Wavering Within Chiaroscuro
by Stella_Lost

Summary

Jared Padalecki knew he was a big guy, not big as in tall and built, but big as in tall and extremely overweight. He knew that he was so overweight that he would never find anyone to love him, so he did what most fat people do; he lost himself in his job, where at least he knew what was expected of him. That was until a chance meeting at a museum gala teaches him that his mother was right all along . . . there apparently is someone out there for everyone, even obese guys like him. Now if he could just let down his defenses enough to let Jensen in.

Notes

This was written for this prompt:

"J1 is overweight and has no self esteem, he thinks no one will ever want him. J2 is attracted to a fuller figured man and when he meets J1 he wants him badly. Cue wooing and courting. J2 shows J1 that he is attractive, worshipping his body and driving both of them wild."

at spnkink_meme. It kind of got away from me, as per what is fast becoming the norm, and it is way longer than I anticipated. Thank you to the OP for nudging the bunny from its peaceful rest until it was stomping on my brain demanding attention. It will also hopefully serve as my inaugural fill on my homebrewbingo card falling under ‘body fetishes (other)’. This work is also unbeta'd, so any and all mistakes are mine, and mine alone.
It felt ridiculous to be dressing up to just go to work, but since the team he had been working with for the past twenty-one months were sort of the guests of honor, he couldn’t very well back out and leave them all hanging. Moreover, he really wasn’t going to work, but rather attending a charity slash fundraising benefit for the museum. It was past his normal time to be going to the museum, after all.

Jared turned and looked beyond the bathroom door at his suit lying on the bed. He hadn’t worn it since his brother’s wedding last May. He prayed it still fit. He felt like such a freak then, jacket stretched tight over belly, stretching at the small threads that held the buttons in place. It would probably be no different tonight.

The electric razor buzzed furiously in his hand as Jared stood in his boxers and undershirt at the bathroom sink. His eyes swept over the various pill bottles, for both prescribed and over-the-counter medicines that stood neatly among his other toiletries in the open medicine cabinet. His eyes sought out the small brown bottle of Xenical half hidden behind a box of allergy capsules. The doctor had put him on it about five months ago, but after only losing fifteen pounds the first three months and then nothing after that, Jared quit taking it.

He wasn’t chubby or plump or big boned or even fat. He was obese. He knew it, his family knew, hell, anybody that saw him knew it. He had been for nearly ten years now. Those fifteen pounds hadn’t really made a difference in either direction, so it was pointless to continue trying, when his body was determined to see if it could reach maximum density all by itself by the time he was thirty?

Sighing, Jared coasted a hand over his jaw and chin to see if he missed any stubble. Taking another quick swipe below his lower lip, he shut off the razor and put it on the edge of the sink. Jared ran his hands through his borderline shaggy hair and closed the medicine cabinet door as he left the bathroom to get dressed.

“There was a reason that I went into restoration.” Jared muttered to himself as he sat on the bed to pull on his socks. He felt the added girth around his waist fold and shift against itself as he bent down. “And it sure in the hell wasn’t to schmooze with the rich and beautiful people.”

Growing up, Jared was going to be an artist. He was going to be brilliant and the world was going to be at his fingertips when his art was displayed in the world’s top museums, but real life had a way of making his dreams turn into ash.

When he was a sophomore in high school, his dad lost his job and times got really tight around the Padalecki house, what with the only income coming in being from his mom’s meager salary as a teacher. The economy had stayed in the gutter for so long, that by the time his dad found work again eighteen months later, most of Jared and his little sister, Megan’s college funds were gone. There was just barely enough left for Jared to go to the local community college when the time came.

Jared reached for the slacks next to him and slid them on; standing, he wiggled a bit to make them rise about his seemingly ever-expanding ass. Jared then picked up the white button down and shoved his arms rather indelicately into the sleeves. He felt the fabric strain across the width of his shoulders when he brought his arms up to button up the cuffs.
His senior year had also brought about a couple of realizations. First, he discovered that his
shyness with girls was actually him trying to not have to deal with them at all. His mom told him it
was a phase, that he would find someone and they would fall in love because there was someone
out there for everyone, but the hard-on that he got when he stared at that picture of Ewan
McGregor, from when he was in Moulin Rouge kind of told him differently. Luckily, for him, his
parents had come around to the idea of a gay son pretty well back then. There was no way that they
could possibly proud of me now, he thought bitterly. Not the way I turned out.

The second understanding he had that year was that he could fill up his growing frame more by
eating off the dollar menu at the fast food joint a few blocks from campus rather than paying for
his lunch at school. That was a lesson that he carried with him for years. The ‘Freshman Fifteen’
was actually twenty-five and by the time he made it to the local university on grants and loans a
few years later to finish his education, he was over one hundred pounds heavier than he had been at
high school graduation.

Man, I miss those fries. The right amount of salt and hot grease. . .

Just thinking about them now, made his tongue moisten in anticipation of them. He bet the food
tonight was going to be nowhere as savory or delicious as those damned fries. His stomach gurgled
its agreement.

Hell, he would still be eating like that if his family didn’t stage an ‘Oh-my-God,-Jared’s-going-to-
turn-into-a-whale-and-die’ type intervention last year.

He glanced at the digital clock on the nightstand.

Dammit.

He shouldn’t have stopped at the bodega after he got off the train, but he had been craving one of
those giant sugar cookies with the thick pink frosting and those waxy rainbow sprinkles like mad.
He ended up buy four.

Jared blamed Dr. Graham, from the education department. Her blouse at work today was that exact
shade of pink. He thought of the last of the four, sitting on the kitchen counter, but the thought of
possibly getting some of the frosting on his shirt and spending the evening looking like a yeti with
a rash gave him that feeble hint of strength to refrain from hurrying to the kitchen and ripping into
it.

His fingers fumbled at the small opaque buttons as he tried to slot them into the holes on his cuffs.
Like any other man, Jared started in the middle and pulled the shirt snuggly around his midriff. As
he reached the bottom and his hands started to do up the upper buttons, he felt the shirt slide up
over the taut roundness of his stomach.

Clenching his eyes closed, he proceeded to get all the way to the button on his collar, but as he
pushed the button through, he could feel the starched cotton chafing at his neck. It bit irritatingly at
the excess pudge that resided there, when he twisted around to see the clock again.

Shit. He really was going to be late if he didn’t go right now.

Grabbing his suit coat and the tie that was curled over the doorknob. He snagged his mobile, keys,
and wallet from the coffee table and huffed out the door.

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The applause for the Governor’s introduction of the three newly restored paintings was loud and
still ringing in Jared’s ears as he stood partially hidden behind the potted tree along the side of the gallery. He checked his phone for the time, mentally calculating when he could make a get away without being too obvious. He hoped it was before 10, because that’s when Vinnie’s pizzeria quit taking orders.

The meal had been good, prime rib, baked potato with all the fixings, and green beans, but Jared’s stomach gnawed and yawned at him. The servings had been portioned as if they were for children instead of full-sized adults. He glanced down at his offended gut and rubbed at it softly in an unspoken apology. The sound of a deep laugh followed by a higher pitched exclamation drew his gaze up from his hand.

“Oh, there you are, Jared! Finally.” Samantha Ferris, director of the Baroque and Rococo gallery at the museum and wife of the museum’s curator, spoke as her small hand attempted to curl around his elbow. “I was just telling Jensen here how amazing you . . .well, you and the rest of the team, are down in that dungeon of a basement here. But we all know that it really is especially your attention to the minutest of details when it comes to restoration that we have to praise, don’t we? These works would have never seen the light of day if it truly weren’t for you. You are a marvel.”

Jared flushed when he felt her arm trapped between his forearm and his side, but as he tried to curl his spine away, so as to make room for her, he still felt her slender appendage rub against the top of what his mom called love handles. Jared called them donuts. Because the area in question wasn’t a mere extra couple of pounds of cellulite. No. And it wasn’t fat rolls, either, which when he pictured something called that, it seemed to be in more of a centralized location. His fat went all the way around.

All the way from his broad, worry lined forehead, down to his slightly swollen feet that were tucked into a pair of dress shoes that had fit somewhat properly less than a year ago.

“Jared? Have you met, Jensen Ackles? He and his family have always been some of the most generous patrons when it comes to the Wiltford Art Museum. They’ve probably done more for the Cincinnati Museum Council and the entire art community really, than Edgar Wiltford ever dreamed of when he founded it. Dear old Edgar and Jensen’s grandfather went back many years. Isn’t that right, hon?”

Jared glanced up to find himself looking with stunned awe at the man that Sam had just addressed. He saw the guy nod and smile down at her, but when his brilliant green eyes turned and met his own, well, Jared’s mouth opened to speak, but nary a sound escaped his lips. He brought his hands hastily around in front of his body, one hand clasping the opposing wrist, trying to cover the bulging buttons of his shirt.

He had heard the name before. Ackles. Everybody from Texas knew of Ackles Technologies. He had even seen Alan Ackles once, which judging by Jensen’s age, was probably the patriarch of the family, when a Rothko had been donated to the Modern Art gallery on the third floor in the family name. Jared knew that the family was still predominately located back in the Lonestar State, but since their business spanned over the majority of the United States, it wasn’t hard to believe that one of them could show up at the museum whenever there was a function. Jared was just surprised that it was tonight and why couldn’t it have been the grandfather? He thought irrationally.

“Jared, this is the Jared Padalecki, I was telling you about. Jared is the wizard of the restoration department here at the museum. I keep telling JD that he should promote Jared to the head of the department when Sheppard goes back to the UK, but he just says that he hasn’t made up his mind yet. Silly man, my husband. Anyway, Jared here is solely responsible for two of those amazing acquisitions that were unveiled this evening. Isn’t that right, Jared?”
He’s gorgeous. Like a statue from the Hellenistic period of Greek antiquity, floated through Jared’s mind as he watched the man’s, no, Jensen’s eyes crinkle up at the corners as he smiled at him. That smile alone made Jared feel like a dandelion in the presence of the noonday sun. Big and broad and glowing brightly in that obnoxiously hideous manner that they always seem to have. It wasn’t a good feeling.

“Mr. Padalecki . . .”

“Jared.” He mumbled the interruption.

“Jared.” Jensen repeated as he extended his hand out towards Jared. And it truly was no fair that Jensen’s voice sounded of whisky and smoke and it was definitely not fair at all that it surged through Jared’s veins at a breakneck speed, causing his heart to thump wildly in his chest, unlike anything Jared had ever heard before. “It’s a pleasure. How long have been with the Wiltford?”

“Nearly three years.” Jared murmured, staring at their clasp hands. It took a mammoth amount of willpower to pull his hand from the warm grip of Jensen’s after he replied.

“So I’ve been admiring your work for this long and this is the first I’ve met you? And is that a touch of Texas I hear?” Jared saw Jensen’s eyes widen a bit before he turned his gaze onto Samantha. “Sam, how is it possible that our path’s have never crossed before? Surely, you have to talk to JD about granting some free time to those that labor away so diligently down in, what did you call it, the dungeon?”

Jared flushed as both Jensen and Samantha laughed lightly at the teasing tone in Jensen’s voice. He wanted to join in, but it was too late now, the moment had passed and he would look the bigger fool if he did, so he attempted a smile and glanced around the room.

“You know, I’ve never been given the full tour of the museum before,” Jensen exclaimed, his hand settling lightly on Jared’s forearm. “I mean, I’ve seen all there is to see up in the galleries and I’ve even been in the art library, but I don’t believe that I’ve ever seen the restoration room; a travesty in my opinion. Sam, do you think JD would mind if I borrowed Jared to act as my guide for a while? It’s just, well, I would love to see where the magic happens, you know.”

Taking a small shuffle back, Jared found his back pressed up against the wall. There was no way in hell that he could take Jensen on a tour; he would probably say something incredibly stupid, which would make Jensen tell his family and then the funding that the museum had been receiving every year would cease, artworks would be sold to pay the overhead of the museum. . . and . . . and after that ran out, the budget cuts and layoffs would start. And Jared really, really needed this job. It was the only constant other than his appetite, in his life. No. he needed his job to pay his rent. He needed to have a reason to get out of bed every day.

“Jared? Jared, are you okay, hon? Do you need to sit down?”

Eyes focusing, Jared could see the seriousness that had flooded Sam’s expression as she peered questioningly up into his face.

