# Earning A Miracle

**Summary**

Jared's quite good with his hands; he has to be ever since he suffered a spinal injury, paralyzing him from the waist down. His whole life now revolves around using his hands. He makes the best of it but things at his new teaching job are tough and his coworkers aren't making it any easier for him. It doesn't help that he's also a carrier. Then he falls for Jensen. Worlds turn upside down, love ensues, and Jared later finds himself pregnant. Can he cope being paralyzed and pregnant, and what hardships will they both have to overcome?

## Notes
do not own these characters. I am just using them for fun.

**Beta:** The ever lovely Demondetox. Thank you for your editing skills. :-)  

**Banner:** The fabulous Kadyn who whipped this up and put a smile on my face.  

**Gift:** This is for and is inspired by a prompt from SammyColt24. I hope you like it dear.  

XOXO  

**Author’s Note:** This wasn’t supposed to become an epic story. Well, you know me...it is. I am excited about it though and it is hitting all my angsty schmoopy buttons. :-)  

All characters are fictional versions and in a fictional situation. I did (he passed on last year) have a family friend with paraplegia so some of the things that Jared deals with are inspired by that. While I did do research, I am human. So please feel free to correct me on anything I incorrectly depict or describe. I hope you enjoy it! Let me know. XOXO
Prologue

The television in the corner of the room is old and the picture comes in fuzzy, but he doesn’t have to see the news report to know exactly what’s on the screen.

A reporter comes into focus, her face somber and lips pressed tightly like any other expression would force her to lose the merger control she has over her emotions.

“We’re back with up to the minute details about the tragic school bus accident we’ve been covering since news of the story broke. For those of you just joining us, there has been a fatal accident on the southbound side of I-35. A school bus carrying 48 fourth grade students from Highland Park Elementary School as well as two teachers and a bus driver returning from a field trip, was slammed into by a dump truck who seemingly lost control and flipped the bus. It is unsure what caused the dump truck to lose control but the initial crash was exacerbated when the gasoline from the fuel tank of the bus ignited immediately after impact. In what we are discovering to be the second deadliest bus disaster in United States history, it has been confirmed that all adults and 47 of the students were pronounced dead at the scene of the accident.

We’ve also gotten news that rescue efforts were hindered by the clouds of dark smoke and threat of further explosion. We’ve learned that the bus fell with a majority of its exists blocked and the dump truck prevented evacuation from others. Rescue officials have now released the name of the lone survivor, a miracle nine year old who managed to get himself partially out of the bus before the explosion but was pinned under the wreckage and unable to escape on his own.

The man turns towards the television and sees a smiley picture of his son, one that had been taken only a few months prior during the start of school.

We’ve learned that the boy is a student of Highland Park Elementary and the school has graciously provided us with his photo, showing a vibrant and energetic boy who, as we speak, is now struggling for his life. Jared Padalecki was brought to Austin Surgical Hospital and is currently in the ICU while a staff of medical professions work around the clock to save this brave little man’s life. Earlier today, our news crews caught up with his parents, who were understandably beside themselves and unable to speak on camera but they ask for your prayers and well wishes while it is still uncertain if their son, Jared, will survive.

The news clip switches over to footage of a swarm of people near the hospital while police try to usher a distraught man and woman, arms locked around each other, into the hospital.

Gerry gets to his feet and flips the television off before cameras are thrown in the tear streaked recorded version of his and Sherri’s faces or before they show another picture of Jared, the one where he’s playing with his siblings. He knows exactly how the news report is going to go because it’s been running on loop, changing a bit to filter in new details, since news of the accident broke through major airwaves.

He’s tired and his hands are rubbed raw from wringing them but he can’t leave.

Sherri hasn’t stopped crying for hours, only quieting every now and then so that she can take a shuddering breath and let it all out again.

A sick part of him wishes that the doors to the ICU will open and someone will tell him that it’s over. One way or the other. He needs to know and waiting is tearing everything in him apart.
If Jared is too broken to be saved, then he hopes his son can find peace.

He hates himself for even thinking that.

When the doors finally do open, the doctor who greets him is exhausted looking. He’s got a picture of a smiley little girl taped to the pager at his hip and Gerry thinks, “this man gets it. He knows. He loves something like I do.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Padalecki?” the doctor offers as he looks from the man to the woman. “I’m Dr. Ferrara and I’ve been on the team that’s been working to save your son’s life.”

“Is he dead?” Sherri asks with a hand cupping her mouth. “Is he?”

The doctor takes a slow breath, eyes sad and creased with years of that very emotion. Gerry’s eyes fall onto the surgical mask hanging under his chin and get stuck on a splotch of red blood. Jared’s blood. He feels sick; the world’s spinning and he has to hold onto the arm of a chair to say upright.

“He’s…alive. For now. We…His inhaled a lot of smoke and he’s having trouble breathing but that’s not that part we’re struggling with. See…in the crash, his spine was compressed for an extended period of time. He bled out a lot and we’ve got him on several blood transfusions but the damage done…I don’t know what kind of long term effects we’re dealing with here. I’m not trying to sugar coat this. There have been severe traumatic injuries to your son’s spine. With the swelling and the…” He trails off and pinches the bridge of his nose. “I’m not sure what we’re dealing with.”

Sherri gasps and collapses into Gerry’s chest, burying her face and hiding away from what the man has to say because she can’t handle it.

“What’s the worst case scenario we are looking at here?” Gerry is brave enough to ask.

“He dies,” Dr. Ferrara states bluntly.

“And the best case scenario?”

“He lives.” There is a pause like the doctor is trying to find words. “But every test we run points towards lack of response in his lower extremities. We’re talking paraplegia. Best case scenario? We’re talking about paralysis from the waist down.”

“Permanent?”

“With the damage to his spine? Yeah. Permanent. I’m so sorry. I wish I had better news but – ”

“Just make him live,” Gerry demands.

He stops listening then. The rest doesn’t matter.

He closes his eyes and the smiling picture of Jared from his fourth grade school photo is painted on the backs of his eyelids.

Jared is a fighter. He is.

He’s got to survive because Gerry isn’t sure anyone else will be able to keep living if he doesn’t.
People think Jared is crazy.

He’s not crazy. He’s just determined to live his life as normal as possible.

People think he’s heroic.

He’s not heroic. He simply got a job that he intendeds to get to on time. That’s a perfectly normal thing for a 25 year old male to do.

Truthfully, Jared has no idea how people could expect him to stay home and do nothing with his time other than whittle down his social life to internet communications.

One does need to live a life outside the house, even though that feat is more complicated for a person like Jared.

Truthfully, staying inside his house would be so much easier. His house is something he’s spent all of his adult years tailoring to be his perfect world. He’s happy and safe there. But he also feels defined there. Trapped almost.

So he forces himself to leave.

He spent six years in college, getting a four year degree because the first two years were a mess of trying to get him to campus and around campus. But he didn’t mind the slow pace because at least he was moving forward. And now that he’s through with it, The University of Texas finally has enough wheelchair ramps and accessibility points for a whole graduating class of people like Jared.

He knows he’s worked years for this but that doesn’t quell the storm of nerves in his belly. Looking in the mirror, he feels like a kid. Hell, he looks like a kid. His hair won’t cooperate and he feels oddly out of place in his button down shirt. He can’t remember the last time he actually wore one. His tattered paint stained tees feel like a security blanket and he’s floundering without them.

Actually, he does remember the last time he wore a button down shirt and he’d felt practically just as nervous. It was his interview at Akins High School. He’d worn the same shirt with a sports jacket his mother picked up for him using her special ability to judge the perfect size on sight alone. She’d even driven him, a habit she’d gotten into whenever Jared had to go someplace he hadn’t had time to scope out beforehand. Jared knows he had to break it but he’d overcome a lot of hurdles so far, he figures it is okay to hang onto some for a while.

He felt like a kid then too.

That’s what people do to him when they can’t separate the man he has become from the boy that serves as a warning for the rest of the public school aged students.

Jared’s fingers danced over the tires on his wheelchair. Some people’s nervous habit was picking at their nails or messing with their hair, Jared’s was tracing the treads of the wheels he depends on for most of his day.

“Mr. Padaleki?” A secretary questions but her avoidant eye contact lets on that she knows exactly who he is. “Mr. Flanagan is ready for you.”

“Thanks.” Jared flips his portfolio onto his lap and tries to maneuver himself towards the office.
door. It’s obvious the office staff weren’t expecting the actual width of his wheelchair because they have given him a dramatically widen breadth to pass through. Unfortunately, Mr. Flanagan’s office isn’t as prepared. It’s hard to clear the corner of the room and there is a brief awkward moment where the men stare at each other for a second. Jared’s used to that stare. The “do I help you or let you figure it out” stare. It’s okay. He manages and parks himself facing the chairperson’s desk.

“I’m good at parallel parking too,” Jared says as a joke to break the tension.

Mr. Flanagan laughs stiffly and reaches out a hand to shake Jared’s. “It’s nice to meet you Jared. I’m Ray Flanagan, chairperson for the art department here at Arkin High School.” Smoothing his tie down, he takes a seat. “Sorry about the tight spaces. I’ve been asking for a larger office on the second floor for years now.” He smiles and riffles through the papers on his desk. “So, I have to admit, your resume is impressive and the caliber of your work is equally so. Can you tell me a little bit about why you think you’ll be a good fit for our art education department?”

Jared’s stomach twists up in knots. He had an answer prepared for that, even practiced with his brother. It’s gone now. “Umm, well…see…” His brain figures out a perfectly feasible response but it’s generic and cliché. He could give some stock answer about wanting to bring the caliber of the art classroom to the next level or making a positive impact on kids. He almost gives that answer but then words come out on their own accord. “Because it’s the only thing I’m good at. I mean…REALLY good at. I…” he puts his hands up and flexes them for Mr. Flanagan to see, “My hands are my tool and…they’re my life. Everything I do revolves around them. And when they were all I had left, I figured out how to live my life making art. I thought that maybe, if art helped me that much, that there are other kids out there that need it too. I’m good at overcoming obstacles and I don’t give up. I thought maybe there are other people out there who aren’t as good at that and…maybe…I could teach them how to be good at it.” It’s an honest answer and Jared blushes for a second at the realization that he just bared his soul. “I mean…I…” He stammers but there probably is no coming back from that answer. He’s botched the interview and he’ll have to keep putting out resumes for a drastically dwindling job market.

Mr. Flanagan stares at him and considers what he just said. He eyes him over and some light bulb goes off in his head. “Wait…You…you’re the Jared Padaleki? The one who almost died in the bus accident fifteen years ago?”

Jared swallows. “Yeah, I…”

“Man! I thought you looked familiar. You’re like a town hero of something –”

“I’m not a hero.” Jared’s voice drops to a whisper and his eyes fall on his portfolio. He wishes Mr. Flanagan would ask to see that rather than dig up old news.

“Like hell you’re not. There…there’s a picture of you over at the elementary school, a memorial of sorts. Well…not a memorial since, clearly, you’re alive and I guess you get the point. But it’s there. Everyone knows you. You’re a miracle.”

“I’m not a miracle either. Just…just a boy who didn’t die.” Jared shrugs and puts on a blank face.

“Whatever you say.” Mr. Flanagan stands up and reaches out a hand towards Jared. “Either way, I’d say Akins High School would be honored to have a town celebrity as part of the faculty.”

Jared hadn’t realized how it happened. He wasn’t sure when he’d actually gotten the job or why he’d gotten it. But it is his now and he isn’t going to make an ass of himself in messing this up.

He’s got a job to do, a new one, and he’s going to make sure Mr. Flanagan, or Ray as he now insisted on being called, will realize he made the right choice in hiring him, regardless of his original
reasons.

The drive to the school is easy. Truth be told, Jared had done it practically 20 times. He even figured out where he could park and what entrances he could use. Unfortunately, the school is situated on a raised plot of land, making steps necessary to get to most entrances. The one wheelchair ramp is around the back of the building and he figures parking as close to that is his best bet.

He gets to the school over an hour early. Ray was still figuring out the classroom situation until the last minute and Jared needs the extra time to plan a travel route for his work day.

What people don’t understand about him is that driving is easy. His car is thoroughly modified to be driven by someone with paraplegia; he’s got hand controls for the break and gas. The hard part is getting in and out of the car. He can actually hold himself up with a serious set of crutches but that’s practically all he can do. He stays in one spot. It’s taken him a million tries and almost a million times falling on his ass but he’s figured out how to get his wheelchair behind the driver’s seat while still being about to retrieve it and get his boney butt back into it when he’s arrived at his location.

It takes a while but the parking lot is still empty, most people hanging onto their summer hiatus till the last moment.

He gets into the building, and makes his way towards Ray’s office. Knocking, he’s surprised by a new face in the office.

“Yes?” She asks as she turns to face Jared, momentarily taken back by his wheelchair.

“Oh, hi!” Jared holds out a hand but the woman doesn’t step close enough to reach him. “I’m… um… I’m Jared. I’m new here.” Being a late hire and not getting to meet the rest of his department, Jared has no idea who he is looking at.

“You’re the new hire?” She blinks several times when her words drop off.

“Ana, be nice!” Ray comes into the office and skirts around Jared. “Oh, Jared! Good morning! Happy first day of school!” He smiles at the man and then scowls at the woman. “Ana, this is Jared. He’s taking the spot Corinne left when she retired. Jared, this is Ana. She usually teaches the fashion and jewelry classes.”

Ana gives a forced smile and her “nice to meet you” doesn’t even attempt to ring true. She gives an indifferent flutter of her eyes and walks out. “I’ll come back later, Ray.”

Looking flustered, Ray tries to figure out a way to smooth things over. “Don’t mind Ana. She’s not really a people person. Well, she’s a kid person but she takes a while to warm up to coworkers. Anyway, what can I do for you Jared?”

Still turned to watch Ana go, Jared can feel the chill she left in her wake. He shoves it down deep and gives a beaming smile. “I, well, I was hoping I have a classroom to teach in.”

“Oh, yes! Of course.” Ray shoves some papers to the side of his desk and flips a master list of rooms to show Jared. “You’re in A-204 and A-116. We tried to keep you on one floor but since most of our art rooms are on the second floor and our ceramics classroom is on the first… there was no getting around it. I hope that won’t be a problem.”

Laughing, Jared waves his hand. “There are worse things than multi leveled buildings in my life. I’ll be fine as long as you have an elevator.”

“Yes, of course. There are two.”
“Two?” Jared’s eyes widen a bit. The school is…well, the school is large. He’s surprised that there are only two elevators to cover the whole layout of the school.

It’s clear Ray didn’t understand the intonation in Jared’s question because he is still smiling. “Yep, two. They’re at the north and south ends of the building and you need a key to operate them.” He provides said key and drops it into Jared’s waiting hand. “Unfortunately, the schedule doesn’t allow for any wiggle room. You have a Ceramics class during 2\textsuperscript{nd} period and another one during 7\textsuperscript{th}. Your Studio Art classes are 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th}. Lunch is 6\textsuperscript{th}.”

“Ah ha.” Jared’s brain is already scrambling to figure out how travel between classes will work. It’s not really a problem till the end of the day when he has to go from A-116 to A-205 in a 5 minute time period. “Listen, Ray, I’m not sure it’s physically possible for me to handle the change between 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th}.”

“Ohh?” Frowning, Ray scans over the master list. “Well…all the art teachers teach 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th}. Even if I could switch your class with someone else’s, it wouldn’t help. How about…how about we try it out today and see how it goes?”

The nerves in Jared’s middle that had just started to settle spike up again. He has no idea what to say. He’s afraid that fighting back will cost him his job. Challenges always present themselves, Jared’s just going to have to figure out a way to deal with this one. “Okay,” he nods and knows it is exactly the type of spirit Ray is looking for.

“Good! Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to deliver some room assignments to the other art teachers. Good luck today and don’t forget, there is a faulty meeting in the faculty dining room after school today.”

“Got it.” Jared watches him leave and sighs. The day hasn’t even begun and his nerves have already done a stellar job of destroying his confidence.

The nice thing about teaching Ceramics is that no one uses the room except for him. If Ray had let Jared talk enough during his interview, he could have told the man that while he excels in many forms of media, working with all things malleable is his forte. Especially clay. He likes clay because there is something symbolic about being able to turn a mangled mess back into a clean slate to begin again.

He gets to class early and surveys what he is to be working with. There is a kiln in the corner, old but dependable. There are well loved jars of glaze adorning the shelves beside the two washtub style sinks and an old book case turned into a paint storage system for all forms of acrylic paint.

Opening the supply closet, he finds more paint, boxes and bags of clay, and a wheeled cart littered with a mess of brushes and clay tools.

Three neglected pottery wheels are shoved into the corner.

Jared’s got a lot of work to do but there is potential.

First on his list is moving the six shared workspace tables. They’re too close together and if he hopes on monitoring his students’ progress, he needs to be able to navigate between them.

By the time he shoves them all apart and gets them perfect, there is a sheen of sweat on his forehead and some trickling down his spine. He’s thankful he wore black. On second thought, looking down
and seeing smooches of clay dust on his shirt, he thinks he might have to settle for gray and khaki from now on.

The bell sounds to signal the end of 1st period and Jared startles. He has a roster of names to memorize but he has no idea what to expect other than fifteen girls and twelve boys. Watching the students filter into the room, he catches them sizing him up. They know well enough to not actually verbalize it but most of them are thinking, “holy shit, our teacher’s in a wheelchair.”

Greeting every one of them, Jared waits till the last student takes a seat and the bell rings. They have first day attentiveness and manners. Every student sits and faces him expectantly.

“Good morning, class. I…I’m Mr. Padalecki – Mr. P if that’s too much of a mouthful.” He swivels his chair slightly to face them head on. “I hope y’all are in the right place. I hope I am. I mean, this is Auto Care, right?” It’s a weak attempt at a joke but some students snicker for his benefit. “I’m kidding. This is Intro to Ceramics and I hope, that by the end of the semester, I can teach you to appreciate it as much as I do.”

A boy in the back raises his hand and strains it towards the ceiling.

Jared’s not sure what he said that would necessitate a question but he points to the student. “Yes?”

“Umm, aren’t you that boy who almost died in the Highland Park bus accident?”

There is a hush of murmurs through the class and another girl pipes up. “Oh, yeah! You are! My mom used to threaten me that I’d end up just like you if I didn’t behave on the bus and wear my seatbelt.” After the words leave her mouth, she cups her hands over it, aware too late at the insensitivity of them.

“Yeah! There’s like…a big picture of you in Highland Park. That was my elementary school. I had to pass you every time I went to the bathroom,” a different girl adds.

“Oh man, wait till my mom hears that you’re my art teacher! She said she used to leave candles out by the hospital for you. You’re a local legend,” the first boy continues with a sense of awe.

“I’m not a legend,” Jared says to cut off the conversation he really doesn’t feel like having. “But I am an art teacher, your art teacher in fact. And yes, I’m in a wheelchair. I…” He pauses and shakes his head. “Since we’re on the subject, let’s deal with the elephant in the room.” He speaks slowly as he makes his way between the tables, making sure to back track and get a good feel of the room. “When I was nine, I was in a bus accident. Some of you may have heard about it. I have a severe spinal injury. Because of it, I lost the use of my legs, thus leaving me wheelchair bound. Everything else? That’s all normal, just like you. And when I lost the use of my legs, I figured out something extraordinary. It’s something I hope I can help you figure out too.” He leaves the class hanging for the moment and makes his way to the supply closet, hoisting a bag of clay onto his lap.

“Umm, Mr. Padalehh…Mr. P, what did you figure out?” a curious girl in the back of the room asks in a nervous breath.

“I’ll show you. Hopefully.” Jared starts throwing a big splat of clay in front of each student. They look thoroughly confused and that puts a smile on Jared’s face. He had plans for the first day of class, rules to go over and introductions to be made. They fall to the wayside as he does what he always does. He goes with it. He wings it. “I’mma show you how art saved my life or at least defined it. I’m going to show you how to speak without any words.”

Two kids in at a table diagonally across from Jared snicker and roll their eyes. Jared throws a lump of
clay at them, purposely missing them but getting close enough to startle them back to attention.

“Now, you may be asking yourself why I’m giving you each a slab of clay. Well, it seems to me that you know who I am but I don’t have a clue who you are. So... you have thirty minutes to make something that speaks to who you are. Tomorrow you’ll introduce yourselves. Any questions?”

A brunette beside Jared raises her hand. “Umm, I’m Kendra. Do you... do you need any help?” She smiles and takes the clay Jared is offering her.

“That would be great, Kendra. Thank you for offering. Maybe you could drag the cart of tools out from the supply closet?” Jared returns her smile when the girl nods and scampers off to do so.

Jared has no idea what he’s doing or if it will work. He has notebooks full of units and lesson plans and he supposes he has no idea if those will work either. Though, he thinks whatever is going on in the room is something. The kids are alive. They’re energetic and focused and whether or not they think the activity is stupid or not, they’re all doing it.

For now, it’s a pretty manageable first day.

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Jared’s Studio Art classes turn out to be full of meek freshmen who are just as new to the building as Jared.

He makes a pact that they’ll all tackle this “big scary high school thing” together and they all seem on board with it.

That’s why Jared likes kids.

They’re quick to ask about his wheelchair and just as quick to get over it.

Adults are trickier. They hover around the issue of his wheelchair forever and then never know if they are being rude or not when they have to talk about it. They don’t seem to get over it. It never becomes a comfort zone for them. They may act like they are comfortable with it but that’s all it is, an act.

Kids are easier.

That exact belief is thrown in his face when he finally gets a breather and heads down to the faculty dining area for lunch. He’s late, of course, because the elevator he has to use requires him to travel to the end of the hallway his classroom is on and then travel all the way back so he can get to the core of the high school. It adds almost seven minutes onto his travel time, not counting how slow the elevator is.

By the time he enters, most of the occupants are eating. They give him a glance and fall into hushed talk.

Jared knows it is about him. He can tell because people keep trying to be sly and pretend they are looking past him but they’re not. They’re looking at him.

He orders a sandwich from a cafeteria staff, a woman named Jeanie who kind of reminds Jared of his aunt. She’s sweet and doesn’t seem to focus on his set of wheels. She looks Jared in the eye’s first, making Jared think that maybe he was being too hyper defensive and sensitive when he first walked into the room. Maybe it’s all in his head. His co-workers are professionals who work with kids, they must have a decent level of sensitivity.
“Here you go,” Jeanie says with a wink as she reaches down to give Jared his sandwich. “It’s nice to meet you Jared. I...well...I’ve got a daughter in a wheelchair. I know how hard it can be for you folk. You’re...you’re a trooper.”

“Not a trooper, Jeanie. Just part of the working class.” Jared gives her a smile.

“Here,” Jeanie adds as she offers up a bag of potato chips. “On the house. Being it’s your first day and all...”

“Oh!” Jared’s eyes curl up. “Thank you. I don’t,” he wants to say he doesn’t need the chips but they’re a gift and he backtracks. Reaching to accept the snack pack, he nods. “Thank you.”

Patting Jared’s hand, Jeanie smiles. “You’re welcome, dear.”

Oddly enough, once he has food, there aren’t really that many tables he can park his wheelchair at to eat. There’s a few high tops which definitely won’t work, and out of the three tables that are his level, two of them are packed. Hoping someone takes pity on him and joins him, Jared scoots over to the empty table, setting his sandwich on it.

No one budges from the other table. Jared’s not really used to this. His personality has more than made up for what he lacks in mobility and he rarely allows himself to be on the outside, but he gets it. He gets cliques and that he’s the new guy. He’s stomping – or rolling – on someone else’s turf and they have to feel him out. He respects that.

So he eats.

He tunes out the world and starts planning tomorrow’s new “get to know you” activity until he hears his name in whispered tones.

“Yeah, he’s that Jared Padalecki. Word is that Ray Flanagan only hired him so we could parade him around like a show pony. Some bull shit about equity in our hiring process. You know...having a disabled person on our payroll looks good and I don’t think they even cared about his credibility. They kicked poor Tanya out of a job. She was filling in for Corinne before the end of last year and everyone was sure she was a shoe in for the position.”

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“That's so ridiculous,” a woman adds, crouching closer to her coworkers and whispering so lowly it is almost impossible for Jared to make out her words. “Does he think he can use his status to float through life? I mean...who doesn’t love little Jared Padalecki? Austin’s hometown hero who defied all the odds. If he gets fired, I’m sure he’ll sue based on some prejudice over his disability. Guess we’re stuck with him.”

Jared gasps and the other teachers face him with embarrassed looks like they’ve been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. They avoid eye contact and make themselves busy by stuffing their faces.

Jared is shocked and disgusted. He has no idea how to respond.

He wants to yell at them but knows it will do little to change their mind. His brain is full of comebacks and he’s screaming on the inside. There are amazing odds that Jared catapulted over and he wants to shove them all in these ignorant people’s faces. Nothing, nothing, has been handed to Jared. In fact, he had to work doubly hard for everything.
Part of Jared tries to stay strong, to stick it out and finish his lunch without giving his coworkers the satisfaction of them chasing him away. The other part of him isn’t strong at all.

The pressure of the day cracks him and he tosses his sandwich in the trash and high tails it out of the cafeteria. He’s out the door only a minute before the bell rings. He forgot he’d gotten started on lunch so late.

“Shit!” Hurrying towards his next class, there is a swarm of students leaving the lunch room. They don’t knock into him but they get in his way and clog up the hallway, making a bottle neck effect. There is no way he is going to be able to make it to his classroom on time. Leaning back, Jared switches direction and takes off towards and opposite hallway but it’s the same situation. “Shit!”

“Having trouble?” A voice behind him states with a hint of amusement.

“Yeah…I….I need to get to A-116 but, well,” he makes a hand gesture towards the hallway to get his point across.

“Yeah, it’s rush hour over here after periods 5 and 6,” the man says with an agreeing nod. “Follow me. I know a short cut.” He sets off in a curve around the crowd of students.

“You know a shortcut?” There is disbelief in Jared’s words as he raises an eyebrow and follows the curious stranger. He assumes he’s a teacher. He sure looks the part. He’s got on a shirt and tie and Jared’s ashamed to admit that, stereotypically, his thin wire framed glasses scream teacher. “Where are we going?” Jared’s hands skim across the wheels faster, trying to keep up with the man’s brisk pace.

“I told you. A short cut. There’s a cut through over here that the kids rarely use. I dunno if it’s because the swinging doors make them forget about it or if they’re so focused on getting to where they need to be that they’re wearing blinders.” He turns to Jared and smiles.

It’s a nice smile. It’s genuine too. Like Jeanie, the man doesn’t once focus on his wheelchair. He makes eye contact and that’s enough for Jared to trust him and head feet first into the throng of teenagers.

“It’s a little out of the way but it actually saves times. Trust me.” Pausing, he turns and offers a hand. “I’m Jensen Ackles by the way. I teach History here.”

“Ja-Jared. Jared Padalecki. Teacher art. I mean, art teacher!” Jared feels the flush hit his cheeks and hates himself for it. Seriously? Why the hell would he lose his cool now? In front of a completely handsome – erm, complete stranger?

“Ahh ha,” Jensen says with a curious smirk. “Come on.”

They break free of the swarm and true to his words, Jensen leads them into a practically vacant hallway.

“Whoa,” Jared says and spins his wheelchair to emphasize his relief.

“Told you.” Jensen snorts victoriously and falls into line beside Jared, able to keep his pace set to match. “No one comes down here unless they have a class, which,” he draws out the last word until they arrive at a door, “I do.” Cracking the door open, he nods to Jared. “It was nice meeting you, Jared.”

“Nice meeting you too, Jensen.” He says testing the name on his tongue. “Thanks for the short cut.”
“Anytime. Well, not anytime because there aren’t any more short cuts but you get what I mean.” Smiling, Jensen ducks inside.

True to his word, Jensen’s shortcut actually gets Jared there thirty seconds before the bell rings.

In a world of ignorant assholes, Jared’s found two that seem pretty genuine and both their names being with J.

He makes a new rule. All people whose names start with J are already making a good impression.

Good thing this class has a Julie, two Johns, a James, a Jackson, and a Jennifer.

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Thanks to Jensen’s shortcut, which is what Jared decides he will officially call the hallway, the rest of Jared’s day is pretty uneventful.

He almost makes it to his 8th period class on time. He’s going to have to work on that.

But other than that little hiccup, Jared deems the day as a success on his part.

The failures seem to come in the form of practically everyone giving him the cold shoulder, like they either don’t expect him to stick around long enough to matter or they feel he’s clearly beneath them. He saves all the anger and frustration for when he’s in his car with the music turned up and he can scream as loud as he wants. He’ll unload to Ryan later because his best friend sure as hell owes him. And if Ryan isn’t around, he’s calling in backup in the form of Jeff and his father.

He just needs to get through the faculty meeting.

It’s pretty routine. The principal is running the show. Jared hasn’t officially met Mrs. Snider but she seems to be like every other principal Jared’s had in life. She smiles a lot, makes corny jokes, and tries to be buddy-buddy with everyone. She’s got a burgundy box hair dye job and a boxy pant suit. The staff seem to like her well enough.

She hits a serious snafu when she starts introducing the new hires. She asks them all to stand when their name is called and remain standing until she is done so they can be welcomed with a round of applause.

Jared cringes. He knows exactly what is coming.

“Jared Padalecki, new to our art department.” Mrs. Snider scans the crowd with a smile. “Don’t be shy, Jared.”

Jared tries raising his hand but she doesn’t catch it.

“Oh no, don’t tell me Jared forgot to come to his first faculty meeting,” the principal continues with a sing-songy sad voice.

“Here!” Jared shouts loud enough to be heard. “The hardware kind of prevents me from doing much more than very enthusiastically waving my hand but I’m here.” He snorts and braces himself for the wave of hushed giggles that hits him. Apparently, working with high school teachers isn’t much different than teaching high school students.

Taking in what Jared just said, Mrs. Snider gets a clear view of exactly why Jared can’t get to his feet. She blushes in embarrassment and clears her throat. “Oh! I’m sorry! Yes, there you are.
Welcome, Jared.” Scanning her list, she plows forward, “Dorothy Reese, new to our special education department.”

Jared tunes out the rest of the meeting. His brain is already at home.

For a second he thinks he made a huge mistake in believing he was cut out for a job like this.

Then he’s not too subtly reminded that it isn’t a mistake at all.

Mrs. Sniders winds down her speech and makes a motion to step aside. “Now, I promised I would save five minutes at the end of the meeting for you to talk as a staff about your union. Please stay and give your building union rep a hand; I’m sure he’s been busy all summer preparing to reprise the role. Mr. Ackles…” She says expectantly while giving a nod to her right. “They’re all yours, Jensen.”

Jared’s head snaps up. Jensen smiles graciously and takes the microphone. “Thanks, Darlene. It’s so weird to be happy and sad to see someone at the same time.” He turns to face the staff and shrugs. “I think we all wish we had a few more weeks off from seeing each other’s ugly mugs. Right?”

There is a bunch of moaning and groaning, mostly in agreement but Jared just stares. He finds himself tracing the contours of Jensen’s face and the way his jaw curves. Closing his eyes, the image is etched in his brain and his fingers are drawing invisible lines in the air, curved suspiciously to mirror his memory.

He had no idea this Jensen person even worked in the school until two hours ago, and now he’s finding out that he’s his union representative?

Jensen’s talking, kinda too fast but Jared figures it’s because most people are itching to go home for the day. He rambles about unity and trying to follow the contract.

He closes with, “So if there are any problems, anything at all, I’m the guy to see. You guys know me, and even if you don’t, I’m never bothered by people coming to me with concerns. So please… my door is always open. Well, not always. I mean…It’s locked sometimes and I have it closed when I’m teaching but if you need me, you know where to find me.”

Jared swears Jensen stares directly at him when he says the last part. It’s impossible to shrink back into his chair, so Jared just gives a stupid grin.

Parts of his first day sucked but Jared wouldn’t be normal if he didn’t complain about his work day. His students – his classes – went well. If he has any problems, he has someone he can go to. Jensen looks trustworthy and with a face like that, what problem could he not fix?

Arkin High is definitely going to be a wild ride for Jared.
Considering it is only the second week of school, Jared thinks he has everything under control.

Sure, he feels like he is flying by the seat of his pants every now and then but he’s got it pretty much under control. He’s actually surprised.

The students, as it turns out, love him. He’s not sure if it’s the novelty of having a teacher in a wheelchair or the fact that he can out-snark any of them. For the most part, they are behaving. He’s got it under control and he’s spent the first week proving to them that he’s the one in charge but he also plans his lessons around each specific student. If they think that he’s become a teacher simply because he’s no good at actually creating art, he’s proven them wrong on the account as well.

In his Studio Art classes he’s set up an easel and canvas, demonstrating more advanced versions of the techniques he is teaching the class.

In Ceramics, he’s working on a statue that he keeps set up in the back of the class. When the kids are working, he paroles the area but in his down time between classes, he works on it a little bit each day to show the class what he’s capable of.

The problem begins when he returns to work after a weekend off.

Apparently the school did some renovating while the building was free of students.

Jared doesn’t understand a lot about the school’s layout. He’s pretty certain a lot of people wouldn’t even take notice of it because it couldn’t possibly cause a problem for them but most of the school has a meaningless amount of steps. The school isn’t really level and every now and then there are two or three steps to get to another section of the building.

In any other situation, he’d complain about the lack of handicapped ramps but he’s new and he’s afraid to make waves. He promises himself he’ll do something about it when he’s more settled in and has a feel for the climate of the school.

For the most part, Jared doesn’t have to worry about it. He has a set path he takes to get into the building and to both of his classrooms. There are ramps for most of the small sets of stairs he needs so even though he has to take the long route sometimes, he can get there.

He’s used to the long route. They’re old friends.

Today, however, he’s faced with a problem.

There are no handicapped ramps.

They’re demolished. Sort of. There are cones and caution tape, like they’ll be dealt with eventually but for the week their importance is put on hold.

Jared can’t get up a short group of stairs that leads him to the elevator. He can take Jensen’s Shortcut and get to A-116 for ceramics but, essentially, he can’t go left down the A wing hallway.

He also can’t get into the faculty cafeteria. The ramp is useless and the three *pointless* steps to get to the lunch room are standing in his way.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Jared snorts under his breath, far too quiet to be heard by any
students’ ears. He is noticed, however, by Ana, who seems pleaded with Jared’s situation.

She walks straight up the stairs beside him and barely bats an eyelash at him.

Jared closes his eyes and takes a calming breath.

He can actually figure this out but it pisses him off that the problem has fallen into his own hands.

Mostly, he’s afraid of what he’ll look like to a group of coworkers who already think he’s pathetic if he fails.

He scoots his butt out of the chair and manages to swing himself so he’s sitting on the bottom stair.

It’s easy enough to lift his wheelchair up to the next level. Upper body strength hasn’t been an issue for years. Climbing the steps backwards by using his palms to help him, Jared manages to get to the top step and lock his wheelchair so he can hoist himself back into it. It isn’t pretty and he’s exhausted by the time he gets there but it works.

No spills. No embarrassing face first meeting with the floor tiles.

Of course all this happens on the first day Jared actually makes it to the faculty cafeteria with pretty much the whole period left to enjoy his lunch.

He doesn’t know why he’s so happy about it. He’s facing a period of people ignoring him or pretending to ignore him when in actuality they are scrutinizing him.

“Hey, Jared!” Jeanie says with a smile when he wheels through the door. “You alright? You look out of breath?”

“Um, yeah…fine. Just…kinda had to figure out how to get around all day without the use of wheelchair friendly ramps. No big deal. It’s totally fine,” he says as he plasters a smile on his face and hopes Jeanie buys it.

“Uhh-huh.” She’s skeptical and narrows her eyes at him but she doesn’t push. “What can I make for you?”

“What ‘cha got?”

“Hamburgers…wouldn’t recommend them. And I made a pretty decent chili for a faculty cafeteria. Or you could stick with a turkey wrap.”

“Turkey wrap,” Jared says almost instantly.

“I don’t blame you.” Jeanie chides with a smile.

It takes Jeanie less than a minute to make his wrap and send him on his way. As per usual, Jared’s left out of the “cool kid” table but he refuses to let them scare him away. He can stand his ground and make them feel uncomfortable.

He eats his lunch in silence, blocking out the fact that the happy chatter from the table next to him drops to a muffled whisper every now and then, signaling that they’re talking about him. Instead of worrying about it, he pulls out a sheet of paper and a pencil from his bag.

He’s got a list of supplies to make and he figures now is a good time as any to get that task over with.

Only, he gets about two items on the list before his mind wanders and his pencil starts doodling in the margins. It starts off as filigree but by the time he swirls the graphite down to the center of the
page, he is drawing something else entirely. His brain gets stuck on the memory of hands gesturing to hallways and doors. It’s not hard to conjure up the image on paper, sketching the contours of the hand his brain knows belongs to Jensen. The palm is open and gesturing towards the left, like it has more to reveal to Jared than just a shortcut through the building.

The sketch becomes something more. Instead of leaving the drawing one dimensional, Jared starts shading and using his finger to smudge some of the graphite so that there’s a soft shadow between Jensen’s fingers. He makes the creases in Jensen’s knuckles, relying on the way his memory locked their position into place.

He’s about to extend the wrist and curve over the little bump of bone that had peeked out of Jensen’s dress shirt when he almost jumps out of his wheelchair.

“That’s pretty good,” Jensen says as he looks over Jared’s shoulder, following the way the man’s hand manipulated the pencil.

Jared feels the flush hit his cheeks and make them burn hotter. He swallows loudly, scrambling to cover the drawing.

“It’s just a hand,” he tells himself. It’s an ordinary hand and Jensen can’t possibly know it is his hand that had Jared so transfixed that he didn’t register Jensen entering the cafeteria and walking towards him.

“I’m sorry if I startled you,” Jensen says and scratches at the back of his neck. “I didn’t mean to.”

“No,” Jared squeaks out. “No, it’s okay. I…I just get lost when I’m drawing sometimes. Like, I think a bomb could go off and I wouldn’t notice. Actually, one did once. Well…not a bomb but a car blew up in my old neighborhood as a kid and I just kept sketching in my book. Barely noticed it…oh shit, I’m rambling.”

“Little bit,” Jensen says as he makes a gesture with his thumb and forefinger to show how small Jared’s ramble was. “Mind if I sit with you?”

“Of course not.” Jared rushes to get his papers out of the way, storing them in his bag before the very same hand he was drawing gets anywhere near them. Looking up, he sees that he’s practically gotten Jensen’s hands perfect, but he missed the way his pinky curls under his other fingers a bit. His memory correct the store data and he tries to force the nerves down in his belly.

Jensen kicks out a chair with his foot and plops down in it. “I zone out too sometimes. Usually happens when I am reading but during the school year those moments are few and far between. I’ve got too many papers to grade and staff issues to deal with. One time though, my oven timer had been going off for over an hour. By the time my brain realized it I had burnt my dinner to a nice charcoal brick and my house smelt like an ashtray. I tried to fix it by burning one of those huge scented candles my sister gave me but then my house smelt like a perfumed ashtray…Now I’m rambling, aren’t I?” Jensen hitches his lips up into a side smile and laughs.

Mocking Jensen’s earlier action, Jared holds up his thumb and forefinger. “Little bit.”

“Sorry.” Laughing again, Jensen locks eyes with Jared before looking down at the table, biting his lower lip. He lets his teeth scrape back into place as he steals another glance at Jared. “So how is Arkin High treating you?”

“Well…It’s…it’s treating me.” Jared says without knowing exactly what that means. He’s not sure what to say. Jensen looks like he honestly cares to hear the real answer but it’s the first conversation he’s had with someone other than Jeanie that he’s enjoying. He doesn’t want to bog it down with complaints.
“Oh really?” Jensen asks. He pulls out the slice of cold pizza he walked in with and takes a bite.

Jared can’t help himself. He crinkles his nose. “Eww.”

“What?”

“You like cold pizza?”

“Yes. I like cold pizza. It’s good. Reminds me of my college days and finishing off the remnants of a pie the morning after a party. It’s kind of comforting. Don’t tell me you don’t eat anything without reheating it.”

Pausing, Jared thinks. He knows he can share something but he’s going to come off like a complete freak. Jensen, though, just keeps eating his cold pizza like he’s proud of it and Jared laughs. “Yeah, well…I used to eat canned chicken soup straight out of the package. Didn’t heat it up or add water. Just stuck a fork in it and ate it. It’s salty as hell but sometimes I just like it. Oh god, that’s disgusting isn’t it.”

Shaking his head, Jensen chuckles under his breath. “Man, I’ll stick with pizza. But whatever you like.”

Jared finds his eyes tracing over the curve of Jensen’s nose and the way his glasses sit on them. He wonders what the man would look like without them, even though it’s not that hard to imagine. His fingers twitch for one crazy second as if they could snatch them away. Unintentionally, he laughs nervously, drawing Jensen’s attention off the pizza and back on him. For the second time in five minutes he blushes and hates himself. He probably looks like the stupid newbie who is lamely crushing on the hot history teacher who’s too nice to be real.

Instead of commenting on the blush, Jensen picks up Jared’s pencil and twirls it in his hand. “You’re really talented you know. That hand is better than half the stuff I’ve seen.”

The only thing Jensen’s words do is make Jared blush harder. It’s a compliment but one Jensen doesn’t even realize the power of. Jensen’s commenting on the likeness of his own hands and that makes Jared feel like sinking into his seat and vanishing. Looking for something to do, he grabs his water bottle and takes a hasty sip, almost choking on it. “Tha-thanks. It’s…it’s nothing really. I’m better at sculpting. You should stop by my classroom if you want to…” Jared lets the sentence trail off in realization that he’s just asked Jensen to visit him.

“A-116, right?”

“Yea-yeah.” Licking his lips, Jared fumbles at looking like he’s got some control over his confidence. His smile twitches a bit but it lands on being dimpled and genuine.

“I’d like to if you don’t mind. If you think that hand drawing isn’t that great then I am curious to see what you consider good.”

“I don’t mind. I asked, didn’t I?”

“You sorta asked. But I guess you inferred.”

“It’s just,” Jared sighs and lets his shoulders fall. “You’re the first teacher who’s been genuinely nice to me. I guess I didn’t know what to do with that fact and I’m…I’m nervous.” There, he said it. Letting it out actually makes him feel better and he relaxes into his chair. “I’m still trying to figure this school out.”
Jensen pulls back at that statement, concern furrowing his brow. “Hmm,” he hums as he cocks his head and tries to wrap his brain around the situation. “Really?”

Jared knows Jensen’s asking for clarification on the fact that, yes, most of the teachers have been downright disgusting examples of human interaction. Instead, Jared goes for a less tricky situation. “Well, yeah. And these renovations to the school make my life difficult.”

“What now?”

“The renovations. Fixing up the stairs or whatever they’re doing. Point is, they left the wheelchair ramps inaccessible.”

Pursing his lips, Jensen shifts his lips to the side in thought. “You know…I hadn’t noticed that…I’m sorry by the way, I didn’t mean for that to sound insensitive, I just didn’t realize until you brought it up and – “

“It’s fine,” Jared says to cut off Jensen’s runaway apology. He means it. It’s not Jensen’s fault that he can’t get around half of the school. “This school just doesn’t understand. Outside, there’s only one ramp at the back of the building and the inside is a nightmare.”

“If you don’t mind…I can mention it to the superintendent. I won’t bring up any names or anything but I figure that they can’t deny that it’s a problem to keep the building handicap accessible.”

Jared doesn’t answer right away. He takes a bite of his turkey wrap and rolls the idea over in his head. “Jensen?”

“Yeah?”

“How many people who actually need the ramps are part of the student population?”

“None.”

“So they’ll figure it came from me, won’t they?”

“Probably but – ”

“But I like my job and I don’t need any more enemies. I feel like…well…no one is really happy to have me on board but…well…the students maybe.”

“Now that,” Jensen says pointing a finger towards the man, “is what really matters, isn’t it? That’s who I care about. Listen, people are going to be…well…people. You learn real fast that some people never grow out of the high school mentality. There are cliques and groups and unfortunately, there isn’t anything you and I can do about that but show them that they’re wrong.”

“Pfft, like anyone has something against you.”

“Not now…no. But…I’m an outsider. A transplant. I wasn’t born here. A lot of them,” he states with a head nod to the table, “are born and raised in Austin. Which is fine and all but they didn’t accept me at first either. They’ll come around. It’s just…a game.”

“Some game.” Jared snorts. The bell rings and jolts them out of their conversation.

“Shit!” they both say in unison and then laugh at the fact.

“Guess we lost track of time.” Jensen says with a smile and gets to his feet.
“Guess so.” Jared shoves the last piece of his wrap in his mouth and pushes away from the table. They’re out the door in a flash, Jensen bounding down the steps, only realizing the debris Jared had mentioned once he’s at the bottom. “Oh.”

“Down is the easy part.” Jared says with a smile and rolls himself back enough to build up a steady speed and he forces himself down the steps. It’s a bumpy ride but he gets to the bottom, forcing his wheelchair to spin in a circle and face the steps again as he comes to a stop.

“Whoa! That’s awesome, Mr. P!” A teen shouts with a smile. He holds out his fist.

Jared laughs and raises his own fist to bump against his student’s. He doesn’t know how awesome he is but he’ll take the brownie points where he can get them when teenagers are concerned. “Don’t you dare try that at home, Bradley. I’m a professional on a closed course.” Although he’s not and he isn’t, the kid laughs.

“Yeah, yeah. Bet you could take the main stairs near the gym. It’d be awesome,” Bradley says as he heads in the opposite direction.

Jared waves him off. “You say awesome, I say hospital visit.”

“It was…pretty awesome, that is,” Jensen adds as he falls alongside Jared.

“Nah,” Jared says but the smile creeps onto his face and makes his heart stumble in his chest like it’s not sure what to do with the compliment. He speeds up and heads around the crowd of children. This time leading Jensen down the shortcut he’d shown him on the first day of school. He’s glad Jensen’s behind him because he can’t manage to wipe the grin off his face.

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It had been a long day and Jensen’s about to make it even longer.

What he really wants to do is go home, change into a pair of basketball shorts and sink into his couch.

What he’s going to do is go head to head with Kyle Jacobs, superintendent of schools and the quickest way to get Jared’s problem fixed.

“Jensen! Hi!” a woman chirps with a smile as Jensen walks into the room.

“Hi, Cathy.” Returning the smile, he makes a show of scanning the office. “Kyle around?”

“No…he’s…”

“Don’t b.s. me Cathy. We both know he’s in there and we can do this little song and dance but we also both know you’re going to let me in. Right?” Sitting on the corner of the secretary’s desk he gives another smile.

Taking her glasses off, Cathy looks up at Jensen with a sigh. “Jensen, you know I love to help you.”

Raising a knowing eyebrow, he takes his own glasses off. “So, help me.” Cathy likes Jensen and he likes her. She does a good job and she knows what’s what. Sometimes, Jensen wonders who is truly running the show – Cathy or Kyle. The woman knows just as much about the inner workings of the school.

Making a big show of rolling her eyes and sighing, Cathy pats his knee. “Fine. I’m going to,” she
makes air quotes in front of Jensen’s face, “go to the bathroom,” she whispers as she makes a gesture with her head towards the exit, “and you can sneak into his office. I hope you know you’re starting off meeting him by essentially poking a bear with a stick.”

“I can handle Kyle.”

“I know you can.” With a sweet smile, she pushes herself up from the chair and shakes her head.

Once she’s gone, Jensen sighs. He can handle Kyle. Unfortunately it’s practically been his second job. And it’s not like Kyle is that terrible of a person. Jensen doesn’t particularly like or hate him and as far as superintendents go, he’s tolerable. The thing is, sometimes Jensen think’s Kyle forgets that the teaching staff are people too, with lives and families and other things in their worlds. And this time he’s certainly forgotten that the school district has an employee who really needs Kyle to pay attention to disability regulations.

Though, Jensen’s still a little impressed with how Jared seems to roll right over every obstacle that’s fallen into his path. The thought alone makes his lips curl up in a smile. And while he may not be able to do much about prickly coworkers, Jensen can do something about making it easier for Jared to get around the building.

He knocks briskly on Kyle’s office door but pushes inside before permission is given.

A middle aged man with a drastically receding hairline is sitting at his desk. Eyes glued to the computer screen at his side, there is no indication that he’s picked up on Jensen’s entrance. “What do you need?” he murmurs.

“Hi, Kyle.” Jensen swings himself into a chair facing the man.

“Jen-Jensen? What are you doing here? Cathy – ”

“Oh, Cathy’s here? I didn’t see her. She must be in the bathroom,” Jensen said with an innocent shrug. “But I’m glad I caught you. I was hoping you’d have a minute to listen to some concerns people over at the high school are having.”

“Listen…Jensen…” Kyle rolls his eyes but tries to slip back into an air of professionalism again. “Why don’t you see Cathy and schedule some time to meet with me next week? I’m swamped.”

Undeterred, Jensen flashes a smile. “It’ll only take a minute.” He knows Kyle can’t possibly be swamped but that the man’s aversion to troublesome issues makes him prone to trying to push off meetings with Jensen.

“Well, it can ‘only take a minute’ sometime next week, then.”

Pretending not to hear, Jensen steamrolls ahead. “How come your office didn’t run the new building construction by the teachers? You know, just to make sure everyone was in the know.”

“Oh…that?” Kyle swivels in his chair and crosses his arms over his chest. “We didn’t expect it to take that long. The company we hired said they’d have it done in a weekend but they hit a water pipe and Sunday was wasted trying to manage that issue. We didn’t send out a memo because we didn’t think it was going to impact that staff there.”

“Yeah, well…the company didn’t finish, did they?”

“Not yet.” They way Kyle clears his throat afterwards gets across just how much he hates being proven wrong.
“Then you should have sent a memo,” narrowing his eyes at the man, Jensen crosses his own arms over his chest, “Kyle.”

“Is that what this is all about?” Kyle asks with relief in his voice. “I’ll have Cathy type up a memo today before she leaves. We can zap it out to the high school staff’s emails by tomorrow morning.”

“That’s a start but…you do realize Ray Flanagan’s department has a new hire? Jared Padalecki?”

“Yeah, I saw that name in my files. Never got a chance to meet him. He’s got the same name as that kid from a while back that caused the school so much trouble in lawsuits and such.”

“Same guy,” Jensen snorts.

Kyle looks like he wants to eat his words. He gapes like a fish for a moment before he figures out how to proceed. “You’re kidding me.”

“Why? Does that sound funny?” Taking a deep breath, Jensen has no idea how Jared deals with ignorant people. Jensen’s spend two days on the outskirts of Jared’s world and he’s already had his fill. “You should know your staff.”

“I do. I know their schooling and qualifications. I also know their subject matter and department. What I don’t know is their faces. So…Jared…."

“Jared is in a wheelchair. And your construction project tore up the ramps.” Jensen pauses while the pieces of the puzzle click into place for Kyle. “You’ve got to do something about that.”

“I…” Huffing, Kyle shrugs. “I’m doing the best I can, Jensen. The company the school hired is giving us he run around and isn’t sure when they can come back.”

“Then get another company to finish the job.”

“It’s not that simple, Jensen.”

“Kinda seems like it is.”

“Well, the first company’s price worked better with the school’s budget.”

Jensen flips open the notebook he is carrying and scans the statistics he’d written down. “You know that we are running under budget so far this year. We’ve allotted a certain amount of our budget to school repairs and we haven’t exhausted that yet.”

“I know that.” Voice growing gruffer, Kyle throws up the defenses and glares at Jensen. “I’m not a stupid man.”

Two can play at this game, Jensen thinks. There were times when he could stroke Kyle’s ego till he got what he wanted or there were times when he could lead Kyle to the right decision and make him understand that there were no other options. Now was one of the latter times. “Good, then we’re in agreement.”

Switching his glare to a confused eyebrow raise, Kyle cocks his head at Jensen. “We what?”

“You’re a smart man. If you understand the budget then you must understand the disability laws and the accommodations Arkin High School, as a public establishment, must provide.”

“I, uhh – ” Kyle stammers.
“I’m sure you’re aware of the violations you’re enforcing by keeping the construction at a standstill and at the mercy of the construction company. And you’re also probably aware of the issues only installing one handicapped entrance to the building is causing. I’m sorry I underestimated you. It was silly to bust in here and jump to conclusions. You are working on fixing everything, aren’t you?” Jensen tries his best to look amicable but he can’t help the satisfied puff of air he snorts out at the end of his rant.

Blinking and at a loss for words, Kyle is lost in Jensen’s whirlwind.

Taking advantage of the silence, Jensen gets up and smiles wide. “Good. Thanks! Perfect! So glad you are going to take care of everything!” He reaches out a hand to Kyle which the superintendent takes dumbly and allows Jensen to shake his hand. “Good seeing you, Kyle. I’m sure everything will be as it should be by next week.”

Nodding a farewell, he wraps up the impromptu meeting as quickly as he started it. With the notebook tucked under his arm, he strolls out of the office, passing Cathy on his way. “Thanks, Cath.”

“You’re lucky you’re cute, you know that?” The secretary says with a smile.

“I’ve been told.” He winks at her from over the rims of his glasses and pushes the office doors open.

He’s got a list of other complaints that the staff at Arkin High have rattled off to him over the first few weeks of school and even though he brought up none of them to Kyle, he still feels like he’s done one hell of a job. Mostly, he can’t get Jared’s dimples out of his head or the way he lights up at the most unexpected moments. He’s hoping he can get those dimples out more and thinks he’s paved the way for that to be a very probable result of today’s events.

He’s having a beer tonight. A good one. Maybe that Belgian beer he’s been aging.

Yeah, he’s a little proud of himself.

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Jared pulls into the parking lot at Arkin High School on a Friday and notices something different. He can’t place his finger on it but there is something catching his eye that his memory is having a hard time placing.

There is a ramp to the front of the building!

It’s painted in the school’s colors – maroon and white – and it’s gaudy as hell but it’s a ramp.

“Holy shit,” Jared mumbles to himself as he slows his car to a crawl and stares at it.

He still parks in the back of the building for today, mostly because he’s familiar with it and he knows the route he has to take. He’s stupidly excited, however, to get to work early on Monday so he can investigate how difficult it would be to get to his Ceramic’s classroom from the front of the building.

Once inside, it’s empty enough that he has no problems getting around. There are a few students lazing around the building, sleep still in their eyes and movements sluggish enough to make it known that they’re not ready to be out of bed. There’s a cluster of them sitting along the ramp near the short stairway to the A-wing.

Realizing what his brain just picked up on, Jared does a double take.
There is a ramp.

Inside the building.

It’s shiny and new and not covered in caution tape or orange cones.

“Sorry, Mr. P. Didn’t mean to get in your way,” a tall girl says as she unfolds her legs and pushes up from the ramp.

“That’s okay, Ashley.” Jared nods a thanks to her and speeds up the ramp before the girl can even spot his movement. “Just don’t hang out there between classes or you’ll get run over.”

“Ha,” Ashley snorts. “You’re the only one with a set of wheels and the ability to do any kind of running over. Bradley told me you did a wheelie of sorts off the cafeteria stairs. That’s awesome. I’m kinda sad we got all these new ramps. Guess you don’t have to show off anymore.”

“All these new ramps,” Jared repeats questioningly.

“Yeah. You didn’t see ‘em? There’s a whole bunch. Sandra’s dad…you know…the one who works as an overnight building manager…well, Sandra said there were people here all night fixing ‘em up. Guess you got a new skate park, Mr. P.” She smiles and tucks herself back into her hoodie, resting her chin on the knees she had pulled to her chest.

“Huh,” Jared exclaims in thought. He spins around in his chair, barely able to notice the ramp near the cafeteria but it is definitely there. A rush of warmth and contentment barrels through him. Four days ago, he wouldn’t have imagined anything like this happening in so short a period.

Sure, he is a constant advocate for himself. Given time, he knows he could make a change in the school.

But this time, it wasn’t him. It was someone else, someone with wire rimmed glasses and hands he has burned into his memory.

Jensen did this. He’s sure of it. Well, he didn’t do this do this, but he’s definitely the one responsible for the school righting its wrongs.

It makes him smile wider to know that there is someone looking out for him, even though he doesn’t really know that person.

He’d like to.

Parts of him are very aware of that. It’s been a long time since he’s had any tugging sensation in his gut to get close to someone. It’s scary, maybe even scarier than interviewing for his job and walking through Arkin High School’s doors on the first day.

The thought leaves him in a daze for most of the day. He ends up working on his sculpture in the Ceramic’s room until student’s filter in. He takes a few minutes to let them look at his work. Most of them are sweet. They compliment him and as if they’ll ever be able to have a free choice as to what project they work on in class.

Some student’s break Jared’s heart. They insist they will never be as good as he is and they’re useless. Jared can’t tolerate that kind of self-deprecation. He spends the period having the students figure out what they think their biggest weaknesses are and then listens to them moan and groan when he informs them that they will be working on their self-chosen weakness for the next four
They’ll figure it out just like he did. Trial by fire.

Studio Art is a blur and before Jared realizes it, it’s lunch time.

He packed lunch today. As much as he likes Jeanie and doesn’t want her to think he has a problem with her cooking, he can’t stomach going into the faculty lunch room every day. It’s impossible.

He’d rather relax and eat lunch around the things he appreciates. While eating in his Ceramic’s room, he’s got company in the form of glazes and brushes. The air is filled with the familiar scent of wet clay and the dust it gives off when dry. He’s comfortable here.

Art won’t judge him.

He spends the period in peace, devouring his cold cut sandwich so that he can go back to his sculpture. He was in the zone before and he’d love to get the curve of the palm just right. It isn’t until his fingers are working over the pinky finger that he realizes he’s been sculpting Jensen’s hand this entire time. Truthfully, he hadn’t given it much thought. His hands just took the clay and went with it. They molded and brought life and form to the hunk of clay he’d started with.

Now, sitting back and looking at it, Jared can’t deny it.

It’s Jensen’s hand.

Swallowing loud and thick, Jared has no idea what to do with the fact. He feels like some lame teenager with a puppy dog crush. Here he is, paralyzed and wheelchair bound, getting fixated on the handsome History teacher who’s got a trusting smile and probably just made sure the school is wheelchair accessible from head to toe.

And for what?

Jensen doesn’t know Jared.

Jared sighs. He figures Jensen must be one of those guys who always do the right thing, regardless of who it involves. He’d be fooling himself to think Jensen helped him because he’s just that nice. Technically, dealing with employee complaints is Jensen’s job. He was elected to do so. Dealing with the ramp issue is probably nothing personal.

Jared feels silly for letting his brain run away with that thought. It has made him smile all day, so much so that his cheeks hurt and he swears he feels his dimples tunneling deeper.

“Hello?”

Jared startles and his hand slips on the sculpture, smudging the work he’d just done in shaping the hand’s structure. He turns as fast as he can and sees Jensen hovering at the entrance to his room, almost like he’d hopped out of Jared’s thoughts and flew in.


“What? Huh?” Jared follows Jensen’s eyes to the smudge of clay. “Oh, no, no, no. It’s clay. It’s malleable. You didn’t ruin anything. I can fix it. Trust me.” He grabs the rag at his side and wipes off his hands.

“Wow, that’s insane.” Jensen stops hesitating and steps into the room, heading straight for the
sculpture. “You like hands, don’t you?” Crouching down lower, he studies Jared’s work.

“Nah, I…” Jared tries to figure out how to end that sentence. He wants to say, *I just like your hands* but he’s not an idiot. He doesn’t want to scare Jensen away before he gets to know him. “I just sculpt whatever my brain is fixating on. It’s nothing really.”

“Nothing? You serious? That’s awesome. You come to my classroom and all I have to show you are old maps and maybe a few old dioramas. I might even impress you with my ability to craft a timeline.”

Jared perks up, “well, that would impress me. I’m not good with numbers…dates I mean. I flip flop them in my head. I’d be embarrassed if you knew just how many historical events I can’t put in correct chronological order.” He quickly throws a cover over his sculpture to prevent Jensen from looking too closely and recognizing the inspiration for the clay hand. Jensen sighs, scans the room and whistles. Jared’s not sure if he’s ever been in the room before but he certainly looks like he’s taking it all in. Trying to get away from the sculpture, Jared propels himself forward and towards his desk. Jensen follows him but the man’s eyes are still searching out the corners of the room. It gives Jared a chance to study Jensen without getting caught. Jensen doesn’t have his glasses on today and his eyes look greener than Jared remembers but he accredits that to the abundance of natural light in the room. He’s got his hands shoved in his pockets and an olive button down shirt on. It’s probably the other reason why Jensen’s eyes look so green. Confidence bubbles up in Jared and he doesn’t know what result he’s hoping for, but he wheels himself in front of Jensen and spins sharply to face him. “So…the ramps and everything, thanks.”

“Hmm?”

“That was all your doing, wasn’t it?”

Jensen smiles in a way that makes his whole face get in on the action. It looks like there is something bubbling under the surface. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yeah, right. You’re a bad liar.” Jared snorts and smiles wide, dimples back out again. He watches Jensen take him in and the man looks like he’s won some secret battle.

It’s almost awkward between them for a moment. There is silence but Jensen looks like he’s trying to figure something out. He has a few false starts and huffs in frustration before he finally manages to speak. “I-I don’t usually do this….hell, I’ve never done this…I mean…work and all and I don’t want things to get weird and I…” Taking a deep breath, Jensen seems to calm himself enough to look Jared in the eyes. “Would you maybe wanna go out with me on Saturday? Like *out* out. On a date or something?”

Jared’s eyes go wide. His heart speeds up and he feels dizzy for a moment. He wants to ask if Jensen really means what he just said. It’s clear by Jensen’s expression that he does. The History teacher looks apprehensive, like he’s genuinely nervous about Jared’s reaction.

This type of thing doesn’t happen to Jared.

People like Jared. That’s not the problem.

But he’s…he’s…we’ll he’s had a lot of flak in his life because he’s the best friend. He’s the reliable one. He’s stuck in a wheelchair, it’s not like he’s going to up and leave unexpectedly. Lots of Jared’s insecurities with actually going on a date with someone who walks on two legs, as he tends to joke with friends, is that *he doesn’t walk on two legs.* He’s been told that he is a catch, however, Jared always hears the silent “but” at the end of those compliments, like the people want to tell him that
he’d be a catch but he’s in a wheelchair and Jared knows that complicates things. Not that dating other paraplegics is much simpler. Jared knows from experience it’s not.

So instead of answering Jensen, he just blinks and blushes.

He can’t manage to utter a sound.

The bell rings and they are still stuck in their trance.

Jared tries to say yes but all he does is make some type of squeak.

Jensen runs with it. “Okay, I’ll pick you up at 8.” He barely waits to make sure Jared hears him. With an adorable nervous smile, he ducks out of the room, jogging towards his classroom.

Students filter in and Jared has to come back to reality but he can’t stop smiling.

It’s contagious. The whole class feeds off of it and there are no complaints for the day.

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Jensen seriously cannot believe he ambushed the new hire.

He also can’t believe how inexperienced he sounded when he asked Jared out on a date with him.

But then again, Jared said yes, so he must have done something right.

Actually, Jared didn’t say anything.

Jensen simply refused to take “no” as an answer and skirted out of the room before Jared could disagree with him. He hopes he did the right thing. He prays that his interpretation of Jared’s blushing and awkward moments of being flustered is spot on. There is also a little guilt. It’s beneath him but he heard a rumor from the gossip mill at work, also known as the grown up version of the “cool kid” table. Usually he wouldn’t listen but this particular rumor made him stand at attention and he latched onto it and ran.

The rumor mill has been spewing information that Jared’s gay. If Jensen is wrong about his assumption then he’s just as bad as they are. He knows better than to speculate but even he has weaknesses. He can’t help but hope the rumor is a truth because he’s itching for a chance to spend more time making Jared blush.

It was hard to teach the rest of the day with that uncertainty in his head.

And then, as if by magic, his uncertainty presents itself.

“Knock, knock,” Jared says as he fills the open doorway.

“Oh, Jared, hey.” Jensen clears his throat and scratches at the back of his neck. He looks at Jared, covered in an understandable amount of clay dust, enough to make him look endearing. An hour ago, Jensen almost melted when he’d seen the dimples he’d hoped to bring out in the Art teacher. Now he is letting it happen all over again. “Listen, I – ”

Jared cuts him off quickly. “What kind of car do you have?”

Pulling back in confusion, Jensen wrinkles his nose. “What?”

“What kind of car do you have?”
“A Honda Accord sedan, why?” Jensen reveals with a confused tilt of his head.

“Got my own set of wheels that have to come with us,” Jared says patting the wheels on his chair. “They need a back seat. So, pick me up at 8?”

“What? Oh! Yeah.” Jensen’s brain struggles to keep up with the conversation. His heart stutters in his chest and he smiles.

“Wait, you…I never gave you my address.”

“Oh, I’ve got it!” Jensen says in a hurry before realizing how creepy that sounds. He silently curses himself and wishes he had rehearsed this issue earlier. “I…uh…union representative and all. I have all the employees’ addresses.”

“Ohh, and do you take all the employees out for dates?” Jared smirks.

“Oh, no! I – ” Jensen trips over his words and panics at the fact that Jared might think that when he’d asked him out it wasn’t a serious thing. It was. Jensen meant it when he said he never dated someone in the workplace. Ever.

Snorting out another laugh, Jared waves Jensen’s stammering off. “I’m kidding Jensen.”

“Yeah, I know,” Jensen says but knows he’s fooling nobody.

“See you tomorrow,” Jared bites his forefinger nervously but then forces it down to his lap while he tries to give a confident nod. He hesitates nervously before flashing Jensen one more smile and backing out of the room, disappearing from view.

“Yeah, tomorrow,” Jensen says in a whisper to the empty room.

Going head to head with Kyle was so worth it.
“Why the hell am I doing this?” Jared says to himself as he looks in the mirror and checks his hair for the umpteenth time. He hasn’t been on a date in a while and with getting a new job and focusing on making good impressions, his life hasn’t left much free time for it.

But then Jensen practically fell into his lap and he’d daydreamed and doodled about the man until he was sufficiently hooked with no possible chance of actually saying “no” to a date with Jensen.

He didn’t tell anyone about the date because he’s nervous enough when left to his own devices. He doesn’t need his family or Ryan hounding him and making him blush so hard that he incinerates. He also won’t have to tell them how terrible the date was if – when – it fizzles and he has to hide his sorry ass around the high school in fear of seeing Jensen. There are so many reasons why he should have said no to the date. He’s afraid that Jensen, as nice as he is, isn’t going to be able to get over the fact that Jared’s life comes with complications that two legged people take for granted.

Unfortunately, he’s used to those types of rejections. He knows not everyone is that gun-shy about dating someone confined to a wheelchair but he hasn’t really had many chances at meeting those who are. His sister says it’s his curse. He goes for guys who anchor themselves in a very two legged life and maybe that’s because Jared’s a bit envious. He misses being able to rely on standing on tippy-toes for an added burst of height or chase after a run-away dog; people with those abilities draw him in sometimes. It’s stupid, he thinks, but it’s there.

So when this date with Jensen doesn’t pan out, he won’t have to hang his head in shame and feel like an idiot for being so excited about it.

And he is excited. Really excited. So much so that his stomach is home to a million nervous butterflies because Jensen seems too good to be true. He’s nice, handsome, and appears genuinely concerned in making sure everyone at Arkin High School is treated with the respect they’ve been promised when taking the job. There is no way he’s going to be anything less than amazing on this date but Jared’s afraid to let himself think that way, to get his hopes up, as a sort of defense tactic.

Swallowing thickly, Jared smoothes out his front, keeping the vest from rolling up at the edge. He’s not sure if he overdressed or underdressed or just plain dressed like an idiot. He has no idea where Jensen is taking him so he tried to find some weird place between casual and formal. It ends up landing him in a pair of dark jeans that look almost like dress slacks, a slim cut dress shirt with a tight grayscale plaid pattern and a vest. He figures he might as well expose Jensen to his penchant for vests early on. Some people have a thing for ties or shoes but Jared likes having his arms on display, he’s built them up over years of wielding his wheelchair, and vests do a stellar job of accenting them. They’re not formal by any means, but they button or zip so that the span of Jared’s chest is undeniably obvious and his arms look good. With the dress shirt’s sleeves rolled up neatly, Jared thinks he looks as good as he ever has.

The doorbell rings and even though Jared’s been anticipating it for the last five minutes he startles. “Coming!” he yells loud enough to be heard through the door. Licking his lips, he pushes down his nerves and rationalizes that Jensen’s probably got the same first date jitters as he does. Closing his eyes, he counts to three before letting out a deep breath and heading towards the door. He pulls it open to reveal Jensen, who is nervously looking around, eyes purposely not fixed on the door. When he turns to face Jared, Jared realizes he’s not wearing his glasses and, yep, his eyes look even greener.
without them on. As if to amplify that fact, he’s wearing an olive green button down shirt and jeans that make Jared feel better about his clothing choice.

“Hey!” Jensen says with plenty of enthusiasm and enough charm to make Jared’s heart flutter.

“Hi,” Jared breathes out. “I hope you found the place okay.”

“Yeah, it was easy. And a GPS helps, so….” Jensen smiles with a shrug. He lets his eyes trace over Jensen’s form and the smile becomes a shy smirk. “You look…good…uhh…nice…umm, yeah. Shit, sorry, I just…I never do this. I mean…I date, I just never date a coworker.”

The fumble is adorable and just like that, Jared feels like he’s got the reins on the nerves in his stomach. “Me either. And you, uhh…look nice…good…too.” He runs a hand through the hair he just spend too much time fussing with and laughs. “So, do you wanna come in or…” he lets the sentence hang there hoping Jensen will pick it up.

“We got a reservation so…go…we should go. You ready?” Jensen seems to shake off his nerves and somehow becomes more confident in the situation.

“Ready.” Jared flicks the lock to the front door from the inside and pulls it closed after he wheels through. When they get to the car Jensen pulls open the passenger side door for Jared but looks slightly lost as to what to do next. Not wanting to make the moment more awkward, Jared smiles. “Many thanks.” He gets as close to the passenger seat as possible and manages to swing himself into the car. He’s done it plenty enough times to look graceful enough doing it now. He reaches out to pull his chair closer so as to start the stow-and-go process.

“I got it,” Jensen says as he places his hands right beside Jared’s and takes over. In no time he managers to get the chair stored in the back seat and jogs around the car to slide in himself.

“Chivalry isn’t dead.” The stupid expression is out of Jared’s mouth before he realizes how played out it is.

Snorting, Jensen’s eyes crinkle up in the corners as he smiles. “Well. I’m not exactly a knight in shining armor and this Honda isn’t exactly a horse and carriage but…”

“Oh thank God for that. Horses and paraplegics don’t exactly jive well. I like plain old wheels. Wheels are good.” He makes a head gesture towards the car. Jared can’t help himself from locking eyes with Jensen for longer than he probably should. He swears there is some type of first date etiquette about that. But his brain wants to remember Jensen’s eye lines. He draws them in his brain and he knows he’s going to turn into a school kid who doodles versions of Jensen’s eyes where no one can see them and rat out his ever developing crush.

It’s why Jared’s so nervous. He does, in fact, have a crush on Jensen. He’s ignored that fact because he felt it was wildly inappropriate to have a crush on a coworker he’d just met but Jensen’s so nice and seems to be looking out for him. Before Jared could control it, he’s in the middle of a full blown crush.

“Wheels it is then.” Jensen turns the key in the ignition and they’re off.

The conversation on the ride over is light. Mostly Jensen fills it with talk about work, simple things that they can both comment on. He’s obviously playing it safe but Jared’s okay with that. He’s thankful there aren’t any extended periods of silence between them.

Pulling up to the restaurant, Jared smiles. “Ruvo? I’ve never been here. Wanted to try it though.”
“Yeah, me either. I figured we’re both trying a bunch of new things tonight. Might as well add a new restaurant to the list, right?” As Jensen parks, the tip of his tongue lingers on his upper lip. Jared thinks it’s kind of adorable and shatters any attempts the man may be making to seem composed. Jensen gets out of the car and comes around to open the door for Jared again. He gets the wheelchair out but can’t figure out quite how to open it.

“Here, it’s…well…” Jared leans out and aids the other man in his struggle. Their fingers brush and it’s slightly electric, almost like it’s a tease of something off limits right now. Laughing, Jared makes some headway. “It took me a while to figure this model out. They’re all different and I have various ones so,” the chair springs open. “There!”

Jensen holds the chair steady for Jared but lets go uncertainly as soon as Jared’s seated in it.

“Thanks.” Jared gives Jensen a smile to know he hasn’t stepped over any boundaries. He gets where Jensen’s head is. So many people, even his family, are never sure when offering help to Jared will seem like an act of kindness or an act of pity. To Jared, he sees anyone offering help as something kind. The part that annoys him is when they refuse to let up on that help after it becomes obvious that Jared doesn’t need it. He needs to get Jensen’s brain off of wheelchair manners and onto their date. He’s seen people get hung up before and he’d hate for that to happen before he gets a chance to really meet Jensen. Sniffing the air, he makes a hungry hum in response to the smells of sauce and garlic filling his nostrils. “Mmm, smells good. I love Italian food.”

“No?” Jensen looks pleased. “Good. Me too.”

The place is packed. If it’s any indication as to the caliber of the food they serve, Jared is looking forward to a good meal. He’s a little nervous about the whole “navigating through crowds” problem. It’s not an issue right now. The entrance to the restaurant is clear enough to make their way inside.

“Good evening, sirs. Do you have a reservation?” The maître-dé asks with a smile towards Jensen. He’s friendly enough and he doesn’t falter when his eyes land on Jared.

“Yes. Ackles. Party of two.”

The man consults his list of the night’s reservations and he nods. “We have you right here.” Looking over his shoulder, he beckons for a female waitress. “Your table is all set, Sandra here will take you to your table. Enjoy your meal.” He gives another smile and leaves them in Sandra’s capable hands.

“Good evening, gentlemen. This way.” With a hand gesture, she leads them on. Jensen goes first but Jared catches the way he tries to gently move people out of the way so that Jared can get through. When they arrive at the table, it’s obvious to Jared that Jensen must have prepared the restaurant for Jared’s wheelchair. The table they are seated at has only one chair and it’s situated so that there is little foot traffic.

“Here you go,” Sandra states with a smile. As soon as Jensen is seated and Jared has situated himself at the table, she hands them both menus. “I’ll give you two a moment and then I’ll be back to take your drink orders and tell you the specials.” She bows her temporary farewell and leaves the men to their menu options.

What happens next is almost too perfect for Jared to have predicted. They speak at the same time and both suggest the same wine. It leads to laughs and the decision to order a bottle. Lightning strikes twice when Sandra reads the specials and they both make an interested noise for the same dish. There’s more laughter and after Sandra gives them a moment to think everything over, they actually decide to order two meals and share so they can get a pasta dish and a steak dish. It should feel too comfortable but it doesn’t. It feels organic, completely genuine and not forced.
The awkwardness comes when their wine arrives. The young man who brings it goes into a spiel about their wine choice before actually making eye contact with the man he’s serving. “Jared?” He says in a stunned question.

To put it bluntly, Jared’s confused. “Do I know you?”

The man makes an apologetic wave. “Oh, no. I’m sorry, no…I…uhh…man, but I know you. Everyone knows you.” He fumbles with the wine for a second. “My neighbor, he was on the bus, you know…the one you…” He lets the words drop, realizing he’s taken a wrong turn into depressing areas and encroached on Jared and Jensen’s date.

Jensen’s equally confused as Jared and it shows in the way he lets his eyes dart between the waiter and his date.

The chill brought on by the mention of the bus accident that changed Jared’s life is instant. Whatever heat he and Jensen have been building, it’s dampened now. In an attempt to get rid of the images that have been thrown back into the forefront of his brain, Jared closes his eyes and bites his lip. “Listen, I…”

“I’m sorry.” The waiter pours the wine as quickly as he can. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said anything. I…I just didn’t expect to see you eating here and I…umm….enjoy your wine.” His sentence comes out a bit slurred as he shoves them all into one big mashed up word.

The dust settles and Jared opens his eyes. “Shit, I’m sorry Jensen. That…that happens sometimes. Not that much but…I was born and raised in Austin. It all went down here and sometimes people can’t let it go. You know how it is.” Reaching out, he takes a sip of wine.

“No. I don’t. I…” Jensen takes a sip of his own wine and smiles in an attempt to get his date back on track. “I told you, I’m a transplant. I wasn’t born here. I was born in Dallas and moved here 8 years ago. So, no, I don’t know how it is. You don’t have to talk about it but…I don’t really understand it. I don’t mean what happened to you…well…I don’t know that either…but I meant I don’t understand the reactions you get from some people and the stuff I’ve been hearing ‘round the break room. Oh lord, I’m tripping over my words aren’t I? I do that – ”

“Yeah. Me too.” Jared smiles and somehow finds a way to slip back into a comfort zone with Jensen. He hadn’t planned on making his accident the center of their date but the opportunity is in front of him and he figures that he might as well let Jensen know what he’s in for. “It’s okay to ask about what happened to me. I’d rather you hear it from my mouth than a whisper from someone else’s.”

Jensen’s quick to jump at that statement. “Oh, no! I’ve never listened to what other people have to say. I just…you know…hear things. I’ve never listened.”

The words hit Jared in the heart because he gets the difference between those two words. He hopes the smile in his eyes is enough to let Jensen know how much he appreciates that. “Well, I…when I was nine there was an accident. It was messy and deadly.” He decides to be blunt and to the point. If Jensen wants the gritty details, he can Google it. “I was on a bus with two classes and some teachers. We flipped. Everyone died except for me. I got pinned under the bus trying to escape the wreckage. It left me with a spine injury that caused my paraplegia.” Looking up, he sees that Jensen is on the verge of saying something so he holds up a finger to silence him. “I almost died. Several times actually. Flat lined once. The city made me into a…well…a hero. I’m not a hero. I’m just a boy who didn’t die. But the city made it into more than that. They set up a vigil. People lit candles around the hospital. I was on every local news channel and in every town newspaper. My hospital rooms were filled with balloons, flowers, and teddy bears. There were prayer circles going on around the clock. It
didn’t let up for months. I got letters and my parents had to field hundreds of television cameras or microphones being thrown in their faces. I was the poster child for a will to survive and the school ran with that rather than dealing with the carnage of the accident. I was alive. They were dead. I was an easier sell. They had ceremonies and plaques put up in my honor. I didn’t get it then. Then I thought it was “cool” that everyone knew my name. But I got older and I realized that…to most people…they still see me as a fragile nine year old boy who doesn’t understand the world. I stopped being a cute nine year old who lit up at receiving a handheld video game or sports jersey. People didn’t – don’t – know what to do with me.”

Jensen blinks and lets it all sink in. It’s an extremely sensitive and delicate subject but Jensen takes to it with an ease that Jared’s seen him employ when stepping into heated issues at work. “Well.” He raises both eyebrows. “Is that all?” It’s an attempt to lighten the mood and Jared takes it. They let a laughter come to both of their lips and Jensen raises a glass. “I’ll drink to that. To a boy who didn’t die. The best I’ve ever done is not cry when I needed stiches as a kid. Okay…well…I cried but my mom promised not to tell.”

“Your secret’s safe with me.” Jared clinks his glass against Jensen’s and takes a grateful drink. The conversation is done and over with and Jensen’s sitting firmly in his chair.

Thankfully, when their meals are served, there is no repeat of the wine incident.

They fall into an easy conversation, way deeper than anything they’ve ever attempted at work. They start with traditional topics such as movies and music but it quickly dissolves into more personal questions like biggest fears and proudest moments. Jensen doesn’t laugh when Jared admits his biggest fear is eating a spider in his sleep but he does offer up another toast when he hears that Jared’s proudest moment is making it through college with perfect grades.

Jared’s not that smooth. Wine almost comes out his nose when Jensen says he’s afraid of chickens. Apparently it stems from some traumatic incident with wandering into a chicken coop on his uncle’s property which left him with a scar on his wrist that Jared had to squint to see. It’s hilarious and cute. It earns him a gorgeous scowl when he imitates a chicken loud enough to draw attention from the restaurant guests. A flick of water from Jensen lands on his nose. It’s playful and light, making his true self come out. With a laugh that vibrates through his whole body, he apologizes and offers Jensen more wine. He composes himself enough to feel his heart swell when Jensen says his proudest moment was holding his nephew for the first time, but both fall into another fit of laughter when Jensen adds, “the proudest part of it was not dropping the kid because that’s what everyone thought would happen.”

Dinner is over quickly. They share practically everything and it’s way easier than it should be for two people who are just learning how to read each other.

Jensen pays the bill and Jared offers to split it but respects Jensen’s refusal on account that Jensen is the one who asked Jared out. The man wants to treat him and Jared knows enough about pride to let it happen.

They’re sated and happy. They’ve had enough wine to make them warm but it’s been over the whole course of the dinner and definitely worn off enough for Jensen to drive them home.

Jensen’s much better at the car and wheelchair dance they have to do to get Jared into the car and back out again once they get home but he’s much more jittery and nervous. It’s kind of becoming on him and Jared adores it.

“Can I walk you to the door?” Jensen asks once they’re both outside of his car.
“Yeah, of course.” Making their way towards the house, Jared doesn’t know what to say. He bites his tongue to stop it from uttering some cliché desire for the night not to end. “Thank you for dinner. It was delicious and the restaurant was really nice. Definitely a place I’d like to go again.” Jared’s hands grow clumsy on his wheels as he draws out the last seconds of the night.

“Yeah. It was great. That steak was,” Jensen makes a quick gestures towards his lips to indicate that he enjoyed it. “I’m glad you liked it.”

“I did.” Jared repeats. He gets to his front door and spins to face Jensen. “So, this is me,” he says stupidly and wants to slap himself upside the head. Of course this is him. It’s his house. Jensen picked him up at this very spot a few hours ago.

“Yep, this is you.” Shifting his weight, Jensen nods towards the door.

“So…”

“So…”

The ability Jared and Jensen had to synch up during their date abandons them. At the same time, Jared tries to get close enough to tilt his chin up and stretch towards Jensen enough to coax the man into a goodnight kiss. Jensen tries to lean down to Jared’s level, not anticipating Jared pushing up in the chair. It causes their foreheads to crash awkwardly into each other’s, thumping hard enough for them to recoil on instinct. Jared tries to salvage the moment by rolling forward after Jensen but unfortunately the man stepped forward in homes of chasing Jared’s flinch. Jared ends up wheeling over Jensen’s foot.

“Ouch!” Jensen lets out and pulls back.

“Shit, sorry!” Jared scrambles but his nerves make him roll over Jensen’s other foot and he curses again. “I’m sorry!”

Reaching out both hands, Jensen puts them on Jared’s shoulders and keeps him in place. “Stay,” he says in a playful tone. Delicately, he leans forward. Jared’s too flustered from their train wreck of an attempt at a first kiss to react. He sits stone still while Jensen’s lips graze over his cheek. It’s just a kiss on the cheek but it makes Jared’s heart speed up. He’d hoped for more but considering how his brain feels short circuited after what Jensen just did, he figures it’s just about perfect.

Pulling back slowly, Jensen looks like he’s stuck in the moment and has to shake his head to clear his thoughts. With a soft smile he takes a step backwards. “Goodnight, Jared.”

“Go-goodnight.” Jared hopes he doesn’t look as astounded as he feels. He blinks several times, much too quickly, as he watches Jensen walk backwards towards his car, smile still on his face. Once he turns, Jared fumbles with his keys and gets into his house as quickly as possible.

When the door closes safely behind him, he lets his head fall into his hands. He feels a bit like an idiot for being such a mess moments ago. He hopes Jensen meant he liked more than the restaurant when he said he enjoyed their time there. Touching his cheek softly, he swears he can still feel Jensen’s lips there and wonders what they’ll look like done up in graphite and charcoal in his sketchpad.

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“Hey, Mr. Ackles,” Ashley says as she shoves the last of her books in her messenger bag. “Can I have a pass to my next class?”
Jensen smiles at his student. “Yeah, sure, of course. Thanks for staying to help rearrange the desks.”
Opening his desk to grab a late pass, he tears one off and looks at the girl. “Where are you headed?”

“Ceramics with Mr. Padalecki.”

Jensen freezes for the barest second when he hears Jared’s name. He knows Ashley doesn’t pick up on it but he’s aware that he has to keep himself in check. He hasn’t spoken to Jared since their date the past weekend. Truthfully, he’s been insanely busy and every time he tried to go anywhere other than his classroom, he somehow got dragged into an administration office to deal with student or staff issues.

Throwing her bag over her shoulder, Ashely smiles. “It’s my favorite class…I mean, yours is great too but art is – ”

“Hey, I get it. I’m not offended. Plus, I hear Mr. Padalecki is a pretty cool teacher.” Jensen does his best attempt at playing dumb and shrugs.

“He’s the best! He can do things with clay that I don’t think I’ll ever be able to do. It’s amazing. And he’s really funny. Like, he gets us, you know?”

“So I’ve heard.” Jensen shoves the late passes back in his desk. “Say, you know what? How about I just walk you to class and explain to Mr. Padalecki why you’re late? I’m heading that way anyway.”

It’s a lie, one Ashley might actually realize because there isn’t very many options for a history teacher near the Ceramic’s room.

“Sure.”

The reason Jensen thinks Ashley will go on to be a valuable part of society is the way she isn’t flustered around people in all walks of life. From dealing with her teachers and even Jared’s wheelchair, she’s rather calm and collected. She doesn’t go mute when faced with walking to class with her history teacher.

She walks into Jared’s classroom with a smile and wave to her teacher. In response to Jared’s questioning look, she points towards the door just in time to land the attention on Jensen.

Jensen’s heart does a funny little half beat in between each normal one when he sees Jared. He’s a bit of a mess, like he always seems to be while working in the Ceramic’s room. There are chalk dust smooches across his pant legs where he brushes past the students’ tables. It somehow seems to give him more personality and makes Jensen smile. Jared locks eyes with him and returns the smile. There are dimples involved and Jensen goes speechless.

“Mr. Ackles,” Jared says with amusement. “What brings you here?”

“I just figured I would drop Ashley off and come tell her favorite teacher that he’s, well, her favorite teacher.” Jensen steps into the room and takes a look at it now that it’s full of students all working on their projects with enough intent so as not to pay them any mind. “I’m sorry she was late. She was helping me out with something. We made a bit of a mess working on group projects.”

“That’s okay. It’s always nice to see you.” As Jared makes his way towards Jensen, he gives a smile just shaky enough to reveal a nerve or two.

The fact that the nerves are there makes Jensen breathe a sigh of relief. He thought he’d read Jared correctly during and at the tail end of their date but the fact that Jared seems as excited to see him as he can while on the job makes things certain. He keeps his eyes on Jared’s class but tilts his head down towards Jared so that his words are heard by Jared only. “I had a really nice time on our date.”
“You did?” There is a surprised question in Jared’s words and his eyes go a bit wide. He immediately tries to hide the shock and coughs weakly. “I mean, of course you did. I did too.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I could have done without the whole crushing your toes bit,” Jared whispers.

Jensen laughs. “I’ll live.” He doesn’t mind the toe crushing part of their date. In fact, the way it left Jared flustered was adorable and completely worth a bruise or two. In whole, there date had been a homerun of a first date. It left him wanting to learn more about the art teacher. Even though he never mixed work with his personal life, he couldn’t help feeling a sound connection with Jared. They came from two different walks of life but on several occasions managed to find themselves on the same wavelength.

A boy in the back of the class raises his hand while calling for his teacher. “Mr. P.!”

“One second C.J., I’ll be right there.” Turning to Jensen, Jared gives a steadier smile. “Duty calls.”

“Yeah, too bad these kids always get in the way.” Jensen nods and goes to leave Jared to his actual job. He will figure out a way to catch up with Jared later so that they can have a conversation about meeting up again that he’s wanted to have for a few days. Before he can get very far, Jared wraps a hand around his wrist and yanks Jensen closer. It happens in a matter of seconds. Jared flourishes a Sharpie marker and scrawls numbers across Jensen’s forearm. Then, with another dimpled smile but without a word, he wheels away towards his student.

Jensen yanks down his shirt sleeve, keeping his palm curled over the area where the number now sits.

For all his power in the union and the fact that he has the staff’s addresses, Jared’s phone number isn’t in the system yet.

It’s in Jensen’s database now and he’s going to use it.

Hello, earth to Jared.”

“Huh?” Jared comes to his senses fast enough to catch the basketball that is being hurled at his face. “What, Ryan?”

“What the hell is up with you? You’ve been distracted all day. Come on man, I haven’t seen you in weeks because of this new job of yours and now it’s like I’m hanging out with your cardboard cutout.” Ryan skirts his wheelchair around Jared’s and comes to a skidding halt perpendicular to Jared’s.

“Yeah, sorry, I know.” Jared rolls his eyes at his own unfocussed nature. He knows Ryan is right. He’s been distracted all day and he owes it to his best friend to be open with him. Plus, he has missed their one on one time, their Jared and Ryan time. Jared and Ryan times makes sense but Jared’s so focused on what Jared and Jensen time can mean that his brain is up in the clouds. Of course Ryan doesn’t understand. He would if Jared actually told him about Jensen but he’s afraid to jump the gun and jinx himself.

“You got something you wanna talk about, Jay?” Ryan runs a hand though his hair, pale skin contrasting with the almost black color of his hair.
“I’m fine.” Jared throws the ball back at Ryan. “Come on, let me continue kicking your ass.”

“Yeah right, Padalecki.” Ryan scoffs and gets back into the game.

Years ago, Jared thought his days playing sports were over and in many ways they are. When he was in physical therapy, however, he met a therapist who introduced him to the world of paraplegic sports, namely basketball. It’s how he met Ryan, way back when he was an awkward teen in an awkward wheelchair figuring out how to wield a basketball and navigate his wheelchair around the court. It’s not the basketball he grew up with but he’s mastered it. He has a special wheelchair and tries to play in games around Texas with other wheelchair bound players. Since he isn’t much for landscaping, he turned his backyard into a miniature playing area, installed a hoop and meets up with Ryan on a fairly regular basis to hone their skills.

Today though, Ryan is right. Jared’s distracted. He does a fairly good job of sinking the ball through the hoop but Ryan’s faster. He gets the ball away more and makes sharper turns. It’s Jared fault when he doesn’t react fast enough and a collision with Ryan lands Jared on the concrete.

He goes down hard but he doesn’t cause any more damage than a surface wound on his right forearm. Hissing, he pushes himself up into a seated position.

“Crap, Jared! Are you okay?” Ryan spins around quickly, abandoning the basketball as he heads towards his friend.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” Waving his friend off, Jared shakes his head.

“Bullshit. I’ve never seen you so slow. What is going on with you?” Ryan right’s Jared’s chair and then reaches out a hand to help hoist him into it. “I still won today, by the way.”

“Whatever. You’re just bitter that I’ve won four out of our last five games.” Jared brushes himself off. “Hey, Ry?”

“Yeah?”

“You know how I haven’t dated in a while?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Well, I met a guy.” Jared sits up taller and tries to affect that his revelation isn’t a big deal.

“No shit!” Ryan’s eyes go wide and he slaps Jared on the back. “It’s about time, man. You’ve been so caught up in fixing up the house and getting a job, I thought you’d be in self-imposed singledom forever.”

“It’s not exactly easy to date, you know that.”


“Ugh, don’t remind me.” Jared returns the laugh. He loves Ryan like a brother now and can barely fathom a time when they attempted to be more than that. The truth is, they were young and dumb. They’d met in physical therapy and with hormones running through their bodies and a short list of dating options, they dated. It was one of those foolish high school relationships that burns fast and hot and fizzes out just as fast. Thankfully, they salvaged something from it, building a friendship without any lingering awkwardness. It served to teach them everything about each other and know well enough that they make a terrible couple but perfect partners in crime.
“So,” Ryan wiggles his eyebrows and elbows Jared in the ribs. “You met a guy.”

“Yeah. I met a guy. A very cute guy with eyes and a smile that could put most people in a trance.” Jared feels his lips twitch into a telling smile.

“So you met a cute guy. Where?”

“At work. He’s a history teacher.” Jared feels like an idiot for blushing. “And I...we...we went on a date last weekend and it was great. I mean, really good. He took me to Ruvo and didn’t even flinch when a waiter brought up the bus accident and he didn’t care about my wheels.”

The words sink in and Ryan sighs. “He walks on two legs,” he states in understanding.

“Yeah, he’s on two legs.”

“Jay,” Ryan shakes his head slowly and drags his friend’s name out.

“Don’t say it Ry.”

“I don’t want to say it but...shit, Jared, you’ve gotten burned in the past by people who don’t understand what being with us – living with us – entails. I’m not saying don’t go for it but I’m saying that you’ve gotta be smart. I see you sitting over there getting all distracted and smiling like an excited teenager. I just –”

“– don’t want me to get hurt. Yeah. I get that.” Jared nods. “I’m not an idiot.”

“I know you’re not.”

“But he’s a good guy, Ry. At least, I think he is. He...he’s the union rep and when the handicap accessible ramps were out of service he made sure they were up and running in less than four days with the addition of even more ramps. I think he gets it. He might not know what it’s like to be with someone like us but I think he’s willing to try.”

Ryan gives his friend an amused smirk and raise of his eyebrows. “I can’t believe you are telling me this now.”

“Sorry.”

“So when you seeing him again?” Ryan goes to retrieve the forgotten basketball and tosses it in the air several times.

“Soon, I hope. He left me a message while I was visiting my parents. We’re playing phone tag this weekend, apparently. But, I work with him. It’s hard to talk to him at work.”

“Those assholes still giving you hell?”

“I dunno. I avoid them. But I definitely don’t want to talk to Jensen about anything personally when inquisitive ears are straining for the latest gossip.” Jared’s words end abruptly as his phone goes off in his pocket. Pulling it out, he sees Jensen’s number displayed. Holding a finger up to hush Ryan, “Shh, it’s Jensen!”

“Oooo, Jensen,” Ryan mocks. He gets in Jared’s space and teases him.

“Shut up!” Jared smacks his friend on the back of the head to warn him to call a truce on their teasing before he picks up the call. “Hi, Jensen? Yeah, how are you? I’m good.” He smiles at the voice filtering through the phone and it widens when the man asks him if he’s free for coffee later on
today. “Yeah, sure.”

It’s been a long build up to a second date but coffee seems like a slow enough speed to try to figure out where things between them are going.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for being patient with this chapter! I knew these last two weeks would render me useless because of RL stuff. I am so sorry for the delay and hope you enjoyed it. Let me know! XOXO

And thanks to my wifey for adding the most perfect sentence that my fried brain couldn't figure out. *mwah*
Chapter 4

Spoons isn’t the run of the mill coffee shop and Jared’s not sure that it’s what Jensen had in mind when he suggested coffee but he asked Jared to pick a place and it’s the first one that came to mind. Selfishly, it is Jared’s favorite place to go and he decides on it before he has time to debate if it is a smart idea to take Jensen to a place that is his place but he offers up the name to Jensen and the man agrees without any questions.

So Jared’s there, earlier than he told Jensen he would meet him. It comes with great relief that the people at Spoons know him because he doesn’t have to deal with all the awkwardness of people trying to size up his disability or making a rather stupid question as to if he is Jared Padalecki. He hopes Jensen doesn’t mind that Spoons is more of a sit down style coffee house with wait staff and a menu with small snacks and desserts in addition to their extensive list of coffees and teas.

“Hey, Jared! Your usual?” A perky brunette with a pixie cut asks as a habitual reflect when she catches Jared wheeling through the front door.

“Hi, Kelsey. No…uh…I’m meeting someone here.” He avoids eye contact for a second and realizes how much that emphasizes the nerves he has about seeing Jensen for their second date…if it is a second date…oh god he hopes it’s a second date. He’ll feel like such an idiot if this is a friendly get together to express that things aren’t going to work out.

Without a coffee order to work on, Kelsey looks a bit lost as to what to make of the wash of emotions wreaking havoc on Jared’s face. Jared feels bad about that. He and Kelsey have a friendly clientele type relationship. He knows she just moved in with her boyfriend and that she loves Chihuahuas – has three of them – but they don’t talk about anything more substantial than that. Sometimes she asks him about how he’s doing if he looks exceptionally sore from a rough round of physical therapy and she’s even come to watch one of his basketball games with her boyfriend but they’ve never once discussed Jared’s love life since he’s distinctly kept his dating life and his sanctuary at Spoons separate.

“Ohh,” Kelsey exclaims before sucking her lips in. “Like someone someone or just a regular someone?”

The question sounds ridiculous but makes complete sense to Jared. “Someone someone…I think? Maybe? I dunno.” Running a hand through his hair, he shakes off the nerves. What will be will be and freaking out beforehand isn’t going to do anyone any favors. “Mind if I take my usual table? And someone’s name is Jensen and – fair warning – he’s mind numbingly handsome so…you’ve been warned.”

“Sure, go ahead,” Kelsey waves a hand towards the table. “And I will try to make sure my jaw doesn’t hit the ground when your someone walks in.”

“Thanks.” Jared makes his way towards his table. It’s one of those tables that has a bench seat that trails along the wall to seat one side of the table and a standalone chair to seat the other guest. Jared shoves the share out of the way and situates his wheelchair there. He likes this table because it’s out of the way and gives him plenty of room to deal with wheelchair related issues. With nothing better to do, he sets into a routine of pushing his sleeves up, fussing with his hair, rolling his sleeves down, and pushing them back up again. He’s dressed casually, but that doesn’t mean he wants to look like
he isn’t put together.

In the end, he’s half way between pushing his sleeves up again when he hears Jensen’s voice. Jared’s not facing the door but he already knows it’s him and hears him tell Kelsey he’s waiting for someone. The girl does her duty and directs Jensen towards Jared, leaving Jared to count to ten before he turns to face him in hopes that he doesn’t look too much like an eager puppy dog.

“Jared! Hey.” Jensen smiles and makes a silly wave. “You’re early.”

“Yeah, I…Never know how long things are going to take, ya know?” Jared licks his lips and smiles at the fact that Jensen’s definitely happy to see him. He’s full of energy that radiates “second date” vibes. “It’s good to see you.”

“Yeah.” Jensen pauses beside Jared, trying to figure out the mechanics of their greeting.

They’re both kind of stuck in this awkward rock towards each other and then pull backwards in hesitation.

Jared feels doubly stuck. He can’t exactly get up and take control of the greeting and if he leans forward enough he’ll land his face somewhere in Jensen’s sternum….not that he wouldn’t mind having his face there but he doesn’t think those thoughts or actions are appropriate for a second date. Licking his lips, he makes a weird clasp of Jensen’s hand. It’s more formal then he wanted but at least it’s a connection and his mind isn’t playing tricks on him, Jensen definitely holds on for way longer than he needs to. Jared’s perfectly okay with that, his fingers twitch with an excited energy and bump his hand into Jensen’s palm in a more solid connection.

“You look good, god…that sounds so cliché doesn’t it? It’s just…when you’re at work, you are always covered in paint and clay. Not that you don’t look good like that too. You actually do. It’s cute and I…” Jensen pauses to compose his thoughts. While lowering into the seat across from Jared, he smiles apologetically, “I’m going to sit down and pretend I didn’t just make a complete idiot of myself.”

“I’m glad you did.” Jared laughs and can’t stop himself. Jensen’s fucking adorable and he’s quite flattered by that display of a runaway tongue. “I’m not gonna lie, Jensen, I’ve been nervous about meeting up with you and that? That was kind of settling. I didn’t know if this was a second date or just going out. And…Yeah…you look good too. Always do. You never got paint on you or anything but you don’t wear your glasses when you’re out with me and it’s nice to have both versions of you.” He shuts his mouth when he realizes he just subjected Jensen to his own version of word vomit and swallows thickly.

“Oh, it’s definitely a second date. Been looking forward to it.”

Smiling, Jared lets it deepen so that his dimples pop and catches Jensen looking. It makes his heart flip flop in his chest. “Me too.”

“Good.”

“Good,” Jared mirrors and thanks god when Kelsey comes over and drops two menus on the table. She runs through the whole specials routine and winks at Jared as she walks away to give them time to decide.

Thankfully, Jensen likes the place and compliments Jared immediately for choosing it. They skim through the menu but Jensen defaults to Jared’s recommendations and he winds up ordering for the two of them. If their first date is any indication, Jared figures they have the same tastes in foods, at
least wine and steak. He hopes it translates to pecan pie and coffee.

For the most part, it does. Jensen definitely likes his sweets but that doesn’t extend to coffee. Jared respects that. He doesn’t like sweet drinks but coffee is his exception so they agree to disagree where the coffee is concerned but order an extra piece of pecan pie.

The conversation is light, for the most part they discuss their families. Jared almost doesn’t believe it when he finds out that their home lives are almost the same, at least sibling wise. It’s a relief that Jensen understands close family relationships because Jared’s mother has a pretty firm hold on him and the family unit is bound to pop up sooner rather than later if the past is anything to go by.

When Jared puts his elbows on the table, his shirt sleeve slides up, revealing the raw skin left in the wake of falling during his basketball game with Ryan. The wound has scabbed up but it still looks painful.

Jensen winces when he sees it, “ouch.”

“Wha?” Following Jensen’s eyes, he realizes his scraped up arm is on display. With an embarrassed flurry of motion, he tries to cover it up. He feels like an idiot for bringing a very unsexy wound to the table on their second date. “Oh, that…sorry…it’s…it’s fine.”

“Whoa, hey, it’s okay. It just looks like it hurts.” Jensen reaches out a hand and places it on Jared’s forearm to steady his movements. “I’ve seen you do some awesome things but I’m pretty sure you’re human and still bleed like the rest of us.”

Jared laughs nervously at the comment because Jensen’s hand is still on his forearm and doesn’t seem to be budging. “Yeah, I got it this afternoon playing basketball with my best friend. It was a stupid mistake. My mind was focused on,” swallowing, Jared locks eyes with Jensen, “something else.”

“Basketball?” Jensen questions with raised eyebrows. The response is quick on his lips and he realizes exactly how shocked he must have come off. “I’m sorry…it’s just…basketball? I didn’t think you…knew you played basketball.”

“I get that a lot. It’s okay. Sometimes people are so used to thinking of their own versions of sports that they forget there are adaptive versions.” Jared hopes his smile lets Jensen know that he’s not insulted. “I’ve been playing since I was a teen. I was pathetic when I first started but I’ve been told I’m pretty good now. Even got two sport wheelchairs to use when I play, which I do whenever I can.”

Looking confused, Jensen scratches at the back of his head. “So…I’m probably going to sound like an ignorant idiot, but how exactly does that work?”

“You’re not an idiot,” Jared says firmly. “Can we come to an understanding about something?”

“About what?”

“Well, about me. I know a lot of people around here are not used to dealing with a paraplegic and don’t understand what a day in my life entails so it’s okay if you’re confused. If you have questions, ask. Just because you don’t know doesn’t make you stupid. I really don’t mind helping you understand, in fact, I would rather have it out in the open than you tip-toeing around a situation because you don’t know what the right move is. So don’t apologize for asking or worry yourself too much about how I’ll take it. Deal?”

Jensen’s only response comes after Jared’s words take their time sinking in. “I’ve never met anyone
like you.”

“Is that good?”

“Of course it is.” Seeming more confident, Jensen gives a sideways smirk. “So, how exactly do you play basketball?”

“It’s kind of the same as the NBA. The rules and scoring are the same, only, we can’t dribble that much considering the hardware we’re dealing with so the rules have been modified to state that players can only touch their wheels twice once they have a ball. After that, we have to bounce it, pass it or try to make a basket. There are a lot of other details if you’d like to know, but it’s easier to understand if you see it in action.” An invitation is on Jared’s lips before he knows what it could entail. “You should come watch me play two Wednesdays from now. My friend Ryan and I are going to be playing in town against some athletes from neighboring cites.”

“Yeah?”

“If you want to. No pressure or anything. I personally think it’ll make more sense. Plus you can see me in action but you don’t have to – ”

Cutting Jared off, Jensen’s words are deliberately punctuated with sincerity, “I’d love to.”

There is a moment where Jared catches himself staring at the ability Jensen’s eyes have to emote in ways that emphasize what he’s saying. He doesn’t think Jensen catches him but his heart speeds up a bit at the sheer thought. So many things are pointing towards Jared being all in way too fast and while he’s scared about that fact, he can’t stop it. Jensen’s so…so….sweet. Literally. He’s got pecan pie residue in the corner of his mouth and licks it away with a brief swipe of his tongue. It makes Jared swoon. He wants to saddle up next to Jensen and share personal space with him. Without warning, he scoots his wheelchair around and swings himself onto the bench seat beside Jensen. It’s a move he’s done countless times in this very booth but when his body stops against Jensen’s, he’s reminded of how different this time is. He’s never been here with someone he wanted to share one side of the table with.

Jensen is surprised by the sudden action and he takes a quick inhale of breath to get that across. His eyes go wider and Jared gets the notion that he’s been caught off guard while simultaneously being impressed by Jared’s dexterity. “Didn’t know you wanted to sit over here; I would have let you and sat on the other side.”

“Well, then there wouldn’t be much of a reason for me to want to sit on this side, would there?” Jared smiles. Having flustered Jensen for a second gives Jared a momentary feeling of confidence, like maybe he’s not the only one feeling the ball of nervous energy in his gut. He gives Jensen a look that exudes flirtatious energy and steals a bite of the pecan pie.

“Guess you’re right.” Jensen brushes his arm against Jared when he reaches for his own fork and they take a moment to sigh over how good the pie is.

With Jensen’s arm against his, Jared’s heart thrums louder. To distract himself, he looks out the window. It’s a natural enough motion for him to get away with but his eyes are only elsewhere for a moment when Jensen’s vying for his attention again.

“Jared?”

“Hmm?” The moment Jared turns to face Jensen again, he meets soft warm lips. They’re on his for the first time and his heart is about to beat out of his chest. He almost pulls away from the shock of it
all, and he knows he’s too wide eyed to look anywhere near as put together as an adult male should be. But pulling away is the polar opposite of what he’s been wanting to do, only he’s frozen in the moment, barely moving and his inner voice is screaming over the fact that there are lips – Jensen’s lips – working against Jared’s.

When Jared fails to respond after a few seconds, Jensen pulls back enough so that their foreheads are still touching, their noses are contending for space but his lips are free enough to speak. “This okay?”

The words kick Jared in the ass because, yes, yes, it is perfectly okay. It’s everything he’s wanted to do to Jensen since he first laid eyes on him and he knows perfectly well how cliché that sounds. “Hell, yes.” He shows Jensen he means it by connecting their lips again and leaning into the kiss. It’s perfect and soft. There are the moments of awkward uncertainty as they figure each other out and adapt to each other’s kissing style but once Jared cocks his head to the left and Jensen tilts his chin up, they’ve got a pretty good rhythm going.

The world continuing on around them goes blurry because it doesn’t matter. Jared’s got Jensen’s lips on him, he’s even given a chance to sweep his tongue inside Jensen’s mouth. The man tastes like pecan pie and coffee but Jared doesn’t stop searching out the taste of something that’s purely Jensen.

He finds it when Jensen reaches up to cup Jared’s face and draw him into a deeper kiss. Jared feels himself melt, is aware that he lets out a breathy sigh when Jensen cradles his face like that. It’s so nice. It’s not at all what Jared pictured because he wouldn’t let himself commit to dreaming about something he thought would never happen. Kissing Jensen now is more intense than any kiss he’s ever had but he supposes it’s because he’s wanted it longer than he’s wanted any other kiss.

Jensen lets out a soft sigh to match Jared’s and they find an easy pace to brushing their lips against each other’s and flitting their tongues inside.

A woman clearing her throat brings them out of it and Jared cracks one eye open to see an amused Kelsey holding their bill between her fingers. She’s smirking at them so hard that Jared wants to punch her; he’s actually contemplating following through on that because he was in the middle of something important. But he likes Spoons too much to jeopardize his patronage. Besides, he and Jensen have been kissing for a long time and while the lights in the place are dimmed, they’re not that dim.

“I’ll just leave this right here for you,” Kelsey says with a wink and sashays away from them before Jared can go back on his decision not to punch her.

Jensen pulls away and clears his throat in some attempt to look gentlemanly again. He smoothes down his hair and glances around the coffee house to gauge how many people saw them making out. Judging by the fact that no one is looking at them, he assumes it wasn’t many.

Jared’s heart is still giddy with excitement and he can’t help himself. The moment Kelsey is far enough away, he reaches out for Jensen and pulls him back into a kiss. This time, it’s Jensen’s turn to make a surprised moan but he eventually falls back into their learned style of working through a kiss. Jared doesn’t care if he looks like an overzealous teenager, Jared wants and he is going to take right now.

They’re in the corner of the coffee house, anyway. He can’t imagine anyone noticing just how much he’s practically crawling onto Jensen’s lap when he feels Jensen cradle his face again. It’s silly, but his brain picks up on the fact that Jensen’s hands feel exactly how he thought they would on his skin. They curve exactly the way he sculpted them in his own work.

The touch is almost better than when Jensen’s tongue slides across the roof of his mouth.
Jensen is out of his element but that’s never been a concern for him. In fact, he thrives there. Ever since he was young, he had a habit of getting caught up in new situations and earning a reputation for himself as overly outgoing. It’s why moving to Austin because of a job opportunity didn’t scare him. His family is still close enough and he knew he’d make new friends and a comfortable life for himself.

He does, however, feel a bit out of place at the Austin River City Rec’ers game. Jared has thrown him into a world he’s never even dipped a toe in before. Last week, he didn’t even know the River City Rec’ers even existed, much less practiced and played at Hoop Zone. It makes him feel a bit ignorant to a world that’s been going on right under his nose but he’d never paid any attention to it. He knows he’s being hard on himself but he can’t help it, that’s also a character trait he’s honed throughout the years.

He’s more than just nervous about being in a room full of strangers with disabilities he doesn’t understand to the full extent. That’s only a faction. The majority is worrying about Jared.

He really likes Jared. That feeling has only grown over the past few weeks. There have been a handful of dates thrown in the mix and Jensen particularly enjoys the fact that those dates are ending on the types of kisses that linger. The ones where their lips don’t seem to want to release their hold on the other and he loves the way Jared’s eyes pout for the briefest second when they pull away. It’s only for a flash but Jensen catches it and loves it. They’ve been taking it slow but working together makes it hard to go a day without seeing each other.

And to be honest, Jensen kind of enjoys it. He loves that they have lunch together in Jared’s classroom on most days and it feels like they are doing something secret and forbidden even though it’s just a bologna sandwich with a side of clay dust. They’re doing nothing more than talking and getting to know each other but it feels so much more exciting. If a student walked in, it would look like nothing but two co-workers laughing and sharing a free period. It’s so much more though, and Jared and Jensen’s smiling eyes let each other know that it’s mutual. Jensen knows people in the faculty cafeteria probably notice his absence but as the union rep, he’s busy during most of his free periods. He hopes they assume he’s just off doing union related things. It’s one thing to gossip about him, that’s fine, but he can’t stomach thinking about the things they’d say about Jared.

This is the first time he’s out to see Jared while not actually speaking to him. He’s literally seeing and that type of date speaks something about the direction things are going between them.

“Jensen!”

Hearing his name through a crowd of strangers startles him and Jensen practically trips over himself as he spins towards a voice he has now determined is Jared’s. He finds the man wheeling towards him, but he’s not in his usual wheel chair. This one is different, somehow sleeker and bulkier at the same time. Its wheels are tilted in towards the seat, creating a tighter angle with the ground. There is an added half ring of metal around the footing area of Jared’s chair, leaving the man’s sneakered feet to rest on it. On further inspection, they’re actually strapped into the foot rest, with another seat belt looking strap across Jared’s lap. The man is wearing shorts, and it’s actually the first time Jensen’s seen Jared’s legs. They’re thinner than average, which is unsettling. Jensen has to remind himself that what would be worrisome for himself isn’t going to be the case for Jared. Jared doesn’t use his legs, thus their atrophied look isn’t cause for alarm. Still, it makes Jensen’s heart break because nothing about his legs looks natural and he’s thrown into thinking about how terrible Jared’s injuries must have been and still are. There are scars too but he can’t make them out enough to get a clear picture. Thankfully, what really gets his attention is the fact that Jared’s smiling face is bright enough to cast
away any shadows. It’s Jensen’s favorite kind of Jared smile, too. The kind where his dimples are
deep and he’s in an open mouthed grin. Also worth being distracted by are Jared’s arms. He’s
wearing a tank top that says “Austin” across the chest, leaving his arms on complete display for the
first time since Jensen has met him. They’re well defined and muscled, perfect enough to make
Jensen’s mouth go dry so that he has to stupidly smack his lips. He finds his voice before he ends up
drooling. “Hey, Jared!”

“I’m so glad you could come! I was…well…I didn’t know if you’d be able to make it.” Jared
scratches at the back of his head and his grin becomes more of a shy smile.

“Hey, I told you I would be here, and here I am. Man, this is a bigger organization than I thought.”

“Oh, yeah! Austin River City Rec’ers do a lot for disability awareness in Austin and sponsor tons of
community events to help wheelchair bound people, like myself,” he smiles with a goofy gesture to
his chest, “find an outlet through sports. Plus, they even have a NWBA team.”

“A wha’?”

“A NWBA team. A National Wheelchair Basketball Association team. I’m not on it because I don’t
have the time but I practice with them sometimes. They’ve gone on to place pretty high in the
championships. It helps us get donations for funding spinal cord research; that’s what the Rec’ers
make donations for most of the time.” Jared is about to say something else but a dark haired man in a
showy yellow wheelchair speeds up behind him and thumps him on the back of the head. “Hey!
Ry!” Jared snorts and glares daggers at the man.

“Come on, Jay! We’re starting in a minute.”

Throwing an apologetic eye roll towards Jensen, Jared makes a gesture between their new arrival.
“Jensen, this is my idiot friend Ryan. Ryan, this is Jensen.”

Ryan perks up and gets a mischievous glint in his eyes, “Oh! This is Jensen,” he says as he saturates
Jensen’s name with mock lovey-dovey sentiment.

“Shut it!” Punching Ryan in the shoulder, Jared turns to Jensen with an embarrassed laugh. “Don’t
mind him. In addition to having a damaged spine, he’s also got brain damage.”

What happens next is an interesting sight to behold. Ryan gets an arm around Jared’s shoulders and
pulls him in for a weird hold as he rubs his knuckles over Jared’s head in their version of a noogie.
Jared growls and pulls him off, cupping a hand over Ryan’s mouth when he keeps repeating
Jensen’s name. It’s comical but also heartwarming. Clearly Ryan and Jared are close enough to act
like brothers but the fact that Ryan is teasing Jared is proof that Jared has been talking about him.
And the lovey-dovey attitude means that Jared is saying lovey-dovey things about him.

That’s okay with Jensen.

Ryan and Jared propel away from each other and Jensen steps between them. “Nice to meet you,
Ryan.” He holds out a hand.

“Likewise.” Ryan returns the handshake while sizing Jensen up and gives Jared a hum of approval.
“You’re taller than I thought you’d be but I guess everyone is tall from my vantage point.”

Jensen snorts. “That’s a pretty impressive looking chair you’ve got there.”

“Oh, yeah. Brand new. I’ve been saving for a while. You should give it a spin, see how you handle
this thing.” He spins in a circle and smirks. “See if you can handle Jared. Give him a run for his
money.”

There is some subtext behind Ryan’s words but Jensen doesn’t have much time to read it. He’s being directed towards the bleachers and Jared’s waving to him as he races Ryan towards the rest of their team. He sees Jared hit Ryan on the back of the head once more and even though Jensen can’t hear what Ryan just said, based on the man’s smirk, Jensen assumes Ryan deserved it.

Before the game, Jensen cheated. He went online and watched videos of wheelchair basketball. He didn’t want to be completely lost during the game. It helps in the sense that he can easily follow the game but he’s not doing much of that. He’s following Jared, that’s for sure, but he doesn’t care who wins or loses. His eyes are trained on Jared and the way he moves across the court. Everything about Jared’s actions are awe inspiring. For one, he’s fast. Really fast. He’s good at getting into a scramble and coming away with the ball on his hand.

He’s also reckless. More than once, Jensen finds himself biting his lips when Jared almost teeters to the side. He never goes down, but the wound on Jared’s arm from two weeks ago is fixed in Jensen’s memory and all he can picture is Jared wiping out. The more he thinks about it, the more he can visualize it. It makes his stomach drop out and an icy chill crawl up his neck.

His mind runs away from him. He gets stuck daydreaming about situations where Jared is helpless. It’s not hard to imagine just how many situations that would be. They range from falling over, to skidding out over a wet floor, to landing wrong after coming down from a curb. Each one of them makes Jensen’s gut twist into a tighter knot.

Just then, a whistle blows and the shrillness of it catches Jensen’s attention and he stops staring at Jared enough to notice that someone has, in fact, landed themselves on the ground. It’s someone from the other team but it looks like he went down hard. The wheelchair prevented him from sprawling out, since he’s still strapped in tight, but there is blood. The man, however, is waving people’s concern off. He’s hurt but he doesn’t seem thrown by it.

Jensen is.

That could have easily been Jared and there’s no way Jensen would have been able to brush that type of injury off. Hell, just thinking about it is making him feel sick.

He makes it through the game but he’s formulating a new set of questions.

Jared’s world is alien to him. He’s trying to get a hold of it but Jensen wonders just how capable he is of being a part of it, of understanding it.

There are a lot of things Jensen found the courage to do but he’s not sure if being with Jared – in the way Jared deserves – is one of them.

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Dinner with Josh is exactly as it usually is. His brother grills a couple of hamburgers and they drink a couple of beers. His sister-in-law and nephew are out at her friend’s house, leaving them to do some brotherly bonding. Which is perfect, because Jensen could really use another beer and he’d feel guilty about that if his nephew was competing for his attention.

Mostly they laugh about stupid bullshit and complain about petty things going on at their jobs.

It’s totally run of the mill Josh and Jensen time until Josh almost chokes on a mouthful of burger and Jensen catches him off guard.
“So…I’ve met someone.” Jensen makes sure Josh hears him before busying himself with his burger.

“Wha’- what?” Swallowing thickly, Josh reaches for his beer to ease the action. “You met someone?”

“Yeah.” That fact alone isn’t shocking. Jensen isn’t a stranger to the dating game. What’s weird is that he’s stopped going to his big brother for dating advice years ago and he knows Josh picked up on the uncertainty of his tone.

With a raised eyebrow, Josh asks, “And I’m guessing there is something about this someone that you’re not sure about?”

“Well, I kind of met him at work. He’s the new Art teacher we hired. You know how I usually don’t mix business and pleasure but I made an exception for him. He’s…well…he’s great. He’s funny and talented and cute.” Jensen smiles at the thought, chewing on the corner of his lip. “He’s got these dimples…they’re like…perfect.”

“Aww, look at you, little bro. Sounds like you don’t need much help from me. You’re already crushing hard on this guy. What’s his name?” Josh elbows Jensen playfully and takes a swig of his beer.

“Jared.”

“So, this Jared works with you?”

“Yeah, in my building. One of his classrooms is practically in the same wing.”

“I know you don’t shit where you eat and everything but sometimes things just work out that way. Based on the smile on your face, you are already too far in that if you stop now, it would be weird for you and Jared either way. Who knows, you guys could be a really good thing. I mean, you are both teachers. There has to be some commonality there.”

“Yeah, there’s that – ” Jensen lets his words die off and takes another bite of his burger. Truthfully, he’s gotten over the work hang-ups. Josh is right. They’ve shared enough stories and enough spit to feel the burn of ending a relationship before it really got off the ground. He knows that the administration frowns on work place romances but he knows his contract and he’s in the know with the higher ups. He can handle the brunt of the issue if administration comes down hard on him for dating Jared.

“But?”

“I mean, he’s…he’s…well…let me start with the fact that you’d love him. He’s witty and so amazingly talented at everything that I feel like a loser for only knowing how to play guitar, make a home brew, and recite the presidents in order of time served. He’s just…easy to talk to, you know? Like, he fits.”

Josh shakes his head. “I’m not seeing a problem here, Jen.”

“He’s also a paraplegic and confined to a wheelchair.”

The words hang between them for a moment before Josh can come up with a response. After a deliberately slow drink and swallow, Josh lets out, “Oh.”

“That’s it? That’s all you have to say?” Jensen narrows one eye at his brother. “Come on man, you’re supposed to help me out here because I’m kind of freaking out over whether or not I can
handle dating someone like Jared.”

“He’s in a wheelchair.”

“Yep.”

“Forever?”

“Since he was nine and he’s not getting out of it anytime soon.”

“And he’s like, what? Paralyzed or something?” The gears in Josh’s head work to get a handle of the situation.

“From the waist down. Basically.” It’s more complicated than that but Jensen doesn’t need to get into all the gritty details for Josh to understand his problem.

“Oh.” Josh repeats.

“Yeah, ‘oh’.” Scratching at the back of his head, Jensen shrugs. “I just…I really like him, Josh. A lot.”

“And the hang-up is the hardware that comes with him?”

“No. Not really. It’s the other stuff. The life stuff. Like…he’s independent and it’s clear he doesn’t need anyone to take care of him but sometimes that’s a knee-jerk reaction for me. I don’t want to overstep my boundaries with him and so far I’ve been good about it. I thought, ‘hey, I can do this’ but then I realized that he is fragile in some ways. He’s…well, he has a disability. I know it doesn’t define him as a person but it does define his way of life. The way he lives and the things he has to deal with, it’s mind boggling. He’s by far the strongest, most determined, person I’ve ever met and I have no idea if I can live up to what he needs or who he needs.” With a heavy sigh, Jensen lets his elbows hit the table and he hangs his head.

“You do know that made no sense, right? You just said he doesn’t need anyone and now you are worried that you won’t be the type of person he needs.”

“That’s just it! He plays basketball. I went to see him play in a wheelchair league and one of the players fell. It made it clear how Jared has limitations. He is vulnerable in some ways. He’s strong in so many more but that weakness is there and it’s terrifying. It’s…”

Josh raises a palm and cuts his brother off. “You really do like him.”

“What? That is all you got from me trying to have a heart to heart with you?” Jensen snorts.

“How could I not get that. It’s obvious. You’re scared about him getting hurt or being weak or losing him before you even really have anything with him. It seems like you already resolved yourself to being with him. You don’t need my blessing on that.”

“Yeah, well, it feels like I do.” Jensen shrugs and downs the rest of his beer. “Can you pass me another?”

“Sure.” Josh reaches for the six-pack and pops the cap before handing the bottle to his brother.

“Josh, can I do this? I mean, can I be with someone in a wheelchair?”

“Jen, I’ve known you from the moment you were born. You’ve done everything you set your heart on. But I gotta be honest, being with someone like Jared is a lifestyle change and it’s a lifestyle
you’ve spent every single one of your years getting comfortable in. If you want to do this, you have to know that things will be different. You’re an outdoors person. And while some of those things are wheelchair friendly, I highly doubt Jared’s going to be able to be a part of your hiking trips or the races you and your friends run.”

“No, but…”

“But nothing. That’s a very real thing you have to come to terms with. You want me to play devil’s advocate, then I will. Are you okay with giving up the dreams of having a romantic partner to do those things with?” Josh tilts his head to indicate the gravity of the question.

