Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

Notes

All the art is made by my sweet ☁️imogen_lily. She also helped a lot with the plot. Love you, hon.
Chapter 1

The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together.

~Erma Bombeck

Jared’s standing at the window in his office of the Dalton News, looking down at the street to where the most adorable scene is just playing out. Lily is piggybacking on Jensen’s back while wearing his Sheriff’s hat and moving her arm like she’s throwing a lasso.

A smile steals its way onto Jared’s face and he touches the glass, just to make him feel closer to his husband and youngest daughter.

Lily and Jensen are incredibly close and it makes Jared’s heart swell to see their love displayed every day.

Today is ‘Visit-Parents-At-Work’-day at day care and while Jared would have loved to show Lily how his work place works, he knew the moment he read the letter from day care that Lily would decide to go with Jensen. All her life she’s been fascinated with the concept of her papa being the town’s sheriff and even though Jensen had taken her to the station on more than one occasion, Lily would never say ‘no’ to one more day spent there.

Besides, Brian will be there too and, of course, Jared’s little girl would choose the place where her best friend would be, over the boring and stuffy editorial office of her dad.

Jared laughs when Jensen swings Lily through the air, her screams reaching up high to Jared’s office. He loves to secretly watch his family. There’s so much love there and it always makes Jared feel warm in the heart to be able to witness it.

The ringing phone pulls him away from the window and he throws one last contented look out of the window and catches Jensen cuddling Lily against his chest and pressing a sloppy kiss to her cheek.

Still grinning he answers the call. “Dalton News, how can I help you?”

“I’m gonna kill him. Seriously, I’m gonna…”


“Yes, who else would want to throttle their fiancé for suggesting the most ridiculous wedding on earth?”

Biting the inside of his cheek to refrain from laughing some more, Jared takes a second to answer.
“So, what did he do now?”

Jared remembers clearly the moment when Luke and Evan announced that they were getting married last October. Ever since, Luke’s been on the verge of throwing one temper tantrum after the other. Because it seems like his and Evan’s understanding of the perfect wedding are not only miles apart, but might even just be in another galaxy.

While Luke wants a down-to-earth wedding with possibly every living person in a 100 mile radius, just to make sure that everyone knows that he’s getting married to the man of his dreams, Evan wants a wedding that consists of ice sculptures, chocolate fountains (even though Jared’s rather fond of that idea) and canapés, preferably held at one of the upper class hotels in Dallas.

Honestly, Jared would have never thought that Evan was the one to utter such ideas, but then Tom had filled Jared in that Evan has dreamed of a wedding like that since he was five. Apparently he had found a bridal magazine in a doctor’s waiting room and from then on insisted that he’d have a wedding just like the one shown in the magazine.

“He wants pink roses, Dad. Pink roses.”

Jared frowns, because honestly that’s not such a bad choice, in his own head. Pink roses seem like a nice choice for a wedding.

“Uhm, okay…”

“Dad, that’s just so girly. I don’t wanna get married with pink things all around me.”

“Well, have you told Evan that?”

“Of course.” Luke sighs. “He told me I was being difficult on purpose.”

Jared chuckles softly. “Well, are you?”

“Dad,” Luke says and Jared thinks that it could be considered a whine. “I just want this to be the best day of our lives. I want it to be perfect. Pink roses, that’s just not us.”

“Well, it seems to me that you and Evan have a lot to talk about, because I’m sure he just wants it to be perfect too. Sometimes loving each other means making compromises.”

“Did you compromise?” Luke asks and he sounds genuinely curious.

“A little,” Jared says and smiles when he remembers the very few discussions with both, James and Jensen. “But I was very lucky that both your father and Jensen were mostly okay with my ideas for the weddings.”


“Because he’s had this idea about his perfect wedding since he was five, Luke.”

“It’s not perfect, it’s sappy.”

Jared shakes his head, even though he knows that Luke can’t see him. “Luke, just talk to him. You love him; you wanna marry him, so you have to work it out.”

“I know,” Luke says quietly. “I just didn’t know that planning the wedding would be so much work. I mean, we set the date for July. It’s only six months away and we haven’t even decided on a
location.”

“But it’ll be okay, son. You’ll work it out.”


“Papa!”

Lily storms into his office, where he’d decided to hide for a little while and file some paperwork, while Chad entertained the kids. She’s looking at him with her right eyebrow raised (Jensen still doesn’t know how she can do that and he can’t - he’s kind of jealous about the skill) and tapping her foot against the linoleum floor impatiently.

“You said you’d be right back.”

Jensen sighs. Sometimes he hates that his five-year-old is too smart for her own good. Okay, so no, he’s normally really proud of her, just when it comes to her scolding him, then it gets uncomfortable.

“I’m sorry, honey. But papa had to file some papers.”

She wrinkles her forehead into an adorable frown and slowly seems to contemplate his answer. Then she nods and walks over to him.

“I can help you. We’ll be done in the blink of an eye.”

Jensen rubs his hand over his mouth to hide his amused smile. He’s still not used to his baby girl trying to talk like an adult. Grabbing her hips, he lifts her up onto his lap.

“So, you wanna help me, huh?” She nods, looking completely serious. He winks at her. “You sure?” She nods again. “But you’d have to sit on my lap and this makes it so easy to…” he starts tickling her, “…tickles you.”

“Ah, Papa! Stop!”

Lily is giggling and squirming on his lap, trying to get away, but Jensen has a tight hold on her, tickling her mercilessly.

“How about we go and get us some lunch and eat it at your daddy’s office?” he asks, when Lily’s panting for breath and her face is beat-red.

Her face splits into the most amazing smile and she nods quickly. “Yes.” After a second, she looks at his desk and frowns again. “But what about the files?”

“They’ll be here tomorrow. I’ll take care of them then.”

He puts her down and stands up, walking over to the coat rack he has in the room. Handing Lily her anorak, he reaches for his own, before making sure that Lily’s buttoned all of her buttons. They
might be in Texas, but it’s still chilly outside in late January.

“We ready to go?” he asks and Lily nods, looking all serious.

She grabs his hand and they walk into the front room of the station, telling Chad and Brian that they’re going to get some lunch and share it with Jared, and that they’ll be back later. The streets are crowded, or whatever you can call crowded in Dalton, so Jensen and Lily have to stop every few steps to say ‘hello’ to someone. Mrs. Whitcomp is one of the people that stops them, pinching Lily’s cheeks and telling her that she’s a real lady now.

Lily frowns a little and Jensen just knows what’s about to come. “But I don’t want to be a lady.”

Mrs. Whitcomp looks a little taken aback. “No? Why not?”

“Ladies don’t climb trees or get dirty. But it’s fun to climb trees and get dirty,” Lily explains and Jensen has to use a fake cough to cover up his amusement.

“Oh,” Mrs. Whitcomp says. “Well, but what about tea parties and cookies?”

“I don’t like tea parties. They’re boring,” Lily says earnestly. “And Granny Donna still gives me cookies, even if my pants are dirty.”

Jensen shrugs when Mrs. Whitcomp looks at him, seemingly looking for help. “Well, I’m fine with you being just Lily. And it’s true, tree climbing and getting dirty are the best things.” He ruffles Lily’s hair and smiles at Mrs. Whitcomp. “Sorry, but we have to get going. Lily’s dad is waiting for his lunch.”

“Oh, of course, Sheriff. Have a good day.”

He pushes Lily past Mrs. Whitcomp. “Have a good day, Mrs. Whitcomp.”

Lily’s already bouncing down the sidewalk and Jensen hurries to catch up with her. He’s not all that comfortable with his little girl walking down the street all alone. There’ve been too many accidents in the past few years involving children. Lily would never just run out on the street, consciously Jensen knows that, but he still wants to be close enough so he can catch her, if she forgets that there’s a road and cars nearby.

They get their lunch at Jim’s, two turkey/ham sandwiches and one with tuna for Jared. Lily wrinkles her nose when Jensen orders the tuna sandwich.

“Tuna is icky.”

He looks down at her. “Have you tried it?” he asks, smiling.

She shakes her head. “It’s still icky.”

“Honey, how can you say it’s icky if you’ve never tried it?”

She shrugs. “Pete at school says it and Brian doesn’t like it too.”

Jensen raises his eyebrows. “Well, Brian doesn’t like tomatoes, but you do. So, maybe you should ask your dad if you can have a bite and just try it?”

Lily sighs and then shrugs her shoulders. “Okay.”

Jensen chuckles, taking the sandwiches from Jim. “Thanks, Jim. C’mon, squirt. Your dad is probably
starving by now.”

They make their way over to the Dalton News building and Lily rushes upstairs. “Daddy, we brought lunch!”

Jared opens the door to his office and Jensen can’t help but smile at the sight. His husband’s hair is all over the place, just like it gets when he’s running his hands through it repeatedly, and the sleeves of his button down shirt are rolled up, revealing strong tanned forearms. He looks a little bit tired, but with being head editor of the Dalton News now, having three small kids and helping to organize a wedding, that’s no surprise.

“Hey, you two.”

Jared sweeps up Lily from the floor and spins her around, before resting her on his hip and leaning forward for a quick kiss with Jensen.

“Hey, Jay. You hungry?”

“Starving,” Jared says and Lily giggles.

They sit down and Jensen hands out the sandwiches, while Lily is snuggling close to Jared’s chest. He rests his chin on her head and Jensen smiles at the picture.

“Luke called.”

“Again?” Jensen asks and Jared snorts.

“Evan apparently wants pink roses at the wedding.”

“What’s wrong with pink roses?”

“I like pink roses,” Lily chimes in.

Jared chuckles and Jensen watches him drop a soft kiss to their daughter’s hair. “I know you do, sweetheart. Luke, however, thinks they’re too girly and he doesn’t want a sappy wedding.”

“Aren’t all weddings sappy?” Jensen asks and Jared rolls his eyes at him.

“Ours wasn’t sappy.”

“It was a little sappy. With these small crystal figurines Angie put up on the tables.”

“Those were angels. They were there to bring us luck and so that we’d always have a guardian angel,” Jared says and Jensen shrugs.

“They were still sappy.”

Jared shakes his head, but there’s a small smile displayed on his face, so Jensen knows they’re okay. “Well anyway, Luke doesn’t like pink roses and I told him that he might have to make a few compromises if he and Evan ever want to get married.”

“Their idea of the perfect wedding is so far apart that I don’t think that ‘a few’ compromises will help,” Jensen says and chuckles.

“No, probably not,” Jared laughs.
When they have finished their sandwiches, Jared asks Lily about Sheriff work and she tells him about the files on Jensen’s desk and that she totally offered to help but Jensen would rather get lunch and be lazy. Jensen enjoys just watching them and when they finally leave, Jensen pulls Jared into a quick, but dirty kiss, telling him that he can’t wait for them to meet at home.

The floor is hard and cold beneath Sophie-Ellie’s knees and she just wishes the nausea would just fade so she would be able to get up and leave the hated high school restrooms.

When she felt nauseous for the first time it was shortly after New Year’s and she thought that she might have eaten something that had caused it. But now it’s the end of January and the nausea is still hitting her on and off. She hasn’t told anyone about it, for fear of what this might mean.

It’s been years, but she still remembers the shock and the relief that was displayed on Luke’s face when he found out that his pregnancy test was negative.

For almost a week now she’s been carrying the test around with her, getting it from a pharmacy when she went to Dallas with her friends last weekend. So far she’s only stared at it, not brave enough to use it. She knows that if she really is pregnant, she should get help; should talk to someone.

Her head’s spinning with the possibility of having a baby. She’s planning to go to Dallas Art Academy next year, would she still be able to, if…

She looks down her body, slowly pulling up her t-shirt, when a knock on the stall door pulls her from her thoughts.

“Sophie-Ellie? You’ve been in there for over ten minutes. You okay?”

It’s Michelle, her best friend since the end of freshman year. Michelle transferred shortly before their school year ended that year and they had hit it off right away, both being into arts and stuff.

“I’m fine,” Sophie-Ellie grits out. “I think I’ve eaten something bad.”

The nausea is almost gone and Sophie-Ellie pushes up from the floor to unlock the door to the stall. She shakes her head when Michelle comes into sight. “It’s fine.” Over Michelle’s shoulder she can see her reflection in the mirror, pale skin framed by dark hair, black eyeliner and black lipstick. She doesn’t look like a mom. “Let’s just go to class.”

They walk out of the restrooms and Sophie-Ellie fakes an interested smile, while Michelle talks about her next art assignment that’s apparently very dark and demonic. Before Christmas Sophie-Ellie would have jumped on it, suggesting colors and brushes to use, now she just nods when she thinks it’s appropriate.

A laugh makes her jerk her head around. Ben’s standing at his locker, leaning casually with his side against it, while talking to Piper, his on and off again girlfriend. Sophie-Ellie doesn’t know at what
stage they’re at right now. There’s a pang in her heart and she wishes she could just walk over to Ben and tell him about her fears. She’s always been good with ignoring the hole in her heart Ben’s absence left, but in the last couple of weeks, she wishes she could have her very best friend back.

**

“Sophie!”

Sophie-Ellie turns around and sees Ben running towards her, waving a white piece of paper at her. He’s grown so much over the summer and now he’s towering over her, his lanky arms and legs not really sure how to coordinate.

“What’s that?” she asks, pointing at the paper when Ben reaches her locker.

“They’re gonna let me play on the varsity basketball team. Can you believe that? Man, it’s so awesome.” Ben’s beaming at her and his enthusiasm is catching.

“That’s great.” Ben picks her up and swirls her around until she feels nauseous. “Put me down you big oaf,” she laughs.

He grins and puts her down again. “Maybe you can try out to be a cheerleader, huh? That way we can be together even at out of town games.”

Sophie-Ellie looks down at her body, she’s small and a little pudgy around her middle and there’s the glasses-thing. She doesn’t think their cheerleader captain will allow someone in who wears glasses as contacts always make her eyes burn. She shrugs.

“Maybe.” She says it, even though she knows she won’t have a chance of making it onto the cheerleading squad. Marissa holds a tight leash on her cheerleaders and they’re all dressed-up little dolls with perfect bodies and spotless faces. Yeah, no way Marissa will let someone like Sophie-Ellie join the cheerleaders, even if she could move to the rhythm of their cheers, which she can’t. It doesn’t matter though, she can still cheer for Ben from the stands.

~

It’s lunchtime and the cafeteria is filled with loud conversations. Sophie-Ellie gets her fill of broccoli, mashed potatoes and meat loaf, before turning around and looking for Ben. For the last few months he’s been sitting with his friends from the basketball team and the cheerleaders and Sophie-Ellie misses him, even though they still hang out sometimes.

Normally Ben’s surrounded by cheerleaders, but today one of the chairs is empty and Sophie-Ellie works up all her courage and goes over to him. However, Piper Something (Sophie-Ellie can’t remember her last name) gets to the chair just as Sophie-Ellie reaches it. She looks down at Ben who gives her a short, apologizing smile, when Piper pushes past her and sits down. It feels like a punch to the gut.

“I was wondering if you’re still coming over tonight?” Sophie-Ellie asks. She and Ben had said that they’d get together so that she could show him the new drawings she’d been working on.

Ben actually looks sheepish when he says, “I’m sorry, Sophie-Ellie. But there’s this party going on at Jordan’s place.”

Sophie-Ellie raises her eyebrows. “Your mom lets you go to a party on a Thursday night?” Ben bites his lips and doesn’t say anything. “Well, it doesn’t matter. Have fun.”
She walks away, looking for a place to sit down. Tears are burning behind her eyes that Ben would just brush her off like that, but she won’t give him or his friends the satisfaction of crying in front of them.

**

They haven’t really talked since that fateful day in the cafeteria. Despite various attempts by their parents to get them to talk to each other, until now they’ve been able to avoid each other. Doesn’t mean Sophie-Ellie doesn’t miss him.

Ben looks up and right back into Sophie-Ellie’s eyes, who lowers her head to hide the blush that’s covering her cheeks now that she’s been caught staring. She doesn’t look into Ben’s direction again and is grateful when Michelle pulls her away and over to where their friends are standing.

Aaron, Sophie-Ellie’s boyfriend, is leaning against a stony pillar, fumbling with a cigarette before putting it between his lips and lighting it. Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes, she hates that Aaron smokes, but no matter what she says he ignores her.

“Hey you,” he says, pulling her over to his side and planting a kiss on her cheek.

She wrinkles her nose, rubbing a little over her belly to keep the nausea at bay. “You know exactly what I think of smoking. Do you have to do it when I’m around?”

“Ah, don’t act like that. It won’t kill you.”

Sophie-Ellie shoves him and wriggles out from under his arm when Ben walks past, looking at them with something that Sophie-Ellie interprets as disapproval. She shakes her head and reaches for Aaron’s hand. Ben lost the right to disapprove of the things she does a long time ago.

Aaron and Sophie-Ellie have been dating for almost seven months now. They’ve been friends longer than that, but during the summer they’d hung out more and somehow feelings of friendship shifted into something more. It pretty much freaked Sophie-Ellie out when she realized that she had a crush on Aaron, because a) she’d never had a boyfriend before and b) she didn’t want to ruin their friendship.

It had been Aaron who’d asked her out and he had taken her to the Dallas Museum of Art and then to IHOP afterwards because they both love pancakes. It had been a great day that had ended in Sophie-Ellie’s first kiss, which was pretty amazing and made her stomach flutter.

There’re a few things that annoy her about Aaron though, mainly the smoking (especially at school, right where teachers could see him), but overall he’s been a good boyfriend. He’s been a little distant lately, but he has a lot going on with all the applications he has to do for the best art schools in the US.

After the last class is over, Sophie-Ellie follows Aaron out to his car. Her stomach turns upside down just at the thought of driving in his car, because it smells of stale smoke.

Aaron looks at her. “You okay? You seem a little green around the nose.”

She shrugs. “I think I’ve eaten something bad.”

“Oh okay. C’mon get in, I’ll drive you home.”

She shakes her head. “Thanks, but I think I’ll walk, it might help with the nausea.”
“Well, okay,” he says, sounding disappointed. “I just thought, y’know… my parents aren’t home.”

She knows what he’s suggesting, but just the thought of being alone with him, having sex with him, turns her off. It’s not that her first or second times were bad, they were pretty good for all she knows. But ever since the idea of being pregnant has stolen its way into the back of her mind, she just can’t imagine having sex with Aaron.

“Sorry, but I’m really not feeling that well. Maybe tomorrow, okay?”

He nods. “Yeah, sure. Whatever. Hope you feel better soon. You sure you don’t want me to drive you home?”

“No, really. I’m sure. See you tomorrow.”

Sophie-Ellie watches him drive off and when she turns, Ben’s standing a few feet away at his own car. Aunt Sophia and Uncle Misha bought it for him for his seventeenth birthday. He’s watching her and a shiver runs down her spine.

“What?” she asks defensively, but before Ben can say anything, Piper appears and asks him if he’s ready to go.

On the walk home, Sophie-Ellie’s head is spinning, the voice in her mind echoing ‘pregnant, pregnant, pregnant’ over and over. She knows that if she doesn’t take the test soon, she’ll go crazy. Maybe she should just get it over with tonight, when her parents, Lily and the twins are in bed and sound asleep.

Luke looks up when the door to their town house opens and Evan walks inside, throwing his bag across the room and onto the kitchen table. He sighs and slams his textbook about programming language shut.

Dan comes down the stairs, sees the both of them staring silently at each other and mumbles something like ‘idiots, just have make-up sex already’, before grabbing his jacket and keys.

“Don’t wait up for me, children,” he calls out and then the front door closes behind his back.

Evan lets out an audible breath and drops into the chair across Luke. He just sits there and plays with the edge of the tablecloth and it drives Luke crazy.

“What? Not even a ‘hello’ or ‘how are you’?” he asks, getting up from his chair.

He pours himself a glass of orange juice from the container that’s sitting on the kitchen counter. Turning around, he leans against the wood, sipping at his glass slowly and waiting for Evan to say something.

“I just want it to be perfect,” Evan says.

“So do I,” Luke answers quietly. “We really need to talk about this, Ev. We can’t keep biting each other’s heads off just because we disagree on something.”
Evan sighs. “We disagree on everything, Luke. There’s not one thing we see eye-to-eye on.”

Luke grins a little. “Well, we agreed to get married.”

Evan rolls his eyes. “I never thought this would be so difficult.”

“Me neither,” Luke admits. “But we never talked about it before, y’know? We just assumed that we wanted the same things and now… now we find out that we don’t. So, let’s just deal with that.”

Evan gets up from his chair and walks over to where Luke is leaning against the counter, hooking two of his fingers into Luke’s belt loops and pulling him closer.

“I just wanna get married to you,” he whispers. “I wanna see that ring on your finger and know that you’re mine.”

“I’m yours, Ev. Always have been,” Luke says softly, leaning his forehead against his fiancé’s.

“Tell me we can forget about this wedding planning shit for one night.”


Evan rubs his crotch against Luke’s and brings his hands up to entangle his fingers in Luke’s hair. “Well, it would involve getting naked and sweaty.”


Their lips meet in a passionate kiss and Luke definitely can forget about all the wedding planning shit if Evan keeps sucking on his tongue like that.

Annie is holding the steering wheel in a tight grip, her knuckles turning white. It’s been two days since she put all of her personal stuff into the bed of her truck and decided that enough was enough.

Now, she’s tired and sore and doesn’t feel at all like the twenty-four-year-old she is. Right now she just wants her daddy to hug her and tell her that it’s okay and everything will be all right.

Well, Dalton is only a couple of hours away.

**

“Where are you going?” Robert’s looking at her with raised eyebrows, while Annie rushes around the bedroom, grabbing all the stuff that’s dear to her.

“I’m leaving.”

“I see that. What I wanna know is where you’re going and when you’ll be back?”

Annie stops for a second, eyeing her boyfriend - well ex-boyfriend would be more accurate. She can’t believe that she ever believed his icy blue eyes were the windows to his soul and the most beautiful feature about him. Now, they just freak her out.
“I’m not coming back,” she says calmly, standing steady and strong, waiting for the next blow. This time she’ll hit him back.

“Of course you will, don’t be stupid. You have your studies and you love them more than anything in the world,” he spits out and she hears the disapproval for her field of expertise in his voice.

“Not more than anything,” she answers quietly.

“So what? You gonna run home to daddy?” Robert stares at her and she cringes under the intensity. How did she ever think he was attractive and charming? When she doesn’t say anything, he laughs, “You really are, aren’t you? How mature, Anastasia.”

He spits her full name out with so much disgust and malice that Annie just wonders when the next blow will come. It doesn’t matter. He’s already hit her twice; she’ll survive a third one. It won’t make her stay.

“I don’t care,” she hisses. “You really think I’d stay with you after you’ve hit me, twice, I wanna add?”

Robert snorts. “Those little slaps? Maybe you should just grow up and deal with them like a woman, instead of running back to daddy. Besides, I know you’ll come back to me. You like what you have here and there’s nothing that can compare living in Bumfuck, Texas with living in Sea Cliff, in a villa looking out over the Pacific.”

Annie just stares at him. Two little slaps? Well, if you call a swollen black eye and a split lip two little slaps, he might be right. Just that Annie would leave even if what he’d dealt out were two little slaps. She’d given him the benefit of the doubt for way too long and hitting her was just the last drop. He’d been so charming when she first met him, attentive and very sweet. Now it’s all gone, revealing his true colors.

“Goodbye, Robert.” She grabs her last suitcase and her purse. Pulling her key off her keychain, she lays it on the sideboard near the door.

Her truck is filled with only the things that are hers, books (she has a Kindle, but sometimes she prefers to have paper in her hands), blu-ray discs and her personal clothes. She leaves everything else they might have bought together behind. She doesn’t need anything to remind her of her time here.

**

When she finally turns into her parents’ driveway, it’s late Sunday afternoon and all she wants is to sleep for a week. She grabs her purse and eyes her suitcases and boxes, but hopes that her dad and Jensen will help her unload.

Fiddling with her key, she hears the TV inside playing cartoons and it hits her like a punch in the gut. She hasn’t been home in years, her studies have taken up most of her time and then the last two Thanksgivings and Christmases she spent with Robert and his parents skiing in Aspen. Her dad and Jensen have been to San Francisco on several occasions, sometimes with Lily and the twins, sometimes alone. But it wasn’t the same.

Turning the key in the lock, she’s met with all the smells she connects with ‘home’ and her eyes fill with tears. Slowly, she takes a step forward and then she sees her family sitting in the living room. The twins are debating about the cartoon that’s on TV, while Lily is lying asleep on the floor right between Sadie and Harley and Luke and Evan are looking at something in a magazine together.

“Annie?” She spins around to see Sophie-Ellie coming down the stairs. Damn, when did her little
sister turn into an emo girl? “Oh my god. Annie! What happened?”

A second later, Sophie-Ellie is cupping her face and turning first left then right.

“I’m fine,” she says. “The other girl looks worse.”

Sophie-Ellie frowns and Annie can see that she’s about to say something, so she gives her a pleading smile to just ignore it for now. Her sister seems to understand, because she pulls her into a tight hug instead. It feels so good to be home.

The little scream Sophie-Ellie let out alerted everyone else in the house and now Annie is being hugged from all sides, while Sadie and Harley try to get in between all the people. Everyone is talking at the same time and Annie starts laughing because she doesn’t understand a word.

“Everyone calm down!” her dad orders, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and pulling her closer. She grins and buries her head against his shoulder. “I’m sure Annie will tell us all about what she’s doing here and how she got that black eye.” He cups her head between her hands. “Damn, that doesn’t look good.”

She gives her dad a grin. “The other girl looks way worse,” she says, but the worry in her father’s face isn’t gone completely.

He presses a kiss to Annie’s head. “Go sit down, I’ll get you something to drink.”

She nods and turns towards the living room when the front door opens.

“What’s all the commotion? They can hear you at the other end of town…” Jesse breaks off when he notices Annie and for a second he stares unabashedly, before a small smile worms its way onto his face. “Now, now, who do we have here?”

They haven’t talked in a long time and only now does Annie realize how much she’s missed him. When they first broke up, she’d missed talking to him, of course but over time, life had taken over and she’d pushed the feeling back, until it was buried deep enough to not bother her anymore.

“Hi,” she says, making an awkward half wave with her hand.

Jesse shakes his head and takes two large steps towards her, cupping her face between his hands. “Do I need to kick some ass?”

As much as she wants to say ‘yes’, she doesn’t want to worry anyone. So she shakes her head. “I took care of it.”

“I really hope so,” he says and then pulls her into a hug. “I’m glad you’re here. Your family has been driving me crazy.”

Annie bursts into a laugh, because she knows how much Jesse loves her family, that’s essentially his now too.

“I’m glad to be here too,” she says and looks to see her family standing behind her, watching her and Jesse intently.

She grins, how much did she miss this.

Chapter 2
When You Lie Next To Me 2/

Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them. ~Desmond Tutu

It’s a busy day at JCH’s bodyshop and car repair - Jesse had changed the name when he took over the business from Charlie - but then it’s been years since Jesse could slack off at work. Definitely not since he took over the business and even before then, they were pretty much always fully booked.

He’s so glad that he can afford staff now. It has been a pretty hard year since first taking over the garage from Charlie. He’d had to do everything alone; from repairing the cars, overseeing bookkeeping and office stuff to cleaning the place up.

Now he has two other mechanics, Jacob and Bob, who work with him and Lizzie Welling-Rosenbaum had been more than happy to work as a secretary/back office assistant/accountant, after coming back from college a few years ago. It’s a pretty sweet deal with all of them helping Jesse, and that way he can even finish work on time to be home for dinner.

He might have moved out of the main house and into the one-room apartment over their garage, but Jared and Jensen still expected him to come over for dinner at least. It’s nice to know that there’s someone who cares if you’ve eaten or not.

It’s lunch hour and the guys promised to bring back a pastrami sandwich for him. Lizzie is gone as well and the shop is beautifully quiet. Jesse loves this time of day, when nobody will disturb him and he can just tweak and test and figure out what is wrong with the car in front of him. It’s nice; just him and the car.

“Hm hm.”

Someone clears their throat behind him and Jesse turns around, pulling his head out from under the hood of the 77’ Chevelle.

Annie is smiling at him. “I kinda missed it.”
“Missed what?” he asks, frowning a little.

“This. You. Under a hood.”

Jesse snorts. “For all there is, that’s what you missed?”

Annie laughs. “Well, maybe you too, a little.”

“Only a little, of course,” he says and winks. “So, how’s your face?” This is getting a little too close to home, so he changes the topic.

“Okay,” she says. “I told you, nothing to worry about.”

Jesse nods and grows silent. He knows that there’s something about the black eye and the split lip that she’s not telling him, and it turns his stomach upside down to imagine what they really mean. He’s been a master at finding excuses for his bruises, so he knows them all and Annie didn’t just get into a fight. He might not have seen her in a few years, but he still knows that it’s not who she is.

“Y’know, if you ever wanna talk about it… the truth, I mean… I’m here.” She opens her mouth to answer, but Jesse holds up his hand. “Don’t… You know what I’ve been through at home, so don’t tell me this is not what I think it is. I won’t force you to talk about it or tell me who did this, but you should know that I’m here if you ever wanna talk.”

She gives him a tight smile and nods. “Okay, thanks.”

That’s enough for him to know that he was right about the bruises. If he ever gets his hands on the guy who did this? He’ll kick his ass for it.

“So, I thought you might like some lunch,” Annie says, holding a folded paper bag in her hand.

“What’s this? Did you make it?” She nods and he grins, “Should I really eat it, then?”

She sticks out her tongue at him. “You’re an ass. You always liked my sandwiches just fine. It’s turkey.”

He laughs and grabs the sandwich out of her hand. “Gimme.” He takes a bite, after unpacking it, and it’s perfect - just the right mix of sandwich sauce, turkey and lettuce. “Hmm.”

“I take it you like it,” she says, sounding a little smug and when he looks up at her, her eyes are sparkling with amusement.

Four years. It’s been four years since the one fateful phone call that ripped him of the one future he thought he would have.

**

“So when were you going to tell me?” Annie sounds sad and a little hurt.

Jesse instantly knows what she’s talking about and he curses under his breath. He wonders which tattletale couldn’t keep their mouths shut.

“Annie…”

“No, tell me. When were you gonna tell me that Charlie asked you to take over the garage?” There’s a long pause and Jesse really doesn’t know what to say. “You weren’t, were you?”
“We talked about me moving to Cali in a couple of months, so why would I need to tell you that?” he asks defensively.

“Because this is what you want to do. This is your opportunity, Jesse. You’ve dreamed about your own shop since you were kid.”

“Well, there’ll be shops in Cali, too. It was an honor that Charlie asked me, but I declined, because I wanna move to Cali, be with you.”

“Jesse…” Her voice breaks at the other end of the line and without her saying any more he knows that it’s over. “I think we should… It’s time… It’s a huge opportunity and you should take it.”

“So, you’re breaking up with me?”

There’s a long pause, before she says, “I’m sorry.”

Jesse feels his heart break into a thousand pieces. But there’s one more thing he needs to know. “Is there someone else?”

“No,” she says quickly. “It’s not like this. This isn’t about another guy. This is about you and me and different paths in our lives. I’m sorry. I just think that this is the right thing to do.”

~

It’s been six months since the phone call with Annie and they haven’t talked at all during that time. Jesse had a phase of looking too deep into the bottle, until Jensen sat him down and had a serious talk with him. After that, he went to Charlie and told him that he would take over the garage. He’s been working his butt of ever since.

Now it’s Thanksgiving and Annie is home.

It’s a weird feeling, to be here with her and celebrate Thanksgiving with her and her family, even though she’s not his girlfriend anymore. Jared had directly set him straight when he voiced his thoughts at dinner a few days ago, telling him that he’s a member of this family and that it isn’t contracted to him being Annie’s boyfriend.

He and Jared are in the kitchen, peeling potatoes and cutting tomatoes and cucumber for the salad, when Annie walks in. Jared’s quick at excusing himself and for the first time since their break-up, Jesse finds himself faced with Annie. She’s smiling shyly at him.

“Hey.”

“Hi.”

“I… you okay?” she asks.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” Jesse nods and then he gets up his courage and says, “Listen, I was pretty shocked when you broke up with me. But… maybe you were right. Y’know, taking over Charlie’s place was everything I ever dreamed of doing. I do miss you, though. Maybe we can at least stay friends, talk from time to time, y’know.”

Annie looks at him and for a second Jesse thinks that there’s something akin to disappointment in her eyes, but then it’s gone and she’s smiling, nodding.

“Yeah, of course.” She takes the knife Jared put down on the counter and starts cutting the tomatoes.
“Now, tell me. How do you like running your own business?”

**

He had forgotten how much he missed her over the years.

Eating his sandwich in silence, he watches Annie walk through the shop, taking in everything intently. He invested in new technology a couple of years back and Lizzie made him organize everything, so that now cleaning the place is easier. There are shelves for the big machinery and trolleys for the smaller tools. Everything looks neat and tidy and Annie seems positively impressed.

“I really like it,” she says. “When it was Charlie’s, it was pure chaos. But this looks great.”

“Thanks. Lizzie threatened to castrate me if I didn’t come up with a solution for the chaos.”

Annie grins. “I’m sure she’s the secret boss here.”

“That’s definitely what she thinks.” Jesse laughs. “She’s a good friend.”

“I’m glad that she was able to help you out, y’know,” Annie says and her smile is almost shy. “When I wasn’t there.”

Jesse feels a lump in his throat. He really doesn’t want to spend his lunch break rehashing the past. He clears his throat. “So, what are you planning now? I mean, you’re here for good, right?”

Annie nods. “Yeah, no going back for me.” It makes Jesse so angry that the guy - whoever he was - was able to drive Annie away from her beloved college and studies. “The Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas is looking for someone to hire, so I sent them my application. Don’t know how that’ll work out, though.”

“What did your dad say when you told him you were staying?”

Annie huffs out a laugh. “Haven’t told him yet. He’s gonna throw a fit though, that’s for sure.”

“He loves you. He wants what’s best for you.”

“Well, staying in San Francisco isn’t what’s best for me,” Annie says, determined and Jesse nods.

“Maybe you should tell him exactly that.”

Her shoulders slump and she shrugs. “Don’t want him to worry.”

Jesse nudges her biceps and when she looks at him, he says, “He’s gonna worry either way. That’s what Jared does, he worries, about everyone.” Carefully he puts an arm around her shoulder. “It’s gonna be alright. He’ll understand.”

She sighs. “I really hope so.”

They lean against the front of the car, with Annie’s head resting on Jesse’s shoulder and him holding her close.

It feels a lot like no time has passed at all.
Ben stops the car in the driveway of Piper’s house and turns to face her. Her long blond hair is pulled back into a ponytail and her lipstick red lips are smiling at him. Ben forces a smile.

“Well, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Piper grins and pushes a strand of her hair out of her face. “My parents aren’t home, so you wanna come in.”

A few weeks ago, he would have jumped at the idea and would have followed her upstairs. Not today, or yesterday for that matter. They’ve always had an on-off relationship and Ben had been fine with that, better taking a break than dealing with Piper’s bitch-fits. But lately he kinda wishes he could be man enough to end it, once and for all.

“Not today,” is what he says and Piper’s grin falls from her face.

“Well, it’s up to you.”

She grabs her bag and gets out of the car without another word, swinging her hips while she walks up to the front door. He knows she’s doing that intentionally, but he can’t really find himself to care or to be swayed by it. That’s why he starts the engine and pulls the car back out on the street.

Five minutes later, he pulls into the driveway of his home. He parks the car, right behind his mom’s car, knowing that she doesn’t have to be anywhere this afternoon. He finds her and Laura in the kitchen.

“Hello, brat,” he says, while dropping a kiss to his mom’s cheek.

“Mom!”

“Tsk, Ben,” his mom scolds. “Don’t call your sister that.”

“What? She is one.” Laura sticks out her tongue at him and he laughs, walking over to tickle her. “See?”

His mom shakes her head, but there’s a smile displayed on her face. “You two are incorrigible.” She continues preparing the beef in front of her, when she says, “So, how was school today? Just this morning I found a pic of you and Sophie-Ellie at your first day of high school.”

There’s a pang in Ben’s heart when his mom mentions Sophie-Ellie’s name. He misses his best friend and he knows it’s his own fault. But back in freshman year, he had still believed that you could have both; his best friend and playing in the varsity basketball team. When he realized that he had lost Sophie-Ellie, it had already been too late.

“Mom…” he says softly.

“What? Now, we can’t even mention her name in this house? Well tough, Ben. She’s my goddaughter. So I will talk about her as it pleases me.”

His and Sophie-Ellie’s broken friendship has been the subject of too many of his and his mom’s
disagreements. Ben knows that his parents are disappointed that he and Sophie-Ellie aren’t friends anymore, but he just doesn’t know how to fix it.

His mom looks at him, long and hard. “Why don’t you go and get your homework done before we have dinner?”

Ben nods. He knows when he’s dismissed. God, sometimes he feels like the enemy in his own home, just because they aren’t friends anymore. Well, friends stop being friends all the time, so it shouldn’t be a big deal.

But then again, he gets why it is.

It’s drizzling and Sophie-Ellie pulls her jacket closer around her body. Pushing her hand into one of the pockets, her fingers wrap around the plastic hidden there. Plastic that’ll change her whole life. She pushed it in there this morning and only just wrapped her fingers around it to see if it’s still there.

The gravel beneath her feet crunches when she rounds the corner. It’s the only sound in the air and that’s what Sophie-Ellie likes about graveyards, it’s always quiet and peaceful.

The headstone stands at the end of the pathway, off to the right and there are fresh red roses lying on it. Grandma always brings roses to the headstone on Sundays.

There had been a huge commotion when grandma and grandpa first mentioned putting up a headstone in remembrance of James. Her dad had been upset and Jensen had called her grandparents insensitive. But in the end her dad had agreed to have a headstone at the local cemetery.

Sophie-Ellie thinks it’s nice that there’s a place she can go and talk to her papa. Luke always says it’s stupid, because there’s no body there. But there’s no body anymore in the grave in Chicago, either. And Sophie-Ellie knows anyway that Luke sometimes comes here and talks to their father too, because she witnessed Luke telling their father that he was going to get married to Evan and that he’d wish that he could be there.

She stops in front of the headstone, reaching out and running her fingers over the wet marble.

_In remembrance of James Nathan Padalecki-Lafferty Beloved husband, father and son Rest in peace 1977/06/23 - 2010/2/11

“Hey, Papa,” she whispers. She doesn’t know if the wetness on her cheeks is the rain or her tears and she doesn’t care. “I miss you and I wish you were here right now.”

She pulls out the plastic in her pocket. She did the test this morning and put it away without looking at it. She wanted her papa with her when she did so, at least he can’t scream at her.

Turning the stick around, she has to blink a few times before her eyes are clear enough to see that there are two blue lines in the little window.

Two blue lines.
Pregnant.

She knew it. Deep down, she knew it. “Pregnant,” she whispers. “I’m pregnant.” She looks up from the stick and to the headstone. “What am I gonna do now? God, Dad will flip out and Jensen… urgh, he’ll probably hunt Aaron down.” She pauses, because she hasn’t really thought about it. “I have to tell him and I really don’t wanna do it alone. God papa, I wish you could tell me what to do.”

She’s openly crying now, not caring if anyone sees. She’s not even eighteen - her birthday is still a couple of months away - and now she’s pregnant.

It’s hard to wrap her head around the fact that there’s a baby growing inside her belly.

She stays for a little while longer, just staring at the headstone, hoping, praying that maybe it’ll give her the answers to her questions.

Jared’s in the kitchen, preparing dinner, when he hears the front door open and Jensen’s heavy footsteps walking through the hallway.

A second later, strong arms wrap around his waist and he’s pressed against the wall next to the counter.

“Jen…” he breathes.

“Tell me that we’re alone,” Jensen whispers, his voice rough and full of lust.

“We’re alone, not sure for how long though.”

Jensen growls deep in his throat. “Don’t care. Need you now.”

He fumbles with Jared’s belt, pressing his crotch against Jared’s ass and rubbing the hard outline of his cock between the cheeks. Jared melts against his husband’s strong touch, lets Jensen manhandle him up the stairs and into their bedroom. Because even though they’re alone, they both know that anyone can come home at any moment.

Jared’s jeans and boxer-briefs go first and his cock is hard and already begging for attention, when Jensen leans down and takes it into his mouth. It’s hot and wet and perfect and Jared bucks his hips, trying to drive his dick deeper into Jensen’s mouth.

Clever fingers play with his balls, before pushing further back and rubbing over his opening. The blood is burning in his veins, leaving him short of breath and lightheaded. He’s panting hard by the time Jensen bends his legs back and licks across his hole. After a round of rimming Jared’s hole, Jensen pulls away, strips out of his clothes and pulls Jared’s t-shirt over his head too.

Their lips meet in a passionate kiss, Jared licking the taste of himself from Jensen’s tongue. It’s so fucking dirty and it turns him on like nothing else. Hebucks his hips, seeking friction for his hard cock and rubs it against Jensen’s hard abs.

Wet fingers make their way to Jared’s hole again and Jared’s already too out of it to notice that
Jensen’s got the lube out of the nightstand. One of Jensen’s fingers breaches him and he lets out a contented sigh of pleasure. He always loves Jensen’s fingers playing with his ass.

A second is added and then a third, stretching Jared wide and when they brush over the spot inside of him, his hips shoot off the bed and his eyes roll to the back of his head. It feels so good, his whole body strung tight and so ready to let go. But he wants Jensen to be inside him before he comes.

When Jensen finally positions himself at Jared’s opening and pushes in, Jared’s shivering with pleasure. His head dizzy with lust and his sight blurry. They kiss again, brushing their tongues against each other, tasting the other and swallowing their moans.

Jensen’s hips are picking up the rhythm, pulling out and pushing in faster and faster, hitting Jared’s prostate on each thrust. Fingers wrap around Jared’s cock, jerking him quickly and he can feel his orgasm building and then washing over him and taking him away on waves of pleasure.

Only distantly does he notice that Jensen’s coming too, sucking a bruise into Jared’s collarbone. He combs his fingers through Jensen’s sweat soaked hair and takes in his husband’s scent. Even after almost eleven years this never gets old.

“I love you,” he whispers. “So much.”

Jensen lifts his head and grins tiredly. “Love you too. I wish we could do this more often, though.” “You’re insatiable,” Jared chuckles.

“Only when it comes to you,” Jensen admits and presses a soft kiss to the edge of Jared’s mouth. “I guess we need to go downstairs soon, huh?”

Jared shrugs. “I guess. The little monsters will be demanding something to eat soon.”

Jensen sighs, but Jared can see the smile on his face. “Well, let’s feed the little monsters, then. The sooner they’re big and strong, the sooner we can kick them out.”

When they get back downstairs twenty minutes later, Sophie-Ellie is sitting on the couch with Sadie and Harley at her feet, zapping through the TV programs. It’s a common sight these days, while a couple of months ago she was always sketching and drawing when Jensen had seen her, now she’s mostly sitting in front of the TV, staring at it. Jensen doesn’t even know if she takes in what’s going on on the screen.

He and Jared both drop a kiss on Sophie-Ellie’s head and she gives them a small smile, but there’s something in her eyes that makes Jensen stop.

“Sweetheart, everything okay?”

Her smile is shaky, when she nods and says, “Yeah.” Jensen can’t shake that feeling that something happened and she’s not telling him.

“I know it’s totally uncool to come to your father and talk about problems,” he says lightly. “But just so you know, I’m pretty good at listening.”
She doesn’t look up again and just nods. He knows when he’s being dismissed and sighs, making his way into the kitchen. Jared’s standing at the counter, continuing to make dinner, roasted chicken with vegetables. Jensen comes up behind him and winds his arms around his body, resting his forehead between Jared’s shoulder blades.

“I think there’s something going on with Sophie-Ellie.”

“You mean her black clothes and make-up?” Jared asks and Jensen knows he’s teasing. It had been quite the change when Sophie-Ellie had thrown out all her colorful clothes and replaced them with black ones. Jensen still can’t really get used to seeing his little girl always looking so depressed.

“That too,” Jensen says. “No, something’s happened and she’s not talking about it.”

Jared sighs. “She’ll come to us when she’s ready; pushing her has never been successful in the past.”

Yeah, Jensen knows that. He still worries, though. Jared turns in his arms and presses a soft kiss to Jensen’s forehead.

“Just give her a little time to work through it alone, then we’ll ask again, okay?”

Jensen smiles relieved and nods. “Sounds good.”

The back door opens and Jensen steps away from his husband, leaving Jared room to work on their dinner. The twins barrel through the door, rushing right upstairs with only a wave to their fathers. Alexis steps over the threshold a second later.

“Hey guys,” she says, greeting both of them with a kiss to their cheeks. “Homework’s all done.”

“Hope they didn’t give you too much trouble,” Jensen says and Alexis snorts.

“When they’re at our place, they’re the loveliest kids.”

Jensen rolls his eyes and Jared chuckles. “Thanks for watching them, Alexis.”

“You’re welcome. So, I just wanted to drop by and say ‘hi’. I’m expected back soon, so I’m gonna leave you to it.” She waves and calls out to Sophie-Ellie, who gives a quick wave, not taking her eyes off the TV. “See you soon.”

As soon as the back door closes, there’s a knock on the front door and when Jensen opens, he has an arm full of a five-year-old a second later. Alona is standing at the door with Brian holding her hand.

“We only wanted to drop Lily off,” she says. “You’re still watching Brian tomorrow, right?”

Jensen thinks about what tomorrow is and then nods. “Yeah, sure.” He presses a quick kiss to Alona’s cheek. “Thanks for watching Lily today, Al.”

“No problem, have a good night.”

She and Brian wave, walking back and down the sidewalk. Jensen has Lily sitting on his hip and both are waving until Alona and Brian disappear around the corner.

“So, how was your day today?” Jensen asks and Lily starts babbling about day care and building a huge sandcastle, with four towers.

He carries her inside and when she stops talking for one second, he sends her upstairs and then goes and sets the table. In the meantime, Annie and Jesse both get home and the once silent house turns
into one where everyone talks at the same time and there’s a constant buzz in the air. Jensen can’t
decide which version he likes better.

Half an hour later, they’re all seated at the dinner table, handing out the bowls with the vegetables
and potatoes, while Jared hands out pieces of roast chicken. It’s almost like old times, the only one
missing is Luke. It feels good to have Annie back home. She hasn’t said anything about how long
she’ll be staying, but Jensen wouldn’t mind if she moved back indefinitely, even though she
probably would not want to live with them anymore, she’d still be close enough to come over for
dinner once in a while.

“So how long are you planning on staying, sweetie?” Jared asks, looking at Annie curiously. “Not
that I’m not happy you’re here, but it’s the middle of the semester, right? Won’t you miss a lot?”
That’s so Jared; always the concerned, worried dad.

Annie smiles tightly and shrugs. “I’m not going back.”

Jensen gapes, because as much as he’d wish for Annie to stay in Dalton, this was not something he
expected to hear. “What do you mean?”

“There’s this job,” she says carefully. “At the Museum of Nature & Sience that I’m interested in. I
sent them my application couple of days ago.”

“But your studies aren’t finished,” Jared says.

“I have a masters in astrophysics, Dad,” she says. “I really think that’s enough for now.”

“You wanted to get your PhD,” he reasons and Jensen can feel tension in the air. Jared only wants
what’s best for his children, but he can sometimes be a little mother-hen.

dinner together. Can’t you just be happy that I’m coming back?”

Jared’s face softens. “Of course I’m happy you’re coming back. I just don’t want you to regret it later
on.”

“If I really wanna get my PhD, UT has excellent programs for that,” Annie says and Jensen’s glad
that a fight could be avoided.

He watches Annie and Jesse exchange a secret smile and hopes that whatever drove them apart will
bring them back together now that Annie’s coming back. But then there is…

“What about Robert? What does he say to you moving back?” Jensen asks. He never really liked
Annie’s latest boyfriend and so he hopes.

“We broke up. It just didn’t work out anymore,” Annie says and Jensen sees the small smile
displayed on Jesse’s face. It’s definitely okay to hope.

“Oh well, whatever you think is for the best,” he says and takes another bite of his chicken. After
dinner Lily is allowed to watch some TV, while the older kids all help cleaning up. Jensen takes out
the trash, like every night, and when he’s almost at the bin, the bag bursts apart and the leftovers and
other garbage, spill out and over the walkway.

“Shit,” he curses under his breath and then bends down to inspect if he maybe can still use the bag,
or if he has to get a new one.
Something catches his eye and he squints, taking the small plastic stick into his hand. It’s smeared with gravy, but Jensen still knows exactly what it is. He’s just not sure what it’s doing in their trash. Maybe…?

He puts it aside for moment, while he collects the other trash and throws it into the bin. Thankfully only one of the handles of the bag broke and not the whole bag. After he disposed of the garbage, he wipes at the stick and pushes it into his pocket. He’ll talk to Jared first.

When he gets back inside, the kids have all joined Lily in front of the TV and Jared’s wiping down the counter. Jensen takes the rag from him and Jared frowns at him.

“You wanna tell me something, Jay?” he asks softly.

“What? What are you talking about?” Jared asks confused, and when Jensen pulls out the pregnancy test, his eyes grow wide.

“So then, this isn’t yours?” Jensen asks and Jared shakes his head.

“No. You know I’ve been on this new hormonal birth control thing for men.”

“Yeah, but I thought,” Jensen says slowly. “I guess I thought it might not have worked.”

Jared shakes his head. “Well sorry, but this isn’t mine.”

“Then whose is it?” Jensen asks and throws a look over to the living room where their kids are laughing about Sponge Bob.

“It must be Annie’s, maybe that’s why she’s back, dropping out of school like that,” Jared says.

Well, it could be, Jensen guesses. “You think Robert didn’t want the baby and that’s why she left him?” Jared shrugs and Jensen knows that this could very well be true. “Let’s go and talk to her,” Jensen says. “Just so that she knows we’re happy for her.”

Jared nods. “Yeah, I think that’s a good idea.”

They walk into the living room together and Jensen pulls the surprised Annie into his arms. “What?” she splutters.

“We know, honey. It’s okay, everything will be okay. We’re here for you. No matter what you need.”

Annie pulls away and she looks at them in confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“The baby,” Jared says. “Jensen found your pregnancy test in the trash.”

“A baby?” Jesse asks, sounding completely overwhelmed.

“A baby?” Annie stutters. “I’m not pregnant.”

“What?” Jensen asks surprised. “But then, whose test is this?”

“It’s mine.” Jensen spins around and sees Sophie-Ellie standing behind them with tears in her eyes. “I’m pregnant.”
Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpected moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“A friend is one who walks in when others walk out.” ~ Walter Winchell

“I’m pregnant.”

Jared’s head is spinning with the news and he takes a few deep breathes to refocus. His little girl is pregnant, and not even eighteen. Sophie-Ellie is having a baby, even though she’s still a child herself.

“You’re pregnant?”

Jensen asks and Jared thinks that maybe he’s having the same difficulty wrapping his head around the news. Sophie-Ellie nods and her cheeks are wet with tears.

“I’m sorry,” she sobs and Jared feels his heart breaking.

But before he can take a step towards his daughter, she’s surrounded by her siblings and Jesse; pulling her into a group hug. Jared can hear words of comfort and support, and it’s what makes him walk over to them and pull his kids and Jesse away to get to his little girl. He wraps his arms around her, kissing her head.

“Shh, it’s okay. Everything’s okay. We’ll work it out together.” Sophie-Ellie is shaking in his arms and he holds her a little closer. “Shh, sweetheart. Don’t cry. I promise we’ll help with whatever you need.”

He meets Jensen’s eyes over his daughter’s shoulder. He looks shell shocked and is rooted to the spot. Jared gives him a small smile, hoping that it’ll keep Jensen from freaking out any further.

“Guys, why don’t you give us and Sophie-Ellie some space?” Jensen asks softly. “It’s almost bedtime anyway.”

Annie looks over to where Jared’s holding Sophie-Ellie and only nods when she seems satisfied with
however the silent conversation with her sister turned out.

“C’mon,” she says, shooing the twins and Lily out of the room and upstairs.

“We’ll come up and say good night in a little while,” Jensen calls after them. “So, how about we sit down?”

Jared nods. “Good idea.” He leads Sophie-Ellie to the nearest couch and sits down with her. She’s still clinging to him and he doesn’t let go of her, just pulls her against his side a little tighter.

Jensen kneels in front of the couch and wipes away some of the tears on Sophie-Ellie’s face. “Why didn’t you tell us?”

She shrugs. “Scared. I didn’t want to disappoint you anymore.”

“Any more?” Jared asks surprised. “We’re not disappointed in you. We love you just the way you are. And we’ll support you, no matter what you decide. It’s just a shock to hear that you’re pregnant. But we’ll deal, okay?”

Sophie-Ellie nods. “Okay.”

“I’m going to go out on a whim and guessing that Aaron’s the father,” Jensen says and Sophie-Ellie nods again. “Does he know?”

“No.” She shakes her head. “I didn’t know how to tell him. He has so many plans after high school.”

Jared takes a deep breath, because he wants to tell her that she has just as many plans as Aaron and that they now both need to decide what to do about them and the baby. They’re both still so young. They both have their whole lives ahead of them.

“Well, we can go tomorrow, okay?” he says. “First, we’ll go to the clinic and then we’ll tell him together. What do you think?”

Sophie-Ellie looks up at him and smiles a little. “Thank you.”

“Oh honey. We love you and nothing can ever change that.” He presses a soft kiss to her forehead.

Jensen pushes a strand of her hair behind her ear. “Your dad’s right, we love you so much. And I know it’s scary. Hell, I remember when your dad first told me about being pregnant with the twins, I felt completely out of my depth. I mean, I was thirty-eight and I wasn’t pregnant, but it still scared the shit outta me.” That brings a little smile out on Sophie-Ellie’s face and Jensen grins. “Whatever you decide, we’ll be here for you, okay?”

“Thank you,” she says. “I love you.” She kisses first Jared’s cheek and then Jensen’s. “I… just thank you.”

Jared smiles. “Why don’t you go to bed now? It was a long day. You should get some sleep.”


Jared lets out a deep breath when Sophie-Ellie disappears upstairs. Warm fingers thread through his hair and he opens his eyes.

“You okay?” Jensen asks.

“I don’t know. She’s so young, Jen. Not even eighteen. I remember how scary it was for me and I
was two years older than her.”

“We’ll make sure that everything’ll be okay.” Jensen pulls him forward a little, brushing his lips against Jared’s. “Our little girl will be okay.”

Jared sighs and lies back on the couch, pulling Jensen with him and atop of him. “I love you. I’m so glad you’re here with me.”

Jensen grins. “Where else would I be?”

Their lips meet in a gentle kiss and Jared thinks that if they’re together, they can deal with whatever they’re hit with.

Now that her secret’s out, Sophie-Ellie feels like a huge weight has been lifted off her shoulders. She was so scared to tell her dad and PJ about the pregnancy, but they had been so amazing about everything. She should have known they’d be amazing. They’ve always been supportive, no matter what.

The next morning she makes her way downstairs, finding Annie and Lily in the kitchen.

“Morning,” she says softly.

“Hey,” Annie grins. “How are you? You want some breakfast?”

Lily climbs down from her stool and strides right over to Sophie-Ellie, lifting her t-shirt. Sophie-Ellie looks down at her in amusement at the concentrated look on Lily’s face.

“What is it, Lily?”

“Annie said there’s a baby in your belly now,” she says and then adds, “How did a baby get into your belly?”

Sophie-Ellie blushes deep red and Annie laughs. “Maybe you should ask your fathers about that,” Annie hiccups, between laughs.

Lily looks confused, but shrugs. “Okay. Daddy!” Then she’s running up the stairs.

“Oh god,” Sophie-Ellie groans. That’s so embarrassing.

Annie smiles. “Wait for when your own kid asks that question.” Sophie-Ellie sighs and runs her hand through her hair and Annie’s smile falls away. “I mean, if you’re going to decide to have the baby. Have you thought about it?”

“My head’s a mess right now,” Sophie-Ellie admits. “I really don’t know what to do.”

Annie nods. “Well, there’s still some time to decide, right?” She puts a glass of OJ in front of Sophie-Ellie. “I heard that’s good for when you’re pregnant.”
“Thanks.” Sophie-Ellie rolls the glass between her hands. “I’m scared,” she whispers and Annie walks around the kitchen island, pulling her into a hug.

“I know. But whatever you decide, you’re not alone.”

“What if Aaron doesn’t want the baby?” she says, voicing one of her biggest fears.

Annie lets out an audible breath. “I’m sure it’ll be a shock at first, but then he’ll just have to deal. It’s his baby, too.”

Sophie-Ellie nods. “I’m glad you’re home.”

Annie smiles. “I’m glad I’m home too. Now, tell me if you want something to eat too.”

In the end Sophie-Ellie agrees to a bowl of cornflakes. She’s still eating when Jared and Jensen come down, with Lily piggyback-riding on Jensen’s back. Both, her dad and PJ, pull her into a tight hug, kissing her cheeks.

“How are you feeling?” her dad asks.

“Okay, I guess. A little nervous.”

“That’s understandable,” PJ says softly, dropping another kiss to her hair.

“Where are Ty and Jamie?” Annie asks, looking at her watch. “Don’t they have to be at school soon?”

PJ rolls his eyes, while their dad calls, “Ty, Jamie, get your butts down here or you’ll leave for school without breakfast!”

A second later there are two pairs of feet trampling down the stairs and the twins come into sight. They look a little out of breath and Sophie-Ellie wonders what they’re up to now. They always have some prank in mind.

“What are you up to, boys?” Jensen asks.

Ty looks at him innocently. “Nothing. Can’t a boy need his time in the bathroom?”

Sophie-Ellie snorts, because that’s the same thing Luke always said and it’s clear that the twins have picked it up from him.

Jared shakes his head. “Boys, if I find out about another prank of yours, I swear I’ll ground you for months, without the TV and your Wii. Got it?”

Ty and Jamie nod, but Sophie-Ellie can see the mischievous glint in their eyes. They really do believe that their dad won’t find out.

A horn honks outside and Annie hands two lunch bags to the twins and out the door they go, waving and laughing.

Their dad drops a kiss to Annie’s cheek. “Thanks for taking care of breakfast this morning.”

“It’s fine. Not that I have anything else to do.”

“Would you mind taking Lily to daycare?” Jensen asks. “Then we can take Sophie-Ellie to the clinic.”
“Sure, no problem.” Annie puts the bowls they used for breakfast into the sink. “I’ll clean that up when I get back.” She kisses Sophie-Ellie’s cheek. “Good luck. No matter what, I’ll be here for you.”

Sophie-Ellie smiles. “Thank you.”

Annie winks and then shooes Lily out of the kitchen. They hear them get dressed in the hallway and then the front door closes and a second later the engine of Annie’s truck starts and slowly fades to silence as it drives away.

“You ready to go?” her dad asks and Sophie-Ellie shrugs.

“Not really sure.”

PJ smiles. “It’ll be okay. I promise.”

They drive to the clinic and Sophie-Ellie is a nervous wreck, even before the nurse leads them into the office that’s attached to the examination room to wait for the doctor.

Her dad wraps his arm around her shoulder. “Relax. Everything’ll be fine.”

Ten minutes later a middle-aged woman enters the room. She has long blond hair, that’s pulled back into a pony tail, and gentle looking eyes. She introduces herself as Dr. Daugherty and then sits down behind her desk.

“Well, Ms. Padalecki-Ackles what can I do for you?”

Sophie-Ellie kneads her palms nervously. “I’m pregnant.”

“Can I ask how old you are?” Dr. Daugherty asks.

“Seventeen, eighteen in a couple of months.”

The doctor nods and scribbles down something on the paper. “I have a few questions for you and if you’d feel more comfortable, we can talk about them alone.”

Sophie-Ellie first looks at her dad and then PJ. She wants them here, but then she knows that those questions might be a little embarrassing.

“I want my dads to stay,” she says eventually.

The doctor nods and smiles. “Okay. I’ll start then. When was your last period?”

“The middle of December.”

“Uh uh. When did you first have sex?”

Sophie-Ellie blushes and so do PJ and her father. “Well, the first time was at the beginning of December, the second time on New Year.”

The doc nods again. “Good. Did you use protection?”

“We used condoms both times.”

“But no hormonal birth control?”
Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. “No.”

“Okay,” Dr. Daugherty says and smiles. “How about you get undressed and we’ll take a look?”

“Okay,” Sophie-Ellie’s voice is shaking a little when she says it. She turns to her fathers. “Will you wait here?”

Her dad smiles and nods. “Of course. You can just call when you need us.”

“Thank you.”

She follows the doctor into the examination room and gets undressed in the little dressing room the doctor shows her. It’s the first time she’s ever been at a gynecologist and her cheeks are deep red when she climbs on the examination chair and lifts her legs up into the stirrups.

“No need to be nervous,” Dr. Daugherty says. “I’ll explain everything I do, okay? If you have questions or something feels uncomfortable, you just tell me, okay?”

Sophie-Ellie nods and lies back, letting the doctor pat her down, prodding and poking, touching and feeling her belly and genitals. She’s still pretty embarrassed but Dr. Daugherty explains every move to her and slowly she relaxes a little.

When the doc is finished with her exam, she lets Sophie-Ellie get dressed again and then leads her to another examination table.

“How about we take a look at the baby?”

Sophie-Ellie nods slowly, not sure if she even wants to see it.

Dr. Daugherty smiles. “You thought about if you wanna have the baby?”

“No,” Sophie-Ellie admits. “My head’s been a mess ever since I found out.”

“Yeah, that’s understandable,” The doc says. “We can talk about options when we’re back in the office and I’ll give you some pamphlets you can read through. If you decide to abort the pregnancy, we’ll need to do that in the next few weeks, but you still have some time to think about it.”

She turns down the lights and Sophie-Ellie watches the monitor above the table. When the stick touches her skin she frowns a little trying to see something on the monitor. To her it all looks the same, gray and grainy.

“Here, there’s your baby,” Dr. Daugherty says, showing Sophie-Ellie something that looks like a little small white spot. “Judging by when you had sex and your period, I’d say it’s about eight weeks old.” Sophie-Ellie stares at the screen, while Dr. Daugherty tells her that the baby is perfectly healthy and that right now, it’s a very normal progressing pregnancy.

When they get back to the office, her dad and PJ are still sitting in their respective chairs, but they look really nervous.

“Well gentlemen, I can tell you that your daughter is very healthy and so is the baby.” The tension seems to fall away from them when the doctor says that and Sophie-Ellie smiles. “I’m giving you a few pamphlets about the options you have,” Dr. Daugherty tells her and hands over the pamphlets. “If you have any questions or need to talk about any of those options, you just call and make an appointment with me, okay?”
Sophie-Ellie nods. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I’ll see you soon.”

After having lunch at Jim’s diner, Jensen drives them across town to where Aaron lives with his mother. He can see Sophie-Ellie fidgeting in the back seat and Jared’s sitting in the passenger seat with his shoulders tense.

None of them have really talked about how they expect Aaron and his parents to react, but Jensen’s heard enough stories where the boy had denied being the father and never wanted anything to do with the baby. He doesn’t want that for Sophie-Ellie and the baby. He hopes that after the initial shock wears off, Aaron will support Sophie-Ellie and they’ll make the decisions of what to do and how to deal with the situation together.

The car stops in the driveway and Jensen wraps his arm around his daughter’s shoulder, pressing a soft kiss to her hair when they make their way to the front door.

“Everything’ll be okay,” he whispers. “Promise.”

Sophie-Ellie gives him a shaky smile and he sees her reaching for Jared’s hand for reassurance, too.

Jane McKinsey opens the door and Jensen gives her a courteous smile. “Hey Jane, can we come in and talk to you and Aaron for a second?”

She looks at them surprised, but waves them in. “Yes, of course. Hey Sophie-Ellie, Aaron said that you weren’t in school today. You okay?”

“Let’s just talk when we’re inside,” Jared says, sparing Sophie-Ellie having to answer.

“Okay,” Jane says hesitantly. “Well, c’mon into the living room.” She turns to the stairs that lead to the second floor. “Aaron, we have visitors. Please come down here,” she calls and a second later footsteps echo through the hallway and then Aaron comes into sight wearing black jeans, a black t-shirt and black eyeliner.

Jensen wonders for a second who came up with the dress code first; he or Sophie-Ellie.

“Hey,” he says slowly, before turning to Sophie-Ellie. “You weren’t in school. You okay?”

Jensen sees Sophie-Ellie shrug out of the corner of his eye and says, “Why don’t we all sit down?” Everyone sits and Jensen continues, “I’m just going to say right out why we’re here. Sophie-Ellie is pregnant, we just found out yesterday and we went to the clinic today to have it confirmed. Everything’s going along fine right now, but there’re a few decisions to be made.”

“What?!” Aaron asks loudly. “No way. We’ve always used condoms and besides, we’ve only had sex twice.”

“Well, obviously, once is enough,” Jensen grits out.
Jane lays a hand on Aaron’s shoulder. “It’s okay. Just sit down.” She pushes him down on the couch. “This comes as a shock to all of us, but there’s an easy solution. Sophie-Ellie and Aaron are both still young and hopefully the pregnancy isn’t too far along to terminate it.”

Jensen tenses and hears Jared audibly suck in a shocked breath.

“I mean, they both have their futures ahead of them and planned out. A baby will only be a burden now,” Jane continues. “So about how much money are we speaking of?”

“I haven’t decided if I want to terminate the pregnancy yet,” Sophie-Ellie says quietly, but her voice is calm.