“I . . .uh, no, I’m fine. I was just . . . was wondering what the workroom looked like. I wouldn’t want Mr. Ackles to get his clothes . . .” Jared waved a hand towards the man. His eyes followed, roving up and down the length of Jensen.

“Jensen. Please call me Jensen.” Jensen interrupted politely; his confident smile twinkled in his
eyes as his fingers touched the back of Jared’s hand.

He’s perfect.

The perfect height, unlike Jared’s own towering frame, the perfect manners, the most perfect face that Jared had ever seen . . .

and the perfect weight.

Jared let his shoulders drop into a hunch, his arms still partially covering his torso. Just being near an average sized man, usually brought on that reaction, but the feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing seemed to magnify tenfold in the presence of Jensen Ackles.

*It really is unfair that Mother Nature, God, Whoever the hell is in charge of the dealings of the world is able to create such a perfect specimen, an ideal figure of a man, someone that even Michelangelo couldn’t even improve upon and then they created the overgrown slug that is me.* Jared really hated himself for thinking like that, but he was exactly that, a huge mountain of a man that would never have a chance with someone as beautiful as Jensen.

“My sister would kill me for saying this” Jensen leaned forward into their little huddle, his breath a warm caress to the sensitive skin beneath Jared’s ear as he mock whispered conspiratorially, “but they’re only clothes. I would still like to see where you work your magic, Jared.”

“Oh, I’m sure it would be just fine, Jensen. You two go on with your little excursion, I’ll let JD know where you are if anyone comes looking for either of you.” Jared couldn’t be sure, but it was entirely possible that Sam’s smile was more sly than sincere as she gave them a ‘shooing’ motion before wandering away with her empty glass of champagne. He often saw her as a bit of a mother figure, seeing how his was so far away back home in Texas, but right now he could have throttled her for making him do this.

“Shall we?”

Jared looked at those expectant green eyes and not for the first time did he want the earth to gawp open and swallow him whole. He gave a short tight nod and started to walk towards the employee elevators that would take them down to the basement and his home away from home.

It would be another two hours before he and Jensen returned to the mezzanine level. Jensen was stopped by an elderly woman whose neck positively dripped with jeweled decadence set in a fragile looking gold filigree. Jared stepped back a ways; he only had a few goodbyes to make. One or two really and it wasn’t as if he wouldn’t see those people in the next day or two, so he bypassed the ballroom for the side hall. He hadn’t said goodbye to Jensen either, but he doubted that the man would even notice.

He checked his watch as he headed for the exit.

Vinnie’s closed over an hour ago.

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Jared was contemplating heading to the vending machines in the employee lounge when he heard the door open to the workroom.

“Hey, everybody.”

Jared looked at the floor when he heard Jensen’s voice behind him. Pulling the blue latex glove
off, he flipped the magnifying spec up from in front of the plastic lens of his protection glasses. The swivel top of his stool groaned as he turned to see Jensen, dressed in black slacks and a dark blue silk dress shirt, angling through the workroom towards him. He heard the rest of the team answer back in a variety of ‘what’s up, man’, ‘good to see you’s’, and ‘hey’s’.

Jared merely slipped his glasses off and shoved them into the breast pocket of his lab coat. Glancing down he could see the small stain of marinara on his shirt, from where the pizza sauce had dripped on him as he devoured his lunch earlier. *Maybe I can make him believe that it’s ‘Venetian red’ oil paint.* Jared thought idly as he shoved the rolling table of his workstation behind the easel that he was currently working at. His palette of blues, yellows, and white now partially hidden to propagate the untruth.

It still amazed him that in the three years that he worked at Wiltford, the first six months as an intern in Archives and the last two and a half down in Restoration, he had never seen Jensen Ackles before, but in the six weeks since the night of the benefit, Jared seemed to see him everywhere.

The gallery upstairs, when he was assisting Dr. Sheppard in accessing the paint quality of the new Rembrandt and Jensen walked through with Sam discussing a new work that he was thinking of buying.

The employee lounge when Jared’s attempt to sneak his lunch out of the fridge was interrupted as Jensen and a pretty blonde, who turned out to be his sister, brought in a platter of pastries and fruit as a way to say thanks to the staff of the Wiltford for all of their hard work.

The gift shop, where Jared had stopped to get a few of the new postcards for his momma, and Jensen slid up next to him, saying that he had seen him from the escalator. Jared said nothing as Jensen selected his own cards, pulled Jared’s from his hands, and paid for the lot.

Hell, even the stairwell, where Jared usually hid to eat said lunch wasn’t safe anymore. Twice now, Jensen had happened upon him hastily shoving the remains of his food into the wrinkled grocery bag that he used to bring his leftovers, sandwiches, chips, and pudding cups in from home.

And every time but one, Jared managed to make the other man laugh; usually because Jared had said something stupid. The singular time that Jensen didn’t even grin was when Jared had made a joke about the elevator that Jared was already in and Jensen ran to catch, was going to plunge to the basement because now with Jensen’s added weight, they had just exceeded the maximum load capacity. It had been nearly a week before he had seen Jensen after that, but the man’s upset look from when he stepped off the elevator had been with Jared the entire time.

“Jay. Hey. I was hoping you would still be here.” Jared decided that Jensen should always wear dark blue as it made the green of his eyes that much more striking. “I was wondering if I could pick your brain a bit.”

Jensen smiled hopefully at him, causing the butterflies in his stomach to take flight.

“I, um, sure. What do you got?” Jared knew that his voice wasn’t as nonchalant as he hoped, but judging the radiant smile that graced Jensen’s face, it didn’t really matter to the other man.

“Yeah? Great!” Jared fought the urge to slide away on his stool as the warmth of Jensen’s palm spread through the double layer of his messy lab mock and the stretched tight polo shirt beneath. “I recently won a bid on a new piece of art. A Rubens. A Peter Paul Rubens. It’s not from any of his famous cycles, but it *is* a Rubens. It cost me more than I care to think about, but it is so totally worth it, in my opinion and I have the perfect place picked out for it to hang. It’s of Oberon. You
know A Midsummer’s Night Dream? Though I doubt that Rubens ever saw or heard of the play. Well, maybe heard of it, but . . . Anyway, I saw it in the Sotheby’s catalog and it just . . . wow! You should see it. The colors. The lines. The majesty. And the lushness of it is amazing. It’s beautiful . . . and I’m rambling, aren’t I?”

He couldn’t help smiling up at Jensen, his enthusiasm for the painting was infectious. He nodded and watched Jensen as he rolled his eyes at himself.

“I can’t help it, okay? It’s my ideal m . . . well, it’s perfect, it really, really is.” A blush made Jensen’s freckles dance upon his smooth cheeks.

“So what’s the favor? If it’s so perfect, there’s not a lot I can do to make it more beautiful.”

“Oh, yeah. I was wondering if you could come over tonight and give me an opinion on how it looks in relation to the other works I’m going to have it hanging with? You know, so that they don’t detract from each other.” Jared noted that the color that had made the pale flesh of Jensen’s cheeks even rosier. It caused him to wonder what he could be so worried about because, if he knew anything about Jensen Ackles it was that the man knew art. It seemed to be the only thing they talked about, besides how superior Texas was to Ohio.

“Tonight? I . . . wouldn’t Sam be a better-“

“She’s giving a lecture in San Francisco tomorrow, so she and JD are taking the rest of the week.” Jensen interrupted quickly, his voice pitched dangerously close to a whine. “C’mon, Jared. I could really use some advice and you know more than anybody about how colors play off one another. I will even pick you up and buy you dinner. Just, I . . . please?”

Jared was already opening his mouth to say yes, how could he not want to spend more time with Jensen, but the offer of dinner made his lips press tightly together. There was no way in Hell that he could eat with Jensen. It would be way too embarrassing to have to see the look of repulsion cloud over that handsome of a face. No way.

“And the lushness of it is amazing. It’s beautiful . . . and I’m rambling, aren’t I?”

“Jesus, Jared. Go help the poor man out.” Both of them turned to see Aldis peering at them over the tessera tile he was attempting to reaffix to the Northern Medieval mosaic laid out in front of him. “Ackles’ is right. You know more about color than the rest of us minions down here. Besides, free food, man. You can’t say no to that.”

The fleet feet of the deer on Aldis’ mosaic seemed to mock him as Jared stared down at it. It was if it could get away, while Jared was rooted in some sort of limbo between want and self-preservation.

“C’mon, Jared. You’ll love this piece, I swear . . . and I’ll even pay you for your time, if you want me to.”

He glanced up at the pleading face above him. Jensen stuck his lower lip out in an exaggerated pout, which caused Jared to shake his head and smile.

“Fine. I’ll help you out, but you don’t have to pay me.”

“Excellent!” In his heart, Jared knew that the faultless smile beaming down on him was payment enough. “What time do you want me to pick you up? I’m pretty sure that I can get us reservations at –“

“I, uh, I already kinda have dinner plans.” There was a sharp pain in his gut when the wide smile dimmed, but there was just no way that Jared could eat with a man who obviously was
Michelangelo’s *David* brought to life. “But I can . . . is seven too late?”

“No. Seven’s fine. I can pick you up at your place, is that all right? Or I can meet you wherever you’re going to be?”

“Here’s good. It’ll give me time to change and . . . yeah, here’s fine, Jensen.” Jared reached into his pocket and pulled out a pencil. Rolling across his station on his stool, Jared felt the pull of his khaki’s across his thighs. He heard Jensen ask Aldis about the mosaic. *Good, maybe he’s not watching the hippo wheel around in his tiny enclosure.*

A brief search of his workstation produced an envelope that he ripped the flap from and he proceeded to write his number down for Jensen, should their plans change, though he hoped they didn’t.

“Great! I’m looking forward to seeing what you think. I really do hope you love it as much as I do.”

“I’m sure I will, Jen.” Jared replied honestly and he knew his longing for Jensen wasn’t bleeding through when he said it. He really did think he was going to like it. He liked nearly all of the great Masters of the art world, save Picasso. He understood the brilliance there, just, well it wasn’t his cup of tea, he supposed.

“I . . . well; I should probably let you all get back to work and I should probably do that myself. Work, that is. I’ll see you tonight, Jared. Seven, right?” He started slowly backing away, his hip twisting slightly to avoid bumping into Aldis’ worktable, “see you later then. I . . . I’ll see you tonight.”

A chorus of *see you’s* and *later’s* followed Jensen out the door as Jared sat slumped on his stool watching. He wished he could go back in time and make the right choices that wouldn’t make him feel like a complete idiot in front of Jensen. His stomach rumbled beneath his shirt. He pulled the rolling table close again and swished his brush in the jar of paint thinner.

A few minutes later, he was heading out the door anyway. A *Milky Way* sounded good right now, or maybe a *3 Musketeer’s* or both. He was going to need the energy after all.

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Jensen pointed out his three-story townhome as they passed it by to circle around to the back where the garage was. Jared knew with certainty that Jensen was going to live in a place a lot nicer than his, but the sheer scale of it was impressive. Even in the dark, he could see the well-groomed shrubs and trees that graced the yard. Jensen reached up to the visor above him and hit the button on the remote to open the garage door. He eased the Lexus in slowly and shifted into park before hitting the button again to let the door roll nearly silently down behind them.

Jensen had already slid out and shut the car door by the time Jared had psyched himself up enough to even open his.

“I –This is nice place.” Jared tried to restart the conversation that had been sporadic for much of the drive before it completely petered out back when Jensen had punched in his number to the security gate. The sound of his door closing was loud in the confined space and he winced.

“It’s the garage.” Jensen’s laugh wasn’t mean spirited, but Jared was already kicking himself for being so awkward.

“Yeah. But it’s got nice things in it.” Jared recovered, waving a hand towards the shape of a car
covered with a dark tarp; from the angles he could tell it was a classic.

“Oh. That’s my baby. A sweet ass ’67 Impala that I inherited from my Uncle Mike, He only had daughters and none of them wanted it. I’ve been restoring her myself, when I can find the time that is. Do you want to take a look, Jared?” Jensen stepped towards the dust-covered tarp. It looked to Jared that it hadn’t been shifted or even breathed on in weeks.

“I don’t really know anything about cars.” Jared answered quickly, hoping that he wouldn’t have to show off his ignorance in a less-than-manly way yet again. “But, I’m sure it’s beautiful. You have good taste when it comes to things that please the eye.”