Jensen doesn’t have to think about the question. “Of course I’m okay with that. Being with Jared doesn’t mean I have to give those things up. It just means I won’t do them with him. Which is okay, because I’ve been doing them on my own for long enough. There are other things Jared and I can do. Maybe figure out our own things.” Said aloud, Jensen realizes how simple his situation suddenly seems. He’d earnestly thought about the issue before but hadn’t voiced it.

“That’s a good answer, Jen.” Sighing, Josh leans back in his chair. “Listen, when you’re with someone, you worry about them. It doesn’t matter if they’re wheelchair bound or not. You always worry. I mean, I know my family is out at a friend’s house and nothing’s going to happen but there is this little pilot-light of worry always on in the back of my brain. So if you think you can’t handle being with Jared because you’re going to worry, then you better rethink being in any relationship because that’s par for the course.”

“It’s just a lot, Josh. You know?”

“And that’s the only concern you have about being with him?” Something in Josh’s words hold a fair amount of disbelief.

Jensen shrugs and takes a swig of his beer. “Yeah, basically.”

“Dude, seriously? I mean…the guy’s paralyzed from the waist down and you’re not worried about anything else?”

“Yeah. Why? What else should I be worried about?” For the life of him, Jensen can’t figure out what Josh is getting at.

Josh takes a drink from his beer bottle, the action longer than usual as he drains most of the bottle. When he’s done, he puts it on the table and clears his throat, coughing awkwardly. There is a faint embarrassed blush on his cheeks by the time he finally manages to mumble out, “what about sex?”

Jensen practically spraying his mouthful of beer all over his brother. Growing up together, he and Josh shared plenty of awkward conversations about sex. Hell, they even caught each other masturbating a few times. Now that they’re adults, they can talk about their sex lives but it’s still awkward being presented with discussing having sex with Jared. “Excuse me?”

“Come on, Jen. You’re not that dense.”

“I don’t see what sex with Jared has to do with dating him. Actually, it has nothing to do with why I want to date Jared. I mean…”

“Dude, seriously? The guy’s in a wheelchair. He’s got a permanent disability. I’m sure there are parts of him not working properly anymore. And you’ve got to ask yourself if you can live without it for the rest of your life. You know…if you can be with someone without the physical connection.”
“Oh,” Jensen says dumbly. He honestly hadn’t thought of that situation being a problem. The way Josh is going on about it, you’d think it was a much bigger issue. “Actually, I understand that he and I probably won’t get a chance to experience that part of a relationship but don’t you realize that there are so many other ways to satisfy each other?”

“Oh god, Jen…the visual.” Josh covers his eyes against the phantom images. “I don’t need you to lecture me on just how many ways you can ‘satisfy each other.’ Oh my god, do you understand how corny you sound?” Laughing, he slaps a hand over Jensen’s back. He lets himself have a lighthearted moment before diving back into the seriousness of the conversation. “It sounds like you’ve made your choice, but, as your brother, I gotta tell you…I don’t want to see you get hurt. I don’t want you to get your heart set on a person who ends up unable to meet needs you didn’t know you had. So…tread carefully. Okay?”

It’s heart warming that Josh cares so much about him and Jensen can’t stop himself from pulling his brother into a hug. They slap each other solidly on their backs before pulling away. “Okay. I will. Trust me, neither Jared nor I want to take this quickly. It’s worth too much to rush.”

“Good. So can we stop talking about your sex life and discuss when you’re going to come over to help me fix the deck?”

“As soon as you come over and help me wire the surround sound system you bought me last Christmas.”

“Touché.”

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The last person Jared expects to find at his door Monday evening is Jensen. After the basketball game, the man seemed a bit more hesitant. He didn’t do anything differently. He still met Jared for lunch for the past three work days and he smiled and laughed at all the right times but Jared is a perceptive man. He sensed something brewing behind Jensen’s green eyes.

“Jensen? Hi. What are you doing here?” Jared pulls the door wider and lets the shock show on his face.

“Hi, Jared. I...uhh…”

“You wanna come in?”

“No, I…well…I just wanted to tell you something and I…I need to do it without getting distracted and,” he smiles nervously while scanning Jared’s body, “sometimes you’re distracting.” Everything he means with those words is amplified by the soft way he looks at Jared with needy eyes.

“Oh, okay.” Jared wheels himself out onto his porch. It’s a nice night, a bit warm but there is a song of wildlife in the air and the moon and stars are throwing enough light to illuminate Jensen’s face. His stomach twists up in knots in fear over what Jensen could possibly deem as too important to get distracted by kissing like they’re teenagers again.

“Listen, I like you…”

“I like you too.”

“No, I…I really like you. I mean…” Jensen pauses and Jared can’t read the scroll of emotions behind his eyes. They’re heavy and important and Jared can’t figure out what is causing Jensen so much strife. When Jensen licks his lips and lets his eyes land on Jared’s wheelchair, things click into
It all makes sense for Jared suddenly. He’s seen this before but he didn’t think it would be with Jensen. A lot of his dates with two-legged people have ended with them unable to deal with his no-legged state. No wonder Jensen has been different since the basketball game; it was the day Jared pretty much threw his lifestyle at Jensen. “Jensen, it’s okay.”

“No, listen.” Jensen holds up a palm. “I like you. These past few weeks have been great and I know this is probably stupid and I suppose it’s always kind of awkward but, I wanna date you. I know we’ve been going on dates and stuff but I wanna date you.” He hesitates before coming out with, “exclusively.”

There are five thousand things that Jared should probably say or do but not one of the logical ones makes its way through. Jensen’s words makes his heart swell with sentiment and he feels a smile tugging at his lips. Gone are the fears he had that Jensen was done with him. In their wake is everything he wants from Jensen. Mostly, he wants the same thing. He wants to date Jensen, and while Jensen is right, this is an awkward conversation to have, it has to be done. It gives them clarity. So now, he assumes he’s supposed to mirror the attitude. Looking at Jensen, he wants to drown in him. He should tell Jensen he’s totally on board with dating exclusively but what comes out of his mouth is, “I wanna make you pancakes.” As soon as the words leave, he feels his cheeks burn and he cups his mouth. It’s too late. He can’t reach out and shove into hiding in his pockets.

“You what?”

“Nothing.” Jared hopes Jensen drops it.

He doesn’t. “You want to make me pancakes?”

“Well, yeah…you know…”

“Umm…why?”

“You know, like…but for breakfast. As in, you spend the night and I make you breakfast.” Jared dares to look up from his lap. He’s afraid Jensen’s going to be looking at him like he’s crazy but he looks up in time to see the other man’s confused expression melt into adoration. It gives him enough confidence to clarify. “I don’t mean right now. I mean…like…when we’re ready. I wanna make you pancakes.”

“I wanna eat your pancakes.” Jensen says with a cheesy smile on his face. Something breaks inside Jensen and Jared realizes it’s whatever restraint Jensen had to keep himself from coming into the house. He leans forward, bracing himself by putting one hand on each armrest of Jared’s wheelchair, and crashes their lips together.

Jared’s ready for it. He has been since laying eyes on Jensen once he’d opened the door. He pulls Jensen closer, cupping the back of his head and fighting for some semblance of control over the kiss. The thing is, they never really manage to divvy up control that way. It’s a constant push and pull but it suits them just fine and keeps them on their toes. Jensen lets out a sexy content sigh and Jared kisses him harder, movements more urgent than any of their previous kissing.

He knows he needs to stop this. He knows that if Jensen wants an exclusive relationship with him, then he deserves to know things about Jared being a carrier and the fact that his accident years ago left plenty of scars inside him. Scars that have the possibility of making their lives barren if they make it to the ‘having kids’ phase. It’s a deal breaker for some people and Jared’s always considered it one of those awkward conversations that he has to have upfront.
But Jensen’s lips feel so good. So right. He’s being selfish because he can’t bear to break the kiss. He wants more of it and it’s almost like now that Jensen’s given himself over to this relationship, he’s exposed himself completely. It’s addictive. Jared wants to soak him in and figure out every little thing that makes Jensen tick.

He wants to start by exploring his mouth. Jensen’s leaning closer to him and he permeates all of Jared’s senses. Moaning, Jared tugs him closer and keens when he feels Jensen’s tongue roll around his. There is a noise that escapes Jensen’s mouth but Jared swallows it down, intent on keeping it forever. It’s so sexy and god Jared wants more. It’s been weeks of this and Jensen has no idea how much of a walking wet dream he is. He’s fueled every one of Jared’s fantasies from the moment they met, to the point where Jared felt like he had a schoolboy crush. Shifting, he tries to ignore his growing arousal.

“Jared,” Jensen breathes out as he tries to take a step closer and hold onto the wheelchair. He clearly didn’t expect to push Jared backwards as a result and his hands slip, landing one of them on the seat and the other brushing past Jared’s hard-on and landing one his thigh. “Oh!”

Jared’s eyes go wide as he blushes. He hopes maybe if he acts like nothing happened, then Jensen will too. He moves Jensen’s hand back to the armrest and feels a bit ashamed for being so turned on by kissing.

Jensen doesn’t seem to understand his embarrassment. His eyes are wide, but his smile is wider. “Oh, so…that works.” He gets closer to Jared again, nipping at his lips and keeping their foreheads pressed together. And he lets out a sexy satisfied noise.

“Yeah, that works.”

“Good to know. I wasn’t sure about that…I didn’t think it… well… it’s good to know.” Jensen sucks on Jared’s bottom lip before kissing him again.

Jared’s heart stops. If he’s reading Jensen correctly, then the man had assumed he was paralyzed there as well and still wanted to be in a relationship with him. It’s a simple enough decision but Jared’s had too many people back down from it. It makes him want Jensen all the more. Throwing his arms around Jensen’s neck, he’s rewarded with an “umph” of surprise from the man and a deeper, more satisfying kiss.

He lets it go on for a while before tearing himself away. “If you want to be exclusive, we gotta talk more.” There is a disappointed sigh from Jensen but the man respects his wishes and pulls away.

“Yeah…I know.” Jensen licks the remnants of Jared’s kiss from his lips and takes a deep breath. “We gotta go slow.” The way he says it makes them both question just whose idea that was. Jared could have sworn it was both of theirs but now he feels like an idiot for going in on it.

“And we gotta talk. Maybe tomorrow? Over dinner? I’ll cook.” Jared shifts his arousal so that it’s not quite as obvious and clears his throat. “Doesn’t mean I don’t want to keep kissing you. But we need to talk.”

Jensen smiles softly and stands upright, nodding in agreement. “Okay. Dinner. What time?”

“Come over at seven. Sound good?”

“Perfect.” Looking like it pains him, and it probably does based on the situation he has going on in the front of his pants, Jensen gives Jared a sweet kiss on the cheek and stays firm to his resolve. “Good night, Jared.”
“Night, Jensen.”

He watches Jensen leave and Jared thinks that this is the second time Jensen’s left him feeling breathless on his front porch.

He absolutely hopes that becomes a habit.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo...I have to say three things:
1) Thank you so much for being patient and waiting for this chapter. So much has been doing on in my life and I had to put everything aside for a few weeks. I hope this chapter makes up for it.
2) I could not have written this chapter without the help of my lovely hetero-lifemate, Demondetox. She is amazing and helped me work out so many kinks.
3) The Austin City River Rec’ers are a real wheelchair basketball team. All the information about NWBA is true and I did lots of research about it. If I have any errors, please let me know. I mean no disrespect to anyone with my words and my stories. I hope you all enjoyed it! XOXO
Chapter 5

Jared’s plan to have Jensen over for dinner seemed like a good idea at the time he offered it. Now, he thinks the feeling of Jensen’s lips against his has him too lust drunk to weigh out the actual serious agenda he has planned for dinner.

His heart has been hammering in his chest since he started to slice up the large tomato on the cutting board and it’s still going strong by the time the ground beef is done browning. Jared is able to make Enchiladas in his sleep but tonight is testing that ability.

There is a direct correlation between how badly he wants this dinner to go well and how much his hands are shaking. He’s lucky he didn’t slice a finger in the process but somehow he manages to fill eight flour tortillas with beefy, cheesy goodness and set them aside in a casserole dish to be warmed up closer to Jensen’s arrival time.

Dinner completed for the time being, Jared knows he has to find a way to snuff out his nerves before they destroy any attempt of him being able to get through tonight. His usual outlet is art, and while he knows that losing himself in his studio for a few hours will mean he has to spend time making himself presentable again, he feels the payoff is worth it.

After wiping his hand on a towel, he wheels himself to the farthest room in the house. His studio is by far his favorite place to be and one of the first construction projects he invested in when he bought the house a few years ago. His parents thought he was being foolish to waste his money on an art studio before he focused on necessities like a refrigerator or bedroom furniture, but Jared knew better.

Art saved Jared’s life and continues to be his lifeline when he needs to find an outlet for the frustrations in his life. Its strong presence is more important than anything one could buy at a furniture store.

Everything about the room is perfect, in Jared’s opinion. It’s open, airy, and bright. The floor to ceiling windows let in enough natural light to give Jared a true understanding of the colors and materials he is working with but shades can keep the room dark to protect them in his absence.

At Arkin High, he’s been trying to get the pottery wheels up and running, leaving him up to his elbows in clay and more than happy to work with other medias while at home. Still, the longing to return to malleable materials is always bubbling under the surface and his hands itch to recreate the curves and shapes he has in his head.

Serving himself a giant chunk of clay, Jared slaps it onto a table. He has no idea what he has planned for it but he needs to give his hands something to do so he can shut off his brain and let the thrum of worry running through it fade into the background. Sighing, he sinks his hands into the cool material. They work on autopilot until he realizes what he’s shaping out with each press and swipe of his fingers.

It’s the crook of Jensen’s neck; the angle at which he’s gone about the sculpting is odd, placed somewhere on the edge of the hunk of clay, but the curve is a perfect replica for the way Jensen’s body carried itself when he showed up last night and leaned in for a kiss. Butterfly wings bat at his stomach, Jared’s memory conjures up the vision in full force and he smoothes out a portion that he imagines Jensen’s pulse point would reside under. The rise Jensen’s collar bone proves a bit more difficult and Jared realizes he’s never actually touched the real inspiration for this sculpture. He wants to. He wants to feel the solid frame under Jensen’s person.
It’s no surprise that the first thing his mind gets stuck on while he is trying not to think of Jensen is actually Jensen. It’s also not a surprise when he loses track of time and hears the distant chime of his doorbell, pulling him out of his work and making him swipe a hand across his forehead. “Shit.”

Throwing a cloth over the impromptu sculpture, Jared wheels himself out of the room, flipping the lights and pulling the door closed behind him. “Fuck,” he mumbles under his breath. He’s probably a bit of a wreck but can’t figure out how to have time to remedy that when it’s going to take him enough time getting to the door as it is. He’s glad his clothing isn’t covered in art residue like it tends to be, but that’s mostly because he usually doesn’t have to consider mind-numbingly handsome men appearing at his door. Tugging his fitted v-neck shirt down and smoothing over his dark jeans, Jared sighs. As he covers the rest of the distance towards the front door, he hopes his hair is still behaving from when he tried to tame it earlier.

Yanking the door open, the apology is on his lips before he even catches sight of Jensen. “I’m sorry. I was just working on something and it’s all the way on the other side of the house and I don’t have a motorized wheelchair, so I’m sorry for keeping you waiting and I -” Jared cuts himself off when he looks up at Jensen. The man’s all smiles and wire rimmed glasses and it sends of punch of want to Jared’s gut. “Oh, wow…” He wants to get something more intelligible across but gets stuck swallowing thickly and soaking up the way Jensen’s green eyes still manage to shine through the glass lenses. He could, if he tried, mix up a color that could match the hue but he knows he’ll never find a way to mirror that type of liveliness.

“Jared. Breathe.” Jensen laughs at the man’s ramble. “It’s okay. I…I’m a bit early but…I hope you don’t mind.”

“Mind?” Jared licks his lips and shakes his head. Rolling out on the porch to meet Jensen, a smile sneaks onto his lips and he brushes a piece of hair out of his face. “No. Of course not. Dinner’s all ready. I just need to heat it up. And…I’m glad you look nice and came.” Hitting his forehead with the palm of his hand, Jared snorts. He’s completely confused by the fact that Jensen can leave him brain-dead. “I mean…I’m glad you came. You…look nice.”

“Well, then I am glad I look nice.” Jensen’s laugh is easy going but the hint of nervousness that comes along with it doesn’t go unnoticed. “You look nice too,” he adds as he gestures towards Jared. “That’s how I met you. Covered in art stuff.”

“Huh?” Jared does a quick scan of his body but can’t figure out what Jensen’s referring to.

“He’s here.” Jensen swipes his thumb over Jared’s forehead, the process slow and drawn out.

Jared’s first instinct is to lean into the touch, his eyes fluttering closed as he tilts his head upwards. The second instinct, the one he goes with, is to blush and sweat at his head like whatever Jensen is indicating can be forgotten if it’s out of sight. Turning his head, he catches his reflection in the window. It’s clear enough for him to see that he’s got a smear of dried clay there. He rubs at it in an attempt to make it flake off while snorting in frustration.

“I think it’s cute,” Jensen adds as a consolation. When Jared throws him a raised eyebrow in disbelief, he adds, “you…you’re not a messy person. You’ve got it together. I can see that from the way you run your classroom. But…the fact that you let that all fall to the wayside when you’re creating art? That’s pretty damn endearing. So…yeah, you’re cute when you’re covered in clay or paint or whatever else you’ve got your hands on.”

Jared practically melts right on the spot. He feels the embarrassment leaving and the punch of want is back in his gut. He’s held himself back from sinking far too deep in his feelings for Jensen but he’s hit a moment of weakness; he can’t help himself. Jensen’s just…everything. He’s sweet, funny, smart
and cute. He’s also a man who thinks Jared is sweet, funny, smart and cute. It’s a losing battle. Jared’s going to get his heart broken if tonight doesn’t go as planned. “Yeah, well…I was in my studio because I was nervous about tonight. So…”

Jensen cocks his head at the nervous comment, a clear indication that he’d heard it and is choosing to steamroll right along. “You have a studio?” Jensen’s eyes perk up in curiosity. “I’d love to see it some time. If you’re okay with that, of course.”

Jared is. He’s secretive about unfinished works but he’s happy to share his projects with his friends and family. The problem is, there is a very Jensen-like piece of sculpture in the middle of the room and he’s not ready to embarrass himself any further tonight. “Sure. Yeah…I’d like that. Maybe another day, though? We’ve got dinner and we need to talk.” Rolling back through the doorway, he makes room for Jensen to pass. “Come in. Please.”

Jensen does, eyes scanning the unfamiliar location and soaking it all in.

Jared knows, on the surface, his house looks like every other house for the most part. Underneath there are little details that help make his day run smoother. Things are laid out a particular way and his choice of furniture came with more than just considering the function and color. His house is warm and inviting but it’s about as uncluttered as it can get. He catches Jensen studying it and can guess what is going through his head. “Welcome to my home. It’s not much, I guess, but it’s all me. I helped build it…at least from a planning stand point.”

Jensen smiles. “It is you, isn’t it?”

Unsure of just how much Jensen truly understands that statement, he smiles back. He thinks that Jensen might have a greater understanding for his aesthetic than some other people he’s met. Jensen seems like a people person; Jared supposes he has to be if he is a union representative.

Coming into the living room, Jensen raises his hand to reveal an unadorned brown six-pack of bottled beer. Jared hadn’t noticed it earlier but he’d been distracted with smiles and green eyes. “Here, I brought these for you.” A hint of a blush joins the dusting of freckles on Jensen’s cheeks as he offers the gift to Jared.

Taking it, Jared settles the beers on his lap. “Thanks.” Upon further study, he can’t seem to find any logos or indication of what’s actually in the bottles, prompting him to look up at Jensen with a question in his eyes.

Jensen catches on. “I brewed them. It’s sort of a hobby of mine. Been doing small batches for years but I think I finally got my technique down pat. I didn’t know if you liked IPAs or amber ales so I brought three of each.”

“Oh!” Jared’s smile widens. He likes beer just fine but he’s not sure what goes into brewing it at home. He’s touched that Jensen made something with his own hands and thought of bringing it along with him. While he knows the man probably didn’t brew this specific beer solely for him, it still sends a wave of enjoyment over the fact that he’s holding a gift Jensen had crafted himself. “That’s kind of awesome. I’ve never done that before.”

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“It’s easy.” Shaking his head, Jensen cuts himself off and starts again. “We’ll it’s easy to learn. It’s a bit harder to get good at it. It’s all about timing and temperature. I’ve made a few nasty batches of brew but at least I’ve had fun in the process.”

“I don’t even know the first step in brewing,” Jared says honestly.
“I can teach you!” Dialing down the enthusiasm, Jensen’s voice gets softer. “If you want me to. I suppose that was presumptuous of me.”

Jared laughs at the clear show that Jensen doesn’t have his nerves on lockdown either. With a nod, Jared avoids Jensen’s apology in favor of returning to their actual conversation. “I might be terrible at it.”

“You might not. Never know unless you try.”

They both stare at each other for a moment like those words are dealing with more than just beer. They make Jared’s stomach flip-flop and he has to swallow as he clears his thoughts. He really wants to try a lot more things with Jensen and hopes brewing beer is one of the many. Nodding towards the beer, Jared forces himself to start speaking in more controlled words. “Well, we can have some of what you brought with dinner. I hope you like Enchiladas because I think I made enough to send you home with lunch for tomorrow. You can take a seat at the table. I’ll just throw the food in the oven. It only needs twenty minutes.” With that, he rolls away towards the kitchen. He hadn’t expected Jensen to follow him, making him startle and almost spill the entire contents of their meal down the front of his shirt. “Shit!”

“Sorry!” Reaching out, Jensen helps right the dish. “I seem to have a knack for sneaking up on you.”

“Yeah, you do.” Taking a calming breath, Jared flutters his eyelashes. “It’s my fault too. I should have heard you coming but I was too focused on getting dinner started.”

“Can I help?”

“You want to?” Jared waits for Jensen’s nod. He’s getting distracted again by looking at Jensen’s lips and wanting to kiss them with the same intensity they’d kissed the previous night. There are things he has to get off his chest before they come to that, however. “Here,” he says as he transfers the entirety of their meal into Jensen’s hands. “You can put this in the oven. It’s already pre-heated.”

“Sure thing.” Jensen tries to figure the kitchen out, pausing as he cocks his head at the oven. He shakes himself out of it in time to actually follow Jared’s request but he gets stuck scanning the room again.

Jared knows what he’s looking at. He’s seen that look before on two legged people. Extinguishing the elephant in the room, Jared shrugs. “Everything in my house is made for me. That’s why the oven is so low, so is the stovetop and the sink. It always takes people a little while to get used to it when they come to my home. But, it makes sense, you know? I gotta have everything on my level since I’m the only one who cooks and cleans around here. The cabinets look pretty normal but I only keep things I don’t need that often in the upper ones. Everything I use on a daily basis is down here,” he adds as he taps a closed cabinet door.

Blushing, Jensen scratches at the back of his neck. “Sorry. Was I staring?”

“A little bit. It’s okay. Trust me. Everyone does it.”

“It’s just…different, I guess.” Shaking out of his stare, Jensen takes a deep breath. “So, need any more help?”

“Yeah, help drinking these.” Jared thrust a beer into Jensen’s hand. “I’ll get two pint glasses and we can have a beer before dinner is ready. Sound good?”
“Sounds great.” Jensen waits for Jared to grab the glasses and exit the kitchen first before following into the dining room.

For most people, the height of the table doesn’t even register. For Jared, he knows it’s the perfect height for him to sit comfortably should he feel like staying in his wheelchair. He doesn’t, however, usually do that. When he eats at the table, he likes to swing himself into one of the matching chairs. For now, he stays in the wheelchair while waiting to take dinner out of the oven. Jensen sits across from him, popping the caps on the beers and holding them both up to Jared. “Amber or IPA?”

“Amber,” Jared answers as he reaches for the bottle Jensen indicated, taking the time to pour it into his pint glass.

Jensen does the same with his IPA, eyes flitting nervously from his glass to Jared’s expression as he takes the first sip. He relaxes into his chair with a smile when Jared’s sigh of approval hits his ears. “Good?”

“Yeah.” It is good. Really good. Jared hasn’t had an amber ale in a long while but the beer is cold and it feels good when it hits the nervous heat Jared’s been building up. “Can’t believe you made this. I…You should sell this stuff. It’s pub quality. Seriously. People would pay for a complex beer like this.”

“I’m pretty sure you’re just saying that because we’re dating.” Even if he believed that, Jensen’s still blushing with pride.

The word “dating” hits Jared’s ears and he takes a longer gulp of beer. He feels like he’s going to need all the liquid courage he can get if he is going to tackle this issue with Jensen. “Yeah…about that…” Clearing his throat, Jared sits up straighter. “We gotta talk about that…the whole dating thing. I know you want to date me but I…I just don’t feel right getting you tangled up in my life until you know exactly what you’re getting tangled in.”

“Jared, you’re hardly something I would consider a ‘tangle’. You…”

Jared holds up a hand to stop Jensen. “That’s extremely kind of you to say but…It’s not true. I’m not playing the pity card here. I love my life and I’m damn proud of what I’ve done, but you need to know what my world entrails. I need you to know.”

“Fair enough. Based on the way you reacted last night, I kinda figured it was something that weighed heavily on your mind.” Falling silent, Jensen respectfully sits in wait.

The silence between them isn’t as scary as it could have seemed but that doesn’t stop Jared’s world from spinning. Instead of going with the speech he’d rehearsed countless times, he blurts out a phrase from the middle. “I’m a carrier.”

“Okay…” Jensen draws out like he is trying to figure out why that fact means he and Jared need to have a long talk about being exclusive. “I’m not…so…that’s kind of…”

Jared cuts Jensen off before he closes the sentence with the predicted word of “perfect.” Under most circumstances, he assumes men like Jensen would find it perfect to get paired up with a carrier. Jared isn’t most circumstances. He comes with enough footnotes and medical expectations to boggle one’s mind. “I…I’m complicated. Okay? There are things in here,” he makes a vague gesture towards his torso, “that don’t always work properly. I’m healthy, for the most part, but the bus accident damaged more than just my spine.” He reaches out and takes a sip of beer to keep him from diving too fast into the next part. “My organs work. I’m lucky enough that none of them were permanently impacted. The only exception to that is my reproductive system. So, while I am a carrier, every specialist I’ve
seen has ensured me that, more than likely, I’m infertile.” Pausing to let the hurt that comes along with that affects the sound of his voice; Jared tries to compose himself. “In the scheme of things, it was the last thing any of my doctors were worried about. Parts of me were crushed and they treated the life threatening ones first. So…according to doctors, I can’t have babies. At least…not biological ones. I’m too damaged in there. All messed up.” His voice cracks at the last phrase and tears sting his eyes. It’s a wound he’s let heal a long time ago but saying it out loud reminds him of the fact that he’s different from so many people in yet another way. He’s set apart. That’s what hurts him most.

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“Jared…” Jensen’s on his feet, lips moving but the words are getting clogged up in his throat.

Honestly? He doesn’t know what to say. He’s blindsided. A day ago, he’d barely been able to recognize the fact that Jared might not be able to have intercourse as a potential problem. Now Jared is bringing never having babies into the mix? Jensen feels detached from that problem. He’s worlds away from being ready to be a father and that isn’t part of his thought process. He might want kids one day, sure, but it’s never been a driving force in the way he shaped his future.

“Jensen?” Jared asks with worry after Jensen’s drawn out silence.

Still trying to find his voice, Jensen knows he can’t leave the other man hanging after such an emotional reveal. But he isn’t sure what to actually say. Saying he’s not interested in having kids is a lie but so is saying he wants kids. The truth is, that isn’t something he’s able to figure out right now. He gets why Jared’s bringing it up; he understands that someone who wants to have an exclusive relationship with another person might have marriage and a family on their agenda. Jensen might. But that agenda is way, way down the line. He’s not able to even picture himself with kids, considering he barely feels like he’s got a handle on his own life and career. What he can picture is dating Jared. There are things he feels for Jared that are new, exciting, and terrifying at the same time. There has to be something right about that and Jensen wants more. “I don’t want babies. I want you.” The words hang there and Jensen realizes it’s the first time he’s let his want be known.

“But what if you do?” Jared licks his lips and wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand. “Fuck, I’m sorry. I didn’t want this to involve tears and baggage…but…I come with a lot of baggage. It’s all sorted and compartmentalized but it’s there.”

Jensen’s heart gives a tight squeeze. He wants to fix this. It’s always a knee jerk reaction from him and is probably what makes him good at his job. But, he respects what Jared is trying to do and covering that over with a bandage in the form of kisses and reassurances that everything is okay isn’t going to fit the bill.

In reality, what Jared’s doing makes Jensen want him all the more. He’s who he is, all the time. He’s laying himself out on the table and Jensen isn’t terrified of that. So what if he can’t have babies? There are a lot of other options should they ever get to that fork in the road anyway. It’s a huge decision to make, but Jensen’s brain can’t come up with one valid reason why Jared being infertile would impact their potential as a couple.

Rounding the table, Jensen sits at the vacant chair beside Jared. “I don’t want babies now. How’s that? I can’t speak honestly about my future because who the hell knows what they are going to want five or ten years down the line, right? All I know is that I like you Jared. I like you a lot. You being infertile? That’s not a deal breaker for me. It’s not.” He says with a little more intensity.

Licking his lips and swallowing nervously, Jared tries to smile. He looks pale and Jensen hasn’t seen him so off his game before.
“There’s more. It’s totally manageable and only a little scary but it’s still…me.” Running a hand through his hair, Jared plows ahead. “I go to physical therapy once a week and usually do stuff here at home every day. And based on my paralysis, sometimes I need to be on a plethora of medications. Things to stabilize my blood pressure or keep residual pain in check. I…” Pausing at the inability to get more words out, Jared points a hand towards a closed door. “Just…go in there. There is a cabinet under the sink. I think you need to see it.” Turning his head away, Jared tucks his chin down like he’s preparing for an emotional blow.

Jensen doesn’t argue. He gets to his feet and makes careful steps towards the bathroom. Opening the door reveals a large square room, clearly laid out for someone confined to a wheelchair such as Jared. The cabinet is there, just as Jared said it would be. It’s small and doesn’t look intimidating enough to be the cause of Jared’s fear. Still, Jensen opens it with caution. Inside, lined up prescription bottles crowd the small space.

There are…a lot of them.

All of Jensen’s medical world has revolved around pill bottles representing sickness. He’s been relatively healthy thus far and has only been in possession of similar bottles a handful of times. To him, they represent some of his weakest times. Those memories make him shudder at the hundreds of pills he’s looking at.

But when he pushes past that first impression, he sees something else. He sees neatly organized bottles. There is a system here and nothing about it is frantic or uncertain. The bottles aren’t a quick cure for sickness, they are something that keep Jared healthy. They’re calculated and planned out. Jared was right…his issues are managed but they are more than ‘just a little scary’ to Jensen. If he’d been scared about how vulnerable Jared was at the basketball match, then this should be a full blown panic attack.

It almost is. He has to sit himself down on the toilet seat and cradle his head in his hands while taking deep breaths. Feelings he’d had the other day crash into him like a tidal wave and he’s back to wondering if he’s man enough to be the right fit for Jared.

He wants to be.

But he needs to be sure before he voices that.

His conversation with Josh comes floating back, reminding him of how certain Josh was that Jensen could do this. That he wasn’t the type of person to give up on something he really wanted in his life. And, if he’s being truthful, Jensen likes Jared a lot more than most of those other things he ‘really wanted’.

Hell, he’d never taken the easy way out of anything. It’s why he moved to a new town, took a job with strangers and took on the added responsibility of being the union representative. He’s at his best when he has to play to his strengths in situations that keep him on his toes.

Josh was right; there is always going to be a danger of getting hurt when it comes to relationships. Jared is alive and healthy in ways that make Jensen want to bask in his presence. It’s not worth running away from that feeling because he’s afraid someone will get hurt: emotionally or physically.

Closing the cabinet door, Jensen composes himself before returning to Jared. He wonders if the feelings swirling in his middle are why Jared was nervous about their dinner. He’s dished out some pretty heavy conversation topics and Jared’s need to blow off some steam in his studio starts to make perfect sense. If Jared is nervous about it, then Jensen feels validated in feeling the same way. It also serves as a type of reminder that they both seem to be on the same page about their relationship,
which is reassuring at the current moment because Jensen’s not ready to deal with any broken hearts, especially not Jared’s.

Walking back to the dining room table, he comes face to face with Jared. The man is facing him head on, wheelchair spun towards the bathroom door.

“So, you saw?”

“Yeah.” Jensen scratches at the back of his neck. “It’s…it’s a serious part of your life and I’m glad you told me. But…you’re not sick, Jared. There’s nothing wrong with you. You’re just different than me, and that’s okay. It’s managed right?”

“Yeah. It is. Has been for a long time. Considering doctors have been trying to figure me out since I was nine, I have a 14 year head start in learning what works and what doesn’t.” A small, hopeful smile appears on Jared’s face.

Walking closer, Jensen puts one hand on the armrest of Jared’s wheelchair, directly beside the man’s.

“Well then, I guess we’re in agreement that dating each other is probably a really good idea.” He smiles to match Jared’s.

Eyes going wider, Jared blinks and lets out a gasp of surprise. An array of emotions get muddled on Jared’s face but he eventually gets a determined squint to his eyes and purses his lips mischievously at Jensen.

What happens next surprises Jensen. He knows Jared is strong; he’s seen evidence of that at Arkin High and on the basketball court. It still catches him off guard when Jared locks his wheelchair in place and gets a firmer hold of each arm rest. Jensen had been about to duck lower to seal the whole deal with a kiss but Jared surges nearly a foot upward, forearms and biceps straining as he lifts all his weight from the chair and closes the gap between him and Jensen.

An odd rush of pride makes Jensen smile and he’s floored by how capable Jared is when it comes to following through with something he wants. He’s seen him do that several times at Arkin High School and twice in his personal life. It makes him lean forward with a smile on his face and press their lips together. He can’t help himself when he brings both hands up to pull Jared’s face closer, deepening the kiss with a satisfied moan, a tremor of happiness radiating from both of them.

Jared finds a way to make the kiss more forceful, lifting out of the chair to his fullest extent. The man’s mouth tastes like beer, his beer, and Jensen can’t remember why he almost had a panic attack about this decision. He wants to learn everything about Jared, starting with understanding what goes into making him tick.

A shrill alarm goes off in the kitchen, and they both startle out of the moment. Jensen stumbles backwards and Jared falls back to his chair with a heavy thud.

“Terrible timing for dinner to be ready,” Jared says with a laugh. He wipes at the sheen of saliva on his lips and brings his other hand to Jensen’s thigh in a show of affection.

“Don’t worry. We can go back to that. You promised me more kissing last night. And…as much as I’m here for dinner, I’m not going to let you back out of that promise.” Jensen coasts a thumb over Jared’s knuckles, lingering in the moment for as long as the alarm will allow them without grating on their nerves.

They are lost to the rest of the world but eventually break apart and settle into their meal.

This time, Jensen sits beside Jared instead of across from him. It’s more intimate and he’s grown
accustomed to Jared’s penchant for ending up on the same side of the table when out at restaurants.

Dinner is delicious. It’s warm and gooey, two things that always make a satisfying dinner for Jensen, though his waist line doesn’t always allow him to partake in them too often.

Turns out, Jared tries and doesn’t like the IPA. Jensen adores him even more for not even trying to lie about it; he’s open and honest. Jensen’s ego can handle a little criticism, especially when it comes from Jared’s mouth.

They both have seconds of the food and a third beer. It leaves them stuffed and content, both happy to sit on the couch beside each other and digest what went down between them along with the meal.

“Jensen?” Jared says with a tentative smile.

“Hmm?”

“I don’t think we should tell anyone at work. You know? It’s not because I don’t want to tell anybody, but I’m new there. I don’t want people to think...things. I mean, dating on the job isn’t always such a welcome thing and I don’t want to give the administration ammunition to get rid of me. I like my job.” Jared shrugs and raises his eyebrows.

Jensen’s not offended by that. He gets it. He’d been a new hire once as well. He’s heard the rumor mill surrounding Jared and while he hasn’t yet figured out how to burn it to the ground, he doesn’t want to add any fuel. “It’s okay, Jared. I...I told you I never date coworkers. It’s mostly because I never wanted to but even before I asked you out, I was worried about what people would think. I didn’t want to put either of our jobs at risk for a few dates.” Voice turning to a whisper as he leans in towards Jared, kissing a trail along his jaw and stops beside his ear. “But you and I both know it’s a lot more than a few dates.”

Jared reacts immediately, sighing and tilting his head so that Jensen has more access to that side of his neck. “Yeah. A lot more.” The words are soft and filled with enough lust to start a fire in both of their bellies.

Jensen takes the opportunity to turn Jared’s face toward him, resuming the kiss that the kitchen timer had so rudely interrupted. This time, the kiss doesn’t come with any type of attempt to stop it. There is no worry or untold concerns. Jensen knows what type of baggage Jared comes with and he wants to kiss every ounce of it.

Everything had been building between them for weeks. Jensen understood that Jared wanted to take it slow, knows now why that mattered, but being a hot blooded male with his lips on another hot blooded, very attractive, male make Jensen groan in want. He’s the embodiment of conflicting energy. All at once he feels like an unskilled teenager and like he could melt Jared to the floor.

He’s nervous; that’s what it really is. This time, the nerves aren’t from wondering if the other man is going to want him. He thinks they are pretty clear on that. This time, the nerves are because it’s been a while and he’s about to thoroughly make out with the newest coworker from Arkin High, giving them another secret to leave them both giddy like they were high school students themselves.

Jared’s hands are on him, pulling him by the shoulders of his shirt and crashing their bodies together. All of a sudden, Jared’s fingers are dancing over him, eager and trembling at the same time. Jensen can’t think straight so he gets lost in the feeling of their push and pull, the way they dive into the kiss and pull back enough to let the other have at it.

Jared’s amazing. He’s a great kisser and definitely keeping Jensen’s brain from thinking clearly with
every sweep of his tongue into Jensen’s mouth and playfully sucking on the history teacher’s bottom lip.

Trying to speak is hard, but Jensen manages to get out, “I know you wanted slow,” he says before getting pulled into a deeper kiss that muffles his words. “But…more? Maybe?” His hands are already coasting under Jared’s shirt, getting a feel of those muscles he’d spotted at the Austin City River Rec’er’s game. He wishes his request sounded sexier instead of so uncertain but he has no idea how far he can push things without leaving Jared uncomfortable.

“God, yes.” Jared breathes out against Jensen’s neck, nuzzling it so that he feels the way the blood strums through his veins. He pulls away, cheeks flushed from the haze of arousal they’ve landed themselves in. “You’re too damn cute with those glasses on.”

Jensen full out laughs at that. He didn’t expect those words to come out of Jared’s mouth but they somehow fit. Taking his glasses off, he deposits them safely on the table besides the couch. “What am I now?”

“Sexy.” Jared bites his bottom lip and goes for the button at the top of Jensen’s jeans. “This okay?” he says with an indication that he’s about to pull the zipper down.

Jensen swallows down a moan and his hips lift up on their own. Jared’s hand is hovering so closely to the new arousal he’s sporting that it makes him shiver with excitement. “Yeah. You?”

“Was hoping on it.” Jared locks their eyes as he drags the zipper down.

It’s stupid but Jensen always has mixed feelings about this moment. He loves the build up to it, but he doesn’t want to miss the butterflies-in-the-stomach feeling that comes before it. The want overpowers that because he feels like he’s going to go blind if Jared doesn’t touch his dick at least once tonight. To take his mind off of it, Jensen takes on his own job of tugging Jared’s fly open, snaking his hand inside to grab the thick, hardening length that had been trapped there.

“Fuck!” Jared curses. His head lolls back onto the couch as Jensen gets a better grip and pulls his dick free.

Jensen takes the opportunity to kiss Jared’s lips when they let out a breathy moan. He shifts so he can get closer while still leaving plenty of room for access to their groins. He wants to keep making Jared sigh like that but is caught off guard when Jared’s hand circles his own cock and squeezes it with the perfect amount of pressure. His long fingers curl around the rigid muscle so that he manages to hit every spot at once.

He’s not proud of it, but Jensen’s brain short circuits. He can’t seem to control his own hand anymore because Jared’s working his arousal over with such skill that Jensen has to blink to remember his name. It’s a hand-job, something Jensen thought would lead them to a slow and steady release. Apparently, Jared doesn’t work that way.

The man is good with his hands and Jensen doesn’t think he’ll ever be able to watch Jared work over a piece of clay in the same light again.

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“Holy, fuck, Jared.” Jensen finds himself gasping as the mash-up between the buildup to tonight and the way Jared’s fisting him have him hurdling towards orgasm so quickly that he thinks he’s going to break a world record.

Jared doesn’t let up. He kisses and sucks at Jensen’s neck, presses their lips together when he can, but his hand doesn’t stop twisting and pumping Jensen’s leaking arousal. With the addition of fingers
swirling along the head and over the slit, Jared seems to have found the magic formula to throwing Jensen over the edge.

“Jared, I’m gonna….gonna…” Jensen tenses, eyes squeezing shut as he bites his lip. “You gotta stop. I’m gonna…” It’s a useless warning because Jared doesn’t seem to feel like heeding it and a spurt of come pulses out of Jensen’s dick, coating Jared’s hand. It’s joined by more fluid as Jared works him through it, managing to muffle Jensen’s moans of orgasm with his lips.

It leave’s Jensen feeling sticky and out of breath. His head is spinning and his vision blacks out enough so that Jared’s the only thing he can focus on. “Holy shit.” He laughs in disbelief over what happened and how quickly. Embarrassment over coming so fast isn’t given a chance to rear its head because Jared’s kissing him so hard that Jensen gets the idea Jared doesn’t mind.

Jensen does mind, however. Now that he knows how skilled Jared is, he feels a bit inadequate in the hand-job department. There are other tricks up his sleeves, ones he knows he’s good at. He doesn’t necessarily always like sucking cock, because, honestly? It’s not always that fun. He does love making someone fall apart. He’s good at that and based on Jared’s initial reaction to being touched briefly, he can tell this is a situation where he’s going to enjoy himself on both levels.

Slipping out of Jared’s hold, Jensen’s on his knees as quick as his brain allows him to be. He manages to manually part Jared’s legs so he can settle between them, leaving him face to face with Jared’s dick. He’s mildly amused over the fact that they seem to be around the same size, and smirks quickly before licking up the length.

The night’s events have taken a dirtier turn, which Jensen hadn’t expected. He’s completely on board with that, but it still gives him an added rush when he swallows Jared down for the first time.

“Jensen!” Jared’s hands claw at the couch cushions but he remains nearly immobile. Jensen’s not sure if that’s because of the paralysis or the fact that he’s short circuiting himself. Either way, it makes Jensen’s job easier. Jared’s easy to swallow down when Jensen doesn’t have to worry about choking on his dick should he buck up.

Jensen gets lost in a rhythm, bobbing his head on Jared’s dick, adding some pressure with pushes of his tongue and popping Jared out of his mouth so he can swirl his tongue around the head. He deep throats the length as best he can, scooting closer on his knees.

“Oh!” Jared shouts and lifts his hips up to meet Jensen’s lips. It’s a little awkward, but he manages to push off the couch and get some much needed extra contact. His breathing grows more ragged and he presses himself against the back of the couch. “Jen-Jensen. Close…I’m so close. You sh-should…” Looking down at Jensen’s head working between his thighs, Jared’s protests trail off into a moan dirty enough to give Jensen’s arousal thoughts of returning. “Jensen.”

Jensen ignores him. He knows what Jared’s trying to say but he doesn’t care. Having Jared shoot down his throat is the idea Jensen was going for. He feels Jared trying to tug at his hair and pull him off but he thwarts the attempts by covering Jared’s hands with his own and pushing himself so his lips are more firmly sealed around Jared’s dick.

It’s only a matter of time after that.

Jared shouts and finally stops trying to pull Jensen off. By the time he’s coming, he’s got a pretty demanding hold on the back of Jensen’s skull and is transfixed in watching the history teacher’s mouth take him. “Shit!” Letting out a cry, Jared falls apart and lets ropes of come coat the inside of Jensen’s mouth.
Jensen coughs, despite trying his best to prevent it. He’s glad Jared’s so far gone that he doesn’t seem to notice. Swallowing the bitter fluid, he pulls off with a smug look on his face and sits back on his heels. “Good?”

“Uh huh,” Jared says with a lazy nod of his head. Cracking open an eye, Jared gives Jensen a look. His chest is rising and falling rapidly and there is a sheen of sweat peaking out of the collar of his shirt. “I get that I use my hands every day, all day, but what gives a history teacher any right to have a mouth that talented?” He ends with a laugh and closes his eyes again.

A snort of laughter leaves Jensen’s mouth. “Are you complaining?”

“No!” Suddenly, Jared’s sitting up straight and looking at Jensen with wide eyes. “Hell no. I’d have to be a complete idiot to complain about that.” He smiles wider and his dimples pop.

It makes Jensen feel another round of warm and fuzzy feelings towards Jared. Pulling himself up on the couch, Jared kisses him, licking inside his mouth without any hesitation over the sure possibility that the taste of Jared’s come is still lingering there. It’s a good combination of reasons for Jensen to feel eager about seeing where their relationship is going to take them.

Right now, Jensen hopes it takes them to more lazy kissing with a splattering of conversation scattered throughout. It’s getting late but they still have time. Every part of him doesn’t want to move a muscle but he knows he has to. Spending the night has seemed tempting ever since Jared first offered making him pancakes but it’s worth waiting for. Drawing out the last of their moments together will have to do.

Fuck, he really doesn’t want to go to work tomorrow.
Chapter 6

This chapter includes some oral sex and a hand job. Any problems with that? Didn’t think so.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

During the workday, Jared’s head is definitely in the game but his heart is somewhere else. It’s somewhere warm and exciting, which has everything to do with Jensen. He’s riding a high that hasn’t let up since their dinner the other week. He can’t help but smile when he thinks about Jensen and it sets off a chain reaction of butterflies going wild in his belly.

Ryan was right to be worried about Jared leaving himself vulnerable to getting his heart broken. Jared’s totally flayed open and exposed. He doesn’t think Jensen will hurt him but he’d be totally defenseless should the man do something to flat-line their relationship. Logically, he wants to take things slow and let their relationship build but Jared’s heart is all about diving in.

Thinking about Ryan tugs Jared’s smile down slightly. He’s been wrapped up in work and spending most of his free time with Jensen that he hasn’t had time for more than a brief phone call with Ryan or spotty text conversation. It’s understandable that some things take a backseat during the pivotal beginnings of a relationship but Jared still knows he has to do something about that situation because all he’s doing now is fueling Ryan with ammunition to tease the hell out of him because he’s the classic definition of a lovesick puppy.

Getting caught up in thoughts of his life is not what causes Jared’s delay in making it to his next class. That has been an issue since he started working at Arkin. He told Ray that he’d have trouble getting to his Studio Art class upstairs from his downstairs Ceramics class. Although he tries his best every day, it is pretty much physically impossible to travel route required in the 5 minute passing time the school gives. He’s usually one or two minutes late but he has two things working for him: One is that he’s an Art teacher and his room is prone to people being scattered, thus making it more difficult to actually realize the teacher is in the room. The second, and more important thing, is that his students like him. That fact alone cuts down on behavior problems without him having to do much.

Today he’s exceptionally late. Maybe over 5 minutes. It has nothing to do with his daydreams, though those do keep him occupied while he waits for the elevator to take its sweet ass time. He even falls into the ridiculous habit of pressing the elevator button repeatedly until it finally dings that it has arrived. He’s coming up with a humorous apology to give his class, usually along the lines of the fact that he’d gone for a run and lost track of time when he notices a student pacing by his classroom door. Rolling down the hallway as fast as he can, he realizes that it isn’t a student. It’s Ana. She has her arms crossed over her chest and is sending him seriously annoyed vibes.

“You’re late,” she spits out with an eye roll that dissolves into a glare out of the corner of her eye.

“Ana, I – ” The woman doesn’t even give Jared a chance to explain himself.

“I don’t care what you’re going to say. There’s no excuse for it. The rest of us have to be on time. Don’t think that doesn’t apply to you just because of your condition.”
“Seriously, Ana?” On one hand, Jared can’t believe what he’s hearing. He doesn’t have a “condition” in the sense that Ana seemed to be implying. He has physical limitations, sure, but it’s not something as distasteful as she made it sound. On the other hand, Jared’s used to this. It’s all been building to a head and he’s done all he could to keep himself from snapping. Now, however, Ana is destroying any grip he has on patience. “It’s not a condition!” He spits, and hates himself for a moment for stooping to her level. “If you gave me one ounce of your time and attention, maybe you’d see that no one has made things easy for me. Hell, they haven’t even made them fair. I have to work twice as hard to do things you don’t even realize you’re doing.”

Again, Ana is cutting him off. “Do you realize you’ve left a classroom full of freshmen to sit without proper supervision? I don’t think I need to tell you that our classrooms are filled with things that, without the diligence of a teacher, are dangerous.”


“Razor blades, x-acto knives, paper cutters,” Ana rattles off. “You should know better.”

Jared’s speechless for a moment. He knows all of those things but the sharp objects are locked in his supply cabinet. He highly doubts his class is going to cause trouble in the five minutes he’s been absent and wonders just what type of classroom management Ana has if she’s freaking out so much. But he knows what this is. This is a clear attack, well planned and plotted. “What do you have against me?”

Mood shifting completely, Ana blinks and shrugs. “Against you? Oh, I’m just looking out for the wellbeing of the students here at Arkin High School.” Her voice drips with saccharine sweetness and it’s so phony that Jared feels like vomiting. “I wouldn’t want anything to happen to the children in our charge. That’s why I feel it is my duty to let Ray know you’ve been negligent in adhering to the bell schedule. I’m sure he’ll feel the same concern that I do.”

Taking a deep breath, Jared keeps his head held high. “Do you have any idea how long it takes me to get here from the Ceramics room?”

“That’s really not my problem.” Her words are accompanied by swivels of her head for emphasis before she zeroes in on Jared for one solid second. Huffing out a lungful of air, she spins on her heels and takes off in the direction of the school’s core, most likely intent on hitting the administrators’ offices.

Jared’s stomach twists into knots. He knows what his coworker just did and said are forms of workplace discrimination but he feels like he’s powerless to do anything about it. Teachers at Arkin High don’t seem to understand what it’s like to be Jared. He’s not the smiling survivor the district likes to parade him around as, and he wishes people would start realizing that. There are probably things he needs to do, grievances he needs to file, but right now he has a room full of freshmen trying to peek their heads out the doorway to see what all the holdup is about.

The classroom is his happy place. It’s where he gets to do what he loves and do it well. Since the students don’t mind Jared’s set of wheels and the skills he’s teaching his students don’t require the need to stand on two feet, they respect him. He’s somehow become the “cool teacher”. He’s teaching them to use their eyes and brain so they can create something with their own two hands.

Teaching and his students are what prevents him from surrendering to the people who have been shunning him since day one. It’s why his stomach tightens up but barely registers surprise when he checks his e-mail at the end of the period and has an urgent message from Ray asking Jared to visit him for ten minutes before the faculty meeting this afternoon.
Jensen’s put in a long day and he’s more than looking forward to decompressing at home. It isn’t that he hates faculty meetings, it’s just that they drag on and on sometimes. Considering he’s only given a few minutes to speak at the end of the meeting, when most of the teachers have mentally checked out, it sometimes feels like a losing battle to ensure solidarity among the staff. Plus, some people seem to raise the same issue time and time again without ever really listening to his suggestions or solutions because they want a quick fix. It grates on his patience.

Okay, maybe he hates faculty meetings. But it’s not because he doesn’t love where he works and who he works with. Like any job, it is frustrating sometimes.

Now that it’s over, it means he finally gets to see Jared. He’s been dealing with some curriculum issues and meetings on his free periods throughout the day. He’s a little bummed that the meeting sucked up so much of his free time and he isn’t sure how much is left but, what he’d really like is a chance to talk about anything non-work related, then quit all the talking and busy his mouth with other non-work related things.

The room’s clearing out pretty rapidly, so it doesn’t take him long to find Jared in the dispersing crowd. As soon as he finds him, a smile breaks out on his face and he ducks his head for a quick moment, eyes scanning the room to see if anyone notices. He gets why he and Jared are keeping things on the hush-hush. They’re still a new couple themselves and trying to figure things out, so he understands why it’s best to leave meddling work people out of it. Still, it’s becoming exceedingly difficult to actually keep affection out of his interactions with Jared when they do cross paths at Arkin.

When he finally makes eye contact with Jared, he realizes that the work-free evening he had planned for himself is probably off the table. Jared’s brooding and even though he tries to return Jensen’s smile, it doesn’t reach his eyes. Closing the gap between them, Jensen’s quick to ask, “what?”

“Stupid shit.” Jared huffs and rolls his eyes. “I don’t want you to worry about it.” Running a hand through his hair, he looks up at Jensen and smiles a little more sincerely. “Been thinking about you almost all day.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep.”

“Good things?” Jensen isn’t buying Jared’s brushing off whatever is really bothering him but he can give the man time to warm up to it.

“All good things. Good things that involve nothing about this building and everything about this,” Jared shoves a finger playfully at the left side of Jensen’s chest. “God, can we just get out of here? Maybe grab dinner? Or coffee at Spoons?”

Jensen checks his watch and sighs. “I’d love to. Really. But, I…I got this thing…” Jensen had been rolling an idea around in his head and he doesn’t want Jared to feel like he’s pushing them way too fast so he’s been hemming and hawing over actually bringing it up. Now, though, it is clear that Jared is upset about something and needs to talk, even if he’s skillfully avoiding actually talking. “So I got this thing,” he starts again, “and I need to pack and get ready for it – ”

Jared cocks his head. “What kind of thing?”

“A family thing.” Jensen shrugs. “A grandma’s birthday type of thing. Silly, I know, but she’s not
going to be around forever and we celebrate every year we have with her. But the thing is back home in Dallas and I wanna leave first thing Saturday morning so I gotta pack and figure out what to actually buy her as a gift because I haven’t had much time. Not that she wants anything anyway.

And then, you know, I was kind of wondering if you might want to come with me? Like I said, it’s in Dallas and it’s a three hour drive so we’d be staying overnight but I’d like for you to come if you want to. But if you don’t feel up to meeting my whole family yet, that’s okay. I get it. I just figured I would ask because I was thinking about it a lot and thought maybe – you know – it would be nice to get away from all this and…so yeah. I got a thing.” Jensen knits his brows and ends on a much needed deep inhale of air. He hadn’t realized he was gearing up for a ramble but supposes that his nerves got the best of him. He really wants to introduce Jared to his family. In addition to his first pep talk with Josh, Jared’s been a key player in most of his conversations with people back home. It took a few dates or so, but Jared’s name has been peppered through phone conversations and the way it changes the tone of Jensen’s voice hadn’t gone unnoticed by his mother.

“You done now?” Jared asks with a smirk.

“With the stream of consciousness thing?” Jensen scratches at the back of his head while he waits for Jared’s nod. “Yeah. I’m done.”

“So,” Jared says, drawing the word out. “Yes.”

“That’s okay – ” Jensen’s brain is cloudy for a second and it takes him a moment to figure out that Jared said “yes” what he’s actually saying “yes” to. “Wait, ‘yes’?”

“Yes. I’d love to come. As long as you don’t think I’ll get in the way…” His inquiry trails off and he punctuates his concern with a gesture towards the entirety of his wheelchair.

Jensen’s still stuck on the “yes” part. He’s gotten used to maneuvering around Jared’s world and hasn’t put much thought about how Jared will move through his. It’s not where his brain goes first. In fairness, he doesn’t accurately know how to put Jared’s concern at ease but he wants it to work so much that he’s sure he’ll figure something out. His family is…his family. They’re great. They’ll love Jared’s energy. But if he’s true with himself, there is a nagging in the back of his brain that they’ll be concerned. Knowing that their son is dating someone in a wheelchair is one thing. It’s an entirely different thing when they are faced with the reality of it. He knows they’ll worry because they’re his parents and they are prone to doing that. His mom let slip one tiny statement about hoping Jensen isn’t in over his head or signing up for more trying obligations than a typical relationship. He knows she means well but he’s not sure how that will translate over to interactions with Jared. There are real concerns there but Jensen goes with his heart and smiles. “You could never get in the way. It’ll be fine. They’ll love you.” Licking his lips, he adds, “I…I wanted to ask you sooner but…well…I didn’t want you to think I was pushing you into meeting them too soon.”

“There’s really no ‘too soon’ after deciding we’re a thing. I don’t play by other peoples rules, Jensen. Who decides when it’s too soon? Right? I think that’s up for us to decide. So…yeah. I’d love to come. I just want to make sure it’s alright. You know…like…your parents won’t mind.”

“Mind? No! They told me to bring you. I was the one who put off asking you because I didn’t want to scare you away.” Realizing how what he’d just said could be mistaken, Jensen puts up his hands and shakes his head. “Not that they’re scary! They’re not. I promise. They’re really nice and they’ll probably just feed you a whole lot because it’s what they seem to do to fill their time. And my brother will be there, so that’s cool. He lives outside Austin but he’s making the trip too. And – ”

“Jensen.” Jared interrupts.

“I’m doing it again?”
“Yeah, you are.” Jared makes a quick glance from left to right. Finding them to be alone, he reaches up and grabs a fistful of Jensen’s shirt so as to yank him closer. “And it’s fucking adorable.” He places a chaste kiss on Jensen’s lips and releases him as quickly as he started the whole interaction.

Licking his lips to savor any traces of Jared, Jensen smiles. “Glad you think so, because…you seem to make me nervous. In a good way,” he adds so as to leave no room for incorrectly reading into that fact.

Jared laughs, the warmth of it echoing through the vacated room. “You do the same thing to me. Catch me off guard and then all I can do is speak stupidly and make a fool out of myself. Thankfully, we’re not English teachers because if you walked past my classroom I’d dissolve into moments to throwing proper sentence structure out of the window. My poor students. They’d fail everything.”

The thought has Jensen laughing along with Jared. It feels good and even though their interaction was just a few minutes in the making, it was momentous. It’s done everything to wash away Jensen’s exhaustion and he feels lighter without having to worry about the debate over inviting Jared to join him this weekend. “So, I’m leaving early. I can swing by your place around eight. Good for you? I promise I’ll come armed with coffee and egg sandwiches. I’ll even let you eat in my car. I don’t let just anybody do that.”

“Glad I’m not ‘just anybody’ then.” Jared plays with his wheelchair, rolling back and forth a few inches. “Eight is good. I’ll be ready.”

“Great. It’s a date then.” Jensen smiles. He finds himself happily letting his gaze linger on Jared’s until the sound of metal being dragged across linoleum distracts him. Looking up he sees a team of custodians working to clear the chairs that had been set up for the meeting. He’d love to lean down and kiss Jared goodbye but he’s painfully aware of the custodians staring at them, probably in confusion as to why they’re still there. “So, I’ll see you tomorrow then?” Jensen’s hand flits out for a second and brushes against the one Jared has on his right wheel.

Jared reacts by turning his hand outward, the knuckles brushing into Jensen’s palm. It’s the slightest gestures but it sends sparks to Jensen’s heart. To the world, it means nothing but Jensen’s pulse steps out of line and he lets out a puff of air with a content snort.

“Sounds good. Tomorrow,” Jared whispers. “Good look with a gift for grandma. My vote is for perfume. My grams can never get enough of it. Wears too much of it too, but that’s another issue.” Wheeling backwards, he nods. “Night, Jensen.”

“Night.” Jensen watches Jared leave towards the wheelchair ramps before he ducks out the side door leading out to the parking lot. He’s got a list of things to do but for a moment he sinks into his car and soaks in the fact that he’s going to bring a date home. To his parents. On his grandmother’s birthday. He’s throwing Jared to the sharks, he knows. They’ll clamor over him but, for better or for worse, they’re his family. He figures, it’s best to get an early start on meeting them.

But still…he’s bringing a boyfriend home. His boyfriend. A boyfriend whose name is Jared and who makes him smile like an idiot from the briefest touch. He hasn’t done that, not in a long time.

The fact that he’s doing it now is…enlightening. It’s not scary.

Not in the sense that he needs to get away from it.

But it’s definitely exhilarating.
Jared has no idea what had gotten into him yesterday when he told Jensen he’d go away with him for the weekend. He wonders if it is too fast for any of this to happen but that’s not actually what’s bothering him as he’s sitting in Jensen’s car, rumbling along in route to his parents’ house.

He’s nervous for a lot of reasons. There are the normal, routine nerves that one feels the first time they meet their significant other’s family but Jared comes with a whole new bonus pack of nerves. He’s not exactly afraid to travel outside of the world he’s built for himself but it does leave him concerned because he’s not sure how wheelchair friendly Jensen’s parent’s house is. Adding the icing to the cake, he’s been stuck on the fact that they are spending the night in Dallas; translation – he and Jensen are going to be spending almost 36 hours straight together.

“You okay, Jared?” Jensen asks as he turns his head to give Jared a smile.

It’s the smile that catches Jared off guard, not the question. He blinks and swallows before spitting out, “You’ve got a great smile. Like…seriously…” Sucking his lips in, Jared nods. “Really good.” Because it is good. It’s like Jensen’s whole face lights up.

A blush creeps onto Jensen’s cheeks and he lets out a bashful laugh before turning to face the road again while shaking his head slightly. “Th-thanks. But that’s not what I asked.”

“What did you ask?” Jared hadn’t heard much and he feels silly that Jensen’s smile could do that to him.

“I asked if you were okay. You look kind of lost over there.”

“Guess I am kind of lost.” Jared sees the way Jensen’s eyebrows furrow in concern and he touches the man’s thigh as a means of comfort. “I mean, don’t get me wrong, I’m not checking out of the situation. I’m just…well…a little nervous. It’s a lot for me to take off with a person, regardless of how charming they are, without a plan of attack. You know? And I’m meeting your family. Your whole family. So, yeah, I am nervous.”

“I get it. I just wanted to make sure you weren’t having second thoughts about coming along. ‘Cause, I could drive you back if you wanted – ”

Jared laughs as he checks the time blinking on the dashboard. “Don’t be ridiculous. We’ve been on the road for a little over two and a half hours. That would be insane. Besides, I don’t want to go back. I just…I don’t want to be nervous. That’s all.”

“Good. Because I really don’t want to take you home for more reason than the fact that my mother would give me one hell of a guilt trip for being and extra 6 hours late. I’ve been looking forward to seeing my family again and it makes it even better that I get to spend time with you as well.”

Jared’s nerves simmer down and he smiles. It has been a nice trip so far. Jensen arrived right on time with the promised egg sandwiches and coffee. He’d even let Jared eat in his car, which he’d said he doesn’t let “just anyone” do. Aside from the anxious jitters in his belly, Jared’s happy. “I’m glad I came.”

“So you’re good?”

“I’m good.”

“Great. ‘Cause we’re here.” Jensen says as the car slows to a crawl and comes to a stop along the property of a stone fronted house. He looks at Jared and squeezes the hand that is still resting on his leg. “Don’t worry. They are going to love you. Come on, if you get a horde or freshmen to adore you, this is going to be a walk in the park.”
“Those are just teenagers.”

“Exactly. They’re not human for a while and you’ve still managed to make some fans. My parents are much better behaved than thirteen year olds. And they won’t use inappropriate wording or get sent to the principal’s office.”

That has Jared laughing and he unclicks his seatbelt with a bit more confidence. “Okay, let’s go.” He lets Jensen retrieve his wheelchair for him and the man holds it steady while Jared hoists himself into it. Getting to the house isn’t much of a problem but they forgo the multi-level walkway and manage to find a path up the driveway.

When Jensen rings the bell, Jared doesn’t have time to do more than brush his hair back and hope it stays down before a blonde woman comes to the door.

“Jensen!” She’s out the door in a second flat and hugging her son around the neck so fiercely that their swaying motion almost jostles Jared’s wheelchair, but Jared can handle that. Jensen seems to have picked up on Jared’s movement because he abandons greeting his mother and rushes towards his boyfriend.

“Jared, you okay. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to – ” He grabs the back of Jared’s chair and shifts it so that it straightens out to face the door.

Waving an apologetic hand, Jared shakes his head. “It’s okay, Jensen. It takes more than an enthusiastic welcome to derail me. I’ve got it.” It’s sweet that Jensen’s concerned, but Jared deals with more than that on a daily basis, especially in the crowded halls of Arkin High School. He looks up to see Jensen’s mother blinking at him, seemingly shocked from her son’s rapid escape from her hug. “Hi,” Jared says with an extend of his hand. “I’m Jared. It’s so nice to meet you. You have a lovely home.”

After more blinking and trying to regain her composure, Jared’s hand is taken and given a light shake. “Hi, Jared. I’m Donna. It’s a pleasure to finally meet you. Jensen’s said such wonderful things about you.”

“Ma,” Jensen mumbles and dips his head to scratch at the nape of his head.

“What?” Donna asks innocently and looks at Jensen. “You have said nice things. I’m just letting him know.”

“I know but…try not to embarrass me…maybe?” Jensen shrugs.


There is a lip on the doorway. It’s fairly simple for Jared to clear on his own but all of the sudden he feels Jensen tipping him backwards and taking it upon himself to help Jared into the house. Jared’s gut reaction is to assert that he could have done it himself but he knows Jensen’s trying to be sweet and is probably almost as nervous as Jared feels about meeting the family. Instead, he turns and gives him a smile. “Chivalry isn’t dead.”

The words cause an immediate curve of Jensen’s lips as they make their way inside. The house is… charming. Jared doesn’t have any other word for it. It is spacious but not so much so that it loses the feeling of warmth Jared is hit with as soon as he gets the full picture. There are traces of family memorabilia scattered throughout and Jared even catches a brief glimpse of what looks to be Jensen’s graduation picture. He makes a mental note to check that out later, when Jensen isn’t pushing him
towards a loud room of people.

Meeting people is honestly a blur. Jared’s good with names and he tries to commit them all to memory. He knows Jensen’s father, Alan, was joking when he said he’d be quizzing Jared later but he can’t help but want to make a good impression by not forgetting anyone. People are nice, as Jared expected them to be. He meets Grandma Dorothy, but is told that Jensen’s siblings will be around later on. There are plenty of other faces to meet. He catches some of them staring at his legs, which he’s usually immune to. It’s a bit different when the people staring are his boyfriend’s family, but he still holds his head high.

Problems arise when Jensen becomes a human version of an assistance dog. He darts off to get Jared plates of snack foods and samplings of munchies that the Ackles have scattered atop the various coffee tables. He checks to make sure if Jared is comfortable what seems like a million times. Jared knows, in Jensen’s heart, it is concern and sweetness that have him acting this way. He knows that Jensen doesn’t truly realize what he is doing. What Jensen’s really doing is making Jared stick out from the crowd. Everyone on the premises can take care of themselves and Jensen’s doting has made it glaringly obvious that Jared’s different than the rest of the guests. It’s habitual for people to act like that around Jared, in fact, he’s even caught people talking slower and louder around him, as if his legs have something to do with his ability to understand them. It’s a knee-jerk reaction. He gets it. Some people just don’t know how to interact with him upon first meeting. So, Jared gives Jensen smiles and lets him know that he should relax and enjoy some time with his family rather than fawning over him.

Jared realizes, however, that he’s going to have to be a bit sterner with his feelings about the situation. Once people move the party outside, to a series of deck work that involves multiple levels and is a seeming nightmare for a person bound to a wheelchair. Jared doesn’t think it will be easy, but his brain is figuring out how much of the deck he can handle and navigate. As he’s about to take action on his own, Jensen kneels down in front of him.

“Hey…I’m sorry if this is too much for you. We can just stay inside if you –” Jensen’s eyes go wide as Jared presses a finger to his lips.

“Shh. Stop, Jensen. It’s fine.”

“I could carry you if you –”

Jared’s finger returns to Jensen’s lips and he feels the way the man is trying to work them into further suggestions. “No.” Using one hand, he rolls himself back and forth enough to look like he’s swaying. “No. That is insane. I’m in a wheelchair, Jensen. Not an invalid. I can handle most of the deck. Don’t expect me to get up to that top area where it shoots off into a small seating area, but I can handle the rest. You? You’ve got to have some faith in me. I told you that sometimes people don’t know how to handle the fact that I am in a wheelchair and sometimes they overcompensate by having too much concern.”

Jensen nods in an effort to show Jared he’s following along.

“Jensen?” Jared says with a smile.

“Yeah?”

“You’re having too much concern right now.” Not wanting to hurt Jensen’s feelings, Jared adds, “It’s sweet, really. And it means so much to me that you care, but I need you to trust me. Just let me be me for a little bit. Okay?”
“Okay, so…No more catering to your every whim?” Jensen asks nicely, like he’s still trying to make that option sound attractive.

Smirking, Jared rolls his eyes playfully. “Oh, there can be catering. Only…not here and not because you think I can’t get a serving of spinach dip for myself.”

“I did do that, huh?”

“Yeah, you did. It’s okay though. I’m not mad.” Curling his fingers around Jensen’s hand, Jensen gives him a lingering squeeze.

“I just want you to be comfortable.”

Jared melts at the sincerity of those words on Jensen’s lips. He almost feels bad for bringing it up, but if he wants him and Jensen to work, they need to have some ground rules. “I am. Trust me. I’ll let you know if something is out of my reach or abilities. I just don’t like this,” he reaches out and grabs Jensen’s hand for a moment, “too far out of reach.”

That seems to calm Jensen’s protective urges and he nods. “Deal. So, lead the way,” he says, sidestepping to allow Jared to direct where they are going.

Jared wasn’t kidding when he told Jensen he has several wheelchairs for multiple purposes. He decided to choose the one he has today because it’s light and allows him to lean back and help the wheel hop up on a raised platform. As long as the raise isn’t too much, he can get up on his own. If not, he’ll ask Jensen. Right now, he’s good. The deck has a scattering of slight raises, which Jared assumes look nice but are rather pointless. Either way, he can navigate. He stops short when he hears someone call Jensen.

“Jen!” The man has a kid on his hip and is waving.

“Josh! Hey man,” Jensen meets the man halfway and pulls him into a hug, both men slapping each other on the back.

The little boy in the man’s arms reaches his hands out and makes grabbing motions towards Jensen. “Uncle Jen, catch me!” He tries to pitch himself forward but his father has a good hold on him.

“Whoa!” Reaching out, Jensen swoops the kid into his arms and throws him in the air. “Hi, Mikey.” The boy lets out loud giggles that increase in volume every time Jensen tosses him up. Laughing himself, Jensen manages to put the child on his shoulders, holding each of his legs firmly. “Jared, this is my nephew Mikey.”

“And I’m his brother Josh,” Josh adds as he holds a hand out towards Jared. “So, I’m guessing you’re Jared.”

“Uhh, yeah, hi.” Jared pulls back a bit and smiles, reaching out to accept the offered handshake. The way the man spoke, let on that Jensen has probably spilled a good deal of information to his brother but Josh looks genuinely happy to meet him, and he’s the first one Jared gets that feeling from. “It’s nice to meet you. Looks like you’ve got one little ball of energy over there.”

“Mikey?” Josh whistles. “You have no idea. Say ‘hello’ to Jared, Mikey.”

The little boy leans so that Jensen has to get a better grip on him. “Hello. You have wheels,” he adds in curiosity.

“Yeah, I do,” Jared emphasizes the point by rolling forward enough to close the gap between him
and Jensen. “You like wheels?”

Nodding his head enthusiastically, Mikey gives an unmistakable yes. “I have cars and trains and carts and planes and wagons and…and…and…” His excited ramble goes on and on, his age and vocabulary limit making him trip over his words every now and then.

Jared laughs. “So this rambling thing is genetic then?”

Snorting, Josh shakes his head. “Oh, you’ve got him rambling? He must like you then.”

“Don’t act so innocent,” Jensen says in defense as he plots the excited child on the ground. “You ramble too, Jared.”

Jared shrugs and shares a knowing smile with Jensen. “Guess I must like you too.”

Clearing his throat, Josh asks, “So you’re a teacher too?” but he never gets an answer because Mikey tries to scale Jared’s wheelchair. “Mikey!”

“It’s okay,” Jared reassures.

Mikey somehow gets onto Jared’s lap and smiles at him. “Can I play with your wheels, Jah-red?”

That smile is almost as deadly as Jensen’s and Jared can’t refuse him. “Play? Not really. I need these wheels to get around. My legs don’t work like yours do, but, if it’s okay with your daddy, maybe we can go for a ride together?” He looks up to Josh for an answer.

“Please daddy! Please. Can I go ride with Jah-red?”

“If Jared says it’s okay, then it is okay with me.” Josh gives Jared a more serious look. “You sure?”

“Absolutely. Don’t worry.” Shifting Mikey so he is more securely seated on his lap, he backs up towards the edge of the deck so he can thump down a couple of steps and land himself on the grass. “Ready, kiddo?”

“Yeah!” Mikey cheers enthusiastically and giggles when Jared uses his strength to wheel himself as fast as he possibly can.

He wants to get a chance to talk to Josh, he really does, but Jared figures that charming the nephew is scoring him some serious brownie points with all parties involved. Besides, Mikey is the cutest thing and clearly thinks Jared’s his new best friend. It feels good that he doesn’t have to work too hard to win another member of the Ackles family over.

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Jensen knows he’s watching Jared out of the corner of his eye despite the fact that he promised Jared he’d stop being overprotecting. Still, it’s hard for him to drop that. The problem is, he’s seen what Jared can do on the basketball court and that knowledge goes two ways. He’s dealing with it, but he can’t help but worry that something is going to happen to Jared and Jensen will feel like he should have been able to prevent it.

Right now, however, Jared seems perfectly content to be mingling with his family. It may have taken a few hours and a full belly of food, but people have warmed up to Jared. Right now, Josh is chewing his ear off about something and from the goofy look on his sister’s face, Mackenzie is trying to fish blackmail dirt out of Jared. Jared seems to be handling himself perfectly.
“He’s great, you know,” Donna says as she falls in alongside her son on the outskirts of the deck.

Being broken from his thoughts, Jensen shakes his head. “Huh?”

“Jared. He’s great. I… I have to admit. I didn’t want him to be. I thought maybe this was a phase that would pass. You know you have a bleeding heart for people. And I thought being with Jared was just…I don’t know. Something you were doing because of that. But I kind of see it now.” Hooking her arm around Jensen’s she pouts. “I’m sorry if I ever gave you the impression that I disapproved of him. I might have…but it was only because I was worried about you. I don’t want you getting involved with someone for the wrong reasons. You can’t fix him, Jensen. You know that, right?”

“There isn’t anything that needs to be fixed,” Jensen replies honestly.

“Good answer,” a deeper voice chimes in.

The voice startles Jensen and he twists to see his father wiping a sheen of sweat that built on his forehead from grilling. “Oh, dad. Hey. Didn’t see much of you today.”

“That’s because I’ve been feeding a throng of hungry people.” Tossing the towel he’d been using aside, Alan slaps Jensen on the back with pride. “I mean it, you know. About Jared? That was a good answer. Your mom? She’s just worried. I am too. You’re a good man Jensen. You deserve another.”

“He’s a good person, dad.”

“I can see that. He hasn’t put up a flag in surrender yet. I know we,” he makes a gesture to the people milling about, “can be a lot, but he seems like he’s up for the challenge.” Pausing in thought, Alan gives his son a nod. “I like ‘im.”

“Me too. I… shit, dad, I like him a lot. He’s…” floundering for a word, Jensen looks up at the sky and shrugs. There are a bunch of things Jared is to him but it’s hard to figure out how to patch them together into a sentence that makes sense. He’s strong hands and clay smudges. If he said that to his father, he’d get nothing but a confused stare but the thought makes Jensen’s heart flip-flop in his chest.

“He’s something if he has you speechless right now,” Donna adds as she leans her head against Jensen’s shoulder. “Come on, we have a cake to serve and an old lady who gets awfully cranky if she doesn’t get her desert. I swear, she’s worse than you, your brother and your sister when you were kids.”

“Hey, I still get cranky if I don’t satisfy my sweet-tooth every now and then.” Jensen laughs and slips out of his mother’s hold so he can help grab deserts from the kitchen. In no time, a cake is set on the outside table, candles are lit, and people are called to come gather round.

His grandmother gets up from her chair on the second level of the deck and Jensen catches her wobble near the steps. She tries to grab the railing but misses by inches and flails. In an instant, Jared’s lightening quick reflexes have him wheeling into position to bounce down the small staircase and hit the brakes just in time to catch Grandma Dorothy in his lap.

There is a gasp from everyone who watches as their matriarch almost falls to the ground and then an equally loud sigh of relief when she lands safely in Jared’s arms.

Dorothy is pale as a ghost and it takes her a moment to get her bearings. “What happened?” she asks to no one in particular. Blinking, she takes note of the deck where she once stood and the fact that she is most definitely not where she last remembers being. “Oh!” Putting a hand to her mouth in
embarrassment, she speaks apologetically. “I must have gotten a little dizzy.” Turning her head, she comes face to face with Jared. “Thank goodness you were here! You saved clumsy old me from ruining this party.”

“Glad to be of assistance, ma’am.” Jared smiles, his dimples popping and eyes gleaming.

Dorothy holds onto him more firmly, still not sure of how steady she is. “My, what strong arms you have. Glad to see my grandson is in such capable hands.”

The whole crowd of people laugh, even Jensen, but his cheeks are burning and he’s thanking god his grandmother doesn’t know exactly how amazing Jared’s hands are. His heart’s still racing from watching his grandmother’s near fall but the sense of calm that washes over him is surprising. He’s sure it has everything to do with what he’s looking at. Jared, out of everyone there, was the most capable of all. Clearly not the weak person some of his family may have taken him for. Jared catches his eyes and they share a secret smile, like they are both glad that “such capable hands” are part of this relationship.

“My hero,” Dorothy says, grabbing Jared’s chin and planning a motherly kiss on his cheek. “Maybe I’ll steal you away. You think Jensen would mind?” She laughs and winks at her savior.

“Well, he might be a little broken hearted. Besides, you’re a married lady. I’m not the type to step in on that,” Jared jokes along. “But any time you need saving? You give me a call.”

With a shaking finger, she adds, “I’m going to take you up on that.”

After watching the scene between his boyfriend and grandmother, Jensen runs down the steps to help her to her feet. “You okay, grams?”

“Absolutely sweetheart. You’ve got one fine man over there.” She gives Jared another wink before taking her grandson’s arm. “Oh, don’t worry. I won’t take him from you. See, we’ve made an arrangement. But….Alan?” She yells towards her son. “Jared gets the first piece of birthday cake. As big as he wants.”

Jensen laughs at his grandmother’s silly sense of a reward, helping her up the steps but looking over his shoulder to mouth a thank you to his boyfriend.

Dorothy pipes up and waves at Jared to follow her. “Come on, Jared. You sit next to me. Gotta help me blow out the candles. This could be my last. You never know when I’ll trip and fall.”

Alan gives a hearty eye-roll. “Mom, don’t be such a doom-sayer.”

“What? If I can’t joke around about it, where is the fun in being saved by a handsome young man?” Dorothy makes a shooing motion at her son and turns back to the task at hand.

After that, Jensen notices a change in the atmosphere. While his family had been welcoming to Jared, there is something more genuine about it. He’s sure they are going to tell stories about Grandma almost smacking into the deck for family gatherings to come. He’s equally sure that the story is going to be blown wildly out of proportion. It’s already evident by the way his cousins are exaggerating the speed at which Jared sprang into action. Either way, he doesn’t care. They seem to be making Jared out to be the hero of the night and he’s perfectly okay with his boyfriend being the center of attention, proud even.

What warms his heart most is when his mother actually pouts at the end of the night after he declines her offer for him and Jared to stay with them for the night rather than a hotel.
“We can’t, mom. This house isn’t exactly Jared friendly,” Jensen explains as he points towards the stairs. “All the bedrooms are upstairs and it’s not a short flight of stairs. Thanks for the offer but we’ll be fine. And, we’ll be back for breakfast tomorrow before we have to take off for home.”

“Okay…I guess you’re right.” She pulls her son into a hug. “It was so good to see you today. We’ve all missed you.”

“Missed you too, ma.” Hugging her back, Jensen sees over her shoulder that Jared is making his way towards them. Most of their goodbyes have been said and there is nothing left to do but bid farewell to his parents and set off on their way. Pulling away, Jensen gives his boyfriend a smile. “You ready, Jared?”

“Yeah, I’m good. Just got your grandmother to let me go by promising her to come back and visit. That…that’s okay, right? I mean, I don’t want to sound presumptuous. But I – ”

“Sweetheart, that’s more than okay,” Donna says with a smile, leaning down to hug Jared for the first time. “You’re welcome in this house whenever you and Jensen can get some time away from work. I know how busy a teacher’s schedule can get.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Ackles.”

“Donna. Call me Donna. Alright? Now you two hit the road before it gets any later and I start worrying about you arriving safely.”

“Ma, it’s ten miles. I think we’ll be fine.”

“I can’t help but worry. It’s the mother in me. You’ll see what it’s like when you have kids of your own.”

Jensen tenses at that but feels confident that he’s able to disguise it enough so that no one picks up on it. Giving a large, general wave to the entire house, Jensen turns to face the exit. “I’ll see y’all tomorrow. Good night.”

“Night boys,” Alan shouts from where he’d been hovering in the background.

It’s only a ten mile drive but boy does Jensen wish it was shorter. His parents love Jared and it’s all because Jared is amazing. It makes him want to kiss the man silly because he’s done sharing Jared with him family. He wants him all to himself for now.

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There had been worries about sharing a hotel with Jensen but Jared’s too tired to really dwell on that for the time being. He’s happy that the hotel they arrive at is accommodating to their first floor room request and that the room is spacious enough for him to move around. Jensen must have thought ahead when making the reservation because Jared saw one or two hotels pass by in route to the current one. That’s something that hasn’t escaped Jared’s attention. Jensen’s diligent in making sure the places they visit have wheelchair access; it’s something he’s been doing since their first date.

Jensen had been a gentleman in the sense that he booked them a room with two queen size beds but Jared hopes he’ll be able to play his cards right and make sure they don’t need the second bed. After using the bathroom first to wash up and get ready for bed, he’d hoisted himself into the bed closest to the bathroom and settled down on the plush mattress. Stripping his shirt off, he made himself comfortable and turned to wait for Jensen.

The door creaks as Jensen steps out in a pair of sweats and wearing his glasses, his face looking
damp from washing it. When he catches Jared looking at him, he smiles. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Jared parrots back before he pats the empty side of the bed. “Care to join me?”

“You sure?” When Jared throws him an ‘are you serious?’ face, he clarifies his feelings. “I mean, yes. I want to but…only if you do too.”

“ Wouldn’t have asked if I didn’t want you to.” Shifting, Jared makes it blatantly obvious how much room is left in the bed. His heart speeds up and he has to swallow once to get a handle of his nerves. But he wants this, and he’s been waiting to get Jensen alone because he didn’t think it would be very polite to suck face in front of his relatives.

Jensen crawls onto the bed, a smirk appearing on his face as he gets closer to Jared. “You were kind of impressive today. Turned me on watching you save the day.”

Raising an interested eyebrow, Jared matches Jensen’s smirk. “Oh? You liked that?”

“A handsome man with strong arms who makes my family happy? What’s not to like. Mikey can’t get enough of you and I’m pretty sure you made a fan for life out of my grandmother.” Shuffling forward on his knees, Jensen gets as close as he can possibly get and bites the corner of his lip. “My grandma did say I was in capable hands with you. Care to prove her right?” Jensen doesn’t wait for an answer. Instead, he dips his head and captures Jared’s lips in a kiss.

Jared melts into the gesture, hands coming up to pull Jensen’s face closer. Considering he’s been thinking of kissing Jensen’s soft lips all day, the actual act has been a long time coming. It’s all the sweeter for it and he feels the butterflies in his stomach kick in.

They kiss for a minute straight as the physical tolls from the day’s events start to fade away. It wasn’t that Jared was putting on a show for Jensen’s family, but his nerves had exhausted him and it feels nice to be in this moment without any pretense or fear of judgment. He smiles into the kiss and sighs happily. He can’t help but let his stream of consciousness out. “You were right. There wasn’t anything to worry about. Your family…they’re great. I…I had a nice time meeting them. I’m happy.” He practically sighs out the last two words and ends with a goofy smile.

“Good.” Jensen leans in further and kisses him breathless, fitting their mouths together so they can coax each other’s tongues into action. They both shift so they are pressed together and can recline in the bed beside each other.

Jared’s hands are all over Jensen, keeping him close and feeling the solidity in his form.

Pulling away, Jensen grabs Jared’s arm and kisses it from the knuckles up to the bicep. Laughing, he looks up at Jared, deliberately placing a slow kiss on Jared’s arm before he speaks. “I bet you my grandmother thinks you manhandle me with these arms or something.”

Jared blushes. “Fuck. Don’t ever mention your grandmother and manhandling in the same sentence. I do not need that visual. Ever. Besides, I don’t usually do most of the manhandling. It’s usually done to me, if you get what I mean. I’m not much good at it, considering my physical limitations. But it’s okay; I can be a pretty bossy bottom if I want to be.”

“Yeah?” Jensen asks curiously.

“Yeah. I can’t do much else. Never physically topped before because…well…it’d be pretty difficult. But, bottoming? Yeah…I love that.”

Jensen hesitates for a moment, biting his lip before the words spill from his mouth in a nervous
tumble. “And…that feels good for you? Like…you can feel stuff down there? Because I was wondering how that would work or if you even liked anything penetrative because…I didn’t know what sensations you were able to feel. I’ve been curious and you said I could ask you any questions I might have. So…this is me asking.”

Jared doesn’t know what to say for a moment because Jensen does have a point. He’s glad the man is speaking about questions clouding his thoughts but it deals with sex and that thought alone has Jared’s dick twitching. He figures if he ever wants to have sex with Jensen in the future, he better let the man know exactly what his body is capable of. “Do I feel things during sex? Hell yeah, I do. It feels really good. Sometimes, though, there are these spotty moments where the numbness shows up but usually I can feel everything and I definitely feel everything internally. Everything works just fine in that department.” As he speaks, he slithers closer. The topic isn’t as uncomfortable to breach as he worried it might be, which he accredits to the bedroom setting and the lazy way Jensen’s stroking his forearm. When he bumps his side into Jensen’s groin, he feels a distinct hardness press into him. Eyes widening and gasping in surprise, Jared blinks at Jensen. The man is seriously turned on or has a third limb vying for room in the bed. It’s an immediate compliment to Jared and he leans forward to kiss Jensen without talking himself out of taking things further.

Jared moans, lips parting and body thrumming with excited energy. “That’s fucking hot, Jared. Hearing you talk about what you like? Hot.” He kisses Jared more intensely before rutting up against him again. “What else do you like?”

“You,” Jared says with a grin. He’s rewarded with Jensen’s hand finding its way to Jared’s thickening arousal and making Jared gasp in pleasure. “I like having my dick played with while I get fingered open.” A shiver of pleasure runs through him and he presses his hips up into Jensen’s hand. “And I like when long fingers work me open and manage to hit my prostate dead on. I can feel all that. I can feel stuff deep inside of me. Sometimes I swear I feel it more intensely than other people because if you hit everything just right, I’ll see stars.” Jared’s groans grow louder as Jensen’s hand strips his cock. By the way Jensen sighs and intensifies the hand-job, Jared understands just how much his boyfriend likes what Jared’s saying. He finds himself choking on a moan and fluttering his eyes back as Jensen pulls out all the stops and catapults him towards the edge of orgasm. Jensen is breathing against his neck and it’s intense in all the right ways. Closing his eyes, he whimpers and imagines what Jensen’s hand looks like as it fists him with fervor under the sheets.

What makes everything better are the moans Jensen’s letting out as well. He’s grown harder and his dick manages to rub against Jared every time his hips make slight bucking motions. “You have no idea how good all of that sounds,” Jensen says as he drags his lips down the column of Jared’s neck and continues to piston his hips in time with the fist working Jared over.

It’s a bit odd because Jensen’s movements land along a stretch of Jared’s side that is partially numb and overly sensitive all at the same time. When he feels Jensen moving, it sets off bursts of excitement in Jared’s belly because he can’t believe he’s found a man who’s turned on by those words rather than concerned that Jared will never be able to handle a physically demanding roll in the bedroom. He’s up for a lot of things, but penetrative sex is an area where he’s limited to specific positions. That’s not to say he’s a dead fish, but he can’t handle anything too crazy, at least not without the right partner.

Things pick up and words fall away as they give up talking in favor of kissing each other’s lips till they’re swollen. Jensen growls from way back in his throat and it kicks Jared’s orgasm into gear. His balls draw up, making him force Jensen into swallowing down Jared’s moans as he latches onto the kiss and stiffens completely. It rolls through him in wave but he gives a shout as the first pulse of come leaves his dick and coats Jensen’s hand.
Jared feels warm all over and loses himself to the way Jensen’s hand feels on his dick. His body is humming with pleasure as the waves wash over him and he loops his arms around Jensen so his palms can cradle the back of Jensen’s head and pull him in for a deeper kiss. “Oh fuck,” he breathes out when his brain finally finds the energy to respond.

“Guess you’re not the only one with ‘capable hands’,” Jensen jokes while kissing along the corners of Jared’s mouth.

“Guess not,” Jared breathes out with a happy sigh. He doesn’t want to move, too happy in his post orgasm haze to focus on much else. But his mind is abuzz with thoughts that Jensen’s turned on by all of these, seemingly more so after making Jared fall apart. That gives Jared and idea and he knows he has to act on it before he gets cold feet.

It takes some maneuvering, but he manages to shimmy his way down the bed so that he can yank Jensen’s sweats down and his lips are an inch away from his boyfriend’s dick. He hears the man hold his breath and draws out the moment seconds longer before he places a kiss on the head. The kiss turns into a series of kitten licks and small intervals of sucking before he manages to get his arms underneath him and he raises himself in a push-up fashion. With that leverage, he’s able to get a good bob going over Jensen’s dick.

“Jared!” Jensen shouts as he throws the blankets off of them to give him a clear visual of what Jared’s up to. “Fuck,” he groans out. Licking his lips, he looks down eagerly at the way Jared’s toying with him. “Your mouth is so…so…fuck.” His words dissolve into a moan when Jared swallows him down in one unexpected move.

That reaction has Jared smiling around Jensen’s dick. He’s wanted to taste Jensen since the man had gone down on him. Having that moment now is pretty damn amazing. He gets to entice more moans out of Jensen’s mouth and when Jensen bucks up, he swallows him down all the more. He uses his arms’ strength to help him move his torso up and down, pulling off enough to swirl his tongue along the head and swipe away the first tastes of Jensen’s pre-come.

Jensen’s careful with him, but not so much so that he’s not absolutely clear how much he wants more and how much he’s enjoying every moment Jared’s lavishing him with.

The appreciation feels good as it coasts over Jared and he’s determined to make this blowjob as good as Jensen deserves.

“Jared…Jare…You should…I’mma…” Jensen tries to make a coherent sentences as he tangles his fingers in Jared’s hair and rug.

“It’s okay. I want you to come. Wanna make you lose it because of my mouth.”

The words must do the trick because Jensen lets out a muffled curse and pushes up into Jared’s mouth, fingers tightening in Jared’s hair and rugs.

“I’m okay. I want you to come. Wanna make you lose it because of my mouth.”

Jared manages to back off enough to swallow everything down without choking. He’s patient about it, lingering there and lapping at Jensen’s dick until he’s positive the last reverberations of the man’s orgasm have played themselves out.

Jensen’s flopped on the bed, glasses askew and an arm thrown above his head as his chest works overtime to catch his breath. “Christ, is there anything you’re not good at.”

“Sudoku,” Jared answers without missing a beat. “All the sexy stuff I’m pretty proficient at,” Jared
saying with a smirk. He’s caught looking at the sheen of sweat on Jensen’s naked chest and sighs.

“That was…awesome,” Jensen breathes out with a breathless laugh. “But…it’s not why I wanted to share a hotel room with you. I hope you don’t think that’s why – mmph!” Jensen’s eyes go wide as Jared shushes him with a closed-lip kiss.

“I know. But I’m glad we had the chance. Work’s been so…stressful. I needed this weekend away from it all and with someone to help me remember what it’s all for. Thank you for inviting me.”

“Glad I could be of service.” Jensen presses a kiss to Jared’s temple and lingers there. They’re both sweaty and hot but they can’t figure out a way to do anything but press their bodies as close as humanly possible. Gathering the energy needed to break away, Jensen sits up and swings his legs over the side of the bed. “Let me grab a wet rag to clean up and then we can conk out.”

“Mmm hmm,” Jared agrees but he’s already lingered in the moment with Jensen too long. Sleep has a firm grip on him. By the time Jensen returns, he distantly registers a warm cloth wiping away the stickiness on his groin before he’s being pulled into a warm embrace where Jensen’s chin fits perfectly over his shoulder.

The lights are flicked off and Jared gives a content sigh. He feels one of Jensen’s arms snake around him and tug him around the belly so that they slot together.

Everything is peacefully, even his worries. The soft fluttering of Jensen’s breath against his pulse points makes him shiver happily and he laces his fingers together with Jensen’s. He wants to say something more as a sendoff to their day but his tongue is thick with sleep and he’s too lazy. Instead, he lets his body ooze contentment and keeps Jensen close.

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Breakfast is completely uneventful. It’s perfect that way. There are no emergency firemen catches or concern from his parents.

All in all, the weekend turns out to be a big success. He’s gotten the difficult situation of introducing his parents out of the way and they seem to be on board with his decision to date Jared. Swaying them over to that opinion wasn’t as hard as Jensen thought it would be but he supposes that’s because Jared makes the situation easier.

He got a text early in the morning from his brother saying that he hoped Jensen took advantage of the hotel room, prompting Jensen to respond with, “None of your business. But if it was, then the answer is yes.”

They’re back in the car again, heading home and towards a full five day work week. The day’s barely over and Jensen’s already mourning the fact that he can’t have another whole day with Jared all to himself.

Jared seems less on edge during the ride back, which Jensen supposes is because they’ve gotten the nerve-wracking moments out of the way. He’s smiling now, dimples out and eyes curving to match his lips. He thinks it’s the perfect time to ask Jared why he needed a weekend away so much. Their interaction after the faculty meeting still has him feeling bothered and he can’t ignore the fact that Jared had been brooding and deliberately avoided talking about the situation.

It’s been bothering him for a while now because the face Jared’s wearing now is the one that should always be on his face. It suits him perfectly. He wants to know what that look of sadness had to do with. Clearing his throat, he eases the car onto the interstate and braves through initiating more
serious conversation. He dives right in because there is no point in dancing around it. “So...since you seem to be in a better mood...I was wondering if everything really is okay at work. I don’t really buy into the fact that you brushed off talking about it for no reason.”

Jared sighs, turning to face Jensen and giving the inquiry some serious thought. “It’s stupid, really.”

“How about I be the judge of that?”

“It’s nothing. I...I was just in a bad mood because Ana’s been giving me some grief. I know she’s pissed that I got the job and her friend didn’t, but that’s not my personal fault. She’s been dying to make my life at Arkin difficult. It’s like she’s hoping I will up and quit one day. But if she thinks that, then she’s got another thing coming. It takes a lot more to scare me away from a job I love with students I care for.”

“And coworkers?” Jensen questions, deliberately avoiding the intense questioning until Jared seems ready for it.

“Ehh, take ‘em or leave ‘em. But there is one who I’m particularly fond of. He’s got these cute glasses and is pretty good looking. Maybe you know him?” Jared’s stretches in the passenger’s seat and gives Jensen a wink.

“Yeah, I know him,” Jensen plays along. “And I hear he was pretty concerned over what was bothering you on Friday afternoon.”

“It’s not a big deal, like I said. It’s just Ana starting some shit. She caught me arriving late to my Studio Art class. I’m never late to my other classes but it’s mathematically impossible for me to be on time for 8th period. I have to travel down the hallway and back while factoring in waiting for the elevator. So, she caught me wheeling up five minutes after the class started. It was like she was purposely looking to catch me and hightailed it to Ray’s office. Ray got all huffy puffy about it and said he had been getting complaints from teachers he wanted to leave unnamed and he was going to have to put a letter in my file. He told me it shouldn’t be a big deal as long as I work on getting to class on time. But I can’t. It’s impossible. It wouldn’t be such a big deal if Ana would busy herself with other things like...I dunno...her own class.” Huffing, Jared unloads the verbal baggage. “I’m sorry to unleash that on you Jensen. I know you have enough on your plate at Arkin. And, like I said, I’m dealing with it.”

Jensen’s stomach twists in knots. He knows exactly what type of meddling trouble Ana can get into. He also knows he has to nip it in the bud as soon as humanly possible or she’ll be riding a power trip all the way to the human resources office and demanding Jared’s termination.

Remedying the situation is all he can think about on the way home. He enjoys his conversations with Jared but the thought is constantly buzzing in the back of his head. It’s there when he drops Jared off at home and walks him to the door.

It’s still nagging at him when he kisses Jared goodnight again and again and again.

He’s fuming by the time he gets home and lets himself into the apartment. Abandoning the fact that he needs to unpack, Jensen leafs through a phone book sitting on the edge of his computer desk. Locating the number he needs, he grabs his phone and dials. It takes two rings before the call is connected but when a woman answers, Jensen clears his throat. “Hello, Ana? It’s Jensen. We need to talk.”

Chapter End Notes
Sorry for the delay. I had a lot of life crap going on. *hugs*
Chapter 7

Jared parks his car in front of his parent’s house and starts the process of getting his wheelchair out and himself seated in it. He’s not exactly ready for his mother’s grilling tactics but he hasn’t seen his family in a while and after the guilt trip she gave him about taking time out of his life to go see Jensen’s family, he knows he’s not going to be able to refuse her. His new job is still draining some of his free time and he’s spending the remainder of it with Jensen, so he knows he’s been neglecting his family duties.

“Jared!” A woman yells with an enthusiastic wave of her arms as she runs down the ramp that leads off the house’s porch. “Baby!”

“Hi, mama,” Jared says with a smile, locking his wheels and bracing himself for the hug that he knows is coming.

Sherri launches herself at her son, hugging him to her chest and kissing him on the cheek. “Hi, baby.”

“Mom,” Jared says, his words muffled against his mother’s body, “I can’t breathe.” He pushes away with a laugh and shakes his head.

“It’s about time that you got yourself over here. We’ve all been waiting for you,” Sherri says, standing upright and dusting herself off.

“Sorry, I lost track of time.”

“Painting?”

“How’d you know?” Jared asks with a confused cocking of his head.

Sherri hums fondly, giving her son a knowing look. “Because you’ve got paint under your fingernails,” she reaches out to brush his cheek, “and on your temple.” She lets out an amused laugh. “Never change, baby.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Jared asks as he scrubs at his temple.

“It means, you live in your own world sometimes. You and art…you two like to distract each other,” Sherri says with a ruffle of Jared’s hair, dodging her son’s attempt to swat her away.

Jared knows he has a habit of getting lost in his artwork but he can’t help it; he’s not going to abandon a project right when he gets into the grove. Art’s the one thing that never left him, he sure as
hell isn’t going to leave it. Still, he feels bad for keeping his mother waiting. “Sorry, mama.”

Sherri waves away his apology and shakes her head. “Come on inside. Jeff and Megan are already here.” She turns and sprints up the ramp, gesturing for Jared to hurry behind her. “Come on,” she repeats.

Jared listens, unlocking his wheels and rolling along after his mother. As soon as he gets into the house, he can hear his siblings bickering over something, but from the tone of it, it’s lighthearted.

Unlike a lot of places Jared frequents, his childhood home is tailor made for him. He can get around the place with a blindfold over his eyes. He rolls into the kitchen where most of the noise is coming from and clears his throat.

Megan’s eyes perk up and she gives Jared a huge smile. “Hey, Roller Skate!”

The nickname is an old one, but it stuck. Ever since Jared was released from the hospital, Megan had a hard time understanding what happened to make her brother’s legs useless. She was young enough to think that bandages and a mother’s kiss could heal everything. Jared told her that he needed wheels to get around now, but it wasn’t so bad. He lied and told her it would be fun. She’d screwed up her face and asked Jared if it would be like being a roller skate. Jared said yes and poof, his new nickname was born. Jared didn’t mind it, but if anyone other than his sister tried to use it on him, Jared would roll over their foot.

“Hey, Meg-ster.” Jared leans back in his chair so that the front pops up as he lands himself beside his sister. “How’s the new job going?”

“Ehh, it’s going. My boss is crazy. She orders all of the interior designers around to do her bidding and then when things don’t go according to plan, she takes none of the blame,” Megan lets out in a rush. “How are you teacher man? Those kids learning anything from you?”

“Doubtful,” Jeff says, as he kicks a foot against the back of Jared’s wheelchair, sending his little brother forward a few inches. It’s a playful action, Jeff’s version of wrestling his brother.

Jared spins to face Jeff and lets out a laugh. “You’re aware that, just because I can’t get out of this chair, I can still take your ass to the ground?”

“Oh yeah?” Jeff barks a laugh and raises an eyebrow at Jared.

“Yeah,” Jared says. It’s actually a fair fight. He’s won just as many times as Jeff has. When he lost his ability to walk, that didn’t mean it took sibling rough housing with it. They adjusted some of the ways they interacted with each other but once Megan and Jeff figured out where Jared was strong and where his weaknesses were, they didn’t go easy on him just because he was in a wheelchair.

Without warning, Jared wheels forward, braced himself against the kitchen cabinet and hooks Jeff around the waist. He’s good with his hands and his arms are stronger than his brother’s, they both know that. Jeff stumbles and Jared lets out a hint of a triumphant laugh. He pushes forward, trying to knock his older brother off his feet but Jeff solidifies his stance and pushes back.

“Boys!” Gerald’s voice booms. “Stop fighting in the kitchen. At least restrain yourselves long enough to take it outside.”

The men immediately drop their hold on each other and try to resume their well-behaved selves.

“Sorry, dad,” Jared says with a guilty look and laughs that his father can still make him feel like a little kid after all these years.
“Yeah, well, try to make it through dinner and then kick his ass,” Gerry says with a hie of his thumb towards Jeff.

“Dad!” Jeff whines.

“What?” Gerry says with a shrug. “You practically threw Jared through the fence last month. It’s about time he kicks your pompous ass.”

Megan lets out a laugh and pops a carrot stick into her mouth, crunching loudly. “Ma, you better get in here before dad starts playing favorites again.”

“I’m not playing favorites,” Gerry defends. “I love you all equally.”

Jared knows it’s true. His father never treats any of them differently and he loves him for that. His parents may have given him more of their energy and attention but they love all their kids in fair shares.

Sherri walks into the kitchen with a smile on her face, leaning against the doorway. “It’s so good to see you all together in one room,” she says affectionately. “Jared’s been so busy, we hardly see him anymore.”

“That’s because our boy here is certifiably in love,” a new voice says, one Jared knows well.

“What’s he doing here?” Jared questions with a roll of his eyes as he wheels himself to face his best friend. Ryan is facing him, wearing a smug grin and wheeling himself back and forth in the doorway to the dining room.

“I invited him,” Sherri says. “I saw from his posts on Facebook that he hasn’t seen you much either. Figured it would be nice to all share a meal.”

Jared groans. “Seriously? Am I the only one who finds it weird that my parents are friends with my friends on Facebook? Or that my parents are even on Facebook to being with?” He looks to his siblings for helps but they come up empty, giving their brother twin shrugs. “Hey, Ry,” Jared says, wheeling closer.

“Hey, lover-boy,” Ryan teases, smirk still on his face.

“Stop it, Ry. It’s not like that,” Jared says, but the flush that creeps onto his face says otherwise.

“Yeah, sure, whatever.” Ryan gives a friendly shove to Jared’s shoulder and turns to smile at Sherri. “Thanks for inviting me, Mrs. Padalecki. I’m starved and god knows I can’t cook anywhere near the way you can.”

“Seriously, Ryan, you can call me Sherri. I’ve known you for years.” Chuckling, she walks past the man and pats him on the cheek. “Alright, everyone in the dining room if you wanna get while the food’s worth getting.”

The family files into the dining room, taking their seats at the table. The room is full of laughter and shared dishes of food. Jared loves this. He loves his family and the chance to let the stresses from his everyday life go so that he can be himself. His family, even Ryan, knows everything about him. He doesn’t have to worry about catty coworkers or the ignorant administration who seem dead set on playing dumb to his requests for mobility equality.

There is a lot to catch up on and Jared’s glad to take a back seat to hearing Ryan rattle off tales of his dating escapades, glad that there isn’t a hint of awkwardness in the fact that they are technically exes.
Jared knows they were both stupid kids when they foolishly thought dating was a good idea. It feels like eons ago and they are confident enough in their friendship to let talk of significant others come without a tinge of jealousy.

The problem with Ryan’s story, is that it sets the wheels turning in Jared’s mother’s head. Sherri turns towards her son with a mischievous glint in her eyes and looks like she’s gearing up for an ambush. “So, Jared…” she draws out as she uses a fork to stab a piece of her food. “How are things with Jensen going? Ryan seems to think you’re falling hard for him.”

Jared gives Ryan a look, complete with a pout to emphasize that he can’t believe his best friend has apparently become his mother’s informant. Rolling his eyes, he throws a dinner roll at the man, landing it on the top of Ryan’s head so that it bounces off and rolls into the next room.

“Ouch, hey!” Ryan rubs at his head. “It’s not like I said anything that wasn’t true.”

Jared throws another roll at Ryan because there is a distinct difference between his parents and his best friend. He tells his parents everything, but he tells his best friend a more personal form of everything. He hopes to god that Ryan knew when to keep his mouth shut and stay mum on the things Jared told him in strict confidence, like the fact that Jensen gave him one of the best blowjobs of his life and is probably the hottest thing on two legs that Jared has ever shared a bed with. The thought alone makes Jared blush, something that doesn’t go unnoticed by anyone.

Megan snorts and throws her brother to the wolves. “Relax, Jare. Ry didn’t tell us anything that would result in that type of blush.” She pops a wedge of potato in her mouth and smirks. “I’m guessing this Jensen must be pretty good beneath the sheets to make you look like that.”

“Megan!” both Sherri and Jared yell at the same time, staring at the woman with dropped jaws.

“I’ve got this covered,” Ryan says with a laugh and throws the roll on his plate at Megan’s chest. When Megan growls at him, Ryan shrugs innocently. “What?” he asks with a glance around the room. “I get two rolls to the head and she doesn’t? I was just cutting to the chase.”

Gerald clears his throat, both a sign of discomfort over talking about his son’s sex life at the dinner table and annoyance that their dinner is making a mess of his dining room. “Will you please stop throwing every roll on the table at each other? I would like to actually eat one before it hits the carpet.”

The comment prompts a deep laugh from Jeff and he plops his roll onto his father’s plate. “Don’t worry pops, I got ya covered.”

“Yeah, and can we please stop talking about Jensen?” Jared blushes again despite himself and hates himself for it. However, he can’t help it. Jensen always does funny things to his heart and his head and he can’t wait until he can see the other man again. It’s always like this with Jensen and for the first time in Jared’s life, he finds himself startled by what exactly is happening to him.

“I’m sorry baby,” Sherri says with a sympathetic smile as she reaches to pat Jared on the hand. “I’m just curious about this Jensen person you’ve been spending so much time with. It seems like you two are really hitting it off.”

“Hitting it off?” Ryan repeats in disbelief. “That’s not hitting it off. No, no, no. Our boy here,” he slaps Jared on the back for emphasis, “is definitely in love.”

“I’m not –” Jared starts with grit but stops himself short, eyes wide in disbelief. He intended to say “in love” but the sentence doesn’t feel truthful anymore and he’s left with a racing heart and silenced
Ryan laughs as he watches Jared’s face morph. “Light bulb.”

There are a million things running through Jared’s head and he can’t believe what direction they are all pointing in. The butterflies in his belly at the sheer mention of Jensen’s name is one thing but the way he’s tripping over his words and flushing like a teenager at his family’s inquiries is another. The sure signs are there. He’s definitely feeling more than ‘like’ for Jensen. It’s bubbling over into something that looks and feels a lot like love and that scares him. He knows what love is because he’s felt the stirrings of it before but the crash and burn that resulted afterwards still makes him feel overly cautious in actually voicing what he’s feeling out loud for everyone to hear. It’s stupid but he almost feels like speaking the words makes it more real.

Sherri looks amused and from the way she’s shaking a knowing head at him, she’s seen the light bulb go off too. “Well, all I am saying is that you should at least invite him over some times so we can get to know him.” Taking a hand and moving it as if she is zipping her lips closed, she nods. “That’s it. I won’t say anymore. I just want to meet this mystery man. But…I’m done. Nothing more to say.” She zips her lips again.

Jared doesn’t believe his mother for a second. He knows she’ll last about five minutes before she starts asking what Jensen’s favorite food is and what day Jared thinks they will both be free.

For now, though, everyone leaves him alone to his thoughts and realization.

They are not even halfway through dinner and the urge to call Jensen already has Jared feeling like his cellphone is burning a hole in his pocket.

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Jared feels like a teenager all over again because his heart hasn’t stopped its awkward rapid beating since he called Jensen when he returned from his parents’ house.

He’s not hungry in the slightest but he still found himself asking the man to come over for a pizza and a movie. Since the moment Jensen didn’t hesitate with a yes, Jared’s been smiling. He’s fussing with his already neat and tidy home by trying to make it neater and tidier; this apparently translates to moving the couch’s throw pillows around into three different set ups and then going back to the way he always does things. He’s nervous even though he’s had handfuls of people over to eat pizza and watch a movie. It’s different this time, he supposes, because none of those people have green eyes he can drown in and can make his mouth go dry and his dick go hard.

The doorbell rings and Jared rakes a hand over his face in hopes that he can compose himself and not look as eager on the outside as he feels on the inside. With a deep breath, he wheels himself towards the door, pulling it open with a wide smile on his lips and he knows immediately the fact that he’s thrilled to see Jensen is written all over his face. “Hi, Jensen,” he breathes out as he wheels back enough to let the man inside.

“Hey, Jared,” Jensen says. His tongue peeks out to lick his lips before he smiles. “I brought more beer for you to try. Don’t worry, no IPAs this time.” A mishmash six-pack of beer is held up towards Jared.

“Awesome,” Jared says but he can’t get much else out because Jensen’s smiling wider and it’s like the man has the power to reduce all of Jared’s thoughts into a stuttering mess. Jensen’s wearing his glasses, but his eyes are still bright, all the more emphasized by the hues in his turquoise t-shirt. It’s actually the most dressed down Jared’s seen him and he thinks Jensen looks just as good in a button
down as he does right now.

There is a moment of awkwardness that always accompanies situations like this. It’s something Jared’s gotten used to but most of the two legged acquaintances take a while to figure out how to greet him. Because he’s not on the same level of most of the people he interacts with, a hug doesn’t happen as smoothly. For a man of Jensen’s size to get down and hug him or place a kiss on his lips, he’d have to lower himself into a position that probably wasn’t very comfortable to hold. So they’re frozen in a moment of Jared wishing Jensen would but wondering if he will.

Jensen cuts down the hesitance between them by bending at the waist, leaning toward Jared and putting both his palms on the armrests of Jared’s wheelchair. From the angle at which he pitches forward, he’s pushing onto the balls of feet and maneuvering himself so that he’s almost brushing noses with Jared. They stare at each other for a moment, enough time for Jensen to smile and wiggle his eyebrows playfully at Jared before pressing their lips together.

Jared smiles against Jensen’s plush lips and closes his eyes. The kiss is brief but it’s the perfect “hello” and quells some of the nervousness in Jared’s belly. He opens his eyes and sighs softly. “Hi,” he repeats.

“Hi.” Jensen gives Jared another quick kiss before pressing away from Jared. “I’m glad you called. I could definitely use a mellow night with pizza, a good movie, and good company.”

“Oh, yeah? Rough day?” As much as Jared would like to repeat of what just happened, he doesn’t want to spend the whole night lingering in the house’s entranceway. Wheeling backwards, he spins around and heads towards the den.

“No, not really. I was just hoping you’d call.” There is no veiled enthusiasm; Jensen’s laying all out in the open.

“Oh,” Jared says with a smirk. “Well, I, for one, had a long day. I went to my parents for the day. Brother, sister, Ryan, the whole nine yards,” he rattles off.

“I know how that can be. I mean, you met my family.” Jensen shrugs.

“Yeah, I did. And they were wonderful,” Jared says with a smile as he wheels off towards the kitchen to grab a couple of pint glasses and a bottle opener. He yells over his shoulder, “but I guess you know what it’s like to have a sister and brother who like to bust your balls.”

“It’s hard for me to believe anyone can bust your balls.”

“Yeah, well, siblings can.” Running one hand though his hair, Jared holds a pint glass out towards the man with his other. “They were pretty intent on grilling me about you.”

“Me?” Jensen says while dumbly pointing to his chest.

“Mmm hmm.” Nodding, Jared wheels back to the couch. “They want to meet you. Told me I should invite you over for dinner sometime soon. If my mother had it her way, she’d have you over last week.” He looks at Jensen with earnest eyes. “But you don’t have to. Trust me. No pressure. They’ll all survive if you don’t take them up on their offer.”

“I’d love to meet them. If you can handle my family and my grandmother flirting with you, I think it’s only fair that I get to see what your family has to offer.” Jensen picks up the beer he brought along and gestures towards Jared with it. “Want one?”

“You got anything Belgian in there?” Jared asks, still stuck on the fact that they are actually doing
the whole *meet the parents* thing.

“I’ve got a Belgian style ale, is that close enough?”

“Yeah. You brewed it?” Jared reaches out for the label-less bottle and turns it over in his hands.

“Yep. Brewed the Hefeweizen too. Since you didn’t like the IPA too much last time I brought beer, I figured I would try some others. I’ve been aging some of these for a while and I think you’ll like them more.

“I’m impressed,” Jared whistles before he adds, “yet again.” Putting the bottle and his pint glass on the couch, he positions himself so he can hoist himself out of the wheelchair and onto the plush cushions. Patting the area beside him, he tilts his head towards it. “Come take a seat. I’ve already ordered a pizza. If you don’t mind getting the door when delivery arrives, I figured I could get comfortable over here.”

“No problem.” Jensen follows Jared’s lead and takes a seat beside the man.

“You really want to meet my family?” Jared’s back on that subject again. He pops the top on his beer and starts to pour it into his pint glass, settling the empty bottle on the table beside the couch as he brings the glass to his lips.

“I wouldn’t have said so if I didn’t mean it.” Jensen laughs at the disbelief in Jared’s voice. “Why? Should I be scared? Are they like, rifle wielding maniacs who are going to threaten my life or something?”

The question makes Jared choke. It’s an ungraceful move but it’s all he can do to stop himself from spitting his mouthful of beer out his nose. Coughing to clear his airways, his eyes water as he composes himself. “No!” he insists with a shake of his head and a laugh. “They’re not like that at all. They’re *great*. I love them. But they are nosy and don’t understand the definition of personal space. So, if you’re okay with that, there shouldn’t be any problems. There are no rifles involved. I promise.”

“Well, that’s comforting,” Jensen says with over exaggerated relief. He pours his own beer and takes a drink, slowing down the tasting process to savor his first sip.

Jared watches him and lets his thought slips from his lips. “You have no idea how attractive it is to me that you appreciate drinking beer out of a glass rather than straight out of the bottle.”

“Oh, man, of course. It’s ten times better. You can’t appreciate the full taste of a beer if you’re not giving it greater exposure with the air. You’d be surprised how many people don’t understand that.”

“No I wouldn’t. Ryan prefers to drink directly from the can or bottle.”

Jensen puts a hand over his heart like the news pains him. “No!”

“Sadly, yes.” Jared nods and lifts his glass towards Jensen. “To us. May we drink many more beers happily poured in glasses.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Their glasses clink together and they both take a long swig.

Jared hums in approval around the rim of his glass. “Mmm, it’s good.” Relaxing back into the couch, he lets some of the tension and nervousness go. “Man, I just wanted to get out of my parents’ house today. They kept talking about you and I realized I hadn’t even gotten a decent chance to talk to you this weekend. Kinda felt guilty about that, but…to be fair, I haven’t seen my parents often either.
So…yeah.” He stares down at his glass and busies himself with taking another drink. What he wants to say is, “I missed my boyfriend all week” but the thought makes him blush because Jensen’s more than a boy and a friend. The word doesn’t seem to fit. Now that he’s stuck thinking about Jensen, he tilts his head up again and catches the way Jensen’s lips are smirking. Stupid sexy lips, he thinks before he finds himself reacting to the own pull of his body and leaning forward to kiss Jensen.

Initially, Jensen’s a little slower on getting the kissing memo, but as soon as Jared’s lips work against his, he parts his mouth enough to allow Jared’s tongue space to sweep inside.

At the taste of Jensen’s mouth, Jared moans. He intensifies the kiss and sneaks his tongue inside Jensen’s mouth again, this time letting it snake around the other man’s. His taste buds are hit with something sweet and light which gives way to the hotter feeling he now associates with Jensen’s mouth.

They lean more of their weight into each other and find themselves maneuvering their head’s so that they can urge the kiss on and licks the taste of beer out of each other’s mouths.

The kiss dies down organically, both men pulling back in small increments. When they part, their chests are rising a bit more rapidly but their eyes are smiling more.

Jared grins and snatches Jensen’s beer without warning, taking a gulp from it. It’s the same light sweet taste he’d found inside Jensen’s mouth. “I think I like that beer even more than the Belgian,” Jared breathes out. “Though, it does taste better on the inside of your mouth.”

A shiver visibly runs through Jensen and Jared can tell the man likes the sound of that. “Funny, I was just going to say that I think the Belgian tastes even better when it’s on your tongue. I think,” Jensen starts with a playful wiggle of his eyebrows, “we should taste all of my beers this way.” He leans in and kisses Jared hard and fast, his tongue running along the inside of Jared’s mouth and getting another taste.

Jared’s breathless because he thinks that is a fantastic idea. He also hopes that Jensen brews more than just four types of beers because he thinks they need some serious taste testing. “Oh, yeah? You think that?”

“Yeah, I really do.” Jensen goes in for another kiss in an attempt to prove his point but the doorbell interferes. “Pizza, I guess. I’ll get it.” Jensen laughs. “If you’re good, I’ll let you see what pizza tastes like on the inside of my mouth.” He doesn’t wait for a response before pushing off of the couch. He readjusts himself before and heading towards the door.

Jared groans. He didn’t miss Jensen’s state of arousal and can’t blame him; his own dick is quickly thickening in his jeans and he bites his bottom lip. Drinking beer should not be nearly as arousing as it’s suddenly become but he can’t stop thinking about the way Jensen’s lips feel against his and the playful sweetness they both shared.

Jensen’s back quickly enough, pizza in hand and he thumps it on the cocktail table. There was supposed to be a movie involved in all of this but they fall into heavy conversation and forget about that detail all together. Never one to pass up food, Jared realizes he’s actually still hungry and munches along with Jensen. Jared still had thoughts of Jensen’s lips and everything in the back of his mind but he’s happily entertained by listening to Jensen wax poetic about the different type of hops he’s trying to use in his beer. It’s all Greek to Jared; all he knows about beer is that he likes it. He does, however, like listening to Jensen talk about it because the man has an energy about him and Jared knows what it’s like to be passionate about something. Hell, he’s definitely gone on rants to Jensen in the past about art related subject matter. It’s nice to be on the opposite side of the conversation.
There are still three slices left in the box when Jensen falls back against the couch and declares, “I’m stuffed.” He looks sated and happy as he stretches his arms over his head.

“Me too. I’ll just go put the leftovers in the refrigerator.” Jared goes to reach for his wheelchair.

“I’ll do it,” Jensen says but then waves his hands in front of his face apologetically. “Not because I think you can’t do it yourself or that I’m babying you. I just…well…I don’t mind.”

Jared laughs. “It’s okay, Jensen. Doing nice things for me doesn’t always equate to you babying me. There is a difference and I know what it is. And I’m too stuffed to move, so, yes. That would be nice.”

“Oh, okay.” Jensen stands up and grabs the box. He smirks to himself and thinks aloud, “Leftovers aren’t so bad. I like pizza right out of the refrigerator in the morning.” He gives Jared a smile and walks to the kitchen.

Jared finds himself smacking his lips. He swore he was stuffed but it’s apparent that he’s hungry for something different entirely. The way Jensen’s ass looks in those jeans is waking Jared’s dick up again and he wonders exactly what prompted Jensen’s last comment. He remembers from their first meeting that Jensen’s keen on cold pizza but applying the fact to the pizza Jared just bought and insinuating that Jensen is going to be eating that pizza in the morning is doing wildly happy things to Jared’s brain.

It’s what he’s thinking about when Jensen returns and Jared stops himself from babbling about how Jensen can eat all the cold pizza he wants tomorrow morning by tugging on the man’s shirt and bringing him down for a kiss. There are trace tastes of beer and pizza involved but, mostly, Jared tastes Jensen and it makes his body hum.

Jensen presses in closer, shifting onto the couch so that he’s practically straddling Jared’s hips with each of his knees. He doesn’t lower any of his weight, essentially hovering an inch from Jared’s lap.

Jared guesses why he’s hesitant, but Jared’s paralyzed, not a piece of porcelain. Grabbing Jensen’s hips, he forces the man to lower himself so that his ass is seated on Jared’s thighs. In the position, Jared’s left to tilt his head up so that he can match Jensen’s kisses, but he’s used to looking up at the world and he’ll happily look up for Jensen. The man’s lips feel amazing, but they are rougher now than before. Needier. Hungrier.

A low hum or laughter leaves Jensen’s throat. Pressing their foreheads together, he pulls his lips away enough to speak. “Does it sound cheesy if I tell you how much I’ve been looking forward to being able to do this again? Cause…I’ve been thinking about it a lot.”

“Then less talking. More doing.” Jared crashes their lips together and Jensen is completely on board. Their kisses get most desperate and somewhere along the line, Jared slips. He goes horizontal on the couch, Jensen tumbling on top of them. The beautiful thing about it is that they don’t even stop kissing. Instead, they fumble around blindly and get into a new position. Jensen actually reaches back on his own and pulls Jared’s legs up on to the couch and Jared’s glad for it because it allows Jensen to completely blanket Jared with his body. Their hands are everywhere: under their shirts, on their jaws, laced in each other’s hair.

Considering their position, it’s not difficult for Jared to realize that Jensen’s hard and wanting more. Whether Jensen means to or not, his hips are jumping every now and then, brushing into Jared’s matching erection and leaving them both groaning.

They’ve been dating for a while and Jared’s always a little gun-shy about going any further with
people on two legs but he *wants* Jensen and he can tell the other man feels the same. His blood feels like it’s boiling and he’s gasping when he pulls back. “Wanna…wanna go to my bedroom?”

