen, we didn’t know.’

Jensen wordlessly shook his head.

_No excuse_, he repeated to himself. If it had been _Jared_ inside… if it had been _his_ omega… He swallowed hard, clenched his eyes shut.

‘How about I go get the car?’ Misha said quietly, squeezing his shoulder. ‘Bring it round? We can… we can head back to town. You can see Jared.’

Jensen opened his eyes and looked at his friend.

Misha shrugged. ‘I can tell… I just think you need to see him.’

‘I do… I just… Mish…’ Jensen started, stopped.

He looked to where JD was instructing some of the Weres, pointing and directing as they dragged bloodied bodies across the dirt. He bit his lip.

‘JD…’ he started.

‘JD can handle things,’ Misha said firmly. ‘You’re no help if half your mind is elsewhere anyway. I’m sure if anyone would understand, it’d be JD.’

Jensen’s brow furrowed for a moment, then he let out a breath, nodded his head.

‘Yeah. Yeah, ok. If you bring a car ‘round I’d… yeah, I’d like to get back, see Jared.’

Misha nodded, turned with a wave of his hand. ‘Wait right here, probably be about ten minutes at most.’

**

Rachel had to hand it to Jared – for all the injuries, the fact that the omega was practically delirious, barely coherent, they managed to stumble and stagger their way a fair distance from the burning house and the fighting alphas. She’d been trying to direct him near to the road, so they could flag down a driver, get a ride to the hospital, and they were close, she could feel, they were close, when Jared’s legs finally buckled and he went down, heavily, dragging her down with him. They both hit the ground and Jared retched, coughed bile and blood onto the ground, his head rolling feebly, eyes fluttering. Rachel rolled him to his side, pushed his sweat-soaked, sooty, dirty hair from his face.

‘Crap…’ she muttered, eyes flickering over the sweat on his face, his sickly pale pallor, his rapid, wheezing breath, the blood on his lips, teeth.

‘J’n’sn…’ she could hear his voice, mumbling, slurried, ‘J’n’sn… J’n…’

Rachel sat back on her haunches, keeping one hand on Jared’s head, absentely stroking his hair.

‘Just… just hang in for a bit, ok, Paddlepop?’ she said aloud. ‘Just hang on, I gotta think. Ok? I gotta think. You’re gonna be okay. I’m gonna make it ok…’
She let out a breath through her mouth, her nose a newly bloodied mess after Mick’s attack, tried to control her pounding heart and rising worry.

*Think, Miner*, she told herself, *think dammit.*

They were close enough to the road, she could drag Jared the distance – but how long would it take? How long before a car passed & they could flag it down? What if the car that stopped was filled with the alphas? What if –

As her thoughts raced and tumbled, her head turned slowly, scanning the forest, the trees, the parked cars through the branches, the –

Rachel’s head spun back.

*The parked cars?*

She blinked a few times, wondered briefly if this was a stress or smoke-induced hallucination. She closed her eyes tight, gave her head a shake, and reopened them.

*Nope, definitely cars.*

‘Yahtzee’ she said.

She gently patted Jared’s cheek. ‘Finally, a bit of luck, Paddywagon’ she told him.

She got to her feet, heading cautiously to the cars. It was ok, she knew how to hot wire a car – she’d done it before. True, a long time ago, but she was sure she could remember.

*Like riding a bicycle,* she told herself.

She tried not to point out to herself that she’d never actually learnt to ride a bicycle because it was entirely counter-intuitive to trying to bolster her spirits and quell the panic she felt about Jared’s wounded state. She could do this, she could –

She could hear someone approaching.

Rachel froze, before ducking behind a tree. She peered through and saw man was strolling towards one of the cars. She momentarily cursed her blood and smoke clogged nose for preventing her from scenting him, then noticed something.

He was twirling car keys on one finger.

Rachel’s eyes widened.

*Oh yes. Finally some luck indeed,* she thought.

**

Misha twirled the keys on one finger as he made for the car, feeling the need to fidget, still edgy with adrenaline and excess energy from the fight prior. He didn’t want to admit to Jensen, but heading back to the town was as much for his benefit as it was for his alpha friend – being around the scent of so much death, blood and fear, all smothered in the scent of smoke and ash was setting him on edge,
wearing on his very soul.

He reached the car, stopped a moment to take a breath, closing his eyes and titling his head back. He could still smell smoke, the smell clinging to his clothes, tinged with the coppery tang of blood, his and others, splattered across him. He couldn’t wait for a shower, couldn’t wait to tear these clothes off and preferably shove them in the nearest trashcan. Many alphas were typically cocky, act-first-think-later, quick to violence types (*Jensen instantly sprung to mind*, he thought wryly) – Misha, however, was not one of them. Very much not one of them.

He breathed out, trying to centre himself, then in once more. And he gave a little gasp – because – because, *holy Christ*, he was hit with *the most amazing scent* – the scent of citrus, fresh and zingy, the scent of *sunshine*, of *energy* – his knees almost buckled – it was almost *overwhelming*, buzzing into his very veins, unlike anything he’d ever scented before -

His eyes snapped open. He spun around, eyes wild – had time to see a tiny woman, dirtied, bloodied standing with a huge stick in her hands creeping behind him – had time to open his mouth to say something –

Then she swung the stick, it connected with his head with a resounding thwack and Misha’s eyes rolled back into his head as he dropped into a senseless heap.

**

Rachel dropped the stick to the ground and swiped a hand across her grimy brow. She stared down at the (admittedly cute) guy on the ground and sighed.

‘Sorry, dude, we need to borrow your car,’ she said, dropping to a crouch, next to him, ‘desperate times and all that.’

She picked up the dropped keys with one hand, used the other to check the man’s pulse, sighing in relief when she felt the steady thrum. The guy would have a helluva headache when he awoke, but he’d be ok.

She straightened up, pocketing the keys, and darted back into the forest. Jared was lying, still, only the wheezy breath that hissed from his parted lips, the stuttering rise and fall of his chest indicating he was still alive, his skin deathly pale, sticky with sweat, blood and dirt. It took a while, a lot of cursing and a lot of trying to ignore the soft, pained whimpers Jared made, but Rachel managed to drag his prone form out from the bushes to the car. She stopped, panting, her own face stinging from the cuts and bruises, sweat dripping down her back. She unlocked the passenger side, hooked her arms, shaking with effort and exertion, underneath Jared’s shoulders and hauled him up, scooting herself in backwards across the bench seat of the car, pulling his body as she went. When she finally had most of him inside, she darted out the driver’s door, back around, lifting both of his long, gangly legs, and folding them into the car, before shutting the door.

‘Dude, you owe me so much right now,’ she told him through panting breaths as she finally slid in behind the driver’s wheel. ‘Like, seriously. You weight a tonne. You’re like a moose. You know that right? A total moose.’

She glanced down at Jared’s still face, and swallowed, a little spike of fear momentarily shooting through her. She reached down, gently squeezed his shoulder.
‘Just hold on, ok, Padama, we’ll get you to a hospital, ok? You’re gonna be just fine. Just hang on for me.’

Then she started the car, peeled out onto the road and gunned it away.

**

After fifteen minutes, Jensen started to get impatient, restless. He rubbed a hand through his dirtied, short hair, bit at his lip and glanced around as if Misha would suddenly materialise from somewhere with the car. What was taking the alpha so damn long? What was the goddamn hold-up?

When fifteen turned into twenty, Jensen had had enough. Tired of waiting around, feeling anxious and antsy, he blew out a breath, turned and started to jog in the direction of the cars. It took him about ten minutes before the cars came into view, his eyes scanning over them, flickering, assessing quickly – then he noticed the sprawled heap on the ground.

Jensen’s heart leapt to his throat. No.

‘Misha!’ he cried out, and broke into a full sprint.

He reached the figure, skidded and half fell, half dropped to his knees, grabbing at Misha’s shirt front.

‘Misha! Misha! Misha – answer me! Misha!’

His hands searched, pushed at fabric, looking for blood, for wounds, when Misha sucked in a breath and his eyes flung open.

‘Cirtus!’ he cried out.

Jensen’s eyebrows drew together sharply. ‘Cit… what? Mish, are you ok?’ he grabbed at the alpha’s shoulders, hauled him to sitting up. ‘Are you hurt? Did they get you? Did an alpha get you? Are they still here?’

Misha blinked a few moments, looking vaguely unfocused, lifted a hand to gingerly touch the side of his head.

Jensen grabbed at his hand. ‘What? What is it?’

‘I – ’ Misha started slowly.

‘Is that blood? Oh Christ, it’s blood! How are you bleeding?’

‘I –’

‘Are you ok? Did they get you? Mish, are you ok? Answer me!’

‘I –’

‘Was it an alpha? Was – ’

Misha lifted his other hand and slapped it over Jensen’s mouth.
‘Jensen,’ he said, ‘for the love of god, sssh!’

Jensen blinked, surprised, then his forehead crinkled in what was unmistakably a scowl behind Misha’s hand.

‘It wasn’t an alpha, it’s just a bump on the head and I’m fine’ Misha said.

Jensen tugged his hand away, still scowling. ‘If it wasn’t an alpha, then who was it? What happened?’

‘It wasn’t an alpha, it was – ’ Misha stopped mid-sentence.

Jensen waited, expectantly.

Misha’s cheeks started to colour. ‘It wasn’t an alpha,’ he repeated. ‘Uh. So, anyway, we should – ’

‘Whoa, wait, wait, Mish,’ Jensen halted him as he made to rise. ‘What’s going on? What happened?’

Misha looked anywhere but Jensen’s face. ‘I… uh… someone. They hit me,’ he cleared his throat, shifted, ‘think they took the keys. And the car.’

‘The c…’ Jensen looked up, noticed for the first time. ‘Son of a bitch! They took a car? Who the hell was it?’

‘Uh… it…’ Misha was definitely pink now. ‘Um. I think. A young woman.’

Jensen sat back on his haunches, stared. ‘Like… what? A girl?’

‘No, not a girl,’ Misha snapped. ‘A, uh, young woman.’

‘An… alpha?’ Jensen tilted his head.

‘Well… uh. No. I don’t. I don’t think so,’ Misha was more red now. ‘An omega. Actually. Probably. She, uh, was very… very small.’

A smile started on Jensen’s features. ‘So… a small girl beat you up and took a car?’

Misha started to get to his feet. ‘A – not a girl, a woman, ok, a full-grown… rather small woman. You know what? Never mind.’

Jensen started to laugh. ‘Holy crap, are you kidding me Mish?’

‘It’s not funny,’ Misha was standing now, hands folded over his chest. ‘She surprised me is all. She was small. I didn’t see her coming.’

Jensen laughed harder, started to climb to his feet, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. ‘This is… actually, you know what? I needed that. Thanks Mish.’

‘You’re a horrible person’ Misha informed him.

‘You got beat up by a girl’ Jensen replied.


Jensen rolled his eyes. ‘Whatever…’ he blew out a breath. ‘Can’t believe you lost a car, man. God
dammit. We’ll have to go back, get another set of keys… I should call JD, let him know what happened, that we haven't left yet… You got your mobile? Or,’ his lips twitched, ‘or did the nasty girl steal it?’

Misha eyed him frostily, rifling for his phone. ‘I think I prefer when you were hysterically babbling with concern over my health.’

‘I was never concerned’ Jensen objected.

‘You were,’ Misha shot back, pulling his phone out. ‘You were worried about me.’

Jensen snatched the phone. ‘Was not.’

‘Were too. You were all concerned I was hurt. It was touching. It really was. You care about me.’

Jensen glowered. ‘I’ll really hurt you in a minute’ he muttered, turning away and dialling the number.

Misha considered it a victory.

**

By the time Jensen rolled into the driveway to Jared and Gen’s house, the sun had well and truly risen and it was about mid-morning. JD had sent them back with another car, and also with several other Weres to drop back at their respective homes. The alpha was, meanwhile, gathering the omegas to take to the local hospital for treatment, and several other Weres were staying behind to ensure the fire burnt itself out. It had been a long, taxing night – a long, taxing day and a half really, and Jensen only felt the last vestiges of the events finally peel away when he gazed up at the house.

Finally, finally, he could relax, and he wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with Jared and sleep for several hours.

He’d have to convince the omega to stay in bed specifically so Jensen could cuddle him for the duration of the sleep, and wondered if, when he’d dropped Misha at the hotel, he should’ve also stopped at the local café to purchase treats to bribe Jared with. He heaved himself from the seat, the clothes he’d chucked on sticking the to soot and dirt on his skin. Misha had tried to convince him to at least shower before he rocked up at Jared’s, but the most Jensen had allowed was to quickly douse his face with a water bottle and wash the coppery taste of blood from his mouth. The rest he could wash off at Jared’s, he figured, because damned if he’d waste another second being separated.

The nights events were taking their toll, the exhaustion make his limbs heavy and stiff as he lumbered to the front door, knocked and then leant a little against the wall, eyes closing. Maybe he could convince Jared to share the shower with him… although he wasn’t sure how appealing the idea of helping him to wash blood from his skin would be…

The door swung open and Jensen opened his eyes, only a little disappointed to see Gen, not Jared, at the door. He masked his disappointment, gave her a tired smile.

