Like a Small Boat

by compo67

Summary

Former small town bookstore clerk Jared Padalecki is not in Kansas anymore. He’s engaged to Hollywood actor Jensen Ackles, due to start filming another box office hit. After a chaotic start to the year, they’ve settled in the heart of downtown Austin—their own house of gold.

However, the start of the summer isn’t all water skiing and barbeque. Along with starting college, volunteering at the Center, and learning how to take care of himself at home and in front of the press, can Jared navigate the transition from sleepy Smithville to hip and trendy Austin?
Welcome!

This is the third part to the Photo Op Series. You need to read "They Met at the Photo Op Booth" first, then "House of Gold" to understand this fic. :D

Please read the tags, they will be changing as I add to this. Special thanks to rie and mcd for being wonderful betas.

Ready?! Here we go!
The floor in the condo has seen its fair share of bare feet.

Sock feet, wet feet, sandy feet, muddy feet, tired feet, happy feet, and sometimes, sad feet—every kind of feet.

But these new feet?

They hardly stay on the ground for more than ten minutes at a time. The floor doesn’t understand them. How do they get anything done? They don’t. How do they get anywhere? They don’t. How do they know which floorboards squeak and which ones groan? They don’t. At least, not yet.
Most of what this floor has seen of its new owners are strange body parts, limbs it never witnessed so much with its previous owners. The floor catches glimpses of the two pairs of feet from time to time, but this is often from the third floor in the master bedroom, from the edge of a giant, cloudlike bed. Even then, the feet that stick out are either constantly moving or still as mud—never anything in between.

Well, that’s not entirely true. One morning, before the sun was up, the floor did see one foot nudge another, and rub it until the owner of that first foot snorted awake.

As the cardboard boxes were emptied and put away, as the walls were painted and people marched in and out with furniture, the floor thought its new owners would finally calm down and enjoy their new residence outside of their room. Maybe they would venture out into the world and come back with boots on, or hiking shoes, or tennis shoes. Maybe they’d return from a walk in plain sneakers, trailing over the floor with warm soles heated by the sun and pavement in May.

Except—that never truly happened.

The feet were gone for a few days at the end of May and returned somewhat upset. The older pair of feet—the floor can always tell these details—was more bothered than the younger pair. With this bubbling storm of emotions, the floor was certain that its new owners would utilize the floor in other sections of the condo for once.

Instead, the floor was privy to four knees pressed down on the floorboards of the master bedroom, right next to the bed. The amount of volatile rocking back and forth was incredibly unsettling.

This is no proper way to get to know new owners.

Throughout the night the floor will creak and groan in an attempt to get their attention. It begs to know anything substantial about these feet. All it knows are extremes, how can it establish a baseline to know them by? How fast do they usually walk? How do they walk when they’re happy? Does the older one get upset often? Does the young pair of feet always walk with a bounce or is that new? When they run through the hallways in the morning and down the stairs to the kitchen, is it because they slept past the alarm or because they always have some place to be?

All the jolting and thundering from the master bedroom can’t be all there is to know. It just can’t be. But… what if it is? What if this continues? What if this is all the new owners do, day after day?

What if, after this abuse, the floor begins to give way because of their activities? It’s not fair. It’s only a floor. Yes, it’s sturdy, but even the floor has its limits. Besides, human bones are much more fragile than floors. Don’t they know they could hurt their knees? It can’t be condoning such reckless behavior. Someone has to put a stop to this.

What could they possibly be doing—

“Jensen!”

“Huh? What? I’m up. I’m up.”

“You fell asleep! I was telling a story.”

“…mmph yuh huh.”

“Did you hear any of my story?”

“…yes. But clearly I’ve failed you.”
“What?”

Jensen weakly reaches out with his left hand, splayed out on their bed, lying down on his stomach. “C’ mere,” he mutters into a pillow.

It might be his pillow; it could be Jared’s pillow.

They’ve lost track this morning. All Jared sees is a hand searching for contact, prompting him to sigh. Very, very gingerly, he starts to lean his face into the hand.

Seconds before contact occurs, Jensen rumbles out his last words.

“Four orgasms in ninety minutes—Jay, you shouldn’t be capable of speech. I shouldn’t be capable of speech.”

If Jensen hadn’t hired professional movers and an interior decorator to move them into the condo, Jared knows—without a doubt—that they would still be sleeping on a nest of blankets on the floor. Without the help and motivation of other people, their asses would be doomed to use boxes of books as makeshift furniture and eating takeout for every meal. An unfortunate series of events led to the air mattress popping two weeks after they bought it. Apparently, air beds are not reliable platforms on which to have sex, especially when both parties involved are six feet tall.

In two days, Jared starts summer classes. After that, it’s only three weeks until Jensen flies out to Vancouver to start reading and pre-production for his next project.

March was filled with good intentions to be productive and efficient. There was a long list of things to do—all the usual chores and errands associated with moving—plus the added task of merging things from Jensen’s condo in Los Angeles and the house in Miami. When the fundraiser for the Center closed, Jensen treated to an unforgettable trip to Las Vegas for a convention, which once more had them seeing the inside of their hotel suite more than the actual city.

Jared spent a weekend in and out of a particular costume, directed by an arousal so fierce it has carried on month to month with no end in sight.

Though he’s happy to know that all it takes is some eyeliner, a certain look, and the flip of his hair to make Jensen forget his name or where he is.

April and May saw some slight increase in productivity. After Vegas they concentrated on moving in, adjusting to Austin, getting the feel for living in a new space, and shuffling back and forth to different interviews and press functions. Of course, this was all easier planned out and scheduled by Carrie, Jensen’s assistant, than actually done. Jared still can’t tie his own tie—that’s his fiancé’s job—and he hasn’t the slightest clue how to polish dress shoes. One redeeming aspect of these functions was that three out of five of those events were Jared’s.

Who needs to tie their own tie anyway, when Jensen Ackles is more than happy to do it for you?

June first marked Jared’s official appointment to the Center’s Youth Advisory and Advocacy Board.

Today, Saturday, June third, the fancy digital clock on Jensen’s nightstand reads noon and Jared has yet to leave their bed for more than five minutes. Not that he really wants to leave for any extended period of time; their activities this morning have left him dreading the act of walking.

Their final week of true home together time has been the stuff of dreams. Every morning, Jared wakes up to Jensen, and every night he falls asleep to Jensen. It’s a routine they’ve sunk their teeth into.
And truth be told, regardless of the chaos involved with moving in together, they haven’t had their feet on the ground in months.

It’s Saturday morning and there is mischief around the corner. In a few short hours they’ll be playing hosts for the first official time since arriving in Austin with house keys and change of address forms.

Jared isn’t surprised that it’s taken them three months for guests to formally come over. Jensen frequently, actively reminds Jared of multiple orgasms and mattress warranties. He’s doing it now, smirking at Jared from his pillow, all freckles and boyish charm as he reaches out to card through Jared’s hair.

Jared continues to lean in without too much question or movement. He might be a little sore but…

“JENSEN!”

Jared’s face meets Jensen’s hand.

“There’s come on your hand! Now it’s… pffft… pffffbt… all over my… are you laughing?! Oh, hell no. This is worse than in my belly button—turn over right now!”

Jensen Ackles? Dead man.

“Jesus, you know what sounds good right now? A two mile run!”

“No, you’re not getting out of this, Jensen! You smeared it all over me! Oh god, this is so gross!”

“You didn’t complain this much last night…”

“It wasn’t half dry!”

“Jay, I said I was sorry about the belly button thing.”

“You did not!”

“Well, sweetheart, sometimes… you know… can’t help the splatter…”

“JENSEN.”

The dead man attempts to haphazardly shuffle towards the doorway, foolishly thinking he’s capable of escape. If the floor breaks under Jensen’s naked, freckled ass, Jared wouldn’t blame the floor one bit.

Two steps away from the bed, howling in laughter, Jensen trips on a pair of his own jeans.

Startled, he wipes out, ass over kettle, a mess of flailing arms and wobbly legs.

He’s winded for ten seconds before he starts laughing again.

Jared throws a pillow at him and swears to Texas that Jensen will pay for what he just did. There’s no way in hell Jensen’s getting away with this or the bellybutton incident. No sir. Jensen can sit on the floor for the rest of his life. He can stay that way, with his legs spread out, thighs looking muscular and firm, cock heavy and half hard, and his tongue peeking out a little as he grins.

…and as he grins wide enough to make the edges of his eyes crinkle.

Twenty minutes later, they have sex on the floor.
Might as well give the floor something else to complain about.
Chapter 2

The phrasing behind invitations is something Jared never gave too much thought to.

One of his first tasks as a member of the Youth Advocacy and Advisory Board is to plan a Summer Social. The Center typically holds a social in early June, however, this year, they’ve pushed it back to the beginning of August. Jared has been trusted with drafting the invitations to donors who will hopefully attend alongside the youth. The donors will then, ideally, shovel out boat loads of money to combine with the funds the music video and crowdsourcing have already raised.

Overall, the end goal remains expanding the Center’s shelter from ten beds to fifty.

Stretching the space seems simple at first—just add more beds.

But there are, as Jared has rapidly discovered, infinitely more pieces to the puzzle.

A shelter consisting of forty beds or more is subject to different zoning restrictions and city codes. The city planner’s hands are tied here: add more beds and the Center will require a larger space. Renovating their current square footage will not meet these standards. Expansion or the creation of an entirely new building is the only way to go. Fortunately, the Center has room on the lot for an expansion. Jared thought that four hundred thousand dollars would go a long way towards adding a new wing.

The actual cost—even after government assistance, tax breaks, and one anonymous private donor—haunts Jared. He’ll wake up in the middle of the night and there it’ll be: all those zeroes.

Two point two million dollars.

$2,200,000.

Literally ten thousand paychecks from Mayhue’s—hell, eight years’ worth of what Mayhue’s actually brings in every year. And those would have to be very good years.

It’s not that Jared is completely naïve. He knows how much supplies and construction cost for a house. He’s sent the check to the bank for his momma’s mortgage multiple times before, and he’s covered utilities with his own money. People need to be paid, checks must be sent, and due dates cannot be neglected. From an early age, Jared was aware of Sherri’s system: she paid four bills on her first paycheck of the month and three smaller ones with the second. Single motherhood left little room for the budget to go unbalanced.

Building a shelter is an entirely different experience.

After the cost of the materials, there’s labor, permits, taxes, and a whole bunch of other expenses that have never occurred to Jared in his almost nineteen years of life. Why does the building require its own interior designer? Couldn’t the architect they will inevitably hire take care of that? An entire team of people must be hired and city codes strictly followed; that’s not even considering what to do after the building is finished. For every ten youth that stay in the shelter, there must be two people on staff at all times—not to mention case managers to handle short and long term aid, plus the cost of supplies to continuously run the shelter.

Every time Jared runs through this list in his head, the world narrows and his blood pressure rises.

How’s the shelter going to sustain itself once it’s open? And for years after that? How does the
Center operate now, when most of the programs Jared utilized were always free?

On top of all of this—how is he going to handle community college? And then how’s he going to pay for whatever university he transfers to afterwards? Oh, and of course, how will he juggle his relationship with Jensen, their wedding, his in-laws, his other mother, their friends, and chores around the house?

Will the world end if he leaves a sink full of dirty dishes?

Did he turn on the dishwasher last night like Jensen asked him or did he think he did it?

Can the paparazzi that follow him and Jensen around Home Depot and Whataburger tell that Jared’s clothes are a little wrinkly because he can’t figure out the settings on the dryer? The dryer is so high-tech it doesn’t even say “start,” so who can blame him? And sometimes—okay, every Friday—his momma has to come over and show him how to work the dishwasher because he hasn’t figured it out and Jensen would rather use a paper plate or eat over the sink than use a dish. But last night they ran out of paper plates and actual plates so something had to be done.

“Sweetheart.”

Speaking of Mr. Paper Plate, Jared looks up.

There’s his fiancé, standing in front of a meat smoker, wearing nothing but black swim trunks and a pair of aviator sunglasses.

Oh, and a smile.

A smile so wide it eclipses the sun in Austin on an afternoon in June without a cloud in the sky.

“There he is,” Jensen says, shaking his head. “Thought I lost you. You sure this is gonna be enough?”

Once Jared managed to escape Jensen’s hands while on the floor, then again in the shower, he tossed on his red swim trunks and a pair of flip flops. He hobbled outside at around one thirty to start setting up. Closer to two, Jensen joined in; to punish his tardiness, Jared banished Jensen to checking on the smoker. It hurt to shoo Jensen away, but at least his hands were kept busy.

“I think you bought enough food to choke a horse,” Jared replies, dragging around lawn chairs.

“You know there’s only five of them and two of us, right?” With the lawn chairs rearranged to a group friendly setting, Jared begins filling water balloons, standing in the grass, cool water from the hose splashing over his toes every now and then.

The smoker happens to be one of the first permanent additions to their residence.

Before they bought couches, Jensen bought the smoker.

Technically, as Jensen has pointed out several times, the contraption is a combination grill and smoker. The left side grills while the right side smokes. Jared just knows that the left side produces hamburgers and hotdogs within minutes and the right side produces mountains of meat after endless hours underneath the mysterious black lid.

Similar to the espresso machine, Jared doesn’t dare touch the smoker. Black, shiny, and imposing with its various dials and doors, it is clearly Jensen’s toy. The day it was installed Jensen nearly shoved the delivery men down to test it out.
For a whole week in April they ate nothing but steak and steak and more steak until Jared begged Jensen to think about their cholesterol. Sure, they’re Texan, but they’re not immortal.

Jensen steps over from the smoker to the grass. He’s also barefoot, a preferred state of being in this house. The heat from the sun-soaked patio doesn’t bother either of them. Peering over Jared’s shoulder, Jensen eyes the smoker and smacks a kiss to Jared’s cheek.

In a happy rumble, Jensen murmurs, “Today is all about fun, Jay. Remember that.”

Jared sighs, but smiles. “I know, I know. I just… got a lot on my mind.”

“Ain’t nothin’ to worry about now, sweetheart.” One freckled hand splies over the small of Jared’s back, rubbing calming circles, yet hovering dangerously close to his ass. Delicious, tempting low tones purr into his ear. “We got the whole day, meat on the flame, a cooler full of ice, and some time to kill before your friends get here.”

Bold fingertips press half an inch above the swell of Jared’s ass.

With a huff, Jared bumps his hips back, knocking the intrusive hand away. “Jen, you promised.”

Growling, Jensen nips at Jared’s ear—the likes of which send a shiver down Jared’s spine. “I agreed to nothin’, sweetheart.”

Surely, Jensen didn’t promise a thing.

Jared’s more than a little bit glad for it.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Austin is the land of breakfast burritos, barbeque, and bats.

Jensen bought Jared season passes to the tours under the Congress Bridge. Jared has already been six times—all of them with Jensen in tow.

Every time Jared has climbed into the Audi, he’s hardly been able to contain his excitement.

In the past three months, their adventures through the great state of Texas have inspired uncontrollable bursts of laughter, infinite winks, elbow nudges, knee bumps, and sloppy, silly spontaneous kisses.

From Dallas to Del Rio, up to Amarillo, Jared has been practically dancing in the streets.

No matter how much fun they have speeding down the highway or standing in line at Franklin’s, their days snake back to the fundamentals.

Three months isn’t long enough to truly move into any place, especially when both occupants lead busy lives. Bit by bit, they’ve moved into the condo, hauling boxes inside, spreading out and settling in. With the rooms painted and the bare basics of their home set up, small but important accents have made their way into everyday life. There’s the porcelain pitcher in the shape of a rooster that Jared brought from his momma’s; he serves lemonade from it daily. Sometimes he’ll switch out to sweet tea. Jensen had the interior decorator stock their kitchen with futuristic gadgets, including a Kitchen Aid mixer, but Jared finds himself using the wooden spoons and hand mixer Sherri packed up for him from her own kitchen.

In the bathroom, Jensen’s Calvin Klein robe, threadbare and well-loved, hangs on the back of the door.

Out in the living room, over one of the large hickory leather couches, Jensen brought over one of the crochet blankets from the treehouse at the ranch. Bright red with cerulean flowers throughout, the blanket adds color and comfort.

On top of the custom oak table in the dining room that seats eight, Jensen placed candles from his Nana, which she sent over before heading to London in the beginning of May. Jared has yet to meet her in person, but he’s sent her pictures in the mail of her candles proudly displayed.

In the wet bar there are ridiculous mementos Jensen kept from their first few dates. Receipts, napkins from the restaurants they went to, sheets of stationary from the hotels they stayed at, and Jared’s old name tag from Mayhue’s.

All the magnets from the house in Miami have made it here. They share the space with a white board Jared bought for a dollar. It’ll have their schedules written out on it soon enough, but for now, it’s filled with nonsense and notes Jared would blush if his mother saw.

Upstairs, their bedroom holds one of Jared’s most prized possessions. He acquired it on his final day in Smithville.

Carefully preserved in a simple black frame, rests a clear black and white picture of a Smithville
institution at its peak, fully operational and packed on a Saturday night. A Fistful of Dollars was showing that evening. Every light on the marquee was brilliant, lit up like fireworks. And above that were two words blazing in neon, which must have shone in dazzling shades of gold, ruby, emerald, and amethyst:

The Flyer.

Mr. Mayhue presented this gift to Jared as a thank you for his hard work.

Jared asked Jensen to hang it above their bed.

Aside from their phone chargers and wallets, a few other items have made their way near their bed lately, like magazines and books, maps and cheesy travel brochures from Lubbock. Jensen’s nightstand is much more cluttered, holding eye drops, lotion, whatever watch he wore that day, and a lanyard Jared bought him from Austin Community College.

Though it seems like the nightstand isn’t the only place Jensen keeps things.

Like travel-sized bottles of lube.

“Where’d you get that?” Jared asks, half laughing, half moaning. “Jen you just pulled that out of…”

“A man has his secrets, sweetheart,” Jensen rumbles into the nape of Jared’s neck. His hips tilt forward, their cocks press together, and Jared can no longer remember words or what words sound like. The gasp he surrenders meets a throaty growl.

Instinctively, Jared’s legs spread open. Fucking Pavlovian response.

No matter how far away they’ve driven this summer to see Cadillacs buried in the sand, their bed remains Jared’s favorite place of all. Bed isn’t just bed with Jensen. It’s more home to them than any part of the space they share. Bed is where Jensen frequently wakes Jared up and declares, full Southern drawl let loose, that he’s made breakfast, lunch will be delivered, and dinner is leftovers because they’re not leaving the house today, not for one second.

Bed is where Jared finds himself now, killing time and being blown.

Gently laid back against a nest of down pillows, Jared watches his cock disappear past pink, plush lips.

Clear emerald eyes look up at him reflecting nothing but love and intimate adoration.

Then Jensen does that thing.

He pops off—bastard that he is—and smacks wet, sloppy kisses on the insides of Jared’s thighs. Teeth scrape against sensitive flesh, followed by the scratch and burn of wild ginger stubble. Kitten licks from an expert tongue lap over marks that seem permanent. Every night, Jensen settles between Jared’s legs, just like this.

Jared chose a calming shade of green called Pear for their room. The shade almost exactly matches Jensen’s eyes when he’s like this—breathless, hungry, and ambitious.

The bay window on the right side of the bed spreads the afternoon sun over shapely muscles and stretches of freckles that go on for miles. Buttermilk sunlight draws out the highlights in short, tawny
hair, the blush to angled cheeks, and one full, luscious smirk.

Long eyelashes do nothing to cover the mischief about to take place.

“Rules,” Jensen murmurs. His mouth hovers a fraction of an inch above the leaking, flushed tip of Jared’s cock. Jared shivers. Jensen continues. “Your eyes don’t leave the mirrors.”

Mirrors?

Realization sets in with one glance over freckled, tanned shoulders.

Three adjustable body-length mirrors sit strategically placed around their room. The one closest to their bed provides a high-angled view of every movement. Not only can Jared feel Jensen’s hands roaming down his body, under his hips to cup his ass and give a rough grope—he can see it at the same time. Excitement blasts through Jared, pumping blood to his cock and fueling a rush to his head. Never mind that he has no idea how Jensen got those mirrors, where they came from, or how he hadn’t noticed them when they tumbled into the room.

His hands dig into the cool, silky, flint sheets Jensen chose the first week they transitioned from the air bed to an actual bed.

Obedient, Jared watches their movements in the mirrors.

Holy fuck, how have they not done this before?

Every shift, every thrust, every grind-more-yes reveals itself to Jared in sleek surfaces times three. He stares at the sight of the sheets rustling, the mattress dipping, and Jensen slicking himself up. The tip of Jensen’s cock, flushed and glossy, nudges against pink muscle still open enough from earlier that the second Jensen pushes forward, Jared takes him without any issue.

There is that drag and scorching burn—friction and pressure—all without pain and all with deep, writhing pleasure.

Inch by inch, Jared watches his hips tilt up and Jensen’s thighs spread to accommodate the angle. He lets out a gasp the second he feels and sees Jensen bury himself to the hilt. The heavy, twitching weight stretching him open and filling him up causes his own cock to swell in response. Having Jensen here, right here, always feels so good. Better than good. But his mind can’t fathom more accurate descriptors. As soon as Jensen rests his hips against Jared’s, his hands and mouth begin their own tortuous advances.

Firm, commanding fingers flutter across Jared’s chest, skimming over the peaks of his nipples and landing across his bottom lip. Sparks of pleasure dance from his lip, settling in the space he makes inside for Jensen.

For a full minute, Jared’s eyes close.

Succulent, sultry kisses draw out every kind of noise from the back of his throat and the caverns of his lungs. His legs rest over Jensen’s hips and he alternates his own touch—up and down one broad, freckled back, scratching lightly, and feathering up and up to play with tawny hair at a longer length than usual.

And then Jensen moves.

“Watch.”
One word, one command, one overwhelming demand.

The instant Jared sees it happen, his body blazes.

Jensen lifts his hips, pulling out halfway. The greedy pink muscle around it stretches, but it also attempts to draw Jensen back in, voracious for more, demanding to be stuffed and fucked to the brim.

Their lips slip and slide together. Jensen kisses him rough once, twice, three times—then his mouth seals over this intoxicating spot on Jared’s exposed neck. Teeth. Beard. Lips. The rumbles of groans and moans from a chest dotted with freckles highlighted by Austin sunlight.

Overcome, Jared shouts out.

“Fuck!”

And that’s exactly what Jensen does.

Jared stares at the mirror to his right. There’s the round, pert shape to Jensen’s ass, the outlines of his powerful thighs, and the ripple of the muscles in his back. A sheen of sweat provides an accent to everything and a coat between the rise and fall of their bodies.

Jensen lifts his hips up.

Exhale.

Jensen slams his hips down.

Over and over again, he fucks Jared at a breakneck pace, causing the headboard to quake and Jared’s legs to spread open. He accepts every plunge, every deep thrust, watching Jensen pound into him onetwothreeonetwothree…

Bearing down, Jensen applies steady, heady pressure against one bundle of nerves. Jared clenches around the swollen, twitching cock, and his left leg bucks. This time, he closes his eyes, squeezed shut so he can focus on the feeling—just the feeling of Jensen driving into him.

Open eyes once more yield a flawless portrait of Jensen’s ass.

With their hips fused together, Jensen swivels, rocking himself from side to side, fucking Jared in tight, rough circles. All Jared can do is react, his eyes flickering from the mirrors to the man himself. Their eyes meet for a split second—evocative and intense.

Before Jared can react, he’s being flipped onto his stomach and knees.

Gasping, he clutches the sheets underneath him as Jensen lines their hips up and fucks him from behind. This view—it’s a beautiful thing.

It’s all Jensen and his hands gripping Jared’s ass, slapping it to watch the bounce of it, pulling Jared back to get them as close as possible and closer still. It’s all Jared hanging onto the bed for dear life, his hair a mess and his face as red as ripe watermelon, but the filthiest, most desperate moans exiting his panting mouth. It’s all trim, tight abdomen, leading up to strapping arms, finished with the look on Jensen’s face like he’s died and gone to heaven.

It’s the clench, claw, and clutch of them. The squeeze, smack, thump, thrust, and fucking crush.

“Jen!”
Bucking, Jared tosses his head back.

He arches up, angling his hips until Jensen fucks into him uninhibited and wild.

Jared starts to come untouched, his cock twitching as it hangs heavy beneath him, but he finishes in the palm of Jensen’s rough, steady hand, making a mess of the sheets. Sticky, thick stripes of come spurt out, coating dominating fingers that wring forth every last drop.

Panting and shuddering, Jared forces his eyes to remain open and focused on the mirrors instead of sinking into his usual post-orgasmic haze.

The sight of Jensen coming—reflected in three, long, perfectly angled mirrors, decimates any and all lucid thought in Jared’s head. He comes again, this time completely untouched, pushing his ass back into the possessive, unshakable grip of Jensen’s hands. Come fills him; Jensen’s mouth forms a perfect, plush, pink O.

And for a split second, their eyes meet in the mirrors.

All Jared can do is inhale—sharp and desperate.

He listens to his body, his mind, and Jensen.

“Sweetheart.”

Chapter End Notes

For being such awesome readers, y'all get about 5,000 words right off the bat, with a smut scene included!

Comments are what keeps me going. If you have some time, please leave a comment. No matter how few or many words, every one of them makes a difference! I love hearing from y'all. Feel free to leave suggestions.

Thank you for being here! Next chapter coming up soon. :D
One weekend in May, Jared accompanied Jensen to what Jensen referred to as a “schmooze and booze” dinner party in a wealthy suburb outside of Dallas. While it wasn’t as uncomfortable—and not nearly as embarrassing—as the Q&A event in Miami, Jared spent most of the evening watching Jensen work.

Working involved holding delicate, frosty flutes of champagne so sweet and dry Jared only took a few sips from Jensen’s. They swung from cluster to cluster of people dressed in designer labels and the summer’s hottest fashion trends. Everywhere Jared looked there were earrings dripping diamonds and suits so perfectly tailored they seemed to be manifestations of their owners’ bodies. He himself was dressed in a three piece suit Jensen practically had to cut him out of afterwards. It was a light silver suit with graphite accents, a gentle teal shirt, and a navy tie.

Jensen picked out every piece, down to the black, polished shoes.

On the marigold terrace lit by torches and patterned lanterns, Jensen wrapped his arm around Jared’s waist and named off designers he noticed people wearing. He himself was decked out in an exquisitely crafted navy suit, just a shade lighter than Jared’s tie. Underneath the superb cut of cobalt cloth was a layer of almost liquid graphite. And over that, neatly pinned, was a teal tie.

They matched.

Jared occupied himself throughout the evening by comparing their colors and watching as Jensen’s eyes glinted emerald in the dim light over dinner.

For a brief moment, Jared felt at ease.

That was before dinner was served.

The food precariously plated in front of them in five courses alarmed him. Dish after dish confused the hell out of him, in addition to the conversation swirling around the table. Names were dropped. Obscure designers were suggested. Far away locations were mentioned. Jensen ate the first course with the little fork on the outside, even though it hardly seemed big enough to stab one single shrimp.

Peering at his plate, Jared listened to the server announce the next course.

“Galangal-braised pork belly with trout roe,” rolled off the server’s tongue like peanut butter and jelly.

A tiny mass of what looked like bacon in orange sauce sat on Jared’s plate. He poked it with a fork he picked up at random and looked around. People were digging in, commenting on the young lettuce with herbed avocado from before and how lovely the current dish was. Although certainly no stranger to avocado, Jared hadn’t been able to recognize any avocado on his plate at the time.

One bite proved all he could take of the Galangal-braised thing.

Beside him, Jensen laughed at a joke about the Oscars. In front of him, another dish appeared.

With the same effortless tone, the server called out, “Dried lime-dusted black cod, blood orange,
Jerusalem artichoke, Opal basil curry.”

At least Jared knew that dish.

Until he tasted it.

Dessert, unfortunately, was another conundrum. It was supposed to be flan, which Jared grew up eating, but it looked nothing like what he was used to. Sherri would buy him clear plastic containers with one small, caramel dome tucked inside, wobbling with the container’s every movement. Sweet, creamy, and smooth, his momma bought two at a time and they ate them after dinner on Friday nights. She’d buy them fresh from a lady at the office.

However, the flan in front of him at that moment would be completely unrecognizable to the flan from Smithville. It was city mouse versus country mouse and Jared feared he was the latter, not the former.

Embarrassment crept up from his stomach to his face.

Until a hand smoothed over his left thigh and gave a squeeze.

“Looks kinda like sand,” Jensen murmured, ducking close to Jared, nearly speaking into his ear. “Doesn’t it look like a beach?”

The slick, beige surface glistened in candlelight. Jared nodded. He guessed that it did somewhat resemble a coastal picture.

Smiling, Jensen took his hand off Jared’s thigh and reached over for his plate. Jared opened his mouth, ready to insist that he’d eat it, but he stopped all noise when he saw Jensen press his thumb over the surface of the flan. Only the indent of his fingerprint was left behind.

Soft and sweet, like the flan from Smithville, Jensen kissed Jared’s cheek.

Jensen’s hand slipped back underneath the table, sliding in place with Jared’s hand, his fingertips grazing over a familiar band of platinum. “Remember last week? On the beach? You left footprints in the sand and I stepped over them, one by one.”

A second later, without care of the stares and glances they were receiving, Jared pressed his thumb into the dome of flan, overlapping his thumbprint with Jensen’s.

It was by no means a completely boring night.

After dinner, their hands never parted.

Today’s party might be a little different from Jensen’s typical event.

Anza arrives first.

She’s Queen Bee of this shindig.

And as Queen Bee, she is the first to spot the hickey on Jared’s neck, visible from Mexico.

Jared rushes over to the guest bathroom on the first floor, off the pantry and near the kitchen, and holy fuck—there it is, a clear indication that he was either punched in the neck or that they’ve been having all kinds of sex this morning. Or maybe he just has dirt on his neck. That has to be it. He
grabs one of the sapphire hand towels from the silver rack on the wall and runs it under the faucet.

Commence scrubbing like hell!

Cackling, Anza joins him in the bathroom.

Very few boundaries exist between Jared and Anza. Smoothing out her violet sundress, she examines Jared’s meltdown for a minute. In those sixty seconds, he goes from shock to panic.

No amount of scouring can remove the marks on his neck.

Anza snaps, “Jay-bird! Relax!”

Punching him in the shoulder, she pauses to fix a few of the curls in her hair and glances at the mirror with Jared. Her lovely face makes for a stark contrast against Jared’s. He starts school in two days and people are coming over today. Everyone’s going to see…

“It’s jus’ a stupid hickey,” Queen Bee states. The violet purse of Magical Properties opens. “Trust me—no one here gonna care about that mark on’chu neck. And you’re so fuckin’ pale, it’ll be gone by Monday. Now, stay still ‘dejo, or I’ll get this in those pretty eyes.”

To play host today, Jared selected a pair of flower print board shorts and a white v-neck shirt. Jensen’s got a similar outfit on, except his shorts are darker and he opted for a weathered Cowboys shirt in case anyone forgot he was Texan. After spending the entire morning naked, clothes feel weird. But Anza’s touch on his neck soothes that out. With the utmost of care, she applies a thin layer of concealer, blending it as well as she can since their skin tones are different.

Pleased, Anza finishes up. She grins at her work and slaps his chest.

“There! Mascara next?”

“No!”

“Hmph! Too good for the rest of my makeup bag. Bunch of ‘dejos I hang out with. I bet your man wears mascara.”

“I don’t know, go ask him.”

“I will. And learn to say thank you, ‘dejo!”

Anza slaps him on the ass—hard—and floats out of the bathroom, headed for the rest of her kingdom.

This is definitely not a typical schmooze and booze.

The backyard of their condo is significantly smaller than the backyard Jared grew up with—and just a miniscule fraction of the Ackles’ ranch in Dallas.

But never let it be said that Jensen isn’t resourceful.

While Anza and Jared goofed around in the kitchen, putting trays of food together, Jensen was outside working his magic for ambiance as he called it. In half an hour, he set up their patio furniture to comfortably seat everyone; then he pushed the smoker and grill to a different angle so he could work and still join in conversation from the patio table. Jared requested as much space as possible on
the grass, so Jensen picked up a stray football, soccer ball, and flip flops to completely clear it.

His last accomplishment was putting up tiki torches and hanging lanterns in between.

Tonight is theirs.

It won’t be the last gathering this summer, but it’s the last one for a while as their schedules block off. Jared still needs to find a part-time job so he can save up for the spring semester; he hopes to find something at the bookstore on campus. Before Monday, he needs to figure out the best bus route from their home to campus. Anza can drop him off and pick him up on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so it only leaves him with Monday and Wednesday to worry about. With four classes for the summer semester—two each day—he’ll be in class from nine in the morning to four in the afternoon. There is a three hour break in between each lecture, which is time he hopes to spend exploring campus, calling Jensen on set, and studying.

There are a million and one things to do before the first day of school, but none of it matters at the moment.

Jensen ducks inside for a quick update, several kisses, and two pecks to Anza’s cheek. Jared means to bring up the hickey issue, however, he finds himself distracted by the curve of Jensen’s ass in those shorts. They hug against him perfectly, showing off the pert shape in such a way that Jared flashes back to the mirrors. He could feel and see Jensen pounding into him. Any time he wanted, he could glance over and revel in the sight of Jensen’s ass—just like he’s doing now.

“Earth to Jay-bird!”

“He’s gone, Anz.”

“YO. ‘DEJO.”

“What?!” Jared growls, ready to run upstairs and take a cold shower. Or a warm one.

Clearly in cahoots, Anza and Jensen lean against each other, Anza’s arm propped up against Jensen’s.

“You’ve been holding that slice of watermelon for the past two minutes,” Jensen snorts. “You plannin’ on puttin’ it down, Jay?”

“What’chu think he was thinkin’ about instead?”

Jensen grins. “Hmm… I don’t know…”

“Well, it sure as shit wasn’t subtle.”

“Yeah. He probably could’ve stared at my ass a little less blatantly.”

“Chu think so? I think that’s as subtle as Jay-bird gets with your ass.”

“I suppose I can forgive him.”

“Can you blame him, though?” Anza looks behind Jensen. “You got nice junk back there.”

Clearly pleased with the attention, Jensen grins. “Yeah? Thanks. How fast you think I can make Jay’s nose bleed? Maybe if I…oh, look.” The pitch of Jensen’s voice rises. “I seem to have dropped something on the floor. I should pick it up.”
Like they’ve fucking timed this, Jensen moves and Anza narrates, laughing, “Bend!”

Facing away from Jared, giving him a first-class view, Jensen bends.

“And snap!”

And he snaps.

Fuck everything.

Jared puts down the slice of watermelon he’d been cutting. He grabs the hose from the kitchen sink and aims it directly at Jensen’s ass. Jensen yips and jumps ten feet in the air as frigid, practically Arctic water hits him with sniper-quality aim.

The doorbell rings before Jared can crow in triumph.

“My real friends are here!” Jared hollers, careening out of the kitchen and towards the front door.

Within seconds, Candy, Memo, and Charlie crowd into the entryway, dragging with them a pink, plastic kiddie pool big enough to fit a hoard of children—or at least a small group of adults.

Charlie and Memo somehow shove the pool through the front door. Wiping his forehead, Charlie sighs, “My sister wants it back in one piece, Jay. You have no idea how much I had to beg to borrow this.”

“She’s six,” Candy huffs and hugs Jared. “Jay! Where’s your powder room so I can change into my suit?”

“She calls it a suit,” Charlie retorts. “More like the idea of a suit. What? Don’t look at me that way, you know I ain’t talking shit, it’s the truth. Show him.”

Memo, as usual, remains the silent observer on the edge of chaos. He’s dressed in a red, button down t-shirt and cargo shorts, practically formal in comparison to everyone else. It must be because Jensen’s home. Memo has been over a handful of times, but Jensen’s either been on his way out or away doing interviews and errands. Jared hugs him while Candy digs through her purse to find her swimsuit. Memo hugs back, but he doesn’t hold the gesture as long as Jared does. Weird.

He’s about to ask, when Candy unearths the suit in question.

“Good Lord,” Jared gasps. “…how does it stay on?”

Flashing one bright smile, Candy taps Jared on the chin. “You’ll just have to see.”

“Hey!” From the kitchen, Jensen calls out. He peeks over to the entryway. “Y’all gonna stand there or y’all gonna help me fire up the grill?”

Kiddie pool in tow, Jared marches forth, swept away by laughter and bets that gravity will ultimately overcome Candy’s so-called suit.

Chapter End Notes

whee! another update! now for bed. :D
comments are love!
“What’s this game called, again?” Jensen asks, hesitantly stepping into the empty kiddie pool.

He hasn’t taken off his shirt, but the afternoon is young.

Jared accepts a deck of cards from Anza. Charlie sets down a TV dinner tray in the center of the kiddie pool and afterwards, Candy hands him two foldout chairs. Despite Jared also climbing in, Jensen remains standing, one eyebrow raised.

“Sit down, Jen.”

“Uh, I don’t sit until one of y’all tells me why we’re sitting in a pool made for four year olds.”

“My sister’s six, thank you,” Charlie clarifies, hands on his hips.

With a huff, Anza advances towards the pool. After a few cold drinks—nonalcoholic everything for everyone because Jensen carded them all—and plowing through two trays of snacks everyone has changed into appropriate clothes for Texas in June. Even Memo has begun to loosen up, though it helps that in comparison to Candy, everyone might as well be wearing parkas.

Anza reties the top to her red and black polka dot bikini. She didn’t trust anyone else but Jared to put sunscreen on her. Afterwards, she gave him a greasy kiss on the cheek.

“Sit down, both of chu’s,” Queen Bee commands, finished with her work. Her ponytail swings from side to side as she looks at both Jensen and Jared. The dragon tattoo on her left hip seems to snarl at everyone around her, accomplishing twice as much bossing around. She places her hand on the center of the table and leans over.

Captivated, Charlie, Candy, Jared, and Memo hang onto her every word, even though they already know the game and the rules.

Nothing interrupts Anza as she goes through the rules. Not even the chirp of a bird.

“This is called Water War, dejos. Lose the hand, toss the glass. First one to go through five glasses wins.” Glancing over at Charlie, Anza’s tone drops dangerous and somber. “You brung The Canon?”

At the name, Jensen tosses a concerned look at both Jared and Anza. Jared doesn’t speak out of respect for The Canon; he holds his head down, as do his friends, as Charlie brings it over. This is their summertime ritual and must be done by the book. No shortcuts. No exceptions. Once opponents step into the ring of fire, they are committed to the struggle. Two participants enter. Only one winner earns the power to wield The Canon.

Taking the utmost care, Charlie sets down the weapon of choice and backs away slowly, head bowed.

“Guys,” Jensen mutters, leaning back in his chair, “that’s a super soaker.”

“Hush!” Anza snaps and slams her fist down on the table, causing the cards to rattle. “Show the
proper respec’ to The Canon! Jay-bird!” She points directly at him, every movement heightened. “Cut the deck!”

“But I still don’t get…”

“And control your man!”

“Jen,” Jared sighs, obviously put upon. “Haven’t you ever played War?”

“Sure, but…”

“So you know the rules.”

Anza orders the water to be brought forth. Candy and Charlie swing into action, each of them hauling over a tray of five extra-large red Solo cups. They each pick a side to stand on—Candy on Jared’s and Charlie on Jensen’s. This leaves Anza and Memo as referees.

Jared stretches and nudes Jensen’s leg with his foot. Their eyes lock and Jared smirks. “I’m undefeated, old man. Hope you’re ready to go down.”

“That’s your job, punk,” Jensen snips, eliciting hoots of laughter from the audience and referees. He cracks his knuckles and leans forward on his chair, finally getting into the game. In turn, Jared cuts the deck in half, sliding one half over to Jensen. They are definitely not in a magenta kiddie pool in the middle of their backyard, playing with a half busted super soaker on a ninety degree day. Nope. They’re in the middle of a town out West, a spit of land no one gives two shits about and no one ever will. Both of them are outlaws but only one of ’em can leave this town alive.

It’s a dog eat dog world and Jared’s not about to lie down and take it.

Technically, he already did that three times today.

Anyway.

Jensen looks like he’s got a grip on things, but Jared knows it’s a well-worn façade. Spurs click. Dust rushes up. With the sun high above them, their hands skim over readied weapons.

Practically whispering, keeping his tone menacing, Jared offers an out at the last minute.

“You wanna switch decks, Ackles?”

For a split second, green eyes consider the exchange. “No,” Jensen ultimately replies, tilting his chin up. “I’m good with what I got.”

This one here might be smarter than he looks. But Jared’s fixing to watch him limp away when they’re through. No one steps into his town and causes trouble. Not even handsome ruffians. With their hands over their respective decks, time slows.

Vultures circle.

There’s gonna be blood on the ground this day.

Anza’s voice rings through the air like a gunshot. “One, two, three—draw!”

The old man is quick for his age, but Jared’s quicker. Turning over his card, Jared reveals a blistering ten of spades. Underneath freckled fingers hides a three of hearts.
“You fixed this!” Jensen accuses, tossing his imaginary poncho to one side. “You rotten, low-life, yella bellied varmint!”

Satisfaction coursing through him, Jared deflects these insults, remaining calm, cool, and collected. “Stay still,” he warns, stifling a laugh. “Take the bullet like a man, old timer.”

Picking up one ice-cold cup of water, Jared stands. He raises the cup to the sun in thanks for his good fortune, then takes one small sip. Ritual. Tradition. Savoring the blood and the sport of Water War. It’s all part of summer. He relishes the flinch from Jensen as he leans forward, teasing and taunting.

Finally, he cuts Jensen loose.

And splashes him in the face with a blast of water for the second time today.

Jensen lets out a shriek, laughing and cussing, scrubbing his face and pushing his drenched hair away from his forehead. He pinches his nose and sputters while the audience and Jared hold their sides as they struggle to breathe from howling so hard.

Two more hands and Jared’s cups rapidly dwindle.

He pours one cup of water directly onto Jensen’s crotch.

And the next down the back of his shirt, with a tiny bit of leftover onto his face.

Drenched and squishy, Jensen holds out his arms. “C’mon! You guys rigged this! How’s he winnin’?!?”

“Jay-bird don’t lie,” Anza snorts, flicking Jensen’s wet hair. “He’s lucky as fuck.”

Looking directly at Jensen, Jared nods, arms folded confidently over his bare chest. “That I am,” he declares, beaming at his fiancée. “The luckiest.”

A blush spreads over Jensen’s cheeks and the bridge of his nose. It settles there, making Jensen look ten times more adorable and more pathetic than a wet dog. That is… until Jared’s down to one cup and on the next draw, they both pull threes.

“WAR!” they scream and the crowd goes wild, shouting for blood.

“Finish him!” Charlie hoots. “Finish! Him!”

Drawing three cards without flipping them, Jared never loses his resolve. Jensen’s mouth twitches, betraying him completely. This is the last bullet. The old man’s walkin’ the plank and Jared sure as hell ain’t gonna make it pretty.

Two simultaneous flips ricochet through the air.

Jared slaps down a Queen of Clubs.

Jensen lifts his hand…

And reveals…

“A two?!” He practically falls off his chair and begins to plead, hands together, on his knees in the pool. “Please, Jay, have mercy. I… I… I got a family to feed!”
Tall against the glaring sun, Jared holds The Canon, firm and steady in his grip.

Unimaginable power courses through his veins. He holds this fool’s life in his hands. One step forward and he nudges Jensen’s chin with the barrel. “Get up,” Jared scoffs, balancing The Canon on his hip. “And reach for the sky.”

Two seconds later, as part of the unofficial rules, the referees strip Jensen of his shirt, the sight of which inspires various catcalls and wolf whistles. The loudest come from Jared.

Feet apart and shoulders squared, Jared aims directly at Jensen’s right nipple.

This is War.

Jared shoots Jensen.

What he doesn’t expect, however, is that after Jensen gets blasted by The Canon’s powerful stream of glacial water, Jensen charges for him.

With a sickening squelch, their chests meet and Jared screeches.

They topple to the bottom of the kiddie pool.

And that’s how the West was won.

Jared versus Charlie, Jared aims for Charlie’s belly button.

Charlie versus Candy, Candy aims for Charlie’s nose.

Anza versus Memo, and Memo means to aim for her heart, as she requested, but he ends up misfiring. The situation escalates into a Janet Jackson wardrobe malfunction. Anza proudly flashes everyone, taking her sweet ass time putting her bikini top back on. She snips at the howling group to calm the fuck down and get a good, long look before she destroys them all.

She then regains control of The Canon and chases Memo around the backyard for the better part of twenty minutes.

Finally, she gets him to shed his “stupid shirt, whatchu think this is, some fucking soiree?”

On the patio, Candy and Charlie decide to hold a contest about who can get a finer tan.

“I’m half Irish,” Charlie complains, slathering on another coat of sunscreen. “It’s a fine line between tomato red and lobster red.”

“But you get all these adorable little freckles,” Candy squeals. She pokes Charlie’s shoulders before he swats her away. “Oh, please, like you haven’t used your freckles to pick up guys. Jay, I’ve seen him do it.”

“I have not!”

“Have too!”

“I am insulted! Outraged!”

“You big queen! Jay, you wanna hear what he said to this one guy over at Benny’s graduation
“Don’t listen to her! She’s full of lies and tricksy!”

As soon as Jared can verify that Anza has not beaten Memo to a pulp with The Canon, he pulls up a lounge chair for a front row view of the Charlie and Candy battle of the hour.

Undeterred by Charlie’s attempts to knock her sunglasses off her head, Candy blurs out, “He walks up to this beefcake and says, ‘A face without freckles is like a night without stars. Wanna light up your night?’”

Jared laughs so hard he drops his phone.

“Really?” he asks Charlie, completely incredulous. “You used that?”

There is nowhere for Charlie to hide. No hole for him to crawl into as his friends dissect his very special methods of picking up dates. Pouting, he shoves Candy’s shoulder. “Not all of us can have flawless skin! I’m covered in what looks like a flesh-eating bacteria! Might as well make the best of it.”

“But with that line?” Jared echoes.

Candy flips her sunglasses on and sweeps her shoulder-length, copper hair behind her shoulders. Like everything else she owns, her sunglasses stand out, neon pink and decked in rhinestones.

“Char, even if I had freckles, I wouldn’t be dumb enough to use that line. Besides, y’all know my daddy is none other than Mister Denzel himself. I’m blessed with flawless skin by nature. Can’t help it.”

From the kiddie pool, everyone hears Memo yelp, “Not my hair!”

The three of them look over to see Anza messing up Memo’s carefully combed hair. Despite the cry of distress, the Charlie and Candy battle continues without missing a beat.

“If your daddy’s Denzel, then mine’s Colin Farrell.”

“Oh, you can have him, Miami Vice.”

“Not his finest, I agree, but still…”

“Pft! Alexander! Boy didn’t even have the decency to dye his eyebrows to match that hideous wig!”

“Jared! Tell her Colin has made some poor choices over the years, but that doesn’t mean he isn’t a fine piece of ass.”

“I’m not getting involved.”

“You wanna hear his other pickup lines? Cause I will spill this truth tea.”

Groaning into a towel, Charlie covers his ears as Candy fires out the horrible truth.

“Library, downtown, he says to this guy, ‘There isn’t a word in this dictionary to describe how handsome you are.’ My cousin’s art show, he follows this dude all night trying to get a word in and he picks this line: ‘Is your dad an art thief, because you are gorgeous.’ No! No, wait!”

Candy clasps her hands over Jared, looking at him over her sunglasses.
“This one, Jay, just listen. So we at the library again, and you’d think he learned the first time. Oh fuck no. He walks up to this RPat look-alike and you know what he says? Do you know what this motherfucker says?”

Candy pauses, clears her throat, and locks eyes with Jared, recreating the scene.

“He says, ‘Honey, you must be a library book, because I’m checking you out.’"

Rocking back and forth on his lounge chair from laughter, Jared holds his sides. He attempts an apologetic look at Charlie, but Candy keeps listing line after line. Triumphant, she tousles Charlie’s hair and takes a delicate sip from her tall glass of lemonade. Charlie has turned a shade of red visible from space.

Over Jared’s shoulder, a familiar shadow appears.

“Do I even wanna know?” Jensen hands Jared a glass of lemonade, taking a sip from it first.

That small act of intimacy sends a thrill through Jared. He smiles up at Jensen and accepts the cold glass. Jensen has also kept his shirt off, though it is Jared’s expert opinion that probably needs another layer of sunscreen.

Before Jared can either catch Jensen up on the ongoing madness or offer to lotion him up, Candy addresses Jensen directly.

“Jensen. What’s the worst pickup line anyone has ever said to you? And it better not be from Jay.”

“I would never,” Jared gasps, his free hand pressed to his chest. “I am full of original and witty conversation. Isn’t that right?”

Seated beside Jared, Jensen hesitates in his response. Eventually, he blurts out, “Of course you are, sweetheart, of course you are.” He pats Jared’s knee and bumps their shoulders together, then glances over at Candy. “All the worst ones are freckle related.”

Charlie squeaks, trying and failing at hiding behind a beach towel draped over his lounge chair.

“Those are the best!”

“No,” Jensen laughs, “as someone with a fuck ton of freckles, let me tell you, they’re not. I don’t wanna hear about your weird connect the dots game with your tongue while I’m trying to enjoy a beer.”

“I’ve never said that, have I?” Jared rests his head against Jensen’s shoulders and peers up as innocent as possible. There may have been mentions of dots and the possibility of connecting them, but Jared knows he was a lot smoother than that.

“Say no,” Candy quips. “Say no and keep your spot in bed tonight.”

“Fine!” Charlie huffs, sitting up and dramatically tossing off the beach towel. “Jensen—hit on Jared. I wanna see how you do it.”

Clear, relaxed green eyes meet Jared’s. The more sun Jensen gets, the darker his tan becomes and the more obvious his freckles stand out. It is, needless to say, an excellent view. Behind Jensen is the brightest, bluest Austin sky on a Saturday in June. A refreshing breeze floats through from the river, bringing with it the scents of slick sunscreen, thriving grass, and barbecue slowly cooking to perfection.
Quietly, Jensen murmurs his line, their noses an inch apart. Crinkles surround his eyes and the words pour out like the cool, sweet lemonade in their glass.

“You’re so gorgeous,” Jensen taps their noses together, “I forgot my pickup line.”

Charlie groans and falls off his lounge chair.

Candy takes another sip of her lemonade, smiling to herself.

Chapter End Notes

lovely chapter to write! hope you enjoyed it too! please leave comments, they are love.
<3
Presented with the option of jet skiing or water balloon fights, their party surprisingly picks the option that involves hurling latex rubber spheres at each other.

Candy and Anza dedicate themselves to filling as many as possible—just over two dozen. Jared is certain that if they could, his friends would figure out a way to combine both jet skiing and water balloons. Charlie attempted the suggestion, but he was promptly shut down by Jensen, who loves nothing more than to scare Jared on the water by taking sharp turns, but remains an absolute stickler for Jet Ski safety.

The afternoon continues to reveal its surprises as Memo takes a seat next to Jared and actually talks. Although their backyard space seems minimal, it’s just enough for their group to spread out. Charlie hangs onto Jensen’s every word about pickup lines and boundaries as they stand by the grill. Every time Jensen opens one of the grill doors the most amazing, mouth-watering scents waft out. Jensen begins adding sauce to the ribs, layer by careful layer, this time experimenting with a honey chipotle combination. The man is consumed with the urge to find the perfect wood for grilling and smoking; hickory surpasses most, but Jensen would drive an hour out of Austin to pick up a lead on apple wood chips. He’s already done so twice since May.

Through the bumblebee sunlight of the afternoon and nearby fragrance of honey and hickory, Jared stretches out on his patio chair, wearing Jensen’s cobalt sunglasses. He flips them up, squinting slightly to make eye contact with Memo.

“Class starts on Monday?” Memo asks, his voice like a gentle wave from the riverfront a hundred feet away.

“For the summer term.” Sitting up, Jared closes some of the distance between them. “I’m kinda nervous. I took a whole year off school and now I’m like… shit. What’d I get myself into?”

Memo has always been the silent, steady portion of their group. Although Anza’s advice has never steered Jared wrong before, Memo’s additional suggestions evened it all out, suited for introverts and shy people, two identities Anza has never claimed for herself. While everyone can be depended on to listen, Memo has always been The Responsible One. He might have seen one too many nights of Jared and Anza screaming their way down the highway, poorly belting out Dolly Parton and Selena. Likewise, he might have seen the ups and downs of Jared’s crushes throughout high school, all of which never worked out and had him whining about the guys he met at The Center.

Typically quiet, reserved, and vigilant, Memo’s personality always had Jared feeling calm and centered.

He could relate to being the observer. When Jared wasn’t in Austin, he was the outsider looking in.

“You’ll be fine.” Memo’s shoulders tense, though it may be in response to Anza’s mention of slipping rocks into the water balloons. “You like school.”

“No,” Jared clarifies with a snort, “I like studying. I hated school.”

“That’s because it was the wrong school for you.”
Laughing, Jared shakes his head. “You mean Smithville High School wasn’t the center of sophistication and arts?”

An awkward beat of silence slithers past, void of any acknowledgement over Jared’s joke.

Finally, Memo speaks again.

“I’m saying you’ll be fine at ACC.” A sigh follows his words. “What are you taking?”

Blushing with regret over his joke, Jared mumbles out, “Uh, Theories of Personality and Abnormal Psych. I tried to get into Stats, but it was full already.”

Memo nods. He looks out towards the river, opposite of the grill and away from Jared or their group.

“Hey,” Jared speaks up, his feet on the patio once more, leaning in, “are you okay?”

“Yeah. Fine. How are you getting to school?”

Flustered by the question, Jared shrugs. “Taking the bus?”

“Really.”

“Yeah, not like it’s hard.”

“Guess not.”

“Anza offered to give me a ride to my Monday and Wednesday class though.”

“She told me.”

“Well, it’s sorta near where she lives. I mean, I’ll be giving her gas money and all. Are you sure you’re okay? You know, there’s snacks and stuff I can bring out if you want. Or we can go inside? You know, I haven’t shown you what Jen brought me back from his interview with GQ in Paris. It’s this really neat picture…”

Memo interrupts Jared, quipping, “Picture of what? The two of you?”

Eyes wide in astonishment, Jared quickly looks away, his entire face blazing. “…picture of the Louvre, Memo. I know you’ve always wanted to go.” Jared bites his bottom lip, suddenly unsure on how to speak to his friend. Should he give Memo some room? Something is definitely wrong, but Anza hasn’t clued him in on anything lately.

What has Jared missed? What is he missing right now?

“Your phone’s ringing,” Memo murmurs, nudging Jared’s phone over an inch before standing up. “I’m gonna go talk to Anza.”

“You’re gonna talk to who, dejo?” Anza snaps, approaching with two neon pink water balloons in her hands. Her eyes flit quickly from Memo to Jared to Memo again. She says nothing about the rift between them, which must be obvious from space; Jared breathes a sigh of relief. No way can either of them handle any direct confrontation at the moment.

“I’m ready to take down the both of chus.” Anza flexes her muscles. “You dejos try to get past me.”

From the grill, Charlie hollers, “Just mention Shakira!”
Whipping around, Anza fires the shot heard around the patio. One bubblegum balloon smacks and bursts square over Charlie’s bare, freckled chest. The combination of cold water and snapping latex wrenches out a sound similar to a crow’s caw.

Staring the rest of their group down, Anza takes command. “Now who wants this one?”

Jared would gladly take the bullet if it means no more harsh, awkward moments with Memo. However, his phone rings again, insistent and loud.

Anza rolls her eyes and faces Jensen, threatening him to fork over some barbeque or she’s aiming right for his chiseled good looks.

Fumbling with his phone, Jared leaps over his chair and ducks away from the patio, stepping onto the lawn. Grass tickles his toes as he takes a few steps out. His conversation is short—just a confirmation and repeat of directions, ended with a reminder that he is still happily engaged, but nice try.

By the time he wanders back to the patio, Jensen has somehow wrangled the neon pink balloon from Anza and she’s ducking behind Candy, who is busy screaming at Anza.

“NO way! You ain’t using me as a human shield!”

“I need chu!” Anza pleads, grasping onto Candy’s shoulders. “You said you’d protect my ass!”

“Not before my ass!”

“Excuse me?! Who lent chu this swimsuit? It wasn’t no bikini fairy!”

“That’s yours?” Charlie gasps from the sidelines. “Won’t somebody think of the children?!”

Looming and menacing, Jensen takes one step forward, his eyes square on his target. “You crossed a line, Anz, now take it back.”

“I take nothin’ back!” Anza throws her arm against her forehead, struggling to keep her spot behind Candy. “I meant every word, dejo!”


“Take what back!” Jared shouts, confused and startled. “What did she say?”

Simultaneously, Candy and Anza shriek, “Jensen makes goo-goo eyes at your ass when you’re not looking!”

And then…

“AHHH!” Doused with freezing water, Anza begins laughing and screaming so hard she tumbles over onto the patio.

Candy reevaluates her priorities and runs away, towards the cooler full of balloons. Jensen tries to beat her to it, but he’s cut off by Charlie, a sudden contender in the race. The three of them bump shoulders in their desperate attempts to grab as many balloons as possible.

From a mysterious source, the first balloon launched hits Memo’s feet.

The second misses Jared by a hair and lands in the grass.
In a nearly professional throw, the third, a product of Jensen’s right arm, unleashes another spray of water at Anza’s feet, leaving her crying out for Jensen’s internal organs.

Although jet skiing might have been the safer option, Jared dives in, ducking three balloons on his way to the cooler. He’s a mere five feet away when Candy hits him right in the shoulder, water exploding from the pulpy remains of a teal balloon.

Within minutes, carnage spreads over the lawn, dotting the grass in scraps of red, green, yellow, pink, teal, and lavender. Jensen seems to have an advantage because of his experience playing baseball in high school, but Anza and Jared quickly figure out that the best way to distract him is to get Jared’s ass within his line of sight and whistle as Jared conveniently bends over.

Anza and Candy pummel Jensen with balloons, hitting him in the jaw, shoulders, chest, and stomach all at once. Jensen falls to his knees, hands in the air, mouth open in a scream towards the heavens, “Why me?! Not my face! My beautiful face! Jay! My face!” Jensen sputters as another balloon hits him in the chest. “I’m not supposed to get water on it! Oh what a world!” He throws himself to lay down on the lawn, limbs spread, two more balloons landing dangerously close to his thighs. “I’m melting! Jay! Melting!”

“Save your man!” Anza shoves Jared forward. “Work that ass!”

Jared careens a few steps towards Jensen, the grass slippery now with water and the sad remains of probably thousands of balloons. He yells, “How am I supposed to save him with my ass?!”

Two seconds after his words leave his mouth, he regrets them all.

Candy throws a balloon that lands right between Jared’s bare shoulder blades. She screams, “Sit on his face!!!”

All around, balloons ricochet and rupture, icy water splashing any willing and unwilling target. Charlie’s got Memo cornered for two seconds, but Memo rushes past him and grabs three balloons that haven’t popped on the lawn. His machine gun technique succeeds in Charlie’s unconditional surrender, but Anza creeps up and plummets two balloons over his head anyway.

Perhaps the most traitorous of all is the man flat on his back on the lawn.

Jared looks down at sopping eye crinkles and a crooked grin.

“You’re crazy,” Jared laughs, extending a hand out to help Jensen up.

For a second, it looks like Jensen’s about to accept. From plush, soaked lips, Texas rumbles out. “I don’t know which is prettier, the water, the sky, or your eyes.”

It seems like the perfect moment to pause and grin down at Jensen.

“Now!” Jensen hollers, jolting Jared out of his lull.

Balloons propel from four separate directions. Jared sees nothing of the battle. He takes hits on his shoulders and legs, jumping in the air, limbs flailing.

Amidst the screams and shouts from his jerkass friends and fiancé, Jared somehow manages to hear the doorbell from the front.

“Screw you, losers!” Jared huffs. “I’m haulin’ ass and I ain’t lookin’ back!”
Jensen’s contribution to Jared’s departure echoes across the lawn. “I’ll miss you, but what a view!”

Jared turns to stick his tongue out and promptly squeals when he sees Anza running towards him, another water balloon in her hand and at the ready. She attacks him from behind as he opens the screen door, and wraps her arms around his shoulders.

Jumping up in excitement, the threat of the balloon present, she squishes their bodies close as a blast of air conditioning hits them both.


“Like I would tell you!”

“Don’t be mad Jay-bird!”

“I’m mad as hell!”

Their damp steps leave footprints through the house as they walk to the front door, Anza practically on top of Jared. She’s about to hop onto his back in an effort to get the truth from him when the screen door in the kitchen opens and Candy sails inside, followed by Jensen, the combination of their charging footsteps creating thunder through the hall.

“Not inside!” Jared gasps, shielding his face with one arm from a surprise attack.

“Nooooo!” Anza cries out and shrieks as she receives the first detonation of water to her feet. “Jay-bird!”

In a panic, Jared wrenches open the front door, hoping that the person on the other side will save him. Jensen, however, sees this as an opportunity to bombard that person. He winds his arm and raises it for the pitch, deadly and determined.

They both expect Nathan Fillion to be standing there once the front door pushes open.

A lime green torpedo explodes against a pair of conservative beige Prada sandals housing two freshly pedicured feet. The force of the blast splashes water all the way to the victim’s once perfectly coifed and brushed blonde hair. The victim emits a screech worthy of any Congress Avenue bat. And the bundt cake she was holding jolts forward from shock and hits the soaked floor with a sickening thud.

Crying, shaking, and drenched, Donna Ackles stands on their front step.

Chapter End Notes

omg i had so much fun with this chapter! XD

hold on for some momma drama!

comments are love! <3
The ensuing scene unfolds like a commercial for paper towels gone horribly, horribly wrong.

Jensen is the only person who dares dab at Donna, until Alan shows up from parking the car in the driveway. Three seconds into his arrival and Alan dives in, helping to steer Donna inside the house, trying his best to join Jensen’s chorus of apologies and assurances that this is no big deal.

Nope. Not a big deal at all.

Every son hits their mother with a water balloon in the face once in a while.

And… subsequently makes her drop the platter holding a bundt cake made from her award winning recipe she wouldn’t stop talking about through Memorial Day weekend. So proud of her bundt cake, she only serves it once a year at Christmas. For her to make and bring it over to present to her son—and to a lesser extent, Jared—means a great deal of effort has been exerted. Donna personally went through the trouble of making a bundt cake and now it lies in soggy, mealy ruins on the floor of the entryway.

“What have I told you, Jensen Ross?!” Donna screeches in the hallway. “Never play with those… things inside the house!”

While Jensen manages the task of wrangling his mother, Jared sets to cleaning up the result of a water balloon intended for Nathan Fillion. His friends remain petrified, startled by the Dallas woman in Prada with mascara running down her face and a disapproving frown rivaling any blue blood socialite.

Anza snaps into action first, joining Jared on his hands and knees to pick up pieces of the ceramic, robin’s egg blue platter. She issues commands to Memo and Charlie to grab towels, a garbage bag, and a dustpan. Her knowledge of the kitchen and the house in general helps her to add where these things can be found, quipping at the designated team to hurry their asses up. With the guys in motion, Anza assigns Candy the task of running out to the patio to grab her purse; she stashed her dress inside it.

A few seconds of mangled, awkward silence weighs down on Anza and Jared as their hands work.

After grabbing for the same fragment of platter, their fingers brush together.

Grinning, Anza takes Jared’s hand and squeezes it.

“That lady is pissed,” Anza whispers, eyes glinting. “I wish I filmed it, Jay-bird.”

“Shh,” Jared hisses, however, his own smile can’t be helped. “She’s always like that.”

“Why didn’t chu tell us they were gonna show up?”

“I didn’t know!”

She huffs and shakes her head. “That’s sorta shitty of Jensen not to tell chu.” Her hands are full of busted platter and crumbling cake. “And who the fuck brings a cake with a hole in it to a barbeque?”
“Anza!” Jared’s shoulders shake but he is *not* laughing. No way. Definitely not laughing. Not at all.

Footsteps approach, but Jared doesn’t need to look up from the grotesque bundt corpse to know that they belong to Memo and Charlie. Anza, Charlie, and Jared dump scoops of cake and platter into the bag Memo holds open. Candy skids over, holding Anza’s purse. Since her journey to the patio, she’s wrapped herself in one of the beach towels Jared provided everyone when they changed into suits.

Sensing the question in Jared and Anza’s eyes, Candy sighs. “What? This bikini is *not* a pissed white lady bikini. Or a mother-in-law bikini.”

“No one told me that,” Anza says, sticking out her tongue. “An’ no one asked chu to cover up.”

“Girl, like you wouldn’t do the same.”

“I would never!”

“Then why you ask me to get your dress?”

“First, don’t act like I’d share my dress withchu.”

“You shared this bikini with me!”

“Bikinis are different.”

“You’re full of bullshit today, Anz.”

“Maybe, but I’m honest about it.”

Lost in the familiar squabbling of his friends, Jared can almost forget that somewhere in this house lurks a dangerous, fire-breathing mother-in-law.

“Here.” Anza folds her violet sundress and shoves it into Jared’s arms once they’ve finished cleanup. “Go! Whatchu standin’ there lookin’ at, dejo?”

Blinking, Jared gawks at the dress. His brain fails to make the connection.

Anza rolls her shoulders and swats at Jared’s arms. “To her! Give it to her! She’s soaked, an’ unless any of you have another idea, she’s gonna need that to change into.”

“Maybe Jensen should handle that,” Memo rumbles, tying up the garbage bag.

“Nuts to that!” Anza places her hands on Jared’s shoulders. “Get your ass over there an’ be the hero.”

Memo tries again, insisting, “Jensen can give her some of his clothes, Anza.”

A dangerous look hurls itself at Memo. “Dejo, quit that shit! Don’tchu see?! This is Jay-bird’s chance to score some points. What the fuck would any of yous do without me?” She turns Jared to the direction of the hallway and all but shoves him down it. “Go! I’m taking these assholes outside. Try not to die.”

“Just watch out for Nathan,” Jared blurts out. “Please don’t throw anything at him.”

“Did we or did we not just learn a lesson from your man?” Candy asks, tapping her chin. “For what it’s worth, Jay-bird, I’m sorry.”
Clinging to Anza’s dress as he walks away, Jared pardons Candy and absolves her of responsibility. If only Donna could be that benevolent and forgiving. But from what Jared can hear as his friends slip out the back door to listen for Nathan from there, forgiveness remains a long, dusty road ahead of him.

“You could have seriously injured me, Jensen Ross!”

Still on middle name territory. Jared hangs back for a second.

“Mom, it was a water balloon, not a torpedo.”

“I suppose you think this is funny, don’t you?”

“Now, honey, that’s not what Jensen’s saying.” Alan’s attempt sounds reasonable, but it meets a quick and timely death.

“What I don’t understand is how a grown man runs around like some… hooligan without any sense or manners, throwing those things around! Didn’t I raise you better? Didn’t we raise you to be a gentleman? And here you are…”

Several times over the past two months, Jared has fought the urge to call his mother and beg her to tell him the secret of being an adult on his own. Figuring out the dish washer was full of trial and error—mostly error. The same can be said for every other appliance in their home. The washer and dryer have so many buttons to them, none of them clearly marked. Every time one turns on it plays a little song, but Jared can never tell how to adjust the settings and Jensen is absolutely no help. He strolled in on the first misadventure and told Jared to step aside, he could handle it. Ten minutes later, they were mopping up the laundry room.

The urge to call his momma and ask her to teleport into the hallway—or at the very least, wave her magic mom that all moms possess and make everything better—rises every second.

One thing pauses that urge.

Texas drawl transforms into short, clipped words devoid of accent but unyielding in its tone.

“I said my apologies,” Jensen says, hands over his chest. “Now you either take them or leave them, mom, but I’m not arguing with you in my own house. And speaking of, I don’t exactly recall you calling to let me know you’d be dropping by.”

An awkward pause hurtles past, nothing like the one that Jared experienced with Anza.

Alan clears his throat. “I told you, we should have called. Son, we just thought…”

“You’ve lived here for three months and we haven’t been asked over once,” Donna cuts in. “When were you going to think of your parents, Jensen? Your father had some business to do in Austin, so I decided to come out and visit you, since you can’t be bothered to call. I thought the point of settling down here was to be close by.”

Jared briefly thinks about interrupting and mentioning that the three hour drive from Dallas to Austin could hardly be considered close by. Thankfully, the spirit of his mother appears and prevents him from making an ass of himself just this once.

Tension in the hallway escalates, swelling up until its occupants threaten to pop.

Taking Anza’s advice, Jared rounds the corner and steps into the hallway, walking over to the cluster
of Ackles standing outside the first floor bathroom.

In his most cheerful voice, he chirps, “I’ve got a change of clothes for you, ma’am. I can wash and dry what you’ve got on.” Before Donna can protest or Jensen can add anything, Jared continues, holding out Anza’s dress. “And I can’t tell you how sorry we are for this whole thing. You see, the water balloons were my idea, and well, I bet Jensen that he couldn’t surprise Nathan with one if his life depended on it. Jen has the worst aim.”

All three of the Ackles momentarily stare at Jared like he’s grown a second head or started walking over hot coals barefoot. That part seems a little more accurate; this is a potentially dire conversation.

With a nervous laugh, Jared passes the dress to Donna. “Well,” he says, smiling and nodding, “why don’t you change, hand me your clothes, and we can get to dinner? You stopped by just in time, Jen’s been cooking all morning. Can I get you two anything to drink? Lemonade?”

“Lemonade sounds great,” Alan replies. Jared lets out the breath he’d been holding. “Doesn’t lemonade sound great after that drive, honey?”

Donna stares at the dress in her hands. Jared can’t tell if her nose is scrunched from the situation, or standing there in the hallway wearing damp clothes, or because the dress isn’t exactly her style. But it’s either Anza’s dress or something from Jensen or Jared’s wardrobes.

“Fine. Lemonade is fine.”

“Oh, great,” Jared says and motions to the bathroom. “There are clean towels in there, and a brush inside the medicine cabinet. Jen, maybe you wanna help me pour the lemonade?”

Jensen’s eyes meet Jared’s, radiating a sense of relief and gratitude. “Sure thing, sweetheart. Dad, you wanna join us?”

The second the bathroom door clicks shut, the three of them scramble for the kitchen. Jensen rants to his father, keeping his voice quiet, centering his speech on the fact that a phone call would have been greatly appreciated. Jared stays out of this discussion. While he puts together another batch of lemonade, cleaning out the rooster pitcher, Alan tells his side of the story. He did have business here that part was true, but Donna talked him into heading over as a surprise.

“What a surprise,” Jensen grumbles, leaning on the counter. “Guess you can still bake a cake and call it a surprise.”

“I’m not saying I agree, son, but I… well, I did want to see your new place.”

Alan pats Jensen on the shoulder. He’s dressed in a business casual outfit of khakis and a tidy, dark green polo shirt. A few quick glances at father and son yield very striking similarities between the two of them. Jared wonders if Jensen has noticed how much he looks like his father. Folks in Smithville were always fond of saying Jared was a spitting image of his momma. The image Jensen and Alan share seems much more obvious.

Jared mixes the new batch of lemonade, tossing in a few ice cubes and chilled lemon slices.

Jensen’s parents probably know—or could at least figure out—that Sherri has not only visited, but spent time with them and helped them set up. Sherri fought with the interior decorator Jensen hired, adamant about keeping the décor and furnishings as simple as possible. The decorator had been intent on draping everything in expensive fabrics. More than once, Sherri had to remind the man that neither Jensen nor Jared needed fancy, frilly shit. The condo had to survive the use of two men constantly on the move.
Maybe they should have had Jensen’s parents over a little sooner.

But there’s nothing they can do about that now, except be the best hosts ever. Jared passes out tall glasses of fresh lemonade and excuses himself to check on Donna. About to knock on the door, it opens abruptly.

Face to face with Donna, Jared suppresses a yelp of surprise.

“Delicate, cold wash,” Donna says, depositing her garments into Jared’s arms. “No softener.”

The struggle is real not to throw her clothes at her face and tell her that there’s a perfectly serviceable dry cleaner’s up the road. Utilizing his experience in retail, Jared grins and bears her tone, walking away from her and ducking into the sanctuary of the laundry room.

He dumps the clothes into washer, unceremoniously pouring detergent in, and peers at the assembly of sleek, LED lit buttons on the control panel. The little song plays, acknowledging that the washer is on and ready, but nothing says delicate or cold rinse. Jared can change the amount of water needed—he sets it to extra low—but everything else remains a mysterious toss-up.

Shutting the lid and pressing start, he prays that this outfit isn’t one of particular fondness or meaning.

Did all this happen? Or did he pass out during Water War? Or maybe, if he’s lucky, this is all a dream, the result of having too much sex and not being adequately hydrated. The dream theory crumbles after a pinch to his arm and nothing changes.

How long can he linger in the laundry room until someone drags him out?

Somehow, Jared musters the courage to take one step out of the laundry room. Voices echo down the hall.

He hears Alan speak first. “How many square feet, son?”

“Little over three thousand.”

“So small,” Donna sniffs. “I hope you didn’t buy this place.”

“I did, mom, it made more sense to.”

“It’s not small for just the two of them, dear.”

“You like having a yard. That can hardly be called a yard.”

“It works just fine as a yard. We like being close to the river, and it’s a straight shot to the community college. Plus, not too far from the airport for me.”

“That’s good, son. Location, location, location. You fixing to buy something sometime down the line?”

“Yeah.”

“In Austin?”

“Well, I couldn’t tell you. Anything could happen. Jay might wanna move. I might wanna move. I don’t think we’ll buy something for another two or three years at least.”

“You’ll get something more appropriate then.” Donna sighs and Jared can hear her opening
cupboards. “Tiny. This is miniscule compared to what you had in Los Angeles. I hope you haven’t sold that.”

Jensen mirrors her sigh. “No, not yet. Look, we bought this because it was a good compromise. Jay’s never owned a house before and I’m not here that often to help with repairs or whatever. We don’t need something with eight rooms… mom, are you looking for something?”

“She didn’t add sugar to the lemonade?”

No, Jared thinks to himself, he added spit. If he had spit in his glass, would she have even noticed?

“Just ask, please,” Jensen urges and pops open the correct cupboard. “Here.”

“Well, at least you have good countertops,” Donna remarks. “I hope you bought this at a good price.”

“We bought this at a great price.”

“Oh. Did Jared put money down?”

“Dear,” Alan warns.

“I’d just like to know. A mother likes to know these things.”

Why ask? To what end?

