Killer Romance - the Complete Series

by Saone

Summary

The completed collection of Killer Romance (aka the adventures of ex-assassin Jensen and crime boss Jared) fics and timestamps in chronological order.

Notes

This chapter was written as a fill to tygrrlyli’s prompt from the comment meme, but it's chronologically the first in the series. It deals with a pre-teen, psychopath Jensen and includes the death of an animal (caused by an OC). Also, I will now forever think of Jensen's dad as James Remar from Dexter.
Worrisome

Alan's always kept an eye out for missing pets. It's not something he consciously thinks about, but when he catches himself doing it there's only a moment of guilt and shame before he accepts the poisonous little doubt that's been hiding in his brain for years.

There's something wrong with Jensen.

Alan doesn't bring it up to anyone else. He doesn't dare. It's just a feeling, after all. It's not like he has anything he can point to and say, 'gee, my middle child's a psycho, does the mental hospital take our insurance?'

And it could all be in his head. He could be imagining the hard look Jensen sometimes gets in his eyes or the calculating way he studies the people around him.

Jensen's charming and sweet. His ears and eyes are a little too big for his face and they, along with his hated freckles, lend him an air of innocence not often found in boys nearing their teen years. He's a perfectly lovely child.

Probably.

But Alan still checks for missing pets.

Then, one day Alan comes home from work to find Jensen crouched over something furry on the sidewalk. Alan feels his stomach drop when he realizes it's one of the neighbor's cats. He thinks he's going to be sick, but there's this odd sense of finally inside him. He was right; now he can get Jensen help, and they can move on.

He gets out of his car, but before he can say anything, Jensen lifts his face. Alan thinks he may have been horribly wrong. Jensen looks crushed, his face wet with tears. The story comes out in bits and pieces between sobs. One of the neighbors down the street, Jenkins, had run the poor thing over. He hadn't even stopped.

Jensen had tried to help, but it was far too late. He moved the animal from the road so it wouldn't get hit again. He wanted to know how someone could do something like that to an innocent animal, and how they could just keep going.

Alan, in his good work pants, gets down on the ground and wraps his child in the tightest hug he can manage.

Later that night, after the children are in bed, he and Donna sit in their kitchen and talk about what happened. They talk about how Jenkins is a menace and a drunk. How it could have been a child in the street instead of that cat. How they can't do a damn thing to stop him until the man actually hurts someone.

While he and Donna are talking, Alan thinks he sees a shadow move by the kitchen door. When he blinks and looks again, it's gone. He doesn't think anything more of it.

The next night someone slashes all four of Jenkin's tires. When he discovers the act of vandalism, he flies into a rage. He attacks one of the other people who live on the block. The police are called. He attacks them too.

They take him down. Hard.
Alan's in his driveway, but he's not watching the excitement down the block. He's watching Jensen. Jensen, who's looking decidedly pleased about the whole situation. In fact, Alan would almost say that he's looking... smug.

Alan doesn't ask. He doesn't even consider asking.

But he does stop checking for missing pets.
Jensen became an assassin through a long and arduous process that spanned half the globe and involved a surprising number of sword fights. But, if you're looking for his first kill...

Jensen tightly keeps a hold onto the knife in his hand as he watches the man he had just stabbed drop to the pavement. The lights out on the street don't do much to illuminate the little alley he's in, but the blood on his skin, and pants, and shoes still looks shockingly red.

There's a noise and Jensen turns to the other occupant of the alley, the one that's not currently bleeding out. The one that Jensen had ventured off the street trying to save.

He's shorter than Jensen, with longish brown hair and a face that's been beat all to hell. The man sneezes and immediately cups a hand around what Jensen's pretty sure is a broken nose.

"Goddammit! Motherfuckin' shit!" He kicks at the body on the ground before he slumps back and lets the building behind him prop him up.

"Bud," the guy says, "don't flake out on me now." His voice is rough and nasally, but his eyes are bright. Too bright. "I might need some help with this."

With the hand not still holding the knife, Jensen fumbles for his phone. "I can call-"

"Hey! You're not calling anyone."

Jensen doesn't know how the guy manages to look half dead and completely menacing at the same time, but he pulls it off.

"Look," the guy says, "I will concede that, maybe, I shouldn't have taken this job when I have a bit of a cold. Or the flu. Whatever. What's done is done. Now, I have a proposition for you."

Jensen wonders if he should be freaking out. He wonders if he's in shock, even though he doesn't feel like he's in shock. He feels kind of... normal. Actually, he feels kind of... good? "What kind of proposition?"
"You saved my life, man. I owe you. So, how about you help me get rid of the body, and I'll cut you in fifty-fifty." The man sneezes, and once again it's followed by a round of cursing.

"You were hired to kill him?" Jensen asks.

The man nods, then groans a bit and clutches at his forehead.

Jensen looks down at the knife again. The blood's starting to get a little sticky. "Seventy-thirty," Jensen says.

The guy stares at him. "Pardon?"

"Seventy-thirty," Jensen says again. "I think I'm being generous. After all, I'm the one who's doing most of the work here."

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Eighty-twenty."

"What the actual fuck? Did we not just establish that I'm a killer?"

"We did," Jensen says. He holds up the knife. "But I'm pretty sure this is yours, since I picked it up just a few feet away from here. And I don't think you're armed with anything else or you would have used it on him. And me. You need my help to get away from this cleanly. And, while I'll certainly listen to your expertise on how to get rid of a body, the fact still stands that I'm the one who's going to be doing the work, ergo, I should be the one to get most of the money." Jensen shrugs. "It just seems fair."

"Did you just use the word 'ergo' in a sentence?"

"It means-"

"I know what it means!" The man stares at Jensen. "You take sixty, and I'll promise to not come back here in a few months, track you down, and pull your intestines out while you're still breathing. How's that for fair?"

Jensen weighs his options. "I'll accept those terms. With one more condition."

"Aw, Christ. What?"

Jensen thinks about his life. He thinks about his family, and his new classes at college, and how he doesn't really have any friends because no one ever wants to meet his eyes. He thinks about the itching he sometimes gets under his skin, and about how it felt to slide a blade between a man's ribs and up into his lung.

He thinks there's always been something wrong with him, and, evidently, there's a market for that.

"So," Jensen says, "how do you feel about work/study?"
In the Beginning

Chapter Summary

All love stories have to start somewhere...

Chapter Notes

Not betad, grammarians beware.
Though this fic is set later in the series, the majority of it is a flashback to Jensen and Jared's first meeting

Jared was bored. Really, truly, horribly bored. The kind of bored that, when he was younger, used to lead to destructive activities like making his little sister eat worms or teaching the family dog to dig in his mom's flower gardens. And, when he was slightly older, boredom led to knocking over convenience stores, which led to Jared's first stint in juvie where he made all sorts of interesting connections who promised he'd never be bored again.

They lied. But Jared can't really blame them, low-level thugs that they were, because he had had his own glamorous idea of what being a feared and respected crime boss would be like.

This definitely wasn't it.

Jared somehow resisted rolling his eyes or stabbing anyone - including himself - with a fork as talk of mutual funds drifted over to him.

Individually, Jared and the other people in this room - with it's lavishly appointed decorations and ergonomic seating - were some of the baddest asses on the planet. Like Bond-villain-type mofos. But together they were no more exciting than any other gathering of high-powered executives. And there was one irrefutable fact in life, regardless of your occupation or moral code: conferences sucked. Hard.

At least the catering was good. After managing to stay awake during the first round of meetings and the small talk and mingling that followed, Jared took up residence by the food table. If his mind had to suffer, at least his stomach could be happy.

"You seem bored, Jared-san," Madam Liu, head of the Yakuza and host of this year's conference, said as she appeared at his elbow. Her smile was serene, but there was a wicked look in her eyes. Jared was reminded that her preferred method of execution was taking her ever-present sword and lopping off people's heads.

"Who, me?" Jared plastered on his best 'aw shucks' expression. "No, ma'am."

"Hmmm." Her eyes flickered to the shrimp platter he had just decimated. "Please tell me you're not still pouting because we voted down your idea to call ourselves the Legion of Doom?"
"No." Yes. That would have been awesome.

"Uh huh." The look Liu gave him was disturbingly maternal. She took his arm and began to lead him towards the floor to ceilings windows that comprised the far wall of the room. "You're one of the younger guests here, aren't you?"

"Um, well..." Twenty-five was kind of young. Most people in his position didn't get to head their own empire until their forties or fifties. But Jared had always been bright, and charming, and a bit psychotic, and had risen through the ranks and broken off on his own almost effortlessly. Still, he certainly wasn't the baby of the group. "Those kids with the wizard-shtick are younger than me," he said, almost defensively. "Oh, and the Mouse's representatives, of course."


Jared followed her gaze to where a ridiculously attractive - in a non-threatening way - guy barely out of his teens was chatting with an equally attractive - and wholesome - young lady. As if they could feel gazes upon them, both perfectly coiffed heads turned as one towards Jared and Liu. They smiled in unison too. Creepy.

Jared barely contained a shudder. He had definitely dodged a bullet there.

With a gentle press on his elbow, Liu turned him towards the glass. Beyond the reflection of the room Jared blinked out at the lights and neon of Tokyo. He had never really felt comfortable in cities - give him open spaces any day - but he would freely admit it was beautiful.

"You have allies in this room, Jared-san," Liu said softly. "But, you also have enemies."

Using the glass as a mirror, Jared quickly found that rat-bastard Pasdar's image. Milo's defection was a year old, but it still stung. "I'm aware, Madam Liu," Jared said, "believe me." His eyes found her reflection. "Was there anything specific you brought me over here to share?"

She laughed softly. "Oh, no. I brought you over here to get you away from the h'ordeuvres. I'd neglected to warn my chef about your appetite."

Jared flushed. "Sorry. I tend to gorge when I'm bored." Or breathing. "Not that this is boring," he said quickly. "I just-"

Lui leaned in towards him. "Can I tell you a secret?" she asked, voice pitched low. "I only get through these things by picturing how everyone in the room would deal with getting some limb chopped off."

"Oh, that's..." Jared shifts uncomfortably.

"For example," Lui says, "I think you would do rather well if you ever lost a hand or an arm."

"Uh, could we not test that theory? Please?"

Lui chuckled and patted his arm. "Oh, I do like you, Jared." She glanced around them and then said in a conspiratorial voice, "I sincerely doubt anything earth-shattering is going to happen for the rest of the evening. You don't have to stick around. Why don't you go out and enjoy what's left of your night. Maybe find a nice all-you-can-eat restaurant."

Jared's stomach jumped wholeheartedly on-board with that idea. Unfortunately, Jeff, his new head of security, had made him promise not to do certain things that might draw attention to his relatively recent rise in the crime community, like ducking out early. Jeff also didn't want him picking fights
with Pasdar and his crew, waxing lyrical about his love for Boba Fett, or making bets involving large
suns of money, territory, or employees, even if Jared knew for sure he would win. Jeff was kind of a
stick in the mud.

"I don't know," Jared said, "I should probably stick around."

Lui stared at him for a few scary moments, then said, "I would consider it a personal favor if you left
before the wait staff brought out the next course."

Oh. "What kind of course?" Jared tried not to quake as Lui's eyes narrowed. "Right. Sure. I can do
that." Jared thought for a moment. "So, when you say a personal favor..."

"I'll owe you one. And trust me, the list of people I owe things to is very exclusive indeed."

The decision was kind of a no-brainer. Besides, Jeff was stuck on the first floor with all the security
personnel for the other guests; he'd never know.

"Deal," Jared said, "and do you happen to know of any place around here that delivers?" Because
the best way to keep Jeff in the dark was to not get him to escort Jared's disobeying ass out of the
building.

That serene smile came back, along with an actual twinkle in her eyes. "I'm sure something can be
arranged," Lui said. "And, perhaps, as an added show of gratitude, I could send something special
up with the food? A not-so-nice young lady, or young man, if you prefer."

Jared licked his lips at the offer to have not one, but two, of his appetites sated. "Make no mistake,
Madam Lui, your offer is very tempting, but..." Jared generally preferred to cavort with people
already already vetted and on the payroll of one of his clubs. He smiled demurely. "It's been a long,
trying day. I'm thinking food, a shower, then sleep might be my best course of action."

Lui inclined her head. "Say no more. Trust me, my young friend, I'll see that you are well taken care
of." She straightens her shoulders and bows slightly. Jared follows suit, and then he's striding
purposefully through the room towards the door. He tries to give off the air of being on an important
mission, even though his inner self is doing cartwheels at the idea of being free.

After chowing down on enough food to feed a small army - or an average sized Padalecki - Jared
decided to take his time in the shower. The stall was surprisingly roomy, with multiple heads placed
at exactly where Jared needed good water pressure to pound away at aching muscles. After using far
too much hot water, and finding that his fingers were beyond pruney, Jared thought he was feeling as
good as could be expected with the specter of two more days of mind-numbing meetings stretching
before him.

Stepping out of the shower, he patted himself dry with an ultra plush towel which he then secured
around his waist. Jared took another towel and scrubbed it through his hair, then wrapped around his
head, turban-style. He took a moment to strike a few silly poses in the mirror before he exited the
bathroom and promptly lost about five years off his life thanks to the guy calmly sitting in the
armchair by the other side of the bed.

Jared clutched at his chest. "Holy shit, man!" Oddly enough, Jared's first instinct upon finding a
strange, unexpected man in his room wasn't fear or rage, because this man - strange and unexpected
though he may be - was gorgeous. Jared had been privy to a lot of pretty as he'd risen through the
ranks of the underworld, but this guy blew everyone else he'd ever had out of the water.

"Mr. Padalecki?" the man said in a rich voice. His green eyes focused a few inches above Jared's face.

Jared's own eyes widened, and he quickly reached up and tore the towel off his head. He shook his hair out and smiled deprecatingly. "Wasn't expecting company," he said, "but after seeing you, I'm glad Madam Liu didn't listen."

The man's eyebrows rose. He seemed almost amused. "I... see. Mr. Pad-"

"Jared." Jared didn't want to stand on formalities, even if this was kind of a business transaction.

Yes, the stunning stranger was definitely amused. "All right," he said. "Jared. I think-"

"And you are?" As Jared sat on the edge of his bed closest to his beguiling visitor, he purposefully let his towel ride up his thighs. The guy may have been a sure thing, but Jared didn't mind throwing a little seduction into the mix.

"You... You can call me Alec."

"Well, Alec," Jared grinned and patted the comforter beside him, "now that introductions are out of the way, why don't you get your fine ass over here so we can get to the good stuff."

Alec laughed, and not a demure little chuckle like someone in his position might offer a client. No, this was a full out guffaw. "Really?" he said, choking. "Tell me that's not your A game."

Jared blinked. Granted, he did like his bed partners to be spirited, but his ego drew the line at being insulted, especially by someone who had been sent to him as a gift. "I'm not sure the kind of treatment you're used to, darlin', but I don't recall telling you to play hard to get." He scowled as his drawl slipped out in his annoyance.

Alec leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. He stared intently into Jared's eyes and said, "There appears to be a misunderstanding regarding my presence in your room. I wasn't sent here to provide... entertainment."

Warning bells started to clang in the back of Jared's mind. "Then why-"

"To be completely honest, my original assignment was to kill you, but-"

Jared was moving before his mind had fully processed Alec's sentence. He rolled across the bed, landed on his feet, and reached behind the headboard for the blade that he had taped there earlier. His searching fingers came up empty.

"I swept the room while you were in the shower," Alec said, standing up. His voice was calm, but there was a slight tension running through his frame. "Behind the headboard, under the mattress, in your clean underwear, in your dirty underwear, behind the television, and in your left shoe, in case you were wondering. But listen-"

"Guess it looks like I'm pretty well fucked." Jared stood up to his full height and rolled his shoulders, purposefully relaxing whipcord tight muscles. "You'll excuse me if I put up a bit of a fight anyway?" Jared was taller, and he had more muscle mass than his would-be assassin. He was also a pretty good fighter, and even if he went down he was going to take a pound of Alec's flesh with him. Jared did wish that he was wearing something a little more substantial than a fucking towel that was just barely clinging to his hips. He eased around the bed and asked, "You mind if I put on some pants before we..."
Alec's gaze flickered to Jared's crotch, and he actually licked his lips. Jared felt a pang of regret at what he was going to do to that pretty, pretty face.

"You look okay to me," Alec said. "Seriously, though, I-


In less than a minute after going on the attack, Jared had his face pushed into the carpet and there was a knee in the small of his back. "Son of a bitch." Well, at least he wouldn't have to live long with his embarrassment.

"That was fun." Alec wasn't even breathing hard, the bastard. He settled himself more firmly along Jared's backside. "You lost your towel."

Jared thought he'd felt a draft.

Alec leaned over, pressing his chest to Jared's bare back. His breath puffed along the shell of Jared's ear when he said, "If you're done acting out, do you think you might feel like listening to me now?"

Jared nodded. The pressure of Alec's body was gone in an instant. Jared cautiously got his knees under him and looked over his shoulder just in time to catch a pair of his jeans before they landed on his head.

Alec shrugged and said, "You're kind of distracting."

Jared knew he shouldn't feel proud that the stupid, ninja-assassin-guy thought he was hot, but he really couldn't help it. Just like he couldn't help puffing out his chest a bit as he stood up and pulled his pants on, carefully tucking himself in before zipping.