‘Hey Gen.’

‘Jensen!’ Gen exclaimed. ‘Jensen – holy – you look awful – are you ok? What’s happening? What’s going on? There was – we got told to stay indoors yesterday, be alert – but no one said – is
Jensen winced at the barrage of questions, rubbed at his cheek. ‘Uh, yeah there was…’ he stopped, heaved a huge sigh. ‘Listen I – I’ll explain, I will. But I’m just… I’m friggen beat,’ he huffed a laugh, gave a lop-sided shrug. ‘Any chance you could just grab Jared and I’ll explain later after a long nap?’

Gen’s brows drew together in confusion. ‘Jared?’ she repeated.

Jensen raised an eyebrow. ‘Yeah. You know. Tall. Too-long hair. Your roommate’ he tried for a joke, but felt a spike of impatience.

‘Jared’s not here,’ Gen said slowly, staring at him.

Jensen straightened up. ‘What do you mean, “Jared’s not here”?’

And something stirred in his stomach, a sick, heavy feeling.

‘He was with you,’ Gen said, looking a little confused, a little apprehensive. ‘He said – after work – he was going to see you –’

‘Yeah, days ago, then he went to work the next day and then –’ Jensen couldn’t help the sharp edge of his voice, the steadily rising volume.

‘No – no, then the next day – yesterday – the next day was yesterday and we got told to stay indoors – and – I assumed – I just assumed he was still with you – I mean, he never came home and I... he told me he was going to see you?’

‘He wasn’t – I haven’t –’ Jensen stepped back from the porch, felt the world spin, felt his brain reel.

No, no, no, no.

He was supposed to be at home safe. Jared was supposed to be at home safe.

‘Jensen?’ Gen scrambled out the door, grabbed his arm, starting to look a little alarmed. ‘Jensen – what’s going on?’

And Jensen tried to control the rising panic, the mounting fear, the horror clawing at the back of his throat –

Don’t panic, don’t panic, he repeated. Don’t panic, don’t panic. He could still be in town. He could just be with someone else. He could be just fine..

‘Jensen?’ Gen asked, voice a little higher, a little more anxious.

Don’t panic, Jensen thought desperately - five seconds before he did the exact opposite of that, and dissolved straight, directly into total panic.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

Hey guys, I’m so sorry this took so long – it’s been a hectic week, and I had a university essay due and also had some terrible news, so my brain was a little distracted!

This isn’t actually where I wanted to end this chapter (it was supposed to be longer) – BUT I really wanted to give you guys something because you’ve been waiting so long, and this is what I’d written so far, so I thought I’d post it just to tide you over while I get my act together and work on the next apart.

Again, so sorry everyone, thank you so much for your patience, your sweet comments and all the kudos <3 xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Four days.

Four fucking days had passed and Jensen still didn’t know where Jared was. Still didn’t know if he was ok. Still didn’t know what had happened.

Four. Days.

In the initial panic, he and Gen had called around to everyone Jared knew – Felicia, Osric, Kat, JD’s mate Samantha, everyone – desperately asking if anyone had seen him, if he was with anyone right at that second. Osric said Jared had left work early the day before and that was the last he’d seen him. Felicia said Jared had told her he was going to see Jensen and she hadn’t heard from him since. No one, it seemed, had seen him beyond him leaving work. It was like Jared had left work and vanished into thin air. And Jensen couldn’t understand, couldn’t think of why – why had Jared left work early? Why had Jared said he was spending the night with Jensen? They hadn’t organized anything between them. It didn’t make any sense.

All the calls they made to Jared’s mobile went straight to voicemail and Jensen was starting to think if he heard Jared’s voice tell him to leave a message one more time he might explode. They scoured the town firstly. JD had joined the search by that time, the omegas from the rogue alpha’s house safely delivered to the hospital. They searched until night fell on the first day and JD told them they needed to stop, needed to rest, that they couldn’t hope to achieve much at night anyway, not when so many of them were already running on empty. At that he had cast Jensen a pointed look, heavy with meaning.

If Jensen could’ve laughed, he definitely would have at the very thought, at the suggestion that he could sleep at that point.

He’d gone back to his hotel, he had. He’d at the very least had intentions of maybe sitting, lying down, resting his aching body. And then he’d stepped into his room and stared. The sheets rumpled on his bed smelt like his omega, the plaid shirt draped over the back of the chair was Jared’s and his omega had left a book on the bedside table. He’d immediately turned heel, left the room, shut the door behind and hadn’t returned since. He couldn’t stand another second there, couldn’t stand any further reminder of what was missing from the picture.

He’d searched through the night, the exhaustion, tiredness leeching into his very veins, his bones, but
he couldn’t stop. Wouldn’t stop. At that point he was going on two nights, two days without sleep, running on pure adrenaline, but he couldn’t bear to close his eyes, couldn’t bear to stop his forward momentum, to give into the crash that threatened him.

By sunrise on the second day, when the others awoke, they expanded the search to the forest.

By mid-afternoon on the second day, they discovered the blood in the woods.

It was a small amount – a splatter on the ground, mixed with dirt. To the undiscerning eye it looked like nothing but a dark stain. But the scent was unmistakable – the coppery scent – and that scent intermingled with something that told Jensen that it was undeniably, unmistakably, Jared’s blood.

The moment he’d realized, it felt a little like the world faded out, like the ground fell away from beneath his feet and he was hit with a wave of dizziness so powerful it almost knocked him out.

It wasn’t just the blood, wasn’t just the implication that not only was Jared missing, but that he was also hurt, it wasn’t just that. It was also the location they’d found it. A short distance from Morning Clearing. A short distance from where Mia had said she’d scented the alphas.

The rogue alphas that had chained omegas up in their shed. That had abused the omegas, reduced them to trembling, wide-eyed shells.

Jensen had thrown up once the implications had hit him.

‘We don’t know,’ Misha had tried to tell him, ‘we don’t know for sure the blood is from Jared running into the alphas. He could’ve gotten caught on a branch, tripped – anything. It could even be days old. Jensen, we don’t know.’

They asked Mia if she’d seen Jared in the area that day, and she told them she hadn’t. That she’d been alone, hadn’t seen anyone nearby or scented anyone aside from the alphas. That wasn’t altogether too surprising. The scent of the group of alphas was still so strong in that area that even Jensen couldn’t even pick up Jared’s scent, couldn’t use it to track his omega. They searched relentlessly around the area, looking for anything – any signs, any indications, anything to clue them into what might have happened to Jared. Gen and Felicia started to call around to the local hospitals, inquiring if Jared had been admitted, if anyone had treated an omega matching his description, but their search turned up fruitless.

‘I thought maybe… there was one…’ Gen had said, running a hand over her face at the end of the second day, her hair a greasy frazzled mess, eyes bloodshot and tired. ‘It almost sounded like Jare… but… the omega came in with a sister. A family called the Winchesters apparently.’

On the third day, after a long day of searching, of fighting a war against the rising hysteria that was building within him, Jensen almost lost it when JD started to quietly talk about the charred skeletons they’d found amongst the remnants of the burnt down house.

‘There were probably more in the house’ he remembered saying to Misha that day.

‘No,’ is what he told JD. ‘No. It’s not. He’s not. I. He’s not, ok? No.’

If that was my omega inside, he’d thought that day, if that was my omega inside I’d run inside to save him.

‘I’d know,’ he was a bit desperate now. ‘I’d know if he. I’d know. He’s my true mate. I’d know.’

Only.
Only as JD had pointed out, sadly, reluctantly, he’d never claimed Jared. He’d never made it official. So… would he know? Would he really know if Jared was dead?

Jensen didn’t know if his steadfast, bordering on hysterical resolution that he’d know, he’d know if Jared was… he didn’t know how much of it was borne from pure denial. How much of it was just him refusing to accept what was… what was a very plausible explanation for Jared being missing.

Jensen didn’t know much of anything really, at that moment. Nothing beyond the world of hurt he was in.

It was like an ache in his chest, a hollow, gaping hole that made it difficult to breathe, to think, to move. It felt like a hand clenching at his heart, tightening, squeezing until it felt like his heart might stop beating, might just burst in his chest. A sickness swirled in his stomach, ever-present, nausea, the mix of grief and fear and self-loathing. The first day had felt surreal – like it wasn’t really happening. Like Jared would just be sitting at home, waiting, ready to give them all an amused look for being so worried and scared.

Denial, Jensen figured.

Jensen kind of missed the denial phase, because once the second day had passed, once they’d discovered the splash of blood in the woods, the acute panic he’d felt thereon was almost unbearable. It pervaded his every moment, filled every inch of his brain. It kept his sluggish limbs moving, restlessly, relentlessly, even when his body cried for sleep, for rest. It conjured images in his head of Jared, of Jared hurt, of flames, heat, flesh burning, and horrendous screaming – screaming – screaming –

It was four days. Four days of no Jared, no sleep, no reprieve and the night of the fourth day, Jensen went to the bar.

He went because he couldn’t – he couldn’t any more. His entire body was trembling, shaking all over from exhaustion. His face was haggard, unshaven, dark rings beneath bloodshot eyes, hair a dishevelled mess. Another day of fruitless searching and he couldn’t face another aimless night of the same, or another night of knowing sleep would never come, of being tormented by his own mind.

You deserve this.

That was the new mantra his brain had come up with. It had started sometime after JD mentioned the charred skeletons when Jensen had realized, when it had suddenly become so clear to him, that this was his fault.

He’d been so caught up in his bloodlust, his desire for revenge against those that had hurt Jared when he was young – he’d been so goddamn cocky and reckless, he’d neglected to check on Jared, had neglected to check to make sure he was safe. He’d failed as an alpha. He’d failed his omega. And anything he felt, all the pain and worry and anguish, his body crumpling under stress and lack of sleep – he’d bought it on himself. He deserved it all.

It was his fault.

He hated the concern, the sadness in Rob’s eyes when he slid the whiskey across the bar. Hated that Rob said, ‘on the house’ like he felt sorry for Jensen. No one should feel sorry for him. He wanted to spit at Rob, tell him he deserved to feel like shit, tell him it was his fault – tell everyone it was his fault Jared was missing, and have them yell at him, blame him like he deserved.
Misha kept his distance, hovering in somewhere in the bar, and Jensen was glad for it, didn’t feel like interacting with anyone, not even his alpha friend, at the moment. He settled himself in a booth in the corner, took a long swallow of his whiskey, relishing the burn of it down his throat. He had half thought Misha might stop him from drinking, recognising the impending signs of a breakdown that frayed at Jensen’s edges, recognising that adding alcohol to the mix might be a dangerous combination; but his alpha friend hadn’t said a word. Jensen wondered if it was because Misha thought the alcohol might actually make Jensen sleep. He could tell his friend was worried about the dark hollows beneath his bloodshot eyes, the tremors and shakes that ran along his frame.

Jensen took another deep gulp of his whiskey.

‘It’s not your fault,’ Misha had told him earlier that day, in that spookily intuitive way he had, ‘whatever we find… whatever happened to Jared, it wasn’t your fault. You know that right? It’s important to me that you know that, Jensen.’

Jensen hadn’t replied. That was probably all the answer that Misha needed.

He drank the first whiskey quickly, the second even quicker. By the third, the world had taken on a fuzzy quality at the edges, and the hurt that had been encompassing his entire body since he found out Jared was missing dulled just that little bit, the alcohol muting the sharp edges. He finished the third whiskey, closed his eyes to relish the hot burn down his throat, the pleasant tingle of numbness that was creeping on. He could see why people did this, why they drank and drank and never stopped in an attempt to ease to the pain, numb the hurt. The appeal was dangerously addictive and he thought if they never… if Jared was…

Well, he squinted at the empty glass, he and whiskey might just be getting more closely acquainted if that came to pass.

He was contemplating getting up for the next glass when there was movement and newly filled whiskey was placed in front of him. He glanced up, blinking, as Mia offered him a cautious smile.

‘You looked like you could use another’ she told him.

Jensen looked to the whisky. ‘Thanks’ he said roughly, pushing aside his empty glass and tugging the full one over.

‘Do you mind if I…’ Mia gestured to the seat opposite him.

It was on the tip of Jensen’s tongue to say yes he did mind, to say he just wanted to be alone, but then he looked to the full drink she’d bought him and felt his shoulders sag a little. She had been helping them, he reminded himself, over the past few days. The very least he could do was be polite to her.

‘Go ahead’ he said tiredly.

Mia slid into the chair opposite him. She took a sip of her own drink, studying him.

‘No offense, but you look terrible,’ she told him.

Jensen looked to the whisky. ‘Thanks’ he said roughly, pushing aside his empty glass and tugging the full one over.

‘Do you mind if I…’ Mia gestured to the seat opposite him.

It was on the tip of Jensen’s tongue to say yes he did mind, to say he just wanted to be alone, but then he looked to the full drink she’d bought him and felt his shoulders sag a little. She had been helping them, he reminded himself, over the past few days. The very least he could do was be polite to her.