“What do you think?” Jensen says with a glint of teeth and a roll of his hips.

“Oh, god,” Jared moans when Jensen’s dick presses up against his own. It’s a very definite “yes” and Jared’s heart flutters away, leaving him feeling lightheaded. Then Jensen’s kissing him again, sucking little bruises into his neck and trailing wet lips over the curve of his jaw. “That’s a yes,” Jared says out loud to clarify things. He puts two hands on Jensen’s chest and shoves him away because he’s not going to be able to make it to the bedroom if those lips keep nibbling at him.

“Bedroom.”

“Lead the way.”

Jared scrambles, almost falling off the couch as he reaches for his chair. He takes note of the way Jensen lets him figure it out on his own – a noted improvement from his behavior during Grandma Dorothy’s birthday party. Once in the chair, he wheel’s towards his bedroom. Jensen’s never seen this part of his house before and he’s nervous for silly reasons but he’s sure he’ll get over that once he gets Jensen in his bed.

Pushing the door open, they rush inside. The room isn’t anything phenomenal but it’s neat and spacious, perfect for Jared’s needs. There are some of Jared’s favorite creations hanging on the wall and he sees Jensen acknowledge them but Jared’s going to save the explanations for later.

Jensen’s cheeks are flushed and he spins on his heels and cups Jared’s face with both hands. He lowers himself enough to kiss the seated man deeply. He looks lost as what to do other than keep kissing. After parting to catch their breath, his eyes are expressive as he speaks. “Jared, can I…pick you up? I need to get you on that bed and – ”

“Yes,” Jared declares without bothering to hear the remainder of Jensen’s plea. He’s in the air before he can wrap his brain around the action and lets out a shocked gasp followed by a hum of arousal. Jensen’s stronger than he looks or just that horny because he moves Jared like he weighs nothing. It turns Jared on and he lets the feeling rush through his body.

Then they are kissing again, but Jared wants more. He tugs at Jensen’s shirt and it’s off in a flash. Jared pushes himself up on his elbows, taking the time to rid himself of his own shirt. He’s glad he and Jensen partook in that bit of dirty talk in the hotel because he has an idea of how things are going to go. Still, Jensen looks like he’s holding back. His fingers are on Jared’s belt buckle but he’s licking his lips and waiting for permission. “I really want you to fuck me,” Jared says. It’s blunt but, considering what they are about to do, it’s aptly fitting.

“I really want to fuck you.” Jensen pushes Jared down on the bed, tugging at Jared’s jeans and lifting the man’s hips so he can get the clothing out of the way. He strips out of the rest of his clothing and crawls over Jared, lowering himself so he can drag his lips over Jared’s sculpted chest and down over his belly. “You got some lube?”

“Yeah,” Jared says as he flails his arm towards the night stand. “Top drawer.” He flops his head back on the pillow while Jensen fetches it and lets his eyes close. His heart is hammering against his chest and he’s a little worried about how tonight will shift his and Jensen’s relationship but he’s mostly burning up with the need to have any part of Jensen inside him. What he doesn’t expect is to feel warm, wet heat around his dick and he snaps his eyes open, propping himself up on his elbows just in time to see Jensen’s mouth swallow him down. “Shit,” Jared hisses with clenched teeth. Jensen’s mouth is *good* and he thinks the feeling is every better when he gets to watch. His arousal spikes to new heights when Jensen rolls his eyes up to meet Jared’s gaze just as he is pulling off
Jared’s spit slick dick and swallowing him back down again. There is something extra dirty about the fact that Jensen’s still got his glasses on. It’s a mixed bag of bad naughty dirty good sexy hell-yes and Jared swallows thickly.

Jensen keeps going down on Jared and the younger man has to bite his lip to hold himself from orgasm. It’s not fair. What Jensen’s doing feels amazing but he wants more. Problem is, he also wants this.

Jensen manages to solve that problem for Jared in a way the man didn’t expect. Just as Jensen presses his tongue over the crown of Jared’s cock, a very slippery finger appears at the rim of Jared’s entrance. It’s hesitant at first, the digit tracing the furled muscle before pressing inside and making circle motions to coax it into relaxing.

“Holy,” is all Jared gets out before he dissolves into a dirty moan. He hears Jensen snicker proudly as the finger sinks deeper. It makes Jared send up a silent thank you over the fact that Jensen seems to have committed to memory the fact that he likes to get blown while he’s worked open.

Another finger is added and Jensen intensifies the suction on Jared’s dick. By the time a third finger is added, Jensen’s grown a little sloppy. There is saliva glistening on Jared’s dick and his ass is slicked up with lube. Jared is able to flutter his eyes open and catch sight of Jensen humming around his arousal and he knows he’s leaking pre-come into the man’s mouth. There is no doubt about it when Jensen’s fingers aim deep and brush against all the right nerves in Jared’s body, making him jerk involuntarily.

Jensen does it again and Jared makes as gasp that sounds a little like Jensen’s name but mostly like the word “fuck.”

Jared’s mind is reeling from fact that Jensen’s fingers are inside him and stroking parts of him that are just between the two of them. It gives him a rush. “I’m good. Real good.”

Pulling off Jared’s dick with a popping sound, Jensen gives a spit slick smirk. “Yeah?”

“Mmm hmm.”

Jensen doesn’t argue with Jared but once he has a condom rolled over his length, the wheels in his head start turning and he freezes. “So…we should…um…”

Jared thinks that this is probably the part where he would part his legs in a very obvious invitation but he can’t actually do that. Instead, he makes things less awkward by telling Jensen exactly how they should proceed. “I’m good on my back. You can shove my legs to the side or throw them over your shoulder if you think they’ll be in the way…which they might be. I can’t move them so…they just kind of lay there.” He laughs to show that he’s comes to terms with that.

“Oh, okay…” Jensen takes his glasses off and folds them onto the nightstand. “So, this okay?” he asks as he lifts Jared’s legs individually and hooks them over his shoulders. At the angle he’s holding his body and the pressure he’s putting against Jared’s thighs, it’s easy to say that Jared’s legs aren’t going anywhere.

“I’m fine.” Jared says.

“You sure?”

“Yeah. I’m good. Trust me.” Jared hopes his voice isn’t shaking because he knows his body is. He’s almost afraid to breathe and shatter the moment by making a fool of himself but he’s nervous. The only thing that makes him feel a faction better is that Jensen’s clearly nervous too.
Jensen modifies his position between Jared’s legs so he can fall forward onto his palms and hover his face about Jared’s. He’s able to keep himself up on one palm while he reaches back with the other hand, guiding the tip of his dick to Jared’s prepped entrance.

For Jared, having someone breech his body isn’t what has him sucking in his breath. His sense of feeling there has been spotty since the accident. The thing that makes him hiss in the ‘pleasure spiked with pain’ sort of way is when he feels the stretch deeper. As soon as Jensen reaches that point, Jared tilts his chin towards the ceiling and closes his eyes. He savors being about to feel where Jensen’s stretching him wider and gives a contented exhale.

The two of them go still, blinking at each other until Jensen lets his head hang. Taking a deep breath, he shoves his hips forward the rest of the way until he’s balls deep. A sigh escapes his lips and his eyes close. The smile on his face speaks of absolute contentment and he takes a shallow breath. He pulls out slowly and sinks back in, adding more speed as he repeats the process several more times.

Jensen moves his hips and gives them an added push when he’s as deep inside Jared as he can go. It causes a ripple effect in Jared. It helps nudge the head of Jensen’s dick against Jared’s prostate, making him tremble. It feels fantastic and Jared bites back a moan because he’s falling apart way too quickly. Having a gorgeous man above him and inside him is a lethal combination to his restraint. It’s been a long time since he’s had penetrative sex, making him overly responsive from the start. Coupled with the way Jensen keeps hitting his prostate dead on, Jared’s not really sure if he can stop himself from losing control.

Jensen groans and presses his lips against Jared’s, shifting his hips so he hits even deeper.

“Augh!” Jared bites his lip and tries to freeze. His whole body goes tense in an attempt to hold onto this moment. As much as he wants to hold it together, it’s all slipping through his control too fast for him. Jensen’s moving faster, his strokes long and smooth, and he’s making gorgeous, appreciative noises. Jared feels like everything is plotting against him. His excitement and arousal are hurdling him towards an orgasm and he’s left blinking in disbelief. He wills himself not to come but it only makes him tense up further and a new string of jaw-droppingly sexy exclamations leaves Jensen’s mouth.

For all the parts of his body that are numb to touch, Jared is hyper sensitive in other ways. Right now, with Jensen’s dick stroking his insides, Jared tries to get a grip of himself but he shivers and a punch of air leaves his lungs. “Oh!” His cheeks flush bright red even as pleasure washes over him and he comes in messy spurts against both of their bellies. The reverberations of the orgasm are written all over his face but so is the embarrassment that he came in no time at all. He wishes he could sink down into the mattress and disappear or that keeping his eyes closed will leave him invisible to the other man who seems like he’s just getting started.

Instead of saying anything, he goes absolutely still, waiting for his mortification to kill him, putting him out of his misery.

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Jensen notices the way Jared tenses awkwardly and wonders if he’s done something wrong. He’s been worried that he’ll accidentally hurt Jared or do something that doesn’t jive well with Jared’s paralysis but up until five seconds ago, the man seemed to be doing just fine. Now, Jared’s gone silent and looks like he’s trying to hide himself away.

His brain is still cloudy with the way Jared’s making him feel. The man is gorgeous and spread out on the bed, tanned muscled chest on display. It fortifies Jensen’s arousal and he bites the inside of his mouth to keep himself from making too much noise. He’s lost in watching the way Jared’s lips have
parted to take shivering breaths. But then Jared goes still and his lust hazy eyes squeeze shut.

“Jared?” Jensen asks in concern, his hips slowing down as soon as he’s alerted that something is off. Once he comes down from riding his own wave of adrenaline he notices the wetness between them and looks down to see sticky strands of moisture smeared around their bellies. “Did you…?” he asks without really asking in detail.

“Oh, god, yeah…I…” Jared covers his face with his hands and turns his head so that it’s towards the door. “I’m so sorry.” He sounds defeated and small, something Jensen’s never heard in the man’s voice before.

Jensen realizes Jared is flushed from embarrassment but can’t for the life of him understand why. “Whoa, Jared, no.” He reaches up with one hand and tries to pull one of Jared’s palms away. “You don’t have to apologize.”

“No…I…I just came like a teenager and – ”

“And it was the hottest thing I’ve ever seen,” Jensen breathes out, his voice an octave lower and his hips rocking forward to prove his point. “Seriously,” he says after pulling away Jared’s other hand so he can kiss his surprised lips. “The fact that I can make you come like that from just the beginning of what I have planned for you is turning out to be a gigantic turn on.” Kissing Jared again, he mumbles against his lips. “You don’t have any idea how sexy that was.”

Jared’s lips twitch into a hopeful smile against Jensen’s and he shakily asks, “yeah?”

“Fuck, yeah.”

“You underestimate how good you feel. The way you’re fucking me? Yeah, that’s pretty much perfect. I can feel everything if you angle it just right, which, you are.” Jared isn’t hiding anymore but his cheeks are still flushed. His confidence is filtering back, aided by Jensen’s kisses.

“I wanna keep going. Is that okay? Think you can handle it?”

Jared’s answer is in the form of his hands coasting down Jensen’s sides and landing on the man’s ass. He grabs each cheek, squeezes and pulls the man flush against him, forcing Jensen’s dick to slide in deeply. “Can you handle it?” he mimics.

Jensen bites his bottom lip and grunts. Jared’s body is snug around him but the added sensation of those strong, talented hands maneuvering him like that makes the connection electric. “Those hands,” he utters and lets Jared control his hips for a handful of thrusts. It’s a nice give and take of the power between them and he thinks he can definitely get off on that. “Think you can come again?”

“Not sure. Wanna find out?” Jared winks, mischief back in his eyes.

Never one to walk away from a challenge, Jensen picks up speed. He takes control back, moving quickly to land themselves where they left off before Jared’s – hopefully – first orgasm of the night. Though Jared can’t move his legs, Jensen finds him responsive in every other way. Jared’s hands are still on his ass, twitching and squeezing in time with his own pleasure. His eyes are practically closed and his lips seem to have forgotten how to breathe without making delicious needy moans. The icing on the cake is when those moans turn into the word “Jensen” and he starts shivering again.

“Fuck,” Jensen lets out in a drawn out breath. Jared’s ass feels so good around him, like they fit together better than anyone else. It seems to be working for Jared too because the man lets out a litany of dirty talk every time Jensen’s dick gets near his prostate.
Getting braver, Jensen gets up on his knees and changes their angle. He’s able to hold onto Jared but he can also buck up and bury himself a little deeper.

“Ugh! Yeah, Jen-Jensen! There!” Jared’s hands leave Jensen’s ass and settle on his hips. He’s digging his fingers into Jensen’s flesh and they’re insistent on making sure the man’s hips don’t slow down. “Come on! Right there! Yes, yes, yes! Oh fuck!”

Jensen apparently found the switch that turns Jared into a wordy mess and damn if he’s going to stop hitting it. Jared sounds strung out on pleasure and it makes Jensen’s dick twitch. They keep moving like that, their combined sweat making the slapping of their bodies louder.

“Gonna come again, Jared?” Jensen pants out, bucking harder and getting his hand in on the game. He finds a way to support himself on one hand placed close to Jared’s head while the other can fist Jared’s renewed arousal. The lengths is hot in his hand and Jensen works it in time with his own hips.

“Think so,” is all Jared gets out on a strangled moan. He strains to raise his shoulders off the bed, allowing him to kiss Jensen.

The kiss is sloppy and uncoordinated but they manage to meet each other’s lips.

When Jared goes rigid for a second time, adding another helping of come to the spread out mess from earlier, Jensen loses it. Watching Jared orgasm is spectacular. It does more than just stroke Jensen’s ego. The way Jared’s entrance flutters and constricts around Jensen has the man thrusting erratically into Jared several more times before pumping the condom full of his release.

“Jared, oh shit, Jare!” He gasps, mouth in an O and eyebrows knit together as the orgasm pulses out of him. Eventually, his hips come to a tiered down stop, settling so that he’s still buried deep. His chest is working overtime to keep up with his body’s need for air but he manages to carefully unhook Jared’s legs from his shoulders. Pinching the base of the condom, he slips out of the heat he is completely enamored with so that he can fall to the bed beside the man.

“Am I dead?” Jared breathes out with a laugh. “‘Cause, I think I stopped breathing a while ago.” He swallows and turns his head towards Jensen.

“Guess I died too then,” Jensen says and he arches his neck so he can kiss Jared lazily. They share a few more soft kisses and Jensen doesn’t want it to end. The aftermath of sex for a new couple is always a bit unsure. They don’t have routines and he doesn’t know if Jared is a cuddler or likes his space. Right now, they both need to breath and clean up. “I’ll be right back. Gonna go grab a washcloth from your bathroom.” He kisses Jared’s content smile and scoots off the bed.

Once he’s out of the room, he gives himself a mental high five, complete with adding a celebratory skip to his step. He told Jared the other day that he really liked him but it’s getting to be more than that. And after tonight, he really likes the new parts of Jared he’s just met too. He goes to wet a washcloth with warm water, wiping off his belly. There is quite a mess there and now that he can really see the visual proof of Jared’s orgasm, it stirs up desire in his belly. His dick is spent for now but the knowledge of just how far he can push Jared’s orgasms is something he hopes to revisit. Rinsing the washcloth, he goes back to take care of Jared.

“Hey,” Jared says when Jensen reenters the room. The word sounds sexier than it ever has before, and Jared’s propped up on his elbows looking like personified sex. The fact that he’s covered in the result of their coupling adds to the image.

Jensen sits on the edge of the bed, gently using the warm cloth to clean up Jared’s come. “Hey.” His
movements are slow and drawn out; Jared looks like he’s about to purr. “You feeling okay? I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“You didn’t hurt me.” Jared licks his lips and swallows. “I know this sounds cliché but, it was great. I don’t want you to think you did something wrong. Sometimes I react differently I guess, but everything you did? That was great. Perfect.”

Jensen’s not sure what Jared means by ‘differently’ because the man’s responses to Jensen’s actions were definitely masturbatory material. There is nothing wrong with them. He’s got a silly smile on his face because he’s remembering the way his name sounded on Jared’s tongue right before he orgasmed. It’s something he’d like to hear more.

“Jensen?”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t go. Stay the night?” Jared asks as he wraps a hand around Jensen’s forearm.

“I’d like that,” Jensen says as he slides into the bed, getting as close to Jared as he can. “I’d like that a lot.”

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Jensen wakes up to an empty bed and sun trying to sneak its way past his eyelids. He stretches his whole body out in the bed before his brain reminds him that he’s not in familiar territory.

He’s in Jared’s bed.

Jared is not.

Stretching again in time with a wide yawn, Jensen groans as each of his muscles protest the action. He’s exerted some of them more than others and the “pummeling Jared’s ass” muscles are not happy right now.

Getting out of bed, he grabs his glasses and scans the room. His clothing is in a neat pile on the foot of the bed, making it easy to snag his boxer briefs and shirt. He leaves his jeans because Jensen has a rule about putting on jeans before 9 o’clock on a weekend.

Dressed enough, he follows the smell of maple syrup and something buttery. What he finds is Jared, clad in only a pair of basketball shorts, in front of the stove in the middle of flipping a pancake.

“Good morning,” he says after he clears his thought.

“Hey! Good morning. I hope I didn’t wake you. I got up a little while ago and figured I could start breakfast.” Jared smiles and gestures towards the small kitchen table he set for two.

“Pancakes,” Jensen says dumbly. His smile is instantaneous when he remembers the first time Jared told him he wanted to make him pancakes. He smiles wider when he takes in the fact that Jared’s not only messy with art supplies but cooking ingredients as well. He’s got a dusting of something floury on his shorts and a tiny fleck of batter on his chest. The man looks completely adorable but he’s also in complete command of his kitchen, something that has Jensen’s heart thumping.

“Yep, pancakes. I hope you’re hungry because I made a bunch.” Jared transfers the last pancake onto a place piled high with them and holds it out to Jensen. “Put this on the table while I get the coffee.”
“And coffee too?” Jensen smirks and raises an eyebrow. He’s impressed. He does as Jared says, reaching the table first. On the part of the table that is up against the wall, there are a few prescription bottles, different pills left in a small pile near Jared’s place setting. It reminds Jensen of what he’s signed up for but comes with little more than acknowledgement. Jensen takes a seat, and waits for Jared to join him.

They settle into breakfast easily, Jared pouring them coffee while Jensen serves them each to perfectly golden pancakes.

“And because I like you,” Jared says as he pushes a small carafe towards Jensen. “I’m breaking out the real maple syrup.”

“Does this have anything to do with the fact that I made you orgasm twice last night?” Jensen banter.

“Of course it does. Everything to do with it. If you only made me come once, you’d be getting the prepackaged kind. And if you hadn’t made me come at all, you’d be getting Sugar Free. Or maybe no pancakes to begin with.”

“Good thing for orgasms then.” Jensen laughs and drizzles syrup onto his pancakes.

“Good thing.” Jared curls his coffee mug in both hands and takes a slow drink, humming softly. The moment is peaceful and perfect. Jensen doesn’t remember the last time someone other than his mother made him breakfast, especially pancakes. He loves pancakes more than any grown man should. He also feels content this morning, waking up to a wonderful man, who he’d had a wonderful night full of wonderful sex with, and now they’re about to have a wonderful breakfast. Happiness thrums though his body, beating in time with the way his heart is starting to do flip-flops.

Jared is on the same wavelength as him in terms of so many things. They share the same profession but it is more than that. They get each other’s humor and react to each other in similar ways, like there is a chemical reaction that happens when they share the same air. It’s all these thoughts that bombard him as he cuts into the pancakes and takes a forkful. They taste amazing. He makes an appreciative noise so that Jared knows they are delicious and takes another forkful.

It’s not on purpose, but Jensen’s suddenly starving and the pancakes are really good. He shovels them into his mouth, thinking about Jared and how touched he is that Jared made him pancakes. But even though he’s thinking of Jared, he seems to have forgotten that the man is sitting in front of him, watching him shovel more food into his mouth. He’s also right there when Jensen’s mouth blurts out the thing on the front of his mind. “God, I love you.”

“I’m sure the pancakes echo the sentiment,” Jared says with a quizzical cock of his head.

Jensen practically chokes on his mouthful of food. Until Jared addressed him, he hadn’t realized he said that part out loud. Now that he has, his brain is stuck on backtracking and trying to make his words make sense. It’s futile because he’s not even speaking and already Jensen feels like he’s going to babble. His mouth gapes and he fishes for words to fill it. “No…not the pancakes. I mean…yes, the pancakes are awesome. You should…make me pancakes all the time. If you want to; you can. And I wanna eat your pancakes. Because your pancakes are really good. And…I love them.” He says the last part with a flush to his cheeks and shoves more food into his mouth, making him look like a chipmunk hoarding food for the winter. He has no idea why he did it but he figures he can’t babble more nonsense if he is chewing.

“Wait, are we still talking about breakfast food?” Jared licks his lips.
“I think so?” Jensen mumbles with a shrug and his mouth full.

“Because if we’re not, then…you know…you can eat my pancakes whenever you want. ‘Cause my pancakes love you too.” Jared blushes and bites the corner of his lip.

Jensen grabs his coffee and takes a loud gulp to wash down the pancake. “Really?” He’s aware that he probably looks like a kid on Christmas morning but he thinks Jared just told him he loves him. Or maybe he said he loves pancakes. Or cooking pancakes. He’s not sure.

“Yeah, really.” Jared pushes away from the table, wheeling over to Jensen’s side and tracing his thumb over Jensen’s lips, snagging the tiny stray amount of syrup in the corner. “Definitely.”

Jensen’s heart thunders to a roar and he sucks in a breath. “Wait…so…we’re not really talking about pancakes? Right? Because I love you. I love your pancakes too but I love you because of the pancakes.” He shakes his head and hates himself for making it impossible for Jared to understand the sense he is making in his head. “We’re really not talking about pancakes, right?” He asks again.

“No.” Jared has on a love-struck smile. “I’m talking about you and me. I’m kind of falling – or fell – in love with you. Figured we could celebrate with pancakes, which, by the way, I will make for you anytime you want.” He lets out a nervous laugh and runs a hand though his hair. “That’s okay right? It’s not too soon?”

“For pancakes?” Jensen asks in confusion.

Jared snorts. “No! For loving you.”

“Oh! Duh!” Jensen rolls his eyes. “No. You are extraordinary, Jared. A man would have to be a fool not to fall in love with you.” He grabs Jared’s hand and squeezes it. “It’s not too soon for anything if we both feel that way, right?”

Jared practically pulls Jensen onto his lap when he grabs the man by the shirt collar and kisses his lips.

Jensen thinks, it’s perfect.

He also thinks that pancakes and syrup taste especially good when they’re on the tip of Jared’s tongue.
Jensen realizes he is doing things he swore to himself he’d never do as a teacher. They’re not terrible things but they are still things and Jensen picks up on it when he’s looking at a sea of shocked faces.

He knows he isn’t a hard ass. Students generally like him and he has a good rapport for being just strict enough to have their respect but human enough to understand that his students are people too. He’s a stickler for deadlines, which he supposes is why his students are all looking at him with furrowed brows when he says he’s going to extend their research paper’s due date till after the weekend.

Honestly, it’s not even a thought Jensen cognitively made. He just said it. It was out of his mouth because his brain is still thinking about being in Jared’s bed – inside Jared – and he wants to die a little bit for even having those thoughts while on the clock. He can’t help himself, however, from conjuring up little memories of what it felt like to make Jared fall apart. He wants it to happen again, preferably this weekend, and he doesn’t want anything in his brain but thoughts of Jared.

It’s why he pushes the assignment’s due date back. There is no way he is going to grade papers when he’s already set on spending as much of the weekend with Jared as possible. They don’t have plans, per say, but he figures they’ve hit that part of their relationship where it’s a given that they’re going to want to have a repeat performance of last weekend.

The news seems to hit Mark slowly. From the back of the third row of desks, his skeptical voice asks what the entire class is thinking. “Really?”

“Yes. Really. I feel like you guys deserve it. We’ve just had a major exam and I know that things are getting hectic with the holidays coming up.” He smiles and adjusts his glasses. He guesses it’s not such a huge deal for him to let his personal life with Jared take priority over his students’ homework this one time as long as he doesn’t make a habit of it. Shifting his expression to a more serious one, he gives the class a nod. “But don’t think that I’m going to do this for all our assignments.”

“Whatever you say Mr. Ackles,” Chelsea says with a smirk. As soon as she says it, she covers her disbelief in her teacher’s statement up with a straight face.

Whatever exclamations of disbelief the other students are going to say don’t have a chance of happening as the bell rings to signal the end of class. They scramble to their feet with a symphony of chairs scratching across the tiles and file out of the room.

It’s always like that at the end of the day, all hurrying out the same tiny door and into a throng of teenagers. The thing the students don’t realize, however, is that their teacher is just as gung-ho to get out of the building and dive head first into his social life.

Gathering his lessons and a few folders of minor assignments that need to be graded, Jensen slides them into his leather satchel and slips the strap over his shoulder. He has a deep sense of satisfaction as he kills the lights and locks up the room. For once, he doesn’t have to linger for a building committee meeting and he makes his way down the emptying hallways.

The next corridor has a fire safety door. It’s usually propped open but on Fridays the magnetic pull that holds it open deactivates for the weekend. He sees a blur of blonde rush towards it, and
recognizes it to be Ana. He hasn’t seen her since their last meeting and while he thought nothing of it until now, the bitch face she’s giving him makes him think otherwise. “Hey, Ana!” He tries to catch her attention but she pushes the door open with her hip, rushing through it so that it slams in Jensen’s face.

“This is going to be fun,” Jensen mumbles to himself before pushing the door open himself. Ana’s slowed her pace and he calls out loud enough to be heard. “Thanks for holding the door for me.”

“Oh! Jensen. I’m sorry. I didn’t see you.” Her voice drips with synthetic sweetness as she turns and bats her eyes innocently at him. Only, she did see him and they both know she’s not fooling anyone. “Love to stay and chat,” she oozes with the same insincerity, “but I’ve got better places to be. Have a great weekend, Jensen.”

Ana hightails it out of the main corridor into the fresh air, whipping her hair as she goes.

“She’s a bitch,” an unknown voice says. Jensen whips his head toward the source and notices a tall man he’s never seen before leaning against a support pillar like he’s the one holding it up.

“Yeah, well, Ana leaves some things to be desired in the personality department,” Jensen blurts out while taking off his glasses rubbing his temples. He should have bit his tongue, it’s what he usually does, but with Ana’s recent attack against Jared, Jensen’s too far in to let her remarks slide off his skin. He realizes the stranger is still looking at him. “Can I help you with something?”

“So…that’s Ana, huh?” The man twists to watch the blondes retreating form. “I thought she’d be…uglier.”

Under normal circumstances, Jensen would have laughed. Instead, Jensen’s alert system kicks in with the fact that he’s in a school setting and faced with a man who clearly knows who Ana is but doesn’t ring a bell in Jensen’s head. “Can I help you?” he repeats with a little more force behind the question.

“You’re Jensen.”

That has Jensen rearing back a step and pulling upright. “Do I know you?”

“No. But I know who you are.” The man steps forward. He’s bigger than Jensen originally thought and gives Jensen an odd feeling because parts of his brain think they can place where he’s met the man before but the rest are coming up empty. A big hand is extended Jensen’s way. “The name’s Jeff. Jeff Padalecki.”

It’s the name that makes everything click into place. He has seen Jeff before, in the pictures Jared keeps around his house. “You’re Jared’s brother,” he repeats dumbly.

“And you’re Jared’s...what? Boyfriend?” His voice is loud enough to be heard throughout the surrounding area.

Involuntarily, Jensen scans the area quickly, more of a reflex than anything, to see if anyone has been paying attention to their conversation. Thankfully, they haven’t. The relief is visible on Jensen’s face but he quickly learns that it looks like something else completely to someone such as Jeff who doesn’t understand his and Jared’s plan.

Jeff looks offended, all big brother prowess pouring out of him as he gets closer to Jensen with a step that he sure as hell knows is as intimidating as it is. “What? You ashamed of that? ‘Cause my brother ain’t nothing to be ashamed of and he sure as hell doesn’t deserve to be seen as such.”
“Oh! No! It’s not like that!” Jensen puts up a hand and takes a step back, not necessarily afraid of Jeff but he’s lost for what to do. He doesn’t want to insult the brother of the man he’s definitely falling deeper in love with but he also doesn’t want to be taken for some dirt bag who isn’t treating Jared like the amazing person he is. Voice low enough so that only Jeff can hear, Jensen speaks sincerely. “Your brother…he doesn’t want to tell anyone at Akins. We agreed to keep it on the down low and see how things go. It’s not a secret…not in our personal lives. But in our work lives? We’re not open about the fact that we’re dating.” He stops and knows there is a smile tugging at his lips before he even gets the next words out. “Your brother? He’s a great guy.”

“Damn straight he is,” Jeff says with a loud exhale as he crosses his arms over his chest. He looks completely unconvinced by Jensen’s story.

The tension between them crackles. Jensen has no idea what to say and Jeff isn’t doing him any favors. “So, you, uh…came to see where he works?”

“Amongst other things.”

There is silence again in the space where Jensen would usually be making small talk but he can’t seem to find words when he realizes Jeff is sizing him up. “Is there some kind of problem?” Raising an eyebrow, Jensen shoves his hands in his pockets and rocks back on his heels.

Shrugging, Jeff casually tosses out, “not sure yet.” He presses his lips together in thought for a moment and then adds, “I know that Ana bitch is giving Jared some issues. And I just wanted to see for myself what type of guy’s got my little brother skipping out on family dinners.” This time, he doesn’t even try to veil the judgment in the glance he gives Jensen.

“I…uhh…” Jensen had no idea Jared was ditching dinners with his family in favor of spending the evenings with him. He’s not complaining, he’s flattered in fact, his belly exploding into a flurry of excited butterflies. He wishes Jeff could understand the way Jared makes him feel because then this interaction would be rid of the blatant machoism. Jared’s voice cuts through his thoughts and sends his head spinning towards the direction of the shout.

“Jeff?” Jared has his head cocked to the side in confusion and his eyes widen more when he notices his brother glowering at his boyfriend. “Jensen?” His hands flit over the wheels of his chair at lightning speed, depositing him in front of the two men while looking even more confused.

“Hey, Roller Skate!” Jeff’s glare transforms seamlessly into a smile when he gets sight of his brother. He brushes past Jensen so that he can offer a quick fist bump to Jared. “What’s going on?”

“Don’t call me Roller Skate,” Jared snorts as an immediate reaction and rolls over Jeff’s toes then he pauses and has to shake himself out of the surprise that Jeff is standing in front of him and he laughs. “Uhh…nothing’s going on. Just finishing up work. What’s going on with you? What are you doing here?” He twists his lips to the side in an action that Jensen deems adorable and the feeling intensifies the minute Jared directs that same confused stare at Jensen.

“Just getting the lay of the land over here at Arkin High School. You talk a lot about it, so I figured I would get a visual while I was in the area. And you’re right. That Ana person is a bitch.” Licking his lips, he points a thumb in Jensen’s direction that same confused stare at Jensen.

“Shh!” Jared and Jensen say at the same time as they mirror each other’s actions of checking if any students’ ears picked up on the word.

Jensen spares a glance at Jeff, noticing that the man seems to be humming approvingly, head nodding as he processes what Jared and Jensen just did. “Told you,” Jensen says in a quick even
“Yeah…well…” is all Jeff offers. It’s not much of an apology but Jensen didn’t think he was going to get that far. Changing gears, Jeff scratches at the back of his head and looks his brother in the eyes. “How come you haven’t brought Jensen around mom an’ dad’s house?”

“I dunno, I – ” Jared starts but gets cut off.

“Well,” Jeff starts before turning to look at Jensen head on. He’s clearly talking directly to Jensen now, despite the fact that he’s wording his conversation towards his brother. “Jensen should come over for dinner. Tomorrow night. He. Should. Do. That.”

It’s clear to Jensen that it’s not really a suggestion or a request. It’s pretty much a command. And this time, Jensen does feel a little intimidated. He partially gets what Jeff is doing; he understands protecting a sibling, hell, Jensen’s done the same. What he doesn’t get is why Jeff feels like he needs to protect Jared. Jensen’s seen just how capable Jared is of advocating for himself.

Jared clears his throat awkwardly, wearing his discomfort clear in the way he’s stiffly holding his upper body. It leaves Jensen unsure of how he should actually answer, making him look at Jared in an attempt to read the man’s mind. All he can get out is, “well, I…”

Jeff cuts him off with a booming voice. “Great! So, I guess I will let mom know you two will be joining us for dinner.” Jeff gives a broad smile as he slaps Jensen across the back a little too firmly, making the teacher stumble forward an inch before he can regain proper balance. “It was good meeting you Jensen.” He nods his head towards the man and then faces his brother. “See ya later Roller Skate.” With a salute style wave, he bids the men goodbye and disappears as suddenly as he seemed to have arrived at Arkin, both men blinking in his wake.

“Jensen, I’m sorry. I had – ”

“You don’t need to apologize, Jared. Really. It’s fine. I’ve got a big brother too, as you know.”

Sighing, Jared’s hands fall into his lap. “Yeah, but he’s not usually such a dick. I have no idea what’s gotten into him. I… I’m sorry you had to meet him like that. And I’m sorry I haven’t invited you for dinner.” Quickly putting up his palms, Jared shakes his head to ward off false thoughts. “I don’t want you to think it’s because I didn’t want to have you there. I do, I really do. I… I’m just a little nervous because… I really like you Jen – ”

Jensen’s caught up in the words and cut’s the man off to echo them, “I like you too, Jared.”

They share a secret smile that hinges on so much more before either of them manage to speak again.

“I really like you, Jen,” Jared repeats, “and I don’t want my family, or the way they treat me, to turn you off. My parents are pretty good about treating me the same as my siblings but sometimes they just can’t stop themselves from making sure everyone who’s an important part of my life knows that I’m extra delicate cargo. Even though I’m not. I’m pretty regular cargo.” There is the hint of a blush on Jared’s cheeks but he hides it by rubbing a hand down his face. “Not that I’m boring. But I’m… awww, hell. I should just shut up now.”

All Jensen gets from Jared’s babble is the middle part. “You think I’m an important part of your life?” His heart hammers in his chest so hard he can feel it in his baby toe.

“I think you’re shaping up to be one. Kinda hoping you will be one. You know? If that’s okay with you.” There is a quick dart of a pink tongue across his upper lip as Jared smiles.
Every part of Jensen’s body wishes they weren’t in a public place so he could let Jared know just how okay he is with that plan. Instead, he settles for moving so he can grab Jared’s hand. It’s quick and subtle but he’s able to dance his fingers over the center of Jared’s palm, tracing out a heart shape before pulling away. Jared’s eyebrow-wiggle lets him know that the message rang loud and clear. “Definitely okay with me. Glad we’re on the same page because my grandmother might get her hooks in you if she thought we weren’t.”

They share a laugh loud enough to draw several confused stares from students who are surprised to see their teachers having a social life. The tension in the air seems to have left with Jeff and Jensen’s not about to start grilling Jared about why Jeff clearly has such a projective agenda. Instead, he keeps the conversation light as they start to make their way toward the staff parking lot. “So, ‘Roller Skate’, huh?” Jensen asks playfully.

“Shut-up,” Jared quips. “It’s an old nickname that my siblings won’t let die.”

Jensen thinks it’s a playful moniker, kind of energetic and lively like Jared. “It’s kind of cute.”

“I’m not cute.” Jared pouts, looking all the more adorable and defeating his own attempt at an argument. “I’m not exactly going for cute in your eyes. I mean, cute is okay. But I was kinda hoping for a lot more than a G-rating.”

“Oh, don’t worry. You’ve got that. I just don’t really feel like talking about anything over a PG-13 rating till we get far, far away from here.” Jensen licks his lips and fidgets, finding it hard to keep his thoughts under that rating now that he’s brought up the whole idea.

“I like that getting ‘far, far away from here’ part. My place? I can give you the low down on what you’ve just agreed to in coming to dinner.”

The invitation is just what Jensen’s hoping for and he snatches it too quickly to even attempt at ‘playing it cool’. “Yeah, sounds good, meet you there.” He gives Jared a smile when he really wants to kiss him and jogs off to his car before he ends up nibbling on Jared’s lips despite all logical thoughts.

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Jared feels a little guilty for asking Jensen to meet him at his parent’s house rather than them arriving together. It’s kind of like he’s throwing him to the wolves a bit because he’s sure the man is feeling just as many nervous jitters as Jared felt on the way to Jensen’s parents. Only, this time, they don’t have each other to seek out for reassurance.

But his mother guilted him something terrible when she heard that Jeff has been the catalyst for a meet and greet with Jensen rather than Jared himself. She somehow got him to come over early enough to help her around the kitchen. It’s a job he’s been delegated since he was a kid because he’s sure the man is feeling just as many nervous jitters as Jared felt on the way to Jensen’s parents. Only, this time, they don’t have each other to seek out for reassurance.

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“Don’t peel the potatoes completely. Leave some skin on ‘em,” his mother reminds and ruffles his hair.

Jared snorts to blow the piece of hair that landed in his face out of his field of vision. “I know ma. It’s
my recipe.” But when Jared looks down, he realizes he’d peeled the potato completely, leaving it ‘naked’ in his palm. “Shit.”

Sherri laughs and takes the potato from her son, depositing an unpeeled one in his hand. “Are you nervous sweetie? Because dad and I promise to behave ourselves. We won’t do anything embarrassing. We just want to make sure Jensen is doing right by you. It wasn’t easy when Jeff went and got married, you know how hard it was to see our first born move on and be part of another family. Not that we don’t love Kate, but you know –”

“Mom!” Jared warns with a loud shout. “You’re rambling. And you’re making it sound like I am running off with Jensen. Which I’m not. We’ve just started dating and I wanted him to get to know me first before I threw him to all of you. I know you won’t do anything to embarrass me but it’s… just…I love you guys and it’s important to me that you all get along because if you don’t…I dunno…I…” Jared stops talking because he doesn’t honestly know what he would do if his parents hate Jensen.

His mother puts down the knife she’d been chopping carrots with and look her son in the eyes, her expression softening into something Jared can’t pinpoint. “Do you love him?”

The potato peeler slips and Jared almost nicks his knuckles. He told Jensen that he loved him but he hadn’t told anyone else yet, not even Ryan. “I…”

Sherri laughs again. “It’s not a trick question, baby.”

Pausing, Jared swallows and then nods along with his replay. “Yeah, I love ‘im.”

“Love who?” Megan chirps as she comes around the corner of the room.

Smile widening, Sherri waves her daughter into the room. “Oh, Meggie, we were just talking about Jensen coming to dinner tonight.” She leans closer to Megan like she’s sharing a secret even though her voice is loud enough to travel through the house. “Your brother is in love.”

“You’re in love?” This time the voice belongs to Gerry and it’s lacking any of the warmth and giggles that Jared’s mother and sister seem to be wrapped up in. “Jared, how long have you known this boy?” He points a finger at Jared, expecting answers.

“Man,” Jared corrects. “Jensen is a grown man and so am I. And I’ve known him long enough to know how I feel about him.” Jared scowls and glares at his father.

Gerry softens a bit, all concern and fatherly protectiveness. “I know that Jared, of course I do. But… the last time you loved someone –”

“The last time I loved someone I was an idiot.”

Gerry shrugs. “Well at least we’re both on the same page on that point.”

“Ugh!” Jared feels the frustration building up and he throws the potato at his dad, mostly because his father just called him an idiot and partially because he wants him to stop digging into his love life. “Dad, I get it. I do. I know you’re worried. And I love you for that. But trust me, okay? Jensen’s different. He’s the only one at work who looks at me and sees me and not just a set of wheels. You’ll love him,” he says, cutting himself off before he voices the words, “I hope.”

“Of course we’ll love him, sweetie. How could we not if you love him?” Sherri gives Jared another potato. “Try not to pelt your father with this one, cut yourself, or peel this one to smithereens. Okay?”
Gerry puts up his hands in defeat and gives Jared an affectionate pat on the shoulder. “I jus’ love you is all. Gotta look out for my kids. All three of you.”

“I know dad. I love you too,” though Jared knows his father is extra protective of him. He can’t say that he blames him because he’s fairly certain he would be extra clingy to something he almost lost too, but sometimes it makes Jared feel like a kid again he definitely doesn’t want to come off as a child to Jensen.

Megan picks up one of the carrots her mother just prepped and bites into it with a snap. “So Jensen’s into the whole Roller Skate thing? Kinky.” She smirks, making it obvious that she’s baiting her brother.

“Megan!” Jared can’t even stop himself from throwing his mostly peeled potato at her, beaming her in the forehead. He’s about to apologize to his mother but she picks a dirtied potato from the pile and flings one at her as well.

Putting her hands up, Megan blocks her face with them and ducks “I surrender!”

“Alright, let’s go,” Gerry kicks the locks for Jared’s wheelchair and pulls him backwards out of the room. “Megan, you finish the potatoes. Your brother is going to help me set the table before he breaks a window if you give him any more reasons to throw a potato.

Jared huffs, “I hate all of you,” but there is no heat in the words, only playful banter because he loves his family. He loves that they are completely ridiculous and unrelenting and he knows he deserves Megan’s teasing. He’s teased her more than enough. But he really doesn’t need to think of the idea of “Jensen” and “kinky” in his parents’ kitchen.

He goes about setting the table in silence, rolling around it and depositing a dinner plate as his father puts out the flatware. His father is quiet and avoiding eye contact, and Jared can help but sigh. “Dad?”

“Hmm?” Looking at his son, Gerry has a sadness in his eyes.

“Thanks for always worrying about me. Even when you don’t need to. Even when I get annoyed about it.”

“It’s what fathers do. You don’t have to thank me for that.” But the way Gerry’s expression changes says just the opposite, that the thank you was well appreciated. “I just hope Jensen has thick skin because he’s going to need it with this family.”

“Don’t worry. He does. We’re high school teachers, remember?” Jared rolls past his father to get the salad bowls and thumps him on the back. “We can handle anything.”

Snickering, Gerry nods his head. “I’m glad we’re both in agreement over that as well.”

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Jensen is stupidly nervous.

He’s standing outside of the Padalecki household with a vice grip on the neck of a bottle of wine. He should probably ring the bell or knock but he stands there thinking Jared had the easier deal. Jared had met his family before things like love were thrown into the mix. Sure, there had been more Ackles about but they were a new couple and riding the adrenaline of that. Now Jensen is head-over-heels for Jared and that makes him do stupid things and blather when he’s nervous. He doesn’t want to make a fool of himself in front of Jared’s family because…well…because he loves Jared and
Jared’s family is important to him.

And while he’s not afraid of Jeff, he’s a little intimidated over the protective vibes the man was throwing off, even if they were unnecessary. Jensen would never hurt Jared in a way that would require Jeff’s big brother job title to kick in.

At least he hopes

He’s about to ring the bell when the door gets pulled open. Jensen’s heart stops for a moment but slows immediately once he realizes, thankfully, it’s Jared who’s on the other side. Jared, all perfect and sitting there in a shirt that no one could possibly look better in than he does. His arms are on display and the warmth of the burgundy is covered by a grey vest, sucking in the bulk of the shirt and letting Jensen appreciate the cut of Jared’s chest. For the moment, he’s speechless.

“Jensen! I thought I heard your car pull up.” He smiles and runs a hand through his hair. “You find the place alright?”

“Yeah. Not difficult to get here at all.” Jensen shrugs and licks his lips. He makes a gesture towards his car, like that can, in any way, get his point across. His eyes sweep over the front porch again and for the first time he realizes how the walkway to the house is custom made, more like tailor made, for Jared. There’s only one set of steps leading to the front door, every other part is perfectly aligned with ramps, one leading from the front of the house and one from the side, where the driveway is. For a second he gets caught up in thinking about pre-teen Jared using those ramps and his heart clenches.

“Jen?” Jared calls and breaks him from his trance.

“Sorry, I…I’m just glad to see you.” He smiles sincerely and leans down to capture Jared’s lips in a soft kiss. He feels Jared react to it, leaning into the gesture himself and chasing Jensen when he tries to pull away, effectively lengthening the kiss by a few seconds.

“I’m glad to see you too. You ready for this?” Jared wheels backwards so Jensen can step inside.

“Course I am.” Jensen says even though there are anxious butterflies in his belly.

Sherri comes around the corner, wiping her hands on a towel. “Jared? Baby? Is Jensen here? Do you think he got lost?” She raises her eyes and sees her son and Jensen in the doorway. “Oh! You didn’t get lost,” she says with a light laugh.

“Nope. I didn’t get lost.” Jensen smiles and scratches at the back of his head. “I’m sorry if I am late, Mrs. Padalecki. Thank you for inviting me.”

“You’re just on time,” Sherri says and steps forward. “It’s so wonderful to finally meet you. Jared has told us all ‘bout you. It seems like you’re one of the bright spots at Arkin High. She pulls Jensen into a sudden hug, squeezing him and rubbing her hands over his back. When she pulls away, she rocks back on her heels and studies him, humming quietly in what Jensen guesses is approval. “It’s just so nice to meet you,” she repeats and pats his arm. “And call me Sherri, please.”

“O-okay. Sherri then.” Jensen smiles and steps further into the house. It’s a lot like his own, full of warmth and the act of being lived in. The layout is different, of course, but Jensen can tell it has the same vibe. It’s multi-level, which surprises Jensen. He’d gotten used to Jared’s house and hadn’t figured he’d grown up in a house with stairs, but then again, he’d remembered Jared telling him that his parents had owned the house for 35 years, well before Jared was born, much less in need of a wheelchair.
Aside from the stairs, there is proof that Jared grew up here covering the walls, pictures of the same set smiling children, one whose dimples gives him away as Jared.

“Come in, Jensen. Come meet the family.” Sherri waves Jensen to follow him and he obeys. “Gerry? Jensen’s here.” They step into a room with a television and a couple of plush couches; two men are sitting on the larger of the two.

Jensen recognized Jeff from their meeting a few days prior but takes the other one to be Jared’s father. He gives them a smile and is about to greet them when the elder steals the opportunity from him.

“Jensen! Glad you could make it. I have to say, I was wondering when Jared was going to get around to inviting you over. Sherri and I have been asking him to bring you over for a while now. Welcome to our home.” He holds out a palm.

Jensen goes to do the same but he is still holding to bottle of wine. Getting hung up on the awkwardness of the handshake, Jensen lets out a silly laugh and the only response he comes up with is, “I brought wine,” and he places the bottle in Gerry’s still outstretched hand and gives it an awkward shake. It’s a complete mess of a handshake but he gives a genuine smile and hopes that counts for something.

“Oh,” Gerry pulls the wine up to look at it. “Sherri, Jensen brought wine.”

“That was nice of you sweetheart,” Sherri says as she takes the bottle and inspects it. “I’ll go put it in the refrigerator to chill.” She returns Jensen’s smile.

“It’s… uhh… red wine. So you don’t have to… you know… chill it.” Jensen stutters out the information, hoping he’s not insulting anyone.

“Of course, silly me. We don’t drink much wine around here. But this will be nice. We can have it with dinner. I’ll just put it in the dining room then.” Sherri disappears into the other room, leaving all the men alone.

“Would have done better to bring some of your beer,” Jared says with a glint in his eye. “Dad, Jensen brews his own beer. He brought a bunch of varieties over my house.”

“Do you now?” Gerry ponders this with an impressed raise of his eyebrows. “Why didn’t you bring me any?” His tone is more playful than accusatory as he slaps Jensen on the back.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t think… I figured…” Jensen stops talking and shakes himself out of talking in circles. “I’ll bring you a six-pack if you ever decide to invite me over for dinner again. Or, you know, if I can manage to stop being nervous and greet you properly. Can we try that handshake again?” Jensen holds out his hand. There is a second of waiting before Gerry takes his hand and they both give a firm handshake. “It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Padalecki.”

“Gerry will do you just fine.” Gerry gives another shake and smiles sincerely “It’s nice to meet you too, Jensen. And I hope I can take you up on those beers.”

“Absolutely.” Jensen looks to Jared who is smiling back like Jensen had just done something good and as silly as it was, it sets off a feeling of warmth in Jensen’s belly. “Hi, Jeff.” He sends a wave towards Jared’s brother as the man approaches them.

“Jensen, nice to see you again.” He shakes Jensen’s hand and puts a palm on his shoulder.

Jeff’s greeting sounds genuine and he supposes he was right in his first judgment that the man is
more bark and less bite. “Same here.”

Sherri returns with a young woman in tow but she walks faster so that she bypasses Sherri completely and lands herself in front of Jensen. “Hi. I’m Jared’s brother Megan. I mean, he’s my brother. I’m his sister. Hi.” She laughs and hugs Jensen like it’s the most natural greeting on earth.

“Hi, Megan.” Jensen finds himself laughing and returning the hug. She’s bubbly and full of life, kind of like Jared once Jensen got to know him.

“He’s cute,” Megan whispers in Jared’s ear. “I like him.” But she’s not all that quiet about it and Jensen can hear every word.

Jared shoos her and looks up at Jensen. “How about I give you a tour of the house before dinner while the animals,” he gives his family a glance, “settle down a bit?”

“Sure. Absolutely. Unless you guys need help with anything? I’m not a cook by any means but I make due.” Jensen looks from Gerry to Sherri.

Sherri shakes her head and gestures for the two men to leave the room. “No, sweetheart. We’ve got it covered. We’ll call you in a few minutes.”

Jared doesn’t waste time; he rolls out of the room quickly and Jensen keeps up with him. The tour isn’t anything spectacular but it is nice to have Jared to himself for a few moments. Each room is just as Jensen would have imagined, painted with the signs that a family of five lived in the house. There are more pictures along the walls in the hallways Jensen is traveling down and he stops at one of Jared in a little league uniform, running with a smile on his face. It’s weird to think of Jared walking because he’s only known him as he is now but he supposes the opposite is true for so many people.

“I don’t like that picture, it’s…” Jared’s voice trails off and there is a hint of sadness in his eyes but he swallows down whatever he was going to say and forges forward. They get to a room that looks like an add on to the house and he gestures to it with the explanation that it was his old bedroom. It’s a guest room now but there is something on the wall that catches Jensen’s eye and he steps inside.

“Did you paint this?” Jensen says as he traces the ridges formed by layers of paint. “It’s beautiful.” He runs his fingers along the curve of the horse’s nose and is stuck staring at the perspective of the piece. It’s a horse, that’s for sure, but it looks so real, almost like the house is reaching to give the viewer a sniff.

“Yeah, I…” Jared runs a hand through his hair and lets it linger there for a moment. “I was practicing with different paints and styles. And…I like horses because…I dunno…maybe because they have four powerful legs and I have…no powerful legs.” He laughs and waves his thoughts away. “My mom has a bunch of my horse paintings around the house. I’ll show the ones on the first floor to you. You’ll have to journey upstairs on your own. Unless you want to carry me.”

Jensen laughs and even though Jared hadn’t done anything remarkable to stir the need for one, Jensen leans down and kisses him. It’s an open mouthed kiss at first, both of them still laughing, but it becomes a fraction more when Jared reaches his hands up and pulls Jensen’s face closer. The seated man lets out a happy hum and flutters his eyes closed.

“You’re amazing.” Jensen breathes out, their faces still close. “You…all of you. And this painting? It’s amazing. I want to see more. Will you show me?” His words get stuck on the fact that he might be talking about more than just oils or acrylics or canvas. But they’re out there and Jared can make of them what he will.
“Yeah, of course. I told you I would.” Jared snakes a hand up Jensen’s arm and traces the shape of his biceps.

“Boys?” Sherri calls from deeper in the house. “Dinner!”

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Dinner goes exceedingly well. Aside from an inside joke about Jensen being lucky there are any potatoes on the table, nothing leaves Jensen feeling like an outsider.

The Padaleki’s are genuinely interested in Jensen’s life and career, even more so when he gives them little clues as to what Jared’s life at Arkin High is like.

With a little wine flowing, everyone seems to loosen up, even Jeff. He slaps a hand on Jensen’s knee and gives a friendly smile. “I’m sorry I was such a dick on Friday. I didn’t mean to come off like that. There’s just been a lot of assholes in Jared’s past and I’m getting really tired of dealing with people like that.”

“No, I get it. I’ve got a younger sibling too. And I have been dating your brother for a while now. I get why you might think I was avoiding meeting everyone.” Jensen takes a sip of wine and continues. “Which, for the record, I wasn’t. Jared never asked me over. He’s met my family though. They love him. Especially my grandmother, which is a little uncomfortable but mostly kinda adorable.”

“Of course they love him. My brother is the best person I know,” Jeff gives his brother a wink.

“Guys. I’m right here.” Jared twists his lips to the side and narrows a playful eye at his brother.

“Yeah, I know.” Jeff takes a mouthful of food and shrugs. When he swallows, he looks at Jensen. “You know, it’s cool that you’re dating him and all, but there are a lot of things that come along with dating someone like Jared. Lots of things I just want you to know…so you know what you’re getting into.”

“And he knows them,” Jared says, voice going completely serious and eyes sending a warning glare to his brother.

“I do,” Jensen says as a way of helping themselves out of this conversation. “He sat me down and went over a lot of it. And I know what I’m signing up for. So trust me when I tell you,” he addresses the whole room and even though his life is none of their business, Jared’s is and he feels like he needs them to know, “I’m really interested in dating Jared. And I think he feels the same. So…”

There is a bit of silence before Gerry clears his throat to get everyone’s attention. “Okay, enough butting into Jared and Jensen’s relationship. They are both adults.”

“Yeah, I know, it’s just…Jared usually dates other paraplegics and the times he dated people on two legs all blew up in his face,” Jeff offers in defense. “Sorry, Jensen. Nothing against you. Just that Jared’s ex’s kinda sucked. ‘Cept for Ryan. Ryan’s cool.”

All Jensen gets from that is the last part and he turns to blink at Jared. “You dated Ryan?”

“Yeah, for like five minutes when we were way younger and convinced we’d be alone forever.” Jared gives a reassuring smile. “Don’t worry, we’re just friends. Have always been friends. That’s way we only dated for five minutes.”

Jensen’s conflicted and isn’t sure of exactly what he’s feeling. Ryan had been likeable in the short
time that they’d interacted but knowing that Ryan is Jared’s best friend and now learning that he’s also an ex-boyfriend makes a knot of jealously form in his brain. It’s stupid, really, because he knows Jared is only friends with Ryan, that much is clear in the way they interact and the way Jared talks about him. Still, it gets Jensen thinking. Jeff may have inadvertently stirred up a new worry for Jensen by making it clear that no one could understand Jared better than someone in the same exact situation. Jensen wasn’t paraplegic, he’d never understand what Jared goes through on a regular basis. He needs to hash this out when a bunch of people aren’t staring at him so he throws the thought on the back burner and laughs. “Well, a lot of my ex’s kinda sucked too so I guess I’m in good company then.” He smiles at Jared and feels the tension go out of the way. The statement is the truth and when he looks at Jared he realizes how much is different between those relationships and what he and Jared are doing now. “Do you have a grandmother who might want to steal me away, too?”

Sherri snorts. “I dunno. Maybe. You’re cute enough. Depends on if you can ballroom dance or not. After dad died, she’s been on the prowl for younger men. Though, at eighty, she’s been looking for seventy year olds. You might be a tad too young for her.”

Everyone has a good laugh at that and they laugh even more when Jensen admits that, no, he can’t ballroom dance. He once broke someone’s toes when he tried learning and smashed his foot forward when he was supposed to move sideways.

And Jensen feels right at home.

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Jared is exhausted. It’s been the type of day at even a trip to Spoons wouldn’t help. Not even a coffee with extra caramel and extra espresso.

It’s that kind of day.

He’s achy all over, achy in places he can’t even feel. The thought makes no sense but he thinks that his body can feel it, his brain can’t.

Going to physical therapy on a Friday is usually not his ideal but it is how his calendar falls right now. Between lesson planning, staying late at the school to help some of his students with projects, and Jensen, Jared has found little time for PT, even though he promised himself he wouldn’t let that happen.

To remedy that, he’s added 30 minutes to his usual hour appointments. And today sucked because they made him do a million things without his hands. It made him feel like shit because using his hands is what he’s good at. He makes a living doing that. Hell, he’s learned to live again because of his hands. Having them taken away was torture. It wasn’t only strain on his body but strain on his emotions because it made him feel useless again.

Marcus knew that. He knew exactly what he was doing when he told Jared to get up off the ground without using his hands. Jared had been working through PT with Marcus and Josie for years and he knows they are doing what is best for him but sometimes he wants to scream at them.

Sometimes, he actually does do that. He curses and screams and it’s like they can’t even hear him. They just keep moving along with their plan for him.

But when Jared does make progress, even the teeniest about, it’s like he cured cancer. They are all smiles and praise and pats on the back and Jared loves them then. In fact, he usually likes them just fine. They are good people, putting in the good fight to help people like Jared.
But today, he hates them.

He hates them because they made him stand, which is terrifying because Jared can’t do that without a lot of help.

He hates them because they are trying to keep a lot of other parts of Jared’s body strong and today’s session was really hard on him.

And he hates them because his whole body hurts and they think maybe he’s getting a pressure sore somewhere because he’s neglecting himself a bit and now he has to get it checked out.

To be fair, none of that is actually Marcus’s or Josie’s fault. But Jared needs someone to blame and he’s going with blaming his physical therapists. He’ll apologize to them later with coffee and muffins when they meet again on Monday, but right now he just wants to cry. It’s childish and he’s above that but sometimes he feels so beaten down that he can’t think of a more adult reaction.

The only silver lining is that he told Jensen he would meet him at his apartment for dinner.

It’s the first time he’s been to Jensen’s place and he has a feeling that Jensen’s been holding off inviting him because he’s part of a multilevel apartment complex and on the third floor. The gesture is sweet but Jared told Jensen to treat him just like anyone else. If there is something he can’t handle, then he’ll let him know.

Right now, however, Jared wonders if deciding to go to Jensen’s straight from PT is such a fantastic idea. He knows it will make him feel better since seeing Jensen always does. Plus, some alone time this weekend sounds just about perfect. They hardly got any with half of their weekend being sucked up by meeting his family, which was a success. He’s glad they got that out of the way because now his mother can’t stop gushing over how sweet and polite Jensen was and his father wants him to come over with more beer. Jeff’s saying nothing, which is perfect. And Megan wants to know if he has a straight brother, completely undeterred by the fact that, yes, he does, but he’s happily married.

He finds the apartment complex easily, following in helpful signs toward the “A” building, which is also easy to find. What isn’t easy, is actually getting to the third floor. Turns out, “A” building isn’t handicapped accessible. It might be on a good day but today the elevator is out and there is one way up via a narrow winding staircase. Jared looks up, counting the floors and he sighs. “Fantastic,” he snorts. He could actually tackle the stairs. He’s done it before but it usually isn’t pretty and takes a hell of a long time. But he could do it.

Making his way around the building, he tries to find another elevator of sorts. The buildings are linked by elevated walkways but it doesn’t seem like there is an elevator at any of the nearby buildings. Putting a hand over his eyes, he squints to see if there is an elevator shaft at building “E” or “F”. Fortunately, it seems like there is one at “F” building. Unfortunately, that building is the furthest way. After the day he had during PT, he’s not looking forward to making his way through all the buildings, but stubbornness kicks in and he sets off for “F” building. Seeing Jensen has been all that’s got him through the day and he isn’t going to give up on that. He knows that, if he calls Jensen, the man will happily agree to meet at Jared’s house, but that is not what Jared wants. He’s been feeling helpless for hours now, he doesn’t need Jensen to inadvertently make him feel like that too.

It takes twenty minutes but he’s able to make his way up to “F” building’s fourth floor, where the raised walkway is, through a winding maze of all the building, and then he scoots on his butt to go down to “A” building’s third floor. When he reaches Jensen’s apartment, there is a sheen of sweat on his forehead and he’s slightly out of breath.
He knocks, fist falling slowly on the door.

Jensen answers it quickly, pulling it open and smiling. “Jared, hi.” His smile falters when he soaks in just how tired Jared looks. “What happened? You –”

There is a hint of frustration in Jared’s voice but he tries to get a hold of it. “You’re elevator’s broken.”

“It is? Oh my god, I’m sorry. I…I don’t use it often and it was working last week. I…fuck! I wouldn’t have told you to come if I knew…I –”

“No, Jensen. It’s okay,” Guilt floods Jared’s brain and he immediately holds out a hand. He knows Jensen would never do something like that. It wasn’t negligent on the man’s part. Jensen has never been anything but thoughtful and proactive. “I’m just tired from work and physical therapy and…you know what? I’m kinda cranky. There…I admitted it. But it’s not because of you. You’re the only part of today that I’ve been looking forward to.”

“Yes?” Jensen grins.

“Yeah.” Jared feels better already, just like he knew he would. He’s still tired and sore but Jensen looks so damn smitten with him and sexy as hell in his white button down. The tie he’d worn at work is gone and the top buttons are undone enough to reveal his collar bone. His glasses are gone and Jared’s struck by how beautiful the man’s eyes are. He’s got to paint them one day, but even though Jensen’s image is alive in almost every one of his recent memories, he’s afraid he won’t be able to get his eyes just right unless he’s staring right at Jensen.

“Come in,” Jensen moves aside and lets Jared in. “It’s not much but welcome to my humble abode.”

Jared is filled with the rush of everything he and Jensen have been doing. Some weird part of him is sad that they’re checking things off of their “firsts” list, things they can never redo for a first time. Most of him is happy that they’ve gotten the nerve-wracking experiences out of the way. Rolling inside, he sees a neat living space. There are maps on the walls, ones that look pretty old but Jared would have to study them more to figure out what they are.

He also notices that the apartment is set up in a tight sort of way. There is room for his wheelchair to pass but just barely. Everything is closer to the next thing than Jared would have placed them in his own home and it might make moving around Jensen’s place a little difficult but it’s still doable.

“I’m sorry you’re tired. I promise you, I don’t have anything planned that is more exhausting than talking and eating dinner. Maybe some dessert if you’re up to it.” Jensen licks his lips and leans against a wall while Jared takes in the apartment.

“Nothing more exhausting than that?” Jared turns his chair, bumping into a small end table but his reflexes are quick enough to still it while he stays in the conversation.

Jensen’s eyes dart to the end table but then back to Jared’s calm gaze. “Well…maybe something a little more tiring, but only if you’re up for it. And, I’d really like to kiss you hello. So…maybe that too.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” Jared reaches up a hand and pulls Jensen down by the V his shirt is making. “Hi,” he breathes out and ghosts his lips over Jensen’s, taking his time to soak in the warmth of the man’s presence. After working with him all day and being forced to keep their relationship hidden, it always feels good to release the pressure by being open like this.

“Hi,” Jensen matches. He kisses Jared twice before pulling upward, leaving one last kiss on Jared’s
forehead. “I hope you’re hungry because I think I made too much tilapia,” Jensen jogs the small distance to the stove and flips a piece of fish.

“I thought you weren’t much of a cook?” Jared’s curiosity leads him into the kitchen, which smells delicious.

“I’m not. But I can make a few things. Horseradish crusted tilapia with herb roasted potatoes is one of those things.” He makes a gesture with his head towards the table at the end of the kitchen. “Go and sit. I’ll be right there. Or check out what’s in the fridge. There are some of my homebrews in there or white wine if you’d like.”

Jared takes Jensen up on the offer, pulling the refrigerator door open to reveal a bunch of unmarked bottles. There are little white labels stuck to each bottle, a handwriting he’s identified as Jensen’s indicating what is inside. “Porter sounds good. You want one?”

“Sure.”

Grabbing two bottles, Jared smiles at Jensen’s hard work. He gets what it’s like to have a passion and even though Jensen’s is edible and Jared’s isn’t, it leaves Jared feeling like they get each other. “Hey, you ever think we could try brewing beer together? It might be fun…you know?”

“You and me?” Excitement fills Jensen’s words and he turns to give Jared an open mouthed smile. “Yeah. That would be awesome. Anytime you want. Well, not anytime because it does take a few hours but…you know…on a weekend or something. I’d really like that. We can make up a recipe tonight, if you want. Nothing too complicated. But – ” He cuts himself off and brings the heel of one hand to his forehead. “I’m getting a little too caught up with the idea, aren’t I?”

“Nah,” Jared makes his way towards the table and deposits the bottles on it. He’s able to swing himself into one of Jensen’s chairs and smirks at the impressed raise of Jensen’s eyebrow. “It’s cute. Really. I’m glad you’re excited.”

“Okay, good. Because…I think that would be a lot of fun. I’ll even let you name it. Fair warning, I am partial to puns. So you give me a pun and you have my heart.” Jensen finishes up, plating the fish and potatoes so he can carry them to the table.

“Like our version of an I.P.A…Imagined by Padaleki and Ackles?” Jared knows it was a lame attempt at something involving their names, but he goes for it.

“Umm…not a pun but we’ll work on it.” Jensen puts a plate in front of Jared and then one at the setting directly next to him. He takes a moment to fish a bottle opener out of his pocket and pops open both of their beers, allowing Jared to pour them into the pint glasses he’d set out. “Dinner is served. Don’t pretend to like it. But, fair warning, it’s the best thing I can cook. So if you hate this, then you’re out of luck.”

Jared laughs and takes a bite of his food. It’s good, delicious in fact. He makes a happy hum and licks his lips. “Jensen, this is amazing.” Aware that he’s talking with food in his mouth, he tries to hide the fact with his hand. “Seriously. It’s delicious.” He swallows and takes a sip of beer. Looking at the glass in awe, he blurts out, “Fuck. Really? This is awesome too. Man, all I can do is cook. You can make food and drink.”

Jensen laughs as a slight blush tints his cheeks. “Well, all I can do is draw stick figures and sketch out the states on a map, so you’ve got me beat there. Besides, I told you, this is the best thing I can make. You,” Jensen points a fork at Jared, “Can make pancakes. Really good pancakes.”
“You like that, huh?”

“Yeah. Seriously, that was the best pancake experience of my life. No shitting you.” Jensen takes a mouthful of food and grins.

Jared completely gets that Jensen is talking about more than just pancakes but he goes along with it. “Well, this is the best tilapia experience of my life.” To prove the point, he takes another mouthful and hums his approval.

The rest of the dinner is just as lighthearted. It’s exactly what Jared needed.

They end up on the couch sharing a bowl of ice cream, something Jared hasn’t done with anyone in a long time. It’s the sweetness he was craving and it tastes even better when Jensen’s kissing him and there is the taste of chocolate sauce in his mouth.

“I’m sorry you had a shitty day.” Jensen offers the bowl to Jared like the man needs it.

“It’s not your fault. Physical therapy was just rough today. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn’t. Luck of the draw I guess.” Jared shrugs and fishes out a cherry from their mess of a sundae.

“Wha-what do you do there?”

“Lots of different things. Usually I have to keep parts of my body moving, gotta make sure my blood circulates and stuff like that. Sometimes they make me do things to see if I am strong enough to get around should I get knocked out of my chair. And sometimes they make me pull myself up to standing, like they did today. Which sucks because I’m not exactly short and I weigh a lot. Pulling myself up is exhausting.”

“You can stand?” Jensen takes the bowl back and steals a spoonful.

“Not really. I can prop myself up so that I look like I am standing but usually my therapists have to support my legs or I can get seriously hurt. No one needs the paraplegic breaking a bone on their watch.” Jared brushes the fact off like it’s nothing. He feels better about the afternoon now that he’s thought it through. Sure, Marcus left him feeling vulnerable but he overcame it. That’s got to count for something. Jared reaches down to move his leg so he can twist his body and look around the room. He spots an acoustic guitar in the corner and remembers the first time Jensen told him that he could play. “Oh, Jen! Will you play for me?”

Jensen thickly swallows his mouthful of ice cream and dumbly points a finger to his chest. “You want me to play for you?”

“Yeah, please? I had such a crappy day and I would love to hear you play. I’m good with my hands but I can’t play any instruments. I don’t have the ear for it. But you can. And I’d love to hear something. Please?” Jared grins at thoughts of Jensen strumming the guitar, aware that his dimples had popped.

Jensen puts the bowl of ice cream on the table and shakes his head. “Like I would be able to tell you no in the first place? Then you’ve gotta go and look so excited about me playing…and now I definitely can’t say no.” He rises and walks towards the guitar, leaning down to grab it while still keeping eye contact with Jared. “I’m just warning you, I play for my own enjoyment. And most of it is Beatles songs…since it’s what my dad loves and I grew up listening to it. There are a bunch of other things in the mix, but you’re getting some Lennon, Harrison and McCartney.”

“I don’t care. Great. Perfect.”
“Okay, you asked for it.” Jensen says with a hint of nerves behind the words. It isn’t like he hasn’t played in front of people before. He has, but none of those people were people he was sleeping with; they were all people he knew for years, who loved him enough to give him an honest opinion. Thankfully, their opinion was that he was pretty good.

He settles in to the corner of the couch, cross-legged and holding the guitar. He’s got this but he doesn’t want the butterflies to start fluttering in his belly when Jared looks at him. Closing his eyes, he plucks the strings slowly. His mind flips through his rolodex of song choices and settles on one the same moment his fingers start strumming the opening cords. His voice kicks in soon after, and he braves opening his eyes to see Jared staring at him in shock. He’d never told the man he sang too. One has to keep a few surprises in his pocket. “Hey Jude, don’t make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better. Remember to let her into your heart. Then you can start to make it better.” His voice carries through the apartment and though the subject matter is far from his or Jared’s life, he feels like it is appropriate, considering the obstacles Jared has faced in his life. “Hey Jude, don’t be afraid. You were made to go out and get her. The minute you let her under your skin. Then you begin to make it better.”

Jared blinks, eyes wide and his mouth twitches to life in a touched smile. Jensen’s singing voice cuts through him and he licks his lips.

Jensen registers that Jared’s enjoying it and he swells up with pride. To him, Jared has been nothing but remarkable. He’s talented, determined, and one hell of a teacher. He’s a lot of things, which is why Jensen feels drawn to him, but it also makes him wonder if he can keep up with Jared. The fact that Jared enjoyed himself thoroughly throughout the night makes him feel like his mission has been accomplished. He kicks out one leg and brushes his socked foot against Jared’s hip before diving back into the song. He’s most of the way through the last lines, when Jared cuts him off mid “nah nah nah nah” with a kiss so heated Jensen loses control of the song. His fingers clumsily drag down the strings, making the instrument let out a loud out of tune sound and it’s shoved out of the way so Jensen can have a lap full of Jared instead.

Jared is grabbing at Jensen’s shoulders, hoisting himself up on the man’s lap and kissing him deeply. “I love that song. How did you know I love that song?” He sighs and leans closer for a kiss, dragging his lips over Jensen’s.

“I didn’t know.” Smiling into the kiss, Jensen brings his hands so that they coast under the back of Jared’s shirt, up his spine until they press into him to hold their bodies together. Jared’s skin feels incredible at his touch and he gives a happy growl when he feels the ways the muscles work under the surface when Jared rolls his upper torso into Jensen’s chest. “I just like that song. Glad you do too.”

“Mmmn hmm,” Jared purrs, nodding his head and nipping at Jensen’s lips and kissing him playfully. “I really liked it. It was,” he narrows his eyes with lust, “sexy. Your voice…Jen, do you have any idea how sexy that was?” He kisses Jensen deeper, tongue naughtily flicking against Jensen’s and he pulls back with a Cheshire cat grin. “Will you play more for me one day?”

“Will I always get this kind of a review?”

Jared nods into the kiss and Jensen’s hands slide slower so he can grab Jared around the waist. He reclines against the chair’s armrest and takes Jared with him. The feeling of Jared’s weight on top of him makes Jensen’s heart flip-flop and he looks up to see Jared’s hair fall into his face. The man looks damn sexy himself and Jensen wants. He makes that point known when he rolls his hips up into Jared. His dick is already half hard but Jared’s mouth and the way the man’s holding onto
Jensen like he’s the most important thing on earth is making quick work of skyrocketing Jensen to full hardness.

They dissolve into kissing, lips fighting to express all the desire they’re feeling and hands trying to hold on to what’s happening between them. Jared keeps his chest hovering over Jensen’s, using the strength in his arms to make sure he’s poised perfectly and his chin is angled so he can deepen the kiss, getting rougher and more insistent.

Jensen loves it. He loves the way he feels holding onto Jared. He loves realizing how amazing this feels and he wants more. He kisses up the line of Jared’s jaw, one hand laced in the man’s hair for leverage so he can press the kisses in more firmly. Jared’s skin tastes salty, which he supposes is the result of all the hard work Jared’s put his body through today. Letting out a slow breath into Jared’s hairline, he kisses the man behind the ear and follows his jawline back down to his lips.

They’re kissing for a long while, Jensen taking the time to lift his hips every now and then to show his appreciation. Jared reacts with a moan in the back of his throat and kisses Jensen deeper. His lashes flutter closed and the kiss gets sloppy for one moment before he pulls away.

“Wha?” Jensen says dumbly, head reeling from the loss of Jared’s attention.

Jared snickers at that and struggles for a moment so that he’s sitting up again. He reaches for his wheelchair and hoists himself into it. “You’re couch is nice and everything but I’m sure your bed is better. Is it this way?” he guesses, pointing a thumb towards the small corridor on his right.

“Yeah, it’s – ”

“Oh, good. I’ll see you in there.” His smile picks up a little more on the left side as he takes off in the direction of Jensen’s room.

Jensen shakes himself out of his stupor, getting to his feet and chasing after Jared. As he goes, he tries to tug his shirt off. It gets snagged on his head and he stumbles a bit but he finally gets it and stumbles into the room.

Jared’s already on the bed, wheelchair now vacated and hovering beside the mattress.

Jensen has to admit, Jared looks awfully good in his bed. He crawls up to meet him and straddles Jared’s hips, leaning down to kiss him. They get wrapped up in the gesture again, bodies melting against each other. Kissing Jared is addicting and even though Jensen’s just begun to get used to it being part of his life, his heart aches when he thinks about losing those kisses. He’s completely intoxicated with the act, loving the way Jared’s mouth opens for him and the way he tastes. He’s hyper-reactive to every move Jensen makes.

Jared shifts, his hand coming to rest over the bulge in Jensen’s jeans. His fingers fuss with the button and zipper and as much as Jensen is dying to have those talented hands on him, Jensen stills him.

“Shh,” Jensen offers a soft kiss to his lips. “You did enough today. Let me do all the work. Not because I don’t think you can but because I want to.” He doesn’t wait for an answer and flips them so that Jared is laying on his side and he can spoon up behind him. The position is a little awkward for it, but he manages to get Jared out of his shirt and pants. He’s careful with Jared’s legs, but even so, he hears a stunted hiss when he lifts Jared’s hips but he lets it go undiscussed for the time being. Once Jared is nude, he removes his own pants and slides back into position behind Jared. Their bodies press together and there are sparks of electricity snapping between them. Jensen needs to kiss every part of Jared’s skin so he starts with his shoulder blades, making slow movements to drag his lips over each inch of flesh. The appreciation he has for Jared’s body is evident in the way he
lavishes attention on each shoulder blade and the dip between them. When he reaches up to kiss the nape of Jared’s neck, he has to inch even closer, allowing the thickness of his dick to slot between the globes of Jared’s ass. He rocks forward, kissing up Jared’s neck and inhaling the scent of his shampoo. “Jared,” he whispers, dragging more kisses down the man’s spine. Hands groping at Jared’s hips, fingers tiptoeing their way through the tell-tale signs of denser body hair and over the base of his dick.

Jared responds with a shiver and the wet sounds of sucking his lips in. He reaches back with the arms he’s not resting on and gets a hold of the back of Jensen’s head, giving enough pressure for the man to kiss him harder, this time adding a nip to the curve of Jared’s shoulder.

Jensen doesn’t know what goes into physical therapy for Jared but he knows what it’s like to be bone tired or sore. He has plans for helping that. He rolls into Jensen once more, savoring the feeling of his arousal pressing against the man. He lets his fingers circle around Jared’s thick length and pumps it lazily while kissing down his spine, sneaking lower and lower until he’s kissing the small of his back. He feels the change in the texture of Jared’s skin under his lips and knows he’s kissing scar tissue. Surgery scars. Remainder from a time when Jared almost lost his life. He’s careful with them, even though he’s not sure if Jared can feel them or not. Regardless, they deserve respect and he takes his time in kissing them.

Jared tenses, body reacting enough to let Jensen know that he can definitely feel everything right now. “Jen, don’t…just…ignore that. Okay?”

“This?” Jensen says, kissing another scar. “Why? It’s part of you and I thought we established that I love you. I’m falling more in love with all of you. All the parts.” Jensen gives a firm pump with his fist, thumb rubbing up the underside of Jared’s dick and over the head. “Can’t ignore any part of you.” Smiling into Jared’s skin, he shifts suddenly, scooting lower and working Jared onto his belly so he can spread his thighs apart. “Want me to ignore this?” He speaks the words against Jared’s lower back and kisses his way down the cleft of Jared’s ass.

“N-no.” Jared makes a sounds that resembles a purr and goose bumps break out over his skin. “Don’t stop that.”

“Not gonna.” Jensen closes his eyes and keeps kissing. He knows Jared told him that he can’t always feel everything but he hopes he feels it enough when he sucks a kiss to the tight ring of muscle there. He keeps up his attention, taking his time to work the muscle open enough so that when he adds a finger it’s not only wanted but it slides in easily. He keeps working on Jared, stroking his insides and when the stretch of two fingers isn’t as easy as he wants it to be, he spares a few moments to grab the lube from his night stand drawer. Jared starts making panting noises as soon as Jensen’s three fingers deep and curling each digit so that they brush against the most sensitive parts of Jared’s insides.

“Ugh, Jensen, give me a second,” Jared’s voice comes out shaky.

Jensen listens, pulling away and allowing for Jared to roll himself onto his back. Jared’s dick is hard and heavy, making the effect Jensen has on him an obvious one. He smiles and shakes his head slowly, “Jen, you…fuck…you sure know how to make me fall apart.”

Jensen growls, remembering how Jared reacted to the first time they had sex. “And it’s fucking sexy, Jared. It’s,” Jensen makes a sounds low in his throat and bites his lower lip. He slides one of his hands down his torso and squeezes his own neglected dick in need of some friction. “I need to be inside you Jared. I want to make you fall apart more.”

“Fuck yes,” Jared breathes out, pushing himself up on his elbows and licking his lips. “Like last time. On my back…it’s better when I’m on my back.”
Jensen scrambles to grab a condom from the same drawer he retrieved the lube from. He rolls it down his length and walks on his knees until he’s between Jared’s legs. He’s careful when he hooks Jared’s legs over his shoulders and leans forward at just the right angle to make sure he has easy access to slide into Jared. He hesitates for a moment, taking the time to study Jared’s lips, parted as he sucks in much needed air. He combines his movements, kissing Jared hard and fast as he holds his dick steady so he can press the head inside. Jared kisses deeper but the moment Jensen’s buried to the hilt he lets out a gasp and arches his back.

The rest of their coupling is faster, Jensen’s hips rolling in a steady rhythm and Jared reacts to each thrust with enthusiasm. He’s cursing, voice gravely and dirty as he asks Jensen to go “harder” and “faster”. He listens, the sweat of their bodies making the slap echo through the room.

This time, Jensen thinks he’s going to be the one who comes too quickly. Jared’s body feels responsive and tight around him and he’s never had anyone like the man. He gets why his family is protective over him because Jared is…something else.

“Jare…Jared. Gonna come. You gonna follow me?” Jensen smirks and kisses the area beside Jared’s ear. “Come on, Jared.”

Jared reacts to the request, grabbing Jensen by the back of his head and pulling him in for a kiss. He moans his orgasm into the kiss, the muscles of his belly tensing up, twitching when Jensen pushes deeper and leans in a way that makes him see stars. What throws him over the edge, making him come in a sudden spurt between their bellies is a combination of Jensen’s hand on his dick and the moan Jensen lets out when he comes himself.

Jensen doesn’t know how he manages to keep pumping his fist over Jared’s dick as he loses himself to the way Jared’s body makes him feel. He thrusts in hard and completely, rooting himself there as he fills the latex of the condom with his release. Foreheads knocking together, they both breathe heavily, letting out pants of shared contentment every now and then.

When Jared goes limp, mind fucked out of him, Jensen is kind enough to carefully lower his legs and flop down beside him.

“Wow,” Jared breathes out. After that, they don’t say anything. They don’t have to. The way their chests are rising and falling speaks volumes.

Jensen gets up even though he’d rather drift off. But Jared doesn’t know the layout of his apartment and he’s not leaving him to fend for himself in the search for a washcloth. Besides, Jensen’s got this. He wants to take care of Jared. He gets them cleaned up and settled, snuggles in behind Jared so he can spoon his body and loop an arm around his waist, tugging him in closer.

They are lazy and floating; sleep is on the horizon but they’re not there yet. So they talk, soft whispers in the quiet night that bring them closer together.

***

When sleep does come, it hits Jensen first. His breathing evens out and flutters against the back of Jared’s neck.

Jared lays there, sated and happy. He twists slowly so that he can see Jensen’s sleeping face and smiles. Excitement is still roiling in his belly because he can’t shake the fact that Jensen sets him on fire. Jensen makes him feel alive in places he has deadened on his quest to prove to the world that he can handle everything.
Tugging down the sheet a bit, he studies the curve of Jensen’s hip and the powerful thigh muscles that come after. It fascinates him and he trots his fingers over the ridge and down the man’s legs. They’re gorgeous and he tries to commit the dimensions of them to memory. Going back to the hips, he lets out a gasp of remembrance when he recalls that those were the very hips thrusting into him earlier.

They’re good hips.

Jared’s going to have to study them more.

He stretches his spine out and settles in close to Jensen so that their noses almost touch. It’s how he falls asleep, with his hand on Jensen’s hip and their foreheads dipped so they meet gently.

He’s completely comfortable.

Jared stays that way until he wakes. For a moment, he’s confused. Nothing about the room and bed make sense. It’s been years since he’d spent the night in another man’s bed and it takes a moment for the sleep to dissipate and memories of sleeping beside Jensen to flood his brain. Only, that still doesn’t make sense because Jensen isn’t there.

“Jen?” Jared calls out weakly, pushing himself up on his palms and looking around the room.

He catches sight of himself in the mirror across from the bed, hair ruffled and out of place while his neck is bearing evidence of the attention Jensen paid it last night. Touching his collarbone, he smiles.

The moment captures Jared and he gets lost to the feelings it invokes. Realizing that it’s morning and the sun’s been shining for quite some time brings him out of it. His body is tired of being in the bed and he needs to use the bathroom. He has no idea where the bathroom is but he’s pretty sure he can find it easily enough.

Jared reaches for his wheelchair in the last place he left it but his hand meets with air. Cocking his head, he looks to his right and finds the space is indeed empty. He knew he left his chair there when he pulled himself into the bed. He always leaves his chair within arms’ reach. Always. It’s just one thing he doesn’t budge on.

Scanning the room, he finds his chair parked neatly beside the bedside table. He reaches a hand towards it, stretching his fingers to their full extent but he still can’t reach it enough to pull it towards him. He reassesses and scoots himself as close to the edge of the bed as he can and reaches out again.

This time, his attempt is met with a far more dramatic result. He reaches, his fingertips brushing against the armrest but when he tries to lean just a little bit more so that he can curl his fingers around it, he tumbles out of the bed.

He lands with a loud thud on the floor, hitting the side of his hip and cursing loudly. “Fuck!” The pain shoots through him. He’s fallen often and he knows what all the consequences can be. Rapidly assessing the situation, he tries to pinpoint everything that’s going on. His hip is throbbing but it’s the completely normal kind of bruising situation that hurts like a bitch but doesn’t require medical attention.

“Jared?” Jensen comes rushing into the room brandishing a toothbrush and completely nude.

“What the fuck, Jensen!” Pain makes Jared snap and he glares at the man. “Did you move my chair?”

“I…I…yeah. I just got it out of the way.” Jensen gets down on his knees and hovers his hands
around Jared, not sure what to do. “Are you okay? Why are you on the floor?”

“No, I’m not okay!” Jared swats Jensen’s hands away and tries to sit himself up properly. “My chair wasn’t in the way! It was exactly where it needed to be. And I’m on the floor because someone moved my chair where I couldn’t reach it and I had to pee and I tried to reach it and I…I…fell out of your bed.” He ends the ramble feeling ridiculous because Jared’s fallen over stupider reasons and hurt himself way worse than the bruise forming on his hip. But it’s the principle of the thing and even though he hates the way he’s making Jensen’s face look right now, Jared can’t stop himself. “Don’t move my chair, Jensen. Ever.”

“I…I didn’t realize. I didn’t think…I…” Jensen knits his eyebrows, conflicted over what to do. Jared’s anger is boiling under the surface but he knows Jensen is speaking the truth. Jensen has never once done anything to make Jared feel like he’s not top priority. Jensen’s looking at him, bare ass naked, a hint of toothpaste in the corner of his mouth and concern flooding every pore on his face.

“Shit, Jensen, I’m sorry. I…over reacted. I…” He sighs and rubs his hip. The moment makes Jared realize that there are going to be bumps in his and Jensen’s road, bumps that might get bruised and hurt like hell. He weighs the options and figures that Jensen’s concerned face is worth it. Dating two legged people always comes with a learning curve and even though Jensen’s a fast learner, there is going to be a transition period. “You don’t know what it’s like to be stranded like that…and I woke up. You were gone and I – ”

“I’m sorry,” Jensen butts in. “I woke up and I figured I would brush my teeth…you know…because,” he shrugs, “morning breath and all. Then I thought I would get the coffee brewing and come back to snuggle with you. I just didn’t want to get my morning breath kisses all over your skin and you…” he gives a defeated snort and lets his words taper off. “But you’re right. I shouldn’t have moved your chair. I wasn’t thinking. I’m sorry.”

“Well now you’re making me feel bad.” Jared leans back, palms on the carpet behind him so he can hold his weight up. “Just…don’t move my chair? Okay?”

Jensen makes an X over his heart with his pointer finger. “I won’t. I promise. I’m sorry. Forgive me?”

Nodding, Jared pushes his hair out of his face. “You were really brushing your teeth so you could kiss me?” He waits for Jensen’s affirmative and laughs. “But I have morning breath too.”

“Yeah, well…I don’t care about that.” Jensen crawls closer to Jared and frowns. “You really fell out of my bed, huh? Sounded pretty hard.”

“Yeah, fell right here.” Jared drags his hand over his injured hip.

Jensen does the same. “Right here?”

“Yep.”

“Here?” Jensen gets closer to Jared’s hip and kisses the bruising flesh gently.

Jared’s heart flutters. “That’s the spot.”

“So, right here? Here is where you hurt yourself?” Jensen gives another series of kisses, each one just as soft as the next. Laughing against the hipbone, he kisses it again. The action is full of tenderness and care.

Things bubble up in Jared’s gut. The anger is fading and he’s aware of a very naked Jensen kissing
his very naked hipbone which is next to his very naked and interested groin. “Jen, stop.” He laughs playfully when Jensen keeps kissing the bruise. “Jen, come on. Seriously. I still have to pee. And as much as I love spending time with you, I don’t think we need to cross the bridge into urinating in front of one another.” He points to his chair, “and you’re going to pick me up and put me in my chair. Then I’m going to take care of business, come back in here, and you can continue making things up to me. Deal?”

Jensen scurries into gear, scooping Jared up in no time and plopping him in the chair.

Jared’s body hurts for a lot of reasons, some good and some bad but he’d dealt with worse. Smirking, he wheels out of the room. Before he’s out of ear shot, he shouts. “Hey, Jensen?”

“Yeah?”

“You got any mouthwash?” Because he sure as hell isn’t going to let Jensen be the only one with fresh tasting kisses.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry it took forever for this chapter. A lot of things were going on in my life. I hope you can forgive me.

Good news? I am back on track. I even have the next chapter written. I hope you like it! XOXO

Also - My lovely wifey/beta was so kind and took time out of her insane life to work on this chapter. I can't do it without her. Give Demonndetox love too!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

Warning: There is top! Jensen/bottom! Jared porn at the end!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The rain is making parts of Jared ache. He used to think that was all in his head but lately he’s noticed that his body seems to prefer the warm sunny days rather than the dreary ones. And he can’t really find fault with that fact. Who wouldn’t prefer a nice day?

As a whole, rain doesn’t bother him. Days when he can lounge around at home make for mellow relaxing rainy days. The light is softer and sometimes it’s the aesthetic he’s in the mood for when working in his studio. He gets some ambient music going and lets his hands get to work. He supposes a rainy day spent being lazy with Jensen wouldn’t be so bad either. Secretly, he’s craving the type of day where the sun isn’t shining through the window and they can cat-nap the day away and not feel guilty about only leaving the bed to feed themselves.

Right now, the rain is pissing him off. Wheelchairs and rain aren’t the best of friends. They’ve made due, but it’s still not ideal. And today is definitely not the type of day where he gets to laze around. He’s got work and he’s dangerously close to running late. Rain always wins out in making Jared snooze one too many times once his alarm goes off. So instead of taking the time to stretch the aches out of his body, he is gulping down hot coffee, throwing some meal bars into his bag and wheeling out the door, practically skidding down to his car.

By now, he can make the drive to work on autopilot. It leaves him time to conjure up dreams in the back of his head about his and Jensen’s relationship, even pictures seeing Jensen’s face on mornings like this and hoping his eyes are enough to throw the gloominess of the day to the wayside. He wonders when he and Jensen will hit the point in their relationship where they spend the night on weekdays. Reaching that point seems more intimate than weekend sleepovers. Jared’s never let anyone into his morning work routine before but he’s tempted to dive right in because the fact that they work in the same place leaves room for the possibility of a joint commute.

While he’s driving, fatter rain droplets splat onto his windshield and Jared realizes it’s not just your average rain storm. It’s pretty much torrential at this point and the wipers are doing barely enough to make sure Jared sees the road. His whole body started the morning feeling tense and off, and keeping up a deathgrip on the steering wheel while itching closer to the windshield, like that can somehow help him see better, is making it worse. He’s afraid he’s on the verge of a muscle spasm or lockup and can’t remember if he took his medicine. He hasn’t missed a dose in years but because the action is so habitual, he can’t actually remember if he took the right amount of pills or he forgot something.

All of these issues are swarming in his head by the time he pulls into the parking lot at Arkin High. He’s not late yet but he’s going to be if he doesn’t haul ass into the building. Swinging into action, he’s out of the car and into his chair at record speed, wheeling off towards the main entrance ramp. Water clings to him, soaking his shirt before he even has a chance to make it to cover. A piece of hair, heavy with rain, falls into his face and drips onto Jared’s cheek. He knows he is pretty much soaked to the bone and has already resigned himself to spending the day in a damp chair with even damper pants. “Fucking fantastic,” he mutters as he looks down and sees the spray of water.
darkening his pant legs as he rolls through a puddle that turned out to be much deeper than it looks.

Thankfully, the security guard sees him coming and holds the door open for him so he can slide into dry territory. “Thanks, Frank,” he says breathlessly as he brushes brush his hair out of his face and shakes both hands to flick the water off.

A man of few words, Frank nods silently, and goes back to his post.

The bell to signal that students should head towards their first period class buzzes right thought Jared’s head he unintentionally grits his teeth and flinches. The things catches him off guard every time. He’s sure he looks like a paraplegic drowned rat but he’s one paraplegic rat who will be brandishing a stencil brush and getting the show on the road with his first period skills lesson.

Rushing so that he reaches the class before most of the students are whining impatiently about the locked door, he takes the shortcut that brings him past Jensen’s classroom. Jared’s hands get ahead of himself when he takes a turn too quickly. Rain water makes his tires skid out from under him and the world is a blur as he falls in a spectacular fashion across the concrete floor. The crash is loud, Jared’s chair falling on its side and slamming into the showcase set into the hallway’s wall and Jared himself tumbling out and landing on his side a few feet away. His head slams down hard on the floor and stars dance before his dazed eyes. Pain shoots down the back of his neck and spine and even though his vision is blurred, panic pumps Jared with enough adrenaline to push himself up on his palms and scramble so he can see his legs. Without being able to feel them, he’s grown used to getting a visual on them in times like these, times where he could have broken both of them and wouldn’t know it. Thankfully they’re fine, useless and vulnerable like they usually are. Jared sighs with relief, his eyes closing for a moment as his upper body strength falters momentarily. When he opens his eyes again, he realizes his crash was loud enough to draw out most of the teachers and students in the wing.

“Jared!” The voice belongs to Jensen and is accompanied by rushed footfalls.

Jared blinks up in the approaching man’s direction. Doing his best to mask his discomfort and embarrassment, Jared shakes his head bashfully and gives Jensen a shaky smile. “Jensen…I…”

“Are you okay?” The words tumble from Jensen’s mouth in a worried mess. He’s down on the ground kneeling beside Jared in an instant, hands searching for contact with the man and chest heaving enough to let on that he’s shaken.

“Yeah, I…” Jared starts but isn’t sure how to finish. He’s embarrassed as hell and everyone is staring at him. He’s used to stares but the weight of the situation makes him want to throw in the towel and give up on trying to fit in at Arkin. Defense tactics kick in and he lets out a laugh to mask everything. “Yeah, I’m okay. Stupid me…got stuck in the rain and sometimes wheels and water don’t mix. It’s my fault really. I’m so…so…stupid.” His voice betrays him for a moment, wavering enough to remind Jared to flash a smile and laugh so that he’s still in control of the situation. One look up at Jensen and all the concern on his face, and Jared immediately feels guilty. The man is hovering over him, hand’s making static movements as they try to figure out how to actually help.

Jensen takes a quick look down the hallway, barking out, “Get to class! Anyone in Mr. Padalecki’s class, wait by the classroom. I’ll come open your classroom door in a moment.” His words snap people into action, instead of staring, most of them are avoiding all kind of eye contact as they scurry towards their destinations.

The only person who seems to stay locked on target is Ana, who is wearing and interested smirk and cruelly slanted eyes. She uncrosses her arms from over her chest and saunters towards the two men. “I can unlock the classroom,” she drops matter-of-factly, lips pursed as if daring someone to respond. “It’s a shame you’re such a klutz Jared. You ought to be more careful.” The words cut in the exact
way she intends them to. The smirk is back in place when she turns and struts in the direction of Jared’s classroom.

The reaction to her words is mirrored in both Jared and Jensen. They both snort through their noses, Jared clenching his jaw and pushing up into a sitting position. He’s about to defend himself when Jensen’s voice beats him to it.

“And since you’re being so helpful, maybe you can call for a substitute to cover Jared’s first period class?” Jensen glares, head tilted enough so that he can look directly over the rim of his glasses. His words take immediate effect, causing a noticeable hesitation in Ana’s gait but it’s enough to let them know that she’s been thrown.

Jared blinks a bit too rapidly at Jensen. “Uhh, no…Jensen. I don’t need a sub. I’m okay. I can…” His words are cut off as he tries to push himself up further but falls further down, proving that he definitely cannot at the moment.

“No. You are not okay. And you are going to take the first period off to make sure that you didn’t do anything that requires a doctor.” Jensen’s words are firm, with something else behind them that Jared can’t put his finger on yet.

“Jen –”

“Jared. No. God,” Jensen runs a hand over his face while taking a deep breath. “You could have gotten hurt. I…” He pauses and licks his lips. “Are you really okay? Does anything hurt? Did you –?”

Jared gets it then. He’s never really seen it before but Jensen apparently has a fierce protective streak. Like a knee jerk reaction, Jared’s walls fall into place all while he knows he doesn’t need to do this around Jensen. It’s habitual and he has to go through the motions before he can get over it. “It was just a stupid fall. It was bound to happen sooner or later. Hell, it happened a lot when I was testing my chair’s limits.”

Jensen whirls around, buzzing with as much adrenaline as Jared is. “Bullshit! You’re not fine. You…” He goes silent and it’s visible on his face that he’s trying to refocus himself. “Jared…I’m sorry. But it’s not fine. It’s not fine that you have to deal with this. It’s not fine that Ana has a god damned stick up her ass when it comes to you for some reasons. It’s not fine that you fall like this and have to compose yourself in two minutes and put on an act to go teach a bunch of students. You can take a period off. My room is empty. Y-you can take the period to assess and refocus. Okay?”

Jared knows Jensen is right, he’s in no state of mind to be a proper teacher right now. He’s not worried that he broke something but he is starting to be concerned about swelling. The responsible thing would be to take care of himself first. Even though he know this, it feels like a huge failure. Not trusting his words, he nods in quick short movements.

Taking his eyes off Jared only long enough to grab the wayward wheelchair, Jensen returns to set it straight in front of its owner. “You think you’re okay to move?”

Nodding again, Jared shifts so that he can get enough momentum to pull himself up. Considering falling is a very real scenario for Jared, physical therapy constantly works to prepare himself for this and he’s become an expert and meeting the floor in such a manner. Even though he can usually get himself back into his chair, it isn’t always easy. To his credit, Jensen lets Jared figure out how much he can do on his own before he needs to jump in and help to hoist Jared up. He’s grateful that Jensen sent all the spectators scattering because wheeling his way towards Jensen’s classroom leaves him feeling like an insecure mess. It opens a dam he’d built in his head and in a matter of seconds he goes
from barely holding it together to drowning in defeatism and failure.

The door to Jensen’s classroom opens and Jared chokes on a sob. He practically gags on it to the point where he’s trying to breathe and cough all at the same time.

Spinning on his heels, Jensen crouches down in front of Jared, hands on his forearms and searching for a way to soothe him. “Hey, hey. It’s okay. You’re okay, right?”

“Yeah. No. I mean…yes. And no. I…” Squeezing his eyes closed, Jared works on evening out the spasms in his chest. In the tense moments between them, Jared realizes he’s not going to win this battle. All the emotions are causing a traffic jam in his brain and he can’t reel himself back.

“Nothing’s okay. I…I’m not cut out for any of this. I thought I could do it. I thought I could come in here and act like I didn’t give a shit that people see me as a set of wheels. Well, you know what? I do care. And I can’t do this! I…can’t take much more of the shit at this school. More staring. More whispers. More people like…like….fucking Ana! I can’t – I can’t…”

“Shh,” Jensen hushes, fingers forcing Jared’s open so he can gain some purchase there.

“No. I can’t. I thought I could. I thought people here would get used to me. Instead…I’m some type of fucking statistic. You know what, Jen? I’m tired of being a statistic. Everything in my life is a number or data, from my survival rate all the way to my percentage of paralysis. I’m sick of it. And, I don’t want to be here just so Arkin can call themselves politically correct. I’m just…done.” The rant ends with a stream of tears. The words hurt Jared as they come out because he’s worked so hard at never letting himself feel this way. Never letting things wound him like this. The worst part is, he doesn’t mean most of his claims of defeat. He knows he can teach and that he’s good at it. He knows he can rise above coworkers who are uneducated about being wheelchair bound. At the moment, however, he really doesn’t believe that he can do it. “Jen, I can’t.” The tears destroy any chance of intelligible speech and he covers his face with a large palm.

Jensen’s completely lost. He doesn’t know what he can say to make any of this better but Jared’s falling apart and he needs to think of something quick. Anger is boiling up inside him, scalding the parts he usually uses for sympathy and clear thinking. Right now, Jensen wants to lash out at every person in Jared’s life who has ever made the man crumble like that. Thinking about just how long that list of people actually is leaves him pushing all the air from his lungs and staring at Jared. He’s not going to cry, he too angry for it, but he feels like he’s on the edge of some emotional instability. “Jared – “

“No, Jen! No! What can you possibly say that will make this better?” It comes out with a bite Jared didn’t intend and the minute he sees Jensen flinch, he feels even worse about himself. “I know you’re trying to help. I do. And…I am being a fucking asshole who doesn’t deserve that compassion right now…but you can’t help Jen. You can’t. This is who I am. And right now I can’t stand being this. I can’t be me right now.” Jared’s voice hitches on an inhale, making him all the more pathetic.

“Don’t you dare do that.” Jensen pulls himself up and takes a seat in the empty desk chair beside Jared so that they can look each other directly in the eye. For some reason, being on the same level strikes him as being important right now. “You aren’t that person. And, you’re right…I don’t know what I can say to make this better. And I don’t know even half of what it’s like to be you. But…I can say I know that I want to. I know I want to understand you. And…I can’t hate who you are. I hate how all those ignorant assholes make you feel but I don’t see you like that. He pauses to take his glasses off and presses his forehead closer to Jared’s. “I see an amazing person who is a hell of a lot stronger than any of the people who give you shit. You’re stronger than Ana, plus you have a soul – something I am not so sure about her right now. And I see a great teacher who is making an impact in the few months you have been here.” Jensen smiles softly. His words may seem cliché as hell but
he means them more than he realized when he started.

“Yeah?” Jared lets out in a weak exhale of air.

“Yeah. And I think, deep down, you know that too.” Jensen presses further into Jared’s personal space. “Do you believe me?”

“I dunno – ” Jared starts before immediately being cut off.

“Because I could go on. I could tell you that I see an amazing person, who is sexy as hell and leaves me weak in the knees with just one knowing glance. I don’t think anyone else here at Arkin can do that. So…unless you think I’m the type of person who would fall for someone as ‘useless’ as the person you just described, then I would say you’re pretty impressive, Jared.” A wave of warmth crashes into Jensen’s chest and he doesn’t think twice about tilting his head so that he can capture Jared’s lips, catching the man in the middle of an inhale.

Jared freezes. He’s too caught up in the fact that Jensen’s right. About everything. He managed to hit the nail on the head without even knowing what direction to strike. Their kiss is different than any of the ones they’ve shared in the past. It slow but neither of them seem willing to move, focusing instead on the connection they’ve established. It’s solid and grounding and Jared loses himself, drowning out the school and the fact that they’re in a classroom.

Their reflexes are put to the test when there is a noise at the door. The two men fly apart so quickly that Jensen knocks the chair he’s seated in backwards and almost falls on his ass.

“Mr. Padalecki?” a voice squeaks, quiet in a way that denotes if she should even be butting her nose into whatever just happened. “Hello?” she asks again, pushing the door open and finally coming into the room.

Whirling towards the door, Jared sees Ashley slip into the room, her head turning in search of her teacher and indicating there was no way she’d seen both her teachers in a lip lock. “Ashley,” Jared calls, directing her attention towards them.

“Ohh! Mr. P.! I…well…I brought Nurse Riley to see if you were okay. I hope that’s alright. We were all worried about you and wanted to make sure you were okay. I mean…I’ve fallen on that floor before. It’s no fun. And it gets really slippery – ”

“Thank you Ashley,” Jensen says to cut off her nervous ramble. He wonders just how hard Jared must have hit the ground if Ashely’s usually confident and personable nature is so shaken. “That was pretty good thinking. Mr. P. is stronger than a lot of people think, right?” Jensen turns and gives Jared a grin as he places his glasses back on.

“I’m a little banged up. But when aren’t I?” Jared licks his lips and grins, putting his teacher face back on and being “the strong one” for his students. “Thanks Ash. Why don’t you get back to class and work on the project you’ve been obsessing over? You don’t need to hang out with a couple of boring teachers. Nurse Riley can make sure I’m not falling apart.”

She gives a quick nod and leaves the adults on their own. With Ellie Riley reaffirming everything Jared and Jensen already knew, she got straight to the task of making sure an incident report is filed, leaving Jared to answer a series of questions and Jensen to hover.

Jared’s snicker comes as a surprise to even himself. He isn’t exactly in a laughing mood but seeing Jensen so off his game leaves him amused. The moment is a much needed break in the self-pity he’s been overwhelmed with. He makes a mental note that Jensen does usually seem to have everything
in order; his classroom, his role as the union rep, his life, but Jared’s seen how unsettled he can get when his heart gets involve. Jared is going to take that as a compliment. “Jen, you just going to mother-hen me?”

“What? Huh?” Blinking, Jensen shakes his head. “I’m not.”

“Yes you are.” Jared’s isn’t ready to give into it fully but he allows himself a half smile. “I am sure you have stuff you need to do. Ellie has things under control. But, maybe you could talk to Ray for me and make sure he got a sub to cover my first period class? I feel okay enough to work the rest of the day, but I need to finish up here.”

Jensen nods curtly. “I’ll check in on you later,” he says under his breath so that Ellie can’t hear.

“I have no doubt of that,” Jared says with a quirked eyebrow.

Their parting is a secretive type. To Ellie, it is just a uniform exchange between the two. But the silence speaks more than that between Jared and Jensen. There are lingering touches that look like nothing more than slow movements. When Jensen leaves, it’s with a headful of thoughts that need sorting out but he is focused on doing what he told Jared he would. He turns right out of the room, marching towards Ray’s office. Most of his is frustrated that Ray hasn’t come to check in on the wellbeing of one of his employees himself but the other part of him isn’t surprised at all. He’s “got people for that”. He can be the friendly face of Arkin High when everything is going well. But as soon as things start to scramble, he ducks and covers.

Something happens on his way to Ray’s office, however, and he spins on his heels. Before he realizes it, he’s heading towards Ana’s room. Until recently, she’s been nothing more than an ice queen and thorn in Jensen’s side. She hadn’t stirred up many issues. She did her job but always failed in participating to keep Arkin a well-oiled teamwork machine. Now, however, she’s become a problem. She’s leading the faction of teachers who seem to have something against Jared and Jensen can’t keep quiet any longer.

Bursting into Ana’s classroom, Jensen finds it empty aside from Ana fiddling on her cell phone. He doesn’t give her a chance to get a word in. In a voice loud enough to get the sincerity of his message across but quiet enough to keep it confined in the room, Jensen lashes out at her. His voice is a sudden boom and Ana’s phone clatters to the ground in surprise. “Ana, I am only going to say this to you once. After this, if you don’t listen, you’re on your own. Get someone else to cover your ass with the union.” Setting his stance more firmly, he stares her down. “Whatever you have against Jared, you better drop it. The attitude? Lose it. You’ve never been much of a team player in your department and people have let it slide. But you continue making things more difficult for Jared and I’m not going to be able to let things go unnoticed. So take whatever stick you’ve found yourself lodged on and get rid of it!” Jensen turns and slams the door behind him. Adrenaline pulses its way through his body, making him feel like he’s shaking. He can barely think and threatening Ana was probably not the smartest thing to do but he knows she isn’t going to say a word. If there is anything Ana hates more than Jared, it’s being made a fool of. She’ll hide Jensen’s words under the rug until she feels like confronting Jensen herself.

Wrong or right, Jensen doesn’t give a shit. He’s riding a high over finally having the balls to tell Ana exactly what he thinks of her attitude.

Pulling his cell phone out of his pocket, he dial’s Josh’s number without paying much attention. Sure he has a class to teach but talking to his brother will help him see straight again. “Hey Josh, It’s Jensen,” he says when the call unfortunately gets sent to voice mail. “Listen, call me back when you get a chance. Remember that whole conversation we had about me maybe becoming over protective of Jared? Yeah…I think that might be happening. You gotta talk me out of it before my concern
makes Jared feel like I’m smothering him. I never wanna do that. ‘Cause he’s amazing. And I know he can take care of himself. I mean, you’ve met him and…and now I’m babbling. Because I’m so fucking angry. At people. Not Jared. Just…just call me back.” Jensen hangs up quickly before he rambles enough to run out his time on the message.

He knows he promised himself that he’d have faith that Jared can take care of himself. Right now, however, he feels the need to butt in starting to creep up in his gut; it’s too strong to ignore.

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A loud whistle pierces the studio as Ryan pulls his head back. “Damn, Jay! You’ve got it bad.” The man rolls his chair backwards so that he can take in the whole picture. “I figured I would find you painting after those angry text messages you sent, but I didn’t think it would be so…pretty. I thought it would be all irritated and splotchy like some impressionist painting or some crap.”

“I think you mean abstract, but I get the point.” Jared’s lips quirk up and he scrunches his nose when he connects the first analysis Ryan gave. “You think Jensen’s pretty?” Butterflies tease the confines of his stomach at the vocalization of his name.

“Jensen?” Ryan brushes a hand through the air to swipe the thought away. Raising an eyebrow, he points towards the painting Jared’s fussing with. There is the curve of a jaw and the beginnings of an eye. “Are these Jensen?” he teases.

“If you can’t tell then, I’m doing a shit job.” Jared huffs. “But yeah. Well, it’s supposed to be. I just can’t get it right. I stare at him all day but this?” Jared hovers his hand over the jaw line. “It’s just not right.”

“Yeah, well maybe you should just look at him a little more.” Ryan crosses his arms over his chest and smirks.

“You think? Because I try not to look at him to the point where I look like a crazy person. But this specific angel is hard to focus on when…O-oh. Oh wait, you’re kidding.”

Ryan snorts and shakes his head with a laugh to get across how right Jared is. “Like I said, you’ve got it bad.”

“What?”

“Whatever this is that you and Jensen have going on. You…well…I’ve seen you with other guys before. You get all goofy grinned. But this is different. But…I just worry because…Jay, he walks on two legs. And we’ve both seen how that’s gone down in the past.”

Jared huffs and drops his paint brush. After the day he’s had, he’s not completely in the mood to prove to Ryan that what he’s feeling for Jensen is more than just puppy love. Underneath, he does understand where Ryan is coming from. The potential to get hurt is there since things with Jensen have landed them at the point where they are vulnerable but he’s a big enough boy to keep himself from getting hurt. He thinks. “I know you’re saying that because of what Miles did to you last year.”

“And what Tyler did to you two years ago. If I remember correctly, I had to kicks his ass for going around with another two legged walked behind your back,” Ryan shoots back.

“You did not kick his ass.”

“Yeah, well…I would have. And it’s the thought that counts.” Puffing his chest up, Ryan sticks his chin in the air.
“Yeah, okay,” Jared says exaggeratedly with a roll of his eyes. “Well, those type of thoughts don’t have to deal with Jensen ‘cause it’s not like it was with Tyler.” Jared spins his chair so that he can wheel past Ryan out of the room.

Hot on his wheels, Ryan follows his friend so closely that they almost collide when Jared stops short in his living room. “What’s it like then?”

“I,” Jared starts but stops to lick his lips and swallow thickly. It seems like Ryan is the last in Jared’s social circle to hear the words straight from his mouth. “I love him.”


“Yeah. I do. It seems crazy but I do. He’s…hot as hell and kind of amazing. Well…he’s definitely amazing. He loves me. He loves my family, god help him. And he loves my pancakes,” he trails off with a smile on his lips.

“Pancakes?” Ryan’s face pinches in confusion. “What does that even mean?”

“Don’t worry about it. The point is…Jensen’s different.” Seeing the smirk of disbelief on Ryan’s face, Jared leans forward and raises his eyebrows in sincerity. “He is. Trust me Ryan. He…He’s done so much to try and understand how my life operates. We’re making this work. And he makes me happy. He’s the best damn part about working at Arkin high.” His eyes dart at his lap and he can’t stop himself from sucking his lips in when he smiles, dimples popping and making him look adorable and shy at the same time.

Ryan’s face morphs into a serious one as he studies Jared in silence before breaking into an open mouthed grin and reaching out to ruffle Jared’s hair, keeping it up despite Jared’s annoyed swatting. “Oh my god…you are in love.”

“I just said that.” Jared gives one last swat at Ryan’s hand before rolling backwards out of his range of attack.

“I know but…like…you’re blushing and shit.”

The teasing makes Jared blush deeper. “Fuck you,” he scoffs without any real heat.

A laugh erupts from Ryan’s mouth and he shakes his head. “Now it’s worse.” After another fit of laughter and a death glare from Jared, he composes himself enough to hold two hands up in a truce. “No, seriously, that’s awesome. I’m happy for you man.”

“Thanks. I – ” Jared’s words are cut off by the sudden chime of his doorbell. He isn’t expecting anyone, which is written all over his face. Shrugging towards Ryan, he rolls in the direction of the door and pulls it open. “Jensen!” He shouts louder than he intended, trying to cover the fact up by clearing his throat. The man stands there with a smile and his hands shoved in his pockets, something Jared wishes wasn’t so adorable because he’s barely recovered from blushing.

“Hey, Jared. Did I surprise you?”

“Uhh…no. No – ” Jared starts before Ryan yells loud enough to drown out his words.

“Jensen! We were just talking about you.” Ryan grins and knocks his wheelchair beside Jared’s, effectively blocking Jensen from being able to enter the home.

Head whipping towards Ryan, Jared locks eyes with him and glares. “No we weren’t,” Jared yells in a harsh whisper.
“Yes we were. Remember, Jay? When you told me you loved him.” Ryan shrugs off Jared’s anger and looks at Jensen with a half-smile. “He said he loves you,” he relays to Jensen matter-of-factly, earning him a secretly pleased eyebrow raise from the man.

“You’re an asshole,” Jared practically growls.

“No I’m not.” Elbowing Jared in the ribs, Ryan smiles as wide as he can. “You love me too. Just not like that. I mean…I hope not like that. Because that would be kind of awkward...since you know...we’re not fifteen anymore and you’re kind of dating him,” he finishes with a thumb jab toward Jensen.

“Ugh!” Jared puts his hands up in defeat. “If you weren’t my friend I would…I would…” Instead of giving an actual threat, he shoves Ryan backwards and out of the way.

Coughing to remind everyone he is still in the room Jensen interject. “I didn’t mean to interrupt or anything. I just…I wanted to make sure you were feeling okay after your fall in the hallway. I tried texting but I haven’t heard back.”

Jared immediately shakes his head and looks up at Jensen. “No! You’re not interrupting. This jerk is just being a pain in the ass,” he says with a nod of his head towards Ryan. “I’m glad you stopped by. I was in the studio painting. It’s kind of what I do when I want to blow off steam.” He holds up his hands towards Jensen. “I’m a messy painter so I usually don’t touch my phone while I’m in the studio. Sorry. I wasn’t trying to ignore you.”

“I didn’t think you were ignoring me. I was just worried,” Jensen scratches at the back of his neck. “I wanted to make sure you were okay. Make sure you didn’t hurt anything.”

“I’m fine. A few bruises but nothing I am actually worried about. Please, come in,” Jared says as he rolls backwards.

“You sure?”

“Absolutely. Let me just go wash my hands, okay? I’ll be right back.” Jared smiles sweetly to Jensen before craning his neck to give a Ryan a warning glance while he mouths, “be good.” He keeps up the eye contact as he makes his way towards the bathroom. His heart is fumbling in his chest and he realizes how much he wants moments like this to never end. He’s not an idiot, he knows these moments will fade but right now he is going to wring out every emotion that comes with the excitement of a young relationship.

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With Jared gone, Jensen isn’t sure what to do with himself. It isn’t that he’s awkward around new people. He isn’t. It’s just that Ryan is Jared’s best friend and he’d like to land himself in good standing with him. He didn’t expect to see the other man there and it’s thrown him. Part of Jensen can’t deny getting snagged on the fact that Jared and Ryan dated. He knows it was a long time ago and remembers what it was like to be in a teenage relationship himself; it probably means nothing now. Still, it leaves him floundering with something to say to Ryan. “So...” he starts.

“So...” Ryan spins so that he is facing Jensen dead on.

The two men size each other up in silence, wheels turning in their heads as opinions are made and solidified. It’s not exactly tense but there is a slight uneasiness to it. Ryan breaks the silence by smiling. “You do know that if you hurt my best friend, I will kill you.” It’s not really a question just
It’s obvious to Jensen that he could take Ryan in a fight, the comment prompting Jensen’s genuine laughter to fill the room. He’s relieved when Ryan joins in, setting the tone for their relationship. “You’re a good friend.”

“Tell him that,” Ryan says between laughs.

“He knows.” Jensen gives one last laugh before turning serious again. He doesn’t owe Ryan anything but he knows what it is like to have someone’s back. “I have no intentions on hurting him.”

“I hope so.”

Voice a bit deeper, Jensen continues. “I mean it. In fact, I spent all day hunting down the people who do.”

“Did you get ‘em?” Ryan asks.

“I lit a fire under their asses. That’s for sure.”

“Good.” Ryan nods. “Listen, I was just leaving anyway. So…I’ll give you two some privacy. But…it would good to see you Jensen. We should, I dunno, get together soon. Jared tells me you brew some pretty good beer. Maybe we could barbeque or something.”

“Yeah, sounds like a plan. Jared and I have been meaning to get to know each other’s friends. So I guess it is about time we got to that.” He reaches out a hand in goodbye as a friendly gesture.

Shaking Jensen’s hand, Ryan nods. “Cool. Well, I’ll see you around.” He gives Jensen a sort of salute before turning towards the door. “Jay, I’ll call you later,” he yells loud enough to travel towards the bathroom and makes his way out of the house moments before Jared comes back into the room.

“He left?” Jared asks.

“Yeah. But only after he threatened to kill me if I ever hurt you,” Jensen teases.

Jared covers his face with a hand, dragging it down slowly. “Oh my god.”

“Relax, Jay. It’s okay. He’s just being a good friend. Besides, my life is pretty safe right now because I don’t intend on hurting you anytime soon.” Jensen leans towards Jared, putting a hand on each of the wheelchair’s armrests. He smiles warmly and feels himself relax now that it’s just the two of them.

“Oh, is that true?” Jared’s words reveal that he’s melting into the safety of their alone time just as much.

“Absolutely.” Moving closer, Jensen juts his chin so that his lips make a teasing gesture towards Jared’s. “Come here. I didn’t get to properly kiss you hello.”

It’s Jared who completes the connection, tilting his head up and ghosting his lips over Jensen’s. After a moment to enjoy the promise of the kiss, he rolls forward enough to crash their lips together. A breathy gasp leaves both of their lips and Jared’s eyes flutter closed.

They kiss long enough for each man to lose himself in the other. Jared allows his eyes to open for a split second but just in time to notice that Jensen does the same. Instead of being weird, the corners of
their eyes smile into the kiss. Both Jared’s hands trace the curve of Jensen’s jaw, his fingers tracing the contours.

When they break apart, Jared’s grinning. Something turns in his head and his smile takes on a mischievous glint.

“What?” Jensen asks.

“Come here. I wanna show you something.” Jared grabs Jensen’s hand, holding onto it as he rolls past him and then plants it on his shoulder so that Jensen can follow him towards his studio. When they get there, he leads Jensen towards the painting in the middle of the room. “I… I was working on this today. What do you think?”

Jensen blinks at the painting. It’s in tones of blue and purple but the realism is striking. It’s clearly the side of a face, a man’s face based on the bone structure. He has a gut feeling that he recognizes it but it’s hard to tell because the face isn’t complete. It’s just a fragment of one floating near the edge of the canvas. The more he looks at it, the familiarity of the painting starts to sink in. “Is that my face.”

“Well…it’s not perfect but…yeah. It’s supposed to be. I just can’t get it right.” Jared chews his lip, making it clear that he’s still not sure how Jensen feels about being his subject matter. “You don’t mind, do you?”

“Mind? Jared, of course I don’t! That’s pretty fucking awesome. It looks so good.” Jensen smirks and goes to trace the jaw line on the painted version of his face. Before he can make contact, Jared grabs his hand.

“Don’t. It’s still wet.” Pulling Jensen’s hand down, Jared curls their fingers together. “You sure you don’t think it’s weird?”

“Weird that my boyfriend is a fucking amazing artist and would rather paint me than some other man’s face? Umm, let me think.” Jensen feigns concentration. “No! Of course not. That’s…that’s awesome Jay. I mean…this whole studio is awesome. I’ve seen some of your art before but I’ve never really see you in progress.” He licks his lips and looks from the painting to Jared and back to the painting. “You said you can’t get it right. I can model for you if you want. Maybe that will be enough inspiration?”

“Really? That would be great!” Jared’s eyes perk up. “I mean….if you want to. I can’t seem to get the angel right but if you’re standing in front of me, I’m sure I could nail it.” Swallowing, Jared licks his lips and looks from the painting to Jared and back to the painting. “You said you can’t get it right. I can model for you if you want. Maybe that will be enough inspiration?”

“You’re trying to impress me?” Jensen asks with curiosity.

“Falling on my ass at Arkin sure isn’t sexy. So, yes, I would kind of like to be able to impress you with something more than my stellar inability to take right turns in the hallway on rainy days.”

“I dunno, falling like that was pretty sexy.” Jensen feigns a lustful express.

“I promise you, this is much better than falling.” Jared says as he picks up the paintbrush he used earlier and positions himself in front of the painting. Combing his fingers though his hair with his free hand, he pushes strands out of his eyes and purses his lips as he studies Jensen thoughtfully before dabbing his brush through some paints. “This doing anything for you?”

“Surprisingly, yes.” Jensen says truthfully. He watches the way Jared chews on his bottom lip while he concentrates. He can’t see what Jared is painting but the brush is dancing over the canvas and
Jared’s face is more expressive than it has ever been before. The way the man’s lips twist to the side and eyes narrow for a split second before he gets a focused determination in them is making arousal uncoil inside Jensen. All it takes is Jared biting the corner of his lip for Jensen to surge forward and crash into Jared, kissing him and earning them both smooshes of paint on their shirts.

“Jen!” Jared’s yelp is muffled by the fact that Jensen’s lips are pressed firmly against his own. Speaking takes a backseat to everything else because Jensen is kissing him and there doesn’t seem to be anything more important than that. Tilting his head back, he’s open to deepening the kiss but it comes with them both moving inches backwards, toppling the easel and the pallet of paint and forcing Jensen to grab Jared’s shoulders to prevent themselves from collapsing. “Jen! It’s oil paint!”

“Don’t care.”

“It’ll ruin your shirt,” Jared says in a failing attempt to keep them both clean.

“Don’t. Care.” Jensen presses forward and kisses Jared deeper. Right now, all he cares about is kissing Jared so completely that the heat he’s feeling inside him boils over and embraces them both. Sure, he’s actually wearing a shirt but the stains are worth the way Jared’s tongue feels when it teases alongside his own. They skid backwards a little more and there are more things clattering around them, and Jensen’s had enough of that. Something rises in him and he pushes into Jared, grabbing him around the waist and pulling them both to the ground. Without the wheelchair in the way, they’re able to lay flush beside each other.

“Oof!” Jared huffs out when he finds himself laying in a mess of paint on his side, nose brushing against Jensen’s as he gets his bearings. He pulls back for a moment in thought but then smiles sexily and dives in for a kiss.

Jensen’s ready for the gesture. He brings both hands up to cup Jared’s face so that he can pull him in closer. He likes this part better, kissing on the same level. There is no difference in their mobility because they aren’t going anywhere, at least not as long as Jensen gets his way. He juts forward, pressing into Jared’s body, realizing his brushing his obvious denim clad hard-on against Jared’s thigh. His brain makes the connection that Jared most likely isn’t aware of the fact that he has the ability to arouse Jensen in a matter of seconds. “So fucking sexy,” he mumbles, grabbing one of Jared’s hands and guiding it down to his dick and pressing his palm firmly against it.