"Like I said, I was sent here to kill you." Alec nonchalantly leaned against the dresser, his legs crossed at the ankles, and his hand in his pockets. His gaze was cool and assessing, but some of that earlier amusement was evident again in the set of his mouth and the light crinkling around his eyes.

"But?" Jared prompted after a moment of silence.

Alec took a deep breath. "But, certain… information has come to my attention."

“What kind of information?”

“The kind that has caused me to reevaluate your contract, Jared.”

“It’s Mr. Padalecki,” Jared said snidely.

If anything, that just amused Alec further. “Of course.”

“Okay, great, you’re not going to kill me. Now, not to be rude or anything-“

“Perish the thought.”

Jared scowled. He didn’t know assassins were allowed to be smartasses. “Why are you even here? You could have just let me go on my merry way without ever announcing yourself.” Or showing his face, which Jared had always thought was kind of a no-no in hired-killer land. It certainly wasn’t a face Jared was going to forget anytime soon. Maybe he would just have to hire his own kick-ass,
ninja assassin to go after this kick-ass, ninja assassin. It could be like Spy vs. Spy. That would be
cool.

"I'm offering my services." Alec rolled his eyes as Jared's gaze involuntarily flitted to the bed. "Not
those services," Alec said. "I want you to put me on retainer."

“Oh, you do, do you?” Jared crossed his arms over his chest and hoped that he was schooling his
expression into something other than the surprise he was feeling. “And why the everlovin’ hell
should I do that?”

"So I can go after the people who want you dead, and still get paid for my troubles."

Ah. "That... makes sense," Jared admitted grudgingly. "In kind of a cutthroat way."

"Cutting throats is one of my specialties," Alec said. "We have a deal?"

Jared thought about it for a moment. He wouldn't need to find another kick-ass, ninja assassin if he
just put this one on his payroll. And Alec being complete eye candy was a plus. Jeff would definitely
not be happy with this development, but Jared could solve that little dilemma by never telling him.
"Fine. But you report directly to me. No one in my organization is to know who or what you are. If
we have to meet, then—"

Alec’s grin was positively filthy. "I think I know a part I could play. But first I should probably..."
He made a little gesture with his right hand. Almost before Jared had realized it, Alec moved across
the room and was right in front of him.

Jared had a split second to wonder how he should react to such closeness before Alec’s warm, plush
lips were pressed against his. Not knowing if touching Alec would get him thrown to the floor - and
not in the good way - again, Jared kind of let his arms flail a bit. Just when he was about to say fuck
the consequences and clutch that tight body to him, Alec pulled back.

The green-eyed man gave Jared a speculative look and licked his lips. "Huh."

Jared shook his head slightly, trying to get all his marbles back into place. "Huh? Good huh, or bad
huh?"

Alec smiled coyly. "Just... huh." He walked over to the window closest to the chair he had been
occupying just a few minutes ago and, with a quick flick of his wrist, the sounds of downtown
Tokyo spilled into the room. Jared didn't even know you could open those windows. "I'll be in
touch," Alec said before he climbed outside.

Jared managed to get control of his senses just as the bottom of Alec's left boot disappeared. "Hey,
wait a minute!” By the time he crossed the room and leaned out the window, Alec was gone.

They were on the fortieth floor.

Jared couldn't help but be a little impressed. "I've hired a fucking badass," he said with a smile.

Jared leans back in his chair, a very similar smile playing across his lips at the memory.

“Wait,” Chris says, sharing a puzzled look with the other members of the audience perched on
various things around Jared's office, “that’s it?”

“Pretty much.”

Jeff’s scowling. “So, how many other times have you completely disregarded advice I’ve given you?”

Columbus ignores Jeff’s grousing and says, “Don’t leave us in suspense, man; who put the contract out on you?”

Jared shrugs. “I have no idea.”

“Jensen never told you?” Columbus and Chris share another look.

“Nope,” Jared says, "he never did."

“Oh, good,” Chris says, "because that’s the kind of information that could never come back to bite us all on the ass."

"You know, I didn’t just say all that stuff for my health," Jeff says to Idris. "I had a lot of wisdom to share."

"Of course you did," Idris says. He waits until Jeff's attention is back on Jared, then he rolls his eyes.

"Well,” Columbus says, "why did Jensen decide to not follow through with the hit?"

"Don’t know that either."

Idris sighs. "I know you're in some deep, all-consuming, soul-bonding type thing with the guy," he says distastefully, "but your nonchalance over this whole episode disturbs me."

Jared shrugs again. "Jensen said he'd take care of things, and he did. About four weeks after Tokyo, he came up to me while I was having dinner in one of my clubs—"

"I remember that," Chad says, butting in. "He came right over, to the VIP section no less, and sat himself down in your lap. Presumptuous little fucker. I almost called security on his ass."

"That would have ended well," Columbus says wryly, probably remembering the time Chad did call security to take care of Jensen and the injuries that followed. Chris seems to be on the same page. A pained look comes over his face, and he gingerly rubs at the bridge of his nose. Oscar reaches over and pats both of them on their shoulders.

"Anyway," Jared continues, "he said everything was fine and I owed him six hundred thousand dollars. Then he told me his real name, and he asked me if I wanted to get my steak to-go and come back to his hotel room and watch a Cowboys' game." Jared grins and spreads his hands out. "How could I say no to an offer like that?"

"By thinking what it might do to the blood pressure of your poor, beleaguered head of security," Jeff growls.

"Oh, come on, Jeff," Jensen says from the doorway, "your blood pressure was fine. The only damage you thought I might do was to the petty cash reserves, and you know it." He fully enters the room and flicks a still grumbling Jeff's ear.

"Okay, maybe you'll spill," Chris says, "who did you have to take care of?"
Jensen glances at Jared for a moment, then he shakes his head. "Nuh uh. That's still classified."

Chris grumps for a moment, then he asks, "Can you at least tell us why you changed your mind about following through with the contract?"

Jensen and Jared share another little glance, then Jared's pulling away from his desk just far enough for Jensen to be able to settle comfortably in the bigger man's lap.

Jensen lets his left arm wind it's way around Jared's neck, while his right carefully rests over Jared's heart. "What can I say; I was mighty impressed by what he was hiding under that towel." They laugh as Jensen's statement is met with groans and scoffs.

For some reason, this seems to signal the end of the meeting. Jared's glad because the warm weight of Jensen's body, is giving him ideas again. He does have the decency to wait until the last man leaves and shuts the door behind him before starting to work at the fastenings on Jensen's clothes.

"Liked it better when you wore less around the house," Jared says against the soft skin of Jensen's throat.

Jensen laughs. "Playing up the whole 'kept boy' angle was fun," he admits, "but I do like being able to be me, especially in our home."


Jensen's got his 'I fell in love with a sap' look on. "Hey," he says, sounding puzzled, "why didn't you tell them the truth?"

"Hmm?"

"About that night, in the hotel? About what I said?"

"Oh." Jared thinks for a moment. "For one thing, no one, especially Jeff, needs to know that I once worked for the Mouse and that some of the new blood wanted to prove themselves by eliminating me. The poor guy's already got enough gray in his beard. As for the why..." He squeezes Jensen. "I don't know, I guess I just think that some things don't need to be shared."

"I fell in love with a sap," Jensen says, and Jared pats himself on the back. He knew he knew that look.

"Damn right, you did," Jared says proudly. He bagged himself a gorgeous, kick-ass, ninja assassin; he thinks he's earned the right to be a little smug.

four years ago...

Jared managed to get control of his senses just as the bottom of Alec's left boot disappeared. "Hey, wait a minute!" By the time he crossed the room and leaned out the window, Alec was gone.

They were on the fortieth floor.
Jared couldn't help but be a little impressed. "I've hired a fucking badass," he said with a smile.

"Very true," said a voice above him.

Jared did absolutely not let out a high-pitched, soprano-ish, I-just-got-kicked-in-the-nutsac scream, no matter what someone named Jensen might say four odd years later.

Alec winced and used the hand not hanging onto the rig on his microfilament line to rub at his ear. "Dude."

"Sorry."

"Ow."

"I said I was sorry," Jared said irately. "What are you doing up there, anyway?"

"Uh, making my exit." Alec frowned. "It's usually pretty clean; most people don't tend to look up."

"But how are you gonna get-"

"I've got a 'chute stashed on the roof. I'm gonna basejump."

Jared felt his eyes glaze over. "That's so fucking cool."

"Right?"

"But, before you go, just..." Jared stopped and thought for a minute.

"Could you maybe hurry it up so I can get moving and there's less of a chance of me getting tired and accidentally plunging to my death?"

"Why did you decide not to go through with it?" Jared asked. "Why me?"

"I do research for every hit, and what I found... I don't like the people who hired me." Alec paused for a moment while his eyes searched Jared's face. "But I think I could like you."

Jared blinked. "Oh."

"Yeah. Besides, I'm from Texas too, and us Mavericks fans have to stick together." Alec winked and pushed a button on his rig. With a soft whirring sound, he's propelled up the line at a speed faster than Jared thought possible.

Jared was still half hanging out of his window as he gaped at the rapidly disappearing man. It took a good thirty seconds before he was able to shout, "Fuck you, I like the Spurs! Goddammit, I am so going to regret this."
The First Fight

Chapter Summary

Jensen thinks Jared is going to break up with him.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for professorx. This is set sometime during their first year together before Jared managed to successfully hammer the whole 'love' thing through Jensen's thick skull.

Jensen knows he's not exactly the easiest person to get along with. Even discounting the whole borderline (eh, maybe) psychopathic, 'hired killer' thing, he's still kind of...

Prickly.

And grumpy.

And overall not that pleasant to be around.

Sometimes.

Most times.

Which is why, if he's being honest with himself, he didn't mind playing the role of the trophy boyfriend when Jared asked him to keep his real identity hidden from everyone, especially his Chief of Security.

Jared worries about Jeff's blood pressure. It's kind of stupid, or heartwarming, depending on Jensen’s general level of annoyance at the time he thinks about it.

But Trophy Boyfriend Malibu Jensen (complete with pool-side accessories, speedo optional) is a joy to be around! He's funny, and polite, and sweet as his mamma's brown sugar pie, and is just overall a lovely, lovely person.

Being Trophy Boyfriend Jensen is exhausting. All that preening, and posing, and smiling.

Ugh.

But still, he does it; he plays his part. Because regular Jensen has a horrible, sneaking suspicion that Jared really, really likes Trophy Boyfriend Jensen. And Jensen has come to really, really like Jared.

Jensen is starting to find himself getting jealous of one of his own personas.

That can't be healthy.
So it's no surprise - to regular Jensen, anyway - when everything comes to a head one night.

They’ve just settle down on the couch in their private living room when Jared says something that goes directly from his mouth to what turns out to be Jensen’s last nerve and does a little jig on it.

Jensen had no idea he was down to his last nerve, but once that last nerve was nothing but a bloody, twisting stump everyone is aware of it.

When Jensen comes back to himself he's standing up, panting, and clenching his - thankfully - blood-free fists. He feels drained, like he's just undergone some grueling and horrific physical trial even though he's barely three feet from the couch.

And, unfortunately, judging from the way the security team burst through the door, weapons out and eyes wide, the real grueling and horrifically physical part of the evening might be about to begin.

Jensen glances over to Jared, who's still sitting on the couch and looking almost comically shell shocked at the turn his night has taken.

When Jensen opens his mouth, he's not exactly sure what he's going to say, but he certainly doesn't expect a rather shrill "Are you breaking up with me?" to come out of it.

"What?" Jared yelps.

Jeff holsters his gun and glares at his boss. "What the hell did you do?"

"What?! Nothing!" Jared quickly glances between Jeff and Jensen. "I didn't... What?!"

"'Cause if you want me gone, I'll go." Jensen also didn't mean to say that.

"I don't even know what's going on," Jared says plaintively.

Jeff snorts and ushers the rest of the team - all scowling at Jared now too - out of the room. "Fix it!" he hisses to Jared just before he closes the door.

Jared opens and closes his mouth a few times, then he slowly gets up from the couch. He holds his hands out, palms down, and takes a few steps towards Jensen.

"Jen," he says, "talk to me. Tell me what the hell is going on."

Jensen's still tired, but he's also feeling wild and slightly unhinged. It's not the best combination. "I know you like him more than you like me."

Jared blinks. "Him who?"

"The other me!"

Jared pulls back just a bit. "Uh, there's only one you, Jensen. Unless you have an evil twin. An eviler twin. Oh, God, do you have an eviler twin?"

"What?" Jensen scoffs. "Don't be ridiculous."

"'Cause I'm the one being ridiculous right now."

Jensen puts his hands on his hips and glares. Jared blanches and takes a couple of steps backwards.

Oh, yeah, he's still got it.
"I know you like the Jensen you get out there better than the Jensen you get in here."

Jared cocks his head to one side. Jensen can almost see the gears turning, and the little light bulb that pops up when he's figured out what's wrong.

"And how," Jared says slowly, "pray tell, did you come to that conclusion?"

"Because!" Jensen says. "Because he's nice. And happy. And you're nice and happy. So... There."

"Jen..." Jared rubs a hand over his face. "I... Come here," he says, opening his arms.

"No."

"Come here," Jared says again, his stance open and obviously inviting.

"I don't want to."

"Yeah, you do."

Yeah, Jensen does. He puts up another few seconds of resistance, then slowly slinks over to Jared's waiting arms. But he certainly doesn't do anything stupid or sappy like sigh once those arms wrap tight around him.

Okay, he totally does.

"Yes," Jared says, "I like the persona you put on when you're around other people because it amuses the hell out of me to think of this gorgeous, sleek, deadly predator fooling everyone into thinking it's some cute and cuddly little kitten. I like him because he's a facet of you, and I automatically adore everything about you."

"Everything?" Jensen asks, his voice muffled from his face being pressed into Jared's shoulder. He feels Jared drop a kiss against the side of his head.

"Everything."

"Even when I'm being grumpy, and antisocial, and a little psycho?"

"You obviously have no idea how adorable grumpy, antisocial, and psychotic you can be."

Jensen pulls back a bit so he can look at Jared's face. "So," he says.

"So."

"This was our first big fight."

"Well," Jared says, "I don't know if you screaming at me and me almost peeing myself in terror counts as a fight, per se."

"If it was a fight, we can have make up sex."

"This was totally a fight."

"Yeah."
Hunting

Chapter Summary

Set sometime during their first year together, Jensen gets riled and reverts to his old ways. Luckily, Jared's there to talk him down. Literally.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for gypsy_atavari.

Jensen watches his prey with the unwavering and uncompromising gaze of a true hunter. From his vantage point he can see the target taking a late-night snack on the veranda, blissfully - stupidly - unaware of the sword dangling just above his head. Any minute now Jensen will spring into action, leaping and tumbling across the night sky before he comes down on that idiotic, blonde bastard like a ton of highly competent and really pissed off bricks.

Jensen's hands flex from the thought of feeling flesh and bone rend and break. He's ready, so ready. He's-

"Jensen?"

Jensen freezes, still as a statue.

"Jensen, I can see you."

Crap. "Uh, no you can't," Jensen says.

"What do you... Yes, I can! I'm looking right at you. What the hell are you doing in a tree?!"

"None of your beeswax. Go away."

"What the..." Jared’s voice softens, “Jen, are you having some kind of breakdown or something? Have you reverted to your childhood? Should I get Oscar to come out and tranq you?"

"Don't you dare!" Jensen lets out an annoyed huff of air. He wouldn't put it past Jared to wake the whole household if he thought he needed to save Jensen from something, even himself. Jensen sighs. His cover's been blown; time to come in from the cold. "Fine, I'm coming down." With a few easy moves Jensen descends from his perch. As soon as his feet touch the earth he's swept up into a crushing hug.

"Oh, God, are you all right?!" Jared asks. He pulls back far enough to check Jensen over. "Did you hurt yourself? Should I call Doc Ferris? I'm gonna call Doc Ferris."

"Jared!" Jensen struggles futilely. All of Jensen's training is no match for Jared when he's clingy. "Not too long ago I was scaling sixty story buildings; I think I can handle an Oak."
Jared reluctantly lets Jensen go. "Okay, fine. I won't call Sam as long you tell me what you were doing."

"Nothing." Jensen kicks at some dirt with the toe of his shoe. He can feel the weight of Jared's stare burning a hole in the top of his head. He looks up. "Just so you know, I've been trained to withstand professional interrogators."

Jared's entire face crumples. "I'm not trying to break you, Jensen! I just want to know what's going on. I... I love you." Jared punctuates his proclamation with wide, watery eyes and a suspiciously placed sniff.

Jensen folds like a towel on laundry day. "Dammit. I was hunting Chad, okay?"

Jared blinks and the waterworks mysteriously dry up. "You were what?"

"Hunting Chad." Jensen crosses his arms over his chest. "He was more of an ass than usual earlier today, and I just... I just... I wasn't gonna actually do anything to the dumbass!"

"Uh huh." Jared's staring at Jensen like he's some unique, and kind of disturbing, new species.

"Sometimes I like to stalk people and fantasize about killing them," Jensen says. "It's no big."

"Uh... huh..."

"Oh, for the-" Jensen rolls his eyes. "It's an assassin thing."

Jared's face clears. "Oh, okay then," he says brightly. "Uh, you aren't really going to kill Chad, though, are you?"