“Well, that’s not really a decision, is it?” Jane says. “You’re too young, so you really have no option but to do it. Or do you really wanna ruin your’s and Aaron’s future?”

Jensen watches Sophie-Ellie, but before he can chime in and say something, his daughter speaks again, “I’d really like to know what Aaron thinks about it.”

Aaron shakes his head. “I don’t want a baby. I’m going to art school next year. I don’t have time for a baby and neither have you, Sophie-Ellie. Just get an abortion and we’ll never have to talk about it again.”

Sophie-Ellie recoils visibly and Jensen feels anger start to burn in his belly. How can Jane and Aaron be so dismissive?

Jared stands and holds his hand out to Sophie-Ellie. “I guess we’re done here, then. We’ll let you know what Sophie-Ellie decides. C’mon sweetheart.”

He leads their daughter out of the room, while Jensen stays, staring at Jane and Aaron. He shakes his head. “I don’t get you. You’re man enough to fuck someone, but you’re not man enough to take responsibility for the consequences. Well, be assured that if Sophie-Ellie decides to have and keep the baby, I’ll make sure that you’ll at least be paying child support, if I can’t make you take responsibility in raising the child.”

Aaron watches him with huge eyes and his mother wraps her arm around his shoulder and says, “Good luck with that, Sheriff. Who says that Aaron’s even the father?”

Jensen snorts. “I’m sure a paternity test will prove that. Have a good day. We’ll see each other soon enough.”

Sophie-Ellie is in the back of the car, staring out of the window, while Jared’s sitting in the passenger seat, fuming. Jensen sighs. He wishes this could have gone differently. But honestly? He isn’t surprised.

When Ben walks into the kitchen, his parents are sitting at the kitchen island. They must have been talking about something serious, because they stopped whispering the moment Ben stepped over the threshold. Both their faces are serious and full of concern and for a second Ben thinks that something
serious has happened, maybe to Uncle Jared or Uncle Jensen.

“Morning,” his mom says. “Why don’t you sit down? You want a cup of coffee?”

“What’s going on, Mom? Did something happen? Is everybody okay?”

His mom shares a look with his dad and nods. “Yeah, everybody’s fine. Just sit, we need to discuss something with you.”

Ben pulls back a stool and slowly sits down, giving his mom a thankful smile when she hands him his coffee.

“We know that you and Sophie-Ellie don’t talk anymore. We’re not really sure why, but that’s not what’s important right now,” his dad says and Ben feels a lump building in his throat. “Anyway, Jared’s just called and they’ve found out that Sophie-Ellie’s pregnant, that’s why she wasn’t in school yesterday.”

“Pregnant?” Ben stutters. “But that’s…” He never thought that Sophie-Ellie would have had sex already. “It’s Aaron’s, isn’t it?” He asks, feeling anger burn in his belly. “I’m so going to kick his ass.”

“Ben,” his mom says softly. “I really don’t think that’s the right way to go about things. We just wanted to tell you this, because we all know how fast gossip spreads in Dalton and Sophie-Ellie needs a friend now, not someone to condemn her or pick a fight with her boyfriend.”

Ben hangs his head and sighs. “Sorry. I just… Whatever, I have to go. I’ll see you tonight.” He stands up, finishes his coffee and then leaves, ignoring his mom calling after him.

Sophie-Ellie pregnant. The thought hits him like a punch to the gut. She must have been so scared and confused. When they were ten, they had the insane idea to be blood brother and sister; they cut their forefingers and everything. They promised each other they’d always be there for each other. And now? Now Ben’s been spending time with Piper that he didn’t really enjoy at all, while Sophie-Ellie’s going through something so serious.

Ben stops his car in the parking lot of the school and can already see Piper standing at the stairs leading to the schoolyard, talking to her friends, Sally and Joanne. He groans, resting his head against his steering wheel for a short moment.

“Hey Collins, get your ass over here!”

He jerks his head up and sees Ray and Tony standing right in front of his car. Sighing, he grabs his bag and gets out of the car, greeting his friends with a handshake. He follows them towards the girls and Piper snuggles close to him. Wrapping his arm around her out of habit, he doesn’t listen to what her and his friends are talking about.

His eyes scan the schoolyard for Sophie-Ellie and when he finally finds her, standing at the other end with Michelle; he lets out a small breath.

“You heard the news, Ben?”

He jerks out of his thoughts and looks at Piper. “What?”

“Sophie-Ellie is pregnant and Aaron’s dumped her because she didn’t want to get an abortion. How stupid is that? I mean, look at her, she’s not fit to be a mom.”
“I think it’s brave,” Ben says quietly. “I’m sure she’s really scared.”

Piper frowns. “Oh yeah, I forgot you used to be friends with her.” She twirls a strand of her hair around one finger. “But I still think it’s stupid to have a baby now. She won’t ever have a life again.”

Ben decides to ignore whatever Piper says from now on regarding the subject and follows her quietly to the classroom. The day goes by in a blur with more doodles on his notebooks than ever before. He’s sure that he didn’t get one thing his teachers talked about.

On their way to lunch, they see Sophie-Ellie and Ben tries to make eye-contact, but she’s not looking in his direction.

“Must be hard to be knocked up and then dumped,” Piper says loudly when they pass Sophie-Ellie.

She must have heard it too, because she jerks around and drops her books.

“Piper, shut up,” Ben says and Piper looks at him, confused.

“What? I’m just saying what everyone else thinks.”

“You’re being a bitch, that’s what,” Ben says and shakes his head.

Piper blinks and pushes her hands against her hips. “Did you just call me a bitch?”

“Yeah, I did and I should have said that a long time ago,” Ben clarifies. “Also, it’s over. I’m so sick and tired of your attitude. Just go and be whatever you wanna be, just don’t bother me anymore.”

“Ben,” she whines.

But Ben turns around and takes two steps towards Sophie-Ellie, dropping to his knees and helping her to pick up her books. She’s staring at him with wide eyes.

“You okay?” he asks and he doesn’t mean just right now.

She nods slowly, taking her books from him and putting them into her locker. “Thank you,” she says softly.

Ben grins sheepishly. “Yeah well, it was the least I could do.” He points to the cafeteria. “You wanna get lunch together?”

“Michelle’s waiting for me,” Sophie-Ellie says and Ben sees her friend standing at the other end of the hallway.

“You mind if I join you?”

“You don’t have to do this, y’know? I’m pregnant not dying.”

Ben smiles subdued. “What if I wanna do it because I’ve missed talking to my best friend? I’m sorry I’ve been such an idiot. It’s probably too late, but I’d really like to make it up to you.”

For a long while Sophie-Ellie doesn’t say anything, but then she nods quickly. The smile on Ben’s face grows into a real one.

“Awesome.”
Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“I have a hand, and you have another; put them together and we have each other.” ~Anonymous

It’s already dark when Evan gets out of his last class; structural analysis is really kicking his ass. Sometimes he wonders what has driven him to the decision to become a construction engineer. And then he looks at the futuristic glass buildings downtown and he knows what.

It’s really time consuming though and with his part time internship at Baker Inc., leading construction company in Dallas, he’s definitely not seen enough of his fiancé lately. He can’t still believe that he and Luke are getting married. Yes, they have their differences about how and where, but the date’s set and Evan knows that in the end the only thing that matters is the ring on their fingers after the ceremony.

Wrapping his scarf tighter around his neck, he makes his way towards the next DART station. Luke should be home by now, having his last class at noon and then his part time job at P.A. Games. Evan is still amused that Luke decided to study information technology and then was able to score first an internship and since a few months ago a full-blown part time job designing video games. P.A. Games even made Luke the offer to take him on after college if he graduates with a good GPA. It makes Evan really proud.

His phone rings in his pocket and he pulls it out. It’s the Hilton calling him and Evan knows exactly why. He sighs and answers.

“Hello?”

“Hi, this is Kelly, calling on behalf of Hilton Dallas. Am I speaking to Evan Welling-Rosenbaum?”

“This is him.”

“Great, so my boss asked me to call you and tell you that we really need a decision on the ball room pre-reservation. We have a lot of other people asking for the date and we really need to secure a booking soon.”
Evan closes his eyes for a moment. It’s been his dream to get married there since he saw a documentary on TV about it, a couple of years back. But Luke hates the idea and Evan loves Luke.

“Cancel it. I’m sorry, I should have called earlier, but something else came up.”

“You sure?”

“Yes, thanks for the call. Maybe another time.”

“Of course. Have a great night.”

Evan disconnects the call after saying ‘goodbye’ and pushes his phone back into his pocket. The sky’s clear when he looks up and the stars are sparkling. Taking a deep breath of fresh air, he smiles. It was the right decision.

When he pushes the door to their townhouse open a little while later, he finds Dan in front of the TV and Luke sitting at the kitchen table, with his head buried behind his laptop.

“Hey,” he says, throwing his bag into the corner. He fist-bumps Dan as a way of a hello and then drops a kiss to Luke’s neck. “What are you doing?”


It’s been kind of a shock to hear that Sophie-Ellie’s pregnant. Evan still remembers her in pigtails. His first intention was to just go and kick some ass, especially after finding out that the jerk wanted her to have an abortion, and didn’t want anything to do with her or the baby if she decided to have it. But Luke had told him to cut it out and just be there for Sophie-Ellie, instead of starting a stupid fight that wouldn’t help anyone.

“How’s she doing?”

“Okay. I talked to her on the phone earlier. She hasn’t decided what to do yet.”

“Well, whatever she decides tell her we’ll have her back,” Dan says. “Even though I still think that the jerk deserves an ass kicking. Knocking someone up and then not taking responsibility for it. That’s a douche move.”

“I’m sure Jensen will make sure that he pays for the baby,” Luke says. “That’s punishment enough for an eighteen-year-old don’t you think.”

Dan nods, but then says, “Still…”

Evan chuckles. “You not getting enough, or why are you looking for a different way to let off some steam?”

“Fuck you, I’m getting more than you two and you’re in a serious relationship or something.” Dan types quickly on his phone and then stands up. “Speaking of which, don’t wait up guys. I’m staying over at Brian’s place.”


Dan flips him the bird and then grabs his jacket and keys. “Have fun, children. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“There’s nothing you wouldn’t do,” Evan states and Dan grins smugly.
“Exactly.”

Then the front door closes behind him and Evan chuckles. “You think he’ll ever grow up?”

Luke laughs. “No, probably not.” He wraps his fingers into Evan’s shirt and pulls him down. “But if that means we have the house to ourselves, I’m not complaining.”

Evan grins and feels his cock stir in his pants. “I’m not, either.”

Their lips meet and he runs his tongue over Luke’s bottom lip, urging him to open up. When he complies, Evan’s hit with the taste of coffee, chocolate and something that’s entirely Luke. He feels his knees weaken a little and pushes back Luke’s chair, so that he can sit down on his lap, rubbing their crotches together.

He breaks away from the kiss and starts trailing small, wet kisses down Luke’s neck. “Hmm, smell so good.”

“God, Ev,” Luke moans, threading his fingers through Evan’s hair, holding on tight.

Evan’s blood is boiling in his veins and his head is buzzing from the lust. His hands push beneath Luke’s t-shirt, fingertips running over heated skin. In one pull the shirt is gone and Luke’s chest is all laid out before him, he kisses his way down, only letting off when Luke pulls his shirt over his head. He plays with Luke’s nipples, twisting and nibbling, until Luke’s moaning loudly and writhing beneath him.

Then he sinks to the floor and pops open the button on Luke’s jeans. He pulls when Luke lifts his hips and the jeans are gone in one swift movement. There’s no underwear and Luke’s cock is rock hard, curling towards his belly. Evan has to push his hand against his erection to not come right then and there.

“Missed you,” Luke whispers, combing his fingers through Evan’s hair. “Missed this.”

He lets his fingers trail over Evan’s face and when his thumb reaches Evan’s mouth, he bites at it and sucks it into his mouth, twirling his tongue around it. Luke’s eyes roll back into his head and Evan grins, feeling a thrill at causing his fiancé such pleasure.

“Suck me… C’mon Ev, don’t tease.”

“You want that, me sucking your cock, making you come down my throat?”


Evan leans forward, letting go of Luke’s thumb and licking over the crown of his cock. He sighs at the musky and a little salty taste that hits him. So good.

“You taste so good, baby. So fucking good.”

“Ev,” Luke whines, putting his hands to the back of Evan’s head and pulling him forward. “Please…”

His lips close around the head of Luke’s cock and Evan feels Luke shiver beneath his hands. He sucks slowly, taking his time to put every inch of Luke’s gorgeous dick into his mouth. Relaxing his throat, he takes it all the way in. Luke is bucking his hips, pushing his cock just a little bit deeper.

Evan loves the feeling of Luke’s cock in his mouth. It’s as if it’s made for him, fitting perfectly and
the weight on his tongue always drives him a little crazy. He pops open the button at his jeans and pulls out his own dick. It’s hard and leaking and demands attention.

While he bobs his head up and down on Luke’s dick and fondles his balls with one hand, he jerks himself with his other, feeling his orgasm approaching fast. He doubles his efforts, pulling gently on Luke’s balls and rolling them between his fingers. His tongue licks along the vein on the underside of the dick in his mouth and when the tip of his tongue runs over the little bundle of nerves at the head, he feels Luke tense and then salty liquid spills down his throat.

The feeling of Luke coming down his throat is what pushes him over the edge and he loses focus for a moment when his cock twitches, coating his own hand and belly with white strands of come. He sucks lazily on Luke’s cock until he comes down from his high and when he finally pulls off Luke’s, watching with a fucked-out, sated look on his face.

“I fucking love you.”


Evan grins. “Okay.” He pushes up from the floor, ignoring his aching knees. “Oh and just so you know. I canceled the pre-reservation of the ball room at the Hilton.”

Luke frowns. “What? I thought you wanted to have the wedding there.”

“Well, I know you hate the idea, and the ranch is really not a bad place. I mean, Uncle Jensen and Jared got married there and that was nice.”

The smile that spreads on Luke’s face fills him with warmth and love.

“I really do love you,” Luke says, taking two steps towards him and catching his lips in a passionate kiss.

It’ll be a long night, that’s for sure.

The alarm clock rings and Jared buries himself deeper under the covers. His t-shirt is drenched with sweat and he shivers a little. Damn, he could have done without the flu this winter. He really hoped that he would be able to escape getting sick. All of his family already had it weeks ago, just Jared had been untroubled by it.

But now it looks like it has hit him nonetheless. His bones are hurting and he feels like shit.

A hand comes to lie on his back and he feels Jensen snuggling closer. He moans lightly, when his husband presses a kiss to his neck.

“Jay?” Jensen asks. “You’re completely drenched.”
“I think I’m getting the flu,” he murmurs. “I feel like shit.”

“Oh no, baby. I thought you’d be safe by now.”

“Yeah, me too.”

Jensen pushes a sweaty strand of hair out of Jared’s face. “How about you staying in bed today? I can get you some soup and orange juice. I’m sure you’ll feel better in a couple of days.”

“Thanks, but I have to go into the office today. Dalton News won’t publish itself alone.”

Jensen rolls his eyes. “You’re sick, Jay. I’m sure Maddie can handle the office for a day or two.”

“Maddie just had her baby.”

“She’s bringing Calleigh with her on most days anyway, why not today?”

Jared shakes his head. “No, I’m okay. I can manage a few hours at the office.”

He heaves himself out of bed and massages his temples, where a headache is making itself known. He pads into the bathroom and the face that greets him in the mirror is pale and with dark shadows beneath his eyes.

“Jay…”

Jensen’s leaning against the door frame, watching him with concerned eyes.

“I’m okay, Jen. It’s just the flu.”

“Yes, and because it is, you should be staying home.”

“Like you stayed home when you had it before Christmas?”

Jensen had been adamant on going to work when he was sick with the flu, even though he had a fever and a cough from hell.

Jensen rolls his eyes. “I’m the Sheriff.”

Jared snorts. “Right and Chad couldn’t have handled the station without you for a day or two?”

“Damn,” Jensen sighs. “Fine, go to work, but come home early, please.”

“I will, promise.”

Jensen kisses his shoulder gently. “I love you.”

Then he steps into the shower, while Jared starts brushing his teeth. His gums start bleeding almost as soon as he starts brushing and he sighs. They’ve been bleeding for a couple of days now. So, he probably won’t be able to push the visit to the dentist any longer. He doesn’t want to have to be treated for periodontitis.

As soon as Jensen’s finished showering, Jared steps into the stall, waiting for the warm water to make him feel a little more alive.

He catches the twins running across the hallway, when he finally steps out of the bedroom thirty minutes later.
“Now, now. What did we say about running?”

Ty rolls his eyes. “Not to do it.”

“That’s right and don’t roll your eyes at me, young man,” Jared says. “Get your butts downstairs. I’m sure your papa has your cereal ready for you.”

The boys nod and then rush down the stairs. Jared sighs. They really need to have another talk about running down the stairs.

The door to the bathroom the kids use opens and Sophie-Ellie steps out. She’s a little pale and Jared cringes in sympathy.

“Morning sickness?”

She nods. “Yeah. How did you do it five times?”

Jared smiles a little and winks. “You’ll get used to it.”


“I must have caught the flu. But I’m okay. It’ll go away in a couple of days.”

Sophie-Ellie smiles in sympathy. “That’s bad. Don’t infect me, please. I don’t wanna be sick now.”

“I won’t kiss you then,” he says. “You thought a little about what you wanna do?”

She shrugs. “I feel like I don’t think about anything else, but then my head’s a mess and I can’t seem to really concentrate on anything.”

“Honey…”

“What if I have the baby? I’m only eighteen. I wanna go to art school in the summer. But I can’t really wrap my head around an abortion either.”

“Well, you can always decide to give it up for adoption.” Just saying that twists Jared’s heart painfully. He can’t imagine his grandkid growing up without them ever knowing him or her.

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. “I don’t think I can do that.” She wipes a hand over her face. “I really don’t know what to do, Dad.”

Jared wants to wrap her into a hug, but she really doesn’t need the flu right now, so he just squeezes her hand. “I wish I could take the decision from you. Whatever you decide, we’re here for you.”

She smiles. “Thanks. I appreciate that.”

“Jared, Sophie-Ellie, breakfast is getting cold.” Jensen’s voice echoes through the house and Jared follows his daughter down the stairs.
Breakfast goes well. Sophie-Ellie is even able to get two slices of toast down without feeling the need to throw up again. She counts it as a win.

Annie’s giving her concerned looks, when she only eats dry toast, but Sophie-Ellie gives her sister a smile and Annie seems to relax. Her black eye is slowly fading, but honestly, Sophie-Ellie doesn’t buy that Annie got in a fight with some girl at a bar. It’s just not like Annie to just get into fights like that.

Sophie-Ellie grabs her bag and tells her parents and her siblings goodbye. When she walks out the door, Ben’s leaning against the side of his car that’s parked at the shoulder of the street.

“What are you doing here?” she asks genuinely surprised.

He grins and man, she missed that grin. “Thought you might need a ride.”

Sophie-Ellie smiles and shakes her head disbelievingly. They haven’t talked in three years and then all it takes for them to practically go back to the way they were is her getting pregnant.

“Well,” he prompts and she laughs, rushing towards him.

“Okay then.”

Ben holds the passenger door open for her and then gets into the car himself. They drive in silence and it takes Sophie-Ellie a second to realize that they aren’t going in the direction of the school.

“Where are you going?”

Ben shrugs. “I thought you might want to take the day off. We can go to school, though. But I kinda think that you can’t concentrate on anything that’s going on in class anyway. I asked Michelle to take notes for you.”

Sophie-Ellie looks at Ben and she feels this warm feeling she always felt when they were together before. “But…”

“You trust me?”

“Yes,” she nods and she does, no matter that they haven’t talked in the last three years. She still trusts him.

“Good.”

Ben takes them to the World Aquarium and Sophie-Ellie huffs out an amused laugh. It’s been her favorite place since Aunt Sophia took them there one day when they were twelve. She hasn’t been here in ages, none of her friends really into stuff like this. But Ben didn’t forget and it makes this visit something special.

“You didn’t forget.”

“How could I? We had so much fun that day.” Ben smiles. “C’mon, let’s have some fun.”

They spend the morning exploring Borneo and Orinoco, stopping and awing at animals and plants. When they get to the shark tunnel, Sophie-Ellie looks up, seeing sharks and skates swimming above her. It feels like she’s a part of the sea and she smiles.

Ben stops next to her. “You okay?”
She nods. “Yeah, I just... I really want my kid to see this.”

“You do?” “Is that stupid?” she asks, all of a sudden feeling a little unsure.

Ben smiles. “No, I think it’s a great idea.”

“Thank you,” Sophie-Ellie says and puts her arms around his neck. “Thanks for bringing me here.”

He hugs her tight and she closes her eyes, feeling happy for the first time in a while now. “C’mon, there’s more to see,” Ben says, after a second.

They visit South Africa and Mundo Maya and when they walk outside again it’s afternoon. Ben buys them an ice cream, even though it’s pretty cold outside, but it’s sunny and Sophie-Ellie enjoys the cookie dough ice cream. It’s still her favorite and Ben still knows that.

“What did your friends say when you told them that you’d rather spend the day with a pregnant girl at the aquarium than practice basketball?” she asks, suddenly curious if Ben told his friends what he had planned for today.

Ben shrugs. “Didn’t really tell them. Figured it was none of their business.”

“They’re your friends, Ben. I don’t want to be what comes between you and them.”

He shakes his head. “No, you’re my friend, my best friend. I’m sorry I forgot that for a while. I was a jerk. I... I thought I could have both, y’know, you and the basketball team. When I realized that I couldn’t it was already too late.”

“Why didn’t you ever say anything to me?” Sophie-Ellie asks curiously.

“I really don’t know,” Ben says and smiles a little. “Can I claim temporary teenage stupidity?”

Sophie-Ellie laughs. “That’s a good reason.”

“You know what I wanted to ask you?” She raises her eyebrows and Ben continues, “What’s with all the black? I mean, you’re a goth now?”

She shrugs. “I like black and it feels right to wear it. Pretty much summed up how I felt those last few years.”

“Sorry.”

She chuckles. “It isn’t just you. I mean, I missed you, yeah. But... honestly, I didn’t know how I was feeling most of the time.”

“And now?”

“Not sure, my head’s still a mess. But slowly things seem to be falling into place.”

“Yeah? What things?”

“Deciding to have a baby at eighteen for one. This last week I’ve been constantly thinking and over-thinking and thinking again. My thoughts were all a scrambled mess and then you come along and all it takes is one visit to the aquarium to straighten them out a little.”

Ben nods. “So, you’re sure you want to have the baby?”
Sophie-Ellie laughs softly. “No way, but I’m sure that I don’t want an abortion. It may be the right decision for other girls but I don’t feel like it is for me. Doesn’t mean that the thought of having a baby doesn’t scare me.”

He nudges her shoulder with his and winks, “Well, I’ll be there for whatever you need.”

A grin spreads across her face. “Good.” She lays her head on his shoulder and eats the last bites of her ice cream.

Yeah, it is a happy day.

When the house is empty for the morning, Annie fires up her laptop. She has a couple of emails. One from the national science center, saying that they’d love to get to know her and interview her for the job next week, and one from Robert. She sighs and opens it.

Just please, come back, Annie. I’m sorry I hit you. I miss you. We can figure it out. I promise it won’t ever happen again. Please just come back to me. I love you.

She snorts. Right, now he loves her. Now, after he hit her and gave her a black eye and a split lip. She shakes her head and shortly writes back that she isn’t coming back and that she has a job here now and that he should just forget about her.

Closing the laptop, she lets her head fall back against the couch. She’s glad to be home. She missed being here, even though she knows it was her own fault. Everything seemed to be more important than going home. However, being here now nothing seems as important as being home again. She’s a little surprised to find that priorities can shift in a blink of an eye. Now she’s home and she isn’t leaving.

Her dad left her a grocery list and she makes her way to the mall. It’s still pretty early and the mall is practically empty. She strolls through the shops, just stopping here and there, taking a look at clothes and accessories. It must be months if not years since she took the time to go shopping like this. It’s nice to not be in a rush.

She meets a few familiar faces and exchanges a few kind words with Dalton’s residents, before she goes into the Safeway and buys whatever her dad put on the list. She also buys herself and Jesse a sandwich and then makes her way to the garage.

Lizzie’s in the office and Annie knocks carefully. She hasn’t seen her or Maddie since she got to Dalton; everything’s been too chaotic and stressful. Besides, she didn’t want to answer more questions about the black eye and split lip. She’s sure though that the twins know that she’s back and she really wants to see them too.

Over the years, the contact had gotten more and more sporadic and she misses her former best friends. They’d gotten along so well in high school and even during the first couple of years of college, but then Annie’s work had taken over hand and Robert had been there too. Now, she really regrets giving him so much of her little free time.
“C’min.” Annie walks in and smiles, when Lizzie’s eyes grow wide. “Oh my god, it’s really you. I didn’t want to believe Jesse when he told me that you moved back here.”

Lizzie pulls her into a tight hug and Annie laughs. “It’s really me. So, what can I say, I really missed home and I really missed you. San Francisco was really stressful.”

“Well, you’re here now. That’s all that’s important. Now, tell me everything.”

Annie grins. “Let me just get the sandwich to Jesse, okay?”

“Bringing Jesse a sandwich, huh?” Lizzie asks with a wink. “I thought you weren’t a thing anymore.”

Annie rolls her eyes. “We’re still friends.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

The door that leads from the garage to the office opens and Jesse steps over the threshold. “What’s the commotion?” When he sees Annie, he smiles. “Oh hey, you bringing me lunch?”

Lizzie snorts and Annie shakes her head in amusement. “Yes, here.” She hands over the sandwich.

“But that’s not one of yours,” Jesse moans.

“I bought it at the grocery store. I’m sure you can deal.”

“Yours are better.”

Annie smiles. “Thanks for the compliment, maybe tomorrow, okay?”

Jesse pouts, but nods. “Okay. I have to get back to that Chevy over there. Lizzie, try not to talk all afternoon. There’re emails that need sending out.”

“Yes, boss. I got it.”

Jesse rolls his eyes and Annie’s stomach drops a little at the motion. She really missed her friends. The door closes again.

“So, not a couple anymore, huh? Well, there’s still a lot of sexual tension between you two, that’s for sure,” Lizzie states.

“Yeah, sure,” Annie says and shakes her head. “It’s been over for a long while.”

Lizzie cocks her head. “Doesn’t mean it has to stay that way. I mean, we all know that you’re Jesse’s dream girl and you know, if you ask me, you’re not completely over him, either.”

“But I’m not asking you.”

“No,” Lizzie chuckles. “Well, if you don’t wanna talk about Jesse, how about you tell me about that fading black eye of yours.”

Annie groans. “There’s nothing to tell, really. The other girl looks worse. I promise.”

Lizzie looks at her for a long time before she nods. “Okay. If you ever wanna talk about it, you know where to find me.”
Annie forces a smile. “Thanks.” Her black eye is the last thing she ever wants to talk about ever again.

They spend the whole lunch hour talking, about their lives, their past, and the present. Lizzie shows her a pic of Calleigh, Maddie’s daughter, and Annie knows that she can’t wait to meet with Maddie and see the little girl in person. She’s the spitting image of her mother.

“Man, lunch hour is already up,” Lizzie says. “But we really should meet up later. I’m sure Maddie will be thrilled to see you again and you have to meet Callie, she’s such a cutie.”

Annie nods. “Yeah, I’d love to meet up later.”

“Well,” Lizzie scribbles something down on a piece of paper, “how about you come over for dinner, around 6 pm. I’ll tell Maddie that she should come over too.”

“Awesome, I’ll see you tonight then.”

Annie walks into the garage and finds Jesse buried beneath a hood, where else. Two other guys are working on another car and they give her an approving look when she walks in. She chuckles and Jesse turns around.

“Oh hey, you hold up my assistant long enough?” he asks, but Annie knows he’s just joking.

“I guess so; I’ll go over and have dinner with her tonight, though.”

“Hey boss, don’t you wanna introduce us?” one of the mechanics asks and Jesse rolls his eyes.

“Not really, don’t you have some work to do?”

“That’s really not nice, Jesse,” Annie says, amused by the friendly banter. “Hi, I’m Annie.”

“Hi. Jacob, but you can call me Jake,” the first guy says.

“I’m Bob. It’s nice to meet you.”

They wipe their hands on their rags and then hold them out for Annie shake. She greets them properly and smiles.

“Nice to meet you too.”

“So how do you know Jesse?” Jake asks.

Annie grins and Jesse groans. “I’m the sheriff’s daughter.”

“Oh that Annie,” Bob says knowingly. “Y’know, our boss here has been talking about you for ages.”

Annie grins smugly and looks at Jesse. “You have, huh? I hope only good things.”

“He’s been singing your praises,” Jake says.

“Can’t you two shut up?” Jesse interrupts. “Go back to the Mustang, Mr. Bernstein will be here this afternoon to take her home.”

Jake and Bob both cackle loudly but go back to the car. Jesse rubs his hand over his neck and he seems a little embarrassed.
“So you’ve sung my praises, huh?”

“Well, you were at Stanford graduating in Astrophysics, that’s pretty impressive.”

Annie smiles, feeling her heart beat a little faster. She really doesn’t know what to say to that, so she just says, “I’ll see you later at home, okay?”

Jesse nods. “Yeah, okay.”

Jensen just came back from the scene of a small car accident, when his cell phone rings. He looks at the display and smiles when he sees Jared’s face on the display.

“Hey baby, what’s up?”

“Jensen? This is Maddie.” She sounds really out of breath.

“Maddie? What are you doing with Jared’s phone?”

“He just collapsed, Jen. At the office. I’ve called an ambulance, and they’re on their way.”

Jensen’s heart stops for a second. Jared collapsed. The flu. Dammit, Jensen told him to stay home and rest, and now this happened.

“I’m on my way, Maddie. I’ll be right there.”

He disconnects the call and rushes out of his office. Chad looks at him with raised eyebrows.

“Jared collapsed. He has the flu and I told him to stay home but he didn’t wanna listen. I’m on my way over to the newspaper. Keep an eye on everything, okay? I’ll call you.”

“Sure thing, tell Jared to get better soon.”

“I will.”

He rushes across the street and up the stairs of Dalton News. Jared’s on a chair and he’s at least conscious again.

“Baby, what’re you doing? Scaring me like that.”

Jared smiles tiredly. “I’m sorry. I told Maddie not to call you, but she said that you’d kick her ass if you found out that something happened to me and she didn’t tell you. But I’m fine, Jen. I don’t need an ambulance.”

Jensen rolls his eyes fondly. “Jay, let them check you out, okay? You collapsed, that’s not something that just happens. Maybe the flu is more serious than we thought.”

“You going with me?” Jared asks softly and Jensen smiles.

“Of course I am. Just let me call Jesse, so that he knows we won’t be home ‘til later today. Maybe he
or Annie can pick up Brian and Lily from daycare.”

Jared nods. “Okay.”

Jensen quickly calls Jesse and tells him that he’s taking Jared to the hospital and that no, it’s nothing to worry about right now. When he disconnects the call, the paramedics are just walking in. They check Jared over and then carry him downstairs to the ambulance, with heavy protest from Jared.

“Just let them do their job, Jay.”

“I can walk, Jensen. I’m not an invalid.”

“It’s policy, Sir,” one of the paramedics says and Jared only grumbles under his breath from then on.

The ambulance takes them to the hospital and half an hour later, Dr. Kripke is walking into the examination room.

“Now, who do we have here? Sheriff, Jared. What can I do for you today?”

Jensen smiles. “Jared has the flu and he collapsed at work. That’s why his assistant called the ambulance.”

Kripke frowns. “That doesn’t sound good. How long have you been feeling badly?”

Jared shrugs. “It really started tonight. I guess I have been feeling a little off for a couple of days now. But I knew it was just the flu, so…”

Kripke nods and then examines Jared, his throat and lymph nodes; he listens to Jared’s breath and checks his blood pressure.

“Okay, I’m just wanna make sure that it’s really just the flu, so we’ll take some blood and check that everything’s okay.”

“But what else could it be?” Jensen asks.

“Sheriff this is just a precaution,” Kripke says. “Right now I can’t say that this is anything but the flu, but Jared collapsed so I just want to make sure we rule everything else out.”

Jared sighs. “Fine, let’s just do it.”

Kripke nods and takes a phial of Jared’s blood. “It’ll take a day or two for the results to come back. My assistant will call you and you can make another appointment so that we can discuss the results. I think if you take it easy for a day or two, I can let you go home. But rest, Jared. This is important.”

“Okay,” Jared says slowly. “I will. I promise.”

“I’ll make sure he rests, Doc.”

“Good. So I guess I can let you go home now. See you in a couple of days.”

Ten minutes later they’re sitting in a cab that’s taking them home. Jared threads his fingers through Jensen’s.

“Stop worrying. It’s just the flu.”

Jensen looks over at him and smiles. “I know. I just worry when you’re not well.” He pushes a
strands of hair back behind Jared’s ear. “Just love you so much.”
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpected moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“The thing about family disasters is that you never have to wait long before the next one puts the previous one into perspective.” ~Robert Brault

Jared blinks open his eyes when he feels the blanket being tucked around his chest a little tighter. He smiles when he sees Lily leaning over him and trying to push the blanket between him and the back of the couch with her short arms.

“Hey, baby girl.”

“Shh,” she says seriously. “Papa said you need to rest.”

Jared chuckles and runs his hand over her hair. “It’s just the flu. I’m gonna be up and about in no time.”

“I’m sorry you’re sick, Daddy.”

She’s looking at him with wide, blown green eyes that look so much like Jensen’s and Jared chuckles a little. “It’s okay, sweetie. Everyone gets sick. Remember when you were sick with the flu before Christmas? It’s nobody’s fault.”

Lily nods slowly. “But I want you to not be sick.”

“I know,” Jared says and smiles softly. “You wanna stay and keep me company? That would make daddy feel better real soon.”

“Okay,” Lily says after a moment of hesitation. She probably thought about the fact that Jensen had told her that Jared needed his rest.

“You want me to read to you?”

“Alice in Wonderland?” Lily asks and her eyes sparkle. She loves that story, ever since she’d heard it
for the first time when Donna read it to her last summer. She even got the book for Christmas from Donna and JD.

“Whatever you want, princess.”

Jared throws back the blanket to make room for her, while Lily goes off to get the book. Then she settles next to him, snuggling against his side.

“You ready?” She nods eagerly and Jared grins, before starting to read. “Alice was to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank…”

Jared reads and when he gets to the rabbit saying ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!’ Lily looks up at him and says, “He’s always late, Daddy. He should have gotten up earlier if he’s always late.” She always says that with such earnestness, that each time Jared has to laugh softly.

“He really should have,” he agrees and goes on, reading about Alice falling down the rabbit hole and stepping into a world full of magic.

“Daddy?”

“What, sweetheart?”

“Maybe one day we can all go where Alice went. It’ll be funny to meet the cat.”

Jared chuckles and presses a kiss to his daughter’s head. “That it’d be.”

She looks up at him. “Maybe we can go when you’re feeling better.”

“First we’d have to find a rabbit hole that’s big enough for your dad to fit through.”

Jared looks up and sees Jensen standing at the door, still dressed in his uniform. He may be almost fifty but he hasn’t lost an inch of attraction for Jared, if anything he’s gotten more attractive over the years.

“Papa!”

Lily climbs off the couch and rushes over to Jensen, who picks her up and swings her around.

“Hello there, pretty lady. How was your day?”

“Brian taught me a new song, Papa.”

“He did? You wanna sing it to me?”

She nods quickly. “I’m being swallowed by a boa constrictor, and I don’t like it very much. Oh no he swallowed my toe, oh me he swallowed my knee, oh fiddle he’s up to my middle, oh heck he swallowed my neck, oh dread, he’s up to my,” she makes first a slurping sound and then gulps, before she bursts into giggles. “Uncle Chad taught it to him.”

Jared shakes his head. It really shouldn’t be surprising that Chad would teach his kid such a silly song.

Jensen laughs. “He did, huh? It’s very funny.”

Lily nods. “Very funny.”
“So why don’t we go and have a look at what we’ll have for dinner, baby girl? What do you want for dinner?”

“Pizza!” she yells and Jared snorts.

“You always want pizza.”

“I loooove pizza,” she says and nods seriously.

Jensen grins and throws a kiss in Jared’s direction, before taking off to the kitchen with Lily on his hip, saying, “Well, we’ll have a look if there’s pizza. But if we don’t have some, you’ll have to eat something else.”

“But we can order it, Papa.”

That’s the last thing Jared hears, before the kitchen door closes behind them. He smiles and lies back on the pillow. He’s still feeling shitty and he’s sure he’s got a fever and his bones are hurting like nothing else. He remembers the feeling from when he had his growth spurt at fifteen.

He closes his eyes, just wanting to rest for a couple of minutes, but when he wakes again, it’s dark outside. There are soft noises coming from the kitchen and light shines through the crack at the bottom. He heaves himself up and yawns. The clock of their blue-ray player is telling him that it’s almost 8pm. He’s slept for three hours and still feels bone-tired.

Lumbering into the kitchen, he finds Jensen and Jesse sitting at the kitchen island, both having root beer.

“Hey.”

Jensen walks around to him and pushes some strands of hair out of his face. “You don’t look good at all. You want some dinner. Annie made some noodle casserole thing that’s really tasty.”

Jesse nods. “San Francisco did wonders for her cooking.”

Jared laughs softly. “Okay, I’ll have a little.” He sits down next to Jesse and tries to ignore the concerned look Jesse’s throwing at him. “You should have woken me up.”

“Naw, you needed to rest,” Jensen says and presses a gentle kiss to his temple. “Here, eat.”

Jared takes a bite from the noodles-sauce-cheese-mix on his plate and it is yummy. It makes him feel a little less weak and he demands seconds after he finishes off his plate. Jensen smiles at him and puts another plate in front of him.

“Dr. Kripke’s office called and confirmed the appointment for tomorrow afternoon,” Jensen says after a second. “The results will be in at noon tomorrow.”

Jared nods. “Okay, fine. You coming with me?”

Jensen rolls his eyes fondly. “Of course, Silly.”

Jared smiles. “Good. Thanks. I think I’ll head up to bed now. I’m still really tired.”

“Of course,” Jensen says and kisses his cheek. “I’ll be up in a little while. Love you.”

“Love you too.”
Jared tries to ignore the concerned looks both Jensen and Jesse shoot him, while he makes his way upstairs.

It’s just the flu. What else could it be?

When Sophie-Ellie wakes, the first thing she notices is that she isn’t feeling the need to puke her guts out. There’s a faint feeling of nausea, but nothing that’ll cause the need to get to a toilet bowl right away.

She counts it as a win.

Once in the bathroom she turns on the shower, waiting for the water to get hot. She gets rid of her clothes and her eyes catch her reflection in the mirror. Her skin is white. Maybe PJ is right and she needs to go out into the sun some more. She remembers times when her skin was tanned and she’d rather spend a day out in the sun than sitting at home drawing or reading.

Her eyes look further down and stop at her belly. It’s still flat, but she thinks she can see a little bump if she concentrates. It’s nothing others will notice, but it makes the idea of being pregnant so much more real.

Ben had taken her out and she had meant what she had said when they were at the aquarium. She wants her kid to see this. Running her finger tips over the soft skin of her lower belly, she sighs. Abortion is not an option for her, but actually deciding to have the baby is scaring the living hell out of her.

What if she’s not a good mom? What if her kid will turn out bad, just because she’s still a kid herself? What if something goes wrong?

There are so many questions and no answers, at least none she can think of right now.

This is crazy. She’s crazy thinking that she’ll be fit to raise a baby in nine months. But she can’t terminate the pregnancy. She’s always supported girls or women’s choices to abort, but standing here she just knows this isn’t the right option for her.

When she gets downstairs, the kitchen is filled with the smell of coffee and bacon. It turns her stomach upside down and she swallows quickly to keep down the bile. PJ is standing at the kitchen counter, stirring the scrambled eggs in the pan. It’s one of the few things he knows how to make, this and his apple pie.

The twins are sitting at one end of the kitchen island, keeping their heads low and speaking in quiet voices, while Lily munches on the Lucky Charms in her bowl.


Sophie-Ellie huffs. “I was feeling good, until I stepped into the kitchen. The smell is making me nauseous.”

PJ cringes in what seems like sympathy. “Sorry. You want OJ or something?”
She shakes her head. “Naw, thanks. I need to get out or I’ll gonna lose whatever I have left of last night’s dinner.” She presses a kiss to her father’s cheek. “I’ll see you tonight. Tell dad I love him and hope he’s feeling better.” There’s a horn and PJ raises his eyebrows in surprise. Sophie-Ellie smiles shyly. “That’s Ben.”

Her father looks surprised, but there’s a pleased smile on his face. “Well then, you don’t want to keep him waiting. Have fun at school, sweetie.”

She kisses her sister and ruffles the twins’ hair, who protest vehemently, before rushing out the front door. Ben is leaning against the side of his car, just like two days ago and Sophie-Ellie gives him a little wave. He grins.

“So where are you taking me today?”

He snorts. “I think I spoiled you with taking you to the aquarium. But unlike yesterday, this is only a ride to school.” She fakes a pout and Ben laughs. “C’mon, you wanna graduate in May, don’t you?”

Sophie-Ellie sighs. “I guess.”

“You okay?” Ben asks, when he seems to notice the seriousness in her voice.

She shrugs. “This is crazy. I’m crazy. I’m not even eighteen. I’m not a mom. I can’t give the baby anything.”

“You can give it your love,” Ben says softly.

“Maybe I should give it up for adoption,” she says quietly. “There’re people out there that can give the baby what it’ll need.”

Ben stops at a red light and Sophie-Ellie can feel his eyes on her, she keeps looking out front, though. “Well, if that’s what you want, then that’s what you should do. I told you that I’d support you however you decide. But let me tell you that I think that you’d be a great mom.”

“Yeah?” Sophie-Ellie asks challenging. “You think so? Then look at me, Ben. I’m some emo teenage girl who still doesn’t know who she really is or what she’s doing. I was stupid thinking I could raise this baby.”

“You think your dad was stupid when he decided to have Annie?” Ben asks and he sounds so damn serious.

“What? No,” she says defiantly.

“Well, he was only twenty and in college. I just thought…”

“He had my Papa,” Sophie-Ellie interrupts. “And Grandma and Pop.”

Ben accelerates when the light turns green. “But you have your parents too and your siblings and your friends. You have me.”

That makes her look over. “Ben…”

He shakes his head. “Forget it. Like I said I’ll support you no matter what, so if you wanna give it up for adoption, I’ll have your back.”

Sophie-Ellie smiles. “Thanks. I just, I never thought… I’d like to at least look into it.”
“It’s your decision and you have every right to look into every option,” Ben says. “If you want, we can google some things after school.”

“Yeah, I’d like that.”

When they get to school, Michelle is waiting outside of school and Aaron is standing next to her. They’re deep in conversation and it doesn’t look like they agree on whatever they’re talking about. Ben walks up with Sophie-Ellie and Aaron seems surprised when he sees him there.

It’s the first time, since Sophie-Ellie and her fathers were at Aaron’s house to tell him and his mom about the pregnancy, that they’ve been close enough to talk. Aaron had made it very clear that he’d been avoiding her for last few days.

“Can I talk to you?” Aaron asks and Sophie-Ellie gives both, Michelle and Ben, a small smile indicating that it’s okay and they can go inside.

“Okay.” They walk to the side a little and for the first time Sophie-Ellie sees Aaron speechless. “So, talk.” There’s a little spark inside her heart that hopes that he’s changed his mind, that he’ll tell her that he’ll be there for her, for the baby.

“Have you thought about an abortion?” he asks and her hope crashes. “You know I can give you money, right? If that’s an issue.”

She snorts and shakes her head. “Money is not the issue. Your attitude might be, though.” She sighs. “Just so you know, I’ve decided to have the baby.”

Aaron looks a little taken aback. “But what about your future? What about art school?”

Sophie-Ellie shrugs. “I don’t know, okay? What I know is that I’ll have this baby. Maybe I’ll decide to give it up for adoption, maybe I’ll decide to keep it.” She shakes her head. “But you made it very clear that you don’t care about that.”

She turns around and walks away, being glad that Ben and Michelle are waiting close by. They both look at her with concerned looks on their faces.

“You okay?” Michelle asks and Sophie-Ellie gives her a shaky smile.

“Yeah.”

Michelle smiles back. “I told him to just man up and take responsibility for the baby. But he didn’t wanna listen.”

“It’s okay. I hope…” she looks back to where Aaron is standing with Jonah, laughing about something, “well, it doesn’t really matter. He’ll never take responsibility. Let’s go to class.”

When Annie gets to Jim’s, Maddie is already sitting at a table, with Callie bouncing on her legs. They’d agreed to meet for breakfast two days ago when they had dinner at Lizzie’s place.
“Hey, you two,” Annie greets and is rewarded with a blinding smile from Callie.

“Hey.” Maddie smiles. “It’s so awesome to have you back in Dalton. I’ve missed breakfasts with one of my best friends.”

Annie grins. “I’ve missed that too. In San Francisco, I was already in class when others had just gotten up, so not too many joint breakfasts there.”

“You studied a lot, huh?” Maddie asks.

“Pretty much,” Annie agrees. “It was what I wanted.”

“And now?” Maddie asks. “I mean, there’s a reason you’re back now, right?”

Annie looks down at her napkin. She really doesn’t want to talk about the reasons for coming back. Kristen, their waitress, saves her when she comes over with coffee and then takes their orders.

“So, how’s being a mom treating you?” Annie asks, to change the subject.

Maddie nods and smiles. She probably is aware that Annie’s avoiding the subject of her moving back, though. “Great. I’ve never thought it could feel like this, but it’s wonderful, just looking at Callie, knowing that she’s mine, that Jonathan and I made her.”

“You should talk to Sophie-Ellie,” Annie says. “She’s really confused right now. I don’t want her to make a mistake and regret it later.”

Maddie nods. “I understand that, but she’s the only one who can really decide if she wants the baby or not. And even if she has the baby, she can still give it up for adoption. But none of us can make that decision for her.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right. I just… I hate to see her like this. I wish I could just tell her what the right thing to do is.”

“I get that. But there’s just not one right thing here. She has options and she’s the only one who can decide what option’s best for her.”

Annie nods. “Yeah well, I promised to be there for her no matter what she decides. But I guess I’d have a hard time accepting it if she decided to abort or give the baby away.”

“If she really does that,” Maddie says, “You’ll need to accept her decision.”

“I know and I’m glad I’m here. I’d hate to still be in San Francisco and for her to go through this without her big sister’s support.”

Maddie smiles. “I’m sure she’s glad you’re here too. We’ve all missed you lots. I know that Jared and Jensen have been to visit you a couple of times, but I’m sure they still missed you at home.”

Annie sighs. “Yeah… I’m glad to be home, but I think I’ll need to look for a place sometime soon.”

“Yeah, I get it. It’s nice to have your parents around you for a couple of weeks, but then it can get pretty exhausting, especially when you’ve lived without them for such a long time already.”

Laughing, Annie agrees, “You’re so right.”

“I’m happy to help, if you need it,” Maddie says and winks. “I think I heard Lizzie talking about an apartment for rent on her block last week. If that’s not for you, you could always ask Jesse if you
could move in with him.”

Annie almost spits out the coffee she’s just took a sip off. “What? Why would I ask my ex-boyfriend, who lives above my parents’ garage at that, if I could move in with him?”

Maddie shrugs, putting a pacifier into Callie’s mouth, because she’s getting a little fussy. “Well, you could always ask him to move out of the garage apartment and move in with you somewhere else.”

Annie shakes her head. “Again why would I do that?”

“Because you and Jesse are meant to be,” Maddie states. “You can’t tell me that you’re completely over him. I see the glint in your eyes when you talk about him.”

“Maddie,” Annie sighs. “It’s over, has been for a long time. We broke up for a reason.”

“Yes, the reason being that you were in San Francisco and he has his business here. But that reason is invalid now, isn’t it? You’re back and he’s still here.”

“Stop it, okay? Even if there were still more than friendship between us, which there isn’t, I wouldn’t act on it. I’ve only just gotten out of a relationship, I really don’t need to jump into another one.”

Maddie looks at her for a long while. “It was pretty bad, huh?”

“Maddie…”

“You don’t have to say anything,” Maddie rushes to say. “Just know that I’m here if you ever wanna talk about it.”

Resting her head in her hands, Annie sighs. “Why does everybody assume that I need to talk about my relationship?”

“Because we’ve seen the black eye and split lip,” Maddie says softly. “And we all know how you look when you lie. You haven’t gotten any better at that.” Annie jerks her head up and just stares at her friend. “Like I said, you don’t have to talk about it now, just know that we love you and are here for you.”

Annie pushes down the tears she feels building behind her eyes. She never thought that her friends could just see through her like that. “Thanks,” she whispers and she means it.

“You’re welcome. Now, let’s finish our breakfast and then we’ll take Callie for a walk. We need our daily dose of fresh air.”

Annie smiles gratefully at Maddie for giving her space and letting her decide if she wants to talk and when.

After her breakfast with Maddie and a very refreshing walk through town with her and Callie, Annie had first gotten Lily from daycare and then the twins from school. Her dad’s on the couch again when they get home. If possible he looks even worse than yesterday. His skin is gray and it’s
glistening with a layer of sweat.

“Hey Dad. How’re you feeling?”

Her dad looks up and gives her a weak smile. “I think I’m getting there. How was your morning?”

“Fine. I had breakfast with Maddie and Callie and then we went for a walk through town, before I got the rug rats from daycare and school.”

“Sounds nice.” The twins trudge into the room, followed by a bouncing Lily. “Hey kiddos, how was your day?”

The twins complain about having too much math homework and that English class sucks, while Lily climbs up on the couch with Jared and tells him about the picture she painted and the castle she built with Brian.

Annie smiles and then goes into the kitchen to make some lunch for her younger brothers and sister. The afternoon goes by fairly quickly, with Annie helping the twins with their math homework and practicing for their English test within the next week.

It’s late afternoon, Jensen and her dad have just left for the doctor’s appointment and Jesse is supposed to be home in a couple of minutes, when there’s a knock on the front door. Annie goes to answer it and stops dead in her tracks when she sees Robert standing on the porch.

“What are you doing here?”

“Did you miss me, babe?”

Annie shakes her head disbelievingly. “Don’t call me that. Again, what the hell are you doing here?” She steps out onto the porch and pulls the front door shut behind her, her siblings don’t need to hear this.

“I’ve missed you. I wrote you an email, asking you to come home. When you said you’re staying here, I thought I’d come and get you.”

“That’s unbelievable,” Annie huffs. “You can’t be serious. What part ‘I’m staying here, I have a job’ didn’t you understand?”

Robert rolls his eyes. “C’mon, you don’t really wanna be here. You don’t belong here. You’re better than this. Those hicks will never see how special you are.”

“Special enough for you to hit me,” Annie hisses.

“Oh c’mon, I thought that was forgiven and forgotten by now. It was two little slaps. You can just get over it.”

“And you can just leave. I’m staying here and I don’t wanna see you ever again,” Annie says calmly. “Now, get off this property.”

Robert shakes his head. “Okay, you’ve acted like a prima donna long enough. Now, get your things and we’ll fly home.”

“What? No! I’m not going anywhere with you.” She wants to turn around and go back inside, when she feels fingers wrap tightly around her forearm. “Let go of me.”

“You will come back home with me, or you’ll regret it,” Robert says. “I’ve been very patient with
you, but I’m slowly running out.”


“I’d do as the lady says.” It’s Jesse’s voice that echoes through the air and Annie lets out a relieved breath. He’ll make sure that Robert leaves, Annie is sure.

“Take your hands off right now, or we’ll see how your face looks behind bars for the night.”

Jesse can’t believe what he’s witnessing right now. He can see that Annie’s just trying to get control of the situation, but the guy will never surrender it to her, even if he has to use violence.

The guy releases Annie very slowly and turns around. “And who are you? Her watchdog?”

“Nope, but her father is the sheriff, so I’d be very careful if I were you. I don’t think he’d appreciate how you’ve been treating his daughter.”

It takes all of Jesse’s strength to not jump the guy and pull him away from Annie. He’s pretty sure that this is Annie’s ex-boyfriend, the one that’s responsible for Annie’s black eye and split lip. Jesse doesn’t need more evidence than what he’s seeing right now.

The guy, Jesse believes that his name’s Robert, snorts. “He can’t arrest me for touching her. I’ve done nothing and I’d be out of there in the blink of an eye.”

“Well, let’s keep it that way,” Jesse says, taking the porch steps two at a time and coming to a halt next to Robert. “I believe Annie asked you to go. Now go.”

Robert steps into Jesse’s space and they’re the same height, but Robert is broader. Jesse is still pretty sure that he could kick the guy’s ass. He probably hasn’t been in a real fight in all his life.

“And what if I don’t?”

“Then we’ll get you arrested for trespassing,” Annie says. “I don’t want you here. Now leave. Fly back to San Francisco.”

“I’ll stay at the hotel in town for a couple of days,” Robert says. “You can reach me there and apologize for your behavior. Maybe I’ll be in the mood to take you back.”

Jesse huffs out a humorless laugh. “You don’t get it, do you? She doesn’t want you here. Just get your ass back to Cali and leave her alone. Or I’ll show you that I can be not so polite.”

“You threatening me?” Robert asks, pushing a little more into Jesse’s space.

“You bet. Now, get lost. I don’t wanna see you close to this property or to its inhabitants ever again. Do I make myself clear?”

“Jesse…” Annie says, but he holds up his hand to stop her.
“Oh my, you’re Jesse, the ex right?” Robert asks. “You trying to win her back by playing the hero? You’re a mechanic; you’ll never be good enough for her. Why do you think she left you?”

“Robert!” Annie gasps.

Jesse chuckles lowly. “Even so, you lost her when you hit her the first time. Now, get lost, or I might just kick your ass off the porch.”

Robert’s eyes grow wide. Jesse knows he didn’t expect that Annie had told anyone about him hitting her, and of course she didn’t, but he doesn’t know that.

“I will leave for now. But this conversation isn’t over yet,” he says, stomping down the stairs.

“Don’t bother,” Jesse calls after him. He turns to Annie, when Robert walks out of the driveway. “You okay?”

She looks at him. “You knew,” she says.

He sighs. “Well, you could say I’ve invented all the excuses there are for getting abused.”

“He didn’t abuse me,” Annie says quickly. “It was just the once.”

Jesse nods. He’s heard it all and he’s said it all too. It had been a long time before he’d admitted, to himself and to others, that what his dad did to him was abuse. “It’s okay.” He pulls her into his arms and whispers, “I won’t let him hurt you anymore.”

Annie sags into his arms and he holds her for a long time, whispering words of comfort and support into her ear.

Jensen looks over to where Jared’s sitting in the passenger seat. He can’t shake the feeling that, whatever Jared has, it isn’t the flu. People just don’t collapse from the flu and Kripke did the blood test for a reason. Maybe it’s just his spidey-sheriff sense, but it feels like something’s not right here.

Jared gives him a small smile. He looks pale and weak. “Everything’s gonna be okay, Jen. Stop worrying.”

Jensen forces a smile. “Yeah, you’re right. I just love you so much.”

“Love you too, Jen. Let’s just get the appointment over with and then, when we come home, we’ll spend the night on the couch watching a movie. Or, you know, snuggling in bed.” He winks and Jensen chuckles a little.

“Ohay. We can do that.”

When they get to the hospital, Kripke’s secretary tells them that the doctor is already waiting for them. They walk into the office and, just like that, Jensen knows that Jared doesn’t have to flu. The dark, concerned look on Kripke’s face speaks for itself.
“Sheriff, Jared. Take a seat please.”

“Just tell me what antibiotics to get, Doc,” Jared says. “I’m sick and tired of feeling like shit.”

Jensen reaches for Jared’s hand and entangles their fingers, as if that’ll help him deal with whatever Kripke is about to tell them.

The doctor sighs. “I’m afraid it’s not that easy.”

“What is it, Doc? Just tell us,” Jensen says. “We can deal.”

“We have to do more tests,” Kripke says. “That’s why I’ve made an appointment for you with Dr. Cohen at Dallas General Hospital. He’ll be waiting for you tomorrow morning.”

“What? Wait,” Jared says. “What’s this about? I mean, it’s the flu, right? Why would I need more tests and who’s this Dr. Cohen?”

Kripke let’s out an audible breath. “Dr. Cohen is one of the most prestigious oncologists in Texas at this moment.”

“Oncologist?” Jensen asks. “That’s… are we talking about cancer?”

“Yes. Jared, there’s a high possibility that you have cancer, but we have to do more tests to really make sure.”

Jensen’s head is buzzing. This can’t be… Jared can’t have cancer. He’s been fine. He has to be fine. This can’t be happening.
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpected moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

"Without you, there'd be no sun in my sky, there would be no love in my life, there'd be no world left of me.” ~ Leann Rimes

Cancer.

It’s the one word echoing in Jared’s head over and over again. He… this is so completely unbelievable. There’s no history of cancer in his family. How can he have cancer? He’s been fine, only feeling sick for a couple of days. Kripke must be wrong, this can’t be cancer. Clearly they would have found something at his last check-up six or seven months ago if it’d be cancer.

Jensen’s hand is tightly wrapped around his and he can see that his husband’s knuckles are turning white, because he’s squeezing so hard. It’s crazy because Jared can’t feel a thing. His whole mind is busy trying to process what Kripke’s just told them. There’s no place for other feelings.

“So, you wanna talk to the kids tonight?” Jensen asks and Jared can hear his voice shaking.

“I don’t wanna scare them, Jen,” he says. “What if Kripke is wrong? What if it’s really just the flu?”

Jensen licks his lips. “What if it isn’t? What do you wanna tell them about the appointment at Dallas General Hospital?”

Jared pinches the bridge of his nose. He can feel a headache coming. “Can we just forget about this for tonight and talk to the kids tomorrow or when we get the results of the test?”

“Jay, we can’t just forget about it. Kripke said it’s cancer,” Jensen says.

“He said there’s a high possibility of cancer. There’s still a chance that this isn’t cancer,” Jared replies defiantly.

“You really think Kripke would send you to this doc if he thought that this would just turn out to be
just some kind of flu?” Jensen asks and his voice is getting louder.

“Jen, please…”

“No, Jay. We need to face up to the fact that this is a real possibility and not some abstract scare tactic.”

“Just… let’s not scare the kids, before we have concrete information about what we’re dealing with. Please, Jen.”

Jensen stops the car in their driveway and drops his head to rest against the steering wheel. “Fine. Just for tonight. As soon as we know for sure we tell them.”

“Okay. Thank you.”

Jensen pulls Jared’s hand towards his mouth and presses a kiss to the back of it. “I just… if this is cancer, we’ll deal with it. Everything’ll be okay.”

“It’s not. I’m fine,” Jared says and he almost believes it, but only almost. “Let’s go inside and have a nice evening with the kids.”

There’s a buzz going through the house. Ty and Jamie are sitting in the living room playing Mario Kart on the Wii, while Jesse, Sophie-Ellie and Annie are in the kitchen discussing something loudly.

“Well, you should have told us,” Sophie-Ellie says.

“I didn’t want to scare you. I had it under control, okay? Can we drop this?” Annie asks.

“What’s going on here?” Jared asks and his kids and Jesse turn around to face him.

“Nothing,” Annie says, giving Sophie-Ellie a pointed look that shuts up any kind of protest. “How did the appointment go? What did Dr. Kripke say?”

“They need to do some more tests,” Jared explains. “But I’ll be just fine.”

“What tests?” Jesse asks. “I mean, isn’t this just the flu?”

“They wanna cover all their bases,” Jensen says, walking up behind Jared and laying a hand on his lower back. “We’re going to Dallas General tomorrow morning and you’ll see everything’ll be okay in the end.” He gives Jared a smile and Jared just wants to kiss him to death right now.


“Don’t worry, sweetie,” Jared says. “Everything’ll be okay. Promise.” He presses a kiss to his daughter’s temple. “So where’s Lily?”

“She’s upstairs, playing with her Lego castle,” Jesse answers.

“I’ll go upstairs and say ‘hello’ to her,” he says, kissing Jensen’s cheek, before he makes his way upstairs.

Lily is sitting on the floor in her room, building another tower for her castle. She looks up when she hears him and jumps to her feet.

“Daddy, come look. I’m building another tower for the castle.”
“I see that. Didn’t you think five towers were enough?”

Lily shakes her head seriously. “No, a castle can never have too many towers.” She cocks her head at him. “Can you play with me, or do you need to rest?”

Jared kneels down and pushes her hair out of her face. She looks so young and innocent. If he really has cancer what will that mean? He wants to see his daughter grow up. Wants to see the twins finally growing out of their ‘pulling-pranks-phase’ and date, get married. He wants to be a grandfather to Sophie-Ellie’s child. Feeling the tears prickling behind his eyes, he pulls Lily into his arms.

“I love you, baby girl. And of course I’ll play with you.”

“I love you too, Daddy.”

They play Legos for a while, building another tower and a new part of the outer wall. Jared catches himself focusing more on Lily and how her face lights up when she puts stone on stone, than on the task of building the tower.

He can’t have cancer. He can’t miss his kids growing up, going to school or high school, graduating and getting a job, getting married and having their own kids.

Cancer can just go fuck itself. He doesn’t have it.

The bedroom door closes behind Jared and he leans against it. Lily and the twins are tucked into their beds, Jesse’s gone to his own little apartment and Annie and Sophie-Ellie are in Annie’s room. Jensen’s in the bathroom, Jared can hear the water running and there’s light shining through the crack at the bottom.

He pulls off his clothes and changes into his pajama bottoms and a t-shirt. Barefoot he pads into the bathroom to find Jensen brushing his teeth. Dropping a kiss to his husband’s bare shoulder, he wraps his arms around Jensen’s chest and rests his forehead against the shoulder blade.

Jensen lays his hands over Jared’s and squeezes. “Whatever happens happens and we’ll deal with it. I love you.”

Jared looks up. “I love you too.”

He brushes his teeth too and five minutes later they’re lying beneath their covers facing each other. Jared feels bone-tired, but he doesn’t want to sleep yet. He runs his fingertips over Jensen’s face, rubbing his thumb over Jensen’s plush bottom lip.

“Make love to me,” he whispers.

“Jay,” Jensen replies softly.

“Please. I need you to make love to me tonight.”

Jensen nods slowly. “Of course I’ll make love to you.”
He bends forward and captures Jared’s mouth in a soft kiss, running his tongue gently over Jared’s lips, urging him on to open up. He does and Jensen tastes of minty toothpaste and his own unique taste. Their tongues brush against each other lazily and Jensen pushes closer to Jensen, entangling their legs together.

Warm fingers push beneath his t-shirt and Jensen doesn’t waste time before he pulls it over Jared’s head. Their bare chests press against each other and Jared shivers when Jensen’s fingertips trail gently over his back down to his ass. Their crotches rock together and Jared can feel that Jensen’s as hard as he is in his pajama pants.

He pushes his hand inside the waistband of Jensen’s sleep shorts and wraps his fingers around his husband’s hard cock. He always thought that Jensen sleeping without underwear had its advantages. He jerks Jensen slowly and not nearly hard enough to push him close to the edge. No, he wants Jensen to come inside of him.

Jensen pushes his hands into the back of Jared’s pajama pants, trailing his fingers slowly through the crack, just barely brushing against Jared’s entrance. They’re still kissing slowly, but now Jensen pulls away, kissing his way down Jared’s stomach. He stops at each nipple, sucking and nibbling until Jared’s skin is on fire and he arches his back towards Jensen’s touch.

They roll until Jared’s lying on his back, with Jensen between his legs, just inches away with his lips from Jared’s hard cock. It’s still hidden beneath fabric, but now Jensen pulls down the pajama bottoms and swallows Jared’s cock right away. It’s perfect, warm and wet, and Jared closes his eyes and pushes his fingers into Jensen’s hair, urging him on.

Fingers push back behind his balls and then he feels them tap against his hole. He pushes down to force them inside, but Jensen pulls back, letting go of Jared’s cock for a second too, so he can get the lube. Then he’s back, pushing two of his fingers right inside Jared.

It’s pleasure and pain at the same time and Jared lets his legs fall apart wider, so Jensen has more room. The suction on his cock returns and he’s torn between pushing back on the fingers in his ass and the wet, hot mouth that’s surrounding his cock.

Jensen takes the decision from him, when he pulls off of Jared’s cock and coats his cock with lube. He bends Jared’s legs back and then slowly, oh so slowly, pushes inside Jared’s body.

Jensen’s fingers dig into Jensen’s hipbones, leaving bruises for sure. Jared couldn’t care less about them. When Jensen leans down and kisses him, he opens up eagerly, sucking on Jensen’s tongue as if it were his husband’s cock. Jensen pounds into him in a steady rhythm that leaves Jared silently begging for more, pushing his ass down on Jensen’s cock on every thrust.

His body is on fire and the pleasure surging through his veins leaves him breathless and panting hard. As soon as Jensen wraps his hand around his cock, Jared knows that he won’t last long anymore. It’s over in a couple of strokes and he coats his belly and Jensen’s hand with his release.

Jensen thrusts into his body without slowing down and Jared can see the exact moment Jensen loses it, his face contorted with pleasure and his mouth open in a silent scream.

Jared wraps his arms around him, running his fingers gently through his fingers, waiting for Jensen to come down from his high. They smile softly at each other when Jensen opens his eyes again, but he doesn’t pull out.