‘Go ahead’ he said tiredly.

Mia slid into the chair opposite him. She took a sip of her own drink, studying him.

‘No offense, but you look terrible,’ she told him.

Jensen gave a one shouldered shrug. ‘It’s been a shitty couple of days’ he told her shortly.

‘I… I heard…’ Mia said softly, looking at the tabletop. ‘I heard about Jared. I’m so sorry. So sorry, Jensen.’

‘He’s not dead’ Jensen snapped sharply.
Because he was sick of people saying that, assuming that.

‘I’d know,’ his voice caught a moment, and he cleared his throat roughly. ‘I’d know if he was dead.’

Mia ducked her head. ‘Of course, I… I didn’t mean to…’ she back-tracked.

Jensen deflated, sighed. ‘Sorry… didn’t mean to snap,’ he muttered. ‘Just… yeah. Bad time.’

Mia reached across the table, laid a hand on his. ‘I know,’ she said softly. ‘I can’t imagine what you’re going through. I just wanted to say that I’m here for you. Whatever you need. Anything you need, I’m here for you.’

Jensen couldn’t muster the energy to shake her hand off, instead concentrated on taking another gulp of the whiskey.

‘I just… you know… it’s such a tough time for you,’ Mia continued, and Jensen noticed she was shifting around the booth, inching towards him, ‘I know you could… use someone. Someone to make you feel better. And take care of you. If you want, I could… I can…’

She was even closer now, still gripping his hand, and his whiskey was almost gone, his head a little fuzzy from so much alcohol in such quick succession and – and when was the last time he ate? He couldn’t remember – it didn’t seem important, eating, not when Jared – when Jared –

‘I – I just mean – you know – I can help you – I can help you –’

Mia was still talking, leaning into his space and –

‘Jensen.’

Jensen jumped a little, startled and turned, blinking, to see Felicia and Misha standing there. Felicia’s arms were folded, her mouth set in a thin line. Misha hovered in the background, a frown on his face. There was something disapproving in Felicia’s eyes and Jensen hated the flush of guilt that pushed through the haze of alcohol.

‘Funnily enough, I don’t think you’re going to find Jared at the bottom of that whiskey glass’ Felicia commented.

Jensen sighed. ‘Give me a break’ he muttered.

‘Excuse me,’ Mia piped up loudly. ‘We were having a conversation.’

Felicia looked at their joined hands on the table the exact second that Jensen realized that they even were still joined.

‘So I see’ the red-head commented drily.

Heat flushed across Jensen’s face and he felt a little thrill of mortification as he yanked his hand back. Mia made a little disgruntled noise and glared at Felicia.

‘Look,’ she folded her arms across her chest, ‘Jensen is just trying to relax here, he would appreciate if you could back the hell off.’

Felicia’s gaze shot to Mia’s face and narrowed. ‘He can also talk for himself’ she snapped.

Mia drew herself up on the seat. ‘Listen, you have no idea what he’s going through right now –’
‘And you do?’ Felicia scoffed. ‘Jesus Mia, you didn’t even like Jared.’

Mia’s face flushed. ‘That’s not – I didn’t – ’ she spluttered.

A headache was starting to build behind Jensen’s eyes, ruthlessly pounding. Why were they arguing? Why were they bickering about such useless things? Didn’t they realise none of this mattered? Nothing mattered, without Jared, nothing –

‘Ladies – ’ Misha held up both hands, stepped forward.

‘You might be batting your eyelids and fooling everyone else Mia,’ Felicia ploughed on, anger starting to spark off her tiny frame, ‘but I see right through you. I see right through you.’

Something flashed across Mia’s face – a look of almost fear – before it was gone in a second.

‘I have no idea what you’re talking about,’ she said acidly. ‘I understand you’re upset because of the omega – ’

And Jensen’s head, half slumped over with the headache, the alcohol, the exhaustion, shot up.

‘Jared,’ he snapped and his gaze swivelled to Mia. ‘His name is Jared.’


‘The hell you –’ Felicia started angrily.

‘Ladies, everyone, if we could just –’ Misha started.

Then he stopped, mid-sentence, and his entire body went stiff, rigid. Jensen looked to his friend, opened his mouth to say something.

‘Citrus!’ Misha shouted.

Then he spun around and threw himself towards the bar in a flurry of limbs.

‘What the hell?!’ Felicia squeaked.

‘Misha!’ Jensen shouted.

He heaved himself from the seat, tired, exhausted, numb as he was, because it was still Misha, still his friend, and he stumbled after him, Felicia scurrying behind them.

‘Jensen!’ Mia’s voice sounded out, a mixture between plaintive and furious.

Jensen hardly paid attention to her. He stopped next to Misha as his friend pulled up short, staring at the bar. He followed Misha’s gaze and saw a tiny, petite Were with blonde hair, her face covered in fading bruises, a white strip of tape across her slightly swollen nose, standing on tip-toes, currently in the middle of talking to Rob.

‘… so, like, I’ve been around to a few packs around the area, asking around, you know?’ she was saying, her voice a little nasal from what looked to be a recently broken nose. ‘I’m looking for someone – well I have someone. I’m looking for that someone’s someone. You know?’

Rob looked vaguely amused. ‘Not particularly.’
'Right. Yeah. Most bartenders have said that to me. The story is –'

'Citrus’ Misha said again, this time almost reverently.

At the sound of his voice, the Were glanced over, saw Misha, did a double-take and spun completely around, her mouth falling open.

‘Oh’ she said.

Then, ‘oh shit.’

Then she turned on her heel, and bolted from the bar.

‘What –’ Felicia started.

Before she could finish, Misha had moved, racing after the Were. At a loss, more confused then ever, Jensen and Felicia ran after him. The Were pushed through the door, burst into the car park, Misha hot on her heels.


The Were darted around the corner, down an alleyway, made a noise of despair at the dead-end, skidded to a halt and spun around as Misha reached her panting.

‘I –’ he started.

She promptly swung out and punched him in the face.

Misha gave a cry and reeled backwards.

‘Misha!’ Jensen shouted, instantly tensing, fangs protruding, claws elongating, hastening toward the Were.

‘Will you stop hitting me every time you see me dammit?’ Misha cursed.

‘I didn’t steal your car!’ the Were cried out.

‘Literally nobody mentioned a car’ Felicia said.

Jensen grabbed the Were by the arm and she moved quickly, elbowing him in the gut, sending him doubling over as she twisted free from his grip, darting back out of his reach.

‘Sonofa – ’ he gasped.

He growled, stepped towards her, and then Misha was suddenly jumping between the two of them.

‘Stop – Jensen – stop – this is – ’ he started.

‘I didn’t steal your car!’ the Were objected again. ‘I swear! I’ve – I’ve never even seen a car. I don’t even know how to drive. You can’t prove anything. You’ve no witnesses.’

‘No witnesses to the crime you didn’t commit, you mean?’ Felicia crossed her arms over her chest.

‘I want a lawyer’ the Were said.

‘I want an explanation,’ Jensen snarled, because he had no patience, no patience at the moment, for anything, or anyone. ‘Misha – what –’
‘I don’t care about the car,’ Misha was facing the girl. ‘I – wow.’

He stopped, staring at her. Jensen peered at his face. Saw the look, the dreamy, enraptured look, his eyes practically glowing, nothing but love on his face.

He knew that look. *Oh yes* he did. It was the look he recognized from his own face when he saw Jared.

*Jared.*

A sharp pang lanced through him, catching him off guard. The adrenaline had chased away some of the affects of the alcohol and he could feel the numbness receding, the pain filtering back through.

‘You’re beautiful’ Misha blurted out.

The Were stared at him, then looked over her shoulder, then back at him. ‘Uh.’

‘I – you – sorry – I’m just – ’ Misha took half a step towards her, stopped. ‘You don’t – I can’t – you don’t scent it?’

The Were, eyeing him a little warily, tapped her nose gently. ‘My nose is pretty screwed at the moment,’ she told him. ‘So… you might want to try some fully formed sentences… not gonna lie, at the moment I’m a tad confused.’

‘We’re true mates’ Misha said.

The Were stared at him a moment, then promptly stepped forward, grabbed the front of his shirt and yanked him down. Misha made a startled noise as she stuck her nose right into the crook of his neck and inhaled. Then she pulled back and beamed.

‘Well, hey, so we are’ she said.

Before promptly tugging him back down and pulling him into a deeply, passionate kiss. Felicia made a startled noise, face flushing red, and looked to the sky, giving a polite cough. The kiss broke off and Misha swayed, looking dazed, lips a little swollen.

‘M’la…’ he mumbled, then tried again, ‘Misha. My name’s Misha.’

The Were grinned at him. ‘Rachel,’ she replied. ‘Nice to meet you.’

Misha smiled back, a dazed, love-struck goofy look.

And it *hurt*, Jensen thought, and hated himself a little for even thinking it. But it *fucking hurt*, to see it, to see the love on Misha’s face, to know he’d found his true mate when Jensen’s was…

He started to back away, retreat from the alleyway.

Because he was a *horrible Were*, a horrible Were who’d lost his omega, and now he couldn’t even be happy for his best friend, *his best fucking friend*, because his chest was hurting, his heart was aching *so much* it made him want to cry –

‘Beautiful’ Misha said again, still gazing at her.

‘Dude,’ Rachel scoffed. ‘My face is a mess. But thank you.’

At that Misha’s face darkened and he reached to gently skim a hand down her cheek, over the
bruises. ‘Who – who did this? I’ll **tear** them apart, I’ll **rip them limb from limb** –’

Rachel laughed, stepping back. ‘Dude, chill. Already taken care of. Paddawhocky took care of that dude.’

‘Paddawhocky?’ Felicia echoed.

‘Yeah, my friend’ Rachel answered.

‘Uh. Right,’ Felicia blinked, and then leant a little towards Misha. ‘I think your mate might be insane, Misha.’

Misha turned, looking mildly offended. He opened his mouth to say something, then stopped, his eyes flickering over Felicia’s shoulders to where he spotted Jensen slowly moving away. Misha’s face twisted in anguish in pain. He stepped back from Rachel and towards his friend.

‘Jensen…’ he said quietly.

And Jensen tried to smile, he really did, even as he felt his muscles rebel again the movement. He knew whatever appeared on his face probably resembled more of a grimace. He couldn’t bring Misha down, not now, it wasn’t fair to his alpha friend.

‘It’s great, Mish,’ his voice sounded hoarse to his own ears, and he tried again, tried to inject more enthusiasm to his tone, ‘you’ve found your… it’s great. I’m happy for you, Mish. I just… I think…’

‘Jensen’ Misha said again, moving towards him.

‘I’m fine, Misha, really,’ Jensen pulled back as Misha reached for his arm. ‘**Really,** I –’

He was horrified to feel prickling at his eyes, to feel his throat closing.

‘I think I – I think I’ll just head in, though, and you can – I’ll leave you to – you should get to know your –’

Misha tried to catch his gaze. ‘Jensen, I don’t… Rachel and I can – I mean, there’ll be plenty of time for us to… so if you need me to –’

Jensen drew a breath, finally met Misha’s gaze. ‘I’m fine,’ he repeated, voice quiet. ‘Go with your mate, Misha. Because… because that’s the thing, isn’t it? Sometimes you don’t have plenty of time. Sometimes you… sometimes you just don’t.’

Misha’s face crumpled a little. ‘Jen…’

Jensen waved a hand, ducked his head and turned away, shoving his hands into his pockets as he started to leave the alleyway. Misha rubbed a hand across his face, brow furrowed with worry. Rachel stepped cautiously towards him.

‘Um… so…’ she shifted awkwardly. ‘That was… I mean… are you two… were you two a couple or something? Is that why…?’

Misha dropped his hand from his face, blinked. ‘What? No – I – **god no** – no,’ he shook his head. ‘No, **definitely** not. Jensen’s just… things are just… complicated at the moment.’

Rachel nodded and Misha gave himself a shake and turned to face her.

‘But that’s not – how about – we should – would you like, maybe, to get some dinner? Or
something?’

‘Dinner sounds awesome, I’m starving!’ Felicia agreed, still gazing after Jensen.

Both Rachel and Misha looked to her and she glanced back, realised.

‘Oh – oh wait,’ she blinked. ‘Oh. Wow. Awkward. Sorry.’

‘Dinner,’ Rachel rubbed at her chin, worrying at her lower lip with her teeth. ‘I guess... just… the hospital...’

‘Hospital?’ Misha sounded alarmed.

Rachel waved a hand. ‘Chill, it’s not me. My friend. Actually... you know, that was uh, the reason I... you know. Borrowed your car,’ she coughed a little. ‘It was – um. Sorry about that, by the way. Hitting you. Twice. And all that. It’s just... it’s been a stressful couple of days, you know? And my friend needed the hospital and... well. You know.’

‘You friend, Paddawhocky?” Felicia ventured.

‘Yeah,’ Rachel nodded, ‘that’s the one. Padfoot.’