Jensen kicks at the dirt again. "No, Jared."

"Awesome." Jared pulls Jensen close again. "I'm sorry he was mean to you. I can have a talk with him about it, if you'd like."

Jensen thinks for a moment. "Will you act all scary and possessive, and make sure he knows I belong to you and shit?"

"Hell, yeah, that could be fun."

"Okay, then," Jensen says. "Bed?"

"Bed." Jared puts an arm around Jensen's shoulders as they start to walk back towards the house. "You know, you're kind of scary."

"Thanks, Jay. I love you too."
Bah Humbug

Chapter Summary

The first Christmas as a couple always has a few - or a lot - of speedbumps.

Chapter Notes

Written for holiday - different traditions square for Schmooop Bingo

Jared is not happy. Which is a crime, seriously. It's Christmastime, and he's warm, and well-fed, and surrounded by pretty, shiny, glittery baubles. The smell of baking yumyness is drifting up from the kitchen and competing with the heady scent of the various trees and garlands liberally placed around the house. There's a half-finished rum cake on the coffee table in front of him beside a cute gathering of holiday pluses. Plates upon plates of adorably decorated sugar cookies are cluttering up the sideboard. A Charlie Brown special is muted on the television. And, most importantly, for the first time ever, there's a beautiful boyfriend - a real one, not someone he's had to hire, or someone working undercover for the feds - sitting beside him on his - no, their - couch.

Unfortunately, it's that final piece of Jared's dream holiday tableau that's causing him consternation.

"What do you mean, you don't do Christmas?" Jared asks, frowning.

Jensen's mouth thins. The undecurrent of tension that's been present in him since he got back from the spa and saw the house's yuletide makeover ratchets up a few thousand notches. "I mean I don't do Christmas. The," he waves a hand towards the tree, "and the," he motions at the cookies, "and the," his eyes look up at the mistletoe hanging off the chandelier, "and that," he points accusingly at the television.

"You don't like Snoopy!" Jared's never been more horrified. How could he possibly be head over heels in love with a man who doesn't like Snoopy?

Jensen sighs. "Its not that I don't like... I like Snoopy just fine."

Jared relaxes a smidge.

"It's just... Christmas doesn't mean anything to me. Sure, I usually didn't take any jobs around this time of year, but I figured that was just being polite. It used to mean something, I guess, when I was little." An odd expression passes over Jensen's face. "But I'm an adult now. I don't believe in fairy tales, and I haven't been to Sunday School in a very long time."

Jared tries to imagine a kid version of Jensen in Sunday School. It doesn't take. Logically, he knows that Jensen must have been a child at some point, that he had parents and a home, but there's a pretty obvious minefield surrounding that unacknowledged past. Jared doesn't know if he's brave enough to risk any explosions just yet. Instead, he decides to bring up his own reason for celebrating the holiday.
"You're talking to a lapsed Catholic here, man. And, okay, technically Christmas is about religion, but... with all I've seen, and all I've done, and what I've figured out about myself and my life, I don't think that aspect applies to me anymore." He takes a deep breath. "But that doesn't matter. What does matter is being in a nice, warm house, surrounded by people I care about - even if they are thieves and killers. To me, putting up decorations, and having special food around celebrates the family and home I've made for myself." Jared wills Jensen to understand.

Jensen's silent, but the little crease between his eyebrows says he's thinking. "I get it."

Jared relaxes a bit more.

"And I think I'm gonna head out for a bit."

"Head out?"

"Yeah."

"For a bit?"

"Just until the first of the year," Jensen says softly.

Jared tenses all over again. Jensen obviously does not get it.

"Oh," Jared says. He absentmindedly reaches over, plucks a stuffed Rudolph off the coffee table, and clutches the animal to his chest. "I see." He swallows. "I'll have everything taken down by tomorrow." Rudolph lets out a squeak as Jared's hands spasm around him.

"Jared, no." Jensen shakes his head firmly. "I don't want you to do that. This stuff is important to you."

"Not as important as you are."

It's simple, and honest, and the absolute truth. Jensen looks slightly floored.

"You'd do that," Jensen says. "You'd give this up for me?"

"'Course. I'm not gonna throw it out. I'm sure I can find someplace that'll take everything, like a nursing home, or... maybe I can turn it into a tax write off."

"I don't know if someone in your position should try and get creative with his taxes," Jensen says wryly.

"Yeah, maybe not." Rudolph squeaks again.

Jensen sighs and extricates the toy from Jared's death-grip. He then maneuvers himself into Jared's lap. Jared's a bit surprised, but his arms reflexively wrap around his boyfriend.

"I don't do Christmas," Jensen says again, "but you do. You really do." He looks heavenward. "I've fallen in love with a giant marshmallow."

Jared's heart skips a few beats at Jensen's mention of the 'L' word. "I ate a lot of Peeps as a kid," he says, his voice rough.

"So, you're saying the toxicity of pure sugar wrapped in more sugar which is then dyed noxious pastel colors changed the structure of your DNA?" Jensen rolls his hips in a very distracting way.
"Um..." Jared fidgets. "What?"

Jensen laughs and the look on his face is filled with such fondness. His hand cups the side of Jared's face. "Don't change," he says.

"The decorations?"

Jensen laughs again. "Anything."

"But you-"

"Have issues." Jensen's eyes dim. "A lot of issues. You gonna help me with that?"

"Can Chef keep making us cookies?"

"Yes."

"And we can keep the tree?"

"Yes."

"And the mistletoe?"

"As long as I'm the only one you ever try catching under it."

Jared smiles slyly. "Can we go caroling?" He bites back a curse as his nose is rather roughly tweaked.

"Don't push it."
This Could Get Messy

Chapter Summary

Jared has a pretty good life with his booming criminal organization and his indecently hot boyfriend, but when right-hand-man Chad thinks he's found a snitch will everything fall apart... or get cut into tiny pieces with a big-ass knife?

Chapter Notes

The fic that started it all!

The original Killer Romance fic, this was written for this prompt at spnkink_meme way back on August 5th 2010, and it was supposed to be a one-off. But then the characters rapidly expanded, much like alien goo from a '50s horror movie, to take over my BRAIN.

Jared's almost finished going over his lieutenants' reports when Chad bursts through the door to his office. He has a thin manila envelope in his right hand and a more muleish than usual expression on his face.

Jared raises an eyebrow. As not only Jared’s right hand, but also his best friend, Chad has more leeway than most in his organization, but there's still certain protocol that should be observed.

"Ever heard of knocking, Murray?" he says.

"Jay..." There's nothing light or mocking in Chad's tone. In fact, Jared hasn't seen the smaller man look so serious since the last time Ventimiglia and his new crew tried to horn in on their 'exporting' business.

Jared feels acid start to churn in his stomach. If Chad looks like that then his news can only be bad. Very, very bad. Jared sighs, imagining his anticipated afternoon activity - watching his boyfriend lounge and preen by the pool - go up in smoke.

"What's wrong?" Jared asks, steeling himself.

Chad shakes his head and seems to look truly remorseful about the news he’s delivering. "I just... I never liked the guy, but I didn't think he'd squeal. I'm sorry, Jared."

Well, crap. Jared's jaw clenches. It’s worse than a possible takeover; Chad had found a traitor in their midst. Now Jared was going to have to get *dirty*.

There's a sound of footsteps in the hallway, and Jared watches as Jeff Morgan, his head of security, and Short and Evans, two of Jeff's men, walk in. It's the man they're flanking that garners most of his attention though.
Jensen pads into the room on bare feet. He's wearing a practically indecent forest green speedo, a breezy, open-buttoned white shirt, and a look of adorable confusion on his pretty face. He cocks his head to one side and says. "Jay?"

Jared resists the urge to shrug. He doesn't know what's going on yet, but he's pretty sure that the end result is going to be interesting.

Chad sneers at Jensen before slamming the envelope he's been holding down on Jared's desk. "This fucker's been meeting with the Feds."

Make that very interesting. And possibly messy. Jared quickly takes in the temperament of these men that, just a short while ago, seemed to get along so well. Chad is, of course, livid. Morgan is still and cold, but Jared can see the fingers on his right hand twitch. Short and Evans are stoic, but clearly uncomfortable. Jensen seems perplexed by the matter.

"I'm not sure what-" Jensen's head rocks to one side as Chad backhands him.

"Chad!" Jared's up from his seat and around the corner of his desk before he even realizes it.

"Dirty traitors don't get to speak," Chad says. "It's all on your desk, Jared. Dates, times, pictures. Seems your boy's been having a pretty regular lunch date over the last few weeks with one Special Agent Collins."

Jared's eyes flit to the envelope. The evidence within sounds damning all right. He focuses on Jensen again. There's a red mark already coming up on his cheek, and he's dropped the clueless act. He's not angry, or scared though. He's just sort of... blank.

Jared knows he needs to quickly diffuse the situation, but how? "Chad."

"Oh, and that's not the worst part," Chad sneers, interrupting him. "No, the worst part is that after the last two meetings they booked some time in a hotel." Chad moves close to Jensen. "I don't get it. You haven't wanted for anything since you came into this house. Did you fuck the guy just 'cause you wanted to add a little extra twist to the knife you were gonna stick in Jared's back? Or have I been right about you all along, and deep down you're nothing but a whore."

That was a mistake.

Jensen moves faster than Jared's eyes can track. In the time it takes Jared to blink, formulate a sentence, and open his mouth to speak, Short and Evans are on the ground, and Morgan is hunched over, still on his feet but in obvious pain. Jensen is standing up straight, feet planted, shoulders back. Jeff's gun is in his right hand and its pointed between Chad's very surprised eyes.

"What the," Chad sputters. "Someone shoot him!"

"Little hard to do," Jeff says with a wheeze, "since that's my gun he's holding."

Jared leans back against his desk. "Jen, darlin'?"

"Yes, sweetiepie?"

Jared winces. "I suppose it's too much to ask for you to not make a mess in my office?"

"He had me followed, Jared," Jensen says. "He had me followed, and he was going to have Jeff kill me, and then have Chris and Columbus cut me up into tiny little pieces and dump all my bits into the ocean." Jensen's eyes and aim never falter, regardless of the irritation that's slipped into his voice. "I'll
buy you new carpet."
"Chad's my second."
"He's a moron."
"He's my friend."
"You're a moron."

"He's loyal," Jared presses. "Yeah, okay, he went about things in a dickish way, but his endgame was to protect me and my interests." Jared can tell that Jensen's waveriing, so it's time to pull out the big guns. "Jen, please."

Jensen snorts and lowers his weapon. "Jesus Christ. When the fuck did I get so whipped?"

"Probably around the time you decided to retire instead of killing me," Jared says with a smirk.

"Yeah, yeah." Jensen frowns as he takes in the carnage he's wrought. Jeff's standing mostly upright now, though it's obviously a struggle. Evans and Short are just starting to come around, their faces are bloody and already swelling. Chad is still looking almost comically shocked about the turn of events.

"Chad," Jensen says with a sigh, "I've never liked you. But Jared does, and, so far, that's kept me from carving you up like a fucking turkey and leaving what's left of your corpse rotting in the desert."

"Yeah, I'd still rather you didn't do that." Jared cringes as he gets hit with the full weight of Jensen's scowl. "Or, you know, whatever."

Jensen once again faces Chad. "Let me make something perfectly clear to you. If I wanted to bring down this organization, I wouldn't go to the FBI, I'd kill all of you in your sleep. And if I wanted to 'twist a knife in Jared's back', then I would have done it when I first met him. And I would have used a real knife. And I would have gotten paid a lot of money for it." Jensen peers closely into Chad's face. "Do you understand?"

Chad swallows hard. "What about Collins?"

"Jesus, Murray," Jeff says, "it might be time for you to shut up now."

"Actually, I'm a little interested in that too," Jared says. He shrugs apologetically at Jensen.

"You having trust issues, Jay?" Jensen's tone is light, teasing, but there's a warning underneath it.

"'Course not. But I would like to know just what's floating around that devious mind of yours."

Jensen grins, and Jared releases tension he didn't know he was holding.

"Collins approached me a few weeks ago wanting me to roll. I drew him in, drew him out, and discovered a few things."

"Such as?"

"Well, he's batshit crazy, for one," Jensen says with a smile. "He's also gotten kind of... disenchanted with the establishment."
Jared knows there's a pleased expression on his face. "You think you can turn him?"

"Pretty sure," Jensen says. "And, if not, well, you know I clean up my messes."

"And the hotel?" Chad asks, eliciting groans from everyone else in the room. "What? Fine, I get it, you're some kind of ex-assassin guy, and you could kill me with your pinkie, but if you're stepping out on my boy we're still gonna have words."

"Fuck," Evans mutters. "No way I'm jumping in front of him to stop a bullet."

"See," Jared says, pointing at Chad and ignoring his security team's discontent, "loyal. You can't kill him he's like..."

"A Pit Bull," Chad says.

"Pomeranian," Jensen corrects, grinning as Chad tries to puff himself up. "As for the hotel, it's got a world class spa, and Misha loves seaweed wraps. I've actually gotten kind of partial to them myself." Jensen glances at Jared. "I've been putting all that on your AmEx, by the way."

"I figured," Jared says. "You are being careful, right?"

Jensen flat out laughs at that. "Oh Jared, you are adorable." He practically slinks over to his boyfriend and wraps himself around Jared's sturdy body. They kiss, deep and wet and hard, and before Jared's ready to let him go, Jensen's pulling back with a sharp little nip to Jared's lower lip. There's heat and temptation sparking in those green eyes, and Jared feels anticipation thrill through him.

"Get out," he says, his voice rough as his hands firmly grab onto Jensen's ass. "Now."

Chad's sputtering is abruptly cut off by Jeff's arm around his windpipe.

"You got it, boss," Jeff says. "And I'll, uh, make sure you're not disturbed." He gives a last lingering look at Jared and Jensen, then follows Short and Evans out the door, dragging Chad with him.

When the door closes Jared lets out a long huff of breath. "Think he's gonna be trouble?"

"Jeff?" Jensen thinks for a moment. "I'll have a talk with him. Make sure he knows I don't want his job." Jensen grins. "Course, he might just be realizing that every time he flirted with me he was basically taking his life into his hands."

"He thought he was teasing a kitten when he was pretty much baiting a tiger." Jared takes in the wicked light in Jensen's eyes. "You're gonna play with him, aren't you?"

"Little bit," Jensen admits. "Gonna play with you first, though."

As Jared's pushed back onto his desk, and Jensen clambers on top of him, he thinks about how his momma used to tell him nothing good could ever come from a life of crime. Shows what she knew.
Jeff's wondering if it might be time to take a nice, long vacation.

Jeff knows he's been skating on pretty damn thin ice where Jensen's concerned. Various members of his security team have told him time and time again that, eventually, fucking around with the boss' property - even if it's nothing more than teasing comments and light touches - was going to result in him getting his ass kicked. If he was lucky. And Jared was in a good mood.

Jeff doesn't even know why he did it. He likes women, mostly, and if he wanted a pretty boy with a nice ass to scratch an itch, well, Evans was definitely a safer option than Jensen. But Jeff never opted for safe. And now a part of him is wondering if that's why Jensen was so alluring to him in the first place - that maybe Jeff knew all along that there was something deadly hiding behind those green eyes.

Or maybe he's just full of shit and doesn't want to admit how badly he, and everybody else, had gotten played.

"Jensen?" Idris is sitting beside Oscar on the long couch in Jeff's office, and they're both staring in shock at their teammates. "Jensen. The guy who spends ninety percent of his time looking decorative or getting fucked. That Jensen? Are you sure?"

Chris snorts then raises a hand to hover protectively over his broken nose. "Ow. Yes, Idris, we're pretty damn sure," he says. "One second I'm thinking how much it's gonna suck to end him since I genuinely like the guy, and the next his fist is breaking my face." He leans back in his chair. "It was fucking surreal, man."

Columbus nods. He looks at Jeff through squinty, swollen eyes. "Did you know?"

There's zero humor in Jeff's sudden burst of laughter. "No. I most definitely did not." But Jared did, and Jeff can't help but wonder what else his employer had decided wasn't 'need to know'. "Trust me, if I had any idea what he was capable of I would have..." Made sure the entire team was in on the take-down? Have Oscar hit Jensen with a tranq dart first? Put a tripwire across the top of the staircase and hope they got lucky? "Fuck it. I would have farmed it out to an outside contractor. Let Neeson and his crew take care of it." He never liked those guys.

"What now, boss?" Oscar asks.

Jeff manages to hide his grimace as every member of his team turns to him expecting guidance. That was a good question, and one that he'd been asking himself since he'd escorted Murray from Jared's office. "The short answer? Nothing." He shrugs. "Jensen's an... unknown, but he's not a traitor. He's loyal to Jared, which means he's not a security risk, which means he's not our problem."

Idris' gaze is heavy and knowing. "You really believe that? A fucking assassin hiding under our noses this whole time and you think that's not our problem?"

"I agree with Jeff," Chris says. "So Jensen's past is just as dirty as ours. So what?" Chris shrugs. "He
took three of us out of commission before we could even blink, but he didn't kill us. He knew what we were planning on doing to him, but he still pulled his punches."

"He did say he was retired, right?" Columbus glances at Jeff, who nods. "And it's not like he hasn't had countless opportunities to take us out, if that's what he wanted."