Before anyone can talk about him further, Jared walks back into the kitchen, less animated than before. Dryly, he mentions to Jensen that the grill probably needs some attention. He should give his parents a tour as well; the suggestion creates a visible cringe from Jensen. Jared can’t express any sympathy at the moment. These are his parents, he gets to deal with them. It sounds a little harsh in Jared’s head, but Anza never lets anyone borrow her sundresses. She saves up to buy them, all in an array of styles, cuts, and colors. But here is Donna, wearing the violet one, totally incapable of recognizing the gesture.

“You’ve settled in nicely, in such a short amount of time,” Donna comments, sipping her lemonade. She looks around the kitchen. “Not a box in sight.”

Fists curled, Jared fields that observation. “My mother helped.”

“I’m sure she did. How nice of her to see you settled.”

Jared fires a look at Jensen.

Is he missing something here? Was he the one to douse Donna in cold water with a water balloon? Did he take a piss in the lemonade without realizing it? Or does he have some responsibility for the stick so far up Donna’s ass, it can talk and sing for her?

The doorbell rings, absolving anyone from further conversation. Jared sprints to the front door. He throws the door open, expecting some more uninvited relatives. Unfortunately, he doesn’t have any water balloons handy to throw on them.

Fortunately, that doesn’t matter.

“Miami!”

Nathan Fillion throws out his arms and envelops Jared in a tight, rib-crushing, inescapable hug.
Sufficiently throttled by the embrace, Jared wheezes the second Nathan lets go. He glares at the man, coughing a few times. “Where… ugh… the hell have you been? You said you were five minutes away!”

“I was!” Nathan sweeps past Jared, letting himself in. He stands inside, looking around in awe, hands on his hips. “Well! You know, I’m surprised. I thought for sure you’d be making pillow forts and building fires in the living room.”

“That’s on Fridays,” Jared huffs. “Is five minutes just the lie you feed everyone?”

Patting Jared’s cheek, Nathan replies, “Don’t be mad, Miami. But you do look so cute when you pout. You sure you’re in this for the long haul? I could buy you a house.”

“Jensen beat you to that.”

“True, but it’s missing one very important thing.”

“Oh? And what’s that?”

“Me!”

Jared presses his hand to his temple and shakes his head.

It’s going to be a long afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

woo! an update on the day of chicon! it's been 2 years since I started this verse. what a journey!

comments are love! any scene with more than two or three characters is tough. hopefully i pulled this one off. :D
It cannot be said that Nathan Fillion does not know how to make an entrance.

Although he politely shakes Donna and Alan’s hands—and hugs Jensen—the introduction he makes with the group on the patio can be likened to a character arriving at a child’s birthday party. Stepping out of the condo, Nathan steps into character, going from himself to Mal in zero to sixty. He shouts one word and immediately captures the attention of his audience in lawn chairs. From out of nowhere, Nathan produces Mal’s pistol, confidently posing and aiming it directly at Charlie.

“AHHHHHHHHH!”

In a pitch that rattles everyone’s eardrums and can be heard by dogs a mile away, Charlie shrieks and flips backwards in his lawn chair.

Jared, Nathan, and Candy rush over to extract a mess of freckled limbs from neon green plastic. Charlie struggles to free himself, holding onto Candy and Jared, simultaneously crying, squealing, and rambling his favorite quotes from Firefly.

“Stop… moving!” Candy huffs, pulling Charlie’s right arm.

“Oh my god, oh my god… you… I…”

“Charlie!” Jared groans, tugging at the lawn chair by the legs. “You’re making this… really… difficult!”

Hands on his hips, providing no help at all, Nathan quips, “I often have this effect on people, it’s very normal.”

Being on his feet doesn’t make Charlie any more eloquent or any less star struck. “It’s you.” He staggers backwards at first, but regains enough footing on the patio to make one zombie move towards Nathan. Jared wonders if his expression was anything like Charlie’s when he took his photo-op picture with Jensen.

“It’s me,” Nathan sighs dreamily. “And I got stabbed, you know, right here.” Lifting up his powder blue shirt, Nathan doesn’t give a damn about exposing his torso, chest, or any other region of his body.

The lifting of the shirt prompts Charlie to tilt back, supported by an increasingly agitated Candy. She shoves him upright, making his voice jump when he squeaks out, “I saw!”

“Don’t care much for fancy parties.” Nathan tips his imaginary hat at Jared, then wheels his attention back to Charlie. “Too rough.”

Every second in Nathan Fillion’s presence increases Charlie’s chances of either fainting, crying, or having a nosebleed—possibly all three at once. Charlie holds his hands to his chin, grinning like a damn fool; toddlers have more self-control over their emotions.

“It wasn’t entirely a disaster,” Charlie peeps, face going from tomato red to lava red in seconds. He even holds his breath in anticipation for whatever Nathan will do or say next.
On cue, Nathan banters back, “I got stabbed! Right here!”

“Alright, alright, break it up, nerds,” Jensen announces from the grill. “We ready to eat or what?”

On a good day, Jared and his friends can tear through the entire contents of a fridge without pausing for breath. Jensen didn’t believe that Jared could eat an entire medium pizza by himself until one Friday night—before any of their kitchen stuff was unpacked—Jared displayed all the power and prowess of a growing teenage boy. For there to be free, Texan style, home cooked barbeque available, the crowd should be pushing and shoving each other down to get to first helpings.

Instead, his friends stand at the edge of the patio, awkward and hesitant.

“Introductions,” Anza whispers to Jared. “Chu know…”

What introductions? They’ve all met Nathan.

“Oh,” Jared hiccups. He steps onto the patio, walking over to the corner of the table Donna and Alan have claimed for themselves. Is he David walking towards Goliath? “Uh, these are my friends…” If he could only leave it at that and then get to eating, Jared might be okay with that outcome. Of course, Anza doesn’t give him an inch to consider that.

“I’m Anza.” She jumps in, hand extended to Alan first—smart choice. “Nice to meet’chu.”

Alan shakes her hand warmly, while Donna predictably offers up a limp and uninterested squeeze. Undeterred, Anza takes charge of the introductions. One by one, every part of their group walks over and greets Jensen’s parents in a polite and friendly manner reserved for company. It doesn’t kill anyone, but it does kill their previously joyous and easygoing mood.

Jensen beams at their group and Jared.

Jared tries his best to smile back. He didn’t feel like playing host today, and his list for being the best son-in-law ever didn’t make the move from Smithville to Austin. Who just shows up on a Saturday, unannounced? The transition from moving out of his mother’s and into their condo hasn’t been completely seamless; Sherri misses him around and he misses her around. But his mother doesn’t turn up without calling or texting.

“Who,” Nathan booms out, grabbing a plate from the table, “would like to sit next to me? Feed me grapes? Bring me a jug of wine, perhaps?” Efficiently, he passes out plates, steering Charlie, Candy, and Anza towards the grill.

With the doors to the grill open, the aroma of mesquite and hickory fuses into the afternoon air. Every breath receives It couldn’t smell more like Texas in their backyard if they tried.

“Hey.” Memo remains at Jared’s side, the both of them standing an arm’s length from the patio table.

Attempting another smile, Jared looks to his friend. “Hey back.”

There was that one time, Memo drove Jared home from the Center right before graduation. Everyone at group had been busy making plans to get together over the summer. But as they cranked up the radio and sang along to awful country music, there was no question they’d hang out with or without plans in advance. Once again in Smithville, Jared invited Memo inside for ice cream. Side by side, they ate popsicles on the back porch and kicked each other’s sneakers until the sun went down and it was time to prepare for another day.

Some of that ease waves at Jared in this moment. It manages to swim above the tension and
circumstances.

“What’s up?”

There’s only one acceptable answer to Memo’s question. Jared delivers it proudly. “Chicken butt.” Sharing the same hint of a smile, Memo rebuffs, “You know why?”

“Chicken thigh.”

“What’s the deal, banana peel?”

“I’m the boss, applesauce!”

“Nice thinking…”

“Abe Lincoln,” Jared blurts out a little too loud. He covers his mouth, cracking up, truly fluent in the art of being a giant toddler. After a second of hesitation, Memo matches Jared’s grin, shoulders relaxed and rocking back and forth on his heels.

Time and space freeze when Candy screams a piece of information from her chair at the table.

“NATHAN BROUGHT A KARAOKE MACHINE!”

Keys tossed to them, Candy and Charlie disappear, a pair of blurs racing for the driveway. Anza sighs and rolls her eyes, punching Nathan in the shoulder. They will never pry Candy away from what she believes is her ticket to stardom, fame, fortune, and enough success to show up at their ten year high school reunion to drive up in a Bentley and look down at all the little people. From their places across the patio, Anza glances at Memo, now with an entirely different expression on his face. Her eyes swiftly demand information from Jared, who can only reply with a weak shrug.

To top things off, as Candy and Charlie return with the machine and a thick CD case, the Ackles reflect expressions better suited for entering a convent.

“Sweetheart.” The grill closes. Jensen holds up two plates, one dressed exactly the way Jared likes his barbeque. “Food’s getting cold.”

“I made’chu a plate,” Anza snaps at Memo. “Stuff’chu face.”

It’s odd hesitating when Jensen calls. In fact, Jared wants nothing more than to poke and prod at the feeling, question it a hundred times, and examine it from all perspectives. Of course, that’s no more feasible than it would be to ask his future mother-in-law if it would kill her to pretend like she’s having a more tolerable time than she would at a state execution.

“Yeah,” Jared says, stepping forward. “Thank you.”

Green eyes lock in on the slightest downward curve of Jared’s mouth. “Jay, what’s wrong?”

Ribs, brisket, slaw, and smoked corn grace the royal blue plate handed over with care. The speed at which his friends wolf down their plates sticks out as a testament to the old saying: you can take a man out of Texas, but you can’t take Texas out of a man.

Jared closes his eyes for a moment and takes a deep breath. When he opens them again, Jensen leans in and pecks him on the cheek. With his free hand, he squeezes Jared’s shoulder.

“Eat up,” Jensen murmurs, passing him a fork. “And set yourself down, sweetheart.”
At the patio table, Charlie and Candy fight over which CD to perform first. Nathan referees, but eggs Candy on, recommending Cher’s greatest hits, or perhaps something from Aretha Franklin. Anza arm wrestles Memo for the last serving of bacon and potato salad. Memo wins, only because Anza has suffered from exhaustion playing water war and kicking everyone’s ass. It doesn’t go unnoticed that Memo splits the tiny bit of potato goodness with her. Nathan makes sure to pry stories about Jared from the teenagers at the table. Charlie tells the one where Jared was going to show a clip of a famous black and white film in class, but he hadn’t checked which DVD was in his bag that morning and wound up showing their English class *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.

“My mother asked me to return it to the library!” Jared insists, pointing his fork at Charlie. “You traitor! You swore you’d never tell a soul!”

“Technically,” Nathan cuts in, cackling so hard he turns the same color as the watermelon on the table, “I don’t have a soul so I don’t count…”

Jensen raises his hand. “I can attest to that—this man here has no soul!” He then grins at Jared. “I’m hurt, Jay. Why wasn’t it one of *my* movies?”

“Wank bank movies!” Candy giggles. “What?! Y’all know it’s true!”

“Wank bank movies!” Anza calls out. “Chu can’t borrow a Jensen movie from Jay-bird…”

Instantly, Charlie picks up where she leaves off. “All the discs are stuck together!”

“That’s SO gross!” Jared quips, throwing a clean rib bone at Charlie’s head. “And it makes no sense! If it’s a wank bank movie then the discs would be in the DVD player!”

“Sounds like chu got a whooooole plan, dejo…”

“I’m flattered,” Jensen laughs and pats Jared’s knee. “But sweetheart, you can throw those out now.”

“Wank bank turned into reality,” Candy sighs dreamily. She rests her elbows on the table, propping her chin up on her hands. “How romantic.”

“Well, I’d like to think of myself as more than wank bank material.” Jensen shoots her a wink.

Nathan shakes his head. “I’m disappointed, Miami. All this talk of your wank bank and my name hasn’t come up once.” He pauses, just enough to make his comment stick. “…Though I do recall your name in my wank bank.”

The entire table bursts out in a riot of hooting, laughing, and variations of Jared’s name being shouted in ecstasy. Well, almost the whole table.

“The brisket is dry.” Donna’s voice cuts through everyone’s fun faster and more effective than the knife Jensen used to cut the brisket. “Shame.”

And then there’s the utter, somber silence from Memo, louder to Jared than Donna’s comment.

Jared freezes. What does he do? What does he say? How does he handle this? Why are there so many people here? Why can’t he navigate groups like Jensen or Nathan or Anza? But that’s not entirely true either, because he’s just fine around most people without a redwood tree up their asses. And what the hell is Memo’s issue? Was it too much to ask for some fun before Jared started class and Jensen left for filming? Is it too late to pretend like they’re not home? Or should he grab another water balloon for Donna—hit her twice just for luck?
“Sorry you feel that way, mom,” Jensen answers. He slings an arm over Jared’s shoulders. “You want seconds, sweetheart?”

“I do!” Nathan holds his empty plate up. “Me first!”

“No me!” Charlie yips, trying to hold his plate up higher than Nathan’s.

Jensen smells like sunscreen, smoke, and super soaker water.

Problems and issues be damned.

He holds up his own empty plate. “Jen, more brisket, please.”

Chapter End Notes

ahhh! an update!

i rewrote this six times. /head desk/ there are a lot of people in this scene (d'oh!) and so much going on that i kept making myself nervous about writing it and working myself up and ahhhh anxiety! hopefully i pulled this off okay. the next chapter is one i've been excited to write since day one. :D

thanks for sticking with me! <3
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

"Oh Atlanta" by Alison Krauss. <3

Anza braids Candy’s hair as dinner winds down.

She runs her hands through as easy as the breeze driftling by from the river. Without the words, Jared hears the story of Anza’s cousins from the Dominican Republic, who have hair like Candy’s, but they hate braids. There was everything and nothing in Santo Domingo. Tropical trees and lavender sidewalks and old men grabbing her tits on those same sidewalks underneath those same tropical trees.

She won’t romanticize Santo Domingo.

Her Tia there lives for gossip and thinks she’s the family matriarch—well, the matriarch of the side of the family that matters, in her opinion. Anza thinks she’s full of shit. Always has. But her Tia used to braid her hair this way. Some of Anza’s earliest memories are of a beach somewhere—her parents don’t remember, she doesn’t remember—and everyone around her was speaking Spanish, singing Spanish, and living in Spanish.

Was it Mexico? Or the DR?

Up and over and under and through and up and over and under and through.

Murmurs shift back and forth.

“Flat-iron that shit,” Candy laughs softly. “That’s what Jinna says.”

“Relax that shit,” Anza sighs, her fingers working. “Like it’s painless or some shit.”

“Blow dry.”

“Perm.”

“Pressed.”

“Textured.”

“Uh huh. Natural.”

“Girl, say it.”

“Kinky,” Candy huffs. “Ratty shitty nappy little weave.”

“Orale.”

“Can’t just fucking be.”

“Over there? They all got hair like ours.”
“Some days I wanna chop it all off. Then I wanna grow it all out. Then I wanna go out like a diva, you know, like a movie star.”

“Chu an’ I, we’ll go to the Oscars and kick ass.”

“Long as I don’t mess up my hair.”

Laughter tumbles out—clear and weightless. Anza ties Candy’s braids with Candy’s bright pink elastic bands. From her own hair, Anza slips bobby pins into Candy’s hair—holding in place a few stray strands. Candy reaches back, touching her new braids, smiling over her shoulder. Anza presses her forehead to Candy’s shoulder blade.

“Jay-bird can take us to the Oscars,” Anza says, shifting to sit chest to back with Candy. Her cheek rests on the crook of Candy’s shoulder. “He got the hook up.”

Jared looks over at his friends. A very familiar emotion settles in him as the sun begins to set on another day in Austin. To the right of his orange lounge chair, Jensen rests on his green one, his left leg dangling off to just barely touch Jared’s. Conversations between him and his parents have settled on other members of their family—neutral territory for the moment. Nathan keeps Charlie and Memo occupied with Firefly trivia and a generous amount of selfies.

Dinner was so good. Jared reminds himself to tell that to Jensen later.

“Oh sure, I crash stuff like that all the time.”

“Betchu crash lots of stuff like that all the time,” Anza teases. Her eyes go to Jensen’s left foot, easily bumped up against Jared’s right.

A brief memory of this morning’s activities flash through Jared’s mind. He takes his own glance at Jensen’s foot, wondering if they can get a small repeat tonight before bed. The dishes from dinner can wait until tomorrow. And if they’re not too tired, the mirrors are still up…

Jensen nudges Jared’s foot. Their eyes meet.

“I, uh,” Jensen stammers, a blush spreading across the bridge of his nose, “I was just telling my parents that the next place we get’ll have a bigger backyard.”

Biting his bottom lip, Jared tries to hold back his excitement. “Really? I mean…”

“You could get a pool!” Candy squeaks.

“They got a whole river already, deja.” Brushing her own hair, Anza clips it back. She nudges Candy’s shoulder before getting up and switching over to Jared’s chair. Jared sits up and makes room for her; naturally, they settle into position, chest to back. Slinging her legs over his, she begins her work. Brushing through a slightly knotted portion of his hair, she murmurs, “Chu want help cleaning up?”

“No,” he insists. “You guys aren’t here to help clean up.”

“I think’chu should let us help clean up, dejo.”

Anza rarely speaks this low or in this tone—like she’s sharing a secret. Or saying something others aren’t supposed to hear. Unable to make eye contact with her, he goes by the slight pull on his hair, a pull to the right. That’s the signal.
“Already?” Jared sighs in understanding.

On the other side of the patio, Nathan wows Charlie and Candy by juggling lemons and singing something slightly bawdy. A true renaissance man, Nathan basks in the attention paid to him by his audience. They move to lighting the tiki torches on the perimeter of the patio, a potentially dangerous act that could burn everything around them, but is nonetheless carried out with conspiring giggles. Memo watches from the patio; he didn’t toss out suggestions for words or body parts either. It troubles Jared to see him on his phone, purposefully isolating. Has hosting people always been so stressful? So involved?

“Ow.”

“Heh.” Anza works out a knot. “Wha’chu thinkin’, eh?”

“Nothing.”

“My tits, nothing.”

“…I don’t know how to answer that.”

She tugs his hair again, this time a lot harder. “Dejo,” she snorts. “You nervous ‘bout Monday?”

The Ackles’ side of the patio reflects the entire opposite of The Great Nathan Fillion Show. Close as they are to Jensen and his parents, Jared can’t entirely make out Donna’s speech. Alan jumps in from time to time, but his sentences are short. With Donna in the middle, she holds Jensen and Alan’s attention. She also manages to speak the most.

“No.” Jared tilts his head back to make it easier for Anza to brush his hair. “Well. Maybe.”

Tucking a piece of hair behind his ear, Anza huffs, her breath landing familiar and warm on his shoulder. “Those college assholes give’chu shit, I’ll end them.” Despite her gruff tone of voice, her fingers remain gentle, working out more difficult knots instead of ramming the brush through them.

A portion of his hair twists up. Jared doesn’t even have to ask.

“Thanks. It’s just… gonna be different.”

“ACC? Please, Jay-bird. It’s like high school. Except those motherfuckers think they the shit.”

“Yeah but I’ll be a year older than everyone.”

“So? Fuck them.”

“In which position?”

Anza cackles and finishes her work with a slap to Jared’s shoulder. “Ooooh, look at’chu, you got jokes, huh? Now you be one of them thinkin’ they the shit.” She stands again, using Jared’s shoulders as a support, and admires her work—two perfect pigtails sitting on top of Jared’s head.

“Do I look cute?”

“Dejo, what kind of nonsense question is that?” she snaps and lightly slaps his cheek. “You took time off school to help your momma…”

“Right, some help I was.”
Arms crossed over her chest, Anza glares down at him. “Escuse me?”

Jared rolls his eyes and shrugs. “Look, I just feel like I didn’t really help her that much.”

“I think that’s fucked up.”

“And I think it’s true.”

“Then chu,” Anza quips, turning to walk towards the more animated side of the patio, “are fucked up, Jay-bird.” She takes three steps and whistles. “Hey! Yeah, you three lazy butts! Help me clean up!”

Charlie clings to Nathan in defense. “Or what?!“

The spoon used to serve potato salad strikes fear in the hearts of millions—or at least in three people. “I sure as hell don’t work alone,” Anza declares. “An’ I don’t work for free. Jay-bird! What kinna ice cream we got?”

Clean up time means going home time soon. Jared had hoped for his friends to stay late into the evening, maybe even past midnight, so they could sprawl out on the lawn and goof around. June is perfect for that. It’s still not hellishly hot outside, but warm enough to relieve any worries of changing into clothes, shivering, or being trapped inside. Jared’s had his hands full adjusting to the move, taking on his role at the Center, and helping Jensen around the condo, so whenever he was free his friends weren’t.

Today was supposed to be…

“Wait!” Charlie whines, stomping over to the patio table. “Does this mean we’re not gonna karaoke?”

“Good lord, it means you shut up and go grab Tupperware,” Candy answers.

“But I don’t know where it is!”

“Get Nathan to help you. That’s what he’s here for.”

“Oh no. I was invited as eye candy.” Nathan inches away from the group. “I was not brought here to perform manual labor.”

A new voice to the mix jumps in. “Wait, wait.” Jensen gets to his feet, holding his hands up. “Y’all aren’t leaving already, are you?” He looks to Jared for confirmation.

Anza gathers up dirty plates. “I said I wanted ice cream first.”

“It’s getting late,” Jared says to Jensen, standing and moving for the table.

“And my momma gon’ kill me if I’m home at the crack of dawn again.” Candy shoo Charlie away from Nathan. “Jay-bird, you want us to hand wash these or use your fancy pants dishwasher?”

Jensen frowns and follows after Jared. “It’s not even eight, sweetheart. And y’all don’t have to wash a thing. Here, let me.” He tries to take a stack of plates from Anza. “…or not.”

Things are quiet by the river for a Saturday night. It seems like the entire world thinks it’s a good idea to turn in a little earlier. Jared lets go of his remaining desire to have his friends stay. Taking a hot shower and crawling into bed are the two greatest ideas ever. And he knows that it’s not a break from his friends that he needs.
“Dishwasher,” Jared tells Candy. He collects bowls and a few bags of chips, making himself busy. “Just set stuff in. Jen can whisper to it later.” Looking at Jensen, Jared tries his best to smile. “It’s no problem to pick up, Jen, you go on and relax.”

The freckled frown tightens. Jensen’s eyes flit from Jared’s to Anza’s and back to Jared. “Fine.” He turns and steps back to his parents.

That… was not supposed to hurt.

Worse, no one knows what to say. Silence slips itself around Jared, squeezing his throat, making his breath catch. Shock issues a command to every muscle: freeze.

“You wanted to show me something!” Nathan shouts out, raising his hand and waving. “I mean… you wanted me to see something personal! I mean… Miami, you know what I mean!” In less than a second, Nathan walks over, grabbing Jared’s free hand and gripping it firmly. “C’mon! Before we all fall to the power of my handsome good looks and down to earth charm.”

Yanked by the will of Nathan Fillion, Jared stumbles forward. Candy manages to save what he’s holding and Charlie opens the screen door for them.

Jared panics once he has a second to breathe—after Nathan shuts the screen door to the patio.

“This doesn’t look suspicious at all.”

“What’s to be suspicious of?” All the handsome good looks and down to earth charm have affected Nathan’s thinking. He places his hands on Jared’s shoulders. Bare shoulders. In front of the screen door. In view of Donna. Somehow, Nathan connects the slight jump Jared gives. He looks at Jared, then at the screen door. Then at Jared. “Oh.”

His hands drop.

“What’s it matter?” Jared grumbles, walking into the kitchen, headed directly for the fridge. “You know, all I wanted was a night at home with my friends.” Typically, ice cream—or any kind of sugar—helps most situations.

Landing with a thud on the counter, the gallon of triple chocolate fudge ice cream does little to soothe Jared’s rising frustration.

Nathan swings around to face Jared. Dressed in a light gray shirt and cargo shorts, he looks every bit like Jensen when he’s off set for a while, minus the scruff. His hands go for Jared’s shoulders again, but stop half an inch before contact. Instead, he holds them up as he speaks.

“Look, I’m not saying you’re wrong, Miami, but you’ve still got a night with your friends. No one has to go home any time soon. Unless you want us to, then we’ll scoot out to the nearest bar and I’ll get that fine group of minors hammered.”

“…”

“Ah,” Nathan teases, nudging Jared’s chin. “You smiled, I’m off the hook.”

After a roll of his eyes, Jared turns and hauls out small, white bowls and spoons. “I’m not playing.”

“Neither am I.”

“No, I meant I’m not playing.”
In a rare, serious tone, Nathan rumbles, “Let me tell you this, Miami, in this business you’re gonna have a lot of people show up on set that you don’t like or have no right to be there. And guess what? Those who can deal with that and adapt are the ones who make it. Those who don’t get eaten alive.” Arms over his chest, he stands tall, shoulders back. “I’ve always thought you were part of that first group.”

That’s… maybe…

Hold up.

Wait a minute.

“Wait one damn minute,” Jared says, setting down the ice cream scoop in his hand. “Since when does Nathan Fillion come into my house and lecture me about ‘this business’? This isn’t ‘the business.’ This is my life—a life I happen to have with Jensen.”

Brushing past Nathan, Jared runs off into the living room.

But no way in hell does this mean he’s running away. He grabs two objects with different histories but of equal importance. Back in the kitchen, he orders Nathan to open the damn sliding door like a gentleman.

This isn’t the business. It’s his life. And if his friends want to leave because the Ackles make them uncomfortable, he’s not going to blame or resent them for it. He’s done pouting over plans not going his way. Nathan Fillion does not have to hold his hand to get through upsets like an adult. Anza does not have to counsel him on his feelings because he’s too stubborn to wade through them himself. Okay. Wait. Maybe he does. But he doesn’t have to react this way and the night doesn’t have to end like this.

He’ll get to say his piece to Jensen about his parents—later.

For now, he’s going to continue on with his plans as if nothing had changed.

“Excuse me, y’all,” Jared announces, his voice tuned up. “Hi. Thank you again for spending time with us. Jen and I have something for you. If he’ll still jump in.”

They should have a fire pit. The thought flits through Jared’s mind in the most random way; he feels a spark of heat in his body the second Jensen looks up and nods.

Outside again, Nathan rejoins his audience.

Everyone pays attention to the sight of Jensen and Jared tuning their guitars.

“I didn’t know you could play,” Alan comments, leaning forward in his chair, smiling at Jared. “How long have you been playing?”

“He’s a Texan, dad.” Jensen beams. “Of course he knows how to play.”

“Jay-bird’s good!” Charlie chimes in. “He taught me how to hold a guitar so I could hit on guys…”

It won’t do anyone any good to dwell on Donna’s expression following Charlie’s remark. Nathan picks up the banter easily. “Really? You know, that sounds familiar. I recall Miami teaching me how to hold an instrument as well.”

Jensen fields the next comment. “Oh yeah?” He swings over to stand next to Jared. “Now, which
instrument would that be?”

“If I remember correctly, Jensen, it’s similar to a flute.”

“A flute, you say? Jay, I didn’t know you could play the flute.”

“I can’t,” Jared quips, strumming his guitar and trying to contain his laughter. “It was more like a kazoo.”

Anza bestows a high five to Jared while Candy and Charlie tend to Nathan’s pride, lying in broken pieces all over the ground. Bumping their shoulders together, Jensen snickers, mentioning under his breath that the only flute Jared should be playing is his.

At the edge of the porch, Memo continues texting on his phone.

“So?” Jensen holds his guitar differently than Jared. His grip is never as formal or practiced as Jared’s. “Let’s kick this out and have some ice cream, sweetheart.”

Guitars may share cosmetic similarities, but no matter how alike they seem, each guitar possesses its own distinct sound. And even though learning to play remains the same for everyone, technique yields personality. There are infinite ways to describe a guitar in the hands of a native speaker—someone who thinks in chords and responds in twangs.

Jared’s guitar is older than Jensen’s—darker and a little heavier. There’s more scuffs on the body and its polish has worn off over the years. It plays a touch fuzzy whenever the weather turns rainy. But it’s no less appreciated in their house. To the sound of Jensen’s excited laugh, Jared tunes it, returning the grins of everyone around him.

Well, almost everyone.

“My god,” Nathan crows, clapping Jensen on the back, “what’s next? You two wearing matching outfits? It’s a slippery slope, my friend. One minute you’re both playing the same instrument, the next, you’re slipping on rhinestone denim.”

Jensen plucks a particularly high-pitched chord at Nathan, then maintains eye contact with Jared. “If this is cheesy, just call me Cheddar.”

“That’s a terrible joke, Jen.”

“Terrible? Or Gouda enough to eat?”

Their guitars mimic their banter, exchanging sweet, crisp notes. “You know, tonight I feel grate.”

“That so, Jay? What if I’m feeling a little bleu?”

“My momma told me love would stink.”

“Ouch, sweetheart. You can be such a muenster.”

Strumming a quick, rapid beat, Jared finishes with, “Who am I to dis a brie?”

The patio bursts out in boisterous laughter. Charlie steps forward to declare Jared the winner, but Jensen begs for a second of silence. He holds his hands up, wearing his guitar over his shoulders, acting as solemn as an American Idol judge.

He clears his throat and looks up at the crowd on the patio.
“Jay, I let you win.” Jensen allows one perfectly timed pause to twirl by. “So maybe you’ll feel feta.”

Laughing doesn’t describe the sounds or reactions given by the peanut gallery. Even Alan stands up to congratulate Jensen on all of his fine years of schooling that have led to this proud moment. Father and son shake hands, while Charlie attempts to console Jared.

“No you think I have a shot with Nathan?” Charlie asks this not too softly. “I think I have a shot.”

“Fire hydrants have shots,” Jared replies dryly, glancing over at the subject in question. He tunes his guitar a fraction more. “Can we talk about this later, though? I mean…”

Charlie’s eyes widen to extremely desperate proportions. “Jay-bird! What if this is my only chance?!”

“It won’t be—okay! Okay, now…” Jared raises his voice to pierce the canopy of multiple conversations going on simultaneously. He stands tall to address the crowd. “As y’all can see, we’ve got the world’s shortest concert to play for you right about now.”

Back in his hands, Jensen coaxes a smooth, sparkling sound from his guitar. The sound matches their earlier daytime hours, where time was nothing more than super soakers and pink plastic kiddie pool. Jared matches the tune. His fingers work the strings in familiar, practiced motions. Side by side, they’re playful; the guitars answer each other just fine. Harmonic and cascading, they lead into a song as easy as breathing.

As a surprise for everyone, Jensen included, Jared starts to sing.

On an Austin breeze, Jared’s voice never once detracts from the lyrics or their jangly, organic playing.

“Same old place, same old city. What can I do?” He looks straight at Jensen. “I’m fallin’ in love. I’m just an old hound dog, roamin’ around, Lord, Lord. I’ve got all this.” He smiles wider. “An’ heaven above.” The tune picks up. They continue playing in sync, bright and sweet. “Oh, Atlanta. I hear you callin’. I’m comin’ back to you, one fine day. No need to worry, there ain’t no hurry, cause I’m…” Notes begin a quick, cheerful descent. “On my way, back to Georgia.”

Jared carries out the drawl, the swing, and the twang without a hitch.

“I get a feelin’ in me, when I remember all those crazy days and crazier nights.” Jensen’s eyebrows rise with his. “Can’t you hear the music playing? You must’ve heard them saying, we’re gonna rip ‘em up and light up the night!”

Anza and Candy clap to the beat, swaying back and forth. Jared’s fingers move without pause or hesitation even over the once-difficult portions. He’s no professional, but he can more than hold his own with a guitar. Jensen isn’t the only one in this house who can play. And for the interlude, they walk in slow circles around each other, their hands moving and guitars enjoying every second of tonal revelry.

Deep breath in.

“Same old place,” Jared practically sighs, grinning so much his face hurts. “I’ve got all this and heaven above. Oh, Atlanta, I hear you callin’. I’m comin’ back to you one fine day. Hey, no need to worry. Ain’t no hurry, cause I’m…”

They dip in. Jared stills his strings and Jensen drives his up hot and focused, shaking his head and shoulders to the beat.
“On my way, back to Georgia. On my way, back to Georgia!”

Together, lush and pure, Jared and Jensen climb through the last few ascending notes.

Jared’s got all of this—Jensen’s expression filled with nothing but adoration. His heart backflips and cartwheels until one of them—it doesn’t even matter who—leans in close enough for their lips to meet. Then Jared’s heart waves its white flag and puts in its two week notice.

It’s done for. That’s it. This is it.

Jensen is it.

As if he needed any reminder.

Suddenly, Jared can’t wait to have everyone out of the house.
True to her word, Anza does not leave without being served ice cream. Nathan hauls out the gallon and the proper accessories. Within sixty seconds, after a hoard of teenagers attack, the ice cream disappears.

And soon after, their guests begin to disappear.

There are four hugs from Anza, three kisses from Candy, two incoherent murmurs about trying to get Nathan’s number from Charlie, and one weak, but well-meaning hug from Memo. And probably a partridge in a pear tree.

Not to be outdone, Nathan departs only after squeezing the life out of Jared from a rib-cracking hug. Sure, Nathan lifts Jared an inch off the floor, but that’s not the most disconcerting part. Jared’s concerns lie mostly in the realm of potential rib fractures and damage to his lungs. In front of Jensen and his parents, Nathan affectionately nudges Jared’s chin. His eyes glint with mischief.

“Keep your chin up,” he imparts, sweatier, wrinklier, and lighter than when he arrived. “You need anything, don’t you even dare to hesitate calling me. I mean it. I’ll set down my margarita, jump right out of the pool at the Hilton, and rescue you in my Speedo.”

Jensen laughs, but Jared can only murmur a faint, “Yeah, thank you.”

It’s not until Nathan drives away that Jared fully realizes what his absence has left him with.

“Well,” Donna chirps, clapping her hands, “shall we get back to the patio?”

Jared flinches and tries not to bug-eye stare at his future mother-in-law. All of his friends just left, hours ahead of what they had planned because of an unexpected visit, the entire afternoon has been one awkward bump after another, and Donna still wants to stay? Does she want to hang out or is this some kind of plea for attention from her youngest son? Does she cling this hard to Josh or Mackenzie? Is anyone going to say something or is Jared going to have to be the one to tell this woman that the night is over,? What would his momma do in this situation?

Probably hand Donna her ass.

Alan clears his throat and places a gentle hand on his wife’s shoulder. “Honey, I think we should let these two turn in.” Oh, thank god.

“It’s not even eight,” she counters and turns to Jensen. “I still wanted to catch up on things.”

“It’s a three hour drive back,” Alan thankfully interjects before Jensen can answer.

If there was ever a time Jared wished he had psychic abilities… He tries to communicate his opinion on the subject of the Ackles staying later. Jensen seems to catch the quiet desperation in Jared’s eyes, but he’s still not handing Alan the keys.

In the middle of this dire anxiety, Alan’s phone goes off.

Donna seizes the opportunity to corner Jensen, blocking Jared, talking a mile a minute about family
members in Dallas and Richardson. For all the thirty seconds Alan takes the phone call, she makes it impossible for Jared to get a word in. The entryway to their condo has never felt so cramped. The only two possible routes of escape still involve some kind of explanation. He could make a run for the kitchen and start cleaning up, but if he abandons his post, Donna might have her way and stay until midnight.

“That was Josh.” Alan rejoinsthem, hand on his chin. “There’s storms outside of Dallas.”

Jared looks to Jensen, who then looks to his parents.

Once again, Alan tries to reason with Donna. “I’ll book us a room at the Hilton downtown. We can drive back in the morning.”

“A hotel? Why would I stay in a hotel?”

“Because I’d love to see you try to stay in a motel, dear.”

“Alan.”

“Let’s say goodbye.”

“Dad,” Jensen blurts out, “y’all are welcome to stay the night.” He doesn’t stop there. “We can fix up the guest bedroom without a problem.”

Those are the magic words. Nothing can take them back. Three pairs of eyes turn to Jared, as if all of a sudden, his opinion matters. But what is he supposed to do now? Open the front door and tell Donna not to trip on her way out? Tell Alan that the Hilton seems like an excellent choice? Grumble at Jensen that wow, he owes him a huge apology and some groveling? Well, there’s time for that later.

With a weak smile, Jared nods and says, “Of course. I’ll go clean up if you want to get stuff ready?”

Not three milliseconds after his suggestion, Donna volunteers herself to help Jensen fix up the room. There’s really not much to ‘fix up,’ but she immediately has three questions about towels and toiletries for Jensen. Jared manages to refrain from rolling his eyes into the next universe—but only by an extremely small margin. In the kitchen, he escapes the reality of his night and enters the reality of cleaning up.

Fortunately, the sight of his momma’s rooster pitcher brings a smile to his face.

They don’t have a theme throughout the condo, but Jared likes to think the pitcher ties it all together anyway. Jared likes the slightly disjointed feel to their home. If it all looked immaculately decorated, he’d feel as out of place as a sinner in church. Well, technically he’s already been the sinner in church.

“Need some help with that?” Alan walks into the kitchen and offers a smile of his own. “Certainly don’t mean to leave you with all the hard work.”

Even if there were a thousand plates to be washed, Jared doubts he has the most difficult job right now. That title belongs to Jensen, who has been left to answer important questions such as the thread counts to their sheets and towels and how long it’s been since anything has been washed. Never, Jared hopes Jensen said, nothing in their home has ever been washed ever, but they will go beat a few towels against a large rock for her right away…

“That’s alright,” Jared hears himself say, sounding more defeated than he wants to admit. “It’s not
too bad.” He assumed Alan would follow after Donna and Jensen. Instead, they awkwardly stand in 
the kitchen. Some barbeque sauce spilled onto the counter. Ice cream somehow managed to get on 
the black backsplash over the oven. Food needs to be wrapped up and put away. Dishes need to be 
washed by hand because Jared hasn’t been able to figure out the settings on the dishwasher yet. 
Jensen seems to have solved the puzzle, but just barely.

Rolling up his sleeves, Alan approaches the sink. “It’s definitely not a job for just one person. I can 
wash or dry? Put away some of the leftovers? Whichever you prefer.”

“...I can wash? Put away?”

“Which one is your least favorite?”

“Putting away stuff,” Jared answers honestly. “But it’s fine…”

“Please, allow me.” Alan speaks softly, in the same tone he was speaking to Jensen out on the patio 
over dinner. “You just point me to the Tupperware.”

Admittedly, neither Jared or Jensen have spent that much time in the kitchen. There was that one 
afternoon, but it certainly didn’t involve any cooking or packing away leftovers. Something was 
packed, that’s for sure. Jared clears his throat and checks a few cupboards, eventually providing Alan 
with the requested items. The rainbow lids seem a little garish now, as he hands them over, but there 
was method to the madness. When they were buying kitchen items—a few weeks into moving in, 
which was the same time they got sick of take out all the time—Jared suggested that brighter lids 
would be easier to find. Now, passing them over to his future father-in-law, it seems like he’s just 
handed over the world’s gayest Tupperware.

Jared washes the rooster pitcher first. He wishes he would have invited his momma over when the 
Ackles showed up. But she was just here a few days ago and Jared didn’t want to cut into her 
weekend.

Silence permeates the kitchen and sticks to everything. It’s almost as bad as the barbeque sauce that 
refuses to come off a plate no matter how hard Jared scrubs. Should he try to make conversation? 
But Alan’s the one who wanted to be here. And why? And what the hell did Jensen put in the sauce, 
glue?

“So.” Alan unsticks them from their silence. “You’re starting school on Monday, right?”

Oh shit. He wants to talk about school.

“Yes, sir.”

“Are you excited?”

“Yes.” Jared clings to a plate. “Uhm, I’ve got a few classes I’m looking forward to.”

“That’s great.” Two Tupperware containers emerge, neatly packed and with their appropriate lids. 
“Mind if I put these in the fridge?”

“Oh, no, I don’t mind. Uhm, you’ll have to move some stuff around…”

Alan opens the fridge and laughs. “Wow, look at this.” He picks up a bottle of hot sauce. “This must 
be Jensen’s, huh? Or do you also enjoy ripping apart your stomach lining?”

Shaking his head, Jared huffs. “I tried to get him to buy something less horrible, but he liked the
name.”

“Hmm. Red Fang’s Night Destroyer Hot Sauce. Let me guess: he’s two steps away from having an ulcer.”

“No,” Jared answers with a smile. “He knows what happens when he eats too much of that. I just manage to be around to remind him before he pours it all over dinner.”

“Did y’all buy it local?”

“Yes, sir. It’s probably the oldest thing in the fridge right now. Not that it’s that old though.”

With only a few adjustments, Alan manages to fit everything into the fridge in a visually appealing manner. “Hot sauce is one of the true kitchen staples,” he adds. “No Texan should be without it.”

Jared lets out a short laugh. “Uh huh, well I’d rather stick to my Blue Bell over that stuff.”

Their conversation continues, without much more stress or awkwardness. While he tells Jared about the time he caught a ten year old Jensen eating straight out of a carton of Blue Bell Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough at midnight, he grabs a sponge and starts wiping down the counters. In exchange for the gem of a story, Jared confides that they’ve probably been going through more cartons of ice cream than is absolutely necessary.

“We made boozy milkshakes last week,” Jared shyly admits. “I didn’t even know that was a thing.”

“Boozy milkshakes? Please, do tell.”

“Well, it’s basically just a milkshake, then you put a whole bunch of… uhm… liquor in it.”

“You young people,” Alan jokes. “Living the high life here in Austin. Would you recommend a boozy milkshake to a casual milkshake fan?”

“Yes, but you have to use Blue Bell.”

“But of course. What flavor did y’all use?”

“We only had vanilla… but we added chocolate syrup.”

“A bold move. Sounds like you two been having fun so far this summer.”

Slightly wary of that comment, Jared answers quieter this time. “It’s going by really fast, that’s for sure. Jen’s projects pick up this week, and you know, I start school.”

“I think I heard from Jensen that you’re also on the board at the Center in Austin.” Alan has moved onto cleaning the mysterious ice cream splotch from the backsplash. Jared never anticipated learning interior design descriptions like subway-style backsplash or chrome pendant lights or Calcutta gold marble with cherry. Apparently, those are things their kitchen has, and he’s sure they add positive value to it somehow. Still, no matter how nice things are in their kitchen, nothing saved them from the hoard of teenagers that stormed through tonight.

One sinkful of dishes stands between Jared and freedom from cleanup. “Oh, yeah. It’s not every week though, just twice a month.”

“Good stuff?”

Something in that sauce has to be made of glue. As he wrestles sauce off one of the plates, he
outlines the Youth Advisory and Advocacy Board’s goals for the summer, including the Summer Social. Anza wants to have a photo booth available this year, but there’s no room in the budget yet. Their next meeting later this month will focus on fundraising efforts within the Austin communities. Even larger than the Social, the Center’s hopeful expansion looms on the horizon.

“I just want to add more beds,” Jared sighs, shutting off the faucet. “I thought it would be kind of… not so much work. It doesn’t seem like such a big deal to me.”

The ice cream splotch vanquished, Alan moved onto the rest of the countertop surfaces. He frowns and looks up. “I would imagine that’s got something to do with the city planner.”

“Yes! I mean. Yes. It does. But it’s not all him. The Center would have to either expand or create an entirely separate building on the same lot. There’s room for sure, but the Board isn’t going to drop two million dollars on just any old project. And expanding the number of short and long term beds isn’t really doing much to address the real problem at hand…” Jared feels himself blush. “Sorry, I’m a little involved.”

Alan rinses the sponge he’s been using and dries his hands on the red checkered hand towel near the sink. His smile resembles Jensen’s. Or maybe, Jensen’s smile resembles his.

“I think it’s a fine thing to be a little involved. Or maybe more than a little.”

“It used to be,” Jared murmurs, looking down at the hardwood floor, “that you’d get put in an institution.” He inadvertently meets Alan’s eyes. “Now, you worry what’s another night on the street gonna do to you.”

Gratitude and anxiety mix themselves into Jared’s gradual exhale. It gets tough working at the Center and coming back home—not only to this fine space and its many luxuries, but the man who has been generous enough to share it with him. It’s not just money; it’s support systems.

And Jared has always had those.

They’ve cleaned the kitchen and accomplished something else, though Jared can’t quite name it.

Chapter End Notes

And away we go!

Thank you for sticking around. ❤  Visit me on tumblr (compo67).
Chapter 11

Somehow, Jensen and Donna emerge from upstairs, though Jensen looks a little worse for wear.

Empathy tugs at Jared’s heart. He doesn’t turn Jensen away when silently asked for a hug before they retreat into the living room with Donna and Alan. In that split second of alone time, Jensen presses a kiss to Jared’s cheek as they hug tight.

“Sweetheart.” Jensen’s breath brushes warm against Jared’s jaw line. “I’m such an asshole.”


“Sorry,” Jared pipes up, the sound of his voice somewhat of a surprise to his ears, “is just fine, Jen.”

A kiss occurs—chest to chest, hands over shoulder blades, the heat of the sun returning and smoothing over their skin. Smoke from the grill lingers on Jensen’s shirt. Sections of his hair stick up, random and wild, from their earlier aquatic activities. Jensen in the summertime is a tall, lean buffet of dreams turned reality. He smells good. Looks good. And kisses even better.

Summer has been good to them, if a little busier than they’d like. But there’s a few weeks in July and August where Jensen will have breaks from filming, and Jared doesn’t have classes on the weekends. They made a list of summer activities and goals back in the beginning of May.

But of course, that list might as well be halfway to the moon right now.

“Jensen?” Donna calls out from the living room. “Honey, would you bring me some Advil?”

Lip-locked with Jared, Jensen flinches. Jared pulls away first and pats Jensen on the chest. “I’ll get it,” he murmurs, and moves towards the cabinet that houses the Advil.

Silent and confident, Jensen pulls Jared back in for another kiss--this one rougher and deeper.

Sufficiently weak at the knees, Jared returns every effort in the kiss, and goes a step further. He bumps their hips together, summoning memories of their activities earlier in the day. Jensen tries to continue that thought, but Jared once again breaks free first. This time, he secures the Advil. With a shake of the bottle, he hands it to Jensen.

Green eyes beg for forgiveness.

Shaking his head, Jared sighs. “Not the eyes.”

Reinvigorated, Jensen adds a small whine to his schtick.

Jared waves Jensen off and glances towards the living room. “Go on, you lead. You can grovel and make it up to me later.”

“Like with orgasms?”

“More like with changing the sheets tonight and doing the laundry tomorrow.”
“You sure you wouldn’t just want an orgasm?”

“Jen.” Jared stops in the kitchen doorway and bops Jensen on the nose. “The way you’re headed, I deserve fresh sheets, folded laundry, and at least two orgasms. Don’t forget a cup of water.”

Satisfied with the way he’s handled the situation, Jared walks ahead of Jensen, strategically swinging his hips because he just knows it won’t go unnoticed. He can’t help but smile when he hears what Jensen says in response, just before Jared slips into the living room and he turns to get that cup of water.

Dreamily, Jensen exhales, “You sure do, sweetheart.”

For an entire hour, Alan, Jared, and Jensen humor Donna by patiently listening to her.

She starts by updating Jensen on the activities and accomplishments of his siblings, including Mackenzie’s promotion—which Jensen knew about last week, Jared remembers that—and Josh’s impending trip to the Rockies—also something Jensen and Jared knew about, having been invited to join in on the excursion. They had to decline, but Jared made sure to make plans with Josh when he got back from climbing mountains and doing other dangerous things computer programmers don’t usually do.

Next on the update, Donna informed Jensen about his nieces and nephews, their playdates, summer activities, and how one of his nieces lost a shoe on the soccer field and it took Donna an entire day to buy a new pair because no one sells just one shoe. It happened to be a very good pair of shoes, so it was important to replace the pair, and at least they got to go out for lunch after tracking down another pair at the Richardson Mall.

And wouldn’t Jensen believe it, but shortly after the Mall, Donna bumped into Quinn, an old classmate of Jensen’s back in grade school. He’s a doctor now, and still in the Richardson area, in private practice, of course. Speaking of doctors, Donna wanted to know if Jensen had managed to find a new primary care doctor in Austin, though of course there would never be any doctor as good as his pediatrician growing up. That man was a saint—a natural with children. He could give a flu shot to the fussiest child and spare everyone tears. He passed away about five or six years ago, and his son took over the practice, but Donna knows that there will never be another doctor quite like him.

Donna considers herself a social historian. She documents what she hears and sees in Richardson and Dallas. Her networking has often helped find everything from projects for Jensen to business connections for Josh.

The Ladies’ Club of Richardson asked the Event Committee to plan a luncheon at a historic site. Donna detailed the choices they had and their budget—both extremely narrow—and covered each committee member’s poor choice of venue. Then, they had to go about selecting the caterer, and that was a literal mess. One caterer presented them with an option that was called The Bucket. Another caterer seemed to think Folgers coffee would be appropriate to serve. Yet another only presented vegetarian and vegan options, and it was a shock to Donna that they could even stay in business—and charge so much—in the land of barbeque and steak. And not to dwell on it, but Yesenia had the absolute worst ideas for table placements. They do have a party benefitting the police department to plan later in the summer, and the budget for that will be much more gracious, but how could anyone think of using disposable silverware?

Jared fell asleep against Jensen’s shoulder.
He didn’t care how rude it was, he was Tired.

Either Donna ran out of steam or Alan must have made some comment about bed, but Jensen gently nudged Jared awake and carded a hand through his hair. Jared sleepily said his goodnights to the Ackles and wandered upstairs without Jensen, giving them time together to say their own goodnights.

Settled in bed after his own nighttime routine, Jared ignores the crusty parts of the sheets and the smell of long-dried lube. Listing off everything he’s done throughout the day, fatigue presses on his eyelids. Their bed isn’t so gross that he can’t still sniff out Jensen on them. Their sheets have consistently had the scents of sunscreen from their trips to the lake and the beach, lush, rich woodlands from their hikes both during the day and at night, and suede from Jensen’s fine three piece suits.

Lost in these memories of summertime, he barely hears Jensen shut their door.

Soft, careful footsteps tread across the floor and onto the rug stretched out underneath their bed.

Jensen’s scruff scratches against Jared’s cheek. His low, decadent voice rumbles against Jared’s ear. “Jay, let me change the sheets at least.”

“No,” Jared mumbles into his pillow, eyes closed. “Jus’ get in.”

“I would…” Kisses brush over the nape of Jared’s neck. Jared knows the outline of those lips anywhere on his body. “…but it kind of stinks in there.”

Moment. Ruined.

“It does not, and if it does, it’s your fault.” Jared huffs and rolls away from Jensen.

“Sorry.” Jensen laughs and tugs at the sheets. “You’re just so cute when you’re mad and lying in dried come.”

“You sure are crude for someone who’s momma is sleeping over.”

“She can’t hear us.”

“Hmph. That’s what you think.”

“Sweetheart.”

“Oh no, don’t you dare.”

“Baby.”

“No, Jen.”

“Darling.”

“Nope. G’way. Sleep on the couch tonight.”

“Honey.”

“Shoo. Get your face out of my face.”

“But it’s such a handsome face.”
...mine or yours?"

"Uh, mine."

"Jensen!"

Like a fire drake from the North, Jensen ambushes Jared in a rush of growls and nips on his shoulders. Their bed becomes the side of the mountain as they wrestle for gold, god, and glory. His back to Jensen’s chest, Jared tries to repress his laughter, but can’t help squealing when Jensen starts shouting that Jared’s the most handsome-est, most beautiful-est, most lovely-est, most forgiving-est, most generou-est, most patient-est, most kind-est…

“That one’s…” Jared wheezes, in between laughs, “…an actual… word!”

“Oh, crap. You’re right.”

Jared seizes his moment during Jensen’s revelation. He rolls them over, onto their sides, pushes Jensen down onto his back, and flips over and up to pin Jensen down. Victorious, and panting for breath, Jared pokes Jensen’s chest, right above his heart.

“Do it,” Jensen mutters, his voice thick and rough. “Do it and take your revenge.”

“No.” Poking harder, Jared taps Jensen’s throat. “That is not how I will be satisfied.”

“You mean to torture me, do you?”

“As I see fit, prisoner.”

Jensen’s voice changes on a dime. “My parents want to have breakfast with us tomorrow morning.”

Sighing, Jared rolls off and plops back onto their bed, lying next to Jensen. “I figured.”

“Is now the time I tell you how much I appreciate you?”

“Hmm.”

“’Cause I do.”

“Uh huh.”

“A lot, a lot.”

“Sure.”

“Thiiiiiis much.”

“Jen.”

“Jay.”

“Your momma does not like me.”

A frown pulls at Jensen’s mouth. He looks away for a second, and meets Jared’s eyes in a manner much less confident than usual. “I want to make excuses for her so bad.”

Sitting up, with more energy than previously thought, Jared places a hand on Jensen’s middle just because he can. It awes him still, this closeness between them. He can reach out and touch this man
in such a way that leaves them both breathless and hungry for more. Not a trace of shyness flashes in Jensen’s eyes when Jared’s fingers meet his skin.

Moments in the evenings from now on might not be as still or as peaceful as this.

“I don’t really know how to handle this,” Jensen admits. He slips his hand over Jared’s. “And I’m sorry my ignorance here has caused you harm.”

Jared can’t help but smile. “You’re talking like you’re in one of your movies.”

“One of the good ones, I hope.”

“Uh huh, but then again, they’re all good ones, right?” Jared flicks Jensen’s nose with his free hand.

Chest puffed with pride, Jensen nods. “Oh yeah, every last one of them. Well… I guess you do love me.”

“Maybe a little.”

“Help me figure this out then?”

“I don’t know…” Jared sighs and shrugs. He looks around their bedroom, amused that the mirrors are somehow still up despite all the foot traffic they had in the house today. For the most part, their room is tidy enough. They each have a tendency to leave clothes around, though for very good, very persuasive reasons. Jared squeezes Jensen’s hand. “Just please try not to put me in that situation again. That was… really, really awkward.”

This is all way more serious than either of them expected the end of the night to play out.

“I promise you, I will try.” Hesitating, Jensen adds, “Do you see how I’m not perfect?”

Clean sheets are in the linen closet across from the private entrance to their bathroom. It won’t take but a few minutes to swap them out if they both do it. All they really need to do after that is go to bed and go to sleep. Tomorrow is another day.

Jared climbs out of bed and holds a pillow to his chest.

“I know you’re not perfect, Jen. You leave the faucet on while you’re brushing your teeth. You snore. You hog the blankets. And sometimes, even you have morning breath.”

A smile breaks free out of all that hesitation and wait.

“So you really do love me.”

“Yeah,” Jared says, with a sure nod. “Warts and all.”

“You mean mother and all.”

“She’ll hear you!”

“No she…”

“Get up.” Jared swats at Jensen’s face. “I want to sleep. Change the sheets, prisoner, or I’ll make you pay with your body.”

“You mean, you’ll take my booty?”
“I’m not laughing at that one, that was awful.”

“But you love me.”


Chapter End Notes

whee! an update! thank you all for waiting and sticking around. these two. sigh.
comments are love! they are what keeps me updating. :D
Most mornings, Jared wakes up first. He typically pads over to the bathroom, freshens up, and slips back into bed. The mornings when Jensen isn’t home are the toughest, so Jared will spread out in the middle and transform into the burrito king.

Spring and summer have spoiled Jared. He’s gotten used to having Jensen home more often than not. And even when Jensen has been out on interviews or promos, those projects haven’t lasted more than a day or two at a time. The new movie will require Jensen to be consistently on set from July through September. Jared can visit, but school makes it difficult. Jensen films from Tuesday to Saturday, and Jared has classes from Monday to Thursday. All that leaves them with is Sunday, but not really, because Jared can barely function after the flight from Vancouver to Austin, let alone study or prepare for school the next day.

This is not the time to think about these things.

These are tomorrow Jared’s problems.

Present Jared has more pressing concerns, like where the hell is his fiance. A brief search through the covers and pillows turns up nothing but the well-known fact that they need to change their sheets more often.

Peeking out from the jungle of covers, sheets, and pillows, Jared surveys their room. The mirrors look back at him, no help at all in his search. Fine then. Guess he’ll have to go Jensen-hunting.

Quite a few things can immediately catch Jensen’s attention. For instance, aged whiskey in fancy bottles, or classic cars restored and kept in fine condition. Custom, tailored suits paired with a brand new pair of shoes will do the trick. Steak, cooked medium rare, and cornbread fresh from the oven. Any chance at swimming in any body of water, decadently large bathtubs will do in lieu of rivers, lakes, or oceans. Fluffy towels right out of the dryer. An opportunity to dress down and dance to honkytonk music at a bar with cold beers and plenty of peanuts.

And itty bitty, way too small t-shirts on Jared.

It was a chance discovery, just a few weeks after they moved in. Neither one of them could figure out the settings to the dryer, so Jared sacrificed an old t-shirt, hand washed it, then ran it through a cycle. Their tinkering yielded a shirt half its size. Jared squeezed into it as a joke, but soon found himself in a heated makeout session against the mischievous dryer.

Ideas quickly form in Jared’s mind. He rustles out of bed and tiptoes to the dresser. Third drawer down, he finds the desired object. It was on clearance, marked down to $5.99, and all it took was two turns through the dryer to make it perfect.

Less is more.

So he puts it on and tugs it down, stretching out the sheer fabric so that the hem just barely reaches his thighs. A quick hand through his hair and he glides over towards their bathroom. His good mood makes his footsteps silent.

“Ahem,” Jared announces, leaning on the doorframe. “Mornin’.”
Yes, last night was less than amusing. Yes, they have a few serious conversations ahead of them concerning Donna and a whole bunch of things. Yes, Jared realizes that he isn’t exactly playing fair at the moment. But none of that matters. All that matters is Jensen nearly choking on his toothbrush.

Pink babydoll.


Jared turns to the side, hips and thighs and legs on display. He leans forward, just enough, aware of the curves and lines of his body accentuated by fabric that can barely contain him. Eyes half closed, he runs one hand through his hair and the other down towards his ass. First he tugs on the hem, breathing in sharp as the shirt stretches out. Pleased with the attention, and as a reward for it, Jared reaches back with both hands and slowly lifts the shirt up, half an inch at a time.

Faster is not always better.

It is always, always a good idea to drink up and bask in attention from Jensen. His eyes turn possessive, his stance at the ready.

Jared tightens the hem across his ass to provide an arousing, provocative outline.

The next motion he makes is pure reaction. Jensen charges, sweeps Jared into his arms, and pulls him in for a hard, crushing kiss. This is Jensen rough. This is him pushing aside manners and ceasing to hold back at all. It's a rush, intense and overwhelming in every way possible. His hands seize Jared's ass, squeezing, groping, claiming. And all the while, he never skips a beat kissing Jared breathless.

He tastes like mint.

Not that Jared has much of a chance to taste.

In a series of seemingly impossible motions, he finds himself flat on his back in their bed. Jensen stands, hooks Jared's legs under his arms, and tilts his hips up. The ceiling. The sheets. The hot, wet sensation of Jensen sucking him off.

Perfect, pink lips framed by light stubble, supported by a firm jaw--Jared bucks and shivers. He maintains enough sense to grab a pillow and moan into it, his cock twitching and tapping the back of Jensen's throat.

“Jen,” he manages to breathe, his voice unfamiliar to himself. “Eat me out.”

The reaction is better than any verbal response. Jensen chokes. He coughs, mouth still over Jared, and forces himself to exhale. The sensation thrills Jared, drawing out a long, satisfied moan. Jensen responds. He goes into double time, slurping, swallowing, bobbing his head and hallowing his cheeks. He blows Jared like a man obsessed.

Which might be true.

Jensen pops off, sudden, unpredictable. His lips glisten with spit and come, slightly swollen from the pressure he was applying over the sensitive crown of Jared's cock. He smiles, knowingly, and languidly licks his lips.

Again. No transition.

Just Jensen spreading Jared's legs and diving in. He doesn't hesitate. There isn't a stripe of skin he won't lick, bite, or kiss. He smacks a kiss on the curve of Jared's ass, then on his inner thigh,
followed by a feral bite. Teeth sink into flesh. His tongue sweeps over the seized section of skin. Instantly, Jared's cock responds. He cries and groans into the pillow, panting, shaking all over. Because at the same time, Jensen’s hands act on their own. One firm hand stays on the opposite thigh, fingertips digging in the same way as his teeth. The other teases Jared's cock, fingers barely touching the base or the tip, driving Jared into a frenzy of too much and not enough sensation.

Until Jensen pulls back completely--takes his hands and mouth off.

For a split second, he admires his work, the purplish, reddish mark on one thigh and the series of light pink moons on the other. His lips brush over the indents left behind by teeth. Sweet, affectionate, and kind, Jensen kisses that mark.

Like the natural dip in tone of a song, Jensen positions Jared exactly how he wants--on his stomach, on his knees, open and spread.


Jared feels himself drip come onto the sheets, his cock flushed and heavy underneath him. He could conduct electricity at this point--hot as he is. But he doesn’t have to worry about anything. Not a thing.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Jared whimpers into his pillow. “Ahh…”

Jensen slips his tongue inside, past the tight, slick ring of muscle. He eases in for the first few seconds, groans, grabs Jared’s ass, and **starts**. Authoritative hands spread Jared open, leaving him gaping and exposed. Jensen’s fingers dig, securing their hold, and he starts fucking Jared with his tongue. He alternates depth, forms a suction with his lips, buries his face, and pushes Jared into the mattress.

And just when Jared thinks he can’t take anymore, can’t hold out much longer, Jensen releases the hold of one hand from his ass.

**Slap**.

Again.

And again. Jensen utilizes the weight of his hand, balancing it with pressure and location. He times each slap, increasing force and pressure, until Jared’s ass is as pink as his baby doll t-shirt.

Jared knows he shouts something. He just can’t figure it out. Pain doesn’t just transform into pleasure--it rides alongside it, grinding just like his cock grinds into the mattress. Shock fades into pleading for more, harder, spank him harder, because this is what he gets for taunting Jensen first thing in the morning. This is his punishment and his reward.

Desperation drives them. Jensen’s cock replaces his tongue. The thick head pushes inside Jared without resistance, but towards the wider base, he has to open Jared further. Chest to back, zero to sixty, Jared clings to the sheets and screams into his pillow. Muscular thighs frame his hips, slamming against him, their bodies rocking and reacting to each other. Jensen pounds into Jared. Muted groans land between Jared’s shoulder blades, against his neck, and in the curved shell of his ear. Their bed creaks. The headboard shakes. Jensen fucks the hell out of Jared.

Until somehow, Jared manages to open his eyes. He looks straight at one of the mirrors and sees
exactly how Jensen fucks the hell out of him.

“Coming,” Jared gasps. “I’m gonna… Jen…!”

Jared loses what little control he had and shouts the second the first rope of come spurts from his cock. He tries to quiet down, but his moans turn into sobs of pleasure. He cries Jensen’s name, coming all over the bed, his stomach, and chest. Breathing becomes a challenge. Jensen fucks him right into a second, merciless orgasm, wrenching a string of obscenities from Jared’s mouth—along with something new.

“Fuck me, Sir, fuck me, please, please, please, please…”

That’s what sets Jensen off—pushes him over.

If the bed wasn’t rattling before, it does now. And if they weren’t failing to be discreet before, they are now. Jensen growls, moans, and shouts. He comes buried deep, filling Jared up, marking him inside and out.

Their time together has limits.

But Jensen always has time to brush away the tears from Jared’s eyes. He replaces them with small kisses and kind, soothing words. Familiar fingers card through Jared’s hair without hurry.

Jared doesn’t have to tell Jensen what this means to him.

Chapter End Notes

thanks for your patience! i got a new job (yay!) so things have been hectic. but, the perk to commuting is that i get to write on the train. :D this is the result of that. writing porn on the train makes time go by much faster.

i hope you enjoy this smut! it felt great to flex this porn muscle. i feel like i need a cigarette... phew!

comments are love, i always enjoying hearing from y'all! that keeps me motivated to keep writing. <3
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jared sends Jensen out ahead of him. He gives the excuse that Jensen already had his shower, and he’s not the one who has to clean come out of his ass. Or from his thighs. Or from the small of his back.

“You're so messy,” Jared balks, definitely pouting. “It's everywhere, Jensen.” Standing up not only creates a twinge of pain between his legs, but that said mess obeys the laws of gravity. Jared hobbles towards the shower while Jensen lounges on their bed, not even bothering to get decent for company.

Jensen deserves facing his parents this morning for laughing at Jared's plight.

“You still love me,” Jensen quips.

“Go!”

“Not even a kiss goodbye?”

“You're going downstairs!”

“Hmm. But I just went down stairs.” Still naked, Jensen opens the glass door to the shower in an attempt to secure a kiss.

“Get out! Don't you even try!”

Jared puts up a fraction of a fight, but he ends up giving in, laying a wet, sloppy kiss on a very receptive partner. Steam gathers in the bathroom from more than just the hot water. If this were any other Sunday morning, they’d take a hot shower together, venture to the kitchen for a cup of coffee and some sustenance, and make their way back to bed. Or stay in the kitchen. Or go to the living room. Or fuck right on the stairs for all they cared.

With a sigh, Jared breaks what could have been a very productive makeout session. It's still early, not even nine, but he doesn't want to keep Donna or Alan waiting. No need to add more to an awkward morning.

“Go,” Jared murmurs. He nudges Jensen's chin. “Make me coffee.”

“Of course. Cream?”

“You've got a one track mind. Get your hand off my ass.”

“It was an accident.”

“It's still on there.”

“And it's still an accident.”

“Don't start, Jen,” Jared nearly cries. “I'm no good at stopping when you start.”

The eyes. Jensen gives him the eyes. And combined with those freckles, eye crinkles, slightly tousled
hair, and the slightest pout to his lips--Jared doesn’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell. He’d have done probably just about anything back when he got his photo-op in Dallas. Now that they are somehow engaged and living together, Jared doesn’t have much of a shield against those eyes. Or those hands on his ass, groping, squeezing right above one of the many marks recently left. And then, as Jensen kisses him deep, one of those hands reaches a little further, so that thick fingertips press against the tender, ragingly sensitive mark on his inner thigh.

Executive decision time.

Jared yanks Jensen close, moaning into that mouth, his body slick and heated from a steady spray of water.

Jensen gives up any pretense of getting dressed and going downstairs. Instead, he steps into the shower, and kisses Jared from his mouth to his jaw to his neck to his shoulder to his chest where his tongue languidly circles around a peaked, wet nipple.

Every inhale, every exhale, slips from Jared like electricity through a power line.

Careful fingers slip over Jared’s hole. Jared shudders and gasps, simultaneous pain and pleasure causing his eyes to flutter. There’s no denying that Jensen fucked him well and hard into the mattress this morning. Jensen could push into him right now without much resistance, but with plenty of heat, and overwhelming desire.

As they are, they’re both half hard, pressed close. Jensen’s cock rests against Jared’s, and if Jared just moves his hips a fraction this way… Jensen makes a sound worthy of recording and playing over and over again.

Breathy, his voice deep and full of Texas, Jensen murmurs one word that eliminates all of Jared’s resolve.

“Sweetheart.”

It doesn’t matter that Jared’s hair is plastered to his forehead or that they’re both starting to prune or that all the steam and lack of breakfast makes Jared slightly dizzy--or maybe that’s his blood rushing to one particular area in his body. Whatever. He’ll deal with it all later. Later. After he allows Jensen to devour him--wholly and completely. He doesn’t care how. It just has to be now.

Now, while Jensen is two seconds away from fingering him, fucking him again with those expert fingers that know exactly how to work him open, curl, press, push, make Jared forget his name.

And all the while, he knows that while Jensen fingers him, they’ll be kissing, exchanging moans, trying to kiss deeper, get closer…

“Jensen? Honey?”

Donna’s voice wreaks nuclear winter on their shower activities.

“I was thinking about going to Geraldine’s for breakfast. Remember that place? Or maybe Perla’s?”

Jensen and Jared look at each other, half stunned, half amused, because Donna keeps talking through the door, mentioning details about what she likes and dislikes about both places and maybe there’s a third option. “Emmer & Rye might be a good pick too, I did like the mimosas there last time, but your father is so stubborn and always wants to go to Geraldine’s. He never wants to try anywhere new.”
Jared covers his mouth for two reasons: one, to smother his laughter, and two, to kill the moan right after. Jensen pushes two fingers inside of him—pressing deep, circling, curling, and brushing over just the right spot.

“Did you know they closed Green Pastures? Such a shame. They had the most excellent blend of a tea I liked.”

She wouldn’t be talking breakfast if she could see her youngest son lick a long stripe down the column of Jared’s exposed, bared throat. Or if she could see the way their cocks grind together while Jared fucks himself on Jensen’s fingers, breath hitching.

“Well, you come down when you’re ready. Your father and I are good to go when you are.”

“Yes,” Jensen calls out. His voice sounds perfectly normal, cheerful even, despite his tongue flickering over Jared’s nipple and two of his fingers fucking Jared in a steady, demanding rhythm. “Just finishing up shaving.” He seals his mouth around Jared’s vulnerable nipple and bites down around it, pulling, tongue pushing at the peak. Jared covers his own mouth with both hands, closing his eyes, determined not to make a sound and failing with every passing second.

“Oh good! I hope you’re using the razor I bought you for Christmas.”


“I just never know what to get you anymore. You and your brother and sister. I swear, the older you get, the more difficult y’all are to shop for.”

What is going on?

Sherri would have gotten the hint ages ago.

“You do just fine,” Jensen responds, still in character. “Usin’ it right now.”

Jared rolls his eyes and decides to take things into his own hands. Literally. He wraps his right hand around both of their cocks, his grip firm. Jensen’s character breaks with a small groan.

“You didn’t nick yourself, did you, honey?”

“Bad boy,” Jensen purrs into Jared’s ear. “So, so good.” He nips at Jared’s bottom lip. It’s an incredible talent for Jensen’s voice to change on a dime—and remain as steady as it does considering the sin they’re committing in the shower. “I’m fine, mom, don’t worry. I’ll head down in a second.”

Donna takes this as an opportunity to talk for another minute, which surprises no one.

The only thing that surprises Jared is how good it feels to be fucked in knowing silence. He focuses on the feel of Jensen’s fingers pounding into him, the muscles in his arm working, the timing of their breathing increasingly erratic and ragged. Then watching their cocks glide and grind together. Then noticing the way Jensen’s hips move, those addictive hip bones on display. And when Jared reaches those green eyes, every sensation intensifies.

“Coming,” Jared whispers, his shoulders shaking. He breaks their eye contact to look down. He wants to see. He just wants to see…

“Fuck yes,” Jensen groans at the same volume. He closes his eyes for a minute, taking everything in, and presses their foreheads together. They feel each twitch, every pulse, and together, they watch each spurt of come. Jared comes first, shooting all over his hand, Jensen’s cock, and onto Jensen’s
stomach. Jensen’s free hand clasps over Jared’s and he comes, just as messy, an expression of pure bliss on his face.

“You sure are using a lot of water to shave, honey.”

Jared shuts off the water. Jensen gives his ass a final, playful squeeze.

“You know,” Jensen calls out, licking come from Jared’s hand, “I just like a close shave.”

Chapter End Notes

phew! once again with flexing these porn muscles! :D

i listened to “A la Noche” by Gepe for inspiration in this chapter. It's a wonderful, hot song, 10/10 would recommend. It's in Spanish, but I promise you, it's *good* stuff.

well. i should probably update the tags a bit! hope y'all enjoyed!
Breakfast does not magically solve all of Jared's problems. Well, except for one. He does manage to down an entire cup of dark roast coffee within sixty seconds.

They decided on Perla’s--a high end place, with organic local vegan gluten free options for everything, as those who can afford it in Austin prefer. Jared knows they offer live music most nights, again, as folks in Austin prefer, but Sunday mornings cater to a different crowd.

He sent Jensen down first, having no issue with that, and they left shortly after. The way Donna greeted him this morning, with her purse slung over her shoulder and almost halfway out the front door. She didn't thank Jared for washing her dress without incident. She didn't ask before she rummaged through their kitchen to find a small snack since she had been up for a while. All she did was comment on how Jensen looks much better without scruff.

“I made him shave,” Jared longs to snap at her. “Just for continuity, right after he finished fucking me for the second time this morning, Donna.”

Ugh.

Coffee is there for him. Coffee doesn't disappoint. He pours a second cup for himself and adds creamer--Jensen shoots him a look and he ignores it best he can--plus three packets of sugar. Light and sweet.

In addition to ignoring Jensen's looks, Jared tries his best to ignore the twinge of pain when he sits at certain angles. It's not just that he's sore, but the pain can easily turn into pleasure if he thinks about it. It's a familiar, addictive reminder of what Jensen does to him. What's under those faded jeans. They got the right positions this morning; it was exactly how Jared wanted and needed to be fucked.

He shoots Jensen a look of his own.

“Gimme a sip of your coffee, sweetheart,” Jensen coos, leaning into Jared.

“You're gonna complain about it, so why should I?” Jared enjoys presenting a challenge.

“Because you love me.”

“Hmm. I guess.”

“I just wanna espresso my feelings.”

“You're such a big cheese,” Jared laughs and knocks their shoulders together. He relinquishes his mug, thinking that this isn't so bad after all.

But when he looks up, Donna’s stern expression greets him like a brick wall. Alan chimes in. “I've never seen Jensen drink any coffee that wasn't pitch black. I should thank you for saving whatever's left of his stomach lining.”

“The less coffee the better,” Donna adds, even though no one asked her. “Tea is much better for you, especially herbal teas.”
“Mom, you sent me coffee last Christmas.” Jensen takes a sip of Jared's coffee and makes a face. “Liquid diabetes like usual.”

Taking back his precious cup of coffee, Jared snips, “No one twisted your arm to drink it, if you recall.”

A few people around their table have noticed them. Well, they’ve noticed Jensen. Jared inches closer to him, part out of an instinctive need and for reassurance. When he can clearly see people, total strangers, taking pictures and selfies around them, what does he do? Go along with it? He definitely makes sure that he doesn't start picking his nose or hooting.

Thankfully, Jensen possesses a sixth sense about Jared's anxiety. He slings an arm around Jared's shoulders and smacks a kiss on his cheek. “It doesn't bother me anymore,” he says, voice purposefully kept at a volume accessible only to their table. Alan nods knowingly and Donna frowns. “It takes a lot of getting used to. Right?”