Jared makes a pleased noise and nips at Jensen’s bottom lip. “Paintbrushes do that to you? Because I have a hell of a lot more paintbrushes. All different kinds. Small ones.” He gives a quick kiss to Jensen’s lips. “Big ones.” Another kiss. “Thin ones and,” pausing he licks his lips, “thick ones.” He nudges his palm into Jensen arousal for emphasis.

Groaning, Jensen melts. “We still talking about paintbrushes?”

“Maybe,” Jared teases. “It seems to get you going.”

“It’s not that. It’s…the way you look when you’re painting. The fact that I know you’re painting me. That you even want to. That’s…that’s…” Jensen growls from his core and scoots closer to Jared, kissing him with enough force to knock the conversation out of him. There a time for talking and it’s not now. The worry he felt from early creeps through and each kiss becomes needier because it’s his way of reminding himself that Jared’s okay. Jared is solid and breathing and by the looks of his groin, just as turned on as Jensen is. He still works just as he always did. The kissing may border on possessive but Jensen thinks of it as more of as protective. Nothing is going to happen to Jared. The kissing is enough to make Jensen believe that. In an attempt to press his torso up so he can look down at Jared, Jensen slaps his hand out, lands it in paint and almost slips back down again. He catches himself a fraction away from Jared, stealing the air from his breath and moaning.
Jared tries to read the expression. It’s difficult when he’s looking cross-eyed at the other man.

“Wha?”

Another husky moan is Jensen’s only answer before moving swiftly to yank Jared’s pants down. It’s a messy affair, paint streaking Jared’s hips and belly before Jensen gets the zipper of his jeans undone. It’s easier after that, but there are smears of purple trailing down Jared’s pale thighs as Jensen rid’s the man of everything below the waist.

Jared tenses habitually at having his scars and legs on display but he barely has a moment to register his self-consciousness because Jensen immediately leans down and licks a trail from the base of his cock to the crown. Pleasure sparks to life and electrifies all the nerves that still feel like working.

“Nngh!” Jared shifts his upper body and bites his lip. One hand finds its way to the side of Jensen’s face and he coasts it through the man’s hair, leaving blue pigment in its wake.

Jensen’s insistent. He feels a fresh pulse of blood thickening Jared’s dick and he hums contentedly. He settles into a flurry of activity, mouth teasing the tip of Jared’s length before swallowing him down only to repeat the action again. Every move is thorough, everything done solidly with attention to every detail of Jared’s groin. It only takes a few moments before Jared is panting and trying to form words he can’t actually articulate. It’s music to Jensen’s ears and he doesn’t want to hear it stop. Usually he and Jared speak out what they are doing; it’s how they’ve made sure nothing hurts and everything is doable based on their mobility. Right now, Jensen’s sure what he has planned is fine with Jared since he doesn’t intend on letting Jared do any of the work right now. Pulling off Jared’s dick with a pop, he hoists Jared’s hip’s up so that most of the man’s weight is being supported by his shoulders. It’s a bit tricky but the smear of paint on the floor helps Jensen slide backwards so that he’s almost laying on his belly between Jared’s splayed legs. He’s supported by his elbows and it leaves him at the perfect height to lick an explanatory wet stripe over Jared’s puckered opening.

“You okay?” he breathes out against Jared’s thigh.

“Uh huh.” Jared sounds far away as his eyes flutter closed but he’s completely aware of the situation. He braces his arms on the floor and uses them to help support his weight. His upper body strength allows him to push into Jensen and keep him steady.

“Good.” Jensen kisses Jared’s thigh several times before trailing the kisses down to Jared’s entrance. He keeps kissing, letting his tongue flick out every now and then before he gets more brazen and teases the furled ring of muscles. Each kiss comes with Jensen’s tongue pushing a smidge deeper. He lets himself get sloppy so things get wetter and louder. The muscle responds to him, twitching every now and then but mostly relaxing into the attention it’s being lavished with.

After sucking the rim, Jensen darts as much of his tongue as he can inside and swirls it around, earning him a moan from Jared. It’s not enough for either of them but the noises Jared is making leaves a pulse of precome to make a mess out of Jensen’s boxer briefs. He rolls his hips for some type of relief even though he’s not going to get what he needs by friction with the floor. He keeps Jared’s hips up as he rises into a cross-legged sit, resting Jared’s ass on his lap. The angle allows him to sneak a saliva wet finger inside of Jared. It’s about all the prep he feels he can handle right now if he doesn’t want to lose it before he even loses his pants. “Can I fuck you?” he asks stupidly.

“It would be pretty awkward if I said ‘no’ right now.” Jared hums when Jensen curls his finger and his pleasure spikes. He turns his head so he can lock lust drunk eyes with Jensen. “And I would be pretty stupid to say no.”

“Glad to hear it,” Jensen bends forward. It’s a stretch but he’s able to stay mindful of Jared’s legs while still capturing the man’s lips in a rough kiss. He keeps a hand curled around Jared’s dick and twists.
“Jen…” Jared gasps, “condom. They’re in my room.” He makes a grasping gesture towards the direction of his bedroom.

“Got one right here.” Jensen nods towards his hip. He twists but can’t reach his pocket. Carefully moving Jared so that he is laying on the floor, he stands to kick his shoes off and rip his jeans off. For good measure, he peels the rest of his clothing away, leaving him naked and fishing through the pocket of his discarded pants. Pulling out his wallet, he finds the condom he stashed there.

Jared’s eyebrows raise. “You carry a condom in your wallet?”

“I do now that I’m dating the hot new art teacher.” Jensen smirks, ripping the foil packet with his teeth so he can roll the condom down his length. “It’s a new occupational hazard.”

“I’ll show you hazard. Get back down here!” Jared’s words are demanding and mischievous at the same time. He struggles while trying to get his shirt off, but he succeeds and rids himself of it to reveal paint flecked skin.

Jensen’s mouth waters at the sight of the Jared’s muscular arms and chest. Getting back down to his knees, both of his hands slide up Jared’s abs, pecs and land on his biceps. He rubs his thumb over a spray of paint smears it. “This paint is sexier on you than on the brush.” He gives Jared a teasing kiss before fully committing to it. He keeps up the kissing and the touching, Jared chases every gesture the best he can. By the time Jensen’s hand sneaks its way back to Jared’s dick, he’s and leaking as sticky mess all over his palm.

“I don’t need that,” Jared pants. “I need you. That’s it.”

“Roll on your side,” Jensen says with a kiss to the column of Jared’s neck. He lets Jared move on his own and lays beside him so the pounding of his heart can be felt as he presses his chest into Jared’s back. He works fast and Jared doesn’t even have to demand the man’s dick before Jensen is lining up and pressing inside.

“Oh, fuck, yes,” Jared keens. He bites his lip and tries to look over his shoulder at Jensen’s face.

Jensen is biting his own lip, gaze cast towards where he is sinking into his boyfriend. Holding Jared’s leg up and out, he slides home. He feels like he’s swooning when he rolls his hips and gets as deep as possible. “Oh, god, baby…” Hooking his other arm around Jared’s middle, he pulls them snugly together and starts moving. Each thrust causes a slide of their bodies across the paint and the snap of his hips pushes all the air out of Jared’s lungs.

Jared grabs at the floor, twisting so that he’s not fully on his side anymore and slightly facing belly down. “Pull my leg higher. I can’t…I…” He pants and looks over his shoulder. “Change the angle,” he gets out in a rush. When Jensen listens, his eyes practically roll back and he shivers at the perfection of the angle. “Right th-there!” His whole body thrums with pleasure and he starts choking on moans. With each thrust, his upper lip twitches and he grits his teeth.

Every muscle in Jared’s body goes tense, Jensen can feel it. He lifts up, keeping his grip on Jared’s leg and using it for leverage so he can quicken his pace. Jared feels amazing. The sheer fact that he is so responsive to Jensen’s actions ends up being an even bigger turn on for Jensen than any of the physical stuff and he fights to keep from coming. He wants to prolong this because it’s good. Amazing. It’s different than any of the other times they’ve had sex. They’re still careful but there is a contained recklessness about this moment that he wants to dwell in. His brain is still aware enough to register the choked moans coming from Jared. He looks down to see Jared’s muscles jerk several times before tensing completely. The man’s eyes are squeezed closed in what looks to be an orgasm, a thought Jensen confirms when he moves his hand enough to swipe through a sticky splash of come
on Jared’s belly. “Jay…”

“Oh god,” Jared says while covering his face.

“Don’t do that,” Jensen breathes against the shell of Jared’s ear. “Don’t hide.” Pulling Jared’s hand down, he kisses his jaw. “I already told you how hot I think it is that you come like that.” To prove his point, he jerks his hips forward and rolls them so that he brushing up all the places Jared reacts to. “I love that you come first. It lets me know I’m not hurting you. That you can feel everything I’m doing inside you. It’s,” he pauses to kiss the sweat damp curve of his neck, “fucking sexy.”

Jared doesn’t use words but lets out a keening noise and arches his neck so Jensen can keep kissing and dragging his teeth over it.

Jensen grunts, snapping his hips faster. Navigating his way through Jared’s moans of pleasure, he starts pounding into Jared, both of them rocking together in waves until it’s too much. Letting out a shout, he fills the condom with pulses of come, tightening his grip on Jared while he rides out each wave. “Holy shit.” He snaps his hips one final time before falling into a boneless heap.

They’re messy and sticky but they can’t complain. Coming down from the orgasm is a medley of panting gasps for air and erratic heartbeats. Jensen finds himself shaking his head with a gentle laugh because they just had amazing sex on the studio floor. He’s reeling from the spontaneity of what they’ve just done. He’s still laughing when he slowly pulls out of Jared, rolling the man so that he’s lying on his back. “You okay?”

Jared blinks his eyes open and they come into focus. He takes Jensen in and lets out his own soft laughter through his panting. “I’m perfect.” His dimples pop when he widens his smile. “You’re covered in paint.”

“You too.” Jensen surveys the damaged they’ve caused. The floor is a disaster of paint, sweat and come but they look even messier. He flops to the floor with a slap so he can lay on his back beside Jared. They don’t talk for a while, only slowly lace their fingers together while taking the time to let their breathing even out.

“This better not happen when you ask other people to model for you,” Jensen teases to break the silence.

“I swear…that’s never happened before.” Jared squeezes Jensen’s hand. “I never wanted it to.” There is something in the depths of Jared’s eyes that hits Jensen square in the heart. “I hope this doesn’t happen when you brew beer.”

“Only one way to find out,” Jensen says with a laugh. “You up for the challenge?”

“Always”

Jensen likes the sound of determination in Jared’s voice. That’s the Jared he’s falling evermore in love with.

Chapter End Notes

Hi everyone! I am so sorry it took forever to upload this chapter. I actually do have the whole story written. I have just been so busy with my wedding (which was amazing)
and life to get it edited and fleshed out. So here is the next chapter. I am going to go back and edit it more but I know people have been more than patient waiting for this chapter. So thank you very much for your kind words of encouragement and inquiries. I hope you like it. Please tell me what you think. I have been away from these versions of Jared and Jensen for a while. I hope I did them justice. XOXO
I adore you!

*SPOILER*
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Jared is FINALLY getting pregnant in the next chapter. Woohoo!
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

OMG...Sex is about to happen. LOTS OF SEX. You have been warned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jared curses under his breath and hates himself for it. He hates that going to Jensen’s apartment is such an ordeal and that it’s getting the best of him. Most of his life he’s worked so hard not to let things that two legged people do with ease come as difficult to him, or at least, he tries to hide it. But Jensen’s apartment complex is a pain in his ass, or more accurately, his hands, since the elevator isn’t fixed and he needs to figure out how to get to Jensen’s floor by taking the long route.

None of that is Jensen’s fault. Jensen’s be raining hell on the complex about the delayed repairs. And it’s not Jensen’s fault that Jared insisted he come over today. There has been guilt on his mind over how often Jensen comes to Jared’s place. True, it’s easier for Jared to get around in his own house, but that doesn’t mean it’s fair that Jensen’s given the responsibility of driving back and forth every time.

Besides, Jensen promised to teach Jared a thing or two about brewing beer. It’s only fair after the hands on art lesson he and Jensen had in his studio. Their romp on his studio floor had been a bitch to clean up but worth every drop of paint spilt. Jensen had made sure of cleaning each fleck of paint off of Jared skin and he was very thorough. Just thinking about the way Jensen figured out how to make showering with him sexy, made arousal coil tighter in Jared’s belly. He’d never thought he’d shower with any man but Jensen went about getting them clean both like it was no big deal that, given Jared’s paraplegia, he had to seat Jared in the chair built into his shower to assist with his showering. He washed them both, leaving them slippery enough to slide wandering hands over places that ached to be touched. He had to cut his thoughts off before he dwelled on the remembrance of the way Jensen’s mouth had felt around his dick when the man dropped to his knees.

But the new thoughts served more of a purpose than stirring up arousal. It sent his frustrations packing; by the time he shows up in front of Jensen’s door, his cheeks are flushed. Jared hopes he can pass it off as exhaustion rather than what it really is because it wouldn’t take much to forget brewing and have a reenactment of their previous x-rated activities. After ringing the doorbell, he braces himself of the armrests of the chair and redistributes his weight because his thoughts on the way up here have left him feeling uncomfortable.

“Hey!” Jensen says with a smile on his face when he opens the door. He’s got on a worn Pearl Jam t-shirt that somehow seems to have mastered clinging to Jensen’s torso in all the right places.

“Hey yourself.” Since he’s still bracing himself in the chair, he pushes upwards as a sign that he wants Jensen’s lips on his.

Jensen complies, bending down and closing the gap between them. His lips are warm and soft, making Jared let out a contented breath the moment they connect. When the moment is over, Jensen steps back. He’s got this shy smile on his face that Jared always finds after they kiss chastely like that. It’s kind of cute and funny that after all they’ve done together, he still gets flustered by Jared’s lips. It’s okay, though. Jared’s pretty much battling his own case of butterflies trying to tickle the
inside of his belly.

Maybe it’s the fact that Jensen’s the first guy he’s dated in a long time, or the first guy he’s seriously fallen for since…ever, but Jared’s caught up in the currents of their relationship. He feels Jensen’s pull all the time but standing in front of him makes reacting to it unavoidable. He wants to be near Jensen in a way that feels vital to his existence. Jared laughs because he doesn’t know what else to do and runs a hand through his hair. “I just saw you but I’m realizing how much I’ve missed you.”

Jensen pivots so that Jared can wheel though the entrance-way. “Well that’s good. I’ve missed you too.” He smiles. Once Jared’s inside, he jump-skips his way in front of him and halts his progress into the apartment. “Missed being able to do this whenever I want.” Leaning down, he kisses Jared again but this time it’s more intense. Their lips work against each other’s and Jared’s eyes flutter closed when he sneaks his tongue out to get a taste of Jensen.

Through the kiss, Jared’s voice is playful. “You should just do that whenever you want. You know, at work. Who cares. The kids would probably love it because it’s a sign that their teachers have souls and aren’t actual robots who live in the school.”

That makes Jensen loud so loudly that he has to pull out of the kiss. “Oh god…I’m sure they would love it. But I’m not really keen on sharing my social life with anyone at work. It’s none of their business, right? The women know they’re barking up the wrong tree with me but that’s about all they need to know.”

There is a lightness to Jensen’s tone but Jared pulls back, feeling like they hit him in the stomach. “Yeah because…” He lets his words drop off because he doesn’t know how to finish. The hurt he feels is so much worse because it came directly after love for Jensen crashed into him.

Thankfully, Jensen is perceptive enough to pick up on it immediately. His face shifts and goes serious, bracing his own weight on the arms of Jared’s chair so he can lean closer. “Hey, no…” He chews his bottom lip and tries to get Jared’s attention. “Hey, wait. It’s not like that. It’s just…”

“It’s just that I’m the new hire there and you’re the union rep and it probably wouldn’t sit well with everyone,” Jared’s words are picked up on the edge and he realizes he’s mocking Jensen.

“It’s not that.” Jensen pauses to huff out a breath. “Well, it is, but it’s not like you’re making it sound. I’m going to bat for you with the administration. I don’t need them thinking it’s because of our relationship. I know exactly what our relationship is. That’s all that matters. Them,” he says with a dismissive wave of his hand, “They don’t matter. They’ll figure it all out in time. And that’s fine by me. Just let it happen on it’s own.”

Jared knows Jensen’s right. He gets it. He wishes the world wasn’t like that but it is. “Shit, you’re right. I’m sorry. Sometimes I think about a few of the people from work and I get…I get…I dunno…like I want to throw a whole bunch of colors that don’t match onto a canvas. That makes no sense does it?”

The ramble breaks the tension and Jensen laughs, pulling back. “No. No, it makes perfect sense. Come on in. Have a beer. It’ll help.”

“You help,” Jared says, knowing how cheesy the phrase sounds. “But beer sounds good too.”

After that, it’s pretty smooth sailing. The kitchen is a bit cramped with all the brewing equipment and Jared’s wheelchair but they make do. Jensen hands Jared a beer and takes one for himself, popping the tops and clinking bottles as they set off on their first brewing collaboration.
Jared doesn’t do much. It’s actually a little difficult since he can’t pivot well from the stove to the cooler Jensen filled with the already milled grains. Mostly he just checks temperatures and weighs out ingredients. He gets the idea of brewing but watching Jensen do it is more interesting than actually learning. The man is all calculation and precision. It’s damn sexy. Seriously, watching Jensen’s passion for his hobby flare to life gives him another depth that Jared wants to explore. He rattling off facts and brewing tips to Jared that astound him. Jared already knew Jensen to be an excellent teacher but for him to master this skill as well ends up being a huge turn on. Part of him already knows that Jensen feels the same way about him if what happened in his studio is anything to go on.

Jared leans over to reach for another round of beers. “This is actually the recipe we are trying to make. It’s an oatmeal stout. I know you told me you like stouts better than IPAs so I figured it would be more fun for you. It’s a lengthier process with a few more ingredients but I didn’t think spending some more time with me would leave you complaining.” He smile and plops the new bottle of beer in Jared’s outreached hand.

“Not a problem at all. I like watching you work.” He smirks and takes a swig of beer. “Shit, you made this? It’s fucking good.”

“You say that like you’re surprised.”

“No! I just… I’m impressed. That’s all.” Jared brings the bottle to his mouth again and drinks more. The finish is flawless. “I could drink this all night.”

“You could but your ass would be on the floor. The ABV is 8%.”

Jared raises his eyebrows. “Are you trying to get me drunk, Mr. Ackles?”

“No trying, Mr. Padalecki. But should you drink too much, you’re more than welcome to spend the night. I’ve heard my bed is pretty comfortable.” Jensen licks his lips and takes a drink from his own beer.

Shaking his head, Jared smiles. “Jensen, you gotta stop talking like this or this beer is never going to be brewed. Come on, what’s next?”

That brings Jensen back to the task at hand. “Okay, so we need about 8 gallons of water and have to bring it to 120° and hold it there for about a half hour until we heat it to around 168° and use it to sparge.”

“What?” Jared says.

“Sparge. It’s what we do with the grains. We fill the cooler with water and then drain it slowly. It extracts all the good stuff from the grains and then we get to boil it for a while and add the hops.” Jensen looks at Jared’s face and laughs. “Don’t worry, it will make sense when we do it. I promise.”

“Whatever you say.” Shrugging, Jared takes another drink.

Turns out, after doing all the meticulous sterilization of materials and measuring out, the other truth about brewing is that there is a lot of waiting. Tons of it, in fact. Jared and Jensen pass the time talking and drinking. They both down several more bottles of oatmeal stout before the alarm on Jensen’s phone signals them that it’s time to sparge.

Jensen does understand sparging once he’s actually doing it. They fill the cooler with hot water, cover it up, and let it sit for a while before draining the cooler into another pot that will serve as the final container the beer will be brewed in.
More waiting arrives when they fill the cooler and Jensen says they have to wait an hour.

That leaves them time to drink more and Jared learns how Jensen got into brewing in the first place. It mostly started from the fact that he used to be really picky about his beer and was determined to make ones he liked. As he brewed, his palate started to expand but he kept brewing anyway, striving to make beers that tasted professional and less like backyard brewing. Jared’s feeling happily buzzed, the alcohol making him lazy. His movements are less precise than usual, everything is drawn out, so there are multiple reasons for letting his hand linger longer than usual when his hand brushes against Jensen’s thigh.

Jensen leans into the touch, smiling into a slow kiss to Jared’s lips.

Jared’s brain likes that. The tip of his tongue traces Jensen’s bottom lip and drives deeper, finding the sweet aftertaste of the beer they’re drinking. Underneath it all is Jensen’s familiar taste. They draw out their kisses, hands coming up to rest on each other’s necks, right below their jaw so they can anchor each other.

Their brains are foggy when they startle out of the moment by Jensen’s alarm going off again. Jensen ignores it long enough to pull Jared’s face closer and give him one deep kiss. Then he’s twisting away to deal with the beer.

“Shit,” Jensen curses. The frustration in his voice is almost palpable.

Jared spins around to see Jensen staring at the cooler with a scowl on his face. “What?”

Jensen points to the white circular twist-on cover. “You left the cover off the cooler.”

“Yeah, I…” Jared pauses, a little slow on the uptake. “Oh, shit! Was I not supposed to do that?”

“You weren’t supposed to do that. The water gets too cold and doesn’t extract enough sugars from the grains.”

“I’m sorry! Shit. I fucked it up, didn’t I? Can’t we just heat up the water again? Shit. Shit. Shit.” He looks up at Jensen, eyebrows lowered and mouth pursed in a frown. “I fucked up. I’m sorry.”

“Nah, we can’t just heat it up again. I have no idea how much sugar was leached out already. I…it just won’t come out right.” Shaking his head, Jensen smiles to show that his anger isn’t directed at Jared. “It’s okay. Really. It doesn’t matter. I had fun just teaching you about it. Honestly, it’s okay.”

“Really?” Jared’s voice is pleading.

“Really. We have more than enough beer here.”

“Can’t we just drink that,” Jared asks, pointing to the cooler.

Jensen’s laugh is loud and it echoes through the apartment. “Jare, that’s just sugar water. It needs to ferment a few weeks before it’s even remotely alcoholic.”

“Shit. Yeah. I knew that.” Jared laughs at his own question but he’s buzzed and it seemed like a legitimate suggestion moments ago.

“Here, taste.” Jensen dips a finger in the cooler and holds it to Jared’s lips.

Rolling his eyes up so he can catch Jensen’s gaze, he locks eyes with him as he snakes his tongue out and licks Jensen’s finger. After a moment he wraps his lips around Jensen’s finger and sucks it,
letting out a filthy moan in the process. “Mmm, it’s sweet.”

Standing there at a loss for words, Jensen’s breathing quickens when Jared rolls his tongue around the man’s finger. Swallowing thickly, Jensen bites his bottom lip. “Fuuuck,” he draws out and moans.

“That sounds like a good idea.” Jared feels mischievous and in the safety of Jensen’s apartment, he’s going to take full advantage of that. “That sounds like a really fucking good idea.” With a teasing smirk, he rolls backwards, out of the kitchen and into the living room area. Jensen’s hot on his wheels and by the time Jared hoists himself out of the wheelchair and onto the couch, Jensen’s blanketing him with his own body.

Jared’s mind reels. Jensen feels so hard and good against him, solid and comforting and all he wants to do is breathe him in and kiss him. They make out, dissolving into sloppy kisses and groping hands. Alcohol makes them more brazen and Jared isn’t shy about letting Jensen know how bad he wants him. How he wants him. It gives Jensen a rush and he rolls his hips into Jared’s pelvis, coaxing a gasp of air out of both of them.

Their movements get more frantic and rushed. Jensen’s hands are popping Jared’s shirt up over his head so that his palms can coast over the exposed well-developed muscles until they land on his pecs. He slides them around Jared’s chest so that they are pressing into Jared’s back, holding them more tightly together.

“Ugh,” Jared sighs as their bodies slot together. He tries to get some type of friction on his dick but he can’t. The fact that Jensen’s got a vice grip on him and without the use of his legs, it’s hard to move. He tries again, arms pushing down against the couch so that his hips can rise up against Jensen’s. He gets frustrated and wiggles more, impatience at getting to the part where Jensen’s hands are down his pants.

Unfortunately, he loses his balance and tumbles off the couch. The action brings Jensen down beside him. Both men land on the floor with an “umph” of disorientation. Shaking his head, Jared’s mind clears and his loud laughter fills the room. If there wasn’t a buzz of alcohol coursing through him, he would have been embarrassed at his misstep but instead all he can do is laugh and run a hand through his hair.

Jensen’s laughing alongside him. “You okay?” His hands find Jared’s face, cupping it and running a loving thumb over his kiss swollen lips.

“Yeah. I’m good. Sometimes I guess it’s a good thing I can’t feel my legs. I landed right on my thighs. But I’m fine. Nothing is broken. I’m…” His words trail off as he gets lost in the hungry look Jensen’s giving him. Jensen’s thumb drags his lower lip down and Jared shivers, closing his eyes and sighing as he opens his mouth to run his tongue over the thumb when Jensen brushes it over his lips again.

“God, Jared, you’re killing me.” Jensen’s moan is deep and turns into a growl at the end. Their lips crash together again, this time more hurried. Their hands are fumbling over each other. It’s only a matter of seconds before Jared’s tugging Jensen’s shirt up over his head, laughing at their clumsiness when it gets caught on Jensen’s head and they have to work together to dislodge it. Jared’s hands go for Jensen’s belt buckles at the same time that Jensen’s hands are working open the button and zipper on Jared’s jeans. Their hands are rough with the rushed tasks, but Jensen yanks Jared’s pants down in a swift motion, backing up enough to pull his shoes off and rid him of his jeans entirely. Jensen’s own pants are mostly pushed down so they expose the swell of his ass and his erection can bounce free between them. Jensen’s leaning over Jared again, pressing kisses to his neck and trailing them up to his lips.
Jared’s brain careens into pleasure. Pressing his palms to the floor behind him, he braces himself just in time for Jensen to push against him, their dicks brushing together. The final straw is Jensen’s hand curling around them both at the same time, pumping them in tandem. “Ngh,” Jared moans. His eyebrows knit as want coils in his belly and warmth radiates from where Jensen is working their erections with firm twists of his fist. Jensen’s lips feel like they’re burning into him. He feels like he floating. All the angst over the past few days of work melts away, just like it always does when he’s with Jensen. The alcohol makes him smile when he moans into Jensen’s mouth, their kisses becoming sloppier but all the more passionate. Jared’s eyes almost roll back when Jensen pumps them harder and faster. His orgasm takes him by surprise, and he comes right there. A splattered mess on his belly and Jensen’s fist. “Ohh,” he shouts, eyes going wide and body going rigid. Wave after wave hits him and he holds onto Jensen like a life line.

“Love when you do that,” Jensen growls. “Do you know how gorgeous you are, Jared?” Jensen kisses the other man through his orgasm. “Do you?” He doesn’t get more than a whimper from Jared as a response. “Let me show you. I gotta have you. Now. Can I?” Jensen words are heavy with need and desperation.

“Hell, yes.” Jared breathes out. He doesn’t even care what Jensen does for them to get them there but he needs Jensen’s dick in him.

Thankfully, Jensen must be on the same train of thought. He rolls Jared on his belly, props him up with a bunch of pillows from the couch, and manages to get the man ass up, legs tucked safely under him. The pillows are doing the job that Jared’s legs can’t; they’re keeping him up. Jared’s forearms do the rest of the work, holding him up.

Truthfully, Jared’s never felt this exposed before. He could move if he wanted to, crawl his hands to the right and flip his body to look at Jensen, but this feels exciting and he shivers. He’s never been taken from behind before since it’s always been easier to stay on his back. Of course Jensen finds a way to teach him that he’s got more tricks than he realized. Somehow the older man has a way of making Jared think he can do anything.

“I’ll be right back,” Jensen says in a hurried whisper. There is the sounds of him removing the rest of his clothing and padding into the next room. As promised, he’s back, kneeling behind Jared. The familiar snick of a cap opening is heard and Jared almost lurches forward and Jensen circles a slick finger around his opening.

“Jen!” Jared tilts his head back. As much as he appreciates everything Jensen does for him in means of prep, he doesn’t have the head for it right now. “Hurry up.”

Jensen laughs, making it sound sexy and amused at the same time. He keeps teasing Jared’s rim, making it a shiny slippery mess before he pushes one finger inside all the way to the knuckle. He works him open more, coaxing more hitches of breath out of Jared with each push and pull of his finger. By the time two fingers are all the way in, he can curl them and draw a loud pleasure drenched sound from Jared’s lips.

“Fuck,” Jared tries to bite his lip but the sound is out anyway. Jared’s prostate loves when Jensen’s fingers come over to play. Jared loves it too. “Do that again,” Jared begs.

“I thought you wanted me to hurry up?” Jensen teases.

“Hurry up and do it again,” Jared twists his head so he can see Jensen out of the corner of his eye. Before the request is even completely out of his mouth, Jensen’s nudging the bundle of nerves again and Jared shivers.
Another finger is added it’s only a few moment’s until Jared’s good to go. Jensen pulls his fingers out, Jared hears a foil packet being ripped, and then Jensen’s lubed up dick is pressing into Jared.

Finally is the only thing Jared can think. He rides out the feeling of being stretched by Jensen’s dick, folding his body forward and opening himself up completely to Jensen. Jensen’s got him. He’s completely at Jensen’s mercy and lets the man take him where they need to go.

Though the actions of their coupling are messy, they figure it out. Jensen’s hips pound into Jared, his hands coasting over Jared’s back, sliding up and down the whole time. The connection makes Jared begin to fall apart again. Jensen’s deep. It’s perfect, doing everything to make Jared shiver. He’s just come but he’s going to do it again after being subjected to the current angle Jensen’s pumping into him.

“I’m gonna come, Jay. I…I can’t…” Jensen groans, bends down and kisses the sweaty nape of Jared’s neck. “You feel so amazing.”

Jared feels selfish at requesting this, but desperation makes words tumble out of his mouth. “Just a little longer. A little more. Please don’t stop.” He wants to ride this as long as he can. If he wants to do this again, he knows they can, but there is something extra stimulating about this being the first time he’s done this – and it being with Jensen.

Jensen grunts low and gravely, “Fuuuuck.” His hips keep moving but he manages to get a hand under Jared. It’s a tight squeeze since the younger man has been doing a good job of getting enough friction by rutting against the pillows. Jensen manages to get his hand around Jared’s dick, thumb swiping over the drops of come lingering at the tip.

In the end, their orgasms are just as messy as the sloppy kisses that landed them in a heap on the couch. They come, bodies crashing into each other, Jensen’s lips burning a brand on Jared’s shoulder blade. Jensen curls around Jared, hips stuttering as he fills the condom.

Jared feels the mess he’s making over Jensen’s pillows; it’s warm and sticky against his stomach. “Holy shit,” Jared huffs. “Holy, holy, shit.” He loses strength in his forearms, body folding forward. It’s uncomfortable but he doesn’t have any strength to do something about it. He can smile, however, which he does, huge grin spreading across his blissed out face.

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Jensen pulls out and falls down beside Jared, chest rising and falling faster than Jensen’s ever seen it. He blindly reaches down, ties off the condom and throws it to the side. Turning, he can see this smile spread over Jared’s face that must be contagious because he smiles too.

His heart explodes. He’s drunk as hell but he means the words even though they come out with a singsong lilt. “I fucking love you.” Shifting, he tugs on Jared’s hips, rolling him on his side so he can spoon up behind him.

Jared laughs at the words, tilts his head back so it lands on Jensen’s shoulder, and smiles. “I fucking love you too.”

Jensen’s hand curls around Jared’s hip, their bodies slotted together so that he can kiss along the dip in Jared’s neck. They’ve just fucked and it was mindblowing but he always seems to want more. “You’re terrible at brewing beer.”

Jared elbows him in the middle. “Hey!” He licks his lips and laughs. “Let’s see how good you are with a canvas and paintbrush before we both berate each other over our hobbies.” Jared twists his
head and catches Jensen’s lips. “Good thing you’re not terrible at brewing beer. Gave us some liquid
courage to try that,” he says with a nod of his head towards their groins.

“Good thing for that,” Jensen says between kisses. “You okay? Felt good?”

“Mmm hmm.”

Letting their kisses linger on each other’s skin and lips, Jensen hums. He meant what he said. Jared is
terrible at making beer but he makes up for it with smiles and enthusiasm. Jensen loved having him there, even if it didn’t go well. And he loves having him like this, wrapped in his arms after an
orgasm that left them both boneless. The desire is still wound tightly in his gut and he moves with a
sluggish slide of his hips to press closer to Jared. “You think…maybe after a little more of this,” he
pauses to kiss Jared’s shoulders thoroughly, then moves up his neck and kisses the spot behind his
ear, “maybe we could do it all again.”

Jared manages to twist himself so they are face to face. His hands slide up Jensen’s body, hooking
under his jaw and pulling him in for a deep kiss where their tongues slide together. “More of this?”

Jensen hums. Jared’s lips are strong against his and he meets his actions. “Yeah.”

Then they’re kissing against like it’s better than breathing. Their hands, messy with remnants of all
they’ve done, are all over each other. They know they’re going to do more, but Jensen’s not rushing it. Kissing is perfect. Jensen hasn’t made out like this since high school, hasn’t kissed for so long that
his lips feel the sting of it.

It’s all they do for a while, but it’s all been building and boils over, covering Jensen with need.
Where he’d usually ask, he takes. He’s been so careful about making sure he doesn’t push any
wrong buttons with Jared by making him feel weak but he thinks Jared would be okay with his
planned course of action. “Bedroom. Now.” Jensen presses himself up, hooks his arms around Jared
and hoists him into his arms.

Jared’s arms immediately loop around Jensen’s shoulders. “Yes,” he says with an overly drawn out
nod of his head.

By the time they do make it to the bedroom, Jensen’s amazed. Between Jared sucking bruises into
his neck and the alcohol, Jensen stumbled a few times. But they make it there. Jared’s safe in the
middle of the bed, legs spread so Jensen can fit between them.

They’ve done enough kissing to revive both of their erections. With Jared still stretched from earlier,
Jensen is glad he can get to the part where he has Jared’s legs over his shoulders and his dick deep
inside him as soon as possible.

There is lube on the table, and Jensen’s head feels hazy as he slicks up. Jared’s hot breath is in his ear
telling him to hurry up. He takes over for Jensen, Jared’s hands wrapped around Jensen’s dick and
slicking it up. He keeps breathing in Jensen’s ear; it’s making Jensen feel even drunker on something
new.

“Jensen!” Jared whines. “Come on. I’m good. I…I…” Jared’s voice becomes a desperate panting.
“Hurry up,” he says for the second time that night.

Who is Jensen to deny his boyfriend? He hooks Jared’s legs over his shoulders and gives him what
he wants. Sliding inside and moaning at the tight heat he finds himself engulfed in.

They unravel. Clear thinking falls to the wayside.
All there is left is Jared and Jensen.

And the way Jensen fills Jared up when he comes inside him.

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Consciousness comes barreling into Jensen like a freight train. The moment he cracks open his eyes, he squeezes them closed again, groaning and scrunching his features up in pain. He runs a hand down his face like it’s capable of covering the pounding in his head.

There is light streaming through his bedroom window, landing in a panel of light across his face. Groaning, he twists to the side to escape it. The movement leaves him face to face with a still passed out Jared. A piece of hair is falling over his face and his lips are parted so his shallow breathing can fan across the pillow.

Memories of last night come back to Jensen in bits and shards. He can remember the sound of Jared’s moans when they were connected in every way possible. Eyes roaming over Jared’s form, he finds bruises along his skin that Jensen must have left there last night. He has remembrances of the taste of those kisses and rubs his eyes with the back of his hands. The memories are there, but they’re hazy and out of order. He remembers sex, *lots of sex*, and moans, hands all over, Jared wanting and giving more.

But even though he can’t seem to clear his mind enough to put the memories in order, he smiles. Everything feels *good*. Happy. He’s a little unsettled at the fact that he and Jared drank a bit too much, but waking up next to Jared makes him feel okay.

He must be thinking loudly because Jared groans and stretches his upper body like a cat. His eyes stay pinched closed the whole time, whines of discomfort accompanying each elongating of muscle. Only when he settles does he brave opening his eyes. Blinking several times, he seems to focus on Jensen. Smiling, he whispers, “morning,” before regretting the sound of hitting his ears and grimacing. He mirrors Jensen’s prior action by covering his face with his palm. “Oh my god, how much did we drink last night?”

“Too much,” Jensen says. He shifts, letting his body experience fully the soreness that comes with a night of copious amounts of sex. “Mornin’.” Moving hurts as much as his head but he manages to reach over and drop a kiss to Jared’s forehead.

“Gonna need more than a kiss to make this headache go away.”

“Yeah. Give me a minute.” Jensen gets out of bed, stumbling from standing upright so suddenly. Regaining his balance, Jensen, in all his nude glory, makes his way out of the room. He pops his head back inside when a thought hits him and he asks Jared, “what about your meds? You need to take ‘em, right?”

Jared sit ups, running a hand through his hair. His voice is gruff and dry when he grumbles, “uhh, yeah. I…yeah. There is a container in the back pocket of my jeans.”

“Got it.” Jensen’s on a mission then. Getting a bottle of water from the refrigerator, he swings by the living room to find Jared’s jeans. What he finds there makes him stop in his tracks. The room looks like a tornado hit it. The couch cushions are upturned and strewn around the room. He finds lube dribbling onto the carpet from an upturned bottle, a torn up pieces of condom wrappers gleaming in the morning sun and a tied off condom thrown into the corner of the room. Clothing is found in bits and pieces in the area around the couch. Jensen takes a moment to admire the thorough job he and Jared did of desecrating his couch and living room. It’s a mess but in a weird way it represents the
passion they had been building up to last night. There will be time to clean it up latter. Snickering, he sorts through the clothing to find Jared’s jeans and finds the pills right where Jared told him they would be. His stomach drops for a split second when he notices how many pills are jumbling around the container. When he and Jared first started getting serious, he told him he could handle the pills. And he can. It’s just that sometimes seeing them reminds Jensen that Jared has an issue that will have to be managed his whole life, not cured. That’s the fact that makes Jensen’s stomach tighten. He feels unnerved when he’s given a situation that is treated, not corrected. Shaking his head, he feels like shit for thinking that way. Jared doesn’t need to be fixed. He’s pretty damn perfect. But the back of his brain knows that Jared used to walk and the fact that he can’t anymore makes him feel set apart from most of the world. Rubbing a hand over his mouth, he leaves the thought alone for now and heads towards the bathroom. He grabs Advil from the medicine cabinet, eyes catching on the bathtub when he turns to leave the room. An idea blooms in his head. He turns the taps on so the tub can fill with warm water while he goes back to Jared.

When he returns to the bedroom, Jared looks more alive. He tosses the pill container at him. By the time Jared’s got it open, Jensen’s already opened the water and took two Advil. He taps some more pills into the collection Jared has and hands him the water.

“Thanks.” Jared reaches out and takes the offered bottle. He takes his pills, smiling gratefully at Jensen.

“Welcome.” He shifts his weight to one foot and raises an eyebrow. “How are you feeling?”

“Pretty good considering my ass feels like you fucked me a few thousand times.” Jared laughs, putting up a hand before Jensen can say a word. “Relax. I’m good. I like feeling you in me, even when you’re not still in me. I like feeling things.” He matches Jensen’s eyebrow raise when his eye coast over the fading read scratches left on Jensen’s upper arms. “How are you feeling?”

“Good. Lazy.” Jensen bites his lower lip. “We’re a mess. Look at us.” They both take a moment to do so, finding the dry come flaking on their bellies. "We need to get cleaned up. I don’t have a shower like yours. But I do have a bathtub. Think that might work?”

“Getting clean sounds like the best idea ever right now.” Jared nods. “Yeah. Tub sounds good. You gotta help me get in it through. I don’t think I can manage right now.”

Jensen feels warmth rush over him. Jared asking for help is a new things and he understands exactly what it means. Jared’s letting him in even more. “I think I can get you in the tub. Getting out might be hard. Maybe we should just stay there forever.”

“As long as forever means that we’ll stay there until you get your ass up and make me breakfast.” Jared gets himself to the edge of the bed. “Where is my chair?”

“Living room. I can get it or do you –”

“Just carry me for now. It’s fine.” Jared reaches out for Jensen.

This time, it’s a lot easier to get Jared into his arms. By the time they get to the tub, it’s nearly filled and the room is steamy. Jensen gets Jared into the tub, quickly sliding in behind him and settling them so that Jared is between his legs, his back settling against Jensen’s chest.

They soak in the tub in content silence, fingertips drawing lazy patterns over each other’s arms. Jensen can’t remember how many times they actually had sex last night, but the warmth of the water does their bodies good. He’s got some cleaning up to do, some condoms to find, because it would be pretty damn embarrassing if a guest found one of their forgotten condoms hiding around. He found
one, but there have to be others somewhere. They’re always safe. It’s just a matter of time before they unearth themselves.

The thoughts flutter away and Jensen enjoys their skin pruning up from lingering in the tub so long that the water starts to chill.

Chapter End Notes

Hello my loves. I am so sorry for not posting. I am not lying when I tell you the whole story is written. It just isn’t fleshed out and worked over. Life has been busy! My hubby and I moved and our new place needs a ton of renovations. We’re doing everything ourselves so mostly I have no time. Today is a snow day...so I can FINALLY post.

I hope you like it. The boys are kind of drunk so they may seem out of character. PLEASE let me know what you think. I love all of you and appreciate all your patience and feedback. Thank you for being so wonderful.
Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The school calendar Jared keeps pinned to the wall in his classroom flutters down to the floor. He wheels over to pick it up, righting it and realizing he has to flip it to March. He can’t believe that he’s already almost three quarters of the way through his first year teaching at Arkin. Although, when he thinks about the shitty parts, he realizes he feels like he’s been working there for ages. The good parts, however, like his students and Jensen, make the time spent in his classroom feel like it is flying. It’s all the other drama that makes him want to hit the fast forward button on other parts of his life.

It gets him thinking about the contrasts in his life. He realizes that most of his life is happy and stable and those parts far outweigh any of the other things trying to drag him down. But today he can’t seem to wrap his head around why he’s feeling off. He’s been feeling this way for a week, and it’s starting to turn his happy self into someone crankier. Jared can’t put a finger on why he’s feeling run down or foggy. That fact in itself starts to gnaw at Jared; being someone who’s been trained to be in tune with his body, he’s always frustrated when his body doesn’t feel like revealing why it’s messing with his head. He’s been beyond happy lately, since he and Jensen have been getting closer and closer. They spend more time together than they do apart, which neither seem to have a problem with. It doesn’t feel like overkill or it’s too much, it feels like a natural coming together that he’s been happily floating in. By all means, Jared should be wheeling on air. And he is, for the most part, but his brain is still snagged on something and he just wants to curl up in bed.

Bed is where he first noticed a serious detour from status quo. He was lagging. At first he thought he might have messed up his medication but checking his pills when he finally swung himself out of bed revealed that everything was as it should be. He is fine, but he is running late because of it.

Running late never works out for Jared. For the most part, it is because he doesn’t have time to make himself breakfast or lunch. He snags a piece of bread to take his pills because doing that on an empty stomach also never ends well. But by the time his lunch period arrives, he’s starving. It’s Monday, so Jensen’s in a meeting right now, meaning Jared’s going to have to go to the faculty cafeteria on his own.

“Fuck it,” he mumbles under his breath and shuts the lights to his classroom, heading off in the direction of the cafeteria. The halls are mostly empty, since the bell rang a few minutes ago, and the journey is quick. Maybe too quick, because he pushes through the cafeteria doors, his head is spinning. His eyebrows pinch closer and a loud breath leaves his lips as he tries to make sense of the situation. If he thought he felt off before, he feels like shit now. The sick feeling makes his mouth feel sticky and he swallows loudly. It almost feels like he’s going to throw up but the feeling comes out of nowhere and he shoves it aside because he knows he’s not sick.

By the time Jared gets himself together, he realizes that the room has gone silent and everyone is looking at him. He can’t really blame them, he was acting strange enough to draw attention. What makes him want to bite all of their heads off is the judgmental looks on all their faces. He holds his tongue, wheeling past them towards the counter. Jeanie is waiting for him with a smile and it’s enough to pacify the irritable mood that’s been building inside Jared.

“Hi, sweetheart. Long time no see. How are you doing?” She gives Jared an even warmer smile as she pulls on a fresh pair of gloves in preparation for making his order.

“Hi, Jeanie. I’m,” he pauses and stops himself from answering falsely, “kind of crappy actually.”
“I’m sorry to hear that.” She purses her lips in discontentment. She looks up to see some of the other staff members with lingering gazes still left on Jared. “Is it because of them?” She makes a silent gesture towards the women staring.

Jared swallows, feeling sick again and he closes his eyes. Jeanie is trying to be sweet, he knows that, but he just wants to close his eyes and let everything flutter away. He forces them open and nods a response to Jeanie’s question.

“Well, screw them,” Jeanie says with a firm, decisive nod. Her hands make quick work of assembling a sandwich, which she warps in deli paper and hands towards Jared. “Here. On the house. Turkey, ham and cheese like you usually get. Extra turkey.” She gives a wink that would normally seem cheesy but somehow Jeanie makes it come off as a sign of comradery. “None of them every get anything free from me.”

Jared takes the sandwich and feels like he’s stuck in a whirlwind. The frustration he’s felt with his body and his coworkers fades away and he wants to cry over the sincere showing of support and kindness from Jeanie. She didn’t have to do that, which Jared’s sure she knows, but ever since he found out about her daughter being in a wheelchair, it’s like they are part of the same club.

“Thanks,” his voice comes out smaller than usual. He sucks in air though his nose, the action sounding like the beginnings of a sob. It’s not. He pushes the thought away. Swallowing again, he finds a stronger voice. “That’s really nice of you.” The moment he gets the words out, however, he feels his eyes growing wetter than usual so he licks his lips, nods, and smiles.

Jeanie seems to get it because she nods back and spins around to return to prepping a salad.

Jared contemplates eating in the cafeteria, if only to annoy some of his other coworkers but he decides it not worth it. The hushed whispering is happening again and he’s not sure what he did this time. The sad truth of the matter is that a lot of the people he works with are great, they really are, but the coor ‘mean girls’ seem to get off on being absolute scum. Feeling off and run down all week leaves him on the edge of being cranky enough to stoop down to their catty level. He bites his tongue. He’s better than them.

He pushes out of the room and heads back to his class. The sandwich sits on his lap like a lead weight because as starving as he was ten minutes ago, thinking of eating makes him want to vomit.

Today sucks.

***

Jensen’s whole day has revolved around the shining light at the end of the tunnel in the shape of getting together for dinner with Jared. It’s not going to be anything grand, Jared said that he was just going to bread and fry some chicken cutlets, but it still feels good knowing he’s going to be able to wind down and shuck off the day’s stresses with Jared.

The happiness is dampened however when Jared comes to the door. The other man looks paler than usual and he’s not his bright eyed self. It alerts Jensen immediately to the fact that something is off about Jared.

“Jay?” Jensen asks, without any further elaboration.

As if in a daze, Jared shakes his head and focuses on Jensen. “Hmm?”

“Are you okay? You look…a little glassy eyed.” Jensen licks his lips and follows Jared into the house, walking so close to the wheelchair that the toes of his shoes skim it a few times.
“Um, yeah. I’m okay. I think I’m just coming down with something. I feel a foggy.” He pauses and swallows. “And kinda queasy.” Turning to face Jensen, his face falls. “It’s not that I’m not happy to see you – god, after the afternoon I’ve had it’s all that I’ve been looking forward to – but I don’t want to get you sick. Maybe we should reschedule?” Jared’s eyes frown up at Jensen.

Jensen hears what he’s saying and while he really doesn’t want to be sick, he also doesn’t feel like spending the evening without Jared. “I think I’ll take my chances, if that’s okay. I’ve been around you practically every day; if I’m going to catch what you have, then I’ve probably already got it.”

The response makes Jared’s face light up and the glassy nature to his eyes takes a reprieve and he looks like himself again. The moment fills Jensen’s heart with a thumping adoration that awakens the butterflies in his belly. Jensen goes in to kiss Jared’s lips but the other man turns away. “No, Jen. I don’t wanna get you sick.”

“Shut up,” Jensen chides, sidestepping so that Jared has no choice but to connect their lips. It’s a chaste kiss, but enough to settle the thrumming of Jensen’s heart. He pulls away, and smiles. “How about we get take out? Maybe some Chinese food? My mother always used to make or pick up egg drop soup when I was feeling shitty. I don’t know if it’s childhood nostalgia, but it never fails to make me feel better.”

Jared hesitates but eventually nods. He lets Jensen do all the ordering and sets himself in the corner of the couch.

The night is low key. Jared seems a little more like his usual self once they fall into conversation. Jensen’s illogically decided that he’s going to beat up all the people who still seem set on giving Jared a hard time. Jared laughs when Jensen lapses into a fictional telling of how the scenario would play out.

It’s light and playful but Jensen can’t shake the fact that he’s realized Jared touched only a spoonful of soup and none of the solid food. Worry blossoms in his gut but he doesn’t voice it yet. From what he’s seen, Jared is he most responsible person in regards to his own health that Jensen’s ever known. He doesn’t want to push things by making Jared feel like Jensen’s mothering him. But he doesn’t like the seasick look Jared’s wearing and he wants to kiss it away.

If only that would work.

***

Groaning, Jared tries to listen to what Marcus and Josie are telling him. Physical therapy is never fun but today it feels particularly grueling. His brain isn’t focused. He’s still distracted by the fact that he can’t shake the foggy feeling his whole body seems shrouded in. His head is pounding and he feels frustration boiling over the surface of his habitually levelheaded demeanor.

“Enough! Can’t we fucking stop?” Jared says as he finishes pulling himself upright.

“You want other muscles to atrophy? Sure. Go ahead,” Marcus spits back bluntly.

Jared glares at him. It’s their usual banter but today it makes Jared fume. Usually, Marcus calls Jared out on his dramatic flare-ups. They’ve been working together a long time and they both know that sometimes buttons get pushed but it’s important to power through. It’s why Jared kept Marcus and Josie as his therapist. They don’t take any shit and they get shit done. They also completely believe in Jared, which is a warming fact.

Josie sets Jared up for another exercise but he can see that there is the beginning of some type of
worry in her eyes. She waits it out before voicing it but once Jared gets sloppy and almost seriously hurts himself, Josie pulls the plug on their session.

“What’s going on?” she asks with a hand on her hip. “You’ve looked like you’re operating at half your capacity for the last week.”

Jared crumples. He lets himself fall to the ground so that his back can lean against the wall. He takes a moment to use his hands to straighten out his legs. “I dunno. I guess work has been draining me lately. I feel like a zombie by the end of the day. And I’ve been trying to wrap a lot of projects up. And, I just feel like shit.”

“That much is obvious.” Marcus responds. He writes something down in Jared’s chart and then squats down beside him. “You think maybe you’re pushing yourself too hard? I don’t mean here. I mean out there,” he says with a nod of his head towards the outside.

“Nah. I mean….I dunno. Maybe?” Jared shrugs. He runs a hand though his hair and feels stupid about giving Marcus a hard time earlier. “Listen, man. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be such a dick. I just…I feel like I’m losing control of my body. I feel so off and it’s kind of freaking me out.” Saying out loud for the first time makes Jared realize how uncomfortable he’s feeling. He’s lost enough control over his body due to the accident. He holds on tightly to the reins of control that he has left.

“Don’t worry about it, man. In my profession, I kind of get yelled at most of the time.” Marcus laughs.

“Yeah, well that doesn’t mean it’s okay for me to act like that,” Jared tries to smile, but nervousness makes him lick his lips.

“Jared,” Josie starts, “maybe you should take some time off. Get some of your strength back if you think you’re pushing yourself too hard.” Her eyes soften around the edges. “I’m worried about you. Actually, I think you’ve never done that before.”

Jared scratches at the back of his neck. “Yeah, I haven’t done that since I was a teenager. I think it’s because I’m coming down with something but it sure as hell is taking a long time to get here. It’s been weeks.” He lets his head thump back against the wall. “Spring break is coming up, so the school will be closed for a few days. I think that will be plenty of time to get some rest.”

“Perfect!” Josie chirps. “You rest up and I’ll check in with you before our next session to see how you’re feeling.”

Jared feels like the worst boyfriend on earth.

He and Jensen had been looking forward to a mini getaway during spring break, maybe even visiting Jensen’s parents. It’s been months since Jensen saw his family and they’ve been pestering him. Jensen’s grandmother has also been on Jensen’s case to make sure he brings his “sexy boyfriend” home for dinner sometime soon. Jared’s flattered and also not one to deny the request of an old lady, but fate seems to have other plans.

On the day before break, Jared starts vomiting. The nauseous feeling he’s been quelling for the past weeks grows too strong to fight and in the middle of one of his classes Jared has to excuse himself to the supply closet. Thankfully, there is an old slop sink in there and he turns the taps on, drowning out the noise of him retching and gagging. Thankfully, none of the students pick up on what he’d done but they do notice their teacher looking clammy. They don’t say anything and when they file out of
the room, Jared finds himself vomiting again.

He thinks he got everything out of his system but when Jensen visits him in his room for lunch, he takes a whiff of Jensen’s tuna sandwich and throws up into the small garbage pail at the edge of his desk.

That’s enough to have Jensen worried. They cancel the trip but when Jared keeps vomiting through the weekend and misses his next physical therapy appointment, Jensen pesters him enough to get checked out.

Jared agrees. It’s definitely past the point of being a stomach bug.

He had hoped the following Marcus and Josie’s advice would have resulted in him feeling like his old self again but he feels worse.

Jensen wants to go with him, which makes Jared’s heart take over his chest. It’s a sweet gesture but Jared wants to keep some mystery alive yet. He doesn’t need Jensen seeing him weak and sick. It’s stupid, he knows, but part of his brain is still trying to impress Jensen. He really loves this guy and he wants everything to be perfect.

Taking your sick, paraplegic boyfriend to the doctor because he can’t stop vomiting is not romantic. Or perfect.

He makes an appointment with his general practitioner. The man always finds a way to squeeze Jared into his schedule.

Jared sits in his wheelchair in the exam room, chewing the corner of his index finger. He’s numb to doctors’ offices, but he’s not used to feeling like he doesn’t understand his body. It makes him nervous and fidgety.

A nurse comes in and takes his vitals and blood before asking for a urine sample. He quickly obliges and then it is back to more waiting while the doctor runs the tests. Dr. Werk finally makes an appearance in the room and Jared can’t read his expression. His usual bedside manner seems stunted by nerves, which enflames Jared’s own anxious energy.

“So, Jared, I’d say it’s good to see you but when people find themselves in my office, it’s rarely for a good reason.” Dr. Werk laughs at his own attempt to lighten the mood. “So, you’re here because you’ve been feeling ‘foggy’ for a few weeks and have been nauseous and vomiting for the past four days.”

“Well, I’ve been nauseous for a few weeks, I just haven’t actually started vomiting till four days ago,” Jared clarified.

“Do you mind?” Dr. Werk asks as he holds up his stethoscope.

Jared shakes his head and the doctor gets down to Jared’s level so he can check his heart and lungs. “I’m just going to palpitate your middle for a moment. Let me know if it hurts.” Dr. Werk explores Jared’s abdomen with calculated presses of his fingers and makes humming noises that Jared’s not sure if he’s aware of. When he’s done, he appears to be reaffirming a thought in his head and he straightens upright to grab Jared’s chart. “Okay…so…”

The hesitation in his voice sends a chill down Jared’s spine. “So what?”

“So, there really isn’t anything wrong with you. But…we ran a bunch of tests on your urine since we know that sometimes your kidney’s can be impacted by your medication and the only thing that
came back…is…” The doctor shrugs and spits the rest out in one compact sentence. “You’re pregnant.”

Jared’s immediate reaction is to laugh. “Yeah. Right.” He rolls his eyes dramatically and laughs again. “Good one. You softening the blow for telling me there is something wrong with my kidneys?”

“I’m quite serious. Of course, the blood test will come back in a few days but from what you’ve described to the nurse and my evaluation of you, you’re definitely pregnant.”

Jared laughs nervously again, the sound ending on a breathy, “what?” He furrows his brows and tries to get words out of his throat but he can’t. He ends up making a croaking noise, mouth gaping like a fish. Finally, he comes up with, “no I’m not.”

“Yeah.” Dr. Werk nods. “You are.”

“That’s not possible! You told me that wasn’t possible. The hundreds of doctors and specialists I’ve seen since I was a kid told me it’s not possible. I quote, ‘you’ll never be able to get pregnant.’ That’s what people told me. So, check your test results again, because I’m not pregnant.” Jared feels like he’s going to be sick and he grips the armrests of his wheelchair for support.

“Jared, I know this is hard to believe, but you’re pregnant. I’m not an expert but I’d guess that you’re a few weeks along.” Dr. Werk tries to give a reassuring smile and he takes a seat in a chair so that he is on Jared’s eye level.

“They said never,” Jared insists. Because he’s not pregnant. He can’t be. That’s the most ridiculous thing he’s ever heard. It’s also a cruel joke because it’s starting to rub in the fact that the bus accident took that away from him too.

“Well, it turns out that ‘never’ was really ‘unlikely’ because you are pregnant. And that’s about all I can do for you. You need to follow up with one of your specialists. I…I don’t know all of your physical restraints and your other doctors are better suited for helping you proceed forward with this information.” He smiles again and puts a hand on Jared’s knee.

Jared can’t feel the gesture but he’s used to people doing it. It’s supposed to be comforting but it just reminds him that in a normal world, a world where a bus didn’t try to kill him, he would be feeling the weight of the doctor’s hand and he wouldn’t need a team of specialists to tell him how to proceed with news of a pregnancy. It makes his head spin. He feels like he’s drowning and can’t get enough air into his lungs. Maybe it’s a panic attack or maybe it’s the world closing in on him but his breathing picks up and he finds himself gasping at the ceiling.

He has a specialist housed in the same building as his general practitioner, just a floor up and three doors down. Jared tries classing him, but his babbling makes little sense so Dr. Werk volunteers to alert the office why Jared will be heading towards them momentarily.

The rest is a bit of a blur. Jared’s pregnant; it’s Jensen’s baby. The facts are glaring at him like neon lights and etching into his retinas. Jared’s mind is blown over the fact that he’s been carrying Jensen’s baby inside of him and he hadn’t even realized…didn’t even know he could. Wheeling himself towards the next office on autopilot, his hand keeps flitting over his belly. He’s terrified on every level imaginable but there is awe somewhere under all the fear. It keeps poking its head up enough to remind Jared it is there before he fear sets in again. A cold chill runs down his spine, or is it just sweat?

He’s going to be sick.
The doctor sees him immediately, no waiting, no small talk. They run the same tests and they come back positive.

Jared’s world spins off its axis.

Both hands fly to his middle and cover it like he has any chance of protecting something he’s been brainwashed into believing can never exist. It’s a hard shift to let his brain believe what is happening to him. He thinks maybe this is all a dream but when he closes and opens his eyes, he’s still in Dr. Walsh’s office and the doctor is telling him that he’s going to borrow an obstetrician from the medical practice and see what’s going on inside Jared. All Jared can do is nod.

Thankfully, Jared’s got his wits about him enough to hoist himself onto the exam table and lay back. The obstetrician is nice enough. She’s friendly and her hands are gentle as she rucks up his shirt and spreads gel across his middle. “Hi, Jared, I’m Dr. Mahoney. Dr. Walsh here said he wants to get a good look. I’m just going to roll this wand over your middle. It won’t hurt but let me know if the pressure gets uncomfortable, okay?”

All Jared can do is nod.

Dr. Mahoney gets to work, sliding the transducer wand over his middle and smearing the gel. There is no pain; it’s all in Jared’s head when he flinches because he’s afraid of what the doctor will find. After a few moments of searching, the doctor looks more intensely towards the ultrasound screen. She smirks in success and turns the screen so Dr. Walsh and Jared can see it. Jared takes a moment to prop himself up on his elbows to get a better look while still allowing the doctor to keep scanning him. She says, “Looks like you’re 8 weeks pregnant, give or take a few days. I can’t be sure unless you’ve got an idea when this little one was conceived.”

Jared realizes it’s a question but he can’t answer. He feels like he’s going to faint. Lightheadedness hits him and his elbows wobble until they slip out from supporting him and he falls back onto the cot. He swallows hard and fast and forces himself upright again so he can stare at his middle like it might have betrayed medical science. There is a grainy image on the screen that Jared can’t read but Dr. Mahoney is telling him it’s his kid. One he and Jensen created. “Shit,” he whispers and his eyes start watering because the day has been too heavy and he’s going to crack. It’s too much. Reeling his memories back, Jared tries to pinpoint when he and Jensen could have made their baby. They are notoriously safe when they have sex. At least, he thinks they’ve been. He gasps with realization as his brain hitches on the time he and Jensen made beer and they practically got blackout drunk. He can’t be certain they practiced safe sex all night and it backs up Dr. Mahoney’s guess. Two days ago would have been eight weeks since that night. “Shit,” he repeats again and then allows himself to return to a reclining positon on the exam table and cover his eyes.

Dr. Mahoney lets the silence sit in the room for a minute before going back to her scanning. “The baby is perfectly healthy so far and nestled low on the uterine walls. In a normal situation, I wouldn’t consider this a very high risk pregnancy. But given the circumstances, I think it’s best that you see a high risk obstetrician. I don’t want to give you any misleading information. I can leave some names the front desk if you’d like.”

“Uhh, okay,” Jared replies dumbly.

“It was nice meeting you Jared.” Her smile is sad when she stands to go. “Good luck.”

With Dr. Mahoney’s absence, Dr. Walsh takes a place at the stool she was sitting on. “Jared…I know this is a lot to take in.” His tone shifts to an even more serious one. “I’ve been your doctor a long time. I can’t tell you what to do.” He pauses, pinching the bridge of his nose like the words in his head pain him. “But I need to tell you what this means. The risks…they’re off the charts. For
you, you’re risking putting pressure on your spine and agitating a condition that we’ve spent years getting under control. At best, you’re uncomfortable for a while, but at worst and what is more likely, is full on paralysis.” He clears his throat, sad eyes locking on a patient who he’s grown close to.

“I…” He pauses and turns away from Jared, the words getting stuck in his throat. “It means going of your medications if you don’t want to impact the fetus’ growth. That means muscle spasms, pain, problems with circulation, which can mean decrease in organ function. And none of this means you’ll have a viable fetus in the end. Even if you can carry the baby, it probably wouldn’t make it to term. Trying to have this baby will not be without a long road of discomfort and heartache.” Turning so that he’s staring directly at Jared, he takes a deep breath. “Jared, I’m sorry, but it’s my honest medical opinion that you should terminate this pregnancy as soon as possible to cut off the medical strains.”

Jared is angry. Rationally, he knows the doctor is just doing his job. However, he never responded well to being told what to do. He’s been told a one in a million event just happened and now he’s being advised to terminate it? He can’t abort. He won’t. When he finds his voice, it’s strong and steady. “No.”

The response seems to take the doctor off guard. “Jared. Listen. Think about it. Don’t be careless with his own life. In the heat of the moment you might think you’re strong enough to handle it but human life after such an accident as yours is fragile. I medically cannot condone of your choice.”

Jared can believe what he’s hearing. The words burn and leave open wounds in their wake. He’s not killing his and Jensen’s kid. The medical world had almost giving up in him as a child, he isn’t going to let it give up on his baby. “Get out!” He yells at the Dr. Walsh, voice shaking with intensity.

“You’re right, you can’t tell me what to do. I’m not getting rid of my baby just because having it will be hard. Get the fuck out.”

The doctor looks at the storm he just kicked up. “Not just hard, Jared. Impossible. Possibly fatal for you.”

“Well you told me it’d be impossible to get pregnant. Guess what? You were wrong.” Jared’s breathing is heavier, his chest rising and falling as he glares daggers at his doctor. “Get out.”

Dr. Walsh looks deflated. He has no more words to say, and he goes sadly out of the room. All his intentions were good, an attempt to keep his patient safe, but he’s become the villain for Jared to unleash on.

When the door closes, Jared lets out a strangled cry. He presses a hand to his slippery stomach and has no idea what he’s doing. He doesn’t care about the medically advised decision. He’s giving his baby a shot. It deserves that after it seems to have barreled through so many impossibilities already. Whether it’s medically advised or not, the decision feels right.

But everything is against him.

It’s clear that Dr. Mahoney thought this wouldn’t end well and Dr. Walsh mirrored the opinion. For as much anger as he has at the moment towards Dr. Walsh, the man has never lead him wrong. He’s cheered for Jared to achieve improbable outcomes. For Dr. Walsh to give up, Jared knows it’s bad.

He feels like he’s fighting a losing battle but he’s going to do it anyway.

It takes him a while, but he get himself together enough to return to his wheelchair and exit the exam room. The world is still surreal and he avoids everyone’s eye contact until he checks out with the receptionist. The woman behind the counter gives Jared a sad smile, indication that she’s privy to what’s going on. With slow movements, she slides him a piece of paper. Jared takes it, flipping it
over and seeing the name Evelyn Atlas and a phone number.

“She’s the best.” The receptionist says. “Exactly what you need right now.”

Nodding a thanks, Jared pocket’s the contact information. He thinks he’s going to need more than just the best high risk obstetrician, but he homies this Evelyn Atlas is a good start.

He heads home to make a phone call that has his heart thumping out of his chest.

He just wanted everything between him and Jensen to be perfect.

Why does the universe seem intent on throwing him enough curveballs to ensure that perfect is always a hand’s reach away?

Chapter End Notes

Please let me know what you think. Some angst is on the way. SORRY!
I couldn't just write a story with steamy, sexy, schmoopy porn between J2, could I?
Well, I guess I could. But the angst makes the schmoop more important.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jared doesn’t recall how he got home, which terrifies him. He’s in a complete daze and the world doesn’t seem real or tangible. He can’t feel his body, his entire body, which is startling since he’s used to feeling at least half of it.

He’s also pretty sure that his heart-rate hasn’t slowed since he learned he is pregnant. It spiked when Dr. Walsh suggested he terminate the pregnancy, but it’s been holding steady at a rapid beating that’s making him dizzy.

He flushes with anger just thinking about Dr. Walsh and his suggestion. Insisting on having the baby is a reflex; it is an immediate decision that he knows is actually the only possible decision, at least for him. His parents, his doctors, the worlds – they all won’t let him forget that he was a miracle child. He was the boy who lived when all signs pointed towards succumbing to his injuries and death. He’s living proof that miracles exist. There is no way on earth he can forget that lesson enough so that he can go through with Dr. Walsh’s advice. He’s not aborting his miracle baby. How could he do that?

He has never given into thoughts that his life was spared for some greater purpose. He doesn’t believe that. But he’s starting to think that since his life was spared, he’s got to do the same thing for his child. No one thought he would live and he did. No one thinks this baby will survive but Jared wants to prove everyone wrong.

He’s good at that.

He just hopes that he keeps being good at that.

His fingers find the crumpled up piece of paper in his pocket with Evelyn Atlas’ phone number scrawled across it. Holding onto it like it’s a lifeline, he won’t let himself think that Evelyn Atlas will tell him to abort his miracle baby. Sniffling, he digs into his pocket deeper and pulls out a printout, his sonogram depicting what he’s been told is a baby. Squinting at the static, Jared can’t really make heads or tails out of it. He doesn’t know what he’s looking at. That fact makes Jared’s stomach drop out.

Maybe he can’t do this. Maybe this whole thing is a mistake, not a miracle. He can’t even figure out how to locate his child on the scan, does that make him a terrible father? That question hovers in his brain and makes Jared feel sick. The need to cry about it bubbles up inside of him and he’s sure he’s going crazy because nothing makes any sense. Holding the picture in front of his face, he gives up on trying to visualize a fetus and settles on the fact that, whether he can see it or not, the square printout contains his kid. It’s proof, at least to doctors and people who know what they’re doing.

“Oh my god,” he says in a slow whisper. Jared’s free hand loosely covers his mouth and a new severity of the situation hits him. He wasn’t sure he wanted kids because he’d never let himself think about having biological ones. He’d been told since he was a child that it wasn’t going to happen for him in this way. His doctors had never sugar coated anything and it’s been years since he made peace with never bearing his own children. So he hasn’t thought about carrying them. And there wasn’t much time for him think about having children another way, if he met another man who was a carrier or if he adopted. His world isn’t at the point yet where he thinks he will be able to support another life. Hell, he’s not even completely stable with his adult life. He feels like he’s a few years behind everyone he’s known, and he is okay with that. Life just takes a little longer for Jared, just
like college and finding a job. But he always gets there.

If someone asked him an hour ago, he would solidly swear that his life was definitely not at the point where he planned on kids. Now, however, he’s thrown head first into the very real scenario of being pregnant and determined to have a kid.

His kid. Jensen’s kid. “Shit,” he says, sucking in his lips and pressing them together. He needs to call Jensen. Jared knows he must be worried by now since he’d promised to call as soon as he got out of the doctor. For a normal appointment, that should have been hours ago. Jensen texted him a few times to check in and Jared read them when they came through but his fingers don’t work. He can’t text anything. Saying he is fine would be a lie. Saying he’s pregnant is too heavy of a revelation to get across via text.

Putting the scan back in his pocket, Jared retrieves his phone. It shakes in his palm and all he can do is stare at it when he swears he told his brain that he wants to call Jensen.

What the hell is Jensen going to think? They’d sat here in this very house and spoke about how Jared can’t carry children. Jensen had said that was okay because he was pretty certain he didn’t want children anyway.

The revelation had made Jared’s heart sing at the time. Now it feels like a funeral dirge.

Deciding it’s best to keep things out in the open rather than let them fester, Jared dials Jensen’s number and hits the send button.

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Jensen’s never driven across town so fast in his life.

He’d been thinking about Jared all day, but when the man hadn’t touched base for hours, which is unlike Jared, he started to get worried.

When his phone rang and he’d seen Jared’s number, his worry had subsided enough for a quick wave of warmth and love to flow through him. The tone of Jared’s voice, however, squashed that and replaced it with fear.

There is definitely something horrible going on.

Jensen’s brain whirls though speculations. He wonders if something is wrong with Jared’s spine or if he’s got some type of infection because of his poor circulation. He’d stupidly let himself use the internet to search for complications that accompany paraplegia and now all he can think of is that Jared has all of them.

So he finds himself breaking a few driving laws and comes to a hasty stop in front of Jared’s house. Running to the door, he tries to smooth down his hair and straighten out his sweater. He’s been worried, but he doesn’t need to embarrass himself from letting Jared know how worried he’s been. He doesn’t want to look like a fool when Jared tells him something far less scary than what he’s searched on the internet.

Jared’s front door is left open, so Jensen lets himself in, calling “Jay?” as he slowly walks into the house.

“In here,” Jared’s voice comes from the kitchen.

Jensen makes quick work of locating his boyfriend, but when his eyes land on him he still can’t
actually find him. Jared doesn’t look like himself. He looks smaller than usual, his personality dwarfed by signs of nervousness. He’s pale, even down to the color of his lips, and his eyes snap to Jensen like he just crossed a hairline trigger.

“Jen,” Jared breathes out, revealing an unsteady voice that matches his demeanor.

“Hey,” Jensen says, keeping his voice soothing and steady. He crouches down in front of Jared, reaching a hand out to touch the arm Jared has lying across his lap. His thumb makes comforting sweeping motions across Jared’s forearm. “What’s going on?” Looking up, he catches Jared swallowing slowly. “Everything okay?”

Jared stays quiet, mouth forming words but failing to find the power to voice them.

“Everything’s not alright,” Jensen guesses. When Jared doesn’t jump to correct him, he knows he hit the nail on the head. “What is it?”

Jared’s tongue pushes into his upper lip and he finally finds his voice. Unfortunately, he doesn’t use it to shed any light on the situation. “I love you,” he says like it’s ripping him up inside.

Jensen frowns at Jared’s tone but leans closer. “I love you too – ” He’s not done with his sentence but Jared cuts him off.

“Ohh good…’cause…I gotta tell you something.” Biting his bottom lip, Jared takes a deep breath. On the exhale, words tumble from his lips like currents ripping through a dam. “I went to the doctor and…well…so…I went to my general practitioner and so…he told me, and I had to go to, and…I ended up with my spinal specialist and…” He gasps for air and lets out a choking sound.

“Jared, breathe for a second. You’re not making any sense.” Now Jensen is even more concerned that it’s something terrible. He rearranges his crouching stance in front of the wheelchair. “Start again.”

Jared does, although in a more babbling way. “So…I went to the doctor and…and…” He inhales, exhales, and seems to strengthen himself. “I’m pregnant.”

Jensen’s eyes widen before he narrows them in confusion. “Wha?”

“I’m pregnant. They…they said that I’m pregnant. It’s yours. Of course.” Jared swallows and wets his lips. “So, yeah…I’m pregnant.”

The words hit Jensen’s brain but it takes him several seconds to comprehend them. Jared probably didn’t say what he thought he heard. “You’re pregnant?”

“Yes.” When Jensen keeps staring at him, Jared awkwardly adds, “it’s yours” again.

The part of Jensen’s brain that’s not snagged on the fact that Jared’s pregnant wonders why Jared keeps saying that. Obviously it would have to be Jensen’s. Unless Jared’s been with other people…which he hasn’t been. Of course. But Jensen’s brain seems to have suffered from the shock since he doesn’t know what’s real right now because Jared just said he’s pregnant and that’s supposed to be impossible. “But, you can’t be pregnant. You told me that you can never carry a baby after the accident.”

Letting out a weak laugh, Jared shakes his head in mutual disbelief. “Funny, huh? Turns out it’s not impossible, just improbable. And so…yep…pregnant. They said that’s why I’ve been feeling so sick lately.” His facial expression shifts and suddenly he’s looking less scared and more like he’s holding back tears. “None of this was supposed to be able to happen. I was told it wouldn’t happen! But now
it is happening…and…I don’t know what to do. And I’m pregnant.” Jared scrunches his eyes closed and pitches forward enough to rest his elbows on his knees.

Jensen blinks and gapes like the fish. There is some relief over the fact that Jared’s okay, at least in the sense that he’s not suffering from any of the terrifying things he’d read about online. Mostly, he’s completely speechless. He’s learned a lot of things in life but what to say when one’s paraplegic boyfriend is miraculously and unexpectedly pregnant isn’t one of them. He tries to talk but isn’t really sure what he’s going to say. After his tongue fumbles over words, he ends up getting out, “Okay…so…”

Jared looks up. “So, my doctor thinks it’s far too risky to even consider having the baby. He wants me to arrange to terminate the pregnancy. The sooner the better…”

The things Jared is saying make sense. The man’s practically crying as he speaks but Jensen can see a light at the end of the tunnel. Jared will be okay. Plenty of people have abortions and go back to their usual lifestyle. An unwanted pregnancy is something that can be medically handled. It’s something doctors do and Jensen feels relief wash over him. Jared’s in danger now but it’s something there is a way of fixing. “Okay. So…So…what do you need? I mean…what does this mean for you? How can I help? Cause, whatever you need…I’m here.” He leans forward and presses his forehead against Jared’s. Their eyes lock, staying focused despite their closeness. The growing relationship he and Jared have may be new by many people’s standards but he’s in love and he’ll do anything to keep Jared safe. He’ll be the shoulder Jared needs to get through the abortion. They’ll be okay. “Whatever you need, Jay. I’m here.”

“Really?” Jared squeaks, tear filled eyes clearing with relief.

“Yeah, of course.” Jensen squeezes the seated man’s hand. “Remember when we first started seeing each other? I told you that I like you. I wanted to date you. I know you come with complications. I am not going to run at the first blip in our radar. I meant that.” He places a kiss to Jared’s lips, pulling away slowly. “It anything happened to you…” He leaves the sentence like that because he can’t finish it. Even though it hypothetical, he can’t do it. His mother was right when she gave her concerns about Jensen dating Jared. Jensen does have a bleeding heart for Jared but it’s not for the reasons she originally thought. It’s not because Jared’s bound to a wheelchair. It’s because Jared is so full of life and Jensen’s addicted to that. He’s becoming unable to live in a world where Jared isn’t part of it. “Terminating it…will that be dangerous for you?”

Jared pulls back like he’s been slapped in the face. He rolls himself away from Jensen, looking stunned and hurt at the same time. Realization over why Jared reacted like he did hits Jensen just as hard. Jared had assumed Jensen was talking about supporting him through the pregnancy, not helping him through aborting it. “Shit,” Jensen whispers.

Defiance flares up in Jared’s eyes. “I’m not terminating it.” They both stand their ground and stare at each other. In an attempt to prove his point, Jared licks his lips and says, “I’m having our baby.”

The term “our baby” shakes Jensen to the core. The world drops out from under him and he’s dizzy. There is no way he’s ready to be a dad, hell, he hasn’t even figured out if he wants kids or not. That’s what he told Jared. He remembers clearly saying he doesn’t want kids now. He’s happy with the “kids” he has in the form of students. Besides, he and Jared haven’t even figured each other out. They’re still in a learning curve and he definitely doesn’t want to add a baby to that. And now Jared’s telling him that he’s pregnant and he’s not following his doctor’s advice to terminate the pregnancy. He knows he heard Jared use the word “risky”. Logic points Jensen in the direction of choosing to do things that aren’t risky an doing things that doctors tell him to do.

Jared is looking at Jensen expectantly and Jensen loses the grip he has on being an adult with
processing skills. Everything he heard causes a chain reaction; he’s shutting down piece by piece. He’s bigger than this, he knows, but right now parts of his brain are switching off and adrenaline spikes his heart-rate. Difficulty breathing makes him lightheaded and suddenly he feels like he’s a high school student instead of the adult who teaches them. Jared can see it happen when Jensen draws into himself and grows colder; it’s a defense tactic he hasn’t resorted to in years but the walls go up brick by brick. Even though he’s aware he’s doing it, he can’t stop himself. He sees the look on Jared’s face and knows he’s breaking him. He hates himself but he’s gone into full self-preservation mode. It’s a dick move but Jensen feels like he’s going crazy. “Jared, I’m sorry…I can’t…” Unable to say much more, he backs himself out of the room, walking without using his eyes and stumbling. His vision is no good to him anyway, it’s dimmed around the edges and he feels like maybe this is a huge misunderstanding and tomorrow everything will make more sense.

When he gets to his car, he fumbles for the keys and gets it started.

He drives and drives. He told himself that he would go home and evaluate the shit storm he just started in Jared’s house. He’s complete scum, he knows that, but he really can’t be the person Jared needs. He’s not enough.

Miles pass until Jensen realizes where he’s going. It’s hours to Dallas but despite the time, Jensen’s wide awake – Jared’s revelation and the adrenaline coursing through him like ungrounded energy is making sure of that. The minutes and miles pass like seconds because Jensen’s stuck on a loop of the shattered expression Jared wore when he’d last found the courage to look at him. He can still hear Jared’s voice ringing in his ears, the words “I’m having our baby” playing on repeat in his head.

He’s just passed a sign welcoming him to Dallas when he feels like his ribcage is crushing his heart and lungs. It’s scary enough that he pulls onto the side of the road but he can’t remove his hands from the wheel. Knuckles white due to the death grip he’s got on the thing, Jensen keeps holding on and he lets his head fall onto the center part.

Jensen’s never had a panic attack before but he imagines that’s what’s probably happening to him now. He tries to breathe deep but his breath catches on every other inhale and he chokes down oxygen.

This is not how he behaves. He has things held together. That’s what he does.

So why is he falling apart on the side of the road?

The answer is easy. It’s because he’s a coward who walked out on his boyfriend – his pregnant boyfriend – without manning up and handling things like an adult.

In the quiet of the night, sounds of cars passing him by keep him company as he tries to compose himself enough to get the car back on the road. He still doesn’t know where he’s going but when autopilot lands him in front of his brother Josh’s place, he isn’t surprised. All his movements are in slow motion as he puts the car in park, turns the key and steps out of it. He’s not sure how late it is but he knows it’s late enough that his nephew is asleep and his brother and sister-in-law probably are as well. This, however, is an emergency, the kind where brothers don’t have to worry about waking each other up.

With one press of the doorbell, chimes ring through the house. They fade away to complete silence. After no signs of life in the house, Jensen rings the bell again. That seems to do the trick. Lights flick on in a way that allows Jensen to trace the path of the person inside the house. The rooms come alive and light makes its way to the front door. There is a shuffle behind the door and Jensen notices the peephole darken for the moment before the door is cracked open. Josh’s eyes fill with recognition when they land on Jensen and he pulls the door open all the way, revealing that he’s wearing
disheveled pajamas. He yawns mightily and runs a hand through his bedhead. “Jensen? What the fuck are you doing here? Do you know what time it is? Mikey’s asleep.”

Jensen can’t speak though he knows his brother deserves an answer. He just looks up at his brother and shakes his head.

The response startles the sleep out of Josh’s eyes. “Holy shit, Jensen. Are you okay?”

Shrugging, Jensen shoves his hands in his pocket. “No, I’m really not.”

“Get in here,” Josh says, yanking Jensen by the arm and forcing him inside.

Jensen tumbles into the house and stands there like he’s lost.

For whatever reason, Josh pulls his brother in for a gruff hug. “Come on man, whatever it is, we’ll figure it out.” He moves to urge Jensen towards the kitchen but Jensen hardly budges. “Come on, bro. It’s alright.”

Jensen can only nod dumbly because he doesn’t know if it’s going to be alright or if he even deserves for it to be.

***

Jensen sits at the breakfast bar in his brother’s kitchen, his hands curled around a hot cup of coffee that he hasn’t taken a sip of yet. The last thing he needs is caffeine because he’s wide awake, memories of the look of betrayal in Jared’s eyes sending jolts of electricity to his heart and threatening to stop his blood from circulating.

He looks into the coffee, seeing a distorted version of his reflection. He doesn’t need an actual mirror to let him know he looks like shit. That is something he feels in his bones, through and through.

“You going to talk anytime soon or do I need to call a hospital or something because you’re really freaking me out over here.” Josh plops himself down in front of his brother, his own cup in hand and he takes a long sip.

“I don’t need a hospital,” Jensen croaks.

“It speaks!” Josh says in mock surprise.

That gets a weak laugh out of Jensen. He allows himself to take a long drink from his coffee mug, letting the hot liquid scald his mouth slightly. “I fucked up.”

“I was guessing something like that otherwise you wouldn’t have been standing on my porch in the middle of the night.” Josh puts his mug down and patiently waits for a deeper explanation.

Jensen doesn’t ease his brother into one. He drops it between them like a brick. “Jared’s pregnant.”

“Woah.”

“Yeah.”

Josh struggles with the information. “I thought you said –”

“Yeah. That’s what we thought. Turns out…that isn’t true anymore. He went to a bunch of doctors today,” he pauses to look at his watch can corrects himself, “yesterday. He’s pregnant.”
“Shit.”

“Yeah,” Jensen says again.

Josh takes another sip of coffee and asks, “how’s Jared?”

There is so much concern in his brother’s voice that it stirs a new mess of guilt inside Jensen. “I… don’t really know.”

“What do you mean you don’t know?” Josh rears back and lowers one eyebrow at Jensen.

“I kinda… I don’t know. He told me he was pregnant and I… well… I just kind of walked out on him.”

Josh’s reaction is lighting quick and almost knocks Jensen off the stool when he reaches over and smacks his brother on the side of the head. “What kind of dick move is that? You? You just left him?”

“Well… yeah… after I said a whole bunch of stupid stuff.” Jensen flinches before Josh can smack him again.

“I can’t believe you did that.” The shock is clear on Josh’s face as he shoots his brother a puzzled look. “What the fuck Jensen?”

Jensen’s hands fly up in defense. “I don’t know. I really don’t. I have no idea why I did what I did. I just… it’s fucking terrifying Josh.”

“Which part? The fact that you left Jared alone with that news or the fact that I’ve just learned my brother might have lost his mind? Because my brother sure as hell would have kicked my ass if I did the same thing as you when I found out Kacey was pregnant with Mikey,” Josh snorts.

“I know! I just have no idea… It was like I lost control of my body. Jared just blurted out that he was pregnant. He told me it was mine – like I might have thought it wouldn’t be – and that the doctors want him to terminate the pregnancy as soon as possible because of all the risks. I thought… I thought that his health was at risk. I thought something was going to happen to him.” Jensen is aware that he’s building up a strong babble but he doesn’t do anything to stop it. “I thought I would support him. That… that I’d be there for him. But then I realized that we weren’t talking about the same thing. He thought I was talking about supporting him in having the baby… that’s what he wants, by the way. And when I asked him if terminating the pregnancy would be dangerous for him, he looked at me like I stuck a dagger in his heart. He told me he’s having our baby. And I shut down. I just…” Jensen gasps and feels the panic attack building again. He can’t breathe and has to duck his head lower.

“Woah, okay… take it easy.” Josh’s anger at his brother evaporates and he places himself in front of Jensen. “Deep breath okay? In through your nose. Out through your mouth. That’s it.” He mimics a deep calming breath and puts a hand on Jensen’s shoulder. “You’re okay.”

“I’m an asshole.” Jensen mumbles and closes his eyes.

“A little bit.” Josh lightens the mood with the jibe and a laugh. “Just relax a second and we can talk about why you’re an asshole.”

Jensen closes his eyes and rests his head on the countertop. He doesn’t know where to start. There are things he should put in order so that the whole evening makes sense but he can’t. All he can focus on are the two facts that Jared’s not having an abortion and his response was to walk out on
him. He groans, drawing the sound out with a long breath. When he sits up, he looks at Josh. “I
don’t know why I walked out. I mean… I know why I walked out but I don’t know why I wasn’t
able to hold it together. It was just too much. It’s like… everything. Jared and I spoke about the fact
that he couldn’t have kids. I was on board with that. I don’t really want them. My life is good the
way it is. My relationship with Jared is good the way it is. We’ve still got so much to figure out. And
Jared? He’s got issues with work and…and he’s just getting his own life together. A kid? That’s
gotta be one hell of a stressor. That isn’t something I want. I thought it was something we both didn’t
want. And then… then Jared’s gotta go and get sick. Well, we thought he was sick. I was so worried
about him.” Jensen checks to see if Josh is keeping up with his ramble. “I thought maybe there was
something wrong with him because of his paralysis…”

“And that scared you,” Josh states.

“Yeah… because I love him.” Jensen swallows and scratches at the back of his neck.

“You love him so much you walked out on him?” Josh deflects a glare from Jensen. “Hey, I’m just
trying to understand. I want to understand Jensen. Because you aren’t that guy. I want to know
what’s got you acting like you’re losing your mind.”

Jensen goes back to looking at his coffee mug because he can’t take the look his brother’s giving
him. It’s a knee-jerk response because Josh is the older brother. Jensen’s practically predetermined to
flinch under Josh’s judgement. “I don’t know. I just shut down. I felt so relieved when he told me
that the doctors wanted to abort the baby because in my head, that would mean Jared would be safe.
I thought we both didn’t want kids…I thought that was the right answer. I jumped to the wrong
conclusion. But… when Jared said he was having the baby, my world felt like it crumbled in on
itself. That was too heavy a blow. It’s fucking scary Josh. It’s dangerous and terrifying and I am
scared shitless.”

“Because?” Josh pushes.

“Didn’t you hear a word I said?”

“Yeah, I did. Lots of them, all jumbled together.”

Jensen snorts at his brother’s smart-ass response. “Because Jared’s health is in danger. And it’s my
fault.”

Licking his lips, Josh nods slowly. “You’re starting to sound a lot less like an asshole now.”

“I am?” Running a hand over his face, Jensen sighs.

“Yeah. And it’s not your fault Jared’s in danger.”

“It’s my kid.” Jensen counters.

Josh snorts. “Still doesn’t make it your fault.”

“I put it there.”

“Yeah, I get that. We don’t need to go into the dynamics of you and Jared’s sex life.” Josh stands up
to retrieve the pot of coffee and refill their mugs. “But it’s not like you did it on purpose. You both
talked about it, right? It happened. Accidents always seem to do that. That’s why we call things
accidents.”

“I still feel like it’s my fault. Jared didn’t deserve me walking out on him but he definitely doesn’t
deserve me putting his life at risk. The fact that I did that…I don’t think I’ll be able to live with myself knowing I hurt him like that. He…he’s had such a hard life and somehow he’s come out on the other side as this great person. He…smiles bright enough to light up a room and as a teacher? Shit, Josh. You’ve got to see him. He’s brought new life to the ceramics program. It was all but dead before Arkin hired him and now enrollment for next year is through the roof. I can’t fuck all that up for him. I can’t."

“You’re starting to breathe funny again, Jen.” Josh puts a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “Let me tell you what, let me talk for a little bit. Okay?” He waits for Jensen’s nod and continues. “When you talk about Jared, you get this puppy dog look on your face but I know it’s more than puppy love. That thing you just said about Jared lighting up a room with his smile? Yeah, you do that too. You did it just now when you were talking about him. I’ve never seen you like this over a guy before. It’s…reassuring actually. I thought maybe no one was going to make you smile like that. And then Jared shows up and he’s nothing like any of us every expected for you and somehow he’s got it all right. So…yeah, maybe I get it why you’re freaking out. Because you love that man and if you really think you’re responsible for harming Jared in some way, then I understand why you shut down. I’d do the same if I thought I hurt Kacey. Or Mikey. What you don’t understand is that you walking out on him probably hurt him a lot more than being pregnant is hurting him right now.”

The words seep into Jensen and he cringes. “I do understand that. That’s why I’m an asshole.”

“Yeah, but not for the reasons you think.” Josh takes a sip of coffee and cocks and eyebrow at Jensen. “Let’s just say - for one minute - that Jared wasn’t paralyzed. What would you be feeling right now?”

Jensen takes the question seriously. He tries to put himself into the situation. The guilt he is feeling wouldn’t be there but the knot of fear and dread would be. “Umm…I wouldn’t be overly thrilled. I think.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m not at a place in my life where I want a baby. And Jared and I have only been together a few months. We’re not ready for that.”

“No one is ready for it, Jen. Trust me.” Josh sighs and sits down. “I wasn’t ready for Mikey, remember? I know you do. I showed up at your apartment drunk off my ass. How I got there, I don’t know. And I was terrified. Because I didn’t know what to do with a baby. But…then Mikey arrived and…well…you know the rest. He’s perfect. He sure as hell is the best thing I’ve ever done.” Josh smiles at the memory and turns to his brother. “I don’t think anyone is ever ready for a kid but it’s awesome. Being a parent is tough and scary and exhausting but awesome.”

Jensen remembers the night his brother is talking about. He thinks he said some of the same things Josh just said in attempts to comfort his brother back then, because Jensen works with kids for a living. He understands what’s so amazing about them. He never, however, entertained the idea of having kids himself. “You don’t think I’d be shitty at it?”

“At being a parent?” Josh shrugs. “You’ve never been shitty at anything you’ve done in your life. Well…except for being a boyfriend. You were a pretty shitty boyfriend a few hours ago.”

“Fuck,” Jensen licks his lips. “I fucked things up.”

“Well, maybe if you pulled your head out of your ass enough, you could salvage it.” Josh says.

Jensen wants to do that. He really does. Things are clearer now that he’s given himself time to think
and talk them out. His reaction may have been childish but people do stupid things in the name of fear. “Jared wants to have the baby.”

“What are you going to do about that?”

“Support him. Of course. There’s nothing else I could do. I just…I want him to be okay. But if I know Jared, when he’s determined to do something he’s set on getting it done or at least trying to. So…yeah. I will support him if he’ll still accept my support. If he forgives me. I don’t deserve it… but…fuck,” Jensen feels his eyes sting and he has to blink away wetness. A drop lands on the counter beside his coffee mug and he inhales loudly. “You think he’ll forgive me?”

Josh is silent for a moment. “I think so, yeah. You tell him the things you’re telling me and…yeah. I think so.”

Jensen laughs, the sound echoing with relief and an unburdening that’s been hard earned. “I’m gonna have a kid.” The words feels bulky in his mouth.

“I’m finally going to be an uncle,” Josh says with his own laugh.

Jensen exhales loudly and slowly. “This is really scary.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll hold your hand and tell you you’re doing a good job,” Josh says with a mocking tone that does little to conceal the sincerity he has for supporting his brother.

Jensen shoves him with a brotherly roughness and rolls his eyes. He has no idea if he is ready for this, or Jared for that matter, but life has already pushed them in that direction so he feels like it’s sink or swim. “I’ve gotta talk to Jared.”

“Not at three in the morning you don’t. Besides, you look like you can barely operate that coffee mug. There is no way I am letting you in your car.” Josh touches Jensen’s elbow and makes a gesture with his chin towards the stairs. “Come on, you’re sleeping here.”

Jensen can’t stifle the yawn that the mere mention of sleep has produced. He wants to argue but he knows his brother is right. He’s useless at this point. He doesn’t fight, going silently along with Josh towards the guest room. He accepts the offer of borrowing sweat pants and sits himself on the edge of the bed. When Josh returns with a pair, Jensen gives him a smile. “Thanks for the talk and for… you know…knowing I’m an asshole but understanding that I’m really not.”

“No problem.” Josh gives a small nod of his head. “Mikey loves you, you know that. You’re a great uncle. You’ll be a great dad.” He flicks the light off and closes the door without giving Jensen a chance to disagree with him.

Chapter End Notes

Jensen is kind of a bad guy here...but he was a dick for a reason. So I hope people don't hate him. He is flawed like all people are.

Thanks for reading!
Vaguely, Jared’s brain recognizes that it’s a weekday but school is out for the week. He wouldn’t be there even if classes were being held; he’s stuck in a world where things are going on around him but he’s not able to move through it. Nothing makes sense.

He wants to know where he is and what happened to the life he’d been floating through not so long ago. Right now, everything doesn’t connect. He feels like shit, throws up two times before the sun even rises and he’s not sure if it’s because of stress or the fact that there is an actual fetus growing in his womb. All he wants to do is stay in bed, pull the covers over his head and hope the mattress will swallow him whole. His body won’t let him do that and Jared’s muscles shiver and shake, giving him a spasm strong enough to jolt him out of the bed. Thankfully, he catches himself enough on the nightstand, but his muscle spasms were strong enough to force him to abandon the plan of fading into pillowy mattress denial.

“Shit,” He murmurs while catching his breath. He wonders how long he’s actually been neglecting the world because that means he’s also been neglecting his medication. It’s a chain reaction and part of the system is starting to fall apart. Sighing, he finds the strength to swing himself into his chair and make his way towards the hall bathroom. On autopilot, he goes about popping doses of the pills he should have been taking for the last two days. Once they’re swallowed and swirling around inside of him, a cold fear shivers through him, almost making him vomit for a third time. He remembers what the doctors has said about his medications and how he’d have to stop taking them. “Shit,” he spits out for the second time. Licking his lips, he closes the cabinet slowly and figures that he’ll just have to wait for clarification about that when he sees Dr. Evelyn Atlas – if he ever sees her. If he stops living in denial and actually picks up the phone to find out if she’ll take him as a patient.

He looks at the clock.

It’s late, way past morning and ebbing into late afternoon. Jared forces himself to start acting like he’s still part of the human race and he wheels around the kitchen fixing something he can put in his stomach. He doesn’t have the energy for much in the way of cooking but he gets a peanut butter sandwich made and down his throat before he even tastes it. His eyes land on an empty bottle he’s been using to stick some of his drying paintbrushes in after washing them. It’s just a plan brown glass beer bottle but the fact that he gets stuck on is that it’s one of the type’s Jensen uses for his home brewing.

That’s when the anger sets in.

He’s angry at himself for getting caught up in Jensen and being well and truly ruined by him. At the same time, he’s furious at Jensen for giving Jared a reason to feel betrayed. The two reasons swirl together and suddenly Jared’s an active volcano. Self-hate and anger towards Jensen push and pull at his inner thoughts and he wonders how on earth things ended up the way they did.
He knows Jensen – or at least he thought he did – and he’s seen Jensen deal with everything in his life with composure and grace. It’s an endearing quality that made Jared feel safe around the other man. But the look on Jensen’s face when Jared told him that he was pregnant feel only slightly less hurtful than the look on Jensen’s face when he realized that Jared wasn’t planning to abort the baby; he wanted to try to carry it to term.

That look on Jensen’s face, and the fact that he bolted like a deer, have Jared fuming. The man had said he wouldn’t bolt at the first blip that came across their radar but that’s exactly what he did. Maybe he wasn’t expecting their first blip to be a fetus shaped one, either way, the man went back on his words. He made Jared feel like maybe, just maybe, everything was going to be okay and Jensen was the one person on Jared’s side when the whole world seemed to be turned against him. He’d grabbed that hope and then Jensen tore it all away in nasty scraps when he abandoned Jared.

He abandoned their kid.

“Fuck him,” Jared snorts. He licks his lips and wheels his way into his studio. Along the way, he passes the painting of Jensen he’d done weeks ago and it’s like his body took control away from his brain because he doesn’t remember wanting to throw the painting, but it ends up sailing across the room anyway.

Jared needs to do something with his hands. He doesn’t want to make something or mold something into nothing. He doesn’t want to create because that whole concept started this whole mess in the first place.

What he needs to do is destroy. Unfortunately, the painting of Jensen lodges itself when Jared’s wheels make it difficult to retrieve. He’s not in the mood to deal with that right now. Instead, he grabs a half finished work from one of his easels and brings it with him to the center of the room. The painting is something he did when he was feeling good, after a day of working with students and feeling like he made a difference. The kids were learning about shading and texturizing, so he started the painting at Arkin and brought it home when time to work on it ran out. It’s a bird’s nest comprised of twiggy elements with two eggs nestled in the middle. One egg is finished; Jared had time to paint the Robin’s blue surface and add some bumps and texture to the curve of the shell in an attempt at realism. The other egg isn’t finished being painted yet but Jared did have a chance to add fissures to the surface, a part where the egg is cracked outward by a baby beak trying to break the shell away. Weeks ago, Jared would have said the painting was coming out pretty well. It’s not his usual subject but he isn’t afraid to try new things.

Today, Jared thinks it’s garbage. Whatever he was trying to get across with the painting doesn’t matter. In a flurry of wheeling around, Jared manages to get most of his paint in arms reach and that’s when he starts breaking down.

The anger is shifting, morphing into something new and more explosive. It streaks his cheeks in tears that burn and he bites his lip to keep himself from crying out. Grabbing the red paint, he gets a heavy dollop on his fingers and launches it at the painting. It hits with a loud splat onto the image of the cracked egg, then drifts downwards in thick drips. Taking a shuddering breath, Jared repeats the process. He keeps grabbing at anything he can get his hands on, any color. His hands are stained with a muddled rainbow and the painting is looking less serene and more traumatic by the second. Jared only stops when a sound hits his ears that startles him and he throws whatever is in his hands to the ground so he can spin his chair towards the disturbance. Jared is surprised to see Ryan and startles, skidding backwards in his wheelchair.

“Well…that looks angry,” Ryan says as he studies the mess of paint that Jared was slapping onto the canvas. He hits the locks on his chair and crosses his arms over his chest to survey the destruction.
“Fuck, Ryan!” Jared shouts and rolls his eyes. “You scared the shit out of me, you asshole! How did you get here?”

The insults bounce off Ryan and he snorts. “I let myself in. You gave me an emergency key, remember? And from the look of the number you’re doing on your studio, this is an emergency.”

“Remind me to take the damn key back,” Jared fumes.

They’re staring at each other across a scarred battlefield of paint and tumbled canvases. The smug look on Ryan’s face denotes that he’s not going to back down, regardless of how murderous Jared looks at the moment. Eventually Ryan braves the warlike tension in the studio and makes his way closer to Jared. “Yep, this is an emergency.” His demeanor changes completely as he soaks in what is radiating off of his friend. “What’s going on Jay? I think after you’ve ignored my calls and texts for the last 36 hours, I deserve an answer. And don’t bullshit me by skirting the issue. I’ve known your stubborn ass long enough to know that you’re good at ignoring things plowing through issues. What’s got you sabotaging anything within splatter distance?”

With a flare of his nostrils, Jared glowers. The hurt and anger are still running their courses through his system and he knows the tears are evident on his cheeks. There is no hiding that he’s already fallen apart at the seams. He’s surprised Ryan can’t see inside of him and figure things out for himself. Licking his lips, he chokes on a sob. His voice sounds weak and broken when he squeaks out. “I’m pregnant.”

The bombshell explodes with disbelief over Ryan’s face. “Woah,” he gasps, eyes wide. “I wasn’t expecting that.”

“Yeah, me either.” Jared rubs his hands into his eyes to stop more tears, realizing too late that they’re covered in paint. “Shit,” he curses under his breath, his whole body sagging.

“Shit, Jay…you look like a raccoon on an acid trip,” Ryan quips.

The comment is so bizarre that Jared has to laugh. The noise edges on sounding insane as it escapes his lips but he can’t stop it. His emotions are fried. He doesn’t know if he’s laughing or crying anymore but he can picture himself, vivid blues, reds and greens around his eyes. He’s sure he looks ridiculous. Ryan’s giving him a forced smile and Jared can tell his friend is trying to be strong for his sake. There is no judgement on Ryan’s face, he’s taking the news like it’s unexpected but not like he’s going to head for the hills because he’s not ready to give that type of support to Jared. “I’m pregnant,” Jared repeats again, this time his voice is more steady.

“When did you find out?”

“Two days ago. I…I was feeling shitty and I got checked out. Seems like the fact that I’m not supposed to be able to carry children is negotiable now.” Frustration makes Jared spit the last part out a little louder.

The silence is tense between them but Ryan remains resolved in his concern for his friend. “What are you and Jensen going to do?” As soon as the words are out of his mouth, he realizes his misstep. When Ryan says the name Jensen, Jared flinches like a bullet nicks him right in the middle. Forgetting his frist question, Ryan roars, “What did that fucker do?”

“Nothing. That’s the damn problem. Jensen did nothing.” Jared shakes his head.

Narrowing his eyes, Ryan leans closer. “What do you mean by ‘nothing’?”

“Exactly that. I told him and…he…” Jared’s voice cracks because it feels like the memory is real all
over again. He closes his eyes and his mind gets stuck on the image of Jensen’s back as he abandoned Jared with the news of their pregnancy. “He left. I told him and he said ‘I can’t’ and then he just…left. Poof. Gone.” When Jared opens his eyes again to look at his friend, they’re filled with tears and Ryan’s image comes in blurry.

Ryan’s reaction comes slowly, each word punctuated by more anger. “I’m going to fucking kill him.” He grits his teeth, upper lip quivering to expose his gums. “I swear…he’s a fucking dead man.”

“Ry – ” Jared tries but gets cut off by his friend.

“No. He’s dead.”

The logistics of the threat whirl in Jared’s head. He’s like to see Ryan maul Jensen about now and can’t help himself from asking, “How exactly are you going to do that? Kick him with two useless legs? Try to punch him before he escapes up a stairwell?”

Ryan screws his face in actual thought and confidently says, “Taser. I can Taser the fucker and then roll him to death with my wheelchair. Leave him a bloody stain on the sidewalk.”

The fact that Ryan is dead serious at the moment makes Jared laugh. The sound escapes and it’s real and loud. His whole body gets in on the action, shaking from the force of the laughter because his brain needs a break; it needs to laugh. But the moment is over quickly when laughing starts to feel wrong and soon the sounds of his laugh take on the shuddering qualities of a sob. Jared hates that he can’t commit to one emotion right now as he breaks down, resting his tear streaked painted mess of a face in his hands. “Shit, Ry. I’m pregnant.”

Ryan rolls as close to Jared as possible, licks his lips, tries to get a word out then pulls back at a loss. The lack of a reaction is enough to clue Jared in on the fact that Ryan doesn’t understand the weight the revelation comes with.

“There is a reason the doctors thought I would never be able to get pregnant. There is a list of complications a mile long and all of them end with something dying. Me. The kid. I dunno…All of it points towards the declaration that having this kid is a very, very stupid thing to do.” Jared braces a glance at Ryan. His friend is staring at him, soaking the words in but not letting anything show on his face. “I’m not aborting it. That’s what the doctors want me to do, by the way.” He sags lower. “I can’t do that. I can’t just kill it without trying. You know? Without having hope. Maybe it’s a side effect of the way I went through my injury and rehabilitation but…there were so many people who should have given up hope in me but didn’t. And it paid off. So…if you’re going to think I’m an idiot for wanting to at least try…then leave. Give me your key and leave.” By the time he’s done speaking, Jared returns to sitting upright, eyes on the defense.

“Woah, hey,” Ryan says raising both palms in surrender. “You’re a fucking idiot, but not because you don’t wanna kill your kid. Fuck, Jared…I’d like to think that you know me better than that. I’m kind of reigning king in the court of dangerous choices. Or…more accurately…choices not everyone is on board with. Hell, my family moved across the country and no one agreed with my decision to say.” He punches Jared in the shoulder playfully. “I couldn’t leave your sorry ass now, could I?”

The memory has Jared laughing. He can picture it perfectly; Jared has been just as terrified at the prospect of Ryan moving as Ryan had been. In a world where they were surrounded by people who walked through life instead of rolled, they had been each other’s life lines. Maybe that’s why they tried dating and it’s probably why that attempt failed. They were a lifeline, too dependent on each other for a functional relationship to develop. Jared thumps Ryan on the back of the head and scoffs. “Yeah, thanks for that. You saddled my family with another wheelchair bound dependent.”
“You love me,” Ryan says confidently.

“And I question that decision every day.” The pang of feeling abandoned by Jensen is still sitting in the middle of Jared’s chest but this feels good. Being himself and being a friend reminds him of a level of normalcy that he thought might have dissipated when he’d found out he is pregnant.

“Yeah, I don’t know why you put up with me either. But you’re kind of stuck with my annoying ass being your friend until the end.” Ryan lets himself laugh for a moment before getting serious. “And that’s why I’m going to kill Jensen.”

“Ry – ”

“No. We’ll call Jeff, get his help. Then we kill him.”

“No!” Jared yells louder than he intends. The sound of his voice not only startles Ryan, but himself. He takes a moment to settle himself. “No. Don’t tell Jeff. Please, Ryan. Please. I don’t want my parents to know, not yet. They… I can’t. I can’t destroy them like I always do. I…I just want to figure out what I’m going to do… or what it is going to take for me to stay pregnant. Then I’ll tell them. I just want to know what I’m in for before I tell them what they’re in for. So, please, don’t tell Jeff. He’ll tell my parents in a heartbeat.”

Ryan sits in silence considering this. It takes him a long time to speak but when he does, he nods. “If that’s what you want. But you gotta tell ‘em Jay. They’re going to be pissed at you but you’re their son. They love you. I am sure your mom will be on board with killing Jensen. She seems scrappy.”

Letting Ryan make light of the situation feels like a good idea for the moment. He can’t keep going the way he’s been carrying on for two reasons. The most important is that he’s going to burn out. The other issue is that he’ll probably destroy his whole study by taking out his feelings on innocent artwork and materials he usually finds solace in. He doesn’t want to taint arts abilities to help power through. “Thanks,” Jared says with a sigh. “For not telling Jeff.” His brother’s name tips the scales and Jared choking on it. “Fuck. Jeff’s gonna kill someone.”

Wheeling backwards, Ryan takes in the wave that’s just hit Jared. “Hey, come on, let’s get you out of this studio. It’s depressing as hell in here right now and some sun will probably do you good.” He starts to wheel out of the room and looks over his shoulder. “Come on.”

“No, I – ” But Jared doesn’t know how to end the excuse so he lets it stand there.

“Come on. It’s a gorgeous day for basketball. Maybe I will even let you win a round or two.”

“I don’t think that’s a great idea, Ryan. You know, maybe I shouldn’t.”

“Cause you’re pregnant?” Ryan scoffs. “If a major traffic accident didn’t kill you, I’m pretty sure a fetus the size of a grape isn’t going to do much damage.” With a smirk, he wheels out of the room, not bothering to look back when he says. “Come on. But let’s wash that rainbow off your face first.”

Since it looks like he isn’t given much of an option, Jared wheels after his best friend. He washes his face and then he kicks Ryan’s ass on the court, which isn’t because Ryan is going easy on him. Quite the opposite. Ryan is brutal but Jared’s on fire and he scores point after point. Ryan’s not treating him like he’s glass and that fact is enough to make Jared remember that maybe he’s something stronger.

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Jensen feels like he’s going to fuck things up spectacularly or lose control of his lungs. He’s betting
on the latter since he’s already done a bang up job of fucking up.

He’d slept at Josh’s and spent the morning hashing things over with his brother, trying to figure out how he could grovel or if he even deserves to have Jared talk to him again. Selfishly, he wants Jared to forgive him so that he can have Jared back in his life. Jared. The person who has become someone he wants in his life more than anyone he’s ever dated. Someone he loves in ways he never knew he could. What he did to Jared is unforgiveable. He doesn’t deserve forgiveness. Yet he finds himself planning on explaining himself and begging.

The plan was to leave Josh’s and go straight to Jared’s but he can’t.

He knows why.

Jensen’s terrified.

He’s afraid of the pregnancy and all the weight it comes with. But he’s more afraid that Jared will never forgive him. He’s frightened all the more that Jared will forgive him because he doesn’t deserve that. And maybe Jared’s forgiveness will come at the cost of the spark that made their relationship so electric. Jensen’s too much of a coward to find out. So instead of going straight to Jared’s house, Jensen drives past it towards his apartment. He validates his choice when he thinks he sees Ryan’s car out front.

Sitting in his empty apartment, he has a panic attack all over again. He sits with his head between his knees and tries to breathe again.

Maybe he hates himself for getting Jared pregnant and saddling Jared with a whole new world of health risks but sitting with only his thoughts makes Jensen hate himself for killing the smile Jared always has in his eyes when they are together.

He’s good at navigating stressful situations so he’s not sure why he bolted.

Then it hits him. Hard. Right in the chest and there is actually pain when his heart tries to keep beating.

He bolted because it’s the first time he doesn’t think he’s strong enough to handle any part of his world since Jared told him he’s pregnant. His first reaction was to fall back on being selfish and keep himself untouchable but it was all because he doesn’t think he can handle being touched.

It takes hours of being alone for Jensen’s brain to come to terms with his new truth. He still doesn’t know if he can handle the situation he’s in but it’s not being touched by it that he can’t handle. It’s the idea that he can’t live with himself if he doesn’t allow himself to be touched by it and give a good try at handling it.

A sleepless night passes and Jensen wakes to work through the next day with a belly that can’t keep food down and a heart that’s struggling under the strain. He’s a zombie as he pulls clothing on his body and finds his car keys. They weight a thousand pounds in his palm but he finds the strength to get in the car and drive to Jared’s house.

This time, he doesn’t keep driving. He parks and steps out. Walking to Jared’s front door feels surreal because he knows he’s going to have to see Jared and find ways to make his voice work. All of that is expected but he didn’t anticipate Jared’s front door to be open. The storm door is closed, and Jensen supposes that makes sense since it’s a gorgeous day. Fresh air is fluttering through the screen on the door. From inside the house, there are the sounds of the television; if they are this loud when Jensen’s standing outside, he can only image what is going on inside. Jensen knocks, the
sound immediately swallowed up by the television. He rings the bell, and still nothing happens.

Four days ago, Jensen wouldn’t have been hesitant to walk into Jared’s place unannounced. He’d probably relish it, looking forward to the pleasantly surprised look on Jared’s face. Now he feels like he has no right to cross the threshold. It’s just one more thing he’ll have to ask forgiveness for and he pulls the storm door open and steps inside calling, “Jay?” Following the sounds of the television, he gets to the living room.

Jared is sitting on the couch with his legs strewn across the cushions. He’s in a faded t-shirt, the neck of which hangs a little more to one side, and a pair of grey sweatpants cover his paralyzed legs. There is a pint of ice cream wrapped in his hands and he’s got a spoon hanging in his mouth when he notices that Jensen’s entered the room. Looking frozen, he blinks and swallows the mouthful of ice cream with some difficulty. Before Jared can say anything, Jensen gets in, “Jay – ”

“Get out!” Jared yells.

The anger in Jared’s voice is new to Jensen. It throws him for a loop and he physically stumbles backwards. Knowing he’s supposed to start groveling, Jensen regains his ground but Jared’s anger knocked all the words out of his brain. He focuses on something on the surface. “Are you eating ice cream?”

Jared takes in a sharp breath and knits his eyebrows together. “Yeah. It’s called being an adult.” The phrase is lost in the confliction of Jared’s snotty tone that makes him come off as less than an adult and more of a rebellious teen. He takes another defiant spoonful of ice cream. “I can eat ice cream for breakfast if I want to. You’re not my fucking dad.”

The phrase jolts Jensen back to the situation at hand. “No…I’m not. But you told me that I’m someone’s father and looks like I’m shaping up to be a pretty terrible one at that.” The words come on their own, like Jensen’s heart knew them all along.

Jared, apparently, didn’t know what to make of them. His lips work to form words but they don’t come. Licking his lips, he’s shaking when he finally get out, “you have no right.” Jared’s chest heaves, moving quicker by the second. “You…you have no right to come in here and say that.”

“I know.” Jensen puts his hands up in both defense and surrender. “You’re right. I’m an asshole. A huge one. Trust me. I know that. And you deserve more than a person who acts like I did. But…I need to say what I have to say. I – ”

“No! You don’t get to do that. I’m having this baby with or without you. I was given another shot at life and there is no way that I’m going to take away my child’s chance at life. I can’t. So whatever you think you need to say…you don’t. Because it doesn’t matter.” Jared’s voice shakes.

Jensen gets the sense that if Jared had been in his chair, he’d be herding Jensen out the door. The anger in Jared blacks out the part of him that seemed childish and he’s all fire now. It breaks Jensen and he presses his lips together, face tense while trying to stay composed. Jared is killing him right now, and while he believes he deserves it, hearing that he’s the bad guy here cuts him deep. “I fucked up!” He shouts in anger at himself and the situation, not at Jared. “I hate myself for doing that. If I could take it back, I would. I would do it all differently. I’d still be terrified. I’d still be torn. But I would have went about it differently. I would have explained. Because…you can do anything Jared. I know it. But right now I don’t think that applies to me. And…I fucked up. So don’t forgive me. Because you shouldn’t. I mean it.” Jensen rubs his palms into his eyes and sighs at the ceiling. “I’m sorry. So sorry. But don’t you dare forgive me. I’m a coward and I ran away but I’m man enough to take responsibility and support the people – person – I love. And I love you. Whatever you want, I’m going to support it. Whatever you need…you’ve got it.” He’s screaming over the
television and the ramble comes out of Jensen’s mouth on a plea. He’s not sure if any of that made sense to Jared.

The torn expression on Jared’s face creates a fissure and Jensen can see that there is something, maybe a glimpse of something there. He grabs the remote so that he can mute the television. His glare doesn’t waver from Jensen’s. “I can’t do this right now. I…” Jared takes a deep breath. “What you did…when I was already down and helpless…it fucked me up, Jensen. And the worst part about all of this is that I love you too. I love you and I hate you and I can’t talk to you right now.” For the first time, he looks away from Jensen, something glistening in his eyes. “You’re damn right. I’m not forgiving you. Not today, at least. It looks like it pains him to say the next part. “Right now, I need you to leave.”

Jensen wants to stay. He wants to stay and hash this out but he realizes he’d be forcing his words on Jared when Jared isn’t steady enough to process them.

Emotions are flying, wild and ricocheting off the walls. They’ve got to spend some time apart before there are fatalities instead of wounds.

“Okay, Jay. Whatever you want. Whatever you need.”

“I needed you.” Jared admits, full of pain like it hurts getting out but it hurts even more when the words bury themselves in Jensen’s brain.

It feels like Jensen’s actually been shot when he struggles out the door.

Chapter End Notes

So, first of all, I just wanted to say that I appreciate all my readers and comments. I really do. I am so flattered and lucky. But I wanted to remind some people who ask me for an update that I am flattered but I am just writing these stories for fun. I have a family and a house that needs repair (which my husband and I are doing all by ourselves because...well...money!) and a job. I have to put all of those things first. That being said. The whole story is written in a skeleton outline. If you want me to post it so you know how the story ends, I will do that. I hadn't planned on taking so long between chapters but life gets in the way and sometimes I have to put my passions on hold. I LOVE writing. It is my stress release and something I really adore. I want to share my stories and fics. But sometimes I need to remember that I can come back to writing at any time. I can't get back time spent with my family. In the future I will try to only post stories when they are complete. I hate making people wait. Trust me. I understand how much that sucks!

XOXO
Thanks for understanding!
Jensen feels like he’s sleepwalking.

He is fairly certain he’s never experienced anything like this feeling of emptiness that’s becoming more cavernous by the day. It’s an alien feeling because Jensen’s lived his life in a word where he makes goals and works his ass off to achieve them. Right now, he wants to find a way out of this tangled mess that he and Jared have dissolved into and no matter how much he racks his brain, he can’t find a way to reach that goal.

He’s failing. He feels like he’s failed completely already.

He rewinds the past week in his head and tries to figure out where things forked off into the wrong direction. He can pinpoint it, he just can’t change it.

If Jared could see inside his head, then the man would know that Jensen’s actions come from a place of love and concern. They are all about keeping the man he loves safe and in the heat of the moment that struck Jensen as most important. The foremost thing that he should be concerned about. But the truth of the matter is that Jared can’t see into Jensen’s head, and all the younger man heard was that Jensen is on board with an abortion. Jared wasn’t able to see the true meaning behind Jensen’s initial embrace of the doctor’s suggestion to terminate Jared’s pregnancy. He wasn’t able to see that it came from a place of love and that it wasn’t an attempt to brush a mistake under a rug.

Thinking about it for the hundredth time, Jensen can see now how Jared might have thought that way. Jared has been told what he can and cannot do for the entirety of his life after his accident; he’s even had coworker’s thoughts dictate what they believed he could do. Jensen sees all of this now, and he sees how they both behaved like children and they should have read between lines and voiced things that went unspoken. They shouldn’t have made assumptions.

But they did. And now Jensen feels like he’s crumbling. After the love struck, butterflies in the stomach journey their relationship started off on, he’d been riding a high for so long that the sudden halt in their relationship has him feeling like he’s fallen flat on his face.

Josh was right, Jensen was a complete idiot. He had run from Jared with what he can only image must have been a look of fear on his face. Had the roles been reversed and Jared left him like that, Jensen would have been hurt for days. The hurt would fester, turning into anger. Thinking about the way he ran leaves Jensen ashamed of himself. He’s not like that. Ever. He stands up to people at work. He deals with shit when people have problems or a problem with him. In the classroom he doesn’t shy away from injustices or issues. It’s why he’s the building representative for the teachers’ union. He’s good at dealing with shit.

So why did he go and make a fine mess of his relationship?

The honest answer comes to the surface. He doesn’t feel ready for a baby and doesn’t want one now. But he does want Jared. And he made a mess of things because his solution made sure Jared was safe and that they could continue to build their relationship. Sure, they’d only been doing what they were doing for the past few months but it has sticking power. It has the potential for greatness. He’s fallen hard. And he’s terrified of that. It’s uncharted territory for him, and maybe for Jared too. A baby isn’t even close to being charted. It wasn’t even a thought aside from that fact that Jensen
knows he’s not even ready to think about it.

Being honest with himself hurts because his flaws surface and he sees cracks in his attempt to be an attentive and committed boyfriend. After dwelling on these ideas for a while, he’s hurt on a different level. He’s hurt because Jared has shoved him out of his life, and while he understands the reasons why, it still pains him. It hurts because it means their time together hasn’t made Jared trust Jensen enough to give him a chance to explain himself. There is pain and a tiny flare up of anger when he truly digests their actions over the last few days. It’s all so confusing and at the moment Jensen doesn’t even know which direction is up or down.

“Fuck,” he mutters under his breath.

Jared doesn’t want to see him right now, and he gets that. He can give him time. But they are going to talk eventually; they’re going to have to work together. He’ll give Jared a few days, maybe until work starts up again and then check in with him. There has to be a way to set things right and understand where each other is coming from. He wishes the day to do that was today because he’s drowning in anxiety over the situation, unsettled with the fact that things are being left unresolved and paused.

He knows he looks like shit because that’s exactly how he feels. He’s not sleeping from all the tossing and turning he’s doing. His brain keeps him up, replaying things in his head and trying to come up with possible outcomes. The spring break drags on, and it’s a good thing it does because what kind of teacher would Jensen be in this state? He’d be useless at best.

He tries to distract himself by reworking lesson plans and units for work, only he finds himself working in circles and doing the same thing over and over. He tries drinking, but one hangover later he decides that was a terrible decision and sticks to distracting himself with other things like brewing beer. He fucks up every single batch he’s working on because he loses track of time and lets the grains steep too long or doesn’t sparge at the right time.

Essentially, he becomes good-for-nothing. A fact that makes him feel even worse about life.

He checks in with Josh a few times, not bothering to contact the rest of his family. He doesn’t need to drag them into his fuck up, especially when they’ve grown so fond of Jared.

He does everything he can possibly think of to keep his mind off of things. They all fail. What he doesn’t do is sleep, despite all his attempts. He misses Jared; his whole body misses Jared. He’s gotten quite used to sharing a bed with Jared at either of their houses and the loss of that shatters parts of his heart. It’s the same spiel every night, that same unsettled feeling.

On the night before school starts up again, a night he’s usually spending mourning the loss of free time, he finds himself wired and nervous. Tomorrow he is going to see Jared and he doesn’t know what to do. Heart pounding away in his chest, Jensen can’t lay still enough to try sleeping, it would be a waste of time and effort. He’s awake, brain racing. So instead of twisting around in the bedsheets, he gets up and plops himself in front of the computer.

Truthfully, he doesn’t know why he hasn’t done this earlier. Now that he’s typing in “paraplegia and pregnancy” into the search engine, he feels like he should have done this days ago. Jared had gone through a condensed version of what his doctor had told him, but Jensen wants to know what he’s walking into before he actually sits down and speaks to Jared.

He wants to be prepared.

He wants to be the type of considerate, conscientious boyfriend that they have both been up until last
Within thirty seconds, he realizes why he shouldn’t seek medical advice on the internet. The search results are varied but they range from happy little tidbits to medically startling statistics. It leaves Jensen more confused because he realizes he doesn’t know the true extent of Jared’s paraplegia. Sure, he knows what Jared is physically capable of and what medications he takes as well as their purposes but he’s reading accounts of people with titanium rods in their spine or fused bones. It makes it apparent that he doesn’t know those types of statistics. He feels lost and helpless. His heart speeds up and the anxiety is back, leaving him terrified. For every story he reads about someone with paraplegia having a successful pregnancy, he reads a horror story. There are cases of severely premature birth or the baby being born with complications because of medications taken during pregnancy. A handful of the stories have difficult endings for the birth parent, the labor leaving them struggling to recover and bounce back. There are stories about a pregnancy being a practical death sentence. He wonders how much of this Jared is clued in to because that last time they spoke he seemed adamant about seeing things through. It’s all too much but he shuts the computer feeling more confused and scared than he did when he logged on.

Surrendering to his nerves, he doesn’t even try to go to bed that night. Instead, he brews a pot of coffee and stares at the clock.