"I don't like it," Idris says. "Not one fucking bit. And if he tries any shit with me he's gonna get acquainted with my blades right quick."

Jeff opens his mouth, but what can he say, really? Please don't start something because I'm not completely sure you'll win? That would go over like a lead balloon.

He's still trying to figure out the best way to keep Idris safe and alive without insulting his badass cred when there's a knock on the door. Jeff knows with utmost certainty who's on the other side. "Come in."

The door pushes open and, yeah, there's Jensen. The smile he gives them has a bit of an edge to it, but it's nothing like the expression he wore while facing off against Murray. Jeff relaxes the hold he has on the piece strapped to the underside of his desk.

"For some reason my ears are burning," Jensen says, "Y'all wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

Jeff's proud of his men; they don't look away or flinch. In fact, it's Jensen who winces when he sees Chris and Columbus and their ruined faces.

"Jesus," he says. "Sorry about that." There's not an ounce of sarcasm in his tone.

"Eh," Chris says with a shrug, "I was planning on cutting your tongue out; I suppose you smashing my nose is only fair." His grin looks macabre, and Jensen's answering grin looks slightly unhinged.

Jeff has the sudden instinct that those two should probably be kept far, far away from each other. He clears his throat. "To what do we owe the pleasure?"

Jensen leans against the doorframe. "Just wanted to make sure we're good. Are we good, Jeff?"

Jeff settles back in his chair. "I don't know. Are we?"


Idris leans forward, his right hand slipping down between the cushions of the couch where Jeff knows he has at least one knife stashed. "And what if, while keeping Jared safe, we end up having a problem with you?"

Jensen cocks his head. There's going to be trouble there, Jeff can feel it.

"Like I told Chad," Jensen says, "if I was going to kill Jared, I would have done it back when I was getting a payday. I don't go for long cons, and I don't get off on playing with my victims," his eyes flick towards Jeff, "much."

Chris claps his hands together. "Good enough for me, man," he says. "Now, I am starving, and you are so buying the two of us dinner for, like, the next ever." He gestures to Columbus. "Right?"

"Hell yeah," Columbus says, surging to his feet and regaining at least a semblance of his usual good
"Hey, what happened to 'I was gonna cut out your tongue, we're even'?" Jensen says.

"Pfft. Sure we're even, but your actions have deprived the world of my good looks for at least the next few weeks. That requires penance, my friend."

"I guess I could use some good karma," Jensen says wryly.

"Awesome," Chris says. "Guys?"

Oscar glances at Jeff, then Idris, before shrugging and standing up. Idris remains seated and so does Jeff.

"You kids go on ahead," Jeff says. "But, Jensen, this isn't over. Next time we talk I'm gonna want to know everything. And I mean, everything. Understand?"

Jensen looks thoughtful. "Ask Jay. It's as much his story as mine. And if he's in a good mood he might even do voices." With that the ex-assassin fucking winks at him.

Jeff watches as the four younger men file out of the room.

Idris snorts. "I'm glad Evans has found a new best friend."

"Don't bitch Chris out yet," Jeff says, "only half that enthusiasm was real, and you know it." Keep your friends close... He was going to have to have a talk with the kid. Make sure he didn't do anything stupid, like actually get attached to Ackles. At least Columbus and Oscar were with them, and Jensen didn't seem overly homicidal.

"Right," Idris says, "and what about you?"

"What what about me?"

"You think that now he's not hiding anymore he's gonna let all those little things you've done over the years slide? What was it you told him when he asked about security for Jared's trip to Bolivia? 'Don't worry your pretty little head about it, sweetheart'?"

Jeff winces. Christ. And that had been one of his tamer comments.

"You're gonna wake up one morning and find something vital cut off," Idris says. "And I'll spend the rest of your dickless life saying 'I told you so'. Because I'm your friend."

"Awesome."

"I'm serious, though, and you should be too," Idris pulls out one of his knives and uses it to point straight at Jeff's chest. "This does change things. And we're going to regret not taking care of it when we had the chance."

"Let's not forget, Jared loves him," Jeff says. "You kill Jensen, you better be prepared to look over your shoulder for the rest of your life, 'cause he'll find you." And they both know the carnage that Jared's capable of. "God, I just realized, Padalecki's probably the stable one in their relationship."

And if that doesn't give a man cold chills...

Idris says nothing, but Jeff can see the gears in head head working overtime. There's a very bad feeling starting in the pit of his stomach, and Jeff wonders how much vacation time he has saved up
Chad's not scared of Jensen.

He's not.

Really.

Chad's not scared of Jensen.

He's not.

Really.

Just because Jensen's some kickass, assassin-type guy with mad skills, and fast hands, and dead fucking eyes that are boring into Chad's skull and down to the very depths of his soul doesn't mean that Chad’s scared of the guy.

Really.

"Murray."

"Ackles."

Jensen keeps staring at him, but Chad is not going to flinch, or fidget, or fling himself from his office window in terror. He's no punk ass, dammit. He's the motherfuckin' man, and Jensen had better recognize!

Jensen's dead, doll eyes roll towards the ceiling as he snorts. "I don't know what you're thinking right now, but I'm pretty sure it's stupid."

"Oh, yeah," Chad says, "well so's your face."

"Oh, God." Jensen rubs at his temples. "I just want you to know I'm in pain right now."

Chad perks up.

"Saying this is giving me physical pain," Jensen continues. "But I think we need to... Christ... We need to get along."
"Fuck no, we don't," Chad says. "I hate you. You hate me. I think our mutual animosity is working well for us."

"Oh, don't get me wrong," Jensen says, "if it were up to me, I'd have your skin suit drying over my shower curtain rod-"

"Dude, gross."

"But I can't kill you," Jensen says. "Or gouge out your eyes with a spoon. Or pull out your tongue with a pair of pliers. Or-"

"Put a lot of thought into this, have we?"

Jensen shrugs. "You're Jared's best friend. For some unknown, unholy, unbelievable reason. He... likes you. As a person. Or whatever."

"Me and the Sasquatch have been through a lot together over the years," Chad says smugly. "Lots of years. Way more years than your pretty ass has been around."

Jensen closes his eyes and takes a deep, long, slow breath. Chad studies him.

"Skin suit?" Chad guesses.

"Tongue pliers," Jensen says. "That's my favorite. I only pull out the skin suit one on special occasions."

"Oh." Chad frowns. "Like what kind of special occasions?"

"Like when you interrupted our anniversary dinner."

Chad almost cringes. "In my defense, that was before I knew you two were for real and everything. I still mostly thought you were some kind of long-rent hooker. You know, like how some people live in hotel rooms?"

Jensen closes his eyes and takes a deep, long, slow breath.

"Skin suit," Chad asks again.

"Yep," Jensen says. He opens his eyes and practically pins Chad to his chair. "Anyway, like I said, we need to start getting along. I love Jared, and I think you care about him too, in your own unique, odd, little way. And Jared loves me and has some sort of strange, Godforsaken affection for you. So... Therefore... Fuck it. Let's just try to not get on each other's nerves too badly, okay?"

Chad looks from the gleam of insanity in Jensen's eyes, to the tick in his lower jaw, to the steady clench of the fingers of his left hand, like he was imagining choking the life out of someone.

"Whatever," Chad says. "But, know this, you break Jay's heart and you and me are gonna have words. Skin suit or not."

Jensen stares at him for a moment. "You're not all horrible, are you, Murray?"

Chad smiles. "I do have my moments."
Jared may be a hardened criminal, but that doesn't mean he's without a soft side. In fact, if anyone scratched his surface they'd find nothing more than a giant puppy. With questionable ethics and morals. And rabies. But, still, a puppy.

He also has quite the romantic side. Even before he met and fell for Jensen, back when he was finding his companions through the escort branch of his empire - Mike's whores were not only skilled, but also cleared through a rigorous set of background checks... so much easier than dating - he made sure that whoever was sharing his bed was lavished with gifts, both large and small, and always thoughtful. And if the gift-giving somehow helped to alleviate some of the hollow feeling that such loveless encounters ultimately incurred... well, that was no one's business but his own.

With Jensen the only thing Jared feels after sex is bone-deep contentment, but he still made it a habit to shower Jensen with presents. At first. Turned out the constant tokens of affection made Jensen feel less loved, and more 'kept'.

"You don't have to buy me ten thousand dollar watches, Jay," he said one night, the open box laying on his sheet-covered lap. "I'm already in your bed."

Jared frowned. "But you wanted it. You said you liked it."

"Yeah, I do like it, but I didn't mention it so you would immediately go out and drop ten grand to get it for me. I was going to get one myself." Jensen narrowed his eyes. "My previous profession was kinda lucrative, you know."

Jared swallowed. He did know, especially considering he was almost nothing more than an addition to Jensen's bank account. "I just want to make you happy."

Jensen sighed, "You make me happy." He put the watch on the nightstand and rolled over to straddle Jared. "How about this," he said, "you limit all gift-giving to holidays, and I don't tie you up and pull out your fingernails."
Jared was pretty sure he was joking. "Holidays, and anniversaries."

Jensen rolled his eyes. "Fine."

"And special occasions."

"Do you want me to get my pliers?"

In the end Jensen did get out his pliers, but a lethal combination of googly eyes and dicksucking kept Jared's fingernails intact and netted him the special occasion clause. He considered it a win.

Now it was once again time for one of Jared's favorite holidays. It was Valentines Day, and Jared had been, admittedly, going a bit overboard this year. For the past week the mansion had been littered with red roses and pink carnations. Breakfast came in the form of heart-shaped pancakes. Chocolate dipped strawberries and champagne had become the nightly dessert. Pink ribbons had been fasted to the staircase, and sparkly white organza had been draped along everything that stood still long enough, including that quite guy on Jeff's team who never takes off his hat. Cupid had pretty much puked all over the Padalecki organization.

Jared knows the only reason he's getting away with such a tacky and pink display of festiveness is because he's still recovering from a gunshot wound to his left thigh. And Jensen, who has a lower tolerance than most for such things, has been off running an 'errand' for the last few days.

Jared didn't ask, even though he really, really wanted to.

He's hobbling into his office, wondering, not for the first time, how far he could push all this guilt-tinged sympathy - calling for mandatory Valentines cards would be worth it just to see Jeff's face. All thoughts fall by the wayside, though, and he's brought op short by the sight in front of him.

A medium sized, baby pink box with a glittery red bow is sitting in the middle of his desk. Jensen is in the chair behind it, a soft, yet wicked looking smile on his face.

"Hey, Jay," he says, getting up and moving forward to sweep Jared into a tight hug.

Jared buries his face in Jensen's neck, but he certainly doesn't cling. Well, okay, maybe a little...

"Missed you," Jared says. He pulls back, but doesn't relinquish his hold. "Where have you been?"

Jensen looks coy. "Getting your present." He wriggles out of Jared's arms and takes his hand, tugging him towards the desk.

Jared can't help but grin. Jensen's excitement is contagious. "I can't open it yet. Valentines isn't for another two days."

Jensen snorts. "Trust me, you're not gonna want to let this wait two days. Unless you put it in the 'fridge."

"It's edible?"

"Um... technically, yeah."

Jared rubs his hands together then lifts the lid to the box. He blinks.

"I just figured..." Jensen looks adorably bashful. "I mean, you've given me all those hearts over the years so..."
"Yours were always filled with chocolates," Jared says weakly. "Who-"

"The guy who shot you. He was hiding out in Laredo." Jensen cocks his head to one side. "Do you... do you not like it?"

Jared puts the lid back on the box, turns to Jensen, and takes a deep breath. He then pulls Jensen into his arms and kisses him, pouring all his affection and desire into the contact between them. "I love it," he says, laying gentle pecks on Jensen's lower lip. "Love you. So much."

Tension leaves Jensen's frame. "Love you too." He instigates their next kiss, and when they're done he lays his head on Jared's shoulder. "Did I really see pink bows on the staircase?"

"It was all Jeff's idea."

“Sure it was.”
Jensen sees a familiar face at one of Jared's parties.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for xcziel.

"Jen, I'd like you to meet-

"Oh, my God! Jensen? Jensen Ackles?!"

Jensen feels his eyes widen just a fraction as he glances back and forth between Jared and a face he hasn't seen in about fifteen years. "Uh, yeah, it's me. Hey, Scott."

"You two know each other?" Jared asks. He's got one eyebrow quirked and a pleasant enough expression on his face. But Jensen's been reading Jared for years, and there's a hint of concern there as well.

"We went to high school together back in Texas," Scott says. He's got a wide grin on his face showing off ridiculously white and unnaturally even teeth. "And now, all these years later, we're at the same function in L.A. That's crazy, right?"

"Yep," Jensen says. He snags a flute of champagne from a passing waiter. "Crazy."

Jared's looking like he can't decide if this is Christmas or somebody's funeral. "High school, huh?" His eyes dart back and forth between Jensen and Scott. Jensen can practically see the questions trying to bubble out of him.

"Oh, yeah," Scott says. "We lost touch afterwards, but I guess that's what happens, right?"

Jensen wants to say that they were never really friends to begin with, but he keeps his mouth shut and plasters on one of his most pleasant faux smiles. "Right."

"We should get together for lunch one day and talk shop," Scott says. "I mean, I assume that's why Jared was bringing me over here to meet you. What do you do in his organization?"

"Uh..." The public face of Jared's company is all above board and acts as a nice little smokescreen hiding the myriad of illegal activities that actually fund it. Jensen doesn't know what Scott's involvement is, or how much of the truth may need to be tweaked.

Jared puts a possessive arm around Jensen's shoulders. "He's my boyfriend," he says, proud as ever.

Jensen had long ago trained himself to not roll his eyes.
A strange look passes over Scott's face. "Boyfriend? I see. So, what is it that you do?"

"I just told you," Jared says, "he's my boyfriend."

The arm around Jensen's shoulders tightens ever so slightly. Jensen starts to feel the urge to hit someone.

"Oh," Scott says. "You don't work, then? Not that there's anything wrong with that, of course." The tone of his voice sets Jensen's teeth on edge.

"Jensen doesn't have to work," Jared says.

It's not like Jensen didn't know what kind of a role he would be playing at tonight's party. Those who know who and what he really is, know. Those who don't, don't. And normally Jensen doesn't mind playing the part of the vain and vapid kept boy.

Now, though, it grates. It grates hard.

"Oh," Scott says again, judgement written plain and clear on his overly tan face. "That's good, I suppose. I mean, being voted best-looking for the yearbook can only get you so far. And I heard that you dropped out of college, so I'm glad you managed to find something to keep you on your feet." Scott's smile is so horribly smarmy and knowing that the only thing keeping Jensen from tearing off his stupid face is the increasing pressure Jared's putting on his shoulders.

"I think you've misunderstood the situation," Jared says with a subtle tightness to his voice. "Jensen's retired."

"Retired from?" Scott asks.

"Headhunting," Jared says, straight-faced.

Jensen could kiss him. And he will, later. Lots.

"Well," Jared says. "I say retired, but he still does the occasional job for me, though. There's no one I trust more to handle a delicate situation. In fact, maybe you'll get to see how he works someday."

"I think I'll really enjoy that," Scott says with a wink.

Jensen feels his lips curl up into a real smile, his first one of the conversation. "Not as much as I will."
Chris has always known that, given his career choice, there was a good chance his end would be violent and bloody. He had even given some thought as to how it might all go down, from the mundane - your standard shoot-em-up gunfight gone bad - to the awesome - sacrificing himself to save the lives of all of his teammates. And a school bus full of orphans. And kittens.

But he had never, not once, thought that the last sight he'd see in the world would be the very pissed off face of his boss. His boss, whose huge hand is wrapped like an iron band around Chris' throat. Chris' own hands are scraping desperately at Jared's, and his feet are kicking out because - holy shit - he's actually been lifted off the floor.

Jared mad. Jared smash.

Chris is pretty sure he can hear Columbus, Idris, and Jeff yelling, but between the throbbing in his veins and the black spots dancing in front of his eyes, it's taking everything he's got to just stay conscious.

He'd been having such a nice morning, too. Happily munching on a pumpkin muffin and joking with Columbus, he'd entered the situation room for the morning meeting. But instead of Jared's usually smiling countenance, Chris had encountered a brewing storm which seemed to get worse the more he opened his mouth. Chris had toned down his natural sarcasm and began to only respond when spoken to, but that didn't seem to help Jared's mood. Then, in the middle of Jeff talking about Jensen's latest antics with that FBI guy, Jared had snapped. In an instant and without warning, Chris suddenly had six and a half feet and over two hundred pounds of muscle coming across the table towards him.

Some small and probably oxygen-deprived part of Chris' brain is inordinately pleased he didn't pee himself, though, the morning is still young.

"Jared!" Jensen's voice is like a gunshot, cracking through the increasing haze in Chris' head. "What the hell do you think you're doing?!

Jared releases his grip and Chris falls to the floor like a busted marionette. He feels hands under each arm, and the reassuring solidity of Columbus and Idris haul him to his feet. He manages to raise his head, and what he sees makes him kind of wish he had given in and blacked out when he had the chance.
Jared and Jensen are facing each other. Chris can't see Jared's face, but Jensen's expression of cold, barely restrained fury is enough to fuel nightmares. Even Oscar, who must have fetched the ex-assassin, is backing away slowly. Chris isn't sure what's going on or why he was targeted, but he does know that if those two go at it nothing, including the house, would be left standing.