Alan helps. He relaxes in his seat and opens his body language to Jared. “Photos from a distance, still respectful, are fine. But the second anyone tries to interrupt or take something that isn't being offered, well, different story. And that's why I constantly tell this kid to let John do his job and accompany us.”

“Dad.”

“Son.”

This conversation is not new, Jared knows this. And he can see both sides. Jensen shakes his head and sighs. “John also deserves off time.”

“I wish you'd have moved closer,” Donna comments with a sniff. “You're so far from us all. And you barely have any room in that condo.”

The waitress needs to reappear. Now.

“Mom, we talked about this. Austin is good for us. We like it here.” Bless Jensen for not looking to Jared to add to that fact. Nothing Jared could say here would make a difference. “And three thousand square feet is hardly small. It's just the two of us.”

“For now,” Alan states, hiding a smile behind his own cup of coffee.

Jared blushes, but laughs at the look of shock in Jensen's eyes. “Don't worry,” Jared snickers. He pats Jensen's knee. “The only addition I want any time soon might be a dog. Or two.”

Clearing his throat and breathing a sigh of relief, Jensen sits up a little straighter. “I guess, wow, well. We haven't talked about that much, have we?”

“You wanna?”

“Maybe. Yes?”

“You promise to buy me breakfast at least?”

“I could probably swing that.”

“Good.” Jared smiles, easy and relaxed. “You can stop looking so scared.”

“Looked like he was about to have an episode,” Alan quips. “Y’all have plenty of time to figure
things out. Besides, if y'all want a bigger place, what have I always said, son?”

With a squeeze of Jared's shoulders, Jensen promptly replies. “Property is the best investment.”

“Right. You're in a good place. You still got the house in Florida.”

“Of all places,” Donna huffs. “If you ask me…”

No one did, Jared almost screams. Absolutely no one asked her ever.

Thank his stars, the waitress reappears. She looks like she spent ten minutes sobbing. And after two seconds of trying to speak to Jensen, Jared sees the cause. She doesn't ask anyone else's order before leaving once again, though it doesn't look like she wrote his down either. Jensen attempts to flag her down, totally confused and at a loss.

“I got it, excuse me,” Alan laughs. He leaves the table for a moment.

“Grocery run, later?” Jensen asks. He cards a hand through Jared's hair, playing with the ends of it. “Remind me to get bread.”

Donna cannot witness a conversation and standby without interjecting her own opinion. “You go out? Honey, they deliver those.”

Your son is in his thirties. Let it go. Stop. Not only is he a grown man, but he's clearly not asking for input from anyone but his fiancé. Jared can feel his blood pressure rise. How is Alan still alive? How did Jensen survive childhood? Or maybe she's only like this around Jared. He's not sure which explanation is worse. Either way, the person in front of him, frowning, exhausts him to the core.

Alan returns with the restaurant manager, who apologizes and offers to cover their meals. Both Jensen and Alan jump in to insist that it isn't necessary. They just want their orders taken. The manager whips out a pen and paper. Jensen and Jared defer to Alan and Donna to order first. Then, Jared puts in his, a buttermilk and blueberry pancake topped with whipped cream and a side of cherrywood bacon, because it is a pancake and bacon kind of morning. He predicts Jensen's order--Steak Ranchero.

“I'll have the Steak Ranchero, please,” Jensen says, confirming Jared’s prediction. “Medium, if that's alright.”

“Honey!” What now. Does she want to offer to cut Jensen’s steak for him? “Didn’t you see the lobster frittata?”

Jared reaches for his coffee.

“Uh, no, mom. I didn’t.” Being the polite person he is, Jensen takes a second and glances at the description for the lobster frittata, which Jared knows has none of what Jensen likes for breakfast. Jensen isn’t a big fan of lobster, and the egg whites does nothing to make it more appetizing.

“It has asparagus,” Donna insists. “You love asparagus.”

Thoroughly confused, Jensen clears his throat. “Well, it's not really my…”

“I bet it’s lovely. You know asparagus is in season right now.”

Jensen looks to Jared for help. Jared almost chokes on a sip of coffee when Donna starts listing the health benefits to eating asparagus. Jared cuts her off. “Jen doesn’t like asparagus.”
The restaurant manager, bless his heart, tries to intervene, but Donna doesn’t give him the chance. She snips back at Jared, “He used to like it just fine. It’s good for him. I’ve seen you eat asparagus plenty of times before, honey.”

“Mom,” Jensen mutters, leaning forward, red from ear to ear, “I’m good with what I ordered.”

Instead of letting the subject go, Donna proceeds to talk about the importance of plenty of fruits and vegetables. Jensen orders himself a cocktail called The Filibuster—gin, grapefruit juice, maple syrup, and orange bitters. Alan asks for the same. The restaurant manager wisely leaves, taking their menus and disappearing.

“I’m just worried that y’all don’t eat enough vegetables.”

There will definitely not be any vegetables in Jared’s breakfast. He may never eat another vegetable again, just because of this conversation. In fact, he would welcome scurvy, arms wide open.

It just wasn’t enough for Donna to crash their Saturday and completely change the vibe of their get together. It wasn’t enough for her to force her presence on them overnight, then be upset about hearing the kinds of things two consenting adults do in the mornings, especially now because Jensen is flying out to start pre-production later in the week and their schedules are about to clash big time. It wasn’t enough for her to take away their Sunday morning and quite possibly some of their Sunday afternoon.

Then, it hits Jared.

She knows what she’s doing.

Beneath that perfectly styled blonde hair rests a diabolical brain hellbent on tightening her grip around her son.

“I don’t let Jensen eat asparagus,” Jared blurts out, setting down his cup of coffee. He raises his hand and manages to catch the eye of a passing waitress. Before the waitress arrives, Jared continues. He looks directly at Donna, his voice and eye contact unwavering. “It’s not good for me.”

The waitress walks up just as Jared’s comment sinks in.

“Hi,” Jared says to the waitress, cheerful and appreciative. “I was wondering, could I get another cup of coffee? And if you could put in an order for sliced pineapple, please, that would be great.”

“Sure! Did you just want slices? Anything else?”

“I’m good with that, thank you.”

Pineapple always wins over asparagus. When the plate arrives, Jared and Jensen split it. Comments from the peanut gallery mysteriously vanish.

Chapter End Notes

i enjoyed writing this chapter! there's so much here. make sure you catch it all! if you don't know the meaning to asparagus/pineapples, let me know. ;)

i just love Donna. she's so fun to write.
comments are love! <3
Alan speaks more during breakfast than Jared has ever heard him speak in their short acquaintance.

And Jared doesn’t mind it at all. Alan asks after Sherri, with a sincerity to his tone and expression that causes Jared to share more than he would have had Donna even bothered to ask. Jared fills Alan and Jensen in on his mother’s mischief. She’s taken to hosting Scrabble nights at the house with their neighbors and a few other folks in town who haven’t done wrong by her and Jared in the past year. While Jared knows that Sherri enjoys a good game of Scrabble--dictionary at the ready in case anyone tries to pull a fast one--he suspects that this may be a front for margarita nights.

Other than admitting to some bouts of loneliness, Sherri has managed to adapt. She’s kept Jared’s room the same, despite threatening to turn it into something old, ancient women such as herself would prefer, like a sewing room or a sitting parlor with plastic over every inch of furniture.

“So she’s fine,” Jared laughs and adds a put upon sigh. “Calls me everyday.”

“Sometimes he lets me talk to her,” Jensen quips.

“I have to limit them,” Jared tells Alan. “Otherwise they talk for a whole hour on the phone and gang up on me.”

“If you didn’t leave your socks in the bathroom, we wouldn’t have to gang up on you.”

“Maybe I like my socks to be in the bathroom.”

“Hmm.” Jensen bumps their shoulders together. “I’ll talk to your mother about this.”

The three of them laugh. Jensen offers Jared a sip of his drink and Jared accepts. His heart still does a small flip whenever he and Jensen share a glass or a straw. If this is all one impossible dream, he hopes to remember details like those. Jared takes a few sips, sets the glass down, and looks at Jensen. Their eyes meet in a simple way, but express so much more than simple feelings.

Alan clears his throat, but when Jared glances over, a stern frown does not greet him. Instead, Alan smiles and shakes his head. He looks at Donna and motions to Jensen and Jared. “Remember what it’s like being young and in love?”

From his hand on Jensen’s knee, Jared feels Jensen tense up. Everyone braces themselves for Donna’s response.

All she has to do is reply to her husband of more than thirty years.

Her shoulders give a slight shrug. She sits up in her chair and looks over Alan and Jensen, towards the tables around them. “I wonder when they’ll bring the check? Or do we go up there to pay?”

Wow.

Jared thanks whatever force of nature or divine energy of the universe that keeps him from flipping their table and shaking Donna by her Dallas socialite let’s meet for lunch lady shoulders. What bothers her more? Alan trying? Jared enjoying Alan trying? The very presence of others enjoying
“You seem like you want to leave,” Jared comments, softening his tone and adding a tinge of false concern. Donna purses her lips exactly the way every single one of Jared’s most annoying customers did. Before she has a chance to reply, Jared goes in for the kill. Maybe it’s the coffee. Maybe it’s his overwhelming desire to have Jensen to himself for the rest of the day--fuck the consequences of his actions. They were going to order in for dinner, eat in the living room, and curl up together to watch *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly.* The promise of that, within sight, pushes the second part out of Jared’s mouth. “And I can totally understand. It’s a long, long drive back and you’ll want to be home before it starts to get dark.”

Sherri didn’t raise no fool.

He’s handled church ladies, bingo night ladies, margarita night ladies, customers demanding to purchase books that don’t even exist, and small town people with small town attitudes. He put together a six figure fundraiser for an established nonprofit right here in Austin--the effects of which contributed to more programs, more available hours for counselors to hold sessions, and two drop-ins a month for the rest of the year.

So Donna should be no big deal. Jared sits up straight in his chair but keeps his body language open and expression concerned. He pats Jensen’s knee. “We better get going too, groceries and all that.”

Jensen immediately replies. “You’re right. I wanted to stop by Latika and get some soap.”

“You really love those handmade soaps,” Jared adds, his mind on-track with Jensen’s.

Thankfully, Jensen rises from the table first, with Jared and Alan quickly following. Alan pats Jensen on the shoulder. “Give me a call once in a while, if you’re not too busy to call your old man.”

“I thought we could…” Donna tries.

“Now, dear, you know it’s a long drive back. And these two deserve the rest of their Sunday,” Jared makes a mental note to send a thank you card to Alan. They make their way to the registers up front, a few people pointing and whispering once they recognize Jensen. The manager swings by and offers once again to cover the bill.

“That’s okay,” Jared chimes in, muscling his way in between Alan and Jensen. “I can treat.”

The manager thanks Jared and runs his card. Old habits die hard though, and Jared holds his breath as the register thinks about it. Once the receipt prints, he exhales, relieved. Alan insists on leaving the tip and Jared lets him. The manager splits the tip between their original waitress, the bus boys, and the chef. He hands Jensen his card and promises to take care of them again and see them back in soon. People act so different around Jensen. It hasn’t ceased to amaze Jared. Everyone bends over backwards to offer him free things. They could have walked out of there without paying and been welcomed back with open arms on a return visit. The waitresses in the Smithville diner would have cut Jared to shreds if he had left a crummy tip.

On the walk to Jensen’s SUV, Alan and Jensen banter about barbeque and dry rubs. This would be a good time for Donna and Jared to bond over a neutral topic of conversation. Jared tries to think of something the world’s best future son-in-law would say in this situation. Should he tell her that they arranged the furniture in the living room based on accessibility and convenience for fucking?

“That was nice of you to pay,” Donna mumbles, holding her purse close to herself. Does she think Jared might reach for it? Swipe it? Rifle through it and reveal the alien hiding inside it giving her
psychic commands like that one movie? What was it? He used to watch it with his mother. *My Stepmother is an Alien*, that’s the one.

“Thank you.” That’s the best Jared can come up with.

Unfortunately, just because he decides to play it safe by being respectful, Donna doesn’t. She just doesn’t play by the rules. She is above them. “Are you working?”

A wonderful question. “Not at the moment.” Well, technically, he does work. He works all day and all night for Jensen—in their bed, in living room, in the bathroom, and even in the kitchen against the counter. And when he’s not servicing Jensen, he’s at the salon, or out having lunch, or harassing sales people.

Jensen opens the passenger’s side door for Jared, which isn’t at all necessary, but it does give him the opportunity to see the look on Jared’s face.

“Your mom just asked me if I was working,” Jared says, once they are all in the car and buckled up. No one is going anywhere. He’s getting this out right now.

“Well, breakfast was quite expensive. I wouldn’t want you to be in a pinch later on. We could have paid.”

“You did. Alan left the tip.” Jared looks out of his window and tries not to think about installing an eject button in the SUV.

“I won’t complain about being treated to a great meal,” Alan adds.

Jensen drives with two hands on the wheel. It looks like he’s trying to snap the steering wheel in half. “Jay pays for things all the time, the scoundrel.”

“I suppose that happens when you share a bank account,” Donna quips and opens her window an inch.

If only she’d open her door. While the car was moving. No. That’s too cruel. The road might suffer. Jared closes his eyes for a moment. His mother did not raise him to be mean-spirited. But he just wants to push Donna out of the SUV to hear her scream about her precious outfit being ruined.

“Mom, Jared used his own card, not our joint card.”

Jared appreciates the clarification, but his face turns red anyway. He was trying to be nice. Yes, he’s never spent so much on a meal for four people before, but he figured it would be an olive branch. Or at least a point in his favor that he could and does pay for things. The Center gave him two thousand dollars for his efforts in fundraising. A private donor contributed the funds out of appreciation, so Jared knew that the money wasn’t taken from grants that could help the youth. He accepted it and paid half of his first semester’s tuition. Jensen paid the other half as an early birthday gift.

“Let’s not embarrass the person who paid for our meals, dear.” Alan pats Jared on the shoulder. “I haven’t had breakfast that good in a long time. Thank you.”

With a nod, Jared mumbles out a response, but remains quiet for the rest of the drive. Fighting with Donna exhausts him. These between the lines, passive aggressive stints of hers require more from him than he’s willing to give. And he can’t figure out her intent. If she wants to wear him down just to have him admit that he’s after Jensen’s money and fame, is this really the best way to do it? Is this how she thinks she’ll get a confession out of him?
“Oh, shit,” Jensen grumbles. Jared looks up and recognizes one of the condos just a block down from theirs. “They weren’t supposed to… uh… they weren’t supposed to deliver this until later.”

The SUV pulls up to their condo, but instead of parking in their driveway, Jensen parks on the street, behind a van that reads something about a dealership. Two men in navy blue suits wait on the driveway, next to a car that is not Alan’s.

Predictably, the first person to speak is Donna.

“What’s that?” she blurts out.

Out of the car, Jared stands next to Jensen on the edge of the driveway. He sizes up the car: a 2017 diamond white metallic Mercedes E-Class sedan. Brand new. Fresh off the lot. They even stuck a bow on the roof, like in one of those Christmas commercials.

Fifty thousand dollars sits in front of Jared.

And he has no idea how to react.

Chapter End Notes

have y’all ever met someone like Donna? one minute you think, "i can handle this person." the next minute you're like, "i need tequila."

also, oh, jensen. oh, jensen. /shakes head/ i mean, y'all are welcome to buy me a brand new mercedes, but maybe--just maybe--he should have talked to jared about such a purchase first? how do y'all think he should react? i love cliffhangers. XD

comments are love!
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

His momma has either made or been present for every major decision in Jared's life so far.

But she sure ain't here now.

If he could find a way to summon her, or maybe share a temporary psychic connection with her, then he could get her advice. Should he blow up and freak out like his gut desperately tells him to because that's a whole fuck ton of car for a whole fuck ton of money that he in no way asked for or even hinted he wanted and it's not the he would have chosen if he had had the choice because holy fuck who drives Mercedes? Right off the lot? Like it's a loaf of bread anyone can just bring home. What. What. Oh my god and the maintenance. The insurance. What if he spills something on the seats? What if he totals this car? It's too much car for someone like him.

Someone like him.

Some small town, almost nineteen year old kid who graduated high school a year ago and whose biggest responsibilities were helping around the house and getting home at a decent hour so not to worry his momma.

Why.

Why does he sell himself short every single time he thinks about himself and his life. He could have easily accepted more money from the donor at the Center and bought his own car. It just wasn't on his mind. What was he focused on?

Registering for classes, getting his books, and spending time with Jensen and Sherri before the semester started.

His momma taught him to never expect something for nothing. But she also taught him to accept gifts, even if he didn't particularly want or like them. On his tenth birthday, she held his party at the Ten Pin bowling alley on Main. After a few games, a whirl through the small arcade, and cake, Jared attacked his presents. Jody June got him comic books. Taylor Olson got him a train set. Maya Rodriguez got him a science kit with a volcano and bottle rocket. The last present was from Hubert Hebert, a shy kid Sherri had invited because she worked with his mother. Hubert hadn't bowled, because he read somewhere that injuries were prevalent at bowling alleys, and he hadn't even participated in any arcade games so he could give his tickets to Jared like the others had. All he did was sit by himself and quote death rates for different activities. According to Hubert, Jared had a one in one hundred thousand chance of dying from an accident launching the bottle rocket. Jared didn't have high hopes for Hubert's present.

And he was right not to get his hopes up.

Jared stared at the so-called gift for a few seconds. It was clothes, which by themselves did not a popular present make, but worse, it was an outfit identical to the one Hubert wore.

Sherri nudged him, forcing him out of shock.

“It's lovely,” she said for him. “And just the right size. Jared.”
That was his cue.

So he mumbled a thanks to Hubert and carefully set the gift down with the others. Sherri would have lectured him about gratitude and humility if he had done any different—and she did, just later, in the car. She explained exactly how much that outfit probably cost and how much Hubert’s mother made and how many hours of work it cost to buy a present for your son to have something to give at a birthday party.

“It’d take you twelve hours of mowing the lawn in the summer to buy an outfit like that just to give it away,” she said in the car. “You don’t gotta wear it if you don’t want to, but the least you can do for someone is show them you appreciate the effort, Jay.”

For all of his insistence that he is an adult, Jared feels ten years old again. Instead of an outfit he will never wear, there sits a Mercedes, picked and purchased specially for him by a man who for some reason thinks Jared deserves such a gift. How many hours of filming and being on set, thousands of miles away from friends and family, did it take for Jensen to buy this car?

While Sherri doesn’t magically appear to smooth things over, Jared takes the keys from Jensen’s outstretched hand. His first instinct was to object. Refuse. Protest. He doesn’t deserve this.

But Jensen thinks he does.

And maybe Jensen has a reason to. Maybe. Just maybe.

“It’s beautiful,” Jared says, because it is. He gives the keys a squeeze and can focus on nothing but Jensen and the car. He tries to plan something else to say, something more to add, but this isn’t an expensive suit or a nice steak dinner or even moving into the condo together. This is something uniquely for Jared and Jared only, something he didn’t really need, but Jensen wanted to give it to him anyway.

Jared surprises himself and cries.

Jensen immediately pulls him in for a tight hug.

“Sweetheart, what’s wrong? You don’t like it?”

“It’s not that,” Jared blurts out and leans against Jensen while he sniffs into Jensen’s shoulder. “I just… I can’t believe you bought me a car.”

“I didn’t want you to worry about how to get around.”

“I would have figured it out, Jen.”

“Yeah, I know, I know that. I know you can figure out anything if you have to. But you don’t have to figure this one thing out. It’s yours. All you have to do is sign for it. I’ll take care of everything else.” Jensen holds them a few inches apart, his hands cradling Jared’s jaw line. Green eyes evoke emotion a million times more powerful than any high definition screen. There’s Jensen on screen and there’s Jensen in person; Jared never thought he’d ever be more emotionally blown away than watching Jensen in movies.

“It’s so expensive,” Jared whispers. Tears cloud his eyes. “You didn’t have to.”

“Worth every penny, trust me. And I know I didn’t, but I wanted to. And I wanted it to be a surprise.” Carefully, Jensen swipes away the tears on Jared’s cheeks with his thumbs. “I didn’t expect you to cry. Now I’m gonna cry. I thought you’d cuss me out.”
Jared gives a soft laugh and shakes his head. “I kind of want to, but I… I guess I can let you off the hook this time.” He brings Jensen in for a tight hug. This is their driveway, their street, their life. It’s all still so new. “Next big purchase though,” Jared murmurs and tugs on a piece of Jensen’s hair, “give me some kind of head’s up, okay?”

Jensen grins because he knows he’s officially off the hook. “Deal.”

They lean in for a kiss.

Less than a quarter of an inch away from their lips touching, Donna blitzes them with her opinion.

“It’s so much car for a college student! Honey, couldn’t Jared have used your SUV? It’s a pretty car, but look how uncomfortable you’ve made him, dear.”

Donna. Doesn’t. Stop.

“Who will manage the payments on the lease? You don’t need another thing to worry about while you’re flying back and forth between sets. You could have asked us for one of our cars, the Ford works just fine. Josh can still bring it over. You don’t need such a big car for yourself, do you? You must feel very uncomfortable accepting something like this without Jensen asking first.”

“Actually,” Jared snips, his tone ice-cold, “I don’t feel uncomfortable.” That’s a lie, but a necessary one.

Donna purses her lips. “I thought you had mentioned taking the bus to school.”

What the fuck.

“Mom.” Jensen physically places himself between Jared and Donna. “I don’t want Jay taking the bus. He doesn’t have to. This way, he can go wherever, whenever and be safe.” Jensen turns to Jared in an effort to salvage some of the moment his mother has killed. “You know if the battery is about to die, it sends a distress signal to the customer service center and they call you to make you aware.”

“It’s a great car.” Alan places his hands on Donna’s shoulders. “And I think we should let these two enjoy it for the afternoon. Let’s go get our things, dear. It’s a long drive back.”

Fortunately, Alan succeeds in pulling Donna back into the house.

The representatives from Mercedes step up from the background and present Jared with a clipboard of papers and a fancy pen. Jared quickly reads through the two pages verifying that he has received the car and signs at the bottom. After a few handshakes, the representatives leave. They just leave Jared and Jensen with a brand new, sparkling white Mercedes.

Jared and Jensen stare at the car.

“Holy shit,” Jared breathes, “this is mine.”

“Yeah,” Jensen answers with a crooked grin. “That’s what I think every time I look at you.”

“Oh, stop. You’re not totally off the hook.”

“What’s it gonna take for you to forgive me for the incredibly cruelty of buying you a new car?”

“You mean now or later?”
“Are you forgiving me in installments? Let’s say later.”

“Fuck me.”

“Huh-- what?”

“Fuck me, Jen. Inside my backseat.”

Chapter End Notes

uploading before bed, apologies for any errors.

ahhhh donna. you bring me a weird sense of joy. and evil.

comments are love!
Chapter 17

How fast can they get from fantasy to reality?

Usually, pretty fast.

One surprising factor delays Jared's demand--Alan. No one expected that, not even Donna. He pulls Jensen aside for what he calls a conversation. Jensen leads them to the bar, tossing a concerned look over his shoulder to Jared.

“Good luck,” Jared mouths.

And then he's left alone in the entryway with Donna.

Great.

Lovely.

Wonderful.

Fabulous.

Jared contemplates screaming and tearing his hair out. That might make things less awkward. No, scratch that, it would definitely make things less awkward. What does one say to their mother in law after her son has just purchased a brand new, luxurious, pinch-me-I'm-dreaming car? Should he invite her to the kitchen for a glass of water? But that would put her in harm's way; wouldn't want her to melt. Sigh. Be nice, Jared commands himself, be nice. She may be one of those Dallas women, but she's still Jensen's mother, and he had to grow up with her. Unimaginable. Scary.

Donna sighs and looks around like she expects Jared to cater to her needs. Would now be a good time for a crater to open up and swallow him whole? Wait. Why should the crater pull him into the void?

Jared's phone goes off--at its usual volume, but it might as well be a series of fireworks set off at close range.

He takes his phone out of his back pocket and almost whoops in relief as he answers. “Momma!”

“Oh, so you are awake,” Sherri quips and laughs. “I'm not interrupting anything, am I?”

Yes. Yes, she is. Thank. Fucking. God.

“Excuse me,” Jared says with a simple smile. “Please, help yourself to anything in the kitchen. I'll take this in the living room.”

He scoots his ass before he can catch Donna's reply or expression. “Momma,” he breathes, “are you okay?”

“Of course I am. Sounds like you ain't. What's going on?”

“Oh… we just got back from breakfast with Jensen's parents.” Jared struggles to say that without
blurting out his exact feelings on the matter. He knows that anything he says now can and will be held against him in court. What an exhausting way to live.

Grumbling, Sherri says what he wants to. “You mean that woman actually stayed the night and dragged y'all to breakfast? Good lord.”

If he doesn't respond fast enough, Donna might think Sherri is talking shit, which she kinda is—is telling the truth talking shit though? If he responds too fast, it'll seem like he's eager to cover up any shit talking.

And really, breakfast isn't what he wants to talk about. Jensen just bought him a car. A car! But if he freaks out to his mother like he wants, Donna could take it as him celebrating Jensen's generosity.

“I had the best toast,” Jared tosses out into the galaxy. He sits on his favorite couch and curls up.

“She can hear you, can't she?”

“Jen got steak, of course.”

“Aha. Well, it's exciting hearing about your breakfast orders. What y'all got planned for the rest of the day? Is the Queen staying?” In the background, Jared can hear her washing dishes.

“We have some shopping to do for the week.”

“Wow. Exciting lives.”

“Momma,” he groans into one of the couch pillows. “Don't.”

Sherri cackles. “But you're so fun to tease. Alright, fine, I'll go along with this. You getting ready for school tomorrow? You sure you don't want me to drive you?”

Would it be so bad if he jumped on the couch ala Tom Cruise and made his new car status known that way? Jared laughs, because that's all he can do. “No, momma, I told you. Makes no sense for you to drive an hour to drive me fifteen minutes. Besides, don't you have work?”

“If Donna gets to be a helicopter mom, don't I get a shot?”

“Very funny.”

“You are no fun today.”

“How are you? You doing okay?” They text on a regular basis, at least every other day, just to check in. She'll call once a week, typically on a Monday night, and if Jensen's around he'll join in on the call. She's only an hour away, but it seems a lot farther when their schedules don't line up.

“Fine, you know, missing your fiancé. He promised me I'd get to meet George Clooney this year.”

Jared smiles and rolls his eyes. “Jensen likes to promise a lot of things, momma.”

With a huff, Sherri defends her connection to George Clooney. “Excuse you, but it's gonna happen. I can feel it in my bones. What are you doing that you're not with the in laws right now? You're not being rude, are you?”

Jensen and Alan have not emerged from the bar. Donna has also been astonishingly absent. She must have found something in the kitchen to judge Jared by and she's taking her time.
Keeping his voice low, Jared says, “Alan wanted to talk to Jen alone. They've been in there for ten minutes.”

The doorbell on Sherri’s end rings.

“Are you expecting someone?”

“Oh, well, not until later. This man,” she sighs. The water shuts off. “I tell him to show up around noon and here he is, an hour early.” A man? Visiting? On a Sunday? Who? “John! You scoundrel, how dare you. I ain't half ready. You know a lady needs time to put her face on and all that shit. Come in, don't just stand there like you didn't get here early. Honey, I gotta go. I'm sorry to leave you on your own.”

Jared sits up on the couch. “Uh, it's okay. Y'all are hanging out today?”

Sherri laughs and Jared can hear John say something in the background. “What? Oh, honey, we're just going to the shooting range. John wants practice before he heads out with Jensen and I said I'd help his sorry ass with aim. Well, it's true, John, your aim ain't worth a damn. Oh, don't throw your credentials at me.” Another laugh. This feels… strange. What is going on? “Okay, honey, try not to let that woman get to you too much. Yes, his parents are over. Don't start, John, zip it.”

A minute later and Jared stares at his phone in confusion and disbelief. What just happened?

He has no time to process his phone call. Jensen and Alan reappear. Jared tries to read Jensen's facial expression and body language, but it's tough. Is this because he doesn't know Jensen well enough? No. Thinking that way allows Donna to get to him and Sherri already made a point about that. If he gives her an inch in his head, she'll take a country mile. Jared stands and holds his arms out to Jensen.

“Did you want a hug?” Jensen teases and flashes a smile that has serious effects on Jared's ability to stand.

Jared nods and continues to stand with his arms expectantly outstretched. He gets what he wants.

“This must be Jared for 'I want a hug,'” Jensen murmurs into Jared's cheek. He squeezes Jared tight and ruffles his hair.

“I'll train you yet,” Jensen murmurs back. The smush of Jensen's mouth against his cheek provides a great sense of comfort. “Momma called. She says hi and George Clooney.”

Once innocent hands slip to the small of Jared's back, an unacceptable location considering the nearby presence of parents in the kitchen. Jared means to say something, no don't stop, but doesn't get around to it. He leans into Jensen and closes his eyes to the feeling of confident fingertips pressing into the curves of his hips, followed by the cup of a firm palm. The permanent magnet between them refuses to lose its magnetism--only three causes can do that.

One of them is Donna.

“Well! Guess we will be going!” She claps her hands and plasters on a smile so wide she might as well hold a sign that says Alan asked her to be nice.

Jensen gives a small sigh, but turns around and addresses his mother. They do the usual song and dance about Jensen visiting more often and calling more often and sending smoke signals more often and sending carrier pigeons more often. There are brief mentions of the Fourth of July, but thankfully, Jensen doesn't commit to a single thing. Alan swings by and gives Jared a hug, then
shakes his hand.

“You get your mother to come up to Dallas one day and we can meet for lunch,” he offers. “And don’t worry about school. You’ll do just fine.” Alan leans in to add, “Always wear a seatbelt, check your mirrors, and figure out how fast that car can go. That last one’s the fun part.”

Donna pats Jared on the shoulder and mentions something like a thank you, but she might be saying something about a tank shoe. Tough call. Jared wonders if he needs to check the kitchen for booby traps. He might never be able to make himself a grilled cheese sandwich without worrying about arrows shooting out of nowhere and a giant boulder dropping down, threatening to crush him.

Then again, it might not be so bad to be Indiana Jones. Indy had to fight Nazis, but he never had to engage in a passive-aggressive war with Donna.

But whatever. The point is: she’s leaving. And they can’t miss her if she doesn’t leave.

“You’ll call, right, Jensen?”

“Yes, mom. I’ll call. Y’all call me when you get home.”

“I’ll call you when we make a rest stop.”

“When you get home is just fine, mom.”

“Try to eat a little healthier. You need vegetables.”

“Mom.”

“I worry, that’s all!”

Somewhere, the world’s biggest understatement died and turned over the crown to that little gem.

Jared and Jensen stand on the driveway as the Ackles settle into their car. Despite the lack of fireworks, confetti, or champagne, the world seems to celebrate with Jared as the car disappears from view. The sun shines a little brighter. The sky looks a little bluer. Birds seem to sing a little louder.

Jensen’s hand gropes Jared’s ass a little harder and leans in for a kiss.

All is right in the world once again.

Especially when Jared ducks away from Jensen’s kiss and runs back into the condo with only a single word shouted.

“Later!”

Chapter End Notes

phew finally updating this week. last week was tough. i’m happy it’s over.

comments are love! <3
Chapter 18

Jared holes himself up in their room and the bathroom. He banishes Jensen to anywhere in their home but those two spaces. Jensen pouts and mumbles something about getting what he wants, but eventually totters off to do laundry.

First things first, Jared moves the standing mirrors from around their bed to against the wall. He has no idea what Jensen plans to do with them--keep them there permanently, maybe--but they take up a lot of space. Second on his checklist is to make their bed, as it desperately needs a change of sheets. Fortunately, in the three months they have been living together, Jared has developed a talent for making their bed. He takes pride in his lightning speed and precision in this daily chore.

With their bedding changed, Jared leaves the old one out in the hallway for Jensen to hopefully collect in the meantime. He ducks into the bathroom and tends to a few personal things in the shower. Wrapped in Jensen’s robe, he then fishes through his side of their walk-in closet, which still seems like an extravagance. To him, it’s large enough to serve as a bedroom--a tiny bedroom, but a bedroom nonetheless. Jensen has already filled up his side with beautiful articles of clothing and accessories. Jared keeps meaning to set aside some time to poke through all of Jensen’s outfits and shoes. Jared has a few new pairs of shoes, but he regularly wears the same one or two. His interest in shopping still extends to picking up a shirt or two here and being done with it.

Since he spends so little time in here, he figured it would be the best place to hide this specific purchase. He reaches behind his row of clothes and pulls out a seemingly undisturbed box that, to the untrained eye, looks like a shoebox. A peek inside and Jared verifies that everything is in order and he can start.

This was supposed to be a birthday present for himself, and, by proxy, Jensen.

But it feels right to pull this out now.

Jared slips into something… that is not necessarily more comfortable.

With a glance in one of the mirrors, Jared takes a deep breath and decides that yes, this will work. He shimmies back into a pair of jeans and a dark t-shirt.

Moving around becomes an odd task. He experiences a self awareness of his clothes, the texture, the weight, in every movement no matter how simple. This amplifies his sensitivity and makes his breath catch if he turns or twists a certain way. He takes his time organizing things in their room and bathroom and enjoys each new sensation. For a moment, he stands in the center of their room, right hand on his middle and eyes closed. Heat, excitement, and awe pool in his lower back, slowly spreading throughout his body. Eyes open, he exhales slow and deliberate.

Yep. So far, so good.

And when he finds Jensen in the kitchen putting away dishes, bent over to reach the dishwasher, it becomes so much better.

Jared places his hands where his eyes were glued. Jensen doesn't flinch, but he does let out a low laugh.
“Myyes?” Jensen humors Jared and stays in the same position, rows of clean plates underneath him.

“I'm done,” Jared murmurs. His hands frame Jensen's ass, appreciative of the shape, the availability, and the tantalizing dip. There's so much to look at and touch, yet so few hours in the day. Jensen's ass leads to the firm contours of his back, then to sculpted shoulders, muscular arms, thick forearms, and hands that possess the ability to wring out the best, most desperate noises from the back of Jared's throat. Jared nudges Jensen's shirt up for a quick look at the smooth skin there, complete with a small smattering of freckles.

“Jay.”

“Hmm.”

“You okay?”

“Uh huh.”

“Alright. Just making sure.”

“Is this okay?”

“You worshipping my ass? Of course it is.”

Jared indulges for another minute, but keeps his touch purposefully lighter and more restrained. He taps Jensen's wallet as a signal and steps back before they don't make it to the Mercedes. Jensen turns, ignores the open dishwasher, and grins before yanking them together for a kiss. He attacks, Jared puts up a defense by slowing down the kiss and preventing Jensen's hands from wandering away from his waist. Jensen has to wait.

“Be good,” Jared snips, nudging Jensen's chin.

“This is me being good. I haven't ripped off your clothes and fucked you over the counter… yet.”

The way Jensen says it, Jared knows it could certainly happen. He bites his lower lip and resists the temptation to let Jensen take control. This is supposed to be different in more ways than one.

Placing some distance between them, Jared takes a deep breath. He looks out the window above the sink. “It's still daylight.”

“Yep.” Jensen presses a kiss to Jared's cheek. “That an issue?”

“Well, yes and no. I wanted to test out the car.”

“Your car.”

Jared gives a small smile. “Yes, my car.”

In return, he receives his own nudge to his chin. “So let's go for a drive. Maybe go out to Smithville.”

“Yeah… but… I want to test out more than just how it drives.”

“Uh huh,” Jensen breathes, his eyes glazed over at the suggestion of certain activities in a certain new place. “So what's the problem?”

“You're practically drooling, Jen.”
“I don't mean to slobber all over you. Wait. Yes I do. It's my job.”

“I guess there's no objection, huh?”

“About having sex in your car in broad daylight? Nope. Not a single one.”

“What about if I parked smack in the middle of Sixth?”

“Then people should be prepared to wear some ear plugs.”

That's good enough for Jared.

Chapter End Notes

whee!! the last update of 2016!! comments are love, thank you for being here with me. <3
The Mercedes drives like a dream. Jared sits in the driver's seat for a full ten minutes just trying to breathe and not burst into tears again. New car smell floods his senses. He can hardly figure out how to start the car without a key. Jensen has to show him what button to press for the engine to come to life. Even the bells and whistles on the car have their own bells and whistles.

Jensen chose a diamond metallic white exterior and a black leather interior complete with red stitching and seatbelts. Red seatbelts. While that impresses Jared enough to love the car forever, Jensen keeps explaining features. The Mercedes is pretty, and comfortable, but it leads other cars in safety features. Plus, Jensen points out, it’s German. He’ll buy American trucks and SUVs, but for his soon-to-be husband, only a German sedan would do.

If the car senses a collision, it will automatically launch front side bolsters to cushion the driver and move them from the impact zone. There’s an evasive steering-assistance program for steering torque during emergency maneuvers. The car boasts a combination of aluminum and high-strength steel throughout the body. Even the windshield wipers don’t need to be told when to work; they detect rain and work on their own.

Then, as far as extras go, Jensen basically told the dealer to put him down for one of everything.


It even has a full tank of gas.

For the first five miles away from the condo, Jared stays at least five or ten miles under the speed limit. What if he totals this car? What if it gets rear ended? What if someone keys it? Steals it? Looks at it the wrong way?

Out on 71, headed East, Jensen assures him that the car can go faster than fifty miles an hour without shaking.

Driving becomes an entirely new experience. In the hour-long ride from Austin to Smithville, Jared leaves Donna and the looming pressure of school behind. He could drive this car forever and still not fully understand everything it’s capable of or all of its accoutrements. But he’s damn sure going to try, while he has the chance. Everything from changing lanes to accelerating becomes easier and easier with the assistance provided by the intuitiveness of the car. This can’t possibly be real. The car handles exceptionally well.

Delirious with joy and overwhelmed by technology, Jared leads them to a secluded patch of land. It’s a poor environment for the Mercedes, but perfect for their outing. The old barn and the road leading up to it haven’t been used or maintained in a while. No one in Smithville really cares to change it, much less do anything about it, so the property and the road remain vacant to the naked eye. But Jared knows it best as makeout central.
Jensen looks around, grinning like a fool. “Did you make out with anyone here?”

The car shuts off on its own. It even says, “Goodbye, Jared,” on the control screen. Look at that. A car surpassed Donna Ackles in manners.

“Once or twice,” Jared replies with a shrug. “You wanna go steady with me?”

“Oh,” Jensen sighs and laughs, “I thought you’d never ask.”

For a second, they look at each other, both of them wearing the biggest grins. Excitement fuels their swift, eager movements. Hands and lips press together in a collision so sweet, Jared’s mouth waters. He feels like he’s in high school again, like he’s dating one of the cool older boys. Except, this cool older boy actually understands him. Jensen knows how to bite Jared’s lower lip, how much pressure to add, how to space out each nibble. He understands that any gesture or motion of his hands towards Jared’s chest makes Jared melt into pliable, helpless mush.

But Jared also knows Jensen.

Jensen’s lips are as sensitive as they are attractive. They’re plush and smooth, like the brand new leather seats underneath them. Jared traces their outline with the tip of his tongue, bites down, and tugs.

A heady, desperate moan escapes those lips.

Without words, Jensen begs. He kisses Jared over and over again, bringing them closer, trying to close the distance between them. Jared gives in, but only an inch at a time, maintaining a pace that leaves them out of breath, panting, and excited like the teenagers who frequent this spot during homecoming season. That pool of heat in the small of Jared’s back expands, overflows into his hips, thighs, and chest. A tinge of discomfort mixes with eager anticipation.

He grabs Jensen's shirt and plasters a rough, solid kiss onto that mouth so brazenly on display and offered up for the taking. In return, Jared offers only one option.

“Backseat.”

Specifics don't entirely matter. What matters is that by some method, they end up in the backseat. Jared dictates exactly how. He slips underneath, to lie on his back, and looks up into eyes that reflect nothing but clear adoration and exceptionally vibrant lust. An idea pops into Jared’s mind, but he sets it aside for another time. He doesn’t want to keep Jensen—or himself—waiting any longer.

Jared steals a few kisses, which become a few more. They test their space, their weight. Jared hooks his legs over Jensen’s thighs. This isn’t as cramped as he thought it would be. It isn’t the spanse of their bed, but it does force them to be creative with space and to get as close as possible. No problems there. The one problem, however, is that Jensen still thinks he’s calling the shots. Jared places his right hand on the center of Jensen’s chest and demands space. If Jensen isn’t going to stay in line, then he can’t touch. Jared smiles, pleased by the look of devastation given to him. He starts with the obvious—his chest. Before Jensen can show him how he walks, he’s got to crawl.

Jared’s fingers work with purpose, lightly sweeping over his chest. Just a flick over his nipples and he lets out a loud moan, followed by a breathy whimper. Pressure builds in his cock and it has nowhere to go. Heat throughout his body intensifies as his fingers circle, skim, and pinch.

Pause.

Panting, Jared allows his hands to go further south, splayed over his middle, dipping down towards
their hips. He traces the outline of the tent in Jensen’s jeans. Pressing down on a certain spot makes Jensen shudder and break.

“Please,” Jensen pleads, his voice serious and deep. “Sweetheart, pretty please.”

Magic words.

“Touch me, Jen.”

Jensen’s hands go for Jared’s chest. Jared shakes his head no and guides freckled hands up to his bare throat. The feel and look cause them both to inhale sharp and exhale ragged. Jared could bet this car that Jensen makes a mental note of this. But there’s purpose here. Jensen’s fingers inch back and come in contact with a delicate silver chain. Green eyes widen. On the end of the chain rests a key.

“Key to your heart?” Jensen purrs, swiping his thumb over it.

He thinks he’s so clever. “Not quite.”

Jared unbuttons his jeans and zips down. Maybe Jensen has noticed the lack of reciprocal weight and pressure. Maybe he’s caught on already. In smooth, seamless motions he has never practiced, Jared takes off his shirt and lowers his jeans to reveal a black, lace bodysuit. Jensen blushes and stares, mouth open. The pattern is exquisitely detailed and fine. The suit as a whole feels incredibly lightweight, like a second skin. Black provides an excellent contrast, highlighting curves, slopes, and dips.

Lace stops at mid-thigh and covers another surprise.

Inch by inch, Jared lifts the hem. He lets out a moan when the hem brushes over the silver surface of his cock cage.

He thought about panties. Or even just a silk bow. But this option--it seemed more challenging.

Shiny, sleek, secure stainless steel weaves over Jared’s cock. A simple copper lock rests at the top. Jared unclasps the chain around his neck and kisses the key. He looks up at Jensen and holds out the chain.

In a soft voice, Jared says, “Take care of me, Jen.”

Jensen doesn’t just take the chain. He slips it around his neck.

After that, reality extinguishes and physics become a blur. Clothes disappear, but lace stays on. Holy fuck does it stay on. Jensen runs his hands over every inch of the suit. He stretches the fabric, tests the give, and finally, fucking finally, starts to touch the cage. With awe and pride, he dips his fingers between the beams, just enough to graze Jared’s cock, causing them both to react. The cage keeps Jared from getting hard; the sensation remains but spreads to different places in varying degrees of intensity. Jensen strokes his own cock, pumping in broad strokes, and runs the tip of it from the top of the cage all the way down.

Lube appears from somewhere, like magic. Hell, for all Jared knows, it is magic lube. He watches Jensen slick himself up, mesmerized by how hard Jensen is, how thick his cock looks, and how much it twitches. Jensen presses the flushed tip against Jared’s asshole. Flat on his back, Jared takes it in without hesitation.

Neither one of them controls the noises that escape their mouths. Jensen growls. Jared moans. Jensen moans. Jared growls. The cage and his cock fight against each other. Pressure meets the deep, heavy,
hot presence of Jensen’s cock completely buried. From this angle, Jared struggles to open up. His eyes water. His skin feels too tight all over. And Jensen’s cock just keeps twitching, pulsing, fattening up hard and solid.

“Move,” Jared pants, hands behind his head, palms against the door. “Jen, move.”

Jensen pulls Jared’s hips up, on an angle, and holds him there. He fucks down, into Jared, slow grinding his hips. Lube and the force of their movements creates a satisfying squelching sound. Jared takes every thrust. He cries out at the depth of every push in and every tortuous pull back. Jensen fucks him in slow, long, forceful thrusts. Jared’s cock and balls bounce in their silver cage, locked and secure.

Lace calls to Jensen like a siren. He pulls Jared’s legs up, steadies himself, and leans down. Jared enjoys the feeling of his feet above his head, but especially enjoys the sensation of Jensen’s cock pushing in a fraction deeper. His eyes flutter the second Jensen places his lips over Jared’s nipples, above the lace.

Muscular hips and thighs work in a rhythm that matches the suck and lick of pink, peaked nipples.

Then, slowed down for a fraction of a moment, Jensen reaches down and fingers the copper lock, making it rattle, treating it as he would the tip of Jared’s cock. Jared gasps and lifts his hips to meet Jensen’s. The cage hurts in the best way. The consuming, fervent thrusts of Jensen’s hips hurt in the best way. Every plunge, each slam, leaves Jared increasingly breathless. His ass bounces against Jensen’s hips. Jensen’s cock drives against Jared’s prostate and Jared’s eyes roll back in a storm of forced calm and heightened senses.

Jensen taps into a reserve of animalistic energy.

He fucks Jared dirty, rough, and raw.

Screams tear from Jared’s throat. He begs. Pleads. Prays. He’s never been fucked like this before—so completely, so brutally desperate.

The lock needs the key.

Jensen lifts Jared’s legs up higher, then brings them closer together, and fucks him in one, two, three, four, five insatiable thrusts. He comes first—voracious, greedy, starved. The first ropes of come fill Jared up, until Jensen pulls out and continues to come over the cage, white over black over steel. Jensen groans, coming hard, shooting out thick, decadent ropes. His mouth forms the most beautiful O. He works his cock with the same intensity he fucked Jared, then rocks into Jared with a single, succulent, squelching slam.

The key meets the lock.

Jared comes without a single touch to his cock, let free from its cage. He comes in staggering pulses all over his stomach, his chin, his throat. And he comes again, because Jensen hasn’t let up. Jensen works him into another orgasm, wringing it out of him in a series of scorching screams.

Key and lock between them, they reach a primal understanding and agreement.

More.
/fans self/ PHEW. last update for 2016 ends with a BANG. XD

tags have been updated. comments are love! <3

so uhm wow. well, this was inspired by justanothertart on tumblr, who is incredible. these links in particular: (all links NSFW!)

https://justanothertart.tumblr.com/post/152594510616/the-key-always-stays-in-focus


https://justanothertart.tumblr.com/post/154286567041/justanothertart-have-some-new-lingerie-to-try

https://justanothertart.tumblr.com/post/152605953346/some-more-snakey-lock-up-time
“Jay.”

“Huh?”

“We can’t sleep in the car.”

“Huh? Why not?...we’ve done everything else in it.”

“This is true.”

“Okay.”

“No, sweetheart, keep your eyes open.”

“G’way. Sleep.”

“Remember that time you yelled at me because apparently it was my fault you didn’t take a shower right after sex and everything got really dry and sticky?”

“I forgive you.”

“Jay.”

“No.”

“My arm’s asleep.”

“Too bad so sad.”

“I’m hungry.”

“There’s some mints in my pockets.”

“I want real food. It’s not that late. We can swing by your mom’s.”

“No, we can’t.”

“What? Why?”

“I… I can’t face her after the things I’ve done tonight.”

“Oh. Point taken.”

“I probably also can’t walk.”

“Heh. Point really taken.”

“Let me sleep.”

“I will, I will, but not here. I’ll drive home.”
“Mm.”

Physics once again ceases to exist for a few minutes. Somehow, Jensen manages to clean them up enough to be somewhat respectable and functioning. His hands touch Jared steady and kind. There isn’t an inch of his body that he would bar those hands from. It is a work in progress, however, learning that intimacy means more than testing out the suspension of a car. Some of it means taking one of the water bottles they were smart enough to bring, pouring a bit of it onto a handkerchief also conveniently brought, and wiping away come, lube, and sweat so that Jared can comfortably get back into his jeans.

The kisses afterwards only help reinforce the fact that none of these actions come from a place of obligation.

Jared settles into the front passenger seat of his own car. The heated feature makes it even more comfortable and eases the familiar ache in his hips. Jensen takes a swig of water and presses the bottle to Jared’s lips. With his thumb, he wipes away the smallest hint of water around Jared’s lips.

From a different view, Jared watches Smithville slip by. Jensen takes all the main roads towards the freeway, but Jared knows an entire set of directions. He knows most of the people who live in the houses they drive past. Just last year, around this time, he walked those stretches of pavement, thinking about what to do with his life. The complete answer to that question continues to elude him.

But the man in the driver’s seat beside him seems to think that Jared can do anything.

How incredible is that?

Jensen reaches over and ruffles Jared’s hair.

“Hey,” Jared murmurs, leaning into the touch. “What’d your dad want to talk about?”

A frown pulls at Jensen’s mouth. He takes a deep breath and settles into the seat. The car merges onto the freeway, smooth and elegant. “He just warned me about you and the business.”

“The business?”

“Show business.” Jensen shrugs. He places his right hand on Jared’s knee and squeezes.

“Okay, what about me and the business?”

“Just to take it easy introducing you to it, that’s all.”

“That’s nice of him. What else did he say?”

“Well… that I should think about this as a transition for you, not just a dive into it. Dad stuff.”

“You’ll have to explain dad stuff to me.”

“You know how your mom says, ‘Don’t give cherries to pigs or advice to fools’?”

“Uh, no?”

“She said it to me once.”

“When!”

“That time at the ranch. You went out to the treehouse.”
At the Ackles’ family ranch outside of Dallas, Jared offered Donna his engagement ring if she truly believed that was all he cared about. She took it. Jared walked out of the kitchen. He had to be alone. Now, Jared touches his ring to remind himself that yes, it is right where it belongs. How is he supposed to live with Donna as his official mother-in-law after they’re married? What will she be like then? What doubts will she cast on Jared once things become even more permanent?

Jensen pokes Jared on the nose.

“She’s right, to an extent,” Jensen continues, both hands back on the steering wheel. “No sense in spending energy on someone who’ll just make a mess.”

“And your dad said something similar today?”

“Yeah. I asked him how to handle my mom.”

“That must have been interesting.”

“It’s tough.” For the first time all day, Jensen’s voice offers up its usual calm, confidence. “We have a complicated relationship. We aren’t close the way you and your mom are. I’m sorry that I won the mother-in-law jackpot and you got… well… a work in progress.”

Can Donna comprehend the way Jensen takes care of Jared after sex? Do parents think about things like that? Do they wonder what the lovers of their children do in the minutes after? Do they hope for those lovers to be considerate and patient, or does it never cross their minds? How do parents teach that in a child, anyway? Or is it instinctive?

It’s clear to Jared where Jensen learned that concern and attentiveness. It wasn’t at all from Donna.

“I know she’s still your mom,” Jared offers. “And it’s not like momma and I haven’t had our differences. But… you know, next time you wanna buy me something big, maybe give me some warning? Like your dad said, this is a huge transition for me. Fifty grand is a lot to spend on anything. I wanna be in on stuff like that.”

Jensen holds back a laugh.

“What?” Jared swats his knee. “What is it?”

With a shake of his head, Jensen replies, “Nothing, nothing. But uh, yes, I will be sure to include you in on major purchases from now on. That is duly noted. …you do like the car, right?”

“Of course I do.”

“I’m so glad. I thought you were gonna hate it.”

“I wouldn’t turn down anything from you, Jen.”

The car goes quiet for a moment. Jared wonders if his struggle to read Jensen’s expression is due to the lack of light or Jensen’s profession. Exhaustion pulls at Jared, tugs at his eyelids and slows down his breathing. He fights it, makes a valiant effort, but loses once Jensen’s voice replaces the sounds of the freeway.

“C’mon, baby, let’s get out of this town.” His voice stays soft, like the lights on the dashboard. However, there aren’t any bells and whistles on Jensen’s voice. It is as it is. The only support his voice receives is the humble glimmer of the silver chain around his neck and the key resting above his heart. “I’ll pack my bag and load up my guitar. In my pocket, I’ll carry my harp. I got some
money I saved, enough to get underway. And baby, you can sleep while I drive.”

They do just that.

Jared sleeps while Jensen drives.

Chapter End Notes

last update of 2016 is also the first update of 2017!

i hope y'all had a beautiful new years. <3

i wrote this all in one go tonight, so i hope it's okay. comments are much appreciated, welcomed, and loved.

"you can sleep while i drive" by melissa etheridge.
Chapter 21

Jensen allows Jared to recover for the rest of the evening. He generously doles out kisses while they watch through the second season of Game of Thrones. Jensen bemoans the loss of Ned Stark. Jensen huffs, Jared tucked into the crook of his shoulder, and grumbles that Jared just has a thing for older men.

“You’re not wrong,” Jared yawns, his cheek smushed against Jensen’s chest. He pats Jensen’s knee. “Not at all.”

“I’m not that much older than you.”

“You tell yourself that.”

“I keep up with your ass.”

“You keep up with my ass because of my ass.”

With a gentle grope to said ass, Jensen remarks, “You’re not wrong, sweetheart.”

Thankfully, after dinner on the couch and two more episodes, Jared passes out within seconds of hitting his pillow. It helps that Jensen shares the same bed and adds warmth to it. Comfortable, content exhaustion shoos away anxiety and self-doubt for the night. It helps that Jensen maintains a hand on Jared’s ass while they sleep—for protection and safety purposes, or so Jensen claims.

Jared dreams about dragons and hillsides and drawing water from a clean, clear river.

The next morning, Jared wakes up sore all over, but especially in one particular place. He peeks out from under the blankets and blearily looks for Jensen. A few seconds pass before he locates a tuft of tawny hair on the pillow next to his. There he is. The man responsible for the—not wholly unwelcome—ache.

Nose pressed to his own pillow, Jared breathes in deep. He has maybe a few more minutes until his alarm goes off to start his day. Mondays and Wednesdays belong to Theories of Personality and Composition 102. Theories starts at nine, but Jared would like to be there by eight thirty. Ever since registering for summer, he has analyzed every what-if scenario possible for his first day of college. And even though everyone, including Memo, has assured him he’ll do just fine at ACC, he still woke up with butterflies in his stomach.

What was up with Memo on Saturday? Jared runs a hand through his hair and sighs. In a perfect world, they would have been able to take a moment from the party and talk things out. Should he text Memo? No. They need to spend some time together in person. But when? Maybe Memo’s free this weekend. Is it bad to wait until Jensen leaves for Vancouver on Thursday?

“You look so serious,” Jensen rumbles. He slings an arm across Jared’s chest, keeping them both under the cover. “It’s too early to think.”

One look at Jensen right next to him in their bed, and Jared answers his previous question: no, not a
bad thing to want as much time as possible together.

“I’m sore,” Jared murmurs, putting on his best puppy eyes. “My ass hurts.”

In completely predictable fashion, Jensen’s hand wanders down to the slope of Jared’s hips. “Oh no, what fiend caused that?”

“Some awful, terrible man.”

“Hmm.” Bold as ever, Jensen gives Jared’s ass a light smack.

“Hmm.” Bold as ever, Jensen gives Jared’s ass a light smack.

Pain and a tinge of pleasure burns through Jared from head to toe. The smack leads to groping, which leads to fingers dipping, teasing, touching… Jared grabs Jensen and hauls him forward for a kiss, morning breath be damned. He’s not sure how Jensen does it, but kissing him first thing in the morning tastes and feels just as good as kissing him goodnight.

Unfortunately, time doesn’t care about details like that.

Jared’s alarm rings--bright, clear, and shrill from its place on his nightstand. Jensen is the first to groan and sigh, which pleases Jared. He reaches over and presses the snooze button for Jared, then settles back into bed, which is an incredibly dangerous decision. After another minute of kisses and gropes, Jared pries himself away. He moves to get up, but Jensen insists he stay in bed for just a little longer. Jared waits and enjoys the view as Jensen climbs out of bed and walks over to the bathroom. Jensen does some morning business--that’s what he calls it and Jared thinks it’s sweet--then swings back, refreshed and more awake.

“On your stomach,” he commands, though his voice stays light. “C’mon, you don’t wanna be late.”

“You told me to stay here and I listened,” Jared quips. Reluctantly, he shimmies out of the cocoon of blankets and warmth, then rolls over as ordered. “Is that lube? Jen…”

“Relax. It’s not lube. You know what this is.”

Jensen sits on Jared’s thighs. His weight provides a sense of comfort to the butterflies in Jared’s stomach. For the next ten minutes, he closes his eyes and focuses on the careful attention paid to him by a pair of loving hands. Before applying it onto Jared, Jensen rubs it on his hands so it’s not so cold. His fingers provide a soothing massage everywhere from his lower back, to his ass, to a much more intimate part of him. Jensen teases for a second because he can, then leans down and nips Jared on the ass.

The alarm rings out for a second time. It means serious business.

Each party present in the bed makes promises for more later. What exactly “more” means can be explored then.

For the sake of time, and to the dismay of Jensen, Jared gets into the shower solo. Routine. This is part of his new routine. So much of his life in the three months hasn’t centered around one. Did he buy all of his books? Yes. Did he make sure they weren’t international editions? Yes. Twice. Does he have a printed copy of his schedule? Two of them, just in case he should lose one. Does the schedule list classroom assignments? Yes. Does he have a map of campus? One hard copy and one bookmarked on his phone. He did register for these classes, right? Does he have extra backup pencils and pens just in case? Maybe he should buy a few more.

Out of the shower, Jared finds Jensen gone from their bedroom, presumably downstairs in the kitchen foraging.
On Friday, he spent twenty minutes debating on what to wear for his first day. T-shirt and jeans? Would that be too casual? Would it send the wrong message to his professors? But would a button down shirt make him look like he’s trying too hard? Jared scraps his decision from Friday at the last second and goes with his best compromise: a navy baseball tee with three-quarter sleeves and a pair of dark jeans. It seems like the best of both worlds. Sort of. This is community college, not Harvard. And he doubts that the students at Harvard wear Armani suits to every lecture.

Maybe he should wear a polo.

No, he can’t fuss about this and eat breakfast and leave on time. He planned a quick breakfast of cereal and orange juice. Jensen presents him with a grilled cheese sandwich instead.

At precisely ten minutes past eight, Jared grabs his backpack--which he’s had packed and ready to go since Thursday--and does a quick run down.


“I’m excited for you,” Jensen says, now properly dressed in sweatpants and a black t-shirt. “You’re gonna text me during, right? Oh, wait, you probably shouldn’t text in class. Well. Do it anyway. I wanna know. Should I meet you for lunch?”

“I’ll text you when I can,” Jared replies with a smile. “And I should really try to find my way around campus today. We can do lunch tomorrow though. Do I look okay? Is my hair weird? What if I get lost? I mean… it’s not like it’s a huge campus but still. What if I hate my professors or they hate me?” Words spawn from Jared’s mouth at a mile a minute.

Jensen bops him on the nose.

“Sweetheart,” he purrs, confident and kind, “you’re gonna have a great first day. Now. At least let me drive you.”

Jared doesn’t put up a fight. They take Jensen’s SUV, since even Jensen doesn’t know all the bells and whistles to the Mercedes and it’s way too early, in his opinion, to even attempt at figuring them out. On the way, Jensen plays one of Jared’s favorites: Shania Twain.

Shania, and Jensen’s hand on his knee, help Jared’s anxiety.

That is, until they drive up to the main entrance of the ACC Riverside Campus. Students stand around the entryway, just outside the sleek, modern building, but it’s not because they’re meeting up with friends or trying to figure their way around. It’s probably got something to do with the small paparazzi swarm. Cameras and microphones in hand, they spot the SUV and push towards it.

“Sonofabitch.” Jensen stops the car in front of the main doors and reaches for the glove compartment. Jared beats him to it and fishes out two pairs of sunglasses. They can both hear the questions already being asked and neither one of them has left the SUV yet.

“Why are they here?” Jared groans, but tries not to show his dismay for the cameras to pick up. But how should he look? Happy to see these people invading his privacy? Delighted that they have nothing better to do than to show up at ACC and deliver an A+ anxiety attack to one of its new students?

“I’d sure as hell would like them to get the fuck out of here. Jay, let me call John and have him go with you. I’d offer, but that might not solve the problem.”
“I don’t wanna start my first day with a bodyguard, Jen.”

“He’s not a bodyguard, he’s just John.”

“As long as they don’t follow me to class, I’ll be fine.”

“Can I walk you to it, then?”

Jared wants to say yes. More than anything. But it’s enough that Jensen drove him. He can and will handle this. And if he can avoid a nervous breakdown during it, that’d be even better. “They’re here to see you, not to follow me through school.” Yes. They can both believe that. “And if they don’t leave me alone, I can call campus security.”

The tone of his voice convinces Jensen to let the subject go—for the moment.

However, Jensen doesn’t let Jared get out of the car first. He shuts off the engine and steps out. Jared holds his breath. Cameras and microphones and boom mics rush forward. Jensen smiles, puts his hands up and motions for people to give him room to walk. They listen. But they hang on every word, they cling to every inflection. Some of their questions filter past Jared’s anxiety--how does Jensen like Austin? When’s the big day? Does he himself regret not going to college? What’s it feel like dating someone so much younger? Is it helping his career at all?

“Allright, here we go,” Jensen says, opening the door for Jared. He extends a hand; Jared takes it. “Text me. If you don’t, we’re not watching more Game of Thrones tonight.”

“Very funny. You’re too hooked not to.”

“Hey, I’m not the one with the crush on Sean Bean.”

“At least I have taste.”

“Uh huh. I’m glad you’re going to college to get you some learnin’. They’ll show you the error of your ways.”

“None of my classes have anything to do with Sean Bean.”

“That you know of. Now go. Learn a lot.” Jensen raises his arms for a second. “Hi there, ladies and gentlemen. Hi. You’ll notice that my good friend John isn’t here, and I know many of you know him. We’re just trying to have a moment, and I trust that y’all will let Jared go to class without an issue. There’s no need for us to bother John on his day off and we’d all like to keep it that way. Thank you, for always understanding, we appreciate it.”

Some of the bolder people shove mics in front of Jared. They ask their questions faster than lightning strikes. Why go back to college? Why community college? What does he think about the rumors? Is it true he’s launching a modeling career on the side?

Jared takes Jensen’s hand and gives it a squeeze.

Jensen brings him in for a tight hug and a kiss.

Cameras go off all around them. It’s so fucking strange.

Needs must. Jensen walks Jared to the door, keeping the paparazzi at a distance he deems non-negotiable. Jared steps inside the building, unescorted, and looks back to see Jensen moving through the crowd around him as if he were taking a walk around the block.
One obstacle conquered, Jared faces his next one: finding his first class.

Or, maybe, figuring out how to address the confused, curious, and shocked looks from people all around him. Or, maybe, trying to understand the complete silence. Not a single person dares to ask him a thing.

This might be a long, long day.

Chapter End Notes

i'm sooo sleepy. it's 4 am. but here we are! yay an update!

please tell me what you liked about this chapter. or about this story. comments are love and i could use a little right now. it keeps me motivated and shuts up the chronic self-doubt i think all writers struggle with. ;-;

okay, thanks for reading! enjoy!
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jared ducks into the bookstore, the one familiar location on campus. He swung by a week ago to pick up his books. While he didn’t have time to tour the campus, he did linger a while in the store, enough to understand the layout, organization of books, and to buy an ACC hoodie.

Surrounded by books, Jared feels calm and reassured. People go to college to learn. Not to gossip.

Okay, that might be a little naive.

But only just a little.

In an empty aisle, he takes out one of his campus maps and looks up the classroom number for Theories of Personality, which should be in Building A on the second floor. It looks like a short walk. He can do this. Well, first, he should fold up his map and put it away in its proper place. Then, he should double check that yep, he brought pens and pencils so there’s no need to buy more. Oh, and he has blank spiral notebooks, those are important. Okay. Backpack zipped. Speaking of zippers, shit, what is the status of his jeans? Jensen would have told him if something were amiss, right? But what if Jensen hadn’t noticed? What if a strong gust of wind unzipped his jeans and he’s about to walk through campus exposed?

There has to be some way to subtly check on this situation. Should he yawn? No, his arms would go the wrong way. Bend down to tie his shoes? No. What if his jeans split open in the back. That would be worse.

How far is it to the nearest bathroom? Why doesn’t he already know that? He should have been touring campus at least three times a week. He doesn’t even know where the cafeteria is should he require sustenance. That’s what he left this afternoon for--exploring. But exploring doesn’t seem so fun anymore.

Panicking, standing still in front of a shelf of Accounting books, Jared almost doesn’t notice the appearance of three people at the end of the aisle. Two men, one woman, all around his age, peer over. Jared pulls at the hem of his shirt, willing the fabric to cover up any potential open barn door, and takes a step towards the opposite end of the aisle to panic elsewhere.

“I told you that’s him,” one of the guys snap. “Next time you call me delusional, look in the mirror, Shelby.”

“I’ve seen porn stars that look like him,” the one supposedly called Shelby quips. “That could be anyone.”

“I think he’s cute,” the second guy comments. “But he’s not Jensen Ackles’ bae.”

“What, because you’re suddenly Jensen Ackles’ BFF? Shel, move. I’m gonna go talk to him.”

Oh, shit. Where’s the exit? Why hasn’t he left for class? Run. Don’t walk. Picture a pack of nazguls in the sky. Or, if confronted, he could say there he’s not in any way connected to Jensen. He’s one of those porn stars they’ve seen, trying to get into character for some kind of professor/student film.

Where did that idea come from?
Jared manages to wind through other people in the bookstore. He makes a crafty exit, almost as clever as escaping from velociraptors in a kitchen. With his legs and feet finally moving towards the second floor of Building A, he makes good time and reaches his classroom. Worrying about his jeans crumbles into a pathetic pile of anxiety ashes as he faces a new, more harrowing problem: where to sit.

Fellow classmates occupy about half the seats, despite his early arrival. A cluster of well-prepared introverts have already claimed the two corners in the back. The room easily fits thirty individual desks and includes windows, making it spacious and well-lit. It also looks a lot like one of his classrooms in high school. But in high school, their seats were assigned. If he takes a seat near the windows, will he be able to concentrate? However, most people have already sat there, so the likelihood of speaking to someone or someone speaking to him increases. Yet, if he chooses a seat near the door, away from people, they might think he’s either not serious about being here or stuck up. Good lord, he can’t stand in the doorway gawking for the next ten minutes.

Can he?

The windows win. He’ll have more room to spread out that way. Just like the desks in high school, he dwarfs this one. And, the seat is just as hard and uncomfortable. It does not help his earlier situation of feeling sore. Or his anxiety. Is he taking up too much space?

Should he unpack his textbook and supplies? A few people have, most haven’t. Those who have, can they be trusted? Or can the ones who haven’t be trusted? Why must he question every single thing today?

He makes the executive decision to take out his notebook but not his textbook, which he brought just in case the professor decided to grade everyone on its presence or absence today. At least the notebook and pen give him something to fiddle with instead of his phone. He will not break down and text Jensen or Anza or Nathan and ask for one of them—or perhaps all of them—to bail him out. This is school. He’s good at school.

No one talks to each other as they sit in wait. Jared appreciate this, but also resents the amplified silence. While he relishes the feeling of writing in a new notebook, it doesn’t completely take away his doubt. Maybe he should have taken online classes. Or started in the fall. Or next spring. Or forced one of his friends to take classes with him. Or pursued an entirely different career that doesn’t require a college degree. Sherri might kick his ass for that one, though.

A young woman with bright pink hair walks in and takes a seat behind Jared. Did she sit behind him because she recognized him? Was it random? Does she also like window seats? Should he strike up a conversation with her about the windows? Or about her hair? It’s a great shade. But maybe he shouldn’t start with that, because then what if she thinks he’s just complimenting her to get her number? No, okay, best to stay quiet.

But it seems like she has other plans.

“Hey,” she murmurs after a tap to his right shoulder. “Did you…”

“No,” Jared blurts out, turning around and putting his hands up for emphasis. “I totally didn’t tell the paparazzi to be here today. I don’t even know how they know where I’m going to school.”

She stares at him, unaffected. “O-okay. I was gonna ask if you already bought the textbook, but alright.”

“Oh! Uhm, I’m sorry.”
“Don’t sweat it,” she chirps and smiles. She picks up her backpack and stands. “I’ll just go sit over here now.”

Great.

+1 alienated classmate. And who knows who heard their brief discussion? Jared stares at his notebook like it’s the most interesting, engaging notebook in the entire world. Thankfully, the professor arrives exactly on time--a woman who looks a lot like an older version of Anza. She wears her hair in a braid and wears a coral skirt paired with a black blouse. Anza would approve.

Professor Ortiz introduces herself, her voice steady and confident. She hands out copies of the syllabus, explaining, “I know it seems tedious, but I’d like to know we are all on the same page, so we’ll read through this together. If you have any questions about how I run my classroom, this is the best time to get it out there. Otherwise, office hours are by appointment.”

Jared receives his copy, passes the rest on, and immediately digs into the information. He reads ahead, occasionally listening into the questions people ask. Most people ask about late assignments or attendance policies. Professor Ortiz clarifies as necessary, then starts introductions. Jared manages not to forget his name, but his face turns into a ripe tomato when Professor Ortiz comments, “Ah, I didn’t know we had a celebrity here.”

People whisper and shuffle around in their desks as Jared prays to the universe for a sinkhole to spontaneously manifest and take him down. Just him though. He’s not feeling terribly mean spirited today. Not yet, anyway.

Introductions take decades. Centuries, even. But everyone seems to breathe a collective sigh when Professor Ortiz launches into a lecture instead of a get-to-know-each-other activity. Jared takes notes, which gets him out of his head for the rest of the class. Professor Ortiz lets them out fifteen minutes early. A bell does not ring to signify the end of class. There’s no in-between period of walking to and from another class right after. Jared picks up his stuff, leaves, and wonders--what now?

Surprisingly, no one stopped to talk to him after class. Relief floods him, but so does anxiety.

All of this obsessive worrying makes him hungry.

His map tells him that food services isn’t too far away--first floor of Building A. Through tenacity and good directional sense, he finds it and grabs comfort food: two slices of pizza, a bag of chips, and a large sweet tea. Settled at a table in a common area, he eats and scrolls through his phone. Jensen has already texted three times for updates. Jared’s thumbs move quick, fueled by a combination of nerves and sugar. He’s okay. But he would like to know the secret to not being awkward about everything, please.

Halfway through another text to Jensen, a text from Anza pops up: HAPPY FIRST DAY JAY BIRD!!!!

She sends a picture of herself and Nathan outside of Franklin Barbecue, their faces smeared with sauce. Jared snorts and shakes his head. Guess Nathan wasn’t in any hurry to get back to Los Angeles or Vancouver. Despite his jealousy and desire to drop everything and join them or go home to Jensen--who sends a picture of himself sprawled on the couch in the living room--he finishes up and starts his tour.

A valiant effort keeps him from wandering over to the library and hiding there until Composition at one.
Building A takes twenty minutes to fully explore. Most academic subjects find their homes here. He locates his Composition 2 and Abnormal Psychology classes on the first and second floors respectively, then wanders over towards Building E to get a sense of where his Biology class might be. The trek from A to E takes longer, as it requires passing through Buildings G and E, then part of Lot F.

He passes through crowds or groups of people with ease. One person stops him for directions, he takes out his map and helps the best he can.

Maybe he was overreacting before?

His Biology classroom connects to a lab. He looks in for a second, since people are in there, and continues walking through Building E onto H, which houses Horticultural studies. Plus, right next to it, sits a greenhouse that looks open to explore.

The greenhouse quickly becomes one of Jared’s favorite spots on campus. A white frame decked with specially made glass houses a plethora of plants, trees, flowers, and vines. He looks up and marvels at a few plants hanging from the pointed ceiling. Jade vines extend down towards him, curling as if offering an invitation. Two or three students work on clipping, watering, and measuring different plants and flowers. They say hi, welcome, and offer to answer any questions he might have. He asks a couple, trying not to sound too ignorant, and receives patient, clear explanations. A woman with striking similarity to Bea Arthur hands him a pamphlet about the Horticology department. She even points him to a student space--a set of chairs next to a small bookshelf tucked away in a corner. Mushrooms grow nearby. Jared takes a seat and two deep breaths.

This isn’t so bad.

For the rest of his break, he alternates between reading his Theories homework and texting. At one point, he stops all those things. He admires his surroundings and closes his eyes to commit it to memory.

It’d be nice to bring Jensen here.

At quarter to one, he gathers his belongings and thanks the students. Bea Arthur introduces herself. Her name is Wilhelmina, but young folks can call her Wil.

She shakes his hand. “You come back now, you hear? And bring your friends.”

Jared nods and turns to leave.

“Jared! Rob from TMZ, hey buddy, how you doing? How’s the first day going? Any opinions on Jensen’s next movie? You excited? When’s the big day for you two? Is it true he’s moving you two overseas? What do you think about his previous relationship with Ty Lane?”

Rob from TMZ is probably not the friend Wil meant to bring.

Not that anyone invited him or his ten colleagues with their cameras and boom mics. Several take a chance at snapping pictures of his bewildered face, and three shove microphones or recorders at him.

Did he ever make sure his fly wasn’t open?

Wil storms out of the greenhouse and asks the unwelcome swarm around Jared what in the burning hell they think they’re doing here? “Jared,” she snaps, “get going!”

Getting going, unfortunately, does not mean the swarm disappears--or even allows him to walk to
class unbothered. They follow. They ask questions. Really personal questions. He hears a few now and then, but mostly, watches in horror as students on campus point, whisper, and take pictures of their own.

Jared practically runs the whole way back to Building A, his head down, sunglasses on.

Chapter End Notes

so glad to be able to write on my day off! i spent all day resting and putting this together, i do hope you enjoy. :)

jared is such a shy bean. i just want to squish his face. :3

comments are love! <3
Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Okay. What to do.

What to freaking do.

Jared snapped at the two cameramen who tried to follow him inside Building A, threatening to call security, the police, and John. They really only backed down once John’s name was mentioned, which gave credit to Jensen’s theory that maybe it would be best for John to go with him to school.

Why is this even happening in the first place? Jared isn’t the one who has been in a million Hollywood movies or tread on a million and one red carpets. He doesn’t work with celebrities or actors, he doesn’t have any influence in the industry, and he certainly doesn’t know the big secret to stardom. Except. Maybe he does. No, he knows he does.

Some people might take this as an opportunity to become a star. They might not completely snap at the so-called press following him around like vultures in a desert. Instead of having nothing at all to say, they might slip a few tidbits of information here and there, tease and appease them a little, take the sunglasses off and smile for the flash of the cameras all around.