Misha didn’t appear phased by the ever-changing names of Rachel’s friend, instead simply reached and tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear.

‘Don’t worry, all is forgiven,’ he smiled. ‘And if there’s anything I can do for Pad... for your friend. I’m happy to help out.’

Rachel brightened a little. ‘Oh well – actually – I was just – I’ve been asking around, different packs. He’s got a pack, see? But I don’t know who they are, and I’m tryna find them – having zero luck so far. The only thing I got is names he’s mumbled? Uh – you don’t – you know anyone called, Alicia? Or, um, Janice? I think? Janice or Jennifer? He wasn’t exactly speaking clearly.’

Misha shook his head, glancing to Felicia who shrugged, looking equally clueless. Rachel blew out a frustrated sigh.

‘God dammit’ she muttered, running a hand through her hair.

‘What happened to your friend?’ Felicia asked, inclining her head.

Rachel pulled a face. ‘Alphas are what happened,’ she answered. ‘Buncha knotheads.’

She looked to Misha. ‘Um, sorry, present company excluded, obviously’ she grinned.

But Misha was staring at her, something stirring, something clicking.

‘Alphas’ he repeated.

Rachel nodded. ‘Yeah I – I mean it wasn’t too far from here actually – maybe you guys heard something about it? A whole group of dickhead alphas set up camp in a house and – and well, it was not a fun time, I can tell you.’

Misha’s mouth opened, worked soundlessly a moment, before he finally got the words out.

‘Rachel – ’ he grasped her arm, his heart thundering, ‘Rachel – that – Paddawhocky, Padfoot… are you… are you trying to say Padalecki?’
‘– so, like, I was worried alphas might be tracking us or something – well, I don’t know – I was just – you know – everything was pretty crazy when we got to the hospital, so I just told them he was my brother you know? Said we were Sam and Deana Winchester –’

The sound of Rachel’s voice barely filtered about the thundering of Jensen’s heart as he followed the rapidly chattering omega down the hospital corridor. Every inch of Jensen was vibrating, shaking, and he couldn’t – he couldn’t wrap his head around it – was too terrified to hope, too terrified that he’d walk into the room and it wouldn’t be –

‘– I don’t even know, my brain was kinda loopy when we checked in – and that night, I mean,’ Rachel babbled, ‘I didn’t know which alpha was who or why alphas were attacking one another – I – it was all so crazy –’

He’d been halfway walking back to the hotel, shoulders hunched, the alcohol wearing off, leaving the heavy feeling of depression settling on his shoulders, contemplating if he should hit up the forest again, resume his search, because he knew he wouldn’t sleep, couldn’t sleep. Then the car had come screeching alongside him – a squeal of tyres – almost mounting the curb – and Misha, Rachel and Felicia had been tumbling out, shouting, a mass of voices, excited and loud – and all he’d heard, the one thing he’d heard, deciphered, among the babble was the name –

‘– Jared was out of it by the time we got here too,’ Rachel carried on as she finally stopped at the door to a hospital room, ‘and he’s been unconscious ever since – the first day he had a fever – there was a pretty bad infection, so I didn’t – couldn’t – I just didn’t want to leave him, you know? And they’ve been letting me stay – stay with him, overnight – you know how it is when an omega is admitted, all the overprotectiveness – anyway. So I only started really looking for his pack today, didn’t want to leave before – it’s just, he’s - he -’

She stopped talking, let out a long breath. Jensen stared past her, stared at the closed door. Misha and Felicia were alongside him, he could feel their eyes on him. He dropped his gaze to meet Rachel’s and she gave a little, trembling smile.

‘He saved my life, you know?’ she said, and gave a little shrug.

Jensen nodded. Rachel stepped to one side of the door.

‘You should… you should go in,’ she said to Jensen. ‘You should go in first.’

Jensen started a little, glanced to Felicia. ‘I –’

Felicia shook her head, stepped back. ‘You go in,’ she said gently. ‘I think you need it.’

Jensen nodded slowly, reached out and put a hand on the door handle. He stopped, hand frozen, and for a second he couldn’t move, for a second he was paralysed in fear. Because what if it wasn’t Jared? What if Rachel had it wrong? He couldn’t – he wouldn’t cope – couldn’t –

And if it was Jared – Rachel had said in the car – she had briefly, in short pieces, told some of what had happened. Of Jared being dragged into the attic where she was being kept, of the fire, of the alpha, Mick, and she had listed injuries – gunshot wound, broken ribs, head injuries, smoke inhalation, stitches to a wound across his stomach, bruises, lacerations and his thumb – ‘they’d had
to amputate,” she’d said, voice shaking, “it was so badly broken” – it had all been so overwhelming, an information overload. And the injuries - could he bear to see that – could he? Knowing it was his fault, knowing it was because he’d failed –

‘He’s going to be ok,’ Rachel lightly touched his back and he jumped, wondered how long he’d been frozen there. ‘I know what I said – it all sounds daunting – but he’ll be fine. The doctor says he just needs rest. And… and you. He just needs rest and you.’

Jensen swallowed hard, tugged on the handle and stepped into the room before he could back out, before he could hesitate further. He closed his eyes the second he stepped in and he breathed – he breathed in deep, and beneath the smell of antiseptic, the sterile clean scent of the hospital – he smelt it. He smelt cinnamon, and vanilla, and home, and Jared. His knees buckled, his legs almost going out from underneath him, and a hoarse sob tore from his throat, the sheer relief, that flooded him, overwhelmed him. His eyes flew open, falling to the bed. He forced his shaky legs to move, a stumbling, tumbling gait and made it to the bedside, eyes rooted to the figure lying there.

‘Jared’ the word fell brokenly from his lips.

Because it was – it was him. It was Jared, his face mottled with bruises that made Jensen’s heart twist and his alpha howl for vengeance, his hand in a cast, it was Jared, hooked to wires and machines, face pale, hair a dark halo on the white pillow.

‘Jared’ the word tumbled out again.

Jensen reached out, cupped the side of Jared’s face gently, let his head drop to rest on Jared’s chest, feeling the rise and fall, and it took a moment for him to realise words were still tumbling from his lips in a rambling litany –

‘ – oh thank god, thank god, thank god, never again, never do that again, thank god, thank god, sweetheart, oh god – ’

He could feel tears pooling in his eyes, spilling down his cheeks, and his legs finally gave in. He sunk into the chair beside the bed, his body still half leant over the bed, head still on Jared’s chest, one hand still at the omega’s face, and his other hand reached to grasp Jared’s uninjured hand, intertwining his fingers with Jared’s lax, cool ones.

There was still the guilt, the blame he felt, the anger at himself – that was still there, and there were still unanswered questions as to what had happened, why Jared had been anywhere near the alphas - but -

But for the moment – for the moment, Jensen just relished that his omega was there, that his omega was safe, that the hollow ache in his chest was slowly filling, that the clench on his heart was relaxing, releasing. That he could finally, finally breathe for the first time in four days.

For the moment, Jensen just basked in those feelings, closed his eyes and for the moment, let everything feel like all was right with the world again.

**

‘It’s super quiet in there,’ Felicia bit at her lip, ‘like, scarily quiet.’
She gestured to the door as she spoke. She’d half been expecting to hear Jensen shouting for joy, yelling, or sobbing or – or something. Not the dead quiet that was on the other side of the door. It was a tad unnerving. Misha hesitated a moment, before he stepped towards the door.

‘I mean – we’ve given him enough privacy by now,’ he said, putting a hand on the handle. ‘Right?’

‘Right. And I want to see my best friend alive and well’ Felicia agreed.

Decided, Misha turned the handle, and they stepped in, Rachel slipping in behind them. Felicia made a squeaking noise was half, “Jared!” and half a cooing, “aww!” Jensen was in the seat next to the bed, half slumped over on the bed, one hand loosely grasping Jared’s, the other curled around the omega’s face. And he was fast, deeply, completely and utterly asleep.

‘I mean, it’s adorable,’ Felicia giggled, a vaguely hysterical sound, most likely bought on from restraining herself from screeching and throwing herself on Jared, ‘but I mean – it can’t be comfortable? Should we…?’

‘No,’ Misha shook his head, stepping back towards the door. ‘No, god no. He hasn’t slept in four days. God knows he needs this, even if his back will hate him in the morning.’

Felicia nodded, rubbed a hand through her hair and followed Misha as he stepped out of the room.

‘I should call Gen and JD,’ the petite red head said, fishing for her phone in her pocket. ‘I’ll tell them to come in the morning.’

She ducked down the hallway, already dialling the number. Misha glanced at Rachel and the blonde glanced up and met his gaze.

‘So… um, dinner?’ Misha offered.

A slow smile, almost a leer, spread across Rachel’s face.

‘Actually,’ she grinned, ‘I can think of something much better we can do together…’

Chapter End Notes

... If this was a little angsty, I apologise. I think I was taking my own angsty mindset out on Jensen a little. I swear I'll be less angsty the next chapter...
Heya everyone! You’ll notice the chapter count has gone up (god know how many times I’ve changed the count on this story *smacks forehead*) – that’s only because my last update wasn’t where I had originally planned to end the chapter, which basically means I had to add another chapter. If that makes sense. Probably not. I’m very sleep-deprived. Anyway! I swear this time, this really is the second last chapter. Honest!

Also, thank for all the comments and kudos! Sorry this chapter took so long – would you believe I had to move house AGAIN?! And, even worse, it took four days before we got internet installed. Hoohh boy, did I miss wi-fi like crazy!

FYI, forgive any medical inaccuracies. I tried to google some stuff, google decided to throw some nasty images in my face, I decided to wing it instead…

The first time Jared woke up, it was in a drug-addled haze.

His brain felt like mush, a swirled, foggy mess. When he tried to drag open his eyelids, they felt as if they weighed a thousand pounds, and he wasn’t entirely sure if he even had a body anymore because he couldn’t really feel it all, his heavy, muddled head feeling strangely disconnected.

The first thing he saw when he finally managed to open his eyes the tiniest amount, was a plain ceiling and the world seemed fuzzy, darkened, like it was the middle of the night. There was a beeping, continuous, repetitive and, the sound almost a little muffled and far away in his hazy state of mind. He couldn’t think properly, couldn’t remember where he was, or why he was there and he thought if it hadn’t been for the comforting blanket of drugs he might start to panic a bit about that.

Then he rolled his head a little, the effort it took almost seeming momentous, and he saw the top of a head resting on the bed, a body hunched over, could make out the profile of cheekbones, unshaven scruff, full lips, slightly parted in sleep, dishevelled hair.

Jensen, Jared thought.

And then he smiled a little woozily and closed his eyes, giving back into the bliss of darkness.

Because it didn’t matter that he couldn’t remember anything – if Jensen was there, he knew he was safe.

**

The second time Jared woke up, he knew the drugs must have been reduced.

For one thing, he could actually feel his body, which was always a plus, although there was an undercurrent of hurt there – an ache in his leg, dulled, but present, the pinch of an IV line in his elbow, a twinge in his ribs and his stomach, his throat achingly dry. His hand felt… off; and he
couldn’t quite pin-point why. He kept his eyes closed, trying to think, trying to remember, but his brain was still frustratingly sluggish.

He must be in a hospital, but why? What had happened?

And why was someone singing?

And why was that so goddamn familiar?

‘… or it’s gonna go down in flames, you can tell me when it’s over, if the high was worth the pain, all the lonely Starbucks lovers –’

‘Did you just say “Starbucks lovers”?’

Jared knew that voice. Jensen.

‘Uh, yeah?’

‘It’s “got a long list of ex-lovers.”’

‘Is not.’

‘It very much is. There was a – how did you not know this?’

‘I think the more important question is how do you know this? A grown man loving Taylor Swift huh?’

‘You’re impossible’.

The second non-Jensen, decidedly female and vaguely familiar voice huffed. ‘I gotta say, I much prefer signing with Paddagon.’

‘Padda… you know one day you’re going to run out of ways to mangle his name.’

‘Never!’ the female voice cried.

And Jared decided it was time to open his eyes, struggling a few moments with the sudden heaviness his eyelids seemed to have acquired. He felt his eyes flutter, then shut and let out a frustrated noise, the sound grating in his dry throat. There was a flurry of movement.

‘Jared?’ Jensen’s voice. ‘Jay? Sweetheart?’

Jared finally managed to open his eyes fully, Jensen’s face immediately coming into view, mouth creased with a worry that almost instantly melted into a huge smile at his open eyes.

‘Hey,’ the alpha breathed, ‘welcome back.’

‘Wha…’ his voice was nothing but a hoarse croak and Jared couldn’t help a wince at the pain.

Instantly the worry was back on Jensen’s face.

‘Oh – hang on – let me – there’s some ice – hang on –’

The alpha vanished from view, and there was movement from the other side of the bed. Jared turned sluggishly in time to see a flash of blonde hair as someone darted from the room.