It’s the first time of import in his life that he doesn’t know the right answer.

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Work is brutal. It’s brutal from the first friendly smile and wave of a coworker that requires Jensen to fake a smile in return. It’s not Dan’s fault Jensen’s relationship went to shit. Dan doesn’t even know Jensen’s in a relationship even though they spend one day a week collaborating on history units for the students. So he forces a wave and wishes Dan good morning, quickening his pace enough so that he can duck out of eyesight from anyone else. He gets so caught up in trying to avoid people that he doesn’t realize what his body is doing. Just before it’s too late, he skids to a halt outside of Jared’s classroom and it dawns on him that he’s absentmindedly falling back on a habit he has developed since Jensen and Jared started dating. He’s so accustomed to getting a morning glimpse of Jared, even if it is just popping his head in and sharing a smirk, that he’d almost waltzed into the room and did just that. The fact that there are heavy reasons why he can’t do so makes him hang his head and sigh. If the way Jared reacted when Jensen showed up out of the blue is anything to go by, then Jared isn’t going to appreciate the company. Head heavy, he backs away from the door and makes his way back to his own classroom.

He misses Jared with every fiber of his being and it’s making him conflicted. He thought they were on the same wavelength, but this recent blip leaves Jensen shaken. It makes him confused about what he wants because the lists he formulated in his brain don’t make much sense. They’re all shaken up. Underneath, things still point in Jared’s direction. He wants to work things out with Jared and if time is going to tame the waters enough so that they can figure out if that’s possible, then Jensen is going to grin and bear it a while longer.

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Spring break was a funny thing. It leaves Jared with a depressing pang in his gut because the fact that it is over makes him remember that he’d been so excited for it to begin. He was supposed to go away with Jensen. He was supposed to have Jensen all to himself for nine days, no annoying coworkers or nosey students to get in their way. And then none of that happened. Instead, all he got was morning sickness and a pregnancy reveal that aired on being dramatic enough to inspire a soap opera plot.

Sitting in his classroom, finding himself at work almost an hour earlier than the students, Jared
wonders what the hell just happened to him. He’s really not sure. It’s a blur, made even more complicated by anger and fear playing tug-of-war with hurt and love. He wasn’t supposed to be sitting here stewing in his own private pity party. He was supposed to be returning to work refreshed and more in love with Jensen than ever. Now he’s wounded and brooding. Jensen hasn’t been a part of his life for days. The thought makes Jared snort because if he really thinks about it, that fact isn’t true. Jensen has been with him every second of every day as a tiny cluster of cells trying to hurl Jared into dangerous territories.

“Fuck,” he curses, slamming his forehead down on his desk. Parts of his rational thoughts start tugging at his brain and he wonders why he can’t seem to get out of this funk. He has things to do, lessons to plan, and doctor appointments he really should be making. All he can focus on, however, is the look on Jensen’s face when he threw him out. Damn right he threw him out. Jensen had no right to come into his house looking like that, looking like his heart was bleeding out. He had abandoned Jared right before the mother of all panic attacks, disappearing for days. Jared wasn’t going to let Jensen waltz back in to jab at Jared while he was still raw and abandoned.

It didn’t matter that he apologized.

It didn’t matter that he seemed completely sincere about it.

It didn’t matter that he looked about as broken as Jared felt.

Jared’s eyes well up and suddenly he feels like vomiting, a feeling which quickly becomes reality; he wheels himself towards the slop sink in the back room so he can throw up the meager meal he choked down on the way to work.

The day is shaping up to be a pretty shitty one.

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The second day back to work for Jared is somehow worse than the first. He feels like a ticking time bomb and he doesn’t know how long he has on his clock before things get messier. He’s in a world of denial and that’s fueling all of the thoughts gnawing away at his brain.

He should have called the high risk specialist a week ago but every time he picked up the phone, he couldn’t manage to dial more than four numbers. He gets caught up with emotions and breaks down, throwing the phone against the wall, which doesn’t do much good when the action only serves to have Jared falling out of his wheelchair when he strains to reach where it fell. It seems appropriate that he would find himself all alone in a crumbled mess on the floor, grumbling as he sets himself back in his chair.

It’s been almost two weeks since Jared found himself in an alternate reality. That must be what this is because Jared doesn’t fuck around with his health. He gets things done instead of wallowing in self-pity. Right now, however, he’s being a complete hypocrite. He hates himself. He needs to call the doctor but a delusional part of his brain his holding out for Jensen. In his ideal world, it’s a decision he wants Jensen to be part of. Not only does he need the support but he can’t lie to himself, he misses Jensen. He doesn’t know what they did because when he used to think about Jensen he stirred up butterflies in his belly, now all he gets is nausea. That’s partially the baby’s fault. But the other part is Jensen’s fault because he feels empty without Jensen filling all the niches in Jared’s life that were perfectly carved out for him.

Jared feels sicker today than he did yesterday. It’s been a slow but sure decline because even though Ryan’s been checking in on him almost every day, Jared’s finding less and less energy to banter with him, much less play basketball. Ryan said Jared’s depressed, but that hasn’t happened in a long time.
Jared won’t let that happen again, he won’t let anything drag him down into those depths again. Ryan blames the fetus fucking Jared’s brain up with hormones and while he might be right, Jared doesn’t want to think like that. Jared may be putting on a tough front, but he’s terrified that there is a piece of Jensen growing inside of him. It’s got cells and a heartbeat. Truth is, Ryan’s right in a different way, because the fact that there is something growing inside him that could kill him, that his body could kill, does mess with Jared’s brain.

The bell signaling students to head towards first period rings and he startles out of his thoughts. He has an entire unit planned on birth or rebirth, which is ironic timing. He’s been planning it from the start of the year and figured the time after spring break would be the perfect time to have students revisit their work from the start of the school year and give it new life. Now, the concept makes Jared laugh darkly. He pulls a bucket of clay onto his lap and in a redux version of the first lesson he ever taught at Arkin, Jared takes a lump of clay into his hand and tosses it at the first student who enters the room. “Think fast,” he says as the clay flies towards Grace.

The girl gives a surprised gasp but catches the clay, giving her teacher a confused look. “Morning, Mr. P.” She takes her seat, keeping her sight on her teacher.

“Good Morning, Grace.” Jared beams a smile at her, successfully pushing down all of his negative thoughts and diving full force into his teacher persona. He’s not afraid to be human but right now he needs this. He, and this art room, need to be a solace for the students. The room needs to be a place of creation, and while creativity can absolutely stem from negativity and pain, he needs to focus on something positive. He needs to show his students that they have grown, and maybe he has grown too. Some of them might have to take small steps but they’re all capable of great things.

With another smile, he lobs two more hunks of clay in succession as two more students walk in the room, each one mirroring Grace’s surprised shock.

“Sit down. Show me what you can do.” Jared says, spinning quickly to watch the students follow his instructions. He still wants to vomit, but Jared fights through it with a smile. His life might feel like it’s falling apart but he’s got this. Whatever blows his self-esteem has taken, he knows he’s a good teacher and he needs to spend time doing something he’s good at.

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“Mr. Ackles?” a voice squeaks uncertainly into the room. Without waiting, Ashley presses the door open and steps cautiously inside.

Jensen’s ears perk up, startling him in the middle of grading a class set of homework assignments. He turns his head to the left and see’s Ashley standing there, her bottom lip caught between her teeth on one side. “Ashley? What are you doing here?” Glancing at the clock mounted over the door Ashley just came through, Jensen realizes it’s been about an hour and a half since he’s had her in class. “You forget something?”

“Umm, no… I,” Ashley stammers, chewing her lip a little more. Looking unsure of herself, she swallows her hesitance and presses fully into the room, rocking back on her heels in front of her history teacher’s desk. “I was just worried a little about Mr. Padalecki. I, umm,” she chews her lip again and scrunches her nose. “And I just wanted to make sure he’s okay. I mean, you helped him out when he fell in the hallway and I thought maybe… I dunno… you should know. ‘Cause, you’re friends right?” She shrugs and smiles.

Jensen’s brains whirls. He’s trying to pick what part of Ashley’s words he wants to react to first. Trying to keep up the platonic appearance between him and Jared, he nods. “Right, yeah. Friends. But, what do you mean that you’re worried? What’s going on?”
“I dunno… I…” She pauses and chews the words over in her mouth several times. “I know it’s probably not my place, seeing as I am just a lowly high school student,” there is a hint of playful sarcasm in her words, “but Mr. Padalecki didn’t look too good last period. He was acting fine, but… he just didn’t seem like himself. You know? And I think I heard him throwing up in the supply room. So…I figured it couldn’t hurt to check with you. Make sure he’s okay.” She smiles again, the gesture warming Jensen’s heart because it’s full of an innocent type of genuine concern.

Jared’s sick? Jared’s sick and Ashley thought Jensen would know about it? It’s like a punch to the gut because Jensen has no idea how Jared is doing. Not a clue, aside from the fact that he could probably guess why Jared’s throwing up. Taking his glasses off and pinching the bridge of his nose, Jensen lets out a slow exhale before looking up at Ashley and meeting her smile. “He was fine the last time I spoke to him,” Jensen lies. “But you know what? It can’t hurt checking in on him. Don’t worry, I won’t ruin your street cred by telling him you were worried about him. Thanks for letting me know, Ashley.”

Ashley laughs. “You can ruin my ‘street cred’,” she says while making air quotes around the words. “It’s okay. I think anyone who noticed was worried about him. Mr. P isn’t like that. He’s always been kind of real, you know? He’s the best teacher I’ve ever had. Everyone loves him.” Ashley pauses and checks the clock. “Crap, I gotta get going. I’m sorry if I bothered you. I was just – ”

“Worried. I know. That’s very kind of you. And you didn’t bother me. I always have time for students.” Pulling open the desk drawer, Jensen whips out a pad of late passes. “Here, let me write you a pass.” Jensen scribbles the information needed and sends Ashley on her way. Left alone, he has time to think about what just happened. Without a student in sight, he lets the worry bubble over and fill his veins with fear over the fact that Jared isn’t doing very well. Picking up the pen he’d been grading with, he flicks it nervously in quick staccato taps against the desk. He meant what he said to Ashley; he’s going to check in with Jared. Jensen promised Jared time and he feels like it’s been long enough. Now that Ashley alerted him to the fact that Jared’s not feeling well, there is no way Jensen can wait much longer in finally speaking to Jared face to face. He knows the school isn’t the best place to do so, but the day is over in another 45 minutes, and he’s pretty sure he can’t wait a second longer.

Jensen’s prediction turns out to be true. 46 minutes later, he has his heart in his throat. He realizes he is actually scared to talk to Jared. It’s different than the jumpiness he’d felt when they first kissed or went on their first date. This type of feeling comes with the feeling that there are wrong and right moves and he doesn’t know which are which as he’s about to walk into Jared’s classroom.

Stepping into the hallway, he watches the swarms of students thin as they make their ways to their lockers and out the door. There are stragglers, as there always are, but most of them take their time getting to extracurricular activities or clubs. Jensen’s hoping today isn’t one of the days that Jared opens his art classroom for students who want to work on their own projects because he already feels the words ready to tumble out of his mouth. When he reaches Jared’s room, he can see through the small pane of glass on the door that the room’s empty. His hand settles on the doorknob and he hesitates, the edginess jumping up a notch. Swallowing thickly, he turns the knob and steps inside.

He finds Jared immediately, but he’s facing away from the door and all Jensen can see is his mop of hair and the width of his shoulders. It’s clear in the way his body reacts, the slightest twitch in muscle as he turns his ear to the door, that he’s aware someone entered the room. Mistaking his new guest to be students, his voice is chipper and warm, a kind, friendliness Jensen hasn’t heard in weeks. “Guys, I’m not staying,” Jared starts as he leans back in the wheelchair and spins towards the door, “late today…” Jared’s words fall off when his eyes lock on Jensen instead of the students he was anticipating, his tone changing into something cold before he goes quiet and slack jaw.
They both stare at each other in silence, tongues darting out nervously to wet suddenly dry lips. Jensen’s heart beats loudly in his chest, pounding so hard that Jensen’s afraid his ribcage will bruise it. He feels dizzy and adrenaline hits him hard because he doesn’t know what to do. He’s trying to figure it out, trying to find a word powerful enough to break the silence. He starts with Jared’s name, the syllables heavy and weighed down with emotion. Jensen says it again, and Jared’s eyes narrow, his jaw sets.

“Jen…what are you…” Jared’s Adam’s apple bobs as he swallows. He’s digging his fingers into the rubber on his chair’s wheels, nervously plucking at it. For as tense as the moment is, it settles them both a fraction of a bit that they are in a sense of mutual confliction. Jared’s eyes dart from Jensen to the corner of the room and back again. He’s everything Jensen is, anger and fear and uncertainty all rolled into one being. Now that they are face to face, it’s like they can’t figure out if they’re being pulled together or repelled. “Jensen…you shouldn’t…”

The man Jensen is looking at right now is a fragment of the Jared that he knows. The fire is still burning under the surface but Ashley was right, Jared looks pale and unsettled. The realization starts a chain reaction and all Jensen wants to do is shake away all the fuckups and missteps and see if there is something good underneath. Clearing his throat, Jensen holds up a hand towards Jared. “No, Jay…I know. I know. This isn’t the time. Or the place. And I probably shouldn’t be doing this here, now. I know you needed some time…I get that. But I need to talk to you. I need to see…make sure…you’re okay. I just…” Jensen pinches the bridge of his nose, looking down and taking a deep breath. He feels all the things in his head racing to be the first one to come out of his mouth. “Jared…fuck…I know you needed time. I gave that to you. I…” He makes a noise that sounds like a strangled laugh. “I’m nervous. I’m so fucking scared. I was so scared to…to what? To talk to you? Isn’t that insane? Why am I afraid to talk to you?” Taking his glasses off, Jensen pockets them and rubs at his eyes with the heel of his right hand. He looks up and sees Jared, noticeably closer than the last time Jensen was brave enough to look. “You know why, Jared? I’m terrified because I love you. You know that. But what you might not know is that I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you. Never. And I think I’ve never been in love with anyone before. You know? And that reaction I had when you told me you wanted to go through with the pregnancy was because I love you.” Jensen’s aware he’s building up a thick ramble, but it’s unstoppable now. “I love you and I want to keep you safe. So all I hear is that the pregnancy is dangerous. And you could maybe die. So it was a gut reaction. I want to keep you safe, I can’t help it. I love you and I’m really scared. I’m scared because I don’t know the right answer. I thought the right answer was keeping you alive, but it came out all wrong and I…shit, Jared. This week? Last week? It doesn’t feel good or right. Does it feel good for you? Because,” Jensen pauses because he doesn’t know how to finish the sentence without repeating things he’s already said several times. “Because, I’ve never cared about someone this much and it’s terrifying.” Jensen stops then, staring at Jared. He feels like his knees are going to give out so he puts his palm flat on the studio table beside him for support. “I don’t know if any of this makes sense…”

The words weave their way to Jared’s ears and travel down to his heart, twisting around it and impacting the way it beats each and every time. The rambling softens Jared, flays him open and leaves him wounded and raw in front of Jensen. “Jen,” he chokes. Combing his fingers through his hair, he brushes it off his forehead and cocks his head at the other man. “I’m sorry.”

Jensen’s head snaps up. He hadn’t been expecting that. “What?” he asks slowly, watching Jared wheel closer to him. The other man is shaking his head and he’s not sure what that means.

“I’m sorry…for the way I acted. It was…” Jared shrugs, making a gesture of uncertainty. “I don’t know what that was. Maybe I was everything. I was being a little hormonal or emotional or sensitive…whatever you wanna call it. I was being a little shit, Jensen. I should have given you a chance to speak your mind. You deserved that. You still deserve that. We weren’t planning on having a kid. We’re both shocked. We’re not ready for it. But it’s happening. And…it’s okay if you
don’t want a baby. I won’t hold that against you. But, I want to give this thing a chance, see how far I can go. And if that means you and I,” Jared’s breath hitches, cracks and when he comes back to speaking he sounds even more shattered. “If that means you and I are through, then…that’s okay. Because you’re entitled to feel that way. And I was an asshole for thinking you had to change your mind.” Jared stares straight up at the ceiling, but the angle of his chin makes it easy to see the tears building up on Jared’s lower eyelid. “I was an asshole. You know? I found out I was pregnant hours before I told you. I was able to digest that. I sprung it on you and when you reacted…the way you did…I threw up every wall of defense I’ve learned how to build over the years. And I’m sorry…” Jared’s voice cracks again and he dries his tears by shrugging one shoulder up so he can wipe his eyes across the shirt there. “And it fucking sucks because of what you said. Because I love you too…like that. The way you feel. And I guess I felt like an idiot for loving someone so much and that person walked out on me before we could figure things out.”

“I shouldn’t have done that Jared. I’m sorry. I told you, I’m an asshole. I…” Jensen shakes his head, his heart thumping so loud that it’s almost hard to hear the hiccup of a shudder Jared makes in response. “Look, we both fucked up. Okay? But I wanted to see you…needed to see if there was something salvageable here because I think there is. And…”

“Yeah,” Jared says a little too quickly. “But we need to talk more.” Gesturing towards the room and indicating the larger picture that is Arkin High, Jared sighs. “Not here. Somewhere else. Okay?”

“Yeah, Jay…I agree. I don’t want to rush into anything, so maybe slow is good? We can talk without the fear of students or coworkers walking in on us and seeing us as ugly crying messes?” That gets a quick laugh out of both of them. Despite just stating that going slow would be good, Jensen is overwhelmed by the want to reach out and touch Jared, to get his hands on him and make sure he is solid and stable. To kiss him, feel the press of each other’s lips that they’ve been missing for the past days. Jensen clears his throat and bites back the urge. He distracts himself by focusing on the concern. “Besides, you don’t look so good. Your students are worried about you.”

“Yeah…I don’t feel so hot. Kind of been feeling like my world…my…” he takes a breath, “my ‘you’ was falling apart. I just need to – ” He stops himself and clears whatever is in his head by waving both of his hands in front of his torso. “Talking to you is a good start. We need to talk. Talk is good.” He’s nodding his head in agreement with his own words. “Can we get together outside of work…maybe tomorrow? Because I don’t think I can handle more emotions this afternoon.”

Jensen nods. “Yeah. Tomorrow night then. It’s a date.” He lets the phrasing hang between them, gut tightened as he waits for Jared’s reaction.

“Yeah. A date.” Jared licks his lips and nods again, his eyes brightening some.

“K, yeah. So…pick you up at 7?” He feels the nervousness again, but he doesn’t dread it. It’s more of an anticipatory sensation. He feels the rambling building up because there are a ton of things he has left to say but he keeps the stopper in long enough to let Jared nod. Things are not better but at least they’re both going to be adults about it and try to figure things out. That’s all Jensen’s asking for, just a chance to know that he wasn’t wrong about what he and Jared had… have.

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For the most part, Jared had a pretty good day at school. He’d gotten through the workday without feeling sick once and the energy in his classroom was infectious. It was enough to pull him up and he felt like he was riding the momentum of the class. The moment was much needed in the sense that it reminded Jared why he does what he does while simultaneously making him feel on top of his game. His day also comes with an undeniable feeling of lightness and he knows exactly why. Finally cracking through the ice that had been building between him and Jensen was more emotional than he
could have predicted. Things are still a mess but talking somewhat cleared the air and he feels more settled. Traveling the halls of Arkin High are still awkward because their paths cross every once and again during the day; they don’t stop and linger in those moments like they used to. At least they’ve bridged the gap of communication enough that they can exchange mutual smiles and that is something Jared accredits to their chat in Jared’s classroom yesterday.

Now that he’s home, Jared wishes his consecutive hours of not feeling sick were willing to continue. At Arkin High he was able to distract himself with work so that he wasn’t thinking about the rapidly approaching date with Jensen. He’s got nothing to blame for feeling sick other than nerves. His kid’s going to be saddled with being the reason for a lot of his ailments, Jared doesn’t need to tack on one more piece of blame. His stomach feels like the storm is brewing inside of it and he feels like an idiot for getting so worked up over seeing Jensen, a man he’s been actively dating and having sex with for months. Instead, he’s anxious about going out, like it’s his and Jensen’s first date all over again. There are butterflies fluttering wildly in Jared’s stomach, battling to make themselves known.

When he came home, he peeled off his work clothing which bore the signs of paint splatter and clay dusts. He slips himself into a dark pair of jeans and a v-neck t-shirt that he absentmindedly thinks shows off the muscles in his arms in a way that Jensen will appreciate. The thought alone makes his heart jump. Jensen and he are getting together to hash out some serious business, not figure out if they still find each other attractive. Still, Jared can’t stop himself. He wants to look good, even though he’s been feeling worn down over the last week. Sighing, he fusses with his hair like it matters. Truthfully, it doesn’t; Jared’s already got Jensen’s kid growing inside of him, it doesn’t make a difference how good his hair looks. They’ve crossed that line a long time back but for some reason Jared can’t stop himself.

Figuring he’s got things as good as they’re going to get, Jared leans back in his chair and lets his head tip back. His eyes are closed while he tries to stabilize himself in the seasick feeling he’s found himself in. On their own accord, his hands find their way to his still flat stomach and he curls his fingers in and out over the area where Dr. Mahoney told him his child was nestled safely. “Am I making you nervous too?” he asks, a soft smile spreading on his face. “I’m sorry. Shit, your other…”

He pauses because the word he’s looking for comes so easily to his tongue but he’s afraid to voice it, like it might jinx the whole situation. After a slow gulp of air, he goes for it. “Your other father has me all messed up. He does that sometimes. He makes everything feel like I’m floating…it’s…” Sighing, the light tone of Jared’s voice grows more serious. “It’s not really like that right now, because we have to talk about some stuff. But…I want it to get better. I think it might…” He touches his belly again, sneaking his hand under the hem of his shirt so he can trace swirling patterns over his stomach. The gesture feels awkward in the beginning; it’s the first time he’s really allowed himself some type of bonding with his baby. He’s been too bogged down with his own pity party and feeling sick to truly recognize what is growing inside of him as its own being.

He’s about to say something more to his stomach when the sound of the doorbell jolts him from his reverie. It startles him enough that his heart trips over a beat and he blinks to clear the fog from his brain. Making his way to the front of the house, the nervousness over seeing Jensen hits him with double the strength as before and he bites the corner of his lower lip as he yanks the door open. “Hey,” they both say at the exact same time, and it’s a good thing they do because it breaks the undeniable tension between them and Jared lets himself laugh.

“He,” Jared tries again, eyes meeting Jensen’s before traveling the length of the man’s body. Jensen is wearing the same white short sleeved button up he’d worn to work, but he changed into a pair of slim cut jeans which serve to show off the strength in Jensen’s thighs and the bow to his legs. Jared swallows, realizing that the jeans were probably doing a good job of hugging Jensen’s ass and he thinks it’s probably a good thing that Jensen is facing him because, apparently, his brain is easily
distracted today. “You look nice.” Jared catches the slight blush that pinks Jensen’s cheeks.

“I do. I mean, you do,” Jensen stammers, trying to clear his throat and make sense of his words, his cheeks getting redder. “I mean, you look good too.” He wets his lips and his eyes dart away for a split second before landing on Jared’s again. “Shit, I’m…” Shaking his head, Jensen leaves the sentence unfinished and gives Jared an apologetic shrug. “You look good, Jared,” Jensen tries again. “Better. You know…better than Monday. Not that you looked ugly or anything…you just looked sick and…shit, I suck at this. I just talk in a circle.” Jensen lets out a defeated sigh, followed by another innocent apologetic shrug.

The ramble has Jared laughing again because it is so indubitably Jensen that he is reminded all at once why he’s nervous about tonight. It reminds him of one of the many reasons he loves Jensen and that he wants moments like this. Always. “I know what you mean. I felt pretty shitty. Not that I feel great right now, but I feel better than Monday.”

“Well, that’s good then.” Jensen shoves his hands in his pockets and rocks back on his heels. “So…I was figuring we could go to McKinney Falls Park, if that’s okay. I know it’s a little too early for dinner and since it’s so nice out today, I thought maybe some fresh air would do us good. You know, a nice breeze while we talk.”

“That actually sounds perfect,” Jared says. He’s been to McKinney before, and while there are obvious reasons why he hasn’t hiked or biked the trails, he has been to many of the wheelchair friendly scenic outlooks. “Let me just grab my sunglasses. Be right back.”

He returns as quickly as he left and the two of them make their way to Jensen’s car. It’s comforting how quickly they seem to fall into routine. Jensen doesn’t miss a beat when he lets Jared get himself into the car but takes the job of folding and storing Jared’s wheelchair for the other man.

The drive is quick enough, but they’re quiet the whole way. Things need to be said but Jared is afraid to start bringing out the heavy subject matter before they even get to their destination. Once he starts, he’s not going to want to stop and he really doesn’t feel like venting his spleen to Jensen while sitting in McKinney Falls‘ parking lot. So instead, they’re uncomfortably silent, making them both thankful when they finally arrive at their destination and Jensen holds Jared’s wheelchair steady why the younger man swings himself into it with a quick thanks.

“Umm, you maybe wanna lead the way?” Jensen suggests. “Not sure what type of terrain you feel like handling today. I’ve seen you jump steps at Arkin High but I’m pretty sure that’s not the current mood of our date.”

The word date speeds Jared’s heart and he smiles as he nods. “There is a quiet place over by the water if we go west from the lot.”

“So, Jared parrots back. They sit in silence for a beat. “Okay, this is weird, right? I’m so damn nervous I can’t feel my toes.”
Jared snorts. He’s not sure what being nervous has to do with feeling one’s toes, but it’s a sweet enough sentiment that it warms him. “Well, I can’t ever feel my toes, so…”

“Shit,” Jensen hits his forehead with the heel of his hand and gives an exasperated sigh. “I didn’t mean it like that. That’s not why I said it…I…shit. I used to be good at this whole talking thing. I’m the union representative and a teacher for Christ’s sake. I get paid to talk. And…you leave me speechless. My heart…it does this weird flip-floppy thing where I feel dizzy and happy and…I just love you,” he says, looking at Jared in hopes that the man understands. Thankfully, Jared does. His own heart is doing the very same thing and he caught up in what they have – had – and he can’t stop the way he melts and wishes Jensen could see into his head and make him understand that they’re on the same page. Instead, Jensen continues with, “It makes me feel dumb because you just make me say all the wrong things…do all the wrong things.” Jensen gets serious, cupping a palm over his mouth and slowly drawing it down. “You turn my world upside down Jared, and usually that’s a good thing. A great thing. But…sometimes it makes me do the wrong things, and I’m sorry. You terrify me. Living without you terrifies me. Having a kid terrifies me. I don’t know the right thing to do but you…” Jensen’s words are cut off by Jared’s lips, which have suddenly found themselves kissing the words off of Jensen’s tongue. Jensen gasps, his lips parted in shock before he fluidly shifts into reciprocating the gesture.

They’re kissing softly, Jared perched at the edge of his chair so he can lean into the kiss. It’s the first physical contact they have had in weeks and they’re dizzied by it immediately, everything darkening around the edges and they drown in it. It’s just a soft kiss, nothing overtly sexual, but it’s the type of kiss that speaks volumes. Jensen reaches out for Jared’s shoulders to steady himself but they’re both too off balance to be any help. They both go toppling over, Jensen sliding from the rock first, pulling Jared along with him so that he tumbles onto Jensen’s lap. Somehow, they don’t completely break the kiss. Their lips part enough to emit noises of surprise and laughter but Jensen’s got a tight hold on Jared, blanketing them both in a sense of the moment’s safety. The kiss deepens, each man parting their lips enough to allow quick dips of each other’s tongues but it’s prevented from going further when Jensen pulls away so he can cup Jared’s jaw and hold the man’s face close while he peppers gentle kisses over his checks and jawline. “Jay,” he whispers hotly against Jared’s skin.

Jared’s buzzing with what just hit him. Closing his eyes, he rests his forehead against Jensen’s and thinks that he could live in this moment. “Jen.” His voice sounds just as raw and desperate as Jensen’s does. “You terrify me too. I…” He needs to pause to take another breath, pulling back enough to press a hard kiss against Jensen’s lips and share the same air. “I’m not scared of a lot of things. I’ve gotten good at beating odds and being by myself. But…I’m not by myself anymore and I don’t wanna be by myself. And that scares me. So I’m scared too, okay. And I don’t care if you’re suddenly not good at it anymore, you’ve got to talk to me. I need you to do that. And I’ll talk to you.” He sighs, looping his arms around Jensen’s neck and kissing him quickly. “I don’t know where things are going to lead us but we’re not going to get anywhere if you run away from me and I act like a complete child.”

“You were not a – ” Jensen starts to protest, but Jared presses a finger to his lips.

“Yes, Jen. I was.” Jared says with a smirk, running the hand he is resting on the back of Jensen’s neck upwards so that he can coast through the short hair. He kisses him again, sighing over the fact that Jensen’s lips are going a knock-out job of reminding Jared how much they’ve missed these kisses.

Jensen shifts, his forearms bracketing Jared’s head and he pulls him in closer, mimicking the same move Jared just did and running his hands through Jared’s hair, brushing strands away from his face. “I’ve missed you so damn much. I’ve been shit without you.” A soft moan leaves his lips as he deepens the kiss and presses his chest into Jared’s. “I mean it, Jay. I’ve never loved anyone the way I
“I believe you.” Jared smiles into the kiss. “Whatever happens, I know I love you the same way. I’ve felt like half of myself with you missing.” Heart thrumming, Jared keeps their connection, their breathing syncing up. Jared’s head is so foggy and they’re pressed so close together that it is hard for Jared to figure out where one of them begins and the other ends. That’s probably been the whole problem to begin with over the last days. They’ve been falling apart without each other and they have no idea what to do about it. “As much as the kissing kinda helped make things clearer, we’re going to have to use words too. We gotta talk, Jen.”

Jensen nods, his forehead bumping into Jared’s as he does so. “I know…but words weren’t working so well. I’m glad you shut me up like that.” Jensen pulls back to look Jared over and gives him a smile, his fingers tracing the dimples near Jared’s own smile. “You okay? I didn’t mean to send us both to the ground.”

“I’m good. You broke my fall…so…thanks for that.” Jared smiles wider, eyes crinkling in the corner as he looks down to gesture towards his ass being safely propped on Jensen’s thighs.

Clearing his throat, Jensen coughs into a fist. “So…ugh…talk. Yeah…” He looks over towards the water swirling beside them. “You wanna maybe cool ourselves off? Sit by the water and dangle our feet in?”

Jared takes a second to digest the question and then laughs, the sound friendly and echoing through the wooded area around them. “You gotta tell me if the water’s cold? Or…you know…wet?”

“Fuck.” Jensen groans. “Jay…I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking. See, I told you I can’t think straight…or talk.”

“It’s fine, Jensen. I’m not offended. I wish I could feel that. But I wouldn’t be opposed to you sticking your feet in.”

“No. Don’t be silly.” Jensen assesses their situation and sighs. “Here, let me help you up.” He waits until Jared loops his arms around his neck and helps hoist the man into his wheelchair. “Listen, let me make it up to you. It’s close enough to dinner time, how about getting something to eat? Nothing too fancy, maybe just some BBQ and talking? There is a small BBQ place I like near my apartment.”

Jared’s stomach answers for him by grumbling loudly.

Jensen laughs, “I’ll take that as a yes.”

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Sitting across from Jared is a bit surreal for Jensen. His head spins a bit over the fact that they’ve gone from being hot and heavy, to not speaking, to sitting here trying to piece things back together all in the span of two weeks.

It doesn’t feel as odd as he thought it might, especially not after the kissing that they gave into while at the park. But he still seems to have a case of feeling jittery, nervous about making the wrong step or not figuring things out. They have a ways to go, but handling issues one at a time is working for them at the moment so he doesn’t want to push it. There are heavier things that need dealing with, one huge thing in particular. They haven’t even said the B word yet, but Jensen knows Jared’s thinking about the baby. It’s obvious by the way that his hand somehow always finds its way to his belly. Jared’s doing it now, in fact. Maybe the man doesn’t realize it, but Jensen can see Jared’s right arm sneaking beneath the table, his strong hand curled over his middle.
The perfect moment to broach the subject presents itself when a waitress smiles her way towards them and asks to take their drink order.

“Yeah, um…water is good for me actually. Thanks.” Jared says, his hand stilling where it had been rubbing tiny circles across his abdomen. Jensen says nothing, and it takes Jared several seconds to catch on. “Oh, you can order a drink if you want. Just ‘cus I can’t doesn’t mean you have to go without.”

Jensen’s about to argue but swallows it down. He needs a drink and hopes it will be able to settle his nerves enough. “Yeah, I’ll have whatever IPA you have on draft. Thanks.”

“You got it,” the waitress says with a playful nod of her head. “You two know what you wanna eat yet or need a couple of minutes?”

Looking up at Jared, Jensen smiles and shrugs, willing to follow his lead. “You ready?”

“Yeah, uhh…I just want a 1/2lb of moist brisket and some creamed corn,” Jared responds to the waitress.

“Same,” Jensen says, because his brain isn’t focused on food right now. He’s just glad that he and Jared didn’t have to call their date to an end before they got to talk about the other things that are actually on their minds. He likes brisket just fine, but he likes the taste of Jared on his lips even more and he’s not in a rush to lose that.

The waitress winks. "You sure about that? It's damn good, that's for sure."

Jensen blushing, thinking maybe he’s been found out, that the waitress correctly interpreted the looks he’s been giving Jared. She’s right, he’d much rather have his lips on Jared’s again than munching down on brisket, but he’s not going to share that information. He thinks she understands well enough. “No, the brisket sounds great. Really. Thanks.” He gives her a smile but ducks his head down slightly.

With a knowing smile, the waitress looks from Jared to Jensen. “No problem. That will be right out for you.” She taps the table with one finger to emphasize her point and spins around to fill their order.

Jared’s quieter now, more the way he was when they were driving to the park. He hasn’t seemed to pick up on what the waitress was insinuating. That is not like Jared. Concern makes Jensen press his lips into a straight line, brows knit. “You okay?”

“Yeah, I…I’m good.” Jared sits back and takes a calculated breath. A glass of water is deposited in front of him and he offers his thanks to the waiter who brought it over and takes a slow sip. “Yeah, I’m good.”

Jensen’s not too sure he believes that. He watches the way Jared’s hand is back to touching his stomach, more obvious than before. For now, he lets the issue rest, taking a large pull from his pint glass. Biting the bullet before he’s too scared to, he speaks slowly. “Jared, we need to talk about the pregnancy. The baby.” It feels odd, foreign, saying it aloud and Jensen’s stomach twist when the words leave his lips. He has no idea if it’s a good or a bad twist.

“Yeah, I know…” Jared scratches at the back of his head, his eyes looking anywhere but Jensen. “I’m having the baby, Jen.” There is a strong edge to Jared’s voice, enough to let Jensen know that there is no room for arguing. Not that Jensen isn’t aware of that fact by now.

“So you’ve said. I know that now. But, I need you to know that I’m not going anywhere. Okay?” I’m
not. But I think we need to know what type of situations to be prepared for. I…” Jensen pauses in an attempt to find the right words to convey his concern and determination to stay by Jared’s side. “I’d like to go to a doctor’s appointment with you, if that’s okay, to see what we’re up against.” Each word leaves his mouth with purpose.

Jared goes still in the middle of taking another drink of his water. He doesn’t move, lips still on the glass and eyes rolling towards Jensen’s gaze. After a second, he settles the glass and cocks his head at Jensen. “You…You wanna come to a doctor’s appointment with me?”

Jensen nods his head firmly. “If that’s okay.” He tries to keep control over the nerves the thought leaves rattling around in his head. “I want to know what we’re in for.”

“What we’re in for?” Jared repeats like he’s not sure he heard right.

“Yeah. We. You and me.” Jensen reaches out and catches the fingers Jared has loosely wrapped around his water glass. He's aware of the offer he's just made as much as he's aware of the fact that he's never meant anything more. “That okay?”

The sound that leaves Jared is weak as he struggles to get it out. “Ye-yeah.” The sentiment in Jared's eyes is tangible and he looks like he's trying to smile with relief but something makes him close his eyes, abruptly pulling his hand out of Jensen’s hold, bringing it to join his other hand over his stomach.

“Jay?” Jensen goes to stand but Jared looks up at him and offers a weak smile, halting him with a raise of his palm.

“Nah, I’m okay. Just feeling a little sick. It will pass; it usually does.”

“You sure?” Jensen goes to stand up anyway.

“I’m sure.” Jared smiles enough so that it’s believable. “Sit down. Okay? You’re right. I can make an appointment with that high risk specialist when we get back. We gotta talk about the kid.”

The way Jared says the word “kid” sends a shiver down Jensen’s spine. Jared talks about the baby like it’s a person already and Jensen isn’t ready to make that jump. He needs to make sure Jared’s safe, then he can focus on other things like figuring out where this baby belongs in his life.

The waitress returns, depositing their meals in front of them and it sets off a chain reaction the second the scent wafts its way towards Jared’s nose. He makes a dry heave sound and cups a hand to his lips. Jensen doesn’t even hesitate when he jumps up, crouching so that he is eyelevel beside Jared. “Hey, Jay. Let’s get you out of here, okay? I got you.” He makes a comforting shushing sound and puts a reassuring hand on Jared’s shoulder. Standing, Jensen pulls two twenty dollar bills from his wallet and slams them on the table, knowing it is significantly more than enough to cover their tab, and gets them out of the restaurant in time for Jared to throw up discreetly, using Jensen’s car to shield him from view. “I got you,” he repeats, falling into the role of being there for Jared, to help take care of him. It feels right. It feels like the way they were all along.

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Jared knows he told Jensen that he’d call the doctor when they got home from their date but he figures Jensen will understand that he didn’t have the energy to make such an important phone call. Being too sick after their attempt at having BBQ for dinner ensured two things: no more kissing and that the phone call would have to wait for another day. He didn’t mean to ruin their date and end up sick; so much so, that Jared was out of strength and Jensen wheeled him into his house. The other
man didn’t leave for a long time. Jared didn’t want Jensen to leave at all, however, they’re not like that again, not yet. But, and that was a relief for Jared, Jensen stayed until Jared finally overcame his stomach’s rebellion and exhaustion catapulted him into a mostly restful sleep.

Jared couldn’t wait much longer to consult with Dr. Atlas, time isn’t exactly on his side during this important part of his life, not if necessary treatments need to be discussed and performed. After another round of sickness and the nausea keeping him busy almost all morning, he eventually decided to make the call. Now, however, it seems like a moot point as his request for an appointment is politely denied.

The voice of the receptionist on the other side of the line sounds heartfelt and sympathetic. “I’m sorry, but Dr. Atlas will no longer be practicing as soon as she delivers her last patient’s baby. She’ll be leaving her practice to her grandson, but he doesn’t specialize in high risk pregnancies.”

Pressing the phone almost painfully to his ear, Jared finds himself stuck on repeating the same request on loop. “Please?” He says, aware it sounds like a helpless question. “I don’t know where else to turn. I...” His voice cracks because he can’t stomach being told by another person that there is nothing to be done to help him. “Please, is there any way you can ask Dr. Atlas to consider my case or at least refer me to someone who is willing to take me as a patient? My doctors won’t see me... they...they want,” wiping at his eyes, Jared can’t stop the words from tumbling out of his mouth, sharing way more than this poor receptionist probably signed up for. “I can’t give up on my baby... and...everyone thinks we’ll die. And...please.” He stops there because he needs to breath but it comes as a wracked sob. Jared has no idea when he’s become this person, when he’s gone from being angry to emotional so quickly. It’s like his baby’s pissed off too and Jared gets that. He does. He puts his hand over his middle in solidarity. “Please,” he says one last time.

After a sorrowful sigh, the receptionist speaks. “I’m sorry for the hand you’ve been dealt sweetie. I truly am. Now, I can’t promise anything, but I’ll see what I can do. Okay? I’ll contact your doctors to have your files faxed over. Maybe Dr. Atlas can take a look.” She pauses, sighing again. “I hope she can help, sweetie. I really do.”

The receptionist isn’t the only one getting their hopes up. Jared hopes so even more.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your patience. I know it has been a while but now I am back in the swing of things and I already have the next chapter ready to complete and send to my beta.

My husband and I suffered a miscarriage 2 months ago and I just didn't have it in me to write anything dealing with a high risk pregnancy. I needed happy feels...not angst. So...I apologize for the delay but I thank you for understanding. Please let me know what you think!!!

And thanks so much for my Wifey's help betaing and for adding perfect amazing ideas and reminding me how cute Jared is when he can't feel is toes and Jensen keeps bringing that up.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Evelyn Atlas was supposed to be clearing out her patient files, not acquiring more. But she finds a new file centered perfectly on her desk, her receptionist’s eerily neat handwriting labeling it with JARED PADALECKI.

Furrowing her brow, she readjusts her glasses and tries to wrack her brain over where she knows the name from. Recognition is rattling around somewhere in her brain and she scoffs at the fact that old age is making it hard for her to place it. Curiosity makes her flip open the file, exposing a slew of files dating back almost twenty years. It’s the first one that makes her gasp. She skims through it, her finger trailing over facts and medical statistics. Nine year old boy. Extensive spinal injuries. Blood loss. Paralysis. Only survivor of a school bus crash.

Evelyn presses her fingertips over her lips when she realizes she knows who Jared is. She knows him. Not really, but she knows his story. It was hard not to. She’d been a grandmother of children the same age as Jared was at the time of the crash. The reports had painted Jared’s condition as a bleak one, and even though she was an obstetrician, Evelyn knew that death might be kinder. It had been all over the news and she remembers the exact thoughts that were going through her head and hates herself for them. That poor boy. That poor family. Those surgeries... Thank goodness it wasn’t my grandbabies’ bus. She had thought that, worried about herself and her family in a way that felt alien to her. That wasn’t how she normally operated after dedicating her entire life to helping others and loving every minute of it. But something about Jared’s case rattled her.

She flips to the next report and the next. Her thoughts are still with them and she realizes how wrong she’d been to pity Jared the way she had. Have concern for him? Yes. But pity him? No, Jared didn’t seem to need that. He’d thrived. The reports were dealing with a lot of complicated information and statistics but it seemed Jared was living a healthy life – until she got to the latest file.

Jared is pregnant. Evelyn doesn’t need to read the file to know what that means, and to know the complications. She’d been responsible for delivering over a dozen healthy babies to paraplegic mothers and fathers. She knows the legwork it takes to ensure that. The wording of her thoughts makes her laugh because Jared’s legs working would probably mean that doctors wouldn’t be faxing his medical files to her office.

She scans the files quickly to understand how far along Jared is. By this point the fetus must be measuring at around 10 to 11 weeks. The attending physician had scribbled down some notes about where the fetus had implanted and her prognosis for the difficulties Jared might encounter. Flipping back a few pages, she rescans the list of medications Jared takes on a daily basis. “Shit,” she mutters and covers her mouth just as fast. Not one for cursing, she amends her reaction. “Shoot.” The medications mixed into the pregnancy scare her more than the spinal injury, although that isn’t saying much. Due to the place where Jared’s spine had been injured, dealing with added swelling and weight distribution because of a pregnancy is still a dicey situation.

Standing abruptly, she grabs the file in one hand and yells as she walks. “Sandra!” Rounding the corner of her nearly empty office, she makes her way towards the front of her practice, repeating the name several times on the way. Once she comes face to face with the woman she is looking for, she points at her with the folder. “Sandra, how did this file end up on my desk?”

Sandra’s face shifts in to an expression of guilt but she tries to cover it up with a heavy shroud of
innocence. “I put it there. I’m sorry Dr. Atlas, but he called yesterday after you left for the day… well, he sounded desperate, like he really needed help. Like he really needed someone. Someone like you.” She pauses and scratches at the back of her head, then puts up a hand to indicate she needs more time to explain. “I know, I know. I overstepped my bounds. I’m sorry. But…did you see his chart? That boy doesn’t have a chance — “

“He darn well does have a chance!” Evelyn cuts her receptionist off. “It’s why I hired you, Sandra. You’re a good person. You know the type of patients who need me and you somehow always find a way to make sure they end up in my office.” Evelyn smiles and narrows a knowing eye at the woman. Sandra is a doll; Evelyn is sure she doesn’t have a mean bone in her body. She’s so glad that retiring isn’t going to affect Sandra’s employment since her grandson is keeping her on as his secretary. It’s a win-win since Sandra has become family, and there is no way Evelyn would sit by and let her practice change hands without the woman who holds it all together. “Now what you can do is stop apologizing and book Mr. Padalecki an appointment as soon as he’s available.” She turns her head at the sound of the front entrance door opening and watches her grandson enter. “Any day or time is good. Seems like my schedule is all clear.”

“Try not to sound so happy about that fact,” the young man says, talking a step closer to his grandmother and placing a kiss on her cheek. She pats him lovingly on his own cheek and smiles. “You’re retiring grams, not being put out to pasture.”

“Yeah, well…I’m going to miss it. I know I said I was ready to hand over the reins, but it turns out, fate has other plans.” Evelyn smiles, holding out the file to her grandson.

Squinting, he takes the file and looks at it skeptically. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“That is my last patient.” She gives a smug smile, but the determined posture she attempts to hit when she shifts her weight into her hip is ruined by the fact that she forgot herself and her arthritic joints and she has to overcompensate by trying to right her posture. It makes her look unbalanced, having the complete opposite effect she was looking for.

“Grams…” the man says, scanning the file and then looking at Evelyn. “Mrs. Innela is your last patient.”

“Correction. Mrs. Innela was my last patient. She had her baby last night, with an assist by yours truly. My new last patient is Mr. Padalecki.”

“Grams. No. We talked about this. I know you love your work. But you deserve a break. You’ve worked tirelessly and have done amazing work. But as much as you like to deny it, you’re getting older grams. Dad and I are worried about you. You work too hard. Your hours are too long. And we know how involved you get with your patients. We just worry.”

Evelyn softens, patting the man’s cheek again like she had just a minute ago. “I know you do sweetheart.” Giving Sandra a look over her shoulder, she catches her attention. “Call Mr. Padalecki, please.”

“No, Sandra. Don’t. Now that Mrs. Innela isn’t a patient, grandmother is official retired.” He shoots his grandmother a look.

“Oliver James Atlas!” Evelyn scoffs, anger filling her tone as she pulls out the three name address. “You listen to me, mister.” She scowls at him and pokes him in the shoulder. “I think I know perfectly well what I can and cannot handle. And there is no way that Mr. Padaleki is going to be left high and dry without my help. He needs someone, Ollie. You’re a good doctor, you know what it means when you decide to take that path. I’m not saying ‘no’ to him. And, besides, I won’t be doing
it all alone. You’ll be here to make sure your poor old grams,” she slaters on the sarcasm to indicate that she is anything but helpless, “isn’t working too hard. Maybe you’ll learn a little something. I know you’re not going into the high risk department just yet – and you shouldn’t, you need a little more experience – but a little more apprenticeship couldn’t hurt.”

Ollie sighs and shakes his head. “You’re not going to take no for an answer, are you?”

“Darn right. You don’t stand a chance against me sweetheart.” She gives him a triumphant smile. “Now if you need me, I’ll be in my office while it’s still mine.” Evelyn turns on her heels and heads in the direction she came from. “Oh, and Sandra, let me know when Mr. Padalecki is coming in.”

Ollie huffs out a long breath. “That woman is a force of nature.”

Sandra just sits back in her chair and laughs, catching her pen between her teeth and shaking her head at her soon to be boss. “Nah, that woman is an angel. Just don’t piss her off. I’m pretty sure she’s not afraid to let the horns come out when it’s called for.”

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Jared is holding onto the steering wheel so tightly that he thinks his knuckles are actually turning white.

“Hey,” Jensen says, reaching out a hand and squeezing Jared’s knee.

Jared looks down for a split second, understanding what Jensen intends by the habitual gesture. It doesn’t matter that he can’t feel it, Jared’s nerves settle enough, his heart giving an extra thump. He looks at Jensen again and bites his lip. “You sure you don’t mind coming with me?”

“Jay,” Jensen says, his voice sounding soft and the word wraps around Jared and keeps them linked. “I meant what I said the other day. You and me, right? I want to come. I want to be with you. You don’t have to keep asking me. I’m sure Jay.” Jensen removes his hand from Jared’s knee, lifting it so he can stroke it down the back of Jared’s head and massage the tense muscles at the base of his neck.

“That feels good,” Jared says without realizing he turned the thought into words. He smiles at Jensen, his lips holding a nervous quiver. “Sorry, I’m just tense. You know…I’m not sure how all this is going to go.” Jared lets the silence fall between them but it’s comfortable, which he assumes is because they’re both riding the same hesitance and concerns. He still can’t believe how he and Jensen fell back in line after the mash up their relationship stumbled over. Although, if he’s being truthful with himself, he can believe it; it’s totally something the Jensen that he has come to know would do. It’s probably why he was so shocked at Jensen’s refusal in the first place. But they’ve talked, it all makes sense now. Of course he can depend on Jensen but that doesn’t make him any less grateful that Jensen is sitting beside him as he drives them towards Dr. Atlas’ office, another fact that he’s grateful for. When the receptionist called him back this morning, he almost cried with relief over the fact that Dr. Atlas wanted to see him as soon as Jared was available. It’s a good thing that he and Jensen both had nothing to do after work today, because the way Jared feels right now, he isn’t sure he’d be able to wait another day.

“I’ll give you a decent backrub when we get back, if you want,” Jensen says, pressing his fingers strategically into the muscles near Jared’s shoulder blades.

“That sounds…” Jared sighs, realizing that whatever Jensen is doing is working to take his mind off of the anxiety growing in his gut. “That sounds really nice actually.” They stop at a red light and he’s given the opportunity to turn and actually study Jensen, getting a good look at those green eyes. They’re filled with concern and enough love to almost drown out the swirl of apprehension behind
them. “Thanks for coming, Jen.”

“You don’t have to thank me for coming to support my boyfriend for something we’re both involved in.” Jensen’s words come to an abrupt halt and he pulls back, looking at Jared with questioning eyes. “That’s still the care, right? The boyfriend thing…that we’re together.”

“Oh my god, yes. Of course. Yeah!” Jared spits the words out in one big rush. “Although, I guess it didn’t feel that way for either of us last week. But, yeah. Of course.” He makes a turn into the parking lot he’d been looking for and brings the car to a slow stop in a space near the door. “And I know I don’t have to thank you. But I’m thanking you because it means a lot to me and I’m really glad you came. I’m so damn nervous I feel like I’m going to throw up.” His hand flutters to his middle and he smile. “And it’s not because of you,” he finishes with a pointed look at his stomach. Turning the engine off, he goes to open the car door but Jensen stops him.

“Yeah, no. Wait.” Jensen tugs at Jared, forcing him to turn so they’re facing each other. “Come ‘ere.” He pulls Jared gently toward him so he can place a kiss on his lips. It’s soft and reassuring, exactly the connection Jared needs. “Whatever we find out in there, things with you and I are going to be okay. You’re going to be okay.”

“Mmm hmm,” Jared mumbles into Jensen’s lips and kisses him several more times while keeping their foreheads pressed together. “‘Cause we’re gonna talk about it like adults this time.”

“Course we are,” Jensen says, pressing one last kiss to Jared’s forehead before getting out of the car.

Jared knows how they physically arrived at Dr. Atlas’ office but he’s a little shocked that he’s actually here, wheeling towards the receptionist’s desk with Jensen by his side. The waiting room is empty, and he must wear a puzzled expression on his face because the woman at the desk looks up and her eyes make a sweep of the room. “It’s usually packed but Dr. Evelyn Atlas is done seeing patients – well, now that you’re here I guess that’s not so true. Dr. Oliver Atlas is taking over but he’s building his client list and still working out of a medical group in an office across town. So, I imagine things will be bumping here soon. Pun totally intended.” She realizes when Jared wheels closer that the desk does not allow her to properly reach out and shake his hand so she grabs a clipboard and pen before rounding the desk. “You must be Jared. Hi. I’m Sandra. It’s nice to meet you.” She reaches out a hand.

“Uhh, hi,” Jared says as he shakes her hand. “I think we talked on the phone.”

“Yeah, that would be me.” Sandra smiles.

“Well, whatever you did, thanks for getting the doctor to see us.” Jared shakes her hand a little more firmly before letting it drop.

“Sweetie, I don’t really know if I did anything. I just gave her your file. Whatever was in there did the rest of the job. But you’re welcome all the same.” She turns towards Jensen and sticks her hand out. “Hi.”

“Hello. I’m Jensen. Jared’s boyfriend,” he responds without missing a beat.

“Well, nice to meet the two of you. I’ll go tell Dr. Atlas that the two of you arrived. While I’m doing that, you want to fill this out for me real quick? And by quick, I mean it will be quick. Dr. Atlas already has all your medical records, but she needs some insurance information and since Jensen’s here, he can provide some of the other details since,” she pauses mid-sentence and bites her lip, giving Jensen a quick look up and down. “You are the baby’s other father, right? I mean, I shouldn’t have assumed or anything but…you just looked the part and all…”
Jared’s not quite sure what she means by that, but when he looks at Jensen, the man’s full on emitting waves of protection and concern.

“Yeah. Of course I am,” Jensen clarifies.

“Oh, good. I thought so. Though, I’ve learned never to assume anything in this business. Anyway,” she reaches behind her and grabs another clipboard with forms attached to it, “you can fill this part out, Jensen. Just so Dr. Atlas knows what type of family history she’s going to be working with here. And your insurance info too.”

“S-sure,” Jensen says with a thick swallow and grabs the offered clipboard.

“Make yourselves comfortable. I’ll be right back,” Sandra says with a quick smile before disappearing behind a closed door.

“Whoa,” Jared says, taking a deep breath. He’s accustomed to doctor appointments but everything about this is new to him. He wheels backwards enough so that his chair is lined up alongside a row of empty seats, and feels better when Jensen settles himself directly beside him. Jensen scans the paperwork, and whistles, running his pen down the list of questions that need answering. “You okay?”

“Yeah, just…” Jensen puts the pen down and looks at Jared. “Shit just got real, I think.”

“Hate to break it to you, it would be real whether we were here or not.” Jared thumps Jensen’s clipboard with his own pen.

“I know. But some of these things here, I’d rather have you learn those from a conversation that occurred organically, not from a sheet of paper.” Jensen looks lost, his face losing some of its color.

A new wave of worry settles in Jared, “like what?”

Jensen taps his pen against the form again before he turns to Jared, “well, my father’s side has a long medical history. Dorothy’s mother died of cancer, and diabetes runs in their blood, too.”

Jared’s taken back by that for several reasons. Mostly because Jensen’s right, it is a little weird, but also because it reaffirms how much they haven’t learned about each other yet. “Who has diabetes?”

Jensen speaks as he checks off boxes and fills in blanks on his form. “Uhh, my father’s uncle, so… my great uncle I guess. And also my father’s brother. My father, Josh, Kenzie and I are fine.”

“Ohh,” Jared responds because he’s not quite sure what else to say. When he fills out his own forms, he adds, “well, there isn’t any diabetes in my family, so…that’s probably good right? But a lot of us are allergic to grass. Not me…but a lot of us.”

“Wait…grass? Like…you can be allergic to that?” Jensen knits his eyebrows in thought.

“Yeah…but grass pollen mostly. Not just the fact that grass exists on the ground. Man…that would have made childhood real rough.” Jared goes back to his form.

Jensen lets out a soft laugh. “Well, I’m not allergic to grass. Or anything really. So…I think we’re good.”

For that fleeting moment, things feel like they’re just a normal couple at a routine obstetrician appointment and that makes Jared smile. The forms really are quick and painless. It’s funny because their insurance info, aside from their ID numbers, is basically the same since both of their insurance
plans are provided by their job.

Jensen just finishes his last question when Sandra is back, smiling and holding the door open. “You two can drop those on my desk on your way back here. I make sure they get into Jared’s file before the actual exam. Right now, however, Dr. Atlas wants to meet you in her office first. This way,” she says with a sweeping motion of her hand.

Sandra leads them to an office at the back of the building. The door is open and Jared notices a petite woman sitting at the desk, glasses perched on her nose, but she removes them and lets them hang from a chain made up of chunky baubles around her neck when she sees Jared and Jensen enter the room. “Thank you Sandra, I can take it from here,” she says. There is some pause as she tries to get to her feet, but she eventually manages and comes to greet Jared and Jensen properly. “Don’t get old,” she warns with a playful smile and shakes her head.

“It beats the alternative,” Jensen supplies.

The statement coaxes a deep laugh from the doctor. “That is does.” She holds out a hand towards Jared first and then Jensen. “I’m Dr. Evelyn Atlas. It’s a pleasure to meet you Mr. Padalecki. Mr. –” She pauses in wait of Jensen’s name.

“Mr. Ackles,” Jensen provides. “But you can just call me Jensen, please.” He shakes the woman’s hand.

“And call me Jared, please. My students call me Mr. Padalecki. Actually…wait…they call me Mr. P. but it’s the same thing really. I don’t know why they can’t pronounce my name, it’s not that hard to say. It’s just confusing to spell.” Jared shuts his mouth. “But you don’t care about that…I’m sorry. I’m rambling. I don’t know why.”

“Because you’re nervous,” Dr. Atlas suggests with certainty. “It’s okay. Being pregnant is a pretty weighty situation to be in. It’s okay to be nervous. But I’m here to help, not frighten you, Jared,” she says, purposely using his first name. “You can call me Evelyn if you like. It’s perfectly fine. In fact, it might be easier considering my grandson is going to be around. He’s also Dr. Atlas, so you can see how it gets a little confusing sometimes. But whatever you prefer, is fine with me. Now, please, take a seat Jensen. Jared, remain seated I suppose,” she laughs softly and gestures towards her desk.

Jared notices that there are absolutely no chairs parked in front of the desks for patients to seat themselves in, indicating that she’d been prepared for Jared and his chair before he even arrived. Jensen has to drag a chair away from the wall and bring it beside Jared’s wheelchair so that they can sit together and face the woman.

Jared sits there wanting to start babbling first but Dr. Atlas is the professional, she’s done this before. Jared doesn’t even know where to begin. He swallows, nails digging into the arms of his chair. He studies Dr. Atlas. As much as he feels like he’s stereotyping, Dr. Atlas looks like a grandmother. Not his grandmother, per say, but a grandmotherly type figure. Her hair looks like it has long been grey and the wavy tresses are pinned back away from her face. The smile lines on her face are deep, and they intensify when she shoots Jared and Jensen another warm smile. It strikes Jared as completely sincere and he realizes he barely knows her and he’s already made up his mind to put his complete trust in her. To be fair, he’s done his share on online homework in the form of researching Dr. Evelyn Atlas. She’s received nothing but raves from every single patient who took the time to reflect on their experience with her. So, he’s not giving her trust blindly. The woman feels like she’s the last hope he has, and he’s desperate for her to be everything he needs. “Thank you so much for seeing us. Umm, Sandra…she told me you were retiring and I guess it’s all my fault that now you seem to have pushed that back. And I’m really sorry about that. But thank you. Sincerely.”
“Now stop that,” Dr. Atlas says with a wave of her hand. “None of that nonsense. I am a grown woman and I do what I want. And what I want to do is keep doing what I do best – bring healthy babies into this world. This old woman isn’t ready to throw in the towel yet, regardless of what know-it-all grandchildren think. And I couldn’t in good conscience turn you away. I’m going to frank with you, Mr. Pada – Jared. Your situation is quite serious, so much so that I’m afraid there isn’t a doctor in all of Austin I would trust to refer you to. I’m not even sure if there are any in the surrounding cities. And that’s not me being vain. That’s just how it is. It’s why I wanted to talk to the two of you before the exam…before the whole seeing the baby thing. Sometimes seeing that baby makes people’s heads a little funny. And I need the two of you to understand what we are dealing with while you’re of sound mind.”

“Understood,” Jared says with a nod. “Right, Jen?” He turns towards Jensen and notices he’s gone a little pale around the edges. “Jen?”

Jensen snaps out of it and grabs Jared’s hand. “Right.”

“Well, okay then,” Dr. Atlas says with a quick dip of her chin. She places the glasses back on the bridge of her nose and glances down at Jared’s open file. “So, what we’re looking at in terms of the baby is nothing scary if,” she stresses by elongating the word, “you ditch half of the medications you are on. Here’s a list I’ve made of the one’s that would need to go.” She slides it across the desk towards Jared.

Jared takes it, giving himself a moment to scan it. “Shit,” he says under his breath but loud enough that the other people in the room pick up on it. Weaning himself off of most of the medications on the list won’t be fun, but he’d be willing to deal with most of the discomfort for a limited period of time. The one he’s really worried about is the fact that he’d have to stop his muscle relaxant and some of his anticoagulation medication. Jensen’s giving him the most confused stare ever as he scans the list as well. “It’s…um…” Jared places his finger over the medication’s names. “This one prevents muscle spasms and tremors, things that make me fall out of my chair or any of my other spastic episodes. This one,” he says, moving his finger down, “is an anticoagulant, since sometimes my circulation is off.”

Dr. Atlas cuts in. “And I can prescribe you a lower dose one, or something with a similar function. But it isn’t going to be quite as successful in maintaining your current quality of life. But anything stronger wouldn’t be safe for the fetus.” She pauses to let the words sink in. “The rest of your medications could have a few negative impacts on the fetus, but it’s worth the risk to keep you on them. Without them, the strain on your body would cause a decline in health and without you there is no fetus. So the positives far outweigh the negatives.”

Jensen’s nails dig into the meat of Jared’s palm, making Jared take a sharp inhale of air. “But… without the…whatever this is called,” Jensen says, pointing to the name of the medication Jared told him control his spasmodic episodes and holding it in Dr. Atlas’ direction, “what’s going to happen to Jared?”

“Maybe nothing,” Dr. Atlas says. “Maybe a lot of things. Worst case scenario leaves Jared with muscle spasms and tremors. Daily tasks could be difficult. Increased risk of falling out of the chair, which also poses a threat to the fetus. My guess is that he’d be fine for the first and second trimester; it’s the third that I’m worried about. But these are just hypotheses.”

Jared watches Jensen’s entire demeanor change. It’s not quite “deer in headlights” but it’s a close relative of that. “Jensen,” Jared says, tightening his own hold on Jensen’s hand. “It took me years to figure out medications that worked. Before that, I just went with the punches. It’s not going to be fun, but…I’ve done it before, so to speak.” Jensen simply swallows audibly and nods. “Okay…so…
“From my experience? Yes.” Dr. Atlas flips a page in Jared’s file to one containing her own notes. “In terms of your health, I’ve written down a few concerns. They’re a lot to take in, and I want you to take your time with them. By all means, take them home. I’m going to rattle them off but there will be as much time as you need to ask questions afterwards.” She waits for a nod from Jared and a following one from Jensen before she continues. “So…in terms of your health there are the side effects of being without the medication, which we just talked about. There are the regular run of the mill pregnancy issues, which I’m not generally concerned about. Decubital Ulcers are common since you’re wheelchair bound and weight gain can put more pressure on your body and require frequent repositioning. I’m sure you deal with that issue already and I’ve read that you go to physical therapy to increase your own mobility, but things are going to get more difficult as the pregnancy progresses. I’m all for being independent, but you’re going to need help. Especially with getting in and out of that chair. It’s going to become more difficult and we can’t have you falling. In terms of your spine, I’m worried that as the baby grows, it’s going to be putting a lot of pressure on your back. It will mean pain in the beginning, it could mean added complications with the compression of your spine and the injury as the pregnancy continues. That could lead to further paralysis, and I’m not even sure what I mean by further yet. I’ll have to physically evaluate you myself. Umm, let’s see here,” she says scanning the words she’d written. “Autonomic Dysreflexia, which is a sudden onset of high blood pressure. We can monitor for that, but in combination with some of your other spinal cord injury ailments, it gets a little tricky.” She sighs and puts the file down. “I’m sorry, I know. I told you it was a lot. I’m almost done, but to be honest, the rest of what I have to tell you really depends on our exam as well as how you handle pregnancy. Because the rest has to do with labor and delivery. Are you able to enlighten me on how much feeling you have in your lower region?”

Jared’s head is spinning from the things he’s just heard. He expected most of them, but hearing them leaves him feeling nauseous all over again. He shakes his head to clear it and blinks at the doctor. “Excuse me? What?”

Dr. Atlas’ expression softens even more. “Honey, I know, it’s a lot. But guess what? I’m giving you all of the things we might run into and I’m not running. I just want to lay everything out there to make sure you know how complicated this is going to be.” She smiles and speaks slowly. “I asked if you could tell me how much feeling in your groin and posterior area your SPI left you with.”

“Oh, umm…mostly all of it. I mean, sometimes I am a little numb and feeling goes in and out, but for the most part I can feel everything.” Jared blushes suddenly when he thinks about how he explained that to Jensen. “Sometimes, my…um…”

“Anus,” Dr. Atlas supplies and when Jared nods, she continues with, “don’t feel shy around me. I might be old but I think we all know how that baby came to be.”

“Yeah, so um…sometimes the feeling around that area is a little tricky but inside I can feel everything.” Jared ducks his head, avoiding eye contact. It feels a little weird talking so frankly about these parts of his body with Dr. Atlas, but if she is to become his doctor, then, he’s going to have to grin and bear it.

“That’s great! That’s what I was hoping for.” The woman claps her hands together and her excitement makes both of the men jump. “I was getting a bit concerned about that and whether or not you would be able to feel labor pains and be able to push during the delivery. Because, your body has been through a lot of surgery. If there is any way around it, I would prefer having you deliver naturally. I’m not going anywhere near your spine with an epidural. Like I said, I’ve got to do an exam, but I think there is a good possibility that we could hit that mark. Or I should say you can hit that mark. You’re doing all the work here. Jensen and I are just back up dancers.” Evelyn smiles at
her own humility. “That is…as long as you carry the baby close to term. That’s the other concern I have. If your body is under a lot of stress, it might trigger preterm labor. If we can get you as close to 35 weeks, I’d feel better about delivering the baby. But that really is a discussion for another appointment, because preterm labor is something I deal with for practically all my patients. It comes with the territory of being a high risk specialist.”

“That’s a lot…to umm…process.” Jensen says, wetting his lips. “Jay…that’s a lot.”

“I know. It’s…” Jared nods and swallows. “I know,” he repeats because what else is there to say? It is a lot. It makes Jared feel desperate and angry because sometimes he can’t help but fall into a pit of wondering what he did to deserve all of these hardships piled up against him. He takes a moment to remind himself that he isn’t that person. He doesn’t throw in the towel and he deals with these hardships because it’s the only choice he has. He’s grown strong enough to look fate in the face and tell it to bring it on. “Okay. Yes. To all of that. If those are the concerns, then I’ll think it over. But right now? Yes. If that’s what I have to prepare myself for in order to make sure this baby is okay, then yes. I’ll do it. Come on, if an inferno inside a 45 foot long school bus couldn’t kill me, I don’t think a tiny baby is going to.”

“I like your fire, Jared. You’re going to need it.” She cocks her head in Jensen’s direction. “You too, Jensen. I know it’s scary and you look terrified. In fact, I’d be worried if you weren’t. But maybe you can get some of Jared’s spark, huh? You’re going to need to think like that, even when things are dark. But I won’t let you delude yourselves. I’m agreeing to be your doctor if, and only if, you listen to me when I tell you it’s too dangerous to continue and we have to say we did all we can and call it a day. I’m going to do my best to make sure we never get to that point because I believe in my heart of hearts that I can monitor this pregnancy to a happy end. But if that day should come, and I don’t think it will,” she repeats, “I need you to trust me and follow my lead. I won’t steer you wrong.”

All Jared gets from that is, “You want to be my doctor?” His eyes a wide and blinking.

“That’s a lot…to umm…process.” Jensen says, wetting his lips. “Jay…that’s a lot.”

“Why of course I do! I wouldn’t have stayed up all night making these lists and doing research if I intended to tell you I didn’t want to take you on as a client.” She shakes her head and laughs.

“If I could get up right now, I would hug you.” Jared lets out a relieved laugh and squeezes Jensen’s hand tightly.

“My legs works perfectly fine. They’re just slow.” Dr. Atlas gets to her feet again, and leans down to hug Jared. Her petite frame doesn’t have to lower itself so much and Jared is able to envelop her in a tight hug. “Easy. Don’t break me before I’m able to be any good for you. And save some hugging for when we get this little baby here safe and sound.” She stands upright and squeezes a hand over Jensen’s shoulder. “It’s okay to be worried. But your boyfriend is in good hands, hands that won’t let any harm come to him and that little one if I have anything to say about it.” She stands up and turns towards her door. “So, how about that exam, huh?”

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Jensen is pretty sure he’s supposed to respond to Dr. Atlas’ question but it seems silly because he knows the exam is going to happen whether he says so or not. To be honest, he doesn’t know if he can walk right now. The list of medical jargon Dr. Atlas rattled off makes little sense to him. What he’s completely clear on is that going through with this pregnancy will be dangerous. Dr. Atlas didn’t mention death but she mentioned a lot of other scary things and Jensen has been building himself up towards making sure Jared is kept on the up and up, not thrown into a turbulent storm of maybes and health snags.
Dr. Atlas seems like a wonderful woman, even Jensen can see that. She is everything he could ever want in any kind of doctor and she is exactly the person he would pick to take care of Jared. But sometimes things are just too dangerous for any doctor, no matter how good they are at their job. Jensen wants to be on board with the optimism but his concern is Jared. And what he hears is a pretty good prognosis for the baby, but a pretty terrifying one for Jared.

“You okay, Jen?” Jared asks for what seems the fiftieth time today.

“Yeah, don’t worry about me.” Jensen stands up, leaning down to kiss Jared’s lips quickly, feeling how soft and alive they are under his own. It makes Jensen want to cup Jared’s face in his hands and hold him there because kissing him seems so much simpler than what’s waiting for them when they follow Dr. Atlas to an exam room. He can, however, do that because he has to act like the adult he promised he would be. So instead, he stands up again and shifts out of the way so that Jared can directly follow Dr. Atlas.

When they reach the exam room, an examination table unlike any he has seen is in the center of it all. It’s got a hydraulic lift, which he supposes makes sense when treating people with spinal cord injuries.

“Alright, Jared. If you would hop up on the table, we can get started. I know you’ve had an ultrasound before, some of the scans are in your file, but I’d like to get a look for myself. And, if we’re lucky, we can get to hear a little bit of the heartbeat too. How does that sound?” Dr. Atlas pats the table and smiles. “After the fun stuff, I’m going to need to do an internal exam, but that can wait a few minutes. I think you two earned a little reprieve from the intensity of what we’ve been discussing.”

Jared hoists himself up on the table, making sure to saddle his chair beside it and out of Dr. Atlas’ way. “Sounds good to me.”

It sounds petrifying to Jensen. He knows that a baby, his baby, is growing somewhere inside Jared but seeing it…hearing it…feels like a really adult situation that Jensen believes he is nowhere close to being prepared for. He doesn’t know why. Josh was younger than Jensen is now when Mikey was born. “Need help?” Jensen offers minutes too late.

“I’m good.” Jared says with a nod of his head to the fact that he’s already in place on the exam table and Dr. Atlas is in the process of lifting the table up to the desired height. “Although, you’re halfway across the room. I’d appreciate a hand, or at least you being close enough so that I don’t need to scream.” There is a lightness to his tone, keeping the mood from growing too accusatory.

Taking three large strides, Jensen stands beside Jared’s head, combing the hair back with his fingers and smiling. “Sorry.” When Jared’s hand reaches up to brush against Jensen’s knuckles, Jensen curls his fingers around it and uses his pointer finger to affectionately draw circles across Jared’s palm.

“So,” Dr. Atlas starts as she fusses with the ultrasound machine, “While I get this situated, why don’t you tell me how you’ve been feeling?”

“Umm, good I think. Tired lately, but mostly because I haven’t been able to sleep.” Jared bites his lower lip, straining his neck so he can see what his doctor is doing.

Jensen chimes in with, “he’s been throwing up a lot,” because he can’t believe that wasn’t the first thing Jared started with.

“Of course you have,” Dr. Atlas says sympathetically. “You two have looked like bundles of nerves from the moment you entered my office. Jared, it’s no wonder you’re not sleeping and throwing up.
We can’t blame that all on the actual baby now, can we?” She turns towards Jensen and gives him a smile. “Don’t worry, it’s a pretty normal symptom. This baby might be tiny, but it’s like a wrecking ball to Jared’s system and feeling nauseous is the manifestation of that. But we’ll keep an eye on that. If it gets too bad, I can prescribe something but since we’re on our way to decreasing your number of prescriptions, I would only do that as a last resort.”

There is a tense silence, before Dr. Atlas is pulling Jared’s shirt up, tugging his pants just a fraction lower and squirting a healthy dollop of ultrasound gel on the flat spans of Jared’s middle. “Okay, let’s see where your baby wants to hang out, hmm?” She rolls a transducer through the gel, smearing it as she goes. The screen to her left looks like a broken television, like static that he can’t make sense of. Jensen’s only seen ultrasounds done in movies and Josh had shown him a few scans of Mikey when he was in utero, but he’d never been able to make those out even though he pretended he could.

Dr. Atlas rolls the transducer slowly, backtracking and pausing. “There,” she says as she taps the screen and turns it so that Jared and Jensen have a better view. “There is your baby. I’ve got to say, he or she is quite photogenic, don’t you think?”

Jared gasps, the reaction almost immediate. His hand squeezes more tightly around Jensen’s and his gaze starts alternating between looking at the screen and staring are Jensen’s eyes. “Jen…”

“Yeah…” is all Jensen can get out because he’s having a pretty intense reaction as well. Mostly because he can actually tell what Dr. Atlas is pointing to. It looks small but Jensen can tell what the static has given way to. It’s a baby, curled up and developing but it’s definitely a baby. It’s a baby that has his DNA in it and Jensen has no idea what to feel because that tiny thing is what is capable of taking Jared’s life. It’s capable of causing such intense struggles and pain and it’s there because of Jensen getting too drunk to remember to wear a condom and keep Jared safe. “Shit.”

Jared laughs. “I said the same thing the first time I saw the baby.” He smiles, looking down at his middle and then back at the screen. “Hi little guy…or girl. You’ve gotten a lot bigger in two weeks. Sorry baby, but you looked like a blob last time. I didn’t think you were this cute.”

Jensen feels dizzy. Jared’s talking to the baby. He’s lying there calmly speaking to it like there isn’t any other care in the world.

“The fetus looks really good, Jared. That’s one thing you have working for you because it situated itself pretty low, and that’s going to be a little uncomfortable as it grows, but the baby is pretty much as far away from your injury as it can be for the time being.” Dr. Atlas clicks away at the machine, printing out several scans. When she’s done, she flicks something on the machine and moves the transducer. She squints in concentration before her look softens and she aims a smile at both men just as a different sound fills the room. It’s wobbly at first, going in and out, but then it becomes steadier as Dr. Atlas’ manipulation of the sensor becomes more precise.

Jared looks around in confusion, narrowing his eyes at the doctor and then Jensen. With a shrug, Jensen lets on that he has no idea what he is hearing. The noise filling his ears sounds weird, and Jensen braces himself for the fact that Dr. Atlas must have just found something wrong with Jared, but she’s smiling at him like it is a good thing. He stares at Jared’s middle and then back at his doctor, questions on the tip of his tongue but unable to voice any of them. His brain is too hung up on the fact that he’s hearing something dangerous.

Catching both men’s perplexed stares, Dr. Atlas turns the sound up. “That’s your baby’s heartbeat.”

Mind backtracking and running through his prior thoughts, Jensen buzzes with the realization of what that means. The baby has a heartbeat. A heartbeat means the baby is still alive and there. “Holy
shit.” And Jensen thinks maybe his first thought was right because he is hearing the sound of something that can harm Jared but the noise keeps finding its way to his brain and he doesn’t know what he’s feeling. It keeps wooshing away and Jensen feels lightheaded.

“That…that’s inside me?” Jared asks dumbly, hands cupping the area where Dr. Atlas is holding the transducer.

Laughing, Dr. Atlas nods.

“That’s amazing,” Jared says. He looks like he’s already completely in love with the image on the screen and the sound filling the room. “It’s so strong. And fast.”

Jensen swallows hard, the sound almost deafening. He gestures towards Jared’s middle and trips over his words. “But it’s okay? I mean, it sounds okay? Because…”

“It sounds great! Perfect. A tiny bit fast, but you’re not even 12 weeks, it will slow down on its own. But it is definitely healthy.”

“So the baby is okay?” Letting out a relieved sigh, Jared falls back to the exam table, squeezes Jensen’s hand and looks up at the man. There are so many raw emotions playing out on Jared’s face that it breaks Jensen. He wishes he could mirror them, but he’s not there yet.

“Yes. Everything seems good.” Dr. Atlas puts the wand down and smiles. “This is going to be an uphill climb, but this is good. Truly. It’s the best I could have hoped for. That little one is as tough as his or her daddy has proven to be. Nice strong heartbeat. Measuring right on track.”

“So…it’s okay?” Jared asks again, not because he hadn’t heard his doctor the first time; it is that he needs to hear it again so that he can be sure it is real.

“Yeah, Jared. Everything is good.” Dr. Atlas smiles, holding out a scan in Jared’s direction.

The sound of their child has faded out but Jensen can still hear it, like it’s drumming around in his brain making sure he’ll never forget it. Jensen can see from the look on Jared’s face, that the man is going to do this with or without him. And Jensen’s not leaving Jared. Which means the conversation they’re going to have isn’t going to be pretty. They are going to need to use their words and hold fast to the promise they made before the appointment. Because Jensen’s going to do this with Jared, but he’s going to need a little help getting on board with it to the point that Jared is.

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Jared isn’t exactly sure what he’s hearing because he was certain Jensen had promised he wasn’t going to try to talk Jared out of having their baby, but that’s a little what it sounds like he’s doing at the current moment. It sure as hell isn’t what he expected when he suggested he and Jensen come back to his place to discuss the appointment. “What the fuck, Jensen! Seriously? How can you even be saying this to me? Weren’t you in that room with me when we got to see our baby? Got to hear how strong its heartbeat was?”

“Yes! Yes, Jay. I was there. Which is exactly why I’m sitting here, talking to you. Like an adult. Just like I promised.” Jensen stands from his chair, pacing the area from Jared’s dining room table to the door and back again.

Jared wheels himself away from the table, rolling to corner Jensen in the den area so that he can’t pace more than three footsteps in either direction. “Well, it sounds a little like you’re trying to tell me that you don’t support me having this child. At all.” Jared knits his brows and gives Jensen a look of disbelief.
“That’s not at all what I’m trying to do,” Jensen insists. “Jay, you promised you would listen to me too. That you would try to see where you’re coming from.”

That deflates Jared, making him settle himself in his chair and lean back. Jensen may have a point there, because Jared’s been hearing Jensen, but he keeps disagreeing so he’s not giving Jensen a chance to finish. “Okay. I’m listening.” He crosses his arms over his chest and huffs out a lungful of air through his nose.

“That deflates Jared, making him settle himself in his chair and lean back. Jensen may have a point there, because Jared’s been hearing Jensen, but he keeps disagreeing so he’s not giving Jensen a chance to finish. “Okay. I’m listening.” He crosses his arms over his chest and huffs out a lungful of air through his nose.

“Thank you,” Jensen says, his own voice calming. He takes a seat on Jared’s couch, leaning forward towards Jared so that his elbows land on his knees. “I was in that appointment with you. I heard everything Dr. Atlas had to say. And I’m not going to talk you out of your decision to have our baby. I’m not. But I have to agree with Dr. Atlas. There are a lot of complications. And if she says it’s time to throw in the towel, we gotta do that. I need to know that you will do that. Because I need you safe, Jared.” Jensen’s voice cracks. “I already told you… I love you and living without you isn’t an option. So…what I heard during that appointment is a lot of scary things that we have to look out for. A lot of things we’re going to have to do together. And I will do all of them with you, I want to, but I need you to know that you will always be my first priority. You first, then the baby.” Jared goes to protest but Jensen holds up a hand. “You need to give me some time to digest all of this. It’s a huge change in the trajectory of my life. But I’m not saying no. I’m just saying that you come first. At least for me.”

Jensen’s words hit Jared’s ears and the rest of the anger in him completely vanishes. There isn’t anything left because the sincerity in Jensen’s voice says more than the words. He watches Jensen, the struggle clear on his face and the way he’s trying to look away from Jared so he can blink tears out of his eyes. Jensen hadn’t been saying that the baby isn’t important; he was simply saying that it was less important than Jared. “That appointment was intense,” Jared starts with.

“That’s one way of putting it,” Jensen says, brushing the heel of his hand over his nose. Jared sighs. “Can I come sit next to you?” He hesitates, wheeling back and forth in front of the couch.

“Of course you can. Oh my god, Jared…I’m kind of insulted you even had to ask that.” Jensen looks at Jared like he’s crazy.

“Yeah, well…I was being kind of an asshole just then. And it’s probably mostly baby hormones and the other part is probably because I’m terrified.” Jared gets in position beside the couch and lifts himself so he can swing next to Jensen, their hips touching. He hadn’t meant to get that close just yet but he doesn’t mind, the connection sends the emotional equivalent of an electric current through him. “I heard all the scary shit. And I guess maybe I’m more accustomed to hearing scary shit from doctors. It’s what I’ve heard most of my adolescent life. But you’re new to it, so I’m sorry I jump the gun and get hyper defensive. That’s on me. Maybe you didn’t hear what I heard, but I heard a pretty amazing heartbeat. And it sounded like a miracle, not a death sentence.”

“Yeah, I heard that too,” Jensen admits, knocking his shoulder against Jared’s.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t listening before. I’m listening now. And it hurts. What you said…it hurts. But it’s how you feel and I’m starting to understand that.” Jared pauses, turning to face Jensen. “The fact that you’re still willing to stick by me and help keep me safe, which in turn helps keep the baby safe, means a lot.” Jared sucks in a shaky inhale through his nose and repeats, “it means a lot.” Jared closes his eyes, but they flutter open as soon as he feels Jensen’s hands on his face, tracing his jaw and swiping a thump over his lips. “Jen…”

“I’m sorry the words hurt.” Jensen’s lips lean down and ghost over Jared’s. “I’m sorry. If I could kiss
away the hurt, I would. You know? Like when you’re a kid and your parents somehow fool you into thinking that you can kiss all the bad things away. I would kiss the words away.” He presses another kiss to Jared’s lips, deepening it just enough to coax a soft moan from the man. “I would kiss your spinal injury away.” Jensen’s lips travel their way down the length of Jared’s neck, the kisses staying soft the entire time. It’s an awkward contortion of his body, but he manages to place a kiss to the non-existent swell of Jared’s middle. “I would kiss all of those concerns and dangers away that Dr. Atlas told us about today.”

Jared’s heart stills in his chest because he’s afraid to move and shatter the tender moment. He knows exactly what Jensen’s doing and what he means but if he doesn’t move or say anything, he’s almost able to fool himself into believing that Jensen isn’t just kissing the struggles away, he’s also kissing their healthy baby. Swallowing, he chokes on a breath when Jensen sits upright again. “Yeah, I wish it worked like that too,” Jared admits because he thinks this whole time in their lives would be more exciting and Jensen would have an easier time getting on board the baby train. “But I love you for trying.”

“I love you too.” Jensen knocks their foreheads together and kisses Jared’s lips. “So much.”

“So much,” Jared parrots. His hands find Jensen, one wrapping around his back, and one sliding up his neck so that his palm lands on the back of Jensen’s head and he can keep him in a tighter embrace. There were emotions that exploded inside their heads today, ones that don’t exactly play nice with each other, but he and Jensen are still here. They’ll take their time to work this out. “Stay tonight? Not to…um…sleep together or anything. But…stay? Like this for a little while?”

“Course, Jared,” Jensen breathes into Jared’s mouth. “We promised to use words, but that doesn’t mean we can’t kiss too.”

“Mmm hmm,” Jared nods, kissing Jensen so hard that there is no more room for words. All that’s allowed is the two of them, running on the energy that their connection produces. Jared’s heart stutters a bit, but each swipe of Jensen’s tongue sets him right. Jared wants to feel the affect he has on Jensen, to remember that they’re present in each other’s life.

Today had turned out to be one of the most life changing moments of his life and he now knows for certain that Jensen’s on the ride with him. He’s scared as hell, but less so than he’d be if Jensen had bolted again. But Jensen’s right here, kissing him like he’s trying to drown himself in the gesture. There will be, without a doubt, more talking but he’s glad it’s Friday because it can wait for tomorrow and the weekend he already knows they’ll spend together.

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“Grams?” Oliver calls, searching out his grandmother by peeking his head around each corner until he finally finds her in her office, head bowed over something on her desk. “Of course,” he breathes out softly. “Grams, come on, it’s late. Time to go and get you some dinner.”

Evelyn looks up at him, making a gesture towards the chair in front of her desk. “Sit down, Ollie.” When he gives an exasperated sigh, she narrows her eyes at him. “It will only take a minute. Then we’ll go.”

Oliver sits down, crossing one leg so that the ankle lands on his other legs. “I’m just – ”

“Worried. So you’ve said. Multiple times.” Evelyn smiles again, heart swelling with love and appreciation for this family that she helped create, a family who loves her this much. “Do you know, you were this big when you were born?” She holds her two hands a little over a foot apart. “Didn’t even weigh three pounds. And look at you now.”
Smiling, Oliver leans back in the chair. He’s heard all the stories before. “Yeah, grams. I know. Somehow or another, on every Thanksgiving mom always brings up how you delivered me when no one else thought I would survive the night except you and her. I don’t even think dad really believed it. He says he did…but…” Oliver’s thoughts dwindle off.

Evelyn makes a sound that is half snort and half laugh. “Your dad believed. He’s just not so good at admitting his mother is always right.”

“What’s this all about, gram? Because if you want to rehash why your career took a change in direction towards high risk pregnancies, I think we can do that over dinner.” Uncrossing his leg, Oliver leans forward so he can rest his elbows on the desk.

Sighing, Evelyn slides Jared’s folder towards her grandson. “It’s about this. Because…that man and that baby are going to be fine. You hear me? Just like you were fine. Even better than fine. Sure, Mr. Padalecki’s case is nothing like when you were born, and there are a ton of hurdles in the way, but they’re going to be fine.” She pinches the bridge of her nose and lets her glasses fall to hang around her neck. “I’ve been staring at this file for hours after they left. Memorizing it or…something. I’m not sure. I just can’t get it off my mind. And it’s funny, because I appreciate all the medical history they provided but I really don’t think any of that matters at all. Not right now, at least. Because this case is going to evolve by the day and I think it’s best if we all take it step by step.” She sets her face in determination and gives Oliver a look. “And I think you should read the file too. I know you’re not his doctor and this isn’t your area of practice, but I’m going to need help. I’m just one old lady –”

“Oh stop that,” Oliver says scoffing at her, shaking his head in disbelief. “Don’t manipulate me with the ‘old lady’ talk. You and I both know you don’t believe a word of it.”

Evelyn’s demeanor changes slightly as she washes away the façade she was trying to put up. “Caught me, I guess. But…I’m serious about needing help, Ollie. And you’re a good doctor. So, maybe…read the file, just so you know all the details. They’re going to make your head swim but it’s better than going in unprepared.” She nudges the file just a fraction closer to Oliver. “Come on, let your grandmother teach you one last thing before I finally listen to the family and retire.”

Oliver’s hand pulls the file closer, sliding it off the desk and onto his lap. “I don’t know if I’ll be any help.”

“Now who is being manipulative?” Evelyn asks, getting to her feet. “Mr. Padalecki is going to see you around the office anyway, so I’m sure you’re going to end up helping in some way or another.” Rounding the desk, she pats Oliver on the cheek. “Now come on, I’m starving and you promised to treat me to dinner.”

“What? No I didn’t?” Oliver sputters as he blinks at his grandmother.

“Oh, didn’t you? I must be forgetting things then. Old lady brain and all.” She taps her head with a smirk and walks about before Oliver can say anymore, leaving her grandson sitting there with an amused smile on his face.
again.
Also - SPI is a terms for Spinal Cord Injury

And thank you so much to my Wifey DemonDetox. She is amazing in every way.

Next chapter should be up next week.
The sizzle of bacon fills the content silence between him and Jensen. It’s way past time for breakfast but Jared really wants pancakes and Jensen didn’t argue, so breakfast for lunch it is. Jared knows he makes really good pancakes, they’re both not going to be disappointed. He looks over at Jensen setting the table as he flips the last pancake onto a large plate. Jensen is smiling to himself and if Jared strains his ears enough, he can hear a soft humming. It makes Jared’s heart swell, and he smiles to himself, reaching to turn off the stove and transfer the rest of the bacon onto the serving plate.

“What are you doin’?”

“How?” Jensen turns to face Jared, taking a step towards him to retrieve the plate of pancakes and bring it to the table while Jared wheels his way in the same direction with the bacon. “Setting the table…” Jensen replies, making the answer sound like he’s unsure of why that fact might be in question.

“No, I mean…what are you humming?”

“Oh,” Jensen blushes slightly. “Nothing. Just thinking and humming…and putting these plates down.”

Jared shrugs and deposits the bacon in the middle of the table with an expert reach of his arm. “It sounded familiar.” He wheels himself to the spot Jensen set for him and settles in, his stomach grumbling with hunger.

Jensen puts the plate of pancakes down beside the bacon and takes his own seat. They’re sitting at the corner of the table with Jared at the head, as they usually do because it both gives Jared space and still allows for them to be close. “I dunno, I just feel better since we’ve been talking.” Jensen’s lips curve into the slightest shy smile. “You might have recognized it. It’s When I’m Sixty-Four by The Beatles. Told you…most of my repertoire is Beatles songs.”

Jared does know that song. The lyrics are a little foggy in his head but he remembers a bunch of them well enough and smiles, using his fork to snag a pancake and plop it on his plate. “You wanna be with me when you’re 64?” He doesn’t know why he says it but the question is out of his mouth, sounding light and playful despite the serious nature of such a question.

Jensen chokes on his mouthful of coffee, almost spitting it across the table and he has to cough a few times into his fist before he can finally speak clearly. “I…I didn’t mean it like that. I was…” He takes a deep breath and laughs, looking at Jared. “I dunno, maybe.” His tone matches Jared’s and they lock eyes.

Cutting off a piece of pancake, Jared shoves it in his mouth and chews thoughtfully. “Well, I sure as hell not going to be knitting a sweater by the fire. So…that part is definitely out.” He says the words with complete sincerity and, while it takes a minute to hit Jensen, it leaves them both laughing. Jared
shuts his mouth about the other lines he remembers, about grandchildren on his knee because he and Jensen are barely staying afloat thinking about one child, joking about grandchildren is going to tip them overboard. He looks up and smiles, watching Jensen take a bite of their breakfast-lunch.

“Good?”

“Mmmhmm,” Jensen moans with a mouthful of pancake. “You make the best pancakes. Really.” His voice changes to something less playful and more sensual. “Okay, forget sweaters. You think you might wanna make me pancakes when I’m 64?”

It’s Jared’s turn to almost choke, roughly swallowing a mouthful of food. He knows they’re not really talking about pancakes anymore, because Jensen’s eyes have changed, curving at the corners and Jared can’t help but find it sexy. Ever since Jared got caught up in Jensen on their first date and mumbled about wanting to make Jensen pancakes, it’s become a weird euphemism for sex between the two of them. “I dunno, you want me to make you pancakes?”

“If they’re always this good, yeah. I’d be on board with that.” Jensen licks some stray syrup from his lips and takes a smooth drink of his coffee.

“Yeah, well, I plan for them to be. So…I’d definitely be game for this whole pancake thing when your 64. I would only be 59, so…you’d be making out on that deal.” Jared goes to reach for a strip of bacon and ends up brushing against Jensen’s hand as the other man attempts the same thing. It’s as cliché as can get, but they keep their hands there, looking at each other to see if they really were talking about pancakes or not. Jensen brushes a thumb across Jared’s knuckles and smiles, the corners of his eyes crinkling a bit as he makes a noise of contentment. Suddenly self-conscious under that gaze, Jared asks, “what?”

“You’re adorable,” Jensen says, giving Jared’s hand one last stroke and pulling away, taking a strip of bacon and munching on it.


“And now you’re pouting. You’re even more adorable.” Jensen ducks just in time to miss the piece of bacon Jared flings at him. “Hey! Don’t get me wrong, you are insanely sexy most of the time. But right now, you’re kind of adorable. Sorry. It’s the truth.” Jensen holds up his hands in defense. “I love the fact that we’re both a little hopeless and that sometimes your words get jumbled. Come on, how adorable was it that your response when I told you I wanna kiss you was ‘I wanna make you pancakes’?”

Jared surrenders because he knows exactly what Jensen means. They are a little hopeless and that fact makes the butterflies remind Jared that they reside in his stomach anytime Jensen is this close to him. The playful banter between them is nice and juxtaposed with the serious discussions they’ve been having since leaving Dr. Atlas’ office, it is a much needed shift. He likes talking about having moments like these with Jensen when they’re 64, even though he’s not ready to make that jump yet. He loves Jensen, but they have a lot more to learn about each other and more speedbumps to master. Thinking of those speedbumps, Jared sighs, looking at Jensen apologetically because he’s about to break their light mood. “I’ve got to tell my parents.” Swallowing, he clarifies. “About the baby. I’ve gotta tell them.” He pushes his plate far enough up the table so he can settle his elbows on it and rest his forehead against the tip of his fingers.

Jensen mirrors the action, only his fingers hit his temples and massage the area with circular motions. “I know. Me too.” He sits back after a moment and bites his lip. “Although, Josh already knows. I had to tell him otherwise he really would have thought I’d gone insane when he found me on his doorstep at that time of night. He promised not to say anything to my family…so…yeah, I still gotta
tell ‘em.”

“Ryan knows. But he promised the same. Although if I keep stalling, I think he might just open his big mouth and tell Jeff. *That* wouldn’t go over well for either of us.”

“Jeff already doesn’t like me,” Jensen snorts.

“Nah, he does. He just likes me better. So by default, he doesn’t like anyone I date.”

Jensen chews his bottom lip, eyes flicking to the table top and then back to Jared. “I’ll come with you, when you tell them. Unless you don’t want me to.”

“I think that’s a great idea. I don’t know if I’d be able to get it all out if I was alone.” Jared settles himself, taking a sip of water and a deep breath. “You don’t know what it was like for them when I was in the hospital after the accident. It…I think it scared them. Every time I have a procedure done or end up in the hospital, they jump like frightened rabbits.” Jared pauses when Jensen makes a surprised hum. “You probably don’t realize that because they’re generally pretty conditioned to having a son like me. My parents never treated me any different than my other siblings. But they get scared every time I’m in the hospital, like it’s the first time all over again and they think I’m going to die this time.” Jared swallows, his stomach feeling queasy at the thought. “I’m going to break their hearts, Jensen.”

“Hey,” Jensen says, sliding his chair so that he’s practically beside Jared. “Your parents love you. That’s why they get scared. And I am sure you won’t break their heart. Scare the shit out of them? Maybe. But you won’t break their hearts. And if it gets to be too much, I’ll be there. You can deflect to me if you need to.” He presses a hand to Jared’s.

Swallowing, Jared nods. He appreciates Jensen’s words, but he’s not so certain they are the truth. His parents will always love him, but he still thinks the news that he’s deciding to have a baby against all of his doctors’ – other than Dr. Atlas – advice, is going to break something in them. “Still nervous about it.”

“Yeah, I get that.” Jensen sits back in his chair, taking Jared’s hand with him. “I don’t really know how my family is going to take it. Well, Grandma Dorothy will probably be thrilled because she’ll figure we get to keep you now.” He snorts a laugh and squeezes Jared’s hand.

Jared isn’t 100% sure what to make of that comment, but he squeezes back. “I’ll come with you too. If that’s okay.”

“It’s a deal.”

Biting his lip, Jared trips over his next words. “Do you think maybe we could wait a week? Like…tell them next weekend? I know it doesn’t matter much but I kind of want to keep it between the two of us for a while longer. You know? I think we deserve a little more time to handle it on our own before we add our families’ reactions to the mix.” He swallows and looks up with pleading eyes.

“Yeah. Sure. That makes sense. Besides, we can give them the heads up that we’re going to stop by. Your family may be close enough for a random pop in but driving to Dallas takes a bit longer.” He strokes the inside of Jared’s palm, sensing the way Jared tensed up. “Hey, what is it?”

“Umm, I’m just a little scared, you know? About the whole thing but also about my family. I don’t mean this as a jab, but you’re barely on my side right now. Or, well…you weren’t on my side but now you’re here and that’s all I can ask for. But…if my family isn’t on my side…I’m really scared.” Jared swallows and nods nervously, like the action stands a chance at making him feel better.
“Me too.” Jensen gets closer to Jared again, kissing his lips softly and then pulling back with a smile.

“What?”

“You taste like maple syrup.” Jensen licks his own lips.

And somehow the tension and fear in the room slips away and Jared’s lungs don’t feel like they are in a vice anymore. He takes a deep breath and when he releases it, it comes as a relieved sound. Leaning forward, he presses his lips against Jensen’s again to find that the other man is right, they do taste sweet. Getting caught up in the motion, Jared keeps kissing Jensen, slotting their lips so they fit perfectly together. In the months they have been together, they have mastered the art of kissing. There is no longer a learning curve, where they bumped noses awkwardly or couldn’t figure out the reach they needed to get lost in their kissing. Right now, Jared and Jensen are able to invade each other’s space like no one else has before, their tongues playfully licking at the insides of each other’s mouth. It’s Jared who succumbs to moaning first, the sound deep and heavy at the back of his throat. His head feels fuzzy in a pleasant way and he pulls back for just enough air to dive back in and kiss Jensen all the more. Both of his hands reach out for the older man, one skimming up Jensen’s spine and the other landing at the nape of his neck so he has enough leverage to pull him into a deeper kiss. Something short-circuits in his brain and he moans again, prying his lips away enough to groan out, “I’m so horny.” As soon as he realizes he said it, his lips still and his eyes go wide.

Jensen doesn’t appear to mind in the slightest, instead he growls a little bit, shifting on his seat so he can press as close to Jared as the man’s wheelchair allows. “Oh really?” he asks with a devious hint to the words.

“Yeah…I…” Jared swallows and distracts his lips by kissing Jensen’s, nipping at the bottom lip. He lets some of his weight fall forward into Jensen, breathing the same air as him and soaking up the fact that his heart seems to have found the same rhythm as the lips his are pressing against. “It’s been a while and I…I just really want it.” He bites Jensen’s lip a little more possessively and emphasizes exactly what he’s talking about by dropping his hand from Jensen’s neck to his crotch. It sends an exciting shiver through Jared’s spine to know that Jensen’s dick is stirring, reacting to his touch immediately. As much as he’s craving more of Jensen, he’s level headed enough to know he wants this connection for more than just biological cravings.

“Jay,” Jensen breathes out, his eyes fluttering closed. “You sure…we…” He pauses when Jared gives a calculated squeeze to his growing erection. “Shit, Jay…this is what I was talking about. Sexy 90% of the time.” His voices sounds like he’s slowly being unraveled. “But…you sure it’s okay if we…” Jensen licks into Jared’s mouth in favor of finishing the sentence.

“I...uhh…dunno.” Jared says, Jensen’s question sending a brief cold front through the room. He really doesn’t know, but he’ll ask, even if he blushes so hard he’s red cheeked for days. “But I think this,” he says with a stroke of Jensen’s clothed dick, “is okay.”

“Oh god, Jared,” Jensen moans, eyes closing and he is melting all the more against Jared and his mouth. His hips lift on their own accord and he deepens the kiss.

That type of response is exactly what Jared was looking for. It causes a chain reaction and his actions become more eager when Jared takes one of Jensen’s hands and helps to press the older man’s palm against his own growing erection so Jensen can feel that he’s not the only one enjoying where things are heading. Jared keeps his hand pressed over Jensen’s, adding enough pressure so that Jensen’s hand is pressing down into Jared’s arousal.

There is a brief moment where time slows down because they’re on the edge of a precipice and ready to throw themselves over. The butterflies go wild inside Jared’s entire body, and he takes a
shuddering breath before pitching forward more, and swallowing the moans building between them. Then, just as suddenly as it slowed, time speeds up. For all the buildup, falling into each other is fast and their hands are getting greedy. Jared presses forward and Jensen meets him with the same intensity. What ends up happening is a bumping into the table so that coffee sloshes over the rim of mugs, a clattering of dishes, and the desperate reach for each other resulting in awkward knocking of elbows and knees against the furniture.

Jensen hisses when his knee takes a particularly hard blow with the table and he curses under his breath. “Couch?” he breathes in Jared’s ear and makes him shiver.

“Couch.” Jared gives Jensen’s cock one more squeeze and kisses his lips before pulling away as quickly as he can manage at the moment. He’s a bit uncoordinated and knocks most of his cutlery off the table, but he manages to wheel himself towards the couch in record time. Jensen’s right behind him, meeting him there at the exact moment and not wasting any time before he grabs him under the armpits and it’s a joint effort that finds Jared on the couch, laying on his back. He barely gets an exhale of air out before Jensen is blanketing his body, their lips connecting again.

Kissing Jensen makes Jared’s head spin. They’d been getting reacquainted with the gesture but the gentle and soft qualities of their prior actions have morphed into something dirtier. Want and arousal are bubbling over Jared’s surface, pooling in his belly and he gasps when Jensen rocks his hips downward, ensuring that both of their dicks brush together. The friction makes Jared squirm. He can move his hips, but not as well as Jensen currently is. He wishes he could buck up more, but he manages to use his abdominal muscles to find greater contact.

Jared thinks he might be saying words. Or he might be babbling. He’s not really sure because his heart is beating so hard that it’s all his ears can hear. He feels Jensen’s hand hooking under his jaw and curling around the side of his neck, giving the other man something to hold onto while he tongue fucks his mouth. It gives Jared the opportunity to take the upper hand and he lets Jensen kiss him silly while worming one of his hands between them. From there, it is quick work to get Jensen’s belt unbuckled and his pants undone. He shoves them down roughly, straining to reach forward so he can slide them over the swell of Jensen’s ass, yanking the man’s underwear along with them. Thankfully, Jensen’s brain is working enough to help Jared’s task along by lifting his hips so Jared’s hands can free his hard length. The arousal feels hot and solid in Jared’s hands and he curls his fingers around it to give several teasing pumps.

“Fuck, Jared…your hands,” Jensen moans out, lips dragging over Jared’s and landing on the younger man’s cheek while he moans. “You’re so good at that.” His hands leave Jared’s upper body and fight for space between them. His kisses become sloppier, chest falling to Jared’s, and he struggles momentarily when trying to unbutton and unzip Jared’s Jeans. Jared has to let go of Jensen’s dick in order to brace his palms on the couch and push up enough so that Jensen can slide his pants down just below his ass, making sure the front is pushed down enough so Jared’s cock pulls free of their restraint.

Grinning into the kiss, Jared grabs the globes of Jensen’s ass and pulls him forward, making their bare dicks slide alongside each other’s. The sensation is delicious so he does it again, pressing their arousals together and pretty soon they dissolve into rutting against one another, panting into their kisses. Jared can’t help but feel like a teenager again, the way he’s moaning and writhing like he’s in heat. He’s glad Jensen’s on top of him, the man’s weight making sure the pressure on their dicks doesn’t let up as he rolls his hips against him over and over and over.

Jared’s hand sneaks back into the mix again, circling Jensen’s cock, squeezes it with the amount of pressure he knows the man loves. He knows how to work his hands and fingers, and he proves it by twisting the fist he’s made around Jensen so that he pushes every button the man has.
“Oh, shit…Jared…Just like that.” His eyes flutter back for a second and his moans turn breathy. He tries to return the favor but Jared shifts his hips in a way that denies him that.

“I got it.” Jared says proudly, enjoying the look of bill on Jensen’s face. It’s an absolute stroke to his ego that he can make Jensen fall apart like this and it sends an extra rush of blood to his own dick. He pushes up on Jensen’s belly for a second to make the man lift up for just long enough so Jared can get both of their dicks just where he wants them. His large hand wraps around both of their arousals, testing the new weight in his hand a few times before he figures out how to work them both towards an orgasm. His wrist twists, stroking up and down slowly, feeling the solidity of Jensen’s firm lust against his own hard flesh. The kissing becomes uncoordinated and they’re mostly keeping their lips connected in breathy gasps rather than actually kissing.

Jensen’s forehead connects with Jared’s, eyes opening so they can lock gazes. They’re so close that it’s difficult, but they ride the wave of that connection and it makes Jared’s heard explode.

They’re getting exceedingly good at this.

Jared’s thumb brushes over the heads of both of their dicks and comes away wet with the mix of their precome. His pumping becomes faster, more insistent, and it matches the increased speed of their heavy breathing. It feels so good and he’s wanted it for so long; having it now is almost too much and he feels lightheaded in the best possible way. They’re still rutting against each other, but Jared’s fist holds them in a solid connection. He knows what he likes and he knows what Jensen likes; it’s an unbeatable combination as he works them over.

“Jay, I’m gonna come…I…” Jensen breaths into Jared’s mouth.

“No, just wait a second. Just one…more…” Jared’s so close that his vision is blacking out. He squeezes his eyes, pushes down on Jensen’s ass with his free hand and then Jared sees stars. “Now! Yeah…fuck…” he growls out, head pressing back into the cushion of the couch as his orgasm hits him full force and he’s coming with punctuated jolts of his hips. His hand keeps moving, although their smooth rhythm is thrown off by the waves of pleasure hitting him. However, it must be enough because Jensen is letting a litany of curses pour out of his mouth, his hips pumping for the both of them and thick pulses of come land on their hot bellies, smearing between them.

They work through their orgasm, muffling their moans by remembering how to kiss again and slotting their lips together so that it looks like nothing can come between them. It isn’t until the current running through them recedes to a manageable level that they pull away from one another so they can breathe.

“What was that?” Jensen says playfully, nuzzling Jared’s ear with is nose and filling it with the sounds of trying to catch his breath.

“Dunno,” Jared says honestly. “Never done that before.” He closes his eyes and lays back, relaxing fully. “You like?”

“What do you think?” Jensen slides forward enough to place a soft kiss on Jared’s lips but there is enough slide to the movement to make it obvious that there is a sticky mess between the two of them. Jared’s keenly aware of how that mess got there. He’s about to say something when a noise at his front door startles him.

“Yo, Jay? What the fuck? I was knocking.” Ryan’s voice calls through the house. “Good thing you didn’t actually take my key away.”
“Oh shit!” Jared says in hushed tones, eyes wide and clear from his orgasmic haze but he can’t figure out what on earth he should do, not that he has much time for anything.

“You make bacon or something? It smells awesome in here.” Ryan’s last words drop off as he comes into the room fully and he realizes the two men on the couch. “Aww come on! Really? Are you kidding me?” Ryan covers his eyes with one hand and makes a scoff of distaste. “No one needs to see that.” Ryan points blindly towards Jared and Jensen, processing what he just saw. “Come on, Jared. I mean, I know I’ve seen all of you before, but I really don’t need to see Jensen’s ass. Or… expect to see Jensen’s ass.” He growls the last part.

“Shit. Shit. Shit.” Jensen curses, trying to roll off of Jared and yank his pants up, but they’re snagging on his underwear and it is an ungraceful attempt. Jared’s not having an easier time but he manages a little better than Jensen. Their come is everywhere, so even though they’re clothed, they are nowhere near decent.

Assuming he’s given them enough time, Ryan peeks his eyes open and proceeds to gag again. “Come the fuck on! Seriously.” He looks at Jared and then Jensen and back to Jared. “I’m so fucking confused. Last week you painted him all different versions of an asshole. Now you’re humping like bunnies and painting him with your fucking jizz? Really?” Ryan’s eyes are wide in disbelief and anger rushes over his face.

Jared doesn’t know how to defuse this. The situation is all his fault; he was the one who cried on Ryan’s shoulder. Of course, his best friend took his side and now Jared fears that he’s made Ryan and Jensen enemies for life. He should have told Ryan that he and Jensen were working things out but he’d been too caught up in the physical act of actually working things out that he’d neglected his friend. Giving an uncomfortably innocent shrug and smile, Jared tries to explain himself. “Listen, Ryan…it’s complicated. And…”

“No, it’s really not.” Ryan cuts Jared off, wheeling forward as he speaks. In one swift move, he punches Jensen square in the jaw, sending the man’s head spinning to the right. “You’re a damn asshole. Leaving Jay like that…’the fuck’s wrong with you, man? That’s so not fucking okay.’” He pulls back, chest heaving and eyes burning holes through Jensen. He grumbles in annoyance, lip twitching the whole time. “Hell, this would be a lot easier if you weren’t covered in come,” he muses, still seething while looking down at his fist and rubbing it.

Jared gasps, hands held out in front of him because he doesn’t know what to do with them. Ryan’s movement sent his wheelchair out of reach and he sure as hell isn’t going to fight his best friend. “Ryan! Stop it!”

Rubbing his jaw, Jensen holds a hand out towards Jared. “No, Jare, Ryan is right. I was an asshole. It’s not ‘fucking okay’ that I left you like that.” With a shake of his head, he rubs his jaw again then tests its movement by wiggling it back and forth. “And you’re right, this would be a lot better for all of us if Jared and I weren’t covered in…well…come.”

Not sure what to make of his reaction, Ryan looks at Jensen skeptically. “It won’t stop me from hitting you again.”

“I’m sure it won’t.” Jensen says calmly.

“I told you I would kill you if you hurt him.” Ryan makes a fist and curls his lip. Then he looks at Jared. “I should beat some sense into you too. What the fuck are you doing with him?”

Closing his eyes, Jared pinches the bridge of his nose. “Ry…I can explain.”
“Really?” Ryan says, gesturing towards Jared with his head like he’s waiting for a pretty amazing explanation.

All that comes out of Jared’s lips is, “I love him,” but the words are so saturated with pure intense emotion and sentiment that they hit Ryan like a lead pipe, leaving his best friend speechless.

“And I love him,” Jensen cuts in before anyone else has a chance to get a word in. “And I can explain. At least…let me explain. Let me tell you everything I told Jared. If you still want to kill me, then…okay. But can I at least shower before we talk?”

“Unbelievable.” Ryan says, throwing his hands in the air. “You know what? You’re perfect for each other. You’re both crazy.” He huffs and retreats into his head, letting himself come down from whatever wave of anger he’d been riding. “Fine. I’ll let you shower, but it’s not because I like you or anything. It’s because I can’t look at you knowing my best friend’s come is all over you.” He curls his lip in distaste and then spins his wheelchair, heading towards the kitchen. “And I’m eating all your bacon!”

Covering his face with both hands, Jared’s words are muffled. “Oh my god…this is so embarrassing.”

“Well apparently he’s seen all your junk before. What about me? That’s embarrassing,” Jensen snorts.

Punching Jensen playfully, Jared allows himself a laugh, “shuddup.”

They linger in that moment for a while longer, both of them afraid to take a step because that would mean they are getting closer to a talk that isn’t going to be pretty. It’s Jensen who breaks the moment, getting up to retrieve Jared’s chair. “It’s going to be okay, Jared. We’re going to talk and if he really is your best friend, hopefully he’ll understand.” A small smile appears on his face and it’s infectious, making Jared’s heart settle enough. “Hey, if you forgave me, then I can’t be that terrible.” He kisses Jared on the forehead before escaping to the bathroom.

Jared watches him go, swallowing thickly. He really hopes Jensen is right because he doesn’t need this stress right now. That’s what he needs Ryan to understand. He needs his best friend, but he needs Jensen too.

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Jensen shifts his jaw from left to right, the hint of pain there serving to remind him of the punch Ryan gave him. He’s had worse by far, but this particular incident is more intense because Jensen had been at the receiving end of his boyfriend’s best friend’s anger. It’s a complicated situation. One he’s not quite sure he has under control yet.

Sure, Ryan sat and listened to him and Jared try to explain. He’s pretty sure Ryan gets the point and understood that Jensen was baring his soul with complete honesty and nothing but good intentions. Jared turned out to be an amazing mediator, helping the situation by reminding Ryan that there had been times when Jared had to forgive his best friend over misunderstandings. Sometimes people make mistakes, and Jensen hopes Ryan can truly understand that.

Things are not going to be smooth sailing between him and Ryan, but Jensen thinks they left things on much better terms than when the man had wheeled in on Jared and Jensen during their post orgasmic bliss. Literally being caught with his pants down hadn’t been much fun, especially when it came with added comments about Ryan seeing all of Jared’s parts before. Jensen knew that had happened, but he didn’t need reminders. It stirred something akin to jealousy in Jensen’s gut, even though he believes without a doubt that Ryan and Jared are now platonic friends, through and
through. But the jealously is there, serving to remind him that he doesn’t want anything rearing its head and getting in the way of their relationship, and that includes Jensen’s own hang-ups.

Now, he’s pacing the length of his apartment because Jared is due to arrive any moment and it’s the first time the man has been over since their fight. It’s the middle of the workweek and while it’s been business as usual at Arkin, he’s in need of downtime with his boyfriend. He’d invited Jared over to have a low-key night of movie watching and ordering pizza with some extra time to go over their plans to tell their families about the baby this weekend. Jensen has other plans as well, and it’s making his stomach twist inside out. For the hundredth time that night, he shoves his hand in his pocket, fingers searching out and tracing the gold wedding band he’s tucked there. It’s his grandfather’s wedding band, one his grandmother Dorothy left in his possession three years ago when his grandfather passed away. Josh was already married by then, and his grandfather had always promised it to Jensen with the stipulation that he only give it to someone he truly loved. The band itself is nothing special but it is chock full of sentimental nostalgia and family tradition. Having always accepted and embraced Jensen’s homosexuality, Grandma Dorothy had given it to Jensen with a wink and a hope that Jensen found a man as wonderful as her late husband had been. Now Jensen had taken it out from where he’s hidden it in his nightstand drawer and realizes that he’s going to ask Jared to marry him. The man is carrying his child, it’s the right thing to do. He hopes his grandfather would agree too, because Jensen had promised the man he’d adhere to the stipulation that came with it.

He’s not telling his family yet. They have enough news to share with them and he doesn’t want to dilute the baby news with news of an engagement. He hadn’t even run it by Josh, which will definitely result in an ass kicking. The thought of his brother makes him remember something he should have done earlier. Checking the time, he realizes he has a few minutes before Jared arrives and he pulls out his cell phone, dialing Josh.

“Hello?” Josh’s voice filters through the phone.

“Hey, Josh. It’s me.” Jensen says dumbly, as if Josh doesn’t already know that part.

“Hey, Jenny. How are you doing?” Josh’s voice is light, but distracted enough to alert Jensen that he’s in the middle of something.

“I’m good. Sorry to bother you, you sound busy.”

“Nah, don’t worry about it. I’m just in the middle of giving Mikey a bath because someone decided he wanted to jump in every single puddle on his way out of the supermarket.” There is the sound of splashing and a giggle from Mikey. “He thinks he’s funny,” Josh adds.

“I’ll be quick. I just…need your help.” Biting his lip, Jensen keeps pacing the room.

“I’m listening.”

“So…Jared and I are keeping the baby.” The words still seem alien on Jensen’s tongue and it spikes his heart rate as he voices them.

“Holy shit! You’re really doing this…”

“Yeah. But that’s not the point. I already told Jared you know, but we want to come to Dallas on Saturday and tell everyone. The whole family, even grandma. So, I was calling because I was hoping you can organize a BBQ at your house? That way Jared and I can stop by and tell everyone in one fell swoop.”
“Wow…Jen, mom’s going to lose her mind. Like…in a good way. And you’re taking a hell of a lot of pressure off of me, considering she’s been hounding for another grandbaby.” Josh laughs, then lets out a long whistle. “Wow, my baby brother. So, things with you and Jared are…” He trails off, letting Jensen fill in the blanks.

“Good, I think. We’re figuring things out. I love him, Josh, you know that. And he loves me. At least we aren’t too dumb to forgive each other and realize that.” Jensen flips the wedding band between his fingers, scratching his nail gently across the surface. “We’re doing good.”

“That’s great! I’m really glad for you. Listen, I – Mikey! Get back here! Get your naked butt back in this tub!” And exasperated sigh comes across the line and Josh snorts. “Jen, I gotta go. But I’ll take care of everything. Just get here around one. I won’t say anything to them. But you and I have to talk about this more. Drinks on me when you get a free moment.”

“Absolutely.” On autopilot, Jensen nods. “Thanks a lot, Josh.”

“Sure. I’ll see you Saturday.” There is another giggle from Mikey and a laugh from Josh as he seemingly snags the child and dumps water over the boy’s head, then the line goes dead.

With that task out of the way, all Jensen has left to do is wait. Josh is right, he does owe his brother some explanation of what’s been going on in his life, but Jensen has to figure that out for himself before he can share that with other people. Feeling antsy, Jensen goes to the door and pulls it open to see if Jared’s car is in the parking lot. He finds that it is but, even better, he finds Jared barely three feet away from him. “Hi!” he beams, but his smile falters slightly when he sees the miffed expression on Jared’s face. “Wait…the elevator is still broken? I swear I checked it on Monday and they had repaired it.”

“They did but it’s acting up again.” Jared grumbles, wheeling into the apartment and resting his forehead in one of his hands. “I’m not one to shy away from physical activity, but being off the medication is leaving me a little loopy. Add that to the fact that I’ve been feeling nauseous almost constantly and…yeah. Today was not a good day for the fucking elevator to go down.”

Jensen swallows slowly because Jared is right. With what he has planned, today is definitely not a good day for the elevator to be out of order, ensuring that Jared is a cranky, sweaty mess by the time he arrived. It also dawns on Jensen how much easier it is for them to meet at Jared’s house. Jared can navigate most places, but there is no denying that there is less drama involved in date-nights at Jared’s house. Guilt bubbles up in Jensen and he gives an apologetic smile. “Jared…I’m sorry. I didn’t know.”

“It’s not your fault. Really. I’m sorry. Ignore me.” Jared shakes his foul mood away and gives Jensen a smile. “It was worth it because I get to see this amazing guy who looks too damn cute in those glasses.” Reaching up, Jared removes Jensen’s glasses. “But those eyes,” he says, letting his smile finish the rest of the compliment for him. “You’ve been wearing your glasses a lot; your eyes okay?”

Jensen’s caught in the dimples Jared’s displaying. He needs to wet his lips before responding. “Yeah, they’re fine. We’ve just been…you know…tearing up a lot over the last few days. I figured this was a lot easier than dealing with floating contacts.”

“Yeah, well, either way. I like you.” Jared smiles again before sighing and sitting back in his chair, putting his hand to his forehead again and his eyes zone out. “Sorry. Like I said…feeling loopy from going cold turkey without all those pills.”

“You didn’t have to come out if you – ”
“I know. I wanted to, Jen. Besides, you promised me pizza and I’m fucking starving.” Jared wheels further into the room, plopping himself on the couch and resting his head on the back.

Jensen knows he should probably call the pizzeria and place an order but his list of things to do is trumped by the fact that there is a ring burning a hole in his pocket. He envisioned this moment being romantic, tailor made to suit the man he was going to marry. This isn’t how he planned the day he would be proposing to his boyfriend, but he also hadn’t planned on getting his boyfriend pregnant before proposing. Thoughts run wild in his head, pounding to the point where they are deafening. “Hey, Jared?”

“Hmm?” Jared turns his head, eyebrows arched.

“So…” Jensen comes to sit beside Jared. “I was thinking.” Words jam up in his throat and bottle neck in an attempt to get out. He knows before he actually starts speaking again that he’s going to ramble and fuck this up. “I was thinking that I love you. And I love seeing you every day and working with you and getting to know you and doing things with you. Like…even when we just watch shitty horror movies or…reruns of something we’ve seen a million times. I love all of those things. And,” Jensen pauses to take a breath. “Jared, you’re an amazing person. There is so much to you and I’m in awe of you. Truly. You’ve shaken up my entire world and…and…I love you.” Jensen’s chest shudders. Jared is looking at him, eyes blinking as he processes the onslaught of words Jensen just threw at him. Taking the moment, Jensen pulls the ring from his pocket and holds it out in front of Jared. “So, will you marry me?”

Jared chokes on his breath, coughs and gives Jensen a wide eyed stare. “Wha-what?”

“Marry me?” Jensen repeats again, holding the ring out. His own head is spinning, world spiraling off its axis and out of his control.

“Oh, Jen…” Waves of emotions crash to the surface of Jared’s eyes, each one more poignant than the next. They color the hazel in Jared’s eyes with adoration, flattery, love, and tears. There is also something else, something Jensen can’t place. Falling forward, Jared wraps his arms around Jensen and holds him tight, neck craning so that he can press his lips to Jensen’s. Their kisses are quick, solid pressure each time their lips meet. “No,” he breathes out between kisses, the word in such contrast with his actions that Jensen’s left speechless.

Jensen puts his hands on Jared’s shoulders and pushes him away so they can see eye to eye. “Wait, what?”

“No.” Jared grabs Jensen’s hands and curls their fingers together, trapping the ring somewhere in Jensen’s palm. “That…that is the sweetest thing anyone has ever done for me. Truly. And it…Jen, it’s making me the happiest man on the face of the planet. But no.” He pauses when Jensen’s expression falls. “No! It’s not like that. Jen…really. I love you so damn much. But…answer me honestly. Would you be proposing to me if we hadn’t have gotten pregnant?”

The question isn’t the slap in the face Jensen thought it would be. Instead, he pulls back even further in thought and tries to digest it, realizing that perhaps he had gotten ahead of himself when he jumped on this proposal train. His life already seemed like it was speeding ahead towards new commitments and when he really thinks about it, he and Jared are not ready to commit their lives to each other. In fact, the words were already out of Jensen’s mouth when he proposed. Their relationship is still new and because of that, they are still getting to know each other. “Uhh, no. I just,” Jensen scratches nervously at the nape of his neck, “thought it was the right thing to do.”

“I know you did.” Jared gives an understanding smile and moves to kiss Jensen’s parted lips. “There are lots of reasons to get married, but a baby shouldn’t be one of them.” Placing his palm over his
middle, Jared looks up. “This, is going to happen whether we’re married or not. And it’s got a time frame. We, however, have no rush.”

Jensen feels stupid all over again because Jared’s right. Now that his boyfriend has said the words out loud, Jensen wonders why the hell he didn’t realize them in his own brain. He has no idea why he keeps making the wrong moves here, falling flat on his face every time. His feelings must be written all over his face because Jared cups his cheek, running a thumb over the cut of his jaw.

“Hey, Jen. Stop. Don’t look like that. I meant it when I said that was the sweetest thing ever. I don’t think anyone has ever given a sliver of a thought to the idea of marrying me. Whether I was too young or too broken,” he spits the work out with sarcasm, “no one has ever been as sweet as you. I know the baby put a giant monkey wrench into the whole thing, but I kinda like the trajectory of our relationship. I like getting to know you because there is a lot more under your hood that I want to know.” He pauses, allowing Jensen to turn his head enough so he can kiss the center of Jared’s palm. “I mean, I don’t even know your favorite color.”