“I love you,” Jared says quietly. “I love you so much it hurts.”
“Shh,” Jensen soothes. “It’s gonna be okay. I love you too.”

They lie like this for a long time. At one moment, Jared feels Jensen’s cock slip out and then warm come drips down his crack. It’s so damn intimate that Jared can’t hold back the tears any longer. They don’t talk, but Jensen doesn’t let go of him for the whole night either.

Jensen wakes after a restless night and he finds that Jared’s already gone - his side of the bed empty and cold. He pushes his hand across the bedspread and slowly runs his fingers over Jared’s pillow.

Cancer.

If the test today turns out positive, Jared will have to have treatment. A lump forms in Jensen’s throat as the prospect of waking up without Jared next to him or even in the house becomes a huge possibility. If this is cancer then there’s the possibility that Jared could die.

No.

Jensen shakes his head and presses the heels of his hands to his eyes to not start crying. He won’t think that. Even if it is cancer Jared will be alright, he’s still young and strong. The doctors will find a way to fix Jared and they’ll still grow old together, watch their kids grow up, get married and have children of their own.

It takes him longer to get ready this morning and when he finally gets downstairs, Jared’s in the kitchen alone. He’s sitting at the kitchen island, the newspaper in front of him, but instead of reading it, Jared’s staring out of the window. He doesn’t even realize that Jensen stepped into the room.

When he finally turns around to face Jensen, Jensen sees that his eyes are rimmed red and puffy.

“Hey, no,” he says softly, rushing over to his husband. He cups Jared’s head between his hands and wipes the remaining evidence of tears. “Everything’s gonna be okay.” He peppers Jared’s face with soft kisses. “You’re gonna be okay.”

“I’m scared.” Jared’s voice is shaking when he says it and it breaks Jensen’s heart to see him like that.

“I know. I am too. But we’ll deal with it together, like we always do. You and me, till the end.”

“What if this is the end?” Jared asks quietly and he sounds so different from the way he spoke when they got home yesterday.

Jensen shakes his. “It’s not. We’re not finished yet with whatever God wants us to do.”

“You don’t believe in God,” Jared says.

Tears are burning behind Jensen’s eyes, when he replies, “But you do. And maybe it’s time for me to start believing again.”

Jared stays silent and just wraps his arms around Jensen’s chest. They stand like this for a long time.
Just like last night Jensen just holds him, feeling the weight and the warmth of his husband in his arms. Jared’s here and alive and Jensen will do whatever it takes to make sure it stays that way.

They drive to the hospital in silence and Jensen’s glad that he needs to focus on the street in front of him, because it gives him something to keep his mind away from dwelling on the ‘What if’s’ that are currently spinning around in his head.

The morning rush is already over when they get to Dallas and it only takes them an hour to get to the hospital and park their car. They take the elevator upstairs, their hands entwined and clasped tightly, but they still don’t speak.

Jensen feels like everything’s been said, reassurances been given out. Now all there is is facing the inevitable, finding out what’s really wrong with Jared and dealing with it.

The nurse leads them into a neat office, with dark wooden furniture and a solid desk. The sun is shining through the curtains, painting part of the room in a soft glow. The walls are a warm beige and Jensen prefers it to the clinical white in the hallways that burns your eyes and gives you a headache if you stare at it for too long.

Jared is sitting in the chair next to him, looking down at something in his lap, while squeezing Jensen’s hand so hard that his knuckles turn white and Jensen’s hand starts to hurt. But he doesn’t loosen his grip, he keeps on holding tight, as if letting go would mean giving up.

Time passes by slowly, and even though they’re only waiting for ten minutes, when the door to the office opens again, to Jensen it feels like a small eternity. The man that walks in is about Jensen’s age and height, with dark brown hair and broad shoulders. A smile is displayed on his handsome face and Jensen instantly likes him.

“Mr. and Mr. Padalecki-Ackles, I’m Dr. Cohen.” He holds out his hand for them to shake.

“Well, I’d say it’s nice to meet you…,” Jensen says in an attempt at a joke and he gets a little chuckle out of Dr. Cohen.

“I get it. Believe me; no one is happy to see me. Well, I’ve talked to Dr. Kripke on the phone and he’s she transferred your files over to me. How are you feeling, Mr. Padalecki-Ackles?”

Jared’s head jerks up, when Jensen nudges his shoulder. “Uhm, call me Jared. Mr. Padalecki is my dad.”

“Okay,” Dr. Cohen smiles. “So Jared, how are you feeling?”

Jared shrugs. “Drained and my limbs hurt.”

Dr. Cohen nods and scribbles something down on his notepad. “Well, I’m not sure what Dr. Kripke told you about the tests we’ll be doing today.”

“Not much, just that there were tests that needed to be done,” Jensen says.
“Well, we’ll do a bone marrow biopsy today and then will directly check for results. It’ll probably only take a few hours, so we’ll know more this afternoon.”

Jared’s still squeezing the hell out of Jensen’s hand, but otherwise he just sits there and looks completely uninvolved.

That’s why Jensen asks the next question. “How will the biopsy work?”

“Well, we’ll insert a long hollow needle into Jared’s lower spine and remove a small part of the bone marrow. It can be a little painful, even if we administer local anesthetics. After that you need to lie down for half-an-hour. But then you’re fine to move around again.”

Dr. Cohen is talking the whole time to Jared, Jensen realizes and it kinda awes him that even though Jared doesn’t seem to hear a word, Dr. Cohen is addressing him directly, instead of talking over him.

“Jared?” Dr. Cohen asks. “Did you understand what I said?”

Jared nods. “Yeah.”

“Do you have any questions?”

“Will I be able to go home afterwards?”

Dr. Cohen rests his elbows on his desk, folding his hands. “I’m not someone who likes to talk about treatment, if it’s not completely verified that you’ll need it. But I’m going to say this, if we diagnose you with cancer, you’ll still be able to go home tonight and talk to your family and friends and get a few things together. Does that answer your question?”

Jared nods. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Any other concerns?”

Jared shakes his head. “No.”

“Okay then, I’ll have a nurse come in to show you to your room for today and prep you for the biopsy. Jensen, you’ll have to wait in Jared’s room during the procedure. But it shouldn’t take more than fifteen to twenty minutes.”

Jared nods. “Okay.”

Dr. Cohen lays a hand on Jared’s shoulder. “I’ll see you in a bit.”

The door closes behind them and Jensen turns to Jared. “Baby, you okay?”

Jared shrugs. “I just… I don’t know.”

Jensen raises their entwined hands and presses a kiss to the back of Jared’s. “Dr. Cohen seems capable. He’ll make sure that everything’s gonna be okay.”

“Yeah,” Jared breathes. “We should call home, so that Sophia can pick up the kids from school.”

Jensen nods. “I’ll do that once they get you for the procedure.”

The door to the room opens again and in walks a tall, dark haired man. He grins. “Hi, I’m Nurse Coletti, but you can call me Stephen. Dr. Cohen said to take you two to your assigned room and prep Mr. Padalecki-Ackles for surgery.” Jensen blinks twice, before it sinks in that this guy is Jared’s
nurse. “Yeah, I get that look all the time. No, I didn’t fail med school. I actually wanted to be a nurse.”

That gets a small smile out of Jared and Jensen couldn’t care less about Nurse Coletti being a guy, if he makes Jared relax a little.

“So, how about you two follow me and we get the show on the road?”

Jensen would think Coletti’s a little out of line with the lax words coming out of his mouth, if it weren’t for Jared visibly relaxing. He even loosens his tight grasp on Jensen’s hand and that can only be a good thing.

They follow the nurse down the hallway and into a single room at the end. He holds out a hospital gown for Jared.

“Why don’t you get changed in the bathroom, sweet cheeks?”

Jared hesitates and Jensen catches him looking down at their entwined hands. “It’s okay. I’ll be waiting right here.”

“Okay,” Jared says, carefully disentangling their hands.

Jensen smiles and only rubs his squeezed-to-death-hand when Jared’s in the bathroom.

“You can wait in here,” Nurse Coletti says. “There’s a TV if you’re bored.”

Jensen huffs. “I’m sure I won’t be bored.”

The guy cocks his head and looks at him long and hard. “You know, if you’d relax a little your husband would relax too.”

“Dude,” Jensen says taken aback. “Sorry, that I can’t relax when my husband is about to be diagnosed with cancer.”

Nurse Coletti’s eyes soften a little. “I know you’re scared, and Jared knows that too and treating him like a fragile piece of glass won’t help.”

“What?!” Jensen shoots back annoyed, but then the bathroom door opens again and Jared walks back out. He looks pale and sick in the white and blue checked hospital gown and the sight turns Jensen’s stomach upside down. Jared looks as if he belongs here. “Hey.”

“Take a seat please,” Nurse Coletti says and points at the bed. “And I’ll take you to the examination room.”

Jensen takes a step towards Jared and cups his face between his hands. “I love you. I’ll be here waiting.”

Jared nods. “I love you too.”

They share a last kiss and then Jared’s pushed out of the room and Jensen’s left alone with all his thoughts running amok.
The waiting is the worst. Time doesn’t seem to go by at all. The tick, tick, tick of the clock on the wall echoing loudly in the room. Jensen’s sitting next to Jared’s bed, bouncing his right foot up and down to a rhythm only he hears.

Jared has been staring out of the window for the last few hours, trying to ignore the dull pain in his lower back. They told him that it should be gone in a couple of days and it’s really not that bad. It just reminds him of why he’s here in the first place and he’d do anything to be able to forget the actual reason.

He shifts on his bed and Jensen looks up. The worry is written all over his face, his skin white and dark shadows beneath his eyes. A small, strained smile appears on Jensen’s face and he reaches out to touch Jared’s hand that’s lying on the covers. He leans forward and presses a soft kiss to the back of Jared’s hand.

It’s a small gesture, obviously meant to reassure, but it breaks Jared’s heart nonetheless. He swallows down the tears that are building behind his eyes and tries to push the thoughts of desperation down that are threatening to overcome him.

They don’t talk. Maybe they should try to ignore the black clouds hanging over their heads for as long as they’ll be able to.

The sun is already going down when the door to the room finally opens and Dr. Cohen walks inside. As if wired together, his and Jensen’s hands meet, squeezing the other’s tightly.

The earlier smile on the doc’s face, has been replaced by a very serious expression and Jared knows that the life he’s lived so far is over forever. Up until now he was able to hold onto a little bit of hope, telling himself that everything’s just a huge mistake and that everything’s gonna be okay. Not anymore.

“You gonna tell us what the test results are or are you just going to stand there?” Jensen asks and on any other day Jared would have asked him not to be rude, but not today.

Dr. Cohen sighs. “I wish I could give you better news. But I’m just gonna say it. It’s cancer, Acute Myeloid Leukemia to be more exact. It causes a rapid growth of white blood cells in your bone marrow and interferes with the growth of normal blood cells.”

“Okay, so what does that mean?” Jensen asks, sounding impatient. “What are you gonna do?”

“We will start chemotherapy starting tomorrow morning,” Dr. Cohen says. “The drugs will be administered for a duration of ten days. After that there’ll be a break and if you feel like it you can go home. Then we do a second cycle of chemotherapy. We hope that will lead to remission. But even if that’s the case there’ll be another couple of rounds of chemotherapy to make sure you don’t relapse.”

Jared nods, trying to wrap his head around the information. It’s hard to get past the news that it is in fact cancer and concentrate on what to do now.

“So, I’ll be able to go home tonight?”
Dr. Cohen nods. “Yes.”

There’s another question he wants to ask, but he’s not sure if he really wants to know the answer. “How long… what’s the survival rate?” Jensen sucks in an audible breath, but Jared just has to know.

“That very much depends on how well you react to the chemotherapy and how aggressive the cancer cells turn out to be,” Dr. Cohen explains. “You’re only in your mid-forties, so that should definitely be an advantage. And even if the chemo doesn’t work the way we want it to, there are still other options.” He smiles. “We’ll all do our best to make sure that you have many years to look forward to.”

“Thanks,” Jared says quietly.

“We all know that this must be very scary and if you’d like to talk to a therapist, I know someone very capable, who also works at the hospital.”

Jared shakes his head. “Thanks, but I’m okay for now.”

“Just let me know. Dr. Roche is the best therapist we have. He’s worked a lot with cancer patients.” Dr. Cohen smiles. “I’ll send over Nurse Coletti so that we can discharge you for now. Please be back at eight in the morning, so that we can get started right away.”

He shakes first Jared’s and then Jensen’s hands, before giving them another encouraging smile and leaving them alone.

As soon as the door closes, Jared pushes up off the bed. He can’t wait to get out of here, but Jensen stops him, cupping his face between his hands.

“It’s gonna be okay. Right?”

His voice is shaking and Jared has never seen him like this, vulnerable and completely out of control of the situation.

“Of course,” he says, not sure he believes it himself. He has cancer, but it doesn’t feel like it. He doesn’t feel more tired or sicker than he did this morning when the result was still a lifetime away.

“I love you,” Jensen says and Jared nods.

“Me too.”

Half-an-hour later Nurse Coletti, or Stephen as he insists on being called, is pushing Jared out of the entrance doors of the hospital in a wheelchair. He clasps Jared’s shoulder.

“I’ll be here to tomorrow morning, so you’ll have a familiar face with you.”

Jared smiles. “Thanks. I appreciate that.”

Stephen grins. “You’ll see, in a few months this’ll all look like a bad dream. Dr. Cohen is the best.”

“I really hope so,” Jensen says and he sounds very dismissive, so Jared gives him a baffled look. “Let’s just get out of here.”

Jared gives Stephen an apologetic smile and gets up from the wheelchair. The wound on his lower back still hurts and he grunts before giving Stephen a small smile and following Jensen to the car.
He sighs when he finally sits down in the passenger seat and shoots a look at Jensen, who’s staring intently out of the windshield.

“Hey, what was that about?”

“What?” Jensen asks, putting the car in gear and turning it onto the street, everything without looking over to Jared.

“You were not very nice. Stephen was just trying to help.”

Jensen snorts. “Yeah, I’m sure he was. He’s an ass.”

“Whoa, where did that come from?” Jared asks surprised.

Jensen huffs out a breath. “Look, just because you like him, I don’t have to. So can we not talk about him anymore?”

“Jen…”

“Jay, please. I don’t wanna talk about him anymore.”

Jared knows exactly when he can push Jensen for more information and when he just needs to let it go, before Jensen explodes. He lays his hand on Jensen’s thigh and squeezes, but doesn’t say any more. It takes a little while, but then Jensen drops his hand and takes Jared’s, pressing a kiss to it.

Leaning back into his seat, Jared turns his face towards the window and lets the outside world fly by without really acknowledging it.

Jared doesn’t remember falling asleep, but he must have, because when he opens his eyes, Jensen’s pulling his car into the driveway of Sophia and Misha’s house.

“I called Luke while you were asleep,” Jensen says quietly. “Asked him and Evan to come over tonight.”

Jared frowns and of all the things he could have said, he says, “You shouldn’t use your phone while driving.”

Jensen pulls the key out of the ignition violently and huffs. “Sorry, but that was kinda my last concern.”

“Jen…” Jared says softly.

“What?” he shoots back.

“You need to calm down.”

“Calm down? Calm down?!” He shakes his head. “I don’t get it, I don’t get you. They’ve just told us that you have cancer and you just act like nothing even happened. Aren’t you scared, angry,
Jared fumbles with his belt and when he’s free, he turns to his husband, reaching for his hands and grabbing them tightly. “My head is a mess. I don’t know how I feel. I have a hard time wrapping my head around anything right now. But you won’t lose me, Jen. We’ll grow old and wrinkly together.”

The corners of Jensen’s lips twitch in an attempt of a smile. “I just love you so much.”

“I know. I love you too. And in a few months we’ll look back on this and we won’t even know why we freaked so much.”

Jensen huffs out a humorless laugh. “I hope so.” He leans forward and their lips meet in a passionate kiss. “I just wish, we could just speed up time and everything would be over already,” Jensen says when he pulls away.

Jared smiles a little. “Yeah, that’d be nice.”

After another few minutes of just sitting in the car and holding onto each other, they finally make it to Sophia’s front door.

“I wanna talk to the twins and Lily when we’re at home. But first I wanna tell Sophia and Misha and the older kids, okay?”

Jensen nods. “Sure. However you think this’ll work best.”

Jared smiles tightly and knocks. A second later, a whirlwind opens the door and pushes past Jared and into Jensen’s arms.

“Papa! Daddy!”

Jensen chuckles. “Hey, sweetheart. How are you?”

Jared runs his fingers through his daughter’s hair. “Hi, baby girl. How was your day?”

“Awesome,” Lily says, wriggling out of Jensen’s arms again and grabbing both Jared and Jensen’s hands, and pulling them inside. “We played cowboys and Indians at daycare and I got to be the sheriff.”

Jared laughs. “I’m sure you were a super sheriff.”

She nods seriously. “Of course.”

They all walk into the kitchen, where Sophia is making dinner. She stops dead in her tracks as soon as she sees Jared. They’ve been through so much and she knows him inside out. Of course he wouldn’t have been able to hide this from her for long.

“Lily, sweetie, why don’t you go upstairs and get your stuff? Tell your brothers to get theirs too, please.”

Lily grins and nods. “Okay, Aunt Sophia.”

As soon as she’s out of earshot, Sophia says, “Tell me. I can take it, just tell me.” Now, Jared feels another wave of tears burning behind his eyes and he takes a step forward, wanting to wrap his arms around Sophia. She takes a step back and shakes her head. “No, just tell me.”

“It’s cancer,” Jared says and he sees his friend take a few deep breaths, before she finally lets him pull her into his arms. “Everything’ll be okay, Soph. We’ll start treatment tomorrow.”
She nods shakily. “Of course. You’re strong. You’ll be okay.” She wipes her eyes. “Misha is upstairs with Laura and the twins. You want me to call him down?”

Jared nods. “Yes. And we’d like for you to come over with us. I wanna talk to the older kids first and we’d hoped that you’d watch Lily and the twins for us.”

Sophia nods. “Sure thing.” She then turns towards the door. “Misha, honey, come down for a minute please.”

A second later, they can hear Misha’s footsteps on the stairs and when he walks into the kitchen there’s a smile displayed on his face, which falls away as soon as he sees them.

“Is it bad?” he asks and Jared grabs Jensen’s hand for support.

“It’s cancer. An acute form of leukemia,” Jensen says and his voice sounds almost even.

There’s a long moment of silence, before Misha moves, pulling Jared into his arms. He hugs him tightly and Jared curls his fingers into the back of his friend’s shirt.

“We’ll be here. Whatever you need, we’ll help,” Misha says. “Just tell us what to do.”

“Thanks,” Jared whispers. “We really appreciate that.”

They hear several feet on the steps in the hallway and Jared pulls back, wipes at his eyes and takes a few deep breaths. He has kinda found his calm again when Lily and the twins come running into the kitchen, Laura right behind them.

“Hey boys, how was school? You finished with your homework?” Jensen asks and the twins roll their eyes.

“Yes, Papa,” Ty says.

“Good.” Jensen nods. “So, how about we all go over to our place and have take-out for dinner?”

“Yay!” the kids all start bouncing around, grabbing their jackets and pulling on their shoes, before they rush outside.

Jared lets out a deep breath, reaching for Jensen’s hand subconsciously and then they’re all following the kids out.
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you.” - Mary Tyler Moore

They decided that someone needs to get the take-out and that’s how Jensen finds himself in the car with Misha and on their way to KFC.

“What did the doc say?” Misha asks, when they’re at the drive-through waiting to place their order. “And please be honest with me.”

Jensen sighs. “He said it’s Acute Myeloid Leukemia and that Jared will have to have at least two cycles of chemo. There’ll probably be more, though.”

“Did he say anything about…?” Misha doesn’t finish the question, but Jensen knows exactly what he wants to know.

“He said that Jared’s still young and that this should be an advantage and that they’ll do whatever lays in their power to save him.”

Misha nods. “Good.” He looks down at his hands in his lap. “He’s gonna be okay. Jared’s strong. He’ll be able to fight it.”

Jensen doesn’t know if Misha says it to reassure him or if he’s trying to convince himself. That’s why he just nods, without saying anything else.

Twenty minutes later, Misha pulls the car into the driveway of Jensen and Jared’s home, parking the car behind Jared’s. They grab the take-out and Jensen takes a couple of deep breaths, before pushing the front door open and walking inside.

There’s a familiar buzz which Jensen thinks feels like nothing has changed. But everything’s changed. Life will never be like it was before. He wants to scream at the unfairness of Jared having cancer.
He walks into the living room to find Evan, Luke, Jesse and Ben cheering at some football game that’s on, while Sophia, Sophie-Ellie and Annie are setting the table. Jared’s sitting on the couch, with Lily showing him some pictures she drew at daycare. The twins and Laura are nowhere to be seen, but Jensen guesses that they’re upstairs.

“Dinner’s here,” he calls, trying for cheerful. He walks over to the dinner table and drops the take-out bags on it, before dropping a kiss to both Sophie-Ellie’s and Annie’s cheeks.

They’re both looking concerned and Jensen knows they know something is up; that this is not just a normal dinner at the Padalecki-Ackles’ household. Even though they have some of their friends over every so often.

Dinner is filled with lots of talk from the kids, while Jensen barely touches any of his chicken wings. He forces a smile on his face, trying to listen to Jared joke with the kids. He knows that his husband is trying to have one last normal dinner before they tell them the devastating news, but Jensen has a hard time pretending, and the concerned looks he receives from Annie, Sophie-Ellie and Jesse are proof that he’s an open book right now.

After they’ve all finished their dinner, Sophia takes the twins, Laura and Lily upstairs. All four of them look a little confused, but the promise of ice cream as dessert, gets them to go upstairs with her.

“Will someone tell us what’s going on now?” Luke asks. “I mean, Jensen, Misha, you’re acting like someone’s dying.” The silence that follows Luke’s statement is heavily filled with tension. “That’s… that was a joke. No one’s dying, right?”

“I have cancer,” Jared says matter-of-factly and Jensen feels the desperation he’s been feeling ever since they’ve gotten the news trying to overwhelm him. Sophie-Ellie bursts into tears and Ben is right there to wrap an arm around her shoulder. He sees both, Annie and Luke, reaching for either Jesse’s or Evan’s hand, looking for reassurance and comfort. “Acute Myeloid Leukemia to be exact,” Jared explains further.

“Are you dying?” Sophie-Ellie asks. Ben is still holding her and Jensen has never been more grateful for the fact that they’re friends again.

“Nobody is dying,” Misha says. “Jared will go in for treatment and everything’ll be fine again.”

“What treatment is that?” Annie asks.

“I’ll be starting chemo first thing in the morning. I’ll have to stay at the hospital for ten days and if I’m feeling well enough I can come home for about a month,” Jared says, waving Sophie-Ellie, who’s still crying, over to him. He wraps his arms around her, whispering something inaudible in her ear.

“What if you don’t feel well enough?” Luke asks. “What about during chemo, can we visit?”

“We’ll check with the hospital tomorrow,” Jensen says. “But I’m sure it won’t be a problem.”

“Will the chemo destroy the cancer?” Sophie-Ellie asks. “Will it be gone completely?”

Jared nods. “That’s what they’re trying to accomplish. I have to go in for a couple of cycles. But even if it won’t help as well as they think it will, there’ll be other options, sweetie. They’ll do whatever they can to fix it.”

Sophie-Ellie nods. “They better. My kid needs two grandpas.”
Jared breaks out into a blinding smile. “So you decided to keep him or her?”

She nods. “Life’s too short to wait for second chances.”

“I’m glad,” Jared says. “You’ll be a wonderful mom.”

That makes Sophie-Ellie cry again and Jared holds her, rocking her back and forth. The others have grown silent. Jensen excuses himself to the kitchen and takes out his phone. His hand is shaking and he’s not sure he can actually call anyone and say anything, but he has to. Their friends need to know, his parents and Angie and Matthew too. He has to call Megan also.

He calls the first number he finds in his cell. Chris and Steve are on a tour stopping at small bars all over the state and have a gig in San Antonio today, but it’s still early and Chris answers on the second ring.

“Dude, you should be here,” he greets Jensen and it’s a simple statement like that makes the tears flow.

“Jared has cancer,” he whispers and he wonders if Chris even heard him.

“What? Oh shit. Is he in the hospital?”

“No, he’s home for now. They’re starting chemo tomorrow morning.”

“Okay, we’ll be back tomorrow.”

“No Chris, this is the small time bar tour you’ve always dreamed about. Please don’t stop it. Jared would only feel guilty.”

“Jen, you need us. Our friends need us. Of course we’ll come home. There’ll be other tours,” Chris says, but Jensen knows as well as Chris that this is probably the only one they’ll ever have.

“No, please. I’ll call you if it gets worse, but…”

“I don’t like it, Jen. I really don’t, but we’ll keep playing if it means so much to you and JT. Just promise to call if it gets worse or you need any help.”

“I promise.”

They disconnect the call a little later and Jensen has to take a few deep breaths, before he’s able to call the next number. He goes through the same routine six more times, each time leaving him more drained than before. But in the end all the important people know what’s going on. They all made Jensen promise to call them tomorrow after Jared’s first chemotherapy treatment and tell them if Jared will be allowed to have visitors. They also offer all their help to Jensen and once again he realizes that they’re pretty much blessed with their friends and families.

After they’ve discussed what’s going to happen now, his older kids let Jared go reluctantly to tell the twins and Lily. He goes upstairs; trying to ignore the fatigue he’s feeling. It’s late and already past
the kids’ bedtime and maybe he shouldn’t talk to them right now, but he has to get this off his chest.

Jensen comes upstairs, the second Jared’s about to enter Lily’s room. Jared gives him a small smile. “You told everybody?”

Jensen nods. “Yeah. Mike will call Maddie, so someone will take over things at the newspaper.”

Thank you.” He reaches out for his husband’s hand. “You know you don’t have to come to the hospital with me tomorrow.”

Jensen rolls his eyes. “As if I’d let you go alone. Of course I’ll be there.”

“You’ll be bored out of your mind. There’s nothing but waiting,” Jared says. “I’ll probably be miserable and no good company.”

Jensen wraps his arms around his chest. “You’re always good company. And you don’t know that you’ll be miserable. Maybe everything’ll be fine.”

“Jen,” Jared sighs. “We both know that chemo will make you miserable.” He lays his forehead against Jensen’s. “It’s just… the kids need you now. You can’t stay with me every hour of every day. So, I guess I wanna get used to it right away.”

“Jay…” Jensen kisses him softly. “I’ll be there as often as I can. And I’ll accompany you tomorrow morning, no discussion.”

“I love you.”

Jensen smiles. “I know.”

They stand in the hallway for a little while longer, before Jared finally pulls away and nods, determined. “It’s time.”

“God, I wish we could just let them believe that everything’s fine,” Jensen says.

“We can’t. They’d find out and be very upset with us for lying to them. Let’s just get it over with.”

They walk into Lily’s room, but it’s empty. They find her in the twins’ room, playing some board game with Sophia, Laura and the twins. Jared blinks twice, because if Sophia got the twins to play a board game, she has to tell him the trick. They’ve never been interested in playing a board game when Jared’s asked them.

Sophia looks up and gives them a small encouraging smile. “Wow, it’s late,” she says. “Laura, we really have to go home. It’s already past your bedtime.”

Laura huffs, but gets up from the floor. She tells Jared and Jensen good night and then rushes out the door. Sophia kisses Lily and the boys, even though both protest loudly, and then pulls first Jared and then Jensen into a tight hug.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she says and then walks out and closes the door behind her.

“Boys, Lily, we have to tell you something,” Jared says and he has no idea how to explain to his kids that he’ll have to go to the hospital for a while. All three look at them with huge eyes.

“You know that your dad hasn’t been feeling well over the last few days,” Jensen says. “Well, we’ve talked to a doctor today and he told us that your dad has to stay in the hospital for a little while.”
Lily stands up from the floor walking over to Jared and climbing on his lap. “Are you really sick? Only really sick people have to go to the hospital.”

Jared smiles and kisses her hair. “Yes, baby. I’m really sick. But the doctors will make it all better.”

“What do you have, Daddy?” Ty asks and he sounds very small right now, even though he always acts like a tough ten-year-old.

“It’s called leukemia and it’s a form of cancer,” Jared says, because he really doesn’t want to lie to his kids. “But I’ll go to the hospital in the morning and be treated for it. I won’t be home for a little while, though.”

“Cancer?” Jamie asks. “Jenna’s dad had cancer and he died.”

Jared remembers that Jenna’s dad had been diagnosed with lung cancer two years ago and then died six months after the diagnosis.

“I don’t want you to die, Daddy,” Lily says and starts crying.

“I’m not dying.” He waves the twins over to him and wraps his arms around all three of them as best as he can. Jensen joins them and together they sit on the floor all wrapped up in a bundle. “Jenna’s dad had a different form of cancer that’s why he died. But the doctors will make sure that everything’ll be okay again.”

“We know that this is really scary,” Jensen says. “But you can always come to us and talk to us. You can ask us anything and we promise to always be honest with you.”

“How long are you staying at the hospital?” Ty asks.

“For ten days, maybe a little longer. And then I’ll be home, before I have to go in for another cycle of treatment,” Jared explains.

“Why can’t you come home earlier, Daddy?” Lily asks. “I don’t want you to be away for so long.”

“It’s because of the medicine they’ll be giving me. I’ll be very weak and the doctors will want to monitor me.”

“But then you won’t be able to read Alice in Wonderland to me,” Lily reasons.

“I’m sure you’re papa will be happy to read it to you,” Jared says, kissing her hair again.

“But papa can’t do the voice as good as you do,” she says and Jared can just feel her getting really upset.

“How about me showing papa how to do it properly?” Jared asks.

Lily shakes her head. “I want you to do it.”

“Don’t be a baby,” Jamie says. “Daddy is sick, so he has to go to the hospital to get better.”

“Jamie,” Jensen scolds. “Don’t talk like that to your sister. She’s as scared as you are.”

Jamie shrugs and Lily says, “I don’t want Daddy to be sick. I want Daddy to be home.”

“Aw, baby girl. The doctors will make it all better,” Jensen says. “And then your Daddy can read you Alice in Wonderland. But maybe we can try and you can teach me how to do the voices
properly?"

Lily shrugs her shoulders a little. “I guess.”

After a little while longer, Jared tells the kids that it’s already past their bedtime, especially for Lily and shoos them into the bathroom. First he tucks Lily in and even reads her a little of the next chapter of Alice in Wonderland. He swallows down the tears when he kisses her good night and turns off her light.

The boys are unusually quiet that night and Jared knows that despite trying to act like tough boys the news has scared them. He tucks them in, pressing soft kisses to their foreheads.

“I want you two to promise me something,” he says and the twins look at him with wide eyes. “Papa will be very stressed over the next couple of weeks, so I want you two on your best behavior, okay? No pranks - not even little ones. Take care of your little sister when your papa asks you to. And please help him with the housework a little. Can you do that?”

Jamie and Ty exchange a look. Jared has always envied their ability to communicate silently with each other.

“We promise, Daddy,” Ty says and Jamie chimes in, “Scout’s honor.”

Jared chuckles. “You’re not even a boy scout.”

“It’s still valid,” Jamie says and Jared pulls him into a hug, pressing a kiss to his head.

“Okay. I love you.” He turns to Ty and kisses his other son too. “You too.”

“I love you too,” they both say at the same time and Jared ruffles their hair for the last time, before getting up and turning off the lights.

Jensen’s waiting in the hallway, when Jared comes out of the room and closes the door behind him.

“You think they’ll be okay?” he says quietly.

Jared nods. “I hope so. This is why you really need to be home often, Jen. I know you want to help me, but the kids really need you now.”

Jensen sighs. “I know. I guess now a clone would be nice.”

“You’ll be fine,” Jared says and he knows that Jensen will manage it all wonderfully. He completely trusts his husband.

“C’mon, let’s go to bed. We need to be up really early.”

Jensen pulls him into the bedroom and twenty minutes later, they’re lying in bed, wrapped up in their entangled arms and Jared tries to take in enough of Jensen’s scent to remember it when he’ll be alone at the hospital.
It’s after midnight and Annie can’t sleep, her mind running through all the possibilities of what her dad having cancer really means. She has googled leukemia, coming up with info to give her enough reading material for a lifetime but nothing really made sense.

Her dad’s only in his mid-forties. He’s mostly eaten healthy food and he always went running and worked out. He shouldn’t be a candidate for cancer, and yet he has it. There’s no real explanation for why and how, not even on all the websites that tell you what to do afterwards.

She read that her dad’s survival chances are good, if the chemo will work. But there’s no guarantee that it’ll work. Yes, her dad said that there are other options, but as far as Annie can tell they’re more of a last resort.

The things she read about the chemotherapy scared the hell outta her. Yes, she had an idea about it, but confirming her assumptions, just turned her stomach upside down.

After another hour of tossing and turning in bed, she gets up and walks into the kitchen to pour herself a glass of water. It probably won’t help her fall asleep, but it’s better than lying in bed running over all of the possibilities in her head and only coming to one conclusion: Her dad is really sick and there’s a chance that he might die.

Out of the window she can see that there’s still some light on in Jesse’s apartment and without thinking about it, she makes her way out the back door and walks up the outdoor stairs to his door. She can hear soft music playing and it takes a moment, before she finds the courage to knock.

The door is pulled open only a second later and Jesse’s staring at her in surprise. He’s only dressed in gray sweatpants that hang low on his hips and Annie thinks that he’s been working out more or maybe it’s just the work at the garage, but his abs are definitely more defined then they were back when they were still together.

“Hey,” he says softly. “What’re you doing here?”

“Couldn’t sleep. Saw that there was still some light on,” she says, running a hand through her hair.

He pushes the door open wider. “C’min.”

She walks over the threshold, letting her eyes roam over the room. There’s a futon bed with a beige colored bedspread at one end and a kitchenette at the other, with a table for four standing in the middle of the room. It’s all neat and tidy, not really what you’d expect from a single male’s apartment. The walls are a warm mix of dark brown and cream, and they’re decorated with two hand-drawn images of their family.

“Sophie-Ellie made them. I thought they were better used like this, then lying in some folder.”

“I like it,” she says and turns around to Jesse to give him a small smile. “I thought you’d have posters of cars on the wall, but I like it.”

Jesse chuckles. “I did. But then your baby sister told me that I’m too old for that.”

“She did?” Annie laughs softly. “Lily can be very direct.”

“Yes, she can,” Jesse agrees grinning. “But she also helped me redecorate. She has good taste.”

Annie can just imagine Lily and Jesse painting the room. “I’m sure you had fun.”

“We really did,” Jesse says.
They fall silent and Annie feels the tension in the air. Neither of them wants to really say out loud why Annie is here. It’d make it too real.

“You wanna stay?” Jesse asks, his voice low and deep. It hits something inside Annie that she buried deep beneath the surface.

She nods carefully, only slowly lifting her eyes from where they were trained on the laminated floor. Their eyes meet and then they’re in each other’s space, kissing and exploring each other’s mouths. When they come up for air, Jesse cups her face between his hands.

“I missed you. So much.”

Annie feels the intensity of his gaze deep in her belly and she licks her lips before she surges forward to kiss Jesse once more. They tumble over to Jesse’s bed, fingers pulling on clothes and getting beneath them, touching warm skin and causing goose bumps.

She feels like she’s falling and only Jesse’s touch keeps her grounded. They’re still kissing, breathing is totally overrated, and they don’t surface for a really long time that night.

Luke doesn’t really know how they get home that night. The first thing he manages to focus on is the front door of the town house closing behind him. Strong arms wrap around him from behind.

“It’s gonna be okay. Your dad’s strong, he’ll be fine.”

“Maybe we should postpone the wedding,” Luke says and he doesn’t recognize his voice, it sounds oddly detached. “Just ‘til Dad’s fine again.”

“Okay, whatever you want,” Evan says, pressing soft lips against his neck.

Luke turns in his arms. “I wanna be at the hospital tomorrow afternoon.”

“Of course,” Evan agrees.

“The chemo will probably be really hard on dad,” Luke says. “Maybe I should move back home for a little while, just to help out.”

Evan pushes a strand of his hair back. “I think the house is full enough right now and what your dad really needs is to get some rest.”

“But I’m his son and I should help.”

“And you will. But I really do think that moving back is not the right way. Annie and Jesse are there.”

“But…”

“Luke,” Evan says softly. “I do get the need to do something, but everyone fussing around, will probably only make your dad more stressed. We all know how well he reacts to fussing.”
“He’s my dad, Ev.”

“I know, baby. And he’ll be okay.”

“When my father was brought to the hospital, I never saw him again.”

“Hey,” Evan says, cupping his face between his hands. “That won’t happen. Jared’s strong and the doctors will do everything to fix this.”

“It’s cancer. People die from cancer.”

“Not all of them.”

“I can’t believe this is happening.”

Evan leans forward, pressing a soft kiss to the corner of Luke’s mouth. “In a few months this’ll only be a bad dream and we’ll be getting married with your dad walking you down the aisle.”

“I really hope you’re right.”

“Of course I’m right. You’ll see. Everything’ll be okay.”

They kiss softly and Luke tries to push back the swirling thoughts in his mind and just concentrate on the feel of Evan’s lips against his.

That’s when the front door opens and Dan stumbles inside, his lips firmly attached to the ones of a blond guy. They both stop when they see Evan and Luke standing in the middle of the room.

“Hey.” Dan grins. “Sorry, I thought you’d already be asleep.” That’s when he seems to get that something’s going on. “Everything okay?”

Luke’s squeezing the hell out of Evan’s hand, but he can’t bring himself to say it out loud again for his friend.

“Jared has cancer,” Evan says and Luke is impressed that he sounds so damn steady and in control.

The grin falls off Dan’s face and he turns to his date. “Sorry, but we’re having a family emergency. Maybe another time.”

The guy nods. “Yeah, sure. I’ll see you.”

The door closes behind him and Dan turns towards them. “When… but… is he gonna be okay?”

“He’ll start chemo tomorrow morning,” Evan says, as if that answers Dan’s question.

“Is he home now?”

“Yeah, he and Jensen will drive to the hospital tomorrow morning.”

“Oh man, that sucks,” Dan says, dropping on the couch. After a second, he stands up again. “I could use a beer. What about you?”

Luke thinks that alcohol might be the only thing that’ll help him sleep tonight, so he nods.

A moment later, they’re all sitting on the couch, nursing a beer. They don’t talk, but they don’t need to. Luke is just glad that his fiancé and his best friend are here with him.
Sophie-Ellie feels drained and empty, completely void of any emotion. Ben is sitting next to her on the bed with his legs crossed at the ankles and his arm wrapped tightly around her. Her eyes are dry and itchy, the tears she cried long gone. She thought she could never stop crying when her dad and PJ told them the news, but now all the tears are gone and she just feels tired and exhausted.

Ben’s running his fingers gently through her hair - just being there without saying anything. It fills her heart with a little bit of comfort.

She doesn’t know how long they sat like this and she doesn’t remember falling asleep. But when she wakes, the lights in the room are out and they’re both beneath the covers. Ben’s arms are still tightly wrapped around her and she can feel his steady breath against her neck.

Just lying in bed like this makes her tear up again. It could be the hormones, she tells herself. But at the same time she knows that it has nothing to do with hormones and everything to do with her dad being seriously sick.

Cancer kills people, good people, and it’s not fair. She has already lost her papa, she can’t lose her dad too, especially not now when she’s about to have a baby in a few months.

The shaking of her shoulders seems to have woken Ben, because he starts rubbing soothingly over her arms.

“She,” he whispers. “It’ll be okay.”

“You don’t know that,” she replies quietly.

“No, you’re right. I don’t. But I believe it. I believe that Uncle JT is gonna be just fine.”

“What if he isn’t?”

Ben is silent for a long while and then he says, “There’s always hope.”
When You Lie Next To Me 8/?

Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

"A part of you has grown in me, and so you see, it's you and me together forever. Never apart, maybe in distance, but never in heart." ~Anonymous

Jared gets up long before the alarm clock sounds on his nightstand. It’s still dark outside and Jensen’s lying next to him with his head buried in his pillow. Jared knows he’s awake too, though.

He makes his way into the bathroom. The bright light hurts his eyes at first and he blinks, taking a moment to get used to it. Brushing his teeth he cringes when he sees the blood of his bleeding gums in the toothpaste. Not once did he think that bleeding gums could mean cancer.

His reflection in the mirror shows him that there are dark shadows beneath his eyes. But that could also be because of the missed sleep last night. He thinks he doesn’t really look sick, let alone like he has cancer.

But that will change, won’t it? He runs his fingers through his hair, pulling it away from his face. What will he look like when his hair starts falling out, when he starts losing weight, because he can’t keep any food down?

The door opens and Jared meets Jensen’s eyes in the mirror, slowly letting go of his hair. He lets his arms fall to his sides and leans back into Jensen’s chest, when his husband puts his arms around his chest. A soft kiss is pressed between his shoulder blades and he lets out a shaky breath.

“I’ll lose my hair.”

“It’ll grow back.”

“I love when you run your fingers through it,” he says, his voice choked with emotions.

“Hey…” Jensen turns him around, pushing his fingers into Jared’s hair. “And I’ll do that again. It’ll grow back.”
Jared nods, licking his dry lips. “I just… I’m sorry, I’m being stupid.”

“Nothing to be sorry for, Jay.” Jensen pulls their foreheads together. “It’ll be okay. We’ll be okay.”

Jared swallows the lump in his throat and nods again. “Of course, you’re right. We’re gonna be okay. In a couple of months, everything’ll be fine again.”

“We’re gonna beat this,” Jensen says, before brushing his lips against Jared’s.

They’ve beaten everything so far. They’ve been through some hard times and in the end they came out okay, only to be facing another hurdle on the way. Jared thinks it’s a little unfair what the universe is putting them through, when they only want to grow old together. But Jensen is right; they’ll beat this, just like they’ve beaten all the other hurdles along the way.

Finishing their morning routine in silence, Jared tries to transfer every little detail about Jensen into his memory, just so he’ll be able to remember them once he’s alone in the hospital. It’s been years since either of them has slept alone for more than a night or two. He wonders if he’ll be able to sleep without Jensen next to him.

The house is really quiet when Jared follows Jensen downstairs and he’s really not used to the silence. It’s just that there’s always a buzz going through the house, especially in the mornings when everyone is getting for work or school.

Annie is in the kitchen and Jared can see that her eyes are swollen. She gives both of them a forced smile.

“I’m gonna take the twins and Lily to school and kindergarten,” she says. “I have the interview at the Science Center tomorrow morning, but I’ll still be able to take them and pick them up again.”

Jared goes over to her and pulls her into his arms. “Thank you. I’m so proud of you, honey.”

“I love you, Dad. I’ll be by the hospital later, okay?”

He presses a kiss to her forehead. “Of course.”

There are footsteps on the stairs and a second later Sophie-Ellie and Ben walk into the kitchen. Jared raises his eyebrows in surprise, because he thought that Ben went home last night.

“Good morning.”

Sophie-Ellie looks over at Ben and then blushes, but doesn’t say anything except, “Morning.”

“How are you feeling, sweetie?” Jared asks.

“I’m fine,” Sophie-Ellie says. “You don’t need to worry, Daddy.”

He chuckles. “I’ll always worry about my kids.”

“I’ll make sure she’s alright, Uncle JT. Promise,” Ben says, wrapping his arm around Sophie-Ellie’s shoulders and giving Jared a reassuring smile.

Squeezing Ben’s shoulder Jared nods. “You’re a good guy, Ben.”

“I’ll be upstairs, making sure the twins and Lily are getting ready,” Annie says, wiping a hand over her face.
“I’ll help you,” Sophie-Ellie says and Jared watches them walk out of the kitchen in a rush.

Jensen’s sitting at the kitchen island, silently drinking his coffee and Jared lays a hand on his shoulder, squeezing a little. Jensen lays his hand over Jared’s, squeezing back, but he doesn’t look up. It’s enough comfort for Jared, though.

“Ben, you want coffee too?” Jared asks. “The cereal is still in its usual place, just help yourself.”

“Thanks. I’ll take coffee, but I’m not hungry.”

The back door opens in that moment and Jesse walks inside. “Morning,” he mumbles and sits down next to Jensen at the kitchen island. Jared pours him a cup of coffee too and puts it in front of him. It gets him a small smile in return.

They all sit in silence, while drinking their coffee and Jared really wishes they could talk about normal things, like school and work and the weather. But he can’t bring himself to say anything.

A knock on the front door, pulls him out of his thoughts and when he notices that none of the other people in the room make a move to open it, so he walks over. Sophia, Misha and Laura are standing on the porch. And he can see Mike and Tom making their way across the yard. It brings tears to his eyes.

“We thought that Annie could take Laura to school with the twins,” Sophia says and Jared can see that she’s barely holding it together.

“I’m sure she can,” he says, pulling his best friend into a tight hug. “C’m in. There’s coffee.”

Misha is his usual stoic self he always is when there’s a crisis, and he pushes Laura past Jared, who waits for Tom and Mike to make their way to the porch. Sophia squeezes his hand, before she steps into the house. It’s only a second later when Jared finds himself in an embrace by first Tom and then Mike.

“Whatsoever you’ll need, JT,” Mike says and Jared forces a smile.

“C’m in. There’s coffee.”

The kitchen is suddenly crowded with people, but Jared still misses the buzz that normally accompanies these meetings. Everyone is really quiet and it gets on Jared’s nerves and makes him twitchy. Even the twins are not chatting away while they eat their cereal and Lily is sitting on Jensen’s lap, not even eating at all. It makes Jared want to scream that he’s not dead yet.

He wants things to go back to normal, but normal seems so far away that it’s not even in range.

When it’s finally time to leave, Jared hugs his kids, telling them that he’ll miss them and that he’ll be back as soon as he can. Lily is crying, clinging to him tightly and it breaks his heart. The twins are really quiet when he embraces them; not crying, but still holding on to him tightly.

He ruffles their hair and says, “Be good to your papa.”

Annie and Sophie-Ellie are both trying to be strong, but Jared can see how shaken up they are. It makes his heart heavy and he only is a little comforted by the thought that both Jesse and Ben, will make sure they’re all right.

Sophia, Misha, Mike and Tom insist on going to the hospital with him and Jensen, even though Jared tells them they don’t need to and that they won’t be able to do anything but wait. He can’t change
When they get to the hospital, Stephen, Jared’s nurse, is already waiting for him. He raises his eyebrows in what seems to be surprise, when he sees Jared’s entourage. He shrugs.

“Couldn’t make them stay at home.”

Stephen grins and nods. “I’m sure they can be really stubborn. How about we get you settled in your room and then I’ll let Dr. Cohen know that you’re here and you can talk about the treatment?”

Jared sighs. “Okay.”

Stephen turns to Jensen and his friends. “Okay, I’m going to get Jared settled in his room. You can wait in the waiting room and I’ll let you know when we’re finished.”

“I’m going with you,” Jensen says and Jared squeezes his hand.


Stephen shows them to Jared’s room and hands Jared his hospital gown. “You can go change and then I’ll take your vitals.”

Jared goes to change and when he looks at himself in the mirror once he’s put on the hospital gown, he thinks he looks paler. As if the white gray of the gown makes him look sicker.

When he steps back into the room, he feels the tension between Jensen and Stephen again that he felt yesterday. He wonders what this is all about. When he’s finally sitting in his hospital bed Stephen takes his blood pressure and temperature.

“I’ll let your friends know that you’re ready to see them. Dr. Cohen will be by shortly. You just push the call button if you need anything, okay?”

Jared nods. “Thank you.”

The door to the room closes behind Stephen and Jared looks over to where Jensen’s standing, looking out of the window.

“Jen?”

“The view is shit.”

Jared snorts. “I don’t think I’ll mind that much.”

There’s a knock on the door and then his friends are walking inside, taking away the chance for Jared to ask what’s really wrong with Jensen.

“So when will the doctor be here?” Mike asks.

“The nurse said soon,” Jared says. “You really didn’t need to come. There’s nothing to do but wait.”
“It’s okay, JT. We like waiting,” Tom says and winks. It’s the first glimpse at normal since the news yesterday.

Jared gives his friend a small smile and nods. “Okay.”

They fall silent again and Jared tries to think of things to say, but nothing comes to mind really. How can he expect his friends to talk about something, if he can’t think of anything himself?

“Good morning.” Dr. Cohen walks inside a little later and stops dead in his track when he sees Jared’s friends crowding the room. “Wow, you’ve got a real entourage here, Jared.” He grins sheepishly and Dr. Cohen claps his shoulder. “How are you feeling today?”

“Okay, I guess. A little tired.”

Dr. Cohen nods. “Your vitals look as good as expected. So, how about we get you started on your treatment?” Jared nods hesitantly, feeling his heart speed up. “To avoid frequent injections we’ll use a central line to administer the drugs. The tube is put into a vein in your upper chest and other than a stiff shoulder for a couple of days, it should be completely painless. We’ll tape it to your chest once it’s in and can use it for the chemo, possible blood transfusions and blood samples. Makes it easier on you and us.”

Jared nods. “Okay.”

“After that we’ll get you hooked up with your first session of drugs. The cycle will last about 5-10 days and after that we’ll see how well you feel and if you’re ready to go home for a few weeks. You might feel nauseous and there might be vomiting, but we’ll give you some anti-nausea drugs. If you’re still feeling sick after you take them let us know and we’ll try some different drugs, okay?” Jared nods again, trying to take it all in. “We’ll do whatever we can to make your stay here as comfortable as possible, Jared. But there’ll be side effects. Nurse Coletti will be monitoring you closely and if you have any questions you can ask him or ask him to call me, okay?”

“Thank you.”

“Okay. Let’s get you ready for the central line. We’ll be giving you a local anesthetic and I’ll try my best to be fast.” Dr. Cohen smiles at him, before turning around to Jensen and their friends. “Why don’t you all go home and come back this evening? Jared will be busy most of the day.”

His friends exchange looks and Jared knows that they don’t want to leave him alone. “It’s okay. You go home and come back later. I’ll be fine. I’m in good hands.”

Sophia comes over first. She presses a soft kiss to his temple. “Misha and I will be back this evening, okay?” Jared nods. “Sure. I’m in good hands, Soph.”

“I know.” She squeezes his hand and gives him a shaky smile.

Misha, Mike and Tom tell him to keep his chin up and that they’ll be back later. They leave with a last look at Jensen who’s still stubbornly sitting in the chair next to Jared’s bed.

“Jen, go home. There’s nothing you can do here.”

“I’m staying.”

Jared smiles sadly. “The kids need you. You can come back later, but they need you to be home
when they come home.”

“Annie is home.”

“She’s not their father. Please Jen, I know you’re worried, but please, you have to be home for the kids.”

Jensen runs a hand over his face and Jared has never seen him looking so helpless and vulnerable.

“Jared’s right, Jensen,” Dr. Cohen says. “There’s nothing you can do here right now. I promise you we’ll take good care of Jared and you can come back later.”

Something flashes across Jensen’s face and Jared thinks for a second that he’ll explode right into Dr. Cohen’s face, but then he nods. “Okay, I’ll go, but I’ll be back tonight.”

Jared smiles. “Of course, I’ll expect you to.” He holds out his hand and pulls Jensen over to him. “I love you. Tell the kids I love them too.”

“Love you too and I will.” He turns to Dr. Cohen. “Can I bring the kids by later?”

Dr. Cohen smiles. “How old are they?”

“Lily is five and the twins are almost eleven,” Jared says proudly.

“I think it’s okay to bring them. But only if they’re not sick. I do think that’s important for Jared, as well as for the kids, to be together, though. However, you might want to think about not bringing them once Jared’s hit with the full effect of the drugs. It can be really hard on them to see their father really sick.”

Jensen nods. “Thanks, I’ll bring them tonight.”

“Awesome,” Jared says and squeezes Jensen’s hand.

Jensen leans down and softly kisses Jared. Jensen’s lips are soft and Jared wraps his hands around his neck to keep him there a little longer. When they finally pull apart, Jared’s lips feel kiss swollen and hot.

“I’ll see you later,” Jensen says and Jared wants to beg him to stay, even though he just told him to go and that the kids need him. But Jared needs him too and staying here in the hospital all alone is very scary all of a sudden.

“Yeah.”

When the door closes behind Jensen, Jared feels like crying. Dr. Cohen pats his hand.

“You’re in good hands, Jared. We’ll do whatever it takes to make you healthy again.”

Jared nods. “Good. Let’s get started.”
Jensen really doesn’t know how he got back to Dalton. He probably should be happy that he didn’t end up in a ditch, but he can’t bring himself to feel anything at all right now. He’s been feeling numb since his little outburst in the car yesterday.

He parks the car in front of the station, but doesn’t get out right away. He just sits there, his fingers wrapped tightly around the steering wheel and he can’t bring himself to let go. As if something horrible would happen if he’d let go of the wheel. It’s completely ridiculous, but he just can’t bring himself to loosen his fingers.

“Jen?”

He looks up and sees Chad standing next to the driver’s door, motioning for him to either get out or roll down the window. Counting to ten, he finally forces himself to take his left hand off the wheel and roll down the window.

“What’s going on, Jen? You’ve been sitting out here for almost an hour.”

What? That can’t be right. Jensen shakes his head. “I…”

“C’mon, Jensen. Get out of the car.” Chad pulls the door open. “Here, see, very easy. Just let go of the steering wheel.”

“I don’t know if I can,” Jensen admits.

“Of course you can, Jen,” Chad says. “You’re Jensen Ackles, Sheriff, father of six; you don’t let a little anxiety attack get to you like that.”

Jensen nods and then counts to ten once more. Then he’s finally able to let go of the steering wheel completely and Chad helps him out.

“Fuck,” he breathes. “Jared’s just started treatment, how will I get through this?”

Chad gives him a sad smile. “You have to get it together, Jen. The kids need you. You’ll need to find a way to deal.”

“I know, genius!” Jensen spits out. Suddenly the anger is back and he really wants to punch something.

Chad huffs out a laugh. “Now that is more like the Jensen Ackles I know. C’min, I’m sure you could use a coffee. Al made carrot muffins too. You know she always bakes when she’s anxious.”

Jensen lets out a deep breath and follows Chad into the station. Katie is at the front desk and gives him a small wave and a smile.

“How’re things going?”

Chad shrugs. “It’s pretty quiet today. And Jensen, it’s okay if you won’t be back for a little while. We’ll deal.”

“Thanks, Chad. But I’m the Sheriff and the people need to know that I’ll still take care of Dalton.”

Chad cocks his head. “Okay, whatever you want. So, how’s Jared doing?”


“Al and I will go see him tonight or tomorrow.”
“I’m sure he’d like that,” Jensen says. “Now, bring me up to date.”

Chad’s right, the day at the station is really quiet and Jensen has way too much time to think about what Jared’s going through at the hospital. When Katie catches him for the third time staring at the wall for a significant amount of time, he grabs his keys and makes his way home.

He finds Annie in the kitchen, cleaning the dishes. She raises her eyebrows in surprise.

“You’re home already. I didn’t think you’d be home before tonight.”

“Young Dad kicked me out, told me I couldn’t do anything. I’ll go back tonight, though,” Jensen says and rubs a hand over his face. “He’s allowed visitors, so you should come too.”

Annie smiles a little. “Sure. How’s he doing?”


“He’s gonna be all right, right?”

Jensen looks at her and sees her composure crumbling. He doesn’t really know how to answer this, because he doesn’t know if Jared’s gonna be alright. He remembers both Jared’s and Chad’s words, though, and he nods. “Of course. Hey, come here.” He pulls her into a hug. “It’s gonna be okay. You’re Dad’s strong. He’ll beat this.”

Annie holds on to him and Jensen rocks her back and forth. “I can’t lose my Dad, Jen. I just can’t.”

“Shh,” he says soothingly. “You won’t. The doctors will fix this.”

They stand like this for a long time and Jensen just holds her, whispering soothing words into her ear, even though it’s only for her benefit. When she finally pulls away, he pushes her hair back and presses a kiss to her forehead.

“I’ll go and pick up Lily and the twins. How about you order us some pizza?”

Annie gives him a tight smile and nods. “Yeah, okay.”

Jensen drives to the daycare first. Lily is sitting at one of the small tables, drawing a picture when he walks into the room. Amanda, the teacher, comes over to him.

“She’s been really brave today.”

Jensen nods and forces a smile. “She’s a brave little girl.” He walks over and runs his fingers through Lily’s hair. “Hey baby, you ready to go home?”

She looks up and throws herself into his arms. “Papa!” She kisses his cheek and then grabs the drawing, holding it out for him. “Look, I drew a picture for Daddy.”

Jensen looks at it and he’s feeling the wall that he built up to enable him to take care of his children
crumble, when he sees what Lily drew: a picture of their whole family, all holding hands and smiling.

“That’s beautiful, sweetie. I’m sure Daddy will love it.”

“Can we go see him now?”

“We’ll go tonight. First we’ll pick up your brothers and have a little something to eat, okay?”

Lily shrugs. “I’m not hungry.”

“Annie’s ordering pizza.” Normally this would have gotten an excited squeal out of his daughter, but today it doesn’t even get him a smile. Jensen swallows hard. “C’mon, your brothers are waiting.”

At school, Jensen sees Sandy waiting with the twins, Adam and Laura. He forces a smile to his face.

“Jen, hey.” She pulls him into a hug. “Sophia called me and told me that we can go by the hospital tonight. How are you doing?”

“I’m fine. And yes, the doc said it would be fine to visit Jared tonight.”

Sandy gives him a watery smile. “Okay, I’ll go see him tonight, then. And if you need anything, Jen, you just let us know.”

Jensen wants to snort and tell her that all he needs is a healthy Jared at home, but he knows that she means well and in the end he only nods. He waves at the boys. “C’mon boys, Annie is waiting with pizza for us.”

The twins trudge behind him to the car and Jensen misses the chattering that’s normally going on. “How was your day, boys?”

“Okay,” Ty says quietly.

“Can we go and see Daddy tonight too?” Jamie asks.

Jensen nods and looks into the rear view mirror, giving the boys what he hopes is a reassuring smile. “Yeah, the doc said that it’s okay, if we visit him tonight.”

Jamie and Ty seem to be satisfied and they fall silent. Jensen grips the steering wheel tighter, as if that’d give him the needed comfort.

Luke wishes he could have gone to the hospital in the morning, but the programming class he’s taking had this really important test today that he couldn’t really miss it if he wants to graduate in the summer.

That’s why it’s already after noon when he and Evan get to the hospital. The nurse at the front desk is really nice and tells them where his dad’s room is. When they get there though, it’s empty.
“Hey, I’m guessing one of you is Jared’s son Luke.”

Luke turns around to see a guy in scrubs standing a few feet away. “I am.”

The guy smiles. “I’m sure Jared will be thrilled to see you once he gets here after the chemo. It’ll take a while though.” He holds out his hand. “I’m Stephen, your father’s nurse. I’m guessing we’ll be seeing each other a lot.”

“I’m Luke and this is my fiancé Evan.”

“Right.” Stephen shakes Evan’s hand. “Jared told me that you’re getting married. He’s so proud of you.”

Luke swallows hard. “Yeah, we’re thinking about postponing the wedding though, so that Dad’s completely healthy again.”

Stephen looks at him with something unreadable in his eyes and slowly nods. “Do me a favor and talk to your Dad about this, before you decide anything, okay?”


“Well, you can wait here. But you need to wash your hands thoroughly. It’ll be a while before he’s back. Down the hall is a coffee dispenser, if you want something to drink, but remember to wash your hands when you enter the room again.”

“Thank you,” Evan says, grabbing Luke’s hand. “We will.”

“Good. I’ll be at the nurses’ station if you need anything.”

He leaves Luke and Evan alone in the hospital room and only now does Luke realize how naked and sterile it looks.

“We need to get Sophie-Ellie to draw some pictures, so it looks a little nicer in here.”

Evan smiles and pulls Luke’s hand towards his lips to press a small kiss to it. “I think that’s a great idea. I’m sure Jared would love that.”

“A few pictures of his family would be nice too,” Luke says.

Rapid steps sound in the hallway and then the door is pushed open in a hurry. Luke practically jumps out of his chair because he’s so surprised. But then he relaxes again.

“Aunt Megan?”


“We’re fine,” Evan says and Luke adds, “Dad’s getting his chemo right now. He’ll be back in a while.”

Megan lets out a breath. “Okay. I came here as fast as I could. Damn, I could use a coffee. You boys want something?”

Luke and Evan shake their heads. “No, thanks,” they say at the same time and Megan raises an amused eyebrow.
“I didn’t know you turned into twins.” Luke doesn’t have it in him to say anything to that and Megan gently touches his cheek. “He’ll be okay, Luke. He’s strong.”

She leaves to get her coffee and Luke leans against Evan. “I hope she’s right.”

Evan kisses his temple. “Of course she is, baby. You’ll see.”

Five minutes later, Megan is back and Luke is grateful for her endless chatting. She tells them about New York and work on Broadway and Evan talks about college and planning their marriage. Luke doesn’t participate in their conversation, but it’s still nice to listen to them talk about some normal things.

It’s an hour later that his dad is rolled into the room in a wheelchair pushed by Stephen. He looks pale and small and it really hits home that he’s sick. His eyes light up when he sees Luke, Evan and Megan waiting for him, though.

“Meggie, what’re you doing here?”

“Now that’s a stupid question, don’t you think?”

Stephen laughs and his dad chuckles weakly too. “I like your sister, Jared.” He helps Jared into the bed and Luke feels so helpless seeing his father weak like this. “She’s very ‘no bullshit’.”

His dad rolls his eyes. “She sure is.”

Megan snorts. “Of course. So,” she looks at Stephen, “are you Jared’s nurse?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Can you tell me about the cancer or do I need to talk to a doctor?”

Stephen gives Luke’s dad a pointed look and then tells Megan about the cancer and the treatment. It’s the first time that Luke hears it too and it makes his head spin.

“So what are the chances?” Megan asks and Luke grips Evan’s hand tightly.

“Jared’s still relatively young, so the chances are good,” Stephen says.

“Relatively young, huh?” Jared grumbles.

Stephen laughs again. “Oh, you know what I mean. I’m gonna leave you with your family now, JT. If you feel any nausea or you need anything just let me know, okay?”

“Yeah, I will. Thank you.”

Stephen leaves and Luke walks over to his dad’s bed. “How are you feeling, Dad?”

His dad smiles. “I’m fine, Luke. A little tired, but other than that I’m fine.” He pats Luke’s hand. “So, how are the wedding preparations going?”

“About that,” Luke says, feeling nervous all of a sudden. “We were thinking of postponing the wedding, just until you’re feeling better again.”

“But I want you to walk me down the aisle,” Luke says and he feels like a little boy begging for the newest video game.

“And I will, son. But keep the date, Luke. It’s giving me something to look forward to.”

Luke exchanges a look with Evan and then nods. “Okay, we’ll keep the date. We also decided to have the wedding at the ranch.”

His dad raises his eyebrows in surprise. “Really? That’s great. I’m sure Donna will be thrilled.”

Jensen and the kids drive to the hospital when it’s late afternoon and he finds Jared’s nurse in the hallway. He still doesn’t like the cheerfulness Stephen displays. This is serious and not something to take lightly.

Stephen shows him and the kids where they can wash their hands, so they can reduce the risk of infection for Jared.

“Now you’re ready to go and see your Dad,” Stephen says and Lily rushes into the room.

“Daddy!”

“Hey, pumpkin. It’s so good to see you.”

Jensen walks into the room, pushing Ty and Jamie in too. The boys seem a little shy, but Jensen’s sure that this’ll go away once they see their dad. Annie, Jesse and Sophie-Ellie are right behind them.

Jared’s sitting in the bed and his skin is almost as white as the sheets. He looks weak and sick. Jensen gives Luke, Evan and Megan a short nod, before making his way over to Jared, pressing a kiss to his temple.

“Hey, Jay. How are you feeling?”

“I’m fine, Jen. Stop worrying,” he smiles. “Now help Lily up here, so she can show me the picture she drew.”

Jensen lifts their daughter up to sit next to Jared and his heart hurts when he sees how happy Jared is about the drawing. He listens to Jared talk to their kids, without really taking part in the conversation. He can’t bring himself to act like everything’s normal. But he realizes that the kids need that; the tension seems to fall off of them the longer Jared asks about their day.

Their friends come by, as do Angie and Matthew and Jensen’s parents, and more platitudes are exchanged, which really gets on Jensen’s nerves. He can’t wrap his head around how they’re able to just talk casually about their day. Jared is sick and there’s a chance of him dying, but they’re talking about days at work and funny things that happened during the day.

He doesn’t get it.

In the end he barely says a word while they are at the hospital and Jared seems to realize that too. He
threw more than one concerned look in Jensen’s direction, but Jensen knows that he won’t ask while the room is so crowded.

When they get home that evening, Jensen lets Annie take care of getting the smaller kids ready for bed and only tells them good night once they’re tucked it.

“Papa, will you read Alice in Wonderland to me?” Lily asks and Jensen shakes his head.

“Not tonight, sweetheart. It’s already past your bedtime. You need to sleep now.”

Lily nods, but Jensen can see that she’s really disappointed. He asks himself what Jared would do and then grabs the book. “But only a couple of pages.”

Lily smiles broadly. “Okay.”

They read for a little while and Jensen didn’t need to worry, because Lily falls asleep during the second page Jensen reads to her. He presses a kiss to her forehead and turns off the light.