What the hell! Jared’s mind screamed at him.

“Yeah, I do.” There was softness in Jensen’s eyes looking back at him, when Jared looked up at the quiet admission. Jensen cleared his voice before speaking again. “C’mon. Let me give you the tour.”

Jensen pulled open the door that lead up into the house and stepped on the first of the two wooden steps that would lead them in before he scooted over so that Jared could go first. Jared sucked in his girth as best he could, but he still felt his side brush against Jensen’s arm. He was busy calling himself a fat bastard when Jensen’s hand fell against the small of his back, guiding him further into the tastefully decorated hallway. Jared tried to take a stutter step forward, trying to put a bit more space between them, but Jensen kept up. Jared could feel one of Jensen’s nimble fingers settling along a fold of skin formed by weight and gravity.

“That’s the kitchen and dining room.” Jensen’s other hand waved towards a door to the left, an open space next to it held a modern, yet elegant table with four sleek chairs surrounding it. “There’s a half bath next to the pantry. And this is the living room.”

A flat-screened television dominated one wall and a dark wood stand below held a disc player of some form. There were a few DVD’s laying next to it. He knew that he and Jensen held pretty much the same taste in music and movies from the random moments of conversation that they had shared, but Jared was too far away to see what they were. There was a plush suede sofa across from the television, remote laying idly on one of the chocolate brown cushions.

“Can I get you a beer, wine or anything? I’ve got a bottle of the barrel reserve Shiraz from the Lost Oak Winery back home in Burleson. I don’t know what you’ve had for dinner, but it shouldn’t upset your palette.”

Jared looked up from perusing the various titles of the magazines laid out on the coffee table in front of the couch. Most of them were art titles, he noted.

“I’m good, unless you want something and then I’ll have whatever.” The last wine he remembered having had been from a box, when he decided to celebrate finishing the cleaning of a Kahlo the museum had lent out to a travelling exhibit. It obviously hadn’t been as well attended to as it travelled across the states.

“Okay. Just make yourself at home and I’ll be right back.” Jensen’s hand ran up his back to clutch lightly at his shoulder before the other man crossed over and into the dining area, where apparently he kept some sort of stocked bar.

Jared stepped over to peruse a series of highly detailed framed watercolors that hung on the half
wall beneath the open stair landing. The fine lines of the brushwork was amazing, some of the finest he had ever seen really. They were of snowy pastoral settings, each similar in color and layering, but the buildings and physical landscapes were different. He wasn’t familiar with the artists’ name, but he tried to commit it to memory so that he could research them at a later date.

Looking down, Jared noticed a few framed family photos on tall antique buffet cabinet.

The first few were of older people, black and white images smiling flatly in staged poses. There were also a few pictures from when film was first colorized that depicted a family on vacation in what had to be the Grand Canyon. However, the image that caught and held his gaze was of Jensen and what must have been his entire family in a tropical setting. His parents both sat in beach chairs, while Jensen and what had to be his older brother held their sister, Mackenzie upside down between them, each one of them tanned, with broad smiles. And incredibly fit.

“That was taken a couple of years ago in Hawaii.” Jensen pressed a glass of red into his palm and picked up the frame. “It’s funny. My dad fights my mom every time, saying we’re all too busy for family vacations anymore, but when she finally talks him into it, he has the best time and never wants to come home.”

Jared smiled as he took a sip of wine. It really was good.

“I know she’s planning on something again soon, but she won’t say what. We haven’t been anywhere since then and now with Josh married and Mac engaged, it probably won’t be as long a trip, what with getting everyone’s schedules to jibe... good, isn’t it?” Jensen raised his glass towards Jared.

“It is. I’m not too educated on how to tell, but I like it.” He took another sip to prove his point. “Do you think... I mean, what about you?”

“The wine? Yeah, I love it. It’s reasonably priced and the quality is that of something more upscale.”

“No. I’m... I guess I’m trying to ask what about you? Do you think you’ll be married, or engaged by the next trip?” Jared rubbed at the back of his neck. He hated how much he sounded like a teenage girl right then. When did I lose the ability to speak to anyone like a normal human being?

“Oh. No, I don’t suppose I will be, unless they pass the law that says that I can.” He sat the photo back in its place on the table and took a small sip from his own glass. “I’m gay, Jared. I’m sorry. I thought you knew that. But it wouldn’t be a problem for my family. Not at all. My mom is forever trying to set me up with all the young eligible bachelors that she comes across in her work as the charity event coordinator for the family trust. Besides, I’m sure they would be more than fine with me bringing along anyone that I loved.”

Jared nodded and looked down at his glass. He really wished that he didn’t know that about Jensen. Now it would be harder to squelch the desire inside that had been building since the first time he met him. He could feel those green eyes boring into the side of his face, he knew that he should say that ‘yeah, cool’ or ‘me, too’ or even ‘do you think your mom could set me up, since you are so far out of my league because I’m too grotesque for you’, but he merely drained his glass and then swirled the slim stem between his chubby fingers.

“Well, do you want to see the Rubens? I’ve got it upstairs.” Jensen took his glass from him and sat them both on the table. He laid a gentle hand along Jared’s bicep, his fingers barely curving around it, and slowly pulled him towards the carpeted staircase.
It was a conundrum really, he loved being around Jensen, the conversations, while not terribly deep, were always stimulating at least, ranging from all things art and cultural to the fact that it was rather silly that Dallas had a hockey team, given that the state wasn’t exactly known for producing its own ice. However, the flip side was that being near Jensen made him endure that sense of failure that was so predominant in his life. Here he was a corpulent man, huffing and sweating to climb some stairs while Jensen jogged lightly up before him, the muscles of his ass gliding gently beneath his dress pants. Jared swallowed thickly.

The loft that Jensen led him to covered three-fourth the second floor of the townhouse. Its walls were painted a soft heathery grey that warmed beneath the recessed lights above. There were several works of art displayed on the walls. Some Jared could identify the artist by just a quick glance and others he didn’t know, but wanted to find out. A glare from a pedestal in the corner caught his eye. . Jared fought the desire to get any closer for fear he bump the stand and send the gorgeous piece of black-on-black pottery crashing to the floor.

He wondered how Jensen could afford all of this, especially when he was only a few years older than Jared’s own twenty-eight. The paintings, the pottery, the house. Jared knew that he was from a wealthy family, but this? This was bordering on too much. Forget bordering, it is too much.

“My grandparents were collectors’ and massive supporters of the arts. I don’t know if I ever told you that before.” Jensen’s voice brushed over him gently, like a sweep of a fan brush blending wet pigments on a canvas. “I know I told you that I work primarily with the philanthropist aspect of Ackles Tech, but I don’t remember telling you that. When they passed, I kind of took over their place in the family as the art aficionado. It’s why we’re such staunch supporters of the cultural communities in the cities that we operate out of. We’re trying to keep my grandpa’s dream alive.”

Jared turned from the spectacular vision before him and stared at the blushing man next to him, the flush casting his freckles a bit brighter in the lighting.

“It’s . . . it’s . . .” Jared searched his mind to find the right word, but he was nearly speechless, he settled finally on “it’s amazing.” But even that didn't even come close to describing what he was standing amongst.

He was shocked, as Jensen blushed harder and bowed his head at Jared’s own stuttering assessment.

“It’s too much, I know. I keep telling myself that I should donate a few of these pieces to the museum. Hell, JD and Sam have been after that Rembrandt on the far wall forever, but . . . I kinda want to keep them, you know, as way to feel like my grandpa is still here with me.”

For the first time in their brief friendship, Jared initiated the touching. He reached out a hand and touched Jensen’s shoulder, but Jensen, ever the more forward of the two, placed his hand firmly on top of Jared’s; it was almost as if he was scared that Jared would withdraw too soon.

“I, um, I think you should keep whatever speaks to you, Jen.” Jared cleared his throat, “it’s obvious that you appreciate quality and, well, you know how to care for such things.”

“Thanks. I, well, I try and I do love beauty.” There was some emotion floating in Jensen’s gaze that Jared couldn’t place, but it warmed his flesh and made him nervous at the same time.

They stood there a few more moments, looking at one another, before Jared, uncomfortable to be the sole occupant of someone else’s gaze, looked away. He felt Jensen slide their hands down his arm and then hold Jared’s carefully in front of him.
“C’mon. I’ll introduce you to Oberon and then get us some more wine.” He pulled at Jared’s hand leading him towards a door framed in lightwood, so as not to detract from the art that hung around it.

Jared’s breath caught as Jensen turned on the light.

In the middle of the room was a large bed, raised as if on a dais of some sort and on either side of the low, highly polished maple wood headboard were two short columns that served as nightstands. Jared hadn’t spent years sitting through art history classes to not be able to recognize the fullness around the middle and base of the columns as Doric in style.

Looking to his right, he saw two doors, which he guessed were probably the closet and the master bath. His eyes swept the room. Across from them between two louvered windows, he saw a pair of pastoral scenes, Northern Renaissance flashed through Jared mind, he wanted to get a better look, but he was here for the Rubens. Stretching his neck around Jensen’s slender form, he noted a painting leaning against the wall.

Oberon.

Jensen pulled him further into the room and gestured with his free hand towards the painting.

“I’ll let you take a look and see what you think. I’m going to go get the wine.” Jared’s hand, his entire side felt cold as Jensen released him and disappeared out the door.

He took a few tentative steps forward, glancing again at the landscapes, before he turned to see the large painting tipped against the wall.

Jesus!

Jensen was right the colors were amazing. The freshness of the greens and the yellows, the blues and red deep and so full of passion; it really was a gorgeous piece of work.

Jared loved work of the Baroque Masters. He knew of many that didn’t, that called it overwrought sentimental bullshit, but he didn’t care what anyone else thought, it still took grace and skill to create such pageantry and elegance with only pigment, brushes, and canvas.

His critical eye sought out the individual brushstrokes; he identified the tension that lay beneath the looseness of several of them. After noting several of the other artistic qualities, he allowed himself to back away a bit and kneel down awkwardly so that he could look it straight on.

The main figure, Oberon, was seated upon a massive stone in a forest clearing, his robe lay across his broad waist, the gathers of the cloth not doing much to prevent the viewer from coming to the conclusion that he was an overly endowed man. All around, there were the brilliant sheen of lightness and air. Around the man’s feet, well, the whole forest glade really, there were faeries, a brief brushstroke of thin white subtly suggesting the gossamer of their wings. It was breathtaking.

Jared leaned back a bit causing the burning in the toneless muscles of his thighs to amplify, but he still couldn’t quite take it all in. He hefted himself to his feet, feeling his knee pop from the strain and backed away until he felt the bed brushing against the back of his thighs.

Jared sank down as he contemplated the work in front of him. Something was niggling in his memory, something that he had heard about this work, but he couldn’t put a finger on it. He continued to stare at the figure of the ‘King of the Faeries’ and admired how smooth Rubens use of
feathery lines and chiaroscuro had portrayed the man as stately, a bit huge really, but regal.

His eyes followed the broad bicep down to a dimpled elbow, the bulge of a sagging pectoral muscle peeked out above a small curve that flared out again at the man’s seated hips and splayed ample thighs. Oberon’s body was as far from da Vinic’s Vitruvian Man as it could be which had long been held as the ideal male form, but it was depicted in such a manner that the viewer saw the majesty before anything else.

Jared continued to take in every nuance of the painting, but that lost thought kept rubbing against what he thought he knew. He closed his eyes and tried to remember what was said in the workroom earlier in the day, but he kept picturing how uncomfortable he had been with Jensen in his space and found that he couldn’t grasp a continuous strain of the conversation.

“So? Isn’t it gorgeous?” Jared’s eyes snapped open; he hadn’t even heard Jensen coming in the room.

The bed sank next to him as Jensen perched upon the edge and handed Jared’s glass to him. Jared was torn. The fact that Jensen sat so close to him made him nervous. He thought about standing to get some distance between them or maybe he should stay seated and take a few moments to indulge in the warmth of another body being so near to his own, even if for a brief time.

He hadn’t actually faced an issue like this before. Of course, he hadn’t actually been on a first name basis with anyone that he had ever dreamed about before, either and he had dreamed about Jensen, more than a few times really, since he had met him. He found it doubtful that anyone else wouldn’t have the exact same nighttime proclivities once they met Jensen. Jared smiled sadly at the thought.