Snorting a laugh, Jensen raises his eyebrows at Jared. “It’s green, but what does that have to do with anything?” Because colors and cliché trivia tid-bits usually mean very little in the scheme of a relationship.

“It doesn’t, I was just making a point. You know what I mean.” Jared rolls his eyes and drops his hand to lace fingers with Jensen. “It was just the first thing that came to my mind. I mean…I’m an artist, right? Colors matter. I would have painted you in green anyway because…your eyes and you look good in it. So…maybe I knew your favorite color after all. Mine’s Quinacridone Red, which probably makes no sense to you but I like it on my pallet when I’m painting because I can mix a few of my violets with it, and I like violet too.” Jared comes to an abrupt stop in the middle of his blathering and laughs. “Sorry, I’m rambling. It’s not important. The point is…thanks for asking me to marry you.”

Jared looks so damn sincere at that, dimples showing up as he smiles at Jensen, their foreheads almost close enough to touch, and Jensen can’t stop himself from giving in and kissing the man. It’s probably the world’s strangest reaction to getting rejected but without the pressure behind the proposal, he feels lighter. There aren’t any expectations or time sensitive steps he has to take, it’s just the two of them figuring themselves out. “Well, I guess thanks for saying ‘no’,” Jensen quips.

“I still very much want to date you,” Jared says, sliding closer and speaking the words against Jensen’s lip.

“Good, because I really want that too.” Closing the small space between them, Jensen draws Jared into a kiss, tongue sweeping playfully into his mouth and hand coming to wrap around his back in effort to keep him close. He thinks maybe his grandfather would be more proud of him over the way things played out than the plan Jensen hatched in his mind this morning. Jensen does love Jared and he thinks they’ll get to the point where the ring is meant to be on the man’s finger, but today isn’t that day.

So he pockets the ring again and searches out the connection he’s building with Jared, which feels like the perfect level commitment at this juncture in their lives because it’s not their end-game, but it’s building towards one.

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Jared is aware that he’s chewing on his lip, making him feel even more like a child than he’s fearing his mother is about to do. He’s not sure how he ended up inviting his family over for dinner, rather than going to his parent’s house, a place he’d be able to escape whenever things got too hairy. Yet,
here he is setting the table while Jensen’s in the kitchen stirring the pot of sauce they made earlier. “Maybe this is a bad idea,” he says weakly, looking up at Jensen with a pleading lift of his eyebrows for some type of justification.

“No it’s not. I think it’s a good idea to have your parents here, in your home. A home you were perfectly capable of creating and maintaining.” Jensen looks over his shoulder, staining to peek through the doorway between the kitchen and dining room so he can make contact with Jared’s eyes even though the man is in the other room.

“I’m gonna throw up.” Jared sighs out.

“Because of the –”

“No,” Jared cuts him off. “Because I’m about to tell my family that I’m pregnant, that we’re pregnant. That’s supposed to be a happy conversation, right?” He catches himself biting his bottom lip again and releases it quickly. “Shit…” He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “I’m supposed to be happy, right? Aren’t people happy when they do this?”

Jensen abandons what he’s doing on the stovetop and comes into the room to face Jared. “You are happy. I mean…I thought you were.” He cocks his head to one side and waits for Jared to take the reins.

“About the baby? I am happy about the baby. Absolutely. But I’m also terrified, tired, anxious, overwhelmed, and have no idea what I’m doing.” Jared comes down from his ramble and looks at Jensen. They’ve been through this so many times in every way possible. “I know…you don’t know what you’re doing either. It’s just…I’m really happy about the baby but I think telling my parents isn’t going to be such a happy moment. And it should be, right?” He pauses for another breath. “I guess that’s just making me sad. That’s all. I’m sorry. Ignore me.”

“I can’t. Sorry.” Jensen shrugs, bringing one hand up to scratch at the back of his head. “Since I’ve met you, it’s been pretty impossible to ignore you.” Crossing his arms, Jensen leans against the wall across from Jared. “Jay, you’ve gotta tell them, right? It’s better you do it sooner rather than later. It can go two ways, good or bad. Either way, things are going to end up okay and we’re gonna be fine.”

Jared sets one last fork in place and looks up at Jensen. His heart keeps swelling in his chest because Jensen’s been pretty damn amazing. He’s been Jared’s cheering squad all week and now he’s here, willingly subjecting himself to the awkward conversation that’s about to ensue as soon as his family arrives. “You sound really certain about that.”

“Because it’s true.” Jensen steps forward and leans down so he can give one of Jared’s hands a squeeze. “Now, you want to help me out in the kitchen before I burn the pasta?”

“You can’t burn the pasta,” Jared scoffs.

“Wanna bet?” Jensen gives a megawatt grin.

Jared knows for a fact, that while Jensen might not be the most amazing cook in the word, he’s damn good at dinner preparations and he does not burn pasta. He, however, appreciates the distraction tactic and follows his boyfriend into the kitchen to make sure their meal is good and hot, waiting to be served to their guests.

Jared’s just thrown a tray of garlic bread into the oven to toast it up when he hears a knock at his front door, followed by his mother’s voice. “Knock knock!”
“Come in,” Jared calls. Giving Jensen a frightened look, he takes a deep breath and smooths down the front of his shirt. “I look okay?”

“Eh, a little green around the edges, but,” he takes a moment to brush a kiss across Jared’s lips, “you look great. Come on, let’s bite the bullet.”

Jared gives a shaky smile and mumbles. “You can remind me of how ridiculous I’m being. I don’t think I’ve ever acted like this in my life.” He focuses on taking one more deep breath and wheels himself towards the front of his house, Jensen not far behind him. “Hi, mama,” he says, trying to keep his voice light and his smile wide enough to make his dimples pop.

“Hi, baby,” Sherries voice sing-songs as she gets closer. Wrapping her arms around him in a huge hug, she rocks him left and right a few times before pulling away. “I feel like I haven’t seen you in weeks.” Pausing for dramatics, her eyes go wide. “Oh wait, that’s right, I haven’t seen you in weeks.” Her voice remains playful but there is a hint of hurt underneath it. Eyes flitting up, she notices Jensen. “I bet it has everything to do with this one here, huh?” She hikes her thumb at Jensen and gives Jared a smile before stepping past her son and encircling Jensen in a hug without any warning. “Hi, Jensen. It’s so good to see you again.”

Snorting a laugh, Jensen returns the hug. “You too, Mrs. Padalecki.”

Waving him off with a laugh, Sherri corrects him. “No, Sherri is fine, really.”

“Okay, Sherri, sorry.” Scanning the room, he questions, “where is Mr. Padalecki?”

“Gerry is getting some dessert out of the car.” As if on cue, Gerald and Megan make their way through the door. “Oh there you are! Is Jeff here yet?”

“No, he just called. He said he’ll be another five minutes, we can get started without him.” Gerry lets his wife relieve him of the cake box and goes towards his son, clapping him on the shoulder. “Hey, Jare. How you doin’?”

“Good, yeah. I’m good,” Jared gets out in a jumbled heap and realizing he’s doing a shitty job of acting like things are business as usual. Because they’re not. Looking at his dad’s smile makes him feel guilty all of a sudden.

Gerry narrows his eyes at Jared for a split second before turning to shake Jensen’s hand. “Jensen, always a pleasure.” He gives another firm shake to Jensen’s hand. “Hope work has been treating you well enough that you’ve had time to make more of that beer and bring some over.”

“As a matter of fact, I did.” Jensen scratches at the back of his head and smiles. “Although, it’s not new. I made it a few months back. It’s been ageing pretty well since then. I hope you like it.”

“Then I look forward to trying it.” Gerry nods, and turns the corners of his lips down in thought. “I’ll tell you what I think.”

The conversation between his father and boyfriend makes Jared huff out a laugh, reminding him of how he and Jensen landed here anyway. It’s all beer’s fault, or at least, it’s the fault of their botched attempt to brew beer. His thoughts are invaded when Megan ruffles his hair annoyingly.

“Hey roller skate,” she chirps. “Haven’t seen you in forever since you’ve been shacking up with Jensen every weekend.”

“I haven’t been – ” Jared starts as a retort, smoothing down his hair and giving his sister an exasperated roll of his eyes. Deciding it isn’t even worth fighting this fight, he shakes his head at her,
knowing she’s just pushing his buttons to get a rise out of him. It’s how their relationship works, and always has. “Hey, Meg. I missed you too.” This time he gives her a genuine smile and it’s returned full force. “Anyway, come in guys. Dinner is done, I just gotta take the garlic bread out of the oven.”

Sherri makes her way towards the kitchen and deposits the cake on the counter there. “It smells wonderful in here Jared. I swear, nothing smells as good in the kitchen as garlic. It makes everyone’s kitchen smell like they’re a chef.” She stirs the pot of sauce and a fresh wave of aroma wafts towards her nose. “Though you were always good at creating things, Jared, whether it be in the kitchen or the art studio. You’re good with your hands like that.”

Her comment makes Jensen cough on an exhale. “If y’all want to take a seat, Jared and I can start serving. I, for one, am starving.” He looks at Jared, an expression of reassurance and composure on his face. It conjures up a wave of emotion strong enough to remind Jared why he loves the man.

Jared’s family’s voices mix together in agreement about being hungry and serving dinner gives Jared something to actually do. He and Jensen go about dishing out pasta and sauce, making sure everyone is provided with a meal. He loves that Jensen actually manages to make his mother sit down and relax rather than trying to take over the meal herself and do all the serving. His parents sit beside each other, with Megan at one head of the table, and Jared in his habitual spot at the other. There is a place set for Jeff beside Megan, leaving Jensen to fill the seat between Jeff and Jared. The pieces fit together and if this was any other evening, Jared would think they’ve come far enough to hit the point of certainty that it will be smooth sailing from here on out. Once everything is served, however, there is a lull in the proceedings. The five of them sit around the table in awkward silence on Jared and Jensen’s part; Jared doesn’t want to delve into a conversation that is going to turn into a useless ramble, filling up their time together with something stupid when he has things of greater import to share. His hand finds its way to his middle, cupping the area with reassuring pressure and he’s given a renewed drive to make sure he gets through this night with his family understanding just how much this baby means to him.

Sherri interrupts his thoughts. “Jared, baby, are you okay?”

“Yeah, umm…I was just thinking.” Jared tries to give her a smile but it doesn’t quite reach his eyes.

“Thinking what?” she pushes.

“Uhh…I would rather wait for Jeff before I get into the whole thing.” As soon as he finishes the sentence, his ears pick up on the fact that someone has joined them in the room.

Jeff is suddenly filling the room, his presence making everyone’s heads turn. “Wait for me for what?” he asks with curiosity.

Jensen cuts through the question, getting up so he can put a healthy serving of pasta on Jeff’s plate. “Jeff, it’s good to see you.”

“Yeah, you too,” He gives Jensen a nod of his head before letting his gaze fall on Jared again. “Wait for me for what?” he repeats. Looking from Jared to Jensen, he notices the forced smiles, permeating with nervousness. “What? It’s not like you knocked him up or anything, right?” Jeff snorts at his own joke, taking his seat by falling heavily into it.

Jared chokes, the sound almost coming across as a dry heave. His entire family knows precisely what Jared’s doctors had once told him about being unable to carry children. It’s not exactly a secret in the Padalecki household; they are open with everything in belief that hiding things that aren’t shameful make them appear as so. Jeff particularly understands the situation since he and Jared have shared many long nights as teenagers playing out thoughts of how their futures were going to go and what
dreams they shared. It was typical growing up bullshit but Jeff knows how conflicted Jared being seemingly unable to carry children left him, how nervous he was that it was just another hurdle in his way of finding someone to be with. It’s what made Jared nervous about being with Jensen. Aside from his medications and obvious physical disability, Jared is acutely aware that he lives in a world where some relationships crumble over issues with fertility or deciding whether to have children or not. Jeff knows all the worries that played out in Jared’s head and here he is making a joke about it, having no idea he just hit the nail on the head.

They are silent for way too long. Jared doesn’t know what to say because he can’t brush the comment off like a joke; it’s anything but a joke to him. Jensen looks frozen, keeping the ball in Jared’s court where they agreed it should be but Jared wishes he could talk that all back. He wishes Jensen could just tell Jeff that he’s right.

In the end, Jared supposes it is actually Jensen who does that very thing. Instead of denying the comment, Jensen clears his throat, looks at Jeff calmly, and then says, “and if I did?”

Jeff has to blink a few times when neither man elaborates.

“Wait…what’s going on?” Jeff says at the awkward silence that follows Jensen’s question.

“Well, Jeff,” Jared gets out a nervous laugh. “It’s kind of exactly like that.”

“Exactly like what?” his older brother asks, having seemingly forgotten his lighthearted accusation.

“What you said before.” Jared swallows and does a sweeping gaze of the room. “About me being pregnant. ‘Cause I am. And we’re having a baby.” He gets stuck on short sentences that pierce the room like bullets. Admitting them out loud feels like weight after weight is dropped from his shoulders and he gets stuck on repeat. “So, yeah, Jeff. I guess you’re right. I’m pregnant. It’s why we wanted to have you all over tonight, so we could tell you all.”

Jeff’s jaw drops and his eyes widen but it’s Sherri’s reaction that draws all the attention. She gasps and covers her mouth with both hands, eyes immediately going from bright with a smile to glossy with the onset of tears. Her reaction is so instant that it makes Jared’s head spin. “Mama, I…”

She cuts him off, shaking her head like she’s heard too much to handle. “You’re pregnant?”

“Yeah, eleven weeks.”

“You’re pregnant?” She repeats.

“Yeah, mama. I am. We are.” Jared tries to give her a smile to reassure her. The hand he had on his stomach reaches under the table to grab Jensen’s hand so he can squeeze it and tether himself to something safe.

“No you’re not,” she insists, looking to her husband in hopes that he’ll back her up. “They said…I heard…” She takes a shuddering sob that serves as an inhale. “The doctors said that isn’t possible. That it was for the best anyway since your body couldn’t handle it.”

“I was just as surprised as you,” Jared says in earnest. “I heard all the same things you heard. But…as it turns out, the doctors really shouldn’t have said that I’d never be able to conceive. They really should have said that there was a really miniscule chance. That it was unlikely. I really am pregnant.” His eyebrows pinch closer and he leans towards his mother in an effort to get her to believe him.

The serious tone to his words elicits another squeak from Sherrie and she cups her hands to her mouth even more. Her eyes dart to Gerry, back to Jared, and then return to her husband. “Oh,
Gerry, who is mid-forkful of food, swallows slowly and takes a long slow breath. “Have you seen your doctors?”

“Yeah.” The one word answer is the only thing he can muster.

“And what did they say?” Gerry calmly asks.

This is the part where Jared knows lies would go over easier than the truth, but he can’t do that. “They, um…said I should have an abortion.”

The reactions from his family are completely in sync, a chorus of sorrowful sighs and concerned glares in Jared’s direction. Before any of them can say anything, Jensen’s voice fills the room. “But we’re not doing that. It’s Jared’s choice to make and he wants to continue with the pregnancy. We invited you here tonight to let you know in hopes that you would support everything Jared’s decided, what we decided. We’ve been seeing a new high risk specialist and even though she said it isn’t going to be easy, she thinks that Jared can do this.” He bites his lower lip for a moment, spending a few seconds looking at each member of Jared’s family as an individual. “I support him. Whatever he needs, I’ll do it. But I really think he needs you, his family.” He finishes his words by looking at Jared, giving him a committed smile and lacing their fingers together.

“Jared, you can’t be serious,” Gerry says after a beat.

That makes anger flare up in Jared, something he’s not accustomed to with his father. Sure, he had the typical rebellious teenager arguments with the man, but Gerald has never, not once, tried to make Jared shy away from doing something other people tell him he can’t do. “Yeah, dad. I am.” Each words is punctuated with an exaggeration of the final consonant. He strains to twist in his chair and reach the buffet table behind him, grabbing the ultrasound scan he’d placed there earlier. He has to stretch his arm past his mother to reach his father’s line of vision. “I’m completely serious.” He drops the scan beside his father’s place. “That’s your grandchild. Perfectly healthy and guess what? That baby is also pretty serious about me going through with this.”

Gerald picks up the scan, studying it in silence for several tense moments before he pushes it towards Sherri. Closing his eyes, and exasperated sigh leaves his lips when he pinches the bridge of his nose. “You’ve been going to your doctors for years. You trust them. They have never done wrong by you.”

“Until now,” Jared counters.

“Jared, baby, it can’t possibly be safe for you. Tell me it’s safe and I’ll drop it. But…” Sherri picks up the scan, tracing the fetus, and it’s written all over her face that her heart is breaking. Jared’s surprised it isn’t audible, considering the wealth of love the woman has for her children. “Tell me the truth Jared.”

Jared swallows, tightening the hold he has on Jensen’s hand to the point where they’re both going white knuckled. “It isn’t safe. It might be, but it also might not be. I could be fine.” He hopes that’s enough but his mother is still looking at him, demanding answers. Looking at his siblings, they have mirrored looks. He’s actually surprised they have remained speechless for so long but he assumes it’s because his parents are running this show. “I could miscarry. Or…the paralysis could worsen. Or I could,” he takes a deep breath but lets the last part out as a whisper; giving it too much voice makes it seem too powerful, “die.”

The levee breaks and tears pour out of Sherrie’s eyes and her fingers scramble to cover them. She
avoids looking at Jared and pushes the scan as far away from herself as she can. The moment feels exceedingly long and every second of it is filled with Sherrie’s cries and gasps for breath. “Gerry, let’s go. I want…I need to go.” She stands up, avoiding looking at Jared and Jensen.

Gerald doesn’t seem to know how to kick himself into action. He’s looking at Jared in disbelief. Taking his napkin from his lap and throwing it on the table, he gets to his feet. “Jared, you’re being completely irresponsible.” The words are aimed perfectly, hitting Jared square in the heart and Jared feels like the disappointment he’s always been afraid of becoming.

“Dad, I – ”

“No.” Gerald says, shaking his head at Jared. “Not now, Jared.” He rises fully and helps Sherrie step out from the table. “Megan, let’s go. You’re mother wants to leave.”

Megan hesitates, looking at Jared with a conflicted furrow of her brow. “Umm,” she stalls, trying to find words that will actually help.

“Megan! Let’s go.” Gerald’s voice is louder. “Jeff…you too. You’re mother needs you.” It’s those words that spark Jeff and Megan to life. They aren’t fighting this fight now and they get to their feet. Megan snags the ultrasound picture and pockets it before Jeff tugs at her elbow and they’re out of the house in a bigger rush of activity than when they arrived.

It leaves Jared and Jensen in the middle of a painfully obvious void, their guests gone and leaving mostly untouched plates of food and silverware strewn about the table, leaving like they’ve ripped themselves out of the scene and wounded Jared. He feels that pain building up in his heart, the areas that have always been there, even as an adult, where he needs his parents to help make it all better. Tears sting Jared’s eyes till he can’t see clearly. He hadn’t expected anything in particular from them but he never would have anticipated that. Tears, yes. Complete refusal to talk it out, no. Jared hadn’t expected Jeff’s complete silence, his mouth gaping like a fish out of water because no words could possibly serve to get across his thoughts. He’d looked at Jensen like he was going to kill him, but Jeff seemed to be the only one to do that. His other family members all but ignored Jensen’s presence after the announcement had been made, like Jensen didn’t matter, he was only a catalyst to this situation. “Jen…” His voice cracks, the storm that had been brewing in his middle breaks free of Jared’s control and he’s sick at all once.

Jensen, thankfully, gets the wordless message loud and clear. He shoves away from the table and manages to wheel Jared towards the bathroom. They’re barely in the room when Jared hauls himself out of the chair and plops himself beside the toilet. Colors blur and go out of focus as his stomach rebels and he vomits into the porcelain bowl of the toilet. It’s not pretty and he has to hold both palms flat on the floor to keep himself from pitching forward too much and smacking his forehead on the bowl. He feels like he wants to die until there is the weight of Jensen’s hand on his spine.

“Shh, it’s okay,” Jensen soothes, his hand rubbing circles along the span of Jared’s back, between his shoulder blades. He shushes repeatedly, holding Jared up enough as he dry heaves again and again until his stomach feels like it’s been emptied twice over. Jensen’s cool hand comes to rest on Jared’s forehead, pushing the mess of hair off the clammy skin there. “You okay?”

“No. You?” Jared says, falling back into Jensen’s hold so that his back is flush with Jensen’s chest.

“Well, that could have went better.” His lips press to Jared’s temple. “Just give them time, Jay. They love you. That’s all.”

His parents could have reacted out of love in a million other ways, but walking out on him was the one they chose. Jared nods and closes his eyes, burying his face in the crook of Jensen’s neck
because things feel simpler there. “Thanks for sticking up for me.”

“You’re welcome.” Jensen goes to move. “Let me get you a glass of water.”

“No. Just stay. I don’t wanna move just yet. I don’t wanna think. I don’t wanna do anything. Just for a minute?” Jared rolls his eyes to meet Jensen’s gaze. He knows they are going to have to repeat this performance tomorrow for Jensen’s parents, but right now he needs to use some alone time with Jensen to recharge.

“Sure,” Jensen says, settling so that his back is against the bathroom wall and he can pull Jared more snugly into his arms.

In the four walls of this tiny room, Jared thinks the three of them feel safe.

Chapter End Notes

Special thanks as always to Demondetox for catching the most ridiculous typos I have made in a long time and for helping me work through the dynamics of this chapter. Endless kisses!

And thank you to everyone for their comments and interest. I am so blessed!
Jensen turns his head to the right, catching sight of the way Jared is turned towards the passenger side door, curling in to himself like there is any chance of hiding his lanky form. Jared has his left palm wrapped protectively over his middle and the fingers of his other hand twitch against his right thigh. Lips tugging down in a frown, Jensen takes in the picture of his defeated boyfriend. It saddens him that he already knows why Jared is looking so wounded; it’s pretty hard to forget the way Jared fell apart after his family reacted the way they had to news of the pregnancy. It was as if Jared just suddenly lost the ability to hold it all together and Jensen couldn’t blame him. Eyes flicking back to the road, he continues their drive and focuses on the connection Jared’s hand has with his stomach. If he hadn’t known Jared is pregnant, then maybe Jensen wouldn’t have noticed anything. But he does know, and he can see the way Jared’s middle is different. It’s puffier, swollen almost. He supposes that fact shouldn’t really shock him, Jared’s practically twelve weeks pregnant. It’s bound to start being apparent. Even Jared’s fingers know it’s there. Seeing it, however, still rattles Jensen. And the way Jared’s got his hand wrapped around that swell makes Jensen’s heart twist up in knots.

Things are so close, right under the skin and tangible, but Jensen has no idea what to do. Sucking in a deep breath, Jensen keeps one hand on the steering wheel, and places his right hand on Jared’s knee. “Hey,” he breathes out with a smile. “You doing okay?”

“Oh?” Jared comes out of his trance and blinks at Jensen. The smile that curves his lips is slight but it’s automatic and he nods his head. Thinking better of it, his nod turns to a slow shaking of his head from right to left. “No. Not really.” The hand he has on his stomach slides downwards and he laces his fingers with Jensen’s. “I…I just can’t…” He pauses and shakes his head again. “I can’t stop myself from thinking that your parents are going to do the same. That they’re –”

Jensen squeezes Jared’s hand reassuringly. “No. They’re not.” He looks at Jared again, eyes narrowing slightly. Jared looks…well, he doesn’t look great. “You want me to pull over for a minute?”

This time Jared’s smile is more genuine. “Nah, it’s a long drive to begin with. I’m gonna be fine. Really. It’s just being off some of the meds isn’t helping much either, you know?” Jared says with a brushing off gesture of his right hand. “And…this kid is making me feel seasick all the time.”

“Uh huh,” Jensen says slowly, turning his eyes to the road. He’s not sure if he should believe Jared, but he knows that not trusting him right now is probably only going to aggravate matters. His boyfriend had thrown up this morning but he’s been powering through. “We don’t have to do this right now if you don’t want to,” Jensen offers in earnest.

“I know. You’ve said that…and I’m really not in the mood to open up the emotional flood gates again, but I think I would rather have everything out on the table, you know? Like a bandage – just rip the whole thing off in one shitty weekend.” Licking his lips, Jared shifts his whole body so that
he’s no longer facing the car’s door and can square his shoulders towards Jensen. The way his fingers are laced with Jensen’s, he’s able to run his thumb over the knuckle of the older man’s pointer finger. “Thanks for the offer, though. It means a lot.” He looks down for a second before turning his gaze towards Jensen again and smiling genuinely.

Jensen catches that look and it makes his heart skip a beat because somehow when Jared smiles, really smiles, it always manages to jam Jensen’s systems and makes him feel like a smitten puppy. He’s capable of controlling it at Arkin, but here in the car with just the two of them, Jensen’s sure that he’s gone full on love struck.

“‘Course, Jay.” Jensen’s eyes stay fixed on the road because he’d rather get them to his brother’s house in one piece than getting distracted by Jared’s dimples. “Told you, I’m not letting you do any of this stuff alone. Besides, if I let you go by yourself to tell my parents the news then my family might decide to steal you away from me and what good would I be to the world if that was the case?” It’s a joke, at least Jensen meant it that way, but the truth behind the statement is too strong and saturates the words with seriousness, making both men laugh a little too uncomfortably.

They fall into silence then, but it’s an easy type of quiet. Jensen’s certain that both of their minds are whirling away at the same speed, but the connection between them is enough to diffuse the tension. The drive, though long enough to require a hotel stay, is probably a blessing in disguise. In a sense, it’s alone time. There is no Arkin High, no best friends who wheel themselves into the house without knocking. There is no one in the car who will disappoint Jared. True, Jensen’s already done that but he thinks he’s having a pretty strong comeback. Nerves are simmering in Jensen’s gut because he honestly has no idea how his family is going to take the news. All he’s got to go on is that Josh seems pretty smug about it, happy in a way that, even though Jensen had been so set on not having kids, fate decided to disregard any of his preferences and make it happen anyway. It annoys Jensen in the way that all brothers get annoyed at each other. Years ago, Josh had told him having Mikey was one of the select best things he’s ever done and assured Jensen that he’d feel the same. Jensen fought him on the issue at the time, but now Josh sees the current events as a big giant “just you wait” and Josh seems like he’s gearing up for an “I told you so.” Jensen can be a humble man, but people aiming to prove him wrong always rubs him the wrong way, even if that person is his older brother. Although, he supposes Jared’s made a life out of proving people wrong, so parts of Jensen’s brain understand that drive.

Sighing, he keeps his food steady on the accelerator and strengthens his hold on Jared’s hand to keep his nerves controlled for the time being. He doesn’t think his parents’ reactions are going to be disappointment or negative, but he’s not sure where on the scale of emotions they’ll land.

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The drive so far had been uneventful. It would have been almost peaceful if it hadn’t felt like there was a giant elephant in the car with them, an elephant that was successfully disguised as a tiny fetus.

It’s not that they didn’t talk about the baby. They did. It just happened in indirect ways because Jared really didn’t know what to say about the baby. He hates the fact that his parents weren’t able to handle finishing their discussion about the baby but Jared realizes that it’s not so different from him and Jensen. They talk about the baby, but it’s in an almost abstract way, like it’s something that is there but separate from them at the same time. He can’t wrap his brain around it really, can’t figure out a way for his thoughts to make sense. Because the baby is real. He’s not only seen it but he can feel it. In fact, he can’t stop feeling it because his palm seems determined to curve around his middle like a shield.

The kid’s growing, and even though clothing does a good job of hiding it, he’s going to have to
figure out a better plan than just wheeling away at Arkin High with things perpetually on his lap. Those, however, are definitely worries for another day. Right now, his brain is stuck on the fact that he’s connected with his child in more ways than he thought he could be and in a shorter amount of time than he could have fathomed. Whereas Jensen is increasingly connected to Jared by the day, so close to moving mountains to make sure Jared is okay, Jared senses the disconnect between Jensen and the baby, and maybe that’s why Jared doesn’t talk about it too much anymore, because he doesn’t like to be reminded. It’s ignorance, Jared knows, but he needs to stay ignorant right now so he can get through some of the other parts of his life. He and Jensen will have time to deal with their shit because they’re not going to have a choice if Jensen was serious of being completely in this together.

His phone’s ringtone cuts through the dangerous path his thoughts were traveling on. He pulls his hand away from Jensen’s so he can fish out his phone. As soon as he focuses on his sister’s name on the screen, he connects the call. “Meg?”

“Hey roller-skate.” Megan’s voice floats through the phone, somehow sounding warm and softly apologetic at the same time. “How you doin’?”

“I could be better,” Jared answers honestly then cups his hand over the receiver and mouthes “it’s my sister” for Jensen’s benefit. Jensen’s eyebrows shoot up but he stays quiet as Jared returns to his phone call.

“Yeah, I figured that,” Megan sighs. There is silence for a long while, spliced with the sounds of her trying to start up sentences and failing

“Megan?” Jared prods.

“Yeah, no. Sorry. I’m here.” There is a deep breath traveling over the line. “So…I just wanted to call because…well…I’ve got this picture over here, you know? The ultrasound scan? And…you told me it was a baby and I guess it kind looks like one. I mean…I’ve been looking at it a lot because it’s my niece – or nephew – and…”

Jared’s sharp breath cuts Megan off. He hadn’t meant to do that, but something about Megan’s words hook his heart and give it a sharp pull. He knew his sister had taken the ultrasound scan home with her but he hadn’t allowed himself to think about what she had done with it. “You look at the picture?” he asks dumbly.

“Well, yeah. It’s so small…how on earth does it look so much like a baby? Isn’t it supposed to be like the size of a kumquat? I don’t even know what a damn kumquat is.” Megan snorts a laugh and explains herself. “I…I looked that up online. I got kinda curious I guess.”

Jared lets out a push of air that sounds like a laugh. “It’s more the size of a lime now…if that helps.”

“Well, yeah. I know what a lime is.” Megan pauses, the sound of her licking her lips coming over the phone. “Look, Jared. None of that really matters. What I’m trying to say is that…I looked it all up online because it’s kinda crazy and I have no idea what’s going on with you. But I’ve got this little picture here and you told me you’re pregnant and I just kinda…did nothing. And that’s all on me. Because what I should have done is give your giant ass a hug because…I’m going to be an aunt and that’s fucking awesome.”

Jared’s breathing does it again, pulling in sharply and cutting all her other words off. He holds his lung full of air for too long, afraid to move and topple everything. When he finally starts breathing again, it’s shaky, his vision starting to blur because, while he’s not crying, his eyes are definitely tearing up on him.
“Roller-skate?” Megan asks with concern.

“Yeah. I’m here…sorry. Just, say that last part again.”

“What part? That I’m going to be an aunt? Or, that it’s fucking awesome?”

“Both, maybe.” Jared feels Jensen’s hand on his elbow, squeezing there to make sure he’s okay, so he turns and gives Jensen a firm nod. He’s most definitely okay but his head is reeling.

“Jared, the baby is really cute. I mean, it’s so tiny. Why the hell are tiny things so cute?” She stops her ramble and reroutes herself. “And I’m a pretty shitty sister – and aunt – for walking out of your house the way I did. I’ve been sitting here thinking about that. And what I would have done, had I not been in shock, is stayed. But…it was a shock, Jay. You’re my big brother. I’m not going to pull any of that crap about being your little sister and you needing to protect me just like I’m not going to play the card about your accident meaning I need to take care of you. We’re grown ass adults. But I am your sister, and that means I worry about you no matter what the circumstances are. Because I love you. And I was in shock because you said – out loud – that you could die. That’s all I heard and it’s been on repeat in my head ever since. I didn’t know what to do. I was little when I almost lost you so I didn’t understand, but I understand now. For the record, Jeff is in shock too. I’m not sticking up for him or anything, but I think the news was too much to process in front of your face. So…I thought about it a lot and I looked at the picture a lot. And I wanted to call you to say I’m sorry and even if mom and dad continue to be asses, I’m not going to do that to you. I’ve got your back. Or wheels. Or whatever.” Her voice cracks enough to alert Jared to the fact that she’s started crying. “Forgive me?” She sniffs louder.

It triggers Jared’s eyes into tearing up more. “Yeah. I do. It hurt a lot but I wasn’t mad. I was…” Jared stops talking because none of it matters. He’s nothing anymore. Megan apologized and her words were raw and real. He’s not going to rehash things against just to make a point, Megan already understands.

“Really?” Megan ekes out.

“Yeah,” Jared says, the one word full of so much relief that he has to tilt his head back against the car seat and stare at the roof of the car. “God, I really needed to hear that. If only mom and dad felt that way.”

“Yeah…well, it’s different for them. I think they’ll come around. Mom’s been crying ever since. And…” She pauses and takes a deep breath. “Give her time, Jay. She’s mom. She loves you. She’s never – ever – going to stop loving and worrying about you. You’re her favorite.”

“Am not,” Jared snorts automatically, letting himself laugh through the sob he felt building up.

“You are too. Since she brought you home from the hospital. There are more baby pictures of you all over the house than Jeff or I. Isn’t that supposed to be a first baby thing?” Megan snorts.

Jared does too. Megan’s right, in a way, but Jared accredited the abundance of pictures to the fact that Jared made some pretty ridiculous faces as a baby, faces that were too good not to share with others. “She still hurt me, Meg. Dad too. I’ve been literally sick about it.”

The words leave Megan’s voice sounding broken. “I know. I’m sorry. Look, what are you doing this weekend? Maybe I can come by – maybe Jeff will wanna come too – and we can talk about it. This over the phone bullshit is crap and I’m getting tears all over my phone. It’s gonna get water damage,” she laughs.
“Actually, I’m driving to Dallas with Jensen to tell his parents. But it sounds like a good plan for when I get home. I might need it after this weekend.” Jared feels Jensen’s eyes on him and he can’t exactly read the expression. It’s certainly not a negative one, but the emotions are too jumbled to sort out.

“It’s gonna be fine, Jay,” Jensen says, soothingly and loud enough so that Megan can hear.

“See, Jay. It’s gonna be fine ,” Megan parrots. “But seriously, that’s some heavy shit. You call me if it goes south? Even though it won’t. I just wanna let you know you can call me.”

Megan is right about having a lot more to talk about but this isn’t the time or the place. “Yeah. I will,” he says, feeling a small part of his heart piece back together. “Thanks for calling, Meg.”

“Thanks for listening. And say ‘hi’ to Jensen for me, okay?”

They say their goodbyes in a long drawn out way, but in the end, it’s good. No matter how today’s barbeque at Josh’s house goes, Jared knows he’ll have this and it’s enough to keep him going.

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Jensen slows the car in front of Josh’s house and shifts it into park. “Well, we’re here,” he says, even though the fact is obvious. It’s something to fill the silence and delay the moment of them actually getting out of the car. Pulling the keys from the ignition, Jensen turns towards Jared. “So…”

“So…” Jared repeats on the end of a long exhale. “You ready to do this?”

“No, not yet.” Inhaling, he meets Jared’s eyes and damn he loves that man. It’s not how he looks in this moment, it’s everything else. Jared has to be as nervous as Jensen is to go in that house, maybe even more so, but he’s sitting there making sure Jensen’s okay. He’s so considerate like that and it rattles Jensen, makes his heart beat louder. Hooking the neck of Jared’s t-shirt, he leans close enough to slot their lips together. Jared’s reaction to the kiss is immediate, he goes with the liquid movements that Jensen’s touch has shifted him into, melting into it and humming in appreciation of the gesture.

Jensen’s brain buzzes because, while they’ve shared enough displays of affection over the last week, this feels different, like they’re trying to swallow down their sense of togetherness before Jensen’s family swarms them. Jensen’s blood courses a little faster and shifts his position in the driver’s seat so that when he parts his lips further, Jared has room to deepen the kiss. They linger in the moment, hands holding onto each other in fear that they’ll stop breathing if they break contact. Unfortunately, they eventually have to pull back, Jensen clearing his throat and trying to look presentable because he doesn’t feel like getting caught like this. Clearing his throat again, his voice is a whisper when he says, “Yeah. Needed that.”

“I think I did too,” Jared says, scratching at the back of his neck. “We should just stay in the car and do that. We’ll send your family a text,” he jokes to keep the mood light but Jared’s already opening the passenger side door.

Jensen’s quick to get his head back in the game, he goes around the side of the car and gets Jared’s wheelchair ready for him, holding it steady while the younger man situates himself in it.

Thankfully, Josh has posted a big sign on the front door alerting guests to go around the back of the house. It is so much easier for Jared’s wheelchair to navigate over the grass on the lawn than the steps leading to the house and then the ones Jensen knows lay inside the front door. Jared lets Jensen lead the way, since he’s the only one who knows it, and soon enough they find themselves in a bustle of activity. It’s not like his grandmother’s party months ago; it’s much more subdued. But his family is his family, and they’re all already seated around a large table snacking on the large spread
that Jensen knows is there because of his mother. He doesn’t understand why his mother always insists on having enough food for more than double the guests at any party, but she doesn’t make any effort to adjust the quantity she brings. She still insists on getting at least one thing that each person loves; the problem is, everyone has a different “favorite” snack. The fact that she always does this comforts Jensen because it reminds him of where he comes from and what he can depend on. Shaking his head, they make their way towards the group.

It’s Mikey who spots them first. “Jared!” he screams, running full force towards Jared and pouncing onto the seated man’s lap. Jared catches him before he makes any real contact, swinging the child into a position that’s comfortable for them both. Jared laughs but doesn’t get to have much more of a reaction when Mikey’s mother runs forward apologetically.

“Mikey!” she scolds. “Oh my gosh, I’m sorry!” She says to Jared before turning to the child again. “Mikey, we don’t just jump on people. You could have hurt Jared.”

“It’s okay. Really. No harm done,” Jared smiles, and gestures towards Mikey with a nod of his head. “I think someone is just a little excited about anything with wheels.”

“But still,” she protests. “I’m sorry. That’s no way to be welcomed to our home.”

“Are you kidding me?” Jared pulls a wide smile. “That’s the best way to be welcomed!” He rolls his chair back and forth to gain momentum and then pops it up slightly, getting a laugh out of the boy. “Hi, Mikey. It’s good to see you again.”

“Hi, Jared!” He giggles again and puts both of his hands on the sides of Jared’s face, forcing him to make a weird fishy-face and then laughs again. “Can you take me for a ride again like last time?” His excitement makes him practically yell the question.

Josh swoops in and plucks the child from Jared’s lap. “How about Uncle Jensen and Jared get a chance to say hello first? Then, if Jared says it’s okay, you can go for a ride with him.” Josh waits for his son’s enthusiastic nod before turning towards Jared. “This one’s been really excited for you to arrive.” He laughs and smiles at Jared. “Hi, Jared. Nice to see you again.” He extends his free hand towards Jared and they meet in a firm handshake.

“You too, Josh. Thank you for putting this together. Really. I mean…thanks.” Jared says.

“My pleasure. Seriously, once I put the idea in mom’s head, she did most of the prep-work, so I got off pretty easy. You and Jensen have the hard part.” He gives a jut of his chin to indicate that they are in on the same secret. Turning his attention to his son, he speaks close to his ear so that the boy can hear him. “Hey, Mikey, you haven’t even said hello to your Uncle Jensen.”

“Yeah, and you haven’t even said hello to your brother Jensen,” Jensen teases, going in for a hug with Josh, slapping his brother on the back. During the hug, Mikey transfers himself so that his arms are hooked around Jensen’s neck, when the man pulls back, he has a firm grasp on his nephew.

“Hey, Mikey!”

“Hi, Uncle Jen!” Mikey squeals, his happiness turning into peels of laughter when Jensen takes advantage of the fact that he’s got the boy in his clutches and tickles his belly full force. “No! Stop!” Mikey tries to get out but he’s laughing too hard. He’s not making much effort to get away from his uncle, just laughing and slapping at Jensen’s tickling fingers. “No tickling Uncle Jen!”

“Oh, is that a new rule?” Jensen laughs and puts his nephew down on the ground, letting the boy try to tickle him and giving him some exaggerated laughter for his troubles. The little boy runs off, exerting his energy on something else for the time being, leaving Jensen glad that Mikey was the first
one to greet them. He left a smile on Jared’s face and set the tone as something light and playful.

“Baby!” Donna says, throwing her hands up in the air as she rises from her seat. She meets Jared and Jensen halfway, hugging Jensen as he leans down to kiss her on the cheek. “We were wondering when you were finally going to get here. Did you hit any traffic? Are you hungry? I made some of those little sliders you liked last time. And Josh marinated some ribs to put on the grill. You want anything?”

Jensen laughs. “Yeah, maybe time to answer you?”

“Oh, you!” She swats at Jensen’s shoulder and kisses him on the cheek. “Such a smart ass.” Turning her attention towards Jared, she leans down so as to kiss him hello. “Hi, sweetheart. How was the trip?”

“It was fine. No traffic or anything. But I can’t say I’m not glad to be out of the car.”

“Well, we’re glad you’re here.” She nods and ushers the two men towards the rest of the family.

Jensen’s struck by how different this meeting is when juxtaposed with the first time they met Jared. His parents had started off with a layer of forced friendliness before it gave way to genuinely becoming fond of Jared. This time, they’re warm right from the get-go. Jensen can tell by the sound of his mother’s voice, the way her pitch changes when he grabs Jared’s hand and tries to have him follow her. He’s glad the laugh shared between Donna and Jared isn’t one of discomfort when they find out that Jared can’t wheel as fast as Donna can walk with only the use of one hand.

Jared’s disability may have caused some added concern from his family in the beginning but he can tell they’re actively trying to acclimate themselves to it.

Jensen and Jared make their rounds, saying hello to everyone in turn. Josh stayed true to his word, he got the whole family there. Mackenzie and her husband greeted them with open smiles and pretty sincere questions as to how Jared’s first year at Arkin High is going. Alan Ackles had made it his job to get the boys a cold round of iced tea after giving them both a hello. But the queen of the family sit patiently in her chair, waiting for Jensen to make his way towards her.

“Hi grandma,” Jensen says, leaning down to place a kiss on his grandmother’s cheek.

“Hello, sweetheart! It’s good to see that face.” She squeezes one weathered hand around Jensen’s younger one.

Jensen laughs and pats the top of Grandma Dorothy’s hand with his other. “It’s good to see you too.”

“It’s good to see my face? Bah…I’m just an old lady. Nothing to look at.” She gives a good natured laugh and turns her head towards Jared, eyes brightening. “Ahh! My knight in shining armor! It’s so good to see you Jared! I saved you a spot right here next to me.” She pats the empty space at the table beside her.

“Well thank you,” Jared slays with a smile. “It’s wonderful to see you too. How have you been doing? Any more falls?” He teases.

“Thank heavens, no. My trusty old feet haven’t let me down! But…I’m good. Happy to be here. Happy to be with my family.” She sits back in her chair and not too subtly straining so that her cheek is offered to Jared. When the younger man doesn’t seem to get the point, she feigns a cough and exaggerates the lean towards him, fishing for a kiss.

Jensen stifles a laugh with his fist. His grandmother is adorable. Only she could lament over getting
older and then act like the damsel in distress that she played herself to be when Jared caught her from toppling off the deck upon their last meeting. Thankfully, Jared gets the hint and wheels towards the woman so he can place a kiss on her cheek.

“That’s more like it,” Grandma Dorothy says in smug satisfaction. “You’ve got yourself quite the gentlemen,” she teases, poking at Jensen’s ribs. “He knows how to make an old lady smile. Bet he knows how to make you smile too.”

“Grandma!” Jensen gives her a pointed look but dissolves into joining her in laughter. He wishes the day could stay as easy as this because this feels like a good pace. Integrating themselves into each other’s lives and families is a slow process and he feels concern over the fact that he’s about to jolt them into overdrive.

For now, they settle themselves at the table. Jared does take the offered seat beside Grandma Dorothy, with Jensen on his other side. The round table makes it easy to have eye contact with everyone. Under the table, Jared finds his hand and squeezes it the entire time they make small talk between taking bites of food. The news they have to share with his family is caught in his throat, rising and falling like he’s trying to find a good time to intervene. He’s putting off talking about anything serious because he’d really like Jared to fill his belly with something but he supposes they’re both too nervous to make any real attempt at eating. At best, they’re picking at their food and his mother is starting to notice so Jensen cuts her off before she can voice any concern.

“So…” Jensen says, clearing his throat loud enough that all eyes turn on him. The barbeque suddenly feels like a terrible idea. There are too many expectant looks and, while he doesn’t mind being in the spotlight in his classroom, he’s folding under the pressure of getting his news out and leaving everyone unscathed.

“Jen, baby, you alright?” Donna asks.

Jensen really wishes his mother would stop calling him baby. She doesn’t do it often, but today it seems like she’s been doing it all afternoon. “Yeah. I’m fine. I was just going to say that, I asked Josh to host this barbeque at his house because I – Jared and I – have something to share with you. And I need you to let me get it all out before cutting me off. Okay?” He sends a look at those who notoriously butt in, his sister and mother.

Alan looks to Josh for a solid second, eyebrows knitting like he’s hoping to read Josh’s mind and make sense of the whole thing, before he shifts his attention to Jensen. “Sure, son. You’ve got the floor.”

“So…” Jensen starts again, his voice dry. He takes a large sip from his iced tea, watching the cubes clink the glass and then lifting his eyes to scan those of his family. “So, it’s true, we don’t get together enough and see each other more. You’re right Grandma, we really should do it more often. We don’t always need a reason to get together. And I guess you’d been thinking there is no reason for today’s get together. But there is and it’s…” Clearing his throat, Jensen feels the words get jumbled in his mouth. He doesn’t know how to make them come out right or what order to place them in. Looking at Jared, a smile curves his lips slightly because he’s reminded that the order doesn’t matter. He simply has to say them and find out how they fall. “I know Jared and I haven’t been together for that long, and it’s been a shock for us to find out, but…Jared’s pregnant. Just thought y’all should know.”

There is absolute silence. Not one sound is made as people process what Jensen just said.

Mikey, propped on his mother’s lap, turns to her and screws his expression tightly in confusion. “What is preg-ant?”
“Pregnant,” she corrects. “And it means Jared is going to have a baby. Well…Jared and Uncle Jensen are going to have a baby.”

“That’s the plan,” Jared interjects, biting his lower lip and looking a little green around the gills.

“My baby is going to have a baby?” Donna says, covering her smiling lips with the spread out fingers of her left hand.

Shrugging, Jensen sheepishly says, “yeah. Like Jared said, that’s the plan.”

The silence on the family breaks, shattering into a chorus of voices and no one is in their seats anymore save for Grandma Dorothy, Josh, Jared and Jensen. The rest are swarming Jared and Jensen. There are hugs and kisses of congratulations from the women, particularly Donna who doesn’t seem intent on letting Jared go any time this century. Alan is hugging his son, shaking his head with a laugh about how Jensen seems to find ways of surprising them every time. In the end, everyone has a show of excitement. Grandma Dorothy reaches over and hugs Jared to her, babbling on about how babies are such blessing and telling him that he’s going to have such a beautiful baby.

When the excitement fades away to clearer thinking, people take their seats again and look to Jared and Jensen for something more, some other words to fill them in or keep them in the loop. When all they get is Jared and Jensen exchanging nervous glances, Mackenzie pipes up with, “what? Something wrong with the baby?”

As a whole, the Ackles’ reactions are overwhelmingly positive but Jensen can’t let himself get sucked into that. His family deserves to know what’s going on. “No…It’s not that. The baby’s fine. We just went to the doctor and she told us everything with the baby looks great.”

“It’s me,” Jared interrupts. “Um…long story short…I was told I could never get pregnant. But…surprise! Guess I managed to find a way anyway. And, my doctors – my specialists because of my paraplegia, not my obstetrician – think that having a baby is a really bad idea. They wanted me to terminate.” He pauses because there are sharp gasps and he’s used to that reaction by now. “But I’m not going to do that.” Grandma Dorothy pats Jared’s hand, the gesture looking like one of solidarity. Watching Jared struggle to get words out pains Jensen. “Jay, I can tell them. You don’t have to.”

Reaching out, Jensen brushes a piece of Jared’s hair behind his ear. It’s such a simple movement, but it’s full of the exposed quality that comes with something so intimate being exposed in the face of so many onlookers.

“No. I wanna explain. I want them to know what we’re doing here.” Jared nods, swallows thickly, and continues. He gets it all out. It’s a bit wordy but he manages to explain their whole situation in layman’s terms until everything – the threat of miscarriage, issues with the fetus, Jared’s possible hardships and death – lay before them. Jared doesn’t hold his punches, he paints a real picture in a way that allows Jensen to understand that Jared’s not just skilled with brushes and pigments.

The silence returns but it’s somber this time, a different type of shock than the first announcement.

Clearing the air in front of him with a wave of his hand, Alan clears his throat. “Alright, so I might not completely understand everything yet but…what I’m hearing is that you two have an uncertain road ahead of you. But, parenthood is uncertain in itself. So, it seems to me that, even what you two have to gear up for is just another version of that kid keeping you on your toes.” He puts up a hand to stop anyone from cutting him off. “That’s not to say that I’m not worried. Jensen’s my son and I want what’s best for him, so it’s concerning to hear that there is the possibility of an unhappy ending. And that doesn’t mean I’m not worried about you too, Jared. I just think that you have to take it one step at a time and we have to take those steps with you, if you know what I mean.”
Jensen thinks he does. He and Jared can take things as they come, and his family will be right behind them. They’re not going to be blindly absorbed in the happiness of Jared and Jensen having a baby, they’re going to consciously absorbed in it. He can see his mother’s face and can read every nervous twitch of her smile. Nowhere on her face does it read disappointment but the concern and worry is obvious. It’s different than the worry Jared’s parents displayed and he supposes that’s because all Jensen’s parents are risking is the life of a grandchild they don’t know and their own son’s broken heart. Alan said he is worried about Jared too and Jensen believes him, but Jared isn’t Alan and Donna’s son. It’s not the same.

Still, their reaction is supportive.

Taking several deep breaths, Jensen closes his eyes. He can’t believe the trajectory of his life at this moment and that he and Jared just announced a pregnancy to his entire family. He wouldn’t have predicted this in a million years.

The questions start almost immediately, and while his family means well, it’s practically too much. Maybe it actually is too much, because Jared grabs Jensen’s hand and looks at him with a pinched expression that spikes Jensen’s concern. “What?”

Jared’s eyes avoid Jensen’s family as he ducks towards Jensen’s ear to keep the conversation between the two of them. “I’m definitely gonna be sick. Like…now. And I’d rather not throw up on your grandmother’s lap.”

“Excuse us,” Jensen says immediately, finding ways to wheel Jared away from the table and through the back door of Josh’s house without bumping into anyone or anything. It’s a straight path to the bathroom at the back of the house and Jensen lets Jared take the wheels from there. It’s only a moment after Jared pushes the door shut behind him that Jensen hears retching. He doesn’t envy Jared, but knows the man has nothing to be embarrassed about around his family. There is no way they wouldn’t understand, especially since most of the people outside have dealt first hand with pregnancy. Leaving the man to empty his stomach, Jensen heads towards the kitchen to fetch his boyfriend a glass of water. He doesn’t expect to see Grandma Dorothy standing there, her hand perched on the kitchen counter for balance. “Grandma, you okay?”

“Of course I am. I wanted to come and check on Jared. He doing okay?” She offers a smile.

“Yeah, uhh, he’s been nauseous like this for a while. Kinda hits him at all times in the day, especially when he’s worked up over something or nervous. It’s a stupid name, morning sickness, huh.” Jensen lets out a nervous laugh and scratches at the back of his head.

“Sweetheart, I know all about it. When I was pregnant with my first baby, your uncle, I threw up morning, noon and night. I used to walk around with an empty coffee can just in case I couldn’t make it to something more appropriate. I thought your grandfather was going to go crazy with worry. But it all turned out alright in the end. Second baby didn’t make me nearly as sick.” She watches the way Jensen’s face pales and pats his hand. “Let’s just worry about the first baby, hmm?”

“Yeah,” Jensen says with a quick nod.

“Jared, he’s tough. I know it. What you two said out there was some pretty scary stuff, but Jared’s a fighter. I could tell from the moment I met him. I know in my gut that he and the baby are going to be okay.”

“You think?” Jensen asks, hopefulness shining in his eyes. His grandmother is neither a soothsayer nor a doctor but, for Jensen, her blessing always holds just as much weight.
Shaking her head, Dorothy snickers in amusement. “I know you younger people do things a little backwards now a days, having a baby before marriage and all. But you do love him, don’t you?”

“Oh of course I do!” The words are out of Jensen’s mouth so quickly that he almost chokes on them. He’s not sure what his grandmother is getting at, but she gives him an approving purse of her lips and nod.

“And you still got that ring I gave you? Your grandfather’s wedding band?” She waits for Jensen’s nod before continuing. “So you remember your promise about only using it on someone worthy then? Because now seems like a pretty good time to use it on Jared. You know, make an honest man out of him.” She nudges Jensen with her elbow and gives him a sly smile.

“Oh, grandma,” Jensen gets out before snorting with exasperated laughter. “Believe me, I remember all that. I asked Jared to marry me last week.”

“And?” Dorothy prods.

“And he said no. He cried a lot and told me that no one had ever done anything so sweet and that he loves me so much but he refused. He said a baby isn’t a reason to get married and that decisions shouldn’t be rushed just because of the pregnancy.” Distracting himself from thinking about the letdown he’d initially felt when Jared rejected him, Jensen turns and fills a glass with water from the kitchen faucet.

Dorothy makes a repeat action of nodding and humming in approval. “So he’s handsome and smart. He’s a catch Jensen, I’m telling you. It’s good to hear that you boys still have your heads on right. The baby may not have been planned but at least you are both being responsible about it. Good for you! I’m proud of you. I’m proud of both of you!” She gives Jensen a kiss on the cheek and then gestures towards the bathroom door when she hears the toilet flush. “Now I’ll give you two some privacy. You take care of my knight in shining armor, alright?” She attempts a wink but it comes off as a blink of both of her eyes, making Jensen laugh. Slowly making her way towards the back door, she disappears from view by the time Jensen turns to face his approaching boyfriend.

Jared’s eyes are less foggy but he’s still wearing the face of someone wiped out from throwing up.

“Here,” Jensen says, pressing the glass into Jared’s hand. “How you doin’?”

Taking the time for several slow sips of water, Jared gives Jensen a helpless expression. “Man, if that’s going to continue for the entirety of the pregnancy, I am never going to get used to it.” Taking another sip of water, Jared holds the glass up like he’s toasting Jensen. “Thanks.”

“You ready to go back out there? Because we can hide out here for a while.” Crossing his arms, Jensen leans casually against the wall beside Jared, watching him, finding it growingly easier to realize when to push things with his boyfriend.

“Actually,” Jared shrugs, looking like he believes the words he’s about to say are as crazy as they sound. “I’m fucking starving. Going out there, where the food is, sounds like a plan.”

Eyebrows raising, Jensen hums but doesn’t question things. He supposes the onslaught of reactions from his family must be waning and there is a large possibility that they will be able to fall back into the comfortable conversations they had been having. Jared and he both need that. There is an infectious quality to his family’s energy; Jensen can feel it whittling away at him and traveling through his bloodstream. It’s like they know something that he has yet to learn and Jensen’s figuring out a way to get there. “Yeah. Sounds great. Lead the way,” he offers because Jared is impressive like that; the two of them are equally searching for the right move in this uncharted territory but Jared
is braver in so many ways. Always going forward even though the uncertainties are staggering. Jensen’s almost dizzy when he realizes that somehow, Jared’s teaching him to walk.

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Jared flops down on the hotel’s king sized bed, head hitting the pillow at the same time the realization that he’s more tired than he thinks does. He supposes that makes sense. He just went through quite an emotional whirlwind and it’s taking a lot out of him.

While there are parts of his heart that hurt when he thinks about the fact that Jensen’s family seems infinitely more supportive than his own, Jared is mostly thrumming with gratitude that Donna and Alan are taking time to process things while making it known that they are excited for another grandbaby. It is comforting and stops Jared from thinking he has been making one wrong decision after another. Even grandma Dorothy is rooting for him, which is both adorable and sweet. He’s pretty sure Jensen’s not aware of it, but while Jared was in the bathroom, he heard snippets of Jensen talking to his grandmother. It’s good to know that she understands why Jared rejected Jensen’s proposal. It’s not that his heart isn’t heading in that direction. Actually, it’s mostly on it’s way there. But he and Jensen aren’t ready for that yet, they both know that. And knowing that grandma Dorothy agrees with them settles Jared’s worries over the rejection being a misstep.

Propping himself up on his elbows just in time to watch Jensen exit the bathroom, Jared smiles.

“Hey,” Jensen says with a smile that makes Jared’s heart stutter. He holds out a glass of water towards Jared along with a pill case. “These were packed along with my things. I figured you needed to take them.”

“Thanks.” Jared takes the items and pushes himself into a seated position. “I was going to get up and search around for them but I needed a minute to recharge.” He flips open the top of the case and swallows down each pill.

After giving him time to complete his task, Jensen asks, “How are you feeling?”

“Tired mostly. It was a long day,” he explains. Combing his fingers through his hair, he brushes it back and takes a deep breath. “It was really nice of your parents to ask us to stay the night. I almost felt guilty about not accepting their offer.”

“Don’t worry about it. They understand and take no offence. Their house isn’t wheelchair friendly, unless you want to sleep on the couch downstairs. Trust me...it’s not that comfortable. I’ve spent a few drunken nights there myself. Besides, I figured you might appreciate the privacy. And the fact that the bathroom is five feet away.” The bed dips as Jensen takes a seat on the edge.

“Yeah, I know. But...they genuinely looked like they wanted us to stay. I feel bad turning them down.” Jared lets himself fall back against the headboard and his palm instinctively finds the swell of his middle. It’s exposed now that he’s rid himself of his shirt and pants, but he hadn’t really thought about the fact beforehand. Now, it’s clear to see the changes to his body, and while he feels no shame over that, he does feel Jensen’s eyes on him and it sends a pang of anxiety through him. Clearing his throat, he refocuses. “I guess seeing them tomorrow for breakfast before we head out is a good way to make it up to them.” He smiles at the way Donna pleaded with them to stay one more day despite knowing that both men had work on Monday. Jared may see his family fairly often, but Jensen’s family only gets him in dribs and drabs. It’s understandable that she wants to soak her son in when she can.

“You sure you’re going to be up for that?” Jensen says, shifting so he’s leaning against the
headboard as well, legs stretched out next to Jared’s.

“For breakfast? Are you kidding me? I love breakfast. I know I’m throwing most of it up lately, but I still love it. And this kid makes me fucking starving in the morning,” he teases, laughing at the actual thought. “I’ll be fine.” He means everything he says but he involuntarily grimaces at a twinge forming in his shoulder blades.

Jensen catches it immediately. “What?”

“Nothing important. I’m just sore, that’s all. My physical therapy schedule has been fucked up and lately I’ve been confined to sitting for longer than I usually do. Now that I’ve gotten out of that chair and can stretch out in bed, I’ll be fine.” He proves his point by sinking lower in the bed and elongating his spine as much as he can by stretching his hands over his head. He’s glad he shucked off his pants and shirt before he landed on the bed earlier, because that seems like too much effort at the moment.

Jensen thinks over the words for a moment. “You gonna go back to PT when we get home?”

“Yeah. Of course, now that I know what’s going on with me. Man, you should have seen it...during my last physical therapy session I pretty much lashed out at Marcus over nothing. He was only doing his job. And I just lost it and...I gave up. I never give up, not like that. I haven’t been back since and it’s been way too long. I know that’s all my fault, but I had no idea what was going on with me and I was so damn tired all the time.” He looks over at Jensen and his boyfriend doesn’t have to say a word. Jared can read him plain as day. Rolling his eyes playfully, he drawls out, “Yeah, I know. I’m going back. Don’t worry. And we’ve got another appointment with Dr. Atlas on Monday afternoon.”

“Yep. Got it in my calendar.” Jensen pulls his shirt over his head and Jared gets a good view of what he’s got underneath.

The view makes Jared’s mouth water, if he’s being honest with himself. He wasn’t kidding when he told Jensen the other day that he’s been horny as hell. He’s drowning in want. But that fact coupled with feeling worn out all the time never adds up to anything sexy. Besides, Jared would be lying if he said he didn’t feel all twisted up inside about the glaringly obvious fact that they haven’t had penetrative sex since before their fight. He okayed it with Dr. Atlas over a very embarrassing phone call; well, it was embarrassing on Jared’s part. The doctor didn’t seem flustered by it at all. A wave of exhaustion hits him and he yawns, the muscles of his torso getting into the action and stretching. With a sleepy voice, Jared prattles on a bit more. “I know I don’t know your parents very well but their kindness really touched me today. It means a lot, Jen. And they actually seem excited that I,” he clears his throat, “we are going to have a baby.”

“Yeah, they do. I mean...my mom is crazy about babies. She’s been on my case for years, trying to whittle away at me and come around to the idea of being a dad. And Josh has that smug look on his face, like he’s recruited another person over to daddyhood. It’s just...” Jensen’s words drop off as he scratches at the back of his neck while searching for ways to finish his sentence. “They really like you, Jay. It might have been a rocky beginning but you’ve charmed them. Especially Grandma Dorothy. She’ll steal you away if I’m not careful.”

That makes Jared laugh, his eyes creasing and dimples popping. He’s happy, he really is, but the pain makes him wince and he tries to stifle a low grunt of discomfort.

“You’re really hurting, huh?” Jensen’s voice is full of concern as he lowers himself to lay beside his boyfriend.
“Yeah,” Jared says truthfully and thinks that this new plan of attack in being open with Jensen about how he’s feeling and his physical disability is starting to feel good. He knows he has a habit of toughing things out so that other’s don’t perceive him as weak but he doesn’t have to do that with Jensen. “I’m achey all over right now. It will pass. Sleep will help.” He turns on his side, burrowing his face in the pillow, and exhales, rolling his shoulders back.

There is silence between them and then Jensen’s hands find Jared. They are warm and strong against the agitated muscles in Jared’s shoulders and upper back. The moan of appreciation that leaves Jared’s mouth is automatic and sounds slightly sinful. If he’d had double the energy, Jared would no doubt take this sign of affection as the onset of foreplay. As it is, however, he’s taking it as a concerned show of warmth and he molds backwards into Jensen’s hands.

“Good?” Jensen whispers as he slides himself closer.

“Mmm hmm,” Jared moans out. Even though Jared can’t physically feel it, he knows Jensen’s legs are tangling with his own. It’s a cute habitual quirk Jensen has and while it sometimes gets annoying when Jared unknowingly gets tangled up in them, he does feel comforted in the act of togetherness.

Jensen has gone on and on about the powers of Jared’s hands, but he shouldn’t sell himself short. Jensen’s hands work their magic on Jared’s spine, coasting up and down the younger man’s back and over the broad spans of his shoulders. It is so good that Jared is flitting in and out of drowsiness. He wants to sleep but he doesn’t want to miss out on the way Jensen is touching him. What wakes him a little more fully is the feeling of Jensen brushing his lips on the nape of his neck. A breath leaves Jared’s lips as they fluidly shift into a smile. “Jen,” he breathes out.

“Hmm?” Jensen shifts closer, working so that he’s curled his body to bracket Jared’s. They connect at the waist, Jensen’s groin saddling up to the curve of Jared’s ass. His breath teases at Jared’s ear and Jensen’s lips drag over the exposed column of Jared’s neck. “You’re so tense, baby.”

“Uh-huh,” Jared nods because he can’t find actual words. His hand is still on his belly, tracing the new swell and figuring out it’s place in his life. This little baby caused quite a commotion this weekend and it makes Jared smile that he’s able to think that, that he’s able to accredit his baby with something because he or she is alive and present. He told his sister the baby is the size of a lime, that it’s still so small, but he’s absolutely in love with the tiny fetus. It’s impossible for him not to be. He loves his child and hopes that he can bring him or her safely into the world and into Jensen’s family, who seems to want exactly that. Fingers stroking lovingly, Jared can feel where the part of his stomach starts to push out and curve. It’s so slight but he can’t stop touching it. It’s soothing and coupled with the feeling of Jensen kissing and massaging him, Jared’s feeling all warm and fuzzy. “That feels good,” he hums out.

“Good,” Jensen nuzzles his nose into the mess of Jared’s hair and takes a slow inhale. He feels a quick jolt of tension stiffen parts of Jared’s body and makes an instinctual shushing noise. “Relax, okay? I’ve got you.” His hands run over Jared’s biceps, working out the tension there from wheeling himself around. He traces each muscle, finding it and rolling his fingers into it. “Shh,” he utters again through lips that are pressed behind Jared’s ear.

“You’re making me feel bad.” Jared sighs and lets his head fall back onto Jensen’s shoulder. “I’m too damn tired to reciprocate.”

“This isn’t about that. It’s about you letting go of some of that tension and letting me take care of you. That’s all. You’ve had a pretty straining few days.” His palms brush up and down Jared’s arms, reaching over Jared’s chest to massage the muscles there. It isn’t sexual; instead, it is soothing and slow. Everything is drawn out and Jensen takes his time working over all the muscles of Jared’s body. “I’m no physical therapist, but maybe this can help a little.”
“Yeah, it is.” Jared’s speech is pulled halfway into sleep. “I love you,” he breathes out against the pillow and sighs happily because he means the words for both Jensen and the baby. He likes that he knows that.

“I love you too,” Jensen says while reaching to place a kiss on his jawline. The older man’s hands are working down Jared’s arms, over his chest, and eventually find the one that Jared has placed on his abdomen. For a minute, they freeze. Jared desperately wants Jensen to keep touching him in those slow, loving, sweeping motions and he’s terrified that the swell in his belly has scared him away. For a moment, it seems like it has. Jensen’s hands retreat to higher ground and massage the tension out of Jared’s neck. Eventually, however, they find Jared’s hand again. This time, Jensen doesn’t freeze. Instead, his hands mimic the tracing motion that Jared has been doing across his own stomach. The sensation coaxes a shuddering breath out of Jared and a smile tugs at his lips. “That feels good,” Jared says again, but this time he means more than just the massage.

“Yeah?” Jensen presses his front closer to Jared’s back so his palms can rest on Jareds torso with greater ease. He inhales happily when Jared nods his head and leans some of his weight back into Jensen for greater contact.

In the end, Jared’s not sure why Jensen keeps touching his belly. He assumes it’s because Jared said it felt good and Jensen was intent on making Jared feel good tonight.

But to Jared, it felt right. Knowing the swell of his stomach is fitted into Jensen’s palm immediately drains away the stress of the day. And for whatever Jensen’s reasons, Jared’s glad that he and Jensen are snuggled up together like this. He’s safe and content, and sleep hits him without letting any worries show their ugly heads.

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Jared has never been so happy to see his home. Breakfast with the Ackles was lovely and the car ride home was uneventful, but Jared is ready to be back in his own four walls, where everything is wheelchair accessible and he doesn’t have to exude more energy trying to do everyday, usual things. Energy isn’t exactly something he has in high supply right now.

Jensen was amazing for every second of the weekend. The man is present, and he’s there. It’s been great, but something in the back of Jared’s head is nagging at him. It feels like Jensen is too present. It’s not that Jared thinks Jensen is faking any of it, but Jared has an idea that Jensen might be forcing some of it to make up for past mistakes. The sentiment is sweet but Jared would much rather have a true and honest Jensen than one who is trying to make things okay for Jared.

The truth is, things aren’t okay. And that’s okay. Things don’t have to be perfect.

But he really wants Jensen and himself to go back to the way things were two weeks ago and resume their relationship from there. He might have gone about it all wrong in turning Jensen away when he originally came to apologize. He doesn’t need groveling. He needs realness. They have to talk because as nice as it was having Jensen’s hand over the protective swell housing their baby, he knows Jensen’s forcing himself.

“Jen?” Jared asks, as he transfers himself from his wheelchair to the couch. “Can you come here a second?”

“Uh, yeah. Just give me a moment.” Jensen darts outside again to get the remainder of their bags, returning in seconds and standing to face Jared. “Are you okay? What’s up?”
Shaking his head, Jared lets out a slow breath. He expected the way that Jensen hovers over him, treating him with more caution than usual. It’s annoying but that doesn’t matter to Jared because he knows the real reason the older man is doing that. Jensen is worried, scared and concerned; Jared can relate to that. If that’s what Jensen needs to do to cope, then he’ll let him hover a little more than necessary. He does, however, feel like reassuring Jensen that he’s not going to break. The things Dr. Atlas told him were scary, but he’s not going to allow thoughts of him breaking, because that’s not going to happen. Certainly not when the baby is the size of a lime. Living life as usual isn’t going to impact the baby, that part is all up to Jared’s body. “Jen...I’m fine. I just wanted to talk about...well, about a lot of things actually.”

“Uh huh,” Jensen says, frozen in his spot and raising an eyebrow at Jared. “I’m annoying you aren’t I? I can tell...I know. I’m sorry. Before we got together, you told me everything you deal with. I promised that I wouldn’t treat you with kid gloves because I’ve seen what you can do. And here I am going back on that promise. But things are different now Jared, and that’s all my fault. That’s me. And so - ”

Jared cuts him off with a laugh. He doesn’t find the words funny, but the way they nervously spill out of Jensen’s mouth is completely endearing and he can’t help himself. “How about you stop the ramble and come sit next to me.”

Scratching at the nape of his neck, Jensen gives an exasperated sigh. “I was rambling?”

“Yeah, you kinda were.” Jared smiles and shifts to the left of the couch, indicating that Jensen should sit beside him. “You know it’s adorable when you do that?”

“It’s not. It’s stupid. Like I’m a lovestruck idiot who can’t get any words out.” A faint blush hits Jensen’s cheeks and he licks his lips.

Seeing the sliver of pink tongue reaffirms Jared’s original declaration that Jensen is adorable. “You are a lovestruck idiot. Well...not the idiot part. You’re not stupid Jensen. I think it’s cute that you get flustered like that. And that you care so much.” Jared gives Jensen a smile to show that he means it. “And, for the record, you’re not annoying me. Yes, it’s annoying to be hovered over all the time, but it’s not annoying when it’s done with all the right intentions. It’s more frustrating than anything else.” Jared grabs Jensen’s hand and laces their fingers together. “And I’m lucky you care so much. But...If something is bothering me, you’ll be the first to know. You don’t have to worry over me like I’ll fall apart if you don’t. You’ve never needed to do that before.”

“Well there wasn’t a kid before.” Jensen licks his lips again, this time the action is more out of nervousness than anything else.

“And how does that change my ability to self advocate?

“It just does Jared!” Jensen looks surprised at his own outburst and reels himself back in. “I never thought you needed me to check in on you or question if you were okay. But then you got pregnant and all I can think about is what Dr. Atlas said about your paralysis getting worse. So...I find myself making sure you are okay all the time. I can’t help myself. I’m sorry. It’s who I am. I worry about people. I worry about everyone at Arkin. I worry about my family. And now I worry about you two fold since finding out about the baby.” Jensen’s voice breaks, features pinched as he shakes his head in an attempt to get a hold of his emotions. He pulls his hand away from Jared so that he can hold his head in both hands and speak into his palms. “I’m sorry.” His voice cracks again. “I’m sorry. I’m trying. I just don’t know what to do and I hate that all of this is my fault.”

Hearing the self accusation again makes Jared rip Jensen’s hands away from his face, holding both of them in his own. “Stop that!” There is anger bubbling in Jared but he’s not angry at Jensen. He’s
angry at this situation for making Jensen feel that way. “Stop! Don’t ever say that. Ever again.” He pulls both hands to his lips and kisses them. “Jen, the word isn’t ‘fault’ because it isn’t anyone’s ‘fault’.” He places another slow kiss to Jensen’s hand. “I know we drank a lot that night, but I recall how much I wanted you. I wanted you very, very, very bad and I think you felt the same. Having sex that resulted in a baby doesn’t put anyone at fault. We’re both responsible for it, but not at fault for it. I love you and I want you, that’s kind of how sexual relationships go. Shit, I still want you. I miss being with you like that.” Jared shakes his head and pushes the thought down because that doesn’t matter at the moment. He thinks over some of the other concerns Jensen had voiced, and things become clearer. He hadn’t seen his pregnancy completely from Jensen’s point of view until now, until he knew that Jensen is just waiting for the second where the baby will damage his spine even further. The thought is terrifying; Jared doesn’t know how Jensen can get through the day with the fear on his mind. “Jen, the baby is this big,” Jared holds his thumb and pointer finger a few inches apart. “It’s not going to hurt me any right now. I can’t promise about the future, but Dr. Atlas is a great doctor. I trust her. She told us things that could happen. And she told us that she’s going to do everything in her power to make sure they don’t. I know we’re both scared, but I have to live my life trusting her.”

Jensen picks his head up and looks Jared in the eyes. “You don’t understand.” It’s comforting that instead of pressing away, Jensen seems to pull Jared closer.

“How? How don’t I understand?”

“I feel like I am ruining things. I am all statistics and chances. And you...I’ve seen you lately. When my father talked about having a new grandchild, you were smiling from ear to ear. The way your whole body lit up when we were touching your belly...You’re falling in love with the baby. And that makes sense. But I’m so scared to love it. Because I love you. And the baby might be taken away from us, and it might take you away from me. And that’s scary. Because the stakes keep feeling higher every time I see you fall more in love.” He leans forward and buries his face in the crook of Jared’s neck, pausing there and resting into the pulse of Jared’s heart. “I told you that for me, right now, I’m putting you first. But I can’t put you first when I know how much you love that kid. I feel so torn.”

“Oh, Jensen,” Jared’s voice breaks before he can get the words out. “Oh...shit...Jen…” He ducks his head lower, shifting so that Jensen can’t hide against him and they have to look each other in the eyes. “I’m sorry I didn’t realize any of this. I...I knew you were forcing some of your actions this weekend but I didn’t know it was because of that. I’m sorry you feel like you have to choose.”

“It’s not your fault.” Jensen presses their foreheads together and they share the same breath. “I guess I just wish I didn’t have to be like this. I wish I could be excited about things with you. You know, getting over not wanting kids is one thing. I can do that. But having to do it in the way that I’ve been asked to...It’s fucking hard Jared.”

“I know.” Jared reaches up a hand and strokes the scruff that’s building on the curve of Jensen’s jaw. “I know we had to talk about this. I can read your body language when you see me touching my belly. The baby is going to grow, Jensen. It’s going to be there. And I don’t want you to feel that you need to avoid it. Having you touching me there last night felt so good. I needed that.”

Jensen says nothing for a moment, only allowing his lips to press against Jared’s and linger there. “I’ll try, okay? Just give me some time.” His lips land against Jared’s again, a slight tremble to them.

“Yeah. Of course. We’ve got time.” Jared squeezes their hands. “I am not going to break.” When he is met with silence, he nudges Jensen. “Hey, listen to me. I’m not, okay? I’m not going to break. You believe me?”
“You’re not going to break,” Jensen says, testing the words out on his tongue. “You’re a fucking powerhouse, Jared. If anyone is capable of staying in one piece, it’s you.”

“You really believe that?” Jared ghosts his lips over Jensen’s.

“I do. The belief is just a little hidden from all the confusing shit.” He slips his hands out of Jared’s and coasts them up so he can cup Jared’s face. “Maybe remind me sometimes?” He presses a strong kiss to Jared’s lips and leans into it. The kiss deepens, both men finding ways to hold onto each other. Each gesture is saturated with raw emotion; they’re dripping with it. Jensen’s pulse is fervent, mind spinning over the direction things were going. His movements look torn between being unable to get enough of Jared and needing to pace himself before his heart gives out. “Oh, Jared,” he breathes out against the pulse points in Jared’s neck. He sucks a bruise there, lips dragging up and over more of the exposed flesh. “I don’t open my mouth sometimes because I don’t know what is going to come out, and I’m scared we’re both going to jump to conclusions. I know we’re trying…but…” His words die out and are mumbled under Jared’s chin.

Jared sighs, coasting his hands up Jensen’s back and pressing him close. Their lips find each other’s and kiss with short, quick assaults of each other’s mouth. It makes both of their visions dim and narrow down so that they are the only things in the room. Jared wants to kiss every inch of Jensen to make up for lost time. Pulling at the collar of Jensen’s t-shirt, he exposes his collarbone and leaves a trail of drawn out kisses there. “Jensen…I’m sorry I didn’t talk about this with you sooner. I’m sorry I didn’t know how much you were hurting.” Having the words out of his mouth makes Jared’s heart ache. He can’t stomach the idea of neglecting the torn feeling his boyfriend is dealing with. “Please talk to me. I won’t ever think your concerns are stupid.” Jared sucks in a shuddering breath and kisses the pulse point on Jensen’s neck. “I’m sorry. I’m the idiot here.”

“Stop it. Don’t talk like that.” Jensen cups Jared’s face in his hands, pulling him up so that they are eye to eye. “We both have no idea what we’re doing. You’re right, I should have told you how I feel instead of forcing myself to think differently. I’m trying, okay? I’ll be there with you. I’ll – ” Jensen goes cross-eyed to look at the finger Jared presses against his lips.

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The pleading in Jared’s eyes is palpable and Jensen wisely shelves the issue for now. “Okay. Later. Right now us.” They lock lips again as Jensen’s hands slide back towards the base of Jared’s skull and up to comb through Jared’s hair, pulling the man in for a deeper kiss.

“Us’ likes the bed.” Jared adds with a smile.

Jensen stills at that. He pulls away to look Jared in the face and they are a matched pair. Both sets of eyes churning with emotion and pulses racing. Sucking in his lips for a moment before dragging his teeth over his bottom lip, Jensen asks, “you sure?”

“Yeah. It’s okay. I checked with the doctor and everything. I promise.” Jared shifts and forces more of his weight against Jensen’s. “And I think we need it.” Tilting his chin towards Jensen, Jared kisses him before the man has a chance to say anything. He knows immediately that Jensen agrees with him solely on the way that he reacts to the kiss. His mouth molds to Jared’s, kissing the air out of him.

“I’llma pick you up,” Jensen offers in warning.
“Fuck yeah,” Jared breathes out, into their kissing mouths. He appreciates Jensen having boundaries and letting Jared do things for himself, but right now he loves the sound of being hoisted into Jensen’s capable arms. It’s a feat actually, the fact that Jensen’s strong enough to manage every inch of Jared’s body.

Their way to the bed is slow; Jensen’s taking his time getting there. Thankfully, Jared’s got a firm hold around Jensen’s shoulders and enough upper body strength to keep himself up when Jensen presses the younger man against the wall and kisses him until he’s practically passing out from need of a breath. They repeat the process several times, Jensen using a wall to press Jared’s torso against while they kiss and find out that they’re pretty good at ridding each other of articles of clothing along the way. When Jared finds the hem of Jensen’s shirt, it’s a bit of an acrobatic trick trying to get it over Jensen’s head and toss it on the floor, but they manage. Using the wall for some support, they wind up getting Jared’s shirt off too as well as both pairs of their shoes. Jensen blindly works open the button fly on Jared’s jeans, shoving them down enough to reveal his hips. That’s as far as they get when Jensen drops him on the bed with an “ouf” sound. Hovering over the younger man, Jensen delivers a chaste kiss to the corner of Jared’s mouth and falls onto his knees between Jared’s legs. He freezes, like he’s trying to figure out what to do next and then sets to motion again, folding forward enough so he can kiss the exposed span of Jared’s chest, down his breast bone and over the man’s stomach. He gets to Jared’s hips and spends a little more time there, kissing softly and trailing lower until he meets the waistband of Jared’s boxer briefs. “Lift up, hmm?”

Jared’s heart flutters for the hundredth time that day when he looks down at Jensen. He has no idea if Jensen meant to kiss so slowly over his stomach or if it was simply a means of journeying down to the waist of his jeans. He thinks, after the talk they had, that Jensen means it. It was purposeful. He can still feel the warmth of Jensen’s kisses over the swell of his stomach, leaving Jared dizzy and in love all at the same time. Adding Jensen’s actions, Jared moves so his hips raise enough and the man shimmies the denim and cotton away. Jared’s transfixed, propped up on his elbows and watching the way Jensen kisses every part of his hips and thighs, deliberately avoiding his eagerly waiting dick in a show of devotion to the whole of him. Swallowing thickly, he feels a rush of want and tenderness that make his eyes shine and a whimper leave his mouth. It’s not from pain, because whatever was ailing him last night is long gone. It’s because the struggle to let Jensen work at his own pace is brutal and the soft sweetness of the man’s actions is making Jared want to smother Jensen with kisses and never leave the bed.

It’s a gratifying thought – never leaving the bed. It would be a hell of a lot happier than the harsh lines of the real world.

Jensen silences the noises floating out of Jared’s mouth by bringing his kisses back north. He pulls away for the slightest second, ripping his pants off at gold metal Olympic speed and then they’re kissing again, bodies meeting in a magnetic pull, kissing each other again like the time between had been too long. “You sure it’s okay, Jay?” Jensen breathes in Jared’s ear.

“Yeah.” Jared had meant the word to sound sexy, drawn out and gravely, but instead it came out too needy. Desperate because he’s damn horny but mostly because he missed the hell out of Jensen. To prove he means it, he pulls Jensen back down, grabbing at his back and keeping them pressed close when he whispers in his ear. “I need you to…to make me know you aren’t going anywhere. Remind me I’m not going anywhere. Can you show me that?”

Jensen’s silent again, and Jared’s not quite sure what to make of it. He thinks maybe he pushed Jensen’s mind back to the fears he has about Jared’s health, the exact opposite of what he intended. But then Jensen’s on him again, groaning into a kiss that’s much rougher than the ones that preceded it. It sets off sparks in Jared’s belly and a new rush of blood to his dick.
“I can do that,” Jensen growls out. Moaning low in his throat, Jensen nudges Jared’s legs apart so that his torso is situated between them. Looking down at the man, his eyes travel over the way Jared’s exposed, hair fanning across the pillow and his hazel eyes locked on Jensen’s. “You tell me to stop and we stop.”

“I know.” Jared nods and grabs Jensen’s hand, leading it to his dick and keeping it there. “I’m not going to want you to stop.” Moving his hand along with Jensen’s, Jared helps Jensen find a comfortable rhythm for fist-fingering his growing arousal. “I trust you.”

Those words seem to be magic because there is a flush over Jensen’s body and his eyes narrow with lust. He takes over control of Jared’s dick, punctuating each twist and stroke of his fist, pausing every few jerks to swirl his thumb over the head. They have talked a lot for the day and words are replaced with the increased volume of their breathing and shudders of air that leave Jared’s lips when Jensen moves his fist just right. Jared strains, kicking the muscles in his abdomen and upper body into gear, so that he can kiss Jensen again and moan into his mouth. Kissing and the feeling of Jensen’s hand around his dick has an unfair advantage in making Jared melt into a boneless heap below Jensen. He’s so caught up in the feelings that Jared sucks in a surprised lungful of air when Jensen forces him slightly onto his side and presses against Jared’s backside, almost spooning.

Jensen grins, stretching to reach their lube in the nightstand, finding it and snapping the bottle open to coat his fingers liberally. “Gonna open you up, Jare,” he announces like he’s asking for permission, because there was no doubt in Jared’s mind that Jensen was thinking about doing anything else.

“Mm hmm,” Jared sighs, nodding his head against the pillow.

“Let me know if it’s too much,” Jensen kisses into the nape of Jared’s neck before rocking back onto his knees and getting to work. One slicked finger trails down the juncture between Jared’s legs, teasing at the puckered ring of muscle. He pauses, watching the shiver run through the muscles of Jared’s back and then repeats the action? “Okay?”

“Yeah.” It’s all Jared allows himself to say because he’s learned this is Jensen’s new coping mechanism. If the man has to have auditory confirmation that everything is okay, then Jared’s not going to draw too much attention to it, even though his body is screaming for Jensen to hurry the fuck up already. Then Jensen’s finger is back inside of him and his thoughts short-circuit. He can’t remember anything he was just thinking and just mumbles, “yeah,” again because he’s feeling everything right now and Jensen hasn’t touched him in so long.

One push of his finger has Jared letting out shuddering breaths and Jensen bends forward again, making the angle work so that he can kiss the muscles of Jared’s shoulder blades. He lets his finger slide against the tight channel of Jared’s entrance, teasing it by circling his finger and getting a bigger stretch. Jared’s moan causes a chain reaction and Jensen presses against him. “I got you.” Jensen kisses the back of Jared’s neck several times before moving his finger again.

“I know,” Jared breathes out. He smiles into the pillow and relaxes under his boyfriend’s ministrations. Jensen takes his time. It’s not their first rodeo but Jensen doesn’t seem like he’s in a hurry and it’s a while before one finger turns into two. There are slow exploratory movements, Jensen’s fingers moving at a languid pace. But when he scissors them, Jared careens and reaches back, trying to get Jensen’s hand to go a little harder, a little rougher. Thankfully, Jensen gets the memo and curves his fingers so he can push them in just the right way to brush against Jared’s prostate.

“Jensen!” Jared’s eyes shoot open. He shivers and leans his head back so that it’s on Jensen’s shoulder. The angle isn’t ideal but they are able to lock eyes, Jared’s expression reading that he’s more than okay. He’s great. He’s seeing stars and he’d like to see them again.
Jensen slides his fingers free and shocks Jared by slamming them back inside in one fluid movement. His hips rock into Jared in time with the pace at which he’s fingering the younger man. “God you’re hot when you moan like that,” Jensen declares out.

“Keep moving those fingers and I’ll do it again.” Jared swallows thickly and rides the rocking motion of being subject to Jensen’s fingers and hips. Inside him, Jensen’s fingers are brushing every sensitive spot that he’s come to know. He teases Jared’s prostate on purpose, then hits it straight on. Jared sees those stars again and mumbles something unintelligible. “Shit!” He sees stars again when Jensen repeats the same action. Sometimes, Jared knows his body betrays him and dulls some of the things he can feel. Today is nowhere close to being one of those days. It’s almost too much and he’s so sensitive that the stars dance before his eyes and insist on staying there. “Jen...Jen...stop - ”

Jensen listens immediately, concern heavy in his words when he asks, “Did I hurt you?”

“No.” Jared feels himself blush and he gulps down air when he admits, “I’m going to come.” He wants to hide his face in the blanket because he always feels like such a teenager when Jensen makes him come so quickly.

“Oh, that’s all,” Jensen teases and resumes his original plan.

“Jen!” Jared yells. “I’m too close…” but he can’t get much more out because Jensen’s fingers have him moaning again, precome dripping from his dick.

“Good. That’s right where I want you.” Jensen’s wrist flicks so that his fingers twist inside Jared. “I love the way you come for me. It’s...It’s the hottest thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Fuck!” Jared screams into the pillow and lets Jensen have his way. He’s coming before he even realizes that the orgasm had a hold of him. Jensen’s fingers are inside of him, playing his orgasm like it’s one of his guitars, and making Jared’s body twitch with pleasure. “Fuck!” He yells again and reaches back to make sure Jensen’s fingers stay sheathed inside him while he comes. The internal stimulation is almost too much but he always comes harder with his senses overloaded like that.

Jensen works Jared through his orgasm, rocking his body against Jared’s as each wave hits him and pulses of come land on the bed sheets. There are kisses placed along the sweat damp lines of Jared’s shoulders until he reaches Jared’s ears and can sigh happily into them.

“Just because you made me come like that doesn’t mean you are getting out of fucking the shit out of me,” Jared quips, words sounding blissed out and spacey. They coax a loud bark of laughter from Jensen.

“I have no plans on checking out yet. I just wanna make sure you’re good.”

“I’m good. I’m really good,” Jared says almost dreamily. “But I’d be even better when you get inside me.”

“Oh, is that so?” Jensen removes his hand and spins Jared, forcing him flat on his back again. He’s leering at him, smile so damn sexy that Jared’s belly twists up in arousal again. His eyes are flirting with Jared, and he crashes their lips together again, crawling over the man so that his very obvious erection gets some friction. “I’m so lucky.” The words come out and he looks like he’s surprised to have voiced them, like they were secret ‘inside his head’ thoughts.

“Yeah?” A playful lilt in Jared’s words.

“Yeah. I get you. Like this. Like last night. Like when your smile charmed my entire family. I get all of that.” Jensen kisses one corner of Jared’s mouth before kissing the other. Without taking his
attention off Jared, he stretches for a condom.

Jared catches his arm. “Umm, we can go without...you know. If you wanna. Condoms are kinda pointless at the moment.” Gesturing towards his stomach with a nod of his head, Jared shrugs. They’re both clean and they’re exclusive; a condom isn’t going to have much work to do.

“Yes?” Jensen lifts an eyebrow, thinks about it, and then abandons his search. Instead, he lubes up his bare dick and assaults Jared’s mouth again. After a bit of situating, he widens Jared’s legs for him and tosses one around his waist. His hips shift into position so that the head of his dick is lined up with Jared’s entrance. His eyes are looking for reassurance but he doesn’t voice it.

“I’m good, Jen. I just wanna feel you fuck me.” He reaches up a hand to cup Jensen’s face just in time for the man to slowly push inside of him. The stretch is better than before because Jared knows it’s Jensen’s dick breaching the furl of muscle. It’s Jensen, who is real and solid and moving above him. Jensen, who is looking down at him with lust hungry eyes and Jared’s heart flip-flops, breath catches and he tilts his head back into the pillow.

That eggs Jensen on and he bottoms out, giving a little added push of his hips to make sure he’s as deep as he’s going to get. He pulls out, thrusts back in, and growls Jared’s name. They haven’t done this for weeks but they’re synching up immediately, responding to every push, pull and touch. Jensen relishes the tight heat that surrounds him with every slide inside Jared, pulling out lazily so he can soak it all in. It’s slow at first, but they build quickly. They know how to get each other off and Jared’s urging Jensen forward, clawing at his back and fall apart at the same time.

“Jared,” Jensen huffs out, “you’re…” He pauses to moan as he rolls his hips and rocks into Jared, “you feel so good. I fucking missed this.” His eyes are genuine, open and staring at Jared to punctuate what he just said.

“Me too,” Jared pulls himself closer to Jensen’s chest.

Jensen quickens his pace, slamming into Jared in a way boarders on blowing the man’s mind. Jensen’s dick is hot and hard, sheathed completely inside Jared and Jared feels everything. He wants everything. He’s practically begging for it.

Jensen keeps thrusting into him, building on every sensation he’s dragging out of the younger man. His hips respond to the way Jared’s gripping him, pleading him for more; they work Jared slowly but then speed up when slow is too unbearable. He picks up a pace that keeps Jared from crawling out of his skin.

Jared feels like they’re stuck on loop because they are so close to being exactly where he wants them but Jensen keeps stopping short. Growling, Jared grits his teeth and lets out a groan in complaint. “Come on, Jen! Harder.” Jared sets his gaze on Jensen’s to let the man know he means business. He can come again, they both know he can, but not if Jensen doesn’t give it to him hard like he needs it right now. “I’m not going to break, remember? And I want you to give it to me.”

That stokes the heat in Jensen’s belly. He grabs ones of Jared’s legs and tosses it over his shoulder so he can get a deeper angle. Rocking forward, he speeds up his hips so that each thrust pushes the air from Jared’s lungs. Biting his lower lip, he keeps up the pace and moans. “Like this?”

The flutters of arousal are there, waking up Jared’s dick because it’s got a little more work to do. He bites his lower lip and lets out a debaucherously filthy moan. “Harder!” He’s challenging Jensen and they both know it. The sustained eye contact is hot as hell when a gravely moan leaves Jensen’s throat and he pins Jared to the bed, fucking into him all the more. “Fuck yes, just like that!”
Then the fireworks go off and Jared’s mouth goes slack and his eyes pop wider. The pleasure slams into him and he yowls out with it. Each thrust nudges Jared’s prostate, each drag and slide thickening their arousals and making them shiver. They are a flurry of movements, both panting and begging for it.

Pleasure washes over both of them. Jared’s mind spins at how responsive he is to Jensen, and he stares at the man, mouth parted so shuddering breathes can come and go. “Jen,” he gets out. He wants to say something more, wants to tell Jensen that he’s getting off on the way they’re refusing to look anywhere but at each other. He can’t get any of that out. All he can do is try not to hyperventilate while Jensen slams into him, the force of his thrusts punching every ounce of air out of the younger man’s lungs. He reaches up and grabs Jensen’s shoulders, holding on for dear life and diggin his nails in. Jared’s eyes roll back and he shivers. “Fuck! There!” He growls and arches off the bed, matching a moan coming out of Jensen’s mouth.

The air around them shifts and it’s clear that tonight is not about getting each other off. It’s about the connection and riding it. It’s about falling in sync with each other. It’s about knowing what their bodies can do and how it’s so much better when they do it together. They’re strong but they’re even more mind-blowing when they work together.

“Gonna come, Jay. Want me to?” Jensen leans forward so that his forehead is resting on Jared’s. They’re too close. They’re not close enough. Everything is hot and on edge. He readjusts his hips and gets the position just right, gets it perfect. “Gonna come too?”

“Yes,” Jared says before sealing his lips around Jensen’s. It’s an answer to any and every question Jensen’s ever asked him. It’s there and his brain reels. “Yeah. ‘m close. So close. So…so…” Jared babbles, getting stuck on the last word, repeating it quicker each time. He’s perfectly capable of stroking his renewed erection but he grabs Jensen's hand and forces the man to fist him in time with the thrusting going on between their legs. The need for Jensen’s touch is bone deep and it makes him sob.

Their orgasms happen so close together that it’s impossible to tell who started the whole thing. Jensen pulls Jared’s leg a little higher, pistons his hips, and his eyes flutter back when Jared’s heat surrounds him. Jared succumbs to the way Jensen’s fingers are wrapped around his dripping length and working him in every way he can. They come in messy spurts and jerky motions, losing themselves all over each other. Jared holds on, riding it as long as possible, vision practically going cross eyed as they hold each other's gaze through the entirety of their orgasms.

Falling back to earth after that type of orgasm takes a long time. There is come smeared between their bellies, Jensen’s come coating Jared’s insides, and sweat plastering them to each other. They are both in desperate need of a shower or a tank of oxygen but both of them have stupid blissed out expressions on their faces.

Jensen gingerly pulls out with a hiss of loss and rolls off of Jared, tilting Jared’s face so that he can place a feather light kiss on his lips. His eyes are soft around the edges where he’s in awe of Jared and basking in their connection.

“I’m good, Jen,” Jared says to quell any worry Jensen might have. He nibbles at Jensen’s neck, his lips coming away salty with the residue of their sweat.

“Wasn’t gonna ask,” Jensen whispers in his ear. “I don’t need to. It’s pretty obvious that you’re good. Especially after the way you came like that.” A growl escapes from the arousal simmering down in Jensen’s gut. “Well, let’s just say it’s very obvious that you’re good.” He continues kissing Jared’s face.
Jared feels like he has whiplash with how Jensen’s gone from soft, to rough, and back to soft. It’s the perfect mix of everything he likes. He arches his neck so he can give Jensen more access to his neck. “Seems like we do our best fucking after some of our best talking.” He twist so that both he and Jensen are laying on their sides, facing each other. They share a laugh over that, crowding into each other’s space and basking in the afterglow. There is still an electric current running through the two of them and Jared can’t stop smiling. “That was great.”

“It really was,” Jensen says, pushing into a sitting position. He surveys the damage and wrinkles his nose. “I don’t really wanna do this, but...maybe we should shower?

It’s a good idea, but Jared doesn’t feel like doing it either. In the end, they realize there is too much come on and in them, as well as splattered across the bed sheets. They need to wash up and change the sheets. The shower is simply one of necessity. Once in the bathroom, however, Jared is hit hard with not feeling well. Instead of hiding it, he opens up to Jensen, telling him that he needs a little help getting in and out of the shower because he doesn’t trust himself. They are in and out quickly, coming back to the bedroom damp and sated, working to change the bedsheets as a team.

When they crawl into bed, Jensen pulls Jared so that the man’s head rests on the muscles of Jensen’s chest. His fingers start combing through Jared’s damp hair, putting him into a content trance and making his eyes flutter shut. “You still feeling sick?”

“A little.” Jared’s exhale fans out across Jensen’s chest. Mostly, he feels settled in the bed, the gentle beating of Jensen’s heart lulling him into relaxation. His eyes pop open when Jensen’s other hand strokes over his belly, tracing circles like the ones he traced last night.

Jensen picks up on the new tension in Jared’s body. “What?” he asks innocently. “I thought you said that this feels good.”

“Yeah, it does,” Jared is quick to say. “But you don’t have to...if you don’t want to.”

“I know that.” Jensen kisses Jared’s temple and they settle down again. He keeps his hand over Jared’s middle.

It really does feel good. Jared’s body hums with pleasure as he moves ever so slightly closer to his boyfriend. “You know what?” he thinks out loud. “I wish we could have one more day off. With all the stresses and emotions running wild, the weekend went by way too fast. I wish we could have just one more day added to the weekend.” He inhales Jensen’s clean scent and sighs. “Just wishful thinking I guess.”

“Why don’t we call in sick?” Jensen suggest, turning in towards Jared.

“Really?”

“Why not? It’s not like anyone at Arkin knows we’re together. They won’t suspect a thing. Besides, I don’t think we’ve used any of our sick days this year. I think we are entitled to a personal health day.” He pulls Jared closer and smiles at him. “Spending the entire day in bed together before going to see Dr. Atlas sounds like it would be good for my mental health.”

Jared’s lips mirror Jensen’s smile. “I like the sound of that, Dr. Ackles. I think it would do us both a world of good.”

They fall asleep wrapped in each other, hands tangled and breath shared.

It really is just what the doctor ordered.
Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much for your patience! I hope you are all enjoying the story!
Special thank you to my wifey for holding my hand and betaing. She is the sweetest!
Next chapter : Visit to Dr. Atlas and return of the Padaleckis.
Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

Some emotional stuff going on...bring tissues.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Jared’s sitting at the table having breakfast with Jensen when it hits him. His muscles betray him, catching him off guard and sending him into a violent spasm.

It’s terrifying for Jensen to watch.

Up until that point, their morning had been uneventful. They slept late, moving with languid movements and took their time properly waking up after the way they wore themselves out. Jensen knows that Jared’s been feeling sick since last night, but he hadn’t been expecting his boyfriend to pitch forward so suddenly. Had Jensen not been sitting directly next to him, Jared would have hit the floor. As it is, Jensen’s reflexes are quick enough and the man tumbles into Jensen’s arms. Without a clue of what to do, Jensen holds onto his boyfriend, oddly wrapping him in his arms while Jared’s body spasms. It looks a little like Jared’s reacting to an electric pulse and a lot like he’s seizing.

“Jared!” Jensen yells, eyes searching over Jared’s face. Adrenaline pummels his heart and he is caught up in it. The whole event is over quickly but Jared isn’t a small person, so even though the moment was fleeting, it was powerful enough to knock Jensen’s emotions and fears on their ass.

“Jare, what do I...are you…” None of the questions get out as Jensen tries to help Jared back to his chair.

“Shit…” Jared breathes out. “I’m sorry you had to see that. It’s nothing...really. I’m fine.” Chewing his bottom lip, Jared’s cheeks flush with embarrassment.

“That was not nothing,” Jensen states firmly. There is no way that spasm could be defined as nothing because Jensen’s heart is pounding as a result, heart breaking over watching his boyfriend’s body snatch control from Jared’s mind. The event triggers the opening of floodgates in Jensen’s brain, letting worry seep in with a firm helping of guilt. He’s pushed Jared too much, asked too much of him by bringing him home to Dallas. Jensen must have gotten too greedy last night when he fucked Jared senseless. He shouldn’t have done that. He should have known better.

Jared’s shaky hand settles over Jensen’s. “No. You’re right. It isn’t nothing but,” he takes a calming breath and brushes his hair out of his face. “It’s normal. I know that sounds crazy but I’ve been dealing with muscle spasms for years. I’m used to them. For you, someone who hasn’t been around them as long as me or my family, I can understand why they’re scary. They look a lot worse than they are.” Fingers lacing with Jensen’s hand, Jared gives him a smile. “Good thing I had you here to take care of me. Getting up off the ground is always a bitch after a longer spasm.”

When Jared puts it that way, it starts feeling a little safer. Still, Jensen’s heart keeps thudding quickly in his chest. “I don’t know if I can ever get used to that.”

“Hopefully you won’t have to. They don’t happen often, although, being off the medication is making things unpredictable. The point is, you probably won’t have to deal with it after I can go back on some of my meds.” Eyes softening, Jared gives a shy smile. “I’m sorry I scared you.”
Something tightens around Jensen’s heart and he presses his lips together. “Jare, don’t apologize to me. I’m sorry you have to actually deal with that. It seems a hell of a lot harder to go through than to watch.” As soon as the words leave Jensen’s mouth, he realizes they’re not true. Jared seems unphased, for the most part, while Jensen’s tangled up in worry and concern, his heart forgetting to beat for several moments when he wasn’t sure Jared was okay. “It scared the shit out of me.”

“I know,” Jared says guiltily. “But thanks for staying here...for staying through it.”

Jensen reaches out and pulls Jared to his chest, holding him a little tighter than need be but the man doesn’t show any ounce of protest. Instead, the man wraps his own strong arms around Jensen, sliding his palms over the curve of Jensen’s back so that they’re fitted together. Jensen buries himself in the type of comfort the gesture brings. “Told you, I’m not going anywhere.” Because he’s not. There is a good possibility that it’s going to get scarier but it’s like his father said - baby steps. If they take baby steps, then maybe the things that looked so daunting will turn out to not be so scary after all.

At least Jensen hopes. His heart is still pounding away over the worry he’d felt for Jared and he tries to rein it in. It was scary but Jared’s fine. He’s seated in his wheelchair again, acting like nothing had even happened to him. Still, Jensen’s mind can’t keep from imagining all the alternate endings to this scenario had he not been there to catch Jared. At his core, Jensen thinks that is what is really terrifying him. He understands muscle spasms, but he’s afraid that Jared falling will be the thing to cause some damage. Sure, Jared can’t feel his legs, but breaking them doesn’t seem like a fun healing process.

Pulling away from Jared, they fall into a nervous silence while they finish their meals. He thinks that they weren’t lying too much when they both called in sick. Jared definitely needs to recoup from the last few days, and that’s exactly what they are going to do until their appointment with Dr. Atlas.

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Dr. Atlas is waiting for them when they arrive. To Jensen, it’s a little funny to find the doctor reading a magazine in the waiting room, passing the time waiting for her patient. They’re not late, in fact they are a few minutes early, but Dr. Atlas body language gives him the idea that she’s a little bored. That fact is reaffirmed by the smile that spreads across her face when she looks up to meet their eyes, like she’s glad they’ve joined her.

“Good afternoon,” she chips, dropping the magazine to the side table. “Have you read any of this garbage?” She lets out a laugh. “I don’t think I ever have. Seriously, we need to get some better reading material in here. I’ll have to tell Sandra to order something more….stimulating. I can’t have my patients - ” She catches herself, reeling back and pursing her lips in disapproval. “Well, I suppose you two are my only patients now. Old habits die extremely hard. The reading materials kept in the waiting room is my grandson Ollie’s problem now, but that doesn’t mean I can’t put in a strongly worded suggestion.” Dr. Atlas gets to her feet and reaches out a hand in greeting to both of the men.

“And we too early?” Jensen finds himself babbling.

“No, not at all. As it turns out, when you only have one patient, your day seems to go a lot slower.” She laughs to herself and waves them towards the exam rooms. “Ollie’s been finishing up some work at his other office. He should be here sometime during your appointment. I’d like him to meet you. I’ve been told he’s unnervingly likeable. I can’t go by my own judgement, I’m biased. Kind of a side-effect of being someone’s grandmother.“

“Yeah, I’m on the receiving end of that type of bias,” Jensen jokes, thinking of his grandmother. “Actually, I think Jared’s on that same receiving end.”
That gets a laugh out of Jared, breaking through his nervousness and finally returning his power of speech. “Hey, what can I say? Apparently, I’m quite charming around your grandmother.”

“Or just charming in general.” Jensen shrugs playfully and smiles. They share a moment, thoughts traveling through their locked gaze, before Jensen becomes aware of the knowing expression Dr. Atlas is showing them.

“Alright, Jared. Same drill as last time. Up on the table, if you don’t mind.” She pats the exam table, the sterile overlay of paper crinkling under her palm.

Wheeling himself alongside the table, Jared hoists himself onto it. He manually places his legs on the table and shifts so that he is stretching across the whole length.

“That arm strength is going to come in handy in the future. Keep that up. If we have things my way, you’re going to gain quite a few more pounds from here on out.” She gives Jared a smile. “So, how have you been feeling since our last appointment?”

“Good. I mean, I think I’m good.” Jared offers her a smile and combs his hair back several times with his fingers. Jensen knows it’s a nervous tick, something he does when his hands can’t fuss with the wheels of his chair. “For the most part, I feel like me. But I’ve been tired a lot.”

“Nothing to worry about there, just try to get some rest when you can. Growing another person takes a lot out of someone. It’s hard work for your body. Add that to the fact that you’re off some of your medications, I wouldn’t expect you to feel energetic. How are you doing being off the meds?” Dr. Atlas slips her glasses onto her nose and grabs Jared’s chart so she can scribble down his responses.

“Yes, that’s been a little tough. I’ve been feeling,” he pauses, fishing for the correct word, “foggy. It’s like I said before, I’ve been feeling pretty tired. But I think I’m weaning off of them okay.”

Jensen has no idea what hits him. Really. It all happens pretty fast. He hears the doctor’s question and all of the concerns from this morning flood his mouth and come tumbling out in a rush. His voice is a bit louder than he’d intended, but the worry has been screaming in his head for hours and releasing it is unavoidable. “He had a pretty bad muscle spasm this morning. Would have fallen on the floor if I hadn’t been there.” Once he gets the statement out, he bites his lip apologetically and looks at Jared. Answering the question has everything to do with concern over Jared and not distrust in Jared about whether or not the man would answer Dr. Atlas’ question honestly. Jensen picks up on the fact that his heart is pounding a fraction quicker than it was before and his head is filled with questions. He wants Dr. Atlas to say that the spasm is not a big deal, that Jared’s fine and the baby is fine. The last thought hooks him, makes him let out a breath he didn’t know he was holding. Jared’s looking at him, brows knit together in confusion because he can see the battle Jensen’s having with himself but can’t make out what it’s about. To be fair, Jensen can’t either. He just knows that there is more worry there that wasn’t showing its head minutes ago. He’s getting attached in ways he can’t really sort out just yet, but he knows he wants Dr. Atlas to quell his worries. “Sorry…I…”

Dr. Atlas politely waves him off and turns her attention to Jared. “Is that true, Jared? About the spasm?”

Jared lets his hand slip over his abdomen and nods. “Yeah. This morning, during breakfast, I had a whole body spasm. I think I would have been fine, but I was on the edge of my chair anyway. So…I tumbled out. Jensen caught me, though.” Jared turns towards Jensen and gives him a soft smile. “No harm done.”
“I see,” Dr. Atlas says, making a quick note in the file. “I’m absolutely certain there was no harm done to the baby. But I’d really like it if you checked in with your general practitioners and other doctors, Jared. I know you told me that they aren’t on board with you going through with the pregnancy, but that’s my problem, not theirs. They don’t have to deal with pregnancy issues, but they are responsible for other aspects of your health. Any respectful doctor would be able to put aside personal beliefs in order to give their patients the best care they can, no matter the situation. I was expecting you to have muscle spasms, and if you’re aware of them and take precaution, I don’t think they’ll be a problem. Still, I would like you to check in with your doctors to see how you’re doing on the decreased medication.” She sets one of her hands down on Jared’s shoulder, the gesture warm and kind. “I don’t mean to startle you. I just like to cover my bases.”

Jared nods to show his agreement. “No. I understand. I was just telling Jensen the other day that I have to start going back to physical therapy and make some other appointments. I’m going to get right on it. I’m usually really on top of these things, I swear. I never miss appointments. I take my health seriously.”

“I know you do. That’s why I am not worried.” Dr. Atlas gives Jared’s shoulder another squeeze. “I highly doubt that someone who was so determined to score an appointment with me would just give up so quickly. I mean, I’m flattered by your confidence in me but you’re the real superstar here.” She nods towards his middle and smiles.

The things the doctor is saying are exactly what Jensen wants to hear, but his gut is still twisted up in worry. “Yeah...but...he fell.” Jensen says dumbly, like the words have any chance of getting across the anxiety he’s feeling.

Dr. Atlas turns and gives Jensen a sympathetic smile, the look in her eyes a comforting one. “And I know it’s scary. I’ve seen it before with patients. Is that the first time you’ve seen it happen?”

“Yeah,” Jensen answer honestly.

“You poor thing.” She pouts at Jensen for a moment before splitting her gaze between both Jared and Jensen. “Unfortunately, it’s something you get accustomed to, but not something you ever get used to, if you know what I mean. It’s always going to be hard seeing someone you love deal with an obstacle.”

“But if he fell - ”

“But I didn’t,” Jared cuts him off. He reaches out a hand and squeezes Jensen’s. “I mean, I fell but only into your arms. That’s not a bad place to be.”

Clicking her tongue, Dr. Atlas shakes her head at the two men. “I know what might make daddy feel better,” she says, nodding towards Jensen to indicate that she’s talking about him. “What if we take a peek at the little one to prove that everyone is doing a-okay.”

Jensen gulps. He knows he referred to himself as a dad when he came to make amends with Jared, but it’s the first time he’s really been labeled as one in such a meaningful manner. It does the opposite of calming him down, heart rate spiking and he feels a little dizzy. He kicks himself for reacting like this, but he can’t help it. He is in uncharted territory here and he doesn’t know what type of response is appropriate. He goes for fear, because that ticks all the boxes.

“You’re really quite adorable,” Dr. Atlas says with a quiet laugh. “I don’t think I’ll ever get over how lost first time parents look. It’s just - ” She makes a gesture of clasping her hands together to indicate that she finds it endearing. “Alright, let’s see what’s going on.” Her hands pause near the hem of Jared’s shirt in wait of permission. When he nods, she pushes it up towards his chest and
reveals the new swell. “Hello, belly. That wasn’t there the last time you were here.”

“Yeah...it just kinda...appeared.” Jared shrugs.

Jensen licks his suddenly dry lips, watching the doctor take several moments to measure the new curve of Jared’s stomach. He swallows thickly and is rooted to his spot beside Jared, fingers twitching over their conjoined hands.

“Perfect! See, no worries so far. Now Jared, do you mind unbuttoning your pants and pulling them down just a bit?” She makes a few notes while she lets Jared shimmy his pants lower to give her better access to the area. She works in silence for the most part, squirting gel on Jared’s middle and sliding through it with the ultrasound transducer. “Where are you hiding, little monkey?” She wonders aloud even though it takes her no time at all to locate the baby. “There you are!” She’s all smiles as she finds the right spot so that a pretty good image of the baby can be seen on the screen.

Jensen stares at the image that seems to be responsible for the giant smile on Jared’s face. The picture on the screen goes in and out, the baby visible and then taken away before Jensen can make heads or tails of it. Then Dr. Atlas works her magic and it’s clear as day. “Oh my god.” The words surprise Jensen as they leave his mouth. The fact that the baby is just as easy to see as the first time they’ve met, if not more so, shocks him. All the air rushes out of Jensen’s lungs when the fetus wiggles, the image hitting Jensen right in the gut. It looks and moves so much like a baby that it’s surreal. He knows Dr. Atlas’ plan was to put him at ease but now he’s even more nervous because...because the baby is kind of adorable. It’s kind of cute. It’s kind of a lot of things but what it definitely is is part of him and part of Jared. His head is spinning again and he feels like he needs to sit down. With the hand he’s not squeezing Jared’s with, he grabs onto the head of the exam table to steady himself. The feelings hitting him are so damn confusing and he wishes he could take a time out to discover what they mean. As it is, he’s not given that reprieve as a knock comes on the door of the exam room.

“Come in,” Dr. Atlas calls, prying her gaze from the screen. She watches her grandson enter the room and her face lights up. “Ollie,” her words float out on a smile. “I was wondering if you were going to show your face.” There is no heat behind the words, just playful banter.

“I’m sorry. I got caught up.” He hesitates entering the room, poking his head in and looking towards the occupants with his hands up, as if saying “I come in peace.” He offers both Jared and Jensen a smile. “I hope I’m not interrupting anything.”

“Well, you are. But it’s not too much of a problem, considering I told Jared and Jensen you would be popping in to meet them.” She waves one hand in Ollie’s direction. “Jared, Jensen, this is Ollie, my grandson. Ollie, meet Jared and Jensen.” She indicates each man in turn with the same wave of her hand.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Ollie says, finally stepping into the room. “I hope my grandmother hasn’t been filling your heads with embarrassing stories about how I once thought people got pregnant by drinking from the same glass when I was five. I assure you, I can actually medically explain pregnancy and everything that involves.”

“Ollie my dear, you just hung yourself out to dry all on your own.” Dr. Atlas laughs and looks towards her patient. “I swear...that one...he was always scrubbing all of his water glasses, even ones fresh from the dishwasher, before using it just in case someone might have drank from it.” She lets out a belly laugh and tries to rein herself back in. “To be fair, Ollie, I was saving that story in my arsenal for when Jared and Jensen looked like they needed a good laugh. So they would have found out anyway.”

“Well, I’m glad that’s out in the open. I have more qualifications than just the fact that I’ve learned
how people actually get pregnant.” He joins his grandmother in laughter. “Hi,” he says while reaching a hand towards Jared. “I’m Dr. Atlas...well...the second Dr. Atlas. Please, call me Ollie.”

“It’s nice to meet you Ollie.” Jared gives a smile worthy of melting Jensen’s heart. “Glad you learned your lesson. I was going to say that we’d have a little problem if you thought this little one,” he points towards the ultrasound screen, “is here because Jensen and I share the same drink occasionally.”

Jensen almost chokes because the way Jared says the words hints at the fact that they share a hell of a lot more than glassware. “Nice to meet you,” he says, to stop the train of thought, and reaches out to shake Ollie’s hand.

“So what do we have here?” Ollie comes around the exam table and stands beside his grandmother. He kisses her quickly on the cheek, a move that makes Jensen instantly like the man. If he knows how to treat his family, then he definitely has the heart needed to assist with Jared’s appointments.

“I dunno, you tell me,” Dr. Atlas says, taking Ollie’s hand and moving it to replace her own on the transducer.

Shaking his head at his grandmother, Ollie snickers. “Are you seriously testing me right now?”

“Yes. Yes I am,” Dr. Atlas says without a hint of hesitance.

“Grams, I am a grown professional doctor.”

“And you’re also my grandson. And human. And we can all do with being put on the spot at times to keep our skills sharp.” She snorts and looks at him expectantly. “Well? What are you waiting for? Unless you’re not sure.” She’s goading him, smug quirk to her mouth giving her away.

“Of course I’m sure.” Ollie’s body shakes with laughter and he rolls his eyes at her. “You’re incorrigible.”

“I’ve been told,” Dr. Atlas states. Clearing her throat, she rolls her eyes towards the screen.

Ollie gets to work then, exploring Jared’s womb and clicking away, taking measurements that Jared and Jensen can’t figure out. The sound of the baby’s heartbeat whooshes through the room, loud and strong, making Jensen’s knees week. Turning towards his grandmother, Ollie removes the transducer from Jared’s middle and drops it to the tray attached to the ultrasound cart. He gives her a cocky smirk and rattles off his findings. “Baby looks really good. All the measurements are in line with a fetus of the gestational age Jared’s records indicate. Heart rate is good too. The nasal bone is there, measuring right on track.” He turns towards Jared and Jensen with a happy glint in his eyes. “Overall, I would say you two have one healthy kid.” Bowing slightly, he laughs. “I’m sorry if none of that made sense. I just had to prove to my grandmother that she’s not the only show-off. In layman’s terms, the baby is right on schedule. There are no markers for Down Syndrome. So, nothing to worry about.”

Jensen’s heart leaps at that. It may not have gone the route that Dr. Atlas intended, but Jensen does feel a lot less anxious about Jared’s muscle spasm. The problem is, that Ollie is wrong. There is a whole lot more to worry about. Because his kid is a person. A person who can be diagnosed with syndromes and conditions. In trying to reassure them, Ollie has opened up a whole new world of worry to Jensen. His vision dims a bit and he nods, falling into a chair beside the exam table because his body can’t find the strength to stand. “So we’re having a baby,” he says to the whole room, like the idea hit him fully for the first time.
“Sweetie,” Dr. Atlas says, patting Jared’s hand. “I think Jensen’s going to need a minute. Why don’t Ollie and I give you a few before the rest of the exam?”

They take their leave and Jensen appreciates it, but he’s going to need more than a minute. Breath hitching, he leans forward and puts his head between his legs. His vision loses focus and he’s hit with too many sensations at once. The one leading the pack is a whole lot of guilt. For quite some time he had, secretly, hoped that maybe the pregnancy wouldn’t progress as well as Dr. Atlas or her grandson just assured them it is. He wanted the baby to just go away, thinking that it would be safer if things ended as a way to protect Jared’s health. Now he sees how wrong those thoughts had been and the guilt over wanting to terminate the pregnancy rather than risk Jared’s life is spreading waves of pain outward from deep within his soul. After seeing the baby today, the reality of the little life growing inside his boyfriend, he isn’t sure how to get over the horrible thoughts he’d once had. Jensen doesn’t hold those beliefs anymore, but the guilt is weighing him down, making him sick. He’s not entirely sure what’s happening, other than the fact that they’re going to have a baby. But right now, he thinks he’s going to have a panic attack.

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Jared is expecting Megan but the sound of the doorbell chiming still startles him. He wheels himself towards the door and pulls it open to reveal his sister. He knows she’s his little sister, but something about her posture makes her look even younger, like she’s got her tail between her legs. “Hey, Meggie.”

“Hi roller-skate.” She steps into the house and gives a pointed look towards Jared’s belly, lost in a sea of his t-shirt’s fabric. “Hi little skate.” With a nervous laugh, she gives her brother a smile, ducking her head down while pushing a stray piece of hair behind her ear.

“Meg.” Jared says, infusing the name with enough emotion to let his sister know that he’s calling her out. He knows she’s dancing around something.

“Oh!” Megan lets out in a broken chirp. She launches herself at her brother like she was a kid and he let her curl up on his lap. When she was scared of monsters under the bed she would plop herself on Jared’s lap, finding safety in the added distance from the floor. She’s bigger now, but so is Jared. It works out in almost the same way, except Megan’s got her legs thrown over one arm of the chair and her arms wrapped around Jared’s neck. “Jared! I’m so sorry! I’m the worst little sister ever. Seriously.”

“Whoa,” Jared says, catching the wheels to stop the backwards roll caused by the force of Megan jumping at him. “You are not the worst sister. And certainly not the worst sister ever. Don’t be dramatic Megan.”

Hugging her brother, Megan’s voice comes out remorseful and guilty. “Well, I sure feel like it. I mean...who walks out on their big brother? It’s like the first time you’ve actually needed me and I botched it.” She pulls out of the hug and gives a defeated slump of her shoulders.

“That’s not true. I needed you that one time I thought I could put christmas lights all through the spokes of my wheels and I just ended up getting the whole thing tangled and lost my balance. I broke so many of those damn bulbs when I went careening out of my chair. I needed you to help me clean up and hide the evidence from mom and dad.”

The memory makes Megan snort out a laugh. “You were like a fish caught in a net.”

“That’s because I kinda was. I didn’t mean to buy that stupid netted version of lights. I was an idiot when I was fourteen.” Jared laughs too because he can still remember calling on his baby sister to
save him. He probably could have gotten by on his own, but not without running out of time and being caught red handed by his parents. Parents who, very firmly, told him not to get into any trouble while they were gone and to absolutely not give into his hairbrained idea of using a giant battery as a power source to light up his wheelchair. “But you saved my ass then.”

“That doesn’t count. That wasn’t really important.”

Jared shakes his head firmly. “I disagree. To a fourteen year old, not getting in trouble with mom and dad is the most important thing. Jeff would have ratted me out just so he could rub it in my face.”

“That’s true, he would’ve done that,” Megan adds. Even though she agrees, she doesn’t let go of her brother, holding onto him as he wheels them both into the house. “But it still doesn’t give me the right to be a truly shitty sister to you this past week.”

“Megaaaaaan,” Jared draws out. “It’s okay, really. We spoke about it on the phone. You made a mistake. I forgave you. It’s okay. Really. And I’d like to move on.” His sister is wonderful, really, but sometimes she knows how to poke at an issue with sticks and it doesn’t help the situation for anyone.

“Just as long as you know how sorry I am.”

“Yes. Got it.” Jared wheels beside the couch and smirks at his sister. He knows how to poke things too, like how to press all her buttons and wind his sister up in only the way an older brother can. “You’re getting a little heavy, sis. Mind getting off my lap and sitting on the couch?” The immediate reaction from his sister is enough to tell Jared that he’s done his job in diverting her attention from feeling sorry and turning back into the sister he knows and loves.

“Oh fuck you!” Megan yells, giving her brother a playful punch in the bicep and throwing him a truly hurt face. She moves to the couch, crosses her arms, and curls her lip at him.

“It was a joke. I can’t feel anything on my legs. You could weigh forty pounds more and I don’t think I’d notice.”

“Yeah, well...you’re still a dick. Joking about someone's weight - my weight - is never very funny Jah-red!” She draws his name out, the pronunciation funny because she ends the last syllable while sticking her tongue out.

The shift in the mood of the room makes Jared feel settled. This is more like it. Jared swings himself onto the couch beside his sister, twisting his hips so that his back is to the armrest and he can face her fully. “It’s good to see you, Meg.”

“You too.” Placing her oversized purse beside her, Megan pulls both of her legs onto her lap and criss-crosses them. “How you doing?”

“That’s a loaded question,” Jared says. He doesn’t know where to start. There is a lot and he and Megan have been out of the loop for a bit.

“Lay it on me! I’ve got nothing else on my agenda except hanging out with your lame ass,” she teases, but the words come out with such an aire of closeness that it’s impossible not to see the sweetness behind them.

“Well. I’m good. I mean, work is work. The students are great but a lot of the co-workers leave something to be desired.” He pauses, bites his lip and offers Megan a smile. “But that’s not really what you’re asking about. So...yeah. Umm, I’m good. Tired. I had to go off about half of my meds. It’s throwing my body for a loop but I’ve got it under control. Nothing too bad. I’m going in for a
few appointments this week to get the docs’ opinions. And the baby,” Jared can feel the way his whole face changes when he says the words. His eyes curve in the corners and he sucks his bottom lip in, riding out a little bubble of excitement that’s knocking into him. “The baby is doing great. My doctor said everything is right on track. Heartbeat’s good, measurements are good. The bones and skeleton are developing normally.” He’s full on open mouthed smiling by the end.

“That’s great, Jare! Really. You must be relieved.” Megan presses both hands over her heart. “I’m relieved!”