The twins are already in bed too and Jensen kisses both of his sons and wishes them sweet dreams.

He walks downstairs and finds the living room and kitchen empty and silent. The silence is echoing in his head and he presses his hands against his temples. Going over to the cabinet above the fridge, he takes out the bottle that’s hidden in the back corner.

Jensen walks outside and sits down on the stairs of their back porch. He unscrews the bottle and takes a deep swallow, feeling the alcohol burn in his throat.
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.” ~Helen Keller

The sun is high in the sky when Annie walks out of the building of the National Science Center in Dallas. It really reflects how Annie should be feeling right now, after getting the job on the research team, but instead she can’t stop thinking about her dad at the hospital. This should be a happy day, but instead it’s overshadowed by the fact that her dad has cancer and how the look of him in the hospital bed last night only made it clearer that he’s really sick.

She can’t really get the image of the paleness of his skin and the dark shadows beneath his eyes out of her head. And she knows it’ll only get worse.

Her car is parked at the end of the parking lot and she walks over to it. She doesn’t even realize that someone is leaning against the side of her car until she’s practically standing in front of him. Letting out a deep breath, she shakes her head.

“I really don’t have time for this, Robert.”

“What were you doing in there?”

“That’s none of your business,” Annie says calmly. “And now I’d appreciate it if you’d step away and just leave. Go back to California, Robert. It’s over.”

He stares at her intently and a cold shiver runs down Annie’s spine. “You’re coming with me. You belong to me now, Annie.”

She snorts. “Yeah, not gonna happen. Why don’t you just accept it, Robert? It’s over. You want me to write it down for you?”

Robert bristles and grabs her arm tightly. It hurts and Annie struggles to get free. “You little
ungrateful brat. Nobody leaves a Worthington."

“Let me go, Robert. Or are you gonna hit me again? Punch some sense into me as you like calling it?”

“Hey!” Annie sighs in relief when she hears a voice calling over to them and footsteps rapidly making their way over. “You heard the lady, let go of her.” Robert presses his lips tightly together, but loosens his grip and Annie pulls her arm away. The guy that interrupted them is huge with broad shoulders and dark hair. He could definitely kick Robert’s ass and Robert seems to know exactly that. “I’d say you better leave now. If I see you here ever again I’m calling the cops. This is private property for employees only.”

“I’ll go,” Robert grumbles. “I’ll see you later, Annie.”

Annie cringes but doesn’t say anything. She waits for him to walk across the street and get into his rental before she turns to the man again. “Thank you.”

He smiles. “No problem. If he ever bothers you again, here or at the center, let me know. I’m Colin. I work here.”

“I’m Annie. I’m new, just got a job on the research team.” They shake hands.

“Hey, if the guy gives you any more trouble maybe you should consider getting a restraining order. I have a friend with the Dallas PD if you’re interested.”

“Thanks that’s really nice. I’ll think about it.” Annie rubs over her forearm. Robert probably left bruises.

“He hurt you?” Colin looks concerned and Annie shakes her head.

“Not really. You had good timing.” He doesn’t look as if he really believes her and Annie adds, “I’m fine, really.”

“Okay. Well, I have to get back to my desk, but it was really nice meeting you, Annie. I’ll see you around, okay?”

“Sure and thanks for the help.”

Colin smiles. “Anytime.”

Annie gets into her car and gives him a little wave before pulling out of the parking lot and onto the street. She had honestly thought that Robert had left Dalton after his little stunt at the house. But instead he even followed her to get her alone. It’s scaring her that he doesn’t take ‘no’ for an answer. Maybe a restraining order is the right way to go, even though she really just wants to forget about all of what happened.

She comes home to a silent house, which isn’t really surprising, because it’s not even noon, but it still hits her like a punch to the gut. Sadie and Harley are lying on the carpet in front of the couch in the living room, barely opening their eyes to acknowledge Annie coming home. She rubs over their heads, before heading into the kitchen.

The dishes from last night’s dinner and breakfast are piling up in the sink and she fills the dishwasher, turning it on. After that, she wipes the counter and puts away the cereal boxes that still stand on the kitchen island.
When the kitchen looks clean again, she makes her way back into the living room, putting away Lily’s crayons and the twins’ Wii controllers. She folds the newspaper that either Jensen or Jesse left unfolded on the coffee table and fluffs up the cushions.

The doorbell rings and it pulls her out of the stupor she’s been in ever since driving back home. Annie lets out a deep breath and makes her way to the front door. Her eyes widen in shock when she recognizes who’s standing on the porch.

“What are you doing here?”

Sharon frowns. “We’ve heard about our son’s illness. No thanks to his husband, though.”

“Excuse me?” Annie asks offended. “I’m sure that has something to do with the little fact that you haven’t bothered getting in contact with your son for the last twelve years.”

“That wasn’t our decision,” Gerald says. “Jared Tristan decided to cut us out of his life.”

Annie shakes her head and crosses her arms over her chest. “Because you couldn’t accept who he decided to spend his life with. Neither my father nor Jensen were good enough in your eyes. What do you expect?”

Sharon gapes. “Gerald.”

“That’s really not a topic I will discuss with you, young lady. Why don’t you let us in, so we can get settled?”

Annie raises her eyebrows. “I’m sorry, but I’m afraid you have to stay at a hotel. This house is already full. Maybe you should just call next time.”

“Mother, Father? What are you doing here?” Annie sees Megan making her way up the driveway.

“Well, your lovely house mate told us that you weren’t home because your brother has cancer,” Sharon says bitterly. “Why didn’t you call us?”

Megan snorts. “Right, now you give a shit. Really, Jared’s in no way able to deal with your bullshit right now. So why don’t you go back to San Antonio. We’ll keep you updated.”

“This is no way to talk to your parents, Megan Alicia,” Gerald scolds.

“We haven’t talked in years - sorry I forgot what the proper way to address you is. So?” Megan looks at them with a slightly amused look on her face.

“We’re not leaving. Tell us in what hospital they’re treating Jared Tristan,” Sharon says. “We just want to make sure that the best doctors are working on his case.”

Annie exchanges a look with Megan. They both know that Sharon and Gerald have their ways of finding out things and that it really is useless to not tell them the hospital’s name, because they’ll find out nonetheless.

“He’s at Dallas General Hospital,” Megan says. “But please, he’s already going through enough. He doesn’t need your meddling.”

“None of us do,” Annie adds. “You didn’t give a shit for years. We don’t need you to now.”

“Anastasia, you need to understand…,” Gerald starts but Annie cuts him off.
“Oh I understand perfectly. My dad made choices you didn’t like - just like Aunt Megan - and because of that you didn’t think he was worth being your son anymore. But let me tell you something, when you’re a family you love each other unconditionally and not only when your kids do what you want them to do. Now, if you’ll excuse us. We have to pick up Lily and the twins from school.”

Annie walks into the hallway and grabs the keys to her car, while Megan stands in the doorway keeping her parents from entering.

“You better find a hotel,” Megan says. “Jensen really doesn’t need to have to deal with you too.”

Sharon and Gerald stand on the porch, looking shell shocked, while Annie and Megan make their way to Annie’s car and drive away.

“You think they’ll listen to us?” Annie asks, already knowing the answer.

Megan huffs out a laugh. “No way. We have to warn Jared and Jensen that they’re in Dalton. Don’t want them to have the same surprise we just did.” She squeezes Annie’s shoulder. “You handled yourself perfectly. That’s exactly how you need to talk to them.”

“I was a little shocked when I saw them standing on the porch,” Annie admits.

“Me too. I haven’t talked to them in years. It figures that they call when I’m not home and I’ll definitely have a talk with my house mate about confidentiality.”

Annie chuckles. “She didn’t know.”

“Yeah well, she should have. She knows what I think about my parents.”

“She probably meant well.”

Megan sighs. “Yeah probably.” She looks over at Annie. “Hey, I didn’t ask. How did the interview go?”

Annie smiles a little. “Good. I got the job.”

“Really, that’s awesome. I’m so happy for you. I’m sure Jensen and your dad will be so proud of you when you tell them.”

Annie nods slowly. “Yeah.”

“Hey,” Megan nudges Annie’s shoulder a little. “He’s gonna be fine. He’s strong and he has so much to fight for.”

“I really hope you’re right. I don’t want the twins and Lily to go through what we went through when our father died,” Annie says softly.

“It’ll be okay. We’ll make sure it is and in a few months, Luke and Evan will get married and we won’t be thinking about what’s happening right now anymore.”

Annie nods. “Yeah. You’re right. It’ll be okay.”
School’s dragging on and on today. The classes are boring and Sophie-Ellie can’t really concentrate on any of them. Her mind keeps wandering either to her dad lying in the hospital or to the baby she’s having. Everything’s still so scrambled in her mind. She may have finally decided to have the baby and raise the baby too, but that doesn’t mean that her future that’s lying ahead isn’t really foggy right now.

She doesn’t know how it will all play out. All she knows is that she has friends and a family that will have her back.

Michelle nudges her shoulder and Sophie-Ellie looks over to her, only to see that her friend is pushing over a water bottle to her.

“You look a little pale,” she whispers and Sophie-Ellie gives her a grateful smile.

“Thanks.” She takes a sip and the cold water rushing down her throat feels good.

Ten minutes later their history class is finally over and they make their way over to the cafeteria. Ben is waiting at the entrance and Sophie-Ellie waves at him, receiving a blinding smile.

“He likes you, y’know?” Michelle says conspiratorially.

Sophie-Ellie frowns. “What do you mean?”

Michelle rolls her eyes. “He likes you.”

“Yeah right,” she says and shakes her head. “We’re friends. We’ve been friends forever.”

“Doesn’t mean that can’t change.” Michelle grins. “I’m just saying.”

“You’re delusional,” Sophie-Ellie says, but there’s a quiet voice in her head saying ‘What if she’s not?’ Ben can’t like like me, can he?

They walk past Piper and her cheerleading squad, who promptly put their heads together and start gossipping. But Sophie-Ellie keeps her head high and stops next to Ben.

“Hey, how’re you feeling?” he asks and she knows that he doesn’t just mean the pregnancy.

She shrugs. “My head’s pretty scrambled right now.”

He puts his arm around her shoulders and pulls her over to their usual table. Michelle gives her a pointed look and Sophie-Ellie feels her stomach drop a little. “It’s gonna be okay. You’ll see. Uncle JT is strong.”

“Thanks.” She gives Ben a grateful smile and pulls out the sandwich she packed for lunch.

“I’ll go and get myself something for lunch,” Ben says. “You want something?”

“No thanks.” She shakes her head. “My stomach is not up to eating fancy cafeteria food right now.”

He grins. “Okay. I’ll be right back.”
“See, I told you,” Michelle says and Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes.

A tray is put loudly on the table and they both look over to see Ray, one of Ben’s basketball buddies, sitting down in a chair at their table.

“I hope you don’t mind,” he says. “Can’t stand Piper’s stupid talk anymore. I think what you’re doing is really brave, Sophie-Ellie.”

She gapes a little at him, because she didn’t even know that Ray knew her name. “Well, thanks, I guess.”

He grins. “So, is it okay if I sit here?”

“Yeah, sure,” Michelle says, shrugging when her eyes meet Sophie-Ellie’s.

A few minutes and a discussion about the healthiness of cafeteria food between Michelle and Ray later, Ben drops into the chair right next to Sophie-Ellie. She sees him exchange a look with Ray and whatever the outcome of their silent conversation, Ben seems to be okay with it because the tension drains out of him and he relaxes into his chair.

They chat about school and basketball and about the party that’s at Ray’s house on Saturday.

“You two really should come,” he says. “We need some cool girls there.” He winks and Sophie-Ellie almost chokes on the last bite of her sandwich.

“I’ll think about it,” she says.

Ray seems pleased. “So, you gonna be at practice this afternoon?” he asks Ben.

Ben shrugs. “Not sure.”

“The coach has asked where you’ve been the last couple of times. He’s not happy with you skipping it.”

“I’ve had more important things to do.”

“You should go to practice, Ben,” Sophie-Ellie says. “I’ll be okay without you for a little while.”

“I promised your dad to watch out for you,” he says quietly and Sophie-Ellie feels her heart swell.

“And you do. But basketball is really important to you. So, I’ll be okay. I can always wait at the library for you.”

“Or we can watch,” Michelle offers seemingly innocent, but Sophie-Ellie knows better and gives her a little glare.

“Yeah, you can always study at the gym,” Ben agrees.

Sophie-Ellie sighs, but the looks on Michelle, Ray and Ben’s faces show her that she’s been overruled for now. Not that she really minds.
“Hey, how’re you feeling?”

Jared blinks his eyes open to see Stephen standing next to his bed, checking his pulse with two fingers against his wrist.

“Sick,” he murmurs. “Or you know, like I have cancer.”

Stephen chuckles. “At least you haven’t lost your sense of humor. You want me to give you something for the nausea?”

Jared shakes his head a little and it takes a real effort. He just feels completely drained. Two days in and he’s already sick and tired of the treatment. “I just wanna sleep. Can you call Jensen? Tell him not to bring the kids?”

“Okay,” Stephen says. “But are you sure you don’t wanna see them?”

“I don’t want them to see me like this.”

“Jared…”

He shakes his head. “They know I’m sick and they’ll see it soon enough.”

Stephen gives him a sad smile. “It’s your decision. Sleep, I’ll call your husband. And when you’re awake again, I’ll have something for you to eat.”

Jared sighs. “Swell.”

“You’re so funny.” Stephen scribbles something down on his board. “But honestly, you need to eat something to stay strong, Jared.”

“I know.”

There’s a knock on the door and a second later it’s pushed open to reveal his parents. Jared’s eyes grow wide in shock.

“Jared Tristan, you never called. Why didn’t you tell us that you’re sick?” Sharon storms into the room, pushing Stephen to the side and putting her hand against Jared’s forehead. “You’re running a temperature and the air in this room is disgusting. Gerald, open the window.”

Stephen gives Jared a ‘What the fuck’-look and Jared shrugs his shoulders helplessly. “What are you doing here, Mother?”

“You’re sick. Of course we’d come by and make sure you’re getting the best care.”

“I am, Mother,” he says tiredly. “Who told you I’m sick?”

“The lovely house mate of our daughter. Of course, Jensen didn’t feel the need to inform us.”

Jared sighs. He’s feeling too tired and drained to argue with her. All he wants to do is close his eyes and sleep for a little while.
“Mr. and Mrs. Padalecki, I need to ask you to leave now,” Stephen says and Jared wants to kiss him - in a completely innocent way, of course - he’s so grateful. “Jared has just come out of chemo and he needs to rest.”

Sharon turns around to him. “Are you his doctor?”

“I’m his nurse.”

She looks him up and down, pursing her lips. “Well, I don’t think you’re in any position to tell me to leave. Jared’s my son.”

“And your son needs rest, Ma’am. The treatment is really tiring and draining. So, please believe me when I tell you that now is not a good time to be here. You should have called ahead and I would have told you to visit in the evenings.”

Jared has to admit that he’s impressed with the calm Stephen is displaying while dealing with Jared’s mother.

“Do you know who we are?” Sharon says. “I’m sure you’ve heard of Padalecki Oil.”

“With all due respect, Ma’am, I don’t care if you’re the Pope. Jared is my first concern and he needs his rest. So, we can do this the easy way or I’ll get hospital security and have them lead you out.”

“Gerald,” Sharon whines and Jared would roll his eyes if he weren’t so tired.

“It’s okay, darling. We’ll go, but we will be back.”

“Of course,” Stephen says pleasantly. “Around 7 pm is a wonderful time to visit.”

Gerald pushes Sharon out of the room, giving Stephen a last annoyed look and then the door closes behind them.

“Thank you,” Jared breathes.

Stephen chuckles. “Oh wow, those are your parents? Poor you.”

“I haven’t talked to them in twelve years, but I should have known that they’d be back one day, trying to weasel their way in and get what they want,” Jared says quietly, before huffing out a tired laugh. “You know what you just did?” Stephen frowns and shakes his head. “You just told my parents to come by when Jensen will be here. That’s gonna be awesome.”

“I’m taking it they don’t like each other,” Stephen says, laughing a little.

“Not one bit.”

“I’ll warn him and you can sleep, okay?”

Jared nods and already feels himself slipping out of consciousness. When he wakes, Jensen will be here and that’s why he falls asleep with a smile on his face.
When Jesse gets home in the late afternoon, he’s met by angry screams. It’s coming out of the living room and he rushes inside to see Annie trying to pull Ty and Jamie apart.

“What’s going on here?” he asks loudly and that actually stops the boys fighting over whatever it is they’re holding.

“Ty and Jamie wanted to play Mario Kart, but both wanted to play the same racer,” Lily says softly and Jesse only now notices her sitting pressed into the corner of the couch. Tears are in her eyes and Jesse’s heart breaks for her. He presses a kiss to her hair.

“Boys, what’s going on?” he asks. “You’re scaring your sister.”

“He played Mario yesterday,” Ty argues defiantly.

“I always play Mario and Ty plays Luigi,” Jamie says.

“But I wanted to play Mario today.”

Jesse looks over at Annie who shrugs her shoulders helplessly. “Well, if you can’t decide who plays whom, you can’t play at all.”

“But I always play Mario.”

“But now I wanna play Mario too.”

Jesse sighs and asks himself for a second how Jared and Jensen always deal with this. “Boys, how about Jamie plays Mario first and then you switch.”

Ty throws the controller onto the floor and stomps his foot. “Of course, you’d be on his side.”

“Hey, I’m on nobody’s side. I’m just trying to help out.”

“Whatever,” Ty says, storming out of the room and up the stairs. A second later, a door slams shut and Jesse feels the sound echoing in his head.

Jamie’s watching him with huge eyes and Annie is holding Lily in her arms now, who’s crying quietly. What a mess and all just because of a video game.

“I’ll go and talk to him.” He ruffles Jamie’s hair and drops another kiss to Lily’s head. “How about you two help your sister scrounge something up for dinner?”

Annie gives him a small smile and motions for Jamie to go with her. Jesse sighs and makes his way upstairs. He’s not ready for this. Jensen should be here and deal with it. The kids need their father around and not some wannabe big brother.

He knocks on the door to the twins’ room and walks in a second later. Tyler is sitting on his bed throwing a tennis ball against the opposite wall.

“I’m pretty sure your fathers don’t like you slamming doors.”
Ty shrugs. “They’re not here.”

Jesse nods and sits down next to him on the bed. “I know it sucks that they’re not here, but the doctors need to make your dad all better.”

“Jenna’s dad died.”

Jesse catches the ball when it bounces back after Ty threw it once again. He rolls it over in his hands. “Your dad’s gonna be okay.”

“You don’t know that.” Tyler starts playing with the hem of his shirt. “I’m not stupid, y’know? I know that cancer kills people.”

“I know you’re not stupid,” Jesse says. “But people survive cancer too.” He swallows and it really should be Jensen or Jared talking to Ty and not him. “It’s hard and scary, but people survive. And the doctors will make sure that your dad’s one of them.”

“Papa said that we can’t go to the hospital because Dad’s feeling unwell today,” Ty says. “I promised to be really quiet, but he still said we had to stay home.”

Jesse pulls Tyler into his arms. “That’s the drugs they’re giving him, they have to make your dad feel unwell in order to make him feel better.”

“That’s stupid.”

“A little, yeah. But it works.” He ruffles Ty’s hair. “How about we go downstairs again and help your brother and sisters with dinner?”

“Will papa be home in time for it?”

Jesse sighs. “We’ll put something aside for him.” Ty hangs his head and Jesse ruffles his hair. “C’mon, buddy. I know you’re hungry.”

Without another word Tyler shuffles out of the room and Jesse follows him. They find Jamie, Lily and Annie in the kitchen making sandwiches.

“Hey, there you are. What kind of sandwich do you want?” Annie asks.

Ty shrugs. “Don’t care.”

“You can play Mario, y’know?” Jamie says quietly. “I’ll play Luigi.”

It doesn’t even bring a smile to Tyler’s face and the rest of dinner goes by in silence with only a couple of words and tries at conversation on Annie and Jesse’s part. After finishing their dinner and cleaning the kitchen, they end up on the couch watching the millionth re-run of The Simpsons. The twins don’t even laugh when Bart shows his naked butt.

Jensen’s not home when it’s time for Lily to go to bed and Jesse can see the disappointment in her eyes.

“C’mon, I’ll read Alice in Wonderland to you,” Annie says, but Lily shakes her head.

“Don’t want to. Want Daddy to read it to me.”

“He’ll be home in a few days,” Jesse says, not sure if he’s trying to reassure Lily or himself. “I’m sure he’ll love to read to you again.”
“Where’s papa?” Lily asks. “I want him to tuck me into bed.”

“He’s with Dad, honey. Tonight you’ll have me and Jesse to tuck you in.”

Lily shrugs. “Okay.”

“Why don’t you go and brush your teeth? We’ll be up in a sec.”

She makes her way up the stairs and a moment later Jesse hears the bathroom door open. He sighs.

Annie gives him a small smile and he reaches out for her, wrapping his fingers around her arm to pull her closer. He lets go instantly when he sees her twitch.

“What? Did I hurt you?”

Annie looks over to where the twins are sitting on the couch, watching another episode of The Simpsons, and then shakes her head, pulling him out of the room.

“Well, you did, so he’d better get it into his thick head. He really doesn’t want to get to know me better.”

“I know.” He grins. “I know.” He wraps an arm around Annie’s waist, pulling her close. “Only when there are people involved I care about.”

She looks up at him, running her fingers through his hair. “Thank you.”

Their lips meet in a sweet kiss and Jesse pushes for a little more when Lily calls for them that she’s
Jensen makes his way to the hospital with the disappointed look on his kids’ faces, after he told them that their dad doesn’t feel well enough for lots of visitors, fresh in his mind. It twists his heart but it’s something he needs to get used to. There’ll be more and more days when Jared won’t be feeling well enough to see the kids.

He’s just glad that Jared can’t keep him away. He knows that Jared wouldn’t do this out of spite, but he knows his husband and he knows that Jared would rather not see Jensen than see him worry.

An expensive Bentley is parked in the parking lot when Jensen pulls the Impala into a spot and Jensen gives it an appreciative once over. He’s more of a classic car guy, but he can appreciate the beauty of a modern car too.

Stephen is at the nurses’ station and Jensen gives him a curt nod when he walks by, not expecting Stephen to grab his arm and stop him.

“What? Is Jared okay?”

“He’s okay. But he asked me to warn you. His parents came by this afternoon and they’re with him now.”

Jensen groans. “Awesome.” This is just what he needs right now. “Thanks for the warning. I appreciate it.”

“Yeah, no problem. I had the pleasure of meeting them this afternoon. They’re definitely a piece of work.”

Jensen snorts. “That’s putting it mildly.” He rubs a hand over his face. “Have you seen Jared’s blood tests? Is the chemo working?”

Stephen gives him a small smile. “We can’t say right now. We have to wait for a few more sessions to say if it’s working.”

“How’s he feeling?”

“Weak and tired. But I’m sure he’ll feel better when you’re there. He misses you and the kids. He doesn’t say, but I can see it in his eyes.”

“We miss him too.”

Stephen slaps his shoulders. “I know. Just go and save him from his parents. I’ll bring dinner in a little while.”

Jensen nods and maybe Stephen isn’t so bad. He makes his way to Jared’s room and knocks softly before walking inside. Sharon is sitting next to Jared’s bed, while Gerald is standing at the window talking on his cell. Jensen huffs out a humorless laugh. He always thought cells were forbidden in the hospital, but he guesses that different rules apply for Gerald Padalecki.
“Jen, hey,” Jared says and he sounds weak, but he looks really happy to see him.

“Hey baby.” He pushes past Sharon, who lets out an annoyed little sound, and presses a kiss to Jared’s forehead. He’s a little warm, but Dr. Cohen told them that a higher temperature is normal and that they’re monitoring it, so it won’t get too high.

“You remember my parents?”

Jensen forces a smile. “Sure, how could I forget? Sharon, Gerald, what brought you here?”

Sharon runs her hand down her dark blue dress and shakes her head. “Of course we’d be here after finding out that our baby is sick. No thanks to you.”

“Oh sorry, but I thought after twelve years of being a no show you weren’t interested,” Jensen shoots back.

“He’s our son,” Gerald says, sounding offended. He’s put away his cell again and is now looking right at Jensen. “We had a right to know.”

“He’s been your son for the past twelve years too, but that doesn’t seem to interest you.”

“Jen, let it go,” Jared pleads.

Jensen huffs out a breath and shakes his head but doesn’t say anything. He sits down next to Jared’s bed, taking Jared’s hand into his. “How are you feeling? What did the doctor say?”

“I’m okay, Jen. Don’t worry. Dr. Cohen said it’s all going well enough, but it’s too early to say anything else.”

Jensen nods and presses a kiss to the back of Jared’s hand. “Okay.”

“How are the kids?”

“Sad that I didn’t bring them. They miss you.”

“I miss them too.”

“Well,” Sharon says. “They need to learn that you have to get healthy first. They’ll be okay without you for a while.”

“Mother,” Jared sighs. “We haven’t really been apart more than a night or two for a sleepover. Of course they’ll miss me.”

“Of course you’d spoil them,” Gerald says and Jensen feels the anger start burning in his belly.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Just saying you could have raised them differently and you wouldn’t have to worry about them right now.”

“Like you raised your children?” Jensen shakes his head. “Don’t think for one second that Jared and Megan turned out like they did because you had a hand in it.”

“Jen,” Jared begs softly.

“No Jay. I won’t let them insult us or our kids.”
Jared gives him a small smile and Jensen can see how tired he is in his eyes. “Mother, Father, maybe it’s better if you go now. Give me some time with my husband.”

Sharon gasps. “What? But we just got here. We came all the way up here and now you’re telling us to leave?”

“Well, if I remember right, nobody asked you to come,” Jensen says, barely holding back his anger.

“Please, I’m tired and I wanna spend a little time with my husband. You can come back tomorrow. Maybe I’ll be a little better company then.”

Sharon exchanges a look with Gerald and they both press their lips tightly together and reach for their coats. “We’ll be back tomorrow. Don’t overdo it, honey.”

Jared gives his parents a small smile and then the door closes behind them. “I’m sorry.”

“What?” Jensen asks. “You didn’t do anything. Don’t apologize for them, please.”

“Okay.” Jared scoots to the side a little. “How about you get up here and tell me all about what’s going on at home?”

Jensen frowns. “You want me…”

“Sure, I want you. I spent last night completely alone, so now I need my cuddles.”

Jensen chuckles a little. “Okay.” He climbs on the bed with Jared and lays his arm across his husband’s chest. “Better?”

“Much,” Jared says and Jensen can only agree with him.
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpectedly moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

"In my wildest dreams, you always play the hero. In my darkest hour of night, you rescue me, you save my life." ~Anonymous

When Evan wakes, the bed next to him is empty. It's early in the morning, only a little after 6 am and Luke doesn't have to be at campus before ten. He lets out a deep breath, rubbing a hand over his face, before sitting up and climbing out of bed.

Luke hasn’t been sleeping very well since they found out about Jared's illness and Evan really doesn't know what to do about it. He feels helpless and is sick and tired of that feeling. His fiancé is going through life like a shell right now and Evan wishes there was something he could say or do to make Luke feel better again.

The only thing that'll make him feel better though, is Jared getting better and after a week of chemotherapy this is still too far away. They've been by the hospital almost every night and it doesn't get any easier to see Jared lying in that bed, pale and weak, trying to hold on and fight.

Each visit takes a toll on Luke too. Evan can see that Luke's just waiting for the night the doctors will tell them that Jared didn't make it. He can see the tension in his fiancé's shoulders, can see the tight line of his mouth, how he's steeling himself for the seemingly inevitable.

Evan guesses this has something to do with the fact that Luke’s already lost his other father. He was so young when it happened. He thought Luke had dealt with it, healed - or as much as you can heal from losing a parent. But right now it’s become apparent that this is not the case.

Luke's in the kitchen, sitting at the table with a coffee mug in his hands. He's just staring into thin air and Evan's heart breaks for him. He drops a kiss to Luke's head and pours himself a cup of coffee too. He takes a sip and then sets it aside, laying his hands on Luke's shoulders, gently massaging them.

He feels Luke relax a little beneath his fingers. "Couldn't sleep?" he asks softly.
Luke shakes his head. "Too much going on in my head."

Evan licks his lips and nods, even though Luke can't see him. He runs his fingers gently through Luke's hair. "Maybe you should talk to someone. A professional, I mean."

"You mean a shrink," Luke says and Evan can hear the tension in his voice.

"Yes. Maybe they could help you. You've been walking around like a zombie these last few days."

"My father has cancer. I think that it's okay if I'm not my normally chatty self," Luke growls and pulls away from Evan's touch.

"Of course it's okay," Evan says quietly. "But you don't sleep, you hardly eat anything anymore. This is making you sick, Luke."

"I'm fine," Luke insists, standing up to go and pour himself another cup of coffee.

"No you're not and nobody expects you to be. But I hate seeing you like this and think that maybe talking to someone will help."

"You don't know what it's like to lose a parent," Luke spits out and slams his mug on the counter loudly. "So don't you lecture me; don't tell me what you think is best."

Evan hangs his head and raises his hands in defense. "I didn't try to lecture you. I was just trying to help."

"Well, you can't, so just stop!" Luke yells and Evan twitches at the harsh words.

"What's going on in here?"

Evan looks up to see Dan standing at the bottom of the stairs in only his pajama bottoms. Before he can say anything, Luke says, "Nothing. Sorry we woke you. I'm going to go to the library, I have a test later this week and I could use some studying. I'll see you tonight."

He grabs his keys and wallet, and walks out without even looking back at Evan, who feels the need to punch something, anything.

"What was that about?" Dan asks and he seems genuinely confused.

He shrugs. "I really don't know." He wishes he knew, so he could fix it, but Luke's pulling away from him and he doesn't know why or what to do to make it better.

Jared stares at the mirror. He doesn't recognize the guy that's staring back at him, with his gaunt eyes and pale white skin. He's lost weight, not too much but still noticeable. His legs are weak, shaking a little with the strength that's needed to keep himself upright to brush his teeth and wash his face.

But it's better than the last two days which he'd spent lying in bed, letting Stephen take over his morning routine, because he felt too weak to even stand for a couple of minutes. He guesses that
means it's a good day today.

He runs his brush through his hair and his breath catches in his throat when a bunch of his hair is stuck in the bristles. His hands are shaking when he lifts his arms and pushes his fingers through his hair, coming away with huge chunks.

So this is it.

Jared stumbles out of the bathroom and reaches for the phone on his nightstand. He presses the speed dial and waits for it to ring.

"Jay?"

Jensen sounds sleepy and Jared curses under his breath that he woke up his husband when he was actually sleeping for once.

"I'm sorry for waking you. Go back to sleep. I'm being stupid."

"No. What is it, baby? Tell me what's going on. You need me to come by?"

Jared feels tears building behind his eyes at the urgency in Jensen's voice and all because Jared's losing his hair. He's being so stupid.

"I just needed to hear your voice," he says, pushing the tears back down. "But go back to sleep, you need it. I just didn't think."

"Jay," Jensen sighs. "You can always call me, you know that. And I have to be awake in a few minutes anyway. So it's not a big deal."

Jared feels his heart clench while Jensen's voice washes over him. He misses his husband and kids more than he could have imagined. They come visit him almost every day, just like his friends and his family, but it's not enough, not nearly enough. He's used to being around them twenty-four-seven and he needs that again.

"I miss you," he chokes, not being able to hold it back any longer. "I miss you so much it hurts."

"Hey now," Jensen soothes. "I miss you too and I'll be by this afternoon, okay? I can't wait for you to come home, though."

Jared nods, even though Jensen can't see him. "I know. I'm... I'm losing my hair, Jen. It's probably stupid to be this upset about it, because it's just hair."

There's a pause at the other end of the line and then Jensen says, "It's okay to be upset. But it'll grow back once you're better."

Jared huffs out a breath and it sounds more like a sob. "I know, that's why it's stupid. I just... I shouldn't have called you because I'm losing my hair. I just... I needed to hear your voice."

"Jay, stop it, okay? You can always call me. I want you to always call me."

Jared lets out a long breath. "I hate this."

"Me too," Jensen agrees softly, before he lets out a little curse, "Damn, I need to get up and get Lily and the twins ready for school. I'll see you soon, Jay."

"It's okay. Give the kids a kiss from me, okay? Tell them I love them. I love you too."
"I love you," Jensen says quietly. "I'll be by as soon as I can."

They disconnect the call just in time for Stephen to come by with breakfast. "Hey, you okay?" he asks when he sees Jared's teary face.

"I'm losing my hair."

Stephen cocks his head and nods. "Okay, you want me to get an electric shaver to cut it off?"

Jared shakes his head quickly. "No, I... no."

"Whatever you want, JT. So here's breakfast." He puts the tray on Jared's bedside table. "Toast and jam, just the way you like it."

Jared looks over and feels his stomach turn upside down. The nausea hits him at once and he grabs the spitting bowl that's sitting on his nightstand. Just like that he loses the meager contents of his dinner from last night.

"Take it easy," Stephen says when Jared stops retching and lifts his head. "It's okay. I'll talk with Dr. Cohen about a different anti-nausea drug, because the one right now doesn't seem to be working for you."

It's the third anti-nausea drug they've tried and every single one has failed them. Jared's still throwing up frequently and can barely keep anything other than toast down.

"C'mon, lay down. Just rest. Dr. Cohen will be by in a little while to check on you and then I'll be back to take you to your treatment."

Jared lies back and closes his eyes. He always feels drained after throwing up and right now, he can barely keep his eyes open. Maybe a little more rest isn't such a bad idea.

After Jared's phone call, Jensen feels like his heart has been ripped out of his chest. In all the time Jared's been in the hospital he never sounded so desperate and helpless. He hates that he wasn't there when Jared discovered his hair loss. He jumps under the shower to clean up quickly, before rushing into Lily and the twins' room, waking them and urging them on to get ready quickly.

While he prepares breakfast for the kids - which has fallen back to him after Annie got the job at the Science Center - he dials Angie and Matthew's number. He knows they're early risers, so he doesn't worry about waking them.

"Jensen?" Angie asks, answering the phone.

"Can you take the kids to daycare and school today?" he asks without a greeting.

There's a pause and then Angie says, "Of course. But what..."

"I have to go to the hospital. Jared... he isn't feeling well. I'll be by as soon as I can."

He realizes what he said a little too late and rushes to say, "It's not the cancer. Just... he needs me."
"Of course he does, honey. You just go and be with your husband. I'll be over in a few minutes to take care of the rug rats. Don't worry, sweetheart."

"Thank you," Jensen sighs.

He disconnects the call and dials Chad's number, telling him that he won't be in today. Chad's very understanding and tells him to say 'hello' to Jared and tell him that Chad and Alona will visit soon. By the time he's finished both calls Lily and the twins are still upstairs. Jensen takes two steps at a time and pushes the door to Lily's room open.

She's standing in front of her closet, staring at her clothes. "I don't know what to wear, Papa," she says and Jensen almost loses it.

"Just wear something," he says strained. "You're grandma will be here soon to take you to daycare."

Lily frowns. "But you promised to take me to daycare, Papa."

"Not today, Lily."

"But..."

"Not today!" he says loudly. "Now get dressed."

In the hallway, he almost crashes into Sophie-Ellie who's stepping out of her room. She looks at him with huge eyes.

"Why are you yelling?"

Jensen rubs a hand over his face. "I didn't yell. I just... got a little loud. Will you please make sure that your brothers and sister get ready quickly? Grandma will pick them up to take them to daycare and school."

"But I thought, you wanted..."

"I can't. Your dad needs me; I need to go to the hospital right now."

Sophie-Ellie's eyes grow wide. "What happened?"

Jensen sighs. "It's nothing bad, but your dad needs me right now. So will you help your brothers and sister to get ready so that I can leave?"

"Sure," Sophie-Ellie says quickly.

He squeezes her shoulder and then rushes out of the house. He only remembers that he didn't even ask how Sophie-Ellie was feeling when he's speeding down the road. He'll make it up to their kids when Jared's doing better, but right now Jared's his first concern.

He can probably be happy that he isn't stopped by a police car, because he broke every speed limit there is. Once at the hospital parking lot he takes a deep breath, his look shifts to the glove box and he opens it. The silver flask is lying there, looking innocent. He put it there a few days ago, just in case, but hasn't taken a sip yet.

Jensen reaches out hesitantly and then grabs the flask. It's filled with vodka and the alcohol burns in his throat, but it also makes him relax a little. He lets out a deep breath and puts the flask back where it belongs.
A few minutes later, he's pushing the door to Jared's room open, just to find Dr. Cohen in the room.

"Jen?" Jared asks surprised.

"Jensen, didn't expect to see you this morning," Dr. Cohen says at the same time.

"I just needed to be here," Jensen says and presses a kiss to Jared's forehead, taking his hand. "You got some good news to tell us?"

Dr. Cohen smiles. "Well, I can tell you that if Jared's feeling well enough he can go home after the weekend. Of course he needs to come to the hospital regularly to check his vitals, but I think that's still pretty good news."

"Really?" Jared asks. "Sounds great."

Jensen nods. "That it does."

"Good." There's a knock on the door and Dr. Cohen adds, "There's someone I'd like you both to meet." He goes to open the door. "This is Dr. Roche, one of the best psychologists at this hospital. I think it might be good for both of you to have someone to talk to."

Jensen frowns and Jared's not looking more excited about the news. Dr. Roche is tall and slim, probably a little older than Jensen, with blond hair.

"Hi, it's really nice to meet you two. Dr. Cohen won't shut up about you." He shakes their hands. "We just thought it'd be a good idea to introduce myself to you. Just so you know that you have someone to talk to, y'know. My door's always open, or you can call if you want to."

"Thanks, but we're okay," Jensen says after a look into Jared's eyes.

"I've worked with a lot of cancer patients and their families," Dr. Roche says. "We know this is a hard time for you and sometimes it might be helpful to talk with someone who isn't involved directly."

Jared squeezes Jensen's hand tightly, which Jensen returns full-heartedly. "Thanks, but we're fine. We'll let you know if we need your help."

"Well, you know where to find me," Dr. Roche says and gives both a little smile. "It was still really good to meet you."

Both doctors tell them goodbye and when the door closes, Jensen lets out a deep breath. "Don't know why they think we'd need a shrink."

Jared smiles weakly. "Probably just trying to help."

"Yeah probably." He touches Jared's cheek gently. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay, Jen. You shouldn't have rushed here like that. I was just being stupid."

Jensen leans forward and presses a soft kiss to Jared's lips. "You're not stupid." He pulls out the beanie he grabbed when he got dressed and lays it on the bed. "You want me to shave it off?" Jared stares at the beanie for a long while, before Jensen notices a barely there nod. "It's gonna be okay, Jay."

"I know," Jared whispers, running his fingertips over the wool.
Jensen wraps his arm around Jared's chest and helps him into the bathroom. He brought the electrical shaver from home and when he puts it against Jared's hairline, their eyes meet. "I love you," he says softly and Jared gives him a shaky smile.

"Just get it over with."

Jensen shaves off Jared's head neatly, his heart growing heavier with every strand that falls to the floor. It makes it more real, even more so than it already is. When he's finished, he cups Jared's head between his hands and lifts it.

"Beautiful," he whispers and Jared rolls his eyes, but leans into the kiss Jensen presses to his lips nonetheless.

There's another knock on the door and Jensen helps Jared back into the main room, while Stephen walks inside. The nurse raises his eyebrows and then nods appreciatively.

"Cool. You look great."

"Yeah, yeah," Jared murmurs and pulls the beanie over his head quickly.

"I'm here to take you to chemo. You ready?"

Jared sighs. "As I'll ever be."

Jensen reaches out and squeezes his shoulder. "I'll be here when you get back."

Instead of arguing about that, Jared just nods. It's a sign for Jensen that Jared's feeling too tired and weak today. It breaks his heart.

---

Annie comes home to Sophie-Ellie sitting next to Lily on the living room floor, both of them doodling a picture.

"Hey, you two. How was your day? Where are your brothers?"

Sophie-Ellie points up. "Upstairs."

"Annie!" Lily jumps up and rushes over to her, wrapping her arms around her legs. "Sophie-Ellie and I are painting some pictures for Daddy's hospital room."

"That's awesome." She kneels down and smiles when she sees that it's mostly pictures of all of them together, holding hands and smiling. "They're great."

"You think Daddy will like them?"

She nods. "Of course. He'll love them."

"Papa too?" Lily asks and something in her voice catches Annie's attention.

"Your papa too," she reassures Lily and looks over to Sophie-Ellie, motioning to the kitchen with her
"Hey Lily, why don't you finish the picture for me and I'll help Annie with dinner?"

"Okay."

Annie and Sophie-Ellie walk into the kitchen and Annie asks quietly, "What's going on?"

"PJ yelled at her this morning. He was trying to get to the hospital quickly and Lily couldn't decide on what to wear, so he got loud." Sophie-Ellie sighs. "She was crying when I walked inside, Annie. I didn't know what to do, so I told her that PJ had a really stressful day yesterday and that he didn't mean it."

Annie frowns. "Why did he need to leave for the hospital so quickly? Didn't he promise the kids to take them to daycare and school today?"

Sophie-Ellie shrugs her shoulders. "I don't know. He said not to worry, but that Dad needed him. The twins didn't say anything, but I could see the disappointment in their eyes when I told them that PJ had left and Grandma would take them to school." She lays her hand on her belly and Annie doesn't know if she's doing it consciously or not, but it still warms Annie's heart to see it. "What're we doing, Annie? Lily and the twins need PJ home."

"I don't know," Annie says and shakes her head. "It's hard for all of us. Maybe we can just talk to him."

"Talk to who?"

Annie turns around and can't help but smile a little when Jesse walks into the kitchen in his grease covered overalls. They haven't really talked about what's going on between them again, but Annie doesn't want to over-analyze it. It feels good the way it is and Annie just wants to enjoy it for now. He presses a kiss to her cheek and Sophie-Ellie raises a surprised eyebrow, but Annie talks before she can say anything.

"Jensen. We were talking about Jensen."

"What's with Jensen?"

"He yelled at Lily this morning," Sophie-Ellie explains.

Jesse sighs. "Maybe we should just give him a break. He's having a hard time dealing with all of it."

"He yelled at his five-year-old because she couldn't decide what to wear. She cried," Annie says. "Don't you think we should at least tell him that he was outta line?"

"I think that we're all pulled pretty tight right now and that he's probably already realized what he did and that he'll apologize to Lily for yelling tonight."

"If he's home," Sophie-Ellie says. When Annie and Jesse shoot her a look, she asks, "What?! He hasn't been home for bedtime in days. Don't you think Lily and the twins have noticed that?"

"Just give him a little time," Jesse says. "I'm sure it'll get better when Jared's home again. The cycle is almost over, right?"

Annie nods. "Yeah, you're right. We'll all be more relaxed when Dad's home again." The back door opens all of a sudden and Annie's surprised to see Luke walk inside. "Hey you, what're you doing
Luke looks a little surprised, as if he only just noticed them standing in the kitchen. "Hey, I just... Hope you don't mind if I stay the night."

They all shake their heads and Annie pulls Luke into a hug. "You're always welcome here. Does Evan know you're here, little brother?"

He snorts because he's at least a couple of inches taller than Annie. "He knows, wrote him a message. And who're you calling little, squirt?"

Annie mock gasps, "Jerk." She pushes his shoulder playfully and he grabs her around her middle, swinging her around the room. "No, help!"

They tumble into the living room and Lily jumps at them, throwing herself at Luke's legs. She knocks them off balance and they fall to the floor. It's not really funny, but Annie starts laughing nonetheless and Jesse and her siblings start laughing with her until all of them are panting for breath.

It takes a second to sink in that this was the most carefree moment they've had in weeks. It hits Annie like a punch to the gut and she scrambles up from the floor. "I'll make dinner," she says, rushing out of the living room and into the kitchen.

She curls her fingers around the edge of the counter, needing something to hold onto when the tears start falling. Strong arms wrap around her from behind and she sinks against Jesse's chest. He holds her while she cries for the first time since they were told the diagnosis.
Chapter Summary

Life’s never easy, especially when you’re father to six children. You learned that the hard way. Now Annie is suddenly and unexpected moving home again, Luke is getting married, the twins are pulling more pranks than ever, Lily doesn’t want to be a lady and Sophie-Ellie has been wearing black for years. And then one of you gets sick. So what do you do when life decides to kick your ass again? You kick it right back and fight for what you love.

“Sometimes your nearness takes my breath away; and all the things I want to say can find no voice. Then, in silence, I can only hope my eyes will speak my heart.” ~ Robert Sexton

The pencil is flying over the paper, the scratching sound drowned out by the loud footsteps on the linoleum floor. Sophie-Ellie's hair is pulled back into a messy bun and she has wrinkled her forehead into a concentrated frown.

She hasn't been able to really draw anything but art assignments and doodles with Lily for ages. It feels good to just let the pencil flow.

A whistle sounds and she looks up to see Ben dribbling the basketball to where Coach Masters is waiting for him and his teammates. He shoots her a small smile before passing the ball over to Ray, who doesn't really expect the pass and is hit in the stomach.

Sophie-Ellie can hear the curse that escapes Ray from up high in the stands. She huffs out an amused laugh when Ray jumps on Ben's back and both boys wrestle a little before the coach tells them to cut it out.

It feels all so normal; as if she's only a normal teenager, watching her friends at basketball training; as if she isn't pregnant; as if her dad hasn't been diagnosed with cancer.

She rests her head in her hand and watches, enjoying just the smallest amount of normalcy. It's nice to have this, even if it's only for a little while, the tension in the house is taking its toll on her.

Even though her dad's coming home today, PJ's strung tight. She can hear him walking through the house at night. There hasn't been any more yelling, but PJ hasn't really spoken at all, which isn't any better.

Lily and the twins are asking for attention whenever they come home from daycare and school. Sophie-Ellie really does love her brothers and sister, but she can't give them what they need right
now, the love and reassurance of a father.

This would be PJ's job, but he's barely home and when he is; he's a shadow of his former self. Of course Jesse was right. Her dad's sickness is really laying heavy on all of their shoulders, especially on PJ's, but she's never seen him like this. It's like he doesn't even believe that her dad will make it. It's like he's already given up after only one week of chemo.

"Hey."

She looks up and sees Ben standing in front of her, smiling. His t-shirt is drenched in sweat and his hair is sticking to his forehead. She still thinks he looks really handsome. A blush creeps up on her cheeks and she smiles sheepishly.

"Hi."

"So uhm... I'll go shower and then we can go back to your place, okay? Uncle JT is coming home today, right?"

Sophie-Ellie nods. "Yeah."

"Awesome. I'll be back in a little while."

He touches her knee gently before he turns and leaves to take a shower and it's still tingling with the touch when Ben's long gone.

"Now that looks like someone has a crush."

Sophie-Ellie spins her head around and sees Piper standing at the end of the row, looking absolutely perfect in her cheerleader uniform and with her hair in a neatly done ponytail.

"You really think you have a chance with him?" She smirks. "You'll never have a chance with him. You think after having me, he'd really even look at you like that?"

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. "No, I don't. But at least he's my friend and I get to have him in my life."

Piper snorts. "Whatever. He'll never love you. He just takes pity on you and the bastard."

Sophie-Ellie feels anger burn deep in her belly. "You better shut up right now or I'll make you."

"As if," Piper challenges and Sophie-Ellie stands up, her note pad and pencil falling to the floor.

The door to the gym opens and Sophie-Ellie sees one of Piper's cheerleader squad walk inside. "Piper? Your mom's here to pick you up."

Piper shoots her friend a look over her shoulder and nods. "I'm on my way." She looks back to Sophie-Ellie. "I'll be seeing you."

Then she's gone and Sophie-Ellie's left alone in the gym. She loosens her fingers that have curled into a fist and takes a few deep breaths. The anger is still burning hot in her veins and she'll need a while to calm down again.

Laughter fills the air and finally Ben and his teammates are walking back into the gym. Sophie-Ellie gets up and grabs her things, making her way down the stands. Ben smiles at her, which causes her heart to jump a little.
She knew that she doesn't have a chance with Ben, being pregnant and looking like a goth, but she told Piper the truth. She's glad she does have Ben as a friend.

"Hey, you ready to leave?" She nods, but Ben seems to pick up that something's wrong, because he asks, "You okay?"

"Yeah, sure. Just can't wait for my Dad to be home." She feels only a little bit bad for using her dad as a lie.

Ben puts her arm around her shoulder. "You'll see, he's gonna be home and well again before you know it."

"So, you excited to go home today?"

Stephen's checking his vitals and Jared just nods, having a thermometer stuck down his throat. Stephen smiles.

"I'm sure Jensen and the kids will be thrilled to finally have you home again. But promise me that you'll take it easy, okay? I don't want you to have to come back early." He takes the thermometer out of Jared's mouth and nods, looking satisfied. "A little elevated, but not too much."

"Good."

Jared sighs and lays his head back, closing his eyes. Today is not a good day. It's not a bad day either, but Jared wishes he'd have more energy when he's going home in an hour or two. He wants to enjoy going home, wants to talk to his kids. He hasn't seen Lily and the twins for three days, because he hasn't been feeling well enough. He wants to see to Sophie-Ellie and talk about the baby, wants to see Annie and ask her about the new job.

They've all been by, but a hospital room full of people is different to having the time to just listen in quiet to everything they have to tell him.

But most of all, he wants to enjoy Jensen. He can't wait to sleep in the same bed as his husband again, can't wait to snuggle up and feel Jensen close by while he falls asleep.

"You okay, JT?"

Jared nods. "Tired, just tired."

"JT, you have weeks at home, so please promise me you won't try to do everything all in one night?"

He opens his eyes and winks at Stephen. "I'll try."

"Jared, this is important," Stephen says. "I know you can't wait to be home, catch up with your kids and your friends. But exhausting yourself in the process isn't going to help you. You need to rest. The chemo took a lot out of you and now your body needs to rest."
"I know," Jared relents. "I promise to take it easy, but I really wanna be with my family."

"We know that." Stephen squeezes his shoulder. "I'll go and get Dr. Cohen for your last check-up before you can go home. I'm sure Jensen will be here soon."

Jared nods. "Thanks."

He closes his eyes when Stephen leaves the room, thinking of his time at home. Dr. Cohen said the chemo went well and that now they'll have to wait and see until the next round of chemo in a few weeks.

When Jared opens his eyes again Dr. Cohen walks into the room. He smiles and gets a smile in return. "Hey Doc, tell me I'm ready to go home."

Dr. Cohen chuckles and checks Jared's chart and vitals for himself. "It looks good. Guess you're going home when your husband gets here."

Jared lets out a relieved smile. "Sounds good. Can't wait."

"I'm expecting you here for your check up in two days, though," Dr. Cohen says seriously.

"I know. I'll be here."

"And promise me you'll rest. We've seen hands on that your family can be a handful."

"I promise. I'm sure Jensen will cuff me to the bed anyway if I don't rest."

Dr. Cohen chuckles. "He'd better." He pats Jared's shoulder. "I'll go and have Stephen get your discharge papers ready, so you can leave when Jensen gets here."

"Thanks, Doc."

It's half an hour later when Jensen walks into the room. He looks tired and pale. He's lost weight as well. Jared hopes that Jensen will feel better again now that Jared's coming home for a few weeks.

"Hey." Jensen presses a kiss to Jared's forehead. "You ready to get out of here?"

Jared nods and smiles. "So much."

Stephen walks inside with a wheelchair. "Your chauffeur is here," he says and helps Jared from the bed into the chair.

"I could walk, y'know." It's mostly show, because Jared isn't sure he could walk more than a few steps.

"Right," Stephen snorts. "You know it's hospital policy so get over it."

Jensen lays his hand on Jared's shoulder while Stephen pushes him down the hallway. He doesn't say anything, though. But his presence is all the comfort Jared needs right now. He tells Stephen goodbye when they get to the Impala.

"I got him," Jensen says when Stephen reaches out to help Jared into the car. He wraps his arm around Jared's shoulders and helps him in.

"Thanks, Stephen. I'll be seeing you."
"Take care, JT."

Jensen closes the door on the passenger side and then climbs into the driver's seat. Jared reaches out, running his fingers over the seam of his husband's jeans.

"You okay?" he asks and Jensen nods, wrapping his fingers around Jared's hand and pulling it up to kiss the back of it.

"I'm fine."

Jared knows that Jensen's anything but fine, but he's too tired to really push for more. Besides, Jensen doesn't do so well with pressure, so he lets it go.

"Can't wait to get home. Can't wait to see the kids."

"They can't wait to see you," Jensen says and his voice sounds so far away and detached. "Why don't you take a nap? And when you wake up we'll be home."

Jared lifts his arm, running his fingers through Jensen's hair. "I love you."

That makes Jensen look at him for the first time since they got into the car. He shoots Jared a forced smile. "I love you too."

The rumble of the Impala helps Jared fall asleep and the last thing he sees is Jensen driving. It's a soothing image.

"Jay?"

Jared blinks his eyes open tiredly and there's Jensen looking at him, concerned. "Hey," he mumbles. "We home?"

Jensen nods. "Yeah. Wait here and I'll help you out."

Jared lays a hand to the back of Jensen's neck and pulls him forward. "Kiss me."

"Jay..."

"Just kiss me."

Jensen relents and brushes his lips against Jared's. It's soft and gentle and Jared melts into it. He opens up to let Jensen in and when their lips meet, Jared shivers. Jensen pulls back and his eyes are glassy, but there are no tears.

"I'm happy you're home."

Jared smiles. "Yeah, me too."

Jensen helps him out of the car and up the steps of the front porch. He's exhausted when they get to the front door.
"You want me to get the wheelchair?" Jensen asks and Jared frowns. "The hospital rented one out to us. It's in the trunk."

Jared shakes his head. "No, I want to walk."

"Jared..."

"Please, Jen. The kids..."

Jensen closes his eyes for a minute and Jared thinks he might just get the wheelchair anyway, but then his husband nods. "Okay. Let's just go inside and get you settled in bed."

The front door opens and Lily rushes outside. "Daddy!"

Jensen catches her before she can throw herself at Jared. "Sweetheart, what did I tell you?"

Lily looks at both of them with huge eyes. "That Daddy is still sick and needs rest."

Jared runs his hand through her hair and pulls her into a gentle hug. "You can come and cuddle with me once I'm in bed, okay?"

She breaks into a huge smile. "Awesome."

Lily takes a step back and Jared can see over her shoulder that his other kids are waiting in the hallway. He gives them a smile and then opens his arms for them to come forward and hug him. One after the other, they give him gentle hugs and he kisses their cheeks.

"Let's get your dad settled in bed and then you all can have a little time with him," Jensen says and starts pushing Jared forward.

He never imagined that the stairs up to the first floor could be so exhausting. He barely makes it and maybe he should have asked Jensen to carry him. But then he looks at the kids and takes the last step. He falls onto their bed a little later and sighs.

"Never thought stairs could be so exhausting."

"What? Why didn't you say something?" Jensen asks, sounding upset. "I would have carried you. Or we can have a bed set up for you downstairs. I didn't... I never realized..."

"It's okay, Jen." He reaches for him and wraps his fingers around Jensen's wrist. "Neither did I. But I don't wanna sleep anywhere else but here with you."

Jensen looks stricken, but then he nods. "Okay. C'mon, I'll help you to change into something more comfortable."

Jared smiles and lets his husband help with getting into his pajamas. When he's finally settled in his bed, he lays his head back and takes a deep breath. It feels good to finally lie in his own bed that smells of Jensen and their washing detergent.

"You want me to go get the kids?"

Jared opens his eyes and smiles. "Yeah, that'd be great." Jensen nods and walks to the door. "Jen?" He turns around with raised eyebrows. "I'm glad to be home."

Something flashes in Jensen's eyes, but it's gone too fast for Jared to really know what it was. "I'm glad too. I'll go get the kids. I'm sure they have a lot to tell you."
"Thank you."

As soon as the kids make their way upstairs, Jensen walks out onto the back porch. He takes out the little flask he put in his shirt pocket and takes a drink. The alcohol burns, but not as bad as it did when he started to drink it regularly. He never drinks much, just a sip or two, but it calms him, makes the wall he built inside himself stronger.

Today, it's felt as if it would crumble at any moment, but he's been able to hold it together, for himself, for Jared, for the kids.

For now, Jared's home and Jensen thought it'd make things easier, but somehow it doesn't. Jared looks weak and sick. The beanie only hits home how sick he really is and Jensen misses running his fingers through Jared's hair. He knows he's being pathetic and stupid. But he can't help but feel resentful, not towards Jared, but towards the doctors and the treatment.

The back door opens and Jesse sits down next to him on the porch steps. Jensen holds out the flask and Jesse takes it. They sit in silence and Jensen thinks that there were times when this felt comforting, now it doesn't. Now it just feels weird and wrong.

"He's gonna be okay," Jesse says. "Another cycle or two and he's gonna be back on his feet."

Jensen doesn't say anything, just takes another sip out of the flask. He should probably agree with Jesse, say some comforting words, tell him how proud he is because Jesse's really pulling his weight at home - and he is, he really is - he just can't voice any of it.

They sit outside for a really long time and all Jensen wants is to be alone, but he can't bring himself to get up and leave or tell Jesse to leave. So he just sits on the back porch steps watching the sun go down and the air turn chilly.

Finally Jesse gets up. He squeezes Jensen's shoulder and then walks inside. Jensen can hear people rummaging and talking indistinctly in the kitchen, but he can't make himself follow Jesse. He should go inside and help make dinner, should go inside and check on Jared, should go inside and take the smaller kids to bed. But instead he just sits here and takes another sip from the flask.

He isn't really drunk, but a little buzzed and it's a good feeling. It makes everything so much easier to deal with.

The back door opens again and he just wants whoever it is to just go away.

"Jen?" Annie asks. "Dinner is ready if you want some. We'll have it upstairs, together with Dad. Will you join us?"

He takes a deep breath. He really wants to say 'no', because he can't deal with all the normalcy, can't deal with them talking about random things. But then he remembers that he's supposed to be strong and keep it together.

"I'll be up in a minute."
Great.

He thinks she will leave him alone again, but instead he feels her arms wrap around him from behind. She doesn't say anything and Jensen doesn't know what to say either, so he just pats her arm awkwardly.

Annie lets go quickly enough and then leaves him alone outside again. He counts to ten and then follows her inside. The kids plus Jesse, Ben and Evan are sitting in his and Jared's bedroom. Ty, Jamie and Lily are curled up to their father's side, while the older kids and their significant others are sitting on the bedroom floor.

"Hey," Jared says and smiles. "Where have you been all afternoon?"

Jensen just shrugs. "So, Annie said something about dinner?"

"We have sandwiches. Daddy has toast," Lily says and points to the tray that's filled with several sandwiches.

Jensen takes one, even though he really isn't hungry. The kids chat with Jared about everything and nothing, while Jensen doesn't say a word. He can see that Jared's getting more tired by each minute and that this is wearing his husband out, but he also can see that Jared's determined to let all of them get out whatever they want to say, want to tell him.

It's past bedtime already when Jensen finally can't take it anymore. "I'm sorry, but your dad's exhausted. We should let him rest. Besides it's already past bedtime for Lily and the twins."

"But Papa," Lily whines.

"No, it's time for bed."

"I wanna sleep here," Lily says here, snuggling closer to Jared's side.

"We do too," the twins chime in.

Jensen feels like the spoilsport in all of this when he shakes his head. "Not tonight. So please, go and get ready for bed, I'll come by in a second."

"Can you read to me, Daddy?" Lily asks. "Alice in Wonderland?"

Jensen can see that Jared's about to say 'yes', so he interrupts and says, "Daddy's tired, sweetheart. He needs to rest. And you need to go to bed now."

Lily pouts and Jared presses a kiss to her head. "Tomorrow, baby girl. Promise."

The twins and Lily make their way reluctantly out of the bedroom, looking back for a last time and Jensen thinks they look like they think Jared might vanish immediately. The older kids hug Jared and wish him and Jensen a good night before making their way downstairs or wherever they're going.

"Jen?" Jared asks, sounding weak.

"I'll take the kids to bed."

"Will you be back then?"

Jensen sucks his bottom lip between his teeth and nods. "Of course."
He sees to it that the twins and Lily get ready for bed and brush their teeth properly. He kisses them good night and tucks them in. He tells them that Jared will be there in the morning and that they can have breakfast together if they want. When all three of them seem satisfied that Jared won’t be gone when they wake up, Jensen makes his way back into his bedroom.

It’s not really that late, but he feels bone-tired. Jared has his eyes closed and Jensen walks into the bathroom. His face is pale and he looks exhausted. He takes a quick shower and then brushes his teeth, before pulling on his pajama bottoms and climbing into their bed.

He touches Jared’s cheek gently. He feels warm and real and Jensen feels his wall inside crumble. Jared blinks his eyes open and there’s a smile on his face when they settle on Jensen. He lifts his hand and runs his thumb across Jensen’s cheek. He hadn’t realized that a tear had slipped out until Jared wipes it away.

"We’re okay," Jared whispers.

It’s a lie and Jensen knows it, because nothing is okay. Everything’s been turned upside down and Jensen’s barely holding it together at all.

tbc
Chapter 12

"Maybe part of loving is learning to let go."

~ The Wonder Years

Jared wakes with a jerk. He can't remember what woke him, but his heart is still beating rapidly in his chest and he's panting heavily.

It's still dark outside and a look at the neon numbers on his alarm clock tells him it's not even four in the morning. He groans tiredly and lies back against his pillow. He scoots closer to Jensen's side waiting for the closeness to calm him again.

But Jensen's not there. Jared blinks his eyes open again. The side where Jensen sleeps is empty and the bedspread is cold beneath his fingertips.

It's not the first time this has happened since Jared came home a week ago. He woke once or twice during the night and Jensen was never there, usually he was too tired to go looking for him. Tonight is different and Jared swings his legs off the bed.

The adrenaline from what he supposes was a nightmare, still surges through his veins and even though he feels tired he knows he won't be able to go back to sleep before Jensen is there to wrap his arms around him.

He pads across the hallway and when he gets to the bottom of the stairs he feels completely out of breath. Damn, it's only a couple of stairs, he hadn't run a fucking marathon. He's getting tired of this constant feeling of exhaustion. It's getting on his nerves, too, that he can't just go and do what he wants to do. He's never done well with lying in bed.

The living room is empty, except for Sadie and Harley lying at their spot in the corner, snoring lightly. The kitchen is dark too, but something catches Jared's attention out of the corner of his eye.

Jensen's sitting outside on the porch steps and Jared pulls the back door open. His husband jerks around at the noise and looks at him in surprise.

"What the hell, Jay? What are you doing up?"

"I could ask you the same thing," Jared replies and gives Jensen a small smile. "Couldn't sleep?"

Jensen stands up and rubs his hands against his sweatpants. "C'mon, let's get you back inside and in bed. You need to rest."

Jared feels his smile slip away. He knows that his illness has taken its toll on their whole family and close friends; the worry on their faces and the strain in their shoulders always visible, but Jared knows that it has hit Jensen the hardest. He hasn't really spoken in days. He goes to work and comes home, but he never really talks to Jared anymore, or the kids for that matter.
"Talk to me, Jen. Don't cut me out, please," he says softly.

Jensen shakes his head but doesn't answer. It's like he's lost all words. Jensen circles Jared's wrist with his fingers and puts Jared's arm over his shoulder. But Jared pulls back. He can't believe that Jensen is trying to cut him out.

"Jensen, stop. C'mon, talk to me."

Jensen sighs. "What do you want me to say, Jay?"

Jared huffs. "I don't know. Just say something, please. This silence-thing of yours is not going to work any longer. I want you to talk to me."

Jensen walks over to the sink and turns on the faucet, washing his fingers beneath the water. Jared takes it as a good sign and sits down on one of the chairs.

"I honestly don't know what you want me to say," Jensen says quietly, turning the faucet off and drying his hands on a near dish towel, but he doesn't turn around again to face Jared.

"How are you feeling? What are you thinking? It's like you're here, but then you're not. It's been going on ever since I came home from the hospital."

For a long moment, Jared thinks that Jensen isn't going to say anything, but then his husband spins around and throws the dish towel across the kitchen. "What do you think, Jared?" he asks loudly. "What do you think it feels like watching you slowly slip away? How do you think it feels to be completely helpless? To just watch you suffer and not be able to do anything about that? How the fuck do you think I feel, Jay?"

Jared's heart breaks and he wishes there was something he could say or do to make it all better, but there's nothing.

"Jensen," he breathes.

"Don't you 'Jensen' me," his husband spits out. "I'm so sick and tired of everyone saying my name like that. It's like you all have this big expectation of me to just be okay with this, to just live my life as if nothing's wrong and play house. But nothing's alright. You have cancer, Jared. I'm sorry, if I can't just sit there and talk about how my fucking day went. That's why I keep my mouth shut, because otherwise, I might just lose it with all at the happy-family-crap we have going on around the house right now."

Jared feels like he's been punched in the gut right now. The "happy-family-crap", how Jensen calls it, is the thing that Jared needs right now to feel like everything's going to be okay.

"Have you ever thought about the possibility that me and the kids need that? The happy-family-crap, as you call it? It's what keeps me sane, Jen."

Jensen nods and presses his lips together tightly. "Well, lucky you." He pushes past Jared and jerks the back door open again. "Go to bed, Jared."

"Where are you going, Jensen?" Jared asks, baffled. "It's the middle of the night."