The thought that people out there even think he’s that kind of person creates a deeper sense of dread.

Are people always going to question his place in Jensen’s life?

Is it possible that Donna not only reads what they put up, but wholeheartedly believes it? Is that why she’s such a piece of work? Or does it an innate response to go after anyone close to Jensen? And oh my god, why is he thinking of Donna at a time like this? His future mother-in-law doesn’t have people around him asking for autographs or pictures--or worse, not asking at all and taking pictures anyway.

Jared does his part and says, “Excuse me, please, I’m late for class.” He gently muscles his way through the crowd of ten or fifteen people. Once clear of them, he utilizes the length of his legs and bolts to Composition. In no mood to talk to anyone, the professor included, Jared takes one of the last seats in the far back corner of the room--with one minute to spare before the start of class.

This time, his classmates whisper and not-so-subtly point at him and snap pictures when they think he isn’t looking. What are they going to do with those pictures? If they upload them on Twitter or Facebook, what kinds of captions will they put? Will they say something awful about him? How many people will comment on each of those posts? How far through the internet will each post get? Would it be worse for people to reblog or retweet his photo or not at all? At least people are talking about him? Noticing him?

For the wrong reasons.

How could anyone want this kind of attention and invasion of privacy? Jared didn’t used to think of sitting in class as an action in which he’d need privacy.

“I’m sure we could all use an assignment to keep us from being distracted,” the professor announces, shooting a look towards Jared. The professor, an older white man in his fifties, does not garner Jared any friends. Now his classmates look pissed. Great.
Way to make friends today.

Out of fear, Jared doesn’t check his phone during class. Fortunately, the professor lets them out an hour and a half early—with a warning that this will never happen again in the course of the semester. Jared encounters the disadvantage of sitting far away from the door. Waiting to leave the room, he can hear what the people ahead of him say.

“He looks better in pictures than in real life.”

“Anyone would look better standing next to Jensen.”

“I wonder why he’s here. Maybe his sugar daddy wouldn’t pay for actual college.”

“Dude, why go to college at all if you’ve got a sugar daddy? What’s the point?”

Which one is worse: his classmates or the paparazzi? At least the paparazzi are getting paid to do a job, to provide a specific—albeit violating—service. His classmates have no such excuse.

People must catch onto Jared’s foul mood. No one approaches him in the hallways. He stops and leans against a wall to catch up on his phone. Two texts from Jensen ask him what time he needs to be picked up. One text from Sherri reads that she’s filled with nothing but love and pride for her son on his first day of college and that they’ll chat later. Another two texts emerge from Charlie and Candy, also wishing him well and threatening to visit soon to eat all the contents of their fridge.

The texts help.

But what now?

Logic says to text or call Jensen to pick him up now. Class got out early. Jensen’s ten minutes away; less than that if Jared made it sound urgent. But after a glance towards the entrance, Jared notices that the paparazzi have decided to stick it out and wait for him to leave. If Jensen drives up and sees them there, then he’ll know that Jared can’t handle them on his own. And he should be able to.

Ten minutes slink by as he tries to figure out ways to banish the paparazzi. Some kind of spell? A hose? Where would he get either or both of those? Is there a magic phrase he needs to shout for them to scatter and leave him be? But then why wouldn’t Jensen have shared that phrase?

“You, Jay-bird!”

Jared flinches, his thoughts disrupted, and almost drops his phone. He stares at Anza.

A mischievous smile graces her face, highlighted by a perfect shade of crimson red that matches her polka dot dress. She’s the only person in Texas to eat barbeque and not spill a drop of sauce on herself.

With a slight kick to his sneaker, she demands an answer. “How long were ‘chu gonna stand here? Huh?”

“Not that long.” Jared breathes a sigh of relief. “What are you doing here? And where’s Nathan?”

Anza slips her hand into his and leads without hesitation. Halfway down the hall, their hands swing as if they were walking through the mall or on some other lighthearted adventure. She explains that news travels fast at ACC and Austin in general. All she had to do was log onto Snapchat and there was Jared, looking pissed, annoyed, and deeply uncomfortable as his classmates uploaded pictures and captions.
So what did Anza do?

“I figured chu’d be here, overthinkin’ everything and haha, I was right.” They stop right at Building A’s main entrance and exit. She reaches up, brushes Jared’s hair to the side a bit, and slides his sunglasses on for him. “I’ll be a bodyguard for chu today. But after this? Chu better put me on payroll or hire someone’s ass to do this for real. Dale. Let’s go.”

Two steps outside of Building A and Jared spots a silver convertible patiently waiting. Its owner talks to one cameraman, but the rest leave him alone. How? How does Nathan do that?

More than one paparazzi tries to intimidate Anza or stall her from getting Jared to the car.

“Hey! Chu best step off, pendejo. Move. Now. Oh sister, I ain’t talking to chu about no shit and Jared neither. Oh yeah, chu ask yourself that question again. Move. Hey! I said move, chu not hear me??!”

Nathan opens the passenger door for Anza and Jared. Anza sits in back. The second their seat belts click, the car blasts forward.

At a stop light, Nathan and Anza exchange a high-five. He turns to Jared and grins.

“Miami, which side do you think is better?” Nathan turns his head to the left and right. “This one? Or this? Do you think they got my really good side back there? Should I call them back and ask for a personal photo shoot?”

Jared can laugh now.

But the future casts a permanent shadow over his shoulders. What about tomorrow?

Chapter End Notes

argh AO3 ate my first attempt at uploading this. let's hope nothing goes awry now.

thank you for being here to read and support. to find out how you can support me outside of AO3 and to read an exclusive fic, visit my tumblr- compo67.tumblr.com. all other fics will be uploaded here like always. :)

comments are love! <3
Not even the world’s greatest psychic could have ever predicted the knowledge that Jared learns inside a convertible, riding alongside Anza, with Nathan Fillion at the wheel.

Nathan enjoys blasting music and singing at eardrum splitting volumes.

And, Nathan knows every single word to every single Kesha song.

The drive from ACC to the condo takes “We R Who We R,” “Your Love is My Drug,” and “TiK ToK.”

Jared and Anza narrowly escape from an encore of “TiK ToK.” They both enjoy Kesha, but perhaps not performed this way, complete with Nathan frequently taking his hands off the wheel at stop lights to flail around and, in his words, “Party it up.”

They tear their way inside the condo and find Jensen napping on the couch, phone in hand. With great pleasure, they subject him to their rendition of Nathan Fillion: Fifteen Minutes of Loud Squawking. Jensen doesn’t seem to appreciate this display of musical talent. He definitely does not seem to grasp what a rare event it is to have Nathan argue with Jared and Anza that he doesn’t sound like that at all, and that had he not chosen to be a world-famous thespian, he’d have become a lauded vocalist.

Anza rolls her eyes hard enough to cause a chain reaction of eye rolling in the living room.

“I was napping and having the best dream…”

“I’m serious, I can hold notes. Actual notes. Better than Adele, probably.”

“Listen to me, dejo, chu can do a lot of things, but chu cannot compare churself to Adele.”

“Yep, I was having the best dream. There was ice cream.”

“I’m at least as good as Adele. I’ll work my way up to Beyonce soon enough.”

“I can’t witchu.”

It is immeasurably easier to go along with everyone than it is to talk about how crummy his first day of school turned out. And it’s even easier to agree to going out for dinner with Anza and Nathan. After that, it’s one easy decision after another: tell everyone at the table that school is fine, his classes seem interesting, and the only time the paparazzi bothered him was when he left. It’s easy to tell Jensen that there’s still no need to send John along and then change the subject to Jensen leaving later in the week. Still easy to ask Anza about the Center and obtain updates about the youth and the next board meeting.

It’s even easy to call Sherri later that night, just before bed, and tell her, “No, momma, everything’s great. I really like school.”

Easy.

Easy to slip into bed and curl up next to Jensen and lose himself in an hour of sex, hard and soft
kisses, and whispered goodnights.

Going back to school the next morning is not easy.

He drives himself. Jensen offered, but it would make him late to a meeting with the casting director for his new project. Jared insists that driving to school will be easy as pie. All he has to do is drive there, park, and walk to class. And thanks to his time between classes yesterday, he already knows where to go.

But it might as well be a repeat of Monday, without Jensen, Nathan, or Anza to rescue him.

By Thursday, Jared contemplates a few desperate measures. Either he enrolls in something like the witness protection program, gets extensive plastic surgery, or drops out of school altogether. Because instead of getting better, school gets worse. His classmates won’t talk to him. In fact, they seem to actively avoid him. Even Professor Ortiz refrains from calling on him for answers, despite raising his hand repeatedly. He manages to read and do his homework all week, but has nothing to show for his efforts in the end.

And try as he might, he can’t deal with the paparazzi with Jensen’s confidence or Nathan’s charm or Anza’s determination. They surround him. They point their cameras and microphones and ask questions purposefully worded to get a rise out of him—and it works.

More than once in the four days he attends class, he ducks into bathrooms throughout campus to commiserate and catch his breath—all attempts to keep himself from having a total nervous breakdown.

Departures from campus become the worst part of his day.

Paparazzi follow him all the way up to his car. They get in the way of him opening the back door to toss his backpack inside. They tap on his windows. Their cameras go off. They crowd the front and sides of his car in an effort to get a soundbyte from him or a comment or a chance to hear him recite the alphabet.

It gets harder and harder to easily smile or laugh outside of school.

“You’re coming back Monday, right?” Jared sits, cross legged on their bed, watching Jensen pack a carry on suitcase. “Monday morning?”

Jensen nods. “Most likely. Unless they keep me for another day, which has been known to happen. You sure you don’t wanna come with me? And then, you know, come with me?” He waggles his eyebrows, which makes Jared laugh, but also causes a pang of regret.

“I have school on Monday.”

“Well, you could fly back on your own on Sunday?”

“I’d still be tired for school the next day.”

“So… come back Saturday night?”

“I’d only be there for less than two whole days.”

“If you wanted to be there for six hours, I’d book you a ticket, sweetheart.”

Jared scoots over to the edge of the bed, closer to Jensen and his carry on. “You’ll miss me, right?
Like, a lot, a lot?”

The offer to fly Jared back and forth tempts him. It just doesn’t seem like the right weekend. Or maybe it’s the exhaustion talking. It would be great to revisit Vancouver, but that takes energy he’s not sure he has. And coming back by himself doesn’t seem appealing. If he stays in Austin, he can sleep, mope around, sleep more, eat, read, take out his feelings on video games, mope some more, and visit Sherri. He’d also like to have Memo over on Sunday, even though Memo hasn’t gotten back to his text about it yet. And after she drops Nathan off at the airport, Anza might stop by on Saturday night. Nathan and Jensen will be in Vancouver at the same time and it just isn’t fair. So why doesn’t Jared just go with? Ugh.

Familiar hands touch Jared’s shoulders. Jensen leans down.

“I’m gonna miss you a lot, a lot,” he murmurs. “Holy moly, me oh my, you’re the apple of my eye.”

A pleasant shudder makes its way through Jared. Jensen’s hands roam and the distance between their mouths closes. This always happens. It’s called The Jensen Effect. The first few kisses stay sweet, nourishing. Jared inhales and exhales at a normal pace. Tension eases away from his body, though it certainly drags its feet.

Before he knows it, he’s kissing Jensen in the entryway at five in the morning, squeezing him close for the last time.

John pats Jared on the shoulder and promises to have Jensen back soon, safe, and sound.

For the next three days, it feels like the sun doesn’t shine at all in Austin. He proceeds with all of his plans. His momma dotes on him when he visits. She enjoys a spin in the Mercedes and reinforces the idea that he deserves his own car and it’s okay for Jensen to spend money on the right things--and a car with an impressive record of safety and reliability, even with bells and whistles, is definitely one of those right things. They talk, catch up, and Jared ends up sleeping over. On Sunday, he heads back to Austin, still amazed that he lives there, and in a condo, and that he has his own set of keys.

Memo cancels, which shouldn’t be a big deal, but it kind of is.

Anza ended up going to Vancouver with Nathan, which also shouldn’t be a big deal, but it kind of is.

Sleeping alone is foreign now, and he tosses and turns every night. He knew Jensen was going to be gone this weekend. And this is nothing. This is just pre-production stuff. When Jensen actually starts filming, he’ll be away for even longer periods of time. But wow, way to be so freaking needy. Jared fights with himself all of Sunday while he cleans, does laundry, and attempts to focus on homework.

Late Sunday night, Jensen calls. Jared curls up on the couch in the living room, wearing one of Jensen’s shirts. Loneliness pricks at the layers of cartilage in his bones. They need Jensen until Wednesday for photo shoots, interviews, and a meeting with the legal team.

When Jared looks at himself in the mirror on Monday morning, his eyes tell him such strange things.

Chapter End Notes

moving this along! :)
i discovered Lizz Wright tonight. this was the perfect music to write the end of this chapter to. highly recommended if you want something deep and bittersweet.

i'm terrible at time skips, so i hope this feels natural and not forced or rushed.

comments are love, thank you for reading!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Pre-production of a film can make or break its success.

Any director or producer worth their salt knows that. Even the most low-budget teams understand the importance of a well-executed pre-production phase. Jensen has worked on a variety of sets, for a variety of outlets and forms. Television pre-production requires a completely different set of rules and guidelines than film. Whenever Jensen experiences a team of directors or producers switching from one medium to the other, he knows their success rate in doing so by the manner of the pre-production phase.

This film works from a pre-existing production company, which Jensen liked, because it meant that they not only had experience, but contracts would be easier. He took a look at the preliminary budget and schedule once he secured the part, and liked what he saw. The Line Producer and Production Manager understood the limits of their budget--what they could and couldn’t afford. Jensen saw the stripboard, script breakdown, and mock call sheets and met with each department head before signing the final contract. This means he’s already met with the cinematographer, production designer, editor, costume designer, production coordinator, and even the production accountant before heading into his first official day on the set. Younger, less experienced actors--like himself in his twenties--don’t know to do all of that before day one. They sign on and show up when told by their managers or agents and know no one on the lot--they don’t know if the entire production will be a good fit, if they’ll be able to get along with the crew, or if their sense of creativity will be nurtured or squashed.

And they have no idea what their director will be like, which is even worse.

The director should regularly meet with the department heads for creative planning. In turn, the department heads should be dedicated to simultaneously creating the director’s vision and expanding on it. Both sides should feel the freedom to ask important questions at all times. Will the cinematographer need special equipment for the climactic shot the director has in mind? Would that be out of the budget? Can they find money somewhere else? Or do it some other way? Is that scene as climactic as the director thinks? Then, if the cinematographer’s special equipment gets funded, will the production designer need more time to design and build a set to create that shot?

Can someone curtail the director’s artistic ambitions if needed? Can the director truly deliver what they set out to create, or will they produce something unrecognizable and hollow? And under all this pressure--can the director factor in the importance of the psychology and emotion of the production’s talent and crew? Can they foster an environment that is creatively stimulating, artistically challenging, and fun to be in?

For the most part, Jensen thinks this director can deliver. One week into pre-production and there hasn’t been too much chaos. Locations have been booked in advance, with permits and insurance details worked out. He’s met up with some of the crew and knows more than a few from previous projects. Rehearsal with the director went well, even though they’re in very rough stages. Jensen hasn’t met with his co-star due to last minute scheduling conflicts, and that concerns him, but they have time.

All the director asks is for Jensen to give his best.
And giving his best means spending a lot of time in Vancouver.

Which means coming home on Wednesday night is actually coming home on Saturday morning.

Jared struggles to find a balance in showing his disappointment, which is real, and his gratitude for Jensen working so much, which is also real. At the risk of seeming clingy and needy, Jared repeatedly assures Jensen that things in Austin are fine and that he’s making friends at school and homework keeps him busy.

Maybe all of that is a bit of a stretch.

By Thursday, his second full week of class, only five people have come up to talk to him in his time spent on campus. He’s spoken more to Wil than anyone, mainly about the importance of greenhouses in urban communities, but their conversations aren’t born out of the need to ask about Jensen. That’s all people want to talk about--what’s Jensen like? Is he as nice and charming as he is on screen? Can Jared arrange for them to meet Jensen? Can Jared get Jensen to sign something for them?

And try as Jared might, Professor Ortiz doesn’t call on him to answer a single question. She gives his first paper of the term--a simple two page assignment--a B minus for poor word choices, simplistic sentence structure, and turning in three pages instead of the required two.

It seems like no one at ACC expects much from Jared.

Hooray.

To make things more difficult, even his car becomes too much to handle. There are too many buttons and no manual that he can find. All the YouTube videos for his make and model don’t have the customizations that Jensen ordered. Jared begins to realize that Jensen didn’t just pay sticker price--he must have paid way more for all the extra add ons.

His complaints make it all ten times more frustrating. Poor baby, his Mercedes won’t stop changing LED colors on the inside, which makes him dizzy and a bit nauseated, but wow, what a problem to have. Poor baby, he feels lonely in the condo his fiance bought with money earned working fourteen hour days on set.

And Memo still won’t answer any calls or texts from him.

And Charlie and Candy went to Houston to visit friends because they’re not taking classes at ACC or UT until fall semester. And Anza is still in Vancouver with Nathan. And even his momma has a busy week at work and dog-sitting for the Murphys.

Life feels like that part in Clueless, right after Ty calls Cher a virgin who can’t drive.

Jared watches Clueless twice on Wednesday night, eating breakfast burritos, sitting cross-legged on the living room floor, wearing one of Jensen’s Cowboys shirts and a pair of boxers.

Thursday, after class, Jared decides to take control over his life, dammit. Yes, the paparazzi still follow him around campus. No, ACC administrators haven’t offered to do anything about them. Yes, Jared has taken to driving Jensen’s SUV because he just can’t deal with learning the Mercedes right now. Yes, he’s made absolutely no progress on finding a part-time job so he’s not exactly rolling in his own money.

But if he has learned anything from Clueless, it’s that retail therapy can help.
In order to dodge the paparazzi, he drives back home, where they can’t follow past the security gate. After an hour, he heads back out, complete with baseball cap and sunglasses that seem to be more and more of a necessity for reasons he still can’t figure out. He pulls his hair back too, which seems to help.

People pack the Second Street District. As long as he doesn’t go waving around a giant poster board that says, “Take pictures of me!” he should be fine.

First on his route, Toy Joy, the best toy store ever.

Bouncy, inflatable horses in every color of the rainbow hang from the ceiling. Every inch of space in the store holds some kind of toy. He walks past a giant donut lamp, a series of poseable Jesus figures, and an assortment of erasers in the shape of food. Maybe it’s sad that colorful, shiny things bring him such joy, but fuck it all. He buys himself a fidgety block, a block to reduce anxiety by providing buttons, a joystick, and switches. It’s also possible that he buys some glow in the dark stars and planets to stick on a wall at home, and a Hello Kitty hamburger coin purse for Anza.

After buying an ice cream cone, he wanders past a store called Teddies for Bettys. A quick glance proves that yes, they do in fact sell lingerie and not teddy bears. Curiosity tugs at him, but both his wallet and anxiety push him forward.

For an hour, he pops in and out of different stores to window shop. He has actual fun inside an interior design store, rearranging swatches of rugs on a display to make appealing arrangements. He buys two tacos from a street vendor and eats unbothered. At a store that sells brightly colored men’s shirts, he takes a selfie and sends it to Jensen. The people in shops don’t treat him poorly or seem to recognize him as anyone but a potential customer.

Satisfaction settles in as he heads into a store for tailored suits and men’s accessories.

A black leather backpack draws his attention for a minute, until he realizes the cost—five hundred and eighty-five dollars. It’s nice. But not *that* nice. His fidgety block cost twenty dollars, and even then he had a tough time justifying its purchase. Does the backpack sing to him? Is the inside lined with gold? Does it provide the meaning of life at some point?

Jared looks at the ties instead.

Richard, a Rebels Representative, introduces himself and offers assistance. Jared stammers out that he’s just looking, but that he appreciates the offer. With a smile, Richard nods and lets Jared know to ask if he needs anything, anything at all.

“Don’t hesitate,” Richard assures. His smile reaches his eyes.

“I won’t,” Jared replies, with much less charm. He’s blushing. Honest to god blushing. But why? For what reason? Why can’t Richard be more like those saleswomen in Pretty Woman who shoo Viv out of the boutique because they claim she wouldn’t be able to afford anything?

Confidence, Jared commands himself, have confidence.

He looks at a purple tie. Jensen might like it. It’s classic, but unique, with a single, diagonal, pink stripe. Forty-six dollars is more than Jared would ever have considered spending on a tie less than a year ago. But it would be nice to give Jensen a gift when he gets back.

A voice that doesn’t belong to Richard the Rebels Representative interrupts Jared’s thoughts.

“Purple,” a blond man with thick, black glasses murmurs. “Excellent choice in color.”
Holding the tie, Jared forces a smile. Unsure of what to say, he goes with a simple, “Thanks.”

Something in the man’s expression hints that he expected more than a one-word reply. Then, Jared understands that this guy isn’t a one-word kind of person. Dressed in trendy clothes and fancy boots, the guy looks and fits the part of Second Street District regular. His clothes, mannerism, and haircut scream that he has more money than he knows what to do with.

“Purple is what’s up this season. Oh, but darker shades, like that. Though, I’m not sure about the cut of that tie.”

“Looks fine to me.”

“It’s much too skinny.” The way he pronounces the word ‘skinny,’ followed by a glance at Jared’s waist, and Jared contemplates asking Richard if needing anything could potentially mean interrupting right here and now. Unfortunately, this person possesses incredible reflexes. They snatch another tie, the same color as the shirt they’re wearing, and holds it up. “See this, this is what’s in fashion. A little thicker, for weight and durability.”

The words that slip out of Jared’s mouth surprise both of them. “Looks a little old.”

Persistent, the stranger smiles and laughs. He extends a hand. “It’s so nice to meet you, Jared. You are definitely very sweet. Jensen has told me all about you.”

Shake his hand? Or flee? Shake his hand? Or grab his arm and twist? Shake his hand? Or…

“Thank you.” Jared gives the world’s shortest handshake. “Excuse me, but, do I know you?”

“Good lord, where are my manners? I’m Drew LaCroix.”

“Like the water?”

“Yes…” Drew laughs. “Like the water.”

“Okay, well, it was nice me--”

“I figured I should introduce myself, imagine what luck bumping into you! Jensen and I go back. I heard he’s just starting another project? And so soon. He didn’t always used to be such a workaholic, especially on the weekends.” Drew winks. “But I guess he’s finally decided to step it up. After all, we both know how much he’d like to win an O-s-c-a-r.”

Holy hell.

Drew draws in closer, as if about to tell Jared who made cheer squad. “You know, if you don’t have plans tonight, I’d love to have dinner. There’s the best place for tapas and drinks a block away.”

Jared does have plans. He’s going to buy this tie, go home and watch Battlestar Galactica until he falls asleep on the couch, then crawl into bed and snuggle with Jensen’s pillow.

“Unless,” Drew says, nodding towards the exit, “you’re not feeling up to it?”

Richard wraps up the tie and places it in a simple, yet elegant gift bag. Jared turns back to Drew.

He does his best to look and sound eager. “Lead the way.”

Chapter End Notes
whee another update! and holy hell it's almost 4 am. D:

comments are love!

(you'll need to have read the previous installment 'What the Hell' to know who Drew is/will be.)
For the past two nights, Jared has lived on a rotisserie chicken he bought at the grocery store and macaroni and cheese from a box—or food he bought on campus. He knows a quality cut of steak or pork because of Jensen’s infatuation with grilling anything and everything. And it’s not like he hasn’t eaten at fancy places before.

But he’d so much rather fork over his money to the guy selling tacos on the street than on tiny plates of… stuff.

The menu offers a few things that seem alright. But most of it doesn’t sound appetizing. He won’t get in the way of anyone’s right to order a twelve dollar plate of cheese; it just isn’t for him.

It is, however, for Drew.

On the brief walk over, he explained that this restaurant is the place for tapas and wine in Austin. And thanks to his lecture, Jared knows that the restaurant is classified as industrial-chic, and the chefs brought the idea from San Francisco, the next best place for culture and cuisine in the entire United States. Tapas is more than just eating. It’s a distinct way of life.

“See,” Drew explains, referring to the menu, “they’re meant to be shared.”

Jared looks down at the assortment of… stuff, and nods. He worried he might not be dressed for this place, but apparently the same people who pay fifteen dollars for two meatballs also enjoy wearing jeans and sandals. No one has to know that his jeans are from Target. Or that he’s never had squid ink before.

True to Drew’s description, the restaurant envelops everyone in a rustic yet sleek decor. Groups of friends share a community table, and since this is Austin, even complete strangers become friends. Jared doubts that will happen at their tiny table. The ambiance is meant to invite intimacy. Jared just wants to go home and eat ice cream.

A waiter swings by before Drew can start talking again. He explains a few dishes, points out his favorites, and asks to take their orders. Drew laughs and flirts and charms the waiter. Jared pronounces two plates with such a terrible accent, he’s sure that Anza can sense it in Vancouver. Unsure of where the bathroom is in this place, and how long he’ll be here, he sticks with what looks the most familiar: pork meatballs and grilled flank steak. His two selections run about twenty-seven dollars without tax or tip. Drew orders up four plates, too fast for Jared to notice the price of any.

“Excellent,” the waiter chimes in. “May I make a few suggestions for wine, gentlemen?”

Drew’s eyes light up at the mention of wine. Or maybe at the opportunity to speak for Jared? “Oh, that’s lovely, but my friend here isn’t old enough to drink. I won’t be a bad influence for him, either. I’ll have a sparkling water.”

“Of course. Lemon or lime?”

“Both, on the side, thank you.”

“And for you?”
Does a place like this have Coke or Pepsi products? They have got to have Coke, if at least to make cocktails. What kind of restaurant doesn’t have Coke? What would Jensen do? Did he and Drew have tapas like this?

“Coke, please,” Jared says, more confident than he feels.

“Ah, good choice. We have Mexican Coke.”

Pleased in his selection of a beverage, Jared nods and smiles. Maybe he can get through tonight by nodding and smiling.

Once their waiter is out of earshot, Drew leans in.

“I bet Jensen lets you take sips of his drinks.”

Jensen has an entire wet bar at home. He does more than let Jared take sips. Jared doesn’t entirely know what Jensen has in stock or how to make the variety of cocktails he does when he’s home and able to relax, but he does know that none of it is off-limits to him. If he wanted, he could make one of those bottles disappear without fear of repercussion. There might be questions as to why Jared downed an entire bottle of vodka, but that’s a different matter.

“He does,” Jared answers and sits up a little straighter. “He put a wet bar in the house.”

With a smile and a roll of his eyes, Drew huffs. “Of course he did! That is so like him. The man loves his liquor. Tell me, has he gotten super involved in beer yet?”

“No?”

“Just wait, it’s bound to happen sooner or later. He used to talk about opening a brewery. I mean, that’s smart, that’s a business that always makes money. Anyway, it’s nice to sit with you and chat. Jensen has done such a good job of hiding you away from everyone, no one’s going to believe that we met!” Drew takes a second to fix his hair and smile at the waiter when their drinks arrive. They get into a conversation about the wonders of roasted beet salad, and how it stains, but in the loveliest way--Drew’s words--especially against white shirts.

“Kind of like the one you’re wearing,” Drew adds, making direct eye contact with their waiter. “How fortunate.”

Charlie asked Jensen how to flirt. He should meet this guy.

Alone again, Drew picks up his conversation. “Now, I know Jensen from way back, when he had just moved to LA. I introduced him to the soap opera circuit and got him a few gigs here and there. Oh, and I got him into modeling. Can you believe he quit it as a teenager, picked it up, then quit it again? It’s like, Jensen, please, there’s so much money to be made in modeling. And it doesn’t involve working sixteen hour days thousands of miles away. Have you considered modeling? You’d be perfect for it, trust me. You have the cheek bones for it. And that hair, so cute! Everyone’s into such short cuts nowadays, but that style makes you stand out. Have you ever thought about growing it out a little longer?”

Wow.

“I…” Jared fiddles with his napkin. “Uh, Jen quit modeling to focus on acting.”

Drew leans back in his chair. “Oh, of course he’s told you that. You can’t tell him that I said anything, but yes, he wanted to focus on the whole making movies nonsense, but he claimed he kept
getting harassed by photographers.”

“He claimed?”

“Well, yes, honey. So a photographer makes a pass at you. You make one back! That’s how this business works. Besides, he’s been shirtless lots of times in his films, what’s the difference?”

It was Donna who got Jensen into modeling as a teenager, and Donna who forced him to stay with it. Jared isn’t sure Drew knows that. “I think Jen made the right decision. He likes acting.”

“Right now he does,” Drew cautions. “But good lord, those days on set are long. I remember. Sooner or later it gets to everyone, even the greats. Why do you think so many of them become directors? The work isn’t nearly as intensive. You can delegate directing. You can’t delegate acting. Haven’t you been on set with him?”

“Yes,” Jared lies, pressured to answer. He was on set, but he technically spent the majority of his time there in Jensen’s trailer. It was so quick, Jared remembers more about Vancouver than the actual set. And it seemed like Jensen wanted it that way. “He gets along with everyone.” That, he knows is true.

Food appears on their table. Tiny plates take up every inch of real estate. Jared can recognize what he ordered, but not what Drew ordered.

“Dig in, dig in,” Drew offers and motions to his plates. “Try a little of everything.”

“Thanks.”

Not one bite into tapas and Drew decides to strike. “Of course! Now, I think I remember you had a stalker not too long ago.”

Double wow.

How should he answer? Seriously? Or seriously? Not even Mexican Coke can wash out the bitter taste in Jared’s mouth right now. How exactly did Jensen spend his time with Drew way back when? And why? What had he seen in Drew that had been so appealing in those moments? Is he judging too harshly? Maybe he’s putting too much thought into this. Maybe he’s giving Drew too much credit.

It’s just that… Drew brings up shit and goes on eating and sampling tapas like it’s nothing.

Like Jared didn’t spend time worrying about his or his mother’s well-being. Like it was nothing that Jared got his car vandalized and people he grew up with quite literally turned their backs on him. Like coming out hadn’t cost him anything or anyone. Yeah, it got him out of Smithville, but the price was high.

That bothers Jared.

“Butter my butt and call me a biscuit,” Jared laughs and slaps the table. “I completely forgot about that. It’s just been nonstop with moving here to Austin and starting school. Oh, and getting to know Jen’s family. His grandmother is such a sweetheart. This is her ring, you know.” Quick flash. Keep going. “And his brother. I’m sure you know Josh. That reminds me though, I should text him soon, he keeps asking me to have lunch since he’s doing a lot of business in Austin. This steak is really good. They cooked it just right. I barely have to work my jaw.”

Sip of Coke.
“But yes, we had a stalker. The FBI took care of it.”

Lips pursed, Drew fails at hiding how forced his smile looks. “I’m so glad. You can’t be too careful, you know. I was so surprised to see you out and about by yourself.”

Unease works itself into Jared’s stomach and chest.

“And you’re from a small town, right?” Drew takes a long sip of sparkling water.

“Yes.” Jared can usually go on about Smithville, not that there’s much to tell, but despite the past year, he’s proud of his hometown. That doesn’t happen here. Talking this way—watching everything he says and how he reacts—exhausts him. And dealing with Drew is a marathon, not a sprint. Energy must be conserved where possible.

“Goodness, this must be quite the adjustment for you.”

“I’m familiar with Austin.”

“Of course, but what a change, huh? I bet it’s been difficult adjusting to Jensen's way of life. He’s so difficult to keep up with, I swear. That’s part of why,” Drew pauses, just a second, “well, that’s why we broke up. He was just go, go, go.”

Jared wonders if Drew knows he was Jensen’s fan and how they met at the photo-op booth. He assumes that he does. It’s not exactly a secret. But then Drew has to know that as a fan, Jared followed news about Jensen. Jensen’s precious long term relationships always got coverage. And Jared has never heard of Drew from Jensen or any other source. So either they didn’t date that long or Jensen managed to keep their involvement a secret. Both are possible.

The waiter stops by with a fresh Coke and an offer for more tapas. Jared declines. Drew orders two more plates. “Eat up! Don’t you worry, this is my treat.”

“Oh, thank you, but I’m good.”

“You’re probably more of a burger and fries person, huh? Sorry, I just love these plates. Next time we’ll go to one of your haunts.” When the man wants to talk, boy does he know how to fit a hurricane of words into a few seconds. “Has it been tough adjusting?”

“Y-yes.” Jared hesitates to tell the truth, but it spills out of him. “A little.”

That smile appears again, just as poorly veiled as before. Or maybe that’s just what Drew’s smile looks like. “Ugh, I can relate. Jenny can be such a diva sometimes. Does he still order those hundred dollar steaks from Japan? Or, oh my god, does he still splurge on penthouse suites? Lord, that man could spend money.”

Who the fuck is Drew talking about?

“And, just between you and me, did he finally stop his… you know… partying habits?” Drew makes two motions: one of drinking and one of smoking.

What little poker face Jared possessed packed up and hauled ass elsewhere. Probably to the land of hundred dollar steaks and penthouse suites.

Jared holds onto his Coke bottle for fear of lashing out in other ways. He right might flip this table. Or just punch Drew. Jared doesn't consider himself a violent or intimidating person, but he grew up in a small town with many small-minded people. He knows how to get rough.
This tete-a-tete shit though? It can go straight to hell.

“I think you knew Jensen at a very different time in his life and career,” Jared musters to reply. “I can appreciate your concern though, being someone he used to be with.”

Motherfucking emphasis on the used to.

After all that, Drew just laughs and flirts with the waiter some more. Nothing touches this guy. He just doesn't seem to care. But then why invite Jared out? It couldn't have been out of the kindness of his own heart. But did he really expect Jared to dish?

Digging into his new tapas, Drew continues talking. He makes some comments about the industry and how it changes people and how he's always hoped it wouldn't change Jensen. He adds in a dash of concern about Jensen's career, mentioning that Jensen should transition from film to television, or at the very least continue modeling while he still can.

“But he's never had a problem making connections,” Drew says with a wink. “He'll find work someway or another. Now, what about you? What are your plans? Have you caught the acting bug? Or has Jensen scared you away?”

“He hasn't,” Jared says, a little too quick. “It just doesn't interest me.”

“Wouldn't it be great though, if you could relate to him on that level?”

That… is actually a valid point.

And it would not help him out to mention that he was in his high school productions of Grease and The Crucible.

“It's such a great thing to try,” Drew presses. “You should give it a shot. Then maybe you'll get to eat those hundred dollar steaks. Or treat Jensen to a few.”

Does Jensen really enjoy eating steaks flown in from Japan? Does he miss staying in penthouse suites or ordering expensive things? Is he holding back on things he enjoys just because Jared doesn’t feel comfortable spending that kind of money? Could this be why he hasn’t exactly rushed home from pre-production this week? Maybe Jared hasn’t been as accepting of Jensen’s way of life as he could be. And if that is how Jensen wants to live, then who is Jared to stop him? It is his money.

For once, Drew allows Jared to sit and stew with his thoughts. He focuses on their waiter while paying the check. The waiter hands him a card, no doubt with his number. Drew accepts it as smooth as ever and makes some comment about beets again. He makes the whole process look incredibly easy. Jared has never received numbers written on business cards.

Except. Wait. He did.

This has been such a waste of time and energy. He stands to leave, making sure he doesn’t leave behind his purchases from the good night he was having before all of this. Retail teaches its peons to smile like they mean it no matter what situation or circumstance. The best managers understood the value of a fake smile that didn’t look fake and perfected it as an artform. Maybe cleaning bathrooms and unpacking pallets didn’t afford him expensive steaks, but it taught him something far more valuable--how to exude false sincerity.

Cue the dimples. A friendly handshake. Direct eye contact. Little bit of puppy eyes.
“Thank you so much for inviting me out, it was a pleasure getting to know you.” Jared radiates sunshine and happiness. “I have to get going, I’m picking up Jen at the airport early. I appreciate your company and advice. You take care now.”

Maybe the only reason Drew doesn’t put up much of a fuss about Jared leaving is because he’s too focused on their waiter. But whatever it takes, Jared just wants to leave.

“You’re such a darling,” Drew drawls, but his accent is not quite Texan. “I’m so glad we bumped into each other. Don’t let Jensen hide you away! Come out with me sometime. It gets lonely when he’s away on projects. I sure do remember that. I’ll friend you on Facebook--don’t be a stranger!”

Jared gets home and walks out to the backyard. He sits on the grass, shoes off, knees pulled up to his chest. A brief glance at his phone yields no new messages from the one person he’d very much like to hear from right now. Once the screen goes black and he looks up past their property, their neighbors, a stretch of Austin, and towards the sky.

Worry crawls out from the pit of his stomach and sits on his shoulders. He’s not worried about what he said.

What worries him are some of the things Drew said. Some things he thinks might be true and one he definitely knows is.

He sure is lonely.

Chapter End Notes

yay, an update! i wrote the end of this chapter on the train ride home. i’m gonna start working from home soon and i can’t tell if i’ll be more productive writing or less. hmm.

anyway, this is an extra long update and i hope y’all have some time for feedback. i asked my betas if this was snippy/clever enough. i hope it is! drew is exhausting to write.

thanks for reading!
Google invades Jared’s dreams that night.

He dreams about searching for Drew and modifying the keywords to find out more about his past connection to Jensen. Google turns up plenty about Drew himself, but Jared has to really dig message boards and abandoned threads for specific information.

By the end of his dream, he’s shaking the mysterious computer monitor in front of him, willing it to fork over the god damn answers.

At four in the morning, Jared wakes up, annoyed, frustrated, and slightly nauseated.

Something in those tapas didn’t sit right with him.

After a not so quick trip to the bathroom--freaking tapas --he wanders through the condo. Maybe it’s the ungodly hour of four in the morning, or his paranoid dreams, or the lingering effects of food he will never eat again, but the condo just looks strange. None of it seems real. But that’s ridiculous. As he trips over a corner of the rug in the living room, he knows that it’s real. This is his reality.

And his reality is standing in the living room of a million dollar property in Austin.

Austin, Texas.

Some of those picture frames on the coffee table? Some of them are his. That framed watercolor painting of the Congress bridge? That’s his. Candy painted it for him last year and he finally has somewhere to hang it up where other people can admire it. Those DVDs and video games? Most of those are his. That pair of shoes over yonder? His. This box of Triscuits? His. Rooster pitcher? His. This bottle of Pepto? Well, he’s not sure who bought it, but it sure as hell is his now.

He plops his butt down on a bar stool at the counter and contemplates life.

There are serious questions that need answers. Situations that need a lot of noodling to figure out. Unfortunately, all his mind can handle seems to fall into two categories: Jensen and what the fuck was in those tapas?

Rubbing his stomach, Jared hunches over the counter and throws the world’s smallest, crankiest pity party. He lied to Drew about getting up early to pick up Jensen from the airport. Jensen won’t be in until the evening and it all depends on which flight he’s able to catch and if it connects to LA or if it’s a direct flight. And when he does land in Austin, John will drive him back home, so there’s really no need for Jared to go to the airport. It’s like all the work is already done. Well, not really.

Maybe his dream was onto something. Maybe he should look into Drew and his relationship with Jensen. If anyone can Google the hell out of something, it’s Jared. He is of the generation of Googlers. Back when he was just some fan, he kept track of shit like this. That seems very, incredibly, super odd to him now, but whatever. He was who he was and he is who he is and he needs to know. How’d they meet? When? Was it instant? On and off? Over the years? Did Jensen look happy? Did they go to events together, so maybe there are pictures? Did they talk in bed? Did Jensen sleep on the same side of the bed as he does now with Jared?
Jared reaches for his phone, which he conveniently brought with.

The pearl white glow of the screen invades the dark, still kitchen.

Just a few taps and he can be on Google, which will probably lead him to a few sites he remembers from his past life as a fan. And then it’ll be a rabbit hole from there. A can of worms. A Pandora’s box.

“Jesus,” Jared grumbles and slides his phone away from him. He props his chin up with his hand and stares at the device. He’s not doing this. He’s not going to play into Drew’s shit. This is exactly what Drew wanted--to give him an upset stomach and get him questioning everything.

Because that’s not paranoia. Nope.

Wait.

Jared freezes and listens, head turned towards the front door. Is that…? Is someone trying to get in? Did he just hear the lock rattle? Could that be the wind? Overactive imagination? The effects of drinking Pepto without measuring it first?

Another sound confirms that this is no hallucination. Muffled conversation goes on, no doubt the potential burglars plotting amongst themselves. Wait. So that means there are two of them and one of Jared, who has exactly no weapons of self defense. Oh. But he’s in the kitchen. But what if he stabs himself with his makeshift weapon? This is no time to sit on his ass and think about what intruders might do. There’s an alarm system, but if the burglars pick the lock, will the system recognize it as a break-in?

Fine. He’ll one up the burglars and just meet them at the door. Then, when they see that someone is home and fully prepared to call the police, they’ll excuse themselves and leave.

On his way to the door, he classifies his plan as one of the most ridiculous things ever hatched from his brain.

But there’s no time for that. Hand on the knob, Jared takes a deep breath. Four in the morning, the sun isn’t even up, it’s still relatively dark in the house and on their street, and fuck, he should have left his engagement ring on his nightstand instead of slipping it on when he woke up. Here goes. Here goes nothing.

“What the… sweetheart?”

Oh, now one of the burglars is trying to get fresh.

Except, the burglar is Jensen.

“Jen?!”

One second to determine that it is in fact Jensen in front of him, and Jared pounces. He gloms onto Jensen with the force of meteors crashing into earth. He could cause a crater and wipe out dinosaurs in this single, perfect motion.

The only problem to this is Jensen’s reciprocal force, which happens to be a touch more than Jared’s.

But what does it matter that they topple over and hit the floor hard? Who cares if Jared gets knocked flat onto his back as long as it’s Jensen doing the knocking.
“I missed you, I missed you, I fucking missed you,” Jensen rambles on. He kisses the hell out of Jared’s face before their lips eventually meet and his deluge of words slows down to a trickle. In between smacks of their lips and clicks of their teeth and bumps of their noses, Jared blurts out a few words, but he cannot for all hell understand what they are.

Half words and messy kisses quickly turn into heated embraces and the firm press of their hips, thighs, chests. For someone who just flew from Vancouver to Austin, Jensen smells so good. He feels so good. They could be dangling off the edge of a cliff and he’d still feel, look, taste, sound so incredibly good.

A push, grind, swivel of Jensen’s hips against Jared’s and someone, it is unclear who, makes a happy noise.

“Ahem.” That noise, though? That isn’t from either one of them.

In his eagerness to be loved, Jared completely forgot about the second burglar.

John stands in the doorway, holding up Jensen’s carry on and duffle bag. “I’m assuming anywhere’ll do for these?”

Jensen scrambles to his feet and pulls Jared up, unable to keep his hands off of Jared for a period of time longer than two seconds. He takes his luggage from John and casts them to the side, forgotten, unimportant things. He maintains a hand on the small of Jared’s back.

“I trust that you don’t go around opening the door for just anyone at this hour,” John comments to Jared, concern in his voice. “And that you’ve been safe the entire time we’ve been gone?”

“Yes, sir.” Jared answers with nothing but respect. However, it’s difficult to be entirely serious at the moment. “I mean… no sir and yes sir.”

Committed to the cause, Jensen’s hand reaches its final destination and gives Jared’s ass a quick squeeze. He makes arrangements with John, insisting that they’ll be fine over the weekend and if they need him, he’ll call. John doesn’t seem convinced, but Jensen assures him that they won’t be leaving home for at least the next twenty-four hours, so he’s got nothing to worry about.

Those twenty-four hours start the second John leaves and Jensen shuts--and locks--the front door.

Leaning against the door, he looks at Jared with nothing but pure starvation, longing, and adoration. He smiles, too god damn confident for his own good, and starts to kick off his shoes.

“I’m gonna give you a ten second head start,” Jensen purrs, “to get your ass to wherever you want me to fuck you. One. Two.” Jared yips and turns. “Ten!”

Jared screams and runs down the hall.

Plenty of questions need to be asked and answered.

Their mouths are just too busy.

Chapter End Notes

I had the worst writer's block last week! It was a tough week for pain. Thankfully, I'm
feeling much better this week and now we have an update! :D

comments are love! thank you for being here. <3
They make it to bed.

Starving is an understatement. Their bodies move in ways better stated as ravenous, desperate, and somewhat startling. Jared lands flat on his back and spreads his legs and accepts the rush of Jensen between each one. He stretches out, making room while simultaneously pushing them closer. Jensen injects a rush of want when he presses their mouths together, demanding and rough, insatiable with his lips, teeth, and tongue.

He hasn’t shaved in a few days. Stubble contrasts against Jared’s smooth chin, scratching, lighting up powerhouses of cravings for pleasure and pain. Jared fuels the fire with a moan and a strategic dig of his nails over Jensen’s back, hiking up his shirt. Pajama pants and jeans create a tempest of frustration and friction.

The bed responds to their combined weight and movement, squeaking, provoking their excitement. On a particularly hard downward thrust of his hips, Jensen groans at the response from the headboard. Warm breaths, heated hands, and the scent of bed lure Jensen into a familiar fervor.

And Jared hates to break the rhythm, but when Jensen’s hands start tugging at his pajama pants, there’s no other option.

Because god damn tapas.

“Mmph, Jen, Jen, stop.”

Not even a week apart prevents Jensen from stopping, immediately, and looking at Jared with crystal clear concern. “What? What’s wrong?”

Nothing’s wrong. Not a thing. Not a thing here, between the two of them. Nope. Well, tapas, but Jared has Jensen pressed against him in their bed, in their home. Not only is Jensen hard enough to practically bust out of the seams of his jeans, but Jared himself is hard enough to do his own damage to fabric. And that feels good. He’s hard, aching, excited, aroused, and at an age to do multiple things about it for hours.

Except--tapas.

“Nothing,” Jared murmurs, his hands in Jensen’s hair. He bumps their foreheads together. “Well, uh, something.”

Jensen kisses him, not at all briefly, and yet changes the feel of it. Instead of rough and dirty, he transforms his kiss into sweet and charming--a true talent. It’s almost like an apology, though he has nothing to apologize for.

“What is it? Are you mad at me?”
“No, not--Jen, no.”

“You’d tell me if you were? If you suddenly hated me for being gone so long?”

“A week is not that long,” Jared lies. Five minutes without Jensen in the same state is too long, but that’s not at all unhealthy or codependent or needy. “I had the whole bed to myself for a week.” He tosses in humor to deflect from the reality that he was pining and moping the entire time. Jensen doesn’t need to worry about Jared while he’s working twelve to sixteen hour days.

With a snort, Jensen kisses Jared’s cheek and adjusts his weight off of Jared’s hips. “Alright, so you didn’t miss me at all.”

“I missed you a little bit.”

“You’re such a liar.”

“And you’re an asshole for not even telling me when you’d get in.”

“I wanted to surprise you. That and I didn’t really know when I’d get in. I got a last second standby ticket. In coach.”

“How awful for you.”

“It was traumatic,” Jensen sighs, the back of his palm pressed against his forehead. “There was no champagne and I had to share my seat. And don’t even get me started on the leg room. I suffered, Jay, just for you and that ass.”

“Then you might hate me because… uhm… right before you got here, I pretty much chugged a bottle of Pepto.”

Jensen laughs, loud and clear. The house felt so empty without that laugh. “So that’s what I tasted. I was wondering if you’d switched toothpaste or just decided to eat a bunch of chalk last night.”

“Well it wasn’t chalk,” Jared quips, his nose scrunching. “But it was awful and I’m never eating there again.”

This might be a good time to bring up the individual responsible for the awful meal and subsequent stomach protest. But Jensen. Jensen just looks too damn Jensen. He’s clearly tired, his clothes are slightly wrinkled from the trip, his hair’s more of a mess than it was ten minutes ago, and even he isn’t above wearing just-off-a-six-hour-flight scent. But it’s him. That’s what causes Jared’s heart to squeeze.

Palm to Jared’s cheek, Jensen smiles, his eyes a tinge red from the lack of sleep.

“Next time you get on my case for eating chili, I’m gonna remind you of this.”

“Fine, be a dick about it,” Jared huffs. “I could be dying.”

“Dying of a Pepto overdose, you goof. You’re not supposed to chug it.”

“Don’t tell me how to live my life.”

Their eyes meet. Smiles strike all around. Jensen leans forward, just an inch, aiming for slow contact. Jared closes it for him, kissing Jensen like an attack. Chalk breath and plane breath be damned.

The ascension of attraction proves dangerous. Once again, Jared finds himself completely caught up,
inundated with raw, hot want. It consumes everything, despite their shared fatigue. It leaves them grasping and famished, battling an unquenchable thirst. Jensen places his hands on Jared’s jaw and tilts his head to the side a fraction for the best access to Jared’s throat. In a place easily covered, Jensen bites down, his teeth intense and exquisitely piercing sensitive nerve endings.

Jared’s eyes roll back. His entire body goes slack one second and winds up the next. Jensen wastes no time and spares no effort. He pulls on that section of skin, using his lips and teeth, then releases only to run his tongue over the mark for a second before biting down yet again.

“I missed you so much,” Jensen murmurs, his lips an inch above the deep mark he’s just made. “I missed you, I missed you, I missed you.”

“Me too,” Jared echoes. “I missed you so much, Jen.”

Sunrise makes its way into their room.

“I don’t wanna call this quits over Pepto.” Jensen smiles, closes his eyes, and bumps their foreheads. “I’m too wound up.”

“You’re too wound up? Look at my neck.”

Pride seeps into Jensen’s grin. “Yeah,” he sighs and looks at Jared. “You up to tryin’ something different with me?”

“Hmm. I can try to try.”

“Hey, you might enjoy it.”

“I’ve heard those words before,” Jared laughs. “And they’re always dangerous.”

“But you have enjoyed yourself.”

“Yes. Very much so.”

Jensen sits up and reaches for his nightstand. Anything could emerge. Jared waits, excited and only a smidge anxious. What might Jensen take out this time?

Oddly enough, Jensen takes out one of the most basic things needed for sex--lube.

He hands it to Jared and nods. “Let’s try this,” he says, somehow both serious and lighthearted. “We might like it.”

Maybe there was a reason for tapas. Because wow--this might not have happened at this point in time without tapas. Jared takes the bottle of lube and searches for doubt or hesitation in Jensen’s eyes and expression. Jensen’s a fantastic actor--Jared should know as number one fan--but Jared is and always has been a reader of people.

He just thought that there would be more ceremony to this. Like This Is A Big Deal kind of talk or dialogue. Maybe they’d map the whole thing out or plan for it way in advance or build up to it.

Then again, most of the new things they’ve tried together have been fairly spontaneous.

It’s just worked out that way.

And Jared can’t say that he hasn’t wanted to try topping. He prefers bottoming and Jensen prefers topping, which has worked out well for them--extremely well. But those are preferences, not definite
boundaries.

“You sure?” Jared sits up and runs a hand through his hair. “Like, really, really sure?”

“Yeah--really, really sure. You need instructions?”

“I think I can manage.”

“Oh, you’ve had some experience, huh?”

“No,” Jared admits, blushing. “But the best tops are bottoms.”

Jensen laughs and takes off his shirt, easy and relaxed. “After you fuck me, I wanna know where you learned that.”

They get right to it, not out of fear that someone will back out, but out of mutual curiosity. Jensen helps Jared out of his clothes--helps describes it mildly--and discards his own jeans, pledging not to wear pants for the next twenty-four hours.

One of the perks of this journey is literally the perk--the firm curve of Jensen’s ass. Jared has appreciated it thoroughly before, in a variety of positions and settings, but never like this. Chest to chest, they kiss, warming back up. Jared takes a deep breath and kisses Jensen hard. Jensen runs his hands up and down Jared, touching anywhere he can.

For a moment, Jared panics. Should he have asked how exactly Jensen wants to do this?

A simple tilt of Jensen’s hips provide the answer. Jensen lies on his back this time, and pulls Jared over. This is familiar. When they start kissing, Jared leaning down, his hair getting in the way like usual, he thinks of what he’d typically be doing. He’d either blow Jensen for a few minutes or slick him up, then start riding him. He knows where his legs should be and how to balance himself and where to put his hands. But for this? None of those motions are committed to memory.

Thankfully, Jensen doesn’t mind showing him a thing or two.

“Do I… need to prep you?” The question brings Jared back to the beginning of their relationship.

“No,” Jensen answers with a small laugh. “Haven’t done this in a few years, but it ain’t exactly new to me either.”

Sunlight soaks into their sheets. Jensen hands the bottle of lube back to Jared, who pours out what he thinks is enough. He reaches down and goes for Jensen’s cock, but grasps his own at the last second. If there’s doubt about his willingness to try this, his cock destroys it. Shuddering, Jared takes a deep breath. Jensen’s right hand joins his left. Jensen makes sure there’s enough lube and Jared desperately tries not to come.

Their bodies slot together without spoken instruction. Jensen spreads his legs, hooks them over Jared’s hips, and tilts up his own.

The sight before him nearly causes Jared to weep and pass out.

He’s going to fuck Jensen.

The tip of his cock nudges against the tight pink muscle offered. For a second, it doesn’t seem like this is possible. How can he fit this into that? But then he figures out that that’s half the fun--
watching his cock fit into Jensen.

Pleasure pierces Jared through and through. The first push requires the most effort and yields the most reward. He hadn’t expected this much pressure, pleasure, and heat. No fleshlight could reproduce this exact feeling. Although he listens carefully to the noises Jensen makes, several wring out of his own mouth. After the first inch, he lets go of his cock and rests his hands on the backs of Jensen’s thighs.

He’s hard enough that he doesn’t need to steady his cock.

The act of fucking Jensen delivers two fold--one, the act itself, and second, knowing that this is what Jensen feels when he tops.

Gasping and groaning, Jensen wordlessly sets Jared’s pace. Slow. Little by little he takes in Jared’s cock, that ring of muscle spasming and contracting. Pressure and heat build with every inch Jared sinks in. The last inch produces noise from both of them.

Jensen closes his eyes and positions his arms above his head, stretched out. “Fuck,” he sighs, heady and intoxicating. “Fuck, sweetheart, you feel so good.”

Jared thinks about all the times Jensen has fucked him to the brink of exhaustion, overwhelmed with pleasure and treated to a tinge of the best kind of pain. Now he can do that for Jensen.

“Tight,” Jared exhales. “Jen, you’re so tight.”

“Gimme just… oh, shit… just a second.”

Pressure never leaves, it only finds new places to concentrate. It moves away from the base of Jared’s cock and deeper inside Jensen. On an exhale from Jensen, Jared tries pulling out and meets with less resistance. Jensen squeezes his eyes shut, concentrating on opening up, hands fisted into the sheets.

Incredible. Incredible how those muscles work, how Jensen molds over Jared’s cock, how it seems like a perfect fit. Jared’s cock swells and twitches, sending electric signals to the base of his spine and muscles in his thighs. Jared tests their fit. He pulls back and watches his cock slide out from that ring of slick, pink muscle. The smallest gasp from Jensen fuels the motion. Jared pulls out until only the tip of his cock remains inside, buried in heat.

If Jensen has taught him anything, it’s that this next move feels good.

Jared pushes into Jensen with a squelch of lube and a squeak of the mattress. This is like medicine. Like potent, fiery magic.

Intensity knocks them both out. Jared tries thrusting into Jensen. That rhythm? This one? This angle? This depth? He notices that Jensen’s cock is no longer completely hard. Is he doing something wrong? Something Jensen doesn’t like?

“Move,” Jensen murmurs, taking measured breaths. “Don’t worry about that, it’ll get back up, I promise.”

“You’re sure?” Jared takes a chance on an angle, trying to remember how Jensen makes this feel good for him. He tilts his hips back a fraction and pushes.

Jensen lets out a noise that doesn’t sound too unpleasant. Jared takes the hint and focuses less on maintaining a rhythm and going for what feels good for him and what sounds good from Jensen. A
few questions nag in the back of his mind--is he doing this right, what if Jensen hates it, he’s not sure he likes topping, is he big enough, does size even matter--until Jensen arches his hips up and changes their angle.

“Oh,” Jared gasps, his arms going weak. “Oh.”

“Oh huh,” Jensen pants. He starts stroking himself, since Jared is occupied trying not to fall over, and after a few tentative thrusts, he’s just as hard as before the Pepto talk. “Sweetheart, you gotta move. You’re killin’ me. Here.”

Firm hands pull on Jared’s shoulders. Jared yields, wincing as the pressure around his cock increases with this new position. He can’t thrust as deep, or pull out as far, but that doesn’t seem to matter. Jensen kisses him--maybe he notices how much overtime Jared’s mind is putting in--and bites back down on Jared’s neck.

Teeth embedded, Jensen creates a new, deeper, larger mark. Jared moans and allows his eyes to flutter, pounding into Jensen without a second thought. Once Jensen’s hands sneak down to Jared’s chest, Jared loses all sense of timing and rhythm. He feels Jensen stretch out and open up on certain strokes, then clench and squeeze in others. All the while, Jensen’s cock grinds against Jared’s stomach, flushed and heavy, bouncing with every jolt of their hips. Jared’s hips take over, pinning Jensen down, spurred on by choice words of encouragement.


Jared kisses him--locking them together by mouth and hip.

Jensen always comes when they have sex. But this is different. Jensen is coming over his cock, buried deep, pounding over a bed of nerves and wringing out an orgasm of a different kind. Overwhelmed, Jensen shouts--every muscle in his body tenses up, releases, and repeats. Obscenities drop in a flurry, drawl unleashed, out of his pretty pink mouth.

Come hits Jared’s stomach, chest, and the bottom of his chin.

He made Jensen come--hard.

He squeezes his eyes shut and focuses on every feeling and sensation around his cock. Heat. Pressure. Depth. Trust. That last thought does it for Jared. He comes inside Jensen, emptying out, gasping at the act of it. The experience of coming inside Jensen--or anyone for that matter--unfolds for him, entirely new. There’s nothing like it. Filling Jensen up, marking him with come from the inside out, leads to rope after rope of come.

Exhaustion sets into them, fueled by ragged breathing and perspiration.

Jensen frames his hands over Jared’s jaw and gives a tired, spent smile. Jared leans into the touch, his own lungs still working overtime. He doesn’t realize how much he’s been shaking until Jensen pulls them back together, chest to chest.

“That’s my boy,” Jensen murmurs, his voice hoarse. He kisses the sweaty, messy top of Jared’s head. “You done good.”

Jared fixes to respond, preferably with a reference to Pepto, but he succumbs to sexy exhaustion. The best kind of exhaustion, in his opinion.
Tapas totally backfired.

Chapter End Notes

okay, let's see if i can finally post this. two updates in 24 hours though! yay! :D

i hope y'all liked my attempt at bottom\!jensen. this won't be a regular thing, because i definitely enjoy bottom\!jared more, but it was nice to try it out and explore the journey with them lol. and i'm happy to post an extra long update.

comments are love! thank you for reading!
Sleep claims Jared until noon. Despite the blinds, sunlight barges into their room, brighter now that it was at four in the morning. He squints, rolls over onto his back, and sits up.

For once, he’s not the sore one the morning after.

But he is the first one awake.

Jensen sleeps like a three hundred year old vampire in the darkest crypt in the comfiest coffin. Nothing could possibly wake Jensen up at this moment and Jared aims to keep it that way. He places Jensen’s phone on silent, having woken up on Jensen’s side of the bed.

Jared curls up next to Jensen for an indulgent minute.

Bed feels completely different when Jensen is actually in it. Jared would trade all the covers and all the stretching room to be able to lay next to Jensen on a Friday afternoon. The sound of Jensen’s soft, steady breathing lulls Jared into wonderful tranquility. He smushes his nose against Jensen’s shoulder and closes his eyes. Jensen doesn’t stir, doesn’t even flinch. It’s odd how sharing a bed creates so much trust. Jared never felt that before Jensen. Even when they stayed in hotels, he trusted Jensen enough to sleep beside him without hesitation or worry.

It’s nice to see that trust reciprocated.

Reaffirmed, Jared plants a few kisses on freckled shoulders. Part of him wants to stay in bed and cat nap, but part of him also wants to return the kindness so generously and graciously given to him on more than one occasion. That part wins the eternal struggle and Jared peels himself away from Jensen and their bed.

What a feat to be able to move around without a twinge in his lower back or slight soreness in his ass or thighs. Then again, he likes that pain more than he’ll ever let Jensen know. Still, the freedom to move around without worry liberates him and provides much-needed energy. He starts off in the bathroom, attending to routine and then debating on a shower now or later. He’d like to clean the bathroom, the kitchen, and organize things in the living room. It might also be a good idea to do a load of laundry or three. Maybe he’s been neglectful of their home while Jensen has been away. But that’s nothing a couple of hours of elbow grease can’t fix.

Hair tied back, dressed in blue shorts and a white shirt, he begins.

Before he gets to household cleanup, he starts in their bedroom. He cleans Jensen up with the greatest care and faintest touch. A soft, damp washcloth should do the trick, until Jared finds that he needs another. The clean up itself he has no issue with--it’s stopping himself from laughing that takes effort. There’s so much come and it’s everywhere and Jensen has laid in it for hours like a debauched mummy.

With a third washcloth, Jared tries to be as delicate as possible. He nudges Jensen’s legs apart--thankful that Jensen is still on his stomach--and tries to dip in between his legs just enough…

Jensen grumbles in his sleep and makes a poorly coordinated attempt to swat at the intrusive washcloth.
Jared narrowly escapes with his life.

At least Jensen can wake up and know that he doesn’t have dried up come on his back or thighs? As far as his ass goes, well, Jared tried.

Topping was good. More than good. It was intimate and challenging and different. Jared starts gathering piles of laundry. He empties Jensen’s bags and sorts those clothes, making sure to fish out anything that might need to be dry cleaned instead. One load in the wash and he makes his way over to the kitchen, then the bathroom, where he cleans the floors, fixtures, and countertops.

When he was growing up, Sherri often worked one full time job and one part time job. It not only landed on Jared to do chores around the house, but it was his way of contributing to their family. Their family may have been small, and the lord knows Sherri worked as much overtime as any job would give her, but at least their kitchen and bathrooms were always clean.

An hour and a half into his fury of cleaning, he takes a break and fixes himself a sandwich. In between bites, he texts Anza and Candy, who have formed a group chat and fight about the appropriate attire for a Hollywood premier. Jared weighs in on what he can. It looks like Nathan has no intention of allowing Anza to come back to Texas. And it seems like Anza isn’t exactly in any hurry to leave Vancouver either. Or Los Angeles. Is she in LA? She must be for a premier.

Two sandwiches later and Jared works on folding or hanging clothes. His domestic capabilities achieve new heights as he manages to work the washer and dryer without shrinking or shredding anything.

He hauls a stack of jeans upstairs.

And out of the murky, slightly smelly depths of their bed, emerges a wild, depraved Jensen.

“My ass hurts,” the creature hisses, tangled in the sheets. “Jaaaay, my ass huuuuuurts.”

Jared rolls his eyes and continues with his work. “Too bad, so sad. Get up. I wanna clean the sheets.”

Jensen peers at Jared from the pile of sheets and blankets he’s wrapped himself in. “I’m not done sleeping. Or whining.”

“You can sleep and whine outside. Go on. Off the bed.”

“I slept like a truck hit me or something.”

“It’s been a long week,” Jared murmurs, his voice softer. “You needed it.”

Sitting up, Jensen runs a hand through his hair, leaving behind tawny spikes that stick up in every direction. “Yeah, guess I did. Thanks for letting me sleep. You need help?”

“Noope. Just about done. Are you hungry? I can make you something.”

“Let’s go out.”

“I thought you didn’t wanna leave the house for twenty-four hours?”

“Okay, so let’s order in. Oh, wait. How’s your stomach? You feelin’ better?” Jensen gets out of bed very, very carefully. He makes a face. “Remind me to reward you with a medal of honor every time I fuck you.”
Laughing, Jared shakes his head. “You owe me a shit ton of medals, Jen. And I’m fine. No more chugging Pepto.”

Midafternoon sunlight looks almost like the morning sunlight they tumbled in earlier. Jensen looks like a combination of utterly exhausted and incredibly excited. And despite his morning breath, the scent of come heavy on him, and a slight grit to his voice, he makes Jared melt the instant they kiss.

Does Jensen even know how he gets to Jared? How a kiss like that makes Jared realize he’s no good without continuous access to more?


With a kiss to Jared’s cheek, Jensen knowingly smiles.

“I’ve got an idea,” he rumbles, hands dedicated to the cause of feeling of Jared’s ass through his shorts.

“I think I can guess it.”

“Betcha you can’t.” Jensen kisses him--ten out of ten score, all judges agree, take the damn gold medal, the man’s won this event. And somehow, he manages to speak in a coherent sentence after that kiss. His voice lowers, as if they were in a crowded place and these words can only be meant for Jared to hear and no one else.

“Let’s get out of here for the day.”

“Where to?”

“Oh, y’know, somewhere close, sweetheart. Don’t worry.”

Chapter End Notes

an update! thank you for your patience. <3

i have a lot going on in terms of pain management (PT, appts, treatments, oh my!) and work and life and oh yeah, working on my big bang. yikes. but i’m glad that my muse tugged me this way today.

i hope you're all doing well and taking care. comments are love! :D
Chapter 30

Somewhere close is New Orleans.

Clearly, they have two different opinions on the meaning of somewhere close.

Jensen drives them to the airport in an outrageously good mood. He drives past the departure terminals and parking, and various signs that say RESTRICTED ACCESS. Jared opens his mouth to insist that Jensen is a few crayons short of a box. But then there it is. The reason for Jensen’s good mood sits on the runway in all its luxurious, luminous glory. They also very clearly have different definitions of travel.

Jared thought they’d probably fly business or first class on a regular airplane. Like regular people. Or maybe since this was so last minute, they’d huddle together in coach.

An overwhelming beautiful private jet waits on the runway.

A bright, clear Austin afternoon makes it shine—incomparable to any other aircraft nearby. It is downright gorgeous.

Cutting the engine, Jensen bumps their shoulders together. “Wait until you see the inside.”

The pilot and co-pilot greet Jared and Jensen on the runway. They all shake hands and the pilot welcomes them aboard for the evening. Surreal? Definitely. Unreal? Absolutely. This is simply walking into Mordor levels of shock, awe, and excitement. Their flight should take two hours, possibly less, and if they need anything, they’re not supposed to hesitate asking for it.

One hundred and ten percent overwhelmed, Jared follows Jensen up the stairs and into the plane.

Their pilot provides them with a small tour and background of the plane—German-crafted with the aim of putting traditional jet layouts in the past. A spiral element in the design creates spatial zones within the extensive, opulent cabin. Contrasting materials, color, and lighting enhances the sense of space.

Decadent, rich mahogany, pure white marble, sleek silver, and cool gray tones create a harmonious balance and flow. Touchscreens and video displays lie within the light and dark panels. There is no shortage of seating or comfort with long lounges and arm chairs on one side and a queen sized bed on the other. The lighting adds a milky, calming hue to every plush surface.

Before Jared knows it, their plane takes off.

He sits next to Jensen on the lounge and stares in awe at the glass of champagne handed to him.

Is this his life? Are these the finer things Drew alluded to Jensen enjoying and taking part in? How often did Jensen do something like this before? How does Texas manage to be so picturesque from thirty thousand feet in the air?

“Sweetheart.”

“Hm?”
“You’re thinking too much.” Jensen takes a sip of champagne.

Jared looks from the window to the platinum ring on his finger. He’s been saving up to buy Jensen a proper ring. It won’t have the history Jared’s has, but it will have just as much meaning. He hopes.

What would his momma say to him right now?

She didn’t raise him to feel so small.

“Jen.” Jared tilts his chin up and sits with his shoulders back. He holds his glass in his lap. “On Thursday night, I, I had dinner with Drew.”

It feels good to put that out there. What doesn’t feel good is the expression on Jensen’s face at the mention of Drew. Something in Jensen’s eyes hardens, instant and instinctive. His jaw twitches and he clears his throat. “You had dinner with Drew? My ex-Drew?”

Damage control. Mayday. Fuck, he should have kept his mouth shut. If he was going to get something off his chest why couldn’t he have started off with the crap about the paparazzi stalking him at school? Or how about the almost unbearable loneliness he’s felt all week? There were a million things to choose from and he had to blurt out this one.

Setting aside his glass, Jared runs a hand through his hair. “I went out shopping. Just… to get my mind off things. I went into this place and bought you a tie.” That he forgot to give Jensen. Shit. “Then Drew just came up to me and started talking. He invited me to dinner and… I’m sorry, I should have told you sooner, it’s just… I’m still…”

Calm down. This is Jensen—not a courtroom judge.

“I felt like I was damned if I didn’t go, damned if I did,” Jared stammers out. “So we went for tapas and I hated it.”

Actors possess the gift of expression. But sometimes, it seems more like a burden. Jensen sits in a particular way, chews his bottom lip in a particular way, exudes unhappiness in a particular way. He might as well hold up a giant sign that says, “JARED, YOU DOLT.”

After one deep breath, Jensen finally speaks.

“Jay, I’m not saying this because I don’t trust you. I’m saying this because I don’t trust him. It is not a good idea to spend time with him. I’m not saying that you can’t. I’m just saying that as someone who knew him.” Jensen takes a swig of champagne and finishes his glass. He looks over at Jared. “Did you tell him anything personal about you and I?”

Oh god, did he? “No. I didn’t tell him details.”

“Good.”

“But… uh… he has this way of talking circles.”

“I know. Trust me.” Jensen sighs. “I know. Why didn’t you tell me sooner? Have you been worrying about this ever since?”

“I didn’t know when it was a good time to say something. And then you came home.”

“Okay.”

Cue another difficult question to ask. “Are you mad at me?”
Jensen doesn’t hesitate to answer, but he also doesn’t stumble over himself in the process. “No. I’m not mad at you. I’m mad at him.” He pauses, looks away, then stands up to pace. They might as well be back home, not inside a tube hurtling towards a different state. Underneath Jensen’s obvious displeasure, Jared can see a hint of exhaustion. Maybe sleeping in for one morning wasn’t quite enough for Jensen to bounce back at full capacity.

So then why fly to New Orleans? Why didn’t he want to stay home in his jammies all weekend?

“What exactly did Drew say?” Questions, questions, questions.

Jared finds himself debating which of Drew’s comments to share with Jensen. Not the partying habit one, though, he is curious about that. What if Jensen never stopped and Jared just hasn’t noticed?

“Jay.”

“I’m thinking back.”

“I know, but I need you to be honest. Don’t think about it. Just let me know.”

“Taking a moment to think back makes me dishonest?”

“No--I didn’t word that right.”

And Jared didn’t mean to be so defensive. However, it’s difficult to admit that. So he doesn’t.

“Drew didn’t ask anything too invasive. What confused me was how much he talked without actually saying anything. The most he said was that you used to buy three hundred dollar steaks. And he wants me to think about modeling.” Jared grumbles out that last part. He leans back into his portion of the lounge chair. “Maybe this sounds pathetic, but when I was just another fan, I don’t remember reading anything about you dating Drew.”

The pilots probably thought this was a private sex plane. Instead, it’s turned into the perfect vehicle for arguing. Neither of them have anywhere else to go. They’re stuck with each other and their issues for another hour.

Jensen stops pacing. His shoulders drop and his voice gets unnervingly quiet.

“Am I treating you like just another fan?”

Guilt and immeasurable longing pierces Jared square in the chest. He stands up and gloms onto Jensen with the same amount of force Jensen used in the doorway of their home. To his great gratitude, Jensen returns the hug, one hand on the back of Jared’s head.

For a minute, neither one of them say a word. The hum of the plane is enough.

It’s Jared who ends up breaking the silence with a small laugh. He butts their foreheads together.

“That escalated quickly.”

“We hugged it out,” Jensen murmurs, adding a small smile. “I gotta admit, I don’t like us like this.”

“I spose it can’t all be rainbows and sunshine.”

“That’s all I promised your momma I’d give you.”

“You do.” Jared frames Jensen’s jaw with a light touch of his hands. “She ain’t mad.”
The platinum ring feels cool against Jensen’s skin. He leans into Jared’s touch and kisses the palm of his hand. Jensen mumbles, “I don’t wanna keep feudin’ an’ fussin’. All I was fixin’ to do was have you join the mile high club.”

It physically pains Jared to reply as he does. “Jen, sometimes we actually need to talk first and then have sex.”

Jensen rolls his eyes. “I guess. I’m just annoyed that Drew showed up. I wanna know what’s his angle. That’s the kind of person he is, Jay. And maybe you haven’t noticed, but I’m a bit protective of you.”

“I know the kind of person Drew is. And I’ve noticed.”

Hesitation marks Jensen’s reply. “If you say so.”

“I think I handled myself just fine.”

“I know you did.” Jensen sighs and sits back down. He pats the space immediately next to him for Jared to join. “But he’s another issue. You didn’t read anything about him and I because we both wanted it that way. For a while we weren’t anything serious. I wanted more, he didn’t. Then I got a good gig on TV, a few more press ops, and suddenly he wanted to settle down. It was to our mutual benefit back then to keep each other a secret.”

Jared takes his designated seat and keeps one hand on Jensen’s knee at all times.

With another sigh, Jensen continues. “He gets in your head and starts scramblin’ shit around. That’s the kind of person he is.”

“Did you love him?”

Jensen’s jaw tightens. “I thought I could.”

“When was the last time you saw him?”

“...back in Vegas.”

“Uh, Vegas like this year?”

“I ran into him for two minutes at the party,” Jensen says, leaning forward. “We didn’t say much of anything to each other. I promise.”

Working at the train museum in Smithville, Jared was privy to the gossip that circulated around town. Folks would lay out their personal lives or those of their neighbors at the museum—a seemingly neutral and familiar place. Add to that the very fact that he grew up in Smithville; his time after school was either spent studying or watching television.

Jared recognizes these combinations of truths and doubts and timing. It’s a perfect storm for a god awful cliffhanger in a two part episode season finale. And everyone’s completely out of character.

“I don’t think it’d be productive if we went over that,” Jared replies. His voice sounds a hundred and ten percent more serious than it was this morning. “But not gonna lie, Jen, it sucks that you didn’t bring it up then and there. I guess we haven’t really talked much about exes.” Jared tries to reason through things in his head. Is it unfair of him to be upset with Jensen about that when he’s done pretty much the same thing? But if they keep doing the same thing to each other, does that mean he never gets to be upset? Is there a way for them to just not ever make any mistakes?
This is not the plane ride Jensen had in mind and Jared knows that.