“What’s that?” Jensen bumped his arm with his elbow and the Shiraz rolling gently in their glasses. Jared looked up to find those emerald eyes smiling curiously into his own.

“What?”

“That smile. It’s because I did good, right? Oberon is brilliant isn’t he?” Jared watched a liveliness ricochet around the green of Jensen’s irises, it was mesmerizing. It took him a few seconds to remember that Jensen was waiting for his opinion.

“Oh... yeah. It’s... he’s amazing. Rubens is a master colorist. I think you’ve done very well to buy this piece. His use of shadows, of chiaroscuro to imply depth and body is nothing short of brilliant. Sure, his work is nowhere near as dramatic as Caravaggio’s when it comes to that particular trait, but the sheer translucency of his pigments and the vibrancy of his strokes is, well, it is fabulous. There is simple joy to his works and this one is no different. See how he built the scene to... what?” Jared stopped short when he felt Jensen’s hand on his forearm. “I’m sorry... I, um, I sometimes get a little to... involved in... work.”

“No. I’m sorry that I interrupted you. I, it’s just that... “

Jared watched Jensen bite at his bottom lip and glance at the painting before looking back. His eyes, when they returned were full of an intensity that made Jared’s skin feel like it was shrinking atop his flesh.

“I love listening to you talk about art, about your work. You lose yourself in it and forget to be so shy.” Jared opened his mouth to reply, but Jensen’s hand crept up his arm to rest firmly on his
chest, leaving his lips wordless and his lungs begging for air. “It’s not a critical thing. I like that you’re shy, but I also like hearing you talk about something with so much, well, passion. I think that I could sit for hours and listen to you talk about what you obviously love so much.”

“Jensen.” Jared looked down to where the lightly tanned skin of Jensen’s hand stood out in stark relief against his snug brown sweater.

“I . . . sorry, I shouldn’t have . . .” Jensen stood and walked towards the painting. Jared felt a resigned familiarity in being left behind. He took solace in staring at a scuffmark in his brown loafers. “Do you . . . Christ!”

Jared’s head shot up. Through his peripheral, he watched Jensen swallow the rest of his wine and then pace towards the door before coming right back to stand in front of Jared.

“Sorry. I’m sorry, okay. I just . . . when I get near you, I kind of lose my sensibilities, you know? And I really want you to notice me and then I sa . . .”

Yeah, Jared thought sadly, I know.

Wait, what?

“. . . I look at you and I think that we’re getting somewhere; that I’m getting somewhere, but then I push too far, too fast. I just . . . you’re gorgeous, Jared and I want to touch you and hold you and make love to you.” Jared looked up then, his entire being ready to handle the mocking look that was surely being rained down upon him, but there was no mocking, no smirk, no teasing countenance to Jensen’s face; if anything the main looked pained, embarrassed. Jensen lifted a hand and slapped it harshly over his mouth. The noise of it brittle in the silence.

The small thud of Jensen’s denim covered knees hitting the plush green carpet barely registered in the stillness between them. Jensen slowly removed Jared’s wine glass from his hand for the second time that night and leaned over to place it and his own on the column slash nightstand. Jared knew that his face couldn’t have looked any less confused as Jensen’s did at that moment.

One of Jensen’s hands grasped loosely at his hand, holding it gently, as if he was as delicate and fragile as a nestling that had fallen from its nest. His other hand came up and rubbed softly at Jared’s knee. Jared found the actions to be confounding.

“Jensen?” Jared didn’t even recognize his own voice, but that one small utterance stopped the man in front him cold. “I don’t . . . I don’t understand.”

“What, Jared?” The room that had been warm, almost too warm up until Jensen dropped his hands down to hang limply at his side now held a chill. “What don’t you understand?”

“Why are you saying those things? I . . . we are friends, right?” Jared whispered all the while berating himself inwardly for sounding so weak, so stupid. “Why would you say such horrible things?”

Jared could feel the burning and itching that usually accompanied the pooling of tears. He stood rapidly, almost pushing Jensen out of his way. It was bad enough that he was a huge blob of a man, but to cry in front of Jensen, well, he would save them both the humiliation factor. He headed for the door.

He was halfway down the stairs when Jensen caught up to him.

“Wait, Jared! Where are you going?” there was an undercurrent of pain in Jensen’s voice.
“Home.”

“No! I’m sorry. Please.” A hand clutched at the bulk of his bicep, but Jared shook it off. It reached out again and twisted itself in the brown nubs of his woven sweater. In his haste, he practically drug Jensen to the bottom of the stairs. “Jared! I am sorry. Really. I don’t know what I did, but I apologize. Please stay. Let me explain.”

Jared stopped and looked around the room. The lights had been dimmed, but he could still see the fine furnishings and the money in the room. His eyes caught on the picture of Jensen’s family and he visualized the picture of his own family hanging in the hall of his apartment. His parents flanked by his brother and sister with him trying to fade into the background behind them. His throat swelled at his shame.

“Jared. What can I say? I was telling you the truth. I think you are handsome, beautiful even. I want to know everything I can about you.”

Jared turned then, the suddenness of the movement causing Jensen’s hand to fall from his arm. He looked at the other man, but he couldn’t see the pleading nor the fear nor anything for that matter for his own view of himself. He was a mess of his own design and he couldn’t fathom anyone seeing him as anything less.

“No.” Jared strode as fast as he could for the front door and after fumbling with the lock, he found himself on the front porch, a shriek of the house alarm followed him out.

Four blocks later, Jared paused under a streetlamp to pull out his cell phone. He called for a cab to come get him, because even he knew that he couldn’t make the more than ten mile trek home without keeling over. As he waited for a ride, he texted Aldis to get him to tell Dr. Sheppard that he wouldn’t be in to work in the morning. There was no way he was going to go anywhere that Jensen could find him.

Jared sat on the curb and let the hatred build up inside.

*****

Pushing ‘off’ to end the call, Jared tossed his phone on the sofa next to him and stared at the television in front of him. He had no idea what was playing, but it was better to keep his mind occupied, he found. Ten minutes later, he flipped the channel. There was seriously no way anybody could be as perky and overzealous about life as the annoying women on the local wake up and go show.

He had just called in sick for the third day straight. Dr. Sheppard wasn’t happy, but Jarred did his best to sound pathetic when he apologized and said that he was on the mend, but he didn’t want to risk giving what he had to anyone else. He promised that he would be in on Monday.

Jared was in mid change again when his phone chimed that he had a message. He snagged it from where it had landed between a pizza box and bag of chip crumbs.

*Dude, you’d best be sick. Sheppards pissed about the Manet*

Jared didn’t have many friends, but of the people that he did socialize with, Aldis was one that he trusted. Well, not enough to tell him about the other night, but enough to know that Aldis had his back at work.

He watched an episode of Maury followed by back-to-back episodes of Judge Judy and while he didn’t have any idea what to do with himself, he did know that he wasn’t moronic enough to air his
dirty laundry for the world to see. He let his mind wander for not the first time to his storming out of Jensen’s home.

It had been a stupid thing to do. He should have stood up for himself and proved for the last time that befriending the less-than-adequate as a form of amusement, was not okay. At any time. He should have told Jensen just what he thought of being used, of what it was like to always hear the whispers that no one thought that he could hear, of being pointed at by laughing teens and stared at by frightened children. Yeah, he should have done all of that, but no, he ran like a wounded elephant for the door.

Christ, he had been a fool. He had so wanted to belong for once, to be somebody, to Jensen. Jared reached into the box of cinnamon rolls next to him but found it empty. He used his finger to swipe up some of the leftover frosting. It was so sweet that it made him wince, but it also gave him something else to concentrate on for a few minutes other than his misery.

But those minutes were short and the frosting was soon gone.

Jared was upset with Jensen, how could he not be. Jared felt like he was in a spot in which he felt that he couldn’t even go to work for fear of seeing him, but he was more angry with himself for believing that he could be friends with someone like Jensen Ackles, art patron, heir to a Fortune 500 company’s fortune, loving son and brother, friend to fatties everywhere. Hell, he probably stopped to help squirrels cross the road, Jared scowled at the image in of his mind of just that.

He stared angrily at the muted TV for a little while longer, stewing and fuming at himself for allowing himself to be played like an idiot.

“Enough. Enough of this shit!” Jared hoisted himself from the sofa, knocking the remote and an empty soda bottle to the floor in the process. “He’s not going to win. He’s not because I won’t let him.”

He walked to the kitchen, yanked the trash bin from beneath the sink, and started sweeping piles of food wrappers and other wayward trash off the counter into it. He then pulled the partially filled liner from the plastic can and moved to the living room, pushing and shoving everything he could find into the bag. Jared was so angry that he could cry, in fact his eyes welled up more than once as he felt his flab shift as he stooped to pick something up, but he held onto those tears, held onto the anger.

The breaking point came when he was wedging a foil take-away container into liner and it lost its integrity, ripping silently and allowing all of his hard work to rain to the floor at his feet.

His determination fell heavily along with it.

As did his tears.

Jared sank to the edge of the straight back chair by the door and let himself go.

*****

The leaves of russet, gold, and amber were rustling in the trees of the complex’s courtyard beyond the rail of his balcony. Jared watched through the sliding patio door as they danced and shimmied in the early afternoon sunshine. He was still sitting by the door, legs splayed in front of him, arms lying useless on his thighs, when a knock sounded on the wooden door next to him.

The knock turned to pounding by the time he had mustered enough energy to stand and pull the door open.
“Jared.” Jensen’s eyes were bordering on frantic as he breathed out the name.

Jared was dumbfounded. He tried to remember when he had given Jensen his address, but his thoughts were scrambled and he came up with partial conversations that led to everything but the information he sought.

Jensen took a step forward and then another until his foot crossed the threshold; his hand rose slowly as if to touch, before he withdrew it quickly to ball it in a fist on Jared’s chest.

“Jared.” His name again, so quietly whispered as if it were the most reverent thing to cross those lush lips in days, years, decades. “I . . .”

And then Jared couldn’t breathe, not due to his own shock, but because he found himself wrapped in Jensen’s firm, unyielding arms. He wanted to ask all the ‘W’s’ that his fourth grade teacher had drilled into his head. Who, where, what, when, and especially why questions saturated his tongue, filling his mouth with stones of doubt, but there were too many to chose just one or two, that in the end he stayed as still as possible. Jared felt his body start to sag under the softly caressing hands that were coasting up and down his back.

There was a murmur against his neck. Jared couldn’t make out the words but the tone was pleading as the moist words warmed his skin. There was the strange sensation to comfort someone, to gather Jensen in his arms and promise that it would all be okay, that they would be okay. His breath hitched at the idea of it.

“What?” Jared finally found his voice to utter that single word.

Jensen’s arms slackened enough for him to pull back a little, but not enough for him to release Jared all together. His eyes, bright green and sharp, peered into his own with such clarity that Jared felt it in his solar plexus.

“I said thank God you’re okay and if anything had happened to you . . . “ Jensen paused to clear the gruffness from his throat.

Jared stared at Jensen’s face. There wasn’t maliciousness or anger, only sincerity and something else affirming that Jared couldn’t quite place before it was gone as Jensen pulled him close again.

“I called the museum on Wednesday. They said that you were sick, but I went there again this morning and you were still gone . . .” The hitch in Jensen’s voice crawled across Jared’s skin. “I had to see you for myself. I had to know that I- that you were okay.”

“I’m okay.” Jared replied unsteadily trying to remove himself with the least amount of awkwardness from Jensen’s arms. He could see a neighbor across the courtyard staring at them curiously. Jared took a hesitant step back, which Jensen matched, a maneuver they repeated. The door shut solidly behind Jensen. Jared guessed that his uninvited guest had given it a nudge on purpose. He didn’t really want Jensen to see how he lived. His apartment wasn’t as nice Jensen’s townhouse and with the way that he had been living the past few days, well . . . he could feel the shame deepening beneath his skin.

“No, you’re not, Jared. If you were okay, you would have gone in to work; you wouldn’t be home or hiding or whatever . . . you wouldn’t have left the other night.” Jensen must have noticed Jared backing away because he released him long enough to slide his hands easily down to Jared’s wrists and pulled him towards the couch. It was if Jared had no control over his extremities, it was as if the determination, the drive, the fight he had felt within his mind earlier in the day had never happened. He allowed himself to be tugged meekly along and with the slightest of shoves from
Jensen, Jared dropped to the cushions.