Jensen shrugs and pulls the door shut behind him, leaving Jared alone in the kitchen, the silence echoing in his head. He wonders if he'll wake up now and find out that it's all been a dream, but even pinching himself doesn't wake him. Not a dream, then. Jensen really left just like that. Jared has a hard time wrapping his head around that.
The sound of the Impala springing to life cuts through the silence and Jared curses under his breath. Jensen shouldn't drive while he's so upset, but when Jared pulls the front door open, Jensen's already pulled out of the driveway and the taillights are the last thing Jared sees.

He leans against the door frame to catch his breath. He shivers when the chilly air hits him. It's the first time he realizes how chilly it's outside. He wraps his arms around his chest and closes the door again. Slowly, he makes his way upstairs, step by step. It takes a long time, with a lot of breaks and catching his breath and when he finally climbs into his bed, he still knows that he won't sleep anymore tonight.

Jensen just drives, the Impala rumbling beneath him and eating up the miles. He doesn't know what got into him when he snapped at Jared and he feels like an ass. But he had to say it, because it's killing him. Maybe some people need to play happy-families when fate hits them with something hard, but Jensen can't just act like everything's fine.

Jared's slipping right out of his hands and there's nothing he can do against it. Just tonight, he once again realized how bad the cancer's gotten to Jared. His husband is a shell of his former self, his clothes hanging off his slim form, his skin pale and dark circles beneath his eyes.

He should be home, Jensen knows that. He should support Jared, be the strong one and shoulder everything. But just looking at his husband, Jensen wants to cry and scream and hit something. But he can't. His family depends on him, but if he does all that, he won't be able to hold it together any longer and he needs to.

Jensen stops the Impala at the shoulder of the road and takes out the flask. He's a couple of miles past the town's border and there's nothing but the stars and the moon lighting the surroundings. He just sits in the car and listens to his own breath, trying not to think about anything, the flask securely held in his hands.

The sun rises some time later and Jensen wishes that sitting here had changed something, but when he'll get home, Jared will still be gravely sick and their families and friends will still act like everything's just peachy.

He hears an engine coming closer and sees in his rear view mirror that it's a patrol car. He really doesn't have to guess too hard who this is and puts the flask back into the glove box. He can't deal with anymore crap.

Chad gets out of the car and he looks pissed. He strides over to the Impala and jerks open the door.

"Y'know, a part of me wishes that I had to pull you out of a ditch. At least then I'd have a decent reason to tell Jared and the kids why you didn't make it home for breakfast. Now, you wanna tell me why you're parking at the edge of the road throwing a temper tantrum?"

"Fuck you," Jensen says without heat in his voice.

"Jenny..."
Jensen's out of the car at once, curling his fingers into the collar of Chad's work shirt and pressing him up against the Impala's side. "Don't call me that."

Chad pries his fingers off his shirt and shakes his head. "Jensen, then. You finished with your little self-pity-party or do you want to stay out here a little longer, worry Jared and the kids some more?"

"Shut up." Jensen says, taking a step back and turning his back on Chad, because he can't stand the pitiful look on his friend's face.

"Jensen, we all know..."

Jensen swings around and punches Chad squarely in the jaw. "Shut up! Shut the hell up. You all know nothing. It's not your spouse fighting for her life, so shut the hell up!" Jensen yells, while Chad rubs his sore jaw.

"You feel better now? Or do you wanna go another round? C'mon hit me if it makes you feel better."

Jensen shakes his head. "Piss off. I can't stand you right now."

"Only if you get into that car and drive home. Show your family that you're still alive."

'Alive' Jensen almost snorts at that. He hasn't felt alive in weeks. He's going through the motions without being able to find his way back.

"Okay, I'm going back," Jensen says. "I have to be at the station in a couple of hours anyway. You happy?"

Chad shakes his head. "Jen..."

"If you tell me to stay home, I'll punch you again," Jensen says and gets into his car. "I'll see you later."

He slams the door shut and starts the Impala, pulling it out onto the road and past Chad's squad car in seconds. The drive home seems to be over way too quickly and Jensen doesn't know how he'll explain his absence. He shouldn't have worried though, because it's already after eight and the house is empty, except for a couple of voices upstairs.

Megan is sitting on their bed, having breakfast with Jared, when Jensen pushes open half-open bedroom door. She looks over at him and gives him a curt nod.

"I'll leave you two to it." She kisses Jared's cheek. "Don't over do it, JT."

Jared smiles and shakes his head. "Thanks for having breakfast with me."

"Anytime. I'll go and clean up the kitchen. You just call when you need me."

She walks past Jensen and shakes her head a little, her disapproval of his actions clear on her face.

"So, where've you been?"

Jensen shrugs. "Nowhere."

"Nowhere? Great," Jared says. He sounds tired but Jensen can hear that he's pissed nonetheless. "You'd rather spend your night and your morning in Nowhere instead of having breakfast with your family, that's awesome, Jen. But you made it pretty clear that you can't stand the happy-family-crap anymore."
"Yeah, that's right. I can't stand it anymore," Jensen says calmly. "Because we're not happy and everyone pretending to be won't fix that."

"Then what will?" Jared asks challengingly.

"I don't know," Jensen replies quietly. "I wish I could say that all it would take is for you to get healthy again, but I don't know that. If the chemo works and if you get better again, there'll always be the shadow hanging over us that the cancer could come back."

"If?" Jared asks and Jensen barely heard him, he's talking so quietly.

"Yes, 'if'."

"What happened to 'when'?"

Jensen shakes his head. "I can't believe in 'when' and then have it ripped away from me."

"So what? You're saying 'goodbye'?"

Jensen can see the unshed tears in Jared's eyes and he feels some burning behind his eyes too. "I love you," he says softly. "More than anything," Jared looks at him with huge eyes, as if he's waiting for Jensen to walk out completely. "I'd never say 'goodbye', but you wanted to know how I feel. And I feel like I'm losing you and that you're slipping right out of my hands without me being able to do anything about it. It's killing me, Jay. You told me to be strong for the kids and that's what I'm doing, Jared. I try to be strong for the kids and for you; try to keep this family running. Just don't expect me to act like everything's fine, because nothing's fine and right now I can't believe that it will ever be again."

"Jen..." Jared breathes and Jensen's heart breaks. He knows that he'll crumble if he takes one step closer to Jared and he just can't.

"Don't say anything," Jensen begs. "Just... don't. I have to get to the station, but I'll be back tonight. And tomorrow, I'll go with you to your appointment at the hospital."

Jensen turns and leaves without looking back. He can't stand the broken look on Jared's face any longer. He rushes past Megan, who's just walking out of the kitchen, and into the Impala. He fumbles with the glove box and then holds the flask in his hands. He empties it with one long swallow.
Chapter 13

“As we grow older, as we continue to change with age, there’s one thing that will never change... I will always keep falling in love with you.” ~ Karen Clodfelder

The sun is high in the sky and blinding Luke when he steps out of the building where one of his programming classes takes place.

It's spring break, finally.

He has a buttload of work to do during the next week, but at least he can do it at his childhood home, be close to his dad. He's been there almost every day since his dad got out of the hospital a couple of weeks ago, but it doesn't feel like it's enough.

Every minute spent somewhere else feels like a waste of time.

"Luke!"

He turns around to see Evan jogging towards him. His heart skips a beat, just like it always does when he sees Evan. That hasn't changed over the years, not even after their fight a couple of weeks ago. They haven't really talked about it, because Luke can't seem to find the words to say that he's sorry for snapping.

He knows that Evan is just trying to help and he loves him for it, but there's nothing anyone can do right now, except to wait. And this waiting is killing Luke.

"Hey," he says when Evan stops in front of him. "How were your last classes?"

"Exhausting," Evan says grinning. "Can't wait to spend a whole day in bed with you, now that we're free for a week."

Luke smiles sadly. "I wanted to drive over to my parents' house."

The grin falls away from Evan's face and he nods. "Of course. Maybe, y'know, we could drive up to the ranch, talk to Aunt Donna about our wedding plans. I mean, if we're up there anyway."

Luke sucks his bottom lip between his teeth. He hasn't thought about the wedding in weeks. Yes, they promised his dad that they wouldn't postpone it, but he just can't wrap his head around the idea of planning a wedding while his dad is suffering from cancer.

"Maybe," he says quietly.

Evan cups his face and rubs a thumb over Luke's bottom lip. "C'mon, lets get home and pack a bag. We can be in Dalton by late afternoon."

Luke leans forward and presses a kiss to Evan's lips. "I love you."
When Jared wakes, Jensen just steps out of the bathroom, already dressed in his uniform. It's early in the morning and Jared can already tell that today is a bad day.

Jensen walks over to the nightstand. "Here, take your pills." He hands Jared his anti-nausea pills and a glass of water.

He swallows them and hopes that the nauseous feeling will fade soon. "Thanks."

"How are you today?" Jensen asks and Jared can hear the strain in his voice.

They haven't really touched upon the subject of their big fight a few days ago and it's hanging over them like the sword of Damocles. The tension between them is palpable and Jared has never felt so much distance between them like right now. Yes, Jensen's still here, he's still going to the appointments at the hospital with Jared, but they barely speak, barely touch.

Jared hasn't been sleeping well ever since their fight and he knows that Jensen hasn't been sleeping well either. Both of them tossing and turning in bed without ever saying a word. It's wearing him down. He just wants his husband back. He wishes they could just talk about it, but whenever he tries to say something about it, Jensen just cuts him off and walks away.

"I'll manage," Jared says tiredly.

Jensen nods. "You want me to stay home?"

Jared shakes his head, because he can't stand another day of strained silence between them. "No. I'll be okay. Sophia is coming over anyway."

Jensen nods again, his lips pressed together tight. "Well, you call whenever you need me." He turns around and Jared calls out his name to stop him. He raises his eyebrows. "You need something?"

You, Jared wants to scream. Just you. But instead he says, "I love you."

Something flashes in Jensen's eyes and for a second Jared thinks he'll walk back to the bed and maybe they will finally talk, but then it's gone again. "Love you too," Jensen says. "I'll see you tonight."

Then he's gone and Jared feels like crying, but he doesn't have time to break down. The door to the bedroom pushes open and the twins rush inside.

"Morning, Dad," both say at the same time.

Jared grins weakly. "Morning, boys. Ready for your last day before spring break?"

"So ready," Jamie groans and throws himself down on Jensen's side of the bed.

Jared ruffles his hair. "It's only a few hours. I'm sure you'll be fine. And tonight you can tell me what you've planned for spring break, okay?"

Jamie smiles, while Tyler stands at the foot of the bed, keeping his distance. He's so much more like
Jensen, bottling everything up and acting like the strong one.

"What about you, Ty? You excited for your last day before spring break?"

Ty shrugs. "Don't really care." He looks over at his brother. "C'mon, Jamie. Dad needs to rest and Papa said that breakfast's ready."

Jamie scrunches up his nose, but then - after pressing a kiss to Jared's cheek - scrambles off the bed and runs after his brother. Jared sighs. He wishes he could tell the boys that everything will be okay again, that they'll be a family again. But he doesn't want to lie to them.

He doesn't know if everything will be fine again.

There's a knock on the door and a second later, Jesse is sticking his head through the door. "We just wanted to wish you a good day," he says and opens the door a little wider to let Lily through. "I'm taking Lily to daycare today."

"Bye, Daddy," she says and throws herself at him. He catches her and presses a kiss to her temple.

"Have a great day, baby girl. I'll see you this afternoon." He looks at Jesse over her shoulder. "Thank you," he says.

Jesse shakes his head. "Don't worry about it, JT." Lily climbs off Jared's bed and rushes past Jesse again, who gives Jared a last smile. "It'll be okay," he says. "Jensen, he'll find his way back."

Jared swallows down some tears and nods. "I really hope you're right."

"Just give him a little time. He'll come around again. He just needs to find a way to deal."

Jared nods again. He knows that, but it's still hard to feel this estranged from his husband right now. "Have a good day at work, Jesse."

"I'll see you tonight. Take it easy, JT."

The last one to come in is Sophie-Ellie. Annie always leaves in the mornings long before Jared's awake. He wishes her a nice day at school and kisses her cheek gently.

"I'll see you later, honey."

"Rest, Daddy. Aunt Sophia is downstairs. She'll be up in a minute." She kisses him gently and then she's out the door.

But Jared's not left alone for long, because Sophia pushes open the door to his and Jensen's bedroom a second later, carrying a tray filled with some toast and tea.

"Hey, JT. How are you feeling today?"

"You want the truth or the sugar coated version?" He asks, trying for a joke, which falls flat.

She presses her lips together tightly. "That bad?"

"I'll deal, Soph. Just don't make me eat anything right now."

"JT, you know what the doctor said. You need to eat to keep your strength up."

"And I will, just not right now." He looks at her pleadingly. "Please?"
"Okay," Sophia relents and sets the tray on the nightstand.

Jared scoots to the side a little bit and Sophia sits down on the edge of the bed. "You really don't mind playing nurse today?"

Sophia shakes her head. "Of course not, JT. We told you we'd help."

"I know. I just don't want to keep you from one of your soon-to-be-moms."

"They can deal without me for a day," Sophia says. "So, what's going on with you and Jensen?"

"Wow, you really know how to ask the hard questions, huh?"

"You know me, JT," she says and winks at him. "But seriously, what's going on between you two? Jensen, he's not himself and he's so completely closed off. And you look equally miserable. So?"

Jared sighs and shakes his head. "I don't know. We had this fight a few days back. I asked him how he was feeling and he told me. It just wasn't what I wanted to hear, I guess."

Sophia frowns. "What did he say?"

"Told me that he can't deal with the happy-family-crap anymore. That's how he calls mine and the kids need for a little bit of normalcy. He also said he can't believe in 'when' anymore."

"Oh, JT," Sophia whispers and pulls him into a hug.

"I was sure that he'd walk out on me, y'know? But he said he'd never do that, but that he can't act like everything's fine either. He says that's why he's closing himself off, so that he can be strong for me and the kids." Jared's voice is shaking while he says it. "He feels like I'm slipping away, Soph. And that's exactly how I feel too, like he's slipping away. I just don't know how to fix it."

"JT, I'm so sorry. That's just..." Sophia lets out a deep breath. "Have you thought about talking to a professional? They might be able to help you."

"The hospital introduced us to someone, a Dr. Roche. I just... I didn't want to talk to anyone else. I thought Jensen would be enough."

"I think you should contact Dr. Roche, talk to him and see how it goes," she says softly. "Just try it; you can stop if you don't like it."

Jared swallows down his tears. "I just want my husband back."

Sophia nods. "And I'm sure Jensen wants just the same."

Spring break. Finally.

Ben's leaning against the side of his car outside of Dalton High waiting for Sophie-Ellie to finish her last class for today. He hates that their schedules are so different. But it's only a couple of months and then high school's over anyway, no reason to fret over it now.
The doors to the school building open and he expects to see Sophie-Ellie and Michelle walk through them, instead it's Piper and a couple of her cheerleaders. Ben crosses his arms over his chest when he realizes that she’s noticed him and is now walking over.

"Hi," she says, when she's only a couple of feet away. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," Ben says and tries to look over her shoulder to see if Sophie-Ellie is on her way.

"Listen, Ben, I know we haven't talked about it yet," Piper says, twirling a strand of her hair around one finger. "But we all know that you're gonna be prom king and of course I'll be prom queen. I think we should just go together."

Ben blinks. "What?"

"To prom. You and me, together, as a couple."

"But we're not a couple anymore, Piper."

She rolls her eyes. "I really think you should stop this charity thing, Ben. It's not good for your reputation. People are starting to talk."

"Charity thing?" Ben asks, feeling anger start to burn in his belly.

"Baby, I know you were friends with her in the past. But you don't have to feel obligated to help her now. I thought it was sweet in the beginning, but you really need to come to your senses soon, so we can start our campaign."

Ben huffs out a humorless laugh and shakes his head. "You don't get it, do you? It's over, Piper. And Sophie doesn't have anything to do with that. I just couldn't stand you anymore."

Piper recoils a little, but then she seems to find her composure again. "You really want to let that bitch and her bastard ruin your future for you?"

For a moment he wishes Piper was a guy so he could hit her. "Shut the hell up, Piper! You're a bitch and you're just jealous that I'm friends with Sophie-Ellie again."

"Jealous?" Piper snorts. "Of her? Yeah right." She throws her hair back. "Well, if you ever come to your senses you know where to find me, if I'll take you back then."

"Don't wait for it," Ben calls after her as she walks away.

He huffs out a breath and shakes his head. Where the hell did Piper find the nerve to come onto him like that? At least Sophie-Ellie didn't hear her.

It takes another full five minutes for Sophie-Ellie and Michelle to walk out of the building and over to him. He waves a little and when a smile appears on Sophie-Ellie's face, his heart skips a beat. For years he hasn't let himself think about what it all could mean, but he's so done with the denial he's been living with.

"Spring break!" Michelle hollers, and he and Sophie-Ellie laugh.

He opens the passenger side doors for the girls. "Ladies." They climb in and he jogs around the car to the driver's side. A moment later, they're pulling out of the school's parking lot and down the road in the direction of Michelle's house.

They drop her off ten minutes later and then they’re on their way to Sophie-Ellie's place. It's where
they've been spending most of their time lately.

Sophie-Ellie is particularly quiet today. It's not like she's chatting away every other day, but today she's especially quiet.

"You okay?" Ben asks.

She nods. "Just, I wish my dad could come with me to the appointment."

Shit, Ben almost forgot about the appointment at the doctors this afternoon. "I'll go with you if you want."

Sophie-Ellie looks over to him in surprise. "Really? I mean, you don't have to. This is not... you don't have..." she groans and lets out a deep breath. "What I want to say is, this isn't your baby, so you really don't have to go with me."

The hurt Ben feels at her words hits him completely out of the blue. He knows that this is not his baby, he just hasn't thought that voicing it out loud would make him feel disappointed and hurt.

"I know. I just thought you might like someone there."

Sophie-Ellie smiles. "I'd love to have you there. I just don't want you to feel obligated to it."

"Okay, it's settled then, I'll accompany you." He smiles. "And this has nothing to do with obligation. You're my best friend, so of course I would wanna be there for you."

"Thanks," Sophie-Ellie says seriously. "It means a lot."

Suddenly Ben feels the overwhelming need to lean over and kiss her, but he doesn't know how Sophie-Ellie would react. So instead he reaches over and squeezes her hand. "You're welcome."

They get to the Padalecki-Ackles' house a little later, only to find Ben's mom in the kitchen fixing some toast and tea.

"Hey Mom." He drops a kiss to her cheek.

"Hi Aunt Sophia."

"Hey, you two. How was your last day before spring break?"

"Too long," Sophie-Ellie says. "Is that for my dad?" She points at the plate in Sophia’s hands.

"Yeah, it's the only thing he seems to be able to keep down today."

Ben feels a wave of sadness hit him at the quiet words of his mom. He knows that Uncle JT has good and bad days, but the bad ones really seem to be more often right now. He hates that there's nothing they can do.

"Has PJ been here for lunch?" Sophie-Ellie asks and his mom shakes her head.

"No, he called and told me that he'd eat at the station."

A shadow falls across Sophie-Ellie's face and she nods, looking disappointed. "I'll take that up to Dad." Sophie-Ellie takes it out of Sophia’s hands. "And then I'll get changed for the appointment, okay?"
Ben forces a smile. "Sure." He hates that things are so strained and tense in the house. Jensen's not coping very well and Ben can't blame him. He doesn't know how he'd react if someone he'd love as much as Jensen loves Uncle JT was fighting for their life.

Sophie-Ellie walks out of the room and Ben lets out a small breath. "Bad day?"

His mom nods. "Pretty bad. He's exhausted and not sleeping well." Ben can see the tears in her eyes and pulls her into a hug.

"He'll be okay."

"I really hope you're right, kiddo," his mom whispers. She pulls away and presses a kiss to his cheek. "You're a good man, Ben. I'm so proud of you. So, you're going to the appointment with Sophie-Ellie?"

Ben nods. "Yeah, she wanted someone there with her."

"That's good. She needs her friends right now."

Sophie-Ellie takes the plate upstairs and knocks on her father's bedroom door before walking inside. Lily is curled up next to her dad on the bed and they're looking at a story book. Lily's the one telling the story to their dad, who looks pale and exhausted. They stop when Sophie-Ellie gets closer to the bed.

"Hey, Aunt Sophia made these for you."

Her dad smiles tiredly. "Thank you, honey. So how was your last day before spring break?"

"Good. Too long, but good. Have a couple of projects to finish as homework."

"That's good to hear." He lets out a small breath. "So, your appointment this afternoon, I wish I could go with you. But you could ask PJ, I'm sure he'll go with you."

Sophie-Ellie's heart breaks at the sadness in her dad's voice. She doesn't know what's going on with him and PJ, but the tension between them is clearly palpable and she hates it. Not once has she seen her dad and PJ at odds, not like this. They were always able to work it out, talk about it and fix it. But right now it doesn't seem like there's a quick fix.

She shakes her head and presses a soft kiss to her dad's cheek. "Don't worry, Daddy. Ben's going with me."

"Ben, huh?" He asks, smiling weakly.

Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes. "Stop it. We're just friends."

"Of course you are." He winks at her and for a second it feels like he isn't sick at all.

"I wanna get changed before we have to leave for the appointment," she says. "I'll be home by dinner, though. I love you."
"Love you too, honey."

"Me too," Lily pipes up and Sophie-Ellie grins.

"Of course you too." She kisses her sister's forehead. "Take good care of Daddy for me, will you?"

Lily nods seriously. "I'll read fairy tales to him, they always help me sleep."

"That's a good idea," Sophie-Ellie says and blows them both a kiss. "I'll see you later."

She walks into her room and pulls off her clothes. A look into her closet makes her stop. Her hand reaches out and she runs her fingers over a pair of light blue jeans that's stuffed at the bottom of her jeans pile. She hasn't worn anything other than black for years, but she doesn't feel like the girl that decided to wear only black anymore. So much has changed in the last few weeks and somehow she wishes her clothes could resemble that.

She pulls out the jeans. They were a present from Angie and Matthew at her birthday last year, maybe they were a hint too, but she's never worn them until now. She finds a dark blue t-shirt and decides that after the appointment at the doctors, she will go shopping, replacing all the black with a few more colorful clothes.

Ben's still sitting in the kitchen when Sophie-Ellie makes her way back down. He looks at her with raised eyebrows, but doesn't say anything.

"You ready to go?" he asks and Sophie-Ellie nods, giving Aunt Sophia, who's watching them with a fond look on her face, a little wave.

"See you later, Aunt Sophia."

"Good luck. And later, I wanna see pictures."

Sophie-Ellie smiles. "Of course."

Ben drives them to the clinic and Sophie-Ellie feels her heart speed up a little. She's a little nervous and that Ben's here with her has a lot to do with it. Yes, he is her best friend and she's glad that he's here, but it's still a little weird and it's making her nervous.

Dr. Daugherty doesn't keep them wait long and walks into the examination room only a couple of minutes after the nurse told Sophie-Ellie and Ben to go inside.

"Hello, Sophie-Ellie," she says and looks at Ben curiously.

"Hi, Dr. Daugherty. This is Ben. He's a friend of mine."

They shake hands. "It's nice to see that Sophie-Ellie has friends that support her," Dr. Daugherty says. "So, how have you been?"

"Good, the morning sickness has faded almost completely."

"That's good. Any dizziness or cramps?"

"No, everything's fine."

"Well, I say we take a look at the baby, then."

She stands up and Sophie-Ellie turns to Ben. "You wanna come?"
Ben makes huge eyes and then slowly nods. "If you want me to."

"Yeah, I do."

A broad smile appears on Ben's face then and he nods. "Okay then."

Sophie-Ellie climbs onto the examination table and lifts her shirt up, exposing her still flat belly. Ben takes a seat on the other side of the table and she grabs his hand, smiling nervously at him. He gives her a shaky smile back. Then Dr. Daugherty turns off the lights and turns on the monitor.

The stick is cold and Sophie-Ellie flinches a little when it touches her belly. Ben rubs his thumb soothingly over the back of her hand and squeezes a little tighter.

The doctor runs the stick over her belly and soon she has found the baby, explaining to both, Sophie-Ellie and Ben, what they're seeing on the ultrasound pictures. She moves the stick a little to the right and all of a sudden, a thudding sound fills the room.

Sophie-Ellie's eyes widen. "Is that...?"

"Your baby's heartbeat? Yes, it is."

"Wow," Ben breathes next to her, squeezing her hand tightly.

"Yeah." Sophie-Ellie can only agree with the sentiment.

Dr. Daugherty prints a couple of pictures for Sophie-Ellie and then the appointment is over again. They walk out of the building a few minutes later and Ben's been really quiet ever since they heard the baby's heartbeat.

"You okay?" Sophie-Ellie asks.

A smile appears on Ben's face. "Am I okay? I'm awesome. I mean, this was... amazing." Suddenly he grabs her and swings her around. "You're having a baby, Sophie. A beautiful, healthy baby."

She laughs at his enthusiasm, wrapping her arms tightly around his neck. He puts her down again and they faces are so close, they're practically breathing the same air. Their eyes lock and it's like time stops. It may sound like a cliché and be sappy, but it's exactly what it feels like when Ben leans down and brushes their lips together for the first time.

Jensen's sitting behind a pile of paperwork, hiding in his office. The tension that's so clearly hanging in the air at home, has somehow followed him to work and his deputies are looking at him like they expect him to snap at any time.

And maybe he will.

He feels like a rubber band stretched too far. He feels itchy and restless, his skin’s too tight and he knows that he'll snap sooner or later and that it won't be pretty. He’ll probably also hit someone who doesn't deserve it, but Jensen doesn't know how to let go of that tension without completely breaking.
He wishes he could talk to Jared, wishes he could take everything back that he said to put that devastated look on Jared's face. But it was the truth and Jared asked for it, he deserved to know how Jensen's feeling.

Maybe this is wrong, maybe he should try to act differently, try to be more supportive, try to put on a happy face for everyone. But he can't. The possibility of losing Jared, of losing everything he’s ever wanted, is too vivid in his head.

He's not happy and he can't pretend to be, not for Jared, not for the kids. It's a lie and it'll only hit him harder in the end if he made himself believe in it and everything broke apart.

"Wow, hiding in the office. I wouldn't have pegged you for the type."

Jensen's head snaps up and sees Chris standing at the door, wearing a small amused smile. "Chris? What are you doing here? What about the tour?"

"Someone called, told me that my presence was needed. We had our tour, Jen. Don't worry about Steve and I. Now tell me what's going with you."

Jensen looks down at the paperwork and shakes his head. "I'm fine."

"Bullshit, Jensen!" Chris spits out and Jensen jerks his head up again. "Of course you're not fine."

"I'm not the one fighting for my life."

"No, but you're fighting for your husband's life," Chris says. "C'mon, we're leaving."

"What? Chris, no. I have..."

"Shut up, Jen," Chris growls. "You can either walk out of here with your dignity intact or I'll throw you over my shoulder and carry you out. But either way we're leaving. So what's it gonna be?"

Jensen sighs. He knows that Chris will do it, so he gets up and says, "Fine, okay. Where're we going anyway?"

"That's a surprise."

Chris leads him out of the station and calls to Chad to hold the fort while he takes care of Jensen. Chris' truck is parked right in front of the station and Jensen feels his best friend push him into the passenger side and then lock the door after him.

"Chris, really?"

"What? Can't have you escaping on me."

Jensen rolls his eyes annoyed. "You think this is really necessary?"

"Yup," Chris says and grins, walking around to the driver's side. "Now you are going to tell me what's going on with you. And don't spare me, please."

"Chris..." Jensen shakes his head.

"No tell me, Jensen. What's it like to see Jared like this? So sick that he can barely make it out of bed on a good day."

Jensen feels the anger burning. "What do you want, Chris?"
"Fucking tell me, Jensen!" Chris says loudly. "You're maybe losing the love of your life, Jen. So tell me how that feels."

"What the hell do you think, Chris?" Jensen retorts. "It feels like my heart's being ripped out of my chest."

Chris nods tightly. "Of course it does. So, you wanna tell me once again that you're fine? That the anger of the unfairness isn't eating you alive? That this isn't killing you?"

"I'm fine," Jensen says angrily. "I have to be fine. Because if I'm not, then nobody is. They tell me I need to be strong, Chris. For the kids, for Jared. That's what I'm doing. I'm being strong."

Chris stops the car. "This is killing you, Jen. And you need to face it."

"I can't, Chris."

Chris gets out of the car and opens the door to the passenger side. "C'mon, let's go inside."

For the first time Jensen looks at the building Chris' parked in front of. It's the shooting range. He shakes his head.

"I can't. Please Chris, don't make me."

"It's okay, Jen," Chris says. "I'm here. Okay? I'm here."

The first time Jensen came here was when he was still a teenager. JD had taken Josh, Chris, Mike and him here when Jensen had turned sixteen. Back then he had been filled with so much hatred and anger towards JD, towards his mom, towards himself, towards his dad. He had hated every minute of the drive here, but his mom had begged him to go, had begged him to be civil with JD, just for once.

"Chris..."

"I'm here. Not going anywhere, okay?"

It takes Jensen a long time to get out of the car and follow Chris into the building and he's sure this is a really bad idea, even while his feet walk after Chris. His best friend rents two hand guns for them and Jensen's shaking when he takes one of them. They walk to the back of the range and one of the employees prepares everything for them.

Chris is the one to hand Jensen the ear protection. Their eyes lock when Jensen takes them and puts them on. He knows that Chris will be here, no matter what will happen, Chris will have his back. Just like the last time.

Jensen takes aim and when he pulls the trigger, he feels it. With every single bullet that hits the target the anger in him threatens to explode. The tension in him grows and he feels his defenses crumble beneath the emotions that hit him. He fires, pulls the trigger over and over again. Someone is screaming and his vision gets blurry.

It's just like the last time, back when he was still a teenager.

The screams get louder and the anger boils in his belly. He fires more, not caring if he hits the target or not, losing his focus and just blindly pulling the trigger. He doesn't really notice when the gun in his hand is empty and pulled out of his fingers. He doesn't fight it when Chris wraps his arms around him and holds him while he cries and screams for the unfairness that's happening to Jared, to them, to their family.
He doesn't know how long it takes for him to calm down again, but when he does, he feels empty and drained. But he feels better too, the tension gone.

"I can't lose him," he whispers.

"Shh," Chris soothes. "We'll do whatever lies in our power to not let that happen, Jen."

Jensen's glad that Chris doesn't tell him that he won't lose Jared, because they don't know that. "Why him, Chris? Why?"

"I don't know, Jen."

"It's not fair."

"No." Chris shakes his head. "It never is."

"I don't know if I can be strong."

"You're only human, Jen. You're allowed to be weak once in a while and you know where to find me if it gets too much. I'm here, Jen. Always."

"I wanna go home, to my husband."

Chris nods. "Of course. I'll drive you."

They don't talk during the drive home, don't need to. Jensen knows now that Chris will be there to catch him if he falls and it gives him strength. He has also realized that it's okay to be weak, to cry and to scream from time to time.

It's already dark when they get to Jensen's home and the windows are lit brightly.

"Go on," Chris says. "I'll explain to everyone that you and JT need some time alone."

Jensen reaches out and squeezes Chris' shoulder. "Thank you." Chris just shakes his head and Jensen is more than grateful for Chris as his friend.

He rushes inside, not even caring to say 'hello' to his family. He'll have time to make it up to them later. Now he needs to see Jared. He jerks the door to their bedroom open and stops dead in his tracks when he sees Jared's parents sitting at the side of their bed.

"Haven't you heard of knocking?" Gerald asks, sounding annoyed.

"This is my bedroom," Jensen says. "And I need to ask you to leave anyway."

"Jen?" Jared asks weakly.

"But we've only just got here," Sharon whines.

"Honestly, I really don't care," Jensen says. "I need to talk to my husband. Alone. Now, if you please."

"But..."

"Mother, you can come back tomorrow," Jared says. "Just leave me alone with my husband."

Sharon huffs out a breath, but in the end the Padaleckis leave and Jensen turns around and locks the
"Jen? Have you been crying? What happened?" Jared asks, sounding upset.

Jensen walks over to the bed. "I love you. And I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what?"

"For not being the husband you deserve," Jensen says softly, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

"No." Jared shakes his head. "That's not true."

"I was trying to be strong. I really was."

"Jen, what happened?"

"Chris and Steve are back, and Chris took me to the shooting range." Jared frowns and Jensen gives him a small smile. "Let's just say it was what I needed and it wasn't pretty."

Understanding seems to dawn on Jared and he cups Jensen's head between his fingers. "Why didn't you come to me?"

"You're going through enough. You don't need to deal with me losing it too."

"You're full of shit," Jared says and Jensen snorts.

"Thanks, Jay."

"Are you feeling better?" Jared asks, looking at him intently.

Jensen nods. "Yeah. I'm still so scared of losing you, but I'm feeling better."

"Will you talk to me from now on?" Jensen closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, and Jared says, "Okay, let's re-phrase that. If you don't talk to me, will you at least talk to Chris?"

"I wanna talk to you. I do. I just..." Jared's thumb wipes over his cheek and that's when Jensen realizes he's crying again.

"It's okay. I'm scared too," Jared says softly. "We can be scared together."

"Jared, I can't lose you. It'd kill me."

"You're stronger than you think you are, Jen." Jared smiles sadly. "That's one of the reasons I love you so much."

"Not with this," Jensen admits. "You're the heart of this family, Jay. The kids are who they are because of you."

Jared shakes his head and then pulls Jensen down, pressing their forehead's together. "You sure you didn't hit your head at the shooting range?"

"What?"

"You're acting pretty dense here, Jen. I would be nothing without you. You're the one to give me strength and you make me the person I am. It's all because of you. And the kids adore you, you're their hero. This family would be nothing without you."
"Jay..."

"Will you just kiss me now and hold me?"

Jensen lets out a deep breath and nods. "Yeah, I can do that." He presses a kiss to Jared's temple. "I've missed holding you."

"Me too. But you're here now."

Jensen wraps his arms around Jared's slim body and his husband settles with his head on Jensen's shoulder.

"I'm not going anywhere again. We'll do this together, Jay."

"We will, Jen. We will."

tbc
Chapter 14

“The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.”
~ Mark Twain

"Ben kissed me."

Sophie-Ellie is looking at a couple of t-shirts on the shelf. She really likes the rose one with the sun print.

"What?" Michelle stutters. "When?"

"After the ultrasound appointment last Friday," Sophie-Ellie explains, trying for casual, even though her heart is beating rapidly in her chest just thinking about it.

"And you're only telling me now? That was three days ago." Michelle sounds baffled. "So what? You're a couple now?"

Sophie-Ellie turns around, facing her best friend and shrugs. "I don't know," she sighs. She knows where she wants it to go, but there's this little voice in her head telling her that Ben would never want to be with her, if it weren't for the reason that he feels obligated. He promised her dad that he'll take care of her.

"You don't know?"

"No."

"So, do you want to date him?"

Sophie-Ellie goes to the next shelf, knowing that Michelle will follow her. She finds a light yellow top that she likes and searches for her size.

"Seph, what's going on? I know you like him. So what's the problem?" Michelle asks, pulling at her upper arm to turn her around.

"What if it's because he feels obligated?"

Michelle snorts. "Really? Have you seen the way he looks at you? He's totally gone."

Sophie-Ellie lets out a deep breath. "Why would he want with me anyway? I'm seventeen and pregnant. That's not exactly girlfriend material."

"Ben really likes you and not just as his best friend. It's written all over his face."

"I just..."

"Maybe you should talk to him," Michelle says. "Let him reassure you that he didn't kiss you out of
obligation. By the way, how did it feel? I'm sure he's a good kisser," Michelle says dreamily.

Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes, but can't help her cheeks heating up. "You're incorrigible."

"So he is a good kisser?"

"Yes," Sophie-Ellie finally admits, still remembering how Ben's lips felt against hers.

"Eeee. I knew it," Michelle screeches. "This is so awesome. You're totally made for each other."

A part of Sophie-Ellie really wants Michelle to be right, but the voice in her head's saying that this is too good to be true drowns it out.

Who'd want a seventeen year old, pregnant girl, if they could have Piper, the head cheerleader?

Evan is watching Luke work on his homework. He looks calm and completely engaged in whatever he's writing, and when his tongue sticks out a little in concentration, Evan smiles. He loves Luke; everyday a little more.

He walks over from where he's standing at the door and presses a kiss to Luke's neck, startling him.

"Oh hey, I didn't hear you."


"Now, what a coincidence." He presses their foreheads together. "I have a few errands to run, but I'll be back for dinner, okay?"

Luke nods. "Sure. I have to finish this paper from hell anyway." He kisses Evan once more. "I'll see you in a few hours, then."

Evan smiles. "Bye."

He walks out the back door and around the house to get to his truck parked in the driveway. He checks to see if the bag he put onto the passenger seat a couple of minutes ago is still there and then pulls the truck out onto the street and towards downtown.

His first stop is at the local tailor's shop.

"Hey," Margaret, the tailor, greets him. "You have it?"

Evan smiles and nods. "Yup." He hands her the bag. "This is the tux Luke wore at Maddie's wedding last year."

"And you're sure he still fits in it?" she asks, winking at him teasingly.

Evan chuckles. "Yes."
"Great. So when do you want me to get the tuxes finished?"

"I've set the date for June 17th. So I guess a couple of weeks before that'd be great. Just in case we need to change something."

Margret nods. "Sure, honey. I'll call when they're ready for fitting."

"You're a sweetheart. What would I do without you?"

"Sweet talker. Go and make sure everything else is ready, and I'll make sure you and Luke look beautiful on your wedding day."

"Right. That's my cue. I have a date at the local pastry and the flower shops. And I want to stop by the ranch to talk to Donna about things."

"Well, good luck."

"Thanks."

He blows her a kiss. The pastry shop is only a couple of blocks away and Evan walks over to it, enjoying the sun and warmth.

Stephanie is behind the counter. He and Luke went to high school with her and when he'd contacted the shop on Saturday, she'd been thrilled about Evan's idea about a surprise wedding. She smiles when he walks inside.

"Hey, I've prepared a couple of things, if you wanna take a look."

Evan grins. "That's great, thanks."

She leads him into the back of the shop. There are five small cakes and next to each is a picture of how Stephanie thinks the wedding cake will look.

"You can just taste all of them and then we can decide on what form and decor you want, okay?"

"Okay."

The first cake is lemon and it practically melts on his tongue. It's fresh and a little sour, but it tastes amazing. After that he tries the chocolate butter cream one and it's even better. The cream cheese one after that almost tops it, but only almost. The almond and the banana nut cakes are delicious too. But in the end Evan knows what cake he'll choose. Chocolate has always been Luke's favorite, so he decides on that one.

Stephanie seems pleased with his choice and in the end they settle on five tier wedding cake that'll serve at least 80 people.

After tasting all the delicious cakes, Evan feels he's kind of on a sugar rush and he's grinning stupidly while he makes his way to the florist.

Luke had made it clear that he doesn't want roses. But Evan thinks that calla lilies or white orchids might be the way to go.

In the end, Charlene, the florist, is able to convince him to use both.

Evan drives out to the ranch and he sees Donna already waiting for him on the porch. She waves when he gets out of the truck.
"Hey, sweetheart. How are you? How's Luke?"

"Hey, Aunt Donna. I'm good. Luke's good too. He's writing his paper for his homework right now." He kisses her cheek. "He seems to be better now that he's close to Jared all day."

Donna smiles sadly. "It's good if it helps him. How's Jared doing anyway?"

"He's always very tired. He hasn't even been down at all in days. It's really scary to see him like this."

"I know. But I do believe that he'll be okay," Donna says, putting her arm around his shoulders. "C'mon, let's talk about something happy and plan a wedding."

Jesse's lying under a '75 Mustang, checking the tail pipe for any rust. He can hear Jake and Bob talking over on the other side of the garage, while Lizzie is in the office talking on the phone to one of their parts' suppliers.

But here, beneath the car, it's almost like he's not there. It's his escape from the real world these days. He can get lost in his work and it's the one thing that keeps him sane, except for his nights spent with Annie.

They haven't spent a night apart since the day they found about Jared's illness. It's calming and reassuring to know that their connection is still there. He knows he loves her, loved her during all those years they were apart, too.

They haven't talked about what's happening between them, just falling into a comfortable routine and Jesse won't jeopardize it by opening his mouth and asking Annie to put a label on what they have or don't have.

"Hey, kiddo. What're you doing here?"

Jake's voice jerks Jesse out of his thoughts and he rolls out from under the car only to see Tyler standing at the rolling gate looking around awkwardly.

"Hey Ty, what's going on? Where's Jamie?" Jesse asks.

Tyler shrugs awkwardly. "He's at the mall with Adam and Laura."

"Oh and you didn't want to go?"

The boy shakes his head. "No."

Tyler's been really quiet over the last couple of weeks and Jesse's heart breaks for him. Jared's illness is taking its toll on Ty.

"So, why don't you come an' help me over here?"

There's a small spark in Tyler's eyes and he makes his way over to Jesse's side, looking at the car. "What's wrong with her?"
Jesse grins at the casual use of 'her'. Ty's definitely Jensen's son. "Well, that's what we're going to find out." He opens the hood. "You know what all this is?"

Tyler shakes his head and Jesse explains the inner works of a '75 Mustang. Tyler listens to him attentively and Jesse thinks there's a small smile tugging at the edge of Ty's mouth.

They work for a couple of hours and when Jesse decides it's enough and they should go home, Tyler is almost bouncing over to Jesse's '70 Chevelle.

"So, you should ask your papa to show you how to work on the Impala."

Ty's eyes light up. "You think he'd let me help?"

"I'm sure he will, if you ask him."

Tyler's smile slowly fades away. "Maybe when Dad's better again. Papa doesn't have time to work on the Impala right now."

Jesse ruffles his hair gently. "The doctors will make your dad all better."

Ty shrugs awkwardly. "Yeah."

When Sophie-Ellie gets home from her shopping trip, it's late Monday afternoon and Ben's sitting on the front porch steps. She frowns a little, when she notices the tension in his shoulders. He hasn't seen her yet, because he's staring down at his hands that are lying in his lap. So, she walks up to him and puts the shopping bags down, startling Ben in the process.

"Hey," he says and his voice wavers a little.

"Hey."

She wonders if this is the moment Ben tells her that the kiss was a mistake. They haven't seen each other over the weekend, because they decided that it'd be better to get their homework done straightaway so they can enjoy spring break. So, Sophie-Ellie really doesn't know what Ben’s been up to these last two days. And two days - almost three - are definitely enough time to change your mind.

"Did you have fun with Michelle?" Ben asks and Sophie-Ellie has the feeling that he wanted to ask her something else completely.

"Yeah. It was fun shopping for new clothes. Even though Michelle doesn't really approve of pastel colors."

Ben smiles. "I'm sure you look beautiful." He sucks his bottom lip between his teeth as soon as the words are out and looks at her sheepishly.

She can't help but blush. "Thanks," she whispers.

"Listen Sophie, I... we... we need to talk," Ben says slowly and Sophie-Ellie's heart sinks. Not that
she ever really had high hopes that Ben could want her in the first place.

"Okay."

"You wanna go out with me tomorrow night?" Ben mumbles quickly and Sophie-Ellie has a hard time understanding him.

"What?"

Ben looks awfully shy all of a sudden. "Do you want to go out with me tomorrow night? Y'know, dinner and a movie?"

"You wanna go out with me?" She asks, stunned.

"Yeah. Only if you want to, of course. But I really, really like you and I know we're best friends and all, but I really like you."

"Ben, if this is because of the baby..."

"It's not," he says, interrupting her. "I've liked you for a really long time. I was just too chicken shit to ask you out."

"Ben," Sophie-Ellie stutters, having a hard time understanding what he's saying. "I don't know what to say."

"Say you'll go out with me. Please."

Sophie-Ellie nods and smiles. "Of course I'll go out with you."

The smile she gets in return is blinding. "Awesome. I'll pick you up at seven."

"Okay."

Ben scrambles to his feet and then kisses her cheek. "I'll see you tomorrow."

He's gone so fast that Sophie-Ellie can't do anything but watch after him and touches her cheek in wonder.

"He better treat you well."

She spins around and sees Jesse standing at the front door, grinning. She rolls her eyes and Jesse laughs.

"Y'know he will," she whispers and makes her way up the couple of front steps, after picking up her bags.

"Still. I think I should talk to Luke about one of us giving him the 'If you hurt her'-speech." Jesse winks at her teasingly and Sophie-Ellie sticks out her tongue.

"Don't you dare."

"So, where's he taking you?"

"What, you wanna stalk us?"

Jesse cackles. "Really good idea." He winds his arm around her shoulder and leans in close. "I'm
happy for you. Just, if he ever..."

Sophie-Ellie looks up at him and nods. "I can come to you. I know. Thank you."

They walk into the kitchen where Luke is sitting bent over his laptop working on something. He looks up at them and raises his eyebrows, when he sees their faces.

"Sophie-Ellie has a date," Jesse says and she slaps him.

"She does?" Luke asks teasingly. "Now, who'd be the lucky guy?"

"You're both jerks."


Sophie-Ellie huffs out a breath. "Like I said: jerks." She looks around the kitchen. "Where's Evan?"

"He had some errands to run," Luke says.

"Oh and here I thought you were attached at the hip," Sophie-Ellie replies teasingly.

Luke sticks out his tongue, and Sophie-Ellie and Jesse start laughing again.

Annie gets home from work shortly before dinner. It's stressful working at the Science Center, but it's also a very fulfilling job. Her colleagues are great, really supportive and trying to make her feel welcome. It was a good decision to take the job.

She meets Sophie-Ellie on her way upstairs to take a shower. Jesse and Jensen are talking in the kitchen, while the twins are sitting in front of the TV for the nightly cartoon hour. There's a small smile on her sister's face and Annie just knows that something's happened.

"Why are you smiling like that?"

Sophie-Ellie shrugs. "No reason."

"Oh yeah?" Annie asks, grinning. "Does this grin maybe have something to do with Ben?" The blush on Sophie-Ellie's face is all the confirmation Annie needs. "Oh my god, it does. What happened? Did he ask you out? Kiss you?"

Sophie-Ellie laughs softly. "Both. He kissed me last week after the ultrasound appointment and today he asked me out."

"That's great," Annie says, pulling her little sister into a hug. "I knew that something was going on between you two."

"He's taking me out tomorrow night."

"You happy?"
Sophie-Ellie nods a little. "Yeah, I think I am. Now only Dad has to get better and everything'll be perfect."

Annie lets out a deep breath. "Yeah. Maybe the new cycle of chemo will finally bring some results. It'd be nice to know that it's working."

"It will work," Sophie-Ellie says seriously. "I know it will."

Annie nods. "Of course, you're right." She kisses her sister's temple. "I'll go say 'hi' to Dad and then take a shower before dinner."

She walks over to her dad's bedroom and knocks lightly, before stepping inside. Megan is sitting at Jared's bedside and Lily is curled up next to him on the bed, asleep. Megan is reading the newspaper to Jared, but stops as soon as Annie walks inside.

"Hey. I just wanted to say 'Hi'."

Her dad smiles weakly. "Hi. How was your day?"

"Good. Stressful, but good. And yours? How're you feeling?"

"I'm okay, sweetheart. A little tired, though."

Annie thinks that 'A little tired' is the biggest understatement of the century, but she doesn't call her dad on it.

"Jensen and Jesse are making dinner. We'll bring it up when it's ready."

Her dad turns green a little bit at the mention of food, but Annie knows that he has to eat something to keep up his strength. "Great," he murmurs and Annie laughs.

"Don't you crave some dry toast with tea?"

Jared grins tiredly. "That's what I crave all day."

Annie leans down to kiss his temple. "I'll go take a shower."

After the shower, she goes back into the bedroom to find her whole family there. Jensen's sitting next to her dad on the bed, the tension that had hung between them over the last couple of weeks is thankfully gone. There's even a small smile on Jensen's face.

Annie sits down next to Jesse on the floor and takes her plate filled with lasagna from him. Their hands brush and she smiles at him.

They have a nice dinner, talking about their day and their plans for tomorrow. Sophie-Ellie shows the pictures of the ultrasound again, but Annie can't get enough of seeing the little person growing inside Sophie-Ellie. To her dad and Jensen, it seems to be the same.

Tyler talks about how Jesse showed him how to work on cars and Annie can see Jensen's eyes light up at the interest Tyler shows on the subject.

It's a really nice evening and Annie doesn't realize that her dad fell asleep until Jensen mentions it and shoos them outside. She helps Jesse, Luke and Evan to clean up, while Jensen takes Lily and the twins to bed.

When it's bedtime, she doesn't even think about it and just follows Jesse over to his garage apartment.
She changes into her pajamas that are stashed in Jesse's room and when she climbs into bed, Jesse's already there waiting for her.

She scoots closer to him, laying her head on his shoulder. His arm comes around her and she feels him pressing a soft kiss to her hair. For a second she wonders how she could ever think that something else could be better than this. But it doesn't really matter anymore, since she's here now.

"I love you," she whispers, holding her breath while she waits for an answer.

"I love you too," Jesse says quietly a moment later and a smile forms on Annie's face.

Sophie-Ellie is right, now all there is, is for Dad to get back on his feet and everything will be perfect.

Jensen takes Lily to bed, reading at little bit of Alice in Wonderland to Lily, even though it's already past bedtime. But it makes her smile and he missed that smile being directed at him.

"Good night, baby girl." He kisses her forehead.

"Night, Papa."

The twins are next and Jensen feels his heart lighten a little at the relaxed look on Tyler's face. The day at the garage with Jesse really seems to have worked wonders. He considers taking Ty to the shooting range one day soon, but then decides against it because Jared really wouldn't like that, but he'll think of something to do with Ty so he can let go of some steam.

Jared's still asleep when Jensen gets back into their bedroom. His skin is slightly flushed and Jensen puts a hand against Jared's forehead. It's warm, but not extraordinarily so. He leans down and presses a soft kiss to Jared's temple.

The shooting range had definitely helped him to find his way back and be strong without feeling like he's crumbling under the pressure. He also knows that Chris is only a phone call away.

He takes a shower, wishing Jared could be in here with him. The warm water makes him tired, and after toweling off and brushing his teeth, Jensen climbs into his bed. Kissing Jared's cheek gently.

He doesn't remember falling asleep, but he must have, because when he looks at his alarm clock it shows him that it's the middle of the night. He doesn't know what woke him, but he feels that he won't be able to sleep for a while.

Turning over to Jared, he reaches out and runs his fingers over his husband's shoulder. It's hot. Even through the t-shirt Jared's wearing, Jensen can feel the heat seeping into his fingers. Jensen sits up immediately and presses his whole hand against Jared's forehead.

"Oh god," he whispers.

Jared's burning up. This doesn't feel like his normal elevated temperature at all. He's so hot, that Jensen thinks it might burn his hand.
"Jay," he says softly, shaking Jared lightly. "Jay, baby, you're burning up. I'm calling for an ambulance."

A groan escapes Jared's mouth when Jensen switches on the light and scrambles for the phone. "Jen?" he asks weakly.

"Yeah, I'm here. I'm calling an ambulance. You're gonna be okay, Jay."

Jared looks at him, his arm reaching up to touch Jensen's face. "Jen..."

"It's okay, Jay." Jensen takes him into his arms, while he dials 911. "It's gonna be okay."

Jared seems to have problems focusing on Jensen, and then his eyes roll into the back of his head and he goes limp in Jensen's arms.

"No, no, no, no," Jensen whispers, shaking Jared gently. "Jay, no. I'm not ready to lose you. No. No, Jay. JARED!"
Chapter 15

“There’s this place in me, where your fingerprints still rest, your kisses still linger, and your whispers softly echo. It’s the place where a part of you will forever be a part of me.” ~ Gretchen Kemp

It all happens in a blur. The kids come running in; Annie and Luke, being the grown-ups that they are, taking Lily and the twins out; the ambulance sirens coming closer; Mike and Jesse pulling him away from Jared's limp body once the paramedics are there.

Jensen knows they're talking to him, but there's a buzz in his head that drowns everything out, except for 'No, this can't be happening. I'm not ready. I can't lose him. JARED!'.

He stumbles after them when they carry Jared outside and climbs into the ambulance, throwing a look over his shoulder to see his kids, their significant others, and Mike and Tom standing on the porch.

For a split second he's hit by the thought that Jared must have gone through something similar when James was taken to the hospital. But then he rubs a hand over his face, telling himself that Jared's not James and that this night won't end with him telling the kids that their dad's dead.

It can't end like this. He's not strong enough, no matter what Jared told him.

The drive to the hospital is over quickly and Jensen rushes after the paramedics who cart Jared down the hallway. The nurse stops him though, when he wants to follow them into the examination room. He wants to scream and hit something, wants to plead and beg, but all he does is pace in the hallway.

It feels like an eternity before Kripke comes out and tells him that they're preparing the helicopter to fly Jared to Dallas General Hospital. He explains that he's already contacted Dr. Cohen and that he'll be waiting for Jared there.

"I'm going with him," Jensen says and his own voice sounds hollow and distant, and not like something he'd recognize if he didn't know it was his.

"Sure. I'll take you up to the roof."

Jensen follows Kripke up. "Can you call Mike or Tom? Tell them that I went with Jared?"

The doctor looks at him and nods. "Of course."

The helicopter is waiting and when Jensen and Kripke arrive at the roof, Jared's being wheeled over to it already. Jensen climbs in and someone pushes the IV into his hands.

"Hold it high."

And Jensen does. It gives him something to focus on, besides Jared's limp form. His fingers brush against Jared's skin and he's still so hot.
It feels like it takes ages for them to land on the roof of Dallas General Hospital. Dr. Cohen and Stephen are already waiting for them.

"What happened?" Dr. Cohen asks and Jensen shakes his head.

"He was fine earlier tonight, just really tired and then I woke up during the night and he was burning up. That's when I called for the ambulance."

"Okay, we'll take care of him now. Why don't you and get some coffee?"

"No, I..."

"Jensen," Stephen says gently. "Let them figure out what's wrong so they can help him. C'mon, I'm paying."

Jensen looks over at him and all he sees is genuine concern for Jared on his face. "Okay." He watches as Dr. Cohen follows the paramedics who are wheeling Jared inside. "I'll see him again, right?"

Stephen's hand comes to lie on his lower back. "Dr. Cohen will do whatever lies in his power to help Jared."

It's not the answer Jensen hoped for, but then again, he's grateful for an honest answer. He couldn't bear being lied to and get his hopes up, just to have them crushed.

This is it, isn't it?

It all ends tonight.

The memory of his father being wheeled away all those years ago is still so fresh in his mind, as if it happened yesterday.

And here he thought that everything would be okay. Here he’d built up hope that this time it'd be different. But it isn't, is it?

It's all a big damn lie. Nothing's gonna be okay.

"Luke? Baby?"

He looks up and for the first time realizes that he's sitting on the bathroom floor, just next to the toilet bowl. Evan wipes his face with a wet washcloth and Luke is hit by a distant memory of puking his guts out only seconds ago.

His arms wrap around his body of their own accord and he slides down to lie on the cold tiles. "Just leave me."

"I'm not gonna leave you," Evan says, lying down next to him, their faces so close they’re almost touching. "Never gonna leave you."
"You'll get sick," Luke mumbles, feeling the tears run down his face.

"I'll deal."

"I don't want you to get sick. I don't want to lose you."

Evan shakes his head. "I'm not going anywhere," he says seriously.

Luke looks at his fiancé for a long time, before he says, "Ev, my dad..."

"Will be okay."

"What if he isn’t?"

Evan reaches up and cups Luke's jaw with one hand. "I'm here. No matter what happens, I won't leave you."

Luke leans into the touch, closing his eyes. "I remember the day my papa died," he says quietly. "He had been sick with pneumonia for a couple of days, but he was feeling better. We played in the snow that day, built a snowman and had this huge snowball fight. I was so happy."

"Luke..."

"But then it all came crashing down." He blinks his eyes open. "It was like one moment everything was great and then it wasn't. He was gone, just like that. We didn't even get to say goodbye."

Evan scoots closer. "You'll see your dad again."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Uncle JT is strong and there're so many things waiting for him. He knows how to fight for all of this."

Luke wants to believe what Evan's saying, wants to believe that his dad's going to be okay and they'll be a family again. But there's a nagging voice in his head telling him that not everything has a happy ending, his papa didn't have the chance of a happy ending. And maybe his dad doesn't either.

Annie's sitting on the back porch steps, watching the sun rise over the horizon. It looks like just any other day. But nothing's the same as before.

She can hear distant voices talking in the kitchen. Angie and Matthew got here an hour or so ago, just like Aunt Sophia and Uncle Misha with Laura and Ben. They're now sitting in the living room with Mike Tom, Megan and Jesse, waiting for more news on what's happening with Dad. The only thing they know is that he's being flown to Dallas General Hospital and Jensen's going with him.

Her first thought was to go too, but Jesse reasoned with her, told her that there's nothing to do but wait and that her siblings need her here right now.

She hates it a little that she's the oldest one. But then she remembers what she'd have given for a big
sister or brother when her papa had been taken to the hospital.

"What was it like when your father died?"

Annie jerks her head around to see Ty standing at the far end of the porch. "Hey, what're you doing up? I thought Grandma put you to bed."

Ty shrugs. " Couldn't sleep."

He's only eleven, but sounds so grown-up right now. "C'mere," she says and waves him over, wrapping her arm around his small shoulders. She presses a kiss to his temple. "Dad's gonna be okay."

"How do you know that? Your papa wasn't. And Laura's dad wasn't either."

Annie swallows hard. What do you say to that? "There's always hope, Ty."

"Hope's for stupid people," he says. "You all think I'm blind, but I'm not. I can see how sick Dad is. And I know how to use the Internet," he explains angrily, pulling away from Annie. "He's gonna die and leave us alone, just like your papa."

"Ty, no..."

"It's not fair!" he yells, stumbling away from Annie.

The back door opens and their grandfather puts his head through the crack. "What's going on out here?" His eyes fall on Ty, standing with his back against the wall. "Ty? What're you doing out here, buddy?"

Instead of saying something, Ty rushes past him into the house. Annie can hear her grandmother calling out for him, but he doesn't seem to stop.

"He thinks Dad's gonna die. He actually asked me how it was when Papa died." Annie wipes at her wet eyes. "What do you say to that? He's right, Papa died and Jenna's dad died. So how do you make him believe that Dad won't?" She's openly crying now.

Matthew pulls her into his arms. "It's okay, sweetheart." He holds onto her tightly. "It's okay."

"I don't want them to go through what Luke, Sophie-Ellie and I went through," Annie whispers.

"I know."

"It's not fair."

"No, it isn't."

"I just want him to be healthy again."

"We all do. And he'll get there. He's strong and he's fighting."

Annie desperately wants to believe her grandfather right now.
Her room is quiet, but Sophie-Ellie can hear distant voices in the living room. She doesn't know who just got here and doesn't really care either.

It's all falling apart and slowly but surely the hope is fading to desperation. What if this is the last time she ever saw her dad? It happened before. She presses her hands against her belly, being able to just feel the little bump there. She can't do this without her dad. She needs him to be there when the baby is born.

There's a knock on her door and she wipes at her eyes. "C'min."

"Hey," Ben says when he walks in. "Mike and Tom called Mom and Dad. How are you feeling?"

"Sick with worry," she says, letting out a deep breath. "We don't even know what happened. He was fine at dinner, just tired."

"So, Jensen hasn't called yet."

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. "He probably doesn't know what's wrong either. I just... god, I wish someone would say something." She rubs her hand over her belly again. "I just wanna know if he's gonna be okay."

"He will be," Ben says, sitting down next to her on the bed. "He's strong."

Sophie-Ellie nods. "I wanna believe that. But Papa was strong too."

"Shh," Ben soothes, pressing a kiss to her temple. "It'll be okay."

"I remember that night," she says and it feels so clear in her mind, so real. "Grandma let us sleep in the same bed and you told me that it'd be okay."

"I'm sorry I was wrong," he whispers.

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. "It helped that you said it that night. I mean, we were only six, but I just knew that you'd be there for me and that made it easier." She means what she's saying, Ben being there helped back then and it helps now.

"I'll always be there for you," Ben says seriously. "And the little one too."

Sophie-Ellie feels tears burn behind her eyes. "Ben..."

"I know it's not mine, but that doesn't mean I can't care about him or her and their mom."

Her heart swells and she knows she's falling in love with Ben. "Okay," she says breathlessly and nods.

Ben leans in and kisses her gently. His lips are soft and warm and they are more reassuring than any words anyone has said.
The sun is already up high when Dr. Cohen comes to find Jensen, who's pacing in the waiting room. The waiting’s nearly killing him. He feels tense and wishes he had something to calm his nerves; the four coffees he’s had don’t seem to have helped.

"So?" he asks, as soon Dr. Cohen steps through the door.

"He has an infection. We're treating it with antibiotics and hope that the fever will go down soon."

"What does that mean? Is he...?"

"It's serious, Jensen. Jared's weak from the chemo and the illness. So we don't know how much his body will be able to fight this."

"But... he'll be okay, right? I mean..."

"He's stable right now and if the fever goes down over the next twenty-four hours, he has a good shot at fighting the infection."

"If?" Jensen asks and he feels like his heart's been ripped out of his chest. This is what he feared the most.

"I'm sorry, Jensen. I really wish I could give you better news."

Jensen shakes his head. "No, no... it's not your fault. I just... can I see him?"

"We’re going to keep him in quarantine for at least the next twenty-four hours, but you can see him through a window, if you like."

"Yeah," Jensen nods.

He follows Dr. Cohen through the hallway and it doesn't feel real at all. It's more like a bad dream that he can't seem to wake up from. He knows he needs to call his family and friends, but he can't seem to find the strength to make that call.

"You want us to call someone?"

It's as if Dr. Cohen can read his mind. "Yes, that'd be nice," Jensen says. "If you could just call Mike or Tom Rosenbaum-Welling? They'll tell everyone else."

"Sure, just give Stephen the phone number and we'll call them."

"Thank you."

"No need to thank us." Dr. Cohen stops. "We're here."

Jensen turns and is hit by the image of Jared lying in a hospital bed right behind the glass window that's separating them. He's seen his husband all too often like this. But up until now, it has always been fine.

But, now...
He presses his hand against the glass and wishes he could touch Jared, talk to him, feel him and just know that he'll make it.

People come and go and Jensen loses track of time, sinking to the floor when his legs don't want to carry him anymore. He closes his eyes and Jared's smiling at him, his dimples showing and his eyes sparkling.

An arm is put around his shoulder, and when he opens his eyes, his mother is there, holding him.

"Mom?"

"Shh," she soothes, pressing her lips to his temple and pulling him in.

He leans against her, letting her hold him. They don't speak, but her presence calms him. She rocks them back and forth while they wait on news of Jared.

tbc
Chapter 16

“Where there is love there is life.” ~Mahatma Ghandi

Jesse can't remember time ever passing so slowly, not even back when he was still living with his parents. It's pure torture waiting for the digital numbers to change.

And then a minute passes and nothing happens.

Nothing.

He wishes he could just make the phone ring; wishes Jensen would finally call to tell them that Jared's going to be fine.

But who’s he kidding? Even if the fever does go down and Jared beats the infection, there's still the more dangerous threat of cancer hanging over him, over them.

He doesn't know why something like this is happening to Jared. It's not fair. Jared's one of the most loyal, gracious, funny and loving people Jesse's ever met. Same goes for Jensen. If it weren't for them, he didn't know what he’d be doing right now, where he'd be.

Why does something like this always happen to the good people?

A knock at the front door jerks Jesse out of his thoughts. The living room is empty, except for Annie and him. Her head's resting on his lap and her breath is steady; it seems like she’s finally fallen asleep.

He runs his fingers through her hair gently. If he could just save her from all the heartache.

Quiet voices that slowly get louder, sound from the door and Jesse lifts Annie's head from his lap, placing it gently on a cushion. He makes his way to the door, only to see Megan arguing with her parents.

"What's going on here?" he asks, crossing his arms over his chest.


"You should have called us," Mr. Padalecki says. "He's our son." His voice is getting louder and Jesse looks over his shoulder to check that Annie is still asleep.

"Can we take this outside?" he asks. "It's been a hard day for all of us."

"I don't think you're in any place to tell us what to do," Mrs. Padalecki snarls. "This is our son's house and you're just...," she looks him up and down, seemingly looking for the right word to
describe him.

Jesse raises his eyes in amusement. "I'm just what?"

Mrs. Padalecki snaps her mouth shut and turns back to Megan. "You can't just not inform us. We're his parents."

Jesse snorts and before Megan can say anything, he says, "Really? Wow, you have a great way of showing it. I mean, I've been living here for the last six years and the first time I heard your name was when you appeared on the doorstep a few weeks ago."

"This is really none of your concern, young man," Mr. Padalecki says and Jesse shakes his head.

"And that's where you're wrong. It is my concern, because I care about this family." He steps out onto the porch, pulling the front door shut behind him and Megan. "I don't know what you're doing here or what you're trying to accomplish. But I know you're not doing it out of love for your son. And it makes me wanna puke, because Jared deserves so much better. So why don't go back to the hole you crawled out of?" Jesse feels anger burning in his veins. How can they even have the nerve to call themselves Jared's parents?

Mrs. Padalecki gasps. "You can't talk to us like that."

"Oh but I just did. And now you better get off the porch or I might lose my last bit of patience. Jensen might have reservations kicking you out because he loves Jared, but I really don't have any such inclinations."