"Get him out of here," Jensen says, and Chris' escorts start to move him.

"He's not going anywhere," Jared practically growls.

Jensen cocks his head to one side. "We gonna tussle, Jay? Over this?" His eyes flick to someone beyond Chris' field of vision. "Take care of him."

Before Jared can say anything else, Chris is out the door and being moved swiftly towards Jeff’s office.

"The fuck did you do?" Columbus hisses in his ear.

As the sounds of shouts and broken glass follow them down the hallway, Chris can't help but think that was a very good question.


Idris finishes palpating Chris' throat, gives him a dispassionate look, and says, "He'll live."

"For now," Jeff says darkly. "So, Evans, any idea why the very, very bad man we work for just tried to pop your head like a champagne cork?"

Chris grimaces as he gingerly touches his neck. "Not a fucking clue," he says with complete honesty.

"Think, man," Columbus says, "there's gotta be something."

"Dude, I haven't done anything! I swear. I haven't even tried sneaking any of his rainbow stripes since that time he caught me and broke my pinkie." Chris hates the slight whine that's crept into his voice, but he can't help it. He's scared out of his mind.

Jeff gives him a hard stare, then nods. "All right. Here's what we're gonna do. Idris and I are gonna run interference while you go to your room and get a bag together. Pack essentials and fuck sentimentality because I want you ready to move out in under two minutes, clear?"

Chris nods.

"I've got a safehouse you can go to. Columbus and Oscar can take you there and then-"

"I'm staying with him," Oscar says.

"You don't have-" Chris swallows the rest of that sentence as Oscar pins him with a no-nonsense look.

"If the big boss is out for your blood, you're not going anywhere without someone watching your back," Oscar says. "Understood?"

"Yeah. Thanks, man."
"All right," Jeff says, "let's move people."

They're ready to head out, Chris still leaning heavily on Columbus, when the door opens. Everyone tenses, but it's Jensen, not Jared, who walks in.

Without preamble he immediately walks over and does his own inspection of Chris' neck. "Jesus," he says softly, "Jay sure did a number on you. So fucking sorry about that, man. It will not happen again."

"We're taking him out of the house," Jeff says, "can we count on you?"

"'Course. But that won't be necessary." Jensen pats Chris' shoulder. "You'll be fine now."

"How are you so sure?" Chris asks. "I thought I was fine before and then, WHAM. I still don't know what I did to incite the whole 'homicidal rage' thing."

Jensen grimaces and walks to the other side of the room. "You didn't do anything."

"Then who did?" Jeff peers at the ex-assassin. "Jensen?"

Jensen rubs at the back of his neck and gives them all a lackluster smile. "Funny story... Jay and I were eating breakfast, and he mentioned how much he was looking forward to the next Pirates of the Caribbean movie, and that Johnny Depp was at the top of his 'Exception List', and-"

"Wait," Oscar cocks his head, "what is an exception list?"

Columbus answers, "it's a list of celebrities your spouse or partner has to let you sleep with, even though it'll never happen. Like, Angelina Jolie is on my exception list."

"Ah." Oscar turns back to Jensen. "And what does that have to do with Jared going, ah, batshit?"

Jensen blushing. Actually blushes. "Well, when he asked me for my exception list he didn't specify the celebrity part."

It takes a moment for the words to sink in, and when they do all heads turn towards Chris.

"You're a dead man," Idris says simply.

"No, he's not," Jensen insists.

"Yes, I am!" Chris says. "How could you... why would you... I thought we were friends, and all this time you've been secretly lusting after me."

"I haven't been lusting-"

"I mean, don't get me wrong, I am flattered. And terrified. Mostly terrified."

Jensen rolls his eyes. "There's been no lusting. It's all hypothetical. Hypothetically, if I wasn't with Jay, you would be an acceptable substitute."

"Acceptable..." Chris nods. "And the flattery's gone leaving behind just the terror. Thanks."

"Well, I'm sorry!" Jensen throws his hands into the air. "I spent over ten years doing the whole killer-for-hire thing, excuse me if I'm not well-versed in cutesy relationship-type shit."

"That's just great," Chris says, "you're sorry, and I'm still dead. There are certain things of Jared's
you don't fuck with; his organization, his family, the candy stash he keeps hidden in the bottom
drawer of his desk, and you."

"I'm going to ignore my ranking on that list," Jensen says.

"And, you didn't actually fuck with him," Columbus says to Chris. "He just wants you to."

Jensen glares at him. "It was hypo... Nevermind. And like I said, you'll be fine now. I've taken care
of it. Jared and I talked it out."

Jeff clears his throat. "Not that we don't trust you and your obviously awesome judgment on things-"

"But how do we know that lover-boy's assurances weren't just to placate you," Idris finishes.

"Because, by 'talked it out' I mean I put him on his back and threatened to dust off my toolkit if he
didn't cut out all this jealous shit."

"Yikes," Columbus says. "That should do it."

"It'd better." Oscar glares darkly at Jensen.

"I told you we should have killed him," Idris mutters to Jeff.

"Well," Chris says with a brightness he absolutely does not feel, "I'm still terrified. But slightly
reassured. And, in the future, if you could please leave me out of your freaky relationship
discussions, it would be greatly appreciated. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to go to my room,
lock the door, and sob hysterically for a little while." Chris nods and manages to make it across the
room without any assistance. He stops by Jensen and gives him a long, considering look, lingering
on the other man's mouth. "Ours is a forbidden love-"

"Shut the hell up."

---

Chris does go back to his room, but he doesn't go on a crying jag. Instead, he packs a light bag that
will stay at the bottom of his closet. Just in case. After that he locks his door, shoves a chair under the
doorknob, downs a couple of old pain pills, and settles on his bed for a nap.

A sharp, rapping sound brings him back to consciousness. A quick glance at his watch shows that
he's been asleep for almost four hours. He thinks he should feel at least a little refreshed, but instead
he just feels more run down than he did before. Nearly getting killed can really take a lot out of a
person.

The rapping sound comes again, a little harder and faster this time. It's someone at the door, probably
Columbus or Oscar coming to check on him.

"Coming," Chris says, dragging himself out of bed. He's smiling. While the situation sucks, he can't
help but anticipate the extra attention he'll probably be getting from his teammates. He's definitely
going to be up for some pampering over the next few days.

Hoping that whoever's waiting in the hall has brought a treat, preferably ice cream, considering the
state of his throat, Chris moves the chair and opens the door. And then promptly shuts it again. Or,
he tries to, at least, but it just bounces off Jared's foot.
Chris absolutely does not scream, or cry, or faint as a glowering Jared makes his way into the room. He does position himself next to his dresser and the stash of weapons hidden under his boxers. He's not reaching for any knives or guns just yet, though. The homicidal rage that was in Jared's eyes earlier is missing. Instead, there's a resigned expression on the larger man's face, and a thin, angry, red ligature mark around his throat.

"So," Jared says. "Nice room."

"Thanks?"

"I like the... colors."

Chris glances around. "Yeah."

"Blues are nice."

"I think so."

There's a very loud cough from the hallway just beyond the door frame.

"I'm getting to it!" Jared yells.

"Get to it quicker!" Jensen yells back.

Jared makes a very rude gesture towards the open doorway then turns back to Chris. He clears his throat. "Uh, I'm... sorry... I tried to kill you earlier."

Chris nods. "I, um, okay." He waits, but Jared doesn't make any move to leave. "Thanks?" he says again.

"There's more," Jensen calls out.

Jared scowls. "I'm supposed to get to know you better," he says. "Jensen thinks if we," Jared crooks the pointer and middle fingers of his right hand and makes air quotes, "bond, I'll be less likely to want to slice your face off. Though, I have to say, I'm getting more and more okay with the thought of you taking him off my hands."

"I heard that!"

"You were supposed to!"

"Guys!" Chris winces and gingerly touches his throat. "Jared, thank you for not killing me, and I would appreciate if you could keep on not killing me in the future, but you don't have to worry about me coming between you and Jensen. Ever. I'm not stupid, or suicidal, and to try and come between the two of you I'd have to be both. You guys are... you're pretty awesome together."

"Oh." Jared's entire countenance changes, and that sunny smile Chris had missed at the meeting makes an appearance. "Gee, maybe you're not so bad."

"Told you," Jensen says, leaning through the doorway.

"Yeah, yeah." Jared claps Chris on the shoulder and nearly sends him careening into the wall. "Take the week off, okay? And when you come back we'll have a few beers, maybe catch a game or something. You a Cowboys fan?"

Chris can see Jensen frantically nodding in the background.
"Uh, yes?" Patriots forever, bitch.

"Awesome!" Jared beams at him. "So, again, you know, sorry about the whole..." Jared waves his hand in the general vicinity of Chris' neck, then sort of bounds out of the room.

Chris is left staring at Jensen "What the hell just happened?"

"Told you I'd take care of it."

"Yes, you did," Chris says. "I'll never doubt you again," he pauses and a devilish smirk forms on his face, "secret lover."

"Keep that up and I'll kill you myself."

"Sorry. Baby."

"Oh, shut up."
"Jeff, I need your help."

Jeff raises an eyebrow as a furtive-looking Jensen closes the door to his office and plops himself down in one of the chairs across from his desk. He's seen that look on faces before, and it usually means the same thing.

"Where's the body, and how do you want to hide it? Wait, my hamstring's been acting up, let me call Columbus." Jeff reaches for his phone.

Jensen snorts. "I can hide bodies all on my own, thanks. This is something different. And difficult."

Jeff wisely doesn't remark on that.

Jensen takes a deep breath, and, after glancing at the closed door, he says, "I need you to come up with some official sounding security reason to put the house on lockdown over Halloween."

"Zombies?" Jeff winces at the glare Jensen gives him.

"I may be a little rusty, but I think I can still remember how to kill a man using just my pinkie," Jensen says. "No, not zombies. It needs to be something Jared's not going to question, and I'm pretty sure the undead would qualify."

Jeff shifts in his chair. This conversation's taken an uncomfortable turn. "Jensen, I... I like you. And you scare me senseless sometimes. But Jared's my employer, and I'm not going to go behind his back just on your say so. Understand?"

Jensen blinks a few times before he grins, and Jeff feels something inside him unclench. "Dude, it's nothing bad, I swear. It's just... You know how Jared tends to really get into holidays?"

Jeff nods, and he's suddenly got a good idea where this conversation is going.

"He gets the front yard all decked out with decorations," Jensen says, "and buys obscene amounts of candy for all the trick-or-treaters, who never show up because this is the house of a freakin' crime lord, and then he gets all mopey and depressed until Thanksgiving rolls around and I can distract him with pie."

"Ah," Jeff says. The funk Jared gets into around Halloween is kind of legendary. Jeff and most
everyone else in the organization had just learned to ignore it. He says as much to Jensen, and the look he gets from the ex-assassin makes him really wish he had kept his mouth shut.

"I don't like it when Jared's upset, Jeffrey," Jensen says in a slow, cold tone. "Even if it's his own damn fault for having unrealistic expectations. And if I can do something this year to try and keep that damn beaten puppy look off his face, I will do it. You hear me?"

Jeff hears him. "Okay, I get where you're coming from. But to instigate a whole house lockdown, well... that would get a lot of feathers ruffled. Me, my team, Murray, Cassidy, Welling... I could go on and list everybody who would either be involved, or want to know what was going on, but you get the idea. There would be a lot of very pissed, very dangerous people, who would not be amused."

"Then they can come to me with their grievances," Jensen says. "I'm sure I can... handle them."

Jeff swallows. "You know Jared doesn't want you killing Chad; I'm sure that ban goes for everybody else in the organization too."

Jensen looks almost offended. "I'm not gonna kill them, Jeff. Jesus, how bloodthirsty do you think I am?"

Again, Jeff very wisely doesn't say anything.

"If anyone has a problem I'll talk to them and explain my reasoning," Jensen says. "And if that doesn't work, then I'll kill them."

"Yeah, you know, let's look at some other options first, huh?" Jeff rolls his shoulders and tries to think of the best, least offensive way to word what he wants to say. "Have you tried... I don't mean to overstep my boundaries, but... I mean, have you thought about trying to..." Jeff sighs. There was a time when he thought nothing of talking to Jensen using the filthiest innuendo possible just to watch a sweet flush spread across the younger man's freckled skin. Now he can't even get the word s-e-x out of his mouth without fearing that Jensen might finally decide to retaliate for all the previous completely (mostly) innocent advances. He tries one more time. "Have you thought about distracting him with, uh-"

"Stop." Jensen raises one of his hands. "Please, stop. Watching you try and skirt an issue is incredibly painful." He cocks his head to the side. "You didn't use to be so shy about sex. In fact," Jensen's grin is pure wickedness, "if I remember correctly, there was even one time, right after I came here, that you actually goosed me."

Jeff bites back a groan. Like he really needed to be reminded of that incident. He thinks about defending himself, but decides that saying 'sorry, back then I thought you were a prostitute' might just make the hole he's in even deeper.

Jensen's obviously feeling a bit magnanimous because he steers the conversation back to the problem at hand. "Yes, to answer your unspoken question, I have tried distracting Jared with sex. And, I'm man enough to admit, it doesn't work. I'm not just talking vanilla sex, either," Jensen says, annoyance clear on his face. "I'm talking toys, outfits, roleplaying..." Jensen leans forward across Jeff's desk. "I offered to let him tie me up. Do you know what he said?"

"Yes, please?"

"He said, 'Maybe tomorrow, baby, I've got to finish carving this pumpkin.' A pumpkin, Jeff." Jensen puts his elbows on the desk and rests his head in his hands. "That was last year, and that was when I
first realized that whatever hold this holiday has on Jared - whether it's a second childhood thing, or
some way for him to try and reclaim some long-lost innocence - I know I can't handle it alone." He
reaches across and grabs one of Jeff's hands. "I spent most of my life without a lot of... friends. But
now that I have some, I'm not above utilizing them to my advantage. So, help me. Okay?"

Jeff uses his free hand to rub the bridge of his nose. This used to be such an easy job. "First, I'm glad
you consider me one of your new friends. Second, you might want to work on your social niceties.
Third, while I still don't think a lockdown is the best option, I will help."

"Thank you!" Jensen releases Jeff's hand and rubs his own together. "So if a lockdown isn’t the best
option, then what is?

Jeff eases back in his chair and lets his eyes focus on the far wall. There's something coalescing in his
mind. Two things Jensen had said - one about Jared, one about himself - are coming together and
forming an interesting idea. "I think I've got something," he says, "but you might have to work to sell
it to everyone."

"Threats or persuasion?"

"Both."

Jensen looks intrigued. "I'm listening."

Jared knows there's this giant, doofy smile on his face, but he can't quite seem to care. The sun is just
starting to rise on the first day in November, and with the encroaching daylight he can more clearly
see what an absolute shambles his backyard is. It matches the mess inside.

"Hey," Jensen says, stepping out onto the veranda, "just to let you know, Superman and Lex Luthor
are hooking up in the laundry room."

"Huh. About time," Jared says. Mike and Tom had been dancing around each other for years, and all
it took was each of them making a serendipitous choice regarding a costume-mandatory Halloween
party to get their heads out of their asses. "Wait. Why the laundry room?"

Jensen scowls. "Spin cycle."

"Oh. Ewww."

"I know. It was time for us to get a new washer anyway. I'll call Sears later today." Jensen shakes his
head, and his scowl melts into a shy smile as he sidles up to his boyfriend. Jared immediately wraps
one arm around Jensen's shoulders and draws him close. At some point during the night Jensen had
lost the worn, tan Stetson that completed his cowboy outfit. With the hat gone, Jared’s able to lean in
and nuzzle his hair.

"Thank you," Jensen says, "for the party."

Jared grins. Between Jensen's unusually heartfelt admission that he missed the kind of Halloween
parties he used to go to as a kid, and the not-so-clandestine looks shared by Jensen, Jeff, and several
others in the organization, Jared's pretty sure he was manipulated into throwing this shindig. He can't
work up any indignation, though, not when he understands that the co-conspirators had his best
interests at heart. Jared knows that he usually gets pretty bummed by his Halloween plans never
turning out as awesome as he hopes, and the fact that Jensen worked with the others and did this for him is all kinds of sweet. Plus... "Dude, you managed to get everyone to dress up. Everyone. In costumes. That's thanks enough." He kisses the side of Jensen's face and works down to his lightly stubbled jaw. "How did you pull that off, anyway?"

Jensen arches his neck to give Jared better access. "An even mix of eyelash batting and intimidation."

"Ah. A winning combination." Jared pulls back a bit. He's pretty sure Mike and Tom aren't the only 'guests' still around - unless Chris just forgot his big, round shield thing - and he'd rather not put on a free show. "Wanna go back to our room and help me burn off my sugar high?"

Jensen lets his fingers trail down Jared's ruffled shirt to where an imitation flintlock is tucked into his belt. "Lead the way, mon capitaine."

"Awesome. But first, find your hat, okay?"

"Yee haw."
Chapter Summary

Jensen's like a big, African cat, and Jared's like a gazelle. Or maybe a giraffe.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for bugmcsnug

It's not that Jensen's stalking Jared.
Except he kind of is. But not like a creeper.
No, Jensen's stalking Jared like a cat.
Like a big, Savannah cat.
And Jared's a gazelle.
Or maybe a giraffe.