“May I tell you what I think, Jared? I think I understand, but I guess I just want to clarify what I did to make you run like that.” Jensen perched lightly on the coffee table across from him, his tone quiet, his hands rubbing soothingly over Jared’s own hands.

Jared must have nodded even though he didn’t realize it because Jensen started speaking.

“I think you’re scared. I think you left the other night because you were scared that I was going to hurt you, which I can promise you that was not my intention. It will never be my intention to hurt you in any way, shape, or form. I look at you, Jared and my god . . . I can’t stop looking at you. You drive me crazy with your humility, your talent, your looks.” Jensen paused to lick some moisture into his lips. Jared sat and listened. So many times he wanted to stop Jensen, to tell him to stop messing with his mind, to stop lying to him, but as he started to open his mouth to say such things, Jensen blazed on.

“I think that you are probably the most fascinating person I’ve even met. I wasn’t lying the other night at my place when I said that all I want to do is touch you, to be with you. At first I thought that I was chasing a dream, you know. That you weren’t even gay. But Sam said that she was pretty sure you were.”

*How does she know?* Jared wondered silently.

“ . . . and then I thought that you might just be painfully shy, hence hiding in Restoration, which believe me, you’ve proven to me, to everyone that you are brilliant at, rather than seeking a career as an artist in your own right, which you would probably be even more brilliant at. But that didn’t answer why you ran from me when I wanted you to stay.”

*That’s because I didn’t want to freak you out with how disgusting I am.* Jared’s mind snarked back.

“But these past few days, when you disappeared . . . and I had more than enough time to replay it all, over and over again, in my head. I realized that you had been hurt by someone. Before. And that’s why you are scared to get close to anyone; why you pushed me away. Jesus, Jared! You have to believe that I would *never* want to hurt you. I want to be the one to make you smile so that you light up a room. I want to make you laugh so that even the people back home in Texas can feel the joy. I want to feel you next to me and know that I never have to be alone again. And maybe that’s too much too soon, but I can’t take it back. I won’t take any of it back. I won’t.”

As unsettled as he already felt, Jared wasn’t prepared for when Jensen’s hands ran up his wrists to his biceps and shoulders to cradle his face in those gentle fingers. He flinched causing the other man’s eyes to flash a dangerous shade of malachite.

“I’m not sure who it was that made you this way, made you scared to be loved , to be held or cherished, but if I ever find out, I’m pretty sure that I might have to pull out my karate lessons from when I was a boy.” Jensen’s voice wasn’t as threatening as his words suggested, but Jared blinked repeatedly at him anyway. “Can you tell me? Jared, is there any way I can make you forget that bastard?”

He dislodged Jensen’s hands when his chin dropped down allowing his eyes to see where their knees slotted slightly against each other. Jared wondered how to explain that there was no mysterious person that scared him or broke him or anything of the like. Because he wasn’t scared and he wasn’t broken, at least not how Jensen thought he was, he just didn’t like to be touched. It reminded him of just how different he was from the regular people the he saw every day. How when he walked past parents cuddling their children, lovebirds necking on the train, or when he
saw old couples tottering through the park hand in hand and knew with surety that he would never have any of that. Never. And another piece of his fading hope dropped away like autumn leaves from a tree.

“Jared? Hey, Jared? I’m sorry okay? I just, well, I came to make sure that you were okay and I can see that you are, so I’ll just, um . . . go.” Jared wasn’t too self-absorbed not to hear the sorrow in Jensen’s words, the defeat in his tone. Those warm comforting hands dropped to Jared’s knees and squeezed gently before slipping away. “I’m sorry that I pushed too hard and that I . . . well, I’m sorry. But I’m not sorry that I’ve met you and I hope that in time, well, that in time, we can go back to being friends, because I’ve got to tell you, I really like you and I like spending time with you, so if friendship is all that I can have then I’ll gladly take it.”

Jensen brushed a hand lightly over Jared’s bowed head as he rose from his seat. Jared watched his sneaker clad feet back away and turn slowly towards the door. He squeezed his eyes shut, took a deep breath, and held it for a few seconds before he blurted out what had been clawing at his throat for the past decade.

“Jensen, I . . . am scared, you’re right, but not because of anybody. I’m scared because I’m fat and I’m disgusting and I don’t like to be touched because then you’ll feel that, how fat and gross I really am and I want you to be my friend. I do. I want you to keep me smiling . . . and laughing. I . . . don’t leave. Please, don’t leave me behind.”

The damned tears were pooling again as he finally looked up to see what Jensen thought of his outburst, but he didn’t have suffer the indignity of tasting them as they ran down his cheeks because Jensen was right there in front of him again; his palms cupped around the sides of his face, thumbs wicking the tears away as quickly as they fell. There was a slight pressure and then Jared found himself falling into Jensen’s unguarded gaze as his face was raised up.

It was then that he was able to pinpoint all those various emotions that had eluded him so many times before as they ran down his cheeks because Jensen was right there in front of him again; his palms cupped around the sides of his face, thumbs wicking the tears away as quickly as they fell. There was a slight pressure and then Jared found himself falling into Jensen’s unguarded gaze as his face was raised up.

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Jensen’s knees brushed against the inside of Jared’s spread thighs as he shuffled carefully forward until Jared’s face was buried in Jensen’s hoodie and Jensen’s hands hugged firmly around the back of his neck. Several minutes later Jared pulled back enough to sniff as gracefully as he could and run the back of his wrist across his eyes.

“Jared?” There was a small crease between Jensen’s eyes that Jared noticed for the first time. “You okay?”

“Jen, I’m sorry . . . I’ He tried to tip his head down again, but Jensen’s tender hands prevented him from doing so. “I’m just sorry,” he finished meekly.

“Hey, there’s no reason for being sorry.” He smiled at Jared’s scowl. “Fine, you can be sorry for making me worry and for not talking to me, but that’s it.”

“I just . . . you know, I see how people look at me, how they treat me, and I know that I’m different, that I’m huge, but . . .”

“Stop!” Jensen interrupted. “I don’t want to hear that okay? To hear that you think so little of yourself because you might be a little bigger than most, doesn’t mean that you are any less than they are. It hurts me here,” Jared watched silently as Jensen laid a hand over his own chest, “to
hear you put yourself down like that. You are wonderful and kind and crazy talented and if everyone can’t see that, then that’s their problem, not yours.”

“I’m no-“

“I’m serious, Jay.” Jared’s lips crooked up slightly at the nickname. “I talk to you and I hear humility and integrity as well as humor and wit. I see you and I see the man that wants to be loved. I touch you . . . and I never want to stop.”

Jared raised his hands to grasp lightly at Jensen’s hips to steady himself.

“What do you feel, Jay, when you touch me?” He found it hard to keep looking into Jensen’s eyes; the honesty was nearly crippling. Jared adjusted his grasp, fingers twitching and rubbing along the edge of the back pocket seam on Jensen’s jeans. “What, Jay? Tell me what you’re feeling right now.”

“I feel . . . stupid and –“ Jensen frowned down at him and made a *tsking* noise with his tongue, “I feel . . . perfection.” Jared finished, feeling lame.

“Me, too, Jared. Every time I get near you, every time I feel the heat from you, I feel exactly the same thing. Let me show you how I feel, Jay. I want you to understand what I mean when I say that, that I feel perfection as well.”

Jensen’s hands ran down his shoulders and up his arms to alight firmly upon his own. His fingers curled around and he stepped back causing Jared to either tip forward from his place on the sofa or to rise. He staggered awkwardly to his feet and looked down into Jensen’s handsome face.

“Bedroom?”

Jared stared blankly for a moment before tipping his head towards the short hall. Jensen stepped back again and soon they were making their way semi-gracefully down it. When Jensen’s back came up against the wall, he pulled Jared down and pressed a singularly temperate kiss to Jared’s cheek before sliding his head the fraction of an inch until Jared’s lips lay atop his. It wasn’t the first time that Jared had ever kissed someone, but it was the first time that someone had kissed him in years. It was a few minutes before Jensen’s face came into focus as Jared withdrew just as languidly as he had been pulled forward.

“Which door?” Jensen’s voice, deeper in the shadows of the darkened hallway, spoke in a whisper. Jared bobbed his head towards the left and Jensen started edging in that direction, one of Jared’s hands still gripped tightly in his, with his other, he reached behind him and twisted the knob to gain entrance.

“Jensen, I . . . well, I’ve never . . .” Jared let his thought trail off. He had brought enough embarrassment upon himself for one day, he thought.

“We’ll go as slow as you want, Jay. If all you want is to kiss, that’s okay. I can’t say that I don’t want to go further than that because, I do. But this is about you, about me showing you just how special you really are, okay?” Jensen’s free hand came up to cradle his face as he spoke before it slid slowly down to come to rest over Jared’s hammering heart. “I just want to love you as you should be, as you deserve to be.”

Jared swallowed thickly. He could feel the heat that was radiating between their bodies. He wanted more, but there was a reason he was a virgin still, nearly one hundred reasons, give or take a few.

Jared allowed himself to be guided to the bed, where Jensen sat, pulling on Jared’s hand to get him
to do the same.

“What can I do to help you, Jay? Are you worried that I might leave, that I might be freaked out and leave? Because I can promise you . . . That. Is. Not. Going. To. Happen.” Jensen punctuated each word with a kiss, each becoming longer and more sensual than the last. “I’ve already told you that I want this, that I want you, what can I do to prove that to you?”

“I . . . it’s just that . . . I’m fat . . .” Jared lifted a hand to Jensen, who reacted as though to speak. Jensen slowly closed his mouth and nodded so that Jared could finish his thought. “I am, according to the doctors that I’ve seen, I’m obese; I’m at least one hundred pounds overweight. It’s probably closer to one-twenty now. I just . . . well, I don’t like mirrors, but it is impossible to get through a day without seeing your reflection somewhere, I know what I look like and it isn’t pretty.”

“I think you’re pretty.” Jensen interjected quietly.

“I’m talking more than my face, Jen. I . . . have you ever been with someone that is as big as me, as . . . fat as me?” Jared could feel the swell in his throat; he was trying to be frank and honest, but it was still such a troubling topic for him. “Have you?”

“When you say ‘been with’ are you talking about dating or are you asking if I’ve ever been intimate with someone, well let’s just say, bulkier than myself, because I can answer both of those questions with a resounding yes.” Jensen’s hand, which had been playing with the tail of Jared’s unbuttoned flannel shirt, slid up to the collar and wormed its way under the material to his shoulder.

Jared was at a loss for words; it couldn’t be true.

“When I was in junior high, I fell in love with my earth science lab partner. Ben Stevens was his name. He was so smart and deadly funny; I would often get called down for laughing when we were supposed to be working. Now this was the time that I realized that I liked guys, you know, instead of girls and that got out, but Ben never treated me any different. Ben was a big guy, too, nearly twice my size. Of course, I was a bit scrawnier back then, so he probably wasn’t that big, you know, but to me he was just Ben. His size didn’t matter, I just knew that I thought that the sun rose and set by whatever he did.” Jared smiled at the faraway look that had settled on Jensen’s face.

“Was Ben gay as well?” Jared asked, genuinely curious.

“No, sadly.” Jensen smiled regretfully before he chuckled, “but he was my first kiss. Say, do you want to . . . I don’t know, lay down? Get more comfortable.”

Jared was somewhat shocked for a few seconds, at the abrupt change of topic, but he still started to slide back on the bed.

“Hey, um, can I take off my sweatshirt and shoes?” Jensen asked rising to stand next to the bed.

“Sure, yeah, please.” Jared replied trying to infuse some confidence into his voice; he didn’t think that he succeeded, but Jensen just smiled that same brilliant smile he always did and set about kicking off his shoes. Jared pulled in a hesitant breath and bit his bottom lip before he raised up enough to pull off his flannel shirt.

This is weird, he thought. It was going to be the first time that he had been next to a guy as hot as Jensen with only a tee shirt and jeans on; usually he wore several layers as sort of a protective shield against the blatant stares that his size usually drew.
Jensen reached down and turned on the lamp next to the bed. He then kneeled on the foot of the bed and crawled up to sit next to Jared; with gentle hands, Jared allowed Jensen to ease him back and they lay on their sides facing one another. Jared cleared his throat.

“So, um, where’s Ben now?” He asked his eyes watching Jensen face for any discomfort, but he was beginning to think that he would never see any. “Are you still friends?”