"Gerald," Mrs. Padalecki whines.

"We're leaving. But we expect you to call us and keep us informed," Mr. Padalecki says. "No matter what you think, Jared Tristan is still our son and we love him."

Jesse opens his mouth to retort something, but Megan speaks first, "We'll call."

Mr. and Mrs. Padalecki leave and Jesse sighs, exchanging a look with Megan. "You believe them? That they care about Jared, I mean."

Megan shrugs. "Jared and I have always been the black sheep of the family. But I do wanna believe that there's at least a little bit of decency in their bones and they care and are worried about JT."

Jesse nods. "I hope you're right."

The house is eerily silent when Ben steps out of the bathroom on the second floor. He’s just taken a shower, thinking that the water might help with the tension in his body. It didn't. The only thing the shower accomplished was to make his thoughts run wild once again. And if anything, he feels more tense than before.

He checks on Sophie-Ellie, who fell asleep shortly before he took a shower. She's still asleep, her head half buried into the pillow. He runs a hand through her hair and presses a gentle kiss to her
temple. She looks relaxed and at peace, and Ben's glad that she can at least find a little bit of that while she sleeps. All the stress can't be good for the baby.

The baby that's not his and yet makes his heart swell.

His feelings for Sophie-Ellie have nothing to do with the baby, he didn't lie about that. These feelings have been there for a lot longer, even though he didn't want to admit it.

But the baby is a part of Sophie-Ellie and Ben can't just not care about it. He knows that wanting to be with Sophie-Ellie means wanting the baby too and he's okay with that. The thought should be scary, should freak him the hell out, but he's weirdly calm and relaxed about it.

What does freak him out is the thought that Uncle JT might not be there to meet his first grandchild. He wishes the phone would just ring, but at the same time just the thought alone scares him. What if Uncle Jensen calls and Uncle JT is...?

No, he won't go there. Uncle JT will be fine. He'll beat the infection and the cancer. In a couple of months they'll all be celebrating because Uncle JT will be in remission.

Ben makes his way downstairs, only to stop dead in his tracks at the bottom of the stairs when he hears quiet sobs coming from the kitchen. He carefully pushes open the door and finds his mom sitting at the kitchen island, crying. Nobody else is in sight.

"Mom?"

She jerks her head around to face him, wiping furiously at her eyes. "Oh hey, Ben. Your dad and Jesse just went to get us some takeout."

He takes a step closer to her. "Uncle JT will be okay."

She nods quickly. "Of course. I know." Ben reaches out and pulls her into a hug. "I'm fine," she whispers.

"It's okay, Mom. It's okay."

Ben holds her for a long time, cursing the powers that be for putting them all through this.

Uncle JT might be one to be sick, but they're all suffering. And the uncertainty is the worst for Ben. Not knowing if Uncle JT will be okay is eating at him and with each day that Uncle JT doesn't get better, hope lessens and desperation spreads.

Jensen jerks awake, the nightmare still clear in his mind; Jared slowly fading away and Jensen not being able to do anything about it until Jared was completely gone and there was nothing left but air.

He sits up, rubbing a hand over his face. It was just a dream, but it felt so damn real that Jensen needs a moment to calm himself.

Steven had made him lie down in one of the on-call rooms hours ago and Jensen checks his watch.
It's shortly before ten in the evening. He’s slept for six hours, even though he swore to Stephen that he wasn't tired. His body apparently needed the rest.

Jensen stands up, stumbling towards the door. He's sure that they'd have come to get him if something had changed with Jared, but he still needs to check on his husband; needs to see for himself that Jared's still there.

The hallways are empty and he makes his way down to the quarantine room.

Jared's still lying in the bed behind the window. The heart monitor is still showing steady lines and Jensen leans his head against the cold glass in relief.

It really was just a dream.

"I didn't know you were awake, baby."

He turns to see his mom standing behind him with a soft smile on her face. "Just woke up."

She nods. "How're you feeling?"

"Don't know." Jensen sighs and runs a hand through his hair. "You should go home, Mom. Get some sleep."

She shakes her head. "I'm fine."

"Mom..."

"I'm not leaving, Jensen." She cups his cheek gently and he leans into her touch. He doesn't want her to leave, even though he knows she must be exhausted. But her presence is soothing. "You want me to get you some coffee?"

He nods. "Coffee would be good."

His mom smiles reassuringly and pets his cheek. "I'll be right back."

She walks away and is almost around the corner, when Jensen calls, "Mom?" She turns around, raising her eyebrows questioningly and he takes a few steps towards her. "Thank you. For everything."

His mom closes the distance between them and pulls him into a tight hug, kissing his cheek gently. "Of course."

"I love you."

"Oh baby," she whispers. "I love you too." She holds him, while Jensen fights against the tears that are threatening to fall again. "It'll be okay, son. It'll be okay."

Gosh, he wants to believe her. He really does.

"I'll go and get you that coffee, baby," she says and kisses his cheek again.

Jensen nods. "Okay, thanks."

He walks back to the room Jared's in, touching the window pane. The heart monitor is still showing steady lines and Jensen lets himself hope that his mom is right.
"Did you at least sleep a little bit?"

Jensen jerks his head around to see Dr. Cohen standing a couple of feet away. He nods. "A few hours."

"Good, can't have to collapsing on my watch."

"Yeah, I guess." Jensen bites on his bottom lip. "So are you gonna check on Jared?"

"That's what I'm here for. But he's been stable for several hours now; that's a good sign, Jensen."

Jensen nods and watches Dr. Cohen when he walks into Jared's room to check his vitals. He wants nothing more than to follow the doctor into the room and touch Jared, feel his heartbeat beneath his fingertips.

His mom comes back with the coffee and they stand in silence watching Dr. Cohen work. Her hand is lying supportingly on the small of his back and the touch helps.

It feels like an eternity before Dr. Cohen walks back out, but the look on the doctor's face gives Jensen hope.

"Fever's almost completely gone," he says. "I knew that Jared would be a fighter."

Jensen lets out a relieved breath, feeling his legs shake. "Can I...?"

Dr. Cohen nods. "You can go inside, but I need to ask you to wear a mask and gloves. I don't want to risk a relapse."

"No, that's fine," Jensen rushes to say. "I just..."

"You don't need to explain, Jensen. I understand."

Dr. Cohen shows Jensen where he can wash his hands and where he can find the surgical masks and the overalls to wear. Jensen makes sure he follows Dr. Cohen's instructions religiously, even if it takes longer before he can make his way into Jared's room.

When he finally pushes the button that opens the door with his elbow, he feels the tension fall off his shoulders. Of course, they haven't won the war yet, but it feels a lot like they've won one of the battles and it gives Jensen some of the hope, he thought he'd lost, back.

Jared's still asleep, looking pale and exhausted. The infection took a lot out of his already weak body, but if Dr. Cohen is hopeful, Jensen can be hopeful too. He runs his glove covered hand over Jared's bald head and presses his lips, covered by the mask, to his husband's cheek.

"I thought I'd lost you," he whispers. "I know you said I'm strong. But I'm not. I don't know how you did it. I don't know how my mom did it. I just can't lose you, Jay. It'll kill me. So, you have to get better. Please. I need to see your beautiful eyes again and hear your voice. The kids and I need you in our lives. Just think about what's lying ahead. Luke's getting married and Sophie-Ellie is having our first grandchild. Can you imagine that, Jay? We're going to be grandparents." Jensen lets out a deep breath. "I love you, Jay. And I really need you to come back to me."

He takes Jared's hand between his and then lays his head on the edge of the bed, waiting for Jared to wake up.
Jared knows that this is a dream. It only can be, because he's feeling none of the fatigue or the nausea he's felt over the last few weeks. Also he has hair again. He runs a hand through it and it feels as soft and thick as it felt before.

He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. Fresh air fills his lungs and it feels wonderful and freeing. He misses the fresh Texan air, misses the sun on his face, because he's been too sick to go downstairs, let alone outside.

When he opens his eyes, he's standing in the middle of a meadow. The sun is shining through the branches of the surrounding trees, bathing the green of the grass and the white of the flowers growing here in mystic light.

Jared opens his arms to his sides and then lets himself fall back, smiling when he sees the deep blue of the sky above him. The ground beneath him is soft and warm, and he could stay here forever. There's just one thing that's missing: Jensen.

Sitting up again, he looks across the high grass and sees a shadow standing at the tree line. It's a man and he has Jensen's height and stature. Jared beams.

"Jen," he calls, scrambling to his feet and running over to where he just saw Jensen standing, but he's gone. "Jen?" he calls again, but there's no answer.

Jared pushes through the undergrowth and soon he's surrounded by high trees and bushes that barely let any light through. But he isn't scared. The darkness and silence hold something serene and peaceful. And he knows that Jensen's in here somewhere.

He makes his way through the undergrowth and finally gets to the meadow again, seeing Jensen standing in the middle of it. And this time he doesn't disappear.

Jared makes his way over, but the closer he gets the more he realizes that it's not Jensen standing in the middle of the meadow.

When he finally comes to a halt, a man of Jensen's height and posture is standing in front of him, smiling softly. Jared knows him from the pictures that hang on Donna's wall.

"Hello Jared."

Suddenly Jared feels anything but peaceful and happy. If he's here and if Alan’s here, does that mean he's dead?

"Am I dead?"

Alan smiles a little and puts an arm around his shoulder. "Not if I can help it."

"What does that mean?" Alan keeps smiling and it unnerves Jared. "What are you doing here if I'm not dead?"

"I wanted to meet the man my son loves."
Jared looks at him stunned. "What?"

"What, don't you think I want to know the man who makes my son happy?"

"Yeah, probably," Jared says slowly. "But... man, this is a weird dream."

Alan laughs. "I guess you could call it that." He grabs both of Jared's shoulders and looks at him intently. "I just want you to remember that losing you will kill him. So you need to fight, Jared."

Jared frowns. "Of course I will."

Alan shakes his head. "You don't understand. It'll be hard and at times it might seem easier to give up. But I want you to promise me that you'll do whatever it takes to beat this."

Jensen's dad is looking at him seriously and Jared nods slowly. "I promise."

"Good," Alan says and smiles. "It's time to wake up now."

The beep of the heart monitor is the first thing Jared hears. He slowly opens his eyes, the room is lit only by a small light in the corner. Jensen's head is lying on the edge of the bed and he's holding onto one of Jared's hands.

"Jen," Jared whispers, his mouth is dry and it makes his voice sound rough. "Jensen," he says a little louder and that gets a reaction out of his husband.

Jensen lifts his head, his face half covered in a surgical mask. "Jay?"

"Hey," Jared says tiredly.

"Thank God, you're awake," Jensen murmurs and Jared lifts his arm slowly to touch his husband's face. "I thought I'd lost you."

Jared shakes his head, letting his arm fall to the bed again. "Not getting rid of me that easily," he says quietly.

Jensen shakes his head, but there's a fond smile on his face. "You're incorrigible." He takes Jared's hand, bringing it up to press his mask covered lips against it. "Just don't do that ever again."

"I'll do my best," Jared replies weakly. "How are the kids?"

"Scared and worried," Jensen says. "I'll call them in a little while to tell them that you're awake and on the mend from the infection."

Jared nods slowly. "Can't wait to see them."

"I know," Jensen says.

"I love you, Jen."

Jensen smiles a little. "I love you too, Jay. Now rest, so you can beat that damn infection and come home again."

Jared wants to stay awake just to watch Jensen a little while longer, but the weakness from the infection is pulling him back to sleep quickly. He falls asleep looking into Jensen's eyes.
Chapter 17

“May the love hidden deep inside your heart find the love waiting in your dreams. May the laughter that you find in your tomorrow wipe away the pain you find in your yesterdays.” ~ Anonymous

It's been three days since he woke up in the quarantine room with Jensen sitting next to his bed, desperation clearly written all across his face.

Dr. Cohen says that the infection is slowly fading and they're even talking about transferring Jared to the oncology ward, which would mean that visitors wouldn't have been limited to Jensen. Not that he doesn't enjoy his husband's constant presence, it's nice and soothing. But he wants to see his kids, their friends and Angie and Matthew, along with Donna and JD too.

He just wants to feel normal again and not be confined to this room where the people he interacts with all have to wear masks and gloves and coats; it’s wearing his nerves thin.

The whoosh of the door tells him that Jensen's back from his breakfast at the cafeteria with Stephen. It seems that those two have gotten a little closer over the last couple of days, something Jared had never thought possible.

Jensen looks worse for wear and Jared can tell that his short beard is turning into a full blown one, by the hairs poking out from behind the mask. His husband has been here the whole time, only catching small intervals of sleep in one of the on-call rooms.

At one time, Stephen had the nerve to voice that Jensen might sleep better at home, but the look Jensen shot him instantly shut him up.

"Hey," Jensen says softly, pressing a mask covered kiss to Jared's forehead.

Jared hates the mask. He hates the gloves too. It means he can't feel Jensen touching him and he misses that touch, wants to feel Jensen's skin against his own and feel the warmth of Jensen seep into his bones.

"I see you had toast for breakfast." There's a small teasing smile displayed on Jensen's face and Jared rolls his eyes.

"Genius," he says weakly.

Jensen chuckles softly. "So, they're talking of transferring you to the oncology ward tomorrow or the day after. That's good, right?"

Jared nods slowly. The oncology ward is the next best thing to going home and being with his family. "You can bring the kids."

"They'll be thrilled to see you."

"You should go home, Jen. They need you." His voice is rough and Jensen hands him his water cup.
He takes a couple of sips and sends Jensen a grateful smile.

"I will, when it's clear that the infection is gone."

The look on Jensen's face shows Jared that it wouldn't do any good to argue, so he lets out a deep breath and nods. "Okay."

Jensen takes Jared's hand between his two and presses a kiss to the back of it. Jared closes his eyes, remembering how Jensen's touch feels against his skin.

"I love you."

He blinks his eyes open and gives Jensen a weak smile. "I love you too."

Wetness shimmers in Jensen's eyes and Jared's heart grows heavy. He wishes he could spare his husband the heartache him lying in this bed causes Jensen.

"What do you say; when this is all over we go to a deserted island and have lazy sex on the beach?"

Jared huffs out a laugh. "That'd be awesome."

"You need to get better, so that we can go soon. Just us. I'm sure Jesse and Annie will be fine with the twins and Lily for a weekend."

Jared sighs contentedly. "Sounds great."

The door to the room opens with a whoosh and Jared looks over Jensen's shoulder to see Dr. Cohen and Stephen walk in.

"Good morning, Jared. Jensen. So how are you feeling this morning?" Dr. Cohen asks, while Stephen checks his chart and the numbers the night nurse had written down.

"Better," Jared says and it's true. He does feel better compared to yesterday and the day before. He might even be able to go the bathroom by himself - well, maybe with Jensen holding him up.

Dr. Cohen smiles. "That's good." He takes the charts from Stephen and skims through the papers, while Stephen takes a vial of blood from the central line in Jared's chest. "We'll do another blood test to make sure that the infection really is clearing up and if everything looks good, we'll move you tomorrow or the day after, depending on how you're feeling."

"Will Jared be able to come home again?" Jensen asks, entwining their fingers and squeezing lightly.

Jared smiles a little, his heart swelling at the knowledge that he doesn't need to voice his wishes to Jensen, because he already knows them.

Dr. Cohen sighs. "If Jared's strong enough, I want to start the next round of chemo at the end of next week." He gives Jared a sympathetic look. "I don't think it'd be practical for you to go home for only a couple of days, risking another infection and pushing the chemo further back."

Jared's heart sinks. He gets that it's impractical but it still disappoints him to hear that he won't be able to go home before the next round of chemo.

Jensen looks just as disappointed.

"If everything goes well, the kids and your families and friends can visit come Monday," Stephen says, petting his shoulder gently. "And in two to three weeks the chemo will be done with and you
Jared nods, giving Stephen a sad smile. "I know, I just... I really wanted to go home again."

"We'll get you there," Dr. Cohen says.

A memory hits him and he remembers promising Alan to fight no matter what. The dream he had while fighting the fever has stayed with him and he intends to keep that promise. So he'll fight and then when the cancer is beat, he'll be able to spend time with his family, for however long he and they want to.

"I know," he says again, sounding more convincing this time.

"Good." Dr. Cohen nods. "I'll be back in a little while with the results of the blood test and then we'll decide when to move you."

"Thanks, Doc."

Stephen follows Dr. Cohen outside, leaving Jared with Jensen. Jensen smiles at him. "It'll be okay. I'll bring the kids by and we can have dinner together, just like at home."

Jared lets out a deep breath and nods. "I know. I just wish..." he rubs a heavy hand over his face, "I don't know. I guess I'm just disappointed."

"I know. But in a few weeks you'll be home for good and we'll be able to spend as much time as possible together."

Jensen kisses his forehead again and Jared leans into the touch, even though his mask covered kiss is only half as good as Jensen's lips against his skin.

Sophie-Ellie isn't really surprised when Ben walks through the back door on Saturday morning when she's having some cereal for breakfast. What surprises her is that he ushers her out of the kitchen and into his car the moment she put her spoon down.

"Where're we going?"

Ben just grins at her and starts the car.

"Ben..."

"I'm not telling you, so you can just stop asking."

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head a little, a small fond smile on her face. "Guess I have to trust you."

Ben shoots her a pleased look and winks at her. "I guess so."

They follow the road out of town and Ben reaches over, entwining his fingers with Sophie-Ellie's that are lying on her thigh. She looks down at their hands and for a second she finds it hard to tell where she ends and Ben begins.
When she looks over at him, she sees that there's a soft smile displayed on his face and it makes her heart jump in her chest. She doesn't know when or how they got here, but it's the one good thing in her life right now, next to the baby. Ben gives her the strength she needs right now and she doesn't know how everything would have turned out if he hadn't made the first step all those weeks ago.

"So, how are you two today?" Ben asks, breaking the comfortable silence.

"Good. Really good," Sophie-Ellie says and it's true. The morning sickness is completely gone and she doesn't feel as tired as she felt at the beginning of the pregnancy. It also has a lot to do with Ben sitting next to her.

"Great. When's the next doctor's appointment?"

"Next week." Sophie-Ellie looks down at their entwined fingers again and lets out a deep breath. "You wanna come?"

Ben looks over to her for a second and nods enthusiastically. "Yes. Only if you want me to, of course."

"I want you to."

"Then I'll be there."

"Thank you," she says, meaning everything he's done for her in the last few weeks and hoping Ben knows that.

He pulls her hand up and presses a kiss to the back of her hand. "Don't mention it."

Sophie-Ellie's skin tingles and goose bumps appear on it. She feels her cheeks heat up a little bit too, looking down at her lap, hoping that Ben doesn't see it.

They drive the rest of the distance in silence and when Ben turns the car onto a driveway lined by cypresses that lead to an old Victorian mansion, Sophie-Ellie frowns. Her eyes grow wide when she sees the sign at the front of the five stairs leading up to the entrance.

'MacArthur's School of Modern Arts' is written in golden letters on a granite plate.

This is the most prestigious art school in the area and Sophie-Ellie never would have even dreamed about going here.

"What are we doing here?" she asks a little breathless.

Ben smiles. "Well, they had this little challenge on their website a few weeks ago and I sent some of your drawings in. Seems like they were quite impressed. So impressed, that they want to talk to you about a scholarship."

"You did what?" she squeaks. "You can't just send my drawings in."

Ben chuckles. "Annie helped. We both thought that this would be your chance and we couldn't let you waste it."

"I can't go here. I'm pregnant."

"They know that," Ben says. "Why don't you just hear what they have to say?"

Sophie-Ellie shakes her head. "I can't believe you." She rubs a nervous hand over her face, looking
out of the window and watching a couple of students sitting beneath a tree in the little distance, talking animatedly and laughing together.

Ben seems to take her silence as a bad sign and says, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to upset you. I just... your head was so full of the baby and Uncle JT's illness, and I didn't want you to miss out on this chance."

Sophie-Ellie looks over to him and sees that he's watching her with an apologetic look on his face. She cups his jaw and presses a quick kiss to his lips. "I love you," she whispers and she means it with all her heart. She always loved him, all her life. He's always been her world, the most important person in her life.

He looks at her with awe in his eyes. "I love you too." His voice is a little shaky and Sophie-Ellie laughs, pulling him into another kiss.

"I can't believe you did this for me," she says when she pulls back.

"You deserve it. You wanna go and talk to them?"

Sophie-Ellie nods excitedly and both of them climb out of the car. Together they make their way up to the entrance.

"Y'know, UT Dallas is only a twenty minute ride away," Ben says conversationally and Sophie-Ellie nods, a smile making its way on her face.

The lady at the reception is already informed about their appointment and tells them to wait in the foyer for a moment. The foyer is decorated with sculptures and prints of famous paintings. It inspires Sophie-Ellie right away and she wishes she had her sketchbook with her.

They don't have to wait long until a woman with long blond hair, dressed in a gray suit, walks towards them.

"You must be Sophie-Ellie," she says. "I'm Principal Meyers. I have to say I'm quite impressed with your work. Why don't you follow me and we can talk about what MacArthur's has to offer you."

Sophie-Ellie exchanges a look with Ben, who grins at her encouragingly, and then nods and follows the principal down the hall.

Luke sits at the kitchen table in the town house, looking over his programming homework. Since spring break is almost over, he and Evan moved back from his parents' house last night. Now that his dad's in the hospital again - getting better again, thank god - Luke is more comfortable being close by.

Evan has gone god knows where again, just like every single day this week, and it makes Luke wonder what exactly the errands he has to run each day are. It makes him a little itchy that Evan always avoids answering Luke's questions and changes the subject.

He doesn't think that Evan is cheating, but there's a little voice in his head telling him that something isn't right. Evan has never been secretive. They've always shared everything with each other and it
makes Luke curious, but also a little nervous.

The ringing of a cell phone jerks him out of his thoughts and he looks around, seeing Evan's iPhone lying on the kitchen counter. He rolls his eyes fondly and goes to answer it. The display says 'Unknown caller' and Luke frowns.

"Hello?"

"Evan, hey. This is Charleen from the flower shop. I just wanted to confirm the date for the wedding. It's still June 17th, right?"

A lump forms in Luke's throat. The wedding. That's what Evan's been up to the last few days. He's been playing their wedding. A wave of love hits him deep in his gut and he croaks, "Yes, it is."

"Great, I'll have everything ready by then. I'm sure Luke's gonna love it."

"I'm sure he is," Luke says softly and then they disconnect the call.

He drops down onto the kitchen chair. That's what Evan's been up to; planning their wedding alone because Luke hasn't really been able to concentrate on anything else but his dad's illness and school. He feels so much love towards his fiancé right now, his heart is threatening to explode and he wishes Evan was home, so he could show him just how much he's loved.

Dan comes down the stairs and frowns. "What is it?"

Luke shakes his head and a small smile forms on his face. "I'm gonna marry Evan."

Dan snorts. "No, really? I didn't know that."

"No, I mean I'm gonna marry him on June 17th."

Dan huffs out a breath. "I knew he couldn't keep his mouth shut. Man, so much for the surprise wedding."

"Surprise wedding?" Luke asks stunned.

"Wait," Dan says slowly. "How do you know about the wedding date and not about the surprise wedding?"

"I answered Evan's phone and Charleen from the flower shop was on the other end of the line. She thought I was Ev."

Dan groans and hits his palm against his forehead. "Shit. Evan's gonna kill me."

"So he's really planned a surprise wedding?"

Dan nods. "Just don't tell him that I told you, okay. Tell him you figured it out or something."


"Man, now you're gonna run around with that moony smile on your face for weeks, aren't you?" Dan looks at him with faked horror and Luke laughs.

"You'll deal."

"Not sure about that." Dan shudders dramatically. "But I guess it'd be better for me to find a bed for
the night, right?"

"If you don't want to be scarred for life," Luke teases.

"I'm gone." Dan says, grabbing his jacket, wallet and phone. "I'll be back sometime tomorrow; don't make a mess of things."

"Go," Luke laughs and with a last salute Dan's gone.

As soon as the front door closes he thinks about how he can make the evening special for Evan, but while he's still thinking where they stashed the candles from their last romantic dinner, the door opens and Evan walks inside. A smile appears instantly on his face when he sees Luke and Luke just marches over to him, pressing him back against the front door.

"Whoa, what's..."

He doesn't let Evan finish the sentence and just captures his mouth in a passionate kiss, pushing his tongue between his lips and rubbing it alongside Evan's. His fiancé moans, his fingers quickly finding their way beneath Luke's t-shirt. He shudders when the warm fingertips run over his cool skin.

His cock is half hard in his sweatpants and he rolls his hips against Evan's, feeling his cock is half hard too. Luke growls deep in his throat and he pulls away from Evan's hot lips, relishing the blissed-out look on Evan's face. He starts peppering kisses down Evan's face, sucking a bruise to the spot where neck and shoulder meet, and soothing it with his tongue.


"Hmm, taste so good," he murmurs against Evan's skin. He lifts his head and looks into Evan's lust blown eyes. "I love you, so damn much."

Evan pushes Luke's hair out of his face. "I love you too."

"Will you fuck me now?" Luke asks and Evan grins.

"I will always fuck you when you ask me so nicely."

He pushes Luke back, until his legs connect with the couch and he tumbles onto it. Evan is above him in a second, pulling first his t-shirt and then his sweatpants and boxers down, before grinding his hips against Luke's. The friction of Evan's jeans feels delicious on his aching cock.

"Feels so fucking good," he moans.

Luke arches his back towards Evan's touch, scrambling with his fiancé's t-shirt. He finally gets it pulled over Evan's head and pushes his hands into the back of Evan's jeans, kneading the butt cheeks he finds there.

Evan pops open the button on his jeans and Luke helps him to push the pants and boxer briefs over his hips.

Now their cocks are rubbing against each other and Luke wraps his hands around both of them jerking them together in a light rhythm, while Evan scrambles for the lube they stashed in the little drawer of the coffee table next to the condoms. He pulls out both and Luke moans at the sight of Evan coating his fingers with the liquid.
Then one finger rubs over his hole and he pushes down on it, needing it to be inside of him. Evan teases him, just tapping against the wrinkled muscle, but not breaching it.

"Ev, please..."


"Evan," he screams.

"I've got you, baby. I'll fuck you so good. You'll feel me for days."

"Fuck, please... just do it..."

A second finger joins the first and Evan starts stretching him out, scissoring his fingers and rubbing them over the sensitive tissue of his inner walls. Luke's panting for breath, feeling hot and dizzy with lust.

"Do it, Ev, fuck me."

"How about your ride me instead?" his fiancé asks cheekily and Luke groans.

"Yeah okay."

They scramble around until Luke's straddling Evan's hips. He slowly sinks down on Evan's dick, feeling it stretching him wide. It burns, but feels so good too. Soon pleasure overtakes the slight pain and Luke starts lifting his ass and pushing it back down. His eyes meet Evan's and they look at each other the whole time. It's almost unbearably slow but it's intense and Luke feels his emotions bubble to the surface and tears burn behind his eyes.

Evan cups his face and pulls him down. "I love you."


They speed up their rhythm a little and Luke can feel his orgasm build in his toes. Heat is burning in his veins and when Evan starts jerking his cock he knows he's so close to the edge that he can't hold it back anymore. He comes all over Evan's fist and stomach, coating his skin white with his release.

Evan is only a second behind him, his head thrown back and Luke's name on his lips when he comes.

Luke wishes Evan could stay in him for a little while longer but they need to get rid of the condom, so Luke pulls off and Evan takes care of the soiled condom, before he pulls Luke down to lie next to him, his head settled on Evan's shoulder.

"So, what brought this on?" Evan asks, sounding amused.

Luke sighs, contemplating if he should tell Evan that he knows about the wedding and then deciding against it. "I just really love you and it's been far too long since we last did this."

Evan chuckles. "What, fucking on the couch?"

Evan just looks at him seriously and pulls him into a sweet, soft kiss.

The garage is as busy as ever and since Jesse hasn't been in for a couple of days the cars are practically piling up in the lot and he really doesn't know where to start. It's Saturday and neither of his employees are in. So Jesse is in the office trying to get an understanding of all the paperwork and emails. How does Lizzie work in this mess? Jesse barely knows where up and where down is with the orders that are piling up on Lizzie's desk.

He really thought that going to work would take his mind off things.

Yes, Jared's on the mend from the infection and they're talking about transferring him to the oncology ward tomorrow or on Monday, but there's still the cancer bit hanging over his head. And that makes Jesse's head hurt.

He's trying to be strong, level-headed and stay positive. But there are days when the worry just eats at him and it seems like today is a day like that.

Henry Baker's 1971 Dodge Charger is as best as any of the cars parked out front to get started with and Jesse takes the papers and keys off the pile of orders. He drives the car into the garage and checks again what Baker wants to have done: full check-up.

Jesse pops open the hood and goes to work.

This finally soothes his mind and he's able to completely concentrate on his work. He checks the engine and the carburetor, jarring at tubes and joints and gaskets. The oil needs changing and he writes down that the brakes need to be renewed in approximately three-thousand miles. But other than that the car seems to be in a very good condition.

After a few hours of steady work, Jesse's ready for the tuna sandwich Annie made him this morning, before she went to work for a couple of hours as well - apparently research work is very demanding too, not that Jesse knows anything about it. Alona and Brian picked up Lily for a day at the zoo, while Ben kidnapped Sophie-Ellie to, what Jesse assumes is, a romantic day out. The twins had spent the last two nights at Sandy and Alexis' place with Laura and Adam having a sleepover.

Jesse's glad that everyone has something on their agenda today so that their minds are occupied. He's especially worried about Tyler and is glad that the boy seemed fairly happy to go to his aunts' house for a sleepover with his brother.

So Jesse hopes that Ty will be okay. He can't imagine how hard it must be for an eleven-year-old to see his dad so weak and vulnerable. Jamie seems to be dealing a little better. But he's always been the more lighthearted one, always smiling or joking, while Ty is the quieter of the two, more subdued and a thinker.

Not when it comes to pranks, of course. No, the flat tires on the principal's car were totally Ty's idea. Oh and the open salt shakers in the cafeteria were too.

The ringing of his cell phone pulls him out of his own head and he rushes over to where he stashed it on the shelf at the far end of the garage. He frowns at the number and then goes to answer the call.
"Hello?"

"Hi this is Connor Gavin. I'm not sure you remember me, but we went to high school together." Jesse tries to remember but he comes back blank. "Listen, I work as a security guard over at Starlight Mall and we've kinda got a situation here. Tyler and Jamie Padalecki-Ackles caused a fight in the food court and I really don't want to call their parents or the police. So we all thought you might be the next best thing, since I need an authority figure to pick them up."

"What?" Jesse asks baffled. "They caused a fight? Well, damn it. I'll be there in a few minutes."

"Great. Thanks."

The mall is about ten minutes away and Jesse curses under his breath the whole time. This really can't be happening. Jensen will be so pissed.

He gets the directions for the security office from the girl at the information desk and marches quickly through the strolling crowd. Jamie and Tyler are sitting on their chairs with hanging heads when Jesse walks inside and he sighs. He gives Connor a short nod - he remembers him now, he was one of the football playing jocks back then. Now he gives Jesse a sympathetic look, though.

"Boys," Jesse says disappointed. "You wanna tell me what happened?"

The twins stay silent and Connor speaks, "They wouldn't tell me what happened. I just know that I pulled them away from a fight with six boys, all their age. The other boys are with colleagues of mine waiting for their parents. It was quite a struggle to pull them all apart."

Jesse shakes his head. "Thanks for calling me. I'll tell their father tonight. And I promise you, it won't happen again."

Connor nods. "Okay, normally we wouldn't allow them into the mall for a couple of months, but since they're still so young and it's their first time. We'll let it go."

"That's really nice. Thanks again." Jesse puts his hands on the twins' shoulders. "C'mon, boys. We're going home."

He leads them out of the office and towards his car. As soon as they're all seated in the car, he turns around to face them.

"Now talk," he says sternly.

Ty and Jamie exchange a look and it's Jamie who speaks, "They called Laura a fatass and ugly."

Jesse raises his eyebrows. "Laura?"

Jamie nods. "We go to school together and they always call her that."

"It was time to make them shut up," Ty says and his voice is cold. "They don't have a right to call her that."

Jesse sighs. "No they don't, but you shouldn't have turned to violence. That's not the way to go."

Tyler stares at him defiantly, while Jamie hangs his head. Jesse presses his lips tightly together. "So where are Laura and Adam?"

"The security guy sent them home," Ty says.

"So they weren't involved in the fight?"
Tyler shrugs and shakes his head. "No."

Jesse nods tightly. "So what? You just jumped the guys that called Laura names?"

"I punched his face," Ty says and he sounds a little proud. And maybe Jesse would be too for standing up for Laura, but a fight isn't the way to deal with situations like that. He learned that a long time ago.

"And then they all threw themselves at Ty," Jamie says quietly. "Of course I went to help him."

Jesse lets out a deep breath. "Boys, you know that I have to tell your papa, right?"

That even makes Ty look a little nervous. "Do you really have to? Papa's at the hospital."

"Yes, I do and if you wanted to spare your papa, you should have thought about that before starting a fight in a food court."

He starts the car and drives them home in silence. Both boys are sitting with hanging heads in the back of the car and when Jesse shoos them inside after parking the car in the driveway, they both shuffle inside quietly.

They go directly upstairs, knowing that Jesse wouldn't allow them to play video games or watch TV right now.

Jesse takes his cell phone out of the jeans' pocket and dials the hospital's number. After they connect him, he speaks to Stephen and asks him to give a message to Jensen to call him back immediately.

It doesn't take five minutes for Jensen to call him back.

"What happened?" he asks in lieu of a greeting when Jesse answers.

"Ty and Jamie got in a fight at the mall," he explains without beating around the bush. "Security had to pull apart a group of eight boys, two of them Ty and Jamie. According to the twins the other boys called Laura a fatass and ugly - have been for a while, too. So the boys decided to teach them a lesson."

Jensen sighs. "Shit."

"Yup." Jesse bites his bottom lip before saying, "Jensen, I know you want to be with Jared right now. But I think it'd be best if you came home tonight. Just to talk to them. Ty's spinning out of control - he was the one to start throwing punches. Please Jensen, as much as I love them and care for them, I'm not their father."

It's silent on the other end of the line for a long time and Jesse worries that he might have stepped over his boundary here. But then Jensen says, "No, you're right. I'll be home for dinner and I'll talk to them."

"Thanks," Jesse replies. "So, how's JT?"

"The infection is almost gone and they'll be transferring him to the cancer ward on Monday."

"That's good. When will he be able to come home?"

"Dr. Cohen wants to keep him in the hospital until after the new cycle of chemo, which they hope to start at the end of the week." Jensen sounds tired and disappointed, and Jesse can sympathize with that.
"Damn, that sucks."

Jensen snorts. "That it does. Jay is completely crushed. He really wanted to come home before the next cycle."

"Well, his health comes first. So we deal, go visit real often when he's on the oncology ward again."

"Yeah." Jensen sighs. "Listen, I need to get back to Jay, tell him that I have to go home tonight. I'll be home for dinner, though."

"Okay, see you then."

They disconnect the call and Jesse sits down on the couch, putting his feet on the coffee table and lays his head back, closing his eyes.

He really hopes that Jensen will get through to Ty.

After his phone call with Jesse, Jensen makes his way back into Jared's room. He feels guilty for putting so much weight on Jesse and Annie's shoulders, just because they're the oldest ones. Jesse's right, he's not their father. Jensen is. But his head has been so preoccupied with Jared and what's going on at the moment that he kinda lost sight of his kids.

They’ve all told him that the kids need him; told him to hold it together for them. But in the end, Jensen was only able to concentrate on one thing and that was Jared's illness. Maybe because it was easier to focus on it instead of talking to the twins and to Lily about what may happen.

How do you tell your kids that their father might die? How do you deal with that, when you can't wrap your head around the possibility yourself? How do you comfort your children when you have barely any strength left to give?

He's been so glad that Annie, Luke and Sophie-Ellie have their significant others to lean on. But somehow he didn't realize that the twins and Lily needed him to be that person.

Jared seems to know straightaway that something's up. "What is it?" he asks.

Jensen lets out a deep breath. "The twins got into a fight at the mall. Jesse had to pick them up from the security office."

"What? Why?"

"Some boys called Laura names and our sons thought that teaching them a lesson was the right way to go."

Jared shakes his head. "They should know that violence is not the way to go."

"I'll go home tonight, talk to them." Jensen sits down next to his husband's bed and takes Jared's hand in his. "I should have spent more time with them, talked to them. But my head is just so scrambled right now."
"Jen..."

"No, it's my fault that this happened. If I had just found a way to talk to them, but instead I hoped that Jesse and Annie would take that place."

Jared shakes his head a little, touching Jensen's cheek gently. "You're a good father, Jen. This is hard for all of us. Don't be too hard on yourself."

Jensen sighs. "Ty... he's... I don't know what to do about him, Jay. I don't know how to make it better for him, when I'm so scared of losing you too."

"He's bottling everything up, isn't he?" Jared asks and Jensen nods. "He's so much like you," he says with a small smile on his face. "Maybe he needs an outlet, just like you did." Jensen looks up and Jared adds, "Just don't let it be the shooting range. You know how I feel about guns."

Jensen smiles. "Okay. I'll make sure I think of something that hasn't anything to do with guns."

"Thank you."

He looks at his watch. "I guess it's time for me to go, so I'll be home in time for dinner."

Jared nods. "Can't wait for them to transfer me so you can bring the kids."

"I know. I'll be back tomorrow for a few hours, okay?"

"Of course."

Jensen leans forward and presses a soft kiss to Jared's cheek through his mask. "Rest, baby. So we can take you home in a couple of weeks, okay?"

Jared smiles. "I will. Give the kids a kiss from me."

Jensen promises that he will and then he steps out of the room, taking a deep breath. His heart is heavy, feeling torn between being there for Jared and taking care of the kids.

"Mr. Padalecki-Ackles?"

Jensen's head shoots up and he sees the shrink Dr. Cohen introduced them to a few weeks back, standing there. "Oh, hey Dr..."

"Roché," the man smiles. "You don't look so happy. Everything okay with your husband? I thought he was on the mend."

Jensen sighs. "He is, thank god. I just... my kids got into a fight at the mall, so I'm going home to talk to them. Feels a little weird to leave Jared here." He doesn't even know why he told all of that to Dr. Roché, but it feels good to say it out loud.

"I'm sure it's not easy to juggle both lives right now," Dr. Roché says, sounding sympathetic. "Just know that I always have an open ear, if you need to talk."

Jensen nods and forces a smile. "Thanks." He shoots a look at his watch again. "I should really get going."

"Of course. It was nice meeting you."

Jensen gives Dr. Roché a short wave and then rushes down the hallway. The drive home feels like it
takes an eternity before he's able to turn the car into their driveway and stop it behind Jesse's car.

He walks inside and Lily is the first to see him, since she's just coming down the stairs.

"Papa!" she squeals, throwing herself at him.

He catches her, hugging her close to her chest and taking in the unique smell of her children's shampoo. He closes his eyes for a moment to bring his emotions in check.

"Hey princess, how was your day?"

"Aunt Alona took me and Brian to the zoo. We saw the tigers and they even had babies," she says excitedly, looking at him with big eyes.

He smiles, he's missed her enthusiasm about little things. "That's great. What else did you see?"

She tells him all about the different animals they saw, while he carries her into the kitchen, where he finds Jesse and Annie making dinner: steaks with salad and potatoes. They both smile at him. Jensen drops a kiss to Annie's temple and squeezes Jesse's shoulder as a thank you.

"I'm supposed to tell all of you that your dad misses you and that he can't wait for you to come and visit tomorrow or on Monday, whenever they transfer him to the oncology ward."

"When will Daddy come home?" Lily asks, still sitting on his hip.

"Not just yet, sweet pea. They're going to give your daddy the next round of medicine soon. So he won't be home for at least another two weeks."

Lily pouts and Jensen presses a kiss to her cheek. "But you'll be able to see him soon. He'll be so thrilled when you tell him about your visit to the zoo. How about you go and draw him a few pictures of the tigers and lions?"

"The babies too?"

"Of course the babies too." He puts her down and she rushes into the living room, grabbing her crayons and a piece of paper. His heart grows heavy when he watches her, but Annie speaks before he can retreat too much into his own head.

"So, how's Dad doing?"

Jensen lets out a deep breath. "The infection is practically gone."

"That's good, right?" Jesse asks.

"It is, but there's still the cancer. That's why they want to keep him in the hospital until they start the next cycle of treatment."

"What do they say about the cancer?" Annie asks, leaning back against the kitchen counter and watching Jensen intently, as if she wants to make sure he's not lying to her.

"Dr. Cohen is reluctant to say anything before the second cycle of treatment. So I guess we have to wait until that's over, to really know if it's working or not."

"Gosh, the wait is killing me," Annie admits.

Jensen watches Jesse reach over and squeeze her hand in support. It makes his heart heavy with
"So," he says. "Where are the two rug rats?"

"They're upstairs."

"I'll go and have a talk with them, and then we can have dinner. Will Sophie-Ellie be home by then?"

"Yeah, her and Ben wanted to have dinner with us. They'll be here in a few minutes I guess." Annie nods and there's a secretive smile displayed on her face that Jensen ignores in favor of talking to the twins.

"Okay. I'll be upstairs."

He makes his way upstairs and takes a deep breath before knocking on the twins’ door and walking inside. Ty and Jamie are both sitting on their beds, looking bored. When they see Jensen, Jamie breaks into a broad smile, but Ty looks at him defiantly.

"Boys," Jensen says. "What, I don't get a hug?"

Jamie jumps up and storms over to him, hugging him tight. Jensen ruffles his hair and holds him close. He meets Ty's eyes over Jamie's head and opens his arm in an invitation. At first Ty seems hesitant, but when Jensen gives him a smile, he rushes over to them, wrapping his arms tightly around Jensen's middle.

Jensen holds his boys for a long time and then he leads them over to the bed, sitting them down, while he still keeps his arms around their shoulders.

"Who wants to tell me about what happened at the mall today?" he asks slowly.

"They deserved it," Ty says defiantly.

"They've been calling Laura names for weeks now," Jamie agrees.

"Boys," Jensen sighs. "Violence is not the answer, you know that. Yes, those boys had no right to call Laura names, but you shouldn't have started throwing punches."

"But Papa," Ty protests, but Jensen stops him by holding up his hand.

"I'm proud of you for standing up for Laura. But I'm disappointed that you did it in the way you did. So you know that there'll be repercussions, right?" Both boys hang their heads and nod slowly.

"What do you think would be the right punishment?"

"No video games," Ty suggests.

Jensen nods. "Sounds good. For how long."

Jamie asks hopefully, "Two days?"

Jensen chuckles a little. "That's a bit insufficient, don't you think? How about a week?"

"Papa," Ty whines.

"No video games for a week and you're not grounded."
"Deal," Jamie says and smiles.

"Good. And I don't want to ever hear again that you started a fight, got it?"

"Yes, Papa," the twins say in unison.

Jensen presses sloppy kisses to their temples and the boys start to squirm away. He laughs. "How about we'll do something together tomorrow, huh? You want to?"

"Just us?" Ty asks.

Jensen nods. "Just us."

That gets him a little smile from Ty, the first Jensen's seen in weeks. "Okay."

"Great, I know exactly what we're gonna do and it's a surprise."

"Can we go see Dad afterwards?" Jamie asks.

Jensen smiles softly. "We'll see if we can see Dad tomorrow. But you'll be able to see him on Monday at the latest, okay? He can't wait to see you."

"We wanna see him too," Jamie says excitedly.

"I know," Jensen says. He ruffles their hair one last time. "So, dinner?"

Both boys climb off the bed, rushing to the door and Jensen follows them. For now it seems like everything is okay again.

tbc
Chapter 18

“Hope is the feeling that the feeling you have isn't permanent.” ~ Jean Kerr

"C'mon, hit it as hard as you can, Ty."

Jensen's standing behind the sandbag Chuck put up for the younger members of the club, holding it and waiting for Tyler to hit it. His eleven-year-old is watching him as if he's gone insane and Jensen huffs out a breath.

"C'mon, son."

After talking to Jared about Ty needing an outlet yesterday, Jensen had decided to take both him and Jamie to the boxing club in town. Chad and Fred work out here regularly and Jensen had worked out here before Jared and the kids, too. So he thought this might be a good idea for Ty to let go of some of his pent-up frustration, fear and anger.

Ty rolls his eyes, while Jamie stands next to him, snickering. "Papa..."

"Just do it. You'll see, it's fun."

Tyler lets out a deep breath and hits the sandbag lightly. Jensen raises his eyebrows at his son and shakes his head.

"That's not the best you got. C'mon, Ty. Hit it."

After a moment, Ty hits the sandbag again. This time a little harder and before Jensen can tell him to do it again, Ty throws another punch.

"Now that's what I'm talking about," Jensen praises and gets a small smile back from Ty. "C'mon, right, left, right."

Tyler does the combination and Jamie cheers for him. Jensen can see the tension falling from his shoulders when Ty repeats the combination.

"Harder, Ty," he encourages his son and Tyler starts hitting the sandbag full force.

Right, left, right. Right, left, right.

A slight sheen of sweat starts covering Tyler's face, which is contorted into an angry frown. The hits get faster and Jensen can see when Tyler loses his rhythm, just hitting the sandbag however he can. Jamie is watching his brother with huge worried eyes and Jensen's heart breaks for his sons.

"That's enough," he says, but Tyler doesn't stop until he wraps his fingers around his arms and physically stops him from being able to reach the sandbag. "It's okay."

Tyler looks up at him and his eyes are shimmering with tears. "It's not," he says, his voice shaking.
Jensen pulls him into his arms and holds him. Jamie comes over to them. There are tears in his eyes too and Jensen wraps his arm around his other son too, holding both of them tightly. He feels completely helpless at the tears he feels soaking into his t-shirt, so he just holds on. He wishes he could say something to make it all better, but he doesn't want to lie.

And even though Jared has survived the infection, the threat to his life is still very real. He could still lose his fight against the cancer. So, he doesn't tell his sons that everything will be okay, because he doesn't know that. He doesn't tell them that their dad won't die, as much as it kills him to not say it. He just holds them, spending all the comfort he has left.

When it becomes clear that his boys are calming down a little, Jensen sinks to his knees and wipes away their tears.

"How about we go home now, maybe pick up some ice cream on the way, and tomorrow we'll go and see your dad in the hospital?"

Jensen had spoken to Dr. Cohen on the phone that morning and the doctor informed him that Jared would be transferred to the oncology ward tomorrow.

Ty nods and then sucks his bottom lip between his teeth. "What if Dad dies?"

The question hits Jensen like a punch to the gut. How do you answer a question like that? He remembers how it was when his dad died. He'd been so angry.

"Dad won't die, right?" Jamie says, looking for Jensen to agree with him.

"Your dad's really sick," he says truthfully. "The doctors are doing what they can to make him better." He gets to his feet and wraps his arms around his sons' shoulders. "And there's always hope." He sighs. "I also want you to know that you can always come and talk to me, okay?" The boys nod and Jensen smiles softly. "Good. I love you both, very much."

Ty throws his arms around his middle and Jamie does the same, both of them mumbling 'We love you too', into his t-shirt.

Eventually Jensen leads the twins out of the club. Chuck, the guy who runs things around there, gives him a little wave and a thumbs-up, when they walk past.

"Door is always open for you and your boys, Sheriff."

Jensen nods gratefully. "Thanks."

They drive home in silence, and just stop at the ice cream parlor to pick up some ice cream for everyone.

Annie and Jesse have gone on a ride on his motorcycle, Sophie-Ellie tells them, when they find her sitting in the living room sketching. Lily is sitting next to her, coloring in the coloring book they got her a few weeks ago.

The twins straightaway take their usual place in front of the couch, with Sadie and Harley padding over to them and snuggling close. So, Jensen hands Sophie-Ellie and Lily their cups of cookie dough and chocolate chip ice cream and puts the other two cups in the freezer for when Annie and Jesse get back later.

He sits down at the table next to Lily and dips his spoon into his own cookie dough ice cream, licking it off with pleasure. Lily giggles at the noises he makes and Jensen chuckles, exaggerating the
noises when he licks the ice cream off the next time.

"Papa," Lily squeals with laughter and Jensen grins at her.

"What? It's just so delicious. You wanna taste it?" Lily nods enthusiastically and Jensen holds his spoon out for her, grinning when she moans so loud that Sadie and Harley lift their heads from the floor. "Good, right?"

Lily nods. "Really good. Can we take some ice cream to Daddy tomorrow?"

Jensen feels his heart grow heavy, but tries to keep his smile on his face. He remembers the last time he and Jared shared some ice cream. That was when everything was still okay. "Sure."

Lily grins. "Look Papa, I drew some pictures for dad from our day at the zoo." She shows him the pictures and Jensen presses a kiss to her hair.

"They're great. Dad's gonna love them."

Lily smiles, satisfied, and goes back to coloring in her book. Sophie-Ellie however seems to have picked up on the tremble in his voice. She's now looking at him with sad eyes and he reaches out, touching her shoulder, letting her know that he's okay.

The back door opens and Jensen looks back over his shoulder to see Chris and Steve walk into the kitchen.

"Anybody home?" Chris calls out and Jensen watches Lily jump off her chair and rush towards them.

"Uncle Chris." She throws herself at him and he swings her around.

"Hello pumpkin." Chris fakes a frown and then adds, "Is that chocolate chip ice cream I see around your lips?"

Lily giggles. "Papa brought some home."

"Is there some left for me?"

Lily shakes her head and seems to be completely amused by the pout that forms on Chris' face. "I've ate it all."

Chris sighs dramatically and says, "Well, I hope you enjoyed it." Lily nods quickly and Chris laughs. "That's good."

Steve sits down next to Jensen, after greeting the other kids, and seems to pick up on his somber mood right away.

"You okay?" he asks softly and Jensen forces a smile, shaking his head, so Steve knows that Jensen won't talk about it here and now.

His friend nods understandingly and starts talking about some funny stories that happened at their small time bar tour. Soon he has all the kids listening to him closely and Jensen retreating into the kitchen to start lunch. He knows that there's still some lasagna in the freezer that Angie brought over some time last week.

"You wanna talk about it?" Chris asks and Jensen spins around from where he had just been rummaging through the fridge.
Jensen sighs. "Ty asked me what will happen if Jared dies. What do you say to that?"

Chris lets out a deep breath. "You're doing good, Jen. You're a good father. You'll find the right words to deal with this."

"Lily asked if we could take some ice cream to Jared tomorrow and I almost lost it," he says.

"Jen..."

"What if he never comes home again?" Jensen asks and feels his heart ripping into two just thinking about it. "What am I gonna do?"

"Let's deal with that when it really happens," Steve says softly, making his way into the kitchen.

Jensen looks over his friend's shoulder to see that all his kids are still in the living room and hopefully didn't hear anything they said just now.

"C'mon, let's make lunch," Chris says, reaching past Jensen and grabbing the cucumber and the tomatoes from the fridge. "Steve and I'll make the salad. So you just have to make sure that the lasagna doesn't burn."

Jensen huffs out a deep breath and rolls his eyes. He's glad that Chris and Steve are here to help him, but they could have a little more faith in his cooking skills. Hell, he makes a mean apple pie. Okay, that's practically the only thing he can make without ruining it, but still.

They work in comfortable silence and Jensen's just carrying over the dishes to set the table, when Annie and Jesse come inside. Both with red cheeks and secret smiles on their faces. Jensen so doesn't want to know.

"You're back early," he says.

"We were hungry," Annie says and laughs a little when Jesse puts her arms around her middle, pressing a kiss to her neck.

Jensen nods. "Riiiiight. He turns back to his task of setting the table. Of course he's happy that Annie and Jesse are back together, having fun. It's just hard to see them like that when Jared's in the hospital fighting for his life and Jensen doesn't know if they'll ever be able to be this lighthearted.

"Where's Lily?" he asks, when he doesn't see her in the living room.

"Went upstairs," Sophie-Ellie says. "She wanted to wrap her drawings for Dad."

Jensen smiles and walks over to the stairs. "Lily, princess. Lunch's ready."

He doesn't wait for her to answer and just goes back to setting the table, telling the twins to turn off the TV. Chris and Steve bring the salad and lasagna inside and Jensen frowns.

"Lily!" he calls again, but once more there's no answer. He looks back at his family and friends, before starting to climb the stairs. A moment later, he pushes open the door to Lily's room.

It's empty.

"Lily!" he calls again. "Sweetheart, I'm really not in the mood to play hide and seek. Lunch is ready. So please come out now."

There's nothing, not even a little peep.
"Lily!" Jensen yells, feeling his heart start beating frantically in his chest. He rushes out of the room and into the bathroom, which is empty too. "Lily!"

His family and friends are standing at the top of the stairs when he comes back out of the bathroom. All looking at him with wide horrified eyes.

"She's not here," he says, feeling like crumbling to the floor and crying.

"Hey," Chris says. "She must be somewhere." He turns to the kids. "Go and search every corner of the house please."

They all walk into different directions calling Lily's name. Jensen shakes his head. This can't be happening. How can this be happening?

"PJ," Sophie-Ellie says and he looks over to where she's standing in the door of Lily's room. "She emptied her piggy bank."

"What?"

"Her money, it's gone."

Jensen shakes his head. "I'm gonna go out looking for her," he says, barely believing what he's saying. His five-year-old is gone, run away, and he can't really wrap his head around it. Jared, now he would know what to do.

"You found me," Annie says suddenly. "You'll find her too."

And she's right. He found Annie all those years ago. But he's still going crazy just at the thought of his five-year-old running away from home.

"I'll go with you," Chris says.

"Steve and I can go north, while you go south," Jesse suggests.

Jensen nods shakily. "Someone should stay here, in case she comes back."

"Sophie-Ellie and I'll stay here. We'll call Mike and Tom, and Granny and Pop, so they can help to look for her."

"Okay," Chris says, taking charge. "Let's go."

They walk through the streets calling Lily's name until their voices are almost completely gone and Jensen's practically lost all hope of finding his little girl. In the meantime the whole town is on their feet to help look for Lily and when Jensen's phone finally rings, he yanks it out of his pocket and answers breathlessly.

"Sheriff? This is Caroline from the bus station. We've found your daughter. She's here and had wanted to buy a bus ticket to Dallas."

"Oh thank god," Jensen breathes, as relief floods him. "Just keep her there. I'll be there in few minutes."

Chris looks at him when he disconnects the call. "Where is she?"

"She's at the bus station, apparently trying to buy a ticket to Dallas."
Chris shakes his head and snorts. "What else?"

They make their way to the main bus station, and when Jensen walks into the building and sees his daughter sitting on one of the plastic chairs, kicking her legs back and forth, he wants to cry in relief.

"Papa!" she yells when she sees him and he sinks to his knees opening his arms to catch her.

"Sweetheart," he breathes, wrapping her arms tightly around her. "What are you doing here? I was so worried about you. You can't just leave the house without telling someone."

Lily looks sheepishly at him. "I wanted to go and see Daddy. Ask him to make you smile again."

Jensen's answer becomes stuck in his throat. "You're so sad all the time, Papa."

"Oh baby girl," Jensen whispers.

"I don't like to see you so sad," Lily says. "And Daddy always makes you smile."

Jensen presses a kiss to Lily's temple. "Will you come home again, if I promise to smile more? And we'll all go together to see Daddy tomorrow."

Lily seems to contemplate the thought and then nods. "Okay."

Jensen smiles. "See, I'm feeling better already."

He picks her up and she wraps her arms around his neck, holding on tight. Chris picks up the little backpack Lily had with her and together they make their way back home. The house is filled with people buzzing around and when Jensen walks inside, everyone sighs with relief that Lily has been found.

She seems to soak up the whole attention and Jensen can't bring himself to punish her for running away. They'll have a serious conversation about it tomorrow.

He really wants to talk to Jared, even though he doesn't want to worry his husband. But the problem is that there's no phone in the quarantine room. So, he calls the nurses' station and explains what happened to Stephen and asks him to tell Jared that he won't make it today, but that they'll all be there tomorrow. It makes him feel really bad, but he just can't leave Lily out of his sight right now.

Stephen tells him not to worry and that Jared will understand. But Jensen still hates that he hasn't even talked to Jared directly.

That night after he tucked his smaller children in bed and was finally able to believe that Lily was safely lying in her bed, he lies in his own bed, feeling restless. His cell phone lying on the nightstand rings and he frowns when he sees a strange number on the display.

"Hello?"

"I knew you wouldn't be asleep. You're probably feeling guilty that you weren't able to come by today. So stop."

Jensen huffs out a laugh that sounds more like a sob at Jared's voice at the other end of the line.

"You know me too well," he says quietly.

Jared snorts. "You're an open book to me. But seriously Jen, stop obsessing over the fact that you weren't here today. The kids need you too."
"I know."

"So, I hear Lily wanted me to make you smile again," Jared says, sounding amused and a little tired. "Are you smiling, Jen?"

Jensen laughs softly. "Yeah. She's right, y'know? You always make me smile."

"I love making you smile."

Jensen sighs and a thought comes to him. "Hey, how are you able to call me?"

Jared chuckles weakly. "Stephen smuggled a cell phone into the room. He says you sounded like your puppy had just died and that he couldn't stand for that."

Jensen shakes his head. "He's a good guy."

"He is."

"We'll come by tomorrow. The kids are so excited to see you."

"Hmm, can't wait," Jared says and he sounds so tired all of a sudden.

"Get some sleep, Jay. I will too. And tomorrow you'll be able to see all of us."

"Sounds good. I love you."

"Love you too. Now sleep."

After another round of 'I love yous', Jensen disconnects the call with a heavy heart, but Jared needs his sleep to get better. And he'll see his husband tomorrow.

He sends a quick prayer upstairs when he lies back, something he hasn't done in years, and asks whoever is up there to make sure that Jared will be healthy again soon.

Jared wakes with excitement bubbling in his veins. Yes, he still feels tired and weak, but he can't wait to see his kids. Stephen grins at him when he brings in his breakfast.

"Man, you're practically bouncing out of your bed with joy."

"I really want to see them."

Stephen nods. "I know. Jensen said they'll be here by late afternoon, when all of them have finished school and work."

Jared checks the clock on the wall. That's another nine to ten hours.

"Aww, don't pout, JT. They'll be transferring you soon and then we can decorate your room with the pictures Sophie-Ellie and Lily drew for your last room."

Jared smiles. "You'd think that you didn't have other patients beside me."

After breakfast, Dr. Cohen walks in, skimming through the data of his blood tests. "And Doc?" he asks. "How does it look?"

Dr. Cohen gives Jared a small smile. "Okay. The cancer hasn't grown since your last chemo therapy."

Jared raises his eyebrows in surprise. "That's good, right?"

"It is. I'm cautiously optimistic. We'll know more after the next round of chemo that we'll start on Friday. First we want to make sure you're strong enough."

"But it's working, right?"

Dr. Cohen nods slowly. "Right now it looks like it. But like I said, we need to wait for the next round of chemo."

Jared lies back against his pillow. He knows that the doctor has to rely on the facts and of course, the cancer not growing doesn't mean that it's gone completely. But it gives Jared hope that he'll be able to beat this. It's good news on a good day.

The time passes slowly during the day and Jared can't help but feel restless. He just really, really wants to see his family.

Stephen comes by before lunch and transfers Jared to his new room on floor six. He even keeps his promise of decorating the room with the pictures his kids drew for him the first time he had been in the hospital. It helps to pass the time too.

But by the time the door to his room opens and reveals Jensen, Jared's practically bouncing out of his skin. He beams at his husband, who smiles fondly at him and then steps to the side to let Lily run over to his bed, climbing on it and snuggling against his chest.

"Hey, baby girl," Jared whispers, burying his nose in her hair.

"I've missed you, Daddy."

"I miss you too, sweetheart."

He looks over to the door to see the twins standing there, looking unsure of what to do. Sophie-Ellie, Annie, Jesse and Luke are right behind them.

"C'mon up, boys," he says, opening his arms to the twins. "Enough space for everyone."

The twins don't need Jared tell them twice, and they snuggle against his side carefully. Jared lets out a deep breath. This is what he's missed so much.

His other kids and Jesse come over to kiss his cheek and squeeze his shoulder. "Hey, I'm so happy to see you all."

"We're happy too," Sophie-Ellie says, pulling a chair up to Jared's bed.

"We've told the others to wait a day or two before coming to visit," Jensen says. "Don't want you to be overwhelmed right away."

Jared smiles. He appreciates that Angie and Matthew, and his friends will give them this time
together as a family.

"Now, who wants to start telling me what everyone's been up to?"

"Me, me," Lily squeals, sitting up. "I went to the zoo with Aunt Alona and Brian. And I saw the tigers and lions. And they even had babies, Daddy."

"They did?" Jared asks, his heart warming at the enthusiasm of his little girl.

She nods. "Three lion babies and two little tigers."

"Wow, that's awesome. So you had fun with Aunt Alona and Brian?"

"So much fun." She turns to look at Jensen. "Papa, give me the drawings I made." Jensen hands them over with a grin, and Lily explains to Jared everything he sees on them. "They're for the walls," Lily says. "So, y'know what my day at the zoo was like."

Jared lets out a deep breath and presses a kiss to Lily's forehead. "Thank you so much, baby girl. I love them." Lily beams at him and then snuggles back against his side. "But just so you know," Jared says quietly. "You run away again, you're gonna be grounded for the foreseeable future. You really scared your Papa and me."

"Sorry," she peeps sheepishly. "I just wanted Papa to be happy again."

"And he will be, we all will be," Jared says, wrapping his arms tightly around his kids' bodies. The mood went from light to somber and Jared looks around. "So, who wants to tell me what they've been up to next?"

"We went to the boxing club," Ty says softly and Jared looks down at his son, who's been silently lying next to him.

"You did?"

"Uh huh," Jamie agrees. "Papa took us."

Jared smiles and shoots a fond look at Jensen. "So and did you have fun?"

Both boys nod, before the smile slips off their faces, but they don't say anything else and Jared doesn't want to pry. He knows that whatever happened at the boxing club, Jensen's already dealt with it.

"When you're healthy again, will you go with us sometime?" Ty asks and Jared raises his eyebrows in surprise, he never would have pegged Ty for a boxer.

"Of course. I'd love to." Ty smiles broadly up at him and Jared ruffles his hair. A shadow falls across his son's face and Jared frowns. "What is it?"

"I'm sorry I punched the boys," Ty says quietly.

"Me too, Daddy," Jamie adds, both of them looking really sorry.

"It's okay. I know why you did it, even though violence is not the way to go. But you know that now and I'll expect you to not hit anyone ever again. Okay?" Both boys nod seriously at him and Jared squeezes them tightly. "Great."

"Now, what about you?" he asks, looking at his older kids and Jesse, who he totally considers one of
his kids too.

Annie nudges Sophie-Ellie's shoulder, exchanging a secret look with her. Jared cocks his head curiously. "What is it?"

Sophie-Ellie smiles softly. "I've got a scholarship at MacArthur's School of Modern Art."

"You've got what?" It's Jensen who asks, but Jared's not any less surprised and proud.

"Yeah." She chuckles a little. "They apparently ran a challenge, and Ben and Annie sent some of my stuff in and they were totally impressed, inviting me for an interview. Ben took me there on Saturday."

"Wow," Jared says, completely at awe. "That's amazing. Honey, I'm so proud of you." He waves her over and pulls her into a tight hug, kissing her cheek.

"They even offered that I could stay at home before and shortly after the baby is born and send my assignments in via email. Apparently, they offer on-line classes and they're happy to set me up with a special timetable," Sophie-Ellie explains, seemingly touched.

"Hey, you must have really impressed them," Jared says, rushing to add, "Not that I'd have expected anything else."

"If Ben and Annie hadn't...," she starts, but Annie interrupts her.

"Pff, it's all you. Those were your drawings that impressed them. We only sent them in."

Sophie-Ellie hugs her sister tight. "Still. I don't know how I'll ever be able to thank you."

Annie rolls her eyes. "No need to thank me."

Jared's heart swells with the devotion and adoration his family shows each other. It really makes fighting this fucking illness so much easier.

"How's my grandchild doing by the way?" he asks and Sophie-Ellie beams at him, rubbing a loving hand over the little bump beneath her t-shirt.

"She's doing good."

"She, huh?" Jensen asks amused.

A blush creeps on their daughter's face. "Yeah, I have a feeling it'll be a she."

Jared smiles. "Well, we'll find out in a few weeks, won't we?" Sophie-Ellie nods. "We can be patient for that long." He looks over to his eldest daughter. "So, how's your work going, Annie?" he asks, curiously.

"Great," she says and smiles. "I'm not gonna bore any of you with details. But it's going really good. My colleagues are great and the work environment is really relaxed. It was the right decision."

Jared smiles. "I'm glad. I really was worried that you'd regret not going back to Stanford. But I'm glad that it all worked out the way you wanted it."

Annie leans down to him and kisses his cheek. "Thanks for letting me make the decision."

"Always," he whispers and pets her cheek. Then he looks at Jesse and Luke, sitting a little further
away. "Now, boys. What's going on with you? Everything going well with the wedding and at the garage?"

Jesse smiles. "Don't worry, JT. Everything's great at the garage. I'm thinking about hiring another mechanic, because there's so much work to do."

Jared's so proud of Jesse, he feels like he might burst. "That's great, Jesse. I'm really proud of you."