Jensen's been spending most of his day hiding in shadows or up in the rafters - and how great is it for someone like Jensen to live in a house with rafters - silently tracking Jared's every move. He's been spotted a few times by various members of the security team, but that's okay because Jensen's just playing. Each time, Jensen's lifted a finger to his lips and winked.

Idris had rolled his eyes. Jeff had shaken his head fondly. Chris had given him two enthusiastic thumbs up.

Over the course of the day, Jensen watches as Jared becomes slightly agitated and almost pensive about something. A line develops between Jared's brows, and Jensen wants to know what put it there.

When the shadows cast by the light coming through the windows start to lengthen, Jared takes his cell out of his pocket. Those long, elegant fingers dance across the touchscreen, then he places the device up to his ear.

He waits, and a worried look comes over his face.

"Hey, Jen," Jared says. "Just wanted to check in. I haven't seen you all day. I... I miss you, and-"

Jensen pounces.
The Agent

Chapter Summary

Misha's not very good at mingling.

Chapter Notes

Comment Fic fordracodion

As Misha stands on the terrace and looks out at the vast array of criminals milling around the back lawn of the Padalecki estate, he wonders just how many brownie points he could get if he flipped again and went to the DA with everything he knows.

Then he wonders if there are any hot dogs left.

Then he wonders if anyone else sees that cloud shaped like a goldfish.

"You know," Jensen says, coming to stand by Misha's right shoulder, "when you get that look on your face I can never tell if you're contemplating world domination or trying to remember what you had for dinner two nights ago."

Misha blinks at him. "You're assuming those two things are mutually exclusive."

Jensen grins and rests his hand on Misha's shoulder. Like Misha's his friend. Misha still sometimes has trouble computing that.

"Seriously, though," Jensen says, "you standing up here and staring down at everybody else is starting to freak some people out. And, as hilarious as that may be, if anyone leaves the party early Jared will pout, and I really hate it when Jared pouts."

The hand on Misha's shoulder tightens just a bit. Just enough.

Misha clears his throat. "For the record, I haven't been up here just staring at everyone else. I've also been looking at clouds."

Jensen looks up. "Huh. A goldfish."

"Thank you," Misha says solemnly.

Jensen grins and gives his shoulder another little squeeze. "Mingle. I mean it."

Mingle. Misha can mingle. Misha is a highly trained Special Agent of the United States Government; he can freakin' mingle.
"Mingling is hard.

"Maybe you should just try being yourself," Evans says to him some time later after Misha had tried making the rounds.

"I was being myself," Misha says.

"Oh. Then maybe you should try being someone else." Evans yelps theatrically as Short's hand cuffs the back of his head.

"Chris!"

"What?!"

Misha sighs. "No, it's a valid suggestion. But one of my instructors at Quantico once told me that I should never compromise who I am at my core just to make the people around me feel better."

"He sounds like a pretty cool dude," Morgan says.

"For a Fed," Elba adds.

"Yes," Misha says. "Of course, he also believed that aliens abducted his little sister and those same aliens will eventually end up enslaving or eradicating the human race." Misha takes note of the many blinking eyes around him. "Did I overshare?"

"Little bit," Short said. "Little, tiny bit."

"Misha?"

"Yes, Jensen?"

"Why are you hiding in the bushes?"

Misha looks around at what he thought was his impenetrable, foliage fortress. He sighs and stands up. "I was trying to avoid you," he says, brushing dirt off his pants.

Jensen looks lost. "Uh... Okay?"

Misha sighs again. This time he puts some oomph into it. "I tried mingling. It didn't turn out so well."

"Yeah," Jensen says, "I heard. Did you really tell Mike that you guys have his sister under surveillance?"

"We have some lovely long-distance footage of her wedding," Misha says. "I thought he might be interested in a copy."

"Uh huh." Jensen tugs at the sleeve of Misha's shirt until he's fully extracted from the bushes, then he
puts an arm around Misha's shoulders and starts to steer him back towards the house.

"Do you know why I like you, Misha?" Jensen asks.

"Because I feed you information?"

"Besides that."

"No clue."

"I like you," Jensen says, "because you are even more socially awkward than I am."

"You're not socially awkward," Misha says.

Jensen laughs. "Playing at being Jared's trophy boyfriend for so many years helped me get really good at faking being comfortable in social situations," he says, "but before we met, I spent so many years alone..." He shakes his head. "It's still hard, sometimes, for me to acclimate myself to this kind of atmosphere even though most of the people here are my friends." Jensen abruptly stops moving and stares at Misha. "I have friends." He sounds slightly bewildered by the notion.

Misha understands. "I think I'd like friends."

"Which is why I wanted you to mingle," Jensen says.

"I don't think my mingling helped to foster any friendly feelings," Misha says.

"Give it time," Jensen says confidently. "If there's one thing that almost all Jared's people have in common, it's that we're quirky. Granted, you're quirkier than most, but still..."

Misha relaxes into Jensen's hold. Friends. He likes the sound of that.
"Mr. Evans, do you think me a fool?"

Chris can hear various curses coming through his earbud, but they pale compared to the words ricocheting around his skull. He knew, fucking knew this was going to go pear-shaped.

"Of course not, Mr. Weaving," Chris says. He keeps his voice as steady as he can. Not that that will probably make much difference. Chris has never been that good at subterfuge, and if Weaving's onto him, then the game's already over.

Weaving leans back into the leather couch he's sitting on. He smiles, and Chris feels fear skitter up his spine. There are serious-faced, black suited men positioned on either side of the couch and on either side of the chair Chris is sitting in. Even if he could somehow make it past them - doubtful - Chris spotted other similarly attired people when he entered club.

He's never going to make it out.

Weaving picks up his drink and studies the liquid for a moment before he lifts it to his lips. "When my employer first got wind of a possible mole in Padalecki's organization, do you think that I did not do my research?"

Chris can hear Jeff's voice telling him to stay cool. Help's coming. Stay cool. Well, help may be coming, but it's not going to get here in time. They had to set up their base too far away, and traffic at this time of evening is a nightmare.

"Research, Mr. Weaving?" Chris asks.

"Yes. Research. On all of Padalecki's little underlings."

Columbus has taken over the comms now. Chris wonders if he should at least try and take Weaving out while he has the chance. Really, listening to him monologue is just going to prolong the inevitable.

"I was naturally suspicious at such an opportunity simply falling into our lap," Weaving says. "So I decided to figure out which one of Padalecki's inner circle would be most likely to betray him."

The voices in Chris' ear are turning frantic, and he kind of wishes they'd just shut up. False hope isn't anybody's friend. Even if they reach the club, even if they get in, it's still going to be a bloodbath.
"The first name on my list was Mr. Elba."

Chris wants to laugh. It was supposed to be Idris here tonight. But he had had a craving for sushi and had spent the previous night and a good part of the morning moaning wretchedly into the toilet. Columbus is worse at grifting than Chris is, and Oscar can’t lie to save his life - which is why in the nearly constant presence of thieves and murderers, he stays so taciturn - so Chris got the short straw.

"Your name, Mr. Evans, was quite low on my list." Weaving smiles again. It's creepy.

"And this list of yours is infallible, is it?" Chris asks.


"You, Mr. Evans, are like a Golden Retriever. Loyal. Steadfast. Charming. And not all that bright." Weaving's eyes narrow. "I wonder, though, how you'll do on the end of my leash."

Oh, fuck that shit. Chris would rather lie down on a grenade before he let himself get taken someplace by these assholes.

"You seem pretty sure of yourself, Mr. Weaving," Chris says.

"Oh, I am," Weaving says. "But, for argument's sake, give me one good reason why you would betray, not just Padalecki, but the other members of your team." Weaving shakes his head. "I've always scoffed at how Padalecki runs his organization, but you lot truly do think of yourself as a family, don't you? So, tell me, what exactly could cause you to turn on your brothers?"

Chris takes a deep breath and tries to center himself. He doesn't know if he's going to be able to kill Weaving before he's put down, but he'll do his damnedest to inflict as much damage as possible. But before Chris can start to tense his muscles, a voice comes from behind him.

"Me."

Chris doesn't have to pretend to be shocked. "Jen?!"

Jensen, who's supposed to be scaling the side of a building and breaking into Weaving's office, is standing there, flanked by two more of Weaving's goons. He looks young, and hesitant, and very, very scared.

"I'm sorry," Jensen says. He glances towards Weaving and back to Chris. He ducks his head. "I know you told me to wait at the hotel, but... I got nervous." Jensen looks at Chris from under his lashes, and he wrings his hands together.

Chris has no fucking clue what to say.

"Say, it's all right, baby," Columbus yells into his ear.

"It's all right, baby," Chris says.

Jensen gives him a tremulous smile. He walks over and, after another glance at Weaving, settles himself on Chris' lap. Chris puts his arms around Jensen and tries to not swallow his tongue.

"Well, now," Weaving says. His face looks a bit red. "This is unexpected."

"We need to get away," Jensen says. "If Jared catches us, he'll-"
"Kill you?" Weaving asks.

"He'll kill Chris," Jensen says. "I don't think I'd be that lucky."

Weaving stares at them. Chris gives Jensen a squeeze. Jensen's eyes well up and he rests his head against Chris' hair. Chris hears Jensen sniff a few times. Chris goes ahead and lets the stomach-churning nervousness he's feeling show on his face.

"You were right, Mr. Weaving," Chris says. He ignores the little pinch Jensen gives to the back of his neck. He's got this now. "I'm not normally the type to turn traitor. But I'm in love with him, so what am I supposed to do? I need money, protection, somewhere to hide."

"And in exchange for all that?" Weaving asks.

"I'll tell you everything." Chris squeezes Jensen again. "We'll tell you everything."

"I see." Weaving frowns and is silent for longer than Chris likes. "Very well," he says finally. "I need to speak with my employer. Meet me back here tomorrow night." Weaving nods once.

Chris knows a dismissal when he hears one. "C'mon, babe," he says, helping Jensen to his feet. He puts an arm around Jensen's shoulders and keeps him close as they leave the club. When they exit into the cool night air, Jensen stays plastered to Chris' side.

After they walk about a block, Jensen nuzzles into Chris' neck.

"We're being followed," he says.

Chris nods, ever so slightly. He'd expected that. He does not, however, expect Jensen to shove him against a nearby building.

And he really doesn't expect Jensen to press in tight and kiss him.

Chris has enough presence of mind to clutch Jensen to him as every molecule of his body squirms in terror. It's the least sexy kiss Chris has ever had, and when Jensen finally pulls away, he's pretty sure he's lost at least ten years of his life.

"All right," Jensen says. "I think they left." He raises one eyebrow and gives Chris a critical look. "You okay?"

Chris whimpers.

Jensen takes Chris's arm and pats gently at his bicep. "Yeah, let's get you back to the safehouse."

After a few more blocks, Chris manages to find his voice again. "So, thanks for that."

"Any time, man."

"What about Weaving's-"

"Don't worry; I've got a plan."

"Oh, that's good," Chris says. "Does that plan include keeping Jared from killing me?"

Jensen pokes at Chris' stomach. "Don't be such a baby."

Chris whimpers again.
Valentine's Day one year later. Jensen's heart is in the right place.

Jensen pauses, every muscle in his body taunt and ready. He wills his heart rate to slow, and his ears strain, trying to pick up any noise that might indicate someone has discovered his location. There are the distant sounds of an active household, but beyond that nothing to suggest he's in any immediate danger of being found. Satisfied that his position is secure - for the moment, at least - he relaxes and commences his operation.

With a diet soda in one hand and a bag of Milano cookies in the other, Jensen lets himself fall backwards onto the overstuffed couch in his and Jared's private living room. He grins and wriggles his butt, sinking deeper into the cloud-like cushion, and momentarily discards his cookies for the remote to the DVR.

Even though everyone in the organization now knows about his past, Jensen still doesn't like to get overly involved with Jared's business. It's not that he doesn't enjoy cracking skulls or watching the light slowly fade from an enemy's eyes, but since retiring, he’s discovered a particular affinity for leisure activities. What had started out as affectations for his new role of 'Well Kept, Trophy Boyfriend' were actually enjoyable. Jensen found himself liking the spa, and shopping in boutiques, and playing a few rounds down at the club. It was... fun. Clean fun. Fun that didn't require him to spend twenty minutes trying to get blood out from under his fingernails.

But over the past month or so Jared and his people had run into trouble. There was a new organization trying to muscle its way into town, and Dobrev and her crew were hoping to accomplish that by taking Jared and his crew out.

Needless to say, Jensen had been busy.

Now, though, for the first time in weeks, Jensen has found himself with a few free hours, and he's going to spend them enjoying the hell out of a couple of guilty pleasures.

He's got his cookies opened and the last two episodes of 30 Rock ready and waiting when Jensen feels the atmosphere in the room change. A half second later he hears two sets of footfalls. "Go away," he says loudly. "I don't care what's happened. I don't care who's dead, or who needs to be dead. I'm having me time."

"Uh huh," Chris says. "Oooh, cookies!"

Jensen clutches the bag of Milanos to his chest and snarls. "Get your own, Evans."
Chris looks wounded. "You won't let me have one cookie?"

"No. What part of 'me time' do you two not get?"

"The part where the scary assassin actually used the words me time."

Columbus reaches around the back of Jensen's head to soundly smack the back of Chris'. "Sorry about that," he says to Jensen. "We just wanna know one thing, and then we'll get out of your hair. Promise." He holds up two fingers in a scout salute.

Jensen sighs. "Fine. Speak."

"We're just curious about what you have planned for Monday," Columbus says.

"There's money riding on it," Chris adds.

"Monday?" Jensen blinks. He hasn't really been planning anything in advance, preferring to act as more of a guided missile than to set up any long term intimidation campaign. Still, there's one answer that's a pretty safe bet. "Uh, I'm... killing someone?"

"Really?" Columbus looks skeptical. "A repeat?"

"I gotta agree," Chris says. "If you give Jared the same thing every year - even if it's a totally awesome, and amazing, and badass thing - it'll start to lose its meaning, you know?"

"No, I don't." Jensen honestly doesn't. In fact he's pretty sure there's a whole level to this conversation that he's missing.

"You could always go the classic route," Columbus says. "Flowers and candy, nothing wrong with that."

Chris scoffs. "Except for being horrifically lame."

"No, they're classic."

"Lame."

"Classic!"

"Lah-hame!"

"What the hell are you two talking about?!"

Chris and Columbus share a look. Chris frowns. "Jensen, you do know what Monday is, right?"

"Yes! No. Monday?"

"It's Valentine's Day." Columbus says slowly.

"What, again?! Didn't we just have one of those... about..." Jensen thinks back. "A year ago?" he finishes weakly.

"Yeah." Chris gives him a wan smile. "It's kind of an annual thing."

"Son of a bitch. Jared's gonna want something incredible, isn't he?"

"Well," Columbus says with a shrug, "the precedent has been set."
Jensen can't help but remember the look on Jared's face when he saw that package on his desk. Sure, he saw Jared's happy face often enough - it was kind of the big guy's default expression - but the look of absolute joy when Jared realized that Jensen had gotten him a present for something other than Christmas or his birthday was, well, something Jensen wouldn't mind seeing again. "Okay," Jensen says. "Monday. Present. I can do this."

"That's a trooper!" Chris claps Jensen on his shoulder and grins, then yelps as his hand is grabbed in a tight and rather painful manner. "The hell, man?"

"You're coming with me."

"What?! Why?"

"Later, man," Columbus says as he quickly makes his exit.

"Because you tried to steal my cookies," Jensen says. "And, also, I'm not that... you know, when it comes to relationships."

"Normal? OW!"

"Well-versed in the traditional lovey dovey aspects. Jackass." Jensen releases Chris' fingers. "Now, where should we start?"

Chris cradles his hand against his chest. "Trust me, I know just the place."

"I'm really very, very sorry I hurt your hand. Can we please leave now?"

Chris sneers. "What's the matter, Jensen? Not liking the mall on a Saturday?"

"I keep forgetting what a complete bastard you can be."

"It's the baby blues," Chris says, batting his lashes. "You can't help but be lulled."

"Uh huh." Jensen looks around. There's a disproportionate number of teenager in the crowd. He shudders. "Seriously, can we go?"

"Not until we exhaust all possibilities." Chris wraps his arm around Jensen's shoulder and walks him over to the directory board. "Okay, we have got the Apple Store?"

"He already has an i-everything."

"Brookstone?"

"Ugh."

"Gamestop?"

"That's romantic."

"Hollister?"

"You do know he's pushing thirty, right?"
"Jared: the Galleria of Jewelry?"

"I hate you."

"Build-a-Bear Workshop?"

"Did I mention hating you?"

Chris throws his hands into the air. "Well, you pick something! I am blessedly single; this is your show."

Jensen peers at the directory. "A repeat of last year is looking more and more likely." He looks hopefully at Chris. "I carve and you scoop?"

"Gross. And, no."

"Fine." Jensen squares his shoulders and stands a little straighter. He gets his game face on. "Let's do this."

"Well?"

"It's a... sweater."

"Yeah."

"You want to get your boyfriend a sweater for Valentine's Day?"

"It's a nice sweater!"

"Okay."

"It is!"

"I'm agreeing with you. Except not really."

"I mentioned the whole hating you thing, right?"

"Yep."

"Jensen, no."

"But-"

"I said no."

"It's practical!"