‘I’ll get the doctor!’ the figure called back.
Rachel. His mind supplied. Rachel. Rachel. And… and alphas. And – and everything came flooding back and Jared closed his eyes against the onslaught of memories – the alphas, Mick, fire, killing Mick, he’d killed someone, oh Christ –

‘Jared?! Jay? Hey, hey calm down!’

Jensen was back, this time looming over him, face a little panicky as Jared opened his eyes. Jared realised he’d been breathing hard, realised the breaths were short and rasping, painful in his lungs, that the beeping noise he’d vaguely registered in the background was accelerating. He forced himself to calm, to slow his breathing, his heartbeat.

He was safe, he was safe – Jensen was here and he was safe.

‘You ok, sweetheart?’ Jensen said gently, brow furrowed.

Jared nodded slowly.

‘Here,’ Jensen said softly, and then he was placing something icy cold at Jared’s lips.

His mouth parted instantly and Jensen slipped the ice chip into his mouth. The water was an instant relief as it melted on his tongue.

‘Better?’ Jensen smiled, and the hand not holding the cup of ice chips came up to gently card through the tangled mess of Jared’s hair. The smile dimmed a bit.

‘Christ, Jay, I’m… I’m so sorry, sweetheart. I… god. I was so worried. And I…’ the alpha blinked rapidly, face crumpling. ‘I’ll never… god I’m so sorry.’

Jared titled his head, confused, because why was Jensen apologising? But before he could ask, the door opened and he turned his head to see a doctor – a beta Were – stride in, Rachel trotting at his heels. She beamed at him and winked and Jared, for a second, thought he saw a mark on her neck, different from the other bruises – a claiming mark? But how –

And then the doctor was at his bedside, peering down at him with a kindly smile.

‘Good Morning, Mr…’ he looked to his file, raised an eyebrow. ‘Should I say Mr. Winchester or Mr. Padalecki?’

Jared stared, thoroughly confused.

‘It’s Paddleboard’ Rachel piped up.

‘I’m sorry?’ the doctor blinked.

‘Padalecki,’ Jensen said firmly. ‘It’s Padalecki.’

‘Right,’ the doctor seemed a little bemused. ‘In any case, it’s good to see you awake.’

‘H…’ Jared winced a little at the rasp, then tried again. ‘How long…?’

‘Five days’ it was Jensen who answered, and when Jared looked to him, there was something haunted in the alpha’s face that he longed to soothe.

He tried to lift his hand to touch Jensen, to comfort his alpha, and then noticed it was swathed in bandages and – and it felt – it felt – there was something –
The doctor noted his gaze and his face grew solemn. ‘Ah. Yes. Mr. Padalecki, I will check you over and then there are some things to discuss…’

His hand, as it turned out, was a mess. A broken, maimed mess. The doctor didn’t say those words exactly, but that’s what Jared heard when he read between the lines. Between shattering the bones pulling from the handcuffs, between falling from the window, between everything that had gone on that night, and with the delay in getting him to hospital, the damage to his thumb had basically been beyond repair. Add to that no micro-surgeons, or surgeons who specialised in the tiny, delicate bones of the hand in the hospital, and none available to come out, they’d had no other choice, no other option, had been forced to remove his thumb. When Jared stared dumbly at the bandaged hand he wondered idly how many more scars he’d managed to gain, whether there was even a nub left, how much had been taken. The doctor said more, about rehabilitation – it would be difficult, as hand rehabilitation always was – about his other injuries, but Jared found himself listening less and less, instead he felt something clenching, tightening in his chest, squeezing his heart, lodging in his throat. He tried to quell it, tried to force it down.

Don’t be stupid, he told himself. Don’t be stupid. What’s another wound? What’s another scar anyway?

Then the doctor was leaving and Rachel, with worried eyes, exchanged a look with Jensen, before she was headed for the door too, saying something about getting “the others.” Jensen gently squeezed his bicep.

‘Jay?’ he said softly.

‘It’s fine,’ Jared said, and oh god, was that his voice?

Why was it cracking, why was it breaking?

‘It’s fine, I don’t – ’

Why was there a lump in his throat, choking him, halting his words?

Don’t be stupid, he cursed, and his vision was starting to blur with tears. Don’t be stupid, it’s just another scar, it’s just another scar –

A hoarse sob broke from his mouth before he could stop it, and the tears were coming thick and fast now and Jared was mortified, horrified, but Jensen was moving quickly, wrapping his arms around Jared, pulling him in tight, pulling him to his chest.

‘Hey, hey, it’s ok, it’s ok sweetheart,’ Jensen soothed softly. ‘It’s gonna be ok.’

‘Don’t – I – I’m – it’s stupid – I shouldn’t – ’ the words stuttered and stopped, forced out between the tears he tried to desperately control. ‘I’m being stupid – ’

‘Hey, no, no you’re not,’ Jensen tightened his grip, his voice firm. ‘Christ, of course you’re not being stupid Jared. You’ve been through so much… I… my strong omega, my amazing strong omega.’

And Jared gave in, crumpling into his alpha’s chest, burrowing into Jensen’s hold. He dissolved into sobs, not sure whether he was sobbing because more of his body had been taken away from him – it didn’t matter that it was just a thumb, because it was just one more thing, one more goddamn thing taken away, like his eyesight in one eye, like his inner wolf – or simply, purely, if he was sobbing, breaking because of everything - everything that had happened. He was aware of muttering through the sobs, the word “sorry” over and over again, and Jensen gently, but firmly shushing him.
Eventually the sobs subsided and he sat for a movement, head tucked beneath Jensen’s chin, the alpha’s strong arms wound tightly around him. He blinked wetly, the tears clinging to his lashes, face wet, nose clogged.

‘Sorry’ he couldn’t stop himself saying it again, sniffling as he did so.

Jensen eased his grip a little so he could draw back slightly, lock eyes with Jared’s one good eye.

‘Stop it,’ he said firmly, an alpha edge to his tone. ‘Stop saying that. You have nothing to be sorry for.’

Jared swallowed thickly, tried to nod. Jensen let out a soft breath, reached up and gently wiped the wetness from Jared’s face with his hand. His eyes were sad.

‘My omega,’ he said, ‘you have no idea… I…’

There was movement at the door, interrupting them, and both Weres turned as Rachel, Gen, Felicia and Misha all appeared at the doorway. Felicia gave a high-pitched squeal and Gen a strangled cry, both betas lurching towards the bed.

‘You’re awake!’ Felicia shouted.

Gen reached his side in an instant. ‘Oh god – Jay – we were so worried – so worried – I’m so glad –’ she babbled.

Jared reluctantly extracted himself from Jensen’s grip, turning a little towards the two betas. Jensen let him pull free, but instantly transferred his grip to light hold Jared’s shoulder, as if he couldn’t bear not to touch the omega. Jared definitely understood that feeling.

He blinked, aware of his blotchy cheeks, one bloodshot eye, wet eyelashes. ‘Hey’ he croaked.

Gen noted the remnants of tears instantly and her face crumpled. ‘Oh Jay’ she whispered in dismay, reaching to stroke his cheek.

‘M ok,’ Jared said softly, managing a trembling smile.

Gen huffed a laugh and rolled her eyes. ‘Right, whatever you say tough guy’ she said, drawing back and heading to grab some chairs.

She dragged three over and Felicia promptly dropped into one, Misha sitting in the other and Rachel – Rachel casually sat on his lap? Jared stared a moment as Misha snaked an arm around the petite blonde omega, and made a mental note to ask about that sometime soon.

‘So I’m just going to go ahead and say it,’ Felicia announced, and her tone was jokey, but there was a shake to it, a tiny tremble. ‘But let’s make a new rule huh? For the sake of all of our sanity – anytime any of us decide to go somewhere we tell another person, another one of us, exactly where we’re going. Exactly. And for how long. And, just, like, every single detail.’

Jared huffed, and smiled a little. ‘Duly noted’ he said.

Gen poked him gently in the arm. ‘Seriously,’ she pressed. ‘Seriously. You tell us – don’t just – vanish like that again – ok?! I mean – I mean – how? What…? Why…?’ she flailed a hand a little.

Jared shrugged a little. ‘Well, I mean, it wasn’t my first choice to be out there,’ he pointed out. ‘I wouldn’t have… anyway. And she wasn’t exactly my first choice to pass on the message of where I was either. It’s not like we hang out, after all’ he gave a mirthless smile.
Then he noticed the others were staring at him.

Gen’s brow furrowed. ‘Who – what are you talking about?’

‘Mia?’ Jared supplied, arching an eyebrow, then wincing as it crinkled a bruise on his brow.

When the others were strangely quiet, he found himself babbling a little more.

‘I mean – it was – it was just a joke. Her texting me I mean - just a prank. I don’t think she – she wouldn’t have – she couldn’t have known that the alphas were out there, how it would turn out, you know? So don’t – I mean. It’s partly my fault anyway – I should’ve just gone straight after her once I told her to run, but I was – I don’t know – I just needed to see, I guess. It was stupid, like I said. And then – well, I was more stupid, but I won’t… anyway, then I got myself captured and I guess Rachel told you the rest and… just. It’s… yeah. Not all Mia’s fault. You know?’

None of the others had spoken yet and Jared started to feel uneasy, on edge.

And Jensen – Jensen had gone rigid, stiff as a board while Jared was talking. He looked to his alpha, had enough time to see the flash of gold eyes, before Jensen stood abruptly, turned away and walked stiffly to the other side of the room, his back a long line of tension.

‘Jensen?’ Jared said, starting to feel like he’d done something very, very wrong.

‘Jared,’ it was Felicia, her voice flat, ‘Mia never said anything about you being out there with her. She didn’t mention you at all.’

And Jared felt a rush of disbelief at first, his head swinging back around to stare at his red-head friend. Because – because –

god, he – Mia hadn’t –

Then Jared surprised himself, and clearly everyone else, when he gave a short, sharp bark of laughter.

‘Christ,’ he shook his head, chuckled. ‘Christ. I mean. Jesus Christ. I knew she didn’t like me, but, God – ’

‘Why are you laughing?’ Gen snapped sharply, and Jared jumped, laughter dying away.

Gen was suddenly on her feet, eyes blazing. ‘Don’t – god – I’m going to kill her! I’m going to fucking tear her throat out – ’

‘Gen –’ Jared started.

‘You could’ve died!’ Gen shouted. ‘You almost died! Because of her – ’

‘I’m sure she didn’t plan for things to go as far as they did,’ Jared tried to placate his friend. ‘Not intentionally, any – ’

‘You’re fucking kidding me? You’re defending her?’ Gen snapped.

‘I’m not –’ Jared started.

Then there was a sharp, powerful crack and all of them jumped a little, eyes going straight to the other side of the room. There was hole – a puncture in the wall, the plaster caved in and Jensen withdrew his fist, blood trickling down split knuckles, and then spun around. His eyes were pure gold, fangs elongated and radiating pure alpha. Without a single word he strode for the door, dark, murderous rage on his face, fury in every line of his body.
‘Jensen!’ Jared called out.

He struggled to sit up, half moved as he called his alpha’s name. Jensen wasn’t listening, or didn’t want to listen, was almost at the door, and Jared half reached, felt stitches pull in his stomach and gave a sharp cry of pain, falling back onto the bed.

‘Jared!’ Gen cried in concern.

And in a flash, his sound of pain had Jensen whirling, hurtling back to his bedside, eyes seemingly torn between gold and green, between anger and worry.

‘Sweetheart, what – are you – ’

Jared shook his head and leaned forward as Jensen gently grasped his biceps, resting his head on his alpha’s chest once more.

‘Don’t go’ he murmured.

Jensen made a noise and Jared felt him tense.

‘Jared –’ he started.

‘Don’t go’ Jared repeated.

‘She – you have no idea,’ Jensen’s voice turned harsh, something Jared had never heard before, ‘you have no idea what she did – what – I can’t –’

‘We’ll tell JD,’ Jared said, and leaned back, looking to the others briefly, before back to Jensen. ‘Please, let JD handle it. It’s – he’s the alpha. That’s his job. I don’t – I don’t want you to get in trouble. Please.’

Jared had never seen Jensen look so stiff, so tense, so torn.

‘Jared,’ his voice was agonising, almost broken, ‘Jared, you can’t ask me to just let this slide – you can’t –’

‘Please,’ Jared said quietly, locking Jensen’s gaze with his one good eye. ‘Please… I just. I need you here. With me.’

For a second Jensen withdrew, straightened up, clenched his fists so tightly they turned white, so tightly Jared was terrified for a second he’d crack his own bones. Then the alpha slowly moved to sit back in his chair, his posture still rigid. Jared let out a soft sigh of relief.

‘Thank you’ he said softly.

Jensen met his gaze, his face still torn, but his gaze softening when it met Jared’s.

Well, *fuck* that.’

Jared jumped a little, turned back. Gen, still on her feet, glowered.

‘If you’re not gonna kill her, I will’ she announced.

‘Gen,’ Jared said. ‘*No one* is going to kill her. We’ll tell JD, he’ll sort it. *Ok?’

Gen’s jaw tightened, clenched. ‘That’s not good enough’ she said stiffly.
‘Gen –’ Jared sighed again.