It would be extremely easy to push all this aside and focus on their quick trip away from Austin. That would be great--but still an episode or two out of touch with the main storyline.

He didn’t watch all the television, all those movies, to come out of it empty-handed.

Before Jensen can reply, Jared continues, his voice shaky but his words clear.

“When I ask you about sets or events that I don’t go to, I want you to know I’m asking because I want to ask.” He maintains eye contact with Jensen. “I don’t want you ever to think that I’m asking because I’m checking up on you.” Deep breath. Keep going. This is god damn uncomfortable. “I have to be able to trust you, Jén. We have to be able to trust each other. So.” Don’t stop. Not there, not just yet. “I’m sorry I didn’t text or call you in the moment--or even right after. He caught me off guard. It won’t happen again.”

Uncomfortable.

But necessary.

It feels like he’s run from Smithville to Austin five times over.

Somehow, it all feels worth it when Jensen smiles and wraps Jared in the world’s biggest hug since this morning. It’s the kind of hug where their chests press close together, Jared’s ear plasters against Jensen’s cheek, and Jensen keeps one protective hand on the back of Jared’s head. Texas issues a drawled apology, in a rumble, sweet and sincere.

Jensen smells like Jared’s conditioner.

Sadly, there is not enough time to initiate Jared into the mile high club.

But there is just enough time for Jensen to say, “I’ve never been loved this way.”

There’s always the plane ride back.

Chapter End Notes

awwww yeah! a nice long update! 2,100 words for y'all. :D

thanks for being so patient. april kicked my ass. i also worked 46 hours last week and pain management stuff and life stuff. phew. but my big bang was successfully submitted and i’ve been paired with an amazing artist! so look out for that! :D

this turned out to be a critical chapter. i was totally gonna make it all about jet plane sex. but i really like the way this unfolded. don't worry. we have a quick trip to NOLA and then the plane ride back. (ha, ride.)

thanks for reading! comments are love! <3 (your comments keep me afloat in between updates, thank you so much.)
New Orleans.

Has a completely different energy, feeling, and rhythm. The city intoxicates, seduces, and mystifies. Addictive and rich, the air provides an electric intensity to every word and movement.

Jared laughs, shimmies, and dances into step with Jensen from the airport to their penthouse suite in the French Quarter at none other than the Ritz. Their lodging is elegant and lovely as only the Ritz can make it, but there’s no time to notice details. The sun has set and there’s so much to do, see, hear, taste, and dive right into. Wild. Joyous. Spellbinding.

Street performers perform magic tricks a block from the Ritz. Plumes of smoke--pink, violet, yellow--rise from the sidewalk as bodies twist and hands work and illusions form. On the opposite side of the street, music from a marching band lures folks up to the rooftop to dance, drink, and forget.

Jensen steps onto the street and laughs. He holds his arms out and offers up the entire vibrant city.

Jared grabs Jensen’s right hand and pulls him into the nearest restaurant. They order at the counter, shouting over music and people, pointing, nodding, profusely thanking the staff, and grabbing a shit ton of napkins because they are going to need it. Fortune gifts them with a tiny table on the corner. Standing, they bite into sin--the marriage of batter-fried seafood with mayo, lettuce, pickles, hot sauce, and fresh bread. Their mouths meet in a mayonnaise kiss after the very last messy bite.

Baseball caps and sunglasses need not exist.

Everyone’s too busy having their own party to notice theirs.

A man carries a bass drum into a small, unassuming building. People follow. Intrigued, Jared follows the followers. Jensen holds onto Jared’s hand, firm and secure despite their greasy, sweaty palms. Up, up, up five flights of narrow stairs, and a rooftop party unfolds.


Smoke. Sweat. Spicy crab gumbo.

Humidity bears down, determined, but makes no difference to anyone. Jensen breaks free for a minute and Jared dances with the waitress who handed him his first bowl of crab gumbo and her cousin, who takes a shine to him. Not a single note of music falters. The trumpet takes over, profound and commanding, showing off its magnetic allure and legendary sound.
Jensen passes Jared a drink.

This is where Jared learns what top-shelf bourbon tastes like, mixed with Campari-soaked orange and rosemary syrup. He downs it in three sips, laughing and perpetually moving to the music. He kisses Jensen as a sign he is finished with his drink. Jensen kisses back, feverish, citrusy, and sweet.

Second drink--Oryza gin, chartreuse, lemon, creme de mure, sparkling wine, garnished with a fresh blackberry.

Third drink--Thai chile mescal, Combier orange liqueur, lime, ginger, pomegranate liqueur, and orange juice.

Fourth drink--rye whiskey, Cognac, sweet vermouth, bitters, and Benedictine.

Fifth drink--rye whiskey, maple syrup, lemon juice, absinthe, and fresh thyme.

Gin, raw egg white, orange-flower water, sugar, cream, citrus all shaken to perfection, basically a cake in a glass with gin. Bourbon, honey, syrup, Tabasco, lemon, basically a cold toddy with hot sauce. A tiny drink pink in a plastic cup that’s three shots of vodka and a secret mixer over ice plus a generous amount of grenadine.

Cocktail after cocktail after kiss after kiss after bump after grind after laughter after big, easy smiles.

Temptation leads them back to the street.

From a tiny kitchen on Dauphine Street, Jensen orders them baskets of shrimp, glazed pork belly, BBQ chicken, and ice-cold lemonade to wash it all down. One block down and Jared buys a trio of tacos, followed by oysters grilled up and soaking in butter and garlic.

A cab ushers them--drenched in butter, sweat, and lemonade--to the Frenchmen Street area. In and out they dance and holler their way through clubs. Snug Harbor. The Spotted Cat. The Blue Nile. The music in each club is exactly like the food and drinks they’ve consumed--deliciously rich, fresh, and no holding back. While the trumpet leads, it’s the drums and cymbals that propel the musicians and dancers into an entirely new level of heat. An infusion of gospel, jazz, and funk pumps through the dancefloor at The Blue Nile, where Jared and Jensen fuse their hips and lips together.

Accumulated energies collide.

The trumpet blares, the saxophone throttles, and the trombone exhilarates.

In unison with the band, the lead belts out, “She like it like this.”

The crowd hollers back, “She like it like that.”

“She like it from the front.”

Jared and Jensen shout, “She like it from the back.”

“Give me some of that good.”

“And none of that bad!”

“She like it like this.”

“She like it like that!”

They can’t get enough. Like trumpets, they spar on the dancefloor, legs, arms, hands set to a churning, exhilarating beat.

They and the music merge together in resplendent, absolute, soulful unison.

Euphoria grooves all the way down to the Garden District. In between sloppy, eager kisses, Jared discovers a store on Magazine Street. He enters and practically faints at the options. After only a minute, he kicks Jensen out and works with the clerks on an intriguing set of ideas spawned in his head from a combination of music, booze, and dancing.

Final product? Delivered straight to their hotel by midnight--guaranteed.

Jared hands over his debit card without hesitation or second thought. There’s no time for his usual over thinking and anxiety. New Orleans requires every second be devoted to the party.

Back in Jensen’s arms, Jared smiles and laughs and leans into a series of starved kisses.

Joy fills the air.

Cold drinks and quick bites to eat lure them into another club. A song plays with the traditional sound of New Orleans in the background until it transforms into something fresh and new in the foreground. It all goes from a walk to a march to a swing. Jensen takes Jared’s hands and swings him around, singing along with the band.

“I hoped and prayed for someone exactly like you. Why don’t we spend money on a show or two? I hoped and prayed for someone exactly like you.” The trumpet surges. It’s all loose but tight. Abandon and relish work hard side by side. Jensen never lets go. “You make me feel so good, I wanna give the world to you. You make me understand. I hoped and prayed for someone exactly like you. Like one two three four five six seven eight, nine, and ten. That’s where my life begins!”

Ragged and absolutely beautiful, the horns play to the ceiling and beyond.

Jared’s hair sticks to his forehead. His heart mimics the jagged, rat-a-tat of the band. And his voice finds its own in a shout, “Don’t you know my mother taught me to be true? I hoped and prayed for someone exactly like you! I wanna be your rug, rug, rug cutter.”

Jensen calls back, “Swing out!”

Jared laughs. His shoulders shimmy and Jensen’s legs do unimaginable things. “Let it roll, let it roll, let it roll!”

New Orleans doesn’t skimp on fun. It’s spiritual, emotional, and powerful all at once.

Conversations? Reality?

Nothing here is as it is in Austin. Not even when they stumble into their suite at some hour between late last night and early this morning. Energetically drunk, they knock into tables and lounges and assorted furniture in an effort to remain plastered together. Kiss after kiss after kiss after pull after please after yes after more after oh fuck.

The air conditioning does nothing to slow or stop the sweat on their bodies. Jared pushes Jensen down onto their bed and grinds down, their jeans still on, enjoying the stimulation of friction and desperation.
He’d have sex with Jensen in the middle of the French Quarter.

He wants all of that good and none of that bad.

And he likes it from the front--grabbing Jensen by the collar of his shirt and planting a kiss on him that is all parts lust, ardor, and devotion.

And he likes it from the back--there’s no question about that.

There were all kinds of music on the streets tonight. Jazz, rock, blues, funk, pop, metal. The Mississippi River embraces them all. It would be sensory overload in any other city, but in New Orleans, there’s no such thing as too much. There’s only more--more dancing, more grinding, more life-affirming trumpet solos to fuel a pair of long, muscular legs.

Kisses transform from a simple dance into an unparalleled rooftop march. Jensen grinds up against Jared harder, perfectly desperate. His hair is a mess. His lips are shiny and slick. He’s got a permanent crooked grin on every time they make eye contact. His shirt is three-quarters of the way open and the tent in his jeans speaks for itself. It’s plain as the music outside that he plans on flipping Jared over and having his way.

Jared smiles and abruptly rolls off of Jensen.

“What…” Jensen looks at the empty air in front of him for a split second before he realizes what has just happened. “Jay? You okay?”

“Yeah,” Jared laughs. He stands, runs a hand through his hair. What is balance? What is breathing? What is sobriety? “I wanna try somethin’.”

Jensen thinks he knows what Jared wants to try. Or something close to it. “Of course, sweetheart. Anything.” Jared knows, despite that confidence, that Jensen means that last part.

This is beyond something like a pair of lacy panties.

There were places they visited tonight that were swanky, casual, festive, and haunted by perpetual celebration. There was smoke, mirrors, beads, boutiques and galleries. The lace Jared slips into reminds him of the intimate relationship between vines and wrought iron gates.

The lace part is easy. Everything fits, as he knew it would, and everything delicate snaps into place.

A quick look at himself in one of the many gilded bathroom mirrors and he feels brave.

Next.

Soft black stretch leather. Side-zip stunner stiletto heel boots.

One step at a time. Easy. No rush. Balance and sway. The ground seems very far away, but no time to think about that. Focus. Focus on trying something. Something just a little bit new. Jared walks, fluid and steady, back to their bed.

Jensen’s mouth forms an O.

Jared poses, just like one of the ladies at the shop showed him--right hand on his hip, left foot over a small, velvet stool, and left hand behind. She said this pose says, “I call the shots.”

And so far, he does. Jensen doesn’t dare move. His eyes remain glued on Jared, taking in every inch of exposed skin, indulgent and meticulous crafted lace panties, skirted suspender, and bold satin
bound straps. Tiny Swarovski crystals sewn into ideal places add glitz, glamour, and shine.

Teasing, Jared touches the diminutive red satin bow on his torso, then the one on the dead center of his panties.

“Sweetheart,” Jensen breathes, sitting up, completely decimated. “I… wow.”

Good response.

But not the right one.

“Come here,” Jared murmurs, smiling. “I wanna be yours.”

Jensen stands. Jared reveals the object in his left hand—a plain, simple, ordinary riding crop. He slaps it against his right palm and points it directly at Jensen.

“Not like that.” Jared maintains the snap in his voice. “Crawl.”

His cock twitches against his thigh the second Jensen drops down to his hands and knees. Utterly enthralling, Jensen crawls from their bed to where Jared stands, waiting. He looks up, pretty mouth and pretty green eyes, absolutely mesmerized.

An addictive rush courses through Jared. This is headier than any drink, more perilous than this pair of heels, and more dangerous than an entire penthouse suite all to themselves. He smooths the tip of the crop over and against Jensen’s jaw, throat, and mouth. Jensen closes his eyes and leans into the touch, open and willing, tongue flickering against the crop as it brushes past his lips.

They’ve spent all night plastered together. Now, Jared works to maintain their distance.

He slaps the tip of the crop against his outer thigh, an action that causes Jensen to shudder and bite down on his bottom lip. Carefully, Jared traces the outline of his cock with the crop, then presses the crop against Jensen’s mouth for another lick.

“Kiss my boot,” Jared breathes out, his voice dark and hushed.

Jensen reaches for Jared’s left foot. Jared smacks his hands away with the crop.

“No hands,” he commands. “Do as you’re told.”

With a slight whimper, Jensen nods. He bends down and brings his lips to the shiny surface of Jared’s boot. He presses a kiss of admission, submission, respect and adoration.

“Keep going.”

This is worship.

And Jared enjoys every single second of it. Pink, plump lips press kiss after kiss over obsidian leather. Jensen takes his time, unwavering in attention, pouring himself into the act. Each motion, no matter how small, highlights the generous outline of his lips, the contrast of pink against black, and his absolute willingness to serve.

Exquisite raw reverence.

Jared slips the crop under Jensen’s chin to guide him.

“Fuck me, Jen.”
Their hearts beat faster.

Jensen treats Jared the same way New Orleans exists to them and the thousands of people in it—cherished, celebrated, and worshipped. He shows it all with a smoldering, frantic, possessive intensity. With permission, he lifts Jared up by the hips and carries him three steps to their bed.

Famished, abso-fucking-lutely starved, Jensen lays Jared flat on his back.

Rooftop marching bands seduce boozy nighttime into profound dawn.

Hands on Jared’s boots, Jensen pushes Jared’s legs up, spreads them open, and slots their hips into place. Prep is quick. Kisses and bites dissolve into moans as the tip of Jensen’s cock pushes into Jared.

Jared thinks about every time he’s ever looked over at Jensen’s lap and thought about--craved--his thick, heavy, flushed cock. Every time he’s wanted it stuffed in his mouth, buried deep in his ass, or gripped in the palm of his hand. Every time he’s laid in their bed at home and wanted it inside him, filling him up, stretching him open, and pounding into him to remind him of how in the here and now, he belongs to Jensen and Jensen belongs to him.

Jensen fucks him like that now, on this hotel bed in this penthouse suite in New Orleans.

He fucks him screaming and moaning--consumed. He fucks Jared in long, brutal, deep thrusts, burying his cock over and over again.

The bed shakes.

A marching band couldn’t be louder.

Almost. Almost. Almost…

“Oh god, right there! Jen! Fuck, yes, yes, don’t stop, don’t stop…! I’m gonna… come… coming… Jensen!”

Jared brings the riding crop down hard on Jensen’s ass.

And comes hard in his black lace panties, all over, ropes and ropes of it landing over crystals and silk. His orgasm pulses through him, Jensen wrings it out of him until his eyes water and he comes again. He comes over Jensen’s cock, legs in the air, ass pounded. Jensen comes, leaning down, rocking against Jared, sweating and shaking. He pumps Jared full of come and then some. Jared feels the first few ropes spill out, making a sticky, obvious mess.

This.

This is better than a million po-boys.

In the shaky, laughing, huffing and puffing aftermath, Jensen kisses Jared’s boots, once on each leg. Then, he takes Jared’s left hand and kisses the engagement ring there.

His voice shot, he sounds a lot like the jazz men on the rooftops.

“Sweetheart, I hope and prayed for someone exactly like you.”
y'all!!! not only do you get an extra-long update, but you get this BEAUTIFUL AMAZING HOT art by goandgetthegun! please, give a round of applause to this fantastic fandom artist. i bow down before their talent. they were absolutely wonderful to work with bringing this to life. <3

so... my brain is shot from writing this. all i can say is... nice to try new things, huh? XD

comments are love. but please, let our artist know how much this portrait of our boy rocks either here or at her tumblr: goandgetthegun.tumblr.com. <3
Jared wakes up sore, warm, sticky, and plastered against Jensen, which is to say that he wakes up perfect.

Peeling himself off of Jensen, Jared moves around the bed with caution. Certain body parts are still asleep or not working at full capacity. His ass hurts, but that’s not a new feeling. The culprit responsible for the majority of Jared’s aches and pains snores away, dead asleep. Jared cringes as he sits up and stretches. He tries not to move around too much. After all those drinks and their nighttime-into early morning activities, plus two weeks on set, Jensen needs the rest.

But Jared also needs to eat.

He hobbles out of bed and limps towards the bathroom. In the many bathroom mirrors, he examines proof that last night wasn’t just some surreal dream. His eyes go wide at the bright red handprint stamped across his ass. If he squints, he can see Jensen’s god damn fingerprints.

Well, no wonder his ass hurts so much. And his thighs—covered in bite marks and hickeys.

The less appealing leftovers—dried come, drool, and sweat—he can’t wait to wash off. The marks though, those can stay. They’re oddly comforting. While he waits for the beautiful clawfoot bathtub to fill up with hot water, he runs his fingers over a pair of deep, violet bite marks on the inside of his right thigh. They look like a butterfly, printed on his skin in a detailed gradient.

Pleased with memories of last night, Jared hums to himself. He dips his toes into the water and decides that yes, he would very much like to submerge himself in water hot enough to brew tea.

Fancy hotels think of everything. Next to the tub sits a waterproof tablet connected to an unseen Bluetooth sound system. Jared finds the music program and selects a classical station. Once the charming, peaceful sound of violins and cellos filters into the bathroom, he sinks into the water.

Muscles relax.

Aches gradually fade into the depth of the tub, never to be seen again.

Jared adds lavender bath stuff into the water. He didn’t grow up with tubs, only showers, and there’s a whole lingo to it he has yet to learn. He knows that after a day of working out or being on camera or doing interviews, Jensen enjoys a hot bath with a few drops of lavender oil tossed in. Sometimes Jared will join him, but their tub isn’t exactly big enough for two people to splash around the way they want.

This tub isn’t big enough for that either, but judging by the snores Jared can hear with the music paused, this will be a solo bath.

He finds a small, blue inflatable pillow to rest his head against while he soaks. Fancy hotels. Sheesh.

Next, he’ll find someway to order room service from the tub.

“Holy shit,” Jared whispers, swiping through the tablet. “I can order room service from the tub.”
Maybe it’s incredibly self-indulgent, but with a few swipes and taps, he orders up breakfast for himself and Jensen. Well. Okay, then. What else can the magical tablet do? He could order an in-room massage, but with the state of their room, that would be less than ideal. However, if he feels like getting one in the hotel spa, he can schedule one. Or a manicure. Or a seaweed wrap.

Being covered in seaweed doesn’t seem as appealing as browsing through the rest of the hotel’s dining menu. If he wants something delivered from a nearby restaurant, all he has to do is use the appropriate app and a liaison from the hotel will go pick it up and deliver it to the room.

How can this be his life?

Twenty four hours ago, he was in Austin, in a condo he now calls home, with a man he calls his. Now, he’s in New Orleans, in a beautiful suite, with a man who is all too happy to make this happen.

It’s so easy to get away, Jared can’t help but question it.

This is all incredibly… nice. More than nice. Spectacular. Wonderful. Amazing.

So why can’t he enjoy it for more than a few hours at a time? Why does he always find himself back at this melancholic space in his head?

He grabs the tablet and scrolls through the music app. Then, he does the absolute worst thing anyone can ever do in this situation. He plays George Jones.

His momma used to play this song, when he was small, while she did the dishes. She’d get this far away look on her face and wash each plate slowly, with a great deal of care. He thought this song was boring, almost haunting because of the background singing. When he heard it, he knew not to disturb Sherri.

Guilt pokes at his chest. He’s never asked her what this song means to her.

Jared sings as only a bathroom, bathtub audience can listen to.

“He said I’ll love you til I die. She told him you’ll forget in time. As the years went slowly by, she still preyed upon his mind.” Jared tries to match George’s pitch and tone. “He kept her picture on his wall, went half-crazy now and then. But he still loved her through it all, hopin’ she’d come back again.”

This is the exact opposite of the music he danced and sang to late last night.

“Kept some letters by his bed,” Jared croons, his voice floating over bubbles. “Dated nineteen sixty-two. He had underlined in red, every single I love you.” He could probably play this on his guitar. It’s not a complicated song. Nothing beats the whine of a steel guitar.

Sitting in the tub, Jared collects bubbles in the palms of his hands and sings to them, melancholy tone full force. “He stopped lovin’ her today. They placed a wreath upon his door.” Inhale. Exhale. “And soon they’ll carry him away. He stopped lovin’ her today…”

He can’t imagine not knowing this song.

And for some reason, he can’t imagine living this life for the rest of his.

“Sweetheart.”

Jared looks up and over to the bathroom doorway. Jensen stands there, leaning against the
doorframe, naked and as weathered and sore as Jared. The sight and sound of him help relieve the weight on Jared’s chest. Jared pauses the tablet and tries to crack a joke. It falls as flat as a pancake.

Jensen walks over, worse for wear, his eyes red. He looks like a walking advertisement for Advil.

It would be easy to brush off Jared’s activity in the tub as nothing much or the fault of a country playlist. Or maybe they could launch into a conversation about George’s substance abuse and struggles with divorce. Or maybe Jared could put on some Shania Twain and pretend that this never happened.

They had such a great night tearing up New Orleans and their hotel bed.

So why don’t those feelings stick?

On the edge of the tub, Jensen sits down and reaches out. His fingers touch Jared’s chin with the greatest care. And with no small amount of tenderness, Jensen swipes his thumb over Jared’s cheek.

“You know,” Jensen starts, in more of a whisper than anything, “she came to see him one last time. We all wondered if she would.”

Maybe it’s okay to be a little sad.

And maybe it’s even more okay to be a little sad with someone else.

Without music, they finish the last chorus together.

Jared pulls Jensen down, wraps his arms around broad shoulders. Cheek to cheek, they stay still like that for a whole minute, before Jensen slowly slips into the tub alongside Jared. It isn’t a perfect fit. It’s technically not even a good fit—they are all elbows and knees squished together in the compact space. Water sloshes over the edge and onto the tile floor. To his credit, Jensen manages to drain the tub and refill it with more warm water using only his right foot.

Despite morning breath on both their accounts, they manage to kiss.

Jensen playfully bites the tip of Jared’s nose.

“One more,” Jensen murmurs, his hands framing Jared’s jaw. “One more and then we go have a great day. Just you and I.”

Jared nods.

Twisting around in the tub, Jensen grabs the tablet. He figures out the search function on the music app.

What’s just as bad as George Jones?

“Blue eyes,” Jensen sings, his voice a temperate rumble, “cryin’ in the rain.”

Freckled fingers never leave Jared’s skin, not for a second.

In the bathroom of a suite in New Orleans, Willie Nelson, Jared, and Jensen, sing out feelings that belong to country songs.

“Someday, when we meet up yonder, we’ll stroll hand in hand again. In the land that knows no partin’, blue eyes cryin’ in the rain.”
Between them, love is not like a dying ember.

Chapter End Notes

squee, two updates in 24 hours?! :D :D :D
Breakfast is quiet, peaceful affair.

They lay on top of the down comforter to avoid resting on stains and proof of their activities the night before. In between bites of French toast, bacon, and strawberries, Jensen talks about the set and pre-production. He loves the crew. There are several folks in different departments that he’s worked with before and knows well. They understand his method, his personality, his communication style. And the folks he doesn’t know as well have all been amiable and easy going.

Since this is a romantic comedy and musical, there are twice as many people on set for dancing scenes--Jensen groans--and musical numbers. They offered a stunt double for the more difficult scenes, and a voice over, but he declined both. It makes more sense to challenge himself as a performer and step outside the comfortable role of an actor. He’s not horrible. But he’s not exactly the next Gene Kelly.

Everything on set involves the actors. He spent most of his time on set this week working with the costume department, makeup, and photography. Everyone wants to get to principal photography as soon as possible--the phase of production where the movie is actually filmed and cameras are rolling. However, there are an incredible amount of details to put together before that can happen. Jensen stood in front of cameras for four hours straight on Wednesday, with brief moments to sit or drink water, while they tested lighting, wardrobe, makeup, props, and background material.

The most fun he had all week was working with the director and producers to scout for locations. He learned more about locking down locations and creating shooting schedules by location to keep costs down. Unfortunately, that was a very small part of his time in Vancouver.

When he wasn’t busy with fittings, makeup, or lighting, he was busy with photography and public relations. They’ve lined up dozens of interviews and commercials and billboards that all require his approval per the conditions of his contract. Jensen read through everything PR gave him, which often left him with a headache and a strong desire to fly home and forget about it all. He sorted things out, talked with his manager, his lawyer, his father, and director, and signed off with only a few changes to their original offers. He was shuttled to and from meetings for special effects, safety, CGI, read-throughs with department heads present, rehearsals, and sessions with his voice and acting coaches and dance teachers.

Every night before bed, the last few things he did before falling asleep were to text Jared and rehearse his lines.

“They changed my look,” Jensen murmurs, munching on a piece of bacon. “They were going for something like John Cusack and ended up with Matthew McConaughey.”

Jared sits up, naked, and stretches. “That’s a big difference.”

“Right? Now I gotta grow my hair out and let them dye it a shade or two lighter. Jay.” Jensen leans in. “They even want me to wear glasses.”

“No!” Jared gasps. “Not that!”

“Yes! They want to hide my beautiful eyes behind a pair of ugly frames!”
“The horror!”

“The pain!” Jensen swoons and lies down on the bed, his long, lean form looking absolutely delectable. What’s better than naked Jensen, a plush bed, breakfast, and the knowledge that the riding crop is somewhere closeby?

Why was Jared so anxious in the tub, but here, rolling around in bed with Jensen, he’s just fine?

It’s like he enjoys making himself sad at the worst moments.

“You know what I like studying?” Jensen kisses Jared cheek. “How they developed McConaughey’s character for that one movie. The one with Jennifer Lopez.”

“The Wedding Planner?”

“Yes! That one.”

“I guess…” Jared laughs. “I’ve never really thought about it?”

“We have to watch it so I can take notes. Look at all the stuff he had to change for that role. Glasses, hair, clothes, posture. It’s kinda fascinating, if you think about.”

“I don’t really spend a lot of time thinking about Matthew McConaughey, Jen.”

Jensen growls into Jared’s ear, “Damn right you don’t.”

They fall right into things with such ease, Jared hardly notices the transition. From conversation to kisses to absentminded hands to the reaction of their bodies--it’s all as comfortable as eating breakfast naked.

Which is why Jared doesn’t understand his mood in the tub or the moods he was in throughout the week. It all amplifies his confusion and throws off his sense of self. But who can think of emotions and reality when Jensen pushes into him, slick with warming lube, heavy and hard? He eases into Jared, groaning and shuddering. He loves this. He tells Jared that every single time, no matter how they do it.

The breakfast trays and plates rattle. Jared wraps his legs around Jensen’s waist and arches up; he meets every solid, deep thrust. Rhythm and intensity build without force or effort. Jared craves the scratch of Jensen’s stubble. They kiss. Sometimes they miss.

Jared holds onto the sheets and opens his legs wider.


Like a boss. The boss.

Breakfast becomes loud and desperate. Jensen closes his eyes, bites his lip, and lets out a guttural, gravely noise, slamming his hips against Jared’s, cock buried and shooting, filling Jared up with a thick load of warm come.

Jared flips them, pushing Jensen onto his back.

He rides Jensen--quick and heated. If anything feels right in this world, it’s Jensen, in every way imaginable. Like this. Like last night. Like most nights in their own bed. Jared comes all over his hand, and all over Jensen’s stomach, marking him up.
It’s always difficult for them to stop here. Why stop at one go when there could be two or three? They might have to space them out, but that’s what room service is for.

“Sweetheart,” Jensen rumbles, out of breath. “What time is it?”

“What? Uh…” Jared lifts himself off of Jensen’s cock in order to see the time. He instantly regrets it. Come drips down his thighs. Jensen plays with it, fascinated, like usual. “Mm… I can’t tell time with you doing that.”

“Try,” Jensen quips.

“Jerkbag. Hah… that feels good.”

“I could finger you all day.”

“I could let you finger me all day.”

“Fuck, Jay. Do you hear that?”

“Uh huh. I… it feels good.”

“You’re so wet.”

“Hnn… Oh, shit.”

“Look at you.” Jensen kisses the column of Jared’s throat. “Hard for me again already.”

“It’s… two…”

“I know. Two fingers.”

“No… it’s two o’clock…”


Jared’s eyes snap open. “You stopped. What gives?”

Blushing, Jensen shrugs and laughs. “Oh, you know, I uh, kind of forgot that we have an appointment?”

“What? When?”

“…half an hour ago.”

“Jen!”

“Don’t worry! I can finger you when we get back.”

“I have to shower again!”

“No you don’t, you look fine.”

“I’m not going anywhere with come in my ass.”

“That’s poetry right there.”

“Ugh, I can’t with you. Who are we meeting? Get dressed! I’ll be quick. Tell me we’re not going
anywhere that requires a lot of sitting.”

Jensen refuses to tell Jared who they are meeting and where. He refuses in their room, in the lobby, and in the private car on the way there.

New Orleans is no less beautiful during the day. No paparazzi. No mother-in-laws. No homework or class or tapas. Just Jensen and their baseball caps and sunglasses.

The car pulls up to the Audubon Butterfly Garden.

What a beautiful thing to see in New Orleans.

“Finally!” A voice shouts out from near the main entrance. “Y’all are late!” Sherri waves. “What? Don’t you recognize your own mother? Get over here so I can nag you about not calling enough.”

Jared hugs her like there’s no tomorrow. She hugs him back just as fierce.

“Your man called and said you were sad this morning,” she says, patting his cheek. “So I thought, well, I can’t have my baby feeling blue.”

“Momma,” Jared breathes, hugging her again. “I’m sorry, I’ve just been… and… you know…”

“I know. We’ll talk later.” She nudges his cheek. “John went to buy the tickets. We flew here in a jet. Good lord, I thought the extra forty bucks on American was something special—but that plane? Have you been eating? You look thin. Isn’t he feeding you? Jensen. You’re keeping the fridge stocked in your absence, right? I can send leftovers if you need them. Or you know what, y’all can build a mother-in-law cottage in the backyard and I’ll move right on in.”

“You’d have to fight my mom for that,” Jensen laughs and hugs Sherri. “And I’m afraid that I would actually pay to see that.”

Sherri waves Jensen off. “Ain’t nothing to pay for, I’d win in the first thirty seconds. Now, let’s go. I wanna hit up the gift shop and buy me a pair of butterfly earrings.”

“Don’t you wanna hear about what we’ve been up to?” Jensen plops his baseball cap onto Sherri’s head.

“Hell no, not until I get my butterfly earrings. And a cup of coffee. There’s a cafe somewhere in this place. Maybe I’ll ask John to hunt it down for me.” With a smile, Sherri links her arm with Jared’s. She pats his hand. “He’s treating you alright? Or do I need to smack some sense into him?”

“He can always use some sense,” Jared quips. “I don’t think smacking him does any good though.”

“You wound me,” Jensen scoffs.

Their group of four tours the butterfly exhibit. Serene, tranquil landscapes provide the perfect home for its residents. Butterflies swoop and soar from one flower to another. Sometimes, they stop to rest on a shoulder or a sneaker or an outstretched hand.

It gets better when a few land in Jensen’s hair and scare the shit out of him.

This was a good plan.

After he saves Jensen from the traumatic attack of three butterflies in his hair, Jared quietly murmurs, “Thank you.”
And Jensen quietly murmurs back, “Of course.”

Chapter End Notes

wheeeee an update! :D

comments are love! <3
In the gift shop, Jensen asks the cashier for suggestions on where they should go dancing tonight.

Reggie laughs. “Jensen freakin’ Ackles is asking me for advice? Did I die? Oh my god, this is your fiance, right? Could I get a picture of y’all?”

Jensen looks to Jared, who blurts out, “What? Me too?”

“Duh,” Reggie says with a wink. “Of course you too. You’re even cuter in person, my god. How does it feel to be so damn attractive?”

“I’ll field that one,” Jensen butts in. “You see, it all begins with my modest personality.”

Thoroughly charmed, Reggie shouts to his coworker to stop messing around with shit and take the damn picture. Reggie wedges himself in between Jensen and Jared and hugs them close. Jared can’t help but smile at the surrealness of it all. They take a handful of photos, in a variety of poses that include kissy faces, and Reggie shakes their hands. He finds a piece of scrap paper and starts jotting down a few names.

“Y’all wanna dance like dance or d’yance?” He scratches out one place and fills in another. “Cause I’m half Creole and there’s a helluva a difference.”

Jensen motions towards Sherri and John. Sherri has managed to rope John into looking at wind chimes. Jared is pretty sure his mother doesn’t need another wind chime, but this doesn’t stop her from asking John to pull one of them down so she can see it better.

“That’s my future mother-in-law,” Jensen murmurs, one hand on the small of Jared’s back. “And she’s joining us tonight.”

“Say no more, I gotcha. This place.” He circles the last name on his list. “The others are great, don’t get me wrong, but this place. It’s right on the water. Music’s classy. Food’s not made by some freaking Michelin chef—just mamas and grandmas. And hey, before I’m an asshole about this, y’all cool with pictures on Twitter?”

“Wait a few hours,” Jensen laughs and shakes his head. “We kinda like the vibe we got going.”

A few more employees come forward with requests for pictures, or, in some cases, just a hug. Jensen doesn’t turn anyone down and includes Jared in each picture. Thankfully, no one asks for odd or inappropriate poses, and the whole interaction is surprisingly calm. That could also be due to John and Sherri’s presence, who have steadily moved closer. Whatever it is, Jared does not have a massive panic attack and for that, he is grateful.

One of the cashiers asks Jared how he likes Austin, and then how he likes New Orleans. Someone else asks him about his favorite food and if he wants to go into acting with Jensen. Jared answers as
well as he can, trying not to overshare but also trying to fit in. He pulls off quite a few successful conversations in a row, which may prove Jensen’s point: this gets easier.

John eventually suggests that they get going. One last round of handshakes and hugs, and they head out of the gift shop.

“Holy fuck,” they hear Reggie say to his coworkers. “Did I die? Guys, am I dead? Did that just happen? Y’all saw that, right?”

One of the finest restaurants in New Orleans sits right on Washington Avenue, not far from their hotel.

Jensen had to pull a few strings to secure a table for four on a Sunday evening. As well as being the finest restaurant, many folks proclaim the Commander’s Palace to be the best in elegant dining anywhere in New Orleans. And while Jared happily eats po boys from plastic baskets or hushpuppies out of paper bags, Jensen wants to treat them all to a little high class, fancy pants food.

The Commander’s Palace has a strict dress code—business attire, jackets preferred for gentlemen, collared shirts required. No shorts, flip-flops, t-shirts, sweats, or open-toed shoes allowed. Jeans are highly discouraged, and anyone with ripped jeans may as well grab onto their butt and kiss it goodbye.

It was tempting to request a reservation in the wine room, but they would have needed ten guests to do so. Jensen jokes that he could probably drink enough wine for the extra six people they’d need; Sherri chimes in that she would be right next to him, helping out.

John drives them in a gorgeous Lincoln. The gentlemen wear collared shirts and jackets, though no ties, because according to Jensen, they’re not aiming to be stuffy, just presentable. Jensen didn’t bat an eye at doing some last minute shopping for their outfits tonight. He had a little too much fun dressing Jared up and asking him to try on different shirts, pants, and shoes. In the dressing room, Jensen also had a little too much fun kissing Jared—on the mouth and on the bruises, marks, and fingerprints leftover from their previous adventures. There was no reason to protest, except for time, and Jared can’t say he didn’t enjoy the attention.

Jared steps out of the Lincoln and allows his mother to admire him dressed up.

“My goodness,” she coos. She licks her thumb, reaches up, and pretends to smudge something away from Jared’s cheek. “You look almost like an adult.”

“I am an adult,” Jared grumbles and tries not to pout. “Momma, my hair looked fine two seconds ago.”

“Hush. Let an old, frail woman fuss over her darling son.”

“You are not old or frail.”

“Says you. Just the other day at the shooting range I only made ninety percent. I’m getting on in years, sugar.”

His mother, of course, looks anything but the haggard crone she makes herself out to be. Tonight’s dinner and outfits are all on Jensen. He gave her his card and let her go to town at a boutique near the hotel. She chose an indigo skirt and a powder blue blouse paired with white gloves and a black clutch. Leave it to her to out class them all.
“What?” Sherri laughs and pats Jared’s shoulder. “I clean up good, just like you.”

As they walk into the restaurant, Jared asks, “Momma, do you ever feel like you’re just pretending like you belong in a place like this? In these clothes?”

Their waiter, an older gentleman with impeccable manners, seats them. Chandeliers provide sumptuous lighting, while the clink of glasses and murmur of nearby conversations add intimacy and warmth. Seated next to each other, Sherri looks at Jared, her eyes bright.

“Jay, honey, wherever you are, you belong. Anyone who makes you feel different, send ‘em to me. Or your man. He’ll straighten them out. Right?”

Jensen pauses his conversation with John for a minute to lean over and peck Jared on the cheek. He gives Jared’s knee a squeeze under the table. “Whatever it is, yes. Right away.”

“You’ll spoil my baby with those kinds of responses,” Sherri teases. “He’ll be impossible to live with.”

“He tolerates my snoring. I’m happy to spoil him rotten. It’s well-deserved.”

John chimes in. “As someone who has pulled overnight shifts in Jensen’s company--I can say that if you’re putting up with his snoring, you absolutely deserve it.”

Garner, their waiter, presents menus and explains specials. Jensen orders a drink called blood and sand, while Sherri chooses a glass of wine. Neither John nor Jared get alcohol. Jared sticks with sweet tea with a twist of lemon, though he does take a sip of Jensen’s drink. Food arrives shortly after they order. Jared tries some of the champagne poached crab meat, savors the Creole smashed potatoes, and devours his plate of Louisiana shrimp and sweet corn risotto. He manages to try forkfuls of Jensen’s plate and his mother’s, and accepts the challenge of sweet, delicious creme brulee for dessert.

Over coffee, creme brulee, limoncello flambeed cherry crepes, and pecan pie, Sherri requests their table’s attention.

She reaches over and squeezes Jared’s hand.

“I have an announcement to make, if y’all don’t mind.” No one minds. Jensen maintains a hand on Jared’s knee. Sherri looks at Jared. “I’m so glad I could be here with y’all. You really know how to make a momma feel welcome.”

Jared briefly--very briefly--thinks of Donna. It seems like his mother has the same thought; she slips him a sly, knowing smile.

“And I’d never take that for granted. Especially after the free clothes. Thank you, Jensen.”

Jensen laughs and waves her off.

“So,” Sherri sighs and smiles. “I figure now is as good a time as ever to let you both know that John and I are seeing each other.” She looks over to John. “He’s damn good company, even if I’m still a better shot at the range.”

Shock rushes through Jared.

His mother? Dating? And dating John?
“I kinda had a feeling,” Jensen admits. “Sweetheart? You okay?”


Quickly, Sherri leans over and embraces Jared. She squeezes him against her tight, her perfume crisp and sweet. “I don’t mean to just up and spring this on you. I wanted to tell you how happy I am. How happy I am with John when we get the time to spend together.”


So why does Jared’s stomach continue to sink?

He looks up at his mother, then over at John, and back to his mother. Whenever they have talked over the phone, even just to catch up for a minute, she has sounded happier. That happiness reflects in her eyes.

“The last time you dated….” Jared says, trying to breathe.

“This is different, Jay,” Sherri murmurs. “Way, way, opposite end of the universe different. You gotta trust me on that one. I promise.”

The news takes a while to sink in. Jared stays quiet for the rest of their time at the Commander’s. John and Jensen argue over the bill and end up splitting it. Sherri handles the tip for Garner, and chats with him about his twenty years in the restaurant business. When the Chef drops by their table, Jared goes with the motions. He compliments the meal and thanks the Chef for the care and attention given to them. But after that, the rest of the world seems to rush on without him fully present.

They leave, arrive at the club, and share a small table near the dancefloor. The dim, rich lights make the wood floors seem like frosted glass.

It really is just like Reggie said it would be--simple, classic, pure New Orleans.

Jensen taps Jared on the shoulder and holds his hand out.

“C’mon, sweetheart. Let’s talk and dance.”

Jared agrees, but he doesn’t talk much when they get onto the dancefloor. He can’t. There’s too much for him to process in his head before he can get it out into words. He leans into Jensen, follows his lead, and tries to focus on the music. The band plays crisp and clear. A trumpet weaves in and out of the notes played by the piano. Balance and flow. Jared leans down and rests his head against Jensen’s shoulder.

Is he really this upset about his momma and John?

Or maybe it has something to do with all of this, all of this wonderful New Orleans, ending in a few short hours? Or maybe it has something to do with tomorrow being a school day.

Those two things certainly don’t help his mood.

The lights in the club turn down and change to the color of emeralds.

Soon enough, the music and Jensen’s voice align.

“I’ve just found joy,” he murmurs against Jared’s ear. “She’s got a pair of eyes that are brighter than the summer skies. When you see them, you realize why I love my sweet Lorraine.” Together, they
drift, comfortable and close, through the music and dance floor. The piano plays, exquisite, accompanied by the haunting trumpet.

Jensen runs a hand through Jared’s hair. Both instruments make way for his voice.

“Now, when it’s raining, I don’t miss the sun. It’s in my baby’s smile. And to think that I’m the lucky one that will lead her down the aisle. Each night I pray that no one will steal her heart away. I can’t wait until that lucky day when I marry sweet Lorraine.”

Jared looks over and sees his momma dancing with John, the two of them lost in their own world of piano, trumpet, and joy.

It strikes Jared as odd when he thinks that maybe, just maybe, he doesn’t want to go back to Austin yet.

Chapter End Notes

/collapses into bed/ enjoy, y’all. i’m so sleepy. forgive spelling errors. comments are love. <3
Chapter 35

At midnight, Jared and Jensen arrive back home.

Austin greets them with a clean home and fresh sheets. Jensen had a company come in and tend to all the little yet necessary details. The few dishes that had been left in the sink have disappeared into their rightful places. Even the laundry that had piled up--both Jared and Jensen’s--now resides in neatly folded piles right outside their closets.

Jared feels gratitude for not having to worry about changing the sheets, but…

“Strangers were in here?” He runs his hand over Jensen’s side of the bed.

Jensen calls out from the bathroom. “Just people cleaning, that’s all.”

That’s all. That should be all. Yes, that should logically be the end of this particular concern. The flight back wasn’t long or difficult--what’s difficult about taking a private jet places? Nothing. Nothing is difficult about taking a private jet places, especially when the destination is a mere two hours away. And especially not when he has his momma, her boyfriend/their bodyguard, and Jensen for company. But okay, Jared does feel tired. Maybe not yet sleepy, but definitely tired.

He undresses and sits on his side of their bed, knees up to his chest.

What seems completely normal and routine for Jensen still seems invasive and unusual for Jared. What did the cleaning people touch? What did they think when they washed these sheets? Did they smell them? They had to know what the stains were. What details and observations did they take with them once they finished? Someone unfamiliar and unknown to him knows the layout of their home, the color of their sheets, the the placement of their things. Was the framed picture on Jared’s nightstand always tilted that way or did they move it?

“I don’t like it,” Jared says, surprised to hear his voice. He says it again, a little louder. “I don’t like knowing that people were here.”

Finished with his nighttime routine, Jensen walks over. He kept on his boxer briefs, but sheds them before climbing into bed. Jared knows what Jensen looks like in a myriad of ways. He knows what his cock looks like hard, soft, or in between. He knows that Jensen has freckles on his thighs--not as dark as the ones on his arms or face, but there, and countable. Kissable. Traceable.

“I’ve worked with that company before,” Jensen answers, his voice a rumble. He leans over and kisses Jared’s shoulder. “They’re good. Jus’ fine.”

“But it makes me really nervous, Jen.” Jared sits up straight, changing positions. Jensen knows what he looks like in a myriad of ways. Soft, hard, in between. He knows that Jared has tiny moles throughout his body. He always finds them, counts them, kisses, and traces them.

“My dear, all they did was clean up and put things back.”

“I know, but….” Jared searches for the right words. The most accurate words. “I don’t mind cleaning or changing the sheets. If it’s something I can do, I’d rather do it myself.”
“The point is so you don’t have to do it, Jay.”

“But I’d like to. I can do those things. I’ve always done them.”

“So when you’re going to school, studying, working at the Center, keeping up with me—you wanna wash dishes and do laundry on top of all of that?”

“Yes. I do.”

“You’re strange, Jay, very strange.”

“It’s nothing I can’t handle.”

“Okay,” Jensen yawns and sinks into the mattress. “I’mma sleep now though.”

Did he just scold Jensen over the ability to clean the house? Was he too harsh? Not understanding enough? Why does this bother him so much? Why does anything and everything bother him so much lately? Is he snippy because of his mother and John? He’s observant. He knows how John has treated her and he knows who and how John is. So that can’t be it, not completely.

Jensen falls asleep almost immediately after his head hits his pillow.

Jared sighs and looks around their room. He’s being ridiculous, right? Paranoid? Why should he be paranoid? It’s not like he was ever stalked by someone and harassed. It’s not like he’s ever had to question if someone was watching him or aware of his daily movements. It’s not like someone got a hold of his personal information and exploited it for their own reasons and personal gain.

Restless, Jared throws on a shirt and a pair of shorts, then heads downstairs to the kitchen. He makes a pot of tea and fiddles with the settings on his phone. He’s had to create a new email account. It’s been a week since he’s posted anything new on Twitter. Facebook is still way too overwhelming, even with his profile locked to private. And he’s too wound up to reply to Candy and Charlie’s texts. They’ve been exploring San Antonio and wreaking havoc on its residents. In the selfies they’ve sent, they seem so carefree.

If Jared can have people clean up after him, why argue?

The second he sets his phone down, it rings.

“Shit, you scared me!” Jared snaps. “Look who crawled out of their hole on Mars and decided to say hi.”

“Baby, chu know I love chu,” Anza laughs. “I been busy, but I had a feeling. My ass kicking senses went all, ‘Girl, you best call your Jay bird and say wassup to his fine ass.’ So here I am. Sayin’ wassup to your fine ass.”

Relief floods Jared. He wanders into the living room and plops down on a couch. “Ugh, where do I start? It’s been… where are you? When are you coming back?”

Anza moves her phone around. “Chill, I’m still in V-town. I’m back on Wednesday—I think.”

“You think?”

“It’s nice up here, Jay bird.” Anza sighs. “Real nice.”

“You’re still with Nathan, right?”
“Ch’yeah. Dude is not as big a dejo as I thought. I mean, he’s still a dejo, but not bad.” The phone moves around again. “I’m like… in this giant ass bed right now. I got it all to myself and in the morning he’s takin’ my ass to breakfast. Like we done every single day. An’ chu know what he says about it? ‘Oh, you’re my guest.’ What is up wit that? Fuck, I don’t even know.”

Jared feels himself break into a smile. “Anza.”

“No,” she groans. “Don’t.”

“You are?!”

“No! I mean… okay! Yes. Yes, I… we…”

“You’re speechless,” Jared gasps. “You are never speechless. Holy shit.” His voice goes from astonished to concerned and slightly threatening on a dime. “Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

“Cool it, amigo,” she breathes. “I’m fine. Like, shout it from the fuckin’ rooftops fine. Chu know I can handle shit.”

“Even shit handlers need help from time to time. I’m shocked. Well, okay, I’m shocked for the second time today.” He runs a hand through his hair and suddenly wishes they were physically next to each other instead of on the phone. He could rest his head in her lap and feel her fingers in his hair.

“No te preocupes de mi--donchu worry ‘bout me. I got my bed, he got his. I like that. He goes out to work, I go out to explore. Fuck, it’s beautiful here, Jay bird. An’ whatchu mean you’re shocked for the second time? What happened? Candy didn’t fuck that Lizard Man, did she?”

Jared snorts into the phone. “No. At least, I don’t think she did. Charlie didn’t say and you know he would have.”

“Damn right, he’s gotta watch her ass for that kind of shit. No one fucks Lizard Man--even if he was the last god damn man on earth. Ugh--anyway, spill the frijoles. Should I get popcorn?”

“No, it’s a shock to me, but apparently everyone else already knew.”

“Oooh, is your mother-in-law a stuck up white woman obsessed with her son and his finances? Oh! Wait! Chu knew that one.”

“People on Mars know that one,” Jared grumbles. “Anza, my mom is dating John.”

Anza gasps. “Whaaaaat?! Dejo! That’s awesome! Get it, girl!”

“Did you know? Do you think it was totally obvious?”


Rolling around on the couch, Jared tries to get more comfortable. Moonlight seeps into the living room. Moonlight looks the same as it did in New Orleans, but feels so different in Austin. “I just feel like everyone else knew but me. Yes, I’m worried. You remember the last asshole.”

“This dude ain’t the last asshole though. An’ don’t worry about other people, ugh, what do I always tell chu? People who say they knew shit knew shit before it was fuckin’ confirmed. No one knows until chu hear it from the source. That’s speculation. Give me an A plus for that.”

Another smile. “I miss the hell out of you.”
“Cha! I miss chu too! But I still got some stuff I wanna see. It’s not like I can afford to take a jet plane to New Orleans with my boo out of nowhere.” Anza shakes the phone. “How could your ass not tell me y’all went to Nawlins?!”

“It was out of nowhere! He didn’t even tell me until we got to the airport!”

“Fool, we were sposda go to Nawlins—chu an’ me.”

“I know. We will—if you ever get back here.”

“Jay bird, you know when you find someone who treats you right, exactly how chu need to be treated at that moment, chu don’t just let their ass ride off into the sunset. You ride their ass off into the sunset.”

“I know,” Jared groans. He buries his face into a pillow. “Am I just this giant weirdo that can’t relax and enjoy stuff? I loved New Orleans. We had a great time. But now we’re back and… I feel like I’m anxious all the time.” A weight eases off ever so slightly from his chest by saying those words out loud. “I feel like I’m walking around without a damn clue and sooner or later, I’m gonna let someone down.” He breathes in and breathes out. “I’m afraid I’m gonna let Jensen down because I can’t seem to get used to this life.”

Two seconds of silence worries Jared. Did he say something wrong? Is he wrong? Is he fucking shit up?

Anza kisses the phone. “There,” she says, confident and sure. “I can’t do the real thing so over the phone it’s gotta be that or nothin’.” She sighs and he imagines her flopping around in bed. “I wish I could solve it all for chu. And I think chu know what I’m gonna say.”

“I have no idea what anyone’s gonna say anymore,” he replies, defeated and lost. “That’s my problem. My life was so predictable before Jensen, you know?”

“Dejo—you are not even nineteen freakin’ years old! Chu talkin’ like an ol’ ol’ man. Who the fuck says you gotta know how to handle this shit? Chu think Jensen knew how to deal with the motherfucking paparazzi when his ass started gettin’ attention? No. Chu think anyone who grew up like chu an’ I can prepare ourselves for rich white men to offer them jet planes to places and bottles of expensive wine? Fuck no. They got a whole other culture—it’s call being a privileged ass, rich ass, white man ass culture. They got their own set of rules and chu just finding them out. That’s real R-E-A-L talk, Jay bird.” Anza takes a deep breath. “Cha! Chu getting me all worked up. Who do I gotta punch?”

Jared smiles into the pillow he’s buried his face in. “No one, it’s okay, it’s okay!”

“Ob-vio-usly not!”

“Why do I feel so lost all the time?”

“Oh my god, Jay bird, I cannot believe I am about to say this to your ass.”

“Oh my god, Jay bird, I cannot believe I am about to say this to your ass.”

“Say it to my face, not my ass.”

“Daaaaaamn, boy’s got jokes. Okay, chu ready? I’m not gonna say this twice. Listen—not all who wander are lost. There! That’s it! I’ll fly back this week and save your ass from total destruction.”

“You don’t have to save me, I’m fine…”
“Hey,” she snips. “You got to accept the help I’m offerin’ or be a dejo that keeps feelin’ lost. You hear me?”

“I hear you.”

“Say it--I hear you, Anza.”

“I hear you, Anza.”

“I hear you, Anza, and chu are so beautiful, chu deserve to go to breakfast with Nathan freaking Fillion.”

“I hear you, Anza, and you are so beautiful, you totally deserve to go to breakfast with fucking Nathan Fillion,” Jared faithfully asserts with a nod. “I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you,” she says, her voice a little quieter. “I was panicking when it happened. Couldn’t believe it. I thought maybe I’d hurt chu.”

“No, not at all.”

“Thanks, Jay bird.”

“You don’t need to thank me.”

Anza gives dramatic sigh. “Ugh, you could just say you’re welcome! Now--chu want all the juicy details? Like the size of his…”

“Nope! Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope!”

“Too bad! Listen, fool, so it happened like this…”

Jared stays awake until two thirty in the morning. When he finally collapses into bed, he scoots himself close to Jensen and bumps his nose against Jensen’s shoulder. Jensen, dead asleep, wraps his arm around Jared without hesitation or question.

Not all who wander are lost.

He thinks about that as he falls asleep.

Chapter End Notes

just a reminder that jared isn't 19 yet, he hasn't been with jensen for a full year yet, and everyone has their character flaws. <3

i feel like this is all a really slow build, but y’all don’t mind more words/longer chapters/longer fic overall, right? right? ;-;

feedback on this chapter is much appreciated, as always. thank you for reading!
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jared set his alarm for eight and it went off at eight.

Only at the unfortunate hour of one o’clock in the afternoon, does Jared realize that at eight, he pressed “stop” instead of “snooze.”

His panic at the hour manifests itself in the form of cursing and stumbling out of bed loud enough to wake up Jensen, who has also slept through any and all alarms. Jensen emerges from the blankets, his hair a mess, eyes bleary, and consciousness unaware of the tragedy at hand.

“I’m late!” Jared yips, scrambling around the room. “Worse than late--I slept through my first class! Shit, shit, shit.” Even if he hurries, he won’t make it to Composition until quarter to two, halfway through the entire thing. He’s got to somehow get dressed, eat something, drive, park, and sprint over to Building A. Panic blares in Jared’s mind, narrowing his field of vision, drowning out everything but the thud of his footsteps as he storms towards the bathroom.

How could he be so freaking irresponsible? So god awful at doing the one thing he’s paying to do? How fucking difficult is it to show up for something that requires nothing more than for him to sit there and learn?

Anxiety causes him to knock over ninety percent of the items on the bathroom counter.

Oh my god. Composition feels like eons ago. What did they cover last Wednesday? Why can’t he remember? He didn’t have anything to drink at dinner or the club right after or on the plane. Holy fuck, yesterday he was in an entirely different state, living an entirely different life. Should he tell Professor Ortiz that he slept through her class this morning because he was exhausted from jetting to and from New Orleans this weekend? Would his exhaustion make any difference to her? He wasn’t exactly sick this morning, but maybe he could fib a little bit and apologize profusely to make up for it all? Offer to do extra credit? Grovel?

“Jared!” Jensen appears in the bathroom doorway, dressed in his robe. “What’s wrong?”

Words explode from Jared’s mouth that may or may not make sense. He struggles to get dressed in whatever is the most convenient, and thanks Jensen for handing him a hair brush. Jared races downstairs, knocking into walls along the way. With the fury of ten college students late to class, he grabs two breakfast bars and a bottle of water. A quick check inside his backpack verifies that he at least has all the right materials for Composition. They have a paper due Wednesday. He cannot forget that. That would be much worse than sleeping through class. And again--how could he?

Jared shoves his feet into a pair of shoes he thinks are his, and all but rips open the front door.

Jensen hollers. “Keys, Jay!”

“Oh, fuck, I forgot.”

A dilemma occurs. Jared can make it to campus in ten minutes if he doesn’t have to worry about the LED lights going off inside the car or the radio turning on at random or figuring out how to stop the windshield wipers. He’s been using Jensen’s car for those reasons. But with Jensen home, he hesitates.
“Can I use the SUV?” Jared adjusts his shoe, forcing his feet to cooperate.

Leaning against the wall, Jensen nods, then yawns. “Sure. Is something up with your car though? Want me to take it to the dealership?”

Fuck.

How does he answer without lying, but also without being a complete ingrate? There isn’t anything wrong with the car. It’s a beautiful car. Jared just isn’t used to a car with the capability of basically everything. He was lucky if the CD player worked on his last car.

Jensen senses something. His eyebrows rise slightly and he offers to drive Jared instead. Jared readily accepts and goes out to the SUV while Jensen changes into actual clothes. Two minutes later, Jensen walks out of the house looking more put together in those two minutes than Jared has all morning. The man just pulls off the casual look so damn well—cargo shorts, Cowboys shirt, flip flops, and a pair of sunglasses. He manages to look coordinated and confident while Jared ardently prays for the paparazzi to have better things to do today than to stalk him around campus.

On the ride over, Jensen tries to reassure Jared that missing one class does not mean certain failure or death. All he needs to do later is calmly ask someone in class for notes and email his professor.

Jared begins to process this advice. He is a good student. He hasn’t missed a class before. So far, he’s turned in everything on time, done his readings, and answered some questions in class. Professor Ortiz can’t fail him for missing one out of eight classes. That wouldn’t be fair. What if he had had an emergency? Maybe he can tell her he really didn’t feel well this morning, but he will make up the absence as needed? As for asking someone in class for notes, that’s another issue. No one has talked to him, not even to ask questions about Jensen, which is good in a way, but incredibly isolating in a larger, more significant way.

“What the shit,” Jensen mutters. He pulls the car up to the main entrance on campus. “What the fuck are these fuckers doing here?”

Twice as many paparazzi as usual swarm both the driver’s and passenger’s side doors. They don’t touch the car, but it’s obvious that they want to get close and cuddly today. Jensen places the SUV in park and turns on the emergency lights. He looks over at Jared—his facial expression screaming, “not amused.”

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“Have they been here the whole time you’ve been going to school?”

Another direct question that should be easy to answer. But if he says yes, then Jensen will worry. And then John will get involved. And then he’ll be even more ostracized.

“Not like this,” Jared manages to say. He turns towards the door. “I need to get to class--”

Jensen places his right hand on Jared’s left shoulder. “Why didn’t you tell me? Jay, this is harassment and bullshit. They can’t be here. How long were you gonna not tell me?”

Eye contact becomes a Herculean effort. Jared struggles. He looks at his backpack in his lap. All around them, cameras flash and microphones stand at the ready. The paparazzi don’t mind hovering or waiting. They’re getting some good pictures of Jared and Jensen’s expressions even with the SUV’s slightly tinted windows. Echoes of questions seep in past the doors and windows—all about their weekend in New Orleans and Jensen’s new movie.

Slightly beyond the ring of paparazzi, Jared can see a group of students forming, watching, staring, filming the entire scene with their phones, and pointing over.
“This is some bullshit,” Jensen growls, taking his hand off of Jared and placing it on the horn. The horn blares and he immediately steps out of the SUV, shoulders tense. “Stay in the car,” he grumbles, just before he turns towards the crowd. He crosses his arms over his chest and keeps his stance wide. “Now that I’ve got your attention—I’d like to…”

Someone from the crowd talks over Jensen with their question about his movie.

“No,” Jensen flat out states. “I’m not answering one single thing—I’m telling you that this ends. Now. Shut them off. Shut them all off.” People refuse. Jensen pulls out his cell phone. “I tried doing this the nice way, now y’all have crossed a line. I’m gonna make three phone calls—one to the Austin PD, one to my lawyer, and the other to John. Who wants to stick around? Anyone?”

A few of the more inexperienced reporters and photographers try to stick around. They try moving slightly away from Jensen, citing that this is public property. Jensen approaches them individually and demands their business cards so he can sue them, their bosses, and their companies. When they still don’t leave, Jensen follows through and calls the Austin PD. Instead of dialing 911, Jared hears him address the Chief of Police. The paparazzi that remain moan about how they’re trying to make a living and they only had a few questions. Jensen finishes with the Chief and skips ahead to call John.

By then, the crowd dissipates. It doesn’t completely disappear—the more tenacious ones stay in the parking lot, waiting to see what happens next.

Jensen climbs back into the car, John on speakerphone.

“It’s a fucking mess,” Jensen says, shutting his door then rubbing his temples.

“Don’t get how you get,” John replies. “I’m on my way.”

“Well, I’m pissed the fuck off.”

“Is Jared still with you?”

“He’s next to me.”

“Then quit being pissed the fuck off in front of him. You’re not doing yourself any favors. I’ll be there in fifteen to walk him to class.”

“No,” Jared opens his door. “I’m fine. I can walk myself to class.”

Jensen snaps. “You call this fine? People out to make a buck off your picture are harassing you and you think this is fine?”

Jared stands up straight, backpack on, hands on his hips. “You call arguing in front of the building is fine? Can we not have this talk right now? I need to get to class for at least the last fifteen minutes.”

From Jensen’s phone, John’s voice booms. “Everybody stop. Jared. Go to class. Jensen. Sit there and wait for me so all hell don’t break loose. I’m sure they’re gonna try to follow you if you leave so stay put. There. Now we can all move on.”

For the first time ever—Jared leaves Jensen without a kiss goodbye or a playful grope or even a set of caring words. He shuts his door and walks away from the SUV. Once inside the building, Jared turns back and sees a squad car park behind Jensen, and another two squad cars make their way into the parking lot. He shouldn’t leave Jensen alone to deal with that mess. But John will be here soon. And he’s not exactly going to help the whole situation, either.
The best thing he can do is finish what he set out to do--go to class.

He tries his best to slip into class unnoticed, but that goes to hell in a handbasket. Everyone, including Professor Pi, stops and looks at him for a full ten seconds. Jared’s face explodes in a blush so fierce, it might as well be on fire. He takes the first available seat and tries to hide how much he’s shaking, how much his stomach hurts, and how much panic he feels as Professor Pi announces a pop quiz on the reading they had over the weekend.

Reading that Jared didn’t remember to complete.

From throughout the classroom, whispers emerge. One whisper finds its way to Jared’s ear, clear as a bell. “Someone went hard on the Big Easy.”

Twenty-four hours ago, he was in the bathtub with Jensen, singing old school country until their hands became prunes. Today, Jared’s heart squeezes and wrings itself in his chest, and it weighs heavy in his chest—just like a prune.

Chapter End Notes

ahhhh! i’m back from austin! it was a wonderful, beautiful trip and i’m so happy/grateful i got to experience one of the cities I write so much about. :D

this is a smaller chapter, but woah, lots happens. o_o

comments are love. thank you for reading! <3
Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After class, Professor Pi hands Jared a copy of the syllabus.

“I still have mine,” Jared stammers out.

She doesn’t take it back from him. “Take it just in case you need a refresher on the attendance policies.”

A reply burns on the edge of Jared’s tongue. He has missed one class—and not even the entire class, just most of it. Is the sky suddenly falling? Are locusts raining down upon the entire campus? Will every single wall crumble all because Jared Padalecki missed most of today’s class? Does she go through such trouble with every single student that walks in late to class or is today just his god damn fucking lucky day?

But because of how his momma raised him, Jared keeps his mouth shut.

He places the syllabus back on her desk and walks out.

Done. Just done. So fucking done, he could not be more done. Peak levels of done have been reached and surpassed. Except… life isn’t done with him. At the end of the hallway stand Jensen, John, the Chief of Austin Police, and a woman Jared doesn’t recognize. His plans to hide away in the greenhouse die a quick and silent death. He trudges towards this group of people--none of whom look especially pleased to see him.

Every muscle in Jensen’s shoulders look tense and taut.

The woman leads them into an empty classroom and invites everyone to take a seat. She reminds Jared of a character in a children’s book, meant to teach its readers that not all adults are kind. Deep lines pull at the frown on her face, which suggests to Jared that she has disciplined or taught many students for a long, long time. Even the administrators at his high school didn’t look this severe.

“Jared,” she quips, “I am Katarina Kryzak, the Executive Manager of Campus Planning and Operations. I oversee this campus and the ACC District Police. I am responsible for the health and safety of our students here at Riverside.”

Jared nods his acknowledgement. There’s no use in him saying much. Everyone is here to talk to him—not with him.

“And I’m Chick Webb, Chief of Police, Austin PD.” Chick, who did not take a seat, extends his hand out to Jared. “It’s good to meet you. Though next time I get a call from y’all, it’d be nice if it was for dinner plans.”

Jared shakes Chick’s hand and manages to thank him for his time and the rapid response. Throughout all of this, Jensen remains as silent as a rock. His face takes on the same expression as Ms. Kryzak. Jared tries to stay focused. As tempting as it is to let his mind wander while the people around him talk, he can’t exactly tune out.

Ms. Kryzak leads the conversation. She stands near the front of the room, arms crossed over her chest, her posture perfect. In short, clipped words she details ACC’s commitment to student safety
and well-being. She runs a tight ship and does not appreciate the spectacle and chaos that the paparazzi bring with them to campus. It puts students at risk and places a burden on campus resources. While she understands that this poses a significant issue for Jared, ACC cannot devote resources whenever he is on campus.

“He’s paying tuition,” Jensen interrupts. “He’s got the same right as any other student here to feel safe when he’s on your property.” John shoots Jensen a look. Jensen ignores it.

“No one disagrees with you, Mr. Ackles,” Ms. Kryzak snaps. “But I cannot allocate any resources to one specific student—we are state funded. We do not have the manpower and it creates a conflict of interest. Now, if you provide your own, private security, we can work with administration to provide accommodations.”

Chick clears his throat. “And I think I need to add here that this isn’t just the cameras we’re dealing with. Any time y’all are in public spaces there’s a certain risk. I can work with the campus police, but I can’t do much once Jared enters the building.”

“No one’s asking for twenty-four seven detail,” John chimes in. He holds his hands up. “But we are asking for some cooperation here. There has been a disturbing lack of outreach from the campus since Jared started. No one has reached out to myself or Jensen about the need for additional security.”

“That,” Ms. Kryzak replies instantly, “is beyond our scope. The student in question is an adult. He has not come forward with his concerns about his attendance or his safety. Those are his responsibilities.”

Jensen fidgets in his seat. “So you’re saying that he should always be the one to reach out to you? How many times has your office called him? Tried to get in contact with him? Tried to ask and see if he was doing okay?”

“Mr. Ackles, we have thousands of students here at this campus alone. If there was a problem, then Jared had every opportunity to call or file a concern with my office during regular campus hours.”

“There’s no way you or campus security didn’t know what was going on,” Jensen pushes. “And here you are saying that they cause safety issues for other students--but what about the student they’re after? What if one of them had followed him into the building? What then? Is it going to take an incident before you or your office steps in?”

“Why is this being brought to my attention now?” Ms. Kryzak looks directly at Jared. “It is already four weeks into the summer semester and this is the first time I have ever met you. No complaints have been filed. No persons emailed or called. No word to my office or any campus staff.”

Jared resists the urge to start yelling. Yes, okay, it is all his fault. Does everyone have to make him feel so terrible about it?

John pats Jared’s shoulder. “Look, I think we’ve got to remember that we’re talking about a college student. His only goal is to get to and from class. What do we need to do to make that happen?”

“Letting me talk would be great,” Jared says and stands up. “I don’t want to be anyone’s problem. I thought I could handle all of this on my own. But y’all are acting like I have years of experience with any of this, and guess what? I don’t. Jensen does, but I don’t.” He grabs his backpack off of his seat and shoulders it back on. He looks at Ms. Kryzak. “And I know that it is my responsibility as a student here to ask for help. I get that. But not one person from ACC has asked me if I’m doing okay. No one. Not even my professors. And maybe I am a problem to the safety of people on
campus, but I’m still a student here. I’m still paying tuition and I expect the same treatment anyone else would get. No one has even given me the courtesy of providing me with your phone number in case I should need anything.”

Ms. Kryzak opens her mouth to respond.

“T’m good,” Jared continues. “I can see that you truly have no interest in working with me to resolve this matter and I will need to either go above you or completely outside of ACC for any kind of reliable, compassionate assistance.”

On a god damn roll, he turns to Chief Webb. “Sir, thank you for responding. I hope I won’t have to impose on the Austin PD again. I am sorry if I wasted anyone’s time.” He extends this apology to Jensen and John. “Very sorry if I’ve wasted your time too.”

Before anyone can say much of anything, Jared takes three steps towards the door.

Jensen’s voice follows. “Where are you going now? We still have a whole list of sh-stuff to talk about. And this… this isn’t even settled.”

Jared places his hand on the doorknob and looks back at Jensen. He keeps his voice as steady as possible. “I’ll settle this when I’m ready. I have to go find Professor Ortiz and apologize about this morning. I’ll see you at home.”

“And how are you gonna get there?”

“Jensen.” Jared opens the door. “I know how to take a bus.”

Chapter End Notes

hi! i’ve been super busy writing grad school essays and my CV--all kinds of things that don’t lend themselves well to creative work. plus, i’m still struggling with side effects of meds, bleh. but! here we go!

comments, as always, are love and much appreciated. <3
Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Of course, Jared doesn’t find Professor Ortiz.

Pacing in front of her office, Jared contemplates begging one of the adjunct professors to please, please, please put a good word in for him. Unfortunately, they all look as frightened and panicked as he does, so he decides not to leave a note or hang around until the time when she may possibly show up. Campus doesn’t exactly make him feel calm either.

He works his way towards the bookstore and buys an ACC hoodie. As soon as he tucks away the receipt, he tosses it on. If that was the only thing he had to do, that would be fantastic. Unfortunately, a preliminary peek outside proves that a few paparazzi have lingered.

This feels like a terrible movie from the nineties.

Jared sighs and takes out his baseball cap and sunglasses. Before he heads out, he sweeps his bangs under his cap and zips up his brand new hoodie.


He can do this.

A group of people exit and Jared tries to fall into step with them without being creepy. No one screams or tells him to get lost, so fate tosses him some sliver of success. Fortunately, the group heads towards the bus stop and about half stay for the next bus. Jared leans against the bus stop awning with his back to the parking lot.

Only when he gets on the bus ten minutes later, does he actually breathe.

And once he’s on the bus--sans hat or sunglasses--no one cares about who he is or who he’s engaged to or what he’s doing there. No one asks him for a picture or an autograph or some awful, personal, invasive question. Good lord, someone would think he’d never taken a bus before.

Deep breath in. Deep breath out.

Even the driver doesn’t care about Jared’s presence on the bus. All they’re focused on is driving.

What could possibly motivate people to be paparazzi? Is the money that good? Is it the thrill? Is there prestige attached to that job? Do they get up in the morning and think, “Today’s a great day to make someone explode with social anxiety?”

Stepping off the bus, Jared spots a familiar pink truck.

There is no want for food trucks throughout Austin. Anything and everything that can be served out of a truck finds a home here. However, Jared knows better than to walk up to the truck and ask for tacos.

Yoli shoves the door open and bursts out, arms open.

“Mi nino!” She wraps Jared in a hug. “Look who finally comes to visit me, eh? Hey, why you look so thin? Your man not feeding you?”
Jared basks in the hug and lingers. “Hi, Yoli. I know it’s been a while.”

Pink nails—the exact shade of the truck—rap on Jared’s shoulder. “Ay, papito, it’s okay. You here to get tested? You need condoms?”

The Center’s only volunteer to reach twenty-five years of service, Yoli knows everybody, and if she doesn’t, she makes it her business to. According to her, that’s what Cuban refugees who fall in love with a man in Miami only to break up with him in Dallas and then move to Austin to live off of his money do.

“No,” Jared mumbles. He sits on the curb. “Can I keep you company?”

“Pero of course papito, it’s slow right now anyway. Want me to paint your nails?”

Jared think of his future mother-in-law and pictures the exact expression on her face if she saw him getting his nails done right on the street. “Yes.”

Yoli hauls out her supplies and treats Jared to a manicure on the curb. Cars, cabs, trucks, and buses drive by without paying them any attention. Flocks of college students from UT head towards either Homeslice or Hopdoddy’s. A limousine slips past and Jared doesn’t even care who might be in it. He closes his eyes and listens to Yoli chat about a few of the programs at the Center. Enrollment has been an issue for programs like GED Prep or Interview Skills, which has been causing the entire staff to freak out and scramble to get bodies in at the last minute so not to cancel. Without concrete proof of attendance, the Center may not qualify for all its grants next year.

“They hold those programs at night,” Jared murmurs. His hand in Yoli’s relaxes him. “I think that’s one of the problems.”

“Try telling them that,” Yoli huffs. “Does anyone listen to me?”

“I do.”

“Of course you do.” Yoli pats his hand. “You’re all good kids. Well, okay, most of you.” She doesn’t falter on a single stroke of polish. “They don’t realize—five or ten years ago, there were plenty of day jobs and you could swing by and do something here after work. Now? You think these kids are gonna work nine to five? Ha! My Cuban ass. Then you gotta reel them in with something more than a slice of pizza.”

“What?”

“Papito—you gonna work an extra hour and make maybe enough to buy two pizzas or you gonna fight to stand in line and sit through a boring class in the hopes of maybe getting two slices? Cha. No brainer there.”

“I like being on the Youth Board. But… I feel like all they trust us with are the parties. And the budget for that is tiny.”

Yoli laughs, loud and clear, almost like a cackle. She finishes up Jared’s pinky fingers. “Don’t talk about budgets wherever Jaime might hear you. That man. He’s got plans for a heart attack soon.”

“Yoli. I think… I think I threw a tantrum today.”

“Did you throw your shoe?”

“…not that I recall.”
Once the first coat dries, Yoli starts on the second. “Then you’ll be fine. I threw my shoe once. Stiletto. Got him in the eye.”

“Did he die?”

“What am I, a doctor?” She thumps her knee. “You’re all set. Go inside and let them dry. The second a man hits you, papito, you leave. No matter what it takes. Even if it means giving up your best pair of shoes and walking out barefoot.”

Jared looks at his nails and their slick, flawless coat of cobalt blue paint. He nods, stands up, and hugs Yoli without messing up his nails. She helps him put his backpack on and sends him on his way with a squeeze to the shoulder. Yoli has always had a way of phrasing things in such a way that they stay with their audience. Jared supposes that’s how she’s managed to keep the testing truck funded all these years.

If only he had that kind of talent.

Jensen would never hit him. Or touch him in a way he didn’t approve of. Of this, he is absolutely certain. There would never be any moment where Jared would have to think about defending himself that way. So--there is that. And that, he understands, counts for a lot.

He heads into the Center and expects to see at least a few familiar faces.

It’s empty.

Even the receptionist is new, covering for folks in meetings. Jared takes a seat at one of the tables in the lobby, shoulders slumped forward. An empty Center can only mean one thing.