"It's a nose hair trimmer; put it down."
"Does he need a motorized tie rack?"

"Does anyone need a motorized tie rack?"

"It's an ergonomic pepper mill!"

"I was wrong. Maybe we should rethink the whole human heart thing."

"A jewelry store? Really?" Chris looks skeptical. "I was kidding about that earlier."

"I'll buy him a nice watch," Jensen says firmly. "You know how much he likes watches."

Without waiting for an affirmative from Chris, he marches into the brightly lit store. A multitude of cases containing various shiny baubles compete for his attention. They're saved from having to navigate things themselves by the arrival of a woman in a smart navy blue suit.

"May I help you, sirs?" she asks, a professional smile already pasted on her face.

"Yes," Jensen says, glancing at Chris, "I'm looking for a present for my boyfriend."

"Ah, I see." The woman leans close to Jensen and says in a conspiratorial manner, "he's very handsome."

"What?" Chris chuckles. "Oh, no, I'm not his... Well, I am on his exception list, which I'm totally cool with now, by the way, Oh, and there was that one time in Amsterdam, but there were major extenuating circumstances in that case, and we kind of had to do some things that were... see, there was this guy who was trying to..." Chris clears his throat. "But his actual boyfriend was totally cool with it. I think. Hasn't killed me yet." He looks back and forth between the slightly shell-shocked expression on the woman's face, and the murderous one on Jensen's. "TMI?"

"You know, you still could have gotten something from in there. We didn't have to leave just because the sales associate thought you were a bigamist."

"Shut. Up."

Three hours - and countless stores - later, they've left the mall. The sun has begun it's slow crawl
towards the west, and while Jensen logically knows there are more stores to be found and more possible gifts to agonize over, his mind is telling him to give up while the getting's good. There's no way to win this. Jensen thinks he's just... *missing* that vital component that lets other people in relationships be so adept at gift-giving. And he knows if he keeps on this path he'll start doubting what it is Jared even sees in him. If he hasn't already.

But he still needs to give Jared *something* on Monday.

"So, we've come to the end of the road," Chris says, staring out through the windshield. "The last bastion of the hopeless and the desperate." He turns to Jensen and raises an eyebrow. "Wal-mart, huh?"

"I... I don't know where else to go." Jensen rubs a hand over his eyes. "Flowers and candy are classics."

"No, they're still lame."

"What about a bunch of candy. Like, an aisle of candy? Is that lame? 'Cause I think Jared would think that was kind of awesome."

"Jen..." Chris unhooks his seatbelt and maneuvers himself until he's facing Jensen directly. "You're a smart guy, so I really don't have to say that Jared's gonna love whatever you give him because *you're* the one giving it to him, do I?"

Jensen can almost feel Chris' words sink into his skull. There's a truth there that's so plain and simple it nearly knocks him sideways. "You couldn't have mentioned that five hours ago?"

"You needed the journey, my friend. Plus, you were a total bitch to me with the hand thing this morning. It's called payback." Chris pats Jensen's knee. "Now, you think it over; I'm gonna go in and get my very own bag of cookies. Oooh, I wonder if they have Sausalitos."

Jensen's fingers spasm on the steering wheel. For a second, just one second, he thinks about driving off and making Chris find his own way home. He waits, though, because that's what a friend does.

"I should have gotten the sweater," he says after a few moments. "Jared would have liked that sweater." Jared will like that sweater, Jensen decides. He'll brave the mall again. For Jared. And he has a game plan now; it won't be that bad.

Feeling relaxed for the first time since he left Liz Lemon in the living room, Jensen lets his head rest against the back of the seat, and he lazily takes in his surroundings. There's a home improvement store at the other end of the shopping center, and a half dozen smaller shops placed in between. What catches his eye though, are a group of people milling around outside one of the stores near the middle of the promenade. Jensen narrows his eyes and tries to figure out what sort of gathering it is. The answer, when it comes, makes his heart skip a beat with the perfection of it all.

Jensen's a killer at this Valentine's Day thing.

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Monday dawns clear, and gorgeous, and *quiet*.

Jensen visited Dobrev's two lieutenants the previous night and brokered a temporary treaty - or put the fear of holy hell into them, whichever - and now he's slowly toweling off after a nice, long,
reinvigorating shower. A pungent scent hits his nose, and he quickly ducks and sidesteps as Jared's sweaty arms make a grab for him.

"Aww," Jared says, "come on. I thought we could shower together. It's Valentine's Day." His lips puff out in a ridiculous pout.

"Nice try, Sasquatch, but daylight's burning. Besides, if you wanted to shower together you should have skipped your workout."

"Yeah, right." Jared pats his flat stomach. "Do you have any idea of how many calories I'm gonna put away today?" He peels off his tee shirt then lets his hands linger at the low-slung waistband of his track pants. "Sure you don't want to-"

Jensen throws his used towel at Jared's head. "You stink, Padalecki." He bites his cheek to suppress the grin that wants to form at the sound of Jared's muffled grumbles. He slips out of the bathroom and, after waiting until the water starts, picks up his phone to shoot a text to Chris.

When Jared gets out of the shower there's a large baby pink box with a glittery red bow sitting in the middle of their bed.

Jared's face lights up. "Jensen, you..." He pauses, a look of distaste stealing over his features. "You put it on the bed? It's not gonna leak, right? I like that duvet."

Jensen rolls his eyes. "No, it's not gonna leak. Well, it shouldn't. You might want to open it sooner rather than later."

Jared huffs. "I appreciate the sentiment, Jensen, don't get me wrong, but-"

The box rocks a bit and moves about half an inch across the bedspread.

Jared yelps and jumps backward. "Oh, sweet Jesus, it's still alive?!"

"Just open the damn box, Jared."

Jared inches towards the bed. The box moves again, and he freezes. He only starts moving again after Jensen clears his throat and gives him a rather pointed look. He reaches the box, gulps, sets his jaw, and lifts the lid.

Chris leans against the wall outside Jared and Jensen's bedroom, and he can't help but grin at the happy sounds that are carrying through wood and plaster. Normally he wouldn't even think about spying, but since he's the one who had taken care of the little mongrel since Saturday, he figures it's his due.

He'd rather not get caught, though, so when the laughs and excited chatter start to die down, he decides to take his leave. As he walks past he lets his fingers rest momentarily against the wood of their door. "Happy Valentine's, guys."
Chapter Summary

Jensen has a rotten day, Jared tries to help, and everyone else makes bets on the effectiveness of Misha's ability to make nefarious plans.

"Why does everybody think I'm a whore?!"

Jared, along with Chad and the Security Team, look up in surprise at Jensen's very un-Jensen-like entrance.

Chris opens his mouth and abruptly closes it again when Oscar's fingers dig into his forearm.

The Spaniard shakes his head sharply. "No."

"It's probably because of your mouth," Chad says. "Motherfuck!" He winces as one of Jared's huge paws clips him upside his head.

Jared shakes out his stinging hand - he always forgets how hard Chad's skull is - and rounds his desk to offer a consoling hug to his boyfriend. "What's the matter, baby? Did someone make a disparaging remark? Do you want me to kill them?" He pets Jensen's hair. "I could maim them. I'm really good at maiming."

"Nice save, boss," Chris says in a stage whisper. Chad mimes sticking a finger down his throat, while Idris looks even more disgusted than he normally does, and Jeff and Columbus look kind of like they would greatly appreciate having the floor swallow them whole. Oscar simply crosses his arms over his chest and shakes his head at the whole sad, sorry lot of them.

Jensen pinches the bridge of his nose. "I'm just going to take that in the spirit it was offered, and say thank you.

"Anyway," Jared says loudly, "I think it might be time to send Agent Whitfield a little message." He frowns. "Nobody messes with what's mine"
"While the whole possessive thing does get me all a' tingle," Jensen says with a smirk, "Misha said he'll take care of it. Whitfield won't know it's in retaliation for what he did to me, but the next few weeks of his life are gonna be torture."

"Oooh, what's he gonna do?" Chris asks with blatant and unholy glee. He, like everyone else who had met the turncoat Fed - except for Idris, the disgruntled bastard - was absolutely enamored by Misha's unique brand of batshit insanity. The guy was just as nutty as the rest of them, but because he had to keep it bottled up while walking the straight and narrow line of law enforcement, his psychosis had fermented in new and interesting ways.

"He called Whitfield's mother and hinted that her son was feeling extra stressed and might need some quality coddling for while."

Jared scowls. "That sounds incredibly lame."

"True," Jensen says, "and if anyone else had come up with it, I'd agree with you. But, it's Misha. There has to be something evil about it." Jensen moves to Jared's side and plasters himself against the big man. He cranes his neck and plants a soft kiss on the side of Jared's mouth. "Have faith."

One of Jared's hands automatically gravitates to Jensen's very not-saggy behind. "Fine. But if it's not suitably horrific I reserve the right to have Idris practice his carving skills."

Idris perks up.

"A hundred bucks on Misha coming through," Chris says. Idris gives him a truly impressive stink-eye, and the blonde quickly ducks behind a still unimpressed Oscar.

"Two hundred says he won't," Chad says. "And I'm not just betting that way because I think Idris is a scary motherfucker who needs kills like some people need Prozac." Chad's grins. Idris glowers. Chad whimpers.

"Oh, no," Jeff says, "we are not starting another betting pool. Or am I the only one who remembers what happened after March Madness? There are sore losers, and then there are sore losers with an unlimited access to lethal weapons and little to no moral code."

Columbus side-eyes Oscar then jerks his head towards Idris. Oscar shakes his head and uses his pointer finger to draw a little 'M' in the air.

Jeff throws his hands up. "Fine. Whatever. But don't come to me if any of you need stitches."

"Awesome," Jared says distractedly. He's not sure when his hand went from simply resting on Jensen's ass to rhythmically squeezing it, but the firm, denim encased flesh is giving him ideas. Granted, just about everything of Jensen's gives him ideas. Hell, even the guy's toes are hot; how does that make sense? "I have no idea what any of you are talking about, but I'm about to sex up my boyfriend, so y'all might want to take your leave now."

Jensen's giving him the come-hitherest of come-hithery looks, and if the others don't exit the room posthaste, they're gonna get one hell of a show.

"What?!"

"Oh, man."

"Great. There goes the meeting."
"I'm good here."

"Evans! Get your ass out that door. Goddammit, I have got to look into retirement."

The door has barely closed before Jensen is climbing Jared like a tree. Jared has a moment, as Jensen's legs wrap around his waist, to thank every pound he's ever benched because he keeps them upright even as Jensen latches onto that sweet spot on the side of his neck.

"Spent hours listening to Whitfield go on and on about how you're using me," Jensen says between licking and sucking on Jared's throat. "At first I was pissed, but then I started getting so hot, thinking about all the times you actually have used me. Misha caught me trying to hide a boner. He thought it was hilarious, the fucker."

Jared spins around and smoothly deposits Jensen on his desk. Jensen's legs stay locked around Jared's waist, keeping their hips snug together.

"Please, never use the words 'Misha' and 'boner' in the same sentence again," Jared says, as his fingers start to work on buttons and zippers.

Jensen stretches his arms above his head and keeps them there. He looks so deliciously debauched, and he's not even half way naked yet. "And if I do?" he asks, a challenge clear in his voice.

Jared's hopes there isn't any pressing business he needs to attend to, because he's pretty sure sating the absolutely wicked look in Jensen's eyes is going to take the rest of the day. And maybe the evening. And possibly into the night. Jared wonders how pissed Jensen would be if he ducked out for some energy bars.

_______

"Ay, oou don ink eff eans 't ooo oou?"

Jensen pauses in his own pre-bedtime routine to frown at Jared. "Spit, then talk. And wipe down the mirror; you got flecks all over it."

Jared obeys and admires his pearly whites for a moment before he says again, "You don't think Jeff means it, do you? About retirement?"

"Nah," Jensen says, running a washcloth over his face, "if Jeff left us what would he have to bitch about?" He leans over the sink and peers at his reflection in the mirror. He makes a few odd faces then says, "I'm thinking about maybe growing a beard."

Jared starts. "You mean like on your face?" He rolls his eyes and resists the urge to smack himself on the head. "First, shut up. Second, why would you want to do that?"

Jensen snorts, then his face grows pensive. "I don't know, just...For something different. Maybe."

"But you look-" Oh. "Jen, Whitfield is a moron. A moron that you could kill with one hand tied behind your back using just a paperclip and a rubber band."

"Who needs paperclips," Jensen scoffs.

"Don't try and deflect," Jared says. "Please, please tell me you aren't thinking of changing how you look just because he thinks that you-"
"Charge by the hour?" Jensen says ruefully. "He's not the only one, though. Chad spent years thinking I was for rent. So did Jeff. For that matter, so did you when we first met."

"In my defense, you did show up in my hotel room while I was in the shower, looking all hot and sexy."

Jensen grins. "And then I kicked your ass."

Jared sighs fondly. "And then you kicked my ass." He takes one of Jensen's hands and lightly presses a kiss against the knuckles. "And then we fell in love."

"If you want to do the massively abridged version of how we got together, then yeah, that's exactly what happened."

"The whole story takes too long," Jared says. "It's late, and I'm tired. Somebody wore my ass out earlier today."

"Really?" Jensen raises one eyebrow. "Your ass got worn out?"

"Semantics," Jared says as he sidles up behind Jensen, wrapping his arms around the smaller man's waist and nuzzling into his neck. Jensen leans his head back against Jared's shoulder while his hands rest on Jared's forearms. For a few long, blissful minutes they do nothing but hold each other and breathe.

While Jared dearly loves how they spent that afternoon and part of the evening, it's time like these that make his heart feel far too big for his chest.

The chime of Jensen's cell phone pulls them from their repose. Jensen extricates himself from Jared's arms and walks into the bedroom and to his nightstand. He slides his thumb across the touchscreen and raises his eyebrows. "It's a message from Misha," he says.

Jared looks at his alarm clock and frowns. "Does he know what time it is?"

"I don't know. Do you know how old you sound?" Jensen taps on the screen a few times then his eyes grow wide. "Oh, my God..."

Jared, concerned, starts to move towards him, but he stops when Jensen throws his head back and practically erupts with laughter. When Jared realizes no answers are forthcoming - Jensen's howling so hard he's wheezing - he makes a grab for Jensen's phone. There, on the screen, is an obviously clandestinely taken picture of Whitfield and an older woman at what looks to be some kind of theme restaurant.

Jared looks at the image. "Is she..."

"Cutting up his meat? Yes." Jensen manages to get out.

"And are those..."

"Bright pink lipstick marks on his forehead? Yes."

"And is he..."

"Looking like he wants nothing more than to stuff his gun in his mouth and end his misery? That would be another yes."
"Holy crap," Jared says. "Misha's an evil genius." Idris might have made Whitfield hurt and bleed, but this, *this* would draw out his suffering like nothing else.

"Chris and Oscar are gonna make some money," Jensen muses.

"Huh?"

"Never mind." Jensen cocks his head to one side. "My honor, for what it’s worth, has been avenged, kind of, and not one drop of blood was spilt. That seems so wrong."

"Would you like me to find someone for you to kill?"

Jensen purses his lips. "Maybe."

Jared grins. "The things I do for love."
You really shouldn't fuck with Jensen's boyfriend.

Not betad, grammarians beware.

Violence, death of unnamed goons, references to Jensen's 'work', though nothing onscreen.

Jared is pissed.

His hands are behind him, wrists tightly secured by cuffs, exacerbating what he's pretty sure is a dislocated shoulder. His left eye stings, and there's blood sticking in his lashes from a gash on his forehead. His ass has gone numb from the hard and unyielding metal chair he's tethered to. And, as the craptastic icing on the shitcake of his current predicament, his nose is itching like crazy.

He's also more than a little woozy - he's not sure if that's from the head wound or if they drugged him while he was unconscious - which, along with the being bound thing, is going to make killing all these sons-of-bitches kind of difficult. Hell, Jared's not even sure how many of them there are since, unless he's been kidnapped by a gang comprised entirely of twins, he thinks he might be seeing double.

"Gonna... kill... fuckers..." Jared manages to get out. He scowls mightily when his prediction is met with laughs instead of the fear it so appropriately deserves.

The kidnappers don't address him directly, but the chatter amongst themselves increases. Jared doesn't recognize the language, but in his scrambled mind it sounds like something one might find in Eastern Europe. "Moose and squirrel," he mutters darkly. Then he chuckles because that shit was funny. Except it really wasn't, and something is seriously wrong with his head.

Jared lets his chin rest against his chest. He takes a few slow, deep breathes and tries to remember what happened.

The first thing that pops into his mind is a face, beloved and precious. Jared's heart skips a beat. Jensen. Where the hell's Jensen?!

Before Jared can panic too badly a memory comes through with startling clarity. Jensen had opted to spend his afternoon playing a few rounds of golf with Tommy. Jared had pouted, but let Jensen go with minimal fuss, knowing that a few hours spent cooped up in the back room of one of Mike's clubs listening to earning projections and growth possibilities would make the ex-assassin one unhappy camper.
That's it. They had been coming back from Mike's club. Jared had been in the back of one of the Mercedes while Idris drove and Jeff lounged in the passenger seat. Then...

Wait. What happened then?

Jared absentmindedly starts to chew on his lower lip. They were in the club, then they were in the car, then...

Oh, crap. Somebody hit them.