‘I didn’t… we didn’t know,’ Jensen said, his voice quiet, and Jared looked back to his alpha, ‘we didn’t know… where you were. We searched… I… all night, all day. We had no clue. Then… there was… there was blood in the woods. I… we thought you were…’ he drew a breath, shook his head. ‘It was… not knowing. Christ, Jared, it was hell.’

Jared swallowed hard, blinking rapidly. ‘Jen…’ he said.

‘That’s what she did,’ Gen said in a low growl. ‘That torture – the mental torture. Christ. She’s… it’s not acceptable. It’s not. And for what? Because she doesn’t like you? Jesus.’

Jared couldn’t stop flitting a little glance at Jensen when Gen said, “for what?” but caught himself, hoped no one had seen.

He wasn’t so lucky.

‘Oh… oh Christ,’ Jensen paled. ‘For me. For me, wasn’t it? You said… a text. Fuck. Fuck. I ran into her that morning,’ he was on his feet again. ‘She took my – my fucking phone. She took my fucking phone and messaged you? That’s why everyone thought you were with me. That’s… everything that happened… because she wanted me. Because of me.’

‘Jensen, no,’ Jared interjected. ‘No. Not – it’s her. It's all on her, ok? It is.’

‘Which is why we should kill her’ Gen nodded her head happily.

‘Stake to the heart!’ Felicia crowed.

Jared’s head was starting to hurt, the aches were starting to creep in, the drugs fading, his stomach throbbing, his leg twinging, and his hand – oh god, he could feel the pain, the stiffening - and then there was Gen and Felicia looking on the verge of murder, while Jensen’s face was in such agony, such shame and guilt it made him want to be sick and he just – he just –

‘How about,’ Misha said quietly, calmly, ‘we all calm down a bit, seeing as how we are in a hospital, and with a patient.’

At his words, all eyes turned to Jared and he knew the pain and exhaustion was starting to make itself known on his face, knew because he saw Gen and Felicia instantly deflate and Jensen slid back into his seat once more. There was a short, terse silence, then Gen sighed.

‘You’re right, Jay,’ she said quietly, also sitting down. ‘We should… we’ll tell JD. It’s… it’s the alpha’s duty. I… sorry. Sorry.’

Jared nodded slowly. There was a subdued silence, then Rachel piped up.

‘So, Jensen is a closet Taylor Swift fan’ she announced.

The resulting laughter broke a little of the tension, and the group settled back into conversation and banter. Jared didn’t talk much, and they didn’t make him, seeing that the exhaustion was pulling him back under. He saw Jensen surreptitiously press the button to up his pain medication and found he was actually grateful for the alpha’s overprotectiveness at that moment. With the increased pain relief floating in his veins, the sound of his friend’s voices surrounding him and the feel of Jensen’s hand gently starting to card through his hair, Jared let himself slowly be dragged back under.
Jared wasn’t sure how long he slept, but when he sluggishly, groggily woke once more, the room was dark and quiet. He blinked a few times, before he noted the gentle weight on his arm. He turned his head, saw Jensen was in the seat beside his bed, one hand resting on his forearm, fingers lightly curved around, holding him. The alpha was leaning back a little in his chair, a book in his free hand, his eyes wolf yellow, tapping into the enhanced wolf sight in order to read in the dimness of the room.

‘Hey’ Jared croaked.

Jensen glanced up from the book, smiled as he met Jared’s eyes. ‘Hey,’ he murmured, putting the book back down on his lap.

‘The others…’ he gestured vaguely with one hand, ‘after you fell asleep… we didn’t want to wake you. They’ll be back tomorrow most likely.’

Jared nodded. His one good eye scanned over Jensen, took in the bags beneath his eyes, the worry lines that seemed heavily imbedded in his face, the dishevelled hair.

‘When was the last time you slept, Jen?’ Jared asked.

Jensen shrugged, looked away. ‘I… on and off. I’ve… ’ he shook his head a little. ‘I’ve had sleep, ok, Jared, don’t worry about me.’

‘Closing your eyes for five seconds doesn’t count as sleep, for the record’ Jared pursed his lips.

Jensen sighed. ‘Jay, I – look – ‘

‘You could go back to the hotel, or even my house,’ Jared urged, ‘get a good night’s rest, some proper – ‘

‘No’ the word was loud, forceful from Jensen’s mouth.

Jared flinched a little, and Jensen deflated.

‘Jared, please… just… don’t ask me to leave, ok?’ the alpha turned pleading eyes to him, green once more and shining damply in the darkness, ‘please. I can’t… I…’

‘Jen…’ Jared said softly.

‘The last time,’ Jensen choked a little, cleared his throat, pushed on, ‘the last time… the last time I left you… I… fuck, Jared. I didn’t… you were missing. For days. And… they all… I could see it in their eyes, what they thought. And I couldn’t… god if you’d… Fuck, Jared, I can’t… I just… I just need to be with you, ok? Just… just for a little bit.’

‘Jen…’ Jared whispered.

He started to move, wriggle across the bed, away from Jensen, wincing as stitches pulled, ribs twinged, and his leg ached, and he saw Jensen look puzzled, almost hurt a moment, before Jared patted the space next to him.

‘C’mere’ he said. Jensen hesitated.

Jared rolled his one good eye. ‘Just get up here, Jensen.’

Jensen huffed a little, but he acquiesced, carefully climbing onto the bed, lying himself down along Jared’s side gingerly, as if the omega were something fragile, breakable. He lay on one side, and placed a hand gently, delicately on Jared’s hip, cupping the sharp jut of the omega’s hipbone, shifting close enough that he could duck his head to the crook between Jared’s neck and shoulder. Jared felt Jensen’s breath on his neck, the tickling sensation, and then heard a deep inhale as the alpha scented him in deep gulps, like a dying man gasping for air.

‘Jen’ he murmured, moving his lacerated, but whole, hand to rest atop Jensen’s.

‘I was so fucking worried,’ Jensen’s voice was muffled, his head still buried in Jared’s neck, ‘so worried, I… just. God, if anything happened to you, I couldn’t…’

‘Jen,’ Jared said softly, turning his head a little to brush his lips over the hairs on Jensen’s head, ‘Jen, I’m ok. I’m ok.’

‘I know – I know, but,’ Jensen’s hand tightened minutely on his hip, before releasing as the alpha gave a shuddering breath, ‘I just… I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.’

Jared shifted, pulled back in the limited space enough to try to crane his neck to see Jensen. ‘You keep… why are you sorry?’ his brow furrowed in confusion. ‘You have nothing to be sorry for Jensen.’

Jensen huffed a laugh, pulled away from him a bit, his eyes downcast. ‘Are you – Christ, Jared, I… I failed you. I failed you as an alpha. I should’ve – I should’ve checked up on you, I should have made sure you were safe – it was my responsibility to protect you, to keep you from harm, and I failed – I failed because I was wrapped up in my own… my own goddamn selfish needs and desires and you almost died. You almost fucking died and it’s my fault!’

‘Jen are you – I mean, are you serious? It’s not – god, Jensen, it’s not your fault,’ Jared shifted, tried to meet Jensen’s eyes. ‘How could you possibly think it was? I mean, if anyone,’ he gave a humourless laugh, ‘then Mia –’

‘Exactly – and the reason Mia did that to you? Me! Me, Jared, me!’ Jensen interrupted vehemently. ‘My goddamn –’

‘Exactly – and the reason Mia did that to you? Me! Me, Jared, me!’ Jensen interrupted vehemently. ‘My goddamn –’

‘Listen to me; guilt, blame? That – it doesn’t do anyone any good, ok? It doesn’t. Trust me. And besides which? This isn’t your fault. You don’t… I mean,’ Jared’s face relaxed a little, a tiny smile, ‘the wanting to protect me… I love that, I do. But,’ the smile curved a little more, ‘hey, I can take care of myself too, you know? I can protect myself.’

Jensen reached up, gently stroked Jared’s cheek. ‘I know,’ he said softly, ‘I know, you’re the strongest… the strongest… it’s just. You shouldn’t have to. Not when you have me.’

Jared turned his head to gently kiss at Jensen’s palm, then turned to meet his alpha’s eyes again. ‘And another thing, this whole… everything… it was. It was awful, but… I mean, you’ve gotta look at the big picture.’
Jensen inclined his head a bit in confusion.

Jared gave a one shouldered shrug. ‘If I hadn’t been caught, if that hadn’t… I mean, maybe no one would’ve found Rachel, in that attic, maybe no one would have found her in time. She might have... you know. And... and if Mia hadn’t tricked me out there, maybe those alphas might’ve attacked – got the drop on the town, killed innocent Weres. Maybe things were meant to happen how they did, you know?’

Jensen gazed at him a moment, then gave a soft laugh, shaking his head. ‘You’re amazing, you know that right?’ he leant forward, brushing his lips over Jared’s in a chaste kiss. ‘Abso-fucking-lutely amazing. All this shit... everything and you... you still see the good. The positives. I... I just...’

‘I... you know. With everything that happened – with my pack, my family... I...’ Jared shrugged again. ‘I’d have gone mad a long time ago if I let... if I didn’t see the good in things.’

‘Amazing,’ Jensen repeated.

Jared rolled his eyes. ‘Hardly.’

Jensen leant forward again, capturing his lips in a kiss, the omega’s mouth parting willingly, a soft sigh escaping Jared at the touch of Jensen’s tongue, the sweep and tangle. He closed his eyes, melted into the kiss, felt Jensen’s hand come to cup the back of his head, brush through the strands of his hair. Jensen broke the kiss, kept his face inches from Jared’s.

‘I love you’ he whispered.

Jared opened his eyes, smiled.

‘I love you too.’

When the nurse came in, sometime later, she paused in the doorway, eyebrows raised at the sight of the alpha, curled around his omega, their legs tangled together, both fast asleep on the tiny hospital bed, somehow their over-6ft frames managing to squish and curl together enough to fit. It was entirely against hospital regulations, but, as the nurse started to smile, she couldn’t find it in herself to be disapproving.

**

‘... JD has her in a jail cell,’ Gen said from the driver’s seat, ‘they’re still deciding what to do with her...’

Jensen half listened to Gen, half focused on the omega that was resting against his side, head on his shoulder, blinking a little sleepily. They were finally taking Jared home from the hospital, Gen driving them both back to her and Jared’s house. There’d been a barrage of information on leaving – dates, appointments, physical therapy, check-ups – and Jensen had tried to memorise every little bit, determined to take care of his omega in the aftermath of his ordeal.

‘... think it’s taking so long because all JD wants to do with her is rip her lungs out,’ Gen carried on, drumming her fingers on the steering wheel. ‘But Samantha is being the voice of reason and saying he can’t.’
‘Thank god for Sam’ Jared piped up.

Jensen inspected him a little, his heart warming to see more colour in his omega’s cheeks, the bruises fading, his health slowly returning. He still tired easy, his leg still couldn’t carry much weight, his hand was still bandaged, the other hand free, but covered in steadily healing, scabbed over cuts. But he was getting better, Jensen told himself, and that was what mattered.

‘S’not what I think,’ Gen snorted in reply to Jared, pulling a face as she pulled into their driveway. ‘JD should rip her lungs out. S’what she deserves. It makes my blood boil to think that she’ll get away somehow with what she did.’

‘Mia will get what’s coming to her, Gen, I’m sure’ Jensen said absently.

Jared straightened up, gave him a look. ‘What’s that supposed to mean?’

Jensen gave him a light kiss. ‘Nothing. Don’t be so suspicious,’ he tweaked the end of his omega’s nose. ‘Ready to go inside?’

Jared narrowed his eyes a little, but let the issue drop, and allowed Jensen to help maneuverer him from the car. The alpha looped an arm around his shoulders and helped his omega to his feet, shouldering most of the weight as they made their way to the house slowly but surely. Gen left them to it when Jensen steered Jared towards the bedroom, claiming the omega needed rest. He lowered Jared to the bed as the omega rolled his eyes.

‘I’ve had enough rest lying around in hospital’ he pouted.

Jensen gently brushed the bangs from Jared’s forehead. ‘Humour me, yeah?’ he said.

Jared sighed, and lay back on the bed, stretching out a little. He patted the bed alongside him.

‘Lie down with me then?’ he implored.

Powerless against his omega’s puppy dog gaze, Jensen climbed onto the bed alongside him after shutting the door, stretching out on his back, casting a gaze to the ceiling. He’d no sooner blinked once, when Jared, with more speed than Jensen would have expected from his recovering omega, rolled right onto Jensen, sprawling his long frame over Jensen’s chest. Jensen made an “oof” noise, startled.

‘What –’

Jared, chest to chest with the alpha, nuzzled into his neck. ‘Hey’ he murmured, lips gently brushing over the bare skin.

A shudder ran through Jensen’s frame at the contact. He reached up to gently stroke at Jared’s back.

‘Hey,’ he replied, a little bemused. ‘What –’

Then Jared started to kiss, gently softly, up his neck to his jawline.