Memo takes a seat at the table.

“There was a raid.”

“I thought so,” Jared answers. “When?”

“Early this morning. Everyone’s keeping low.”

“Any of ours?”

“Jim’s working on it.”

“Good.” Jared’s problems appear to him as petty and insignificant. “Is there anything I can do?”

Memo shrugs. “I don’t think so. Jim would ask you if there was.”

“I wish Anza would come back.”

“Yeah.”

“I can’t blame her for staying out there.”

“Guess not.”

“...how are you?” Words between them come slower and slower. Jared tries to keep his voice steady and with it. “You haven’t answered my texts, so I figure you’ve been busy.”

“How’s school been?” Change of topic. Great.
Testing his nails, Jared replies, working not to scream in frustration. “Oh, you know, awful. Bombed a quiz today. I basically wrote my name on the thing and turned it in.”

It doesn’t seem right to complain any further considering what happened to so many youth early this morning, caught completely off guard. And whoever wasn’t caught will certainly feel the effect. Yogi hadn’t told him. Probably to spare his feelings. But he found out eventually, so what’s the point?

Shit.

Across the table, Memo stands up. “I just told you about the raid and that’s what you say?”

The words hit Jared just as good as a slap to the face.

“You asked me about school,” he snaps. “And I gave you an honest answer.”

Jared knows Memo. He knows that Memo has always had an interest in studying butterflies, but there’s not exactly a huge demand for that in the real world according to his parents so he focused on math throughout high school. Like Jared, he was a Mathlete. And also like Jared, he enjoys lengthy tabletop board games that involve a hearty mix of math and strategy. Deck building games with Memo have always been the most fun. Working on the same team, they took on any and every challenge while eating their way through a bag of pizza rolls and telling Charlie to quit stalling. That used to happen every Wednesday night last year.

But then Jared took on more hours at Mayhue’s so he could afford his ticket to the convention in Dallas to have his picture taken with…

Realization strikes Jared in the chest.

“Why is everything all about you lately, Jared?” Memo raises his voice. “You never used to be that way. But it’s like ever since you went to Dallas that one time you’ve just been MIA. Shit happens and all you can do is talk about you.”

Oh no.

How did he not see the blaring red signs about this? The barbecue earlier this summer. The silence. The distance. The sad smiles. The defeated looks.

Memo likes pepperoni and mushrooms on his pizza at Homeslice because he loves the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. He always offered Jared his sweater whenever they’d drive to and from Smithville and Austin. On the highway, they’d punch each other in the shoulder every time they saw billboards for Alan’s Boots or Beaver Nuggets. They once wrote their math homework out on the sidewalk in bright pink chalk and Anza made fun of them for weeks about it and how proud they were to be geeks or nerds or eggheads. And when Candy volunteered at the costume shop on South Congress, Memo bought Jared this beautiful crushed velvet cape that looked like it had belonged to Bela Lugosi.

“Oh my god,” Jared blurts out, standing up and taking a step back. “I get it now.”

Memo rolls his eyes. “You think you do—but you don’t. And I don’t think you ever will. Not after Dallas.”

“Hey,” Jared huffs. “You can call out my dumb ass all you want without dragging Jensen into this.”

“Can you honestly say you like who you’ve become since you met him?” Memo waves Jared off.
“You don’t get it. At all.”

“Say that to my face, Memo! You wanna talk shit, at least have the guts to make eye contact. What is with me, what is with you?! Is there some law that got passed that says you gotta be an asshole today? Or is that just your new god damn personal mission in life? Look at me. I’m talking to you, dammit.”

Memo puts his hands on Jared’s shoulders.

Jared doesn’t have a pair of stilettos.

But he does have decent reflexes. He shoves Memo’s hands off and immediately reaches for the pepper spray hanging off his backpack. The can of pepper spray John convinced him to carry. He unhooks it in record time and holds it out in front of him—just like John taught him.

“Don’t,” Jared hisses. “Don’t touch me.”

Memo steps back. “Whatever, Jared. Keep fucking shit up and telling yourself you haven’t changed. Good luck with that.”

Temptation and rage urge Jared to act out, to scream, to yell, to press down on the red button and release pepper spray because it isn’t always hands that hurt.

But this is the Center.

And he’s not going to be drawn into anything that might jeopardize his ability to volunteer and visit.

He’s capable of knowing that, at least.

The very least.

“You’re not worth it,” Jared says, tucking the pepper spray into his pocket. “Go home, Memo. Grow the fuck up. I didn’t owe you a goddamn thing. Look at you and your Nice Guy self. If you had feelings, you should have spoken up. Now you’re upset I didn’t end up fucking you instead? Fuck today.”

Outside, Jared stares at his phone.

It feels so much easier to blame everyone else.

He dials a number.

“Josh?” The connection is clear. Crystal clear.

“Jared? Jared, are you okay? What’s wrong? Where are you?”

Hesitation pulls Jared back. But he manages to break free. Just this once.

“No,” he says, in honesty. “I’m not.”

Chapter End Notes

i was like... do i hold off on posting this next chapter? and then i just couldn't because i
want feedback on all this. XD

i would not want to be 18 again. /shudder/
Chapter 39

Killeen, Texas doesn’t have much going for it. Jared’s only been there once with a youth group from the Center. They went to Dana Peak Park, rented out some boats, brought picnic lunches, and talked about the pros and cons of penis lengths in partners.

Josh laughs at the anecdote and assures Jared that the drive from Killeen to Austin will take about an hour and a half. For the time being, Josh encourages Jared to duck into a restaurant. He recommends Irene’s on West Avenue, around the corner from the Whole Foods. The hostess on the day shift, Ricky, will seat him.

It was a stroke of luck to find out that Josh was in Killeen on business. Instead of being three hours away, he can take the 195, then the 35 through Georgetown and straight into Austin.

Jared walks around Lamar and 6th Street. He heads into both Waterloo Records and BookPeople, but nothing holds his attention. Emotions churn away in the pit of his stomach. He tries calling Anza, but gets her voicemail, which he can’t hold against her. She deserves her time with Nathan sans his problems. But oh my god, Anza and Nathan. He’s happy for the both of them, yet somehow worried. Concerned? Protective?

And then his mother and John. When did that happen? Was it instant? Did they hit it off right away?

It’s much easier to think about everyone else’s relationships instead of his own. Because that’s a whole can of worms he can’t deal with right now. Or, it seems, at all. Lately, it seems he’s been doing a spectacular job at failing. Failed his quiz. Failed to show up to class. Failed to notice things around him. Failed to speak up. Failed to solve his own problems. Failed to help a tourist take a picture at the ATX sign on the corner of Lamar and 5th because he didn’t understand how to use their phone.

He ends up at Irene’s, which looks much like any other restaurant and bar downtown. It’s crammed into a lot that doesn’t look like much. A bunch of signs warn not to park in the Frank and Angie’s parking lot. Jared is grateful for not driving; the only available spot nearby would involve parallel parking. If he tried to parallel park in the Mercedes, well, nothing good could come out of that.

A pink neon sign lets folks know they’ve reached Irene’s. There’s a tiny pick-up window, an outdoor patio with picnic tables and umbrellas, and an indoor space. Jared notices that the patrons of Irene’s look very put together and well-off. But, no one pays him any attention, so that’s good.

Inside, Jared walks over to the hostess.

“You must be Jared,” Ricky chirps, hand held out. “Josh said to expect you. Right this way.”

Ricky leads the way, never once faltering her step. Jared imagines himself in her shoes--literally in her shoes. They’re white pumps that look like they could kill a man at twenty paces. He couldn’t walk in those wearing sweatpants. He isn’t sure how she walks in them black fishnets, a red and black plaid dress, a black leather belt, and red vinyl gloves. She’s gorgeous, and everyone they pass by knows it.

Temptation begs Jared to ask her how to be that confident.
Worry over offending her keeps his mouth clamped shut.

“Right here,” Ricky announces. She brings Jared to a table near the kitchen, tucked away from the bar, in a mostly quiet and secluded corner. “Can I bring you something to drink or eat while you wait? Josh said he’d be a while yet.”

“Oh. Uh. A Coke, please.”

“You want me to toss a shot of rum in that?”

“I’m not...”

“I know,” Ricky says with a smile. “But you sure look like you could use one.”

Jared blushes and nods. “I feel like I could, if I’m honest.”

“You set yourself down, look over the menu, and I’ll bring you back something cold.”

Two minutes later, Ricky brings him back two of something cold--one the color of the neon sign out front, the second a Coke with a kick. Jared tries to pace himself. Nothing like meeting with his future brother-in-law while being totally wasted. Two drinks probably wouldn’t smash him, but the way Ricky defines something cold could probably knock him out if he’s not careful.

He’s right next to an open space that’s typically reserved for large, private parties. It almost looks like a skating rink the way it’s set up. Like any bar or restaurant with outdoor space, Christmas lights line the perimeter. The bar, however, sets a more modern, sleek tone. People come here to sip and be seen. Jared sips, but he does not wish to be seen. He hides behind his phone and menu, and eventually orders a steak sandwich with a side of mac and cheese.

His phone doesn’t provide much in way of pleasant distractions. He can’t decide what’s worse--one hundred texts from Jensen or none at all.

No, wait.

None at all is worse.


This must be what people call, “space.” And Jared brought it on himself. It’s not fair of him to throw a tantrum, walk out, refuse to be followed, and then expect Jensen to reach out. Logically, he knows that.

Emotionally, it sucks.

He does answer the five texts from his mother with simple, short replies. If he tells her too much, she’ll want to solve everything. It’s tempting--especially since she would and do it right--but he refrains. He ain’t dead. There’s that.

Food arrives and Jared finds that despite his angst, he can still eat. Ricky brings him a second helping of mac and cheese, plus a big glass of water. She pats his shoulder before she walks back to the front.

In high school, Jared was on the debate team for a semester. He won two awards and a trophy based on his abilities to form logical, persuasive arguments and deliver them in a clear, consistent manner. Maybe he should apply those skills to his life right now. He could write everything down, lay it all
out, and sort through things in a rational and removed way. Yes. He can do this. He digs through his backpack, finds his notebook, and turns to a blank page.

Item number one: Jensen.

Should he separate this by bullet points or charts? Maybe it would be best to write on one page and make a chart on the other. Okay. Item number one: Jensen.

“Well, if I haven’t been running all over hell’s half acre. Jared?”

That voice.

Jared inwardly cringes. He sends a brief prayer to the gods of Austin, and sees Drew, bright eyed and bushy tailed.

“I knew I spotted you,” Drew gushes. “I thought, ‘Who is that tall drink of sweet iced tea over yonder?’ You know, I’ve been meaning to text you. I’m sooo glad I bumped into you.” Without asking, Drew plunks himself down at Jared’s table. He also sets down the two shopping bags he had been carrying.

Without energy, Jared mumbles some acknowledgement that yes, hello, he also sees Drew and knows that it is wrong to reach out and slap someone without at least giving them the opportunity to make a fool out of themselves first.

Drew is clearly in his element. He wears his hair slicked back and perfectly sculpted, silver and gold bracelets jingle on his arms, and his clothes show not one wrinkle, tear, or untamed thread.

“Well,” Drew laughs, “how the hell are you?”

“Great,” Jared answers and gives a thumbs up. “How the hell are you?”

“Oh, please, don’t even get me started.” Okay, sure, Jared won’t get him star… “You know it’s absolute chaos on sets these days. Everyone and anyone thinks they can just waltz right up to the photographer and make demands. Like, honey, please! There’s protocol to these things. And you know they don’t know that Jean has worked for Johnny and he’s practically joined at the hip with Donatella. Then they have the nerve to ask for a bite to nibble on in the middle of a shoot!” Drew makes some kind of dramatic pause and motion that look more to Jared like he’s swatting invisible flies. “It’s all about drive, Jared, you know? One weekend you’re in the Hamptons. The next weekend you’re staying at a Hampton Inn. Absolutely stressful, these newcomers.”

Jared doubts his resilience in the field of psychology if he has to counsel anyone like Drew.

Sparkly bracelets and all, Drew reaches across the table and places his hands over Jared’s. “Jared, before I forget, I must ask.”

“You must?” Jared clears his throat and takes his hands back, then grabs one of his two strong drinks for a long sip. “Ask what?”

“Oh, shit, I think I see Benji Lucho.”

“Who?”

“Don’t worry.” Drew smiles. “You’re with me. Just remember--nothing is truly off record.” Drew then stands and holds his arms out for Benji Lucho, who happens to be five feet tall and what Sherri would describe as higher maintenance than a stopped up sink.
Benji and Drew exchange kisses on the cheek, except, their lips don’t actually touch skin. Air kisses on the cheek. It’s odd.

Jared doesn’t stand up. He takes a bite of his sandwich.

“Darling, you told me Austin was heaven in the summer and I can’t find a decent salon that knows how to relax hair.”

“BLu, I know, the salon scene here is murder. Did you try the place I told you?”

“No. That’s another thing. Everything is so small here. This is hardly a city.”

“You’re so jaded and that’s why I love you.”

“Yes, well, I would love to meet your friend here, who seems like he’s very much been enjoying his cut of prime rib.” Benji Lucho extends a hand towards Jared and magically produces a business card. “Benji Lucho, columnist at People.” Rich people must have excellent eyes. The font on the card is tiny.

Both Benji and Drew take seats opposite of Jared.

They order drinks.

And settle in.

“Benji would love to interview you for a spread,” Drew reports. “I’m so surprised Jensen didn’t give the exclusive to People about your engagement.”

“We contacted him,” Benji chimes in. “Repeatedly. No one out of my office got a peep. He went with those people out of Malibu. They’ve got a circulation the size of, well, I won’t get into that. But to be honest, Jared, we are interested. The exposure would be phenomenal, I can promise you that.”

Drew elbows Benji. “Now, now, don’t corrupt him just yet. Look at him, he’s still so young and cute!”

“Youth is so subjective.” Benji takes a sip from his drink. “Anyone can be young--with the right staples and scalpel.”

“You are wicked, BLu.”

“I try my best. So, Jared, when can we schedule some time? I’m here another few days. Oh, maybe Wednesday. Thursday is awful, but Wednesday. Six? Dinner? Drew, dear, we’ll need somewhere to nosh.”

“Fixe,” Drew instantly answers. “That’s the only place to go.”

“We’ll let People pick up the tab,” Benji laughs. “I hear that you’re from a small town an hour away from here? I know how that is. I grew up in Kansas.”

“The awful Midwest.”

“Awful. Imagine being the only Filipino boy with style in Kansas.”

“Let’s not and say we did.” Drew raises his empty glass for another. “My god, I miss the drinks at that one place in Atlanta.”
Benji huffs. “You mean, Hotlanta?”

“Ooh, don’t get me started, don’t get me started, praise the lord for Georgia.”

“As I recall, you and Jensen spent some time in Georgia over the weekend.”

Before Jared can even begin to answer, Drew cuts in. “No, no, BLu, keep up. It was New Orleans. Jensen thought he was being so undercover, it was adorable. He’s so cute that way, right Jared? He thinks a baseball cap and sunglasses will throw off the paps.”

“Please,” Benji pretends to yawn. “As if.”

“Y’all look like you had some serious fun.”

“Well, they would have if the paparazzi that snapped them would have done a decent job of it. I don’t know how Massimo can get away with taking such shoddy pictures. But then again, that’s why we sacked him and he works for beans at whatever that rag is called.”

“A butterfly museum though,” Drew gasps. “How did you get Jensen to go? Well, I guess the better question is how did you cure his hangover? That man…” Drew shakes his head. “That man can knock back a drink or five.”

“It’s indecent how he can look so good hungover.” Benji raises his drink for another. “And so thin. Though I think--and correct me if I’m wrong--it looks like Jensen’s been enjoying some home cooking here in Austin. Don’t get me wrong. When he posed for Tomas I almost force fed him a sandwich. I mean, really. The man looked exhausted.”

“That was right around when he didn’t get the part of Captain America. He was devastated, poor thing. Jared, could you imagine him being Captain America? I don’t think I envy Chris Evans.”

“Hell no. Marvel is a bitch and a half. No, he’s lucky he was passed over. Though I can’t say I’m too happy about his newest project.”

“Jared, is it true he’ll be singing and dancing in this one?”

“Of course it’s true! Lillian told me. And you know Lillian.”

“Sometimes I think Lillian gets too invested.”

“Impossible. It’s dedication.”

“Well, I don’t mean to be vulgar, but Jensen has the pipes for long notes and the hips for a little jailhouse rock.”

Benji laughs. “Let’s not have a nosebleed, dear. I think we all belong to the same Jensen Ackles Fan Club. But Jared here is the lucky, lucky boy with the scoop.”

“Would the lucky, lucky boy with the scoop say that the cone is still… adequate?”

“And you say I’m nosy?” Benji swats at Drew. “Really. If I want to ask about someone’s penis, I’ll come right out and say it. What I’m most interested in though is why I haven’t seen you mingle, Jared. Why aren’t you out and about at the parties in LA? Or, my god brace yourselves, New York? I don’t know why everyone’s so obsessed with NYC.”

“Jensen likes to keep him close. He can be so possessive.”
“Interesting.”

“Of course, I don’t remember him that way. But that was back then! Forever and an age ago in gay years. My god, we were so young.”

“Young and hung, I presume?”

“Ha! Now who’s nosy?”

“Certainly not I. I do remember Janet saying something about Jensen’s early days.”

“Janet was such a bitter old hag.”

“Yes, but you don’t get to be the Editor in Chief without being a bitter old hag. She mentioned something about Jensen’s tastes leaning towards veal.”

“Oh god, a meat metaphor, how original.”

“Young,” Benji says, with no reservation, “and thirsty.”

“Thirsty?” Ricky interjects. She stands tableside, one hand on her hip, and stares down at Benji and Drew. “The only thirsty ones I see are the two of you. Y’all have finished your drinks.” She sets down a bill. “And I think it’s time for y’all to chit chat across the street. Now.”

Drew smiles at Ricky. “That’s funny, the three of us were just leaving for another bar.”

“No.” This voice comes from a different source. “I’m staying here.” Jared keeps his cool and maintains eye contact with Drew. “I’m meeting someone.”

That someone manages incredible timing. Still in his business suit and tie, Josh approaches the table, quickly scanning over Drew and Benji Lucho, who decide at that moment it is time to leave. And leave they do. Faster than the way they drank their drinks. And they leave Jared with the bill.

Ricky punches Josh’s shoulder. “Way to bust up my fun.” She then speaks into a walkie talkie. “Bertha, two pigeons headed towards the main door. Stop them. I’ll bring their check, since it seems they forgot.”

Josh rubs his shoulder and takes a seat next to Jared instead of across from.

He takes a deep breath. Jared takes a deep breath.

They look at each other and laugh.

“Bertha never lets anyone skip out on a check,” Josh shares. He steals a fry from Jared’s plate. “So I figure I’ll be hearing about how you’re meeting another man for drinks without Jensen pretty soon, huh?”

Jared rolls his eyes. “How could you tell?”

“I’m no movie star, but I know snakes when I see ‘em. That’ll be cool though. Now I get to be the next Nathan Fillion.”

“All I did was have pizza with him and then people freaked out that I was cheating on Jensen. Now look at me. I’m drinking really cold Coke with a man that isn’t my fiance. What’s next? Maybe I’ll show you my ankles. Or tell you how much is in my dowry.”
Josh brings Jared in for a hug. He pats Jared’s back. “Let’s talk first, then we can address the ankles and dowry. And full disclosure: any deal on your dowry I gotta run past my wife first.”

Finally, Jared manages a smile.

Ricky moves them over to the private section and brings Josh his own cold drink and a fresh plate of fries for them to share. After the first thirty minutes they’re together, Josh and Jared roll up their pants and expose their ankles to each other in a show of ankle solidarity.

Patient and kind, Josh listens to Jared as he maps out his list of worries.

It’s a pretty long list.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter exhausted me. can you imagine being like benji and drew all the time?

it's almost as bad as being like donna.

comments are love! thanks to Deb for the help on this. :D
Chapter 40

Josh orders two ice cream cones—one with crushed Oreos, the other with rainbow sprinkles and crushed Fruity Pebbles.

The ice cream at Irene’s turns out to be some of the best Jared has ever had. For three dollars, anyone can enjoy a cup or cone of cool soft-serve vanilla, good enough to hold its own plain, but better when topped. Jared shares this observation with Josh, who laughs and snorts in response. Carefully, Jared thinks about what he said and a light bulb practically goes off above his head. He swats at Josh and laughs along with him; he comments how of all people, he’d know about vanilla being topped. They both laugh harder.

Legs stretched out in front of them, they enjoy the shade provided by trees growing around and over Irene’s. The ice cream proves a sweet end to the two more sandwiches, avocado toast, and cabbage slaw Josh ordered at the start of their conversation. They neatly stacked all their plates for various servers to take away before digging into their ice cream.

“I don’t mean to derail,” Josh comments, in between licks. “But can I tell you something?”

“Of course. I don’t need to be the one always doing the talking.”

“Don’t you dare tell that to anyone else in our family.”

“Hey, I held myself just fine over Memorial Day.”

“Just wait until your first Thanksgiving or Christmas with us.” Josh sighs. “Now that takes stamina.” Jared smiles and shakes his head. “You’re doing a real great job at comforting me right about now.”

“Crud, I’m sorry. I’ll get back to my original story.”

“Wait… how pissed will your mom be if we don’t go to the Ackles’ Thanksgiving dinner?” Jared takes a small bite out of his ice cream cone. “Because I’m not looking forward to telling her that.”

Josh looks up for a moment, then back at Jared. “If I remember correctly, you and your momma help out at the soup kitchen that day? Back in Smithville?”

“Yeah,” Jared sighs. “But we’re focusing on Austin this year. After what happened last year.”

“Seems to me you’ve had quite a year.”

“I hardly know how to manage,” Jared admits. “I mean, you heard my schpeel. Everything keeps happening to me and I just kind of… exist. Or sometimes I don’t exist. I don’t know which one is worse. When I think I react the right way, there’s someone tellin’ me the opposite. When I think I’ve fucked up to all hell, there’s someone tellin’ me that I fucked up to all hell and back.”

Gently, Josh does as Jensen will often do: he bumps their shoulders together. “Sounds to me like you’ve got a case of the being eighteen years old.”

“Ugh, e tu, Brute? Everyone keeps saying that like I don’t know how old I am.”
“Hey now, I don’t mean no disrespect.”

“I know you don’t, but most people do. How can I keep proving to them that I’m more than just a teenager while at the same time being a teenager? Or young adult. Whatever.” Jared finishes his ice cream with a pout. “I’m just tired of people cutting me down because of my age, but then expecting me to act like I’m forty years old one hundred and ten percent of the time.”

Also finished with his ice cream, Josh nods. “That’s definitely frustrating. And let me tell you, even people who are almost forty like yours truly—even we haven’t got our shit together fifty percent of the time.”

“Lord, don’t I know that,” Jared grumbles. “Stones in glass houses.”

“Well, I’ll tell you a story.”

“Oh god, I’m sorry, I totally derailed.”

“Don’t worry. We got to it.” Josh finishes up his ice cream. “So you’ve met our mother…”

Jared refrains from pitching himself to the ground and screaming. “Yeah…”

Josh offers a knowing smile. “She never allowed Jensen to have any problems—couldn’t tolerate the thought that he might be pained or inconvenienced by anything. I think that’s probably why Loretta stayed with him as a housekeeper for so long. If our mother couldn’t live with him to make sure his life was like butter, then at least she had Loretta there.”

“How’s she doing? Loretta, I mean.” Jared feels an obligation to ask.

“Fine. Nosy, like always. Mac is trying to get her to ease up on the kids after school.”

“That’s… good.”

“You’re too nice, Jared,” Josh laughs.

Grumbling, Jared sighs. “So I’ve heard. Go on.”

“My brother was a premie. He was supposed to be the last kid, so until Mac surprised everyone, he was the baby. I didn’t model like my mom wanted, didn’t go into show business like my mom wanted, didn’t go to UT like my mom wanted. All I did was get a degree in Computer Engineering.”

“How awful.”

“Right? Except it was. Even my dad—the guy who actually was an actor—didn’t push me or Jensen towards something in modeling or acting. It was easy for me to escape it. I didn’t have talent or skill at either one of those things. Shit, cardboard cut outs were better than I was at the three auditions my mom forced me to go to.”

The patio lights flicker on and add a warmth to the outdoor space. More people fill into Irene’s for drinks and dinner. The door to the kitchen never stays closed for longer than ten seconds as staff pour in and out.

Josh looks up at the largest tree above them. “You know our mom never let Jensen climb trees? She was afraid he’d break his nose.”

“Didn’t he?”
“Yes to both. He did climb trees whenever she wasn’t around or we’d ride out on the ranch. And he did break his nose. Playing baseball. Which she also didn’t want him to do.”

“That’s… interesting.” Jared fidgets for a second and runs a hand through his hand. “I broke my arm when I was six years old. I rode my bike down a hill, crashed into a fence, flipped over, and landed on my left arm.”

“And you survived, how remarkable!” Josh sighs. “But it was our mother’s sworn mission in life to protect Jensen from anything and everything. Kid swiped his lunch money at school? She was there to lecture the kid, the kid’s parents, the teacher, and the principal. Didn’t get cast for the school play? Hello, drama teacher, homeroom teacher, and principal. The poor dude who took school pictures didn’t catch Jensen’s smile the right way? She’d go after him, his supervisor, and the company’s CEO--then hire another photographer to do things right. Jensen Ross Ackles was never, ever allowed to step off of the golden pedestal on which Donna Ackles had placed him on since birth.”

“Yikes.” That’s an understatement--more like, dear god. “But… then how did Jen…”

“Not become an asshole?”

“…yes.”

“Our dad and grandparents managed to exert some influence on his goofball ass. And he had his friends in high school. We wrangled him into shit all the time, most of which our mother is to never know about. I’m also not telling you all of this just to point the finger at our mother. But you know what happens when you grow up with a parent like her?”

“I cannot say that I do.”

“Well, two things. When you grow up with someone fixing all your problems for you--guess what you do when you get older? You figure that everyone else’s problems are yours to fix too. And, because of how we grew up and my brother’s work, most of what gets problems fixed seems to be money. Problem here? Throw some money at it. Problem there? Write a check.”

“This seems familiar,” Jared says, nodding along. “Very familiar.”

Josh shrugs. “It ain’t bad. He’s not awful for helping out by writing a check here or there. I’m not trying to talk shit about my little brother or make bullshit excuses to cover his ass. I’m just trying to give you some perspective about how he manages things out of his control. And that’s the second thing growing up like we did does to you--you have to have your life in control, your shit together, one hundred and twenty percent of the time.”

Since their meeting, it has been obvious to Jared that growing up with Donna must not have been easy or altogether pleasant. But the extent to which Josh details her influence in Jensen’s childhood… just hearing it makes Jared feel completely exhausted.

Once more, Josh bumps their shoulders together. “Your momma let you make mistakes and learn from them, even if they were tough lessons. I bet after you broke your arm, you were a lot more careful on that bike.”

Cheers sound out from one of the larger community tables inside Irene’s. The noise doesn’t distract Jared from his train of thought. He sits leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, hands propping up his chin.

He devotes a few moments to forming his next question. “Knowing this, how do I… take this into consideration but still hold Jen accountable for some of the stuff stressing me out?”
Josh stretches and stands up for a second before sitting back down. “Okay, so the best answer to your question is a little above my pay grade as a Computer Engineer and concerned brother-in-law. But!” He gives Jared a reassuring pat on the back. “The fact that you ask that? You’re already like three thousand steps ahead of most folks engaged to be married.”

“Thanks,” Jared murmurs. “But I don’t feel that way ninety-nine percent of the time.”

“Do you think Jensen does?”

“Yeah…?”

“I think,” Josh says, standing up again and extending a hand to Jared, “y’all need to talk a little more, both be a little more honest, acknowledge your mistakes, and learn from them before they keep happening.”

Standing up, Jared asks, “Okay, but Josh, how the hell do I get the paparazzi to stop following me around?”

“Honest answer?”

“Uh huh.”

“You probably don’t. Maybe not just yet.”

“I was afraid you’d say that.”

“That’s not to say there aren’t ways to manage it. You’ve got some famous friends now. Maybe it’s time to start asking them how they manage.”

Ricky sweeps by to let them know the staff has to start setting up the patio for a private party. Jared helps her carry back the rest of their plates and glasses and Josh insists on paying. With Ricky’s blessing, they leave Irene’s. For a moment, they chat about Austin and the construction all over Sixth Street and San Jac.

Tentatively, Jared inquires after Josh’s plans afterwards.

“I’m free,” Josh says with a smile and a shrug. “I’ll probably crash here instead of driving back to freakin’ Killeen though.”

“Stay with us.”

“Look at you, being mighty thoughtful. We’ll ask Jensen together, yeah?”

“Yes.”

“Anything else you wanna do while we’re out and about? Maybe something you do to let off some steam?”

“Well… that depends. Do you care about being seen with me?”

Josh laughs while unlocking his car. “Hell, I should be asking you that. Are you settling for Jensen’s brother now? Are you after the hearts of the Ackles’ brothers? I don’t see any paparazzi here to cover that scoop.”

In the car, Jared provides directions and full disclosure.
Just because Josh has been so nice to him, dropped everything to drive almost two hours to visit, and happens to be Jensen’s brother doesn’t mean that anyone, even Jared, will have mercy on him with what they’re about to do. He issues directions from the passenger’s seat—take Lamar, go north, and on the left, across from the Whataburger, turn into a tiny strip mall and even tinier parking lot.

Every Monday night, Outlaw Moon Games & Toys hosts a DnD night.

For a hot minute, Jared worries that Josh doesn’t play DnD or any tabletop boardgame at all. “If this isn’t your thing, we can totally do something else.”

Josh enters Outlaw and claps his hands together at the sight of multiple tables of games being played. He issues Jared a stern and somber warning.

“I’m a Computer Engineer, Jared. These are my people.”

A warlock and a wizard sit down to a game.

The warlock bumps shoulders with the wizard every now and then.

Chapter End Notes

whee! an update! :D

no joke—if you go to irene's, you have to try their ice cream. it's fantastic.

i'm struggling with medical stuff still (sigh!), with a new diagnosis and new treatments and all that jazz. but at least i get to outline fic plots in my head when i'm at treatments. so there's that. XD

i tried really hard to balance dialogue and everything else in this chapter. like, i wanted mostly dialogue but also wanted to flesh out everything going on in beyond what was being said... so... comments are love, like always. <3
“Jared. I kicked ass tonight. Serious ass.”

“Hey! I helped. That owlbear was something else.”

“Okay, I admit you did help. But what about that stone giant? That was pure Josh.”

“Dude, first of all, only Adam West gets to refer to himself like that. Second of all, rest in peace Mr. West. Third of all, I’m the one who rolled a nine to help you finish off your precious stone giant.”

“Okay, okay, can we both just agree that we’re lucky we didn’t run into any kuo-toa? Those things are butt ugly.”

“Oh, look at the pot calling the kettle black.”

Josh gives Jared a friendly shove on the way back to his car. They had a great time playing DnD. Luckily, Juwan was their dungeon master. Jared has played in a few campaigns and quests with him before, so he felt more at ease sitting down and kicking ass. Juwan also understood that Josh and Jared needed to keep their quest short--an hour max.

It was just enough time to get lost in the game, forget about Benji Lucho and Drew, and regain some confidence. He might not be able to walk through a crowded space like Ricky, but he can, at the very least, feel confident in his DnD skills.

If only ACC offered classes in DnD.

In the car, Josh talks about how he could never get Jensen into tabletop games. He even started Jensen off with easy ones or incredibly short campaigns. Since Jensen enjoyed drama and theater in high school, Josh figured he’d fit right into the tabletop scene. Nope. Not even a speck of interest. And when Mac was finally old enough to understand tabletop games, she thought of DnD as a dinosaur and preferred to play newer games.

As they drive through Austin, Jared shares that he learned DnD from Sherri. Every other Friday night she’d order a pizza and he would set up the table. It was like that for a few years, until she started working more and Jared wanted to play longer campaigns.

“I used to play with Memo and Charlie,” Jared sighs, looking out the window. The bright, jam-packed restaurants on Congress fly by.

“Y’all can still play, even if you don’t have time for a four hour campaign.”

“You’d think that.” Jared holds his backpack close. “Do you think I’ve changed? I mean, I know you haven’t known me that long, but do you think I’m…” The right words refuse to form. “Do you think I’m fake?”

At a stop light, Josh looks at Jared, his expression serious and concerned. “No, I don’t think you’re fake. And you’re right, we haven’t known each other that long, but I don’t think anyone needs to know you for more than ten minutes to see how genuine you are.”
Jared trusts Josh. But not enough to silence the insecurity building in his chest as they approach the condo. John’s SUV sits on the driveway, a clue that Jensen hasn’t been alone this entire time, which is somewhat comforting. The lights from the living room cast a marigold net on the lawn. That, plus the cheesy *home sweet home* sign on the front door that Jared hung up last month, makes the condo look cozy and welcoming. Standing on the driveway, Jared briefly thinks about how much he likes the curtains the interior decorator chose for the living room. They provide privacy, yet the fabric makes it look like fireflies hang around.

Gently, Josh places a hand on Jared’s shoulder. “My brother’s not gonna yell at you,” Josh murmurs. “And he’s not gonna send you to your room or think any less of you.”

“Can I get that in writing?”


Josh has been to the condo quite a few times. He helped Jensen and Jared move around boxes and furniture, spot painting, and organization during their move. About once a month, he visits for a low key barbecue between the three of them. He may or may not have enabled Jensen’s enthusiasm for barbecuing and smoking meat. They have plotted on making beef jerky, but haven’t had the time to follow through.

Jared breathes a sigh of relief when he key still works in the locks. That’s a good sign.

Reason tries to tell him it would be ridiculous for Jensen to change the locks after one argument and that even if he did, that would still serve as an important sign of where their relationship is headed. Still, it’s tough to maintain reason, optimism, and logic when so much has gone so wrong in such a short amount of time. Jared shucks his backpack, toes off his shoes, and announces that he’s home.

“In the kitchen,” John calls out. “Y’all can grab some spoons and seats.”

A massive, decadent chocolate cake sits on the kitchen island, already half-eaten. Nearby, a tub of Haagen Dazs vanilla bean ice cream slowly melts into cold soup. Two glasses of ice and whiskey round out the rest of the island’s countertop.

Jensen looks up and immediately locks eyes with Jared.

Can Jensen see the same exhaustion, frustration, and ardent longing in Jared’s eyes as Jared sees in his?

“Josh, good to see you,” John rumbles, shaking Josh’s hand. “Nice surprise.”

“Thanks, you too. Yeah, I was in Killeen.”

“Bunch of nothing up there.”

“You got that right. Cheaper for the client, though. You know how it is.”

“Of course. How’s the family?”

“Everyone’s good. Except Megan. She’ll tell you I am the meanest and the most horrible and she’s two days away from dying.”

“How old is she again?”

“Eleven. Tam and I won’t let her get her ears pierced until she’s sixteen.”
“That’s five years off. You think she’ll survive?”

“I have a hunch she will. Just barely.”

At the Ackles’ Memorial Day gathering, Megan begged Jensen to talk to Josh. She pleaded and presented three or four unquestionable facts about why making her wait five more years was completely cruel and unreasonable. Jensen promised nothing. But Jared knows he’s already bought her two pairs of clip-on earrings for her birthday in August. Jensen almost bought her the real deal until Jared chimed in that there’s no sense in creating possible conflict over piercings. Clip-ons, Jared convinced Jensen, are a good compromise.

Jared takes a seat next to Jensen.

They sit in silence, neither of them moving, while Josh and John talk. Jared picks up a spoon and tentatively takes a bite of cake. Chocolate and rum hit his taste buds. Did Ricky bake this cake?

“I might as well help these two out.” John takes his seat again, across from Jared and Jensen. He keeps his voice calm and tone soft. “I’m gonna put this out there and then Josh and I are gonna disappear to get ourselves a drink.”

Josh asks Jared if that might be okay, if he feels comfortable. Jared agrees that it sounds like the best thing to do and tells him again how much he appreciates their afternoon. He’d like Josh to stay and hold his hand through this, but that’s not exactly how real life works.

John continues. “Okay then. I think y’all need to put some thought into what to do about three things: school, cars, and time together. Ain’t no one expecting you to hash it all out in five minutes--don’t go putting bandaids on things. But there’s also no need to reinvent the wheel here either.”

Their support systems exit the kitchen.

Fuck.

Jared buzzes with anxiety and fear. He just wants to get this over with and instantly go back to being them. This stifled, silent, awkward feeling between them can go to hell.

Yesterday, they were in New Orleans talking about butterflies.

Today, they’re in the kitchen watching ice cream melt.

Fuck, it’s been a long day.

And it seems like it might be a long night until Jared hears words coming out of his mouth. Desperate, honest, sincere words that don’t sound the least bit rehearsed or forced. All at once he’s apologizing for walking out, disappearing, and refusing to communicate. It’s like he’s riding a bicycle for the first time. He starts off wobbly, veers to the left, to the right, stops and starts, narrowly dodges obstacles, and ends up pushing forward despite all that.

He spills his guts.

He shares that the Mercedes overwhelms and intimidates him; he would have liked some input on the car. School is awful and it’s crushing Jared, little by little. He’s always been good at and enjoyed school. In his short time at ACC, it feels like he walked in on some kind of Twilight Zone and fell flat on his face. Not a single classmate has walked up to him and offered their friendship or attention. The people who approach him outside of class are random strangers asking for Jensen’s autograph or an appearance on campus. His professors either ignore him or go out of their way to call him a
celebrity. The only time he enjoys being on campus is spent in the greenhouse with the horticulture students and Wil, who offer him tea and flowers to take home.

But that’s not going to earn him college credit.

He’s not even learning anything about the flowers he takes home.

Every single day he dreads going outside, looking at the car he can’t properly drive, getting to campus only to be ambushed and followed by paparazzi, sitting in classes he doesn’t feel welcomed in, and coming back home to an empty house, then going to sleep in an empty, Jensen-less bed.

Jared’s voice alternates between frenzied high and exhausted low pitches. His hands flutter, unsure of what to do while once reclusive words take center stage. He wishes he could apologize for simple things with simple fixes, like breaking a coffee mug or leaving the car on empty all the time.

As he speaks, the truth of what John said about bandaids sets into his mind.

This won’t be the only conversation. This won’t even be their last argument.

Once again holding the spoon in his hands, Jared finally gets to the heart of the issue. “I’m sorry,” Jared says. “I’m sorry that I haven’t told you any or much of all this. I don’t want to be a burden. I don’t want to cause problems. I don’t want to be ungrateful.” He takes a deep, slightly uneven breath. “And most of all, I don’t want you to worry.”

He looks up from the spoon and at Jensen. Please, Jared internally shouts, say something. Anything.

Jensen rubs a hand over his jaw, then through his hair. A frown tugs at his mouth. How can someone look so exhausted, yet still so desireable? Jared wants him. In the way the roots of a tree want water and sunlight after both drought and storm.

In one swift motion, Jensen brings Jared into his embrace.

Chest to chest, cheek to cheek, he brings them together with unparalleled strength. He talks into the crook of Jared’s shoulder. For more than a moment, Jared feels Jensen riding a bicycle for the first time—wobbly, unsure, and afraid. His words run together as he pedals faster and faster, fearful that he might not get it all out. In one big breath he admits that he needs to check-in with Jared more often about specific things. He needs to ask before doing instead of assuming it’ll work out in the end. He needs to make time to talk about the serious aspects of their relationship instead of opting for pleasure and fun. Jared is never, has never, and will never be a burden or a problem. And Jensen will always worry, even if told not to. It’s just how he handles that worry that needs to change and he knows it.

He needs to learn how to support, not save.

Clammy palms rest on Jared’s neck—the very place a few, light marks remain from New Orleans. “I’m sorry, sweetheart,” Jensen adds with a sniffle. “I really am.”

Seems like they’re both learning how to pedal without falling over. Maybe this is one of those times they forgot to wear helmets, pedaled too fast, took a sharp corner, and completely wiped out.

Nothing’s completely fixed. But it ain’t all broken, either.

Chapter End Notes
special thanks to my betas for all the help with this chapter. <3

apology chapters are tough! i’m wiped out. i read about ten different relationship articles and skimmed through books.

comments are love. thank you again for being so patient.
For the first time in months, Jared and Jensen go to bed before midnight.

They put away the cake, the ice cream, and set the dishes in the sink. A different kind of silence occupies their usual nighttime routine. It doesn’t feel awkward, but it doesn’t feel like any other night, either.

Climbing into bed, they each decide that there will be no more problem solving tonight.

The lump in Jared’s throat gradually disappears and takes with it the pressure on his chest. Warmth seeps into him, head to toe, once he climbs into bed and finds his place curled up against Jensen. He breathes in the smell of laundry detergent and toothpaste. Once Jensen turns out his nightstand light, Jared sighs.

Jensen’s feet are cold. Jared rubs their feet together.

With care, Jensen kisses the top of Jared’s head.

“It’s time to rest,” Jensen murmurs. “You can close your eyes, you’ve done your best.” He places one of Jared’s hands on his chest. “This time we have together, is our shelter from the rain. I will share the weight you carry.”

Jensen brings Jared’s hand to his lips and kisses Jared’s ring, then each finger after that.

Their home is quiet. Their blankets are ample. Their bed is soft.

“Let me be your sanctuary. Let me be your safe place to fall.”

They sleep with their hearts in likeness, mirrors of each other for longer than one single moment.

Chapter End Notes

omg we're at 42 chapters! :O

decided not to make y'all wait for this tiny chapter. thank you to Deb for recommending the song and helping out with this piece.

phew! so many feels.
Jared wakes up before Jensen.

Silent, Jared takes this opportunity for observation and reflection. Tuesday. Today is Tuesday. How is that possible? It seems like a million and one things have occurred--things befitting to six months' time. But no, it’s only Tuesday. New Orleans was only two days ago.

A glance at the time proves Jared’s anxiety to be correct. He has once again missed both his classes for today, waking up at a record-breaking two in the afternoon. In the great honor of all his burrito king traditions, Jared hides underneath the covers, pillows, and Jensen. How have they managed to stay asleep in bed for fourteen hours? And even though Jared’s bladder and kidneys scream at him to quit sulking and march to the bathroom, he duly ignores his body’s demands. If he gets up, he will admit that life exists outside of this bed.

He doesn’t even feel that rested, which upsets him, because sleeping next to Jensen guarantees him a good night’s rest. Instead, he feels groggy, slightly nauseous, and cranky. He fell asleep instantly last night, the second after Jensen finished singing. There weren’t even any nightmares to blame this on.

Who needs nightmares after meeting Drew and BLu?

Or after everything Memo said? Exactly when did he start having a crush on Jared? Why didn’t he say anything then, instead of waiting until after Jared was in a relationship and engaged? And why does Memo make this all out to be Jensen’s fault? Jensen has been nothing but open and welcoming to Jared’s friends. And has Jared really changed because of Jensen’s celebrity status? Changed in a bad way?

How can he be so incredibly naive about the world? Why didn’t his mother prepare him for something like this? How could she not have predicted that Jared would catch the eye of a famous actor who happens to be wealthy, incredibly handsome, and absolutely taken with Jared?

Jared huffs and pops his head out of the blankets.

Blaming his mother--or anyone else--won’t help anything.

How’s he going to explain this to Anza? Unless Memo already told her about it, which is possible. Jared refuses to move and check his phone. That, too, will mean he admits to life outside of this bed.

Did Charlie know? Did Candy? Why didn’t anyone tell him?

Focus. Focus on something good. Something positive. Something like the star of ten feature films. Something like the man who regularly attends red carpet parties, awards ceremonies, industry events, screenings, auditions, and interviews. Something like the man who drools and snores in his sleep, doesn’t fully understand how god damn adorable his freckles are and how he should fight against makeup artists covering them up, and frequently calls Jared to tell him how much he misses Jared’s culinary specialty: boxed macaroni and cheese.

In quiet adoration, Jared commits to memory the image of Jensen sleeping soundly in their bed.

Until Jensen sneezes in his sleep.
Directly in Jared’s face.

“Sweetheart, I’m flattered, but what were you doing?”

“Nothing,” Jared mumbles as he turns the shower on. “I was just trying to gaze lovingly at my fiance’s face first thing in the morning.”

Jensen laughs, as if he has any right to do so. “I’m sorry, Jay. I said I was.”

“I know you did.”

“Maybe don’t gaze lovingly at me so closely next time.” Without a second thought, Jensen sits down to pee and read the paper. Jared leaves him to it and steps into the shower.

The spray of hot water on his back and shoulders causes him to sigh. He leans back and allows the beautiful shower head with twenty different settings do its job. After a solid minute, Jared sits down on the stone seat, a perk in the master bathroom shower, and contemplates the state of this afternoon. There’s so much to talk about and work out that he can’t focus on any one particular problem.

“Just shower,” Jensen calls out. “I can hear the wheels turning and everything can wait until after breakfast.”

“It’s almost three. That’s not breakfast.”

“Hey.” Jensen steps into the shower. “You’re gonna need to turn that frown upside down real soon, partner.”

Steam builds in wisps and curls around them. The warmth of the water mixes with the presence of freckles, a kind smile, and wet tawny hair. Before stepping in, Jensen flipped the switch for the heated tiles. Jared makes room for Jensen on the seat.

“I don’t want to turn my frown upside down,” Jared grumbles. He leans against Jensen, their skin sticking together from the water and steam. “Things were going so well and then... “


And that’s only describing everything Donna-related.

Sitting side by side, naked and wet, Jared and Jensen hold hands in silence for a few minutes. It’s odd for Jensen to let Jared’s words trail off and not pick them up, but it isn’t devastating or catastrophic. Eventually, Jensen picks up a bottle of shampoo and washes Jared’s hair. He hums to himself and takes his time with the shampoo. Calm, fearless, devoted fingers work in hypnotic circles. Jared breathes in steam and fragrant scents of vanilla and almond. He doesn’t have to ask for conditioner; Jensen stays two steps ahead of him.

This.

Finding a man that takes his time to wash his hair--that’s called hitting the jackpot.

They don’t even have to conceal, hide, or cover-up their relationship. Jared can declare to the entire world without worry or hesitation that Jensen washes his hair. They share the shower. Jared returns the favor and focuses on the difference between their hair textures, the smell of Jensen’s shampoo, and the fact that they share the same brand of conditioner.
The heated tiles provide continuous heat long after they finish with their hair. Jensen lathers up body wash on a washcloth. He presses the cloth to Jared’s chest and starts from there, not an inch of Jared’s body forbidden or forgotten. Before Jared can reciprocate, he takes Jared’s left hand and kisses his palm.

Delight courses through Jared’s muscles and joints.

Washcloth in his hand, he shuts out all other thoughts. He starts as Jensen did, on Jensen’s chest, and languidly works his way out, up, and down. He pays careful attention to each hill, valley, and curve. Here, they practice a language without words, harmonizing and in sync.

Droplets run down freckled skin, more valuable than any diamond.

Jared turns off the water and indulges in one, sweet, wet kiss.

Jensen sighs and licks the beads of water trickling down Jared’s throat. His tongue and lips drag over Jared’s skin with concentrated familiarity, territorial and doting. Even after Jensen wraps them up in one large towel, Jared welcomes continued licks and kisses to his neck, shoulders, and jaw. Jensen even bites a strand of hair and tugs on it. All the while, his fingers dip into the small of Jared’s back.

Moments dissolve into minutes into seconds into each fluid inhale and exhale.

This is honeyed, possessive, and succulent tranquility.

“Sweetheart.”

“Hmm?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too, Jen.”

Jensen brings them chest to chest, still damp.

“Jay, I wanna marry you.”

His hips against Jensen’s, Jared basks in the intensity of every feeling. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.” Jensen noses Jared’s hair. “Christmas or New Year’s?”

“Are we… picking a date?”

“We are.”

The frown turns upside down.

Chapter End Notes

hi y'all. some of you know, but for those who don't follow tumblr...

doctors have found masses on my liver and we're doing a biopsy next week to see if this is cancer or not. i've had cancer before, so this puts me at greater risk of it returning. please be patient with updates. i'll try my best.
thank you for being here. <3
Jensen orders the pizza while Jared sets up their favorite couch in the living room. In sweatpants and matching Cowboy shirts, they settle in for an evening of television, television, and more television. They start with The Nanny, because Jared has never seen it and Jensen insists. When the pizza arrives, Jared steals the remote and switches to the Food Network and whines every time Jensen tries to change it.

“That looks like a plate of yuck,” Jensen grumbles.

“Well, they had terrible ingredients to work with. Who can make anything pretty out of finger limes and duck eggs?” Jared takes a big bite out of his slice of pizza. “And I cannot believe the look Ted gave that one dude. Holy shit.”

Folding his pizza, Jensen takes care not to get cheese or sauce on his shirt. “He barely did anything with his face, Jay. And his tone of voice,” Jensen says, deftly imitating Ted Allen, “never changes.”

“Is someone jealous that he doesn’t host Chopped?”

“Ha, hardly.”

“I had a crush on Ted when he was on Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.” Jared reaches for another slice of pizza, then sits cross legged on the couch. His left knee rests against Jensen’s right thigh. “I used to watch that every night at midnight.”

“Midnight?”

“We didn’t have Bravo, so I had to stream it. The soonest the new episodes popped up was midnight.”

“Hmm. So Ted Allen, huh?”

“What?” Despite his best attempts at preventing it, Jared still blushes. He tries to hide behind his pizza. “Oh no, fuck, that dude is using the ice cream machine.”

“Is that some crime against nature?”

“No, no, Jen--the ice cream machine never works. Oh, and look, surprise, surprise.”

“That one woman is making champagne pudding, that sounds good.”

“Ehh. Sounds good in theory, but sounds like it has the potential to be super runny.”

“Jay.” Jensen looks at Jared, smiling, but shocked. “You’re super into this, huh?”

Jared laughs and gestures at the screen. “How can you not be?! I’m dying to know what Miguel is gonna do now that the ice cream machine has, once again, proven to be an epic fail. And I really want Sharli to win. I think it’s pretty awesome she’s going simple but high-end. And she’s cooking Filipino food.”

“If we’re gonna watch more of this, I need something else to drink,” Jensen says with a laugh. “I
think we deserve some champagne.” He pats Jared’s knee and head before disappearing towards the wet bar.

He brings out a bottle of champagne, imitates Ted Allen while narrating facts about this bottle. Laughing hard, Jared pauses Chopped. “Contestants, this is a champagne that the French call a tete de cuvee, or, top of the batch. A genuine, bonafide bottle of Krug with a full body and long finish. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the perfect bottle for a truly refined palate.” Jensen expertly opens the bottle without it getting everywhere, and hands Jared the first glass. “You’ll see that it has a hint of hazelnut and a touch of honey.”

“Does it pair well with pepperoni?”

Jensen pours his glass and sits back down. “I sure fucking hope so.”


Crinkles form around bright green eyes. “Sweetheart, I just read the label.”

“You read it very well. Thank you.” Jared murmurs, not bothering to hide his smile. “With everything that happened yesterday, I totally didn’t expect to be having champagne and pizza tonight.”

“Every night could be champagne and pizza night. All you have to do is say the word.”

“I’m sure your mom would just love that. You know how concerned she is about your vegetable intake.”

“There are mushrooms on this pizza.”

“No there aren’t.”

“Oh, right. I meant to add vegetables on here, but then I remembered, hey, this is pizza.”

“Tomato sauce counts as a veggie, Jen.”

“You’re right.” Jensen leans over and pecks a kiss on Jared’s cheek. “This is why I’m marrying you.”

Grinning, Jared clinks their glasses together. “Here’s to marrying me, I guess? And at least that’s a more family-friendly way to describe why you’re marrying me other than you like my ass.”

“Jay, I don’t just like your ass. I love it.” Jensen hooks an arm around Jared’s shoulders. He takes a swig of champagne and smacks his lips. “Ahhh. That hit the spot. I promise that my vows will be a lot more eloquent. And probably not read off of a label.”

This is them. This is their home, where they are free to banter, play, and tease. Jared basks in the feeling of Jensen draped all over him. Why would he ever need to leave the couch? For the moment, he doesn’t. And that seems to be enough to quell the worry that plagued him in the shower. Some wonderful emotional fairy allows him to bask in their comfortable party for two. Or maybe it’s the bubbly, sweet, rich champagne going quickly to his head. The thirty dollar pizza, which Jared paid for, ends up pairing well with the three hundred dollar bottle of champagne Jensen paid for.

“It’s a good metaphor,” Jared announces.
“What is, puddin’ pie?”

Jared snorts in response to puddin’ pie, but does not object and hopes this could be a recurring thing. He curls up to Jensen, happy, warm, and full of pizza and bubbly. “I’m pizza. You’re champagne.”

Finishing up his glass and slice of pizza, Jensen ponders the metaphor. “Hmm. I’m not sure about that. I think you’re champagne and I’m pizza.”

“You just wanna be pizza.”

“Maybe we’re both pizza?”

“Nope. Nope. That’s not how it works.”

“You’re sweet and bubbly like this sham pag knee.”

“Don’t,” Jared laughs. “Don’t pronounce it that way.”

“Too hick?”

“Too… yes, too hick.”

“I can be hick,” Jensen drawls. “Honey, I can be real hick.”

“Jensen, hicks don’t buy three hundred dollar bottles of champagne and have them around for a rainy day.” Jared playfully thumps Jensen’s chest. “Me? I know hick.”

“Baby, you worked in a bookstore.”

“Precisely. I’ve seen it all. You ever had anyone ask for a book with recipes for raccoon and rabbit stew?”

“…no.”

“I win the hick conversation. And I am not always sweet and bubbly.” Jared’s voice softens in tone and volume. “I definitely don’t feel that way lately. I feel awful. Like this hormonal, moody, angsty ball of anxiety and… ugh. Blech.” He sits up, mutes the television, and looks at Jensen. “I’m not like, super depressed, but it’s… maybe I’m getting there? I think.” Running a hand through his hair, Jared feels the champagne wrestle with the pizza. “And it’s fucking difficult to tell you any of this, because I don’t wanna be clingy, I don’t wanna be immature, and I don’t wanna be ungrateful. Or a burden.”

Jensen’s eyes go wide at that last part. Jared can see the urge to rush in and solve everything--Jensen’s default mode. For a few moments, it looks like Jensen might allow that urge to take over. But then he presses two fingers to his mouth, deep in thought, and waits another second to speak.

“Okay. First of all, I think you know, logically, that you’re not a burden to me. But something is telling you that you are? And I’m not sure what it is.”

“I don’t know either. I’m sorry.”

“Hey,” Jensen gently says. “No sorries. We’re good. We just need to figure out how to tackle these things together. You had the idea for pizza. I had the idea for champagne. And look at the awesome dinner we had.”

“You eat in Michelin star restaurants all the time and you’re calling pizza and champagne
“Jared. I like all kinds of food. Anyway, that’s not the point. So first of all, you’re not a burden, and I’ll repeat that as often as you need me to. I think… sometimes I feel like I might be holding you back? I don’t know. I can’t articulate it well.”

“You don’t.”

“Ah, see, why is it okay for you to tell me that, but not okay for me to do the same?”

“…I. I do not know.”

Jensen pours himself another glass of champagne and takes a small sip. “See? Okay. So second of all, I don’t think there’s anything wrong with being clingy. And I think clingy is not the right word. Ugh, see, this is why I don’t write scripts.” Jensen bumps their shoulders together. “I’m just… I don’t know how to tell you in such a way that it’ll sink in that you are none of the negative things you think you are.”

Jared munches on a piece of pizza crust. He takes a break from eye contact with Jensen. “I hate school, Jen. I’ve hated it since the first day and I hate that I hate it. I have always been good at school. But the harder I try to fit in, the more I suck at it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner though? If you’re struggling--with anything, not just this--I wanna know so I can help.”

“Because it’s my problem. I need to get myself out of it.”

“True, but that don’t mean I can’t support you.”

“Would you really support me or solve it for me?”


“Which is a great problem to have!” Jared tosses his arms up. “Oh, poor me, I won’t let my fiance solve my problems or help me out. That’s how I feel. Poor little Jared, can’t handle class, can’t drive his brand new Mercedes, can’t get along with his socialite mother-in-law.”

Jensen takes the remote and shuts off the television. Neither of them misses it. He pours another glass of champagne for Jared. This doesn’t seem like the greatest conversation to have right after they’ve picked a wedding date.

“My mother, a socialite?” Jensen scoffs, but smiles. “Did she pay you to say that? Because I bet a thousand dollars, that’s something Donna Ackles would do.”


“That’s a joke,” Jensen adds, handing over Jared’s glass. “It’s okay. I know my mother is a huge source of stress for anyone who isn’t herself. And her behavior has been a shit-fest of epic proportions.”

“Worthy of a romantic comedy, I’d say.”

“Maybe worse, but I’ll drink to that.”

They clink their glasses and do just that.
“Alright, so.” Setting down his glass on the coffee table, next to the now empty box of pizza, Jensen regains his focus. “I’m gonna make statements. You make statements. Then let’s see where we go from there. I think we got three main things to talk about: the car, school, and Memo.”

“I think we have three main things to talk about: school, the car, and Drew.”

“Good. Let’s eliminate other people from this right now. We can get to them later.”

“Okay.”

“That leaves us with school and the car.”

“Yes.”

“Do you like the car?”

“Yes and no.”

“What do you like about it?”

“I like that you gave it to me. I love that you gave it to me.”

“Nope. More than that. C’mom. Practical stuff.”

“Okay. Uh. I love the leather seats. I love that it’s brand new. I love how loud the stereo gets… once I figure out how to work the volume. I love how it drives.”

“Alright, excellent. Now, what don’t you like.”

“Do I have to?”

“Yes. I can take it.” Jensen pats his chest. “Scout’s honor.”

“You were never a Scout.”

“No, but I modeled as one! Work with me, Jay! C’mom.”

“I don’t like how much… stuff is inside it. It’s a car. It does not need rainbow lights in the backseat and the seat warmers are just… and the settings… and I can’t figure out the GPS or how to unlock and lock it without using the keys and I’m afraid that I’ll push one wrong button and go Looney Tunes.”

Jensen busts out laughing. “Looney Tunes? Like… push an eject button and go Wile E. Coyote?”

“Yes!” Jared makes a few wild gestures of terror. “One day I’m just gonna try to turn on the stereo and then you’ll just hear of some awful accident on Congress because an anvil fell on the car!”

“What a horrible feature on a car.”

“Jensen!”

“Okay, okay!” Jensen tries to reign in his laughter. He takes a deep breath. “Okay. I promise you. There is no eject or anvil button anywhere on your car. And I promise you that we have options. We can return the car.”

“It’s too late.”
“Eh, the dealership will just have to suck it up. But it sounds like you don’t completely hate the car?”

“No. Just… it’s incredibly overwhelming. And… ostentatious.”

“It’s a Mercedes. I bought it because of its safety rating, not because I thought you needed to look posh.”

“Yes, but no one else at school rolls up in a Mercedes.”

“No one else is getting chased by paparazzi, either. You’re in a unique situation.” Jensen takes Jared’s hand. “Sweetheart, your life has changed.”

Life has changed.

Jared knows that.

So why has it been so difficult to accept?

Jensen clears his throat. “I don’t think that I’ve been the best at introducing you to these changes. I think that’s what my dad was aiming at. Things should have been gradual. Instead, I kinda just… slapped a tuutuu on the situation and called it ready for opening night.”

Jared raises an eyebrow. “I liked my pizza and champagne metaphor better.”

“We can’t all be Shakespeare, Jay. Some of us have to settle for being the lowly actors.”

“Jen--I don’t want to quit school.”

“I thought we were talking about the car?”

“We were, but this just… I like school. I need to go to school. I don’t want to give it up.”

“I want you to go to school too, sweetheart. No one’s saying you have to give it up. I think it’d be great if we had a college grad in the house.” Jensen squeezes Jared’s hand. “I went to Los Angeles, not college. And no regrets, blah, blah, but man, I would have benefited from college.”

Somehow, Jared hadn’t thought of Jensen’s education.

“So you should,” Jensen continues. “You should definitely keep going. I’m all for that.”

“Okay.”

“Can I make a suggestion, though?”

“Of course.”

“You’ve got options. You could take these gen-ed courses online. Or you could go for classes online or in person at UT. I think one of those might be a better fit than what you’ve seen at ACC so far.”

“It’s too late in the semester for me to get a refund. I won’t earn any credits.”

Jensen nods. “I get it. But I think that you and John can talk to the higher ups and make a good case for at least seventy-five percent of your money back.”

“And it’s too late to enroll in summer or fall for UT this year.”

“Not for online stuff. At least, I think that’s how I remember it.”
“I just don’t want to keep deferring,” Jared sighs and flops onto his back. “And if I take online courses, will I learn the same stuff? What if I don’t learn well with that format? Jen, UT is also super expensive, even as a state school.”

Reaching over, Jensen places his hand on Jared’s forehead. “Slow down, puddin’ pie. Slow down.” He leans down and kisses Jared just as slow as he wants Jared to think.

“Get the refund,” Jensen murmurs. “Compare and contrast ACC’s fall online stuff with UT’s stuff.”

“I don’t want to go back to class,” Jared says, out loud for the first time. “But I’m not a quitter.”

“You ain’t quitting, Jay. You’re just finding the right fit. This isn’t it. Focus your energy, time, and money into finding the right one. This is an investment. Shit went sour, which wasn’t your fault, so now you gotta take your coin elsewhere.”

This isn’t going to sink in right away. Jensen senses that. He sits back up and pats Jared’s knee. “We can return the car and you can pick out a new one—or you can take a ninety minute class at the dealership. One on one, free of charge. You can take the class, think on it, and then decide the next move. Fuck, we can both take that class. I have no idea how to turn on the seat warmers and I need your ass at optimum temperature at all times.”

The next few minutes involve a brief pillow fight, the last of the champagne, and sloppy, hungry kisses.

Before heading up to their room for the night, Jared calls his mother. He puts her on speakerphone and allows Jensen and Sherri to joke around for a minute. Taking back his mother’s attention, Jared breaks the news.

“We set a date,” he announces, following Jensen up the stairs.

“Oh, honey, it’s about time!” Sherri shouts and whoops. “When is that man making a decent husband outta you?”

Jared slips ahead of Jensen and promptly swats at Jensen’s grabby, possessive hands.

“We’re having a wedding at midnight, momma. New Year’s Eve.”

Jensen chimes in. “With pizza and champagne!”

So far, those are the only wedding details they’ve got. But it’s one helluva start.

Chapter End Notes

biopsy results tomorrow. i’ve been in a lot of pain since wednesday night, but i’m better today and this was a great distraction. these two make me smile. and ahhh! we have a date!!! and actual working through issues!! what!!! i’m also happy that this is a longer chapter at 2,900 words. :)

this fic has turned out waaaay longer than i originally planned. i kinda wanna wrap it up, but there’s still so much to do. there won’t be the wedding in this installment. i’ll focus on that in the next one. but still so much to write!
comments are love. also, thank you so much for all y'alls thoughts and prayers. it really means a lot to me. i'm just filled with gratitude for y'all. it's been a tough month. fingers crossed for tomorrow. <3
An Announcement from Your Author

Results are in!!! I don’t have cancer!!!

I still have a serious liver condition with high risk of internal bleeding BUT it should go away on its own.

Thank you all for your support thoughts prayers and love. ❤

Merry Christmas!
Two days later, Jared finds himself on a plane to Vancouver.

He happens to sit in first class, next to a snoring, drooling, eye-mask-wearing Jensen. Temptation tells Jared to pull the mask back and let it go with a snap, but common sense chimes in with reason and logic. Jared settles for taking a picture to send to John, his mother, and Josh later.

Jensen fell asleep two hours into their six hour flight. Now in the fourth hour, he doesn’t show any signs of life aside from his rhythmic snores.

Jared places his earbuds back in and tries to focus on the psychology podcast playing. With Jensen’s encouragement, he downloaded a few podcast episodes in an effort to reign in his anxiety. Instead of reading a book, which he tried but couldn’t stick with, he chose this podcast, narrated by a cheerful psychologist with a perfect voice for radio. Before they left for the airport, Jared quickly scrolled down the list of episodes and chose a handful centered around anxiety, imposter syndrome, and how to deal with difficult people. Most of them have been helpful—especially the one about dealing with passive aggressive people—but after two and a half hours of episodes, Jared’s mind gives up.

Boredom starts to seep in, which leaves Jared’s thoughts to wander down less desirable avenues.

Before his thoughts can spiral and anxiety makes him claw at the window, he pulls up the soundtrack to The Hobbit. He sinks into the singing of dwarves and tries to wrestle his thoughts together.

Jensen got called back to set a couple days sooner than he had expected. He got down on both knees and begged Jared to go to Vancouver with him. And he didn’t so much as get down on both knees and beg so much as he blew Jared in the shower and mentioned it the three or four times he took a break to breathe. Once they were done doing everything in the shower but showering, Jensen proceeded to present facts on how going to Vancouver together would be a good thing for both of them, and how he noticed that the size and width of Jared’s cock has changed since they first started dating.

Jared feels blood rush to his face and his cock from these memories of the past two days.

They holed themselves up at home, where they were free to have sex wherever, whenever, and bask in comfort and familiarity. Jensen left once and only once to go get tacos from the nearest Torchy’s. When he got back, they ate in the kitchen, watched a movie in the living room, and made their way back up to the bedroom.

Unfortunately, reality called and interrupted their continued celebration of having picked a wedding date.

Vancouver is wonderful. Beautiful. Lovely.

It just isn’t Austin. Or Miami. While waiting to board, Jared asked Jensen if they could find a weekend to spend at the house in Miami. They’ll have to stay in a hotel while Jensen works on set, simply because it’s easier than renting an apartment or a house. They can come and go as they please, making it convenient for trips back and forth. But convenience comes at a price. Hotels don’t feel like home.
How can he miss Austin when he’s barely left it?

And what does it matter anyway, he’s with Jensen. That’s what matters.

Jared fishes his journal and a pack of markers out from his backpack underneath the seat. In rainbow colors, he writes down accomplishments from the past week.

#1. Called Josh for help.

That was a big deal, despite doubt telling him otherwise. He identified someone he could trust and actually reached out. Plus, he got to spend quality time with Josh and Josh alone. They feel less like in-laws and more like friends.

#2. Withdrew from ACC.

He can’t take all the credit for that one. Both John and Sherri went with him to his appointment with the Director of the Registrar’s Office. The three of them presented a united front and delivered their own experiences and perspectives—that of a student, a security expert, and the mother of a student. In the end, it was Sherri who got Jared a full refund. Not one single mother within a two hundred mile radius would go without hearing how her son was treated by ACC if he wasn’t given one hundred percent of his money back for both books and credit hours—in addition to the most sincere and kiss-ass apology ever given to a student in ACC’s history.

Which goes into number three.

#3. I let momma and John help me.

They insisted. He ultimately accepted. The world did not end and no one, Jensen included, thought any less of him for accepting the help in getting the ACC stuff sorted out.

#4. I applied to UT.

Somehow, in between sex and tacos, Jared filled out the online general education program. He wrote a two thousand word essay on why he chose an online program, his intended major, and how he could benefit from a Longhorn education. Jensen somehow managed to proofread the essay and Jared’s application. He paid the fifty dollar fee to apply as an early birthday present for Jared.

He should know the decision by the end of July, and he’s not incredibly worried about being accepted. It’s the financial aid part that scares him. Even though it’s a state school, UT still isn’t as cheap as ACC. And since he applied for part-time classes, most scholarships aren’t available to him. He has what he paid for ACC to cover a down payment at UT, but beyond that, he has no clue what else to do in terms of financing the rest of his credit hours.

#5. I think I know how to drive my own car. (???)

He’s at least fifty percent sure about that. At least.

The Customer Liaison Representative at the Mercedes Dealership—an older gentleman, Gerard—did the best he could with Jared and Jensen. At least Jared understands how to work the stereo and cruise control. And how to finally control those LED lights in the backseat.

It’ll be a while before Jared feels comfortable in the Mercedes, but, as Jensen pointed out, he won’t have massive anxiety attacks as he practices.

#6. I downloaded this podcast. And made an appointment with Jim for next week.
Jim was happy to hear from Jared. The Center misses him. Jim placed him in for a morning appointment on Wednesday, and encouraged him to call if he needs to reschedule.

Jared sets down his markers and looks over the brightly colored pages. He then looks over at Jensen, envious of how deep some people can sleep on a tube shooting through the sky—though Jensen does have infinitely more travel experience.

What must it be like for Jensen to fly back and forth between Vancouver, Los Angeles, Austin, and Miami? Jared noticed that two of the four flight attendants knew Jensen and were excited to meet Jared. Even the ticketing agent welcomed Jensen back for another flight, then chatted with him about football and chili. Maybe Jensen’s naturally outgoing, extroverted personality makes all of this easier.

#7. I spent quality time with Jensen.

Two months ago, that wouldn’t have been such an accomplishment.

It was easy to get spoiled having Jensen around in between projects.

Jensen fidgets and murmurs in his sleep. Jared takes his earbuds out in hopes of catching what exactly was said. At first, it’s unintelligible, but after the third time, Jensen very clearly murmurs, “… right there.”

Someone is having a very good dream.

Carefully, Jared places his right hand on Jensen’s upper thigh and gives a squeeze. Jensen responds as predicted—he gives a low, gravely moan. Except, he moans a little louder than Jared anticipated.

“Jen,” Jared laughs and moves his hand to thump Jensen’s chest. “Wake up.”

With a snort, Jensen sits up, takes the eye mask off and scrubs at his face. “What? We there already?”

“It’s been four and a half hours,” Jared whines. He quickly puts away his journal and markers. “Entertain me. Pay attention to mee. Hey--what were you dreaming about?”

“Huh?” Jensen yawns and stretches.

For a moment, Jared and Jensen lock eyes. Jared smiles and glances down at the enthusiastic tent in Jensen’s jeans. Jensen also glances, then laughs, turns bright red, and tries to cover it up by crossing his legs. When this does not help, Jensen takes his very comfortable airplane pillow and pretends to give it a good home on his lap.

“Smooth,” Jared says and accepts a kiss on the cheek.

“I was dreaming about you, sweetheart.”

“Don’t sweetheart me.”

Another long glance and they share an equally long kiss. That kiss quickly turns into two, which morphs into three, which multiplies into enough to have leave them slightly breathless. A few more kisses and Jared might ask to borrow that pillow.

He hopes it’s always like this between them—electrifying kisses, toe-curling attraction, and deep, unwavering adoration.

Jensen happily sighs and rests his head on Jared’s shoulder. “You make me feel things, Jay.”
“Good things?” Jared reaches up to pat Jensen’s head. “I hope?”

“Of course good things. That’s kinda why we’re getting hitched.”

“Do you propose to all your fans that you meet at photo ops?”

“Nah.” Jensen stretches and makes himself comfortable, leaning into Jared. “Just the one.”

“Must be a lucky guy.”

Jensen sits up. He looks completely serious as he leans in close just to whisper, “Baby, I’m the lucky one.”

That’s it. The plane might as well land wherever they are because Jensen killed Jared.

Two hours later, Jared greets Vancouver, sunglasses and baseball cap at the ready. They only brought carry ons with, so once they exit the plane, Jensen leads the way. For a minute or two, Jared thinks that maybe they won’t run into anyone demanding to take their pictures and ask incredibly invasive questions.

Oh, how wrong he is.

Who tips off the paparazzi? Is it someone’s job to send out an alert? Wait. Jared sighs and squeezes Jensen’s hand. It probably is someone’s job.

Then again, people did see Jared and Jensen while they were on the plane. Any one of their fellow passengers could have tweeted about their presence. The same thing happened in New Orleans.

“We got this,” Jensen murmurs and flips on his sunglasses. “This is good practice.”

The flood of cameras and mics doesn’t hit as harsh as whenever Jared had to go to class. This is partially because Jensen’s with him, and the crowd of paparazzi isn’t as large. Jared smiles and nods to a few of the cameras and mics that get near him, however, he does not make direct eye contact and he doesn’t answer any questions no matter how absurd they sound. Jensen banters back and forth with one TMZ reporter on the subject of Texas chili. This helps keep the mood light, but also reminds others that they’ll get more from Jensen if they keep a respectful distance. Getting up in his face—or Jared’s—immediately causes Jensen to shut down and move on.

Breathe. They’ll be out in a minute. Breathe.

“JAY BIRD!”

Anza muscles her way past fans and paparazzi. She holds a neon pink poster board--the same color as her rockabilly dress. Jared doesn’t have time to read what the poster board says. Anza launches and embraces Jared in a rib-crushing hug.

It’s good to be with Jensen and it’s good to be back in Vancouver.

Chapter End Notes
thank you all for your patience. <3 it's been a hellish 3 months and my liver journey isn't over. i'm in quite a bit of pain, plus back to working full time, etc etc. so writing has been rare for me. i'm often way too tired to write. i wrote this over two weeks, devoting a little bit of time every day to it.

comments are much, much appreciated. they really brighten my day. <3 happy valentines day! go each some chocolate. :D
Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Nathan manages to pry Anza off of Jared, which gives Jared a chance to breathe--until Nathan also envelops him in the kind of hug that could crack walnuts.

From there, things become a blur of paparazzi, fans, and the Vancouver airport. Nathan and Jensen flank Jared and Anza as the four of them speed walk towards the nearest curbside exit. It isn’t safe to talk and walk, but Anza grabs Jared’s hand and gives it a tight squeeze--a great comfort in itself.

Around this time last year, Jared remembers hanging out with Anza at the laundromat on 38th. It was a Friday night and they had nothing to do but wash her family’s comforters and blankets. While the wash cycles spun on, they ate tacos and watched episodes of South Park on her tablet. At one point, she went next door and brought back two strawberry paletas. She perched on top of a washing machine and swung her legs. Her flip flops fell off and she hardly cared. Jared finished his paleta and stood in front of her. The laundromat didn’t have air conditioning. A Korean soap opera blared in the background. Jared leaned in, wrapped his arms around his waist, and lay his head against her waist.

She held him like that for a while, fingers in his hair, humming something soft and serene.

Once inside the waiting limousine, Anza brings him in for another hug. She curls up to him, holding on tightly, as if he might disappear at the next light.

Jensen and Nathan talk in the background. Jared only half listens to them catch up and trade schedules for the next few days. He catches glimpses of Vancouver from the glossy windows, but only in a series of traffic lights, trees, and building facades.