“We are,” Jensen replied as he brought a hand up to coast up and down Jared’s arm that wasn’t propping him up. “He still lives in Texas. Dallas. He works for the city as a planning engineer. Still not gay, but he does have a lovely wife, Beth, and three kids. I try to see him when I go back, but it’s been a while. And before you ask because I know that you’re thinking about it, he’s still a big guy. Not as tall as you, but he is most definitely stockier than most.”

“I wasn’t going to ask.” Jared pouted reaching out and poking Jensen in the side. He knew that if Jensen hadn’t told him, he would have wondered, but that was different than asking. Jensen caught his hand and curved it around his slender waist, before resuming the caressing strokes his own hand had been doing.

“Okay, I just wanted you to know anyway. So there, I didn’t really date Ben, but I did have a crush the size of Texas on him and I did date Kyle in high school. He was a wrestler. Heavyweight division.”

“Kyle? Was he cute?” Jared let his fingers play along the waistband of Jensen’s jeans; it felt nice, well, odd, but nice nonetheless, to be able to touch someone else and not be terrified to see them withdraw both emotionally and physically from him.

(Of course, I only have the best taste when it comes to men.” Jensen teased, leaning forward to make a quick peck on Jared’s lips, causing him to smile shyly. “Granted Kyle wasn’t out and when he got a full ride scholarship to the University of Nebraska, we kinda lost track of each other, but last I heard, he was still single and living in California.”

“Was he . . . did you and he . . .” It seemed to personal to ask, if Jensen lost his virginity to Kyle. Jared was still trying to figure out how to ask when Jensen saved him by shaking his head silently as his hand slid low enough to slip under Jared’s tee shirt. Jared started to suck in his stomach when Jensen shook his head again and whispered.

“Don’t, Jared. Please don’t do that. I can see that you are big –“

“Fat.”

“Big,” Jensen restated, “and I can see and I can feel and I am more than okay with that. I think you’re sexy . . . Don’t look at me like that, Jay. I do. And I can’t wait to touch you everywhere.”

Jared knew that his face must have read like a book that he thought Jensen was crazy. Jensen’s whole hand was now smoothing across the thinned skin along his hip. He did not have the taut, smooth skin that one would find on regular sized man. It was difficult not to flinch away, but Jensen started talking again and Jared forgot to do so.

“I don’t know how to prove it to you that I think that you’re gorgeous. You are way more handsome than Kyle ever dreamed of being, I swear.” Jensen leaned forward then pressed softly against his lips. It felt so sweet, so full of promise that Jared wanted to forget all of his fears and just say what the hell, but old barriers are still barriers and he pulled back to stare into those serious eyes so near to his own.
“It’s hard, Jensen.”

“I know it is, but I also believe that you are a lot stronger than you think, Jay.” Jensen’s voice was so sincere that Jared could feel himself warming at the belief he heard. Jensen scooted a little closer so that the arm he was partially leaning on could be used to tuck Jared’s hairs behind his ear. “So, where was I? There was Ben, my first love. Kyle, my first experience in hand jobs and blowjobs, so that means we’re up to Brian. Brian broke my heart, but he was the first man that I was ever had sex with.”

“Brian sounds heartless.” Jared suggested, but Jensen murmured a negative noise as he let his hand drift down to Jared’s spine.

“Brian was wonderful, is wonderful, it’s just that he . . . I thought that Brian was the one, you know? We met when I was a freshman at Texas Tech. He was a junior in international studies. He showed me how to do so many things and was so gentle and patient with someone that was more than a little inexperienced.” Jared was practically close enough to feel the warmth bleeding off Jensen’s flushed cheeks.

“So he was your . . . first?” Jared asked watching his hand flex before he let it curve that tiny bit so when he slid it down Jensen’s hip again, he could feel the tightness of the muscles of his ass. He was amazed that he was being so bold, but with Jensen next to him he was beginning to feel lighter, well, not literally, but his soul didn’t feel as heavy. It a particularly freeing sensation.

“He was. Brian was a force to be reckoned with, his intelligence and his larger than life presence is what drew me to him. He was the vice-president of the GLBT organization and he never made anyone feel excluded or different or anything less than the most important person in the room. I was actually scared of him at first, you know? I couldn’t talk when he was around or meet his eyes, and I was so scared of being found out for my crush, for being rejected because he was just so . . . dynamic.”

Jensen released Jared then and rolled to his back, Jared’s hand still in mid caress, ghosted over the fly of Jensen’s jeans before landing further up on his body at his abs. The fact that there was defined firmness both beneath Jensen’s thin blue v-necked tee shirt and behind that faded bit of denim caused Jared to want to draw his hand back, but he swallow his fear and rolled forward a little, propping himself more securely on his bent arm so that he could look down into Jensen’s face.

“You okay?” He asked and Jensen nodded slightly as he flicked his tongue across his upper lip.

“Yes. I just realized how similar you and Brian are when it comes to how I felt about him and how I feel about you.” Jared wanted to scoff at the idea of the outgoing man that Jensen had described and his own barely-there existence would have anything in common, but Jensen’s eyes were nothing if not serious as they stared straight up at the textured ceiling. There was also a current of uncertainty mixed quietly into Jensen’s tenor voice. Jared only noticed it because of his own familiarity with that particular emotion.

“Where, uh, where is Brian now?” Jared hated to ask; it sounded as if he was out of Jensen’s life for good, but the idea of being used as a substitute started to worm its way into his brain. He didn’t want to believe Jensen capable of such an act, but maybe it was a subconscious thing, maybe he didn’t realize that he was playing with Jared.

“Brian is in Europe. He . . . we dated until he graduated and even for a little while after he moved to London to continue his studies, but you know how it is, there was too many miles between us, too few ways to connect. I still had school over here and well, yeah . . . it was difficult, but in the
end it was for the best.” Jared let his hand rub up to Jensen’s chest until it seemed as if he were trying to soothe his broken heart through his firm pectoral muscles. He started when Jensen’s hand landed gently on his own, but it wasn’t to stop him from his ministrations, only to encourage him to continue them. “He’s married to Johannes, who seemed like a great guy when I met him and they stay primarily in Belgium, but I think they also have a house in France. I’m happy for them both, but it took me a while to start looking again, you know?”

“I’m sorry, Jen. That sounded . . . it must hurt to lose someone so special to you.” It was an awkward thing to say, especially when Jared had no point of reference, but he hoped that Jensen knew that he meant well anyway.

“It did hurt at first, but then when doesn’t it?” It sounded like a redundant statement so Jared just hummed a bit as his eyes traced along the same path as their hands. Jensen’s hand slid to his wrist and then higher still until it clutched tightly at the meatiness of flesh right above Jared’s elbow. The action threw Jared’s balance off and he tipped forward, his broad chest and ample stomach rolling partly onto Jensen, effectively pining his arm and left side to the bed.

“I . . .” It was hard to collect his thoughts when Jensen turned his head to look him in the eye. He looked back, nearly staring and watched as Jensen’s pupils started to widen in the shadow he cast above him. It was an unsettling feeling. He tried to push back but Jensen held him firm. “Sorry.” He mumbled and dropped his gaze to the pillow below the other man’s head.

“Don’t be, Jared. I’m not. I know that I keep saying it, but I really do like touching you and I love how I feel when you touch me.” Jared was going to protest, but he had no idea how he would word what he wanted to say without offending Jensen and it was moot anyway because Jensen had ran his hand up to Jared’s neck and pulled him down until their lips were slotted together.

They lay like that for several long minutes, only the muted sounds of fabric shifting and heavier breathing separated them. It lasted until Jared felt coolness on his back as Jensen rucked his tee shirt up to nearly his armpits. He had rolled off Jensen as fast as he could and was working at pulling the shirt back down when Jensen’s honey brown hair loomed into his view of the ceiling.

“Jay?” Jensen crawled to a kneeling position beside him, but it was only a few seconds before Jensen swung his leg over both of Jared’s, balancing himself on his knees with the padding of Jared’s thighs giving him extra support beneath his ass. “Why?”

Why? Jared tried not to look at Jensen but the more directions that Jared looked, Jensen would angle himself to stay in view until it was just easier to meet the sympathetic eyes boring into him from above. He wanted to scream at Jensen to get off, to leave him alone, to not touch him, but he merely lay there and let himself be pitied.

“I thought that we were doing okay, Jay. I . . . know that I said I wouldn’t push, but, well . . . If I ask you something, will you answer me?” Jensen’s voice was troubled. “Why did you stop? I’ve already told you that I like my men . . . bigger, so you have to know that I have no problem with seeing you shirtless, Hell, I have no problem with seeing you without pants for that matter. It’s just that I . . . do you hate yourself that much? Or is it me that you distrust so much, that you think that I’m going to be surprised or worse, leave because I can see all of you?”

Jared continued to stare mutely up at Jensen, neither nodding nor confirming in any other fashion to Jensen’s queries. It was one thing to hear the words in Jensen’s voice, but if he answered truthfully, it would be his own voice telling the truth out loud not for the first time, but the first time in front of someone else. Jensen sighed above him then crossed his arms at his wrists, grasped the soft cotton hem of his tee shirt and pulled it off, leaving his hair mussed in its wake.
Letting his eyes drop down, Jared looked at Jensen’s chest, his pecs firmly defined beneath his broad freckled shoulders and his dusky rose nipples perked up under his scrutiny. A brief flaire of goosebumps spread over the light tawny skin before smoothing out again.

“What did you say when I asked you what you felt when you touched me? Earlier, out in the living room, I asked you what you felt and you said what, Jared?” Jared watched silently as Jensen looked down at his own chest, a hand came up to scratch briefly at the skin above his navel before falling back to his side. “Perfection. You said you felt perfection, but when I look at myself, I see freckles, way more freckles than anyone else in my family, than anyone I know. I hated them growing up, you know? My mom chased me around with SPF100 most of the time I was growing up. It sucked out loud.

And my legs are bowed like crazy. You should see me in shorts; gym was a bitch in middle school, let me tell you. The teasing and mocking of pre-teens was and probably still is, ruthless. I wear glasses or contacts most of the time because my eyesight’s shit and I broke my nose ramping my bike as a kid, so there’s that weird bend and my ears are kind of pointy and odd and do you get what I’m saying, Jay? Nobody is perfect. Nobody.”

Jared let his arms drop from where they had been crossed protectively over his torso, his fingers brushed against Jensen’s knees. It was funny, he thought, he had never noticed Jensen being bow-legged before or that his ears were anything other than normal.

“Jared?” Jensen’s spiderwalked his fingers down until they closed loosely over his own. “I know those things about myself, but I don’t let them define me. Just like you shouldn’t let yourself be defined by your size.” He lifted his hands bring Jared’s with them until they lay at the bottom edge of Jared’s size 4x tee shirt. “If you say no, then I’ll accept that . . . for now, but don’t doubt that I’m not going to work on convincing you that you are someone special, that you do deserve to feel cherished, worshiped even. It’s up to you, Jared. We can continue just laying here talking with maybe a kiss or two thrown in to tide me over or we can spend the night or maybe even the rest of our natural born lives telling . . . no, showing each other just how perfect we think each other really is.”

Jensen dropped his hands back to his thighs, leaving Jared staring down at where his own curled around the worn fabric of his shirt. He wanted to trust, to believe Jensen, but he knew deep down that there was always the risk of being scorned, no matter how sincere the other man seemed. He closed his eyes briefly and drew in a big breath before he started the agonizingly slow removal of his shirt. Jared stared at the back of his eye lids as he leaned up enough to pull first one arm and then the other through the broad armholes until the excess material lay bunched around his neck. Jensen’s eyes smiled down at him approvingly when he opened them again.

“God! Look at you, you’re so . . . wow, I can’t believe how gorgeous you are.” Jensen leaned forward to help Jared rid himself of his shirt. He could feel fingertips flitting softly over his shoulders and chest before the hands continued down past his nipples to rest easily against the upper swell of his stomach. “I . . . just . . . you are absolutely stunning, Jared.”

Jensen’s hands jiggled as Jared laughed nervously at the ridiculousness of that statement.

“No, you are. You are not only smart and talented, but you have the body of a man, a real man.” Jared stopped laughing when he caught the reverence in Jensen’s tone, but he was helpless to wipe the embarrassed smile from his face.