“Yeah…” Jared’s eyes tear up slightly. “I got to see the baby yesterday.” He puts his hand over his pregnant middle. “Megan, you should have seen it. The baby was so active. Moving around and wigging. It was so... cute! It’s just…” The words get caught in his throat and Jared knows he sounds corny beyond belief but he can’t help how he feels. “I was watching my baby prove to me that he or she is doing well and I couldn’t stop myself from thinking that this is my little miracle. My little miracle baby.” He reaches a hand up to brush at his eyes with his knuckles, spreading a wet tear across his cheekbone. Pointing to the kitchen, he catches Megan’s attention. “Go grab the new ultrasound printout. I’ve got it up on the fridge. It’s so much better than the one you took home.”

Megan nods excitedly, hops off the couch and scampers towards the kitchen. When she comes back, she’s got the scan in her hands, walking slowly towards her brother because she’s too focused on staring at the print out. “Oh my god, Jared.”

“I know.” Jared says, voice just above a whisper because the emotions are too strong. If he opens those floodgates, he’s going to be a goner before Megan and he really have a chance to speak.

“Look how cute,” Megan says in a daze.

“I know.”

Bringing one hand to her lips, Megan’s eyes full of awe when she looks at her brother. “He...she...is so perfect!”

“I know!” Jared repeats for a third time. His heart flutters happily with the knowledge that his sister gets it. She’s caught up in the same wave that he is.

“Oh my god, Jared! You’re having a baby!” Megan catapults herself onto the couch, grabbing Jared into a hug. Unlike the one when she arrived, this hug involves her twisting herself from right to left, pulling Jared with her. “I’m gonna be an aunt to the cutest kid in town.” She kisses Jared on the cheek quickly before pulling away to look at the scan. It’s clutched in both hands, held as gingerly as if it was the baby itself. “Boy or girl?”

“Too early for that, Meg.” Jared scratches at the back of his head. “I know a lot of parents say they don’t care if the baby is a boy or a girl but I don’t think anyone has ever meant it as much as me. I just want my little miracle baby to get here healthy and safe.” Jared’s hand starts to stroke his middle with long, drawn out traces of his fingers.

“You’ve got a belly!” Megan yelps, all of her words suddenly filled with too much excitement to be constrained to a normal level of volume. Placing the scan on her lap, she reaches out and paws at Jared’s belly. With one hand on each side of the swell, she can get a good idea of how tiny and huge it is at the same time. “Oh my god!”

“Can you say anything else?” Jared teases. His sister may be stuck on loop, but he can read her actions loud and clear. “Yeah. I’ve got a belly.” To reaffirm the point, he lifts the hem of his shirt and exposes the swell.
Megan outright coos at his middle. She ducks lower, like the baby can hear her better that way. “Hi, baby. I’m your Aunt Megan.” She gives Jared’s stomach a giant grin and then looks up to her brother. Hands still on Jared’s baby bump, he smiles even wider at him. “Jared, this is amazing. This baby, the one no one thought would ever be here. Somehow you managed to do this.” A bubble of laughter erupts from her throat. “Shit, I can’t believe I’m going to be an aunt.”

Maybe it’s having someone so genuinely excited about his pregnancy, or it’s the fact that Megan’s words sound like she has no doubt over the fact that Jared’s baby will be delivered safely to make her title of ‘Aunt’ official, but Jared is hit with a tidal wave of sobs. Megan is the first one to touch his belly like this and actually talk to his child. At best, he’s been weakly holding it together but now he falls apart completely. The tears hit and he’s crying, grabbing Megan’s hands and pulling her to his chest. “You think so?” he gets out between ragged breaths.

“Yeah.” She runs a soothing hand over Jared’s back, trailing down his spine.

Despite being comforting, the gesture only makes Jared cry harder. Jared’s spine is why he’s in this physical condition anyway. His parents never shielded him or his siblings from the actual specifics of his paralysis. He supposes that’s why he used to wake up with band-aids all down his back when Megan was little and still stuck in her childish beliefs that band-aid can heal everything. He wishes they could. “I’m so scared about my body fucking this up, Meg.”

“I know.” Megan pulls away, still sitting cross legged but facing Jared, and clasps both of his hands, holding them in the space between them. “But you can do anything, Jay. You’re my big brother. You beat everyone’s asses in basketball in highschool when they told you that you couldn’t play sports. You found a way to scare the shit out of Suzy Weisman when she bullied me on the playground. You made Stephen wish to god that he’d never cheated on me. You... you’re fucking strong. And...I hear what you’re saying. You have a lot of things to be scared about. But you’re also you. You’ve got this.”

“You have no idea how much I appreciate the last five minutes.” Taking calming breaths, he composes himself and swallows. “I wish everyone else felt the way you did.”

Megan’s face screws in distaste over that comment. “Ugh, they need to grow up,” she scoffs. “Jeff wanted to come see you but he’s been swamped at work. Which is true, but between you and I, he’s not so good at this sibling feelings stuff. You beat everyone’s asses in basketball in highschool when they told you that you couldn’t play sports. You found a way to scare the shit out of Suzy Weisman when she bullied me on the playground. You made Stephen wish to god that he’d never cheated on me. You... you’re fucking strong. And...I hear what you’re saying. You have a lot of things to be scared about. But you’re also you. You’ve got this.”

“Yeah. Stupid, I know. But...he means well.” Megan grabs the onesie and drapes it over Jared’s belly. “Perfect fit,” she teases.

“Not even close yet.” Jared corrects.

“Yeah well,” Megan shrugs. “And mom and dad have been talking. I haven’t heard anything, just whispering and sobbing. But they’re getting there, Jared.” Twisting her fingers together, she asks, “but Jensen’s excited though, right?”
“Jensen? Jensen’s…” Jared doesn’t know how to begin. His boyfriend has been supportive and amazing. But he’s also been a shaken up mess. “Jensen’s been having panic attacks.”

“Well you’re having the baby, I guess he’s got to have something.” She laughs at her stupid attempt to lighten the mood. When Jared doesn’t laugh, she frowns. “Hey, he’s being good to you?”

The question startles Jared. He has to blink twice to really focus on it. “Jensen? Yeah. He’s the best. Literally the best person I’ve ever met. He’s just..terrified. And it’s complicated.”

“You wanna talk about it?” Megan offers.

Until the question, Jared had no idea how much he really did want to talk about it. He and Jensen hash it out but talking to his sister, someone who has essentially known him and his parents since she was born, is a fresh perspective. “You’ve got all night?”

“Yeah. But I’m ordering pizza.”

Jared’s stomach grumbles at the mention. “That sounds amazing.”

“Whatsoever baby wants. Gotta get some practice at being the world’s best aunt.” She whips out her cellphone and dials, placing their usual pizza order.

Jared thinks Megan’s come a long way from the pigtailed little girl he’d grown up with. It’s funny that she is the one who is mature enough to be part of Jared’s pregnancy with him. She’s shaping into someone he knows his kid is lucky to have as an aunt.

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Sometimes physical therapy isn’t fun but Jared can handle it because he knows it is being productive.

Physical therapy after missing so many appointments? That definitely isn’t fun, even when Jared reminds himself of the end goal.

“So, pregnant, huh?” Marcus says as he watches Jared go through the series of leg extension stretches.

“Yep. Pregnant. That’s why I was a heinous beast last time we met up.” Jared groans and bends over to cup one palm under the arch of his foot and one under his thigh, pulling his leg up. He knows he’s supposed to go to the point of fatigue but he almost feels like that’s the place he’s started today. “Ugh, this isn’t going to work when I’ve actually got a bigger belly in the way.”

“Yeah, I’ll work on a program for you. We can definitely still do floor exercises, but nothing laying down. The pool and arm bike are still good options.” Marcus readjusts Jared’s hold and lets him do several more stretches. “This is definitely going to help with some of those muscle spasms you’ve been having.”

“Whatever you say,” Jared huffs out, winded before he should be and he’s disappointed in his stamina. “Remind me never to miss physical therapy again.”

“Never miss physical therapy again,” Josie deadpans, thumping him on the back of the head. “So when are we going to meet your baby daddy?”

Jared pauses, rolling his eyes up towards his other therapist. “You wanna meet Jensen?” He supposes the woman’s question isn’t all that surprising. He’s been through physical therapy with Marcus and Josie for years, they practically grew through the beginning years of adulthood together.
He knows about Josie’s wife and Marcus’ girlfriend and they know about Jensen. And while Jared has met said significant others, they’ve just never crossed paths with Jensen.

“Why not? I figured he’d be around here in the waiting room one of these days, but no such luck.” Josie pulls on one of her curls, letting the tress of hair spring back up to frame her face.

Seemingly satisfying Marcus, the physical therapist rearranges Jared’s legs, gets down on his knees and helps the seated man into a series of hamstring stretches. It’s a lot easier now that the therapist is doing the work, so Jensen just has to enjoy the ride. “Yeah, I...Sometimes I like to keep my Physical Therapy world separate from my social life.”

Marcus lowers his eyebrows at his patient and stares him down. “Why, you ashamed of us, Jay-bird?” he asks, pulling out the nickname and making Jared snort.

“No!” Jared declares before really thinking about the question. “Not in the way you think. I’m not ashamed of this. I’m proud of it. But it’s hard to look sexy and fuckable when you’re learning to crawl across the floor or ungraceful keep your head above water. Kinda want to keep the mystery alive.”

The statement earns a snort from both Josie and Marcus.

The rest of their appointment goes fairly simple, but Jared’s spent after Marcus makes him do one too many arm push ups for Jared’s liking to remind him that, more than ever, it’s important he keep up with his exercises, stretching, and overall physical therapy. He knows his doctors have clued in the physical training center about his change in medication and the new symptoms Jared’s dealing with, but it’s a relief that Marcus and Josie have been business as usual.

He leaves after a tight hug from Josie and Marcus walking to schedule his next appointment. Marcus bids him farewell with with a wink and a thumbs up, reminding Jared of something straight out of an 80’s movie.

During the drive back home, it’s obvious that Jared’s body hurts, but not in a bad way. It’s more like muscle exhaustion and the feeling that he’s done something good for his body. He’s not actually tired, however. It’s more like he’s riding through some endorphins. Even with the little swell in his tummy that likes to make him vomit around this time, he feels good.

That is, until he arrives home.

Before he even pulls into his driveway, he can see his mother sitting on his front steps. She looks lost, zoned out and staring at something far in the distance. As soon as Jared swings his car towards the driveway, her trance is broken and she scrambles to get to her feet.

Jared’s heart clenches. His mother is a transparent person and Jared doesn’t need to be skilled to be able to read her. It’s plain to see how distressed the woman is, body worn down by lack of sleep and wrinkles running a little deeper with worry. It’s hard for Jared not to give into his immediate reaction of feeling relieved to see his mother because that’s been hardwired into him since he was born. So he doesn’t fight it too much, he just makes sure it’s served up with a heaping serving of trepidation.

“Mama?” Jared questions when he pushes open the driver’s side door. With his biceps and arms shaky from therapy, he gets out of the car easier than he anticipated. “What are you doing here?”

Megan is definitely her mother’s daughter because Sherrie’s reaction is so close to what his sister did. Sherrie chews on her lip and rocks back on her heels. “Jared, baby,” she says softly, a longing lilt to the words. She wipes her brow and gives Jared a sheepish look. “I’ve been waiting here for almost
an hour. Didn’t know when you’d be home. I don’t mean to impose...or to encroach on your personal space. But...I needed to see you. I wasn’t sure if you would want to talk to me given the fact that I’ve been a disgrace of a mother.”

Wheeling towards her, Jared stays collected. “You’re my mother, of course I would talk to you.”

“I’d deserve it if you didn’t.” Sherri looks at the ground, twisting the ball of her foot against a dried out piece of grass. “I made chili, the one you like with the cornbread right on top. Your favorite, ever since you were in utero.” She holds up a lidded cast iron pot.

The comment is true but it strikes Jared in a way that it never has before. That’s becoming a new occurrence for him. His first thought is to wonder how his mother knew he liked it in utero. His second is to ask himself what his child is going to love eating. Right now his baby likes making Jared’s stomach rid itself of food, not keep it inside. “Mom,” Jared starts but doesn’t get more out than that.

“Oh, baby,” Sherri says, setting the chili down. She closes the small gap between her and her son and kisses him on the forehead. “Please let me make up for how I’ve acted. Please. I’m appalled at what I did. Truly. I don’t even remember how I reacted; it’s like I blacked out. That’s no excuse, but I thought you should know.” She hovers in front of Jared, waiting to see her son’s next move.

They are at a standstill while the things before him sink into Jared’s brain. He rolls his wheelchair back and forth the slightest amount and then looks up at his mother, really seeing her. Sherri’s eyes are bloodshot, red and watery from too many tears. Jared thinks she looks impossibly older than the last time they were face to face. “You broke my heart, mama.”

“I know I did. I know I did baby. And I hate myself for it. Jared, you have no idea how much I hate myself. I feel like I let my baby down. I…” She chokes on a sob, her face distorting into one of sadness and worry. “I made a promise...that night when I thought I was going to lose you...I promised that I would never hurt you as bad as that bus. I promised I wouldn’t stop until you had the life you deserved.” She wipes at her eyes, the picture of a mother who would move the moon for her child. “And I broke that promise. You told me you were pregnant, and children need their parents’ support when they’re making a revelation like that. So what did I do? I threw it all in your face. I made you feel like you were wrong for trying to have the life you deserve. Because you deserve a baby, Jared. I believe that. But you have to understand how much your father and I love you, and how scary it is for us to hear that we might lose you. Trading your life so you can have an attempt to have something that comes more easily to average people doesn’t seem like a fair exchange. It’s not fair Jared.” Sherri crumples, falling to her knees, leaving her eye level to be closer to Jared’s.

Those were weighty words, heaved at Jared in one bundled up package. He wishes they weren’t outside, ripping their hearts open and baring their wounds and fears for all the public to view. “Mama,” Jared says because he needs to say it. He needs to remember that she’s there, she’s always been his cheerleader and underneath the initial mess of this situation, she still is. “Let’s go inside. Okay?”

Sherri doesn’t get any words out, her crying is too messy and violent for that. But she does nod, turn around, and march towards the house. She grabs the chili on the way, depositing it on the dining room table once Jared unlocks the front door.

Jared supposes his legs and arm muscles today aren’t the only things getting exercise today; he’s giving his heart a thorough workout. Holding his mother’s hand so that she knows he’s always going to be her son, Jared finds a way to get his words out. “Mom, what you did was painful. That whole day, I was terrified to share my news with you and then you made me feel like an idiot. You
abandoned me. I understand why you would be upset, but turning tail and running is something you’ve told me not to do in life.”

“I know. You’re right.” She pats his cheek, letting her palm linger there for too long. “You’re so smart, baby. You know so much. And you’re right. I was horrible. But I was in shock. All we were expecting was a nice simple dinner with you and Jensen. Maybe we thought you were going to tell us you were moving in together, something like that. None of us were ever prepared for the day when you revealed you were expecting. You have to understand that. We’ve all been told that would never happen. So when it did and you explained the side effects, I was in shock. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. I thought it must be a nightmare. But when I woke up the next day, it had all been real. And I’ll never forgive myself for walking out on you instead of sitting down and talking like the adults we all are.”

Jared’s going to forgive his mother, he knew that before she even showed up at his door. He needed her to understand where he was coming from and he thinks she gets it now. The woman is crying, squeezing Jared’s hand and hugging him every chance she can. “I needed you, mom.”

“Well I’m here now. I promise. I may not agree with your decision, but I agree that it is your decision to make. Not mine. So I’m here. And I will support you. But that doesn’t mean I’m not scared. And it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t hurt me,” she taps her index finger into the space over her heart, “right here.”

“I’m sorry I have to hurt you.” Jared hugs his mother to him, letting her face fall into his shoulder where his shirt can catch her tears. “But it’s my baby, one that I never thought I could have. I’ve gotta give it a chance. Just like you and dad gave me one.”

“I know sweetie. I get it. And maybe you will understand where I am coming from once that baby gets here, but a parent is always going to put their baby first and foremost. So...you’re my baby.” Sherri pulls away and smiles with pride at her son.

“And this is your grandbaby,” Jared says, pressing her palm to his belly.

At the touch, Sherri gasps and dissolves into a new waterfall of tears. It’s like the connection makes the situation real for her. She looks at Jared, blinded by tears but still trying to smile through them. “And he’s beautiful.”

“He?” Jared questions.

“Or her. I don’t know.” Sherri reaches out a hand and swipes away some of Jared’s tears. “Megan has the ultrasound scans. The baby is gorgeous, Jared. Looks just like you, nose and everything.”

Jared thinks his mother is biased; it’s impossible to tell what the fetus looks like. Still, the love in her voice is tangible and Jared doesn’t argue with her. “You think so?”

“Of course I do.” She rubs Jared’s bump in a sweeping motion. “You know I’m over the moon excited to be a grandmother, don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” Jared answers honestly, voice cracking.

“Well I am! Of course I am! I’m just not thrilled about the idea that I might lose my son.” She holds onto Jared’s hands, grounding the both of them. “But I wanted to come and make sure you know I am sorry. And I will love that baby with all I have, just as much as I love you. And you’ve got a whole team of people who are behind you, willing to do anything we need to do to help you.” She pushes Jared’s hair out of his face and smiles softly. “Your father wanted to come, baby. He really
did. But I asked him to stay home so I could talk to you alone. I was the one who started this whole mess and made your father and siblings walk out on you. Sure, I know they are grown adults who have minds of their own, but we were all at a loss over how to react. So, dad let me come pave the way to an apology first. I owe Jensen one too, I’d like to give it to him face-to-face.”

The mention of Jensen makes Jared laugh nervously. His mother gives him a quizzical furrow of her brow, urging Jared to explain himself. “It’s funny, because Jensen’s reaction was so much like yours. He freaked out because he’s terrified that by getting me pregnant, it’s all his fault that my health and life are in danger. He feels so guilty and all he wants to do is keep me safe.”

“I knew I liked that boy,” Sherri murmurs.

“Yeah, well...he walked out on me too. But we’ve made amends. We’ve worked it out. He loves me, just like you love me, and he’s scared that I’m making a needlessly dangerous choice. But he’s supporting me.” Jared pauses to wipe the tears out of his eyes. “I guess I am telling you this because Jensen helped me understand how he’s feeling and how you might be feeling. Each of your reactions weren’t all that different and I’m starting to understand the reasons behind you walking out. But it stills hurts. A lot.” Jared swallows and tries to find comfort in slipping his palm under the hem of his shirt so he gets skin on skin contact with his swollen middle.

“Now you’re breaking my heart. Which I deserve!” Sherri declares quickly, lest her son think she’s fishing for excuses. “But I am going to try to make it better. I know it’s stupid, but I thought the chili might be a good start. Some comfort food from mom for the soul.” She looks at Jared, twisting her hands in her lap, looking as eager as anything Jared’s seen. “I think I need another hug.”

Jared feigns embarrassment but gives in to hugging his mother again, wrapping his long arms around her and holding her tight. “Me too.” He hugs her until her shuddering chest and sobs peter out and dissolve. “I could also use a nice dinner with mom. One where you actually listen to me. And where I get two servings of your chili.” Just the thought makes his mouth water and he starts to understand what his mom meant by being able to tell that he loved eating chili, even in utero. His baby definitely wants a hearty serving.

“Baby, you can have all of it. And if you want more, I will march right on home and whip you up another batch.” Sherri laughs, the sound filled with relief and echoing in Jared’s heart.

A little at a time, the fissure in Jared’s heart is being filled in. The ache in his chest lessens and he can breathe more deeply. A few more pieces have to fall into place but he thinks that most of the emotional battles have been fought. He’s just gotta hope that his body wants to be just as strong about the physical ones.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter should be ready to go soon! I hope you enjoy!
And thanks, as always, to DemonDetox for the hand holding and the love.
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jared looks at his watch and realizes, that if he hightails it, he can catch Jensen real quick before the first bell rings. It’s not that he has anything important to tell him but touching base feels like a really good idea at the moment. He knows something has been going on inside Jensen’s brain. Jared’s pretty sure it’s not a bad thing, kind of the opposite actually. He’s got a feeling that it’s more like emotional growing pains and he wants to make sure his boyfriend knows that he has all the support in the world while figuring things out.

Jared’s been in that position before; he’s had plenty of years trying to come to terms with the twists and turns his life’s lead him on. He knows that it’s a one person sort of operation. As much as he would love for Jensen to talk to him, he gets it. Still, he can’t help but give in to the ache in his heart to check in on Jensen and make sure he’s okay. He feels mildly ridiculous when he thinks about it that way, considering he is the one racking up medical concerns, not Jensen. But issues of the heart are as much of a priority as issues dealing with Jared’s condition.

“Hey, Jen,” Jared says, popping his head into Jensen’s classroom. Finding it empty for the time being, he wheels himself inside.

Jensen looks up from a stack of notes on his desk, a genuine look of pleasant surprise on his face. Smile curving on his lips, he turns to face the room’s new occupant. “Hi, babe.” He catches his words and licks his lips nervously.

That pet name is new, and Jared quite enjoys the way a flush creeps over Jensen’s cheeks. The endearment results in a rush of warmth spreading through Jared’s body. Raising his eyebrows, Jared makes a contented noise and returns the smile. “I just wanted to swing by before class. Just to…you know…check in.” Jared combs his fingers through his hair.

Pointing a finger dumbly to his own chest, Jensen furrows his brow. “Me? I’m fine. But aren’t I the one who should be asking you that?”

“Pffh,” Jared huffs. “No one’s keeping score.” He does, however, take note of the concern in Jensen’s voice and that never fails to make him happy. “I’m feeling really good today. I mean, mentally at least. Pretty positive about the rest of the school year. But I am so glad my first year here at Arkin is quickly coming to a close.” Jared’s exhale comes with a sigh of relief. The year has been amazing in so many ways: he really honed his skills at a teacher, he’s had amazing students, and he got to meet the man he’s pretty sure is shaping up to be the love of his life. And as amazing as the year has been, he and Jensen are painfully aware of all the negative things the school year has brought. Rolling his shoulders, Jared meets Jensen’s eyes again. “Man, going back to physical therapy is really helping but the spasms are becoming a bit umm,” he makes a gesture by rotating his wrists and making circles in the air with his hands.

Jensen looks like he has heavier words on his lips but he swallows them down when several students filter into the room. Fishing for a new response, Jensen lets his shoulders drop and asks, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I dunno. They are just kinda…there. Like bubbling under my skin. It’s probably nothing big. I’ll just bump up my next appointment. Josie said I might need to do that. Considering that things,” Jared avoids the word ‘baby’ when curious little student ears are all around them, “tend to complicate
any person’s center of balance. Considering I’m sitting down most of my life, It’s hard figuring that out.”

Jensen shifts so that his body is blocking most of Jared’s torso and his lips are hiding from the students’ views. “You sure that’s all it is?”

“Yeah, probably just another fun quirk.” Jared’s ears perk up when the warning bell rings. He’s not teaching first period but he told some of his ceramics students that they can have extra time to work on the final projects. “Shoot, gotta get going.” His eyes narrow, curving up on the sides with the hint of flirt. Certain the students can’t see, he reaches out and gives Jensen’s hand a quick squeeze. “We can talk later.”

“Okay,” Jensen gives a smile but his attention is stolen when he turns towards some of his students. “Oh no, I don’t think so Joe. We’re not sitting on the radiator.” Giving one fleeting apologetic smile to Jared, he waves farewell and marches towards the trio who seem to be making themselves at home on the radiator. “We’ve got desks for a reason, gentlemen!”

Shaking his head, Jared makes his way to his classroom, where it is business as usual. None of his students are sitting on the radiator, but they are digging through the supply closet that they know damn well they’re not supposed in. “Willa, what do you think you’re doing hoarding all of the sculpting tools.”

The girl freezes when Jared wheels towards her, looking like she got caught with her hand in the cookie jar. “Sorry, Mr. P. I was going to share. I promise. I just wanted to get started.”

“Apology accepted. Now get your butt in a seat and get to work because it’s looking like you’re going to be finishing this project just under the wire.”

The room gives way to a flurry of activity. These students, the ones who want to spend all of their free time doing art, are speaking Jared’s language. He gets them. And he’s so glad that he’s able to share his love of creating with students who are so willing to learn.

Just another morning at Arkin.

***

For as well as the morning started, second period has Jared feeling out of sorts. Now that his ceramics class is full of students, the energy that he had during the extra help session seems to be diminishing.

Jared’s glad that a majority of this unit’s lessons are taught and done. His role now is simply to monitor, critique and give differentiated mini-lessons to students who might need them. It should be a relatively light teaching day, all things considered. But Jared finds his head spinning. When the first wave of dizziness hits him, he’s just finished explaining how Steven can build texture on his work and he catches himself on the corner of a work table. It makes his vision blur around the edges but he thinks it’s a one shot deal.

When the second wave of dizziness hits him, it’s doubled in force. He’s only vaguely aware of what’s happening to his body when he’s hit with a muscle spasm that’s way worse than the one he’d had in front of Jensen days ago. The force of the spasm pitches him from his chair and lands him belly down on the classroom floor. He hits hard, wind knocked out of him and head spinning. He’s trying to make sense of what just happened to him but there’s a disconnect in his brain and the circuits don’t seem to be connecting.
“Mr. P!” Willa gasps, jumping to her feet. Her call of alarm alerts the other students in the room, and suddenly everyone is on their feet and hushed murmurs fill the air.

From his position on the floor, Jared strains to tilt his head upwards, finding 22 sets of concerned and startled eyes looking down at him. He gets his palms flat on the ground for support and tries to press himself upward into a less prone looking position. He fails immediately, his body giving up on him like he’s lost control of it. He’s vaguely aware of some students rushing out the door, but he’s not sure who because all he can see is two pairs of sneakered feet traveling past his line of sight. Jared’s second attempt to sit upright is more successful, and while his world is still spinning, at least he’s giving his vision a fair chance of making sense of the world now that he’s right side up. “I’m okay, guys,” he hears himself say, but he’s not sure if he’s trying to calm his students or himself. There is an ache in his body from hitting the ground without properly bracing for the fall and the anxiety over the baby isn’t helping him get his bearings. Instead, he knows he’s panicking. It’s the exact opposite of helpful at the moment and his heart rate spikes. Squeezing his eyes closed, he tries to remember how to work his lungs.

“Mr. Padalecki?” Nurse Riley says, standing in the classroom’s doorway, flagged by two students. She’s got a wheelchair in tow, and when she catches sight of the fact that Jared’s own wheelchair is several feet away from him, she blushes for a moment, mentally kicking herself for stupidly automatically arriving with the school’s emergency wheelchair. The moment passes quickly and she rushes into the room. “Boys and girls, why don’t you give us some space, alright? Take a seat and give Mr. Padalecki some air,” she directs with the calm voice of a woman well experienced in these situations.

The students listen, blindly finding their seats because they don’t take their eyes off their teacher. It’s, without a doubt, the most drama Arkin has seen all year. Even in his moment of panic, Jared realizes this. He seems to bring a lot of attention his way; the thought sends an extra jolt of adrenaline through his system.

“Jared,” Nurse Riley asks as she crouches down beside the man. “Want to tell me what happened?” She reaches out to steady the man.

Jared blinks at her twice before he can focus on what is going on. Embarrassment over the nurse being sent for twice this year, all on the account that Jared fell out of his chair, burns through him and he wants to hide his head in the sand. He’s never been good at having a fuss made over him. What overrides those feelings is worry about the baby. Inside his head, he’s screaming for Jensen. For as well intentioned as she is, he doesn’t want Nurse Riley; he wants his boyfriend. His brain gets stuck on a repetitive loop of needing Jensen and his heart knows that he should give into that want. He should tell the woman to go get him. Who cares if Jensen is in the middle of teaching his own students? But his brain tells him to rein himself in and practice control. As much as he wants Jensen, he doesn’t want to blow this issue out of proportion. Getting Jensen involved will throw two classrooms into a flurry of activity, and that isn’t necessary, especially when it’s going to be around so many prying eyes. He looks up at Nurse Riley’s concerned eyes, waiting for an answer to his question, but before he can say anything, the bell signaling the end of the period rings.

“Okay kids, head on over to your next classes. I’m sure Mr. Padalecki just needs a few minutes to recover. He’s in good hands. Nothing to worry about,” the nurse reassures the students as they walk out of the room in silence.

The room empties quickly, none of the students keen to stay in the uncomfortable tension of the classroom any longer. Nurse Riley helps Jared back into his wheelchair, her concerned eyes growing sterner. “Jared, what’s going on? I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me. Do you need me to call for an ambulance?”
Jared waves the offer off. “No. I’m sorry. I’m just…a little stunned right now. It…it was a muscle spasm. A bad one. And…I think I hit pretty hard.” Biting his lips, he rubs at the hidden swell of his stomach, not giving a shit if the nurse finds it odd. Now that he’s back in his chair, he finds that it’s easier to get his composure. He’s always left with a sense of vulnerability when his means of mobility are lost to him, and now that it’s been restored, he’s more level headed. He’s able to see the panic for what it is: anxiety based on worry, not medical findings. He’s freaking out; while it’s a normal reaction, Jared knows he has to put a damper on it if he wants to be useful enough to proactively handle what happened to him. Looking at the nurse, he swallows thickly. “Spasms are kind of my normal. They happen to me sometimes. I still think that I should get checked out by my doctor…’cause they’re usually not like that.”

“I was going to suggest the same thing.” Nurse Riley’s intensity seems to level out now that her patient is a participant in discussing what just happened.

Shaking his head so that some of his hair falls into his eyes, Jared sighs. He situates himself more comfortably in his chair and wonders what his students think just happened to him. They’re good kids, ones with big hearts. “I feel like a fool now that I made a spectacle of myself in front of my students.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” the nurse chides. “I’m pretty sure, had you been able to avoid that, you would have.” She looks short of shaking a finger at him. “I make it a general rule, Jared, not to put anyone’s wellbeing and health above my own.” She pauses and considers her statement, backtracking to make an amendment. “Well, aside from my kids. But that’s a different matter entirely.”

Her words hit Jared like a bullet, making his stomach drop out again because the nurse doesn’t know that he’s actually following her advice. He’s letting her help him and fighting his habit of toughing things out because he’s worried about his baby. All his brain wants to do is make sure that his and Jensen’s child is safe, that he didn’t fuck this up and ruin the glimpse of a miracle fate tossed him. It makes him feel sick to his stomach, something that must be written on his face because he hears his name being called again.

“Jared?” Nurse Riley repeats. “Are you sure you don’t need an ambulance? Or maybe someone to come pick you up?”

“What?” Jared clears his throat and realizes what she’s asking him. “No. I was just thinking about something. Sorry. You don’t need to call anyone.”

She huffs but doesn’t push the issue. “Then at least let me escort you to your chairperson’s office. Ray Flanagan, right?”

A simple nod from Jared has the two of them silently making their way towards Ray’s office. It’s the nurse who knocks on the open door as a courtesy warning, drawing Ray’s attention towards them. Her presence is the cause of the way Ray’s expression changes from curious to alarmed.

“Maryann,” Ray starts, looking at the nurse and then towards Jared. “Jared…” He draws the man’s name out, cocking his head to the side slightly as his brain whirls to figure out what has brought the two people to his office. “What’s going on?”

Jared tilts his head up, “I can take it from here, Maryann. Thank you for your help.”

The nurse gets the point and respects Jared’s privacy by allowing the man to wheel himself inside the room before she closes the door and retreats. That leaves Jared to face Ray alone with the very real task of revealing his pregnancy before he’d even given himself a chance to think about this moment. The words come tumbling out of his mouth because they’re all going to land in the space between
the two men regardless of how delicately Jared phrases them. The knot of worry in his stomach is making him want to get them out as soon as possible. “Ray… I’m 14 weeks pregnant.” He continues speaking through the way Ray seats himself slightly more upright at the statement. “And I just had a muscle spasm. It made me fall – hard – and I landed on my stomach. I’m here to let you know that I’m leaving to go straight to the doctor.” There isn’t the hint of a request there, because Jared doesn’t care what Ray says, he’s going to the doctor either way. He’s only doing the responsible thing and telling his boss that he’s leaving so that his classes can be covered.

For his part, Ray doesn’t budge while he soaks up Jared’s revelation. When he finds his words, it's not to fight. “Of course! Of course, Jared!” There is a flustered quality to his voice but it’s due to surprise, not disagreement. “That’s exactly what you should do. I’ll call the main office and have them put a substitute in for your absence.” He gets to his feet, rounds his desk and sits on the edge so that he’s situated closer to Jared. “Can I do anything for you? Do you need a ride to your doctor’s office?”

Jared is taken aback by how forthcoming Ray is with his support. As a professional, Jared knows that Ray is doing his job, covering all the bases as any administrator should in such a situation. But he’s not accustomed to people at Arkin going out of their way for him. But Ray’s doing what should be done when an employee is found to be in need of medical attention while on the job. Arkin teachers are part of a union for a reason. “No. I’m okay to drive. I just wanted to make sure everyone knew I was gone…and that you knew why I was gone.”

“Well can talk more about the why when you return.” Ray says, standing so as to reopen the door. “Right now, you put yourself first. Okay?”

“Oh, okay,” is all Jared has the energy to eke out. He makes his way out of the office and nods towards his boss. “Thank you.”

“Nothing of it.” Ray returns the nod. “Good luck.”

Jared swallows thickly and nods again. He’s going to take all the luck he’s offered. Though not alerting Jensen to the situation is looming over him, he’s too worried about the baby to let himself worry about the feeling that he’s making a mistake in that choice.

***

Jensen doesn’t mind letting his students chat until the bell rings if they end class a minute or two early; today was a good day and they packed a lot in, they earned it. It’s not annoyance that has him walking over to a group of students hovering by the door. It’s curiosity. His ears picked up on the hushed style of whispering that can only indicate juicy gossip that he really doesn’t want to know about, or the type of things Arkin students complain about that any teacher should know about. Today’s gossip seems to be the latter, since he distinctly heard the words “classroom”, “nurse”, and “scared”. As he approaches the students, they don’t immediately shut up, giving him the impression that his assumption had be correct. They’re not spilling secrets but there is the type of frenzied chattering that is only intensified by close talking and hand gestures.

“What’s goin on guys? Anything I should be worried about?” Jensen raises an eyebrow and his lips quirk in an inquisitive fashion.

The students take the bait immediately, leaping at the chance to fill their teacher in. The eagerness these teens have to spill the drama of their days makes Jensen laugh. Cheryl speaks first, “Oh my god, Mr. Ackles! Maybe you can help us!” she pipes up, like the brilliant idea came to her just this moment.
The words immediately spike Jensen’s level of concern. “Help you with what?”

Instead of letting Cheryl answer, Denise takes over. “Help us with figuring out what happened today. Do you know what happened to Mr. P.? I mean, is he okay?”

Jensen blood turns to ice water and he freezes, the expression on his face making it perfectly clear that he has no idea what is going on. “Mr. P.? As in, Mr. Padalecki?” He dumbly asks for clarification because they obviously can’t be talking about Jared. Jared was fine a few periods ago and he’s fairly certain he would know if that fact had changed.

“Yeah, oh my god!” Cheryl gets to her feet, her voice leaving the whispering behind in favor of being loud and clear. “You didn’t hear? He had like a seizure or something in the middle of class. Nurse Riley had to come get him. But no one really knows what happened because class ended and she shooed everyone away. We thought maybe you would know because you two are friends, right?”

Jensen has to swallow thickly before he can get a word out. “Right.” His brain whirls, jumping to the worst possible conclusions before his logical brain reminds him that there is a distinct chance that his students don’t have their facts right. They don’t know Jared as anything more than a teacher and they’re acting as any uninformed student would. “When did this happen?” Jensen probes.

Denise counts backwards in her head. “Um, like two periods ago. Right at the end of second. Everyone’s been talking about it...Steven said he didn’t look real good.” Biting her lower lip, her eyes widen with something akin to shock. “Maybe he’s dying,” she says with an airy quality to her words, like the suggestion is too real to handle.

“He’s not dying!” Jensen yells, catching himself on the end of it and lowering his volume. He hadn’t meant to raise his voice but Denise’s words hit him in the heart and sent him reeling into panic again. Clearing his throat, he makes an apologetic press with his palms.

“Yeah, well. It was still scary. Steven said he fell really hard. Maybe he hit his head or something, I dunno. We just thought that maybe you would know.” The bell rings and the students all spark to life, standing upright and shouldering their bags. “See you tomorrow, Mr. Ackles. Tell Mr. P. we hope he’s alright if you see him.” Cheryl says with a wave, oblivious to the fact that Jensen’s stomach feels like it just left the building.

Jensen watches the students go, staring blankly at the door they all exit through. Everything the students said to him ping-pongs around his brain and he feels a cool sweat break out on the back of his neck. Jared had a seizure? The kids said he hit the ground hard...that he hit his head. What if he didn’t fall that way at all? What if the fall hurt the baby? What if Jared fell and injured his spine more? Denise had been dramatic when she suggested Jared might die but Jensen’s not confident enough to actually write that fear off. If something happens to the baby, it’s going to kill parts of Jared. And if something happens to Jared’s spine? Well, that can kill him too. Jensen’s going to be along for the ride, parts of him dying right beside Jared.

He feels like he’s going to be sick.

Whipping out his cell phone, he calls Jared. Despite his hopes, the call goes directly to Jared’s voice mail. “Shit,” Jensen curses under his breath. Heart beating so quickly that he’s lightheaded, Jensen rushes out of his classroom and pokes his head into the room next door where Mike is just gearing up to start his lesson. “Mike, you got a second?”

The man nods and meets Jensen by the door. “What’s up?”
“You still bringing the rest of your classes to see the Army vet’s presentation in the auditorium?”

“I was planning on it, why?” Mike replies with a nod.

“You mind grabbing my class and letting them tag along too?” Jensen’s voice is a whisper so that students don’t have another gossip storm about him. “Something pretty important just came up and I think I’ve gotta bail for the rest of the day.”


“I dunno...I hope things are fine but...I gotta find out.” Jensen gives an appreciative nod and a step backwards. “Thanks, Mike.” He doesn’t wait for a response before heading towards his chairperson’s office. He knows Trisha won’t give him a hard time about leaving. Jensen barely leaves or even calls in sick and he’s not the type to take advantage by asking for some time off over something trivial. He’s right, off course. Trisha doesn’t hesitate in shoving him out the door when he asks to leave over a family emergency. It’s not a lie - Jared is family. And regardless of how conflicted Jensen’s been over the situation, so is the baby growing inside his boyfriend.

Once he’s in the parking lot, he tries using his cell phone again. Only this time, he dials Dr. Atlas’ practice. Sandra picks up on the second ring, seeming all shades of surprised when Jensen asks her if Jared’s there. Jensen doesn’t blame her, he’s feeling just as surprised about not knowing Jared’s been at the office for a while now. Revving his car’s engine, he hightails it in Jared’s direction.

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Now that Jared’s made his way to Dr. Atlas’ office, he doesn’t quite know what to do with himself when Sandra tells him that Dr. Atlas isn’t there.

Of course the woman isn’t there. She doesn’t work regular hours anymore and unless she is scheduled to see Jared, she’s not at the practice. That is Ollie’s responsibility now. He wasn’t level headed enough to think about calling Dr. Atlas before he made the trip, all he could muster was driving there in a daze.

Now he’s choking on air in the waiting room and staring at Ollie, who’s trying to speak sense to Jared. Sandra had fetched the doctor as soon as Jared spit out enough words for her to piece together what happened.

“Jared, take a deep breath, okay?” Ollie takes a knee in front of Jared’s wheelchair. He nods encouragingly and mimics taking a breath and letting it out.

“I’m sorry,” Jared lets out before he exhales. “This is stupid. I’m sorry...I didn’t mean to...I’m sure you have patients.” He waves a hand in front of him like he’s trying to brush away his panic.

“Nothing to be sorry about. Yes, I do have patients, but they’re all settled up at the moment.” Ollie waits for Jared to take another round of breaths before continuing. “Whatever it is that has you so upset, we’ll get to the bottom of it. I might not be the high risk doctor that my grandmother is, but that doesn’t mean I’m not here to help you too.” A soft snort of laughter breaks up his words. “I think my grandmother made that quite clear. She’s invested in your care, but this is my practice too.” Jared swallows and nods. “I just...I...” He chews over his words because he doesn’t want to insult Ollie. He’s sure the man is a great doctor, but he’s not Evelyn. “Is your grandmother around? I...I know it sounds stupid, but I would feel a lot better if she was - ”

Ollie cuts Jared off. “There aren’t stupid concerns when it comes to dealing with your pregnancy. Of
course it’s not stupid that you would want to see my grandmother; she’s been the one treating you.” He pauses and gives Jared a smile. “Tell you what, how about you let me examine you, just to rule out the chance of any time sensitive emergencies? But before we do that, I don’t mind getting my grandmother on the line and asking her to come down. She’ll be here before you know it,” he says reassuringly, successfully getting Jared’s breathing more regulated. “That woman can move with more speed than you’d think a woman of her age is capable of.”

Ollie’s offer makes a crack in Jared’s worry and the man nods quickly. “If you wouldn’t mind.”

“Kinda feeling like you wouldn’t have it any other way, even if I do mind.” Getting to his feet, Ollie places a hand on Jared’s shoulder. “And that’s okay. It means you’re serious about advocating for what you think you need. Besides, I don’t mind. Once we know that everything is right on track with you and the baby, my grandmother is going to have a huge smile over this. She’s not going to mind either.”

Jared nods, his worry dissolving further over the fact that Ollie seems confident that things will be fine. In Jared’s opinion, Ollie doesn’t physically resemble his grandmother, but he can tell that they’re related because the younger doctor must get his positive outlook from Dr. Atlas. It does the trick in calming Jared’s nerves, just as Dr. Atlas had straight from the beginning.

Ollie shows Jared to the exam room and gives him privacy while he situates himself on the exam table. Then he excuses himself so he can, as promised, make a call to his grandmother. By the time he returns, Jared’s already stretched out on the table, arms folded behind his head as a way to pin them down and stop them from nervously fidgeting.

Jared’s tripping over words while he gets out the whole story about the spasms, falling and landing on the pregnant swell in his middle. Ollie listens patiently and then holds up his hands as a sign of asking permission. “I’m just going to do a physical exam, and see how it goes from there, okay?”

“Yeah.” Jared hikes up his shirt and stretches his neck so he can look at the curve of his stomach. It’s odd to see that there, since his torso has been long and lean ever since his body filled out with muscles from toning and physical therapy. Seeing the new way his middle is shaped, makes his heart feel like it’s being strangled by his ribcage, like it’s caught on a beat and can’t find a way to work properly. Licking his lips, he winces when Ollie puts his hands on him.

Ollie retracts all pressure immediately and shoots Jared a concerned glare. “That hurt?”

Jared’s quick to reply. “No. I just...It caught me off guard. I was thinking…”

“About this?” Ollie gestures towards Jared’s middle with a dip of his head.

“Yeah.”

Expression shifting to one of understanding, Ollie smiles. “Ahh ha.” He puts his hands on Jared again, this time more slowly, and when his patient doesn’t have a physical reaction, he gets to work. As his hands search, his words try to distract. “When’d you pop?”

“Few weeks ago. Kinda just showed up.” Jared bites his bottom lip and uses one elbow to prop himself so he’s got enough of an angle to watch the doctor work.

“Yeah, it happens like that a lot with first babies.” Ollie palpitates Jared’s middle several times before satisfaction curves the shape of his lips. “The body does a lot of work to keep little ones cushioned. It’s amazing how far your body will go to make sure the fetus is safe.” Removing his hands from Jared’s middle, he gives a warm smile. “The baby should be fine as long as you don’t make a habit
of falling on your stomach. And while I don’t see any issues that are alarming me, I would like to do an ultrasound just to put everyone’s mind at ease.”

Jared has a feeling that Ollie mostly means that he wants to put Jared’s mind at ease. And while an ultrasound will probably seal the deal, now that Ollie’s expressed that nothing feels out of the ordinary, Jared’s found that he’s let out a breath he didn’t even know was caught in his lungs. Scooting up the table slightly, Jared manages to put both of his palms flat on his stomach. “Really? The baby’s okay?”

“Well, we’re going to find out for sure.” Ollie holds up the ultrasound transducer. He effortlessly deposits gel on Jared’s middle and smears through it with the wand. Resuming his distractive efforts again, Ollie asks, “Your kid camera shy?”

Jared shakes his head and watches the black and white static on the screen. “Um, no. I don’t think so.” He has no clue how to make sense of the ultrasound but his gut tells him he’ll recognize his child when Ollie locates the fetus. He’ll just know. He sucks in a deep breath and holds it, pressing his lips together while he stares at the screen. Things shift and clarity spreads over his face as things come into view. The unmistakable image of his baby has Jared whispering, “Hey, you.”

“Yep, not camera shy.” Ollie laughs, looking as if he’s about to lean closer to the screen but the exam room door opens and all eyes are drawn towards Dr. Atlas bursting into the room. Ollie mocks a dramatic glance at his watch. “It’s about time you got here.”

Dr. Atlas doesn’t miss a beat, and while the gesture is gentle, she reprimands Ollie with a tap to the back of his head. “Shush, you.” Ignoring her grandson, she turns to Jared. “Seems like you and your baby wanted to bump up your next appointment. Sorry I wasn’t aware of the change of plans earlier. I came as fast as I could.” Her smile is warm, almost motherly. “Sandra told me what’s going on. I hope Ollie’s been treating you right in my absence.”

Jared nods, wanting desperately to get his eyes back on the screen. As glad as he is to see Dr. Atlas, he’s fidgeting at being held on the edge of finding out if his child is okay or not. “He’s been great. We were just - ”

“Getting to the good part,” Ollie finishes.

“Well then, by all means. Continue.” Dr. Atlas settles herself beside her grandson and gives a nod to indicate that he should carry on. Focusing on the screen depicting the images, Dr. Atlas perches her glasses on her nose and looks at the feed. “Can you move the transducer a little to the left?” She’s quiet for a moment as Ollie follows her request. “A little higher. But still left.” Ollie rolls his eye despite the fact that he listens to her. “No, the other left. My left.”

Freezing his movements, Ollie turns and faces his grandmother. “You wanna drive?”

Seemingly pleased with the offer and steamrolling right through Ollie’s sarcasm, she isn’t ashamed of her backseat driving and steps forward to reach for control of the transducer. “Why, yes. I would. Thank you.” She gives a smile, looking proud of herself. She moves the wand exactly where she wants it and focuses on the screen. Before she can say anything, the room is disturbed for a second time as the door swings open.

Jared turns his head, finding Jensen standing in the open doorway, looking out of breath and frazzled like he’s never seen him before. “Jen? What are you doing here?” He asks stupidly despite guilt and relief working in tandem to crash into him at the sight of his boyfriend.

Jensen gets caught in a magnetic pull that draws him towards Jared. “You had a seizure?” It’s part
acccusation but disguised as a question and the look in Jensen’s eyes makes Jared’s world shudder.

Jared wrinkles his nose and knits his brows. “What?”

“The students...they said you had a seizure. That you hit your head...that you…” Jensen pauses to breathe, giving up on talking and using his hands to see for himself that Jared’s in one piece. He places his palm on Jared’s cheek, then coasts it upwards, running it through his hair and across the, clearly in tact, curve of his skull. “You…”

Jared leans into the touch automatically. “I didn’t have a seizure. It was just a muscle spasm,” he admits, realizing his mistake in trying to brush it off as no big deal when he see’s Jensen curl his lip in distaste. “I...I know I should have told you - ”

“Not dealing with that now;,” Jensen says curtly as a way to shut down that conversation. Leaning down he presses a kiss to Jared’s lips, pulling away just a fraction before doing it again and lingering there. “You okay?”

Jared feels his eyes tear up and he reaches both his hands up to clasp behind Jensen’s neck and pull the man so that their foreheads stay together. “I dunno,” he admits honestly, voice unsteady. Now that Jensen’s here, it’s undeniably apparent that Jared needs him. “I fell pretty hard...face down. And I just...I don’t feel so great.”

Despite Jared holding onto him for dear life, Jensen manages to twist and direct his question to Dr. Atlas. “Is he okay?”

Unfazed by the seemingly unsettled issues between Jensen and Jared, Dr. Atlas gives the new arrival a smile. “Well, you’ve got good timing. We were just about to figure that part out.”

Then there is silence in the room. It doesn’t last long but Jared knows the seconds are going to drag. He manages to lace his fingers with Jensen’s and squeezes, the gesture tightening when he hears Dr. Atlas clear her throat.

“You can breathe Jared, everything looks fine.” She puts the transducer down and hands Jared paper towels to wipe the gel off his middle.

“Really?” Jared asks, despite the fact that he heard her loud and clear. His brain had been braced for her to find something wrong, leaving him unprepared for what she actually said.

“But Jared’s okay too?”

Jensen cuts in. “But Jared’s okay too?”

“Well, I suppose Jared should check in with his other doctors, but I can’t see any harm done.” She turns towards Jared. “I know that the way this pregnancy came about is leaving you in a new world. But it’s more important than ever that you heed the warnings your body is giving you. If you’re feeling sick or off, take some caution.” Clicking her tongue, she gesticulates with her finger in the air.
“It’s a good thing you were surrounded by people when you fell. Things like this can be time sensitive.” She looks down at Jared and smiles kindly in preparation for what she’s about to say. “Jared, I know we haven’t known each other long, and you can correct me if I am wrong, but I know you are a strong person. You would have to be in order for you to get to this point in your life. And I applaud that. But I think it is best to err on the side of caution and limit the time you spend being alone.” She doesn’t catch the way Jensen tenses at the warning, focusing instead on Jared’s reaction. “It’s okay to lean on Jensen for help or to let people do things to help you if you’re feeling strained. In the classroom, try to make sure you don’t over do it. I know you can do your job and still keep this little one safe.” She concludes with another smile of confidence. “Try to relax, okay? Do something to de-stress.”

Jared nods, agreeing to every word the woman says. He can do all of that. It won’t be too hard, especially since Jensen’s been more attentive by the day. He swallows and a question floats out of his mouth before he really thinks about it. “Is it okay for me to paint? Because that’s what I do to relax. I paint and...I’ve already stopped using certain paints because of the fumes, but...I just want to check.” He almost puts the stopper on the ramble before another question eeks out. “And clay too. I sculpt and - ” Kind laughter bubbling up from Dr. Atlas stops his words and falls on him like a blanket. She’s not laughing at him, he can tell by her tone.

“Relax, Jared,” she repeats. “You know paints. Just steer clear of oil based paints. And clay is dirt,” she simplifies. “No one gets hurt from dirt. Go have fun and play in the dirt a little while.” She points a finger at Jensen, narrowing her eyes at him. “You’ll make sure of that, won’t you?”

Jensen absentmindedly points to his own chest while processing the question. “Yeah...of course.” Then he shoots Jared a look that’s deadly serious and Jared’s not sure if Jensen’s going to hover over him until he relaxes or if he’s going to lecture him on the concept. Either way, Jared’s got the feeling that he’s not going to be able to follow Dr. Atlas’ orders right away.

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Jensen stomps his way through Jared’s front door, neglecting his usual habit of letting Jared enter the house first. He’s pissed off and he’s not sure how to process that information. He knows pacing around his boyfriend’s house like a brooding teenager isn’t going to solve anything but he needs the extra time to think and process. After seeing Dr. Atlas, the time alone in his car as they made their ways back to Jared’s house is proving to not be enough.

He heard everything that Jared heard and he knows that Dr. Atlas wants Jared to take some time to come down from the emotional rollercoaster he’d set himself on. And Jensen wants that too, but he can’t let that happen when he’s got all these uncomfortable feelings gnawing inside of him. They’d promised each other they would talk like adults if things were bothering them, and Jensen’s going to do that. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he comes to a stop with his back towards the front door. He hears Jared enter the house, calling his name.

“Jensen, listen…”

“No, you listen,” Jensen says, turning around and trying to keep control of the emotions in his voice. He doesn’t want to fight with Jared, that’s not what this is about. But he needs to make sure his boyfriend knows what he did isn’t okay. “What were you thinking?” His eyes lock with a shocked looking Jared.

“Huh?”

“What were you thinking just disappearing from Arkin like that? I had to hear from students - students - that my boyfriend had some type of medical emergency in class and was sent home for the
day. Don’t you think maybe I should have heard that from you?” His words hit right on the mark, and Jared flinches.

“You wanna know what I was thinking?” Jared asks, but there is fire in his words, making the question have a hint of a threat. “I was thinking that I fucked up. I was thinking that I messed this whole thing up and my body found a way to make sure to get rid of the new stressor it’s been dealing with. That I lost the baby and…” Jared’s voice breaks to the point that he can’t continue. Instead he swings his head to the right and sets his features, his stare burning a hole in the wall.

Jensen’s angry, but he’s not heartless. Jared’s words knock him down a peg or two and he stumbles over his response. “Jared..that’s not…” He closes his eyes and refocuses. “That’s not what I’m talking about. I get all of that. But what I don’t understand is how you think not telling me was a good idea. Because that hurts, Jared.” Jensen’s voice cracks. “It hurts to hear that the man I love is dealing with something and I seem to be the last to know. It hurts that you wouldn’t trust in us enough to tell me. Because you and me and the baby…” the last word tumbles out of his mouth like lead weight due to the emotions he’s saddled it with “…we’re family, right?”

Jared’s head snaps back to Jensen, pulling back as surprise over the words hits him in the face. “I dunno. Are we?” His glare at Jensen is accusatorial before continuing. “I’ve given you space but you’ve been flighty and freaked out lately. I didn’t know what you were processing. And I didn’t want to make it worse.” There is anger in the words but it melts away to fear as he continues with a deeper response. “And I didn’t want to treat the fall like a big deal because I refused to let my brain go there. I was so scared that I fucked up...that I did something wrong. And I guess, stupidly, I thought if I refused to actually latch onto the idea that it was a big deal, then it wouldn’t be a big deal.” Wheeling himself closer, Jared looks directly at Jensen with earnest eyes. “I really wanted you Jensen. I thought that as soon as I fell. Then Maryann Riley was around, and all the kids, and all I was worried about was not making a scene. Like I said, I just wanted to pretend that maybe it wasn’t a big deal. But I really did want you there, Jen. I swear. Even at Dr. Atlas’ but I was too scared to do anything about it.”

Jensen believes every word and hates himself a little for pushing Jared to the point that he looks like he’s ready to break. Shaking his head, Jensen realizes he’s at that point as well. He feels wrung out and exhausted after the emotional marathon he’s been running and his next question rings so true that it’s deafening. “Did it ever cross your mind that I would want to be there too?”

“You do?” A sharp inhale from Jared fills the room, and the younger man’s chest starts to rise and fall a little quicker. His body language reminds Jensen of an open wound and they stare at each other trying to figure out what to do about that.

“Shit, Jared. Yeah. Of course I do. I told you that. I was so fucking scared. I know they’re kids and they have no idea what they’re talking about, but when I heard that you had a seizure? I felt like the floor dropped out from underneath me. Of course I want to be there.” Jensen crouches down in front of Jared’s wheelchair so that they are eye to eye. “I’m sorry I’ve been dealing with my own stuff. But I love you and today was proof that I can’t always protect you and that is a whole new world of terrifying.” He raises a palm before Jared can interrupt. “I know you don’t need me to protect you. You don’t need it. But I’d still like to be able to offer that. And it makes me feel so useless that I can’t help you with anything. And then it felt like you didn’t want me around when you fell and...that fucking hurt Jared.”

Jared’s breath hitches. His right hand reaches out cards through the hair behind Jensen’s left ear. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I know that now,” Jensen says softly as he covers Jared’s palm with his hand. “But that doesn’t
mean it didn’t sting at the time.” He bounces up enough so he can hook his fingers under Jared’s chin and pull them closer, their lips hovering a breath apart. “I don’t know what we’re doing, but I think it helps when we’re both on the same page. It’s scary not knowing what is going on.”

“How do you think I feel? My own body doesn’t want to listen to me. And then I didn’t want you to get in trouble at work if I dragged you into things - ”

Jensen cuts him off immediately. “Screw work. Family comes first.” The words are so strong that even Jensen’s impressed by them. “You come first Jared.”

Rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand, Jared sighs. “Well now I feel like an asshole.”

“Nah. Just learning, right?” Jensen laughs enough to lighten the mood. “We both don’t know what we’re doing and this learning curve is brutal.” He allows himself a brief pause so he can kiss the corner of Jared’s lips. “Isn’t that what Dr. Atlas said? Learn to lean on others for help?” Swallowing, Jensen steadies his nerves and stands up. “Come’ere.” He leads Jared to the couch and allows him time to swing himself onto the cushions before taking a seat next to him. “Actually, I was thinking about what she said…that you shouldn’t be alone…and I couldn’t stop myself from thinking that, you’re alone a lot. When I’m not here, you’re alone at night. And in the morning. And…” Jensen’s heart rate spikes. This isn’t like when he asked Jared to marry him out of some instinctual nervous twitch that it was the right thing to do. This is something he’s ready for, something he’s been wanting for a long time and now all the pieces seem to make sense. “We should live together. I mean…I wanna move in with you. If you want to,” he adds quickly, like the statement has any chance of keeping him safe if Jared refuses. This isn’t the proposal and Jensen’s heart is in the right place. He wants this man and days spent together even with all the good and bad that’s bound to occur. Jared’s not saying anything, his brain having a hard time bouncing back from almost crying. Giving a nervous smile, Jensen’s voice pipes up again. “I think it would be good….so…do you? Wanna move in?” Chewing the corner of his lip, he careens over the edge of holding it together and lets nerves kick in. “I mean, probably not in my place. That place doesn’t work for you and I don’t like my apartment complex all that much either. But we could get a new place or...I don’t wanna impose...we could move into your house. It’s not like I’m trying to invite myself,” he pauses and gives an embarrassed laugh. “Actually, I guess I am. But your place is perfect for you. And it could be perfect for me. So I’d like that...if you’d wanna move in with me by letting me move in with you.” He finally reins in his words and swallows. That didn’t go at all like he planned but Jared’s eyes are smiling back at him so he obviously hit something right.

“Are you asking me if I would be okay with moving in together by letting you invite yourself to move into my house?” He quirks his lips to one side and snorts a laugh.

“Well, in different words, but yeah.” Jensen nods, lips quirking into a smile.

Jared’s answer is leaning towards Jensen so he can press into his personal space and make himself at home. “I’d really like that. I’ve been thinking about it myself.” He catches Jensen’s hips and pulls himself closer. “And I think it’s a great idea. And I’d like it very much if you would move in with me.” He tilts his chin upward to kiss the underside of Jensen’s jaw. “Jensen?”

“Hmm?”

“Will you move in with me?”

The way the words slide off of Jared’s tongue with so much love make Jensen’s heart explode with happiness. He’s pretty sure he doesn’t need to answer, but he does anyway by leaning back pulling Jared on top of him. It allows him to kiss all the words out of Jared’s mouth while simultaneously wrapping his arms around the other man’s waist to keep him close. With all the things they just
hashed out, Jensen’s going to make good on the deal he made with Dr. Atlas. He’s going to make sure Jared spends the rest of the night relaxing; while being stretched out on the couch, wrapped up in kissing and touching, might not be the type of relaxing the doctor had been implying, it’s still going to get the job done.

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Jensen groans as he laces his fingers together and stretches his hands overhead. Jared’s couch is cozy but he’s left with a kink in his back from passing out beside his boyfriend. While the couch is fine for sitting, he and Jared are by no means small men, leaving Jensen with reminders that snuggling for hours in the cramped spot isn’t always the best idea. Falling asleep on the couch next to Jared hadn’t been the plan, but once they found themselves feeding off of the comfort that being together brings, neither man wanted to move. It felt too good having his arms around Jared, his hand flat on Jared’s belly in the way that made Jared melt into him. Moving was not an option. So they didn’t, leaving them with stiff necks but smiles on their faces.

Jensen’s not smiling so much right now. His brain is whirling with the possibilities of what Jared’s doing at the moment. During his off time before second period, Jared met with Ray and they’d scheduled a meeting during his lunch period with the superintendent of human resources so Jared can inform the school about his pregnancy and that he will have to take paternity leave during the upcoming school year. Jensen knows the school won’t give Jared any problems, but he’s still got a knot of worry in his gut. However, there is nothing he can do about it at the moment other than sit and wait for Jared to let him know how it went. The younger man had promised that he would text Jensen as soon as he was out of the meeting.

With no Jared around, Jensen doesn’t have much to do during his lunch period. He’s gotten so accustomed to eating his lunches with the other man in one of their classrooms that he barely remembers what it’s like spending his lunch period in the faculty cafeteria. That had been his habit for years, but since Jared lit up every fiber of his bones, he can barely remember those times. He’s got a smile on his face over the thought as he makes his way towards his prior lunch location. Unexpectedly spending the night at Jared’s had left him unprepared for work this morning and he barely had time to run home to change his clothing, let alone make himself lunch. Jeanie’s the best food service staff Arkin’s had in years, and he’s in a good mood at the prospect of the woman not letting him go hungry during his hectic day at work.

The good mood immediately ceases to be when he pushes the cafeteria door open and is met with Ana holding court over some of Arkin’s resident bitches. Up until his recent confrontations with Ana, Jensen gets along with everyone, he really does, but being a union rep has left him on the receiving ends of complaints about co-workers from many of his peers. He knows who the trouble starters are and who keeps their heads above the gossip waters. The group he is looking at are the one’s who fall into the former group. They don’t even raise a glance his way, continuing on with their bickering undisturbed by the room’s new occupant.

Jensen’s going to get his food, get out, and ignore them. He intends on doing just that as he gives Jeanie a wave, but when the group’s topic of conversation hits his ears, Jensen sees red.

“You’ve gotta be shitting me,” Rob says with enough snark in his voice to make his distaste tangible.

“Nope, I shit you not,” Ana says, head held high with a pugnacious smirk on her face. “Heard it from my chairperson’s secretary herself. She can’t keep her damn mouth shut. Especially about something so scandalous.”

Rob snorts. “Who the hell would fuck a cripple like Padalecki? Or worse, knock him up?” His scoff becomes a laugh and he rolls his eyes.
Another round of laughter rolls through the group when another woman thinks she’s being funny by adding, “Must be some redneck with a few screws loose. Or better yet, one of those people with a weird kink for paralysis or something.”

Jensen’s seething at this point, frozen with anger and disbelief over the actual words his coworkers are using. They’re weapons, sharp and hurtful and miles away from who he and Jared really are. They’re meant to cause scars. These people are supposed to be part of a team who work together to make sure the youth of America grow up with values and a sense of ethics, yet here they are being cattier than any of the teenagers in the school. Disgust fills Jensen’s bones at the realization that they all deserve to be told off. But the next thing Jensen hears takes the cake, toppling him from being angry to being downright murderous.

Rob laughs, trying to for all the world to sound smugly superior. “That poor kid. It’s probably going to be retarded or something. Having an invalid for a father and all.”

Jensen lunges. It’s like something takes over his body and he’s gone rage blind. For all his level-headedness, he can’t remember a time in his life where he’s felt this enraged. “You damn fucking asshole!” Jensen yells as he storms Rob, jolting the guy out of his seat and crowding him against the nearest wall. Shoving into him, Jensen’s forearm presses into Rob’s throat, cutting off his air enough to have Rob’s eyes wild with fear. “The fuck you just call Jared?” Jensen’s words hiss out with hot breath across Rob’s face. He hears a commotion from the group behind him but it’s white noise for him at this point. Rob can’t get a word out and Jensen gives a growl. He’s a man possessed at this point. He’s a rational man, but no one attacks him or his family like that. “The only invalid I see here is you and your narrow minded, pathetic, authoritarian ways. I’m not a fucking redneck but I sure as hell can fight like one.” Jensen’s head is foggy with anger but he knows damn well what he’s doing when he pulls his arm back and punches the guy straight in the law. “Just so we’re clear, you ever dare talk about my boyfriend or my kid like that again? You won’t like what’s coming.” He lifts his fist up again but doesn’t go in for the punch again. Instead, he releases Rob, shoving him back towards his group. “Get out of my face!” When he spins on his heels, he turns to Ana. “And you!” he accuses, taking a intimidatory step in her direction. “Just be glad I’d never sink low enough to touch a woman because you sure as hell deserve your ass handed to you. You’re the worst of them all.”

Ana’s mouth gapes open and closed like a fish. Jensen has deflated her completely, zapping her of all her pent up bullying ways and calling her out for exactly who she is underneath.

From the corner of the room where she’d been discreetly watching the whole thing, Jeanie slips up and a little whoop of a cheer leaves her mouth. She catches herself but not before drawing attention in her direction and making it known that she saw the whole thing and she most definitely agrees with Jensen.

Jeanie’s cheer disperses the fog that surrounded Jensen and he blinks. He can’t believe he just did what he did, despite the fact that Rob and Ana had it coming. Shaking his head, he storms out of the faculty cafeteria, his feet hitting the tiled floor hard enough for his footsteps to echo down the hall as he steals himself away in his classroom. Coming down from his anger has Jensen feeling a little drunk, dizzy now that the adrenaline has had its way with him.

As a professional - as a union rep - Jensen should know better than to act like that. He should have known that fighting sharp words with sharper ones and using fists is not the correct way to settle things. Hell, he does know that and he didn’t care. And now he’s feeling like he’s just dug a giant hole for himself. However, he’s definitely up for a whole lot more digging when it comes to protecting his family. And, god it felt damn good to finally tell them off. It’s scary to discover a whole new side of himself, but Jensen is realizing that there are parts of him that will not budge. He
will move mountains to keep Jared and their child safe, from both physical and emotional attacks.

And just like that, Jensen realizes that maybe the things his brother has been saying aren’t so ridiculous after all. Jensen’s gone full on protective of his new family.

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Jensen holds his coffee mug with two hands, tilting it back and draining the thing in one long gulp. He slams it back on the table and almost jumps out of his seat when Kelsey appears beside him.

“You look like you could use another.” She drops a fresh cup of coffee in front of Jensen and gives a perky smile. “Rough day?”

“Something like that,” Jensen breathes out, giving Kelsey a nod to thank her and sipping his new cup of coffee immediately. The liquid is hot enough to burn his tongue but he doesn’t care. He hadn’t expected to find himself sitting at Spoons, especially without Jared. If he had to give it such a delegation, the coffeehouse belongs to Jared. It’s where they spent their second date and many late nights out, but it’s Jared’s through and through. He doesn’t know why he was drawn here, but he couldn’t go home. He was angry enough to punch a hole in the wall, and that won’t do him any favors when he’s trying to break his lease with his landlord and move in with Jared.

So he came to Spoons, and Kelsey must have psychic powers because she’s honing in on him. She doesn’t know Jensen as much more than Jared’s handsome boyfriend, but that’s enough to render Jensen under her good graces. The barista seats herself in Jared’s habitual spot, propping both elbows on the table. “Where are the wheels?” she says, indicating Jared.

“Hopefully on their way.” Jensen sighs and takes another drag from his coffee. His day has spun wildly out of control. He was expecting it when his chairperson came and found him not ten minutes after his tirade in the faculty cafeteria. He was expecting to be reprimanded but not with the type of sympathetic eyes that Trisha gave him, like she knew that even though Jensen’s actions were wrong, he was also right. He also wasn’t expecting the woman to put him on leave for the day with instructions to meet with the superintendent in the morning so they can figure it out. In the end, Jensen managed to text Jared hours ago to say that his chairperson sent him home for the day, that he was fine but the two of them needed to talk as soon as Jared was out for the day.

It left Jensen’s head swimming and somehow he thought drowning coffee would help him see straight again. At the moment, though, he’s only feeling on edge and jumpy, like the answer is just beyond his reach and he’s doomed to fall short of it.

“Wanna talk about it?” Kelsey asks, friendly yet not pushy.

“Nah. Thanks for the offer though. And the coffee,” he adds, holding the cup up.

Getting the hint, Kelsey rises. “‘I’ll keep ‘em coming.” And just like that, she weaves back into the folds of Spoons.

The coffeehouse is filled with the noises of patrons and brewing machinery, but Jensen’s ears still pick up on Jared’s voice as he gives a friendly hello to Kelsey. The woman must have offered him a coffee because Jared shakes his head and puts both hands on his belly. From his viewpoint, Jensen can make out the way Kelsey’s eyes widen in what Jensen assumes is surprise over the pregnancy. There are hugs and smiles that make Jensen feel a little guilty of ruining a happy moment with the news he needs to share with Jared.

When Jared finally makes his way towards Jensen, the question on Jared’s lips isn’t what Jensen had
been prepared for. “What the hell did you do, Jensen?”

Swallowing, Jensen puts his coffee down slowly. “So you heard about it then?”


That elicits a laugh out of Jensen. In two days, the school has blown their lives out of proportion. “God, I hope not. Is that what they told you?” He doesn’t wait for an answer and laughs again in disbelief. “No. I haven’t been fired. But I am not going to be at work tomorrow because I’ve got a superintendent's conference to discuss what I did today.”

“And what did you do today?” Jared asks cautiously, drawing out his words and leaning over the table so he’s closer to Jensen.

Jensen sucks his bottom lip in, ashamed to tell his boyfriend that he sunk to such levels. “Umm, I punched Rob Taylor in the face and threatened to do the same to Ana.”

Jared’s eyes go wide. “You did what!?” The whole coffeehouse quiets at that, turning their heads towards the couple. Jared ducks his head apologetically and lowers his voice. “You did what?” he repeats.

“I know…” Jensen’s cheeks flush. He’s been so adamant about taking the higher road, about Jared doing the same, and he feels like a hypocrite. “Come on, you know Ana and her minions had something like this coming for a long time.”

“What the hell, Jensen? You can’t do things like that!”

Jensen holds up a hand. He’s not proud of what he did but he’ll defend his reasons until the end of time. “What? You think I’d let these guys trash talk you and my baby? They deserve every word I handed them.” He crosses his arms over his chest and sets his jaw. “No fucking way I’m apologizing for that, Jared. Violence, maybe. But defending you and our kid? Never.”

Jared’s entire demeanor changes when he digests Jensen’s words. He softens around the edges, smile widening when Jensen says “my baby” and “our kid”. Leaning over the small table between them, Jared reaches for whatever part of Jensen’s shirt he can get his fist around and pulls the man across the table to kiss him. “You shouldn’t have done that. But I’m fucking glad you did.” He goes in for another kiss.

They’re still kissing when Kelsey flits her way towards them, but the woman does an about-face and heads back from whence she came, letting the men kiss because sometimes when the world crowds in on you, you’ve just gotta hold on to a good thing and have faith that it’s enough to carry you through.

Chapter End Notes

THANK ALL OF YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR AMAZING COMMENTS! I am so flattered to have the best readers on earth! *blushes* Please let me know what you think! Jensen is finally realizing a lot of things...and it's been a long time coming. More happy stuff for our boys soon.
Also - Cheryl is completely based on my niece who would actually react exactly as this character did. Just a little tid-bit.

I hope you all enjoyed!
Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

Yay! I can finally post.
I just want to say I adore all of you for sticking with me and showing me the love I've needed this year.
Sorry for the delay. The next chapter is all but finished. So there should be more soon.
I've just been so busy lately. And my lovely wifey (and beta) is coming to stay with me for a week. So I've been busy getting the house liveable.
If someone wants to do all my home repairs and build me some new kitchen cabinets...I would gladly write for a living. LOL

Jared can’t stop his mind from racing. It’s all Jensen’s fault, really. Ever since Jensen sat across from him at Spoons with that protective look on his face and told Jared that he’d finally told Ana off, Jared’s been a goner. His mind keeps racing around wishing he saw Ana’s face when Jensen told her that the baby Jared’s carrying is his. Jared knows that it was his idea to keep their relationship a secret for the time being, but he’s so glad that Jensen decided to let the facts speak for themselves. Despite the backlash Jared’s expecting from work, he’s undeniably happy that people know about them. He doesn’t think he’ll ever get over the thrill that ran though his body and the way his heart sped up over the fact that Jensen did that for him. For them.

Jensen’s sleeping beside him, stretched out and pliant in the early morning. Jared should be soaking up the last few moments as well before it’s time to start their day but he can’t. It’s inevitable that his mind is going to be far away from the classroom today, stuck on wondering how Jensen’s meeting with the superintendent is going. He’s dreading it. Right now, however, they’re both here and Jared’s not going to waste that by falling asleep.

He has more devious plans. Their alarm clock is going to go off soon but Jared has another idea of how to wake Jensen up. Shifting, he’s able to slide down the bed and slip under the sheets without disturbing Jensen too much. From there it’s pretty easy to lower his boyfriend’s boxer-briefs and expose the length of his cock.

After Jensen’s show of utter and total commitment to their relationship, it only seems right that Jared wakes Jensen up with a blow job because Jensen fucking deserves it.

He knows exactly how long he’s got before the alarm starts blaring but he still takes the time to test the weight of Jensen’s dick in his hand. Running his fingertips over the organ in stroking motions, Jared grins when it reacts to his touch. It stirs up the desire that seems to be constantly simmering inside of him. That fact is fueled a little more by Jared’s undeniable attraction to Jensen, a stronger pull than he’s ever felt. He’s still got a satisfied smirk on his face when he licks a long stripe over the length. Without time on their side, he gets straight to work, swirling his tongue around the tip three times before swallowing Jensen whole with a bob of his head.

The way Jensen moans in his sleep is borderline adorable. He’s groggy and every movement is slow but his brain is rapidly catching up with what Jared’s doing to his dick. The rate of Jensen’s breathing starts steadily increasing and Jared quickens his pace in time.
Jensen’s hips buck once in his sleep but at the end of his groan, his eyes flutter open, “Jay…” His voice is both confused and concerned as he searches for his boyfriend. Trying to turn, he shifts so he can push himself up.

“No,” Jared orders, propping himself up on his elbows and using his palms to hold Jensen in place. “Relax. I’m good. I’ve got this.” Without giving Jensen a chance to respond, Jared goes back to work, making sure the tip of Jensen’s dick hits the back of his throat in one fluid motion,

“Oh shit,” Jensen gets out between grit teeth. He lets his head fall back to the pillow, melting into it as Jared uses a filthy little trick of pressing his tongue along Jensen’s arousal while adjusting his suction. “Jay,” he gasps.

Jared loves those throaty noises Jensen makes and he holds onto his hips more firmly, sucking Jensen off, quick and dirty. It’s going to be the type of day where they both need to start off with something good. Whatever stresses are going to hit them, this is going to have to carry them through. Wrapping a hand around the base of Jensen’s cock, Jared goes to town. He’s messy and lacks some finesse, but it’s good enough to make Jensen’s toes curl when Jared pulls him out of his mouth with a pop so that his tongue can swirl around the cockhead, playing with the sensitive thatch of nerves under the crown. The movements are more fluid now before taking Jensen in his mouth again with more suction. Jared knows how to get Jensen there, and he hasn’t even brought his hands into the mix.

Jensen rides the wave. Fingers laced through Jared’s hair, he doesn’t do anything more than give Jared’s head a hint of guidance. “Oh, yeah, Jared…that’s…” his hips buck gently, “good.” With his palm shaping to the curve of Jared’s head, Jensen keeps up the connection while he lets the man work. A hum travels up his dick, letting him know Jared is pleased with himself.

They keep up this routine, moans getting louder and tremors making their way through Jensen’s muscles. When Jared speeds things up by twisting his hand around the base of Jensen’s dick, the older man nearly hits the ceiling. Jensen pulls up on Jared’s hair and gasps, trying to get Jared to stop but it’s fruitless. Jared only deep throats him with more force and Jensen’s helpless. He lets it happen as another wave of toe curling pleasure runs through him and he groans. “Fuck, Jay.”

Jared repeats the action, the skill of his hand making Jensen’s breath go ragged and hurdles him close to the edge. He’s aware that Jensen’s close, his tells are all there in the way that he’s warning Jared, but Jared doesn’t care. He’s gotten better at this and he wants Jensen to come right now. In this moment with him. It makes him more determined to keep up his ministrations.

Jensen whines, low and feral in the back of his throat. “Jay, you –fuck I don’t want you to – but you gotta stop or I’m gonna come…I’mma…” Jensen curses as his words are swallowed up by the pleasure he’s feeling. He flips the blanket off of them enough so he can watch Jared work, the sight making him flush with want. Transfixed by the visual of his boyfriend going down on him, Jensen’s chest shudders and his eyes grow heavy with lust. He doesn’t try to push Jared away. Instead, he shoves Jared’s head down, gasping. “Don’t stop.”

Jared doesn’t. He keeps up his pace and when Jensen growls that he’s close, he hums again.

Jensen loses it, coming with a shout while fistng Jared’s hair as every nerve in his body rejoices in the fact that Jared doesn’t pull off. Jared keeps going, swallowing and only pulling off with a smirk after Jensen’s whole body has gone limp.

“You’re getting too good at that for your own good,” Jensen lets out through panting laughter.

“Are you complaining?” Jared pulls himself up beside Jensen, saddling against the lines of Jensen’s body.
Eyes earnest and wide, Jensen shakes his head. “God no.” When he turns onto his side, it’s to nudge his head against Jared’s so that they can fit together more closely. “What did I do to warrant that?”

“It’s…” Jared licks his lips and swallows. Tilting his head, he catches Jensen’s lips with his own, speaking the words against the man’s satisfied smile. “It’s not like we’re keeping score or anything…but…I just thought you deserved that. That you need that.”

“Well it’s a pretty fantastic way to wake up.” Jensen rolls on top of Jared, carefully bracing himself on his knees and forearms so that none of his weight is resting too heavily on top of the younger man. “In fact, I think we should wake up like that every morning.” With a content exhale, he kisses Jared’s jaw. Each touch is loving and gentle as Jensen’s hands travel across Jared’s skin and walk over the swell in his middle. His face hovers over Jared with just enough distance so they don’t have to go cross eyed to look at each other. “You okay?”

“We’re good.” Smiling warmly, Jared closes the gap between their lips. He lets the comfort found from the connection with Jensen’s body wash over him as he savor the last seconds they have together before being thrust into their workday. Jared didn’t suck Jensen off with the intention of the act being reciprocated but with Jensen’s weight pressing down on the arousal he’s sporting, his brain starts getting other ideas.

He’s about to allow his brain to get caught up in those ideas when the alarm goes off, making them groan in unison.

“Ugh,” Jared whines, slapping his hand out to knock the alarm clock into silence. Even though he knew it was coming, Jared has no idea how the morning snuck up on him. He can’t think of something he’d want more than being able to bury himself into the blankets and pretend it’s not a workday. His thoughts are cut off by the deep rumble of Jensen’s voice.

“I’ll get you off in the shower, if you’ll let me.” There is a glint in Jensen’s eyes as he sits upright in bed, sliding out so that Jared can watch his naked ass walk towards the shower.

On second thought, Jared can absolutely think of something he wants more than staying in bed.

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Jensen isn’t delusional. He knows that Kyle is his boss and, as such, he has the power to fire Jensen should he deem it necessary. Jensen knows that he shouldn’t have physically attacked Rob, but he also knows that Ana and Rob were out of compliance with faculty guidelines.

Usually, Jensen knows what to expect from his meetings with Kyle. Being the union representative, he’s been to a fair share of meetings with Kyle but never over issues stemming from him personally. Usually he’s there as a representative or to present a grievance. Or he’s there to bust Kyle’s ass over some general injustice like when he brought the sever lack of handicap accessible ramps and entrances. Today, however, he has no idea what he’s in for.

When he walks into central office, Kyle is standing near his secretary’s desk. Cathy has just enough time to huff out a sigh and shoot Jensen a look like she has no idea what Jensen’s gotten himself into before Kyle jumps into action. He snaps his fingers and sends a traveling pointed finger in the direction of his office.

The two men move silently towards Kyle’s office and once inside, Kyle closes the door behind them. He turns to find Jensen opening his mouth to speak but cuts him off with a firm, “sit!”

Jensen nods, stiffly setting himself down in the armchair Kyle was indicating. To his surprise, Kyle
doesn’t take a seat across from him, but beside him.

“Do you have any idea how surprised I was when yesterday’s events made their way across my desk?” He pauses for the briefest second and then plows forward. “I thought, ‘Jensen? There is no way Jensen could have done something like that. Jensen’s a smart man. He knows what is expected of all of Arkin’s employees.’ So it was a bit of a shock to learn that I hadn’t misheard. And that a smart man like yourself has landed himself here for actually assaulting a coworker.”

“Kyle, I can explain - ” Jensen tries before getting cut off again.

“Can you? Because it seems pretty clear cut Jensen. It’s a simple rule to follow. Don’t harass or assault your coworkers. And you broke that rule. Which leaves me in a difficult position.” Kyle pinches the bridge of his nose and sighs. When he looks up at Jensen again, some of the anger in his gaze has simmered down and shifted towards looking torn. “Look...Jensen. I’m not a stupid man. I didn’t get to this position without knowing how to play the game. And I know exactly what type of teacher you are. Arkin is lucky to have you. Your selfless dedication to your peers and students is well known.” He slows his speech and holds up a finger to indicate that Jensen should keep quiet. “That’s not to say that your reputation is going to save you from disciplinary action.”

Everything in Jensen wants to bubble over the edge and scream that plenty of Arkin employees have broken the harassment rule long before Jensen ever did. He knows, however, that opening his mouth at the current moment isn’t going to do him any favors. For the moment, he swallows his words down and stares blankly at Kyle.

Instead of another rant, Kyle shakes his head and turns his palms up at his employee. “What do you want me to do, Jensen?”

“Do you want me to answer that honestly?” Jensen asks.

“I don’t know. I don’t know if the answer is going to matter.” He lets his elbows fall onto his knees so he can lean forward, his expression getting the gravity of the situation across to Jensen. “What were you thinking, Jensen?”

“I...I wasn’t thinking.”

“That’s right. You weren’t,” Kyle butts in again. “Because if you were thinking, the Jensen I know wouldn’t resort to physical violence,” there is enough of a pause after his words that Jensen starts to explain himself further but Kyle elaborates, “unless there was a pretty damn good reason for it.”

That throws Jensen for a loop. He’s left blinking, mouth trying to fill with words but all he comes out with is, “What?”

“You heard me.” Kyle sits back in his chair but looks no more relaxed. The tension in his body radiates through the air, getting across importance of Jensen’s reply. “So please Jensen, tell me this pretty damn good reason.”

It’s the opportunity that Jensen needs. In hindsight, things seem so simple. He should have been in Kyle’s office weeks ago. But weeks ago, he wasn’t completely certain that Ana was still up to anything. He and Jared had been avoiding most of the workforce at Arkin since they’ve been an item. It wasn’t until that day that things came to a head for Jensen. Still, he wishes he’d managed to cut Ana off at the pass. “There is a really good reason. I promise. And...” Jensen turns to face Kyle more fully in hopes that the man can see how truthful his words are. “I love my job. And I love Arkin. It’s been my home away from home. But what I don’t love is when people decide it’s okay to treat other people like garbage. I can’t stand by and watch that happen. Maybe I shouldn’t have
punched Rob, I know that, but I couldn’t sweep the things I heard Ana and Rob say about Jared under the rug. I can’t.” The emotion in Jensen’s words starts to seep outward, giving his voice the sense that he’s going to break. It just might. That’s how much this means to him. Thankfully, Kyle holds up a hand and halts his words, silencing him and keeping him from flaying himself open.

“You don’t have to repeat what Ana and Rob said. I know.”

“You know?” Jensen doesn’t know where his voice went. He’s a good public speaker but somehow he finds himself stuck in a world where he can do little more than question everything Kyle says.

“Yes, Jensen. I know.” Stretching over his desk, Kyle reaches for a sheet of paper. “I’m sure you are aware that Jeanie Shultz was witness to the entire incident in the faculty cafeteria. She’s been kind enough to contact my office and offered a typed statement of the accounts. And it doesn’t look good for Rob and Ana. That doesn’t mean you should have punched Rob! But, it does give us evidence of Ana, Rob, and several others, harassing Jared. Which is something I, and the entire Arkin school district, cannot stand for. I’ve had Ana and Rob in here as well. I think we’ve all come to an understanding.”

“Yeah right,” Jensen snorts. “Like Ana understands anything.”

“Well this time she does. Mostly because I made it pretty clear that Jared has one hell of a lawsuit on his hands. In fact, Arkin’s just lucky that Jared isn’t looking for a lawsuit because I have no doubt in my mind that he would win a discrimination and harassment lawsuit against Arkin, Rob, or Ana. Thankfully, he’s put a call into my office this morning to tell me all he wants is for people to understand that what they are doing is wrong. And I think that is a wonderful idea. As superintendent, maybe I was ignorant in my belief that all of the employees understood how to conduct themselves in a professional environment. I think the whole school needs to relearn the expectations in terms of harassment in the workplace. All types of harassment. I’m going to mandate a compliance training at the beginning of next week. All staff have two weeks to complete it or they risk administrative action.”

Jensen’s speechless. He’s not entirely surprised that Jared called Kyle but in the scheme of things, that action makes complete sense. Of course Kyle would want to talk to the man at the heart of this whole mess. “I think...that’s a great idea.”

“Well, Arkin is lucky to have an employee like Jared who just wants the fair and right thing done. And I intend to make good on that wish. He also asked that I don’t fire you.” Crossing one ankle over his knee, Kyle shakes his head at Jensen. “I never had any intention of firing you, Jensen. You’re a damn good teacher and I’d much rather deal with union business from you. You’re a sharpshooter. But I can’t let you off without taking some sort of action. I’m forcing Ana and Rob to go on leave without pay for a week while they mull over what they’ve done. And, since resorting to violence isn’t okay, I am going to ask you to stay home from work - with pay - for two days.”

It’s a slap on the wrist, Jensen knows that. It’s nothing. But Jensen understands. Kyle has to keep up his reputation as a man who adheres to the school’s standards. “I understand. Thank you.”

“Thank me for what? For the fact that you have to pay the consequences?” There is a lilt to his words that lets on to the fact that he’s playing dumb. “I respect you Jensen. Which is why I am going to ask you to keep your mouth shut about me going easier on you. As far as the faculty goes, we’ve dealt with this fairly. Got it?”

“Got it.” Jensen holds out a hand and shakes Kyle’s. The dread he’s been feeling over today’s meeting lifts and he feels like he can breathe again. “Thank you,” he repeats.

Not willing to look a gift horse in the mouth, Jensen gets to his feet as soon as the words leave Kyle’s lips. Before he can get very far, Kyle calls him back. “So, it’s your baby, huh?”

Jensen turns to take another look at the man. He should be surprised that Kyle figured this information out on his own. But, the man’s a smart one and Jensen is left with a proud smirk on his lips. “Yes. It is.”

“Hmm,” Kyle muses. “Kinda puts it all in perspective. Jared was just here yesterday and…” he makes a gesture like he’s putting all the missing pieces together, “I think I get it now.”

It’s funny because Jensen didn’t think he would feel so light over the fact that people know about his and Jared’s baby. But hearing Kyle acknowledge it makes everything feel official. He leaves Kyle’s office with that thought clouding his mind. It’s probably the reason he’s distracted and almost walked into Cathy. “Oh shit! Cathy, I’m sorry!”

“My fault. I was 100% eavesdropping on your meeting with Kyle. I knew he wasn’t going to fire you since he didn’t ask me to draft up your release papers, but I wasn’t sure what his game was.” She gives him a smile while she places one hand on each of his shoulders. “I’m glad he didn’t kick your ass to the curb. It would be a waste. It’s a pretty nice ass.”

Jensen snorts, raising an amused eyebrow at the woman. The two of them have a long history of bantering, and he wouldn’t have it any other way. “If you were eavesdropping, then you know Kyle doesn’t take too highly towards any type of harassment, including sexual.” He laughs to let on that he’s not miffed by Cathy’s comment.

“Yeah, I heard about that. I also heard that someone is going to be a daddy.” Her smile grows warmer, almost maternal and glazed with remembrance. “Congratulations. That’s wonderful news.” Her arms wrap around Jensen in a lingering hug. “So, Jared’s the lucky guy who was able to get your heart, huh?”

By the time he releases Cathy from the hug, Jensen’s beaming. “I dunno, Cathy. Kinda looks like we’re both coming up lucky on that front.”

Jensen knows, however, luck has very little to do with it. He and Jared are better when they’re together and that has everything to do with who they are. It’s not luck. It’s not fate. It’s them.

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Jared is starting to understand how Jensen must have felt a few days ago, only this time, it’s Jared’s turn to go through his work day at Arkin while his mind is off wondering how things are going over at the superintendent’s office. He was counting the minutes till his lunch break because now he can compulsively check his cell phone without 28 pairs of eyes staring at him. Jensen loves his job, and Jared doesn’t need to be told to know that losing his job would wreck his boyfriend. Worrying about Jensen is making the minutes drag and, after a call to Dr. Atlas, it’s the reason for the discomfort in his middle. Despite trying to follow doctor’s order and keep everything in check, Jared can’t stop his mind from wondering. “Shit,” he breathes out, looking down at his stomach when it grumbles. “I guess we haven’t made the last week easy on you, huh?” He rubs a hand over the swell, letting his palm stay there.

Thankfully, his day has gone pretty well. It’s been easy. Maybe it’s because the students are extra sympathetic since they’ve learned about his pregnancy, or maybe it’s because the school’s gossip mill has trickled down the information to students that Jensen’s the father, but everyone has been
exceedingly sweet. He’s not complaining, but it does seem to have come on all at once.

“Knock knock,” comes a voice, drawing Jared out of his thoughts and making him turn his head to see Jeanie peeking into the room.

“Oh, Jeanie. Hi.” Jared’s dimples pop when he gives her a smile. “What are you doing over here?”

“I snuck away for a few minutes because I realized I haven’t seen you around in the lunchroom too much. It wasn’t until the other day that I understood why that was.” Her shoulders fall while she shakes her head sadly. When her eyes connect with Jared’s, it’s clear that they both fully understand the situation. “And I figured that you might be hungry.” Jeanie holds up a wrapped sandwich in one hand, walking forward. “For you,” she says as she sets it down on the desk in front of Jared. “And a little something for the baby,” she adds, placing a chocolate chip cookie beside the sandwich.

Jeanie’s kindness makes a flush of warmth hit Jared in the chest. The woman has no idea how much he appreciates her visit, considering he didn’t think to pack lunch. He smiles wider, eyes first landing on the sandwich and then the cookie. Of course, his stomach takes that as an opportunity to growl again.

Laughter bubbles out of Jeanie. “Never met a kid who could say no to a chocolate chip cookie. Even in utero it seems.” She laughs at herself again, her smile never faltering.

Jared knows he’s supposed to talk now, but he’s not sure where to begin. Truthfully, he’s not feeling like himself, he’s all jumbled up inside. He supposes he could point the blame for that on his body’s hormones making him feel the way he is. It’s just a chocolate chip cookie but Jared feels so touched by its presence that he could cry. He’s not going to cry, but he feels like he could. Aside from the onesie Megan brought from Jeff, it’s the first gift he’s received in the name of his child. Thankfully, Jeanie cuts off his train of thought with a chirp of laughter. “It’s just a cookie Jared. You can eat it first if you want to. It’s kinda one of the best things about being an adult - dessert as a meal and everything.”

This time, Jared actually finds his voice. “Thank you, Jeanie. Really…” He turns his face up to her and smiles. He’s aware that there is something undeniably sappy around the edges of the gesture but Jeanie lets it go without comment. “It’s just...really sweet of you...you know, to think of me - us - like that.” Following Jeanie’s suggestion, he grabs the cookie and takes a bite of it. The sweetness hits his tongue and he lets out a hum of appreciation before speaking with his mouth full. “Thank you.” The words are a bit garbled as he chews.

The thanks hits Jeanie and she puffs ever so slightly with pride. “You’re very welcome.” Crossing her arms, she leans against the door frame of the classroom. “I do miss seeing your friendly face in the cafeteria, Jared. You bring such an energy with you. But,” her tone shifts towards being more serious, “after what I saw happen to Jensen yesterday, I kinda get why you don’t come around as much. You’re better off.” Her effort to break the tense moment with a wink works slightly before she continues. “Besides, seems like you got much better company to have lunch with.”

It takes Jared a good ten seconds to catch on to what Jeanie is saying, when he does, his eyes grow wider. “Oh! You mean Jensen!” Heat hits his cheeks and he shoves more cookie in his mouth to keep him from saying anything without thinking. Jensen makes his head cloudy in a good way but sometimes it leads to babbling. “Yeah, uhh...Jensen. We kinda eat in here most of the time. No offence to you of course! It’s not your food that’s keeping us away. It’s just...we kinda like the alone time and - ”

“And you don’t like dealing with judgemental assholes. I get it.” Jeanie snorts.
The harsh words on Jeanie’s tongue make Jared pull straight in surprise. “Um, yeah, that too.” Checking the clock on the wall beside her, she sighs. “Listen, I really have to get back to my post before anyone realizes I’m gone. I just wanted to...check in with you. I,” she sighs, lips screwing to the side as the wheels in her head put words together. “I just wanted you to know that I saw everything that went down in the faculty cafeteria. Everything. And I went to human resources about it to tell them every detail. What Ana and Rob did? That is reprehensible. I sure as hell don’t want to work in a school that would let their actions slide without any type of punishment.” She holds up a finger when it looks as if Jared is going to speak up. “I also wouldn’t want to work in a place where someone like Jensen is undeservedly punished for standing against them. Sure, he probably shouldn’t have punched Rob but,” she pauses and bites her lower lip as it curves into a grin, “I am so glad he did! Don’t get me wrong, violence isn’t the answer or anything, but that man had it coming. Ana did too. I’m surprised I didn’t walk over there myself and give her a slap. But Jensen seemed to have it covered so...” Shaking her head, she clears the air with a wave of her hands. “Sorry, I got away with myself there. It’s just...I’ve been watching Ana and her crew gossip for years. It’s finally time light was shed on that situation.”

Relief floods Jared’s veins; it’s the type of feeling where Jared realizes he’s not the only one aware of the discriminatory actions at Arkin. Jeanie gets him. Putting the cookie down, Jared wheels himself towards her and grabs her hand, clutching it between his own. “Jeanie...tha-that’s awesome. That you did that. That you brought this issue to a higher level of administration. Thank you. I mean...Jensen’s at central office right now and...I’m freaking out. I dunno if you can tell or anything. Hell, I practically almost cried over a cookie.” The laugh that leaves his throat is forced out with a quick exhale of air.

“Honey, that’s not because of worry over Jensen. That’s because you two have a little one on the way.” She rubs her free hand over the knuckles of one of Jared’s. “I don’t know if it’s any consolation, but I think Jensen’s going to be just fine. He’s a genuinely good person and everyone here at Arkin knows it.” Patting Jared’s hand again, she smiles softly. “I’ve always liked him. You got yourself one of the good ones.”

“I think I did. Thanks, Jeanie. Doesn’t mean I am not going to worry until I hear from him.”

“I wouldn’t have expected otherwise.” Jeanie pulls away regretfully as she looks at the clock once more. “Shoot. I’ve gotta go. But you let me know if you need any lunchtime deliveries. I’d be happy to sneak away for you.”

Touched by the offer, Jared shakes his head. “You don’t have to do that.”

“I know. I want to.” Hesitating on her step towards the door, she twists towards Jared. “Listen, I know I don’t know all the personal details about what’s going on with you...but I understand the health issues with being confined to a wheelchair. You remember that about my daughter, right?.” She waits for Jared to nod. “And I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, because nothing ever is. But this kid,” she gestures towards Jared’s middle, “is going to be a powerhouse. Considering who you and Jensen are? Your baby is going to be a force to be reckoned with. You too!” She shakes her fist like her declaration is law.

“Thank you Jeanie, for everything.” This time, Jared’s eyes do actually well up because the thank you is meant to blanket so much more. It’s about Jeanie being able to reinforce his strength after he’s been sagging under the weight of negativity and reminding him that there are kind and good people in the world.

“It’s just a cookie,” the woman says, words soft and teasing in a way that reveals her complete understanding of what Jared’s actually feeling. She makes her exit at the perfect moment because
Jared knows he’s going to cry, and he knows that he’d cry even harder if Jeanie stuck around. Her kindness resonates in him and he has to let himself believe that she’s right. Jensen’s going to be fine, but so is their baby. It’s really the only option he’ll accept.

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Jared is not making good decisions right now. When he got home from work, he thought he was but now he’s realized that none of that is true anymore. He somehow made it through the day at work, that fact made possible by Jensen calling him and letting him know that his meeting went well but he would explain in detail when he came over tonight. The man had said that since he’s moving into Jared’s house, he should swing by his own apartment and pack a few bags. Apparently, now that they’ve started this whole “move in together” plan, Jensen isn’t wasting any time. According to the older man, they’re not spending another night apart. Which is what sparked the idea of Jared moving things around the house to make room for some of Jensen’s. He quickly realizes how stupid this idea is when he both shouldn’t and can’t move the couch.

“Fuck,” Jared sighs, flopping back in his wheelchair. It’s not like he wants to move things too much, after all, everything in his house is deliberately laid out in a way that makes maneuverability easy for Jared. All Jared wanted to do was tweak things a bit so that there is room for Jensen’s guitar beside the couch and space for his brewing equipment. Jared has an entire room to support his hobby, he wants to make sure that Jensen’s hobbies have space in their lives together. Besides, he really loves when Jensen plays guitar, so there might be a few selfish reasons for fostering that hobby.

He’s about to call it quits when the doorbell rings. There is no way it can be Jensen this early in the day, besides, he has a key. Cocking his head in confusion, Jared wheels himself towards the door, pulling it open to reveal his brother. Jeff is standing there with his tail between his legs, looking all different shades of uncomfortable.

“Jeff,” Jared states bluntly.

Jeff responds with the same tone as his younger brother. “Jared,”

Snorting, Jared asks, “what are you doing here?”

“Uh, I was in the neighborhood and I figured you would be home from work. Thought maybe we could talk.”

“You’re always in the neighborhood, Jeff. You live five minutes away.” Crossing his arms, Jared raises an eyebrow. “Coulda come to talk anytime.”

Rolling his eyes, Jeff drops his shoulders in a form of defeat. “Yeah I know. I’m an asshole, okay. But I’m also your brother. Can I please come in and talk to you?”

Jared can’t stop himself from laughing. He’s still mad over his last interaction with Jeff, but there is something about the way his brother is acting that hits home for Jared. They are brothers and they’ve had their fair share of asshole moments. Jared answers by swinging the storm door open as a way of inviting his brother in.

Jeff takes it from there, coming inside and closing the door behind him. He follows Jared into the main room and sits on the couch, leaning forward so that he props his elbows on his knees. “Listen Jared, I’ve been meaning to come over sooner, I really have. But...work got in the way. And then my brain got in the way...shit...I’m never really much good at this sentimental stuff. I...I’m just not. I mean...You know I’ve got your back and I would kick the asses of anyone who fucks with you, but...words are not my strong point.” The struggle to express himself is blatantly apparent in Jeff’s
words and he looks up at Jared for help.

Half tempted to let his brother flounder, Jared waits quietly. Enough time has passed that his anger is dissipating quickly but the sting of his brother’s actions still throbs painfully on his heart. Jeff’s right, they’ve always had each other’s backs, but that doesn’t excuse walking out of Jared’s house after the pregnancy reveal without a word. Still, Jeff is here now and Jared isn’t going to settle this like a child. Clearing his throat, he says, “I got your present...for the baby.”

The laugh that comes out of Jeff is partially fueled by shame for himself and embarrassment. Scratching at the nape of his neck, he looks at Jared. “It’s stupid, isn’t it?”

“That’s it is but it’s not. I mean, my kid’s going to be better looking than you so...there’s that.” Jared pauses when Jeff lets out a more earnest snort of laughter. “But, it was nice...that you thought of the baby and bought it.”

That seems to open the flood gates for Jeff. “Listen, Jared...I’m sorry. Okay? I’m really sorry. I mean it when I said I’m an asshole. I shouldn’t have dropped out of your life like that.” Pinching the bridge of his nose, Jeff looks at the floor. “Shit, I...I threatened Jensen about never hurting you and I went and became a hypocrite by doing that very thing. Shitty brother I am, huh?”

“Jeff, no. It’s not like - ”

“Yeah, it is like that. I’m sorry Jared. I froze. I dunno why. Maybe it was seeing mom and dad so upset. It’s like...when we were kids and whenever something really serious was going on with you...they had this voice. This serious voice. And I knew they would take care of it and that you would be okay. Well, that’s kinda what they sounded like that night. I didn’t know what the right move was then.” Finally raising his head, he meets Jared’s gaze. “I do now. I shouldn’t have left you alone. That must have hurt like hell. I have a habit of making sure no one in life tells you that you can’t be who you want or do what you want and that should apply to mom and dad. I should have told them off. So, yeah...I’m sorry for that.”

Megan had told Jared that Jeff was coming around to the idea of Jared’s pregnancy so Jared’s not completely caught off guard by his brother’s reaction. “Yeah, it would have been nice if you’d done that, if you took my side, no questions asked.” Swallowing the lump in his throat, Jared lets that pain go. It’s not doing him any good to hold onto it. Besides, even with the way things went down the last time they saw each other, Jared knew his family isn’t going anywhere. They’re scared. And they’re scared because they love him. Jared isn’t selfish enough to stay blind to that fact. He’s always been good at seeing things from other people’s perspectives. Maybe he lost sight of that when he got tangled up in his own determination to carry this baby to term, but he understands where Jeff is coming from. He also understands that he is truly sorry. “But you’re here now. So...it’s okay.”

Jeff looks honestly surprised. “What?”

“It’s okay. Just don’t do it again. You’re allowed to disagree with some of my decisions, but don’t take it out on your niece or nephew.”

“I didn’t - ”

“Maybe not directly, but it kinda felt like people were discrediting the fact that there is a living person growing inside of me. It’s got a beating heart and everything. It kinda felt like everyone just wanted me to forget about that part.” Jared’s hand finds the swell in his middle and he looks his brother in the eyes to make sure he understands. “Don’t just blame the baby for any of this. Okay?”

Digesting Jared’s words, Jeff nods. “Yeah, okay. But you? You, I’m still gonna bust your balls.”
Despite the threat, Jeff gets to his feet and pulls his brother into a hug, yanking the younger man forward enough so that he can thump him on the back.

“Kinda be weird if we didn’t give each other a hard time.” Jared laughs, giving his brother a smile. An idea pops into his head and he smirks. “Hey Jeff, since you’re here, do you wanna help me move some furniture? Jensen’s moving in.”

A facade slips into place when Jeff stands upright again and considers what his brother just said. “I just hope he doesn’t think that since he’s living here now that he’s exempt from my threat of killing him if he fucks this up.”

“He won’t fuck up.” Jared says, pretty sure of his words. All the soul searching that he and Jensen have been doing is landing them in a pretty great place. “You know you’re all talk on this one. You like Jensen.”

“What’s going on?” Jeff asks, a teasing lilt in his voice. Shaking his head he changes the subject. “Okay, what are we moving?”

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Jensen was ready to drop when he walked into Jared’s house. He had been ready to plop on the couch and pull Jared beside him so they could spend a lazy evening rehashing what had happened during his meeting with Kyle.

What he hadn’t expected, however, was to find that Jared had Jeff over to help move a few things around the house. It’s something he realized instantly, frozen with one duffle bag of clothing in each hand as he surveys the subtle changes Jared made. He’s completely touched and hit with a magnetic pull towards Jared, needing to be near him.

Dropping the bags at his feet, Jensen surges forward and captures Jared’s lips with his own. The connection is so fluid that the familiarity they have with each other is blinding. “I love you,” Jensen breathes out against Jared’s lips. The words bubble out because Jensen can’t help himself. Jared is making it easy for Jensen to fall even more in love with him every day, his actions reaffirming the choice Jensen made to put his career on the line when defending his boyfriend.

There are things to talk about but right now this is exactly where Jensen belongs. He might be on paid leave for a while, but now Arkin knows the truth about him and Jared, which was a long time coming. It’s a weight off his shoulders that he didn’t even realize had been there. Sure, Jared will still be at work, but having off will allow Jensen to move in even quicker.

He feels the steady pressure of Jared’s hand on his lower back, a subtle hint that he wants to stay close. Knocking their foreheads together, Jensen smiles. “You ready for this?” The question leaves Jensen’s mouth and though he thought he knew what he was asking, there is an ambiguity to the questions and he’s not so sure anymore. Maybe it’s more than just the move. Maybe it’s everything.

“Yeah. If you’re here, then...yeah.” Tilting his head upwards, Jared slots their lips together and gives into the kiss.

The fear that kicks up in Jensen’s brain gives a weak attempt of reminding Jensen of its existence but Jared’s lips squash it. All he can focus on is this connection and the fact that Jared is making his stomach flip flop. God, he’s unequivocally in love with this man.

Chapter End Notes
Thank you to my darling DemonDetox for always knowing just the perfect things to tweak. That proud smirk on Jensen's face is all her doing.
(Well...not in the fic...mostly we have to give credit to this version of Jared for that.)
Chapter 21

Jared’s drawing out the process of getting out of bed, soaking in the fact that his head is propped up against the comforting warmth of Jensen’s chest. Sometimes it’s difficult for them to fit themselves together like this, but when they woke up Jensen yanked Jared closer, hooking him around the waist and making up for the strength that Jared’s legs can’t muster. Jared’s enjoying it, loving the fact that Jensen’s all moved in and not going anywhere. The series of events that brought them here seemed organic, making it feel easy, like landing at this point in their lives was written into their DNA. That sense of contentment swirls through Jared’s blood until he’s pulled out of it so suddenly that it lands him at the opposite end of the spectrum.

“Shit,” he mumbles, trying to push himself up on his palms but slipping and almost falling chin first onto Jensen’s chest. A flush of panic that rolls through him alongside the sickness, and he turns his head towards his side of the bed, where is wheelchair isn’t exactly out of reach but still too far away from where Jensen has pulled him into the middle of the bed. It’s not Jensen’s fault, but all his brain can comprehend is frustration. He gets himself upright again with only enough time to let out a garbled, “I’m gonna be sick.”

Jensen swoops in, moving so fast that Jared barely registers it until he realizes that his boyfriend has the small wastebin they keep beside the bed plopped onto his lap. There is embarrassment over not being able to make it to the privacy of the bathroom but it’s overpowered by his need to vomit; every other feeling fades away while he retches into the garbage.

Jensen’s hand moves up and down Jared’s spine, the gesture meant to be soothing but it only makes Jared feel sicker. If his damn spine wasn’t so fucked up, then they wouldn’t be in this mess. But, no, he’s stranded in the middle of their bed and gagging on bile. He doesn’t really take time to think about it before he smacks Jensen’s hand away and groans. When he’s finally done being sick and he’s wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he sits upright and notices the hurt look on Jensen’s face and the way the older man’s eyebrows are knitting together in worry. “Shit, Jen...I didn’t…” Jared’s not exactly sure what he wants to say. He remembers being irrationally frustrated at Jensen moments ago but now it’s like that emotion never existed. His hand finds it’s way to the swell in his middle, fingers twitching over the taut skin. “I’m sorry, Jen. I didn’t mean it. It’s just...I dunno...baby hormones or something. It’s making me feel frustrated, like I lost all patience for my paralysis and everything that comes with it. And I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it. Really. I guess I’m just a little worried about today and I’ve still been feeling pretty sick in the morning and-”

“Shh,” Jensen hushes, swiping his thumb over Jared’s lips and ghosting a kiss there.

Swallowing slowly, Jared runs a hand through his hair. He’s looking at Jensen, not sure what to say next so he lets out a weak laugh instead. “Thanks for letting me be ridiculous.”

“Shhh,” Jensen hushes, swiping his thumb over Jared’s lips and ghosting a kiss there.

Jared pulls back. “No. Don’t. I just threw up and…”

“And nothing. It’s okay. It’s just a little kiss, Jay.” Jensen’s eyes have lost the hurt quality by the time the soft smile he’s now wearing reaches his lips.

Swallowing slowly, Jared runs a hand through his hair. He’s looking at Jensen, not sure what to say next so he lets out a weak laugh instead. “Thanks for letting me be ridiculous.”

“You’re not. Being ridiculous, that is.” Jensen sits up fully, sheet falling down so it pools around his hips. “I’m nervous about the appointment today, too. Granted, I don’t have all the baby juju going on making me sick, but I think I get it.”
“Twenty weeks is a big deal...kinda a milestone I didn’t know I would reach.” Jared’s lungs fill with air, holding it for a second until releasing it slowly. His hands are more certain now, cupping his distended middle, the tangible proof that it’s grown so much larger than when he first discovered his child’s existence.

Jensen laughs now too. “I knew you would. Of course you would. If there is one thing I’ve learned after knowing you, it’s that you’ve done everything you’ve set your mind to. Maybe not in the way other people do, but you’ve done it.” Another snort of a laugh leaves his throat. “I, on the other hand, wasn’t sure I’d make it here.” Shaking his head, his eyes drift away from Jared. The rest of his words fall from his lips in a rush. “I was such a scared idiot.”

“But you’re not that anymore.” Jared wishes he hadn’t pushed Jensen’s attempt to comfort him away, even though it was a fleeting moment. He thinks they both need the connection, now more than ever.

“Well, I’m still scared.” Jensen sighs, eyebrows raising in time with the shrug of his shoulders.

“Me too,” is all Jared can say because it’s the truth. Others always call him brave but what they don’t realize is that he’s fought through his own fear to get to the other side each and every time he’s achieved anything worth talking about in his life. But this fear is messing with his head and he’s glad for more than one reason that he’s reached the twenty week mark and he’s hoping Dr. Atlas can maybe put his mind at ease.

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Jensen’s biting the corners of his nails. He doesn’t remember doing that since he was...he actually can’t remember. His body’s sitting there but his mind is wandering. The day had flown by, which isn’t what he expected. He thought that he’d be too focused on his and Jared’s appointment with Dr. Atlas that the work day would drag. But it was over before it felt like it began and now he’s sitting beside Jared in an exam room while Dr. Atlas smears ultrasound gel over Jared’s middle. The hand of the fingers he isn’t nervously annihilating is curled around Jared’s, a steady exertion of pressure coming from each of them. He’s staring at Jared’s middle, the gel amplifying the way it curves out. There is no denying that their child is growing whether Jensen’s ready or not.

The transducer touches Jared’s skin and Dr. Atlas smiles. “Let’s see if your miracle baby feels like being cooperative today.” She moves the wand in searching movements, her experienced eyes focusing on the monitor and doing a much better job finding what she’s looking for than Jensen’s could in a million years. Pushing her glasses back to their rightful place on the bridge of her nose, Dr. Atlas clucks her tongue. “Just because they’re little miracles, doesn’t always mean they’re angels.”

Jared licks his lips and chews on words he doesn’t succeed in getting out. Instead, he swallows thickly and his eyes give Jensen a pathetic call for help.

Coughing to clear his throat, Jensen manages to say, “yeah well, the kid’s definitely been making Jared sick all the time, so...that’s not very angelic.” It’s an attempt at a joke but the waver in Jensen’s voice makes it fall flat.

“Don’t know how much solace it brings you but feeling sick means Jared’s hormone levels are up where they should be. Sometimes the sickness can be unpredictable.” Dr. Atlas halts her exam and cocks her head towards Jensen. “Hey, I’m doing all the hard work here...aside from the obvious part Jared has in this whole matter. You going to stop looking like a deer in headlights during our appointments anytime soon?”

“As soon as you tell me Jared’s alright. Yeah.” A knot forms in Jensen’s gut. He’s too worried about
Jared to focus on much else and gnawing at his fingers really hasn’t lessened the anxiety that’s been building up.

Something goes through Dr. Atlas’ mind making her shake her head knowingly. “You do this for as many years as I have and you get familiar with the fears and concerns of your patients. So, Jensen, it’s okay to be worried about Jared but you’ve got to trust me. Jared’s doing great; that’s what our exam was all about earlier. He’s perfectly healthy. So do your heart a favor and trust me. Right now, however, isn’t so much about Jared. It’s about the baby. Let’s focus on that, okay?” She doesn’t wait for an answer but at the absence of a refusal, she picks up the wand again and continues the exam.

It’s not that Jensen doesn’t want to believe her, it’s that he’s the type that has always had to see with his hands. He’s always had to figure things out for himself. The fact that he’s in completely foreign territory right now leaves him feeling vulnerable and...exactly like a deer in headlights. His eyes follow Dr. Atlas’ and he can’t deny the unmistakable profile of a baby on the grainy screen. Sure, the head looks a little too big to be normal, but there is the swoop of a nose and the pursing of lips. The clarity of it all hits him hard, making him duck his head so that he can press a kiss to Jared’s temple. He’s not ready for any of this and his heart thumps so quickly he feels sick. “Jay,” he squeaks out in a whisper.

“I know,” Jared responds, hand clenching Jensen’s a little tighter.

But how can Jared know? Jensen’s sure Jared doesn’t know that he wants to throw up right now, that his world is a spinning mess of colors. Jared’s nervous for other reasons and Jensen’s the idiot making things all about himself. He can’t look back at the screen so he stares at Jared and the way his boyfriend’s thoughts are painted all over his face. It’s clear in the way that Jared’s facial muscles twitch and his lips don’t know what to do with themselves that Jared’s falling in love with their baby. He’s flustered in a way Jensen’s seen before, when they tripped all over their words and talked about Jared wanting to make pancakes for him. Jared’s falling in love. Or falling more in love.

Dr. Atlas is talking, saying that everything looks great. The baby is measuring right on schedule and everything is exactly as it should be. She’s pointing out the spine and the feet and hands but Jensen doesn’t react much until he hears her ask, “you two want to know the gender?”

Jared’s response is out of his mouth before the question is even finished. “Yeah. Yes. I…” He swallows and nods. “Yeah. I do. Just in case...if this is the only way we meet…”

Dr. Atlas snorts in distaste. “If you’re going to talk like that, then I’m ending this appointment. No more screentime for this cutie.” It’s a reprimand but one that comes from a warm heart, rather than a place of disappointment. “You’re going to meet this little one. I just figured you might want a headstart in knowing what you two are in for.”

Jensen laces his fingers with Jared’s, stroking his thumb along the meat of the man’s palm. He and Jared have talked about this scan. Most of those talks have been at night, in the safety of their bed and each other’s arms. He’s never been able to read the fear on Jared’s face in the dimness but he can see it clearly now. Jared might not voice it often, but Jensen’s not an idiot. He knows Jared’s scared that his body will betray him and he won’t be able to carrying their child to term, that they might never truly know the baby outside of the womb. Jensen’s afraid of that too for a plethora of reasons but mainly because of the fear he has that it will kill a piece of Jared. He kisses the worried crinkle in the corner of Jared’s eye and knocks their foreheads together. “Whatever you want. You wanna know, then I want to know . But none of those other thoughts, okay?”

“Yeah. I wanna know.” Jared looks at Jensen, bites his lower lip, head nodding nervously. “Right? We do?”
“Told you, your call. Anything you want.” Running a hand down the side of Jared’s face, Jensen’s thumb drags hard enough across the dip under Jared’s lower lip that he unsnags his boyfriend’s lip from where Jared’s biting it.

“Okay, yeah. Can you tell?” Jared tries to get a better look at the screen by propping himself onto his elbows.

“Sweetheart, I’ve had a hunch for a while now. I just wanted to wait to make sure my first assumption was correct. If you’d stop wiggling...” She laughs and looks at Jared. “Not you. The baby.”

“Oh.” Jared stares at the screen.

After barely a moment, Dr. Atlas makes a triumphant sound. “Looks like I was right. You two are having a boy.” She flicks a switch and the whooshing sound of the baby’s heartbeat can be heard. “He not only looks good, but he sounds good too.”

For the first time during the appointment, Jensen’s eyes are glued to the monitor. It feels like his whole world has dropped out from underneath him and something else has taken its place. His heart rate spikes and he can’t breathe...except he can. It’s not that he can’t breathe, it’s that every exhale is shaky and his inhales leave him gulping down oxygen. The sight on the screen is making him dizzy because the image of his son is crystal clear now. He can see the way the baby’s fists are balled and that he’s shifting and stretching inside Jared’s womb. On his next exhale, his voice tries to come out but it turns into a cry. He’s staring wide eyed at the screen, body shaking when a hand comes up to cover his mouth. It muffles his cry a little but the tears building up in his eyes are unmistakeable.

It’s his baby on the screen. His son. His and Jared’s.

Jensen feels like a complete idiot because it’s been there all along. This type of love that he’s kept under lock and key because he’s been afraid to feel it...it’s been there since Jared told him he was pregnant. It’s sneaky enough that Jensen didn’t realize it was there but watching the image of his son and hearing his heartbeat breaks it free and it hits Jensen all at once. The gender of the baby doesn’t matter, it really doesn’t. What matters is that his child has a gender. It all sounds a little crazy in Jensen’s mind but he’s reeling from the fact that the baby is multi-faceted. It’s got fingers and legs and - apparently - a penis. It’s mind blowing, really. Because what the moment broke through for Jensen is that their baby is a person. A tiny person who is part him and part Jared. It’s real and thriving and Jensen can’t deny that he is falling in love with that baby. He cries louder, eyes squeezing shut to block out the entire world but when they open again he can see Jared staring at him.

Aware that something larger than her grasp is happening, Dr. Atlas freezes the picture on the monitor, leaving the image of Jared and Jensen’s baby on it while she places the transducer back on the cart. “How about I give you two some privacy. When you’re ready, you can find me in my office.” She’s all smiles but she moves as quickly as possible to file out of the room and leave the couple to their own devices.

“Jensen, hey, what…” Jared starts but doesn’t get much out because Jensen surprises him by coasting both hands up Jared’s middle. The residue of the gel makes the slide easy, but Jensen’s hands are firm, claiming partial ownership of the property.

The world is still spinning for Jensen and all he can focus on is Jared. It’s the one thing he’s been pretty good at, despite some bumps in the road. “It’s a boy,” he repeats dumbly.

“Yeah, it is.” Jared shakes his head, unsure of what Jensen’s getting at. His own eyes have been wet...
for a while, but they're tearing up again. “You’re happy about that?”

“I…” Jensen starts, then lets out a huff of air that sounds like both a cry and a laugh. “Yeah. I’m happy. Really happy.” He leans down and presses a kiss to Jared’s lips, lingering there and taking a breath before he repeats the action. A tear falls from his eye and splashes onto Jared’s cheek and when he pulls away to wipe it, he realizes he’s just swiping it through Jared’s own tears. “You’re fucking amazing Jared. Do you know that?” His smile is a little unsteady, trying to hold strong throughout the crying. “Because you are. And you’re giving us a son and I just…” his voice hitches, “I just love him so much. I...shit Jared. I love you so much. I love both of you.” Jensen’s choking on breath now but he can’t stop. There are words pouring from his mouth and Jared’s eyes are locked on him, watching him fall to pieces. “And it’s a boy. And you’re having my baby.” Jensen feels like he’s having an aneurysm or something similar because he’s going in circles. “That’s my kid in there,” he declares, pointing to Jared’s middle. “I mean...we’re having a baby. And I don’t deserve any of this. You do . God, you do. But I’ve been so blind and so—”

“Shut up.” Jared’s voice is strong and certain.

“No. It’s true. I feel like an asshole to not love our baby the way you did from the get-go. But—”

“I said shut up.” Jared’s sitting up now. His breathing is a little shuddery on account of the crying, but he’s looking Jensen dead in the eyes. “Shut up and kiss me. His tongue sneaks out to wet his lips. “Shut up and kiss me because we’re having a son. Kiss me because I knew you loved him, but now you know it too. So stop ruining this moment and just—”

Jensen kisses him. He surges forward and kisses Jared so forcefully that the pregnant man is knocked back onto the exam table, arms linking around Jensen’s back and holding him there. Their mouths fit together as their bodies finally get what they needed to bring them back to earth. Jensen’s shaking but he can feel that Jared is too and it makes his heart explode with even more love for his boyfriend. Jared’s fucking perfect. The way the younger man’s hand coasts up the nape of Jensen’s neck so he can pull Jensen in for a deeper kiss is perfect too. It’s emotional and grounding at the same time and Jensen cups Jared’s jaw with one hand on each side, thumbs brushing away tears that seem to be falling for a whole new set of reasons. It’s only when Jensen pulls away to breathe that he realizes he’s crying too, the realization of love too heavy for his body to handle without it all out. Both of their heads turn towards the screen and Jensen whispers, “look at that.” They stare in silence for a while because words aren’t doing a good job of getting rational thoughts across.

“He’s really cute,” Jared lets out, tone light.

Jensen can’t argue. “You’re gonna love him more than me, aren’t you?” A light wink accompanies his question, letting Jared know that a ‘yes’ answer is fully expected.

“Nah. I’ll love him the same.”

The way Jared says the words makes it impossible for Jensen to not believe them. It also unveils thoughts in his head, things he was certain he’d hold fast to forever. Jensen understands what Jared means because he finds himself thinking the same thing. It may have taken him a while to realize how much he loves his child but he gets it now and he can’t go back to the way he was before. He was wrong when he said Jared would always come first for him. The baby doesn’t come first either. They’re on a level playing field and he thinks maybe now he gets the turmoil that’s been going around in Jared’s head and the man’s fears. “He’s really perfect, Jay.”

“You mean that?” Jared asks.

“Of course I do. He’s perfect. You’re perfect. It’s all perfect. Exactly as it should be. And I’m sitting
here, a crying mess, because I’m the one realizing that I would do anything for both of you.” Heart
clenching in his chest, Jensen’s hands cup Jared’s face and he holds him gently while kissing the
dimple he knows is hiding under the surface. “It’s the first of a thousand ‘thank you’s to come, but
thank you for doing this for us.”

Jared smiles, eyes blurring with tears again. He yanks Jensen by the collar of his shirt until their
foreheads are touching again. “Kiss me again or I’m going to start crying all over again.”

Jensen thinks that’s a great idea. He has a lot more to say, a lot more apologizing to do, but he thinks
Jared get’s it. With a gentle hand cupping Jared’s belly, he hopes that his son gets it too. Jensen’s still
terrified, but he’s going to have to deal with that because he’s all in. Head over heels in. When he’s
born, Jensen might have to apologize to his son for not having a clue about how to be a dad, but he’ll
learn. He’s always been a quick learner, especially now that he’s hands on and isn’t letting go
anytime soon.

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Jared’s head is still spinning. For the first time, he hands over the reins to Jensen completely and lets
his boyfriend take control of the wheelchair. Thankfully, Dr. Atlas possesses a boundless amount of
patience because Jared’s sure he and Jensen spent way too long in the exam room making emotional,
teary messes of themselves while Jensen pawed at Jared’s belly and apologized to both Jared and
their son. But in the end, they got a stamp of approval from Dr. Atlas and were on their way home.

Jared could barely manage to hoist himself off the exam table and into his wheelchair and that had
nothing to do with the recent redistribution of his weight. His arms were weak from the emotional
rollercoaster he and Jensen just rode and he was thankful that Jensen didn’t need to ask if he needed
help. His boyfriend just scooped him up like it was no big deal and plopped him in his chair. He
even navigated their way to Dr. Atlas’ office, pushing Jared’s wheelchair so that Jared could
remember how to breathe.