It isn’t Austin or Smithville or any other strip of Texas outside the comfort of the limousine.

Every minute pressed against Anza feels like a dream.

Chapter End Notes

tiny chapter, but it didn’t feel right to keep adding past the last line. i hope to have way more soon. :)

i haven’t been able to shake health issues. i had a liver biopsy yesterday to figure out what’s been going on. i’ve been super sick since february and i’m ready to find some relief. thank you for being here. <3
Chapter Notes

CN: edging, cock ring, Dom!Jensen, fleshlight.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.


Marshall was a senior at a private Christian school just outside of Austin. He lived in the Estates at Westlake, a wealthy neighborhood up north, right along the Colorado River.

On a Saturday morning, Anza was at the Center, working on a project and helping with a few of the youth groups. She volunteered to hang up flyers around the Center and chose to start at one of the emptier hallways. It wasn’t difficult to spot Marshall; he slowly walked down the deserted hallway and admired some of the art on display. He was a new face—completely absorbed in portrait after portrait. Anza started hanging up flyers and glanced over every few seconds in an effort to tease out more details. The boy could dress, he seemed to have a basic understanding of hygiene, and there was something kind about his expression while looking at the displays. He also looked lost.

Youth didn’t typically show up at the Center just to look at the art.

Anza strolled over and handed him a flyer. She said her blurb about the ice cream social and immediately launched into asking questions about the basics. Age? School? Favorite female vocalist?

Fairly quickly, Anza assessed the situation and decided that he’d be a good match for a friend of hers. She described her friend to Marshall as her single, shy, and utterly adorable BFF. Would he maybe want to go out on a date with said friend?

Marshall politely asked for a few more details.

As she scrolled through her phone to find a picture, she added that her friend worked at a train museum in the summer, was a junior in high school, volunteered at the Center, and hit six foot two earlier that year.

Two seconds after Anza showed him a picture, Marshall wrote down his number.

Jared refused to call a random person.

He refused to call a random person especially with the purpose of asking him out on a date.

Anza pulled a deus ex machina and coordinated the entire thing. Marshall and Jared were to meet at Home Slice on a Saturday night, precisely at eight o’clock, for some completely innocent and harmless pizza.

An hour after completely innocent and harmless pizza, Jared found himself in the bed of Marshall’s old Ford.

Marshall was blond, six foot six, and had scouts from Division I colleges across the country fighting for his attention. He was also so far in the closet, he was halfway to Narnia. He had zero experience
kissing another guy, zero experience putting his hands on another guy, and absolutely zero experience having sex with another guy. And because of his faith, he didn’t watch porn. The only working reference he had of sex with another cis dude was purely based in fantasy.

Being a virgin himself, Jared didn’t claim to be an expert in gay sex, but he sure as hell had years’ of experience watching muted porn at midnight. That had to count for something.

Except there’s a big difference between watching and doing.

They were both too eager, too nervous, too turned on, too young, and too impatient for any kind of technical skill or technique. Marshall didn’t use enough lube and Jared didn’t completely understand the importance of prep or breathing. Neither of them had a good handle on the basics. Both of them came way too fast and it was over within minutes.

It sucked. But it wasn’t terrible.

Jared spent that night at Anza’s instead of driving back to Smithville--emotionally and physically drained. Marshall didn’t call Jared again after that night, and Jared didn’t bother calling him either. They each got what they wanted out of it.

Why think about Marshall now?

A familiar hand gives Jared’s knee a squeeze. “Sweetheart, we’re here.”

Jared lets go of a breath he’d been holding. He embraces Anza, accepts a kiss on the cheek in return, and somehow manages to untangle them. Certainly, he hugs Nathan goodbye, exchanges words, and walks under his own power. The four of them agree on meeting for dinner later tonight. But he doesn’t completely feel or hear any of it.

Their carry ons bump on the curb. Spotless glass doors open up to a streamlined, modern lobby complete with white marble and black granite. They barely stop at check-in; concierge services already knows Jensen. A set of private, silver elevators take them up to The Prime Minister’s Suite on the top floor.

It’s an entirely new level of opulence.

And yet, nothing in the suite feels cold or sterile. There’s a mix of minimalism in the furniture and layout, but the fabrics, artwork, and champagne tones provide a refreshing sense of airiness.

Then there’s that view--the unobstructed view of the harbor and North Shore Mountains.

This is a suite in the clouds.

Jensen pulls Jared into their bedroom. He issues simple, quiet instructions: freshen up and get ready. Ready for what, Jared doesn’t have to ask. Jensen’s eyes and tone of voice tell him.

Jared’s pulse picks up, yet he continues to float.

The record player in the living room switches on. Jared strips down to nothing and neatly folds his clothes on top of a plush lounge inside the bathroom. The sleek, black tile underneath his feet feels cool and soothing. He starts the water to fill up the oversized tub and hums to himself along with the song that must be playing from a speaker somewhere within in the bathroom.

This could be heaven or this could be hell. Such a lovely place.
Hot water lulls Jared even further into the downy, soft marrow of his mind. The speakers pick up every pop of the record, but the winding guitar and steady drums come through strong. He adds some of the provided vanilla soap to the water and over his body until his skin shines.

Eyes closed, Jared soaks, lingering and stretching out.

As if on instinct, Jensen walks up to the tub the second Jared’s hands begin to wander. Jared opens his eyes and offers a smile that’s half apologetic and half daring. He refuses to break eye contact until a few seconds later, when he ducks underwater.

Patiently, Jensen waits.

Jared surfaces and takes notice--Jensen changed clothes. He went from jeans and a black tee to a perfectly crisp, three piece, two button, indigo suit the color of a midnight sky. It does more than fit, it accentuates. A crisp white shirt, black tie, black formal shoes, and his expression ties everything together.

Jensen means business.

He adjusts his tie and cufflinks.

A shiver sears through Jared. Sparks of anticipation drill into every nerve. He takes Jensen’s outstretched hand, clasps on, and emerges out of the tub completely naked.

Audible directions aren’t necessary. Jared stands in the middle of marble, tile, and glass, eyes closed and electric guitar riveting in the background. Jensen takes a towel and starts to dry Jared off. He keeps his motions gentle, attentive to every part of Jared, and takes his time. He kneels down to finish, and to Jared’s disappointment, doesn’t touch more than what is absolutely necessary.

By the time Jensen stands up, Jared feels two steps away from shamelessly breaking down and begging for Jensen to touch him.

Of course, that’s the whole point.

They stand face to face for all of a second before Jensen steps back. He removes his jacket. Silk and wool move in clean, delicate waves. With care, he hangs up the jacket on the back of the bathroom door and walks towards their bedroom. He pauses, only to look over his shoulder and nod for Jared to follow.

Jensen loves suits.

Jared loves the view.

In a few strides, Jared catches up. Once again, they stand within an arm’s length of each other. Jared can’t help but wear a smile. Jensen gives Jared a languid once over, appreciative and adoring.

“Get on the bed,” Jensen murmurs and moves away. “Wait for me.”

 Completely indignant, Jared’s cock gives a traitorous twitch. Jared obeys, but makes sure to whine and pout as he climbs onto the king bed. It feels odd to sink into a different mattress and lay atop a different comforter. A crystal chandelier presides over the entire room. The sun hits each crystal and provides an extra sense of indulgence.

The album on the record player changes. Within a few seconds, Jared identifies the song.
Jensen approaches the bed and approves of what he sees. He holds Jared’s riding crop in his hands.

After a nod, Jensen taps the crop on the side of the bed. Jared’s heart pounds with the punch of both guitar and drums. He kneels and closes his eyes without hesitation or doubt. When the tip of the crop nudges his chin, he tries his best not to gasp—and fails.

Hard blues rocks into Jared the second Jensen’s lips press against his.

Music, skin, and silk slot together.

Jared grabs Jensen by his vest and tugs him closer, tries to pull him onto the bed. Jensen smirks and maintains his balance. Electric guitars herald electric kisses. Jared wraps his arms around Jensen’s shoulders.

Troubles will come, but they’ll pass.

Jensen lifts the crop and brings it down hard over the curve of Jared’s ass. Jared yips and digs his fingers into the smooth surface of Jensen’s shirt. As the mark blooms, Jensen reaches around Jared and gropes him harsh and unforgiving. He separates their mouths in favor of biting down on Jared’s neck. Teeth bear down--aggressive and predatory. Jared releases a low moan and melts.

The song’s bass line and cymbals feed directly into Jared’s body.

Commanding hands squeeze the insides of Jared’s thighs, then up the small of his back to his shoulders and finally to his hair. Jensen pulls on a handful of hair for Jared to tilt his head back and expose the full line of his throat. Still kneeling, Jared clings to Jensen after one, two, three ravenous bites to his throat and chest. On the fourth bite, Jensen slips his right hand underneath Jared. Lube feels cold against Jared, but he forgets about that entirely as Jensen pushes a finger inside.

In between kisses, bites, and moans, Jensen works Jared open. He adds more lube and a second finger. He lets Jared hear the sloppy squelch of his fingers and Jared’s asshole stretching. He pushes his fingers deep, following the rhythm of the arpeggiated chords playing in the background.

Jared mumbles off incoherent pleas for Jensen to stop teasing.

Because with every forward grind of his hips, Jared smears come all over Jensen’s clothes.

“Shh,” Jensen whispers, his lips pressed against Jared’s.

Time passes in a rush of heated, maddening worship. Jensen never stops fingering Jared, pushing down on or against Jared’s prostate, milking and stretching him wider. Jared moans and gasps at the attention. He glances down in time to see a string of come drip from the flushed head of his cock. Jensen catches the string with his thumb and uses it to circle over the tip, causing Jared to tremble and cry out.

Breathing becomes an intense labor.

Stormy electric guitars thunder through the speakers--arpeggiated chords match Jared’s quick breaths. He slips into music and overstimulation, sinks into white linen and Jensen’s mouth.

Jensen slips his fingers out of Jared and produces a cock ring from his pocket. Jared shivers as Jensen rolls it onto him. It doesn’t pinch, but it does cause Jared’s hips to buck at the sensation of building pressure. For a solid minute, Jensen keeps his hands off Jared. He licks Jared’s cock from its aching base to flushed tip, but withholds any kind of friction.
When Jared tries to push his cock into Jensen’s mouth, Jensen uses his hands to hold down Jared’s hips and nothing else. It’s an impressive display of restraint on Jensen’s part—and absolutely torturous for Jared with every passing second.

The guitar solo extends from the speakers and directly into the raw beating of Jared’s heart.

All coordinated function drains from Jared.

Jensen flips Jared over onto his stomach, pushes his legs apart, and starts eating him out. Loud. Filthy. Hot. Guitar melodies, piano lines, and lyrics mean nothing to Jared as he hands control over to Jensen.

How good it feels to do that.

And how good it feels for Jensen to confidently accept control.

A change in song means a change in approach. With his head on a pillow, Jared draws in a deep breath and descends into magnificent overstimulation. Jensen uses his tongue in deft, quick motions to work Jared open, groans, and grips onto Jared’s ass. He never touches Jared’s cock, ignores every twitch, swell, and pulse of come. The cock ring takes every harmonic sensation and squeezes it into something overly compressed and focused.

Jared starts to sweat. Or at least he thinks he does. That could be tears. Because Jensen switches back to using his fingers and pushing against Jared’s prostate. His fingers circle, flex, and graze before delivering a series of taps directly on that bundle of nerves. Jared imagines he’s doing it in time with the song, but his brain lacks the energy to complete that train of thought. His cock feels harder than it’s ever been and it gives a hard twitch the second Jensen presses something warm and solid against the tip of it.

Gripping onto the sheets, Jared cries out. His cock sinks into the tight, velvet space of a fleshlight. A fleshlight that feels impossibly small.


Words tumble out of Jared’s mouth. He says something like, “No, not yet.”

Pleasure and pleasurable pain saturate Jared as Jensen squeezes the fleshlight again, this time with more pressure and force. Jared tries to grind into both Jensen’s palm and the fleshlight, but Jensen keeps a firm grip on his hips. Only when Jared behaves does Jensen go back to eating him out. He alternates by adding fingers, licking the spot where the fleshlight and Jared’s shaft meet, and leaving piercing bite marks on the insides of Jared’s thighs.

The smell of sweat and sex fills the room. Mountains and the harbor look on from the large, clear windows that seem to lead out to a private garden. There remains so much to look at and discover within the suite, but all Jared really understands is the feel of Jensen all over him.

The song on the record changes.

Melodic and gritty, the ultimate rock anthem starts.

Silk floats over Jared’s right wrist—Jensen’s tie.

Jensen ties Jared’s wrists together behind his back, the knot secure and tight. The rhythm and riffs

In one swift and powerful motion, Jensen penetrates Jared, sinking in until their hips meet. It nearly knocks the wind out of Jared, but he manages to let out a noise. Jared goes from a whisper to a whine to a scream. Jensen pulls out completely, then drives back in, pulls out, drive in, pulls out, drives in and starts to fuck Jared in the same brutal, exacting pace as the drum line and guitar riffs. He holds onto Jared’s wrists and leans back so his hips have more room to work.

Jensen works Jared like a pair of cymbals.

Jared’s eyes water. He pants and shakes and demands more. His shoulders ache. His throat feels raw. He hears the wet, soaked sound of his ass taking every inch of Jensen’s heavy, hard cock.

In what seems like seconds, Jensen flips reality.

He changes their positions so that he lies flat on his back and Jared straddles his thighs. Jared struggles to keep himself upright, wrung out already, dizzy and lightheaded. Jensen sits up and kisses him long, sweet, and gentle. With his thumbs, he wipes away the freshest tears from Jared’s eyes. His clothes are wrinkled and his own face is flushed, but nothing stops him from pulling Jared close and tightly embracing him.

Jensen shares a few more kisses. He devours every moan and whimper from Jared’s mouth.

He slips the tie off of Jared’s wrists and drapes it in Jared’s mouth for him to bite down on.

Take. Me. Home.

Jared settles back down on his stomach. The fleshlight comes off. Jensen lines up behind Jared. He runs his hands down Jared’s shoulders, back, and hips once, twice, three times in a soothing and comforting way. He’ll take care of Jared. Of that, there is no doubt. Jared reaches back and holds himself open, just to show how slick, sore, and ready he is to start again.

The song launches into overdrive. The tempo picks up doubletime.


Take. Me. Home.

Please, please, please. Take. Me. Home.

Fully entrenched in this fever dream, Jared shouts louder than the track, his voice switchblade-sharp. “Sir–enough!”

Within seconds, Jensen unclips the cock ring. His thrusts increase in pressure, power, and depth all doubled by Jared’s single command.

Jared feels his orgasm build, dangerous and urgent. So much so, that it almost frightens him. Jensen places a hand on his cock and starts jerking him off from base to head–all the while pounding against his prostate. Jared lets go. Surrender and yields.

He comes in long, thick spurts. Heat floods his body head to toe. Euphoria. Frenzy. Delirium. All of it and more. He begs Jensen to keep fucking him, don’t stop, more, more, keep going… He struggles for breath as a second orgasm follows–intense and searing.
Jensen comes inside him, fills him up, overflowing.

The record ends.

Near silence takes the place of music.

What does the past matter.

When the present--and their future--feels so good.

Chapter End Notes

PHEW. i need a cigarette. except, i don't smoke. so i'll eat some chocolate instead. XD

three songs used here: Hotel California, Simple Man, and Paradise City. i've been listening to rock and rock history all week in preparation for writing my BB. of course, then this happened. so. here we are.

comments are LOVE. <3 seriously. they make my day! thanks for reading 90,000+ words into this section.
Jared wakes up at three in the morning, moon and city light slicing through the drapes.

Dazed, and a little dizzy, he sits up. A familiar pain and soreness causes him to wince and move with greater care.

“Jensen?” Jared scrubs his face and looks around the room, things appearing different in nighttime.

The lack of Jensen in their bed worries him. He climbs out of bed and stands up, slightly unsteady on his feet but determined to find Jensen.

A glass of water and two Tylenol sit on the nightstand. Jared takes the Tylenol, drinks up, and throws on a robe he finds at the foot of the bed. As he takes his first few steps, he wonders what the hell even happened. Stumbling through the room and into the expansive living room, Jared remembers the specifics of their activities upon arrival. Jensen was a man possessed.

Possessed by classic rock and raw, wild lust.

Jared’s mouth waters.

They have to repeat that again. Just maybe not that soon.

The unmistakable sound of a Howard Shore score echoes throughout the suite. Jared approaches the pale blue light of the TV screen, just in time to witness Galadriel almost succumb to the power of the Ring.

“I know what I must do, it’s just… I’m afraid to do it,” Frodo confesses.

The words pierce Jared, sharper than they ever were, though he’s watched this movie so many times. Maybe he hasn’t watched it enough. He steps over to the large leather couch where Jensen sits, in an identical robe, his knees pulled up to his chest.

Jared clears his throat so as not to frighten Jensen. Then, in sync with Galadriel on the screen, he says, “Even the smallest person can change the course of the future.”

Jensen turns and smiles instantly.

Lord, may he always smile at the sight of me.

“You’re up,” Jensen yawns and stands. He extends a courteous hand towards Jared, who graciously takes it. They sit on the couch, not an inch of unnecessary space between them. “Hope I didn’t have it too loud.”

With a smile and a snort, Jared quips, “Are you kidding? I can hear Lord of the Rings at twenty paces—underwater.” He bumps their shoulders together. “What are you doing up?”

“Couldn’t sleep.” Brow furrowed, Jensen glances at the screen, then back to Jared. “I had a nightmare, actually. Can’t remember the last time I had one.”

Slowly, Jared brings his hand up to run his fingers through Jensen’s hair. He relishes the texture of it,
the highlights of gold that glimmer in the light of Lothlorien. “Oh, Jen.” Pressed close, Jared shares the warmth of his body. “Tell me about it?”

Leaning into Jared’s touch and presence, Jensen closes his eyes. He sighs, yet his jaw remains tense. “It’s gonna sound ridiculous. Oh, I texted Anz and Nathan earlier.”

“Thank you. And don’t worry about how it’s gonna sound. I’m listening.”

Jensen opens his eyes briefly as if to make sure. “Hmm.” He settles into the couch, stretches out his legs, keeps his head tilted back for Jared to continue playing with his hair. “I won an Oscar. It was great. Okay, no, it should have been great. I knew I was supposed to be happy about it. You know, you win an Oscar, that’s shit to celebrate.”

Jared nods.

Tension thrums through Jensen’s body despite his relaxed position. He keeps his eyes closed. “I just remember looking at it on stage and… it just didn’t mean anything. Then I looked up to try and find you in the audience and… You sure you wanna hear this? I can make hot chocolate instead.”

“Finish telling me and I’ll make us hot chocolate after,” Jared presses, keeping his voice tender. “Was I not there?”

“No. You weren’t.” Jensen doesn’t meet Jared’s eyes. His shoulders roll forward and he draws his knees up once again. “I tried to find anyone in the audience that looked familiar and I couldn’t. Then it all shifted.” He takes a deep breath and lets it out slow. “I was in Malibu and you were there, but you know, classic nightmare crap. I called your name, you didn’t hear me. Right when you were about to turn, I woke up.”

The Fellowship leaves Lothlorien with the gifts bestowed to them by Galadriel. Frodo holds the light of Earendil, the most beloved star. “May it be a light for you in dark places... when all other lights go out,” she whispers, as the Fellowship heads into more of the unknown.

After a minute, Jared places his free hand over Jensen’s chest and asks, “What do you think it means?”

Biting his bottom lip, Jensen looks up at the ceiling. He quotes Legolas in the next scene. “A shadow and a threat has been growing in my mind.”

Jared can’t help but smile. “You’re a bigger nerd than I am.”

At least that makes Jensen laugh. “Yeah, yeah, probably. I mean, I guess I did pick this movie.”

“Yes. Major nerd.” Jared playfully tugs at Jensen’s hair, however, his voice settles back into its tone of concern. “Have you had this nightmare before?”

“A couple times, yeah.”

“Same details?”

“Sometimes.” Jensen’s mouth presses into a line. He presses a hand to his temple. “Fuck. Why’s this so hard to talk about?”

A pang of homesickness hits Jared out of nowhere. He wishes they were home, in their living room, on their couch, watching their copy of the extended version of Fellowship.
“Take your time,” Jared murmurs. He rests his head against Jensen’s shoulder. “No rush.”

Boromir attempts to take the Ring from Frodo. The Ring wields its ugly, twisted effect on Gondor’s proud son. It leaves him sobbing on the forest floor while Frodo flees.

Jensen wraps an arm around Jared. “I think... I worry that I’m too old for you.”

Jared feels a frown pull at his mouth. “What?”

“It’s not a constant worry,” Jensen adds. “But it is there. I’m not telling you this because you’ve done anything to make me worry. Please don’t think that.”

Instinct tells Jared to insist on further explanation. Aragorn resists the Ring. Jared pushes on. “I might be talking out of my ass,” he says, comfortable in Jensen’s presence, “but I think that worry is normal when there’s an age gap. And there is an age gap. Though, if you ask me, it doesn’t feel like there is.”

Orcs descend on Aragorn and Frodo flees yet again.

“No, it doesn’t,” Jensen affirms. “It really doesn’t. I’m still… shocked by that.”

“Why? You’re so easy to talk to, Jen.”

“Don’t judge me, okay?”

“Never.”

“Talking I can do. Okay, most of the time, I can. I think sometimes I get so wrapped up in the business.” Jensen does air quotes in a way Jared finds extremely charming. “There’s this constant pressure to be young, look younger, stay young, all that. Sometimes I’m like, who the fuck am I kidding? I’m in my mid-thirties. I have wrinkles. It takes more and more effort to put on muscle. Or pull sixteen hour days. I’m not eighteen anymore. Or twenty-five. Or even thirty.”

Jensen takes a deep breath.

His voice takes on a hard and cold edge. “Sometimes, the shit they print gets to me. I try my best not to read it but inevitably something pops up and I do. Then it just sets off this raging fire of insecurity. Which then feels like Moria--fucking dark and cavernous.”

For a moment, they sit without speaking.

Jared searches his mind for an answer. Something to say that will lift all the insecurities away from Jensen and banish them forever.

Can anyone do that? Can Jensen?

No. Not exactly.

Boromir dies honorably. The Fellowship splits. It breaks apart, as Galadriel said it would, but this is not altogether a bad thing. Jared knows how the rest of the story plays out. There’s reason to hope. He doesn’t know how the rest of his and Jensen’s story will play out.

But he knows he wants it to continue for a very, very long time. That is reason enough to hold onto hope.

The end credits roll.
“...” Words feel clumsy as they leave Jared’s mouth. “I can definitely relate in a lot of ways. And maybe this is deeper than just you and I. But I’m gonna be here to remind you that I’m not goin’ anywhere. No matter how many times you need me to say it, I will. And... even Moria serves a purpose.” Jared offers up a small smile. “You can’t appreciate light without darkness.”

Jensen returns the smile. He kisses Jared’s forehead and pats his thigh. “Amen to that. And I’ll take you up on the reminding part.”

“I like your wrinkles.” Jared stands up and holds his hands out to Jensen. “And I like when you eat pizza and work shorter days. If you have another nightmare, just remember: Meldanya mel pan im ui.”

Accepting the offer, Jensen takes Jared’s hands and hauls himself up. “Meldanya mel pan im iu?”

“Ui.”

“Ui,” Jensen murmurs and presses a kiss to Jared’s mouth. “Translation, please, Professor?”

Turning off the TV, Jared guides Jensen back to bed. It may not be their bed, but that’s okay. Jared would rather sleep in a million foreign beds with Jensen than continue to sleep alone in their own bed at home.

Hope glimmers—like a spike of pearl and silver.

“My beloved loves all of me always.”

Chapter End Notes

guess who watched lord of the rings tonight? XD

thank you for your patience as i worked on my big bang and such. i'm still battling liver issues etc. but i've been able to write more lately, which has been a huge relief. i was going to write coffee shop tonight, but these two begged.

comments are love. i tried very much to capture a realistic conversation between partners. you can't fix everything, but you can keep working at things. :)

"like a spike of pearl and silver" is a boromir line. <3 (also, excuse my elvish. i have no idea if that's accurate but i tried my best!)
Their hotel prides itself as the premiere luxury hotel in downtown Vancouver.

Naturally, it strives to exceed its clients’ highest standards.

Jared wakes up, bleary eyed and exhausted, wondering if somehow he fell out of bed in the middle of the night and plopped into the path of an oncoming semi truck.

Gingerly lifting his head off his pillow, Jared grunts and groans. Sore muscles and joints complain as he moves around in the massive bed. Of course, for all the mattress real estate provided in the master suite, he ended up curled into a burrito of blankets at the edge of the bed.

Right smack against Jensen.

“Wake up,” Jared hisses, disentangling himself from Jensen, who turned into a human furnace. “Jen, get off of my arm.”

Somewhere in this suite there has to be a coffee machine. A coffee maker. A coffee robot. Something that combines hot water with coffee beans. He’ll find it as soon as he shoves Jensen off the bed and runs to the bathroom. How long have they been in bed? A decade? Jared feels stale in more ways than he would ever care to think about.

Desperate, Jared nips at Jensen’s left ear lobe. He might bite down if Jensen doesn’t get the fuck up.

“Quit it,” Jensen grumbles and swats weakly at Jared. “Mmphsleepgrrgh.”

“I will pee on you. In the next three seconds. Two. One.”

Jensen rolls over--but he rolls the wrong way. He rolls onto Jared, effectively crushing him. With his face buried in the crook of Jared’s shoulder, and keeping his body a dead weight, he rumbles, “Sweetheart, that’s so kinky.”

“No, no, no,” Jared half cries, half laughs. He avoids Jensen’s morning breath by smacking his palm against Jensen’s face and pushing away. “You’re being so god damn annoying!”

“I’m what? Jay, I can’t hear you. I’m being what?” Jensen shouts into the mess of pillows and blankets that threaten to overwhelm them.

Summoning the power of ancient gods, Jared heaves Jensen off of him, and sprints for the bathroom. He damn near pees in the sink, but manages to make it just in time. Standing up does not feel good and he openly, loudly blames Jensen for it.

“So sit down,” Jensen snickers and joins Jared in the bathroom. “And hurry up. You’re holding up the line.” He smacks Jared’s ass with a newspaper of unknown origin.

Jared closes his eyes and tries to focus on not falling over. “Don’t,” he snips. “This is all your fault. I can’t sit. You can go pee in the sink.”

“Me? A famous movie star, pee in the sink? I think the fuck not. Move over.”
“We’re not peeing at the same time!”

“It’s a perk, Jay!”

“No!”

“I promise not to cross the streams.”

“Oh. My. God.”

“See. You should’ve let me sleep.”

Finished, Jared hobbles away from the bathroom and heads back to bed. He shouts at Jensen from the safety of the mattress, overwhelmingly happy to be horizontal. He reprises his role as Burrito Boy and glares out at the world around him. “Shame on you, Jensen. Shame on you for causing me pain and contributing to my suffering.”

Jensen’s newspaper flutters as he turns a page, in no hurry to get out of the bathroom. “I did not know I was marrying someone so prone to suffering. Should I fetch your smelling salts?”

“I am a delicate flower,” Jared whines. He slathers on his accent, thicker than butter on a biscuit. “Good lord, it stinks in this bed.”

“That’s the sin,” Jensen laughs. “Don’t pay it no mind.”

“I promised my momma I’d wear white on my wedding day.”

“Sweetheart, we are so past wearing white.”

This. This is good. This is them. Jared basks in the easy, uninhibited banter and sinks further into their bed. Cheerful, abundant walls of sunlight come in through the large, pristine windows. And despite the lack of shades or curtains, Jared feels a strong sense of privacy. The harbor greets him as his eyes adjust to daylight. He could lie here all day--dozing and gazing out at the sweeping view.

Unfortunately, reality sets in.

“Holy fuck.” Jensen emerges from the bathroom, panic in his eyes. “I’m late!”

At some point last night or early this morning, Jensen’s phone died, and he thought he plugged the sucker into a charger. Turns out he plugged the phone in, but neglected to plug the charger into the outlet on the nightstand. The clock in the bathroom informed him that hi, hello, his set time was fifteen minutes ago.

Jared watches--half in awe, half in fear--as Jensen goes from completely naked to fully dressed in zero to sixty. Absolutely no one would believe that less than five minutes ago, his hair was not styled, his teeth were not brushed, and he did not look runway ready in a pair of dark jeans and a black button down shirt.


The second Jensen hangs up with the director, Jared pulls him in for a kiss.

Jensen moans and melts into the kiss. He sits on the edge of the bed and makes no comment, no move to stop. Until his phone receives a text.
“Three o’clock,” Jensen murmurs, reluctantly pulling away. He runs a hand through Jared’s hair and cups his jaw. “You got three hours. I’ll send a car. Don’t be late.”

“For what?” Jared leans into the touch and kisses Jensen’s palm.

“I want you on set later.” Jensen’s phone pings and a message flashes on its screen. “Kiss me, baby, before I go bring home the bacon.”

One, two, maybe even three kisses later and Jensen leaves.

Jared rattles around in the suite like the last pea in the can until an epiphany hits him on the head. He picks up his phone and presses the third name on his favorites list. Once he finishes agreeing on a time and a place, he showers, dresses, and fixes to leave.

On his way out, he notices an envelope with his name on it sitting on one of the sleek foyer tables, next to a vase of fresh flowers.

He opens the envelope in the elevator.

Twenty minutes later, Jared pays for his taxi with his brand new, black American Express Centurion card.

Anza waits for him outside of The Diamond. She holds her hand out so he can kiss it. “Dahling,” she coos, linking arms with him as they walk inside. “You look gorgeous.”

No one bothers them.

No one questions them.

They drink craft cocktails in the cozy, mahogany lounge and order plates of whatever the hell they want. Jared listens to Anza describe her Adventures in Sleeping with Nathan and Running Around Vancouver. He soaks up every work the same way his second Tahitian Revolution soaks into him.

Jamaican rum, orange sherry, orgeat, lime leaf bitters.

He snaps a picture of his drink, then takes a selfie, then takes a selfie with Anza. She smooths out his short-sleeved, navy button down, which he chose to pair with a black v-neck underneath, black jeans, and red sneakers. In her embroidered, lavender dress, with its scalloped lace and tulle skirt, she is the maraschino cherry to his American rye. The smoked black tea to his Campari.

“The ice to your cube,” she laughs and stays curled up next to him in their dark and secluded booth. “Chu look so good, Jaybird. Like chu finally realize you deserve all this good shit.”

Someone, somewhere in the restaurant snaps a picture of them. Jared can’t bring himself to care.

“How do I know I’m not taking advantage of it? Of him?” He takes a sip from her glass. “I’m paying for lunch, but I didn’t work an eight hour shift to do it.”

Anza pats his hand, gives it a squeeze, then taps at his engagement ring. “Chu never take that off, ever. Chu don’t wear it for assholes to see. Fuck, I bet chu wear it to sleep.”

Jared tries to hide his smile behind his glass.

“Ugh,” she says with a roll of her eyes. “Seriously, chu two are so gross. See? What I say? Jaybird.” Dreams fill her eyes. “I can’t believe I’m here witchu. I can’t believe I’m here at all. This rich white man just walked into my life and asked me if I had a passport and if I wanted to spend some time
with him.”

Soft, fluttering music on vinyl plays from somewhere in the lounge. It almost sounds like a live band. A quartet--every musician and every instrument in sync and in touch with a cultivated, smooth rhythm.

“An’ let me tell chu,” Anza murmurs, her eyes bright. “I have laughed my ass off wit this dude. Every time I’m wit him. Even when he helps me zip up my dress in the morning. An’ I know that chu got chu own tall drink of somethin’ fine.”

Before they leave, he hugs her tight against him, afraid she might float away back to Austin if he doesn’t.

She insists on another selfie and threatens to cut him if he skips out on dinner plans tonight.

At three o’clock sharp, a driver picks Jared up from the hotel and drives him half an hour away, onto his very first movie set.

He looks at the last selfie he took with Anza before uploading it to Twitter. They look exactly as they should--young, happy, and vibrant. Jared’s smile holds no tension, no worry, and no hesitation.

“Chu got a fiance that loves chu, a knock out best friend that loves chu, a momma that loves chu, and no good punk ass friends back home that love chu,” Anza declared after their selfie. “Enjoy it, dejo. Especially since now. I’m here to kick chu ass if you don’t.”

The driver opens the door for Jared.

Jared thanks him and steps out.

He doesn’t go two seconds without spotting Jensen, who waits for him with arms wide open.

“Jay! Get on over here and prove you’re not related to George Glass. Look, Karen, is he adorable or is he adorable?” Jensen wraps an arm around Jared. “Karen, this is Jared. Karen’s the production manager of this operation. Here’s Don, the assistant director--the guy in charge of scheduling and yelling at my ass to get on set. Arjun, this is Jared. Jun’s the camera operator, so we all know how important his job is. Holy shit, Jay, you have to meet Ella. And the Gaffers. They don’t have names--don’t worry. Oh, and here’s trouble: Sarah, Chloe, Jeff, Millie. Bobby over there’s our main grip, and that’s his husband Sean, set designer and all around god.”

Jensen squeezes Jared’s shoulder.

“Y’all, I want you to meet the one person on earth who can look at me, dead in the eyes, and tell me I’m incredibly handsome. And oh, he said he’d marry my sorry ass. Ain’t that right?”

Jared hardly gets a chance to answer. Folks have formed a crowd around them in order to shake Jared’s hand and thank him for stopping by. They invite him to visit every corner of their set, eager to finally get to know him.

In a way, as he holds Jensen’s hand and follows him on a tour of the set and the lot, this feels a lot like coming home.

As he observes Jensen and the crew, he realizes that everyone works to make it feel that way.

So he does, too.
/speaks into the mic/ hello? hello? is this thing on?

hi! omg it's been FOREVER. here's 2,000 words to make it up to y'all. <3

i am still struggling with health issues. there are the tumors on my liver, fibro/RA flares, sinus issues, and complications from the surgery i had two weeks ago to try and help my liver. the nice thing about being on medical leave is i have more time to write, sleep, and recharge. and how nice is it to be back in this verse. ahhhhh. :D

as always, thank you for being here and being so patient. if you'd like to lend support outside of AO3, visit my tumblr: compo67.tumblr.com.

thank you!
All the resources and studio money in the world does not guarantee a good movie.

Even its lead and supporting actors can’t carry a film on their own. Talent and beauty crumble under weak writing, rushed pre/post-production, cheaply made sets, haphazard editing, improper frame rendering, and god awful lighting. And that’s only what happens on set.

Sometimes every element on set can come together, work as a cohesive unit, and the movie could still flop because of poor marketing, last-minute studio pressure, or scandals caused by the lead actors.

Or, maybe the movie just… sucks. Maybe, despite test audiences and marketing groups, the world isn’t ready for the movie. Maybe a bigger, better movie from a competing studio schedules its release date the same weekend and receives fantastic reviews.

In any case, making a movie requires the combined skill, talent, and dedication of all parties involved.

Jensen shares one of the production checklists with Jared as they tour the massive set. Some of the screenwriters are present today; Jensen describes them as curious creatures of the night that are rarely persuaded to leave their writing cave. They might be present for a variety of reasons: rewrites, continuity, or studio orders.

If he’s lucky, Jensen will talk to a few and provide his input on whichever section of the script they’re filming today. If he’s god damn lucky, they’ll listen. If he’s blessed by the universe, they’ll actually take his suggestions and incorporate them into future revisions, which may make the final cut.

“I never hold my breath when it comes to writers,” Jensen laughs and bumps shoulders with Jared. “Same with producers. They all have, ‘we need to stick to the budget,’ tattooed somewhere on them.”

Producers float around more often than the screenplay writers, but never as often as the director or the rest of the crew. Jensen likes some producers more than others, just like anyone else, but he goes out of his way to pick projects with certain ones. He doesn’t think their job is easy, but a tightly wound producer or team of producers can make the whole production a nightmare from its conception to ten years after it’s released on Blu-Ray.

Bodies from the studio roam the set and try their best to either go unnoticed or demand everyone’s absolute attention. There is no in-between. Jensen avoids them like the plague.

Then there are lawyers, risk management professionals, investors, press, and craft services.

All of these people, in one way or another, help complete the production checklist. Jared flips through it as they weave through departments and sets within sets. The production list outlines the steps involved to make the movie. Outside of costuming, Jensen hands Jared a copy of his script and today’s schedule.

“It’s changed three times already,” Jensen explains, pointing to edits made in red ink. “They wanted
to shoot 24A, which is a closeup, but for whatever reason, we’re gonna shoot 27B instead.”

Jared shakes his head. “This is impossible to read, Jen.”

“It’s another language. My first time on a big budget set, I almost peed myself when I read the daily. Don’t worry. You’ll get the hang of it.” He peers at the schedule. “Looks like we have twenty minutes until my butt needs to be in Ellie’s makeup chair.” With a smile, he meets Jared’s eyes. “Still with me?”

“I’ve watched extended editions, bonus features, film documentaries…” Jared runs a hand through his hair. “This is ridiculously nothing like any of that.”

And on it goes.

Jensen seems to know everyone’s name. He makes quick introductions as he steers them towards craft services. Jared expects a single table stocked with some instant coffee and cheese danishes.

His heart leaps at the sight of the actual craft services spread.

Charlie Scott shakes Jared’s hand upon arrival to the first of four massive food stations and one food truck. An older gentleman. Charlie shares that he’s been in the business of feeding movie crews for thirty years. He’s served grips, gaffers, property masters, costumers, electricians, hair and makeup artists, actors, extras, and countless others. It’s his job to see that they get what they need to make it through their fourteen to sixteen hour days in reasonable comfort.

“When I started, everyone brought their own food in a brown bag.” Charlie walks with Jared and Jensen through the stations. “Then Universal started rolling a coffee and donut cart from stage to stage. You put a nickel in a cup and you got your snack. Then some of the studios decided to go cheap and jus’ order a buncha pizzas. Can you work fourteen hours with nothing but pizza and donuts in your stomach? Nuh uh. Don’t think so.”

There is pizza, but it’s clearly fresh and made from scratch. Charlie and his two sons keep about two hundred and fifty people on set fed and hydrated. If Jared doesn’t see something he wants at any of the stations--no problem.

“Absolutely no problem,” Charlie insists and claps Jared on the shoulder. “You want an Italian beef sandwich? I got you. And if I don’t got the stuff to make it, I’ll get it for you.”

Jared takes advantage of this opportunity and asks, “What does Jensen eat the most?”

“Nothing but fruits and vegetables,” Jensen interjects. “And tofu. Lots of tofu.”

Charlie shoots Jensen a look, then turns to Jared. “This man will eat an entire porterhouse in five minutes if you let him. I’ve seen it happen. The second he wrapped that last movie, his scrawny ass ran over here and begged me to grill him up a steak. And I was happy to do it. He ate like a damn rabbit that whole run.”

“I guess that’s not terrible,” Jared laughs. “Could be worse.”

“He’s also got it bad for pasta,” Charlie adds. “Pasta and French fries.”

Jensen insists on making a plate for Jared before any more of his dietary habits can be disclosed. There’s so much to choose from, Jared lets Jensen pick for him. Of all the places on set, Jared makes sure to remember the location of craft services. Charlie promises steak tacos later on.
With their containers of food, Jared and Jensen make their way to a set of trailers.

“I’m not supposed to eat in the chair,” Jensen sadly admits. “But I’m starving.”

Although small and crammed with hundreds of wigs, mirrors, and lights, the hair and makeup trailer feels infinitely more peaceful than the costuming department. The classical music in the background helps drown out the sound of the set.

Ellie leans against one of the many counters, reading a paper. She reminds Jared of one of the group facilitators at the Center, Darlene--tall, tattooed, and in love with the color red.

“Let me guess,” she exhales a put upon sigh. “You’re starving.”

“I’ll eat fast,” Jensen mumbles, already stuffing a slice of pizza into his mouth. “El, this is Jay. Sweetheart, this is El. She makes me pretty.”

“I’m also witness to Jensen at four in the morning after he’s spent all night texting you,” Ellie adds. She shakes Jared’s hand. “It’s good to meet you, even though I feel like I already know you. Sit down, Ackles, god damn. And use a napkin. Jared, go ahead and have a seat in the second chair.”

Turning to the counter, Ellie works on extensive color palettes. Her hands move quickly. “How you like the set so far? Or did Jensen get distracted and only show you craft services?”

“Oh no,” Jared answers. He hunkers down and starts eating, his lunch at The Diamond a distant memory. “Craft services was our last stop. I liked the costume area.”

“My wife works there--Sal. Did you get to meet her?”

“No, sorry. We didn’t get to spend a lot of time there. I might head back and poke around once Jen starts filming.” The fettucini alfredo causes Jared to see stars. “Can I ask what you do? If you don’t mind explaining? This is the first time I can sit and listen to someone.”

Ellie grins and kicks Jensen in the shin. “I like him. In fact, he may be too good for you.”

Glaring, Jensen kicks her back. “Quiet. Don’t go planting ideas like that in his head.”

Step by step, Ellie explains what she does in this moment and overall on set. She primarily works with Jensen, while Tommy, the second hair and makeup artist, works with his co-star. Everyone else that needs to be in front of the camera gets divided into three groups: Ellie’s, Tommy’s, and their assistant Noah. This production happens to have a decent budget for makeup and hair, surprising since it’s a rom-com and doesn’t require extensive special effects. But Ellie’s not complaining. She appreciates being able to use products she wants instead of products she has to make do with.

Part of her job involves coordinating with costuming and lighting. If she makes Jensen’s face too shiny under the bright stage lights, she’ll hear about it later. If she doesn’t add enough contrast to his face, then he’ll look washed out under those same stage lights. She shows Jared her notebook, where every morning and evening she will make notes about what she used and how she used it that day.

It’s not just scenes and story that need to follow continuity.

Jared asks for permission to take a picture of Jensen in the chair. Jensen and Ellie give their blessing, though Jensen cautions not to post it anywhere, since it could draw the ire of the studio as leaked behind the scenes footage.

Taking out his phone, Jared finds his screen overcome with alerts. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,
Snapchat—even his email—erupt with notifications. His stomach twists. This can’t be good.

The Internet knows Jared is in Vancouver with Jensen.

However, neither the paparazzi pictures at the airport nor the selfie he posted to Instagram and Twitter sparked this deluge.

The Internet knows Jared is in Vancouver and having intimate lunches with someone who is not Jensen.

It turns out that the person who snapped a picture of him and Anza wasn’t just a random fan. They were actual paparazzi—likely tipped off by staff.

Without permission or consideration, they captured a shot of Jared and Anza curled up in their booth at The Diamond. In the span of an hour, the photo was edited, uploaded, tagged with a caption, and shared. It isn’t even uploaded or shared by a single media outlet, but several, all of which attach their own captions and ridiculous speculations.

One of them declares that this is further proof of Jared’s heterosexuality and how he is exploiting one of Hollywood’s leading gay men.

Is this all they’re ever going to write about Jared? Speculative shit? Should he not have lunch with his best friend? What could he do next time to prevent this from happening? And why is the default to accuse Jared of exploiting Jensen?

On and on, these questions cycle through Jared’s mind. He almost doesn’t hear Jensen when he asks what’s got Jared so quiet.

Jared hands over his phone with the most egregious post pulled up.

Jensen reads it and rolls his eyes.

“Fucking bullshit. Besides, I’m not gay,” he huffs and fidgets in the chair. Ellie swats at his face with a brush. “If I were gay, I would be Out Gay. But I’m not. I’m just your average, everyday, chiseled jaw bisexual.” He lays on the sarcasm to add, “A no-good, greedy, treacherous bisexual.”

“Bisexual icon,” Ellie corrects. “Bi-con. Bisexual Hero. Ackles, if you don’t hold still, I can’t be responsible for what happens to your face.”

Jensen glances over at Jared. His tone softens. “Sweetheart, ignore it. It’s hogwash. It happens. It’s happened and it will happen again.”

Ellie swaps out brushes and dusts the bridge of Jensen’s nose with more concealer. “Avoid The Diamond if you can,” she offers. “That place and Lupo will rat out anyone.”

“I had no idea,” Jared sighs and finishes sending a text to Anza.

He lets her know about the picture and cautions her to stay on guard until they meet for dinner later. Immediately after, he texts his mother, who has already seen the picture and wants to know if she should fly out to Vancouver to kick some ass.

Biting down on her bottom lip, Ellie gives Jensen a final look over. She fixes pieces of his hair, which she has parted down the right. “Bishop’s is still safe. The restaurant thing is trial and error. My brother used to work at Lupo. He got three hundred bucks every time he tipped off an asshole.”
Stylistically, this movie is a departure for Jensen. He looks more like Matthew McConaughey in *The Wedding Planner*. Jared is no expert in film studies, but he understood the style choices behind McConaughey’s character. The glasses, the hair, the wardrobe selections were all intended to make him relatable, approachable, and non-threatening. The same can be said for the accent he carries throughout the movie. It all works together for the character and the overall story.

The directors and the powers that be decided that in this film, Jensen needed to fulfill a similar role. His last movie had him as a worn down gladiator struggling to survive. In this film, he wears tailored suits, glasses, and his hair parted and gelled. It’s a complete one eighty; they aren’t in Kansas anymore.

“Nice work,” Jensen says with a laugh. “Remember to cover up my freckles this time.”

“If I miss any, tell them they can CGI that shit out if they want,” Ellie grumbles. She leans against the makeup counter. “Okay. That’s all I can do for your face. The rest is up to god herself. I thought freckles would make you more irresistible to your adoring public.”

Jared reassures his mother that he doesn’t require her assistance in Vancouver just yet. He sighs and shoves his phone in his pocket when he receives her response.

“Jay?” Jensen gets up from his chair and takes a few shaky feet towards Jared. He’s been sitting for ninety minutes. “How you doin’?”

“John’s on his way,” Jared answers and extracts himself from his own chair. “I guess he and momma decided it was best for him to fly out early.”

Ellie starts cleaning brushes and tosses out sponges. She holds one brush like a wand. “Bippity boppity boo, John’s on his way to rescue you.”

“Rescue?” Jensen sighs. “Or kick my ass?”

“Uh, hello,” Ellie grumbles. “This is John we’re talking about, so clearly both.”

Jensen nudges Jared’s chin with his hand. “Hey, get off the pouting train and hop on the party train. It’s alright. He had to fly out here anyway. You know. To do what I pay him for.”

Anza texts back with a suggestion for dinner tonight. She proposes that they cram into Nathan’s apartment and either attempt to cook or order a ridiculous amount of food. Jared holds back on answering, though relief sets in. People can’t take their pictures and sell them for money without their permission if they stay in. Maybe he and Anza should have done that earlier.

“I know, it’s okay,” Jared clarifies and smiles. “It just caught me off guard. That’s all.”

“You can’t stay three steps ahead of them, you’ll exhaust yourself trying, Jay.” Jensen bops Jared’s nose. “I’d kiss you, but El would kill me three times before I’d hit the ground.”

“Four times,” Ellie chimes in. “I think I see Sarah headed this way. You know what that means.”

Jensen claps his hands together. “Showtime.”

Chapter End Notes
what! an update in a timely manner?! gasp!

hey, you got a minute? :D take this survey i made to help me decide how to do fic updates. it's two questions, easy peasy.
www.surveymonkey.com/r/7RCDY83

i love researching movie sets. i find it super interesting. i would also like to eat at craft services.

also, throughout this, i kept thinking about that behind the scenes mockumentary the spn cast did a few years back. XD

comments are love! <3
Crew members have been working on this particular section of set for the past two hours--setting up equipment, running cables, adjusting lighting, testing for sound, and loading film. The photographer in charge of taking behind the scenes pictures captures some of this process--both to prove to the studio that this production takes its job seriously and for any extras the studio decides to release.

Getting ready to film and actually filming requires stamina and discipline from everyone involved.

And patience.

Lots and lots of patience.

Smaller films, with an experienced crew, can be shot in about twenty-five to thirty-five days. Larger films, more of the blockbuster type, take anywhere from eighty to one hundred days--more if the film
relies heavily on CGI and other special effects, which will require actors to be on set longer. Jensen hopes he can wrap filming within forty days. Today marks day seven for him, though the crew has been working on pre-production for the past three months.

Sarah leads Jensen over to the correct stage for this afternoon’s scene: a park bench situated on astroturf, surrounded by green screens, lights, mics, cameras, and mats. One of the PAs sets up four chairs away from the stage--one for Jensen, his co-star, the director, and the producer.

Jared tries to keep up with the number of people that introduce themselves to him and give congratulations on their engagement. Jensen works with Sarah by rehearsing a few lines and going over what the end goal is for today. Ellie holds up a photograph of Jensen from his previous time on set and makes last minute adjustments to his makeup and hair. Crew members work in a flurry to finish set-up.

A man about Jensen’s height walks up to the set. Trim and lean, he wears an oversized white t-shirt with blue horizontal stripes, plain jeans, and scuffed sneakers. The salt and pepper beard he sports makes him look a tad older, but a curious, bright look in his eyes cancels it out.

“Is Garrett here yet?” he asks, browsing the set. From his back pocket, he takes out a red Moleskine notebook and pen, then starts to jot down notes.

Sarah fields the question. “Not yet, but we have confirmation that he left Marjorie’s ten minutes ago.”

“Hmm. Good. That buys us some time. We’re doing a few lines, yeah? El, I thought we had Jensen in a red tie last week.”

“We did,” Ellie confirms. “But then you complained it was too distracting so we changed it to navy. I have proof. Pictures. Affidavits. Witnesses.”

Salt and pepper man laughs, easy and open. He continues writing. “Okay, I remember now. Not sure why I didn’t write this down last week. No red tie. Changed to navy.”

“Maybe you can’t read your own handwriting,” Ellie quips. “Also, care to explain why we had to hire Garrett? Wouldn’t a singing cactus been a better option? Cheaper, too.”

“Let’s not argue and say we did--for continuity. You know I had to hire a choreographer.”

“Yeah, well, you’re the director--reign his ass in.”

“I will do whatever needs doing to people’s asses as I see fit. Now.” The Moleskine book closes. “Where is the man with the face?”

Jensen has slowly moved closer to Jared, not wanting to attract attention in doing so. He makes it with only three more feet to go. Abruptly, he turns and holds his hand up. “Right here, oh most noble one. And might I add that you look especially handsome today.”

Salt and pepper walks over. He laughs again, though he shakes his head. “What do you want, Ackles? Evian with bubbles and a twist of lemon?”

“Yeah, that’s right--fetch me my Evian. I drink from only the finest springs and lakes in France. I also want to talk to you about the quality of the coffee. Oh, and introduce you to my fiance, Jared.” Jensen beams, smiling wide, and holds his hand out to Jared.

Jared accepts Jensen’s hand and the two of them stand side by side, holding hands in the middle of a
movie set, like this kind of thing happens to Jared all the time.

“Oh my god,” Salt and pepper gasps, hands on his cheeks in embarrassment. “I’m so sorry. My mind is a haze of fog after the meeting I had with the suits. Hi! I’m Kauri.” He enthusiastically shakes Jared’s free hand, then shoots a glance at Jensen. “You’re so selfish with your boo, you bad man.”

Heaving a labored sigh, Jensen shrugs. He lets go of Jared’s hand in favor of squeezing his shoulder. “I didn’t want to bring him here and scare him off, since y’all are such beasts.”

Kauri huffs and rolls his eyes. “Crew is family. And family can get a bit scary, especially Ellie. Do you like the set, Jared? I hope Jensen hasn’t ruined it for you.”

“I love it,” Jared blurts out, unable to conceal his enthusiasm. “Everyone’s been awesome and can I just say that I loved your work on ‘Kiwi.’ The pacing. The timing. The sets. It’s iconic. And thank you for shooting down the idea of having a ghost scene—I watched your interview in the extras on the DVD.” Before he can help himself, he adds, “And uhm, the decision to make ‘Kiwi’ with the focus on an indigenous character—also amazing.”

Jared finds himself pulled in close for a hug. Kauri laughs and thumps his back. “I knew it, I knew you were good people the second I saw you. Holy shit, you know I don’t know if anyone’s ever told me they watched my interview on the extras.”

Different members of the crew approach Kauri for his signature on orders, shipments, or studio updates. Sarah fields questions as she can, and delegates to others when she can’t. Not everyone knows each other’s names, but everyone seems to be on good terms. Jensen takes his place back in front of the multiple cameras and lights to run through lines with two extras, who appear delighted to be included and Jared doesn’t blame them. He can hardly stop himself from gawking as Jensen’s photo double walks up to Ellie and asks for advice on his hair for a scene he’s shooting two stages down.

“You can sit,” Ellie says to Jared and motions towards Jensen’s chair. “He’s still gotta be wired for sound and that takes an age.”

“Is it okay?” Jared resists the urge to take pictures of everything and anything.

“Listen, if anyone tries to start shit with you, send ‘em to me. Remind them that I’ve got mascara that could cause blindness. Sit. Make yourself comfy.”

And so, Jared sits.

In Jensen’s personalized directors chair.

On a movie set.

What the fuck.

Furiously, he texts Anza, Charlie, and Candy about his experience with a long string of exclamation points at the end of each somewhat coherent sentence. He texts his mother that he may have died and gone to heaven—he’s happier than a clam at high tide.

The entire set goes dead quiet the second Kauri announces, “Rolling!”

Jared doesn’t dare make a sound. He even stops texting for fear his thumbs might make a noise. Candy demands a moment to moment description with not a single detail omitted. And while Jared tried to deliver that for her, words cannot convey the sight and sound of what happens next.
Jensen stands in front of the park bench and reads off the details from the black and white clapper snapped by an assistant. Kauri and one of the sound crewmembers raise their thumbs.

“Action,” Kauri commands, in place behind the center camera.

Instantly, Jensen’s body language transforms from his own to his character’s. Edison stands, moves, speaks, smiles, and laughs in a completely different way than Jensen. The differences are jarring for the first few lines. Everything, down to hand movements, shouts the presence of Edison and only Edison. Lines come through quick and lively, in a voice Jared only faintly recognizes. This voice adjusts for the size of the stage and stays crisp after three takes.

Kauri and Sarah pause to adjust lighting, consult with technicians, and coach Jensen.

“Good,” Kauri says, standing next to Jensen, facing the cameras. “I just want you to stay ambitious. Chin up. A little louder. Let’s shoot from the right this time. Are we ready?”

Everyone, including Jensen, responds with a solid, “Yes.”

No amount of DVD extras could have prepared Jared for The Real Deal. He puts his phone away and zeros in on Jensen at work. Once again, Jensen slips into character on a fucking dime. It’s so seamless, Jared shudders. Facial expressions. Vocal inflections. It all comes together to deliver something natural and believable. Edison is jovial, excitable, and spike after spike of restless energy.

A simple scene in front of a park bench turns into a thrilling production. Crew move in the background—involved and invested in capturing the best take. All of their hard work and expertise ensures that the audience sees nothing other than Edison—fully realized in this exact moment.

Edison moves left, right, forward, backward, and side to side as directed from behind the camera or as he sees fit. He climbs over the bench, stands on it, holds his arms out, sighs, laughs, and jumps down. On a line about the moon, Jensen stumbles and quickly apologizes. Kauri waves off the apology and filming barely sees a hiccup.

Jared watches Edison admit to the camera that he’s not even a hot mess… he’s a lukewarm mess.

This is definitely a comedy. Jensen uses his ability to surprise, his talent for timing, and his knowledge of how the scene needs to look to the audience to deliver these lines to Kauri’s standards.

And still, when the scene wraps two hours later, all Jared can think about is the lukewarm line.

Jensen gives Edison a sense of vulnerability in a line that some might see as a throwaway. But in that line, in those ten seconds, Jensen and Edison turn themselves inside out and back again without the slightest hitch. Edison carries on—but only because Jensen allows it.

This is so much more than a comedy.

“That’s a wrap,” Sarah shouts for the crew. “Set-up for 22A.”

Worries and hurt from the past tumultuous month of adjustment, introductions, miscommunication, and distance continue to heal as Jared continues to seek out solutions. He knows he often drags his feet on some of the more obvious solutions—but there seems to be hope for him.

It makes sense to Jared why Jensen kept stringent rules on having visitors to his movie sets. And it fills him with gratitude and appreciation to be the exception to those rules.

Jensen walks over to Jared as soon as he can. Beaming, he holds out his arms.
There’s the actor, the character, and the man who wears threadbare Cowboys shirts and boxers around the house, snores like a chainsaw, eats Blue Bell chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream straight out of the carton, and devotes hours to the study of barbecue and whiskey.

“This must be Jensen for, ‘I want a hug,’” Jared wonders out loud.

He then returns Jensen’s grin with one of his own and yanks Jensen in for a rib-crushing hug that rivals Nathan’s. “Holy fuck, am I proud of you,” he murmurs into Jensen’s cheek.

“I’ll train you yet,” Jensen murmurs back, pleased. He ruffles Jared’s hair. “Thank you, sweetheart.”

Chapter End Notes

howdy! 1,900 words just for you. :D

special thanks to D for the help and prodding to get this kicked out. XD

thanks to y'all for being here and sticking with me as i work on this massive installment to this verse. it’s been quite the ride these past... thousands of words lol. the doc for this fic is massive.

comments are love and super appreciated. <3

if you enjoy my work and would like to support me outside of AO3, visit my tumblr: compo67.tumblr.com. :)

(also, i finally made a collage thingy for this fic! :D)
Ninety-nine percent of the time, Jensen works with folks on set called Movement Coaches--folks who walk him through specific movements for more physically intense scenes. The Movement Coach would work with the director to make sure their vision was met for the scene and overall movie. Teamwork between all parties ensures a seamless filming and viewing experience.

Teamwork is the last thing on Garrett Jeoffrey’s mind.

Jensen tenses at the sound of the choreographer’s voice. Actually, the most of the film crew tenses, including Kauri. The only one immune to this reaction is Ellie, because she knows better, and Jared, because he doesn’t. Between filming a few more lines, reshoots, touch ups, photography, and checks for continuity, there wasn’t much time for anyone to, according to them, “Properly prepare you for the Garrett Experience.”

But that’s okay, because Jared has watched The Devil Wears Prada at least two hundred times with Charlie, so if this man is anything like Miranda Priestly, he’ll be fine.

Except that Garrett pulls a Miranda and flings his nicotine-soaked coat at Jared before sauntering over to Kauri.

Caught unprepared, Jared peels the coat off of his face and assures the four PAs who rush over that he’s fine. He’s fine. Totally fine. If he had a pocket knife so he could cut slits into the Gucci coat, he’d be better, but he’s fine.

Garrett’s voice matches his dark, man of mystery aesthetic. Instead of shrill, it comes out in the most chilling, intense, sinister baritone–surprising for his small, lean frame.

“When I worked with Liza on the set of Cabaret, even the greenest production assistants knew I required to have a live lobster every single day of production. Not just Monday. Not just Tuesday. Every. Single. Day. This is a part of my contract, Kauri--it is not up for negotiation.”

The expression on Kauri’s face changes from exasperated to someone-will-have-to-exhume-your-remains-shortly-so-kindly-fuck-off.

Jared whispers to Ellie. “What’s he need a lobster for?”

“To replace the one he shoved up his ass the day before,” she sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. “Here we go. Hold onto your butt.”

He does not miss the Jurassic Park reference, but why the fuck is everyone treating Garrett with the caution worthy of a raptor or a T-Rex when he’s not even an actor in the god damn movie?

Garrett steps on stage, approaches Jensen, and shakes his head and rolls his eyes. “No, no, no, no, no. Mr. Ackles, have we not talked about posture? Every time I look at you, your posture screams Texas trailer park trash. Shoulders back. Chest out. Chin parallel to the floor. We’re going for charming, not schlubby.”

Oh.
In a shout, Garrett demands that the appropriate music begin on a loop.

“I wanna fucking loop him one,” Ellie snarls, arms crossed over her chest. She starts to say something else, until Garrett barks out an order for makeup.

“Look at him,” Garrett grumbles and grabs Jensen’s chin. “I’m seventy years old and I look younger in a light powder than all this gunk you’ve used with your putty knife. He’s positively geriatric.”

Ellie shoots a glare towards Kauri, who sighs and asks that Garrett please refrain from touching the actors and focus on the job he is contractually obligated to do.

With a scoff, Garrett unleashes his opinion. “I’ve seen pictures like these tank faster than Travolta’s career when he agreed to do *Saturday Night Fever 2* --against my wishes. God rest his soul.”

“Travolta isn’t *dead,*” Ellie snaps and applies a fresh coat of powder over Jensen’s nose.

“Death would have been a mercy in comparison. Jensen, we do not have time to go over the basics from our previous delightful session--I hope you still remember which foot is your right and which one is your left. I don’t have time to teach you again.”

Jensen opens his mouth to reply, but Garrett beats him to it.

“Close that mouth. Get into position. Breathe through your nose. I’m sure *someone* on your high school football team told you that at least once.”

Drew might be a piece of work, Donna might be a piece of work, but this man makes Miranda Priestly look like Michael Scott. Anger, rage, fury, previously untapped loathing fills Jared from head to toe. He clenches his hands around the arm rests of Jensen’s directors chair, trying not to actively think of them as Garrett’s most breakable limbs.

No one talks to Jensen like this. Not even Donna at her worst. Jensen doesn’t require ass-kissing treatment from anyone, but this is abuse. Why isn’t anyone speaking out?


Is it any fucking wonder when the next words out of Garrett’s mouth are, “No, no, no! I said--fourth position, *fourth* position. This is why I refuse to work with blondes. Mr. Ackles, we spent twenty-seven minutes last week going over the fourth position. Look. Here it is for you, one more exhausting time.”

Jared thinks back to Mayhue’s, when a tourist started screaming obscenities at him because he refused to honor the price of a book as it was listed on Amazon. This woman couldn’t have been more than five foot two, but she managed to get under his skin, despite the distance of the sales counter between them.

In the end, he gave her the discount, rang her out, and banned her from the store.

Some people take manipulation to new heights for their own sadistic gain. But that was a customer. Garrett is supposed to be a professional. It’s his job to teach Jensen how to tell a story and affect the energy of a scene through dance.
However, Jared isn’t naive enough to think that he can stand up and start yelling at Garrett to not be such a prick to Jensen and the crew.

There’s shit going on in the background Jared doesn’t see—contracts, networks, favors, reputations, awards. Maybe Kauri had to hire Garrett because the studio made him and any pushback from the set could jeopardize the movie—and the thousands of jobs it creates. Maybe Kauri thought hiring Garrett would earn the film some prestige—Hollywood doesn’t exactly make a shit ton of musicals anymore. Maybe Kauri was held at gunpoint and forced to choose the only available choreographer within the production’s budget.

And Jensen is a grown man. He doesn’t need Jared to potentially ruin a day of filming or negatively affect the fate of the entire movie. If working with Garrett is intolerable, he could have said something by now, right?

...right?

Forty-five agonizing minutes pass by with little progress. Jensen struggles in the middle of whatever steps Garrett yells at him to do. Irritated, Jared stands up and paces. Ellie paces with him, though with substantially more swearing. Kauri suggests a ten minute break, but Garrett refuses, citing he has places to be after this and he refuses to be late.

God forbid.

Jared places his right hand over his mouth to keep himself from shouting that Garrett better not forget a broom—it’s his only ride home.

Fuck.

Exhaustion, tension, and trauma radiates from everyone on set except Garrett.

After Garrett finds a way to insult Jensen’s freckles and his legs, Jared breaks two rules. The first involves the use of his phone. The second, he asks Ellie for a piece of paper and a pen. He writes faster than a bride late for her wedding. After two revisions and a once-over, he calmly walks over to Kauri and Sarah.

In his best Texan accent, he asks for a favor. “I think I got it,” he explains and shows them his notes. “I mean, I’m pretty sure I’ve got it, down to the last step.”

Garrett shouts for someone to bring him a god damn caramel macchiato before he loses his last nerve with an actor who can’t dance.

Kauri bites his bottom lip and quickly scans Jared’s crumpled sheet of paper. He nods and tells Sarah to cut filming on all three stage cameras, then to document this in the notes to send to the studio in the morning. If anything happens, Kauri can at least tell the studio that it didn’t cost them money to film.

There should be a few other things to happen, like liability forms, but Kauri opts for a handshake and a prayer or five instead. He walks on stage and asks a few crewmembers to bring over extra mats and place them around the park bench. This is to ensure that if someone falls, they’re likely to fall on the mat.

“We’re going to take a ten minute break,” Kauri states, his tone hard and uncompromising. “Give everyone a chance to cool down and drink their caramel macchiatos without interruption. Then, we’re going to try something new.”

Garrett attempts to protest, but shuts his mouth as a PA procures a caramel macchiato from thin air.
Lord, if only that was the end of it.

The second Garrett walks off to, in his words, “smoke a pack and try to calm down before working with Mr. Ackles again,” Jensen grabs Kauri by the shoulders.


Kauri laughs nervously and motions towards Jared. “Well, Jared may have a solution to prevent you from fully losing your shit.”

With confusion and desperation in his eyes, Jensen looks to Jared. He takes Jared’s hands in his.

“Sweetheart, I know this is tough to watch, but I’ll be okay I--”

“I got it,” Jared quips. He squeezes Jensen’s hands. “I understand the steps.”

“You do?”

“Yeah. I mean, wasn’t a walk in the park, but I figure I got it. I also made a change here…” Jared takes out his crumpled piece of paper and points at a section of steps. “Instead of right, kick left. It’s not a huge change, but I think it’ll help you make that transition into the fourth position like he kept screaming.”

Jensen rubs his chin and ignores Ellie’s muttering from a far to quit ruining his makeup. Serious in tone, he asks, “Jay, if we change anything, he’s gonna lose his shit.”

“It’s one step,” Jared insists. “And look--the transition is easier for you because you’re stronger on your right. We ain’t changing more than that.”

“He’ll notice.”

“He’ll also notice that I’ve written down his work and I’m about to show it to you.”

Eyes closed, Jensen takes in a deep breath. He runs a hand through his hair. “That’s my next question, Jay. What do you mean by, ‘I got it’?”

Jared stands with perfect posture. “It’s called cotillion,” he answers. “Momma sent me to Miss Penny’s Junior Manners Cotillion for young boys the whole ninth grade. What fuck face is having you do is something similar what Gene Kelly did in *Singin’ in the Rain* and *An American in Paris*. He’s just not explaining it right.”

There’s no sense in pretending he’s a world renowned, experienced choreographer and dancer because he’s not. But he has watched every Gene Kelly musical in existence more times than he’s watched *The Devil Wears Prada* and Garrett should be fucking ashamed of himself. What he’s presented to Kauri as original choreography is a weak mesh of two well-known, slightly rearranged pieces that aren’t his.

“We can try,” Kauri chimes in. “I’m willing to try. Jared’s willing to try.”

Yes seems to hang on the tip of Jensen’s tongue.

Unfortunately, Garrett bursts back on stage, another lobster up his butt. He rants and rages over Kauri’s demand that Jared be given fifteen minutes to help Jensen figure out the steps.

“And who the fuck are you?” Garrett roars and points at Jared. “Some PA trying to get your fifteen minutes of fame without getting down on your knees? Well, let me tell you this, sweetheart…”
“Sweetheart,” he shouts, “happens to be my fiancé. And if you ever speak to him like that again, my foot’s gonna be so far up your ass, you won’t be able to eat your precious fucking lobster for a year.”

“I will not be usurped by an amateur. My lawyers and the studio will be hearing about this mockery!”

“Ain’t nobody tryna replace you,” Jensen snaps back. “Jay’s just gonna dumb it down enough for a poor ol’ redneck like me. It’ll save you the hernia.”

Color drains from Garrett’s face as Kauri calls for quiet on set.

Jared asks Kauri to dim the lights, if possible.

“Bobby,” Kauri calls out. “Bring the lights down a touch, please.”

“Make these fifteen minutes count, sweetheart,” Jensen murmurs, the two of them in position by the park bench.

“Just listen and follow my lead. We’ll go through it once without the music, second with.”

“I get all tingly when you take control like that.”

“Jen!”

“Sorry, sorry!”

Miss Penny, at eighty-four years young, had called Jared the best dancer in his group. However, what Miss Penny taught him was not anywhere near how to dance on a movie set, next to his future husband, in front of about one hundred people. Lord, give him strength. Please, please, please don’t let him fall flat on his face and break either his nose or Jensen’s.

Let him handle this better than he handled that lady at Mayhue’s.

Ellie gives Jared two thumbs up from her place off stage.

Okay.

He can be confident for fifteen minutes. In a soft tone, the one he usually reserves for early mornings in bed, Jared begins from the top. “Step. Step. Back. Back. Step up.” He imagines himself pouring a cup of coffee for Jensen in their kitchen, adding a touch of cream and a hint of sugar so he might sneak a few sips out of it later.

“Step up again. Down. Up. Kick right—swing into fourth position, that’s it, great.”

Their movements no longer look or feel lukewarm. “Lunge left,” Jared continues, his tone even and calm. “Step forward. Push out. Step left. Hands up, bring ’em around.” He issues instructions like Brooks and Dunn on a Friday night at their favorite country bar in Austin. “Kick right. Pique turn into fifth, then kick out left. Land back, both hands up, good, turn. Up on the bench—hold.”

Beads of sweat roll down Jensen’s temples. His brow furrows in concentration, jaw set.

This is so weird. Maybe weird isn’t the right word. Surreal. Impossible.

Jensen seems to think so too, as reflected in his eyes as they look at each other while standing on the bench together. Holy fuck, they’re doing it.
Then again, maybe it’s not so odd to be able to sync together this way. They dance to Brooks and Dunn on a regular basis. They rock out to Zeppelin, Queen, and Van Halen whenever they shower together and someone remembers to turn on the Bluetooth speaker. They follow each other’s moves underneath the comfortable sheets of their king-sized bed inside the space they both call home.

They have god given chemistry.

“Leap,” Jared says, breathlessly happy in this moment.

Jensen leaps.

Jared follows.

Chapter End Notes

phew! this was a delicious challenge to write! i had "Grace Kelly" in my mind as i day dreamed this chapter.

now, just don't expect Jared to suddenly become a professional choreographer or a dancer. XD (although...!)

thank you to D for the help on this chapter, as always.

comments are love! also, holy cow, this fic just reached 1,000 kudos. :O

(for more info about me + my writing, visit me on tumblr: compo67.tumblr.com)
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

**John:**

The life of a celebrity bodyguard is far from easy.

And very often, it is anything but glamorous.

John has made a living for himself the past twenty years by being invisible. He’s dealt with handlers, managers, PR, agents, studio execs, wannabes, stalkers, reporters, paparazzi, celebrities, and entourages. Some of his clients have been more manageable than others. Some have been incredibly difficult to work with and John couldn’t wait to haul ass out of the job.

The life of a client in need of a bodyguard is often fast-paced, unpredictable, chaotic, and quite often downright bizarre. One client, back in his early days, insisted on going for jogs at two in the morning. But she couldn’t go for a two in the morning jog in the comfort of her own in-home gym. She insisted on going for a run around the block. For ten miles. She also subscribed to a diet that consisted of grapefruit juice cleanses and spaghetti made out of zucchini.

In the eight years he’s worked with Jensen, John has definitely seen Jensen go through his share of carrot juice cleanses, kombucha fasts, kale chip dinners, power bar lunches, green smoothie breakfasts, and all of the inevitable cursing.

Despite the cycles of whatever diet Jensen took on for himself or the studios pressured him to try, he never demanded that John go with him on a ten mile jog in the middle of the night. Nor has he ever insisted that John pick up kids from daycare, walk the dog, or construct detailed lies for both studio execs and family.

John found his way to guarding Jensen Ackles through Levy, Jensen’s former bodyguard. Levy had been an excellent Sergeant in the Marines, but he was a shitty bodyguard.

He was much too lax. His attention lapsed. And he often got too schmoozy with his clients.

Bodyguards are not friends.

Levy could never understand how to set boundaries. Jensen was twenty-three, had finally landed more than a few roles as extras or one-liners, and the world was his oyster. Levy was hired by Jensen’s then agent and the two of them got along fine for two years without much of a hiccup.

Until Jensen’s fame got him thinking that maybe he was also a celebrity. Maybe he was Jensen’s friend.

All it took was one studio party.

Jensen’s so-called friends had pushed him into trying out a few things; things that came in baggies. John has worked for celebrities and musicians. He’s no stranger himself to alcohol and shit stronger than a blunt. Fuck, he was a teenager in the seventies.
The Marines knocked that shit out of him right quick.

That could not be said for Levy.

So although he had been able to keep certain habits and experiments swept under the rug from everyone including family, when his young client was unresponsive in the morning, the whole goddamn world imploded.

Fortunately, Jensen’s father understood how to keep the details out of the papers. He also knew how to quietly check his son into rehab for two weeks.

Most fortunately of all, Alan Ackles fired Levy’s ass.

John had been working for a few clients when Levy called and begged to be recommended for something. Anything. With more ex-Marines turning to private protection, competition was merciless, and Alan Ackles—with a wall of lawyers--did everything possible to ensure that Levy’s career took more than a momentary hit.

The last John has heard from Levy, he was working at his brother-in-law’s car dealership behind a desk.

Bodyguards must be ready for anything. Colds. Flus. Plane delays. Overbearing families. Fans. Studios. Pressure from the industry, pressure from the inner circle, and pressure from the reflection in the mirror. Actors, musicians, athletes, authors, industry giants—they all need buffers. They need people around them unafraid of setting boundaries and following through on tough decisions.

John flew out from Los Angeles to Dallas to meet directly with Alan.

He offered boundaries.

He offered an extensive resume of following through on tough decisions.

He offered the ability to navigate the same pitfalls and mistakes so many of his clients had been through.

Alan hired him for a six month trial period. If Jensen decided to, Jensen could keep him on or dismiss him at the end of those six months.

Almost ten years later and John flies into Vancouver at ten in the evening.

Mary greets him at the terminal. Perpetually cheerful, a true Midwestern at heart, she hands John a docket. “Look at you,” she whistles, confidently five foot three to his six foot three. “Looks like your butter cake’s done in the middle.”

“Mind your own butter cake,” John murmurs, but allows a sliver of a smile. “SUV?”

“Out front.”

“Paparazzi?”

“Also out front.”

“Mary.”

“Kidding!” She grins and keeps up with his pace. “I told them you were landing and they left quicker than my grandmother chasing after pantyhose on sale at the Jewel.”
“Good.”

“Yeah, she was always a frugal woman.”

John shoots her a look. “Uh huh. What about my room?”