“No, you are. You are not only smart and talented, but you have the body of a man, a real man.” Jared stopped laughing when he caught the reverence in Jensen’s tone, but he was helpless to wipe the embarrassed smile from his face.
“Yes. Yes, I do. And I mean every word, Jay. Even with the fear of you thinking that I’m a- a pervert, I also want you to know that I want to be the one to show you how wonderful you are, how you deserve to be loved, your body worshipped.” Jared snorted in disbelief at what he was hearing. “No, I do, Jay. You’re like one of those pre-historic statues that are the penultimate idols of fertility and mating. You’re like a Hen-“

“I can’t believe that you just compared me to the Venus of Willendorf.” Jared interrupted.

“Fine, that might have been a stretch, but you do make me think of a Henry Moore sculpture, all long lines and bulk and so aesthetically pleasing that I want to lay you out and touch every square millimeter of you.” Jensen ran his hands up to Jared’s shoulders and then down his arms. The flesh beneath his hands warming and then staying so as Jensen’s moved on to his waist and started the circuit again, sometimes they stopped and kneaded for a moment or two, but they stayed moving, soothing away Jared’s doubts.

“Jen?”

“Hmm?” Jensen had leaned down again, a hand between Jared’s arm and chest, propping himself up so that he could rub his cheek and nose against Jared’s skin. It made Jared feel a bit hedonistic, what with all the attention that Jensen was lavishing on him.

“Oberon . . . did, um, you buy him to try a- and seduce me?” The idea sounded weird to even him, Jared had to ask.

Jensen stopped his nuzzling and brought his other hand down to balance himself above Jared’s body. He pressed a string of kisses from his heart up to his neck and chin before landing on his mouth.

“Oberon. Well, there are a couple of reasons that I bought Oberon. First, it’s a Rubens, a master’s work, thus a sound investment for the family’s collection and second, it’s probably the one painting in the entire art world that comes closest to being the exact image of my ideal man. I look at Oberon and I see a man with two realms at his fingertips, the mortal world and the magical world. I see his quiet majesty and I don’t know if you saw them, but the faces on the faeries were rendered so that they looked to their master in awe and adoration, not so terribly different than how I see you. Seduce? No, but I did sort of stretch the truth about worrying where I hung him. I knew all along that he was going to go in my bedroom.”

He leaned forward and pressed a kiss onto Jared’s lips, his tongue sliding wetly along the seam until Jared gasped and it delved in to lick at the roof of his mouth. Jared let his hands, which had been resting on Jensen’s denim clad thighs, run up the smooth skin of Jensen’s waist. It was a novel feeling not to touch skin that was flawed with tiny tears beneath skin pulled too tight like his own. He wondered what Jensen thought when he touched those marks. He pulled as far away from the embrace as his pillow would allow to ask.

“I’m sorry, Jensen. I’m . . . I don’t get . . .” Jared released the man that hovered over him with one hand to run it through his hair. Way to sound like a moron that can’t even speak right, he chastised himself internally.

“What don’t you get, babe?” Jensen replied gently as he shifted his lips to glide along the fleshiness under Jared’s chin.

“Jen, I . . . why do you like, well . . . guys like me?” Jared stuttered out, his thoughts unraveling as Jensen sucked a bruise along his neck.
Jensen leaned up enough to place a fist under his chin on Jared’s chest and looked under his long eyelashes up at Jared. He tilted his head a bit to the side as if pondering the question. His free hand came up to brush Jared’s hair back behind his ear.

“I don’t know, I just do.” Jared caught the rise in tone at the beginning of Jensen’s statement. It had all the earmarks of a question, as if Jensen seemed as perplexed about his taste in men as Jared was. Jensen licked his bottom lip, rolling it in between his teeth before he continued speaking.

“I’ve already told you that I always seemed to gravitate towards boys, well, men now, who are on the heavier side,” he sighed, “After Brian, I thought that maybe I was doing something wrong, you know, chasing the wrong type of guy. So I tried going out with men that my mom set me up with that were closer to my own size, or that I met at the gym, but it never felt right, I . . . I never felt that thing, that sense of wholeness that I felt with Brian.”

“But you said that he was really outgoing, which I’m sure that you’ve noticed by now, I am not.” Jared prompted, reaching up a hand to caress down Jensen’s bicep. “Surely, there was a guy that stimulated you that way.”

“One or two,” Jensen acquiesced, “but it wasn’t enough, you know? I liked them as men, could even see myself as being friends with them, but the spark, the lusting drive to fall into bed with them? Yeah, so not there. I’ve tried to identify what it is that draws me to a guy like you, I have, but I can’t pinpoint just one thing. It’s like a bunch of little things, like pixilation that up close looks like nothing but from a distance creates a whole picture.”

“Like a Seurat painting.” Jared suggested.

“Kind of, only not so well designed.” Jared smiled at Jensen chuckled above him. He could feel the firm, hard length of Jensen’s cock rubbing so dangerously close to his own, causing him to swallow nervously. “I do know that I like what I like to think of as ‘real’ men, someone that isn’t scared to eat something that may not be one hundred percent healthy and doesn’t spend hours in the gym searching to destroy every single ounce of fat on their body. I tried to date a few of those and I felt that I was always supposed to be working out with them and that I would always take a back seat to their own quest for perfection.”

It was irrational to want to go punch anyone that thought more of themselves than Jensen, Jared knew it was, especially when the man in question had started making dilettante shifts with his hips causing his cock to slide closer to Jared’s own growing member. He had Jensen and they didn’t, but that didn’t stop his dislike for them from expanding within his chest. Jensen’s voice dropped an octave as he spoke again.

“I also like men that make me feel safe and sheltered, protected. When I was with Brian . . . or when I stand next to you, I feel like I don’t have to be the strong one, the quote real idea of a man end quote, well, you know what I mean, I don’t have to always be all stoic and strength. I can look at you and know that I don’t have to face every minute of every day being manly and tough and I’m not saying that as a gay man but as man that doesn’t want to be the archetypal view that the world sees how every man should be. Does that make sense, Jay?” Jared nodded. He wasn’t sure if it totally made sense, but he knew by now that Jensen wasn’t out to use him or play him for a fool.

“Good.” Jensen replied as he wormed one of his hands under Jared’s neck and surged up to drive his tongue into Jared’s mouth again. Surprised at the sudden movement, Jared flung his arms around Jensen’s back to steady him, but soon found that the delightful warmth of the other man’s chest was also present along the firm muscles of his back. His fingers brushed along the waistband of Jensen’s jeans and the man ground down against Jared. Jared swore that if it had been dark right then he could have seen the sparks and stars above them that that move had caused.
Jared felt as if he was dying. The sheer magnitude of having Jensen, extremely sexy Jensen, grinding against him was making his heart race and his breath catch.

Jared made a troubled noise when Jensen pried his mouth away, his voice wrecked as he ground out. “Let me. Please God, Jared, let me show you . . .” Jared nodded and raised up to bite at Jensen’s collarbone. He worried the flesh between his teeth before letting it slip away. He was too far gone to say ‘no’ and was way past the point of even wanting to. Jared wanted to feel anything, everything that Jensen had been talking about; he wanted to experience what he had been missing out on his whole life.

He wanted to step out of the darkness of his mind and bask in the light of Jensen. No more grey. No more muddled hues. No more chiaroscuro. He wanted vibrancy and . . . Christ he wanted anything the Jensen would give him.

“I’ve got to . . . you are . . . Jesus!” Jensen kept up a steady stream of half-finished thoughts as he forced himself to push away just enough to wedge a hand between their stomachs to pull at the button of Jared’s jeans. “sexy . . . and gorgeous . . . and so fuckin’ hot . . . Jay, I want . . . aaah . . .”

Jared’s moan of pleasure blended with the groan of passion that was sounding from low in Jensen’s throat as the more slender man grasped his prize. A feeling of absoluteness filled Jared’s lungs and then radiated out until he could feel even his fingers and toes tingling with the need crashing through his veins when Jensen’s hand wrapped around his cock.

He could feel the Jensen’s hair brushing against his brow, his breath harsh and gravelly, as it blew hotly over his the wide expanse of his cheek. Jared was panting in time with them both. Sounds that he didn’t even know existed wrapped them in a cocoon of fervor, greed, and a hunger that he had never felt before. He was ravenous, not for something to fill him up as he normally was, but for Jensen. Jared shoved his hands down below the waist of Jensen’s jeans and cupped the meatiness of his ass. The rapidity of the clenching and unclenching muscles beneath his palms increased as Jensen continued to hump against his hips.

“C’mon . . . come on, Jay. Show me how . . . perfect you are . . . how perfect I know . . . you are.” Jensen had angled his body again, one arm supporting himself to give both his hand and wrist as well as his own stuttering hips, better leverage. “Come for me, Jay. Come on me. I want you to . . . God, I want you so much.”

Whether it was the quick twist on the upstroke of Jensen’s clutching palm or the never-ending pleading that was pouring out of him, Jared knew he would never be able to decide, but he felt his balls tighten in the humid confines of his jeans. He was so close and as much as he never wanted this to end, he was helpless to hold it back. The entire afternoon had been filled with long caresses and gentle touching, more than Jared had ever had in his life. A long, low moan filled the air above him, around them; he heard Jensen plea again for him to come and he did then. Thick and hot pulses erupted from his cock. He couldn’t see it, but he could feel it and Jared knew that he was coming harder than he ever had alone.

“Yeah . . . that’s it . . . cover me in it, Jay . . . feel you. God, you’re so . . . sexy.” Jensen’s voice was still getting through the murky haze as the aftershocks of his orgasm twinged and sparked over and through every nerve in his body. Jared slammed his eyes closed and tried to make the feeling last as long as possible. As he was coming back to reality several moments later he could hear Jensen grunting out words like perfect, gorgeous, and beautiful as he rode Jared’s hip with sharp halting snaps of his own pelvis.

“Jen –“ Jared started to say that he wanted to touch, to help, but Jensen cried out that it was too late and his head tipped impossibly far back on his neck, slender cords of tendons stretched to their

absolute ends. Jared watched fascinated as Jensen’s eyelashes dusted rapidly against his cheekbones and his jaw alternated between clenching tightly and gaping open in what could only be identified as ecstasy. God, he’s stunning was the only thought that Jared could throw a loop around in his exhausted state.

A few more wild pulses and Jensen groaned out his release, rocking precariously before dropping bonelessly onto Jared, who lifted his hands to feel the still twitching muscles along the other man’s sweat covered back.

“You’re the beautiful one, Jen.” He whispered into the suddenly too still room. Jared felt the grey starting to close in again. The entire afternoon and evening had been so charged and fraught with such emotional swinging from uncertainty and despair to the elation of release, he was scared to think of what was next. Jensen hummed and nestled in closer to Jared, but didn’t answer.

It took a while to slow down his wildly veering mind, but Jared eventually dropped into an uneasy slumber beneath the warmth of his bedmate.

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The room was dark when Jared slit open his eyes, he pulled the soft chenille afghan that had been a gift from his grandmother up to his chin and turned his head to stare at the window. He was alone, he wasn’t surprised, but he had hoped so hard before closing his eyes, that he wouldn’t be. At least he brought me the blanket from the couch, Jared thought miserably.

He could see through the break in the curtain panels that it was still nighttime, probably the wee hours of the morning. A sound of dying leaves rustling in a steady wind could be heard through the single-paned glass.

He sighed and shifted in the bed. His boxers pulled uncomfortably at his skin, the feeling of dried come, stiff and itchy. Jared sighed again. He had hoped that Jensen would have at least woke him to tell him that he was leaving, to say goodbye. He felt he was owed that much, that Jensen . . . Jared expelled a breathe again before he pulled himself up and sat on the edge of the bed. He wanted Jensen to mean it, to mean what he had said, but here at the end it was just as Jared feared.

Brushing a hand over his face, Jared could feel the dampness that could only be tears on his skin. Hefting himself up, Jared stripped off his fouled boxers and jeans before he stumbled towards the door, his foot catching on his discarded shirt. He muttered a curse and flung the door open harder than he meant to, the knob banging against the wall and sending it back towards him. Jared would have tried to catch it from hitting him, but he was too stunned by the view directly across from him. The shock of the door smacking his elbow barely registering.

There, in the second bedroom that served as his home studio, stood Jensen, staring back at him with rounded eyes made bigger by a delicate looking pair of glasses. The light from the overhead light fixture reflecting dully along the platinum frames.