‘Jared –’ Jensen’s voice came out a little strangled.

Jared moved to his ear, bit gently at his earlobe and Jensen couldn’t stop, couldn’t help his hips jerking involuntarily, a gasp escaping his lips. He tightened his grip on his omega, tried to tilt his head away.

‘Jay, you gotta – you keep doing that, I’m…’ he huffed, ‘you’re gonna get me all excited.’
Jared drew back, locked gazes with him and gave a slow, deliberate roll over his hips over Jensen’s, the friction, the contact, shooting straight to Jensen’s groin, making a soft noise escape his lips.

‘Maybe that’s entirely the point’ Jared smirked.

Jensen’s mouth had gone dry and he tried to swallow, tried to clear his head.

‘Jay, I – we can’t – you’re still hurt – I don’t want to hurt – ’

‘You won’t’ Jared said firmly.

‘I – your ribs – ’ Jensen tried once more, even as he felt his resolve failing beneath the weight of his omega, failing with each inhale of Jared’s intoxicating scent that was growing heavier, sweeter with the omega’s arousal.

‘So we won’t take a page from Kama Sutra this time round,’ Jared teased.

He ducked down to kiss gently at Jensen’s lips, then across his chin, mouthing back to his neck. ‘Want you, Jen,’ he breathed against the alpha’s skin.

Then, ‘want you to claim me.’

Jensen moved in a flash, flipping them over so Jared was pinned beneath him. There were flecks of wolf gold in his green eyes, and he could feel his alpha thrumming in his veins, close to the surface. ‘You...’ he stopped, ‘you can’t just say... you have to mean -’

‘I do,’ Jared interrupted, and reached up, looping both arms around the alpha’s neck tugging him down. ‘I want to be yours, Jen. Wanna be all yours, alpha.’

A strangled noise, half moan, half growl, escaped Jensen’s mouth, and then he was diving down, capturing Jared’s mouth in a fierce kiss, the omega’s mouth opening, surrendering instantly to his alpha. Jensen’s hand came up to grasp and tangle in Jared’s hair, manoeuvring his omega’s head to kiss deeper, to taste more. His other hand slid underneath Jared, slipped into the curve of his lower back, then dipped beneath the loose sweats he was wearing to grasp, palm and feel, his fingers already finding the slickness, the wetness.

‘Fuck, sweetheart,’ Jensen broke the kiss with a shuddering gasp, ‘fuck, already so wet for me, so fucking hot.’

In a second he was pulling off Jared, tugging at his shirt and swiftly discarding it, before grasping at his jeans to tug them down and toss them to one side on the bed. As he did he saw Jared slip from his sweat pants and for a moment his movements stuttered at the stark white bandage around Jared’s slender leg. His eyes flew up as he saw the omega wince and struggle with his shirt. ‘Here I - let me’ he moved forward, helped Jared to ease from the shirt.

His eyes skittered over his bandaged stomach, his rib support, the bruises and Jensen felt his alpha recede, took a step back. ‘Jared, maybe...’ he started.

Jared glared at him. ‘So help me god if you back out on me now Jensen’ he warned.

Jensen laughed, felt some of his tension ease and he moved forward as Jared lay back on the bed. He bracketed the omega with his arms, looming over him, and locked eyes with him.
'You tell me,’ he said firmly, ‘the second anything hurts. You tell me straight away. Ok?’

Jared smiled, reached up to gently caress Jensen’s face. ‘Promise,’ he agreed, then his smile turned wicked, teasing, ‘now hurry up and fuck me, alpha.’

A low growl rumbled in the back of Jensen’s throat and he dived down once more to attack Jared’s mouth, his tongue fucking into the omega’s. Their bodies slid together, bare chests, rapidly hardening cocks. The first slide of their cocks together had Jared arching, breaking the kiss to moan, and Jensen took the moment, the opportunity to slide his hand beneath the omega, palm at the cheeks of his ass. His fingers slid between, to Jared’s hole already oozing slick. His first finger slid in with no resistance, eliciting a groan from both of them.

Jensen could feel his alpha bubbling beneath the surface, clamouring to claim, to take his omega. His cock rutted against Jared’s hip as he worked a second finger in. The omega clutched at his back, arched into him, cock hard and red between them, oozing precome. It wasn’t going to last, wasn’t going to be long, Jensen knew, and he quickened his prep.

‘Jen,’ Jared moaned, nuzzled into his alpha’s neck, ‘Jen s’ok, m’good. M’good.’

Jensen pulled his fingers out, touched them to Jared’s lips, saw the omega’s tongue slide out, lick at the slick, taste himself and Jensen groaned, cock twitching.

‘Gonna be the death of me, sweetheart,’ he rasped. ‘Drive me fucking crazy.’

He positioned himself between Jared’s legs, lining up with the omega’s hole and pushing in on one long thrust. A long groan tore itself from his throat at the tight, hot clench, the feel of Jared surrounding him. He could already feel his knot tingling, his teeth elongating. Jared rolled his hips.

‘Move, gotta move Jen’ he pleaded.

Jensen meant to go slow, he did, because Jared was injured, recovering and he needed to be gentle - but it took a few slow thrusts, and then Jared was pushing back, was fucking himself back on Jensen’s cock, and was moaning - noises so pretty, so gorgeous and his to claim, his to have, his omega - and he couldn’t stop, couldn’t help his hips starting to thrust, harder, faster.

He grabbed Jared’s hips, hard enough to bruise, his eyes flaring yellow as he fucked into his omega, hips snapping, the slap of skin, slip-slide of sweat between them, slide of the slick. He felt his knot start to swell, start to catch and caught a hold of Jared’s cock, grasping it, starting to jack it hard and fast.

‘C’mon, come for me sweetheart, wanna feel you come around me, wanna see it’ he panted.

And it took barely one more stroke before Jared was coming, back arching, spilling between them, a cry escaping his lips and the sight, the clench around his cock, tipped Jensen over the edge and his knot swelled, caught and he gave a roar, a cry, his fangs out and latched onto Jared’s arched neck, biting, his orgasm crashing into him in a wave, overwhelming, his vision almost whiting out. He felt Jared jerk, jolt beneath him, felt the feeble pulse of wet of his omega coming again at the bite and felt another wash of his own pleasure at the thought, another hot pulse of come into Jared.

He felt it, in the instant of the bite - the clicking together of their souls, the filling of his own soul, the sense of “completeness” finally, finally easing him. He felt Jared, a tangible force now in his mind, a presence lingering there, sweetness and light.

He released the bite, easing back to gaze at the sluggishly bleeding bruise and, blinking through the orgasm haze, he bent to lap, to soothe, before lifting his head to meet Jared’s gaze, eyes worried.
'You’re ok - I didn’t hurt you?’ he asked urgently. ‘Your ribs? Your leg? Your hand? Your stomach? I don’t - ‘

Jared blinked a few times, looking vaguely out of it and unfocused. He gave a lopsided smile. ‘M’great... m’fucking fantastic’ he mumbled back.

Jensen couldn't stop the laughter escaping his lips, and he nuzzled briefly into Jared’s neck, into the claiming mark.

Because... well, he could feel that. That Jared was content. He could feel it somewhere, a low buzz of happiness that he identified as his mate.

‘Love you’ he whispered.

‘Love you too, Jen’ Jared murmured.

Jensen moved them carefully, still locked together, so he could spoon up behind his omega, gently running his hand up and down Jared’s side, unable to stop from nuzzling into the mark every few seconds. They lay for a few moments in silence, sated, content, before Jensen spoke.

‘Do you... can you feel...’ he hesitated, bit his lip.

Because he knew the silver had blocked Jared’s inner wolf, had taken so much from him and he wondered if this was another thing, another side effect. Jared was silent a moment and Jensen worried he’d upset him, when the omega spoke.

‘I don’t... I don’t think it’s as... that it would be as powerful as you'd be feeling it... but I do... I feel something, you know? Definitely different from before,’ he paused. ‘I feel something that’s... you. I don’t know how I know it is, but it’s you. I feel you.’

Jensen smiled, felt relief flood him, and he gently kissed Jared’s neck.

‘Yeah,’ he breathed, ‘that’s good. That’s... yeah.’

They lay in silence a moment more and Jensen felt Jared grow heavier, more lax, felt the omega’s breathing grow steadier as he slipped into sleep. He smiled, content to lie, to watch Jared sleep, to watch over his omega.

There was a buzz from his discarded jeans and he twisted a little, reached to grab them without tugging at the knot binding him and Jared. He fished out the cheap phone he’d bought to keep in contact with the others until he replaced the one Mia had stolen, and looked to the screen.

"1 New Message."

He furrowed his brow, unlocked the phone, saw the message was from Gen and opened it. A single sentence was typed:

"YOU GUYS ARE BUYING ME NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES IMMEDIATELY."

Jensen put a hand to his mouth to stifle his laughter.
... and for those wondering, don’t worry, the next chapter we finally see what happens to Mia... :p
Ahhhhhhh the last chapter! It's only a short one, just to wrap things up. Thank y'all so much for your patience in waiting for this! :)
Precious Padalecki, clearly, she thought acidly. But, she had always found Stephen attractive, though he’d only reciprocated her feeling once, but maybe now with something in common...?

She heard the soft sound of footsteps approaching.

Mia started a little at the noise. She was in her undercover parking at her apartment complex, and the place, with its darkened lighting and claustrophobic feel, had always freaked her out a little. She turned around, peering through the rows of cars. She knew it was probably a neighbour, maybe another Were coming to sticky beak at the exiled beta – and if it was that, she’d tell them where to go. The nosy, busy-bodying –

Then someone stepped right up behind her and tapped her on the shoulder.

Mia squealed, the noise echoing in the car park, and jumped, spinning around, flailing a little. Her eyes widened and for a second she was stunned.

It was Jensen.

She took a step back instinctively, because, god, it was the omega freak’s alpha – or something – another person who Jared had managed to bewitch or screw into liking him – but... but Jensen wasn’t snarling, wasn’t glaring, wasn’t ready to tear her to pieces. He was smiling, it was a weird smile, but he was smiling, and his body language was open, relaxed and casual.

For a moment, Mia thought that maybe Jensen hadn’t heard about everything that Jared had said. That maybe he was still oblivious to the omega’s... allegations.

‘Uh, hi, J-Jensen’ she managed to get out, and she gave a smile, shaking and tremulous.

Jensen leant against her car, his green eyes not leaving her face. ‘Mia,’ he greeted, and he was still smiling, his voice strangely jovial. ‘I see you’re packing up?’

Mia hesitated. Did Jensen know about everything or not? She couldn’t tell.

‘I... uh... yes’ she stuttered. ‘Just... yeah. I.’

She lapsed into silence, shifted a little from foot to foot.

Jensen nodded his head. ‘Mmm,’ he hummed a little, and finally glanced away from her face to gaze across the parking lot. ‘Anywhere in particular that you’re heading?’

It was frustrating, not knowing, and Mia was starting to feel nervous, off-kilter. She didn’t like it.

‘Not... not sure yet’ she answered hesitantly.

Jensen nodded again and there was an awkward, tense silence.

‘Was there...’ Mia started, stopped, swallowed. ‘Was there something you wanted? I... is... was there... anything?’

Jensen gave a one shouldered shrug. Then he tugged back his sleeve and looked at his watch. ‘Fifteen minutes to six o’clock,’ he said conversationally, not looking at her. ‘Cutting it pretty close, aren’t you?’

He knew. And for a second Mia wanted to berate herself, because of course he knew. The omega had him on a tight leash after all.
‘I was just –’ she rushed to say.

Jensen pushed off the car, straightened up and turned to face her. He wasn’t smiling now.

‘I was just leaving,’ Mia said hurriedly, ‘I was. I was just leaving.’

Jensen didn’t say anything, stared at her.

And Mia couldn’t stop, couldn’t help herself. ‘It’s – look, I mean, you’ve – those things… what he’s saying,’ she found the words coming out in a rush, ‘I mean, it’s just his word for it. Honestly, it’s – this whole thing. Blown out of proportion. He’s – he’s exaggerating! He’s lying! He – I mean – ’

‘You’re kidding me, right?’ Jensen’s voice was low.

‘There’s just –’ Mia floundered, spread her arms wide and tried to smile. ‘It’s just – omegas, you know, they –’

She didn’t finish. In two short steps, Jensen was in her face, had grabbed her by the collar of her shirt, swung her round and slammed her back against the car. Mia let out a screech, flailed, and then the alpha was pressed against her, eyes yellow, teeth bared and she could feel the scrape of claws on her chest, the sharp cut on her skin. Panic spiked and Mia made a strangled, high-pitched panicked noise.

‘Don’t!’ it burst from her mouth. ‘Don’t! You – you can’t! JD –’

One hand grabbed Mia’s shoulder, dug in, the other twisted in the collar of her shirt, and between the two Jensen hauled her so her feet dangled from the ground, pinned against the car, a terrified noise escaping her lips.

‘JD?’ he snapped, and laughed. ‘JD wanted to tear your goddamn throat out! You really think he’s going to do anything to me if I kill you?’