“I was about to book you a room at The Grumpy Ass Inn, but yeah, yeah, I got you one in the same hotel, one floor down. Your key’s in there. So is Jensen’s schedule for tomorrow, some fan mail that came through, and like, five hundred dollars of gift cards from The Diamond.”

“Good,” he grumbles. “Did we get the name of who took the original photo?”

Mary sighs and shakes her head. “It was Shang. He’s turned into such a jerk ever since he started working for People.”

“Hmm. Wonder who he’s takin’ orders from.”

“I can find that out.”

“Good. Where you staying?”

“With the rest of the crew at the Rosewood, down the street from you guys. Set call is at one for Jensen. You wanna meet up on set to discuss details?” Mary hands him the keys to the black, unmarked SUV waiting at the curb.

“Make it two. Got a meeting. Thank you for getting everything ready.”

“Please,” Mary laughs and shrugs her shoulders. “I know I rock this job. Have a good night.”

John enjoys planning.

Always has.

He was the first of five children—three sisters, one brother. Growing up, there were two options for someone like him in the town of Shepherdstown, West Virginia: work for the police or go into the military. Since his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather had served in the Armed Forces, he figured why break tradition.

All the cops do in Shepherdstown is respond to ghost stories anyway.

After his honorable discharge, he kicked around in West Virginia, working odd jobs here and there. He took on a few independent assignments from private security companies and noticed that he liked planning for whatever could go wrong.

Be friendly, but never familiar. Be proactive and think ahead. Speak when spoken to. Pay attention to details. Exist with a healthy dose of paranoia. Use social media sparingly, like any weapon. Work with others, not against them. Never allow any fan to take your picture.

John repeats these rules to himself on more stressful days.

On the drive from the airport to the set, John thinks back to a few stressful days with Jensen. There was that one time Jensen ran into Leonardo DiCaprio in a public area in the evening—all of it random, unscripted, and within sight of at least ten paparazzi vultures. Between DiCaprio’s detail and John, they worked their asses off. Their highest priority was to prevent any inconvenience to
their clients, who had every right to walk outside without being harassed or hounded. Both clients understood that they could give out a few autographs, pose for a few photos, and allow their security detail to step-in as the big bad purveyors of, “Excuse us, please step back, thank you.”

It is vital to Jensen’s career that he maintain an approachable aura towards fans.

While ninety percent of fans respect Jensen’s time and personal space, there are still the ten percent who do not. It is John’s job to maintain the delicate balance of healthy distance and personal connection.

He worked with Jensen through Jensen’s first stalkers--the first one had broken into his apartment, the second one had infiltrated the set as a PA. He’s shoved Jensen into a car after an event and had fans mob the car--rocking it back and forth until it threatened to tip over. He’s fended off people in and outside of the industry with offers of sex, drugs, and money just for one-on-one access to Jensen.

A few years back, he was there minutes after Jensen broke up with that annoying sack of… with Drew. Out of everyone in the world, John was the first to know it was over. Over with a capital O.

He’s been there for most of Jensen’s break-ups, either immediately after or in the days following.

The relationship with Drew was the only one with screaming matches and constant dysfunction. Drew seemed to enjoy having meltdowns on an hourly basis. On an epic level, the man could create sob stories worthy of a Pulitzer. Complaining was an art form. There were times Drew demanded that John accompany him to his own private event without Jensen--simply because he felt entitled to the security Jensen paid for.


John has faced every single danger in Jensen’s life for the past eight years and he’s not about to change that.

However, he hadn’t quite been able to plan for an eighteen year old fan at a convention in Dallas. A pure force of nature.

Almost as stubborn and set in his ways as Jensen.

He distinctly remembers Jensen meeting Jared at the steakhouse after the convention. Upon learning Jared’s age, Jensen got up from the table, apologized for the misunderstanding, and set to walking away without a second thought.

“You’re just gonna leave the kid there?” John had asked, closely following after Jensen.

“I’m sure as hell not gonna get involved with someone barely old enough to vote,” Jensen had whispered in reply. “He looked twenty-one.”

“I ain’t pushing,” John muttered. He shot a few looks at overly curious waitstaff. “I’m just saying--I drove through traffic at speeds that would frighten fish because you wanted to have dinner with this person.”

“Yeah… so?”

“It’s dinner,” John had sighed, “not a wedding. I bet you the kid doesn’t even have a way to get back home because you asked him to meet you here.”
John was married once. After the divorce, he married his career.

He parks right outside the set and chats with Lonny, the overnight security guard. He confirms that filming wrapped half an hour ago and Mary already sent the previous driver home for the night. Lean as a beanpole, Lonny fills John in on a few hockey games.

Crew members trickle out, exhausted, but buzzing with conversation.

Two particular individuals catch John’s attention right away--distinct in height and walking so close together, god himself couldn’t fit a piece of paper between them.

“I can’t fucking believe how amazing you are, Jay!” Jensen hollers, his arm securely around Jared’s waist. “You killed the monster! Slayed the dragon!”

“Someone is tired,” Jared laughs, yet he does nothing to push Jensen off of him.

“Someone is pumped,” Jensen quips. “Holy fuck, wait until Anz and Nathan hear about this. ‘Jay: Enemy of Choreographers Everywhere.’ You’re the next Lord of the Dance!”

“Reign it in, Jen,” Jared snickers and rolls his eyes. “Pretty sure I’d get along okay with Garrett if he wasn’t such a raging asshole.”

“Baby, you done a good job. He left with his tail between his legs, crying for his goddamn lobster.”

“What’d he say to me right after we finished filming?”

Jensen clears his throat and speaks, arms open, clearly imitating whoever was handed their ass tonight. “Excuse me, is amateur hour over?”

Jared takes an exaggerated bow. “Ladies and gentlemen, your amateur.”

In one fluid motion, Jensen pulls Jared in for a kiss.

Working in a highly personal capacity for high profile clients brings with it an enormous amount of responsibility. Discretion is a rule. Integrity is a necessity. Planning is a requirement. John has plans for just about every situation known to man. His back up plans have back up plans.

“I’m gonna marry you,” Jensen says with a sigh.

“Please do,” Jared answers back. “Or my momma’s comin’ after you.”

“That sounds about right,” John interjects. “And I’d be worried. She’s a better shot than me, I’ve heard tell.”

Both Jensen and Jared jump back in surprise, then laugh as they recognize their driver for the evening. Jensen gives John a pat on the back and quietly thanks him for flying out. Jared hangs back, but eventually holds out a hand.

“Your momma sends her love,” John relays and shakes Jared’s hand. “Don’t think I’ve ever seen Jensen in such good spirits after a long day of filming.”

Jared smiles, all amusement and gratitude. “I kicked ass today.”

“So I heard.” John opens a door to the SUV and sees Jared and Jensen in. He nods to Lonny, and Ellie, who waves at him from the crew member exit. She must be waiting for Sal. Changed the color of her hair again, he notices. “Lookin’ good,” he calls out.
“Feelin’ good,” Ellie calls back.

In the SUV, John texts a certain interested Texan that he has arrived safely and picked up her so-called Precious Cargo. Sherri replies with a picture of her living room couch, the blue quilt he bought for her just before he left, and two cups of coffee on the nearby TV tray. “You come back soon as you can, you hear? This couch and I are mighty lonesome.”

Before he can reply, she adds, “Don’t hold out on me either. I’m done buying AAA batteries.”

John thanks the good lord that no one can see his face. He tucks his phone away and revs up the SUV. Back to business. “Where to, gentlemen?”

“Nathan’s, please,” Jensen announces. He’s busy taking selfies of himself and Jared in the backseat. “His downtown place. Do you need the address?”

“Nope. Got it.”

“Where’s that one filter?” Jensen asks, brow furrowed, concentrating on tapping at his phone’s screen.

Jared heaves a put upon sigh and takes command of Jensen’s phone. “The one with the flowers?”

“Fuck no, I wanna be a cat.”

“Watch your mouth. Or I’ll use the watermelon filter when you’re not looking.”

“Sweetheart! You would never.”

John tries his best to maintain professional boundaries with Jensen. It ain’t easy. He likes Jensen, respects him for the work he does, the effort he puts in, and the humility he’s kept after more than a decade in the business. Rarely does Jensen ever do anything that requires shrouds of secrecy, non-disclosure agreements, or lengthy legal battles. The risky behaviors of his twenties--partying, drinking, smoking, whatever--faded into the background as he aged. Not everyone in the public eye grows into maturity.

However, John does not take his boss’ generosity or easy-going nature for granted.

Plenty of people have tried to muscle their way into Jensen’s life--people who had no right to his attention. Sometimes, Jensen has let those people in. And those people have taken what they could without giving half as much back.

His client ain’t perfect.

And neither is John.

But it seems like they’ve both managed to find folks in their lives content with making mac and cheese at home, cozying up on the couch, and taking selfies in the warm glow of whatever’s on the TV. That’s not to say a certain woman doesn’t enjoy going out every now and then.

Except her idea of going out doesn’t involve putting on pearls and matching her shoes to her handbag. She lives loud, proud, and in the moment.

It’s Sherri’s god given responsibility to take John out for ice cream, followed by skeet shooting, and finished off with an afternoon of horseback riding through lush, sloping hills. He countered by taking her to a gun show, going fishing, and fixing her up a barbeque worthy of foreign dignitaries.
Both mother and son ain’t perfect.

He thought it would be a conflict of interest to date his client’s future mother-in-law. Before he asked Sherri if she’d do him the honor of joining him for dinner, he asked Jensen for the all-clear.

The boss gave his blessing.

Arrived at their destination, Jensen pats John on the shoulder. “Come on up with us. Nathan says he’s got hot buns. And food.”

John leaves the car with the doorman, Roger, and heads up to the penthouse apartment alongside his client and Jared. He knows the layout of Nathan’s apartment, apartment building, and the exact number of minutes it would take the police to arrive if necessary.

He surprises himself and allows the force of Nathan and Anza to pull him into the group for a midnight dinner on the outdoor patio. The five of them eat, drink, and listen to Nathan’s excited ramblings. There might be a movie in the works with Clint Eastwood directing and Nathan punches Jensen in the arm. Anza and Jared curl up together, texting their friends back in Texas, and taking a few more selfies in between replies.

Nathan films Jensen and Jared singing to an old school Lyle Lovett song.

It is a privilege and a pleasure to watch his client lean into his fiance, the two of them awash in the soft shine provided by string lights and candles.

“She’s no lady,” Jensen sings, his mouth pressed to Jared’s cheek, “she’s my w-i-i-ife.”

“She hates chu momma!” Anza quips and pulls Nathan up for a dance. “Seems like I’ve always been’a hangin’ off chu right arm.”

Nathan spins Anza and they dance chest to back. “She loves to lie beside me, almost every night.”

“I don’t hate her,” Jared clarifies, biting back a smile.

Jensen continues, his arms wrapped around Jared’s waist. “She loves to tell me how much she hates the th-i-i-ings I do.”

All four chime in for the final few lines, “She’s no lady, she’s my wife. She’s n-o-o-o lady, she’s my w-i-i-ife!”

John sends a thirty second clip of the festivities to Sherri.

Within a minute, she texts back. “Great googly moogly, you’re about as sentimental as I am. ;)”

Before he can challenge that, she adds, “You’re making my heart melt over here--faster than sugar in the rain.”

There was a time when Jensen used to hide his Texan accent from people in his personal life. He had to do it for business, and he felt the need to do it at home. He leads a rousing rendition of “Stand by Your Man,” his drawl out full force as he honors Tammy Wynette.

There was a time when Jensen convinced John to fly fifteen hundred miles out of their way so he could buy a book from a certain store in Smithville, Texas. It was just a slight wrong turn on Rodeo Drive.

And maybe there was a time when John hoped they would continue to go out of their way and wind
up in Smithville. Or Dallas. Or Austin. Anywhere Jared was--because that’s usually where his momma was.

John takes a picture of the empty seat beside him.

“Hopin’ you’ll join us soon. Mighty lonesome here with these knuckleheads,” he taps out, thinks on it for a second, then sends off the picture and its message.

Sherri sends back a few simple words. “Honey, just you wait.”

He ain’t exactly religious, yet here, in this moment, John watches after his client and offers up a simple hope, courtesy of Tammy.

*Show the world you love him. Keep givin’ all the love you can. Stand by your man.*

Chapter End Notes

pov switch! aha! thanks to D and T for the feedback in beta. this chapter took hours to write, but it's one of my favorites.

thank you for your patience, y'all. <3 if you enjoy my writing and look forward to updates, visit my tumblr (compo67.tumblr.com) to see options outside of AO3 to support and engage with me. there’s bonus fic, art, behind the scenes notes, and access to unpublished fic. :D

it was fun to write a pov switch outside of j2 for this verse. i hope to do it again in the next installment! also, we’re winding down on this installment--gasp! but you know what that means for the next installment? WEDDING BELLS! (i have a spreadsheet for this wedding already, i swear to god...)

thank you for being here. <3 comments are love!
One week later, Ellie sits Jared down in the main makeup chair and looks at him without saying a word.

This might have struck Jared as odd before, but now he understands that silence from Ellie means the makeup artist wheels are turning.

The Fourth of July came and went in a flurry of begging, pleading, and driving. Jensen had to beg Kauri to let them finish filming early on the Fourth. When Kauri didn’t give him an answer, Jensen switched to pleading. Finally, against all odds, Kauri tossed Jensen out of the set earlier than expected.

Jensen not-so-secretly asked John to drive them to the airport, where Jared stepped out of the car, confused, and received a bear hug from his momma. The four of them flew to Seattle in a private plane, and arrived just in time to celebrate the last of the Fourth--American style. They watched the fireworks from the rooftop garden of the Four Seasons.

Before she left, Jared treated Sherri to a mother-son spa day at the Four Seasons.

In response to her protest about the cost, he told her, “If anyone deserves to be wrapped up in seaweed and buried in mud, it’s you.”

He paid for their spa day with his new credit card and sent her home with enough lotion, bath bombs, soaps, oils, and scrubs to last her for the next five years. Back in Smithville, she texted him that she was the best smelling person in First Class—not, wait—the entire plane.

Ellie leans against the counter and rubs her chin, deep in thought. She snaps, which brings Jared back from the hazy days of last week. “I’ve got it. If we go blonde, it’ll wash you out. Red is way too harsh. Black has the same problem. But I like a challenge.”

Jared holds his hands out and up, unsure of how exactly she pried him away from watching Jensen film scenes 32A, 33B, and 33C.

As she writes furiously in her notebook, and flips through pages for reference, Ellie details the different sets and movies she’s worked on. She started off as many makeup artists start: in art school. Her original major was in Fine Arts, and she specialized in mixed media. Oils. Acrylics. Watercolors. Charcoal. Spray paint. Her plan was to create enough art to sell at multiple galleries and tour the world.

Until she met Sal in her senior year. Sal, the cool, calm Fashion & Design senior who happened to participate in local Drag King competitions.

“Holy shit,” Ellie cackles, putting together a palette, “did my world change.”

Through Sal, she met her Drag Family. Little by little, she picked up odd jobs here and there, working for queens to do their makeup. What started off as a hobby turned into a side gig. Quickly, she learned that any kind of cream or liquid products on the face needs time to heat up to the rest of the face before blending it all together. Contour Queen? Cook the goddamn foundation. Only then can the beauty blender glide over like magic. Glitter Goddess? Invest in a fucking highlighter and
watch the shimmer. Princess Pout? Slap on some quality lip liner for long-lasting lipstick wear.

Ellie’s mantra changed from art school “less is more,” to drag runway “more is more.”

Drag demands versatility when it comes to makeup. No queen is the same, and every queen must own her look. Want a rounder cheek? Fine, just use a darker, thicker contour all the way to the corners of the lips. There are a million and one ways to contour and create illusions.

Never forget to blend.

And always, always tap and blow with eyeshadow.

She took her BA in Fine Arts and moved to Florida with Sal. From there, she worked a two year makeup apprenticeship at Walt Disney Studios. To pay her way through the program, Sal found her gigs for queens. She schlepped her ass across Miami and Orlando to apply crushed rocks and minerals in different combinations on faces.

It didn’t matter if the queen had the funds or not--Ellie made makeup work.

Why obsess over expensive, bullshit brand names when beauty supply stores and drugstores had stuff with the same quality for a better price?

One of her favorite queens--never fidgeted in her chair ever--happened to know a friend of a friend in Hollywood. Another move, this time without Sal for six months, and Ellie worked her way up from the gofer for an established makeup artist on a set to Lead Apprentice to Assistant to Lead. She managed to take an online Intro to Filmmaking class to understand lighting choices, camera angles, how to chart, execute, and organize a movie’s makeup plan for every character, scene by scene, working with the script.

Makeup artists arrive first and leave last on every set no matter what movie or show.

From queens to screens, her job boils down to speed, accuracy, and motherfucking attention to detail.

Exhaustion pulls at Jared just from hearing about the years of long hours, crummy pay, diva actors, sexist studio suits, ridiculous directors, ornery crew members, and inevitable budget cuts.

Once Ellie finishes the first part of her experiment, he barely recognizes himself in the mirror.

She grins and rubs her hands together, then holds up a can of hairspray.

“Close your eyes,” she instructs, tugging her red bandana over her nose. “And hold your breath. This might sting.”

Chapter End Notes

hello! glad to see y'all here! :D

i struggled with this chapter, until drag queens saved the day (as usual). i am terrible at time skips, but i had to move past that discomfort in order to continue writing this.

comments are love! <3
Jared walks down two blocks of downtown Vancouver without a single person recognizing him. And he doesn’t fall flat on his face either, which counts as another major win.

The Blue Water Cafe on Hamilton Street was highly recommended by Ellie, her wife, and every one of the grips for the food, scene, and service. Jared checks in with Lou at the front. Ellie called ahead and pulled a few strings. He walks over to the space at the bar specially reserved for him, carefully takes a seat, and observes the world from behind his Gucci sunglasses.

Everything he has on is borrowed and most will need to be returned.

However, he has been instructed to enjoy himself. It’s not every day that the studio lends out a pair of French Tutu Alta Louboutins. At twenty-three hundred dollars retail, Sal described these boots as an homage to the elegance of 1920s France. Smooth obsidian leather creates a dramatic curve all along his legs, all the way up to his thighs. The heels click like magic on the mahogany floor of the Blue Water.

He thought a lot of this would be incredibly uncomfortable, or at the very least, confining.

While this outfit isn’t exactly like wearing sweatpants and a t-shirt, it’s easy to move around in. Sal fitted him for everything and took the time to make a few adjustments for his size and height. She argued with Ellie about every piece except the boots. They both agreed on the boots.

An older gentleman behind the bar asks Jared if he’d like a drink, on the house, compliments of the Bar Manager. Jared frantically Googled the bar menu in the private car he ordered from the hotel so he would be able to order right off the bat and look like an Adult Who Knows Things.

“A Santiago Swizzle, please,” Jared replies with a smile.

It feels pretentious in a Jack Nicholson way to wear sunglasses inside. His worry fades when he spots a few other patrons wearing their own pairs.

He checks his phone and takes a sip of his drink—a concoction listed on the menu as bold, refreshing, and fun. The pineapple syrup sold him, along with the pisco, coconut Campari, lime, and Angostura Bitters. Three sips in and he notices someone at the bar who looks a little lost.

Jensen searches the bar. His eyes make quick work of those seated. After thirty seconds, he takes out his phone and starts sending a text.

Jared smiles into his drink and takes a deep breath.

Showtime.

Miracle of miracles, he slides off the bar stool in one smooth motion and glides over to the little lost movie star, drink in hand. He stands next to Jensen and leans in, close enough for intimacy, far enough not to give everything away all at once.

It’s possible that Ellie gave instructions on how to adopt a different, slightly higher tone of voice.
“A man like you shouldn’t have to wait for their date,” Jared quips. “You can be mine instead.”

Green eyes crinkle, amused. “Mighty nice of you,” Jensen says with a nod, not bothering to look up from his phone. “But my date is worth waiting for.”

At this point in time, Jared’s heart may or may not jump out of his chest due to this sudden ambush of love. What an impression that would make.

Calm down. Stop slobbering. Don’t cry. Regain control of the situation.

He tosses his hair over his shoulder and brings his left hand up to point at Jensen’s phone. “Seems like they’re not answering.”

A frown tugs at the corners of Jensen’s mouth, annoyed that this person not only hasn’t taken the hint, but also insists on invading his privacy. He opens his mouth to say something, no doubt a tad more severe than the gentle brush off moments before.

Light from the chandelier above the bar catches on a certain ring--highlighting the platinum band and classic cut of the diamond that rests on top.

After that, Jensen takes in the thin gold band and bangle bracelets on Jared’s wrist. Little by little, Jensen takes in a few more details like the white, off shoulder, mini dress fitted like a second skin. He might also notice the cinched belted waist with a sleek silver buckle. All this followed by a few scant, daring inches of bare skin before leading to the centerpiece: a pair of long, lean legs in Louboutin boots.

Jared grins and gives a slight shrug. He slips his sunglasses down his nose and looks Jensen in the eyes.

“Ditch your date and have a drink with me,” Jared teases.

“I…” Jensen’s mouth moves, but no sound leaves it. “…”

“Can you hold my drink? I should check my phone.”

Mired in shock, Jensen takes Jared’s drink without a word. The glass shakes in his hand as it threatens to shatter. People at the bar begin to pay attention at Jensen’s presence, however, unlike other places, they turn back to their own business without a fuss.

Jared replies to Jensen’s text with a few heart emojis, then tucks it away in the black clutch Ellie insisted he take with. He then sweeps his hair up into a silver clasp, exposing more of his shoulders and neck. The miracle of hair extensions, a professional makeup artist, and creativity made all of this possible.

Their eyes meet once again. Jensen runs a hand over his mouth and jaw. He looks around, then over his shoulder, and leans in. He practically whispers, “Maybe I do have a few minutes.” He checks Jared out with all the subtlety of an elephant crashing through Tiffany’s.

With a smile, Jared walks a half circle around Jensen. Just to sell the view from all angles. “I’m more than a few minutes kind of gal, Sir.”

Jensen immediately sets down Jared’s drink on the bar and leaves a twenty dollar tip. He moves faster than lightning. His voice filters into Jared’s ear, close, dark, and tense.

“Sweetheart,” he rumbles, hands on Jared’s bare shoulders, “we’re leaving.”
It’s an order, not a question.

In an instant, they arrive at the hotel.

They do things in the elevator that would frighten porn stars.

Jared makes a mental note that it might be a good idea to ask hotel security to erase that span of time from the security tapes. He files it away the second Jensen pushes him up against a wall in the entryway of their suite.

Every movement is swift, brash, and urgent.

Their bodies grind together in a mix of leather and denim. Jensen pins Jared down by the wrists and hips, seals his mouth over Jared’s, and proceeds to kiss him—filthy, possessive, and greedy as fuck.

Without warning, Jensen breaks from Jared’s mouth to his neck and bites down hard.

“My mine,” he growls, licking over the bruise. “Only mine.”

Before Jared can respond, Jensen bites down again, his teeth sinking with insatiable brutality. Jared gasps and runs his hands down Jensen’s back, making sure to use his nails because fair is fucking fair.

Unlike the other day, where Jensen took his time to break Jared apart piece by piece, Jensen gives into his hunger and feeds his impatience. He lifts Jared up by his waist. Instinctively, with no shortage of desperation, Jared wraps his legs around Jensen. The dress hikes up. The boots stay on. The bracelets clang together from the vigor of their movements.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Jensen pants into Jared’s mouth. “Holy shit, no way.”

Jared smirks at the discovery of a lace bra complete with the slightest hint of the most realistic silicon.

“My eyes are up here, Jen.”

Neither of them speak a coherent word after that.

The muscles in Jensen’s arm flex as he holds Jared up. He manages to work his hands up Jared’s dress and over his ass. It causes him some difficulty, but Jensen figures out how to grope Jared’s chest and ass at the same time without them falling over. Gravity and the laws of physics are their bitch.

Jensen unzips his black jeans. The sound of his zipper causes Jared to shudder. He kisses Jensen long, sweet, and messy, then swallows the moan Jensen gives when he realizes no lube is necessary.

Like a boy scout, Jared believes in being prepared.

He took a few minutes to himself in Jensen’s trailer before he left the set.

Skin to skin, they burn like flame against crystal. The blunt, wet tip of Jensen’s cock pushes against Jared’s slick, needy hole. Stubble scratches against Jared’s neck at the same time his hips sink an inch down, perfectly angled.

It’s always that first inch of Jensen’s cock that knocks the breath out of him.

Thick. Hard. Heavy.
They become call and response. Jensen pushes in. Jared breathes out. Inch by inch, Jared opens up, his skirt in bunches of fabric around his hips. The last two inches pound in with a loud squelch.

Jensen groans into Jared’s shoulder, buried deep. His cock responds with a series of swells and twitches. He is the needle and Jared is the groove in the record waiting to be played over and over again.

Impossibly fused, Jensen starts to move. Call. Jared grips onto Jensen’s shoulders. Response. The slap of skin against skin lays over the sound of their moans like lace against silk. Jared dips in for a kiss that is all spit and teeth and swift, swerving tongue. His mouth opens wide the second Jensen’s cock hits his prostate.

Body and soul.

Jared offers it all. Jensen takes it all.

Jensen offers it all. Jared takes it all.


Overwhelmed, Jared shouts and arches up. He spurts ropes of come into fabric, onto Jensen’s shirt, and some of it even drips onto his thighs.

High-velocity. High-intensity.

It’s like waiting for a fever to break.

Jensen comes inside Jared--twice.

Jared kisses Jensen, closes his eyes, and lets the afterglow take him wherever it wants to go.

Chapter End Notes

PHEW. working that porn muscle, it got pretty rusty! XD

hi! thank you for your incredible patience and support! my team is still trying to talk about a liver transplant. i’m better at accepting this news as we continue to look at my options. :) 

so right now, i’m just trying to work as much as i can so i can afford things like car insurance (yikes).

thank you for being here. <3

be sure to visit me at: compo67.tumblr.com.
Chapter 57

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

An abundance of adoration.

That’s the way Jensen looks at Jared, forty-five minutes later, sprawled out on one of the larger couches in the living room.

Panting still, completely wrecked and naked, Jensen grins.

It’s one of those megawatt, movie star, yet humble boy from Texas grins that reaches his eyes—intense and playful. The kind of grin that continues to melt Jared from the inside out.


His voice is shot, but it pours over Jared—peppery, divine, melodic. Jensen hacks Jared’s Twitter later on and tweets: “Wow. Just Wow. -JA”

Jared is the only one in the entire world who got to hear it.

Rest follows easy.

Chapter End Notes

i once had someone comment that they enjoyed smaller chapters as a break between long ones. so i don't feel too bad for posting a tiny update.

liver transplant talk is coming up in April. just trying to write as much as i can before then. thank you for being here. <3
Chapter 58

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Jared + hair extensions + Jensen’s intense fascination with them + their king size bed = a damn good

time.

Jared + hair extensions + Louboutin heels + special-order lingerie delivered to their suite + their king

size bed = Jensen’s complete and utter annihilation.

Jared + hair extension + Louboutin heels + special-order lingerie + their king size bed + Jared

topping + the very comfortable sofa near the wet bar + a few glasses of dry, rich whiskey served in

crystal glasses = Jared’s complete and utter annihilation.

There are so many ways to do the math.

Jared vows to explore them all.

As promised, Jensen buys the Louboutins, the dress, and every single accessory Ellie selected. He
can’t hardly walk when he returns to set to do so, but such is the sacrifice.
Between time on set and time in bed, Jared loses track of time. He indulges in his own lack of scheduling and events and discovers the hotel's pool terrace, complete with cabanas and palm trees. Anza joins him in the spa on the fifth floor, as an early birthday gift, Nathan treats them to a day of anything and everything at the Willow Stream Spa. Jared sips a cocktail at two in the afternoon, buried in mud next to his best friend, awaiting a Signature Massage and Manicure.

This is somehow his life.

He learns about eucalyptus infused foot cleanses, reflexology treatments, body butter, paraffin hand treatments, herbal wraps, coral stone massages, and deep cleansing facials—that last part never ceases to invoke memories of late-night Google Incognito searches.

The hotel encourages him to use their complimentary BMW car service for seamless transportation to and from Jensen’s set, and any other destination in Vancouver he desires to go.

Anza takes him to the Burberry store inside the Hotel Shangri-La on Alberni Street, then to Tiffany & Co. on Burrard, which is conveniently located next to Hermes, not too far from Louis Vuitton. Every single store, boutique, and showroom caters to their every whim. He half expects to pay a cover charge to get in just to look at the clothes.

Jensen tells him in plain words: “Show them your card and buy a few things I’d like to come home to, sweetheart.”

Two months ago, he and Anza were fighting with super soakers in Jared’s backyard. A year ago, they were babysitting Anza’s cousin’s niece’s twin boys for an afternoon just to afford an extra-large pizza at Homeslice the next day.

Now, he calls upon the spirit of Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman, and prays he doesn’t faint or clutch his pearls when he sees the price tags of some of the items selected for him by professional shoppers. A forty thousand dollar Hermes Birkin bag. A thousand dollar pair of sneakers from Ferragamo. A seventy-five thousand dollar Rolex.

With numbers like these, he genuinely considers a Rolex Oyster Perpetual Air-King Watch for five thousand dollars.

He settles on purchasing a suit for himself—something for Jensen to come home to. It almost physically pains him to swipe the card at the Gucci store. Anza holds his hand.

Most of the suits he’s bought in the past have been for funerals, weddings, or graduation and came from Goodwill or the Salvation Army. Sherri would try to fix them up—the pants were never long enough and the jackets were always too short.

In the fitting room, an older gentleman helps him in and out of the suit for alterations. The gentleman explains the details of the suit he selected: single-breasted jacket, full canvas construction, fitted drape, check cotton, horn buttons, patch pockets, baby blue lining, 100% cotton, made in Italy.

What all that means is in the next three to five business days, he’ll have a custom-tailored suit of dreams.

He can’t wait to have Jensen see him in and out of it.

Reality sets in at the Versace store, where he focuses on buying shoes, socks, cufflinks, and ties for both himself and Jensen. He proudly works on putting together coordinating outfits for them, like some kind of goddamn professional.
Then Drew calls.

“This better be good,” Jared grumbles before answering.

Anza tries on a dress and hardly skips a beat. “Why are you even picking up, dejo?”

Jared answers, purposefully placing the call on speaker, and makes sure to loudly say, “If I don’t, he’ll keep calling--hi Drew, what can I do you for.”

“Oh honey, what can you do to me,” Drew laughs.

Mimicking Drew’s laugh, Jared rolls his eyes. “Wow, what a phone call, so glad I picked up.”

“Me too! Your reception must be terrible up there because I’ve been trying to get through for days.”

“Yeah, it’s just awful, even though I just had this phone upgraded and we’re near a tower, but let’s not dwell on details.” Jared changes his tone on a dime. “What do you want.”

“BLu never heard back from you,” Drew sing songs. “You know, pumpkin, about interviewing for People. Big opportunity to sweep under the rug just like that.”

“Give it a rest,” Jared huffs and helps zip Anza up. “You can drop the act. It’s not gonna happen. Y’all cornered me at Irene’s and expected me to appreciate it. Well, I don’t do interviews—I don’t need or want the publicity.”

Drew scoffs and his voice raises in volume. “Oh, quit it with the farmboy routine, Jay-Jay. You’re as shallow as the rest of us, but you don’t have the balls to admit it yet. You better be grateful for any publicity, because as far as I’m concerned, the only talent you have is that face and that ass. And let me tell you, in ten years, Daddy Jensen will be shopping around for a new model.”

Jared takes the phone off speaker and tries not to crush his phone. “I’m sick of people like you thinkin’ they can walk all over me. The way you hang onto Jensen through me? It’s pathetic. And a waste of my fucking time. You’re so vapid, you’re afraid to look past the mirror because you know--you fucking know, Drew--that when you do, you’ll find nothing. Oh, and that’s Mister Daddy Jensen to you. Have a nice life.”

God bless the block feature on his phone.

Anza hugs him and kisses him on the cheek. “Damn, dejo, where chu learn how to be a boss ass bitch like dat? I was about to take off my earrings and smack a bitch through the phone. What the fuck!” She punches Jared on the shoulder. “He been talking to chu like dis the whole time an’ chu didn’t tell me?”

Satisfaction only lasts so long. Jared tucks his phone into his pocket and shrugs. This probably won’t be the last of Drew--he’s not lucky enough for that--but at least that’s one irritation off his plate for the time being.

“I thought I could handle it by being nice,” Jared mumbles, his face red and heart beating a mile a minute. “And I don’t wanna be… too quick to dismiss anyone.”

“Can’t be nice to some people,” Anza murmurs. She focuses on him, worry lines apparent around her mouth. “What else you been carrying on chu shoulders, huh?”

“Buy your dress.”
“Nope! I will live in this dressing room until chu tell me, dejo. Spill. Dimelo todo.”

“...you probably could live here, it’s bigger than my room at my mom’s.”

“Jay bird!”

“Okay, okay!” Jared holds his hands up. “I hated school! Every single second of it. People looked at me weird or didn’t talk to me. Or worse, wanted to talk about Jen. None of the professors helped me. No one helped me. That one dude from TMZ got in my face multiple times even when I said I didn’t wanna talk. Everywhere I went, someone either wanted something from me or didn’t even acknowledge my existence. Then there was Drew and he’s fucking exhausting. Then the car Jen bought me--awesome! But fuck if I knew how to even drive it. And Memo--holy fuck, I still don’t know what to do about Memo.”

Anza’s eyes go wide. She advances. She places her hands on Jared’s shoulders. “What? What about Memo? What happened?”

Steady, Jared tells himself. This ain’t squealing. This ain’t lying. It’s him reaching out. Letting people in. Accepting help.

Quietly, Jared summarizes his last interaction with Memo.

“That chingadera,” Anza whispers, one hand on her forehead. She sits down on one of the many cushioned couches. For a few terrifying moments, she doesn’t say a word.

“Did y’all know?” Jared sits next to her. “Did he ever tell y’all he felt that way about me?”

Her eyes meet his. She bites her bottom lip. “I’m gonna kill him.”

“Don’t,” Jared sighs. “Why didn’t anyone tell me?”

“It wasn’t up to us to tell chu. It was up to him. He… ay, Jay bird, this whole thing!” She jumps up and paces around the dressing room. “Does your man know?”

“He does. I told him, but… a while after. I didn’t know how much to say right away. Not after everything with school, him being gone to film, the car, his momma, my anxiety…”

“Breathe,” Anza commands. “I’ll take care of Memo. But chu… chu gotta tell your man in the moment when this bullshit starts. This happened to my Tia Rosa once. She never tol’ my Tio Ramiro an’ he never trusted her ever again. He heard it from my damn Tia Carmen, who heard it from my prima. Oh my god, don’t end up like my Tia Rosa. You have to tell him when shit happens, Jay bird. You have to tell me. Anyone. Chu spent all this time letting it eat you up inside when I could have kicked some ass for chu.”

Jared jumps up and starts to pace. “I’m trying. I’m trying to figure all this out. It all got so… complicated. And off course.” He freezes in place. “What if I do end up like your Tia Rosa?”

“Pffft. She still owns two thirds of the laundromat and my Tio Ramiro cheated on her years before that anyway. The point is…” Anza bops Jared on the nose, then places her hands on her hips. “You can’t shut us out, especially your man. This all gotta be based on trust and respect an’ shit like that. Serious shit like that. Not high school crap. We’re talkin’ real adult ass shit.”

This might be one of the most intense conversations that has ever occured in this Versace dressing room.
“Jen was really understanding,” Jared mumbles, looking at his shoes. “He said pretty much the same thing. I hold back too much, I guess.”

“It’s a process, motherfucker,” Anza snorts. “Ay, get me out of this dress. I’m sweating--this is your fault.”

“You gonna get it?”

“Fuck no, did you see the price tag? Shit. Nathan didn’t give me his black credit card,” she laughs. “But nah, I don’t need it. I’m going back to Texas with you tomorrow, not the motherfucking Guggenheim. An’ who can walk in this shit? This thing weighs a ton.”

He begins the process of helping to extract Anza from the eleven thousand dollar, heavy as fuck dress. “You think Memo and I could ever be friends again?”

With her hands on his shoulders for balance, Anza shrugs. “That depends. He was a real asshole. Maybe give him time not to be such an asshole.”

“I had no idea he felt that way about me. At all.”

“Well, dejó, you ain’t the sharpest crayon in the box.”

“Hey!”

“Fine,” Anza sighs and rolls her eyes. “Look, y’all can be friends if his pushy, emo ass can accept that chu are with Jensen. But who knows if he can do that. Who knows if he’ll be able to move any limbs when I’m through with him.”

Jared holds her dress, then places it on the hanger while Anza changes back into jeans and t-shirt.

Outside of Versace, Anza holds Jared’s hand and gives it a squeeze. They wait for the hotel’s car service to arrive. Tomorrow, they’ll be on a flight back to Austin and the world will no longer be on pause. Vancouver around them continues its everyday routines. He’ll miss the mountains, the water, the buildings, and the urban feel without being overwhelming. He might even miss the rain. But they have dinner reservations at the Botanist in half an hour, since both Nathan and Jensen will work late on their respective sets, and he’s looking forward to it. Moment by moment.

He needs to stay mindful--moment by moment.

Anza takes a selfie of them and sends it off to Candy and Charlie.

“Chu tell Jensen about that motherfucker today,” Anza says, reapplying her lipstick. “Soon as chu get back, chu tell him how much chu kicked ass.”

Jared + a little more self-confidence + telling Drew off + solid communication with Jensen = a standing ovation and a bonafide adult relationship.

This works.

Chapter End Notes

well, hey! happy birthday jensen! i was able to knock this chapter out in time for it. :D
thank you all for being here. <3 this is the beginning of the end of this installment. next installment is all about getting married! if you’d like to see more of my work and get more updates, be sure to visit my tumblr: www.compo67.tumblr.com

i'm about a month away from my next transplant appointments. aside from a brief immediate care visit (damn diaphragm!) and stress, i've been carrying on. some days i struggle with depression, pain, and anxiety--but i, like jared in this fic, am getting better at reaching out and asking for help before everything goes to shit. XD

anyway... hi! and thanks for being here!
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

There is no average day in Jared’s life anymore.

And according to everyone around him, he would do better to accept this fact than work against it. He can start his morning with a boatload of plans--scheduled down to the hour--and the universe will still find a way to send it all to hell.

Life is like a box of… No. Wait. Life is like knowing which condiment to apply to a good steak.

He’s been using ketchup when he should have reached for the A1.

Lately, he’s been dousing everything in sight with ketchup, trying to force things to happen. Instead of taking a step back and considering other, less stressful, possibilities, he’s been avoiding situations, not dealing with them head on. Drew. Anxiety. College. Donna. The distance and time alone.

It’s easier to avoid it all, smother it in ketchup, and swallow it down.

Fuck.

He wouldn’t eat a fifty dollar porterhouse steak dripping in off-brand ketchup. So why doesn’t his life get the same consideration?

In an ideal world, Jared would stretch out on his favorite lounge chair on their patio. He’d wait for Jensen to finish grilling, and sip ice cold lemonade in between breezy conversation about their days. Sounds of their neighbors doing much the same nearby, or folks zooming down the river on jet skis would fill the background, but Jensen’s voice would always be the most comforting element.

After a few beers, in his easy, rumbling, Dallas drawl, Jensen would tell a cousin Joe story. The infamous cousin Joe--from his daddy’s side--once tried sun tanning on a trampoline. But, cousin Joe being cousin Joe, instead of using sunscreen, he used olive oil. When he woke up, he was cooked bright red--redder than a tomato out of memaw Lacy’s garden.

Which is why Jensen will never, ever own a trampoline.

In the real world, Jared regularly flies back and forth between Los Angeles, Miami, Vancouver, and Austin. There have been times when he’s had to ask Jensen, or reread his boarding pass, to remember where he’s going.

On top of all the travel, there have been numerous events in the past three months he’s had difficulty sitting through. He doesn’t always understand the industry lingo tossed around in conversation, or prefer the fancy food served, or know anyone else but his fiance.

It can feel isolating and chaotic, especially when cameras and reporters start swarming.

However, attendance at these events--interviews, photo shoots, dinners, galas, functions, etc.--is mandatory for Jensen. For him, these aren’t things to get through, they’re part of his career. And just because Jensen sits through them without batting an eye, doesn’t necessarily mean they’re his first
pick in what to do for an afternoon either.

This was the subject of their conversation at two o’clock this morning, as they indulged in a long, hot bath.

Jensen would rather be at home, making sure he cooks Jared’s steak medium rare, the way Jared likes, and talking about how much he prefers hickory chips over applewood. Hickory, in Jensen’s opinion, is the best to bring out the flavor in good cuts of steak.

Talking about grilling while he’s grilling might be one of Jensen’s favorite hobbies.

If he’s not doing that, he might be flying and testing out new model helicopters.

Or kicking back on the couch to watch a game and yell at the screen.

Or catching up on sleep, snoring away, his hair a mess and one foot sticking out from under the covers.

When they’re not together, within reach or eyesight, they work twice as hard to find their way back home.

Instead of fighting against the reality of their lives, what would happen if Jared rolled with the punches? What if, instead of setting rigid plans, holding himself to unrealistic expectations, and listening to people who don’t have his best interests in mind—what if he did the exact opposite?

Those are just some of the questions Jim has been tossing out throughout their counseling session on Skype for the past forty-five minutes.

Jim being Jim, he hasn’t pulled any punches–these are the questions and concerns that need to be addressed, as uncomfortable and messy as they are.

“I literally don’t know how I would do that,” Jared blurs out, taking a deep breath. He stretches out on the couch in the untouched guest room of the hotel suite.

Jim’s gentle laughter echoes from Jared’s phone. “Well, think on it. What would life look like if you adjusted your approach to things out of your control?”

This is their first remote session, as Jared had to reschedule last week. After catching up on smaller details, Jim dove right in with tough questions. This question, however, has been the toughest one yet.

Jared decides to answer the question with another question. “You mean what could possibly go wrong if I just let things happen?”

“Something like that.”

“I don’t think I could do that.” Jared runs a hand through his hair. “I have to overthink everything to death.”

“How has that been working out for you?”

“Anywhere from fairly well to a complete disaster.”

“I remember how you led support groups here at The Center.” Jim leans back in his chair, his office a familiar background. “You’d remind your groups that acceptance is a process. Change is a process. Healing is a process. None of it is linear, either.”
“Yeah,” Jared sighs and rubs his neck. “But I’m not that patient with myself.”

Jim smiles and shrugs. “Few of us are. You hold yourself—and to some extent, the people around you—to some pretty high standards. And that’s okay in moderation. But in the process, you leave very little room for mistakes or a chance to adapt. People need that room, that space to fuck shit up.”

“What if I can just do everything right and then I won’t have to worry about fucking shit up?”

“And how has that worked for you in the past year?”

“...maybe, probably not the greatest.”

Stress sits squarely on Jared’s shoulders, a sharp contrast from how relaxed he felt climbing into bed after their bath this morning. He glances over to his luggage, packed and ready to go.

He can do this. He can head over to the airport with Anza and fly back to Austin without Jensen. He can go back home and settle in with the knowledge that Jensen will arrive tomorrow evening—just in time to take Jared out for a quiet birthday dinner.

Tomorrow, he’ll be nineteen years old.

In truth, it feels more like forty.

Yet, he can’t even imagine turning thirty years old. How different will life be ten years from now?

Jim chimes in, his tone filled with the gentle patience he has for every youth at The Center. “Celebrate your birthday and take it one day at a time. And once you’re settled back home, I’ll put you and Anza to work on the ice cream social.”

“I sent Jose the rough drafts for the invitations!” Jared sits up straight, enthusiasm returning, all too happy to talk business for a moment. “He’s griping about the cost, but I think going local for the vendor matters.”

“I’m sure Anza will take care of his concerns.”

“For sure, but I also wanted to talk to you about funding to expand the shelter.”

“You wanna talk business now? Aren’t you fixing to leave for the airport in a few?”

“Yes,” Jared laughs and keeps pushing. “But I was wondering if you could get me a meeting with the board. I have a few ideas.”

Jim taps his chin, then checks the large calendar on his desk. He flips a few pages, brow furrowed. “Well, let’s see here. The next general meeting isn’t until August. I could get you fifteen minutes, would that be enough?”

“That’s perfect. I’ll draw up a business plan and have a presentation. Do you think I could run ideas past you in the meantime?”

“Of course, we can work on it before or after sessions for fifteen minutes. I can add on some time.” Jim makes notes on his calendar. “I’m gonna put you down for another session this time next week. If you’re in Austin, come on in. If you’re elsewhere, I’ll send you a Skype invite. Sound good?”

Excitement and relief buzzes through Jared. He smiles and nods. “Sounds great. Thank you so much.”
“You’re welcome so much. Hey, before we wrap up, are you still fixing to go to school in the fall?”

Jared takes a deep breath.

“I want to, but…” The words feel awkward in his mouth. “I think right now, the most I can handle is one online course through UT. I really want to go full time, in-person, the whole nine yards.” He frowns and shrugs. “But I think that’s me trying to fit a round peg through a square hole, you know?”

“I had a friend in a similar situation.” Jim leans back in his chair, hands behind him. “This was years ago. Frank was in the middle of grad school. He met the love of his life, Howard, who happened to be a pilot for one of those big airlines. You can imagine the amount of travel Howard had to do and how tough it was for those two to make things work.”

“Yeah,” Jared sighs and nods. “I feel that. Did they work it out?”

“Not without hiccups.”

“I know all about hiccups.”

“Well, I’m happy to report that Howard and Frank made it work. Frank put his MA program on hold and things were a whole lot easier to work on from there. Four years later, Howard started his own business as a pilot for the rich and famous, and guess who’s his co-pilot?”

“No way.”

“Yup. Frank got his license, finished his MA, and he’s one of the happiest guys I know.”

“What was his MA in?”

“English,” Jim laughs. “He writes columns for National Geographic on the side. It suits him, I think. And you’ll find something that suits you. If you don’t go to school full time, in-person, is it the end of the world?”

Jared hesitates, and feels a smile tug at the corners of his mouth. “...no, I suppose not.”

“If you expect yourself to go to school full time, in-person, and deal with everything else on your plate, what are you fixing to do?”

More hesitation, but the answer comes a bit easier. “Crash and burn?”

“Exactly. I know you wanna do it all, and you will. But maybe not all at once. Maybe it’s okay for you to give yourself permission to get your pilot’s license in the meantime.”

With a grin, Jared shakes his head. “Can you imagine? Me, flying a plane? I can barely drive my car.”

Jim holds his hands up. “Anything is possible. This reminds me, we’re starting a new group for gay men over the age of fifty next week.” Jim jots more notes down onto his calendar. “I think it might be a good idea to have a few of young folks join us for a few minutes at the end. You might meet a few more couples like Frank and Howard.”

“People who made it work?”

“People who made it work. You can ask ’em how.”
“I’d like that.”

“I’ll email you the details.” He puts down his pen and looks directly at the webcam. “We have two minutes left. Anything else you’d like to cover before we wrap up?” Behind Jim, his office window reflects a bright, exceptionally sunny summer day in Austin.

For all his past complaints about the heat and humidity in Texas, Jared itches to be back.

“Next week,” Jared adds, “can we talk about my future mother-in-law?”

In a rare break from his composure, Jim’s eyes go wide. “That—that’s gonna be interesting.”

Jared presses his palm against his forehead and groans. “Ugh. Interesting is one of the words I’d use to describe her. I’m not sure who’s gonna lose their shit first with her--me or my momma.”

“All weddings have growing pains. Some… more than others.”

A knock at the door reminds Jared of the time.

“That’s my cue,” he says, looking fondly at his phone. “You’re off the hook talking about the monster-in-law for now. Thank you again.”

“This is a good place to end,” Jim chuckles. “My pleasure. How you feeling?”

Jared stands up and stretches. “Less like everything’s spiraling out of control and more like… I think I can do this. Or at least try.”

“I think you can, too. Have a safe flight.”

After he disconnects, Jared checks his texts. Charlie and Candy will meet him and Anza at the airport tonight, with plans to swing by Homeslice for pizza like old times. Candy sends a picture of her latest bikini experiment, and Charlie demands another barbeque hangout. Jared replies to everyone, then texts Sherri to let her know he’s on the move, on his way back home. He adds that it would be nice, if their schedules work, to have John over for the weekend.

This is a good place to end.

And it’s a good place to start.

Jared opens the door, luggage behind him, and heads out into the suite.

“Jen?” Jared calls out. “You ready?”

Drinking a soda from the fridge, Nathan Fillion steps out from the kitchen, looking like he owns the place.

“Miami, I may not have Jensen’s ass, eyes, jaw line, or Texas charm…”

“So what do you have?” Jared snorts, hands on his hips.

“Shit, what do I got?”

“You tell me!” Jared throws his hands up, dramatically exasperated. “What’d you do with Jensen?”

“Let’s not talk about that now.” Nathan steps up to Jared and places his hands on his shoulders. “This is your last chance to run away with me and Anza. We’ll all get married in Vegas and live our
lives as a throuple.”

Jared busts out laughing. “Fuck, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to laugh *that* hard. I don’t even wanna know how you know the word ‘throuple.’”

Sighing, shoulders slumped, Nathan holds his hands up. “Fine, break my heart. I’m here to collect you so we can head over to the airport. Anz is waiting in the car, speaking of breaking my heart.”

“You know, you could come with us.”

“And miss out on the unbearable loneliness and crushing angst? No way.” He takes Jared’s carry on and backpack. “But thank you, Miami. I’ve got business to take care of around here, then some stuff going on in LA before I can make my way back to y’all.”

“Aw,” Jared teases, walking out of the suite, towards the elevator. “You’re saying ‘y’all’ now. Honorary Texan.”

“Well, here’s to chu an’ I.” Nathan bumps their shoulders. “Ready?”

The elevator arrives.

Jared leads the way.

“Ready.”

Chapter End Notes

**hi hi hi!!!** 2,400 words for you! thank you SO MUCH for your patience, support, and love. <333

may was a rough month for me. i struggled with mood swings, depression, and health issues. i have a few more tools in my tool box to manage things. here's hoping june goes a bit smoother.

thank you again! comments are love! :D
Storms follow Jared everywhere.

The weather app on his phone reports rough weather for the next week in both Vancouver and Austin--complete with temperatures in the nineties and humidity thicker than his momma’s homemade grits.

But the weather tantrum?

That’s future-Jared’s problem.

He’ll cope with storms when it comes time to worry, and not a damn moment before. Jim kept emphasizing the importance of mindfulness and staying in the moment. Worry only creates more worry.

If he continues spending energy worrying about things that haven’t happened yet, how can he expect to enjoy and appreciate the changes in his life?

Vancouver in July looks nothing like its winter counterpart.
Summer serves a smorgasbord of countless activities. There are beaches he hasn’t yet visited, night markets in North Vancouver, book stores he has yet to wander through, trails he hasn’t hiked, and plenty of food he hasn’t tasted—not to mention all the scenic spots.


All of these places, Anza insists, could be the site of Jared’s wedding to the man of his dreams.

On the plane, thirty thousand feet in the air, she turns to him, eyes wide with excitement. “Or the Capilano Suspension Bridge! Imagine the view, dejo.”

“I’m not getting married on a suspension bridge,” Jared laughs, settled into his seat.

Anza rolls her eyes and waves him off. “Chu have no sense of adventure, Jay-bird. None. Nada.”

“Forgive me if I don’t want anyone to plummet to their death at my wedding.”

“Hmm.” Anza shoots him a smile. “I could think of someone.”

Jared taps his chin. “Am I sinister enough to push my mother-in-law off a suspension bridge?”

“Nah.” She elbows him. “We jus’ gotta make it look like an accident.”

First class seats are an experience in and of themselves, especially on this plane. Instead of traditional seats, one of the flight attendants showed them their private pod suite—essentially a small hotel in the sky.

A video during take off explained all the bells and whistles onboard for their six hour direct flight to Austin: leather seats that fold out to form a six foot, eight inch bed, two large tray tables, a swivel seat, noise cancelling headphones, a seventeen inch touch screen TV, a premium remote, free WiFi, adjustable mood lighting, and made to order meals.

Their personal flight attendant, Nicole, encouraged them to pick an item from the menu right after takeoff, then one before landing. Anza ordered the Baked Boston Lobster with Gruyere, Emmenthal, and Cheddar cheeses, while Jared chose to keep it simple with the US Prime Beef Burger with Fried Quail Egg, hold the Foie Gras and Rocket Leaf.

Anza holds up her glass of complimentary champagne.

“A toast,” she announces, “to the wedding of the century.”

Jared shakes his head and scoffs, “The wedding of the millennia.”

The privacy afforded to them in the air beats the lack of privacy on land.

Despite John’s expertise and planning, paparazzi managed to find them at the airport and get in their faces. All kinds of shit questions were tossed at them, without any consideration for consequences or how it might affect their emotional well-being. Accusations. Innuendo. Gossip. Outright lies.

Anything to get Jensen or Jared to look their way or spill some secrets, even if out of frustration.

Is it true they’re breaking up? Is Jensen seeing someone else on the side? Can Jensen explain why he was seen kissing a woman at a bar? Is Jared marrying Jensen for the money and fame? Will they have a prenup? When is the wedding? Is it true Jared is demanding a million dollar wedding? Does Jensen have any plans to quit acting? Do they want kids? Is it true Jensen has a love child in Miami?
One reporter shoved people out of the way and stormed over, too close for comfort. He thrust his mic forward and blurted out, “Which one of you pitches and which one of you catches?”

Jensen stopped walking.

He looked the reporter dead in the eyes.

And growled, in a hushed tone, “Why in the hell would I tell you, Brad?”

Brad suddenly wasn’t so interested in speaking to Jensen and had somewhere to be.

Their planned private goodbye before separating went up in flames. Something Jared used to take for granted became precious and difficult to achieve. On their way to the gate, John called for additional airport security, which only created more attention and foot traffic.

Ultimately, what did it matter? Yeah, it sucked that their every second at the airport was photographed and shared to the rest of the world without their explicit consent or knowledge.

But he got to kiss Jensen—long and sweet—without a massive panic attack.

And that’s all that matters, ever.

It’s progress, and he’ll take it.

“Good lord,” Jared sighs, stretching out in the suite. “I can’t wait to be home. I miss our bed.”

“Didchu even sleep on this trip?” Anza flops over him, forcing him to share his seat. She sprawls out, and bops him on the nose, clearly pleased with herself and their lack of personal space. “I don’t see no hickeys this time. Chu get better at hiding ‘em?”

“How dare you imply that I’ve had sex before marriage.” Jared can’t finish that sentence without laughing. “I am as pure as the driven snow.”

“Oh, chu were ‘driven’ alright.” She holds an imaginary mic in front of his face. “Can chu tell me who did the driving and who did the riding?”

“I’ve only driven once,” Jared snorts, his face red. He takes a long sip of champagne. “My area of expertise lies within my ability to hold on for longer than eight seconds.”

Anza swats at his face and he reminds her not to ask if she doesn’t wanna know.

She sits up and starts naming off places in Austin that might be appropriate for the wedding of the millennia. The Pearl Snap Hall. Mayfield Park. Palazzo Lavaca. The Caswell House. Lady Bird Lake. The fucking Botanical Gardens, with the city skyline in the background.

Jared mimics pulling his hair out. “What about just the backyard?!?”

“NO! DEJO!” Anza nails him in the head with her travel pillow. “Don’t you dare go all redneck on me!”

“We could just get a sheet cake from HEB and a case of beer…”

“Stop!”

“...Jen could barbeque in his tux with an apron on...”
"Auuughhhhh."

"Vista on Seward Hill," Jared quips, catching her hands in his. "Anywhere, as long as you'll be my Best Friend of Honor. Please?"

Anza stays quiet for a full thirty seconds. She squeezes Jared’s hands and places a peck on his cheek. With every effort not to burst into tears, she nods, sniffs, and answers, her voice soft. "Of course, Jay-bird. I’m honored. Thank chu."

"You gonna start crying?"

"No!" She laughs and wipes at her eyes. "Chu know how long it takes to get the perfect wing tip? Ay."

"You could stamp it on."

"That’s for cheaters and quitters," she huffs and taps him on the chest, above the heart. "Promise me-no sheet cake."

Thus, the immortal promise of no sheet cake is born.

She also bans Bud Light, flip flops, and camouflage.

For the next hour of their flight, they eat, drink, and talk about the most ridiculous wedding plans. Should Jared hire a skywriter to write hearts in the sky for the big day? Should they fly in Las Vegas’ most talented Elvis impersonator, and if so, should he sing “It’s Now or Never” as Jared walks down the aisle? Should Anza give Jared away? Or his momma? Or both? What about a circus theme? Will Jared or Jensen be wearing the garter? Would Cher sing at the reception? Or Elton John? Is it going to be a gay wedding or a gay wedding?

When does the anal sex take place? Should people bring rainbow flags and throw condoms instead of rice?

Jared laughs hard and loud. He can picture it now--penultimate gay wedding of the millennia.

Wedding planning awaits his arrival in Austin. Jensen asked him to put together a list of dreams, must-haves, and must-nots for the big day. They have less than six months to plan and a lot of ground to cover. On top of putting together lists, idea boards, spreadsheets, and binders of information, he still needs to buy his books for the two online classes he’ll start in August at UT.

He’ll start with the basics: English 102 and Math 101.

He can handle that.

One of the admissions coordinators emailed him about a scholarship opportunity. As soon as he lands, he needs to kick out an essay and submit his application.

Things can and will fall into place. He has to trust that they will.

Anza announces a trip outside of the suite, to mingle with commoners and stretch her legs. "Chu need anything, dejo?"

With a sigh, Jared answers, "Just Jensen. I wish he could’ve come home today. I should’ve left after my birthday."

"An’ anger your momma? Break her heart an’ stomp on it, eh? Pendejo." She opens the door to the
aisle. “Wait here. I’ll be right back.”

“Where else would I go?”

“Knowing chu? You’d parachute out da airplane to get back to chu man.”

Jared looks at the engagement ring on his finger. A warm and fuzzy feeling follows.

He just wants to get home and throw himself on their bed, surrounded by sheets and blankets that smell like Jensen. After a brief rest, he can tend to a mounting pile of laundry and much needed cleaning. As beautiful and luxurious as the hotel suites they stay in, nothing can beat home sweet home. Maybe he’ll sit in the wet bar and read, and pretend that Jensen stepped out for only a moment.

Tossed about like a small boat on the ocean, he’s made it. And he’s not fixing to quit anytime soon.

This is his life.

He’s got a lot of fight left in him.

Music floats in from an unknown source. His mind and body return to the plane. A guitar sings the blues—each strum louder than the last.

Curious, Jared peeks out into the aisle, where the guitar sounds like it’s coming from coach. Did Anza inspire a revolution in coach and this is their anthem? How did a guitar get past the TSA? They confiscated Jared’s water bottle, but they let someone bring a guitar on board?

Jared climbs out of the suite and looks around for the source. He fixes to ask one of the flight attendants if they’ve decided to include live music for coach passengers as an apology for the lack of legroom—but not a one is in sight.

The guitar jumps in volume, encouraging him on. He follows the rich, deep chord progressions towards the partition between coach and first class. The notes bend and a baritone voice sings out, Texas drawl and twang tossed into the mix.

Jared pulls back the partition.

“Well you’ve heard about love givin’ sight to the blind,” Jensen serenades, his eyes glued to Jared. “My baby’s lovin’ causes the sun to shine. He’s my sweet little thing, he’s my pride and joy. He’s my sweet little baby, an’ I’m his little lover boy.”

All of coach erupts into clapping and cheering. A dedicated section claps to the rhythm of Stevie Ray Vaughan ala Jensen Ackles.

“Let’s do it, y’all,” Jensen calls out, strumming faster, standing in the middle of the narrow aisle. “Yeah, I love my baby, heart and soul.” People join in and the volume increases two fold. “Love like ours won’t never grow old. He’s my sweet little thing, he’s my pride and joy.”

This may have something to do with the movie they watched one of the first nights they moved into the condo, as they ate macaroni and cheese straight from the pot. Before falling asleep on the air mattress, the last movie they watched was “The Wedding Singer.”

A movie Jensen called, “One of the greatest romantic epics of all time.”

Anza steps into view and offers Jared her hand. Swept up in the excitement, Jared takes her hand,
sings along, and twirls her. They hug tight, partners in international crime, and follow Jensen as he starts moving up and down the aisles to form an impromptu conga line of sorts.

“Yeah, I love my baby, he’s long and lean.” Jensen’s hands move with bravado. His eyes shine, bright and brimming with adoration. “You mess with him, you’ll see a man get mean. Yeah, I love my baby like the finest wine. Stick with him until the end of time. ‘Cause he’s my sweet little thing, he’s my pride and joy.” Jensen ramps up the tempo. “He’s my sweet little baby, and I’m his little lover boy…”

Jensen treats the entire section of coach to champagne and airline miles.

At the end of the song, Jensen hands off the guitar, and brings Jared in for one big kiss.

Pleased with himself, Jensen doesn’t see Jared’s next move coming. Retired to their pod suite, Jared springs Jensen with a surprise, promise, and question all rolled into one. He was going to do this when they were both in Austin, but why wait?

Anza snaps a picture.

Jared may have decided to change the way he paid for his two classes at UT in the fall. Instead of paying for everything in full at the beginning of the semester as he did for ACC, he chose a payment plan. The down payment took only half of what ACC refunded him.

With the other half, he may have secretly asked Nathan and Anza for suggestions relating to another important purchase. And he may have secretly been in contact with a jeweler in Vancouver who not only found what he was looking for with only a few days’ notice, but within budget.

This is his way of staking his claim until New Year’s Eve.

It might not have the same history as Jared’s ring, but Jensen’s vintage, Tiffany-inspired, platinum engagement ring has an equally bright future.

Minutes after they land, Jensen tweets her picture onto his very own, brand new, official Twitter account.

*I’m a lucky man. -JA #YES #isaidyes #heputaringonit #gettinghitched #JAJP

Will wonders never cease.

Within the hour, thousands of people like and retweet Anza’s picture of Jensen holding up his hand, showing off the ring Jared gave him--the two of them kissing on a plane somewhere over Utah.

A single word can make a heart open.

New Year’s Eve can’t get here fast enough.

Chapter End Notes

the LAST chapter! AH!!!

but no worries, i gotcha with an epilogue, and the next installment, which will be wedding-focused! <3
if you'd like to offer support outside of AO3, visit my Tumblr!
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Cover: Jared Padalecki, photographed in Austin, Texas. Shirt by GUCCI. Shoes by Chuck Taylor. Watch by Tiffany & Co.
Introducing Jared Padalecki: A Vanity Fair Exclusive

August Edition.

Story By Anne Fa. Photography by Emile Vargas. Styled by Lupe Sosa.

With a wedding on the way, charity work for LGBTQ youth, and a recent relocation to Austin, the groom-to-be is showing no signs of slowing down.
I’m from a small town. I used to work at the local train museum during the summer. I can still tell you more than you’d ever want to know about Texas locomotive history. It took some adjustment to step out of my hometown. But now that I’ve seen more, been to great places,
I’m excited to keep expanding my view of the world.”

Hustle & TACOS

- “There’s always something to do, somewhere to go, and music to listen to in Austin. And the food. If I could take Torchy’s Tacos with me everywhere, I would. My favorite taco is The Democrat.”

Jared Padalecki lives a charmed life.

No one knows that more than the young man from a small town of four thousand ninety minutes outside of Austin.

“My momma has worked two jobs ever since I could remember,” he shares, watering the indoor herb garden in the living room. He and actor Jensen Ackles have recently purchased this beautiful condo, complete with direct access to the Colorado River. “Sometimes three jobs. I still find myself thinking about things in terms of how many hours I’d have to work at the bookstore to afford them.”

Padalecki, who turned nineteen this summer, has been working odd jobs since he was fourteen, mowing lawns for his neighbors. Then, there was a paper route, a brief stint washing dishes at the local diner, a few summers at the railroad museum, and a management position at the only bookstore in town.

I help him rotate a few of the plants and herbs from the mantle to the windowsill. Three classic guitars hang above the mantle, the beginning of Ackles’ collection. Both Ackles and Padalecki play, their musical talents recently featured in their second music video to raise money for Austin’s only LGBTQ Center. Released a week ago, the video takes place in downtown Austin. To date, it has five million views on YouTube.

“It’s the law out here,” Padalecki says. “You’re issued a guitar at birth and you go with it. For my birthday, Jen got me the guitar there on the left.” He points to a baby blue Gibson. “Since we wanted to play on the video, we went with ‘Play Something Country,’ by Brooks & Dunn.”

The money raised from the video--so far a staggering eight hundred thousand dollars--will help The Center expand its services. With this money, The Center hopes to grow its shelter from ten beds to thirty in the next few years. With his close friend Esperanza, Anza for short, he serves on the Youth Advisory Board. Work for The Center keeps them busy, as they each facilitate groups and train volunteers.

“That’s the awesome thing about working with Anza,” Padalecki laughs. “We hang out at work and work to hang out.”

As I set down a particularly fragrant pot of basil, I ask if they’ve been plant parents for long.

Dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a UT t-shirt, he flashes a bright, dimpled smile.

“No,” he laughs and gestures, “these are the result of a new hobby. I kinda raided the nursery.”

Our time together passes quickly with easy conversation as we tend to jade plants, a vibrant oxalis, rosemary, two unique, hanging String of Pearls, and a variety of succulents. A master at conversing with anyone, Padalecki retains his small town charm. He shares the tale of a water balloon fight between his friends earlier in the summer. He then makes sure to ask about my hometown, my parents’ health, and if I’d like more lemonade--with the warmth and hospitality of any true Texan.
Padalecki smiles and adds, “My momma would wear me out if I let my guest go thirsty.”

I gladly accept a refill on my lemonade, served to me from a pitcher the shape of a rooster. Although the kitchen follows a sleek and modern design, prized personal possessions such as the pitcher, or Ackles’ grandmother’s 1953 copy of *Better Homes and Gardens Cookbook*, add to the cozy atmosphere.

“We decided to start small,” Padalecki says, answering my question about choosing a condo over a house. “It’s our first time living together. We wanted something we could realistically maintain. I have enough trouble keeping up with three thousand square feet. I don’t wanna imagine vacuuming ten thousand.”

Indeed, Padalecki tends to all the household chores himself. We sit at the kitchen island with our lemonades and a tray of cookies from Austin staple, Tiff’s Treats. I ask if Jensen has any designated chores, and select a divine chocolate chip pecan cookie.

He laughs as he tells me, “Jen’s job is laundry. He knows what needs to be dry cleaned or hand washed or ironed, whatever.” He bites into a sugar cookie. “I can handle everything else. Motivation is the really hard thing. That’s partly why I got the herbs and plants. They motivate me to get things done around here.”

Though Padalecki arrived late last night from Vancouver and had an early, online lecture this morning, he exudes energy.

His mother, Sherri, or more affectionately known as ‘momma,’ calls for a quick catch up.

With momma on speakerphone, it’s clear where Padalecki’s exuberance and warmth come from. She raised her son on her own--their relationship has always been solid. Despite living away from home for the first time, their relationship remains as strong as ever.
“I had a livestream lecture this morning,” Padalecki says to Sherri. “We had our first quiz yesterday. I’m happy to report that I got an A.”

A member of his high school’s debate team, and proud former Mathlete, Padalecki reflects on his college experience. He had little privacy attending on-campus classes at community college, and ultimately decided to try an online program. Wanting the flexibility to fly out and visit Ackles on set, Padalecki enrolled for only the one class this semester. He hopes to add more next semester.

“I wanted to take more classes to get credits out of the way.” He starts eating another cookie. “But when the upside is spending time with Jen on set, it’s damn near impossible to think of it any other way.”

Still new to his fiance’s career, Padalecki has started to join him on the sets of different projects.
Ackles has been working on his latest project, *Guarding Tessa*, with Oscar nominated director Kauri Tuhiwai—a step away from Ackles’ previous, highly acclaimed gladiator film.

When Ackles auditioned for the role, he was still planning on how to pop the question to Padalecki. *Guarding Tessa* marks the first romantic comedy and musical for Ackles, a role he took for the challenge. Audiences will see him playing Edison, a quixotic dreamer and guardian angel falling hopelessly in love with his charge—vineyard owner Tessa, played by newcomer, Quillin Reed.

Padalecki gifts me with a guided tour of the condo.

I ask him about his experience going from fan to fiance.

“Surreal,” he laughs. “I’m in the process of trying to understand everything I don’t understand. Does that make sense?” Leaning against the doorway to the simply decorated guest room on the second floor, Padalecki smiles, and his eyes go soft. “I’m still waking up in the morning, thinking this is a dream. I’ve never been loved like this before.”

Pictures of their adventures together across the country line the hallway to the master bedroom.

Love, in its purest form, lives here.

Pictures of them kissing on Bourbon Street. Pictures of them in a cathedral in Vancouver. Pictures of them in Los Angeles, pointing at the Hollywood sign, actor and close friend Nathan Fillion sandwiched between them.

“Don’t tell Nathan I had it framed,” Padalecki says with a fond grin. “He thinks he looks old in that one.”

Our conversation continues. Padalecki shares Ackles’ love of model helicopters. They own ten and counting. Asked if I would like to fly one, I jump at the chance.

Instead of lounging with the rest of young Hollywood at hot spots like 1 Oak or Elevate, Padalecki patiently shows an old journalist the trick to successfully not-crashing a model helicopter.

“No-crashing is the goal,” Padalecki explains, manning his own model like an expert. “Even Jen crashes one once in a while. So we settled on not-crashing as the gold standard.”

Padalecki has nothing against Los Angeles or nightclubs.

“I’d just rather go line dancing. Jen jokes that I’m secretly a seventy-year old retiree.”

This brings us to a topic of conversation I’ve skirted around. Ackles is notorious for his privacy, which extends to Padalecki. So far, Ackles has given one—and only one—intimate interview about his personal life in regards to Padalecki. That was in last year’s *Miami New Times*, a joint interview about the couple’s engagement. Aside from that, the couple has been unapologetically guarded when it comes to talking about their personal lives.

Once again inside, we take a break from the heat and humidity. Sprawled on the world’s most comfortable living room set, I take the chance and ask my question—what about their age difference? How do they make it work?

Taking a moment to think about his response, Padalecki sips on a fresh glass of lemonade.

He knew people and the public would take issue with their age difference from the start of their relationship.
Fortunately, Padalecki shares that their friends and family have supported the couple every step of the way. He details his future father-in-law’s help in navigating the film industry and how to handle the issue of finances. With a nod to Joshua Ackles, Jensen’s older brother, Padalecki adds that they regularly meet to play tabletop board games.

“And Jen’s mom,” Padalecki says, “has been the epitome of grace and warmth. She is a true Southern Lady.”

According to Padalecki, the fourteen year age gap only becomes an issue when making pop culture references. Padalecki allows Ackles to make terrible puns, while Ackles never complains when Padalecki misses a Thundercats quote.

“Fortunately, our goals and values are pretty similar. Obviously, we get along just fine. We relate to each other. I don’t like the implications some people make when they reference our ages,” he says. “I’m learning how to manage the media and expectations from outside forces. We’ve also got a wedding to put together in less than six months, so I’m committed to focusing on what’s important, not what’s loud and in my face.”

The big day will be at the end of the year, on a date Padalecki does not disclose, taking a page from Ackles’ book on privacy.

With a smile, Padalecki adds, “There are some things we want to be ours and ours alone. I took that kind of privacy and privilege for granted before.”

His experience with the media and paparazzi haven’t made Padalecki eager to allow interviews.

I can understand his hesitation to step into the spotlight. Padalecki states that he wants to stay involved in Ackles’ career—behind the scenes. And while he’s not averse to spending time in Vancouver, Los Angeles, or New York City, he’s more likely to enjoy tacos from the nearest food truck in Austin.

In the space of a year, Padalecki has seen a multitude of changes in his life.

“I think the most crucial thing I’ve learned so far, since we met at the photo op booth, is the importance of retaining a strong sense of self,” he says. “Without that, everything gets distorted and overwhelming. My momma, my friends, and Jen keep me grounded. Every Sunday Jen doesn’t have to be on set, we’re somewhere watching a movie or exploring Austin.”

Friendship drives them both to find time together, whether it’s to watch The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, or to volunteer at Austin’s LGBTQ Center.
Padalecki’s charm and sincerity boils down to his upbringing. His momma taught him to be true to his authentic self. Hollywood won’t change that.

“I’m proud to be the partner of an openly bisexual actor,” he says. “Visibility, authenticity, representation—lifting the voices of others—all of that is incredibly important to me. And it’s important to Jensen. When you share that kind of mutual commitment, the rest falls into place.” Knowingly, he laughs. “Of course, I just have to stop overthinking everything and wrestle my anxiety. That’s definitely easier said than done, but I’m working on it.”

An advocate for making mental health resources accessible to marginalized, queer youth in Austin, Padalecki hopes to obtain a degree in either Psychology or Social Work. Eventually, he’d like to pursue an advanced degree in Nonprofit Management.
However, curiosity begs me to ask—would he ever join his partner on screen?

“No,” he laughs. “I don’t think so. I like working behind the scenes. Jen can have the screen time, I’m more interested in knowing how the scene should be shot.”

What about children? Would Ackles take a break to play the role of a new father?

Padalecki smiles. “I haven’t given that a lot of thought. I’m not quite there yet, neither is Jen. We’re happy to talk about it, but that’s about it at this point. We both have a lot we want to accomplish before we can make plans like that. If we decide to have kids, we’ll go all in, a hundred percent.”

An animal lover, Padalecki doesn’t exclude the possibility of adopting dogs.

Or buying more plants.

It’s refreshing to talk to Padalecki about this stage of his life—his insecurities, successes, and passions.

This young man is out to change the world. Without sacrificing or losing his sense of self.
“At home,” Padalecki says, “I get to be me. I’m comfortable here. This is home. My favorite ice cream parlor is a few blocks away. I got Jen hooked on mint chocolate chip. It’s fun to visit new places and meet great folks. I wouldn’t trade that for anything—but Texas is home. I’m always gonna circle back here, where I was born, where I grew up, and where I met the love of my life. I’m excited for what’s next.”

it's here!!! yay!!! OMG.

i hope that i captured that Vanity Fair vibe! omg this was so much fun. i can't believe i managed to wrap up this installment. thank you all for being here with me along the way. <333 i'm so excited to move forward with the wedding. :DDDD comments are love!

i'll be posting wedding image boards and polls on the platform i have outside of AO3. visit compo67.tumblr.com to learn more! <3

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