“I . . . um, I took a shower, if that’s okay?” He nodded toward the bathroom door down the hall as he spoke. Jensen’s voice was as nervous as his posture, arms wrapped protectively over his bare chest and raised tense shoulders as if he was fearful of being kicked out in just his shorts. Jared noted the wetness still dragging at the ends of his hair.

“Oh, yeah, I . . . yeah, that’s fine.” He answered as they continued to stare at one another; the hall seemingly a greater divide than the whole of the world’s largest ocean.

“These are really good.”
“I thought you left.”

They spoke at the same time, both flushing when it sunk in that they hadn’t heard a word of what the other had said. Jared gestured for Jensen to speak; he was the guest after all.

“I – you really are an amazing artist.” Jensen looked behind him at the room filled with sketches taped to the white walls and canvases stacked carefully beneath the window. “I really love that one.” Jared watched as Jensen pointed to a landscape that he was partially finished with, sitting on an easel.

“It’s my grandparent’s place back home, just outside of San Antonio.”

“It’s beautiful. The colors. The space. It really is quite exquisite.” Jensen turned again, his eyes seeking out Jared’s reaction.

“I thought you left.” It wasn’t what he should have said, Jared knew that, he should have said thank you and let Jensen gather his stuff to go, but Jensen had said so many things before, well, before they did what they did and Jared wanted to catch him out. It was petty and possibly even cruel, but so was fucking and running.

“No.” Jensen replied simply, dropping his arms and standing straighter. “I took a shower and I wondered what this room was. I had opened the door earlier in my search for the bathroom, but . . . my mom always said that I was too curious for my own good.”

“But . . . why didn’t you leave?” Jared was losing his mind. If he kept saying things like that, Jensen would go and he really didn’t want that, but he was so confused that Jensen was still here that he couldn’t stop his mind from thinking like that.

“I didn’t want to, Jay. I wanted to take a shower because I was a bit sticky and then I was coming back bed.” He waved a hand in front of the placket of his boxers and blushed at implication. “I promise, Jay. I wasn’t going to leave. I might not even leave tomorrow, er, today that is, unless you really want me to.”

Jensen smiled indulgently then, eyes crinkling at the corners, teeth straight and bright.

“But . . . oh” Jared had looked down then see if Jensen could still see the evidence of his own mess on his boxers, but the sight of his rounded belly was all he saw and while he couldn’t quite see it, he knew Jensen could, his limp cock probably looked ridiculous. He had forgotten that he had kicked off his clothes in his room. He took a step back in shame, which spurred Jensen to take three steps forward and clutch at his arm.

“No, Jay. I’m sorry, okay? I’m sorry that I wasn’t there when you woke up. I’m truly sorry that you thought me heartless enough to leave and not say goodbye, I am. But I’m not sorry for what we did or what I said or that I just got to see you, all of you in all your glory here in the light, and know that I got to touch you like I did, to show you what you do to me. I meant every word I said, Jared. Every word. I want to see if I can make you make some of those noises again. I want to feel you in me, so deep and hard . . .” Jensen shifted up to press a small kiss to the corner of Jared’s mouth. “So help me, Jared, I want everything with you. I need you to believe that if nothing else.”

“I’m sorry . . . I’m . . . naked.” It wasn’t what he meant to say, but when had ever been able to do that, to say what he meant especially when Jensen was near, but the fact that Jensen snuck his arms under his, embracing him so tight and full of purpose while he nuzzled at the spot where Jared’s jaw hinged, made it seem okay.
“I’m not.” Jensen laughed lightly, “in fact, I prefer it. C’mon, let’s get you cleaned up and we can go back to bed. I’m hoping for maybe a round or two after breakfast, how ‘bout you?”

Jared pivoted slowly in Jensen’s arms and they both walked towards the bathroom. He knew that the world he lived in was never going to be same, not now that Jensen was in it, but Jared figured that he was okay with that. He jumped and then growled as Jensen slapped him lightly on the ass and then dove around him towards the bathroom door, demanding kisses to gain entry.

Yep, it was going to be different, but no different than when the sun comes out after a thunderstorm or when an artist creates a world of light and dark with his brush. Life is full of varying colors and hues and he was tired of languishing in the grayscales, Jared was realizing that he had a whole new brightly tinted spectrum to explore.

... epilogue...

“Good morning, hon. Did you already eat?” Jared felt the peck at his temple that proceeded the question.

“I haven’t yet, Mrs. Ackles, but that’s okay, I’m waiting for Jensen.” Jared smiled as the blonde woman settled onto the overstuffed sofa cushion next to him. Leaning forward she set her teacup next to Jared’s own empty coffee mug. Donna then pushed his mug away and produced a fresh one for him. He murmured his thanks.

“Now, what have I told you, sweetie? I’m either Donna or mom, please none of this ‘Mrs. Ackles’ business. I still way to young for that.” She laughed patting Jared on the knee. “And where is my wayward boy anyway? I figured that once I saw you, he wouldn’t be too far behind.”

Jared blushed at the implication. It had only been four months since he and Jensen had started dating and only two since Jared had moved into Jensen’s townhouse, but according to Sam and JD, Aldis and apparently, Donna Ackles, it wasn’t often that you found one of them without the other. He glanced at the softly burning fire in the massive stone fireplace, which was in the center of the ski lodge’s great room.

“Mackenzie and Jen wanted to get in a run before breakfast, so they took the first lift up this morning.” He shrugged and then smiled when he thought of how fabulous Jen’s ass looked in his snow pants this morning. He couldn’t wait to see it without them later.

“And everyone else?” She picked up her cup and took a sip before balancing it on her knee. “I mean, I know that Alan is up in the room getting dressed, but how about anyone else. Devon? Josh and Haley?”

It had been odd at first, being made a member of such a close knit family, but it hadn’t been as difficult as Jared originally thought it would be. Jensen kept telling him that he was worrying about nothing and he had been right, again. Nobody looked at him like he was freakishly huge or an outsider, apparently once you married or became engaged to or even just lived in a domestic partnership with an Ackles, you were welcomed with open arms and instantly loved.

That’s not to say that his own family didn’t like Jensen, they did, but Jared could still see the reservations that lay beneath his momma’s watchful gaze. It was if she expected Jen to wine and dine Jared and then leave him behind a broken shell that she would have to fix. Plus there was the curious glances that he saw Megan give Jensen, as if trying to figure out why someone as hot as him would go for someone like her brother, but Jensen laughed it off when he mentioned it to him, saying that she was just jealous.
“I think Devon’s still sleeping and Josh was going to go, but Haley wasn’t feeling well, so he decided to stay upstairs until she was ready to come down.” Jared replied. He looked out the window at the multitude of gem-like sparkles that the rising sun was creating as it touched the snow for the first time that morning. It glittered and flashed like a million tiny mirrored balls were spinning lazily, loftily above.

“Oh, dear, We’d hoped that she would have been over the worst of the morning sickness by now. I should probably have some crackers sent up and some tea.” Jared watched as Donna pulled a small tablet and pen from her cardigan pocket and made a note. He knew that in one of her many little notebooks that she carried with her at all times due to her work, was a page or two dedicated to him. His birthday and family’s names, his home, cell, and work numbers, his shirt size. He had balked at the last one, but Jensen told him to quit worrying, that his mom had excellent taste in clothing. It had taken more than kisses and cuddles that night for Jensen to convince him though.

“What about you, Jared? Why didn’t you head up with my two youngest loons?” Her voice was light and playful, but Jared knew that Donna knew just how much his weight still sometimes bothered him. He really hadn’t lost any since he and Jensen got together and not because Jensen wouldn’t have supported him if he decided to, but it was the acceptance in spite of his weight that kept him from the gym. It felt good to be loved just as he was. He never thought that he would ever have that. Besides, his body had toned up some, how could it not with all the amazing sex he and Jensen were having.

“I didn’t want to slow them down.” He replied honestly, grinning softly. “I’ve never skied before and I figured that with all the experience that those two have . . . anyway, Jen said that we were going to hit some of the easier hills this afternoon, so I decided to stay behind this morning.”

“According to Josh, she is, but I think it might have been the fact that she worked all day on Monday, flew to Dallas on Tuesday and then up here to Canada yesterday. She’s probably just tired.” Jared reasoned. He really didn’t know anything about pregnant women that wasn’t learned from looking at several hundred different paintings that were of the Madonna and Child and even then she wasn’t your typical pregnant woman, but it sounded like a logical explanation to him anyway.

“Are you sure, Jared? Don’t let my son make your decisions for you. I know how headstrong he can be.” Donna said patting her hand on Jared’s thigh again. She smiled at him brightly and nodded when he didn’t flinch like he had the first few dozen times one of the Ackles’ touched him. It was feeling that Jared was coming to enjoy, not the touching even though that wasn’t bad, but the fact that he enjoyed it. The first time that he initiated some sensual caresses with Jensen, the sex had been mindblowingly awesome.

“Jensen Ross! Is that any way to treat someone else’s furniture?” Donna chided titling her head to receive a kiss from her rosy-cheeked daughter, who had the wisdom to walk around the sofa and end table next to it, to drop tiredly into the depth of an extremely cozy looking chair. Mac laughed and pointed mockingly at Jensen causing Jared to chuckle softly next to him.

Jared looked at both of them and then his eyes lit up as he glanced between the women, at the bank of elevators against the far wall. He lifted his hand in a small wave causing both his mom and
sister to turn expectantly to see who was coming. Jensen grabbed Jared’s chin and dropped a
promise-filled kiss onto his mouth.

“If you’re saying I’m bullish, I’ll show you just how bullish I can be, stud.” He whispered heavily
into Jared’s ear, causing the younger man to flush a bright red.

“Jen! You big faker!” Mackenzie exclaimed. “Momma!”

“Jensen, that wasn’t very nice.” Donna rebuffed him, but her smile proved that there was no heat in
her reprimand.

“Yeah, but kissing my boyfriend without an audience certainly was.” Jensen proceeded to disprove
his own statement when stuck out his tongue at his sister and then brush his lips sensuously across
Jared’s until he was able to push that very same tongue into Jared’s mouth.

“Get a room, you two.” Alan Ackle’s baritone caused Jared to jump slightly beneath Jensen’s
mouth and he pulled away wiping the back of his hand across his lips. He knew his face was
probably as red as if he had stuck it into the fire, but he couldn’t stop the grin that seemed to have
become permanently affixed there in the past few months. He looked up to see that Alan and
Mackenzie’s fiancé Devon had joined the group.

“Not a bad idea. Jared?” Jensen stood and offered his hand down to his lover. “Want to go see if
that hot tub works in our suite?” Once Jared put his hand into Jen’s, he was hauled easily to his
feet. Jensen started pushing at his back to get him to move.

“What about breakfast, boys?” Donna asked their retreating forms.

“Room service.” Jensen called over his shoulder, laughing as he hustled Jared into an opening
elevator.

Alan dropped onto the sofa next to his wife, placed an arm around her shoulders, and pulled her
close.

“Ah, the honeymoon stage, you remember that don’t you dear? How we couldn’t keep our hands
off one another?” He whispered in her ear before bussing her on the cheek, his free hand dropping
lightly onto her leg.

“Alan!” She swatted at his wandering hands as she looked over at her youngest child. Mackenzie’s
head bent over a shy smile as her fiancé whispered something in her ear. Her babies were all
growing up and settling down and while she was overjoyed that they had all found love and were
happy, she was a little sad at the same time.

“Well, I do,” he stated quietly, “want to make this a second honeymoon, sweetheart?”

She flushed and giggled softly.

Breakfast could wait.

End Notes

Disclaimer: The actors within this work belong to themselves (and their respective
spouses/families). I have no allusions as to what they do in their free time and truthfully, it is none of my business. No profit is expected or even desired for the creation of this work of fiction. I just like to take the pretties out and pose them a bit, really. You know, dress them up or in most cases, undress them and then make them act out fantasies. It was written for a bit of fun and that is all. No harm is intended to these fine actors and actresses.

All of the artists mentioned within the story are real people that work in the styles indicated. The painting that Jensen purchased however, is not. It is based off of a real Rubens painting, but only in style and body image, not in subject matter or setting. The painting, *Bacchus*, is at home at The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. For those of you that are interested, you can follow this link: http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/03/hm3_3_1_3c.html to view the inspiration. Thanks for reading <3!

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