Jesse doesn't blush often, as far as Jared knows, but this time a slight blush starts covering his cheek and he lowers his head. Jared grins and shoots an amused look at Jensen, who's just as much trying to hold back his laughter.

"Why don't you tell them how the wedding is going, Luke?" Jesse says, clearly trying to change the subject.

Luke smiles. "It's going great. Really. I'm not gonna tell you what we've planned, because it's a surprise. But it's going really well."

Annie frowns, looking confused, and Jared wonders what it means, but the look on her face is gone pretty quickly and he doesn't feel like over-analyzing it.

"I'm glad, son. I'm guessing we'll get the invitation soon enough."

For a second Luke seems to be a little panicked, but then he quickly nods and says, "Of course. They'll be sent in a few days."

Jared smiles. "Good. That's good." He lies his head back, meeting Jensen's eyes over their kids' heads, and smiles, getting a soft smile in return.

The whole afternoon and evening is filled with stories about what happened during the last week and about what is planned for the next, and Jared soaks it all up. They have dinner together and it almost feels like being home. It's completely dark when Jensen shoos them all out of the room and Jared feels pleasantly tired when his husband presses a kiss to Jared's lips and takes the sleeping Lily from his chest.

"I'll see you tomorrow, baby."

"Thank you, Jen. For bringing them all over."

Jensen smiles softly and shakes his head. "Don't mention it."

Jared watches them leave and it doesn't take long for him to fall asleep with a smile on his face.
Chapter 19

“For it was not into my ear you whispered, but into my heart. It was not my lips you kissed, but my soul.” ~Judy Garland

It's pretty late when Annie leaves the Science Center and makes her way to her truck. She looks up at the starlit night sky and takes a deep breath. The stars are sparkling brightly and she feels a smile appear on her face.

It's stupid, but seeing the night sky lit with the stars gives her hope. It always has. She knows that her father's up there somewhere; watching over her, over the people she loves. She blows a kiss to the stars and then gets into her truck.

Her fingers wrap around the steering wheel and she lets out a deep sigh.

After another round of chemo that had left him exhausted and even thinner than before, her dad's coming home tomorrow and Dr. Cohen says that the chemo is working. Her dad still has a long way to go, more rounds of chemo to come in the future, but the slight optimism the doctor displays gives Annie hope that everything will be okay again.

She turns the truck from the parking lot out onto the street and turns the radio up high, singing quietly along to the song that echoes through the car.

The message she got five minutes before she left work, makes its way to her mind.

I can't wait for you to get home

Jesse's been sending her silly messages every day for the last few weeks and whenever her cell beeps with a new message, she feels her heart speed up in her chest. She's twenty-four and she thinks it's a little stupid to act like a fifteen-year-old with her first crush, but Jesse does that to her; makes her heart beat faster and her knees go weak, and all that after all those years, she knows him and has been in love with him.

Sometimes she wonders if it's the same for her dad and Jensen, but she only needs to take a look at them, when they think no one's looking, and she knows the answer.

She's completely lost in her thoughts when lights appear in her rear view mirror, startling her. The road is empty except for her and the car behind her, so she slows down, making room for the car to pass by. But it doesn't stay right behind her, slowing down too.

Annie frowns, but accelerates again, concentrating on the street in front of her. The car behind her is really close and she accelerates a little more to bring some distance between them. But it doesn't seem to work, the car just speeds up as well. Irritation forms in Annie's stomach and she shakes her head angrily.

That's when something hits her rear and she curses under breath, holding on to the steering wheel so
not to be swayed off the road. The car hits her again and Annie has had enough, stopping her car at the shoulder.

"What the hell?" she asks loudly when she gets out of the car. "Are you crazy? You wanna kill us both?"

The door of the other car opens and Annie's breath gets stuck in her throat when she recognizes Robert getting out of the car.

"Robert?"

"Annie," he slurs and she can smell the alcohol from where she's standing a few feet away. He's drunk, of course he is.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? I thought you'd be back in San Francisco by now."

"Not without you," he says and takes a step towards her.

Annie sighs. "Robert we talked about this. It's over. When will you understand that?"

"No," he growls and then he's on her so quickly that she doesn't know what's happening. He has pressed her against the side of the truck, holding her arms to the metal. "Nobody leaves me. You're mine and you will come back with me."

"Let go of me." She pulls on her arms, but he has a death grip on them. "Dammit, Robert. Stop being such an asshole."

She never thought a drunk would be able to act so quickly, but the pain that shoots through her head a moment later, is all the proof she needs that it's possible. Her cheeks are burning and her vision goes blurry for a moment.

"You little bitch," he growls. "I'll show you where your place is."

"Robert, no!"

It takes her a moment to realize that Robert has let go off her arms and she shoves him back hard. He stumbles a little, giving her the opportunity to run to the driver's door. But before she can open it, he's on her again, pulling her hair violently.

She hears the engine before she even notices the headlights coming quickly closer. Sending a quick prayer upstairs, she kicks back and hits Robert in the shin. He tumbles back and Annie sprints out onto the street, her arms waving.

The car comes to a halt and Annie feels like crying when she recognizes the patrol car from Dalton's Sheriff's Department.

"Annie?"

It's Chad and she just stumbles towards him in relief. He catches her and she can't hold back the tears any longer.

"What's happened?" Chad asks and she can't answer, only sobes coming out of her mouth, so she just points behind her.

An engine starts and Annie spins around to see Robert tearing away from her truck and down the road towards Dallas. Chad looks completely baffled, but is still able to radio the station to call in the
accident.

"Hey now," he whispers, his arm around Annie's shoulder. "It's okay. Whatever happened? It's over. C'mon." He leads her to the patrol car and settles her in the passenger seat.

"My purse," Annie whispers, her voice shaking.

"I'll get it." He's back in a second and turns the patrol car around, driving them home. "You wanna talk about what happened?"

"He's my ex," she says quietly. "He just... he doesn't get it that it's over."

"Okay?"

"He was drunk and hit the truck. He wanted me to go with him. I said 'no'."

Chad looks over to her and nods. "That why he hit you?"

Annie nods and another sob escapes her mouth. "I thought it was over when I left San Francisco."

It seems to take Chad a second, but then his look turns hard. "Why didn't you tell anyone? Why didn't you press charges?"

"I just wanted it to be over. I never thought he'd come here." Annie leans her head back, looking out of the window and Chad seems to get that she doesn't really want to talk about it anymore.

The rest of the drive is spent in silence and Annie only moves when Chad parks the car in the driveway. He walks up to the front door with her and she knows that he'll tell Jensen what happened.

"Annie?" Jensen asks when she walks into the living room with Chad. It seems to take him a moment to take it all in, but then he's on his feet, cupping her face gently in his hands. "What the hell happened?"

"Her ex-boyfriend is apparently a really nice guy," Chad spits out. "One who likes to hit girls."

Jensen's eyes widen. "He did this?" Annie nods, tiredly. "He's done this before?" Annie nods again and Jensen looks at Chad over her shoulder. "I guess someone needs a visit from the Sheriff's Department."

Annie sniffs. "Jen..."

"Shh, you let me take care of it." He kisses her temple gently. "Why don't you go and lie down, huh? I'm sure you're exhausted. Jesse's already waiting for you."

Annie nods and slowly makes her way through the kitchen and up the stairs to Jesse's garage apartment. She opens the door to the single room Jesse lives in and he's lying on the bed, reading a book. He puts it away when he hears her enter, but the smile that's been on his face falls away quickly and he's in her space a second later.

"What the fuck happened? Did Robert do this?"

Annie doesn't have the strength to tell him he's right, she nods and then wraps her arms around his chest, burying her head in his neck. His arms wrap around her tightly and he whispers soothing words into her ear.

"It's okay. You're safe now. You're okay."
She lets him lead her to the bed and they settle back to chest, Jesse's arms wrapped tightly around her body.

Annie falls asleep pretty quickly and Jesse's glad that she can find a little rest after what happened tonight. He still isn't sure what exactly happened, but one thing's pretty clear and that is Robert needs to be put in his place.

So when Jesse's sure that Annie's deep asleep, he gets dressed and makes his way downstairs to his motorcycle.

"Where do you think you're going?"

He spins around and sees Jensen standing in the doorway to the main house. Jesse sighs. "Where do you think?"

Jensen presses his lips tightly together. "You remember the thing with Brad?" Jesse frowns and nods. "I do believe it was you who told me to be there for Jared and not go on a personal vendetta."

"But..."

"Let Chad handle it. I really don't need to have to bust you out of jail tomorrow morning."

Jesse cocks his head. "That why you're still here?"

Jensen chuckles and shrugs. "You think the guy would walk away alive if I'd got my hands on him?"

"That why Chad didn't allow you to go?"

"He knows me too well. Used Jared to keep me here," Jensen grumbles. "The little shit."

Jesse grins and shakes his head. "That's Chad."

Jensen huffs out a laugh. "How about a beer while we wait?"

Jesse shoots a look over his shoulder to his apartment. Everything's quiet. "Yeah, why not?"

They make their way into the kitchen and Jensen takes out two beers for them, placing one in front of Jesse. Jesse unscrews it and takes a long sip.

"So, do you know what exactly happened?" he asks, after another sip.

"Only what Chad told me. Apparently Robert followed Annie. He was drunk and hit the truck. Annie got out and they had a fight. He hit her, but then Chad came along and he flew."

"Asshole."

"Yeah, but they'll get him and he'll pay for it."

Jesse looks down at his bottle, picking at the label. "He has a lot of money."
"I know," Jensen says. "But we'll make sure he never touches Annie again." He looks at Jesse with raised eyebrows and they clink their bottles together.

"That we will."

They sit in the kitchen for a long time, sharing another beer and then reverting to water and soda. It's the middle of the night when Jensen's cell phone finally rings. He answers it at the first ring and Jesse's glued to his words.

"And... yes, okay... good... I'm sure he has... okay, thanks... I'll see you tomorrow."

Jesse raises his eyebrows when Jensen disconnects the call. "And?"

"They got him. Busted him for drunk driving, a hit-and-run, and assault. He didn't even deny the hit-and-run, just the assault. But he's in jail now."

"Good. Hopefully he'll stay there for a while."

Jensen nods, pressing his lips together tightly. "Hopefully." He yawns. "Let's go to bed. I promised Jared to pick him up before noon and I need a little rest."

Jesse claps his shoulder. "Then go on. I can't sleep at the moment."

"She'll be okay. And we'll make sure he won't get near her from now on," Jensen says seriously. "But I'm sure she'd appreciate it if you're lying next to her when she wakes up."

Jesse smiles a little. "I'll go up in a minute."

"Good. I'll see you in a few hours."

Jesse nods and watches Jensen make his way upstairs. He steps outside a moment later, sitting down on the stairs that lead to the yard. Anger is still burning hotly in his belly, even though he knows Robert is behind bars for the moment. But it's not enough.

Jensen's right; he should be there for Annie, not going off on a personal vendetta. But he thinks about how good it would feel to punch the guy in the face.

In the end, he stays outside for about another hour and then makes his way upstairs, finding Annie just like he'd left her; deep asleep and curled up on her side. He strips out of his jeans and sweater before climbing into bed, wrapping his arms around her warm body. He drops a kiss to her shoulder and when she presses back against him, he smiles softly.

The first thing Jensen does in the morning is check in with Chad at the station. He walks inside and sees Katie at her desk, waving at him.

"Hey boss, how's the hubby doing?"

Jensen smiles. "The doctors are cautiously optimistic."
"That's good," she smiles. "Chad's in the back."

"Thanks, Katie."

He makes his way to the back of the station and finds Chad in the changing rooms. "Mornin'."

Chad turns around and grins. "Mornin'. Or y'know, night."

Jensen laughs. "I'm sure Alona has an awesome breakfast waiting for you before you go to bed."

"She always makes me pancakes when I have the night shift, because she knows how much I hate it."

"Of course she does." Jensen sighs. "Any news on our prisoner?"

"His lawyer is on his way. And we'll probably have to let him go on bail," Chad says. "But he'll be charged with drunk driving, a hit-and-run, and assault. Let's see how he weasels his way out of this."

"Let's keep a close eye on him, okay?"

"Sure thing, boss."

Jensen lets out a deep breath. "I'm gonna go and pick up Jared."

"You do that. Tell JT that we'll be by later tonight, okay?"

"Will do." He claps Chad's shoulder. "Thank you."

"For what?" Chad asks, frowning.

"For everything."

Chad rolls his eyes. "Get out of here, Jensen. And I don't want to hear another word. This is what friends and colleagues are for. Now go and get your man."

Jensen drives to Dallas and finds Dr. Cohen in Jared's room when he gets there. He drops a kiss to his husband's forehead. Jared looks exhausted and pale, but there's a smile displayed on his face.

"Good news?" he asks.

"The cancer has reduced further," Jared says and grins. "It's working."

Jensen feels like a weight is lifted off his shoulders and he lets out a deep breath. "That's good." He looks over at Dr. Cohen. "That's good, right?"

The doctor smiles. "It is good. We'll need another round of chemo and hopefully it'll be gone by then. After that we'll just have to make sure it stays gone. So, it's still a long way to go, but it's good."

And there it is, the hope, bright and shiny. Jensen smiles. "Let's go home and tell the kids, huh?"

Jared smiles. "Yes, that'd be great. I wanna sleep in my bed again."

Stephen comes and pushes Jared down the hallway a little later, with Jensen carrying Jared's things.

"Enjoy your time at home," Stephen says and pats Jared's shoulder. "And no early return, okay?"

Jared shakes his head. "Not if I can help it."
"We'll be careful," Jensen says and Stephen nods at him.

"I know you will." He shakes their hands. "I'll see you in a couple of days for your checkup. Say 'hi' to your kids and Megan."

"Megan, huh?" Jared asks amused.

"Shut up and go home," Stephen says and Jensen doesn't need him to say it a second time.

He helps Jared into the passenger seat and presses a soft kiss to his husband's lips. "So glad you're coming home. We've missed you there."

"I've missed being home," Jared says and smiles. "I've missed sleeping next to you."

"Hmm," Jensen hums and turns the car onto the street.

This is a good day.

Sophie-Ellie can't wipe the smile off her face, hadn't been able to for the last couple of weeks. Michelle rolls her eyes at her whenever their eyes meet, but Sophie-Ellie can see the fondness behind it.

School will be over in two months and Sophie-Ellie knows that she'll miss Michelle sitting next to her. But Michelle's going to Rhode Island School of Design at the end of summer and that's one of the most prestigious art schools in the whole of the US and Sophie-Ellie is so proud of her best friend.

Walking through the hallways of the high school now, Sophie-Ellie remembers her first day here; adulthood and independence seemed so far away that day. But here she is now; pregnant, with a boyfriend who loves her and the baby, and with a scholarship for an art school close to home. The little girl she once was is finally grown up, even if the future sometimes seems scary.

She hears a snort and turns away from where she was rummaging through her locker to find her calculus book. Aaron is leaning against the next locker, watching her with raised eyebrows.

"You think people will like you more now?" he asks and Sophie-Ellie frowns. His eyes roam over her body and she gets that he means her clothes. She's wearing light blue jeans, with a rose colored print t-shirt today. Her hair is back to its natural brown color and she braided it this morning.

Sophie-Ellie shrugs. "I don't care if people like me." And it's true, the important people already like her and everyone else doesn't matter. She lays her hand on her little bump and Aaron's eyes flicker to it. "By the way the baby's fine."

He huffs and shrugs.

Why Sophie-Ellie ever hoped that he would come around and maybe care for the baby one day, she doesn't know. He'll never come around. But it doesn't really matter, does it? The baby will be loved so much without Aaron ever being there.
"Hey," Michelle says, bouncing down the hallway and throwing her arm around Sophie-Ellie's shoulder. "Did Sophie-Ellie tell you that she got a scholarship with MacArthur? That's so cool, isn't it?"

Aaron's look turns sour and he turns on his heels, walking away quickly. Michelle cackles and pulls Sophie-Ellie into the direction of the food hall.

"You're evil, you know that?" Sophie-Ellie says, amused.

Michelle snorts. "Asshole needs to know that you don't need him."

Ben and Ray are waiting on their usual table and Sophie-Ellie goes to pick up her lunch, spaghetti bolognese. As soon as she sits down across from Ben, she feels his foot loop around her ankle and she grins at him, only for him to beam at her.

"Man, you're disgusting," Ray says. "If this was a comic book, red hearts would be shooting out of your eyes and would kill us all."

Ben laughs. "You're just jealous."

Sophie-Ellie grins. "Maybe ask Michelle to prom, huh?"

Ray snorts. "As if she'd go with me. She's deep and artsy and stuff and I play basketball."

Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes. "Just ask her."

"Ask whom what?" Michelle asks, when she sits down, putting her tray on the table. "Here." She hands her chocolate dessert to Ray, who takes it with wide eyes. "Hey, no big deal. I don't like it, so I figured you might like to have it. You love this shit, don't you?"

"Thanks," he mumbles.

Ben shoots Sophie-Ellie a pointed look and she grins. "So Michelle, Ray was just talking about asking you to prom. You think we should all share a car?"

Michelle looks over to Sophie-Ellie and then over to Ray, who's beet red, picking through his spaghetti. It seems to take her a minute, but then she says, "Sure. Hey Ray, my dress is blue, just so you know which bouquet to get."

Ray looks like he might just puke and stutters, "Blue, okay, got it."

Sophie-Ellie chuckles and looks over at Ben, who looks really pleased. Lunch passes by in a rush after that and Ben presses a soft kiss to her lips when they part for their last two classes. She doesn't even realize that Piper saw them until the girl steps into Sophie-Ellie's way, her hands on her hips.

"What?" she asks.

"Don't think he loves you. He's just with you because he pities you," Piper spits out.

Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes. "C'mon Piper, let it go. You and him have been over for a long time."

"You bitch," Piper screeches, shoving Sophie-Ellie hard against the wall. "You and your bastard ruined everything."

Sophie-Ellie doesn't know what hits her when Piper punches her right into the stomach. She pants for breath, doubling over. She hears Michelle yell and tries to catch her.
"Hey." She looks up and sees Ben kneeling next to her. "You okay?"

She wants to nod, but is hit by a sharp pain in her belly. Her eyes grow wide. "The baby," she whispers.
Chapter 20

“I love you not only for what you are, but for what I am when I’m with you. I love you not only for what you have made of yourself, but for what you’re making of me. I love you for the part of me that you bring out.” ~Roy Croft

Jensen’s footsteps are dully echoing on the linoleum floor as he hurries down the hospital's hallway.

He remembers the nausea that hit him when he answered his cell and heard Ben tell him that they had to take Sophie-Ellie to the hospital because Piper - who he remembers faintly as Ben's ex-girlfriend had punched his daughter in the stomach.

Who the hell does that to a pregnant girl? Don't they know what can happen?

He sends a quick prayer upstairs that Sophie-Ellie and the baby are going to be okay.

The hallway is the same one that he ran down all those years when Jared collapsed while pregnant with Lily and it brings the memories of fear, anger and helplessness back. When he rounds the corner, he finds Ben and Michelle sitting on two plastic chairs, while Sophia is pacing.

Ben's the first to see him and he jumps up.

"What the hell happened?" Jensen demands.

"Piper... she... I don't even know... she just punched her. And then the cramps started," Ben tells him miserably.

"Where is she?"

Sophia pulls Ben into a hug and answers Jensen's question over his shoulder, while rubbing soothing circles into her son's lower back, "She's in the examination room right now. Justin's with her and they called Dr. Daugherty."

Jensen's hit with a wave of gratefulness that Justin had decided to close his own practice a couple of years back and had taken the opening spot as a gynecologist at the hospital. Justin had made sure that Jared and Lily were okay, he'll make sure that Sophie-Ellie and the baby are okay too.

He rubs a hand over his face. "I just... Jared's... I could barely make him stay in bed when the call came. God, he was out of his mind with worry. I need to call him, tell him what's going on."

Sophia nods slowly. "You do that."

Jensen takes a couple of steps away and pulls out his cell. He could really care less that cell phones are forbidden in hospitals.

"Jen?" Jared answers a second later, sounding out of breath.
"Hey, I'm at the hospital. Sophie-Ellie is still in the examination room. But Justin's taking care of her. We don't know anything yet, though."

"Jen, I... I should be there. She's my little girl. What if she loses the baby?" Jared sniffs and Jensen wants to punch something with all the rage surging through his body.

"She won't lose the baby. Justin will make sure of that."

"Jen..."

"No, Jay. Everything's gonna be fine. I'll call you as soon as we can see her, okay? Rest, please. Promise me you'll rest."

There's a long pause at the other end of the line, before Jared says, "Okay. But you'll call?"

"Of course." Jensen lets out a deep breath. "Is Angie there?"

"Yes, she just got here five minutes ago. I really don't appreciate you calling a babysitter for me though, Jen."

Jensen huffs out a laugh. "Not for you; for Lily and the twins."

"I can watch my kids, Jensen."

"Jared, even though the chemo is working, you've still a long way to go, we have still a long way to go. So please, humor me."

On the other end of the line, Jared sighs. "Fine."

"Can I talk to Angie now, please?"

A moment later the voice of his mother-in-law - she's the only one who ever deserved the label in Jensen's opinion - sounds down the phone. "How's Sophie-Ellie?"

"She's still being examined."

"It'll be fine," Angie says. "You'll see."

"Yeah," Jensen breathes. "Listen, can you please make sure that Jared rests? I know he's upset, but the stress is bad for him. So, will you make sure he doesn't overdo it?"

"Of course, Jensen. I'll take care of him and the kids. Don't worry about it. Call when you know more."

"I will. Tell Jay I love him."

They disconnect the call at the same moment Justin turns the corner and walks towards them. He looks at the phone in Jensen's hand with a disapproving look, but he knows not to say anything.

"How is she? How's the baby" Jensen rushes to ask, while Ben, Sophia and Michelle are standing right behind him, waiting eagerly for an answer.

"For now, they're both okay. It was quite the punch Sophie-Ellie experienced. But we got the cramping under control and the baby's heartbeat is strong and steady. I want to keep her here for observation for a day or two, though."
Jensen feels relief wash over him. His daughter and grandchild are okay.

"Can we see her?" Ben asks.

Justin smiles. "Yes. She's already asking for you all."

He shows them to Sophie-Ellie's room and Jensen walks in, just to see his little girl lying in the hospital bed with a protective hand draped over her stomach. The thought that she could have lost the baby hits him like a punch to the gut. He didn't want to entertain the idea beforehand, but seeing Sophie-Ellie and her baby bump makes what could have happened so much more real.

"Hey," he says and walks over to the bed, pressing a kiss to Sophie-Ellie's forehead. "How're you feeling?"

"Better," she says, with a little smile on her face.

Then she looks past him, holding out her hand for Ben and Jensen's steps aside. He and Jared are not the most important people in Sophie-Ellie's life anymore. He feels a little jealous when Ben leans down and they hug tightly. Ben whispers something into Sophie-Ellie's ear and Jensen sees the tears appear in her eyes. But for the most part, he's just happy his daughter has Ben in her life.

Jensen looks over to Sophia and sees the pride in her eyes at the way her son grew up and is taking responsibility and showing a kind of maturity Jensen's sure he didn't portray when he was the same age.

He takes a few steps towards the window and calls home again. Jared answers after the first ring.

"How is she? How's the baby?"

"They're both okay. They need to stay in a day or two for observation, though."

Jared lets out a relieved breath. "Good. Can I talk to her?"

"Sure."

Jensen hands Sophie-Ellie the phone and listens to her reassuring Jared that she's okay and that the baby's okay too. She also tells him that she's happy that the chemo is working and that he's finally home again.

When she hands him the phone back, her eyes are watery. Jensen leans down and kisses her cheek. "Everything'll be fine." And all of a sudden he realizes that this is the first time in a really long time that he completely believes it.

He sits down in a chair, watching Ben push Sophie-Ellie's hair out of her face gently. He clears his throat a little, hating to interrupt their moment, but there are things that need to be discussed.

"What is it?" Sophie-Ellie asks.

"You should think about pressing charges against Piper," he says. "She could have really hurt you and the baby."

Sophie-Ellie looks at Ben and then down at her stomach, before she shakes her head. "We're okay. I don't think I wanna press charges. I just wanna concentrate on myself and the baby right now."

"Sophie..." Ben says softly.
"No." She shakes her head again. "I know you want her to be punished. But I think she's already been punished enough. She lost you."

Jensen takes a deep breath and wonders for a second when his daughter turned into this graceful, forgiving woman.

"It's your decision, honey," he says. "But I'm with Ben on this."

She smiles at him softly. "I know. But we're okay." She rubs her hand gently over her stomach. "We're okay."

His mom, Uncle Jensen and Michelle leave when it's time for dinner, but Ben refuses to leave too. So he sits next to Sophie-Ellie's bed, watching her eat a sandwich, some yogurt and a nasty looking green Jell-O.

"I'm not gonna vanish when you look away," Sophie-Ellie says teasingly and Ben blushes a little, because he really feared that something bad would happen if he took his eyes off her.

"You sure?" he says and winks.

The teasing smile slips off Sophie-Ellie's face. "I'm fine. We're both fine. This is just a precaution."

Ben nods, but he feels the knot in his stomach return that he felt the first time when he saw her kneeling on the cold floor of the high school's hallway, obviously in pain.

"Hey," Sophie-Ellie says again and he meets her eyes. "You okay?"

"I was really scared," he admits. "I don't know what I'd have done if something serious had happened to you or the baby."

"But we're fine. Ben, we're fine." She takes his hand into hers and puts it on her stomach. "Me and my daughter are fine."

Ben feels the bump beneath his fingers and it fills him with awe, so it takes him a moment before he realizes what Sophie-Ellie just said. "Your daughter. Your daughter?" He looks at her in amazement and she beams at him.

"It's a girl. I'm having a girl."

"You're having a girl," Ben says and laughs. "That's amazing."

A shadow flits over Sophie-Ellie's face and there's sadness in her eyes all of a sudden. "I wish she could be yours."

A lump forms in Ben's throat and Sophie-Ellie really doesn't know how much he wishes for that to be true. He leans forward and kisses her softly. When he pulls back he says, "She's mine, as much as she can be." Tears are rolling down Sophie-Ellie's cheeks and he wipes them away gently. "I love you. You and her."
"I love you too."

It's already getting dark when the nurses finally kick Ben out and he makes the short drive home. There's a smile on his face and he's unbelievably happy. His broad smile is wiped off his face the moment he sees Piper sitting on their porch steps, though.

"What the hell do you want?" he asks when he gets out of the car. "Don't you think you've done enough?"

Her cheeks are tear-stained but he really couldn't care less. "I'm sorry," she says. "They've suspended me."

"Right," he says and nods. "You don't think I believe that, do you? You've hated Sophie-Ellie since I chose her and her friendship over you. And don't think I feel bad for you for being suspended."

"I love you. I wanted you back."

"So you think the right way to go about it is punch my pregnant girlfriend in the stomach?" He shakes his head. "You need to leave before I lose my patience."

"Ben, I really am sorry."

"Well, if you really are sorry, why haven't you asked how Sophie-Ellie or the baby is doing?" She looks at him blankly. "You're such a self-centered, egoistic bitch, Piper. You only care what happens to you. Now get out of my sight."

She hangs her head.

"And I don't wanna see you near Sophie-Ellie ever again. Am I making myself clear?"

She nods and then walks past him. "I really do love you," she mumbles, but Ben decides to ignore her and just walks over the entrance door.

When he turns around, Piper is standing at the end of the driveway, looking back over her shoulder. He opens the door and then closes it, blocking out Piper's image.

"I'm proud of you, son."

Ben turns and sees his dad standing a couple of feet behind him. "For what?" he asks confused.

"For the man you've become; seems like your mom and I did something right."

Ben smiles and wraps his arms around his father in a tight hug. "I couldn't have wished for better parents. I just hope I can honor that one day."

His dad nods slowly. "I'm sure you will." He ruffles Ben's hair and Ben chuckles, ducking away. "So, you want some dinner? Your mom put something in the fridge for you."

Annie stares into the mirror, while she touches the blue and green bruises on her cheek. She winces
at the pain. Robert, once again, had made a good job of punching her. It's been two days and the bruises are more present than ever.

What's with people hitting Padalecki-Ackles' girls anyway? First Robert and then the bitch, Piper. Did Sophie-Ellie and she have an invitation tattooed on their foreheads, or what?

She sighs.

"Hey."

She spins around and sees Jesse leaning against the door frame casually. "Hey," she says quietly and turns back to look into the mirror.

"How are you feeling?"

Annie shrugs. "Okay, I guess."

Strong arms wrap around her middle and Jesse's head comes to rest on her shoulder. Their eyes meet in the mirror. "I love you," he says and she pushes down the tears that are threatening to fall.

"Me too," she whispers.

"It's over. He's gone," Jesse says and she knows it's true.

Chad called yesterday, saying that the judge who granted the bail also sent Robert back to San Francisco, where he'll face being charged with a hit-and-run, drunk driving and assault. According to Chad they took the first flight out this morning. Robert really is gone, but there's still this nagging feeling in the back of her mind.

"I never thought he'd go this far," she says, feeling small and vulnerable.

"None of us did." Jesse presses a kiss to the side of her neck.

"I thought leaving San Francisco would be enough."

"I know."

Annie bites down hard on her bottom lip. "How could I’ve been so stupid?"

"Hey, no. You weren't. You did the only right thing; you left him."

"I'm scared," she admits. "When I was driving home from work today, I almost lost it. He's gone and I'm scared. I wasn't scared when he was still here."

"It's the shock," Jesse says. "Of what length he went to. But I promise you, he won't hurt you anymore."

"Were you scared?" she asks looking at him through the mirror.

"Everyday," he says quietly. "Took me a long time to not be scared anymore, when I moved in here. You know what made me feel safe?" She shakes her head. "You."

She turns in his arms and wraps hers around his neck, pulling him down into a hard kiss. "Make me feel safe?" she asks and Jesse looks down at her for a long moment, before lifting her up, causing her to wrap her legs around his waist, and carrying her over to the bed.
He worships her, kisses every inch of her body gently, tells her how beautiful and strong she is. His fingers make her forget everything but the pleasure they're evoking.

She falls asleep sated and feeling safe, and when she wakes in the middle of the night she knows that everything will be okay. She looks at Jesse's sleeping form and gently shakes him awake.

"What? You okay?" he asks immediately when he opens his eyes.

She nods. "Yeah, I'm okay." She smiles. "I was just thinking, we should move."

"What?" he asks confused.

"Find a place for ourselves. Give Sophie-Ellie and Ben the opportunity to move in here, if they want to."

Jesse falls back on his pillow. "And that's why you wake me up in the middle of the night?"

Annie smiles sheepishly. "I guess. I just... you make me feel safe. And I wanna be with you forever."

Jesse reaches up and entangles his hands in her hair, pulling her down. "I'd love to move into a place of our own with you, because I wanna be with you forever, too."

Their lips brush and they start kissing passionately. Middle of the night or not, this needs to be celebrated.

Evan wakes and the bed next to him is empty. He groans and looks at the alarm clock; it’s just after seven in the morning, but it's not like they have an early class to go to, so Luke should still be in bed with him.

He swings his legs off the bed and goes in search of his fiancé, who will soon be his husband. Everything is planned so far and he even sent out the invitations with a top secret clause for everyone invited so nobody would spill the secret to Luke.


His fiancé spins around. "Shit, what are you doing up? Go back to bed."

"What?"

"Go back to bed."

"Why?"

Luke rolls his eyes. "Because I want to surprise you with breakfast in bed, that's why."

"Oh," Evan says slowly. "Well, I won't say 'no' to that." He walks over to Luke, planting a soft kiss on his shoulder, before making his way back into the bedroom. He waits patiently for Luke to come back with the breakfast and gives Luke a blinding smile when he walks in with the tray.

There's orange juice, scrambled eggs and bacon, toast, and pancakes. It all looks delicious.
"So you gonna tell me how I deserve all this?"

Luke grins. "Just because you're the best fiancé in the world and I love you to death."

"Did you get up to something I should know about?"

"No," Luke laughs. "Really, this is just because I love you so much. And I've been in a bad mood ever since Dad got the diagnosis."

"Which is totally understandable," Evan interrupts.

"Yeah, I know. But I wanna make it up to you."

Evan looks over at him and then cups his face between his hands. "Y'know, you do that just by being with me."

"So you don't want breakfast in bed?" Luke asks teasingly.

"I didn't say that."

"Then eat." He forks up some of the eggs and brings it to Evan's mouth. Evan opens up dutifully and moans around the delicious taste. "Good?"

Evan nods. "Very." They share a sweet kiss. "I love you too, y'know."

Luke looks at him seriously. "I do know that and I'm grateful for it every single day."

"I think we should stay home today," Evan says and Luke's eyes sparkle with lust. "What do you say?"

"I say my fiancé has the best ideas."

They don't get out of bed all day and if they do, it's only to go to the bathroom or order food. It's a perfect lazy day and Evan hopes for many more to come.

Being home feels amazing.

It's like an energy drink - okay, maybe not exactly like it. But it lifts Jared's spirits and makes him feel a lot better. The hospital stays wear him down and grate on his nerves, but being home with his family is the best medicine he could have wished for, now that they know the treatment really is working.

Yes, he's feeling tired and weak, and the nausea hits him from time to time too, but just being home, spending time with his kids, and falling asleep next to Jensen gives him the strength to deal with all the negative things in this.

His friends are only a phone call away and Sophia spends more time in their house than anywhere else these days anyway. Misha is a constant figure too. Mike and Tom drop in for dinner more often than not, just like Chris and Steve, and Sandy and Alexis.
Megan is still living with them and Jared enjoys spending time with his little sister.

Angie and Matthew look to it that Jared and his family always have something to eat and don't need to resort to take-out too often, while Donna and JD also drop by with Tupperware full of delicious home-made food.

Jared couldn't be more grateful for all the help and he loves his family and friends even more for all their support. They all have their own lives, but they still make time to help and make sure Jared, Jensen and the kids are okay.

And thankfully all of them are okay. Sophie-Ellie came home from the hospital the other day and Justin gave her the all clear to go back to school come Monday. And Annie's bruises are fading and with them the worry lines on her forehead and the haunted look in her eyes.

They got the wedding invitation for Luke and Evan's wedding today, with a top secret clause in it and Jared had wondered what it all was about until Annie filled him in that Luke doesn't know anything about the wedding - or at least is not supposed to know anything about it. Jared has his own assumptions that his son is very well aware of what Evan's planning, though.

There's a knock on the door that pulls him out of his thoughts and he looks up to see Sophie-Ellie walk inside, dressed in sweatpants and a tank-top. She looks beautiful with her pregnant belly on display.

"Hey, honey. You okay?"

She smiles and climbs into bed with him, snuggling close. "Yeah, I am."

Jared smiles and wraps his arm around her, pulling her closer. "I'm glad." He presses a kiss to her hair and waits, because he knows she has something she wants to tell him and doesn't know how.

"I...," she starts and then stops again.

"What is it, baby girl? C'mon, tell me."

"Will you be mad if I don't want Aaron to be named as the dad?"

Jared frowns. "What? Why would you think I'd be mad?"

"You don't want that?"

She shakes her head. "I don't know. I mean... he'll never come around. We all know that. And as much as I want the baby to know her biological father, I know he doesn't want to be her dad. But Ben, he wants to."

Jared takes a deep breath and nods slowly. "You really love him, don't you?"

She looks up at him and nods. "Yeah. And he loves me and her."

"Her?" Jared raises his eyebrows.

Sophie-Ellie nods, smiling. "They told me, when I was at the hospital. It's a girl."

"Wow," Jared says stunned. "That's amazing. My girl's having a girl herself." He touches her belly gently. "You do what you think is best for you and her. And we'll have your back."
"Thank you, Daddy."

"Oh, sweetheart. No need to thank me."

There's another knock on the door and Jared's parents stride inside without waiting for Jared to call 'Come in'.

"Jared Tristan, it's good to see you home," his mother says and then her eyes fall on Sophie-Ellie and her tank-top that's stretched tight over the baby bump. Jared sees her mom's eyes grow wide and he knows what’s coming next. "Are you pregnant, Sophie-Eleanor?" she asks disapprovingly.

Sophie-Ellie's hands fly to her stomach and she says defiantly, "Yes. So?"

"Jared Tristan," his father hisses. "This is..."

"This is what?" It's Jensen's voice and Jared sees him coming into the room over his parents' shoulders.

"She's not even eighteen," his mother spits out.

"Oh so you know how old she is?" Jensen asks and shakes his head. "I tell you what it is. It's none of your business. Yes, Sophie-Ellie is pregnant and we're proud of her."

Jared's mother looks like she swallowed a lemon. "But what will the neighbors think? Have you learned nothing from your mistakes?" She looks Jared in the eye and he feels anger burning in his veins.

"Mistakes? I'm sorry, did I understand you right that you're calling my kids mistakes?"

His mother purses her lips. "You know what I mean. If you just hadn't gotten pregnant so young."

"Then what, Mother?" he spits out, feeling his heartbeat speeding up.

She shakes her head. "That boy... if it hadn't been for him."

Jared swallows hard. "That boy has a name, Mother. His name was James and I loved him. He's the father to three of my children and you will not talk about him like this. Just like you will not talk about my kids or Jensen like they're inferior to you. Gosh, I can't believe I thought you might have come here because you care."

"Jared Tristan..." his father starts, but Jared interrupts him.

"No, you will shut up and listen me," Jared says and he can see the pride shine in Jensen's eyes. "Not once have you cared for me and my family. You're only here because you think that's what you're supposed to do to protect your reputation. And this ends now. I want you to leave and don't ever come back. I'm so sick and tired of you belittling my family."

"Gerald," his mother whines and Jared is so sick of hearing that sound.

"I think that really needed to be said," Jensen says. "I think you know where the door is."

"It's okay, I'll show them out." Jesse's voice comes from the door and Jared has to hide his smile behind his hand.

His parents are spluttering, but with Jesse's help Jensen's able to maneuver them out of the room. As soon as they're out he closes the door and turns to Jared, bursting into laughter.
"Oh my god," he says. "That was awesome. I... Did you see their faces?"

Jared chuckles. "I did."

"I don’t think anybody has ever kicked them out," Sophie-Ellie says and shakes her head amusedly. "But they so deserved it."

Jared presses a kiss to his daughter's temple. "That they did. I'm sorry you had to hear all of that, though."

She shakes her head. "No, don't apologize for them. I don't care what they think. It only counts what you and PJ think."

"We love you," Jensen says. "No matter what."

"That's right, honey. We just want you to be happy."

Sophie-Ellie grins. "I am. Now you just need to get better real soon." She kisses his cheek. And Jared vows that he'll make sure of that.

tbc
“Eventually you will come to understand that love heals everything, and love is all there is.” ~Gary Zukav

Chapter 21

Jared blinks his eyes open just as the first rays of the morning sun are breaching the curtains. A heavy arm lies across his stomach and he smiles softly, running his fingers gently over the hairs on Jensen's arm.

His husband stirs a little but then buries deeper into his pillow again. Jensen loves his sleep; always did, however Jared hasn't seen him sleep in in weeks; at least not since the diagnosis. So he settles against his pillow, keeping his eyes trained on Jensen's sleeping form. He's beautiful and the way the light shines in it just enhances it, the freckles standing out on the tanned skin.

Carefully, so as not to wake Jensen, Jared reaches out, bringing his fingers to Jensen's plush lips and rubbing his thumb over them. They're soft, warm and a little wet, like Jensen had just licked his lips.

Something stirs in Jared's stomach. There’d been days when a morning like this would have ended in Jensen making love to him; slowly prepping him and then pushing inside, filling Jared up. Jared misses those mornings. He misses a lot of things, but this is one of the things he misses the most. But he's simply too weak to even consider it.

Instead he just lies next to Jensen, basking in his peaceful form. It looks like, while asleep, all the stress and worry falls off of Jensen and he's finally able to relax and recharge.

Jared brushes his fingers over the bridge of Jensen's nose and smiles when his husband wrinkles his forehead in his sleep. He knows it won't take long for Jensen to wake up but he can't keep his fingers to himself, not when he has Jensen at his mercy.

When Jared runs his thumb over Jensen's bottom lip again, Jensen's arm shoots up, his fingers wrapping around Jared's slim wrist. Jensen's eyes, however, are still closed.

"What are you doing?"

Jared smiles. "Looking at the most beautiful man lying next to me."

Jensen squints. "Really? Where is he?"

Jared rolls his eyes. "Very funny."

"That's me," Jensen groans, rolling onto his back, stretching his arms over his head. "I'm a funny person."

The covers have slid down Jensen's body when he moved and now his naked chest is gleaming in the sunlight. Jared licks his lips and brings his hand over to draw random patterns on Jensen's soft
skin. His husband squirms a little.

"Not fair, you know I'm ticklish."

"I just can't keep my hands off you."

Jensen blinks his eyes open and Jared smiles fondly. "Mornin'."

"Mornin'," Jensen drawls, giving him a soft smile in return. "Tell me that we can stay in bed all day?"

"I'm afraid we can't," Jared says and Jensen groans. "But Megan is taking the kids to daycare and school this morning. And we only need to be at the hospital after noon. So we have the whole morning to ourselves."

"Is that right?" Jensen asks with a smirk on his face. Jared nods, grinning. "Now what could we do with all this alone time?"

Jared knows exactly what he wants to do, but since that's out of the question, he says, "You up for a long hot bath?"

"With you? Always." Jensen sits up and swings his legs off the bed. "You stay here, I'll get everything ready." He presses a kiss to Jared's forehead, his hand cupping the back of his bare head gently.

Jared nods and lays back again. He listens to Jensen rummage around the bathroom. The water is turned on and a second later the curtains are pulled closed. Only the flicker of candles in the room is visible now.

Jensen comes back out, already naked, and Jared feels a surge of want go through his body, his eyes flickering to where Jensen's flaccid cock is hanging between his legs.

"Like what you see?" Jensen teases and Jared rolls his eyes, sticking out his tongue. Jensen laughs, but soon turns serious again. "You want me to carry you?"

"No." Jared shakes his head. "I think I can walk."

Jensen raises his eyebrows. "Okay, then."

He comes over and helps Jared up, looping Jared's arm around his shoulder, while he puts his own arm around Jared's waist. It takes a while for them to make it into the bathroom, but then Jensen undresses Jared quickly and helps him into the bathtub.

Jensen climbs in when Jared's seated and sits down behind him, his legs bracketing Jared's hips. Jared lets himself fall back against his husband's chest and lets out a deep, contented moan.

Clever fingers are gently caressing his body and he lets out something that comes close to a purr. Jared knows that he's lost a lot of weight and that, where defined muscles had been, is now flat skin and bones beneath. It makes him self-conscious, but Jensen takes his worries all away.

"You're beautiful," he whispers.

"Liar," Jared teases and Jensen bends his head back, so that they're looking into each other's eyes.

"I'm serious. To me you're so damn beautiful that it sometimes takes my breath away."
"Jen..."

"I love you, Jay." Jensen pulls him in for their first kiss of the morning and Jared melts into the touch.

"I love you too, Jen," he whispers against Jensen's lips.

They stay in the water for a long time. Their skin is all wrinkly and the water is cold when they finally climb out of the tub again. Jensen wraps Jared up in one of their super fluffy towels, rubbing him dry. Eventually they get dressed and Jensen helps Jared downstairs, where Jared explains to him how to make Jared's awesome pancakes.

It's nice to have the house to themselves for a morning. He loves his kids and he'll never regret having six of them, but once in a while it's nice to just spend time with his husband, without anyone else demanding their attention.

Sadie and Harley come trotting into the kitchen when they smell the scent of pancakes and bacon. Jensen fills their bowls and Jared just takes it all in, sitting on one of the barstools. Jensen's dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, but he's still barefoot and his hair is still a little damp. It remembers Jared of weekends spent alone when they'd just forgo breakfast for fucking on the kitchen floor. Only when the kids weren't there, of course.

"What are you thinking about?" Jensen asks, flipping the pancakes.

"How, in the past, we would forgo breakfast for a fuck on the floor when the kids weren't here."

Jensen licks his lips and swallows visibly. "Uh huh," he says dumbly.

Jared smirks. "You remember the one time..."

He doesn't get to finish the sentence, because Jensen is already in his space, cupping Jared's face between his hands and pressing his lips against Jared's. Jared opens up easily when Jensen licks across his lips and when their tongues touch something warm spreads in Jared's body. Jared's hands settle on Jensen's hips, pulling Jensen between his legs, and he wraps his arms around Jensen's neck.

He gets dizzy fast and when Jensen pulls back he's panting hard.

Jensen's thumb comes up and rubs over Jared's swollen bottom lip. "Beautiful," he whispers.

Jared smiles sheepishly and lowers his eyes. He still blushes when Jensen compliments him, even though they've been married for twelve years.

Jensen puts his finger beneath Jared's chin and lifts it. "You okay?"

Jared nods. "Yeah, I am." He's still tired and exhausted, feeling like he won't even make it over to the couch without stopping on the way, but he really is okay at that moment.

After breakfast, Jensen reads the newspaper to Jared, while lying on the couch, Jared's head pillowed on Jensen's legs. It's really nice and Jared missed moments like this.

It's almost noon when Jensen helps Jared into the Impala and then drives them to the appointment at the hospital. Stephen greets them with a broad smile.

"Well, you look good today," he says and after shooting a quick look over at Jensen, he adds, "You both do."

Jared smiles. "We feel good."
Stephen grins and nods knowingly. "Well, Dr. Cohen is waiting for you. I'll see you later."

After an hour of being poked and prodded once again, they're sitting in Dr. Cohen's office, waiting for some good news.

"So," Dr. Cohen says. "How are you feeling, Jared?"

"Okay. I'm tired and exhausted a lot, but at least I'm not constantly nauseous anymore."

Dr. Cohen nods. "That's good. The results of the test show that the cancer has reduced further."

Jared lets out a deep breath and shares a quick, relieved smile with Jensen. "I still want you to have one cycle of chemo here at the hospital. If, after that, the cancer has reduced even further, we can have you come in for your treatment every day, but otherwise you can stay at home. How does that sound?"

"That sounds great," Jared says happily.

"It really does," Jensen adds. "What do you think, Doc, how many cycles do we need overall?"

Dr. Cohen looks at the file in front of him. "Well, it's hard to say. But I'd say, including the next one, three to four cycles."

"And then the cancer will be gone?" Jensen asks and Jared can hear the hope in his voice.

"That's what we hope," Dr. Cohen says. "But we'll have to wait for the results to really know."

"But it's better than what we had when we got started," Jensen says.

"It is," Dr. Cohen says. "The treatment is working the way it should."

"Thank you," Jared says whole-heartedly.

"Don't thank me yet," Dr. Cohen says. "You can spring for a dinner invitation when you're in remission." He winks and Jared chuckles.

"That we will."

The drive home is filled with Jensen singing softly along with the country song that plays on the radio. Jared watches him and it fills him with relief that the worry lines on Jensen's forehead have faded a little. They're still there, but there's something else too: hope.

When they get back home, it's almost dinner time. Megan is in the kitchen, clearing out the dishwasher. She smiles at them and ask what they want for dinner.

"There's a noodle casserole in the freezer. My mom brought it over the last time she was in town. We can heat that up."

Jared nods. "I love your mom's noodle casserole." He presses a kiss to his sister's head. "Did you hear anything from them?" he asks.

She shakes her head. "Not that I would've picked up if they'd called. But no, I didn't."

Jensen nods, grimly. "It's better that way."

Jared knows he's right, but he still thought that maybe this time it would have been different with his parents. Of course, he had been wrong.
He goes to lie down on the couch while Megan and Jensen prepare dinner. He must have dozed off, because a small, cold hand against his forehead brings him back to the present. Lily is staring at him with wide eyes and he huffs out a laugh.

"What are you doing, pumpkin?"

"Papa said to check on you."

"And?"

"No fever."

"That's good," he says and laughs a little, pulling his youngest onto the couch with him. She snuggles against his chest. "You wanna tell me how your day was?"

She starts rambling about daycare and how she and Brian built a huge sandcastle outside. She had also climbed up one of the trees that are in the backyard of the daycare.

"It wasn't dangerous," she tells him seriously. "It was really easy. But Brian was too scared. He's a wuss, Daddy."

Jared chuckles. "Is he now?"

Lily nods seriously. She wants to say something else, but Jensen comes over to get them for dinner. The other kids are home by now too and Jared doesn't know how he could have missed the buzz going through the house. Ben's having dinner with them too and Jared's heart swells when he sees how Ben's looking at Sophie-Ellie and her growing belly.

Ben's only eighteen but he's more mature than most boys his age. He's taken over the role of Sophie-Ellie's boyfriend and maybe even father to a child that's not his so easily that it blows Jared's mind a little. But he sees a lot of good mixed from both, Sophia and Misha, in him and maybe it's the genes.

They've almost finished eating, when Annie says, "We're moving out." Her black eye is completely gone and it seems to have taken away the scared look on her face too.

"Who? What?" Jensen asks, raising his eyebrows and Jared chuckles.

"Jesse and I. We're moving out." Annie shoots her boyfriend a fond smile. "We thought it might be time to have somewhere of our own. And we thought that maybe Sophie-Ellie and the little one want to move into the garage apartment." And Ben too, she doesn't have to say it, Jared hears it loud and clear.

"What?" Sophie-Ellie asks surprised. "But you really don't have to. I mean..."

"Soph please, you and the baby need the room," Annie says and reaches for Jesse's hand, who entangles their fingers. "And we really want something for just the two of us. It'll still be close by of course. We haven't found anything yet, but hopefully it won't be too long. There are some apartments for rent or sale in Maddie's building. We're going to have a look at one tomorrow."

"I think it's a great idea," Jared says and Jensen nods slowly.

"Yeah, it comes a little as a shock, but I think it's a good idea too."

Jesse smiles and Annie beams at them. "We're pretty excited."

After dinner, Jared goes to bed, with Jensen helping him upstairs and to undress. He's snuggling with
Lily and the twins, when Jesse comes in. "Hey squirt, Jensen's looking for you. It's bedtime," he says to Lily.

"I don't want to. Wanna stay with Daddy."

"Aww, baby girl. You're already falling asleep," Jared says fondly and presses a kiss to her hair. "Go and let your papa read you a bedtime story." She grumbles a little, but then kisses his cheek sloppily before climbing off the bed and rushing out the door. "Would it be okay if you'd let me talk to Jesse for a moment?" Jared asks the twins. Both boys nod shortly and a moment later, he and Jesse are alone."

"You really okay with me and Annie moving into somewhere of our own?"

Jared wants to roll his eyes, but he's too tired for that. "Of course. She loves you, you love her. What more could we want?"

Jesse nods slowly. "I... I wanna ask her to marry me... someday... in the future. But I wanted to ask for your blessing first."

Jared shakes his head slowly. "Boy... how can you not know that you have our blessing? You're the best thing that could have happened to her. Of course you have our blessing."

"Thank you." Jesse smiles shyly. He then claps Jared's shoulder lightly. "I'm glad you're getting better, JT. It wouldn't have been the same without you."

"You're not getting rid of me that easily," he jokes, trying to cover up how touched he is by Jesse's statement.

Jesse gives him a grin. "Good, keep it that way. I'm gonna let you get your rest. I'll see you tomorrow."

He's almost out the door when Jared calls after him, "I'm proud of you, son. Really proud."

The blush on Jesse's cheeks is the best reward Jared could have gotten. "Thanks," he mumbles and then he's out the door.

Jared falls into a light sleep until Jensen finally comes to bed, wrapping his arms around Jared's body and pressing his chest to Jared's back. A soft kiss is dropped to the spot between his shoulder blades and Jared snuggles back into the embrace.

Today was a good day.
"When two people are meant for each other, no time is too long, no distance is too far, and no one can ever tear them apart." ~Anonymous

Chapter 22

Jesse pulls over Annie's truck to the shoulder of the road and stops it. The apartment house looks modern with huge glass windows and a neat little front yard. He shoots a look over to Annie, who looks skeptically out of the window, eying the house with a frown on her face.

It's the fifth apartment in three weeks they're going to look at.

Somehow Jesse had thought it would be easier to find something both him and Annie liked, but Annie is very nit-picky. Not that Jesse doesn't know why that is, he's noticed the look on her face and the glint in her eyes whenever they pass the house at the end of Lindon Road.

It's a white two-story house, with a porch where you can sit on a swing and watch the sun go down. It's located a little away from the street and a gravelly road, lined by neatly trimmed bushes, leads up to it.

Jesse thinks it would be perfect for them, especially since there's a 'For Sale' sign displayed at the beginning of the driveway. But whenever he brings it up with Annie, she just shakes her head and says that an apartment would be better to start with.

However, so far each apartment they've looked at has lacked whatever Annie had in mind. Jesse doesn't think that this time will be any different.

"Maybe we should have delayed the viewing," Annie says, sucking her bottom lip into her mouth.

Jesse cups her jaw gently, pulling her in for a soft kiss. "And that would have gone over so well with your dad," he says, smiling a little.

Jared's going in for the next round of chemo today and the mood in the house this morning had been more subdued than the last few weeks, when more laughter had filled the air again. But Jared going back to the hospital brings back the very real threat of the illness still hanging over them, even if the doctors say that Jared's getting better and that the treatment is working.

Annie huffs out a breath. "It doesn't feel right to not be there for him."

"Bella," Jesse whispers, pushing a strand of her hair out of her face. "It's gonna be okay. And we can go visit him tonight. One more week and he'll be home for good."

Annie pinches the bridge of her nose. "The last few weeks have been so good, I almost forgot about the cancer."

"I know. But your dad will be okay. He's on the right path."

"Yeah," she breathes, her head falling forward and now resting against Jesse's forehead. He presses a
"C'mon, let's give this apartment the once over and see if it fits."

Annie scrunches her nose. "It doesn't look very inviting."

She's right, the huge windows and the neatly trimmed front yard give a feel of cold and impeccable. It doesn't feel very homey.

"Let's give it a try," Jesse says and they finally get out of the car.

Sonya, their real estate agent, is already waiting for them at the entrance door. She's dressed in a dark blue skirt and a white blouse, her long blond hair pulled back into a neat bun. Jesse has the feeling that she'd fit in here way better than Annie and he in their jeans, t-shirts and sneakers. He wonders for a moment what the other tenants would say if he'd walk through the lobby in his work clothes.

Sonya starts rambling as soon as they shake hands, telling them all about the amenities of the house. It has its own gym and swimming pool. The whole building has camera surveillance and a reception for guests. That makes it very unlikely for break-ins.

Jesse feels like he suddenly stepped into a movie and they're not in Dalton but in New York, viewing a loft at the Upper West Side.

The apartment is on the second floor and Sonya makes them take the elevator, running her key-card over the scanner. She explains that there's only the one apartment on the floor and that the key-card is the key to the apartment at the same time.

Annie doesn't look happy at all and Jesse thinks about telling Sonya that they're so not interested. But then the elevator doors open and Sonya leads them into a huge open room. The whole apartment is furnished in white, the floors are gray granite. There's a huge LCD-TV at the one wall and the sun is shining through the huge window front. Sonya explains to them that it's possible to darken the windows just by the push of a button.

They follow Sonya into the two bathrooms and then into the two bedrooms, where everything is furnished in white too. It feels... cold.

Jesse wants something where he can put his feet on the coffee table and lounge on the couch without the fear of ruining the leather. He wants something where a kid can run around without someone running after them to wipe off the fingerprints on the gleaming surfaces.

"I don't think this fits the bill," he says, interrupting Sonya in one of her rambles of how awesome this apartment and building is.

Sonya looks at him a little stunned. "But it's beautiful. And it has all the amenities. It's perfect for a young couple."

"Jesse's right," Annie says. "It's not what we're looking for."

"Well, this is the fifth apartment I've showed to you, I'm slowly running out of options," Sonya explains, sounding a little annoyed that they've once again vetoed the apartment.

"What about the house at the end of Lindon Road?" Jesse asks.

"What about it?" Sonya asks.
"Jesse," Annie starts, but he continues as if he didn't hear her.

"Well, it's for sale, right? Can you show it to us?"

Sonya's eyes start sparkling again. "Of course. We can go right away, if you want." She staggers towards the elevator excitedly and Jesse has a hard time not to laugh out loud.

"Jesse, what were you thinking?" Annie asks and he looks over at her.

"What? You're already in love with the house, don't deny it."

"But it's too expensive," Annie says. "We can't just buy a house."

"Why not?"

"Have you thought about the money it'll cost us? We don't..."

He wraps her arms around her middle and pulls her closer. "Don't you worry about the money. I have a very healthy business, and I didn't really have anything to spend money on over the last few years."

Annie's eyes grow wide. "What? No! You're not buying me a house."

Jesse shakes his head fondly. "I'm not buying you a house, I'm buying us a house." She sucks her bottom lip between her teeth. "You wanna see the house?" he asks seriously. "If you really don't, then we won't."

"I wanna see the house. It's beautiful," Annie admits slowly.

"So, then let's go and see the house."

A smile spreads on Annie's face when she nods enthusiastically. "Okay." She pulls him over to the elevator where Sonya is waiting for them with a knowing smile on her face.

The drive to the house at the end of Lindon Road takes ages, in Annie's opinion. She's sitting in the passenger seat, her hands shaking with anticipation, while Jesse is driving the truck to follow Sonya down the road.

The house - it's always been Annie's dream house - it's beautiful and perfect, in her opinion and even if the interior doesn't match the exterior right now, she's sure they can work on that; make it fit them and their needs.

When Jesse finally turns the truck onto the gravel road that leads up to the house, Annie's heart starts beating a mile a minute in her chest and the sound of the tires on the gravel is like music to her ears.

Sonya leads them up to the front door and Annie turns around, taking in the view from the porch. The street looks far away and she can totally imagine sitting on the swing in the corner, watching the sun go down at night.
"The house is not furnished, except for the kitchen, of course," Sonya says. "Hope that's not a problem."

Annie's heart sinks, when she thinks of all the money that's needed, but Jesse just grabs her hand and tells Sonya that 'No, it's not a problem'.

The front door opens to a hallway, where stairs lead up to the second floor. To the left is the opening to what looks like the living room and to the right is a room that could be used as a dining area, because it's directly connected to the kitchen.

Sonya babbles about all the amenities of the house, but Annie isn’t really listening to her and just follows her and Jesse from room to room. The living room has a fireplace in the one corner and a large window door leads out onto the back terrace.

The kitchen is decorated in egg white and brown with a cooking island in the middle of the room. It also has a back door that leads to the backyard. Annie runs her fingers over the smooth surface of the counters and smiles a little, it already feels like home.

Upstairs, Sonya shows them three bedrooms. The master bedroom is at the end of the floor and Annie can just imagine what a California King would look in the middle of the room. The en-suite bathroom has two sinks that are encased in a marble vanity. There's a large glass shower and a bathtub.

A hand takes hers and she looks up to meet Jesse's eyes, which are sparkling just as excitedly as her own. This is their house, their new home, and both of them know it.

The floor has a second bathroom and the other two bedrooms are just perfect for a child or two.

Annie can't really believe that she's thinking about kids, but this house feels perfect for raising kids.

"I'm gonna give you both a moment," Sonya says and walks back downstairs.

Jesse wraps his arms around her, pressing his chest against her back and whispers, "What do you think?"

"I love it," she says softly.

"I knew you would," Jesse says, chuckling a little.

"But isn't it too much? We'd have to buy all the furniture too."

Soft lips press against her neck. "I told you not to worry about the money. I've saved a lot over the years. Your parents only let me pay for utilities."

"God," Annie sighs, turning around in Jesse's arms, to put hers around his neck. "We're crazy, right? Considering this?"

Jesse laughs. "More like crazy in love."

"So, we'll take it?"

"We'll totally take it," Jesse nods and then swings Annie around.

She laughs. "We're buying a house."
"It doesn't fit," Sophie-Ellie whines, trying to pull the zipper up on the long strapless dark blue dress she’d just tried on, with no success.

Michelle rolls her eyes. "Well, you're pregnant."

Sophie-Ellie huffs, putting her hands on her hips, "I'm not that pregnant." She rubs her hand over her little belly bump.

Michelle laughs out loud. "You're almost six months along. Maybe we should take a look at the maternity section."

"But their dresses are all so boring."

"You haven't even looked."

"I want Ben to be blown away when he sees me," Sophie-Ellie says, letting out a deep breath. "Look at me, I'm fat."

"You're stupid, that's what you are," Michelle says and Sophie-Ellie glares at her. "Ben loves you and he loves the baby. He doesn't care that you've gained weight, which is totally normal, by the way, for a pregnant person." She lays emphasis on the last two words and Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes.

"I know that. But it's prom. I wanna look beautiful."

"And you will. Now get dressed and we’ll go and have a look at the maternity dresses. If you don't like one of them, we can always come back."

Sophie-Ellie sighs, and steps out of the blue dress, eying it with longing looks. It's a really beautiful dress, simple but still elegant. And the blue satin shimmers in the light.

With a deep breath she gets dressed in her maternity jeans and t-shirt again, and then follows Michelle down to the maternity section. All the dresses look plain and she skims through them, feeling bored already.

"What about this one?"

Sophie-Ellie turns to see Michelle holding up a dark purple dress with beige decorative embroidery sewn into the top chiffon layer. She shakes her head. No, she wants something simple yet classy and elegant. Damn, the blue dress had been perfect.

That's when she sees an egg white dress hanging off to the side. It's knee-length and has a satiny undergarment, while soft chiffon is the top layer. It has thin spaghetti straps that are barely visible and it's cut in an empire style. She runs her fingers over the soft material.

"It's beautiful," Michelle says, sounding a little in awe. "You should try it on."

Sophie-Ellie nods and takes the dress to the next dressing room. She strips out of her clothes and then steps into the dress. It fits perfectly, falling softly down her sides and caressing her body gently. She
steps out of the dressing room and sees Michelle's jaw drop.

"It's good, right?" Sophie-Ellie asks and Michelle nods dumbly.

"It's awesome," she says a moment later, her face breaking into smile. "It's perfect. Ben's gonna love it."

"I think so too." She turns in front of the mirror a few times, looking at herself in the dress from every possible angle. "It's perfect."

She buys a few accessories with the dress, namely hair clips and decorations, and finds the matching shoes in another shop close by.

When she gets home, she finds Annie in the kitchen, helping Megan with an early dinner. PJ and her dad are at the hospital already and they all decided to go to Dallas later to visit. That's why they're having dinner early.

A somber atmosphere lies across the house, but Sophie-Ellie doesn't want to let that bring her down. Her dad's gonna be okay, the doctors said so and if another round of chemo will get him there, then she's all for it.

"Hey, what are we having?"

"Just some noodle casserole," Annie says, grabbing a few plates out of the cupboard.

"Yummy," Sophie-Ellie says. "So, how did the apartment hunting go?"

Annie shoots her a look over her shoulder and there's a glint in her eye. "We're moving."

"Really?" Sophie-Ellie asks enthusiastically. "Where? When?"

Annie laughs. "We bought the house at the end of Lindon Road."

"No way!"

"Yes. Jesse has saved some money over the last few years, so we went and had a look. And Sophie-Ellie? It's perfect. I'm so in love with it already."

Sophie-Ellie laughs, wrapping her sister up in a tight hug. "That's amazing."

"We're moving at the end of the month, but before then, I need you to go furniture shopping with me."

"Totally." Sophie-Ellie grins.

"And how did the dress shopping go?" Annie asks.

"Good." Sophie-Ellie holds up her bag.

"Ahh. Show me now." Megan and Annie demand at the same time. And when Sophie-Ellie pulls out the dress, they 'aww' and 'ohh' and are generally completely blown away by the dress.

"Well, if we're just exchanging good news," Megan says a little later. "My agent called today. They want me for Éponine in the remake of Les Misérables."

"Oh wow," Sophie-Ellie breathes. "That's amazing. Éponine has always been my favorite
character."

"It's awesome!" Annie exclaims.

"I'll have to go back to New York next week, though," Megan says, a little sadness in her voice.

Sophie-Ellie wraps her arm around her aunt's shoulders. "Don't be sad, this is an amazing chance. And Dad will be okay. And you'll come back for the wedding anyway and when the baby is born too."

"I know. It just was so nice to spend the last several weeks with you guys. It's nice to have some family close by."

"We'll miss you too," Annie says. "But maybe we can come and visit sometime."

"That'd be amazing."

The clock on the oven beeps and Annie goes to take the casserole out of the oven. "Can you get Lily and the twins? I'm gonna go and call Jesse down."

Sophie-Ellie nods. "Sure. I'll get them."

It's late afternoon when Luke walks out of his last class for the day. Finals are close and his head is spinning with all the information his professors are still trying to hammer into his head. But in a few weeks it'll be all over and then he and Evan are going to get married. And after that, there's a job waiting for him.

He walks the few blocks to their townhouse and sees Evan climb out of their car, holding two suit bags. His fiancé looks around carefully but doesn't see Luke, who's hiding behind a telephone post. Luke grins. Looks like their tuxedos for the wedding are ready.

Luke wonders if Evan will ever tell him about the wedding, or if he'll just lay out the tuxedo on June 17th and push him into the car to take him wherever. Or he could...

"Ev," he calls out, jogging across the street. The slight panicked look in his fiancé's face almost makes him laugh out loud.

"Hey," Evan says, trying to hide the suit bags behind his back and failing terribly.


"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

Evan nods. "Nothing."

Luke laughs a little. "You sure those are not the suits for our wedding?"

Luke presses a passionate kiss to Evan's lips. "I love you."

"Me too," Evan replies baffled. "But what were you saying about our wedding? How do you know? If someone couldn't keep their mouths shut, I swear..."