By the time they get to the car, Jared has come back down from his high and he nods at Jensen. “I
got it,” he says before swinging himself into the passenger seat. He does, however, let Jensen store
the wheelchair for him because his hands would much rather busy themselves with touching his
middle. Their son was so active on the screen but Jared hasn’t been able to feel any of that. Dr. Atlas
told him it was still early to feel fetal movement but he’s scared his paralysis will rob him of that
moment too. He feels like he’s going to have whiplash from how quickly he’s bouncing between the
highs and lows of his life. In his defence, he’s not functioning on all cylinders; Jensen’s declaration
of love for their child has sent him careening to opposing corners of his mind. It must be written all
over his face because Jensen’s asking him something, having to repeat himself before it sinks in.

“You okay?” Jensen asks as he slides into the driver’s seat.

“Yeah, I’m good. Just thinking. It’s a lot to take in.” Jared shakes his head to clear it of his prior
worries and focuses on something good. He wants to give the little guy who uprooted his life the
attention he deserves. Just thinking about him makes his lips curve in a hint of a smile. “Can we tell
people? Do you care? I don’t mean everyone but...our parents and siblings? I know Megan’s been
hounding me about the baby’s sex. She’s convinced it’s a girl. But I think she’s just saying that
because Jeff keeps calling the baby a boy. But we don’t have to tell if you don’t want to. I just
thought -”

“Jare, you’re rambling.” Jensen laughs, turning the key in the ignition and shaking his head in
adoration of his boyfriend.

“Sorry. I’m excited. I can’t help it. You do the same thing, you know. So don’t act like you don’t
understand.” Smirking, Jared raises an eyebrow and nods in Jensen’s direction.

“No, I do understand. I was just stating a fact.” Reaching over, he squeezes Jared’s shoulder. “I’m excited too. I get it. You can tell whoever you want. Fair warning, once we tell my parents this, they’re going to want to have us over to celebrate. They like to celebrate things.”

“Probably the same on my family’s end.” Jared’s smile falters a bit.

“Your dad still being a hold out?” For a second, Jensen’s eyes flick from the road to land on Jared’s face.

“I dunno. He says he supports my decisions but he’s been a little distant. I know it’s because he’s worried, I get that, but it still makes me feel sad about it. Like I disappointed him in some unredeemable way.”

“He loves you.” Jensen states.

That isn’t up for questioning. “I know,” Jared huffs.

Jensen favors Jared with a sincere smile. “He’ll come around. I’m sure of it.”

“You think?”

“Yeah. He and I just needed a little extra time, that’s all.”

Jared nods, hoping Jensen’s right. Pulling out the ultrasound scans Dr. Atlas printed for them, Jared soaks in the image of their son all over again. Maybe the sweet curve of the baby’s nose and the way he looks like he’s fist pumping will have the same effect on his father as it did on Jensen. He pulls out his phone and snaps a picture of the scan so that he can send it along with a text message. His heart is thumping away in his chest as he types the words “Baby Boy Padalecki” and sends them along with the picture to his brother, sister and parents. For good measure he sends it along to Ryan as well, hoping his friend can focus on congratulating him without making a dig at Jensen. That done, he sends the picture to Jensen as well, just so he has a copy for when he wants to tell his family. By the time he’s done, they’re already pulling up to the house, only Jensen keeps the car idling, like he’s seemingly forgotten how to turn it off. “What?” Jared asks dumbly.

“Can we talk? Like, more than we talked at Dr. Atlas’ office. Not bad stuff...just...we promised that we’d talk about the things that are going on in our heads and...can we talk?” He repeats.

“Can we do it inside?” Jared teases.

“Of course. Good idea.” Jensen swallows and kills the engine. No sooner do they make their way inside and they’ve settled on the couch is Jensen picking up exactly where they left off. “I need to apologize.”

“Jen, you’ve apologized about seventy times at Dr. Atlas’. I told you, it’s okay. I understand. I forgive you.” Reaching out to grab Jensen’s hand, Jared thinks not forgiving Jensen, after his earnest groveling and declarations of love, would take a heartless person.

“No. Not for the things I already apologized for - although I am still sorry about that. I will never stop being sorry about that. I’m sorry for losing who I am. That’s not like me. Some of the things I did...running away from you when you needed me...that’s not me. You know me. I think it’s what you fell in love with. But you...and loving you...and the baby...it’s made me so confused. I used to think I had my life figured out but then you and I collided and I felt like this - you - are what was missing. I knew nothing until you showed up and then I had to figure it all out again.” By this time
Jensen is gesticulating wildly with his free hand and he lets it fall to his lap as he sighs. “I’m not making sense...I’m just spitting out words.”

“No. Keep going. I think I get it.” There is a nod of encouragement along with a gentle squeeze to Jensen’s hand.

“You...you make me...” Jensen pauses, rewinding the idea in his head and going about it a different way. “Normal me is composed. Normal me has confidence and knows what he’s doing. I know what I am doing as a teacher, a union president, a friend, a son and as a sibling. I know how to do all of those things. I even know how to be a boyfriend. And even though you make me a little love-stupid, I generally have a pretty good grasp on how to be your boyfriend.” Stopping for a breath, Jensen smiles. The gesture is a twitchy with nerves, but for the most part it’s loving. “I’m usually confident in myself. I’m not proud about the fact that I lost that for a little bit. Because what I’m not confident about is being a father. I didn’t feel ready for that and it threw me for a loop.” When Jared goes to speak, Jensen shakes his head and holds out a palm. “So, I’ve been going around in circles feeling scared and uncertain. And then today - in the office - I had this moment of clarity. Things made sense. I don’t have any clue what I’m doing but that’s okay. I’ve always been in control of my life but I’m not completely in control of things now...and that’s okay. I don’t know how to be a parent, and I’m probably not ready for it, but is anyone? I want that...with you. So...I’m done with all this second guessing and wavering confidence. Because while I might not have had confidence in myself, I’ve always had confidence in you. And I’m sorry that I lost my way but I think I’ve figured it out now. So,” Jensen’s voice cracks on the edge of getting choked up. “What I’m trying to say is that I’m sorry for doubting all of this and for doubting myself. I’m sorry.” When he’s done speaking, he raises his eyes to Jared’s.

Jared’s heart stops for the second time that day. He sees everything Jensen just said reflected in the man’s eyes. He’d been thrown for a loop as well when Jensen broke down about their baby, their son, but this is taking it to a whole other level. He meant it when he said he accepted Jensen’s apology but he didn’t realize until this exact moment how deep the issue ran with Jensen. “You don’t have to be sorry for that. I get it. That’s why we said we’d talk things out, right? Because we’re both human and trying to figure life out together. ‘Cause I’m sorry too. I’ve done shitty things. I think we both got caught in our own world. And I understand what you said because that’s been my problem all along. I’ve always been so determined to beat the odds. I’ve fought hard to have confidence in myself and these past weeks have rattled that. So...I get it.” Jared pulls himself closer to Jensen, embracing the man in a hug so that their chins hook over the curve of the other’s shoulder. Wary of Jared’s belly, Jensen hugs a fraction tighter, his relieved breath fanning across Jared’s neck. A thought pops into Jared’s head and he can’t help but laugh.

“What?”

“You said you always had confidence in me. It’s funny, because over these past weeks my confidence has been wavering, but I’ve had faith in you. It’s why I love you. Because you love so completely and with your whole body. And I agree; I think it’s time we stop being so hard on ourselves.”

“We’re a couple of idiots, aren’t we?” Jensen pulls back enough to look Jared in the eyes. “I’m sorry, Jay.”

“You don’t need to be. I get it. But I’m sorry too.”

Jensen’s head falls to the crook of Jared’s neck, the man’s lips leaving a soft kiss there. “I love you.”

The three words warm Jared’s heart and solidify the knowledge that he’s worth loving. That Jensen’s worth loving. “I love you too. So damn much.”
“Thank you for being strong enough to love our son enough for the two of us. I’m gonna make up for it. I promise.” As he speaks, Jensen’s hand slips underneath Jared’s shirt, curving along the underside of the swell.

“I think that was part reckless determination on my part. But don’t worry, I don’t think he knows you we’re testing the waters a bit until now. Nothing to make up for.” Jared tilts his head to the side, giving Jensen more room to deposit more kisses along the stretch of his boyfriend’s neck.

“My grandmother said babies don’t always come when people are ready for them.” Jensen mumbles into the area he just kissed.

“Your grandmother is smart.” Humming, Jared asks, “when did she tell you that?”

“Last week. When I called her to check in. You know I always call her once a week. She could tell by the sound of my voice that I wasn’t feeling too sure of myself.”

“She tell you anything else?”

“Yeah. That I better take care of her knight in shining armor and make sure he feels like the world’s most important person for growing her newest great-grandchild.”

Jared likes the sound of that. “I take it back. Your grandmother is a genius.” Letting out a laugh, Jared relaxes into the back of the couch. “She give you any idea on how to do that?”

“I wouldn’t let her. I wanted them to all be my own ideas.” Leaning in for a kiss, Jensen’s tongue swipes teasingly into Jared’s mouth. “That and I really don’t want to talk about our sex life with my grandmother.”

“What does our sex life have to do with taking care of me?” Despite knowing full well how the two can relate, there is a teasing lilt to Jared’s voice.

“Hopefully everything...if you’re feeling okay.” Jensen nudges Jared’s chin with his own, moving the man’s head a fraction so that they can connect more soundly for a kiss.

“I feel great, actually.” And why shouldn’t he? With the events of the day and the talking they’ve done, Jared feels lighter. It has everything to do with the fact that they’re a team. They’re in this together. “We’re ready for this, right?” He asks, despite the fact that his heart already knows the answer.

“No even close. But yeah. We’re ready.” Jensen laughs at the conflicting statements in his answer and Jared does too. Because while it makes no sense, they both get it. They’re not ready, but they’re ready to learn how to be. “You and me...we’ve got this. Even if we don’t. Right?”

There is so much emotion residing behind those few words and it hits Jared square in the chest. It’s powerful and real, something that’s been growing with him and Jensen even when they were too dumb to realize. This is it for Jared; it’s what he wants. They’ll make it work, he’s more sure of that now. “Right.”

Then the words fall away. They don’t need them anymore. Yanking on his boyfriend’s shirt, Jared pulls Jensen in for a kiss. It starts off a little sloppy because the current of sentiments running through him is intense and he doesn’t know how to steady himself without giving into the constant pull between him and Jensen. Their kiss is a livewire shooting sparks, making him forget to breathe. It’s cliché and cheesy all at once, just like Jensen breaking into tears when he saw their son but Jared doesn’t care and he’s going with it. Pulling the older man closer, Jensen deepens the kiss. Jared moans between the crashing of their lips, the sound almost muffled by Jensen’s tongue exploring the
inside of his mouth.

“You let me know if it’s too much,” Jensen breathes into the kiss. His whole body shoves forward another inch, melting against Jared’s.

“You were there in the exam room,” Jared breaks his speech so that he can hook his hands under Jensen’s chin and take control of the kiss. They’ve been drenching themselves with so many emotions that he practically growls when he dives in for another kiss, reminding him that they belong here, in this moment. Switching it up, his kisses make their way along Jensen’s jawline until they’re brushing against the older man’s ear. “You know I’m fine.”

For a second Jensen hesitates, the concern making him slow his kisses. Jared can almost see the wheels turning in his head. He can also pinpoint the moment when Jensen decides to trust Jared. To trust *them*. “Bed. Now,” he groans out, voice throaty and growing heavier with want by the syllable. He moves to fuss with Jared’s chair but Jared catches his hand and pulls him back into a kiss.

“Fuck the wheelchair. Just carry me,” Jared growls into a kiss deep enough to make Jensen’s head spin. Jared knows he isn’t light. Had it not been for the accident, there is a good chance he’d stand taller than Jensen. But for as independent as he is, sometimes it thrills Jared when his boyfriend is so revved up that he makes lifting Jared seem like a walk in the park.

Jensen doesn’t disappoint. He hoists Jared into his arms, waiting until the younger man has his arms linked around his shoulders until ambling towards the bedroom. It’s a wonder they get there at all, and Jared only feels a little bad when his kisses distract Jensen enough that they crash into the wall once and the doorway twice. Eventually he heaves Jared on the bed, making the mattress bounces as it settles with his weight. “Clothes off.”

“Aren’t you supposed to be the one spoiling me?” Jared quips, but he’s already in the process of complying with Jensen’s request.

“Don’t worry. We’ll get to that.”

Jared shivers at the promise and the way Jensen’s voice slithers to his ears. He reaches out to help Jensen shuck his pants off. It’s a fumbling mess of limbs and Jared letting Jensen help him out of his shoes and socks, but they get the job done for the most part. The mood shifts temporarily when Jensen grabs the hem of Jared’s shirt. He lifts it up slowly, eyes glued to the exposed skin of Jared’s belly. For a second, Jared thinks Jensen’s going to cry again because his boyfriend’s eyes have that glassy look to them but he surprises him by giving a dopey grin.

“I think I love your belly,” Jensen insists without missing a beat.

“You developing a weird kink?” Jared tries to joke because he’s not sure he can stomach more emotional moments today.

“No. Just...I don’t think I ever told you. Hell, I didn’t even tell me.” Jensen crawls forward, taking the time to yank the rest of Jared’s shirt off. “I love your belly.” His smile is wide and sweet and he dips down to press a kiss on the middle of Jared’s stomach, right below the man’s bellybutton. He repeats the action, dropping kisses over the stretched skin.

Seeing Jensen kiss his middle like that does crazy things to Jared. Not only does it spike the love he feels towards Jensen to greater heights, but it makes his head swim. His emotions are an unpredictable mess to begin with and he has no idea how he’s gone from being so aroused to being so touched by the sweetness in Jensen’s kisses.
“I love you too, little guy,” Jensen says so quietly against Jared’s skin that Jared almost misses it. He lifts up so that he can trail the kisses a little higher, moving upwards until his lips find Jared’s again. “I love you.”

“I really needed to hear that today.” Jared’s fingers tiptoe their way up Jensen’s newly naked back and he presses his palms to his shoulder blades. “I needed everything about today. Been feeling pulled in so many directions.” Snorting, he adds, “Feeling really fucking pregnant.”

“You are pregnant.”

“Yes, but...I feel pregnant. Like...come on, Jen. When you met me I was in pretty good shape, all things considered. Now I’ve got this belly and,” Jared pauses to laugh because he already knows what he’s about to say sounds ridiculous. “You only got a few month’s of ‘hot Jared’ and now you’re in for double that amount of time with ‘pregnant Jared’.”

“That’s okay with me because, the way I see it, any and all version of Jared are shaping up to be pretty fuckign hot. And I’m dead set on proving that to you.” Draping himself over Jared, their naked bodies slide so that they’re fitted together. There are a million things Jensen could do to Jared right now, the man is at his mercy, but he starts with kissing his boyfriend until he can’t see straight. Until he knows how hot he is. Hands sliding up Jared’s flanks, Jensen stretches them upward until he’s combing his fingers through the hair on the back of Jared’s head and holding the man more tightly. The position allows Jensen to bracket Jared’s face with his forearms while he shifts his weight to fall into a deeper kiss.

Eventually, Jared gets the point. The tension drains from his body and he lets himself melt into Jensen’s hold. His belly makes it impossible for Jensen to grind down on him and Jared whines in frustration. Sneaking a hand into the mix, Jared toys with his thickening arousal, speeding it to full strength. Jensen, who doesn’t seem intent on giving up the devoted kisses any time soon, starts stroking his own dick, letting out a filthy moan which Jared swallows down. “Let me,” Jared says, his hand replacing Jensen’s so that each finger curls around Jensen’s dick with familiarity. When he takes over, he twists his hand in just the way Jensen likes and pumps him with confidence.

“Shit, your hands are amazing,” Jensen breathes out, letting his forehead fall against Jared’s so he can gulp down oxygen.

“My ass isn’t too bad either,” Jared goads, teeth nipping at Jensen’s lower lip as he grins. He can feel the shiver run through Jensen’s body and he knows he has the man right where he wants him. He coaxes another shiver out of the man by stroking Jensen’s dick with a little added pressure. The kissing and touching is nice, but he really wants to feel fireworks go off between them.

“Ugh.” Jensen drags out the utterance for too long, the sound getting caught against his teeth. “Your ass is...it’s...” He gets adorably tongue tied, looking all love drunk when he meets Jared’s gaze. “I’m gonna fuck you now. Okay?”

Jared almost lets out a complaint about not needing to be asked when Jensen rolls him onto his side, but the minute he hears the snick of the lube’s cap and feels one of Jensen’s fingers at his entrance, he purrs instead. There is too much lube involved, something Jensen attributes to Jensen’s habit of being a little over protective, but he doesn’t care. Jensen’s finger knows exactly what it is doing when it slowly makes its way inside him, pulling out to trace circles around the furl of muscle there. His boyfriend is looking for a clue to make sure Jared’s okay and the way Jared’s breath hitches when Jensen sinks one digit in to the knuckle lets Jensen know to proceed with caution. For a moment, Jared’s tense but then he moans and let’s Jensen work.

By the time Jensen’s got three fingers inside him, scissoring them on every other thrust, Jared’s a
“Mess. ‘Feel good?’

“Mmm hmm,” Jared gets out, twisting his head so that he can bury his face in the pillow. He’s able to reach back and pull his thigh open wider, letting Jensen have at it. When Jensen’s fingers take things to the next level and brush against Jared’s prostate, he bucks his hips and sends Jensen’s digits a fraction deeper. “Keep doin’ that,” Jared pleads, voice gravelly and pulled apart with want.

Jensen does. He gets in several more thorough connections with Jared’s prostate, letting his free hands pump lazily around Jared’s cock. Jared sees stars each time Jensen manipulates that bundle of nerves. He’s so sensitive that he’d almost be ashamed, but it feels too good and from the look of Jensen’s own dick, leaking where it’s sliding against their sheets, Jensen’s enjoying coaxing the sounds out of Jared.

Sucking a bruise along Jared’s collar bone, Jensen finds it hard to get coherent thoughts out. “I wanna be inside you right now. You okay with that?”

“Hell yes,” is all Jared has to say to move things to the next level. He looks a bit dazed when he opens his eyes. Jensen’s hovering over him, brows knit together. “What?”

“I wanna see your face.” He’s got a hand on his own dick, looking like it hurts to delay their coupling. “When you come. I wanna see your face,” he clarifies. “You okay on your back?”

“Not for an extended period of time. But trust me, this isn’t going to take me very long.” Jared returns to lying on his back, the weight of his legs causing them to fall apart on their own.

“Me either.” Jensen nudges the younger man’s thighs open a little wider so he can settle himself between them. With a bit of maneuvering, Jensen hikes Jared’s left leg open and up, holding it so that it is wrapped around his waist and there is enough room for him to position the tip of his slicked up dick at Jared’s opening. Their breaths shudder together and they lock eyes, their bodies rising and falling in tandem. When Jensen slides inside Jared, it’s like he’s moving in slow motion. In a smooth movement, they dissolve into the type of gentle, slow sex that speaks of sweetness. Jensen rocks his body into Jared, pushing breathy moans out of his mouth every single time. It’s different than anything they’ve ever done, or maybe it just feels that way because they feel miles from where they were yesterday.

Jared’s riding high on emotions and adoration for this perfect man sliding inside of him. For as much feeling as he’s lost, having Jensen inside of him is like an explosion of color. It’s every painting he’s ever done. Too intense and not enough at the same time. Jensen’s careful, aiming each thrust with accuracy, hard enough to send ripples of pleasure through Jared but gentle enough to keep their son safe. His dick is leaking on his belly, where he knows it doesn’t need to be touched to cover them in his release. Eyelids fluttering, Jensen rocks forward, his dick managing to stimulate every overly sensitive spot in Jared’s body. “Shit, Jen. Right there!”

“I love you,” Jensen breathes for the tenth time into the hot skin on Jared’s neck. He kisses the area, traveling upwards so that he can kiss away the moan forming on Jared’s lips. His hips roll to ensure his dick rocks in a little deeper. “I love you,” he repeats, not looking for a reply but needing to make sure Jared knows.

“Then fuck me harder,” Jared says, although he swore he told his mouth to remind Jensen that he loves him too. He can’t help it, he’s delirious with pleasure. With each slide of Jensen’s dick, his breath is coming in short pants, pushing out of his lungs each time Jensen’s length fills him. “Shit, I love you too,” he says in Jensen’s ear before kissing his lips and groaning down Jensen’s throat. “I’m gonna...I’m gonna...” The rest of Jared’s words leave in a gasp as pleasure uncoils in his gut and his heart clenches up.
“Me too. Wanna wait for you...Come on, Jay.” Jensen bites his bottom lip like he’s determined to see his plan through but it also gives away that he’s struggling to hold on. “Come on, baby.”

Jensen sounds sweet and sexy, all rolled into one vibrating moan as he shoves forward, pushes deeper and circles his hips. Jared short circuits, waves of pleasure overloading him and he yells out louder than he intended when his orgasm crashes into him. It’s not that it took him by surprise, but it hits him hard and he’s a mewling mess as his release splashes between them in messy spurts. Vaguely he’s aware Jensen’s coming too, clued into the fact by the way Jensen’s hips stutter and then still once he has his dick fully sheathed in Jared’s body. Jensen’s groaning too, a sound of pleasure leaving his mouth on every exhale of air.

Somehow, they’ve synched up. Maybe it was the momentum they built, but their breathing is coming at the same ragged intervals. Even though it doesn’t need to be said, Jared states, “that was good,” through a blissed out smile, head falling back onto the pillow.

“It’s always good - great - with us. I love watching you come. Love knowing I can do that.” Jensen rolls onto his side, one hand reaching up to comb Jared’s sweaty tresses back.

“Proud of yourself, huh?” Jared raises an eyebrow.

“Hell yeah I am.” Jensen smirks, the sweat gleaming on his face serving to accentuate the smile lines on his face and it makes Jared’s heart do flip flops. Straining to reach his discarded shirt, he uses it to clean up a majority of the mess they’ve made, wiping Jared’s skin clean enough so that his fingers trace over the circumference of his boyfriend’s baby belly. “You okay?”

“Never better.” Jared sighs in satisfaction, succumbing to the enjoyment of the way Jensen’s hand feels on his middle. His eyes flutter closed but he cracks one open after a few moments and catches the look in Jensen’s eyes, the way his boyfriend is looking at him. “You’re kinda proud of that too,” Jared states, gesturing towards his middle.

“Not ‘kinda proud’. Definitely proud.” Jensen smiles, making a smooth movement to kiss Jared’s lips.

Jared smiles right back because this is everything he’s been missing. The lightness to their conversation after such an emotionally saturated day is, even now, bringing them back to where they were.

His phone pings from where it is tucked in his discarded jeans. Seconds later, it pings again. Curiosity makes Jared shimmy out of his lazy mood and snag the hem of his jeans, dragging them towards him till he can fish out the phone. Unlocking the screen, he sees a response to his text from his sister. Reading it has him snorting with laughter, shaking his head. It’s not even that funny, except it is, because he can picture his sister’s face if she had been there speaking the words out loud. He can see the annoyed crinkle in her nose.

“What?” Jensen asks.

“My sister. Here, look.” Jared turns the phone towards Jensen.

Megan Padalecki

What? You’re kidding me. Now I’ve got to return all those dresses I’ve already bought!

Unless you think maybe your kid will wanna wear dresses.
Congrats btw. I’mma have the cutest nephew in town. Keep cooking mini-skate.

Jensen’s eyes scan over it and he laughs too. “Our kid can wear whatever he wants. I don’t care. I just want him to get here.”

And just like that, they’re back to being a team. In total agreement on all accounts.

That feels just about perfect.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all liked this chapter! Thank you so much for reading. And, as always, I am so flattered and honored that I have amazing readers and that you have patience with me.

Also - I got to spend a whole week with my wifey and it wasn't enough! I need her in my life! Without her, this story would be falling flat. XOXO
Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the delay. I have the same excuse as last time. I need to spend more time on my real life and my marriage and work. But I adore this story and I am so sorry to keep you all waiting. I hope you all love this chapter. And the amazing DemonDetox made a new banner and fantastic art for this chapter! Check out the rest at the end of the chapter.
Jared shifts on the couch so he can try to redistribute the weight he’s been slowly - but steadily - acquiring. Despite his upper body strength being what it is, it isn’t all that easy. Dr. Atlas wasn’t kidding when she’d warned him that growing his and Jensen’s son was going to be harder on his body than others’. Discomforts aside, he can’t complain too much. The school year is quickly coming to an end, and Jared has lazy summer days dangling in front of him like a carrot. He just has to make it through a few more weeks of working at Arkin High School. With that horizon comes a new set of worries: he isn’t sure if Arkin is going to keep him on the staff, despite Jensen assuring
him they will be shooting themselves in the foot if they fire Jared just because he is pregnant. Jared knows that, but he also knows that underneath the pleasantries, the school probably isn’t thrilled at the fact that their brand new hire is going to be out on paternity leave a mere four weeks into the new school year. And that’s if Jared carries to term. And if Jensen takes time off too? Jared can’t deny he’s worried but that’s a problem for future Jared.

Right now, all he is allowing himself to focus on is the fact that Jensen is seated at the opposite corner of the couch, playing around on his guitar. He isn’t actually playing anything in particular. The sounds that are coming out of the instrument are snippets of songs, melting together to form a type of mellow mashup. It’s nice, however, and Jared doesn’t mind hearing Jensen tiptoe into one song before switching it up and seamlessly taking on another one.

It’s a morning Jared’s needed for a long time. A morning where they are doing nothing more than sitting on the couch, nothing stopping him from watching the way Jensen sucks his lower lip in just enough when he’s playing for Jared to find it downright sexy. He knows Jensen’s aware of his presence, occasionally giving Jared a quick glance and smirk as he checks on his boyfriend, but for the most part he’s absorbed in his playing. And Jared’s absorbed in watching him and those hands that he’d found himself drawing eight months ago.

Jared’s own hand is settled on the swell in his middle, absentmindedly drawing swirling patterns across the stretched cotton on his t-shirt. When did his belly get so big? It’s not so unbelievable but he’s not used to any extra weight in that area since his physical therapists have always kept him on a pretty intense upper body strengthening routine. His ears perk up when he hears Jensen finally settle on a song and stick with it long enough to develop past the introduction. There is no doubt that he plays “Hey Jude” more often than not because it’s Jared’s favorite song. Jensen’s voice is deeper than McCartney’s voice when he sings the opening lyrics, but he doesn’t try to be something he’s not and the sound vibrates through Jared’s body. A happy sigh leaves Jared’s lips and he sinks back into the couch so his head can lazily rest on the cushions there.

Watching Jensen makes Jared’s heart flutter. He can’t help it and he wouldn’t even if he could. It’s not that Jared is into the guitar thing, but on Jensen he’s very into it. It suits him, just like when the man brew beer. It also makes him understand the smitten look Jensen gets on his face when he watches Jared in the studio. Being passionate about something is a turn on Jared wasn’t sure he understood until he met Jensen.

Jensen’s eyes flick away from the guitar and land on Jared’s face as his voice coils around the lyrics. “Hey Jude, don’t be afraid. You were made to go out and get her. The minute you let her under your skin, then you begin to make it better.”

Jared’s about to smile back, however, before he can get that far, his lips screw to one side and he’s taken aback by something he’s never felt before. Jared’s gotten used to not feeling and things he needs to tell his doctor about feelings. He’s eerily in tune with his body but he guesses that bragging right went out the window now that he’s acquired a temporary passenger. He pulls himself up straighter, eyebrows furrowed when he feels it again: a fluttering flurry of activity in his middle.

Maybe it’s the sluggish morning making his brain foggy, but it takes him feeling it one more time before he figures it out. Jared’s sharp intake of air is loud enough to catch Jensen’s ear and coupled with the way his hands fly to his middle, the whole scene starts to look a bit alarming.

Immediately letting the guitar fall to the side, Jensen’s arching across the couch. “Jay?” Jensen says, full of worry as his eyes dart all over Jared in search of a cause for concern. “What? Are you okay?”

Jensen hovering in front of Jared, looking at him with such care and genuine love that it makes Jared’s heart turn over. All he can do in response is laugh and nod, smile taking over the look of
surprise he once had. “Yeah, I…” He pauses to make sure he isn’t crazy. “I think I just felt the baby move.”

“Like now? Just now?”

“Yeah. When you were playing. I felt something here,” he says, indicating the area he meant by placing his palm over the right side of his middle. “It was just small. Kinda like a kick.” Running his hands through his hair, Jared shrugs in hopes of conveying that he doesn’t really know how to explain it to Jensen. It’s so many things all rolled into one. Dr. Atlas told him that he might not feel the baby move for a while yet since some of his nerves and sense of feeling are weakened or deadened in his lower body. She’d told him not to worry, and Jared, trusting her, has done his best to try and follow her order. But now, the flurry of movement is gone and he is desperate to feel it again.

“Right here?” Jensen questions, lifting up Jared’s shirt to expose his pregnant middle. His fingers walk over the curve, stopping at the spot Jared pointed out before. Looking up at Jared, he waits for a nod before turning his attention to Jared’s belly. “You movin’ in there?” His lips curve up, breath ghosting over Jared’s skin before his stubble tickles the area when he presses a long kiss there.
“You use those little legs, kid,” Jared teases, lost in the surreal fact that his son has a gift that Jared himself lost years ago. Taking in the scene in front of him, a soft laugh rumbles in his throat.

Jensen sits upright but pulls the bulk of his body closer to Jared, head cocked curiously. “He still moving?” His hand still covers Jared’s stomach, exploring the area in hopes of answering his own question.

“Nah, he stopped.” Jared shrugs. “Dunno if you could feel it yet anyway.”

They both sit in silence, staring at Jared’s belly and waiting for something to happen. “Guess we’re giving him stage fright,” Jared says. Sighing, he lets out an exhale of air, directing it towards his forehead so that he blows stray pieces of hair out of his eyes. “Kinda wanted to feel him again, you know? Been waiting for a while…and…I know Dr. Atlas said not to worry but a lot of the things I’ve been reading said a parent can feel the baby they are carrying as early as 13 weeks.”

“I thought you weren’t going to worry,” Jensen scolds, but with a lightness to his words that it’s more of a comforting reminder than anything else.

“I know. And I’m not. Not really. I just…” Jared chews his lip. “Feeling him move felt normal. Like…this,” he gestures towards his middle, “is normal and everything is going to be just fine.”

“Everything is going to be fine.” Jensen smiles, his hand finding a way to grab Jared’s and squeeze it reassuringly. “I’m gonna make sure of that.”

Jared knows that Jensen’s been dedicated making sure Jared stays safe, but with his new determination towards making sure their son is as well, Jared’s sure Jensen’s going to give him a few grey hairs with worry. However, it’s also a promise Jensen sounds sure of and Jared’s going to let himself believe that.

“Our kid’s just playing by his own rules,” Jensen adds.

“Of course he is,” Jared laughs out. Shrugging, he says, “Maybe he just likes your singing voice.”

Jensen snorts out a laugh. “God help him, because he’s probably going to be hearing a lot of it.” Still smiling, he picks up his guitar and resumes “Hey Jude”. “So let it out and let it in, hey Jude, begin. You’re waiting for someone to perform with. And don’t you know that it’s just you, hey Jude, you’ll do. The movement you need is on your shoulder.” His fingers work over the strings as he sets off into a series of “nah nah nah”.

It’s almost clockwork, but the minute Jensen starts strumming again, Jared feels their son move. He’s not sure if it’s an arm or a leg, but there is a moving sensation along the inside of his belly. He watches his middle for any sign of the movement and he swears he can see it. It’s slight, but that doesn’t mean it’s not there. “Shit Jensen! It’s you! He likes what you’re doing.”

Jensen stops the lyrics, but keeps strumming the last few cords on repeat. “Really?”

“Mmm hmm.” Jared nods so fast he almost makes himself dizzy. Biting his lip, he looks down at his middle and flattens both palms to it, making a diamond between each thumb and pointer finger. The shape he’s made encompasses the area where their son seems to be focusing most of his movement.

Smile splitting across his face, Jensen starts playing harder. The result is louder notes flooding the air while he sings with more force, Jared picking up the Lennon parts. “Hey Jude, don’t make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better. Remember to let her under your skin, then you’ll begin to make it better better better better better, oh.” Jensen’s eyes are getting a gleam to them that tell of something larger going on behind the scenes.
Jared finds himself gasping again because their son has something to say about that and full on kicks, hard enough so that Jared’s palm feels it. He doesn’t need words to get that part across because Jensen seems to understand. The man can read everything that is happening and maybe that’s why he dropped the guitar and slides across the couch on his stomach, upper body supported by his forearms. “Jen what are you…?” He doesn’t get to finish because Jensen’s singing louder, each vocalization directed at his pregnant middle.

Jensen’s hands walk over towards where Jared’s are and he presses his palms down “Nah nah nah nah nah nah nah, nah nah nah, hey Jude.” On the last word, the baby presses out against Jensen’s palm. The movement’s soft but it’s written all over Jensen’s face that the man felt it. “Shit!” Open mouthed grin on his face, Jensen looks up. “That was it, right? That’s what you feel?”

“Yeah.” Is all Jared gets out before Jensen’s moving so quickly he doesn’t register it. All he knows is that his boyfriend has captured his lips in a kiss, hands cupping the sides of his jaw. Melting into it, one of Jared’s hand slides up Jensen’s neck so that his long finger can comb through the man’s short hair. They kiss like it’s all they remember how to do and why shouldn’t they? This is a normal moment. This is a great moment. Jared is damn sure he’s going to celebrate that.

“Our kid moves,” Jensen mumbles into Jared’s mouth. He keeps their heads connected but pulls away just enough so that they can get some air.

“He always moves. You saw that on the screen.” Jared laughs but his words go softer on the tail end because, even though he’s being a smartass, he knows what Jensen means. “But yeah...he moves.”

The excitement over their son’s movements is enough for them to let go of each other; entwining their hands over Jared’s stomach again. Though, their son seems to have quieted down after showing off. “Jay?” Jensen whispers, the name dripping with love.

“Hmm?”

Jensen moves his head so that he can breathe Jared in and sighs again. “I’m so proud of you.”

“I didn’t do much. That was all him.”

Shaking his head enough that Jared can feel it, Jensen’s words stay soft. “No. It wasn’t. It was because you got him to this point. Got me to this point too. And...I’m proud. Just let me be proud.”

When he hears Jensen say that out loud, Jared gets it. He guesses he’s proud of himself as well because he’s done things this past year that he never thought possible. For as determined as he’s been to forge his own way in life, Jensen’s helped him learn that it's okay to let other people help. It's okay to step aside and just be proud. “Jen, you can be as proud as you want. This little one deserves all the positive feelings in the world. And I guess...I’m proud of him too. Proud of you for being such a good dad that you’re practically crying while singing a Beatles song.”

“Shut up,” Jensen says playfully, making a gesture with his hand to swat away the sentiment behind Jared’s words.

“I’m serious!” Jared grabs Jensen’s chin and makes certain they lock eyes. “Makes me feel better that I’m not the only one getting choked up over here.”

“I think we should name him Jude.” Jensen says like the words surprise him despite coming out of his own mouth. He suddenly sounds unsure of himself. “I mean...we don’t have to if you are really against it. But...I think he likes that. I know I like it.”

The suggestion catches Jared off guard. He hasn't allowed himself to think of names for their child
yet because his heart is too afraid to get ahead of the game but he supposes this conversation was inevitable. In his head he thought this conversation would have been bigger but now that Jensen’s asking, it seems so simple. Things feel right and with Jensen staring at him, however, Jared has to give an answer one way or the other. He doesn’t have to think long. Jensen’s right, it’s clear their child likes it. And Jared loves it. “It’s perfect. It’s…” He blinks away the emotions flooding his vision. “Oh my god,” he pauses to take a breath, “our baby’s got a name.” Sucking in his lower lip, Jared smiles hard enough to make his dimple pop. “Hey, Jude,” he says, greeting his baby bump. The words roll off his tongue like they were meant to do so and a happy thrumming spreads across Jared’s body.

And just like that, they’re not having a baby. They’re having a boy named Jude.

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Jared’s classroom is a flurry of activity. True, the school year is winding down, but for Jared’s classes that means one last push for his students to get all their creative juices flowing and complete their final projects for the end of the year presentation.

In an effort to mirror the way he began the year with his students, he gave them one simple prompt for their final project: “something that speaks to who you’ve become.” He figures it will be nice to have gone full circle with them. Jared remembers each and every project his students completed on the first day they’d met in response to “something that speaks to who you are.” He’s curious to see if they understand the challenge and are aware they’ve all grown in the short 10 months they’ve worked together.

“Fifteen minutes until cleanup, everyone,” Jared reminds. He knows he’s going to have stragglers, students who don’t quite want to let their work go yet. It’s understandable; Jared’s never quite finished until he’s wearing half of his art supplies and has been lost in one particular work for hours.

“Mr. P.?” Kendra questions, lower lip sucked in on one corner and her clay smeared fingers picking nervously against themselves. There was no requirement to use clay, the same material as their first assignment, but many of the students stuck with the medium. “I know you said our project had to be done this period but…It’s not done. I’ve got more to do and…” Instead of finishing she huffs out a sigh.

Jared can’t stop himself from laughing. He’s not laughing at his student in any way, but the statement she made rings true on levels he’s sure Kendra doesn’t understand. “And maybe that’s who you are now. You’re not done. But you’re getting there.”

“Yeah, but,” Kendra whines, getting cut off before she can babble more.

“Kendra, trust me, I’d love to give you more time. I would. But the school year is over and we’ve quite literally exhausted all our class days. There is nothing left but exams and heading off to summer.” Jared wheels himself around the table his student is working on. Studying the clay sculpture, he tilts his head to the left and smiles. He’s looking at a tree. In September, Kendra had sculpted a dead tree, and this one has nods to that silhouette only it looks more like a tree in winter, one that is temporarily dormant. It’s not dead. There is life all around it on the base Kendra created, a mock muddy landscape with animal paw prints and signs of growth. She’s a teenager; Jared remembers what that’s like. She is full of angst and hormones and dramatics but she’s figured this out. She’s figured out that she’s growing, even if she’s not doing it in leaps and bounds. “I don’t think I’m ever truly done with a piece of art. Sometimes it’s done with me and I move one. So what if this is a work in progress? I think it’s one of the, if not the, strongest pieces you’ve done.”

Kendra puffs up with pride, and even though she tries to keep it underwraps, it shows in the way her
eyes smile. Still, she lets out a dramatic sigh. “Yeah but...but…” Inhaling deeply, all the words in her brain rush out in a quick stream. “But I wanted you to see the finished product because you’re my favorite teacher and you’re the best teacher at Arkin and I wanted you to see that I can do it. That I am...good at this. And that I learned a lot. And I wanted to finish so you could see it because you might not be here next year and - ”

The last part makes Jared stop her mid ramble. “You know something I don’t?”

“No but,” Kendra makes a gesture towards Jared’s middle.

“I’m having a baby, not dying.” Even though it’s a joke, it doesn’t taste right in Jared’s mouth.

“Unless the school district tells me otherwise, I fully intend to be back here next year. Maybe after some time off with this little guy,” his hand rests on his middle.

Relief over knowing her favorite teacher will be back and her reaction to the news about the baby widen her smile.“Oh wow, you’re having a boy?”

“Yeah,” is all Jared can say because he’s rendered slightly breathless when the baby kicks him. He’s been doing that more lately. If Jared’s not moving around the room, Jude seems to get restless.

Maybe he’ll regret the thought but Jared loves it. His and Jensen’s son can wiggle, punch and kick as much as he likes. It’s his right.

“That so cool!” Kenda smiles wider, hands clasped together happily.

Jared snorts a laugh. He guesses it’s “cool” but he thinks having a girl would be “cool” too. “Yeah, I guess it is.”

“Hey, Ash,” Kendra calls over her shoulder. “Mr. P. is having a boy!”

“Aww,” Ashley gushes, “Baby P.!” She holds up a paintbrush in a weird type of salute and grins. “Congrats!”

Suddenly the whole class is chiming in. What was supposed to be clean up time turns into a whole lot of sitting around, a chorus of his student’s voices congratulating him and sharing their well wishes. The funny thing is, Jared thinks they all mean it. While the first response from other people in Jared’s life respond is pity, despite their lack of life experience, his students are somehow able to grasp onto the joy in the situation. True, they don’t know the medical concerns, but they are trusting their teacher. They’re simply happy for him. He has to laugh at some of their reactions and the way they stare at Jared like it’s strange that he has a whole life outside of the classroom, and with their other beloved teacher, Mr. Ackles, no less. He’s a human, but for so many months he’s been a teacher, a fixture at Arkin High School. And while it took him a few weeks to get his students to see him as more than his disability, he knows that deep down they know he’s human, the same as them.

The room is a mess when the bell rings and most of the students file out. Practically nothing has been put away but the students sure did put a smile on Jared’s face. Ashley and a few others stay behind to do the actual cleanup and he’ll send them on their way soon with his thanks and a late pass. He’s lost in a little bubble of thought, lovingly rubbing his belly, which is why he doesn’t notice Jensen until he’s right in front of him. “Oh, hey!”

Jensen whistles and surveys the room. “A bomb go off in here?”

“It’s not that bad,” Jared quips.

“I mean, in comparison to my classroom it is, but the worst damage my students seem to do is a rouge textbook being left behind or a poster falls off the wall. Given the nature of your subject area, I
guess this is par for the course.” Jensen smiles, his eyes crinkling in the corner. “I just came to check on you and Jude.”

Jared doesn’t think he’ll ever get over that smile. It shoots directly through him, turning his insides into liquid. He could melt right off his chair, and probably would if he wasn’t trying to hold onto at least one thread of professionalism. “We’re good.”

“Yeah?” Jensen’s eyebrow quirks up. “He movin’?”

“Mm hmm,” Jared nods.

Jensen moves a hand towards Jared’s middle, hesitating just before contact and pulling back. He looks over his shoulder, noticing the students tidying up the room, and shoves his hands in his pockets before he can’t help himself and touches Jared anyway.

“They know he’s yours,” Jared whispers. When Jensen pulls back in surprise, Jared elaborates. “They might not be saying it outright, but they’re talking about it. Teacher gossip is too juicy for most of them to ignore. They won’t ask me; they’re smart enough to keep boundaries, but they know. Plus, even if gossip didn’t trickle down from the meetings as central office, they have eyes. They can put the pieces together themselves. With you popping in here all the time.”

“Two can play that game,” Jensen snorts playfully. “You’re in my room all the time too.”

“I wasn’t denying it.” The look on Jared’s face is one of exaggerated innocence as he points to his distended middle. “So, you might as well touch. It’s shocking no one.”

Jensen looks like he’s got a comeback on ready to go but he simply pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose and checks out the room one more time. The kids aren’t even paying attention to them so he follows his boyfriend’s advice. He costs his hand over the swell, moving slowly so that the curve of his palm matches it perfectly. “Hey, Jude,” he smiles, like he’ll never get sick of those words. His smile is even wider when the baby responds enthusiastically. He looks up to share the grin with Jared but is met with a wincing motion. “You okay?”

“Yeah,” Jared says immediately, waving away Jensen’s concern. “I’m fine.” When he notices that Jensen isn’t buying it, he repeats himself with more emphasis. “Really, I’m fine. He’s just getting bigger and sitting in this chair all day doesn’t make that fact all that comfortable. But he’s being good. It’s not his fault.”

“Didn’t say it was. I just - ”

“Worry. I know. But we’re good. Ready to get out of here and go home. You can paw at me all you want there.” Jared smirks, dimples popping. Instead of seeing the look he expected on Jensen’s face, he sees something that looks a lot like guilt. “What?”

“Well, now you went and offered me free pawing rights and...well...I’m not going home right after work to make proper use of them.” Jensen keeps his hand on Jared’s belly but manages to shrug his shoulders.

It takes Jared a second but his brain provides him with the information it seems to have misplaced moments ago. “That’s right! Your friend is in town for a few days. What’s her name again? Tina? Tara?”

“Tara.”

Shaking his head apologetically, Jared blows a piece of hair out of his eyes. “Yeah, you told me.
Sorry, I didn’t forget but I forgot. Baby brain. Whatever.” He smiles sheepishly. “It’s fine. You have a fun time. I’ll be home when you get there and there isn’t any expiration on the pawing.” He grabs the wheels of his chair and rolls backwards and forward just enough to keep up a rocking movement.

“God I love you,” Jensen whispers so the words only hit Jared’s ears.

“I think they,” Jared says in indication of his students, “know that part too.” Looking up at his boyfriend, he appreciates the puppy love look the man is wearing and the way his glasses have slipped just a fraction lower. He know Jensen’s lips are stuck in a magnetic pull and want to kiss him and more than anything Jared wishes he could reach up and yank Jensen down for a proper kiss. That, however, will have to wait. Until then, he’s going to leave Jensen wanting the same thing by dragging his teeth over his lips and whispering “I love you too,” in a way that sounds too dirty despite barely being vocalized.

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Even though he’s expecting his friend to meet him at their usual bar, Jensen still jumps when he feels a friendly slap on the back. Disguising the sharp intake of air as a warm, “hey!” while turning to great Tara, his surprise is covered well enough

“Hey stranger!” Tara accepts the hug Jensen offers her, holding on for several seconds before stepping back and giving him a wide smile.

Tara’s remark isn’t too far off; he hasn’t seen Tara since she decided to accept a job offer this year teaching in a school several hours away, making their time together dwindle. It makes Jensen thankful that, being a teacher herself, Tara understands that sometimes free time is a luxury. Still, he feels guilty that they haven’t been in touch. Before she left, she’d been his closest friend at Arkin High, but he understands the move was the best choice for her future.

Saying this date to catch up is long overdue is an understatement.

“Get over here,” Jensen says, opening his arms and hugging Tara again.

“Oh my god, stage five clinger,” Tara whines but still makes a content noise as she hugs her friend.

“Takes one to know one. I didn’t think I was going to be able to actually get you in the moving truck when you were leaving. Thought maybe I would have to get used to a Tara sized growth as part of my left arm.”

Snorting, Tara playfully slaps him across his chest. “That’s different. I was leaving my best friend.”

“Uh huh,” Jensen nods, letting Tara believe her lie. He’s pretty sure Tara actually remembers the real story that, even though she knew the move was the right thing for her, she was heartbroken nonetheless over leaving everything and everyone she had ever known. Unlike Jensen, she’d grown up in Austin and it’s been all she’s ever called home. “It’s good to see you.” His words are as sincere as ever and he takes a step back to look her over.

Tara does the same. “You too.” With a quick look up and down, she nods approvingly. “You look good.”

“I’ve been good.”

“It shows. They treating you alright at Arkin? Not working you too hard?” She doesn’t wait for an answer before adding, “You’re too good for that school.”
While he appreciates the compliment, Jensen brushes it off. She’s not wrong but they both know that any work place has it’s ups and downs. There are enough things that keep him at his job and outweigh the bullshit. “Nah. It...it doesn’t work like that. I’m good for the staff. Good for the students. It’s mostly been good.” Jensen shrugs.

Rolling her eyes, Tara elbows him playfully in the ribs. “Spill. What did administration do now?” She draws out the last word, like whatever comes out of Jensen’s mouth will be juicy but not necessarily surprise her.

Jensen’s not sure how to answer that. For that story to be told, Tara has to know about Jared, and he hasn’t actually got around to discussing that with her. Mostly they’ve been too caught up with the currents of their lives to do more than send several texts throughout the year. It doesn’t seem fair to squish a conversation as important explaining what Jared means to Jensen into scraped together minutes when they’ve both been able to talk on the phone. “That story is going to require a few drinks.”

That does surprise Tara. “That bad, huh? Well it’s a good thing we’re meeting at a bar.” She hops up on the stool, and does a drumroll on the bar top. “What are we drinking? You’re ordering.”

Jensen expected as much. When they became friends, Tara drank a handful of beers, but having met Jensen and tasting some of the different varieties he’s brewed himself, she’s become more adventurous. She’s been lazy in discovering new beers on her own, trusting Jensen to lead her in the right direction.

They order a round of beers which becomes another. The conversation is loose, easy and a relief to Jensen that the distance hasn’t dulled their friendship in the slightest. It eases the guilt but he’s still kicking himself in the back of his head over neglecting his role in that friendship. He’s pretty sure she’s going to give him a hard time about the words he finds slipping out of his mouth. “So...I’ve been seeing someone.”

“Shut up!” Tara punches Jensen in the shoulder, surprising the man and making him swallow his mouthful of beer awkwardly. “Since when?”

“Since the end of September.” He tenses a bit, this time prepared for Tara punching him again. “Yeah I know…I suck. I’ve just been preoccupied.”

“Clearly,” Tara teases. “With this new guy, I guess. You know, this kind of thing wouldn’t be such a shock if you actually updated your social media like a normal person.”

“You know me, I like to live my life in the real world...not on the internet.”

“Yeah, I know you.” Tara’s annoyance over being kept out of the loop melts away and she smiles sadly, putting her elbow on the bar and resting her chin on her palm. “And that was okay when I was able to see you out in the world. But now I just get digital communication.” She sulks for exaggeration purposes. “I miss my best friend. And if I can’t see you in real life, it would be nice to at least see pictures of you living it.”

“I know. I miss you too Ta’ and I’m sorry. I value your friendship, you know that right?” Jensen scratches at the back of his neck, one eyebrow raises a fraction higher than the other as he hopes she understands.

“Of course I do. Never doubted that. It’s just new...you know? We’ve always known everything about each other - maybe too much so - and I’m not used to it being otherwise. It’s my fault too. Phones work both ways. And life gets busy sometimes.” She sits upright to take a swig of her beer.
“At least we’ve both been busy with good things. Me: a new start in a new town and you: a new guy.” Getting a gleam in her eyes, she prods, “so, how did you meet? What’s he like? What’s he look like?” She watches the way Jensen’s eyes soften and his lips smile. “Shit, look at you. This guy’s got you wrapped around his finger six ways from Sunday.”

“Yes.” A laugh vibrates through Jensen. “I’m kinda okay with that because I think it goes both ways.” Laughing again, Jensen realizes he’s starting to sound like a schoolboy but Tara’s right about the fact that Jared and Jensen make each other a little love stupid at times. “I met him at work. He’s the new art teacher at Arkin.” He holds up a palm, halting Tara from pointing the hypocritical points to that statement. “Before you say anything, I know. I know I said I don’t date in the workplace because it can be too messy. But it’s not like that. It’s different. He’s…” Jensen pauses to find the right words. “He’s not like anyone I’ve ever dated before. Hell, he’s not like anyone I’ve ever met before. He’s amazing, Tara. You’ll love him! I swear. He’s amazing.” He repeats, like his brain is stuck on it.

“The guy must be if he’s gotten you all hot and bothered enough to break your own damn rule.” Tara laughs through an open mouthed smile. She tries to fish for Jensen’s back pocket and it takes the man a second to realize she’s looking for his phone. “Pictures! Come on. You’ve gotta have them even if you’re not going to post them on Facebook.” After he swats her away she turns on the charm and pleads. “Oh come on, please? Pretty please?”

“Your pleading face has never worked on me.” Jensen pretends to ignore her and takes a sip of his beer. Despite having a biological one of his own, Tara’s always been like a sister to Jensen in some regards. Teasing each other mercilessly is one of those ways. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees the woman’s posture crumple in on itself and her big eyes blink pathetically at him. “Oh, don’t be so dramatic, you know I’m going to show you anyway.” He shifts so he can retrieve his cell phone and opens the gallery to a picture he and Jared took the other day. It’s quickly becoming one of his favorites despite how annoying it was to get the actual picture. They had been out with Ryan, who is actively trying to build some type of friendship with Jensen. And despite Jensen trying to do the same, they’ve somehow landed themselves in a place where they mostly communicate with sarcasm to tease each other. It’s not quite unfriendly, but it’s got some work before it can grow to something stronger. Jensen doesn’t blame Ryan; the man is only being a best friend to Jared and making sure Jensen doesn’t break his heart again. So when Jared and Jensen asked him to take their picture the other day, he complied, but not before using a ton of ridiculous filters. Seven of the shots have Jared and Jensen with animal ears and noses or flower crowns. The best one was taken in greyscale and shows both Jared and Jensen in the frame, Jensen’s giving an open mouthed smile, leaning in towards Jared. It’s pretty obvious that Jared’s seated next to him in his wheelchair, pregnant belly loud and clear and obvious. The man’s arm is lovingly draped around the swell, making it seems all the rounder. It’s another piece of news that he hasn’t been able to share with Tara so he’s hoping this picture can kill two birds with one stone. Turning the phone towards his friend, her eyes light up and she snatches the phone out of Jensen’s hand.
Tara’s all doe eyed over the sweetness of the picture but that’s short lived when she takes a surprised inhale of air. It’s pretty obvious to Jensen that she’s riding a wave of shock as she turns the screen towards Jensen again. “You’re dating a pregnant guy?” Her finger taps the picture directly over Jared’s pregnant middle, inadvertently serving to enlarge the photo and zoom in on that area.

That is not the assumption Jensen expected his friend to make and even though he knows he shouldn’t, he has to laugh. It helps cut his nervousness, and he takes a minute to figure out the proper response. Because, yes, Jensen is dating a pregnant guy but that wasn’t the case when they started their relationship. “Yeah, well...I don’t only have a boyfriend.” He pauses to give his next words added weight. “I’ve also got a son.”

Flat out dropping the phone on the bar top, Tara stares at Jensen with a slack jaw. “No you don’t.”

“Yeah, actually I do; he’s due in ten weeks.” Retrieving the phone but keeping it face up on the bar top, Jensen scrolls through the gallery to a picture from Jared’s latest ultrasound. His son’s profile is pretty easy to decipher. “His name’s Jude.”

“No way,” Tara says, still staring at her friend. “You’re fucking with me.”

“Tara, I swear to you, I wouldn’t joke about this.” He nudges the phone towards the shocked woman with the tip of his finger. “You can swipe to the next bunch of pictures. They’re all him.” He keeps pushing it towards her until she takes it in her hands does as her friend said. She stops on one that still plays with Jensen’s heartstrings because it’s the one where Jared and Jensen found out they are having a boy. It’s also the day Jensen’s walls came tumbling down and he fell irrevocably in love with his son.

“Oh god, poor kid,” Tara says shaking her head.

Pulled upright defensively, Jensen spits out, “hey!”

“No, not because you’re his dad - even though there is that - but because he’s got no privacy. You’re all up in his junk.” She indicates the picture which shows Jude at an odd angle, all booty and spread
legs with the word “boy” typed between them by the doctor. She lets herself laugh over her wittiness but quickly turns serious again. “Shit, you’re really having a kid. You. The man who has been pretty vocal about not wanting kids. What the hell is happening? I leave town and suddenly up is down and left is right.”

“I didn’t want kids. As much as I love them, I never pictured them in my life. I thought I had things all mapped out.” Shrugging, he realizes that as much as Tara needed to be informed, he’s needed this day too. He’s needed to vent and talk about his life because it’s made him realize that he’s loving who he and Jared are becoming. It’s been one hell of a ride, one that is far from over, but it’s taking him to places that feel right on him. “I don’t want kids but I want this one. And I want this man.”

Just like that, the doe eyed look comes back to Tara’s face. “Shit! Jenny, you’ve gone and fallen in love. And not just the type of love you see on television. You’ve gone and fallen so hard that you’ve been rewired.”

“That’s an understatement.” He opens the phone again and goes back to the original picture. “So, him being pregnant is the only thing you noticed?”

Tara looks at him like she’s not quite grasping what he’s asking. Then her eyes widen like she can’t believe Jensen’s asking such a stupid question. “You mean the wheelchair? Yeah well, I noticed but it’s not like I haven’t seen wheelchair bound people before. In fact, I went to school with one. I guess I’m not as up close and personal with that type of lifestyle as you’re getting, but I’m familiar with it.”

Pleasantly surprised, Jensen smiles. “Huh, kinda thought maybe you’d be shocked by that too.” He’s seen one too many people underestimate Jared and he wonders why. Aside from concerns about the pregnancy, Jensen never saw Jared as his disability.

Tapping her head while fishing for a memory, Tara takes another swallow of beer and makes an “ah-ha” noise when the pieces click into place. “There was this kid in school who survived a bus accident when he was younger. His name was Jared. Anyway, we used to be in the same art classes. I was never much for art, but it was fun. But him? Shit, you should have seen how good he was, even as a teenager. He was a cool kid. We didn’t hang in the same social circles, but we were definitely friends. He helped me out with more than one assignment. I kinda envied him. He seemed to have life figured out, even with the rock thrown in his way. And the things he could do with his hands? Freaking amazing. He totally made up for all his lost leg-power with his hands.”

Tara’s still reminiscing but Jensen can feel the heat rushing to his face. His friend doesn’t know they’ve been talking about the same Jared, nor is she aware that Jensen knows exactly what Jared can do with his hands. His dick twitches just enough to make his face flush darker because that organ also knows what Jared’s hands can do and exactly how they feel.

Too lost in her story, Tara doesn’t notice Jensen’s flustered appearance. She goes on with, "Man, I wish I knew what ever happened to him."

"Me,” Jensen spits out.

For the second time, Tara looks at Jensen like he’s insane.

Jensen clarifies with, “my guy? His name’s Jared, Jared Padalecki. Sound familiar?”

Things click into place and she points a finger towards Jensen’s chest, turns it on herself, and then points back to Jensen. “Wait...your Jared is my Jared?”
“Well, technically he’s *my* boyfriend, so I’d say he’s ‘my Jared’ before I would say he’s yours.” He smirks around the edge of his pint glass and takes a sip.

“Smart-ass,” Tara huffs, lightly kicking Jensen in the shin. “Hold on, I’m gonna need a second.” Exhaling deeply, she sits up and finishes the fest of her beer in one long gulp. “Okay…I’m good. Anymore surprises you want to throw at me? You didn’t ask him to marry you or anything?” She looks up when Jensen stays silent, still smirking. “You did? So you’re getting married now?”

“Nah. I *did* ask him. But he said a baby isn’t a reason to get married so…” There is too much emotion behind the incident to explain it to Tara in a simple sentence so he settles on, “He’s right, of course, and I wouldn’t have proposed then had we not gotten pregnant. But now...now’s different…”

“Hold that thought,” Tara says, putting up her pointer finger. Then she leans over the bar just enough to get the bartender's attention. “Can we get another round? Thanks so much,” she adds with a sincere smile before even getting the drinks. Turning back to Jensen she smiles, “Okay, tell me everything, right from the beginning. I’ve got all night.”

He doesn’t have the whole night, but he’s got enough. So Jensen tells her. He folds in all the good, all the bad, all the making pancakes, and all the details that make his and Jared’s relationship come alive for Tara. He supposes all those details are the reason that Tara won’t let them part ways before he promises to introduce her and Jared.

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Cursing under his breath, Jared tries to lean forward in his chair to shift his spine but he can’t, not with his growing belly in the way. Everything hurts today. There isn’t another way he can think of elaborating on that.

He just hurts.

Their son is being good but wiggly, which doesn’t really hurt the problem, but it doesn’t help it either. He supposes the whole pregnancy itself is what is making things more difficult for him but that’s not his baby’s fault. Jude’s not doing anything wrong. But after a full day of work and trying to keep himself focused enough to get through the final end of the year requirements, Jared’s cooked. Right now, Jared just wants to get out of his chair and figure out a way to get some of this pain off his back. He’s felt some negative side effects of carrying his child rumbling through his body, like they’re on the brink of overtaking him, and he’s mindful of them. It’s been awhile since he’s had a significant muscle spasm but he can feel that it’s only a matter of time. Without some of his medication, his body’s not always playing by the rules.

He supposes this discomfort was to be expected. Dr. Atlas told him there would be a lot of physical strains on his body; up until now, things haven’t been too difficult. Today is probably the worst he’s felt in a long time. He’s learned from his mistakes, however, and instead of making it a secret from Jensen, he told him that he’s going to head straight home after work instead of going to the end of the year meeting. Jensen felt bad and wanted to go with him but as the head of the union at the high school, he has to stay. Jared understands that, and he could see how torn up Jensen looked about that fact. He promised Jensen he’d be okay but he’d call if he needed anything and Jensen promised Jared he’ll get home ASAP.

Finally arriving home, Jared makes it through his front door with a little difficulty. He heads straight for his bedroom, not bothering to peel off some of his work clothing before situating himself on the bed. It used to be that his strong arms made it an easy swing of his body onto the mattress but he’s
finding that a little harder too. Getting in and out of his chair was a big enough task at times before the pregnancy. Now it takes him a few tries to built up enough momentum.

Lying in the bed, Jared turns on his side, eyes scrunched in pain. He’s ninety percent sure it’s not labor pain, based on everything he’s read and Dr. Atlas told him. Part of his brain had been expecting this because sitting in his chair leaves a lot of the baby’s added weight to strain his injured spine. There’s not much room for the baby and weight to go anywhere so it’s all settling against the parts of him the accident left pretty messed up. Hoping that lying down will help, he swallows a pained sob and forces himself to take a deep breath, letting it out slowly. He’s determined to tough this out. He wants this and if this is what he has to deal with, then he’s going to deal with it.

Curling one hand across his belly, he lifts up the hem of his shirt so he can rub the smooth curve. “Come on, baby. Work with me, okay?” His body is curled in a slight C shape around his middle and he looks down at the little life he’s been protecting since he’d found out about it. “Please, baby?” He continues breathing slowly, feeling guilty for asking anything of his son.

He knew there would be pain involved and that this is normal, but it hurts so much that he lets out a shaky breath, the exhale ending on a cry.

He can do this.

He’s strong enough.

But more than anything, he’s stupidly terrified that if he can’t do this, then it’s game over for Jude. And the pain radiating through him is making his brain cloudy enough to think maybe he’s been fooling himself all along

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Of all days for a union meeting to drag on, it had to be today.

Jensen gets that it is the last week of work and there are a lot of issues for them to tie up but his heart isn’t in it right now; it’s with Jared back at their house. He got the job done, of course, but trying to stay focus was borderline herculean.

Jared’s been feeling more tired lately and Jensen’s noticed the way he winces from time to time. It’s nothing they didn’t expect but it still leaves a pang in Jensen’s heart. Jared’s gone through so much pain in his life and Jensen hates that he’s in store for another serving of it, regardless of the fact that it’s due to something happy on the horizon.

Quiet greets him at the door when he walks into their house and drops his messenger bag on the couch. “Jay?” His call is met with the same silence. “I’m home.” He lets out a worried hum and searches for Jared in their bedroom.

The man is there, curled on his side, facing away from the doorway. “Hey, I’m sorry the meeting took so long.” He kicks of his shoes and sits on the edge of the bed, making the mattress dip. His heart breaks over seeing the state that Jared’s in. His larger than life personality looks dwarfed in the stillness of the room and he assumes the man must have fallen asleep. He amends that thought when he hears a groan, hard to make out because it’s muffled by the pillow Jared has turned most of his face against. “Jared?” Crawling into the bed, he makes his way around so that he can get a good look at his boyfriend. “You okay? You need me to do anything for you?” Combing his fingers through Jared’s hair, he pushes the strands out of his face. It’s then that he realizes Jared’s not asleep at all. He’s awake with tears slowly slipping down his cheeks and dampening the pillowcase. “Jared!” He yells more out of surprise and concern than anything else as a shot of adrenaline goes off in his heart.
“I’m okay,” Jared quickly replies, but the worlds are unsteady.

“No. You’re not. If you were okay you wouldn’t be crying!” The knee-jerk reaction Jensen has to feel guilty that he’s caused all of this for Jared comes back with a vengeance. It runs through his veins and sets off alarm bells in his brain. None of this seems “okay” despite Jared’s words.

“No, it’s okay. I...I’ve got this,” Jared swallows and opens his eyes at Jensen, nodding quickly. “It’s normal.” His palm flattens protectively over his belly and he licks his lips.

“It’s not. You’re practically shaking.” Jensen’s hands run over Jared’s body like he’s looking for a way to make all of this better, only it isn’t there and he knows it. He can’t do anything to make this better. Pushing Jared’s hair out of the way again, he kisses the man’s temple and his heart breaks over how warm the skin feels under his lips. “I’m calling Dr. Atlas.”

“No!” Jared catches Jensen’s hand. “I can do this. It’s okay.” This time Jared pushes himself upright, trying to look stronger than he’s capable at the moment. Instead of making Jensen feel better about the situation, it only serves to make it worse because he lets out a pained cry and presses a palm to his back.

“Baby, I know. I know you can do this.” Cupping Jared’s face in his hands, he kisses his lips. “But sometimes that’s not enough. And I’d promised I’d keep you safe.”

“You promised you’d keep him safe too,” Jared pleads, eyes foggy with pain.

Jensen freezes because he doesn’t know what to say. Jared’s right but Jensen’s freaking out and he doesn’t know how to stop being overprotective and putting Jared first. He’s out of his depth here and the panic is making his heart race enough to make him dizzy. Of course he loves Jude and wants to keep him safe, but he doesn’t know how to do that. Swallowing, he squeezes Jared’s hand. “Can’t keep him safe if I don’t take care of you first, right?” He can hear his heart pounding in his ears and he takes a deep breath. “I’m going to call the doctor, and we’ll take it from there.”

The words soak in for a moment before Jared reacts to them. “Okay...okay. I think you should.” With his eyes closed, Jared swallows and nods his head but his hand never leaves his belly, not even when they get to the doctors.

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In the exam room, both men are faced with an unhappy looking woman as she takes her glasses off and lets them hang from the eyeglass strap around her neck. They’re not needed now that she’s already examined Jared.

“I’m mad at you,” Dr. Atlas scolds, her tone similar to one used when a child misbehaves. She doesn’t give either man a chance to speak before she continues. “Of course you call when you’re in that much pain! I know I told you it was normal - and you were right, it’s as we expected - but that doesn’t mean you have to sit there and do nothing about it. There’s nothing wrong with the baby or the pregnancy, but if you keep suffering in silence, it’s going to put even more stress on your body, and more stress isn’t good for the baby. So...you do the math.”

“Okay,” Jared says, voice quiet as he avoids her eye contact and nods.

At that reaction, Dr. Atlas’ scolding melts away completely and she is warm and grandmotherly again. “Oh, honey, I’m not really mad at you. I was...” She pauses to reassess what she wants to get across. “Maybe it was the wrong choice of words. All I was trying to do was let you know that I don’t want to see that happen again. I gave you my phone number for a reason. You’re in too much

“Uhh-huh.” Jared nods again, still not looking at her.

“Stop breaking my heart, sweetheart.” Letting out a long sigh, she gets to her feet. “What’s going on?” Jared still sucks his lip in and when he meets her gaze, it looks like he’s still stuck in his own head. “As your medical provider, I strongly suggest you tell me.” Her stature means she has to look up in order to be able to meet Jared’s eyes from where he’s sitting on the exam table.

“I feel like an idiot.” Jared says to the ceiling.

In eerie tandem, both Jensen and Dr. Atlas speak at the same time: “You’re not an idiot.”

“Yeah well...I should have called. I know that. But, I kinda knew in my gut that it was normal. So I thought maybe I could tough it out for a while until it went away. I didn’t want anyone to think…” His words trail off and he swallows what is left unspoken.

“Didn’t want anyone to think what?” Dr. Atlas prods.

A storm brews behind Jared’s eyes. He looks conflicted but then everything spills out. “I didn’t want anyone to think that my body couldn’t do this. That I couldn’t do this. And then...we’d have to end this. I want Jude to have as much of a chance on the outside right now as he can, and -”

“Jude?” Dr. Atlas cuts him off with.

Jensen smiles softly as he answers her. “It’s our son’s name. Was weird at first to start calling him that, almost like I was naming Jared’s stomach. But it feels right that he has a name.”

“Jude,” the doctor tests out once before nodding in approval, a smile in her eyes and on her lips.

“Jude. I like it.”

“Thanks,” Jared says, voice still sounding broken.

Smiling softly and grabbing one of Jared’s large hands in her own, she pats the tops of her patient’s hand right over the knuckles. “Jared, your body’s done some pretty amazing things. It survived more obstacles and injuries than I can count on my hands. It’s bounced back with strength and determination. It made Jude.” She pauses after the last statement to give a wider smile. “You know, I think your body saved an old lady from sadly marching into retirement before she was 100% ready. And it saved her grandson a lot of time without me meddling in his business. So, I’m pretty positive that your body can handle cooking this one a while longer and getting Jude through a safe delivery. And you? You’re superman. What can’t you do? So if you were afraid that calling me was going to end in me telling you that it was game over? Then honey, I think maybe you need to get your hearing checked. Because I promised you that we would work together and I wouldn’t leave your side until that little boy is safe and sound in your arms.” She pats Jared’s hand again.

Jared lets out something that sounds like a sob but it’s not from pain or distress. It’s dripping with relief and maybe a little enjoyment of his doctor’s sense of lighthearted conversation. He nods and looks like he can’t figure out how to verbally respond until he says, “can I hug you?”

Dr. Atlas full on lets her head tilt back and laughs kindly. “Go gentle. Strong guy like you could crush this fragile old doctor and then what good would I be to you?” She takes a step forward so she can be encircled by Jared’s arms and hugs her patient, patting his back. “There, there.”

“Old bones aside, pretty sure there’s nothing fragile about you,” Jensen joins in, letting the words
come out like the compliment he intends them to be.

“Hey, you watch your mouth with that ‘O’ word,” Dr. Atlas teases.

Jensen’s face screws up in confusion. “But you…”

“Yeah, I call myself old. That doesn’t mean everyone else can.” She gives Jensen a pointed look but it falls away instantly and she shakes her head. “Come here sweetie. You still look so terrified. But you did the right thing in calling me.” She goes to hug Jensen as well, giving into their unconventional doctor-patient relationship. “Jared and your son are just fine. As the baby’s getting bigger there isn’t going to be many places for him to go because of the way he’s positioned in Jared’s womb. And with Jared seated for a majority of his life, it makes it a little - or a lot - uncomfortable. The pain is going to be a problem we’re going to have to find ways to work around. A lot of it has to do with sitting for too long. I suppose it’s a good thing your job is going to be on summer break or I would suggest a leave of absence.” She pulls away to face both men. “Too much time seated isn’t great for the baby. That’s advice I’d give to anyone. But in Jared’s case, going for a walk isn’t an option.”

“Well, he likes it when I go for my version of a walk. I think the movement lulls him to sleep.” Jared coasts a hand over his middle and give Dr. Atlas a smile that’s finally lost most of his fear.

“Good to know. And it’s good that you’re keeping yourself active and that heart pumping from wheeling around. So, make sure you go for plenty of walks and keep that little guy happy.” She taps her forehead in thought. “You gotta give me some time on this one, at least enough time to talk to your physical therapy provider. Because I am thinking some time lying on your side will be helpful in order to keep pressure off your back. And maybe we can figure out a way to have Jensen help support your hind quarters while you’re on your hands and knees.” She turns towards Jensen, ideas turning in her head as she tries to figure this out. “That way Jared can get some relief and let some of the pressure off his injured spine. I’m sure you can both work on it in physical therapy and then start incorporating it into your daily routine at home.” Clasping her hands together, she rests her chin on the crisscross pattern of her fingers. “Yes. That sounds like a plan.” Making a shooing motion, she playfully dismisses her patients. “Now you two get out of here. I have phone calls to make and you’ve got a PT appointment to make. So go home. You rest,” she points to Jared, “and you,” she points to Jensen, “practice being a good daddy by babying him today.” Before Jared can say anything, she puts up a hand in Jared’s direction. “I know you don’t need him to, but sometimes it’s nice to be pampered. Besides, I don’t want you doing more than laying down resting for at least two days. Can’t do much more than be babied when those are the doctor’s orders.” She smiles, an idea on her lips when she looks at Jensen. “Why don’t you sing ‘Hey Jude” for him or something?”

Both men laugh, filling the room with something warm. “That’s actually the real story about how he got his name,” Jensen clarifies. One of his palms curves around the side of Jared’s neck and travels upward so he can lovingly caress the back of his head while the other one takes the time to lace fingers with Jared’s.

Today felt like a test but it’s just the beginning of a harder road. But for now it seems like there is a light at the end of the tunnel.
This chapter could not have happened without my amazing beta and wifey DemonDetox. I mean that because my muse decided to go off somewhere and die and without her I would have just stared at a skeleton outline of the chapter. She even helped me rework some of the dialogue and it's her idea and words where Tara is talking about Jared without realizing she and Jensen are both talking about the same Jared. *hugs her to death*
And then she went and made art!? It's too much. I am so flattered and lucky.

Click HERE to visit DemonDetox's page with all her other art.

And another big thank you to all the people who are sticking with this story. It means so much to me that people have read and left comments. *blush* I hope you like it! *hugs*
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

This chapter includes schmoop, angst, and some sexy times. You’ve been warned. :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Coming to Jared’s physical therapy session had been a mutual decision. If they’re going to follow Dr. Atlas’ orders on finding ways to alleviate the strain on Jared’s spine, then Jensen’s all in. It was their deal, after all. They’re a team in all of this, even though nothing breaks Jensen’s heart faster than seeing the pain Jared’s going through. It makes Jensen feel stuck on the sidelines and useless. He can’t take the discomfort away from Jared - the world knows he would if he could - and he’s scared to death of how much harder everything is going to get.

If Jared’s physical therapists are going to try to come up with things Jared can practice at home, then Jensen sure as hell is going to be there. How else will he learn what to do? Despite that, he does feel a little like a fish out of water. These appointments are things Jared does on his own. At first, he’s sure it was because Jared was trying to keep Jensen from being scared away at the prospect of being in a relationship with someone in Jared’s condition. But now, it’s habit. It’s a place Jared goes to keep his body strong and in best working order. He’d once teased that he didn’t want Jensen around to distract him, because then he’d get nothing done, before honestly explaining that he likes going alone. It is his time to focus and think, and Jensen gets it. Maybe it’s why he feels like he’s encroaching in something that’s been solely Jared until this point in time. It’s almost as if he’s overstepping one of the few boundaries they have, invading Jared’s personal space in a way that isn’t comfortable for either of them. Though, it has to be. Jensen makes a mental note to leave Jared to his own devices during therapy time once the pregnancy is over with.

Marcus and Josie are nice enough. It’s clear that they have a well honed relationship with Jared; every interaction with their patient speaks of the fact that they’ve been working together for years. They’re not deliberately trying to make Jensen feel like the odd man out, it’s just that their very being there is making it pretty obvious that it’s exactly what Jensen is.

“Jensen, you come around over here,” Marcus instructs, trusting Jared’s care to Josie so that he can twist away from Jared enough and make eye contact with Jensen.

The words snap Jensen out of his reverie and he startles. “Oh, yeah, okay,” He says as he shakes his head to clear it. Doing as Marcus requested, he scrambles onto the mats where they are working with Jared, saddling up beside his boyfriend.

“Come ‘round here often,” Jared tries to tease from his place on the mat. He’s in a modified all-fours position, having both of his palms flat on the mat and directly under his shoulders so that they hold his upper body up. Josie and Marcus worked on manipulating Jared’s legs, making sure his knees are aligned with his hips and placed in such a way that evenly distributes his weight and Jared’s essentially holding himself in the position all on his own. The problem is, with his swelling middle and messed up center of balance, Jared can’t get himself into this position all on his own. Add the fact that, without his medications, there is always a chance he’ll have a muscle spasm and fall out of position, and Jensen quickly understands his part in all this before they even explain it to him.

“Hey,” Jensen breathes out, voice soft and familiar in a way that denotes he’s only speaking for
Jared’s ears. “You okay?”

“I’m…” Jared pauses and scrunches one side of his face in a wince. Transferring more of his weight to his right palm, he can keep his balance long enough to press a palm to the movement in his belly. “I’m okay. He’s just being naughty.”

Though Josie’s shifting Jared’s hips slightly, it’s enough for Jared to slam his palm back to the mat for stability. “Just let gravity do its job for a moment. The whole plan is to make sure he gives your spine a break, give him an opportunity to stop settling up against it.”

“It’s not his fault,” Jared huffs out protectively, shaking his head from left to right.

“No one said it was,” Jensen reassures, combing his fingers through Jared’s hair and pushing it away from his face.

Jared winces again and rocks his weight from palm to palm. “No, you’re right. It’s my fucking fault for having to sit down all the time. Kid’s got nowhere else to go - ”

“Shut up,” Jensen warns, his words an ordinance but in no way harsh. “Without you, he wouldn’t even be here. So shut up.”

Jared does, snorting a push of air through his nose that Jensen thinks makes him look more adorable than annoyed.

“Glad you said something,” Marcus elbows Jensen and chimes in, “because if you hadn’t, I would have. I’m not working overtime so you,” he gives a pointed glare to Jared, “can have a pity party. So cut it out. And before you say anything...I know you’re tired. I know you’re in pain. And I know those two things make you cranky. If I’ve been working with you as long as I have and I didn’t know those things? I’d be worried. But trust me, this is going to work.”

Jared falls out of the position but with so many hands on him, he is gently guided to the mat. He still has his palms holding him up but now he’s resting on his right hip. “Okay, yeah. So...let’s make it work,” is all Jared says while a new determination slides into place.

“Good.” Marcus grabs Jensen’s hands in his own and guides them to where he wants them on Jared’s body. “I’ll teach you how to get him up into position, and then where to hold his hips to help alleviate some of the stress his spine’s been under. Then we’ll practice getting out of the position and into it again until you both have the hang of it.” Marcus concludes while working together with Jensen to hoist Jared’s hips up and square them to the mat. Then he moves his hands away so that Jensen is the only one holding Jared steady.

“Got it.” Jensen shuffles a little closer to Jared’s form but remains focused on keeping Jared’s hips just the way Marcus had shown him. “This okay, Jay?”

“Yeah,” Jared says, looking over his shoulder at Jensen. The expression on his face morphs as he bites his lower lip and furrows his brows together. “Shit, baby, come on,” he pleads, managing to transfer his weight to his right palm again so that he can press a comforting hand to his middle. “Remember when I was worried because I couldn’t feel him?” Jared pushes through the discomfort to laugh through a dimpled smile. “I’m man enough to admit that I was wrong.”

It takes some maneuvering, but Jensen manages to sneak forward enough so that he’s able to reach his hand out and place it besides Jared’s. His boyfriend’s right; Jensen can feel angry little kicks - he thinks they’re kicks - and it’s not like Jude to be this feisty. “Hey, Jude,” Jensen says, his tone completely conversational before his brain remembers that the phrase will never not come with
thoughts of the song of the same name. An idea, a silly one, sparks in his brain and he wets his lips before letting it unfurl. There is potential for him to make a fool of himself in this moment but, if it will ease Jared’s discomfort, then it’s a fair price. “Hey, Jude,” he says again, this time there is a lilt to the words and his throat lets the melody of the song and lyrics fill the room. He’s not loud, but with his voice aimed towards Jared’s middle, it’s enough.

He’s not going to pretend that the fact his and Jared’s child always calms down at the sound of Jensen’s singing voice doesn’t fill him till he’s bursting with pride. Even a stranger could see that on Jensen’s face. It’s hard for Jensen to be anything but filled with a warm, accomplished feeling - like all is right in the world. That he can take care of his son in so many ways already and the baby isn’t even topside yet.

Yeah, Jared’s been dealing with the brunt of the pregnancy, but in this way, Jensen gets to level the scales a bit.

Not that it’s a competition. He knows it’s not. But it still evens him out. He’s built a career on managing coworkers’ and students’ distress and making sure everything is copacetic.

He doesn’t sing the entire song, just an abridged version, but Jude starts to settle down and Jared lets out a relieved sigh. It’s a moment of calm between them and Jensen forgets for a second that they’re not alone, reminded of that fact when Josie lets out something between a squeal and a sigh.

“I’m sorry that was...pretty much the sweetest thing I’ve actually seen happen in front of me,” Josie falls back into a cross-legged sit and curls her hands to her chest. “Why are you gay?” she asks in Jared and Jensen’s direction, not really aiming the words at one man in particular. As if she hadn’t meant to say them aloud, she chokes on a breath of air and blinks. “I mean...” but she doesn’t finish her words, choosing instead to laugh and make a gesture with her hands to clear the air.

“Aaanyway,” she drags out, rising once again to her knees and smoothing both palms over Jared’s back, one on each side of his mostly elongated spine. “This should release some tension here. Rounding or curving your spine a little bit is okay but I don’t want you to put too much pressure on it by lowering it too much. Just soft, gentle movements, okay? Let’s see if we can get the kid to hang out away from your spine.”

Nodding, Jared tests his range of motion and settles into the safe support of Jensen’s hands. “It does feel better, actually.”

“Well imagine that,” Marcus adds with feigned surprise. “Josie, I guess we don’t have to turn in our degrees after all.” The lightheartedness in his voice is enough to finally cut through any of the lingering pessimistic haze.

And just like that, everyone’s head is back in the game.

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They’re sitting in the car on the way back from physical therapy when an idea pops into Jared’s head. “Hey, Jen?”

“Hmm?” Jensen hums, without taking his eyes off the road.

“I’m kinda craving some pancakes right about now.” Turning his head, Jared watches the wheels in Jensen’s head turn. It’s hard not to find it just a little bit funny. Pancakes mean so many things between the two of them ever since Jared blurted it out in response to Jensen saying he wanted to start dating exclusively. It’s probably why Jensen’s scrunching up one side of his face trying to settle on exactly what meaning Jared’s going for. Truthfully, Jared’s not sure himself. Yeah, he’s
exhausted in a way that he always is after physical therapy, but he’s also happily settling into a respite from all the back pain he’s been feeling. It’s a relief and comes with a satisfying burst of energy. Having Jensen butted up against his backside during a majority of the PT session left him wanting a little one on one time with his boyfriend. But he is also pretty darn pregnant and hungry, which does have him craving the actual food product. Having pity on Jensen, Jared’s stomach makes things a bit clearer by grumbling.

“Oh, those type of pancakes,” Jensen laughs out.

“Well, yeah. That and...you know…” Jared shrugs and laughs as well, but he’s pretty sure Jensen isn’t following the second part of that sentence. His boyfriend is already too caught up in the new directive of needing to provide sustenance for his growing little family. Jared can clarify everything later, because right now? Jude is making it pretty clear that he doesn’t care what his fathers do, but they better make sure he gets something to eat soon.

Thankfully, their son doesn’t have too long to wait as they are already pulling up to their house. It’s pretty routine for Jared to get himself out of Jensen’s car, but today his body isn’t having it. He tries to swing himself out and into the waiting wheelchair Jensen has popped open in wait by the passenger side door but Jared doesn’t feel confident enough to try swinging himself into it. With his belly getting bigger, Jared’s been able to keep a handle on the changing distribution of weight and center of balance, but after working through PT, his arms are tired enough to make him unsure if he should do this himself. “A little help?” he says, the words coming out as the request they are meant to be. He looks up at Jensen with a large exhale of defeat. “Getting too big to move like I used to.”

Jensen moves on autopilot, maneuvering himself so that Jared can throw an arm around his shoulders and they work together to get him seated in the chair. “Jay, I don’t think you being big has ever stopped you from being able to do anything,” he jokes, eyeballing Jared’s frame. “It’s jus’ that you’ve got an added passenger who is making it a little difficult.”

“That’s exactly what I meant,” Jared says with a roll of his eyes as he playfully punches Jensen’s shoulder. The cheese factor in Jensen’s words has an unexpected effect and makes butterflies explode in Jared’s chest. His heart flutters at the way Jensen laughs a little louder at his own joke and Jared is irrevocably in love with this man. It’s hard not to be, especially after he just serenaded their child - an action he’s done before but never with an audience - in front of Marcus and Josie and his unwavering dedication when helping Jared through physical therapy. Before he removes his arm from around Jensen’s neck, he surprises the man by pulling him into a kiss.

Jensen’s taken aback and almost falls onto Jared’s lap, but only because he’d been moments away from pulling upright. Once his brain gets with the program, he stabalizes his stance and gives Jared a run for his money by intensifying the gesture. With the way Jared tilts his head back just enough for Jensen to sweep their tongues together, their instant connection is palpable.

They melt together in a kiss that they’ve both been needing. Everything pours out between them and their lips work to make sense of it all. Jared isn’t prepared for any of it because this simple act of kissing the man he loves is so intense. With his fingers combing through the hair on the back of Jensen’s head, Jared closes his eyes and pulls Jensen closer. They kiss until they are out of breath, only pulling away a fraction so that their foreheads are still connected. “I really wanna make pancakes with you.” Jared breathes out in little pants. “Like...all the time. But...especially now....’cause…” He can’t figure out how to string more words together so he shuts up and kisses Jensen’s lips again, softer this time and sweetly kissing the corner of the man’s mouth before he pulls away again.

Jensen’s eyes crinkle with a smile like he finally does know everything in Jared’s head. “I love you
“I didn’t say anything,” Jared blinks.

“You kinda did.” Jensen strokes a thumb along the line of Jared’s jaw. “And I wanna do all that too. You have no idea. But…” He squeezes the hand of the arm Jared had wrapped around his neck before slowly lifting it off of him. It makes it easier for Jensen to settle one of his palms on the swell in Jared’s middle. “How about lunch? How about we do that first?” There is a little flurry of activity under Jensen’s palm, making him smile. “Kid says ‘yes’."

“Lunch sounds good,” Jared nods, adding with seriousness, “but I’m cooking.” Jared puts both of his hands on the arms of the chair and shifts himself into a comfortable position.

“You don’t have to. I’m sure you’re tired from the day. I’ve got it.”

“It’s not that I don’t appreciate the offer, Jen,” Jared says while rolling back and forth an inch, “it’s just that...I’m way better at making pancakes.” He knows it’s a baited statement, one Jensen isn’t going to leave sitting there, which is why he raises his eyebrows at Jensen with a smirk before hightailing it to the front door.

“What did you just say,” Jensen calls after him, getting himself together to languidly jog after his boyfriend.

“The truth,” Jared replies. “Don’t feel bad. There are a lot of other things you’re good at. This just isn’t one of them.” Jared’s laugh rings out as he gets their front door open and wheels inside. He’s not wrong. Jared really is better at making pancakes, but Jensen’s strengths have been shining in so many other areas of their lives. Even in places Jensen never thought he’d be, like a soon-to-be father.

Jared hears Jensen’s “you’re gonna pay for that,” and he’s sure he will. Now, however, he’s busy getting to mixing up some pancake batter because the sooner they get to eating, the sooner Jensen can make Jared “pay for that”.

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The smell of freshly prepared pancakes and syrup is still in the air long after their meal is done; Jensen can smell it even though they are in their bedroom.

After the meal, Jensen had managed to convince Jared to practice the position Josie and Marcus taught them, if only to put his mind at ease that the spinal pain Jared had been experiencing really is, for now at least, fading into the background. “This right?” Jensen asks, as he supports Jared’s hips. He has his boyfriend positioned just as he’d been taught, carefully making sure Jared’s legs are hip width apart and staying parallel to one another.

“Yeah,” Jared confirms. He looks over his shoulder. He’s managed to wedge a bunch of pillows under his chest so that his wrists are not supporting all of his weight. “I must look like an idiot like this.”

“Are you serious?” Jensen does understand why Jared would be feeling vulnerable in such a position. But idiotic? Definitely not. Jensen thinks he’s anything but. All Jensen sees is that determination that had originally attracted him to Jared. He sees strong arms and those hands that turn him into putty. Jensen sees a man he is undeniably in love with, a man who is visibly going through hoops to make sure he carries their child to term. All of that makes Jensen’s blood quicken. Shaking his head in disagreement with Jared’s statement, he shuffles forward on his knees so that the warmth of his body meets Jared’s backside. “You can’t be serious. Because my dick may have behaved too,” he says.
during therapy, but I’m not making any promises about that right now.”

“Huh?” Jared gets out before the sound dies on his tongue. He figures out what the other man means when he rocks his bodyweight backwards and feels the harder line of Jensen’s body, more specifically, the thickening line of his growing arousal.

“I was pretty much rubbing up against you the whole time, and I kept the right head in the game. Not exactly easy to do when...I’m me and you’re... you,” Jensen says softly. “Gotta give a man some credit.” His hands don’t loosen from Jared’s hips, holding the younger man steady when he shivers.

A breathy noise leaves Jared’s throat and he swallows thickly.

“You look pretty good to me, Jay.” Jensen licks his lips and then drags his teeth over the lower portion. “Much better when I get to touch you behind our doors.” His fingers splay out so that he’s still holding Jared up with the meatier part of his palm but he’s about to stroke the sensitive skin around Jared’s hip bones.

There might have been a word on Jared’s lips but Jensen can’t understand it. All he hears is Jared’s breath losing its steady rhythm.

The coil of want that has been pent up inside of Jensen all day finally has the opportunity to unfurl and stretch through Jensen’s body. It hits him hard, making him swallow a growl as his dick hardens and seeks friction between the cleft of Jared’s ass cheeks. That kiss in front of the house was a hard one to come back from. Jared had pulled him in hard and fast and, though the phrasing might be silly, all he wanted to do was make their own person brand of pancakes. It’s their thing. It’s such a silly phrase that became a way of revealing the currents of their love. The only thing that stopped him was this new penchant for worrying about their son and Jared during this pregnancy. But now that he’s sure that everything is taken care of in that regard, he really can’t help himself. He wants to touch Jared and prove that the man looks far from idiotic. “Jay, you have no idea what you do to me.”

“I do.” Jared turns his head and locks lust blown eyes with Jensen. “I really really do.” He shifts his weight to his left palm and balances himself there so he can take Jensen’s hand and pull it forward and across the joint where leg meets torso. It helps Jensen get a good hold on the man by hooking his arm there, but it also let’s Jared bring Jensen’s fingers in contact with his own clothed stiffening cock. “Cause you do it to me too.”

That has Jensen groaning. He allows himself the luxury of stroking Jared a few times just to hear the man’s breathing go erratic. “You okay holding yourself up for a few seconds?”

“Uh-huh,” Jared affirms.

To do what Jensen intends on doing, he has to let go of his hold on Jared’s hips. Instead, he supports him less securely by wrapping arms around his waist while managing to tug Jared’s pants and underwear down. He gets them yanked down to the bend in Jared’s knees before he goes back to holding him firmly. “I’m gonna show you just how much I like the view,” Jensen breathes out as he drags a kiss across Jared’s left buttocks, “but you gotta tell me if it’s too much. Or if it stops feeling okay.” He gives a reassuring squeeze around Jared’s hips. “Don’t worry. I got ya. But you tell me if you get uncomfortable.” He leaves a trail of kisses to Jared’s other ass cheek and rests his forehead there. For his part, Jensen has done everything in his power to familiarize himself with the confines of his partner’s body. He has stumbled a few times, but Jensen’s figuring out ways to understand how paraplegia has changed Jared’s body. He has hang ups about certain things, old ways of thinking that it’s not fair Jared can’t have strong muscles here, in his thighs, like he does in the rest of his body. But he’s learning to stop thinking about what Jared doesn’t have and being thankful for
everything he does have. Everything Jensen can kiss, like the sensitive furl of muscle that causes Jensen to shout when Jensen sucks a kiss against it. “Gotta tell me you’re okay, Jay.” It’s a new position for them, parts Jared is conscientious about are on display, and Jensen wants to make sure Jared’s okay with it, both emotionally and physically.

“I’m…” Jared shivers and Jensen can feel him rocking back to increase the pressure of Jensen’s lips against his anus in the slightest amount. “I’m good.”

That’s all Jensen needs to hear. He holds onto Jared tightly, smirking at the thought of having the man at his mercy. As long as Jared is still giving him the all clear he can: kiss, nibble and suck every part of him until he’s falling apart. It’s a thought good enough to send a fresh pulse of blood to his own arousal. Jensen is definitely going to use the fact that some areas of Jared’s body, like the one he’s kissing around and teasing, have decided to make up for the areas that Jared’s lost feeling in by becoming hypersensitive to his advantage.

He starts off slowly, teasing Jared’s opening by pushing from the tip of his tongue against the opening’s edges, moving in a slow circle to be sure he’s attacked every nerve he can reach. Then he starts by probing deeper, making slow pushes inside Jared and taking his time licking the sensitive walls there.

“So good,” Jared breathes out, fists curling into the bed sheets his palms are pressed against.

Jensen’s voice vibrates against Jared’s opening and he smirks mischievously, “Yeah?” Having enough of the slow exploration of his boyfriend’s opening, he starts to eat him out with more intensity. He kisses the muscle there, sucking at it and teasing it until he can really work his tongue inside. Going deeper and faster, Jensen builds up to a steady onslaught on Jared’s anus.

“Oh my god,” Jared moans. He’s shaking slightly but holding steady in the position. True to his word, Jensen’s still holding him securely and Jared trusts him enough to not worry about falling and only focus on what the man is doing with his mouth. “Jensen...don’t stop.”

Heeding those words, Jensen fucks his tongue into Jared’s ass all the harder. He encourages the way the younger man is rocking back into his face by helping the movements along. With his hands on Jared’s hips, it’s easy to direct Jared exactly where he needs to be for Jensen to inflict optimal pleasure.

It’s not long before Jared is falling to pieces; Jensen can tell. He’s able to read the younger man like that. Even without being able to see Jared’s face, Jensen knows what expression he’d find on it - lust heavy lids almost closing over his eyes and lips parted, twitching every now and then as he makes pleading moans. He repeats the same one armed attempt to hold Jared up that he relied on earlier when pulling his pants down and doesn’t waste time coating his pointer finger with his own saliva. His mouth had done a thorough job of loosening Jared’s entrance and when he pushes the digit inside, it’s with little resistance.

A punch of air is forced out of Jared’s lungs, followed by a drawn out moan. It isn’t until the sounds Jared’s making become a sudden yelp of pleasure that Jensen knows he’s aiming his finger spot on to toy with the bundle of nerves inside Jared that always have him hurling towards orgasm.

“Jus’ like that,” Jared urges before saying the words again, this time sounding like more of a plea.

Jensen curls his finger along his boyfriend’s insides, stroking them slowly before pulling the entirety of his finger out. Jared’s starting to shake too much and Jensen’s already decided he’s going to resume holding him properly, but not before fingerling him with the added stretch of his middle finger. He gets in several strokes, each one hitting their mark, before he pulls both fingers out and
returns them to their place around Jared’s hip. Everything happens in one smooth movements, and
the moment Jensen’s fingers leave Jared’s body, his tongue is taking their place.

“I’m gonna…” Jared tries to get out, but he moans out something that sounds like “come.” He
desperately tries to balance himself on one palm again, his newly freed hand reaching back to stroke
his neglected dick.

“Oh no you don’t,” Jensen warns. He’s able to curl his hand forward and grasp the base of Jared’s
length. Thumb and forefinger curling around the organ, Jensen gives a little squeeze. “I’d love to get
you there, Jay. I really would. But I could also keep you on the brink a little longer.” The whine in
protest from Jared isn’t unexpected. It doesn’t do enough to convince Jensen to release the pressure
around Jared’s dick, but it does urge him to lap at Jared’s ass in hopes of showing Jared what he’s in
for. “I’ll eat you out till you’re coming all over this damn bed...but,” Jensen pauses to suck the ring of
muscle under his assault. “You’re gonna have to admit that I can make pancakes too.”

Jared’s response is so quick that it’s almost on top of Jensen’s demand, every part of his voice
sounding wrecked. “Yes, yes...I admit it. You win. You can make pancakes too. Now make me
come already!”

Those are the magic words Jensen needs to switch his hand’s intentions from starving off Jared’s
orgasm, to coaxing it on. He wants to be eating Jared out when the man finally falls over the edge,
but his fingers can’t help themselves. They wrap around Jared’s dick and stroke him several times,
coming away sticky with the moisture already gathering at the head. Jared’s length feels hot and
heavy in his hand, making Jensen regret not taking the time to shove his own pants out of the way.
Touching Jared has Jensen’s dick straining at the zipper of his jeans and he growls at the frustration
of it all.

“Shit,” Jared gets out. “Hold me up, Jen. Not gonna be able to...gonna…” Jared shivers and tosses
his head to the side.

“I got ya.” Jensen says once he’s released Jared’s dick and has hoisted the man’s hips a little higher.
The words, “come for me,” leave Jensen’s mouth before it’s back on Jared’s anus. He probes inside
the twitching hole, tripping the nerves there and setting of a chain reaction.

When Jared comes, it’s with a shout of Jensen’s name. Jensen works him through it, licking at
Jared’s insides gently. He doesn’t pull away to survey the damage until every wave of orgasm seems
to have subsided.

Jared’s still holding himself upright, but his arms are shaking with fatigue and his head is sagging
between his shoulder blades.

“You okay?” Jensen asks.

“Ye-yeah. So good…” Jared turns his head and their eyes meet. “Can you...uh,” he pauses, partially
to catch his breath and partially out of sheepishness. “Can you fuck me? Not like this,” he hurries out
of his mouth while he makes a nodding gesture to indicate the position they’re in. “Like...on my
side.”

Jensen’s heart stumbles in his chest. He’s wanted to be inside Jared for hours, but he’d been so
focused on getting Jared off that he wasn’t playing that card. If Jared was too tired to do anything
more after that, then Jensen wasn’t going to push for it. But hearing the request out of Jared’s mouth
and knowing that his boyfriend is riding a post orgasmic high are enough to make a pulse of come
dampen the inside of his boxer briefs. Jared is so pliant and sensitive after he comes, even more
responsive than he usually is. And every fiber of Jensen’s being is filled with want. With need for the
perfect person who’s still reeling from the orgasm Jensen just brought him to. “Fuck yes,” Jensen drawls out. He manages to shift his own body so that he can gently bring Jared out of the position and lay him on his right side. Jared looks flushed, but his whole body is thrumming with pleasure and his eyes are curved into a satisfied smile that makes Jensen need to kiss those lips. He smooths brown hair off of Jared’s forehead and dips his head so their lips can brush against one another’s. In regards to the intensity of it all, the kiss is a lot like before. Adding the fact that Jensen’s hands now have the power to roam Jared’s entire body and Jensen’s already weak in the knees, Jensen knows he’s a goner. “Not gonna last long. Not after…” Jensen doesn’t finish but he’s sure Jared gets it.

“Me either,” Jared counters.

“Fuck,” Jensen groans out. That’s just about the hottest thing he’s heard. It’s not the first time he’s made Jared fall apart so quickly in a row, but it will never get old.

“That’s your job,” Jared says but when Jensen doesn’t move to do anything, he continues. “No, really. I need you to fuck me. You weren’t the only one with a well behaving dick. Can’t always feel what you’re doing back there, but I can feel those hands on my hips. And I…wanted that dick pressed up against the parts I can feel.”

“Yeah?” Jensen raises his eyebrows. He’s not asking because he doubts what Jared’s telling him; he’s asking because he likes to hear Jared say it.

“Yeah.” Jared shoves the mound of pillows he had made, grabbing one of the pillows to tuck under the side of his belly. “Want it real bad.”

Jensen does too. His fingers find the button fastening his jeans closed and yanks it open harshly. The jumbled mess he becomes when he shucks his pants off is borderline comical but Jensen doesn’t have time to care. He forgoes removing any of his other clothing, just takes enough time to grab the bottle of lube from their nightstand and to completely rid Jared of his pants, which had become tangled at his feet.

Coating his hand with lube, Jensen curls it around his dick to coat it good and proper and then he shimmies down the bed so that his hips are alongside with Jared’s. He hooks his left arm around the inner portion of Jared’s left leg so that he can hold it up and open. Then Jensen props himself up on his right elbow for stability and works, making an awkward reach to align his arousal with Jared’s opening, he holds the length steady as he pushes his hips forward and watches each inch disappear into Jared’s heat.

The position doesn’t lend itself to having a lot of leverage and it’s a lot of work on Jensen’s part, or rather his hips, to build up the force needed to pound into his boyfriend, but Jensen manages it. Holding onto Jared’s leg helps, but even then, Jensen’s conscious of not pulling too strongly. “Shit, Jare…You always feel so good.” Jared’s ass feels as amazing as ever around Jensen’s cock and Jensen groans low in his throat when he bottoms out. He twists his hips slightly, working to find the angle at which to fuck into his boyfriend that will make sure Jared feels everything. He’s been told he’s good at that, and it’s a lot of pressure to keep up his winning streak. Testing the angle, he makes a few slower practice thrusts until he gets the hang of them.


Communication is a beautiful thing. Jensen does as Jared says and they fall into a perfect rhythm of pushing and pulling. It’s clear that Jared’s not messing around because the man already has his hand on his dick and is stroking it at a pace comparable to the snap of Jensen’s hips. What they’re doing is nothing fancy, it’s just the two of them dissolving into pleasure tinged panting and raw sex.
It’s fast and simple, but every thrust of Jensen’s hips makes the head of his cock collide with the nerves inside of Jared and the way Jared’s ass constricts around him brings him one stop closer to orgasm.

“Holy fuck,” Jensen shouts and his hips go haywire. Their smooth movement gets choppy and he works to bury himself in Jared, seating himself there before the first rope of come splatters onto Jared’s insides. Closing his eyes, Jensen loses himself to his orgasm and his hips make tiny abbreviated thrusts into Jared. He’s blissed out, but not too far gone to feel Jared reach a hand back and scramble to force Jensen inside him as deeply as possible.

“Stay there...stay...stay...” but Jared’s words end on a litany of dirty declarations that he’s coming along with all the throaty sounds that come with the act.

Jensen does stay buried as deeply as he can, but he drops Jared’s leg and pulls the man closer. They’re a mess of sweat and come and there’s nowhere he’d rather be. Kissing at the nape of Jared’s neck, he inhales his boyfriend’s scent and floats in the post coital haze they’ve landed in.

They’re quiet for some time, so long that Jensen thinks maybe Jared fell asleep. But it’s Jared who breaks the silence. “As much as that position helps with my spine, I don’t know if we’re going to be able to keep doing it. Because if it ends like that, every time...it might kill me.” Jared takes Jensen’s hand and brings it to his lips so he can press a kiss there.

“Could be worse.” Pulling Jensen’s hand away from his lips, Jared coasts it down over his stomach. “Feel real good right now.”

“Good. Glad to be of assistance.” Jensen nuzzles his nose against Jared and kisses him yet again. He can’t help himself. When his lips are this close to Jared’s skin, how could he not? His palm flattens against the curve of Jared’s belly and realizes he’s holding both his boyfriend and their son. It’s sweet and peaceful until Jude gives such a strong kick that Jensen gasps. “Whoa, someone’s up.” He knits his brows at Jared’s lack of reaction. “Doesn’t that hurt?”

“Umm...sometimes. Not really when he’s where he is now. Kinda numb to some sensations over there. It comes and goes...kinda like the nerve pain. And without taking some of my meds...what I feel has been a bit unpredictable. So...if my hand wasn't on my stomach, I probably wouldn't have noticed.” His words cut off abruptly and he winces. “That...that I felt. Pretty hard to ignore a kick to the bladder.” He rolls his eyes in surrender to what comes next and winces again. “And now I have to pee.” Pushing himself up, he scans the room for his chair, which is just out of arm's reach for him. Pointing a lazy finger at the chair, Jared’s lips make an apologetic frown. “Which, unfortunately, means you gotta get up and help me pee.”

“That’s so sexy,” Jensen teases.

Jared scowls at him playfully. “Shut up.”

“No, really. What’s sexier than that? Helping my fucked out boyfriend to the bathroom?” Jensen shrugs, being overly dramatic in his delivery of the words. “That’s romance.”

Jared pushes a palm to the middle of Jensen’s face, both shutting him up and muffling the laughter he is starting to emit. “I hate you.”

“The mess you left on the bed begs to differ.” Jensen kisses the palm Jared has hovering over his lips.
and then slips out of the bed, moving to get the chair. Today feels like it was full of moments they needed. There were uncertain and uncomfortable moments in physical therapy, but when those were all peeled away, they are still them. They’re still playful and ridiculously in love.

Jensen would be lying if he said the day squashed all his worries over where this journey towards parenthood is bringing them. For the moment, however, it’s settled them and Jensen's going to take what he can get.

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Jared hates the feeling in his gut right now. It’s something he always forgets happens to him until it’s actually happening again.

Jared doesn’t panic. Not really.

He usually likes to see how situations play out before he decides what plan of attack his mindset is going to take. True, he does tend to live in a world of concern over Jude’s well being, but that’s different. That’s his baby.

But habitually, Jared doesn’t tend to jump to conclusions. Since childhood, he’s lived his life in a world colored by the terms “best case scenario” or “there are a handful of possibilities”, so he knows better than to let his mind wander to the worst case scenario because sometimes that’s what it is, but he’s proven to doctors that in most cases, for him it is not.

So when he finds himself jumping to the worst possible reason for why his father just called him, Jared starts to get that sick sense of dread in his stomach. There was just something in Gerry’s voice when he asked Jared to come over that has Jared thinking his father has been gearing up over all of these months to finally sit Jared down and tell him just what a big mistake he thinks he is making. Gerry’s tone had been dead serious, his classic lightness missing completely.

So it’s hard for Jared to think anything but the fact that something must be wrong.

The way he asked Jared to come over for lunch was more of a statement than a question. The simple words of “come over for lunch,” were left hanging between them until Jared offered to be over in an hour. Then the call disconnected and Jared’s brain started reaching for the thousands of possible reasons for the call.

He’d usually try to quell his nerves with art, but there isn’t time for that. There isn’t really even time to call Jensen and storyboard the possible ways lunch with his father can go. Despite being the weekend, Jensen’s out at Arkin, helping work on a building wide attempt infuse school pride as the seniors prepare for graduation. He’d offered to chaperone while students came into the building to decorate the walls with banners depicting hand painted versions of the school’s mascot and hang ribbons in the school colors. Jared was all set to join him, but, much to his students’ disappointment, he’s smart enough to know that he’d be pushing himself too much this weekend.

So now he’s stuck in his head with enough time to get himself ready and drive to his parent’s house, but no time to figure anything out.

Pregnancy’s been getting rougher on his body, making him slower and tiring him out. He doesn’t really know what he expected, but Jared feels the literal weight of being pregnant adding new layers of difficulty to his life. He’s simply physically not able to do some of the things he used to do before, which he supposes is true for everyone, but limiting his physical abilities even more has been a challenge. He can’t just swing himself around like he’d gotten used to doing. Now it’s a slow and calculated process that has Jared wondering how difficult things are going to be as he inches closer to
40 weeks along. Jude’s just going to get bigger, meaning Jared is too.

He smoothes out where the front of his t-shirt stretches out, working hard to cover the swell in his middle. Jude’s been naughty all morning but in this moment the baby is quiet, like he knows Jared’s feeling overwhelmed.

“Ready to go see grandpa?” Jared laughs at the end of his question because he doesn’t think he ever used that term in regards to his father. He probably should have because Jared can’t remember a time when his father was defined as anything other than parental. Gerry is, in so many ways, the role model for how Jared would love to parent Jude. He wants to have the same energy that his father has, and the same way of simply knowing his children can do whatever they want to do. Jared doesn’t even know who Jude is going to be, but Jared already knows that he wants Jude to grow up in a world where no one defines him. Nobody but himself. He know his mother loves him just as much, but she was more calculated and cautious. Gerry let his kids, all three of them, experience the world on their terms in order to figure it out. Just because Jared came with a wheelchair, didn’t mean he was coddled from the bumps and bruises that came with growing up. Gerry let Jared figure it out, and if he failed, at least he failed in a way that gave him the ability to go back at it at a different angle.

But Jared can never be his father. That thought is both literal and figurative. However, Gerry has set a prime example of how Jared wants to be as a parent. Yet, a small part of him has doubts that his physical inability will stop him from doing just that.

“Shit,” Jared mumbles under his breath. He’s not ready for these thoughts and they’ve come out of nowhere. He supposes it’s normal to have doubts before having a baby, but these realizations are darkening his outlook. “Shit,” he repeats. Maybe his dad was right...about all of this only leading to heartache.

And a headache.

On the drive over to his parents’ house, he can’t seem to shake the thoughts. They are written all over his face, a fact he knows because he can feel the weight of them furrowing his brow and tightening the lines around his mouth. He has to make a conscious effort to plaster a smile on his face by the time he’s in front of his parent’s house and using his key to let himself inside.

“Dad?” he calls, wheeling himself down the hall.

“In the kitchen,” comes Gerry’s response.

Jared follows his father’s voice, finding the man knee deep in preparing for...something. One eyebrow cocked, he asks “what are you doing?”

“Cooking….or trying to.” Gerry curses as he surveys the mess he’s created.

“And what exactly are you cooking?” Jared wheels himself closer to get a look for himself.

“Homemade spinach and cheese stuffed tortellini,” Gerry answers, like it’s the most rational decision to make for a simple lunch.

The fact that his father’s response came across so matter-of-factly is exactly why Jared does a double take. “For lunch? Are you serious?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Two reasons...well, actually three. One, that takes hours. Hours . More like a dinner than a lunch
item. Two, that’s mom’s recipe.” Jared supposes that’s not actually a reason why his father shouldn’t attempt to make it, but it’s something his mother always makes. That’s just the way it is. There’s something wrong with the wavelength of the world if reason two doesn’t pull any force in his argument. “And three, possibly the most obvious reason, have you ever made homemade pasta?”

“As it turns out, those are all good reasons,” Gerry says without a bruise to his ego. “I don’t actually have a clue what I’m doing but I figured, ‘hey, it can’t be that hard.’ Took me about ten minutes to learn that it’s pretty complicated. I don’t know how your mother makes it look so easy.” He turns and brushes off his flour dusted hands on the thighs of his jeans. “Figured I am too far in now to just throw in the towel.”

“I’d say the towel throwing would probably be the most merciful way to deal with this situation,” Jared laughs. His fingers dance over the recipe card his father placed on the counter and traces the scrawl of his mother’s handwriting. Scanning the card, he can see that having the ingredients isn’t the issue; they’re all laid out before them. “Why didn’t you just have mom make them?”

“In case you haven’t noticed, your mother’s been a little too preoccupied with the fact that she’s going to be a grandmother. She’s got no time for me, her husband of thirty plus years.” Gerry says the last part with a bit of added self-sympathy. “You want a glass of water?” he asks, but doesn’t truly wait for an answer before reaching for two glasses and filling them from the tap. “Anyway, she’s not here. Took off to spend the weekend at her sister’s. Didn’t she tell you?” He continues after Jared shakes his head ‘no’. “Yeah, well, she said something about not having seen her in some time and there is no way in hell she’s going anywhere for a long while after that baby’s born.” He gestures towards Jared’s middle with the glass of water he has in his hand before offering it to Jared. “She figured she’d see her sister now. Leave me here to fend for myself.”

“You’re perfectly capable,” Jared teases. “Though you wouldn’t know it from the looks of the kitchen.” There is pasta flour dusting over the nearby surfaces, various mixing bowls and a his parent’s pasta machine in the middle of it, not entirely assembled correctly. Scratching at the back of his head, “it’s not as bad as it looks.” Gerry says with mock innocence.

“Still...homemade tortellini for lunch?” Jared preoccupies himself by rocking back and forth. Despite the humor of finding his father in such a culinary mess, he still remembers the tone in Gerry’s voice when he’d called. The lightheartedness they’re in now is like a blanket. “When you called me spur of the moment to come over for lunch, I was thinking something more like a turkey sandwich.”

“Thought about that. But, I’ve been craving these tortellinis for a while now. And since your mother isn’t here. I figured my only shot of having them was to make them myself. Guess I was wrong. I don’t know what I’m doing…” his words dwindle into a silent musing. “But you do,” he declares, pointing a finger at Jared.

“Yeah, well, I mean...technically. It’s been years since I’ve helped mom make them.” Jared holds his palms up and shrugs. Jared knows he is a completely adequate cook. Actually, he’s damn good at it. But, what a lot of people don’t realize, it’s not simply because he likes cooking. What he likes to do is be creative. Whether it is painting, molding clay, building something, or cooking, Jared has always excelled at using his hands to create things. And while he did spend a lot of his childhood outdoors, learning to cause just as much trouble as his siblings, he also spent more time than Jeff or Megan in the kitchen. Maybe it’s because playing with food was his first blank canvas to be completely creative, or maybe it’s because it was a place where he could do everything. There were no limits for him because of his wheelchair.

“I bet you’ll remember real fast.” Gerry checks the clock on the wall. “I’ve got time if you do. We can make it an early dinner. Megan’s coming over later. She can be a guinea pig.”
“I’ve got time.” Jared nods.

“Good.” Gerry throws an empty mixing bowl at Jared. “Here, you work on making the actual pasta. All I am good at making are rocks of dough. I think I can handle the filling. That’s pretty straightforward. All measuring and no finesse.”

Jared switches to autopilot. Nothing in his parents’ house has changed since the bus accident, when they restructured their lives to fit Jared in it. Everything is exactly where he remembers it being and it doesn’t take Jared long to get the mixing bowl he prefers and wash his hands. Reassembling the pasta machine is easy once he separates the parts his father crammed together incorrectly.

Then they work in silence. The two of them haven’t had any type of one-on-one time since before his pregnancy reveal and that leaves Jared jumpy. Following a plan - albeit a recipe - makes it easy for Jared to take his mind off of any of the concerns he’s had about coming to visit his father. He wheels back, grabs the right amount of eggs from the fridge, and cracks them into the bowl with one hand, a move that’s often made his sister jealous. Megan is all dainty hands and cracking eggs is always a two handed ordeal, otherwise she’s serving egg shells into the mix. Tossing the shells in the garbage, he ignores all the utensils his father has out on the counter and pulls open a draw to find a battered old dough whisk that has been around longer than Jared has. He slowly incorporates the eggs into the flour, building the mixture into a soft dough.

All of this is done without Jared sneaking a look at his father. He’s so focused on his task and the thoughts in his head, that he startles himself when he slaps the dough onto the part of the kitchen island that is just perfect for his height. His capable hands begin to knead the dough, working it into the perfect consistency by adding just enough flour to make sure it isn’t sticking to the counter. His dad was right, this reminds him of making meals as a family, when all five of them were crammed into the kitchen and pulling their own weight during dinner prep. It’s how it always was for his family and Jared appreciates that more than ever.

But he also remembers days where Megan and Jeff would speed through their assigned chores and join in on a huge neighborhood-wide game of tag. Or after dinner when the telltale sounds of the ice cream truck’s musical siren traveled to their door and the two of them would rush outside to chase it down. Sure, they always got him a snack, but Jared knew there was no way he’d been fast enough to catch up with the truck on his own.

“Dad,” Jared chokes out because he’s ready to rip the bandage off and admit that maybe his father was right in the beginning. “I...I’ve been thinking the whole ride over here and...for the last half hour. I…” He sighs and drops the perfectly kneaded dough to the counter. “I think you’re right.”

“About?” Gerry says, rolling his wrist in a gesture of needed elaboration.

“Maybe I’m not cut out to be parent material.”

The conversation goes so quiet that when Gerry releases the spoon he’d been using to mix the cheese and spinach filling, the sound of it clattering to the edge of the bowl reverberated through the room.

Jared takes that as a sign of agreement, like he hit the nail on the head. “I mean...I’ll never be able to do a lot of things. Those traditional things, you know? Like...I’ll never be able to run and play with my son. And if he gets hurt, what if, because I’m in this chair, I can’t help him in the way he needs me to? And I can’t teach him to swim.” Jared starts to get carried away, his brain rambling off a thousand things that he can’t do so that they are all snowballing together and shooting him into a whirl of anxiety. “I mean...what if I can’t - ”

“Stop it.” Gerry commands, voice booming. There is anger behind it, but not one Jared can pinpoint.
“But you’re right.” Jared wheels himself, inadvertently covering the handholds with flour, backwards so he can spin to face his father more squarely. “I think maybe I’ve gotten in a little over my head.” His voice cracks with the emotions behind the words. It’s fear of letting his father down, or letting himself down, and he sees that now. He can’t let his son down as well. With a tremendous exhale of air, Jared turns sideways again so he doesn’t have to see the expression on his father’s face. He’s sure it’s one that will confirm all of his fears.

“Jared,” Gerry says with a sad verberbarance to the name. He uses his foot to spin Jared so that they’re facing each other again. “I’ve never thought that. Not even once.” Running a hand over his face, he looks like a different man when he meets Jared’s gaze. His eyes have turned down in a heartbroken expression, the frown lines around his mouth doing the same. “And I went and fucked it all up by letting you think I did.” He puts a hand up, asking for Jared to allow him more time to collect his thoughts before continuing. “It’s not the I doubted you’d be a great parent. There is no one on this earth who I think is better prepared to do that. I mean that.” He nods along with the words. “I’ve watched you grow from a tiny thing I could hold in one arm into the man sitting in front of me. I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone as strong as you, Jared. I’d like to give a lot of that credit to your mother and myself, but I know it’s more than that. Yeah, we had something to do with it, but it’s who you are. It’s your spirit. It’s why you’re a good teacher. You’re kind, selfless, determined, and fiercely loyal. I never doubted that. It’s simply - and maybe you’ll understand this when Jude is here - I’d rather die than see anything happen to you. I almost lost you once, I wasn’t ready to be in that position again. So...what you interpreted as me not having faith in you as a parent...that was me being afraid that your body wasn’t strong enough to make you a parent. To make me a grandfather.” Gerry stops there because he chokes on a cry that stops up his throat and comes out in a loud mess. Jared’s seen his father cry before, but not often. His father has no problem expressing himself or showing emotions, but seeing his father cry has always been a rare thing. It makes the scene all the more painful for Jared to watch because those emotions are raw and radiating from Gerry. Jared can almost feel them as much as he can see them. It’s all written there and Jared knows how much his father means what he says. The regret at causing Jared any emotional turmoil is palpable. “Dad…”

“I love you Jared. I love all of you. Your brother...your sister…” He wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand. “I love you all equally. And hearing you tell me that there was a chance you would be putting yourself in danger? I was afraid loving you wasn’t going to be enough.” He lets out a laugh that sounds partially relieved and partially like he’s realized his own foolishness. “Of course, you’ve gone and proven to me that you can do just about anything you set your mind to. I mean...look at you.” He gestures towards Jared’s middle. “Looks like you’re smuggling a basketball rather than shooting hoops with one.”

“Thanks,” Jared snorts, trying to diffuse the emotion in the air. His eyes are damp with the things Gerry’s words have stirred up.

“It’s a good thing, right? Means he’s gonna get here safe and sound.” Gerry holds a hand out, hesitating as he hovers it over Jared’s middle.

“You never really touched him before,” Jared muses, taking his father’s hand and pressing it to the swell. “He’s really strong, dad.”

“Course he is. He’s your kid.” Gerry smiles, the expression deepening when he feels the slightest movement from his grandson. “Hey little guy,” he says softly. “Guess I didn’t really know how to do this. How to still be afraid but also be excited.”

“I can teach you a thing or two. I’m pretty much both of those things...all the time.” Jared stretches in an attempt to get more comfortable. “Well, those two things and hungry. I’m hungry all the time.”
Gerry laughs at that, letting the sadness in his eyes shift over to something lighter. The moment is fleeting, as he gets back on track to what he has left to say. “I didn’t like hearing those things come out of your mouth, those things about not being able to do things for Jude. Because...none of them are true. You can do anything. You’ll figure it out just like you always do. So what if you can’t run after your kid. That’s what Jensen’s for, right? I’ve seen you two. You’re a team. What he can’t do, you can. And vice versa. This little boy, my grandson,” he says, pausing as he tests the words on his tongue, “he’s lucky to have you two as parents. And he’s got one hell of a basketball player for a father. So, all of this concern about not being able to do those traditional things with your son? That’s bullshit.” He places a hand on Jared's shoulder and squeezes. “You've got this.”

The words are powerful. Those three syllables have the answer to why Jared has been feeling unsteady in his confidence. His father has always been his number one supporter. He's fought for Jared even before Jared could understand just how hard those fights have been. After hearing his father's words, it all seems to click into place. “Shit,” he says, covering his eyes with his palms. “You're gonna make me cry.”

“That's why I wanted to have you over for lunch,” his father replies.

“To make me cry?” Jared laughs softly at the silliness of his own question.

“To make sure you knew all that,” Gerry clarifies as he makes a waving gesture with his hand to somehow sum up all they've discussed.

Jared nods. “I'm glad you did.” He’s still tearing up, but his eyes are smiling along with the waterworks. “Even though you've got me crying like a baby.”

“Nothing wrong with that. I'm pretty sure I was doing the same thing a few minutes ago.” With a smile, Gerry squeezes Jared's shoulder again before patting him good-naturedly on the back.

“Yeah...glad we’re on the same page now. Because I know my body can do this. I just know. So you’ve got to trust me. The rest of the parenting issues? I’m gonna have to trust you and hope I learned from the best.” When Jared takes in a breath it starts as a sniffle but develops into a clearing of his airways. He feels remarkably better than he did this morning. Sometimes, he supposes, he needs his dad to set his head straight. And that works the other way around as well.

“Hello?” A voice - Megan's voice - calls through the house followed by the sound of the door slamming behind her. She walks into the kitchen, eyes darting between her father and brother, taking a moment to assess the situation and notice the residual tears in their eye. “Everyone okay?”

“Yeah. We're making tortellini.” Jared says, clarifying everything and nothing all at once.

“O-kaaaay,” Megan draws out, brain scrambling to come up with some sort of explanation. Failing, she shrugs and rounds the kitchen island. Bending down, she places a kiss on her brother's cheek. “Hey roller-skate.” Voice peaking in enthusiasm, she rubs her palm over Jared’s baby bump. “Hi baby-skate! How is my favorite nephew?”

“Yes. We're making tortellini.” Jared says, clarifying everything and nothing all at once.

“Hey roller-skate.” Voice peaking in enthusiasm, she rubs her palm over Jared’s baby bump. “Hi baby-skate! How is my favorite nephew?”

“Hungry,” Jared says. “How is my favorite sister?”

“I'm your only sister.”

“Jude's your only nephew.”

“Touche.” Megan goes to her father and looks at the ingredients littering the counter. “Mom's tortellini?”
Nodding, Gerry adds, “an attempt.”

Swiping her finger along the bowl containing the cheese mixture, she pops it in her mouth and cocks her head in consideration as she tastes it. “Mom's is better,” she teases her father. “Move out of the way old man, Jared and I have this.” She butts him out of the way with her hip and grabs the pepper.

Putting his hands up in surrender, Gerry backs away. “Fine. I see how it is. My kids...always insisting they know better than their father.”

“Yeah, ’cause sometimes we do.” Jared raises an eyebrow at his father, eyes finally drying and filling with a habitual laughter that he has around his family.

“Sometimes you do,” Gerry echoes with a smile.

It's a simple moment shared between them. To Jared, however, it means everything.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry for the delay. Without getting into to much detail, I was pretty sick for a long while. In and out of hospitals and doctors. One of the biggest issues was loss of my sight for a while. As you can imagine, that made typing impossible. And when I could see, I was supposed to limit my eye strain. So...I believe I am on the up and up. But all thoughts and prayers are appreciated.

All of the thanks go out to my sweet and amazing beta. Without Demondetox, I would not be able to get my head out of my ass and actually write this chapter. She has been so sweet to me during my illness. And she literally wrote Jared's "just make me come" line. And so much more. Thank you for the handholding and asskicking!

I know you might not believe me, but I already have parts of the next chapter written. I promise to post much faster! I thank you so much for your patience!!! I am so floored by your kindness and comments. I hope you did enjoy this chapter. Please let me know what you think. XOXO

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!