At the word “kill” Mia gave a sob, and felt panic spike in her chest, her breath constricting in her lungs, her heart thundering, and she tried to wriggle, to move, but the alpha was strong, stronger than her.

‘Oh – god –’ her eyes blurred with tears. ‘Please – you – don’t kill me!’

Jensen snarled, pushed his face close to hers. ‘Believe me, I want to,’ his voice dipped dangerously low, ‘god how I want to. If it were up to me I would tear you apart – there’d be nothing left of you once I was done. You tried to kill my mate,’ he made a snarling noise, gave her shake, ‘my mate! You tried to hurt the most goddamn important person in my life – and then you – you tried to seduce me? Did you really think that would work? Did you really think, that even if Jared wasn’t in the picture, that I would even look twice at you? You,’ he enunciated every word, slow and precise, ‘disgust me. Do you understand me? You disgust me. And you deserve no mercy, none!’

Mia gave a gurgled whimper, started to sob. Jensen made a noise, and in a second he had released her, stepped back, face twisting. Mia slumped, sagged against the car.

‘But I’m not going to kill you,’ he said. ‘I’m not.’

For a second Mia blinked through a wave of tears, still half crouched, her legs jelly, trembling against the car. Jensen bent down close to her.

‘You wanna know why I’m not going to kill you? Huh?’ he said, his voice a low whisper. ‘The only
reason – the only goddamn reason that I’m not ripping your throat out – that I’m not tearing you to bits right now – the only reason, Mia, is because Jared – Jared, who you almost got killed, who you tried to hurt – he doesn’t want me to – do you understand me? He doesn’t want me to hurt you. The person you tried to kill is showing more mercy, more compassion than you could ever understand. The person you tried to kill – Jared – is better than you, better than me even. Better than we can ever be.’

Jensen pulled back a little, studied her.

‘Jared seems to think you didn’t intend for him to die,’ he said. ‘He seems to think you never set out to really kill him. That everything… that it was more you just didn’t care if he lived or died. Apparently, Jared thinks that makes a difference, the intent thing.’

Mia swallowed. Her legs were starting to steady. Her entire body was still trembling, shaking, but she didn’t think she would collapse now. Now that she knew he wasn’t going to kill her, now she knew she would survive.

‘I didn’t – ’ her voice cracked, seemed a pitch higher than normal. ‘I didn’t –’

‘It doesn’t,’ Jensen interrupted. ‘Make a difference. Not really. Not to me anyway.’

‘You’re… you’re not going to kill me’ Mia whispered.

‘No,’ Jensen shook his head. ‘No. Because I promised Jared I wouldn’t.’

And then he moved so fast Mia never saw it coming. One second she was slumped against the car, the next he had her pinned to the ground again, eyes blazing.

‘But,’ and Jensen’s eyes glowed yellow in the car park, ‘have you ever heard the expression an eye for an eye?’

He grinned wolfishly.

‘What about a thumb for a thumb?’

**

Misha had thought the many years of being Jensen’s babysitter might have prepared him for being a mate.

He was, after all, thoroughly practiced in taking care of someone. As it turned out, however, there was a difference between taking care of someone with a sense of exasperation and taking care of someone with an overwhelming, overpowering sense of total love and devotion.

Mostly, the difference was that the latter was infinitely more stressful.

He was probably making it stressful, he supposed, as he hurriedly cut the tomato into round, perfect slices. After all, Rachel had only asked if there was something to eat.

It had been his decision to race immediately to the kitchen and start to prepare a peanut butter sandwich. It had been his decision to, after panicking that maybe that wasn’t what she wanted (because he hadn’t clarified? Why hadn’t he clarified? What kind of terrible mate was he?), to then
make a cheese sandwich. And then what if she didn’t want a cheese sandwich? Maybe Rachel liked ham sandwiches? Maybe what she really wanted was a jelly sandwich?

So far, Misha had five sandwiches on a plate and was in the middle of making a sixth.

He wondered if every other mate had this issue or if it was just him.

There was the sound of cheerful whistling, the click of the front door opening and he glanced up as footsteps approached. He was in the kitchen of Jared and Gen’s house, and the faint sounds of Rachel, Felicia, Gen and Jared wafted from the back patio where they were all sitting. With them all accounted for, he knew exactly who was arriving and sure enough, as he looked to the kitchen entrance, Jensen emerged. The alpha was smiling, a big, relaxed, eye-crinkling smile, his body as loose and relaxed as Misha had ever seen and instantly, immediately, he was suspicious.

He narrowed his eyes at his alpha friend. ‘Where have you been?’

Jensen flashed him a toothy smile. ‘Good evenin’ to you too, Mish,’ he greeted, and swung a small paper bag on the bench. ‘Picked up a refill of Jared’s antibiotics from the hospital.’

‘You went to the hospital?’ Misha looked to the small bag.

‘Mhhhmmm,’ Jensen hummed.

‘His antibiotics don’t run out for another two weeks,’ Misha squinted at his friend. ‘You didn’t need to go to the hospital. And,’ he checked the bag, ‘this isn’t even the closest hospital to town. This hospital is miles away.’

‘I was headed that way,’ Jensen shrugged.

Misha pursed his lips. ‘You’ve been up to something’ he accused.

‘You’re way too suspicious, Mish,’ Jensen rolled his eyes, and then his face lit up as he reached out. ‘Ooh! Ham sandwich – ’

‘Don’t you dare!’ Misha immediately smacked his hand away.

Jensen yanked his hand back, a look of hurt on his face. Misha waggled the knife in his other hand. ‘Those are for my mate. You touch them, I will cut you’ he threatened.

Jensen raised an eyebrow. ‘All of them? I mean - she must eat a lot...’

Misha deflated a little. ‘Well, she didn’t... specifically... I mean. She... she said she was hungry’ he said.

Jensen looked at the kitchen bench. ‘So you made her five sandwiches?’

‘I didn’t know what kind she liked’ Misha said.

He looked down. ‘And actually... six.’

‘Wow, ok,’ Jensen blinked. ‘I mean, that’s great and all man. But, like, what if she hates sandwiches?’

He couldn’t help bursting out laughing at the look of pure horror on Misha’s face.
It only lasted a few seconds, before the alpha was pelting the half-sliced tomato at Jensen and cursing him from the kitchen. Still chuckling, Jensen ducked out onto the back patio, pausing a moment to smile at the scene. Gen cross-legged on the ground, Felicia in one of the deck chairs, Rachel in the other and – where his eyes were automatically drawn – Jared curled on the long, bench seat, a blanket bundled on his lap, looking soft and beautiful as ever, hair curling lightly, a black hoodie on, a small, content smile on his face. The omega was healing in leaps and bounds, getting stronger and healthier each day through his physical therapy and doctor’s appointments. Each time Jensen looked at him he couldn’t help but swell with happiness at how much he improved, day by day, the colour returning to his cheeks, the bruises all but faded and his omega, his strong omega, coming out on top with his positivity, with his amazing attitude still in check.

Jensen was really glad that none of them were looking at him to see the sappy smile that broke onto his face. It would’ve been enough fodder to tease him for life.

In a moment however, Gen glanced up, noticed him and waved a hand. ‘Jensunnnnnnnnnnnn’ she crowed enthusiastically, the other hand clutching a purple coloured drink. ‘What upppp?’

It was then that Jensen noticed the table in the centre of the little group was covered in glasses filled with brightly coloured liquids, some glasses decorated with intricately cut bits of fruit adorning the rim, and all glasses, Jensen could smell with his heightened wolf senses, containing more than a fair amount of alcohol. He arched an eyebrow.

‘You guys having a cocktail party or somethin’?’

Rachel waved a hand at the glasses. ‘I told Misha I wanted a drink and he,’ she shrugged a little helplessly, ‘just came back with all of these. I, uh, didn’t have the heart to tell him I just meant a beer.’

‘Psssh, beer,’ Gen gave a particularly unfeminine snort, then slurped some more of her drink. ‘Cocktails are th’way to go! Cocktails!’

‘Cocktails!’ Felicia cheered in agreement.

‘Cocktails!’ they chorused together, before collapsing into giggles.

Jensen couldn’t help chuckling a little as he carefully made his way over to where Jared was sitting.

‘I’m gonna guess you guys have had a few of them already, huh?’ he grinned.

He reached the bench and met Jared’s eyes, the omega giving him a soft smile, and shifting along so Jensen could sit down. Once he was seated, Jared immediately came to rest at his side, snuggled into his chest, and Jensen slung an arm around his shoulder.

‘Hey,’ the alpha murmured softly, turning his head to brush his lips over the top of Jared’s head.

He closed his eyes a moment to breathe in the welcoming scent, tapping into the Jared-sense within him and smiling at the contentment he felt from the omega.

‘Hey back,’ Jared replied, and tilted his head a little to look up at Jensen. ‘Where you been?’

Jensen gave a one shouldered shrug. ‘Had some errands to run,’ he answered, and smilingly kissed Jared’s forehead. ‘Nothin’ to worry about.’

‘Hmmm,’ Jared hummed, turning his head to burrow back into Jensen’s chest.
There was a pause, the chatter of the three girls filling the silence.

‘You’re… happy,’ Jared spoke softly, and Jensen could hear the smile in his tone. ‘I can feel it.’

Jensen gave his arm a little squeeze. ‘I am’ he confirmed softly.

‘Me too’ Jared said softly.

He turned his head again, and hesitated a moment, biting his lip.

Jensen arched an eyebrow. ‘Somethin’ on your mind, sweetheart?’ he asked.

‘Umm, Gen and I… we were talking,’ Jared started, hesitating a little. ‘And – uh. Well. It’s just. Felicia – she’s… well, her lease is up and she… um. Well she and Gen were talking and they – they might get a place together. An apartment somewhere. So I was – and Gen also suggested – that maybe… I mean. It’s a big house for me to be on my own, you know? So maybe, if you wanted to – I mean, it doesn’t have to be straight away, we can wait, but – ’

Jensen couldn’t help smiling at his omega’s stuttering and stammering. He lifted his free hand and tweaked Jared’s nose gently.

‘You askin’ me to move in, Jay?’ he asked.

Jared’s cheeks were a bit pink. ‘If – I mean, if you want –’

Jensen dipped his head down, kissed him gently on the lips. ‘ Couldn’t think of anything I want more’ he murmured against Jared’s lips.

He felt Jared’s lips curl into a smile, a soft little sigh escaping the omega.

‘Good’ Jared murmured.

Jensen moved to kiss him again, to taste his omega once more – when something decidedly wet and sticky smacked into the side of his head. Jensen gave a yelp, head jerking up, and a piece of pineapple dropped to the ground.

‘You!’ Gen was pointing at them. ‘Enough with the suck-facing! Nu-uh! No suck-facing allowed! S’bad enough I have to listen to you guys. Don’t wanna see it too, jeez. You lovebirds. Forcin’ me out of my own home with your loud sex.’

Felicia dissolved into helpless giggles that Gen soon joined in, the two betas cackling. There was movement at the doorway and Misha appeared with an incredibly large platter filled with sandwiches and a three different packets of crisps.

‘I got you some food, Rachel’ he beamed.

Rachel took one look at the platter and promptly burst into laughter. Jensen gave a little shake of his head, relaxing back into the seat, feeling Jared loose, relaxed and happy against him. He let his head tilt back, closed his eyes.

He would move in with Jared. Maybe he’d get a job helping out with JD, or even with the police-force with Matt. Misha and Rachel he hoped would stick around, would set up house somewhere in the town with them. He would visit his own pack, his brother and father and mother, introduce Jared to them, holiday there. He would build his new life with his omega.

A smile curved his lips. He breathed in, the scent of his omega wrapping around him. Cinnamon,
vanilla, sweetness, Jared and home. He listened to the laughter of his friends and he let feeling of contentment that thrummed from inside Jared, from inside himself, fill his chest.

Home. He was home.

Chapter End Notes

Holy crap! It’s done! I’ve finally finished this story! *flails wildly*

I have to say I really enjoyed writing this one – it was a nice mix of humour and action and I had a ball doing the interactions between Jensen and Misha… Though I am so sorry to everyone that there were so many delays – that’ll teach me to write when I’m a) moving house multiple times and b) nearing the end of semester when I’m up to my eyes in assignments & exams! Planning is not my strongest suit… *face palm*

And I know some people wanted to see Jared pregnant at the end, but I wanted it to be more about him accepting that it’s ok that he can’t have kids, that he’s ok how he is, scars and all, and I like to think in this ‘verse down the track they adopt some pups together anyway :) (that being said I do consider this finished so there won’t actually be any sequels, timestamps etc)

Anyway! So, big, huge, MOOSE SIZED hugs and love to everyone who’s stuck with me, who’s commented and kudos’d or read –you all keep me going <3 You’re all amazing and every kind comment made my day xx

I’ve got another fic in the works to be started soon, BUT, I’m going to be smart this time and wait until AFTER exams before I start… (well that’s the plan anyway).

All the hugs xx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!