Luke grins and shakes his head. "Nobody's said anything. It was more like a little misunderstanding. You left your cell at home and I answered it. The bakery thought it was you and asked about the wedding."

Evan groans. "Shit."

"Relax, I know nothing. Only that it's set for June 17th."

Evan huffs out a breath. "I wanted to surprise you." He even pouts a little and Luke thinks it's adorable. He runs his thumb over Evan's plush bottom lip. "Don't pout. It's still a surprise. And I love you for planning all of it. It must have been a pain in the ass."

Evan sighs. "It wasn't. And you were needed elsewhere."

Luke puts his arms around Evan's neck. "I still love you for it. And I can't tell you how much I wanna marry you right now. You're the One, Ev."

"Love you too," Evan says softly. "I still wanted it to be a surprise."

"And it will be. But this way we can spend the night before the wedding apart and do it right," Luke says gently. "Will you show me the tuxes?"

"No!" Evan exclaims, making his way into the house quickly. "It's still a surprise."

"But..."

"No." Evan points a finger at him. "You will keep your fingers away, you hear me?"

Luke acts like he's upset, but honestly he doesn't even want to look at the tuxes before the wedding. He's just fine with it being a surprise, just like everything else.

The hospital hasn't changed since he left it. It's still cold and sterile, smelling of chlorine and disinfectant. But he's here to finally beat his cancer. He can do another week away from home if he gets to go home for good at the end of this cycle.

The chemo isn't any less tiring than before, but he feels like he's dealing better with the knowledge that it is working. Stephen seems to think so too.

"You look good," he says. "Happy too."

Jared grins, looking over at Jensen, who's talking quietly to Dr. Cohen. "I am. It feels like things are
finally working out."

Stephen shoots a look over his shoulder. "He looks better too. For a while I thought he might lose it."

"Me too. And he did, but he had a good friend who helped him through it. He's been better since."

"He loves you very much."

"I love him very much too. He's the best thing that’s ever happened to me."

Stephen smiles a little. "I'm sure he thinks the same about you."

Jared laughs a little. "I'm sure he does. Before me, he was some kind of a gigolo."

"I can imagine that," Stephen chuckles. "But you turned him around."

Jared grows serious. "We were made for each other," he says softly, looking over at Jensen, smiling when his husband looks over his shoulder at the same time, shooting him a soft smile.

Eventually Jensen and Dr. Cohen are coming over. "You ready to finally beat this thing?" Dr. Cohen asks and Jared nods, entangling his fingers with Jensen.

"So ready."

"Well, let's get started then."

It's late afternoon and Jared's dozing after getting his treatment. He feels Jensen's hand wrapped tightly around his own and it brings a smile to his face. He blinks his eyes open, only to see Jensen looking at him.

"What are you looking at?"

"Just at the most beautiful man in the world," Jensen says and Jared snorts.

"Right."

"You are, Jay. You're beautiful and you'll be even more beautiful when the cancer’s gone completely."

"My hair will grow back," Jared sighs dreamily.

Jensen chuckles softly. "It will and I will be able run my hands through it again."

Before they can get anymore girly, there's a knock on the door and his family barges inside. Jared lies back in his bed, listening to all their stories of what they did today. He gets a new drawing from Lily and the twins tell him about their Bs in the math test.

He learns about the house that Annie and Jesse have just bought and about the dress for Sophie-Ellie's prom. He listens to Luke and Evan moan about the last week in college. And then reassures his sister that it's okay for her to go back to New York and play in Les Mis.
During all this time, his and Jensen's fingers are entwined and looking down on their joined hands, Jared isn't sure which one is his and which is Jensen’s.

And it's perfect that way.
Chapter 23

“There is no doubt that it is around the family and the home that all the greatest virtues, the most dominating virtues of human society, are created, strengthened and maintained.” ~Winston Churchill

Ben parks the car in the driveway directly behind Jensen’s Impala. Seeing the car parked there tells him that Jensen’s already back from picking up Jared from the hospital for the last time.

Sophie-Ellie told him last night that the doctors had said that the next round of chemo in a few weeks would be changed to hospital visits every other day. The drugs that Jared is getting have changed too, if Ben remembers right. He’s not a doctor, but if he understands Sophie-Ellie right, those drugs are to make sure that the cancer stays gone.

They said that Jared will need another two cycles of chemo with these new drugs and then if the cancer doesn’t come back, he’ll be in remission. So far the cancer is gone, but Ben knows it could come back any day, so he prays that the doctors are right and the next two cycles will make sure it stays gone.

Ben grabs the plastic bag from the passenger seat and walks up to the front door, pushing it open. He finds the living room empty. The kitchen is empty too and when he calls out to ask where everyone is there's no answer. He makes his way out back and suddenly hears laughter and loud voices coming from the garage apartment.

He takes two stairs at a time just to stop dead in his track when he sees Sophie-Ellie standing across the room, showing Lily how to use the paintbrush. Bib overalls aren't supposed to be sexy. But the way it stretches across Sophie-Ellie's breasts and belly, Ben decides she's never looked more beautiful. Her hair is pulled back into a messy bun and a few strands have fallen across her face where a couple of pink blurs of color are displayed on her forehead and cheeks.

Knocking on the door frame, Sophie-Ellie spins around and beams at him. "Ben, hey, there you are."

She walks over to him, wrapping her arms around his neck, and presses a soft kiss to his lips. He melts into her touch, his hands settling on her hips, pulling her closer.

"Ewwwwwwwwwwww!"

Ben breaks away and for the first time he realizes that the twins are in the room as well and from one of the corners, Jared and Jensen are watching him and Sophie-Ellie with secret smiles on their faces. He can't help but blush a little.

"Wait until you're their age," Jared says to the twins and winks at Ben.

"I kissed Brian once," Lily announces suddenly and everyone gapes at her. "It felt weird."

Jensen snorts. "Wait until your older, baby girl. Then the kisses will get better."
She looks at him skeptically but then shrugs. "If you say so."

Ben can't help but laugh. "Listen to the grown-ups, Lily-bug. They might surprise you." He walks over to her and ruffles her hair. "Now, show me what we're doing."

"We're painting the walls," Lily says, rolling her eyes a little, as if it should have been obvious. "This will be the baby's corner," she explains further, waving her brush in front of his face, bathing him in little pink sprinkles.

"Lily, be careful," Jensen chides, but Ben just shakes his head.

"It's okay. These are old clothes. It's okay if they get ruined. Besides, I'm at least ten sprinkles behind all of you." He winks at Jensen, who rolls his eyes too.

"The twins are painting the other wall," Lily continues, as if she didn't hear anything Jensen and Ben had said, waving her brush enthusiastically. "I use pink and they use yellow."

"Because you're the girl," Ty says. "Boys don't paint walls pink."

Jensen laughs. "You should have seen your dad then when he painted Lily's room. That was a lot of pink."

Jared fakes a grumpy huff and says, "It wasn't pink, it was rose."

Jamie, Ty and Jensen look at each other and then turn to Jared. Jamie says what's clearly written over all their faces. "Isn't that the same thing?"

Jared shakes his head and laughs. "Not really, but I'm not going into the fine difference of color nuances with you."

Ben bursts into a laugh and looks over to Sophie-Ellie. "Anyway, it's pretty colorful, don't you think?"

She rolls her eyes and slaps his biceps playfully. "Shut up. I'm a colorful girl."

"Thank god for that," Jared says quietly and Ben chuckles.

"We're glad we have your colorful side back," Jensen says, before turning back to the twins and continuing to paint the wall in a light yellow.

The room is empty except for the foil on the floor, the paint buckets and the chair Jared's sitting on. It's still a little weird to see him with his beanie while outside it's hot and humid, but the spark in his eyes is back and Ben is happy it is.

They had moved Jesse and Annie's stuff to the new house yesterday. It wasn't much; mostly just clothes, books and DVDs. They're at the house now, waiting for their new furniture to be delivered and they promised to have a house warming party when everything's ready to be shown off.

"Y'know," Jared says, pulling Ben out of his thoughts. "We still have Lily's old crib. Maybe you wanna have it?"

Sophie-Ellie looks touched and nods slowly, before looking over at Ben. "That'd be awesome. Don't you think, Ben?"

It still throws him that she's including him in everything concerning the baby and the baby's arrival. She's asking his opinions on clothes, colors and names, and it makes his heart swell.
"It'd be great," he agrees.

She smiles. "Here," she says, handing him a paintbrush. "You can help with the yellow wall."

He'd rather have pulled her into her arms and kissed her until they're both panting, but they'll just have to wait until they're all alone. He puts down the bag he brought with him and sees Sophie-Ellie look at it curiously.

"Later," he whispers and she shrugs, grinning.

They paint the walls in record time, and Ben and Jensen carry up Lily's old crib and the diaper changing table too. They decide to disassemble Sophie-Ellie's bed and closet tomorrow and carry them up when the walls are dry.

It's dinnertime when Jensen helps Jared to the living room and the twins and Lily trudge after them. Sophie-Ellie makes her way over to where Ben's just cleaning off his paintbrush in one of the buckets full of water. He looks up at her and grins.

"What?" he asks.

"What's in the bag?" she asks back, looking over Ben's shoulder at the bag that's lying in the corner.

"Oh, you wanna know what's in the bag, huh?" Ben stands up straight and grins. "What will I get if I show you?"

She rolls her eyes. "I could just go and take a look myself."

"You wouldn't do that."

"Oh, I wouldn't, huh?"

Ben shakes his head. "Because then I'd have to punish you by tickling you senseless."

"You wouldn't." Sophie-Ellie gasps in horror.

"Oh, I so would," Ben says and smirks. "But I'm not cruel. So," he goes and grabs the bag, handing it to her, "take a look."

She looks inside and her eyes grow wide. "You didn't," she breathes in awe.

Ben smiles sheepishly. "I couldn't not do it. Do you like it?"

Sophie-Ellie takes the little teddy bear out of the bag and looks it over. "I love it. The bear is brown, with huge black eyes and a red bow around his neck. She runs her fingers carefully across the fur. "It's so soft."

"Glad you like it. You think the little one will too?" Ben asks, taking a step towards her, laying a hand gently on her belly.

Sophie-Ellie nods and he can see that she's tearing up. "Of course she will. Her first teddy."

They're about to kiss when Ben feels the movement against his hand. He pulls back in surprise and awe. "Was that...?"

Sophie-Ellie nods. "She's been doing that for a couple of days now. Letting me know that she's there."
"This is amazing," he says softly, pressing his hand gently against her belly, feeling the baby kick.

Jensen claps his hands, yelling 'That's it, Ty. Show him' when his son throws a particular good punch. Ever since they went to the boxing club the first time, Ty hadn't shut up about going again, so a week ago Jensen signed him up for some lessons.

He had asked Jamie if wanted to take some lessons too, but his other son had shaken his head and said he'd rather play baseball instead of getting hit on a regular basis.

So now Jensen takes Ty to boxing practice on Saturdays, while he takes Jamie to baseball practice on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. He stopped training the Little League team years ago and now he enjoys being one of the parents, sitting on the stands cheering for his son.

And if Ty really wants to, Jensen's happy to make sure that he'll get training lessons more often during the week too, but right now this is an experiment to see if his son really likes boxing.

Ty's face is glowing, his cheeks a deep red and sweat is running down his forehead, but he gives his punches his all. Jensen stands next to the ring, cheering and clapping. It goes on for an hour and when Chuck says practice is over, Ty is panting hard but he looks happy.

"That was awesome, Papa," he says happily.

Jensen reaches for Ty's hands and starts to undo his gloves. "So you like it?" Ty nods enthusiastically. Jensen looks over at Chuck. "What do you say? The boy got some talent?"

Chuck nods, impressed. "He's one of the best I've seen in a while. You should think about bringing him over for practice at least twice a week."

Ty's eyes light up. "Can I, Papa?"

Jensen cocks his head. "If you really want to."

"Yes, I want to."

"Okay, then."

"Great," Chuck says, fist-bumping Ty. "You've got real talent here, boy. Work hard and we might make a second Muhammad Ali out of you."

"Who's that?" Ty asks, frowning.

Jensen laughs. "He was the world's best boxer. But that was years ago." He hands Ty a towel. "C'mon, let's get home. Your sister is going to her prom tonight; we don't wanna miss her leaving."

They come home to find Jared on the couch, while Lily and Jamie are sitting on the living room floor, watching Bugs Bunny.

"Hey, how was your first lesson?" Jared asks. He's still too thin and his skin’s too pale, but Jensen can see that he's slowly feeling better; each day a step in the right direction.
"Awesome," Ty says, his eyes sparkling enthusiastically. "Can I use the computer, Dad?" he asks. They've made sure that the smaller kids only have limited access to the computer, not wanting them to sit in front of the thing for the whole day.

"What for?" Jared asks.

"I wanna Google Muhammad Ali."

Jensen snorts. "Go ahead, son."

"You wanna come?" Ty asks in Jamie's direction and his brother nods.

"Who's Muhammad Ali?" Jamie asks.

"The best boxer in the world. Chuck says I've got real talent and if I train hard enough I can be a second Muhammad Ali," Ty explains while they walk upstairs and Jensen laughs.

Jared raises his eyebrows. "That's what Chuck said?"

Jensen nods. "That's what he said." He sits down next to Jared on the couch, pushing to the back a little, so he has enough space to lie down too.

"Is Annie upstairs with Sophie-Ellie?" he asks, because he knows that their oldest had wanted to come over to help her sister to get ready.

Jared nods, nuzzling Jensen's neck and throwing his leg over Jensen's. "Michelle too. The bathroom looks like a war zone, with all the clothes and make-up and perfume all over it. And I was forbidden to enter."

Jensen chuckles. "Women."

Jared brushes his lips against Jensen's gently. "So happy I'm gay."

The doorbell rings and Jensen looks at the clock on the wall. It's not even 6pm, and the boys aren't supposed to be here before 7pm. He frowns and scrambles off the floor.

Sophia and Misha are standing on the porch, holding a six pack of beer and two large pizzas. "We thought it might be nice to see off our kids together."

Jensen grins. "Awesome, come in. Jay's in the living room. I'll go and get some dishes."

Soon after they're all sitting in the living room eating pizza and having a beer, while the twins, Lily and Jared have orange juice and soda. Annie, Michelle and Sophie-Ellie had refused to come out of the room for something so banal as pizza.

The front door opens again and Jensen grins when he sees Jesse, Luke, Evan and Dan walk in. He raises an eyebrow and Jesse shrugs.

"You didn’t think we'd miss Sophie-Ellie going off to her prom, did you?" Jesse says, sitting down on the floor, grabbing a piece of the pizza in front of him.

"We brought pizza too," Dan says, dropping a kiss to his mom's cheek.

"I guess I raised you right," Sophia snickers.

 Shortly after 6pm, Michelle comes running down the stairs, quickly waving at them. Her hair is in an
updo and her make-up is firmly in place, while she's still wearing jeans and a t-shirt. "Ray's picking me up at home, but I'll be back later."

Jensen grins. "We're gonna take pictures then."

It's almost seven when the doorbell rings and Jensen jumps up, getting funny looks from Jesse and Jared. He grins at them and then makes his way over to open the door.

Ben's dressed in a black tux with a beige flower in his lapel and in his hand he's holding a corsage for Sophie-Ellie, matching her dress.

"You look good," Jensen says and Ben nods, grinning sheepishly.

"Oh my," Sophia says, rushing over to them, petting her son. "You look amazing, honey." She sighs, and Jensen can see she's holding back the tears. "I'm so proud of you."

"Thanks, Mom."

When the others come over Jensen excuses himself and makes his way upstairs. He knocks. "Girls, Ben's here."

"We're coming," Annie calls out. "One minute."

Jensen smiles and walks back. "She's coming. Just one sec."

The first to walk down the stairs is Annie and she grins broadly, kissing Ben's cheek lightly. "You'll be blown away. She looks beautiful."

"I know," Ben whispers and Jensen searches for Jared's hand, squeezing it tightly.

His husband looks over at him and he can see the happy tears swimming in his eyes. The gratefulness that he's allowed to witness this is there too and Jensen feels a pang in his heart. They'd come so close to losing Jared in the last few months and it's a gift that they're here together.

Jensen kisses Jared's cheek gently. "I love you."

"I love you too." Jared looks over at him and their eyes meet.

The moment is over as soon as they hear Sophie-Ellie's footsteps on the stairs. Jensen wraps his arm around Jared's waist and waits. Annie didn't lie; Sophie-Ellie is beautiful in her high heels, the egg-white dress that fits her body perfectly and the neatly done updo. Her eyes are sparkling and the pearl necklace his mother brought over two days ago lies around her neck.

The sight takes his breath away.

This is the little girl he met on a baseball field all those years ago for the first time and directly fell in love with. This is the girl he was allowed to watch grow up into this beautiful amazing woman, soon-to-be mom. This is his daughter in all the ways that count.

Ben seems to be completely in awe too and Jensen knows that he loves Sophie-Ellie just as much as Jensen loves Jared. What more could a father ask for?

Sophie-Ellie blushes lightly when Ben whispers something into her ear, but there's a loving smile displayed on her face too. She's happy and glowing and Jensen couldn't be more proud of her.

Sophia breaks the moment with her squee, pulling Jensen out of his thoughts. They take a lot of
pictures and Jensen gets to hug Sophie-Ellie tightly, kiss her cheek and send her on her way.

Michelle and Ray ring the bell a short time later and they take some more photos and wish both couples fun tonight.

Jensen knows that Ben rented a hotel room for the night and when he looks at them together, he knows that he doesn't need to worry. They're made for each other.

Her hand is lying in Ben's while they're sitting across from Michelle and Ray in the back of the limo. It feels good, natural, and when she looks down, it's like both of their hands have melted into one. When she looks up again, Ben's watching her with a soft smile on his face.

She smiles back and he lifts their entwined hands, pressing a gentle kiss to the back of hers.

It doesn't take long for them to get to the hotel where the prom's being held and the parking lot and foyer is already buzzing with people. The theme is 'A Night to Remember' and the decorations are in dark blue with a lot of small LED lights resembling the stars. It looks beautiful.

They find their table close to the dance floor and Sophie-Ellie lets her eyes wander over all the people that are already there. A couple of them sense her eyes on them and turn around, waving or smiling. She's never been part of the most popular crowd, but she always got along with most of the other students.

Piper is dancing with someone from the basketball team and Sophie-Ellie looks away. She really doesn't want to deal with Piper tonight.

They dance a lot and talk to teachers and other students about the impending graduation and what they have planned after that. There's a lot of laughter and fun, and Sophie-Ellie enjoys the night. The best times are when Ben pulls her onto the dance floor for a slow dance, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her close.

"You're so beautiful," he whispers, when the band is playing another slow song. "I can't even believe that you're really mine."

She looks at him. "I'm yours. We're yours."

Ben touches her belly softly and she melts into his touch. "You two are the best that's ever happened to me."

It's way after midnight when they tell Michelle and Ray - who are dancing, wrapped tightly around each other - goodnight and make their way up to their room.

Sophie-Ellie feels her nerves when Ben closes the door to the suite. They haven't really done anything, except for making out, and Sophie-Ellie doesn't know how far Ben expects her to go tonight. She knows that Ben and Piper had sex, and of course she's not a virgin herself. But she feels like one tonight, not knowing what to do.

"Is this awkward?" Ben asks. "This is awkward, right?"
Sophie-Ellie feels a little of the nervousness fall away and she chuckles. "A little."

"Damn," Ben groans. "We've shared a bed before. This shouldn't be awkward."

"It probably does have something to do with the fact that it's prom night and what that entails," Sophie-Ellie says, looking around the room.

"That's not...," Ben shakes his head. "I didn't... That's not why I got the room."

She looks over at him and he looks shy and a little sheepish. "No? Why not?"

He raises his eyebrows in surprise. "I just... This, us, it was never about sex. And it shouldn't be tonight."

"So, you don't want to?" Sophie-Ellie asks a little unsure.

Ben lets out a deep breath. "Of course I do. I love you. And you're beautiful and I'm just a guy." He chuckles. "But it doesn't have to happen tonight. I'm happy to wait for as long as I have to."

Her heart melts and she walks over to him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Just kiss me."

Evan is woken by soft lips trailing down his chest. They're warm and wet, and he feels his dick stir in his boxers. Hands are running over his body, causing goosebumps to appear on his skin. He moans a little and feels a tongue push into his mouth, curling lazily around his own.

Slowly he lifts his arms, cupping the back of Luke's head with them and holds his fiancé in place. He surges up into the kiss, chasing the taste of him. He doesn't care about morning breath. He just cares about feeling Luke against him, above him, inside him.

"Ev...," Luke moans, when they break apart from the kiss.

"Need you," he whispers. "Want you."

It's not like they do this often. Luke enjoys bottoming way too much, but from time to time Evan needs to feel Luke inside him, filling him.

"Hmm..."


It's warm and wet and perfect inside Luke's mouth and it's early morning, so he's about to come already when Luke pulls off and bends his legs back, exposing his hole. He groans, when he feels Luke's breath ghost over the furled muscle. The first lick sends shudders through his body, making his scream out and call Luke's name.

His fiancé licks and nibbles at his entrance, making it nice and wet, before he pushes a single finger
inside. It burns a little, but then Luke brushes against that spot inside of Evan and he bucks his hips, pushing down on the finger.

Luke prepares him carefully, adding lube to the spit, and stretching him with three fingers before he pulls on the condom and pushes in.

Evan's head falls back, his eyes roll back inside his head and he groans. He feels so full, almost to the point where he thinks he might burst. But it's the thought of this being Luke, filling him up, that pushes him closer to the edge.

When Luke starts to move, Evan's already so damn close and a few strokes up his cock are enough for him to feel his orgasm wash over him. He shudders and writhes beneath Luke, feeling him pick up the pace and pound his ass harder. When he comes a few seconds later, it's Evan's name that tumbles from Luke's lips.

They kiss passionately while they come down from their highs and it's only interrupted by the knock on the door.

"Guys, you don't want to miss your own graduation, do you?"

Evan groans and looks at the alarm clock. It's almost nine and they have to be at the campus before ten. "Holy shit," he curses, pushing Luke off, who's eyes have grown wide at the sight of the time.

They jump in the shower together, to save time and Dan is sitting on the couch with a disapproving look on his face when they come out half an hour later, dressed in their suits. They make it to the graduation ceremony just in time, finding that their families are already waiting for them.

Evan greets his fathers, sisters with their respective others and little Calleigh, while Luke and Dan walk over to their families. They all agreed to have a joint lunch at a fancy restaurant after the ceremony, and Evan knows they'll have enough time to talk to their families then.

All three of them make their way to their seats and Evan listens to the Dean’s speech. Then it's time for them to pick up their diplomas and when Dan and Luke are called he claps and hollers loudly, just as they do when he's called to pick up his diploma.

They've reserved the back room of the restaurant, because otherwise they wouldn't have been able to sit together. Luke sits next to him and Evan notices straightaway that something is off.

"What is it?" he whispers.

Luke shakes his head. "I'm being stupid."

Evan frowns. "Why?"

"Dad... he's just told me that he won't be able to walk me to the altar. He's getting better but he won't be able to do that yet."

"Oh... I thought..."

Luke nods. "Me too. But he tires quickly and I don't want him to overdo it. I just... I'm disappointed."

Evan sighs and cups Luke's face between his hands. "How about we walk down the aisle together?"

"What? No, you wanted your dad to walk you down the aisle."
Evan shakes his head. "Now I want us to walk together. Our dads already gave us to each other. So, what do you say?"

Luke smiles softly. "I'd love to walk down the aisle with you."

It's only a couple of weeks now until the wedding, but Evan wishes they could get married right the fuck now.

Jared puts the wheelchair away the moment they come back home. He hates the thing. It hits home just how sick he still is. He tires a lot and he still feels weak, even though he's getting better every day. He just isn't well enough to walk Luke down the aisle and he hates that.

"You okay?" Jensen asks, running a hand over his back.

"I hate this shit."

Jensen cups his head between his hands. "What are you talking about?"

"This, me, the cancer."

"But you're doing better."

"But not good enough to walk Luke down the aisle. You should have seen his face today when I told him. I wanna be able to do things like that; want to be able to play with my kids in the yard; go to their graduation without a fucking wheelchair; walk them down the aisle."

"Jay..."

"Don't 'Jay' me, Jensen. It sucks."

Jensen looks at him softly. "It does suck. But you're getting better. You're here with us and we're more than grateful for that. Luke understands that you're sick and that you can't walk him down the aisle."

"He shouldn't have to." Jared pouts.

"No, he shouldn't. But he has to." Jensen sighs. "We almost lost you, Jay. It was a close call. Can't we just be happy that you're beating this thing?"

"Jen..." Jared lets out a deep breath, feeling his heart break at the sadness displayed on Jensen's face. "Of course we can. I'm just saying it sucks." He reaches out for his husband. "Make me feel better?"

The sadness on Jensen's face fades slowly and he smirks. "You got something in mind?"

Jared sucks his bottom lip into his mouth and says, "Maybe."
“To the world you may be just one person, but to one person you may be the world.” ~Brandi Snyder

It's the morning of Luke's wedding and Jensen wakes before the alarm clock, only awoken by the first rays of sun shining through the curtains. He turns around, reaching out for Jared lying next to him and is surprised to find Jared already awake.

"Mornin'," he mumbles, smiling softly.

"Mornin'," Jared replies, stretching his limbs a little.

The covers fall down his body a little, giving way to miles of soft skin. Jensen brings his hand up, running his fingertips slowly over the exposed belly. Jared's still thinner than he was before he got sick, but he is gaining weight every day.

A finger lifts Jensen's head and he didn't even realize that his eyes were glued to Jared's chest. Hazel-green eyes meet his and he feels a pang in his heart. He wonders if he will ever be able to look at his husband and not see the haggard and sick version of him. Jared's getting better every day and it's not just on paper, it's palpable and for everyone to see, but Jensen's having a hard time getting rid of the images that are burned deep into his brain of Jared sick and almost dying.

"Our son's getting married," Jared says quietly and Jensen snaps out of his funk. He smiles.

"Yes, he is."

Jared sighs, rolling onto his back and stretching his arms above his head. "I remember when I took him home for the first time. Sometimes it feels like it was only yesterday and not twenty-two years ago."

Jensen nods and smiles sadly. "He was a cute baby. I've seen the pictures."

Jared looks over to him. "Hey. No. We're not being sad today. It's a happy day." He reaches out and runs his fingers through Jensen's short hair. "He's your son and he loves you."

"It's just... sometimes I wish I could have been there, y'know?"

"Jen... you're here now, that's all that counts."

Jared pulls at him a little and Jensen goes, hovering above his husband for a second before leaning down and kissing him softly.

When he pulls away Jared has closed his eyes and there is a happy smile on his face. Jensen runs his thumb gently over his cheekbones.

"I was so nervous on our wedding day," he says all of a sudden, not really knowing where this
Jared opens his eyes and raises his eyebrows. "You were?"

Jensen nods and chuckles a little. "I felt like it was all too good to be true. I mean, I met you and the kids, and suddenly my life had a new meaning. I was scared that I'd fuck it all up."

"Jen...," Jared breathes.

"From the moment, I met you in that damn supermarket; I just knew that my life wouldn't be the same ever again. You're the best thing that's ever happened to me; you and the kids. Sometimes I wonder how I deserve all this."

"You deserve all this because you're amazing. A doting father and the best husband I could have wished for. You're loyal and funny and passionate. You deserve the best and more," Jared says seriously. "You made me believe in love again, Jen. If I could marry you again, I'd do so in a heartbeat."

Jensen smiles. "Good thing we're already married, Mr. Padalecki-Ackles."

Jared beams at him. "That never gets old."

"It better not."

Jared's hands come up to lie on the back of Jensen's head again and he pulls him down a little. "Kiss me?"

"Your wish is my command, baby," Jensen says, capturing Jared's lips in a passionate kiss. He licks inside his husband's mouth, ignoring the sour taste of morning breath.

Jared opens up to him easily, his fingers pushed into Jensen's hair, holding him close. Their tongues rub against each other, sending sparks down Jensen's back. It's been too long since he really let himself go when kissing Jared, always holding back and trying to be careful. Today, though, he wants his husband to know how much he's Jensen's 'One and Only'.

They shift a little and Jensen rolls between Jared's legs, feeling them wrap around him, only their boxer briefs separating them. They're both half hard in their underwear and Jensen swallows down the soft moan that escapes Jared's lips. He feels Jared's hands wander down his back, fingernails scratching lightly over oversensitive skin, leaving Jensen panting into his husband's mouth.

Clever fingers push beneath the waistband of his boxer briefs and he moans when Jared digs his fingers into his butt cheeks, bringing them closer together.

There's a knock on the door that doesn't really register in Jensen's mind until the door is jerked open.

"Dad, I really..." Luke stops in the middle of his sentence and when Jensen turns his head he can see their son staring at them with huge eyes and a blush on his cheeks. "Oh shit, sorry, I'm... I'm just gonna go...," he points over his shoulder, "I... see you later." He rushes out and the door slams shut.

Jensen looks down at Jared and when their eyes meet they both burst out laughing. Rolling off Jared, Jensen takes a hiccupsing breath.

"Awkward," he says and Jared snorts.

"It had to happen sooner or later with six kids."
"Glad it was Luke then and not Lily or we'd have to have the baby talk on our son's wedding day. Can you imagine your daughter telling the wedding guests how babies are made?"

Jared laughs loudly. "I'm happy for small mercies, then."

"So, I guess Luke needed our help," Jensen says after another moment. "Think we should get up and see what we can do to help?"

Jared looks over to him. "Only if you promise to make out with me during the reception, preferably in your childhood bedroom."

Jensen huffs out a laugh. "I didn't know you were so kinky, Mr. Padalecki-Ackles."

Jensen doesn't know how it happens but Jared has him on his back in a heartbeat. "Don't start something you can't finish, Mr. Ackles-Padalecki."

Jensen moans at the way his last name rolls of Jared's tongue, low and dirty. He runs his hand over his husband's bald head, bringing him in for one last kiss before they have to get up and face today's wedding insanity.

Luke rushes back into the guest room he spent the night in, his cheeks deep red. He rubs his eyes wishing he could just forget what he saw right now.

"What happened?" Sophie-Ellie asks. She's sitting on the bed, still dressed in her butterfly pajamas.


"You caught them doing what?" It seems to take a moment before it sinks in. "Oh... ewww." Sophie-Ellie shudders. "That's something you never want to know about your parents."


She laughs. "You're getting married today, Luke. That's so awesome. I'm really happy for you."

He rolls onto his side and grins at her. "Can't really believe that Ev and I are finally getting married."

"And he's your high school sweetheart too. Who can say they married their high school sweetheart?"

"Not many, I guess. Dad got married to his high school sweetheart, though." Sophie-Ellie nods, giving him a sad smile.

"You miss him?"

"Every day," Luke says, taking a deep breath. "I wish he could be here."

"He is, in our hearts," Sophie-Ellie says. "He'll be watching and I'm sure he's so proud of you."

"He's proud of you too, Sis. You're gonna be an amazing mom." Luke cocks his head and gently touches Sophie-Ellie's big belly. "How does it feel?"
She smiles. "It's hard to explain. It's feels amazing. I mean there's a little person growing inside of me and it just blows my mind, y'know? But I'm sure you're gonna experience that soon enough for yourself." She winks at him and Luke blushes.

"Maybe."

"I'm sure Evan can't wait to knock you up."

"Sophie!" Luke gasps in shock and she laughs.

There's a knock on the door and Luke calls 'Come in', seeing his parents walk inside. At least they're decent this time.

His dad opens his mouth but Luke rushes to say, "Can we not talk about this, ever?"

"Fine by us," Jensen says. "How about we have some breakfast before we get ready to see you get married?"

Sophie-Ellie scrambles off the bed. "I'm gonna wake the twins and Lily." She rushes outside and Jensen follows her, saying something about making pancakes.


"Not really. I'm excited, though. Can't wait to see that ring on my finger."

His dad grins broadly. "That's good."

He walks over to Luke and sits down on the bed. He looks better, but Luke still can see the toll the cancer took on his dad's body and he has to remind himself that in a couple of months it'll be gone completely, if everything goes the way it should go.

"I'm really proud of you, Son," his dad says and Luke can hear the emotion in his voice. "And I'm very happy that you've found someone to make you as happy as Jensen makes me."

Luke wraps his dad up in a tight hug. "Thank you. For everything. I love you, Dad."

"I love you too, Luke."

Breakfast goes by in a blur and when he's upstairs again finally taking out the tux Evan had had made for him, he's buzzing with excitement and energy. He can't wait to see his fiancé, soon-to-be-husband.

The tux is white with a silver satin vest, a silver tie and a white shirt. He runs his fingers carefully over the expensive material. It looks beautiful. He gets dressed slowly, savoring each moment of putting the tux on. When he's finally completely dressed and standing in front of the mirror, he can't really believe that it's himself he's looking at. He looks like someone out of a wedding magazine.

"You look very handsome."
Luke turns around to see Jensen standing at the door, already dressed in a black suit, white shirt and light blue tie.

"Thank you."

There’s something that looks a lot like nostalgia displayed on Jensen’s face and Luke wonders for a second what is going on in his step-father's mind.

"I still can remember the first time we met."

"At Little League practice," Luke says and grins. "That was a good time."

Jensen laughs softly. "It really was." He takes a step forward. "I just... I know that I can never take the place that your father has in your heart and that's totally okay. But I really want you to know that I couldn't have wished for a better son."

Luke swallows hard. "You are, y'know? My father, I mean. I wouldn't be who I am today without you." He can see the tears glistening in Jensen's eyes and hugs him tightly. "Thank you, Jen. For everything. I love you."

"I love you too, Son."

They step away from each other and Jensen looks down at his watch. "I think it's time to go." He looks up again. "You ready?"

"So ready."

Jensen laughs and together they make their way down the stairs.

Luke didn't really know what to expect and if he's honest he thought he'd get married in a church. But this here? Is so much better. He's looking out of the window of the room Donna showed him to when they got to the ranch half-an-hour ago. She'd hugged him and then escorted him into the room, locking him away from the chaos that's going on downstairs.

Outside there are several rows of white chairs and in the middle is an aisle, the grass is covered with a white carpet. The aisle is lined with white flowers and at the end Luke can see a gate that's covered in, what he guesses are, white roses. He knows that this is the spot where he'll say 'I do' in about an hour.

The sky is a deep blue and the sun is blinding, bathing the whole scenery in bright light. There's a knock on the door and he turns around to see Jesse walk inside, dressed in a dark blue suit. He smiles.

"Dude!" Jesse exclaims. "Holy shit. He really seems to love you."

Luke rolls his eyes. "Seems like it."

Jesse grins and pulls Luke into a quick hug. "I'm happy for you, man. Really happy for you."
Luke smiles. "Thanks. And thanks for agreeing to be my best man." He had asked Jesse a couple of weeks back and at first he had been reluctant, but after Luke had told him that he didn't want anyone else but his brother to be his best man he had agreed to it happily.

"You ready to get married, Luke?"

"Yeah, I think I am."

Jesse smiles and nods. "Good. I think they're gonna get started soon."

Luke lets out a deep breath. "Can't wait." He turns back to the window, seeing Annie standing outside, talking animatedly to Donna and Sophie-Ellie. "So when are you gonna pop the question?"

Jesse steps up beside him. "You wanna be my best man?"

Luke looks over to him and grins. "Sure thing. You just tell me the date and I'll be there."

A knock on the door interrupts them but Luke promises himself to pester Jesse at the reception for the date. Jensen looks inside. "They're ready for you. Evan's waiting for you too."

Luke takes a deep breath and nods. "I'm coming."

Jesse claps his back and then hurries after Jensen to take his rightful place at the rose gate, opposite Dan, who's Evan's best man. Luke waits a few seconds and then he makes his way downstairs. He's not prepared for the picture that meets him. Evan is standing at the terrace doors, dressed in a similar white tux as Luke is, and the sight just takes Luke's breath away. He's so damn beautiful and all of a sudden Luke can't wait for the wedding to be over, so that he can get Evan out of the tux.


"You too."

"Let's do this then."


Together they walk down the aisle and Luke takes his time to take it all in. His whole family is here and his friends. They're smiling at him and Luke feels the happy tears build behind his eyes. He meets all their eyes and smiles back at them. The last one he sees is his dad, who's already wiping at his eyes. He grins and his dad gives him the thumbs up and an encouraging nod.

The minister is waiting for them beneath the rose gate and Luke lets his words wash over him. He only has eyes for his beautiful soon-to-be-husband. When it's time to say their vows, Luke almost forgets what he wants to say, while listening to Evan.

"Luke, I remember the moment we first met. You had just moved to Dalton and you had just lost your father. I just wanted to wrap you up in my arms and wipe away the sad look on your face. We were only ten, but even back then I knew that I just wanted to make you happy. The first time you really smiled at me, when you hit that home run, I think that was the time I fell in love with you, because I wanted to see that smile for the rest of my life. I love you, Luke. You compliment me, make me whole. I wouldn't be who I am if it weren't for you. You are the One, Luke. And I wanna spend the rest of life showing you how much I love and adore you."

Luke is crying silently and he doesn't really know how he's going to say his vows because his voice
is barely working.

"Evan, you're my best friend, the person that knows me best. When we met, I was so sad but you put
the smile back on my face. You were always there, through good and bad, just lending your love and
support. I don't really remember the moment I fell in love with you, because I think I always was
from the moment we met. I can't imagine my life without you and I wanna make you as happy as
you make me for the rest of our lives."

Evan is smiling and there's a single tear rolling down his cheek, which Luke gently wipes away.
When they finally exchange their rings, Luke is giddy with the need to kiss Evan. Then it's time to
say 'I do' and Luke just rushes it out, making the audience and minister chuckle.

"You can kiss now."

Luke surges forward, wrapping his arms around Evan's neck tightly. "I love you so much," he
whispers against his husband's lips. "So much."

"I love you too," Evan agrees and then they're kissing, forgetting everything.

After having pictures taken, they make their way over to the pavilion where the reception is set up.
The guests applaud as soon as the DJ announces Mr. & Mr. Welling-Padalecki. The new name
makes Luke's heart speed up and he's grinning like a loon by the time Evan pulls him onto the dance
floor for the first dance.

Evan's arms fit perfectly around his body and Luke can't take the eyes of his husband, whose brown
eyes are sparkling with joy and love.


"We are. Finally."

Luke grins. "I can't believe that you planned all this on your own."

Evan looks a little offended, before grinning. "It was a butt load of work. But I liked doing it. Do
you like it?"

"Do I like it? I love it. It's everything I wished for and more."

They kiss gently, swaying to the rhythm of the song.

Annie is standing at the edge of the dance floor, the reception is in full swing, and she's watching her
brother and his new husband bouncing around to some silly song. Lily and the twins are running
circles around them and Annie laughs, when Luke almost lands on his butt when Lily bumps into him.

Sophie-Ellie is sitting at a table across from where Annie is standing and she can see her talking to Aunt Sophia, while having a protective hand draped over her belly.

An arm wraps around her waist and she leans back into Jesse's touch. "You okay?" he asks and she nods.

"Yeah. I'm happy."

"It's a beautiful wedding."

"It really is. And you," she turns around in his arms, "are so handsome as best man."

"Thank you. But you are the one looking stunning tonight. That dress is amazing."

Annie smiles. She had searched long enough for the red, satiny, strapless dress she's wearing right now and she's happy that Jesse likes it.

"You wanna dance with me?"

Annie looks at him and presses a soft kiss to his lips. "Yeah, I do."

They make their way onto the dance floor and Annie doesn't really care that there's a fast song playing right now. She just wraps her arms around Jesse's neck and lays her head on his shoulder.

Next time it will be their wedding.

Jesse lays his head against her temple and slowly they sway together. She should have known that her family wouldn't take that though, because soon enough Lily is wriggling in between, forcing them apart. Annie laughs when the twins pull her over to Luke and Evan jumping around like crazy.

She meets Jesse's eyes over her brother's shoulder and he smiles at her, sending a shiver down her spine. She doesn't really get that she could ever think there was someone else out there for her, but she's glad she came to her senses and they're here now, only one step away from getting married themselves.

"How are you feeling?"

Sophie-Ellie looks up and smiles at Aunt Sophia. "Good. I'm good."

Aunt Sophia pulls over a chair. "I'm glad you are, honey." She smiles. "Ben told me about the scholarship, that's really amazing."

"It is. But it's all him. If he hadn't have sent in my drawings, I wouldn't have gotten the scholarship."

"He really loves you."

"I love him too," Sophie-Ellie says, feeling a little defensive.
Aunt Sophia smiles softly. "I know."

"I never... we never talked about this, but are you okay with Ben... and me?" Sophie-Ellie asks, because if she doesn't do it now, she'll never be brave enough.

"Oh sweetheart, of course we're okay with you and Ben." Aunt Sophia smiles. "We couldn't wish for a better daughter-in-law."

Sophie-Ellie laughs a little. "We're not married yet."

"It's only a question of time," Aunt Sophia jokes. "But seriously, he loves you and you love him. Why wouldn't we be okay with it?"

"It's not his child."

Aunt Sophia leans forward and presses a quick kiss to Sophie-Ellie's cheek. "It might not be his child biologically, but it's his in his heart. That's all that counts for me."

"Thank you."

"You are my goddaughter, sweetie. And I love you. So I couldn't really imagine anyone better for my son." She looks up and smiles. "I'm gonna leave you two alone."

Sophie-Ellie looks up over her shoulder to see Ben standing directly behind her chair. "Hey."

"Hi." He leans down, kissing her gently. "You okay?"

"My feet hurt, but other than that, I'm great."

He laughs and takes the seat his mother has just vacated. He grabs her legs and she lets out a surprised squeal.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm massaging my girlfriend's feet. You complaining?" He starts pressing his thumb to just the right places and she shakes her head quickly.

"No, not complaining."

Ben laughs. "Good. So, is the little one behaving?"

"She's been really good. Just a kick here and there. And a few somersaults."

Ben reaches out to lay one hand on Sophie-Ellie's belly. "Hey, baby girl. We're just as excited to meet you as you are."

Sophie-Ellie looks at Ben gently. "I love it when you do that."

"What?"

"Talk to our daughter."

"Our daughter?" Ben asks, his voice a little shaky.

"If you want to."

He crashes his mouth against hers and she lets out a surprised laugh. "You really have to ask? Of
"So, how are you?"

Jared looks over to Misha and smiles. "Getting there."

"You wouldn't believe how good that sounds," Misha says and smiles.

"Thanks for everything, Mish. We wouldn't have made it without you and Sophia."

"No need to thank us. We're family, JT. In good and bad."

Jared smiles. "I know. Still..."

Misha shakes his head. "I don't wanna hear it. You and Jensen would have done the same for us."

Jared nods, because it's true, they would have done whatever they could for all their friends. "I'm just glad you're getting better."

"Me too," Jared says slowly, looking across the room where Jensen is talking to Chris. There's a smile displayed on his face and crinkles around his eyes. He looks good, relaxed and happy.

"You two are okay," Misha says and it's a statement not a question.

Jared nods. "Thank God."

"I don't think God had anything to do with it. It was just the love you two are feeling for each other." Misha smiles. "You're soulmates, JT. Made for each other."

Jared smiles. "Yeah, I know."

They watch Jensen make his way over and Misha says, "I think I'll go and ask my wife for a dance. You should do the same." He winks and then he's gone.

"Hey," Jensen says softly, sitting down next to Jared. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm good, Jen. No need to worry about me."

Jensen smiles a little. "I always worry about you. That's just who I am."

Jared leans forward, pulling Jensen into a soft kiss. "Dance with me."

Jensen pulls back a little and smiles. "It'd be my pleasure."

It's late at night and things have quietened down, so has the music and the DJ is mostly playing slow songs now. Evan and Luke are dancing, so are Annie and Jesse. Sophie-Ellie and Ben are sitting at the sidelines, holding hands and talking softly, with secret smiles on their faces. The twins are outside with their grandpas, playing catch, and Lily is practically asleep in Donna's lap.

Jared smiles at seeing his family together and happy. He lets Jensen take him onto the dance floor, wrapping his arms around his husband’s neck. They sway softly to the music and Jensen nuzzles his
neck.

"I'm so glad you're here, Jay."

"Shh," Jared soothes. "I'm not going anywhere. Not for a long time."
"You're officially in remission, Jared."

Jensen lets out the breath he's been holding since Dr. Cohen walked into the room a few minutes ago. He's shaking a little and his head is spinning. His heart is beating rapidly in his chest and he feels dizzy with joy and relief.

Jared's hand is entangled with his own and Jensen can feel his husband squeezing tightly, as if he's still waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Dr. Cohen leans forward in his chair, a smile displayed on his face. "It's over. You beat it, Jared."

"I'm cancer free?" Jared asks and Jensen can hear his voice shaking.

"You're cancer free."

"Oh god."

A sob escapes Jared's lips and Jensen's on his knees in front of his husband's chair in a second. He cups Jared's face between his hands, wiping at the tears spilling out of his eyes. Jared's been so strong; had barely shed a tear while he was treated for AML. His walls had to come crumbling down at some point.


"We did it," Jared hiccups and Jensen smiles.

"Okay, we did it." Jensen tips up Jared's head and presses a soft kiss against his lips. "We're okay."

"Can we go home now?" Jared asks and Jensen chuckles a little.

"I'm sure Dr. Cohen is okay with that."

The doctor clears his throat and Jensen looks up at him to find him watching them with a fond look on his face. "It's Matt. And I'm very much okay with you two going home."

Jensen grins and stands up, his knees protesting loudly at the quick movement. Jared bursts out laughing and Jensen shrugs. "What can I say, I'm getting old."

Jared rolls his eyes and shakes Matt's hand after he gets out of the chair. "Thank you. For everything, Matt."

Matt shakes his head. "It was all you, Jared. I only lend a helping hand."
"Still," Jared says quietly.

"I'll see you in January for you check-up, Jared," Matt says, interrupting whatever Jared wanted to say next.

Jensen shakes Matt's hand. "I make sure he'll be here. Thanks, Doc." He lays a hand against the small of Jared's back and pushes him gently towards the door. "C'mon, the kids are waiting for some good news."

Stephen is talking to another nurse when they walk down the hallway and he raises his eyebrows in question. Jensen gives him the thumbs up and he smiles broadly, clapping Jared's shoulder proudly.

"Knew you could do it, JT."

Jared smiles a little. "Thanks for everything, Stephen. I'm... thank you."

Stephen shakes his head. "Don't mention it. That's what I'm here for. I'll be seeing you in January, JT. Not before then, or I might have to kick your ass."

Jensen sees the tension drain out of Jared's shoulders. Stephen always had a way to put his husband at easy and maybe Jensen is still a little jealous about that.

"Jensen, take good care of him and yourself," Stephen holds out his hand and Jensen lets out a deep breath before he takes it.

"I will."

Jared tugs at his hand and Jensen looks over to his husband, who's smiling broadly, practically lighting up the hallway. "Let's go home, Jen."

Jensen smiles and nods, leading Jared down the hallway. The drive home is uneventful and Jensen pulls the Impala into the driveway of their house an hour later.

"We should have a BBQ or something," Jared says after Jensen stops the car. "Y'know, celebrate that we really did it."

Jensen looks over to him and reaches out, bringing their faces together. "Whatever you want, Jay. Whatever you want."

Their lips meet in a gentle kiss and Jensen pushes back all the dark thoughts. Jared's here, Jared's fine. The cancer is gone.

"It's okay, Jen."

Jensen opens his eyes and meets hazel-green ones. He nods. "You're right. It is okay. Better than okay."

"You don't need to worry anymore."

Jensen huffs out a laugh. "I will always worry about you and the kids. I wouldn't be me if I didn't."

Jared smiles, dropping a soft kiss to the corner of Jensen's mouth. "I love you."

"I love you too." Jensen smiles softly. "C'mon let's get inside."

It's early evening on a Friday afternoon and the house is buzzing with people. When they'd told the
kids that today would be the appointment at the hospital that would determine if Jared's in remission or not, all of them had said that they'd be home for dinner.

Now, the TV is running and Jensen can hear people talking in the kitchen and the living room. It feels lively and he knows he'll miss it when Annie and Jesse and Evan and Luke go back to their own houses afterwards. But then he looks over at Jared and he realizes that the only ones in the house tonight will be Lily and the twins, and all three of them sleep like rocks. So maybe it's not that bad that the older kids all have their own homes now.

"What are you thinking about?" Jared asks.

"Having you all to myself tonight," Jensen says quietly and Jared's cheeks turn red. After all these years, he still can't get over the fact that Jared's still blushes when Jensen makes any kind of sexual innuendo.

"Daddy!"

Lily is the first to notice them standing in the hall, throwing herself at Jared. He catches her and picks her up. For a second, Jensen thinks about scolding Lily. But the smile on Jared’s face at the fact that he’s finally able to pick up his baby girl again, is enough to stop Jensen. He really has to learn to cut back on the mother-henning.

"Hey, baby girl. How was your day?"

She babbles about learning how to write the letter 'S' and that her teacher was really proud when she counted to twenty without a single mistake. Since she started school in September, she is always talking about how much fun school is. Jensen wonders how long her enthusiasm will last.

Jared carries her into the kitchen and Jensen follows them. They find Annie and Sophie-Ellie there, preparing sandwiches and salad for dinner. Jensen drops kisses to both girls' cheeks and steals a tomato slice off one of the plates, which causes Annie to slap his hand away.

"Ow," he murmurs, rubbing over the stinging skin.

Sophie-Ellie laughs, rubbing over her huge belly. She's due any day now. They're practically all just waiting for her waters to break. "That's what you get for stealing, PJ."

"It's not like it isn't mine anyway," he glares playfully at them and then steals another slice.

"Hey!" Annie protests, but he avoids her slap this time.

"So what did the doctor say?" Sophie-Ellie asks, eventually.

"Why don't we take the dinner into the living room and we'll tell you all together?" Jared suggests, putting Lily down and grabbing a plate full of sandwiches.

Jensen picks up the salad bowl and follows his husband into the living room, where he finds the boys sitting in front of the TV, laughing about a new episode of The Simpsons. Jesse turns the TV off when Jensen and Jared put down the plates, and they all scramble off the floor to take their seats at the dinner table.

"Okay, before we have dinner," Jared says, when everyone's seated. "We have something to tell you." Everyone is staring at Jared with wide eyes and the tension is palpable in the air. "Your old man is officially in remission."
All of a sudden the tension seems to completely drain out of all of them and the kids are all talking at the same time. They get up and hug Jared; there may even be some happy tears. Jensen watches the scene in front of him with a mixture of joy and happiness.

When they're finally all seated again, it feels like the mood in the house is even better than before Jared announced the news.

Dinner is filled with happy, careless chatter.

Luke and Evan talk about their new jobs that they started a couple of months ago, and about thinking of moving out of the townhouse to finally have something just for them.

Sophie-Ellie talks about the art assignment she got for the week and Ben gushes about how beautiful the painting turned out. His arm is lying on the back of Sophie-Ellie's chair and Jensen can't take his eyes off their happy faces.

Annie and Jesse ask their opinions of what would be the best date for their wedding. It wasn't really a surprise when they announced their engagement a few weeks ago.

Tyler talks about the boxing club; Chuck wants him to have his first real boxing fight soon. Jensen's always filled with pride when he thinks about how much Ty loves the sport and how much he has blossomed ever since he started taking lessons.

Jamie talks about his Little League game on Sunday and Lily can't stop chattering about school.

Jensen thinks this is the perfect evening. They're all happy and together. When Jared's foot finds his beneath the table though, and when their eyes meet for a second, he knows that he'll be more than happy when they're alone in bed.

Jensen leans against the bedroom door taking a deep breath. They're finally alone. He can hear the shower running and he imagines how Jared's skin looks; all slick and wet. He grins, feeling his dick stir in his pants.

He makes his way over to the bathroom, stripping out of his clothes in the process.

The air in the bathroom is heavy with wet heat and he licks his lips, before opening the door to the shower stall and stepping inside.

Jared's body is wet and soapy. Jensen runs his fingers over the skin, making Jared look over his shoulder, grinning.

"Couldn't wait?" he asks coyly.

Jensen shakes his head and presses against his husband's back, his cock riding Jared's soapy crack. "Never can wait to touch you."

He places a kiss between Jared's shoulder blades, his hands making their way around Jared's body, wandering down his chest towards black curls and then Jared's cock. It's half hard when Jensen skims his fingertips over it.
"Jen..." Jared breathes, his head falling back to rest on Jensen's shoulder.

"Hmm," Jensen hums, wrapping his fingers around Jared's dick, stroking lightly. He runs his thumb over the head, feeling Jared buck his hips. His own cock is rock hard by now, riding Jared's crack. He takes it in one hand, while the other keeps stroking Jared lightly, and rubs it between Jared's ass cheeks, the head catching at his husband's entrance.

Jared keens, pressing back, forcing the head inside just a little.

"Shh, baby. I'm gonna take care of you. I'll make it so good, Jay. Fuck you so good, gonna feel me for days."

"Please, Jensen..."

"You want it, don't you? Can't wait for me to push inside and make you mine again and again. You're mine, Jay," he growls, sinking his teeth into Jared's shoulder muscles.

"Yours, Jen. Just please..."

Jensen takes his hands away and Jared moans at the loss. He doesn't have lube here, but the shower gel has always done a good enough job. He squirts some of it on his fingers and brings them down to Jared's butt. He parts the cheeks, skimming his fingers over the furled muscle, making Jared beg and push his hips back.

It's tight and hot and perfect when he pushes his first finger inside. Water is raining down on them and Jensen licks it off Jared's back.

"Oh god, Jen... fuck, Jesus, please..."

Jared's already reduced to a begging mess and Jensen hasn't even really started yet. It's been too long and he wants to take his time. The hand jobs over the last few weeks haven't been enough, but Jensen had been hesitant to go any further, until Jared was stronger again.

"Fuck, Jay... you feel so good. So tight."

He adds a second finger, rolling Jared's balls in his other hand. His husband is trembling and Jensen brushes his fingertips against his sweet spot, making him cry out.

"Now, Jen. I'm ready. I need you inside now."

Jensen chuckles a little, adding a third finger, feeling Jared relax around him. He strokes the soft walls, pulling his fingers out slowly, before pushing in even slower.

"Fuck, stop teasing. Please Jen..."

Jensen's cock is rock hard and leaking and he knows that he could easily come from seeing his fingers disappear into Jared's body. But he also knows he doesn't want that. He pulls his fingers out and positions his cock, pushing in one hard thrust.

"Holy..." Jared curses loudly, his body clamping down on Jensen's cock, providing delicious friction that feels a lot like sweet torture.

He puts his hands on Jared's hips and pulls out almost completely, letting his head catch at the rim. His hips shoot forward, burying his cock deep into Jared's body again. It's too much and not enough at the same time. He picks up the pace, fucking into Jared hard and deep.
Jared's head falls back and Jensen sucks a bruise to his neck. "C'mon, Jay. Get yourself off for me. Wanna feel you come."

Jared brings his hand down to his own cock, while Jensen holds him up with one arm. It doesn't take long for Jensen to feel Jared come, his muscles squeezing him so tightly that he knows he won't last another minute. He comes with a cry, shooting his release into Jared's body.

They stand like this, still connected so intimately, for a long time, until their panting quiets down and Jensen's soft dick slips out of Jared's body. Then Jensen towels both of them off and they make their way over to their bed.

It doesn't take long for Jensen to fall asleep, sated and with a healthy Jared in his arms.

"Ben?"

He groans, burying deeper into the pillow. Sophie-Ellie can't really expect him to get up when it's still dark outside and also that it's a Saturday.

"Ben, love. It's time."

That gets him up like nothing else. He jerks up in bed, staring at her with huge eyes. "You sure?" She smiles and nods. "Holy shit... uhm... I need..." He scrambles out of the bed, almost falling over when he tries to jump into his pants. "Where's your bag?" He looks around frantically. "Damn, I know I put it somewhere here."

"Ben, baby. Could you calm down please?"

He looks up at her, seeing the deep frown on her face. "You okay?" he asks, rushing over to her. She grunts, holding her belly. "Hurts."

"We'll get you to the hospital." Finally he finds the bag at the front door. "Hah, I knew I put it here somewhere." He wraps her arm around his shoulder and supports her down the stairs. "Okay?"

She nods. "Better, thanks. Can you tell Dad and PJ?"

Ben nods and takes Sophie-Ellie over to the car. "Just take a seat. I'll be back in a sec." He storms back to the house and upstairs. He doesn't even consider knocking; he just jerks the bedroom door open and says, "Sophie-Ellie is having the baby."

Jensen lifts his head, blinking. "We're right behind you," he says. "Just get her to the hospital."

Ben nods and rushes back down. Sophie-Ellie is letting out puffs of breath in the car and Ben just knows that it's another contraction. He makes the breathing noise they showed them in the prenatal course they went to. Sophie-Ellie glares at him and he shuts up.

"Just drive," she grits out and he starts the car.

The hospital is close by and Ben parks just in front of the entrance door, ignoring the glare of the
security guard. He runs around the car and helps Sophie-Ellie outside. A nurse must have seen them, because she's rushing outside with a wheelchair.

That's when her water breaks.

"Sweetheart, tell me how far apart the contractions are coming?" the nurse asks.

"Two minutes or so," Sophie-Ellie pants.

"Okay. We'll get you set up in the delivery room." She turns back to Ben. "And you, young man, can take that car to one of the parking spaces."

"But..." he starts to protest, not wanting to let Sophie-Ellie out of his sight.

"It's okay, Ben," she says. "Just hurry."

He nods and turns back to the car. Ten minutes later, he's running through the hospital towards the delivery room. Jared and Jensen are right behind him. A nurse is waiting for him and shoos him into the room. He throws a look over his shoulder and just catches Jared and Jensen giving him the thumbs up.

Sophie-Ellie is already all set up and Ben sits down next to her, grabbing her hand. She looks over at him. "Don't go."

"Not going anywhere," he promises.

It's over in a blur. Once Dr. Daugherty enters the room, Ben doesn't really grasp anything at all, until the little bundle is lying in Sophie-Ellie's arms. The baby is red and wrinkled, and yet she's the most beautiful baby Ben's ever seen.

Sophie-Ellie is looking up at him in awe. "She's beautiful."

"You did good," Ben says, feeling happy tears burning behind his eyes. He wipes sweaty strands of hair out of Sophie-Ellie's face and places a kiss to her forehead. "You did real good."

"What's her name?" the nurse asks.


Ben almost falls from his chair when he hears the last name Sophie-Ellie's just said, but she just looks at him with so much love in her eyes. He leans forward. "I love you," he whispers. "And you too, Hope." He places a gentle kiss to the baby's forehead and the girl yawns broadly, making him laugh.

Evan follows Luke down the hallway, carrying a huge teddy bear. He declared Luke insane when he bought the thing, because the bear is almost as big as he is and the baby will probably be scared to death by the thing. But Luke just looked at Evan with his patent puppy-dog look and he'd won.

So now Evan is carrying the huge thing down the hall, hoping Sophie-Ellie and Ben won't take his
head off for bringing it here.

The room they put Sophie-Ellie in is almost empty, except for Ben and Sophie-Ellie. Evan grins at them and puts the huge bear in a chair, walking over to Sophie-Ellie, kissing her cheek.

"Congrats," he whispers, when he sees that the little one is sleeping in Ben's arms.

"Thank you," she says quietly. "But what's this?" She points at the huge bear.

"You have to ask your brother that."

Sophie-Ellie laughs a little and looks pointedly at Luke. "What?" he asks defiantly. "You can't expect me to not buy this when my sister is having the most beautiful baby girl in the world."

He coos over her and when Ben puts her down into his arms, Luke beams at Evan. "Look, she's so beautiful."


Sophie-Ellie rolls her eyes. "Sweet talker."

Evan chuckles. "You did good, Sophie."

"Thanks."

Luke is still completely entranced with Hope and Evan smiles fondly at his husband. It still feels new, even though they've been married for four months now.

"So when are you gonna have one of your own?"


"Yeah, I think so too. Too bad I have to give this little one back."

Evan laughs. "We can have our own, y'know. No need to steal one."

Luke hands Hope back to Ben and turns in Evan's arms. "Maybe we should go home and start practicing."

Evan swallows a groan when Luke rubs against him, subtly. "Maybe we should."

Ben and Sophie-Ellie's laughter follows them out of the room and down the hall.

"Hope's such gorgeous baby," Annie says and Jesse looks up from where he's reading the newspaper on the couch. He smiles at the mooney look on his fiancée's face.

"Sophie-Ellie did good. She looks just like her," he agrees, reaching out for Annie and pulling her towards him.
She comes willingly, sitting down on his lap, straddling his hips. "Thank God," Annie says wholeheartedly.

Jesse snorts, wrapping his arms around her waist. He pulls her down and captures her lips in a sweet kiss. "I can't wait to have a little girl running around here that looks just like you."

Annie grins. "What if I'd rather have a handsome boy that looks like you?"

"Oh god," Jesse groans in fake horror. "You really want a boy that always has grease beneath his fingernails and oil on his clothes?"

"I want to have a boy that has your eyes," Annie says softly. "And your smile. He'd break so many hearts."

"I didn't," Jesse says. "Because I found you. The moment I saw you, I was done for."

Annie shakes her head. "You never told me that."

"I don't think I realized it then, but my life changed the moment you walked into my life," Jesse says, pushing her hair out of her face. "I love you, Bella. There's no one else for me and I knew that the first time I kissed you."

Annie leans her forehead against his. "I wish I'd been so confident. We could have been engaged for a lot longer."

Jesse smiles and shakes his head a little. "Don't... no regrets, okay? We're here now, together and happy. That's all that counts."

"We're getting married too," Annie says.

"That we are. So see, it all worked out in the end," Jesse replies.

It's the last weekend in October and the weather is still beautiful. The sky is blue and it's nice and warm. It's like it knew that they had life to celebrate.

Jared walks out back, looking over the long table they'd put up for their guests. Lily and the twins are chasing Sadie and Harley through the backyard, while Jensen is checking the grill.

A door creaks and Jared looks up to see Sophie-Ellie making her way down the stairs of the garage apartment. He smiles, when she walks over to him and puts the sleeping bundle into his arms.

"How's my granddaughter today?" he asks and Sophie-Ellie scowls at him.

"Sleeping blissfully; in contrast to her mother, who didn't close an eye last night."

Jared smiles softly and presses a kiss to his daughter's temple. "Welcome to parenthood."

She huffs out a breath. "I'm gonna help Annie with the salads, if I don't fall over."

Jared laughs and rocks Hope in his arms a little. "Your mom's grumpy, princess. You should really
let her get some sleep tonight." Hope yawns, but keeps her eyes tightly shut. Jared rubs his finger gently over her chubby cheeks. "Aren't you just the most beautiful baby girl?" he coos.

"Daddy?" He looks up and sees Lily running over to him.

"Hey, sweetheart. What's up?"

"Can I hold her? I'll be really careful."

"Sure. Come here and sit." Lily sits down on one of the chairs and Jared hands her the baby, showing how to hold her arms to support Hope's head. "Careful now."

"Yes, Daddy," Lily says seriously. She rocks Hope gently and Jared smiles at the picture. "Why is she always asleep, Daddy?"

"Babies sleep a lot, Lily. She'll be awake a lot more the older she gets."

"Did I sleep a lot?"

"Oh yes," Jensen says, ruffling his daughter's hair. "But you've made up for it in the last few years."

Jared laughs, but Lily just frowns, confused.

The yard gate opens and Annie and Jesse walk inside. Lily squirms on her chair and Jared takes Hope back again, so that his daughter can run and greet her older sister. Jesse spins her around and then throws her over his shoulder making her squeal in delight.

"Ty, Jamie, go and wash up please," Jensen calls. "We'll have lunch soon." The twins run past them and Jensen calls, "No running in the house!" He lets out a deep breath and looks at Jared. "Jeez, how many times do I have to say that?"

Jared laughs and takes a step closer to his husband. "A lot, Jen. A lot."

Jensen rolls his eyes and then kisses first Jared and then Hope gently. "We have a beautiful grandchild." Jared grins and holds her out for Jensen, who takes her carefully. "She has your nose," Jensen says.

"Oh dear, I hope not," Jared laughs, running a hand through his short hair. It started growing again a few weeks ago and Jared can't help but run his hand through it a lot. Jensen always watches him fondly and he knows that Jensen's waiting for his hair to be long enough again to entangle his fingers in it.

"You're gorgeous, Jay."

Jared rolls his eyes. "You have to say that. You're my husband." He winks at Jensen, who shakes his head fondly.

The yard gate opens again, revealing Sophia and Misha, followed by Chris and Steve, and Mike and Tom. They walk over to greet them and Jared hands over Hope to her grandmother, seeing the pride in Sophia's eyes.

They're still talking to their friends, when Donna and JD, and Angie and Matthew walk into the yard, loudly greeted by their grandchildren. Luke and Evan are the last to come, with Sandy, Alexis and Adam.

Soon enough, everyone is seated and Jensen's handing out delicious smelling steaks. Jared watches
his family and friends with gratefulness. Ten months ago it looked like he wouldn't get the chance to see his family together and happy again.

But now he's here and he's healthy, and he's grateful for that. He meets Jensen's eyes over the heads of their guests and he knows that Jensen's just as grateful as he is. Making his way over to his husband, he is met with open arms.

"I love you," he whispers and Jensen kisses him softly.

The End

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!