It's fuzzy and distant, but Jared can remember Jeff yelling and Idris cursing and trying to swerve as a big, black Hummer came out of nowhere. Jared hadn't been wearing a seatbelt, and the impact had turned him into a pinball.

Well, at least now he knows where his head trauma came from, not to mention possibly the rest of his injuries.

Anger runs through Jared, hot and heavy, at not just what these assholes did to him, but to his people as well. Not to mention the car. He loved that car.

Jared bites down on the inside of his cheek. He needs to focus. He knows Jensen's coming - that's a complete no-brainer - but he doesn't know how long it might take. Even if Jeff and Idris survived the crash - please, God - there's no guessing what kind of shape they might be in, or what kind of information they'd be able to share. The worst case scenario has Jared waiting it out while Jensen slices and dices his way through Jared's rather impressive enemies list until he finds the right one.

At least, since they took him alive, Jared thinks he might have a little time to work with.

Jared keeps his head down, but he lets his eyes scan the area he's being held in. It's big, possibly part of some kind of warehouse. There are windows high up in the walls, at least fifteen feet off the ground. Even if Jared had the means and wherewithal to reach them, he's pretty sure he wouldn't be able to get his shoulders through. His eyes continue their trek. There's a door - metal and solid-looking - set into the wall just beyond where the thugs are playing some sort of card game. About ten feet to the right of them there's another table pushed up against the wall that's covered in all sorts of handguns and rifles. Wherever they've taken him, the thugs feel safe here. Morons.

There's the sound of a plane taking off, and Jared's eyes automatically flit upwards. He doesn't see the plane, obviously, but he does see a skylight which, like every other possible escape route, doesn't do him a whole hell of a lot of good.

Jared sighs and wonders if he should try playing the bathroom card yet or if he should wait until he might be a little less likely to fall over. He blinks a few times and notices that his vision has cleared a bit, which is a good because he's treated to a beautiful sight.

There's a red laser beam cutting through the air. He follows the trail of it from one of the windows straight down to a rather burly thug's head.

Jared grins, and it's not a very nice expression at all.

Two things then happen that both brighten Jared's day considerably. From somewhere outside a bullet is fired that travels along the path of the laser right into the thug's skull, the back of which explodes in a mist of blood, brain, and bone.

And Jensen crashes through the skylight.
Jared's still stuck to the chair so all he can do is kind of wriggle with glee as he watches his badass boyfriend completely dismantle his kidnappers. In one smooth move Jensen releases himself from his harness then pivots to kick one guy in the face while simultaneously drawing a throwing knife with his right hand. The blade ends up buried in the neck of another thug, but before he even falls, two more weapons are flying through the air and hitting their targets with satisfying thumps.

Four out of the five remaining thugs scurry to the weapon's table, trying to arm themselves before Jensen draws his own gun from the holster strapped to his thigh.

Jared knows it's beyond inappropriate to get turned on in a situation like this, especially since the fifth thug is now holding something sharp against his windpipe, but dear Lord, a *thigh holster*.

Four sharp cracks echo through the warehouse, then Jensen smoothly swings his aim to the man standing just behind Jared.

"The only reason you're still alive is because I need you for information," Jensen says calmly.

"Oh," the thug says, "so it has nothing to do with this?"

Jared feels whatever the man is holding slip into his skin. The intrusion is shallow but deep enough that he can plainly feel blood start to run down his skin to the collar of his shirt.

Jensen doesn't appear to react to the threat at all. But for someone who knows Jensen, it's oh so easy to see the fury bubbling just beneath his chilled facade.

Someone's going to die messy, and it's not going to be Jared.

"You have two options," Jensen says. "You either move away from Jared, put down your weapon, and answer all my questions like a good little goon, or the man standing behind you will fire his taser and make you piss yourself."

The pressure on Jared's throat disappears as the thug starts to turn. There's a shriek and the sharp smell of ozone, then the sound of a body hitting the floor.

"Dumbass," Columbus says. "You alright, boss?"

"How..." Jared feels a gentle hand touch his shoulder. He thinks he's confused again, then he sees the door he had noticed before. It's standing wide open.

"We snuck in while Jensen was doing his ninja routine," Columbus says. He grunts. "All right, this one's ziptied and secured."

We? Jared swings his vision around to see Chris rifling through the pockets of one of the corpses.

"Ha! Found the keys."

Chris throws them to Jensen who catches them without a glance. All his attention is focused on Jared, and there's this horrible, almost tragic, look on his face. He clears his throat. "Chris, help Columbus get our friend into the trunk." He slowly walks to Jared and leans over, pressing their foreheads together.

Jared just breathes for a moment, letting everything - the pain in his shoulder, the wooziness in his head, the frightened cries from his erstwhile kidnapper - fade away.

Jensen kisses the crown of his head, then moves around behind Jared's chair and begins removing his
restraints. "Just so you know, Doc Ferris is already standing by at the medical center, and if you even think about saying anything macho like 'I'm fine,' you're going to be sleeping on the couch for a whole damn month."

"I am fine." Jared smiles, but before Jensen can get too indignant, he adds, "I mean, my shoulder's fucked, and I'm pretty sure I've got a concussion, but..." Jared lets the hand belonging to his non-injured arm wrap around one of Jensen's. "You're here."

For one glorious moment Jensen looks not only startled, but shy, and ridiculously pleased all at once. Then his expression clears and settles into one of comfortable mockery. "Instead of losing all respect for you, I'm just going to blame that on the head wound, okay?"

Jared grins. "Kay."

"Can you walk?"

"Um..." Jared seriously ponders the question.

"Yeah, I'm gonna take that as a no. Hang tight, let me get Chris."

Jared starts to nod, then thinks better of it. "I'll be here," he says. "Wait, Jen?"

"Yeah?"

Jared swallows. "Jeff and Idris, are they..."

"Pretty banged up, but they were feeling good enough to call me names when I nixed their plans to come with. Sam threatened them with catheters if they didn't voluntarily stay in bed. It was hilarious. I think Chris got a video of it on his phone." Jensen palms the side of Jared's head. "Jeff said he'd kick my ass if I didn't get you back."

"And you let him live?" Jared asks, only half jokingly.

"He was scared," Jensen says quietly, letting his thumb stroke over Jared's temple. "We all were."

Jared leans ever so slightly into his touch and holds Jensen's gaze with his own. "I wasn't." He doesn't have to say the rest. Jensen already knows.

Jensen leans over and kisses Jared with just enough force to let him know the message was received. "Dork," he whispers fondly.

"Oh, my God!" Chris says. He's standing by the door with his hands on his hips and a look of faux exasperation clear on his face. "I should have known when you guys didn't come out right away that you had stopped for some nookie."

"Shut up, you ass, and help me get Gigantor here out to the car."

Chris nods and moves around to Jared's non-injured side. He and Jensen carefully help Jared stand. Spots dance in front of Jared's eyes but before he can feel himself do more than slightly sway, hands tighten around unbruised parts of his flesh.

"We gotcha," Jensen says softly. "Just concentrate on moving your feet; we'll keep you upright."

Despite everything Jared finds himself giggling. "I love you guys."

"Uh..." Chris looks at Jensen. "Concussion?"
"Oh, yeah."

"Can I record this?"

"For laughs or blackmail purposes?"

"Oh, strictly for laughs." Chris thinks for a moment. "Or possibly a raise."

"Eh," Jensen says shrugging, "sure."

"I take it back," Jared huffs, "you guys suck."

Jensen waits until Jared has been poked, prodded, declared 'mostly well', and medicated before he leaves to take care of his unfinished business. Chris and Columbus are staying at the clinic, and Jensen knows that between the two of them - not to mention Jeff and Idris in the next room, and Sam who can be a bit of a bear when it comes to protecting her patients - that Jared's as safe as he can be. Jensen still worries, though. He can't help it. Though he should be able to exorcise some of those frustrations soon enough.

The warehouse he pulls up to is well-maintained, yet nondescript, and registered through such a complex series of dummy corporations, Jensen wouldn't be surprised if most people in the organization didn't even know of its existence. Jensen unlocks the outer door, slips inside, then locks it behind him. He takes a sharp right, goes through another door, then down a staircase. There are several more doors set into the long hallway, but Jensen is going to the one at the very end.

He knocks sharply, just once. The door opens, and the first thing Jensen sees is Chad's worried face. Oscar's is right behind him.

"He's gonna be fine," Jensen murmurs.

Chad's face almost crumples, but he holds it together. Oscar closes his eyes. He takes a deep breath, releases it slowly, and when he opens his eyes any trace of relief or compassion is gone.

"How's our birdie?" Jensen asks, walking further into the room.

The surviving - for now - thug is secured to a chair positioned right over a drain in the metal floor. Jensen's toolkit is beside him. A leather apron is carefully folded on top of it. There's an industrial sized sink against the far wall with a stack of towels and what Jensen recognizes as a change of clothes laying on a stand beside it. Underneath the stand is a roll of plastic sheeting. Good. Chad and Oscar had obviously been listening to his instructions.

"Oh, he's been singing up a storm," Chad says.

"You get names?" Jensen asks.

"Several."

Jensen scowls.

"Anyway," Chad says, "he's all yours. I hope you don't mind if I skip the festivities."

"Wait, wait!" the thug says, eyes wide and spittle flying from his mouth. "I've told you everything I
know. I swear! There's no point in torturing me for more information; I have nothing more to give!"

Jensen chuckles. "I believe you. I know, regardless of what the CIA claims, that intel retrieved that way is notoriously unreliable. No, I'm going to torture you for retribution."

The man opens his mouth wide, probably to start screaming, but he doesn't get a chance because Oscar shoves a rag in there first. He then pulls a roll of duct tape from somewhere and securely fastens the gag by winding a strip around the thug's head a few times.

"You nearly killed two of my friends," Jensen says. "You kidnapped and threatened the man I love." He cocks his head. "Did you really think there wouldn't be repercussions for those actions?"

Jensen opens his kit and takes out a pair of nitrile gloves. He pulls them on, slowly. "I don't normally enjoy this kind of thing; it tends to get a little too messy for my tastes. But, in your case, I'm going to make an exception. You're going to serve as an example, not just to your former employers, but to anyone else who is stupid enough to think about trying something similar."

Chad snorts. "You are one scary motherfucker, Ackles. Jay's lucky to have you." He shakes his head and smiles ruefully. "We all are. Give me a call when you're done; I'll send over Tigerman and the cleaning crew. Have fun."

Jensen waves his goodbye, then he turns to Oscar. "You don't have to stay either."

Oscar shrugs. "You will need someone to help you with the body once you are done. Besides," he says, eyes dark and cold, "you are not the only one who nearly lost family to this capullo."

Jensen gets it.

"Okay," he says, clapping his hands together, "let's get to work."
Jared's used as leverage to get Jensen to do a job.

Comment fic for gemini8.

Jensen's fairly certain that if he wasn't almost twitching with the desire to peel the skin off of Agent Whitfield's face, he'd probably want to buy the man a drink.

"I'm sorry," Jensen says, leaning against one of the concrete walls of the parking garage, "run that by me again?"

"I want you to kill someone for me," Whitfield says. There's a file in his right hand, and he waves it in front of Jensen's face.

"Yeah, that's what I thought you said." It's not often that Jensen gets thrown for a loop, but he has to admit that he's more than a little surprised by this turn of events. Whitfield arresting Jared was unfortunately kind of par for the course. But Whitfield calling Jensen to set up a meeting in a parking garage to discuss a hit is a little too Twilight Zone for Jensen's comfort.

Whitfield lets out a gusty sigh. "Look, I'll do the whole song and dance if you want me to, but I'd much rather cut to the chase. I've got your boyfriend in custody, and I am fully prepared to use as much taxpayer money as I can to keep him buried."

"Whatever you try and charge him with isn't going to stick," Jensen says. "It never sticks, because you never have anything."

"Maybe not," Whitfield admits. "But I've got a buddy at DHS who owes me a favor. Somehow I think helping me disappear a crime boss won't affect his conscious much." Whitfield grins. "Ah, that's got your attention, hasn't it?"

Jensen's fingers are starting to itch. He can't kill Whitfield here, though. Not yet.

Whitfield nods. "Yeah, you are one scary motherfucker, aren't you? I gotta admit, man, you had me snowed. Damn. It took me a while, to find your pattern - and you do have a pattern. And then it took me a little longer to realize that Padalecki hadn't hired any new talent. That the person who was so quickly and so efficiently running through his enemies was you."

"If you don't mind my asking," Jensen says, "how'd you figure it out?"

"I'm a Special Agent," Whitfield says. "It's my job."

Jensen inclines his head slightly. "All right, Special Agent. Who do you want me to kill?"
For the first time, Whitfield looks uncomfortable.

"Come one, Special Agent," Jensen says, "you're halfway there; don't punk out now."

Whitfield scowls and shoves the folder towards Jensen. "Fuck you. Just because you're not the sickest bastard in the city doesn't mean you aren't headed straight to hell with the rest of them."

Jensen frowns, and when he opens the folder he sees what has Whitfield so uncharacteristically upset. "Jesus. This was your case?"

"I'm organized crime," Whitfield says. "The lead was my old partner, though. He's had to take a leave of absence. He just couldn't..." Whitfield glares at Jensen. "Look, you're a murderer, but you're not a monster. That," Whitfield says, pointing at the folder, "is a monster. And if he isn't stopped, then-
"

"Yeah," Jensen says. "I get it." He shuts the folder and tucks it under his arm. "Any preferences on how you want it done?"

"Jesus." Whitfield scrubs a hand over his face. "However you get your rocks off, man."

"Okay." Jensen turns to walk away. He pauses after a few steps, and looks back. "Oh, and Special Agent, if you ever try and use Jared's life as a bargaining chip against me again, regardless of the reason, you'll see how much of a monster I can be." This time when he walks away, Jensen doesn't look back.
Chapter Summary

When the team gets attacked, Jensen goes on the offensive. But is everything - and everyone - really what they seem?

"I'm gonna kill Collins!"

Jensen sighs but doesn't bother to look up from the latest issue of National Geographic. While normally Jared and Jensen prefer to relax in their private living area upstairs, tonight finds them both sacked out in their sleepwear on one of the couches in the communal living room. Their change of location has nothing to do with the fact that it's creeping up on two in the morning and Jeff and the others still haven't gotten back from their 'boys' night' yet. Nope. Nothing at all.

"We'd make awesome parents."

"Shut up, Jared."

"Jared," Jensen says as he turns a page, "this should go without saying, but you're not allowed to kill our FBI informant because he beat you at some word game."

Jared practically bristles with indignity, his iPhone clutched tightly in one hand. "It's not just a word game, Jensen, it's-

"Something I care absolutely nothing about? You're right; that too."

Jared huffs, and pouts, and scrunches himself deeper into the cushions on his end of the couch.

Jensen turns another page and tries to ignore Jared's increasingly lengthy sighs. But, after a particularly impressive exhale, he gives up trying to make any sense out of what had been a very engaging article. Jensen would never admit it, but something just doesn't sit right inside of him when Jared is upset, even if said upset-ness is mostly put on and over something completely silly.

Jensen lowers his magazine enough so he can look over the top of it. He stretches out one leg and lets his sock-covered foot run up along the length of Jared's calf. "Aw, baby," he says, the teasing tone in his voice half amusement, half enticement, "don't be that way."

Jared snorts. Then, in the blink of an eye, his pout is replaced by something far more predatory. He pats his thigh and Jensen sees it for the invitation it clearly is.

Jensen throws his magazine over the back of the couch and twists around until he's on his knees. He starts to crawl up the length of Jared's body, and just when he gets to a very interesting location, the front door bangs open.

Jensen pushes Jared down into the couch and peeks over the back. He relaxes as Chris' voice filters down the hallway, then tenses up again when he hears what that voice is saying.

"Ow! Shit, Oscar, be gentle!"
Jensen and Jared share a look.

"It's about time," Jared says quietly, "but I really wish they wouldn't get their freak on in the foyer."

Jensen thinks neither he nor Jared have a leg to stand on when it comes to hoping others avoid sex in public areas of the house, and he's about to state that opinion when another voice reaches them.

"Oh, shut up," Columbus says.

Their eyebrows shoot up.

"Whoa," Jared whispers. "Threesome?"

"Did not see that coming," Jensen says.

"God, you big baby," Columbus continues, "she barely clipped you. Jeff got his fucking ass kicked."

Jensen and Jared share another look, then both of them vault over the back of the couch and hurry out into the hall.

Chris spots them first. "Oh, hey, guys," he says weakly. He's leaning against the wall and using his right hand to clutch a rapidly reddening towel to his left arm. "You waited up; that's so sweet."

Jensen takes a second to check out the rest of the crew. Chris is the only one bleeding profusely, though Jeff looks beat to hell. Columbus, Oscar and Idris appear unharmed but extremely pissed off.

"What the hell happened?!" Jared demands, compete with arm-waving action.

"Jeff got his ass handed to him by some girl," Idris says, "who then proceeded to wing Chris as she was making her getaway."

"Okay, first of all," Jeff says, swaying on his feet, "she wasn't a girl. I'm not a hundred percent certain she was human. I think she might have been possessed. I'm pretty sure her eyes were completely black." He ends his serious and solemn statement by keeling sharply to the left. Jeff is only saved from faceplanting by Idris' quick reflexes and strong arms.

"Yeah," Jensen says, moving to help Idris, "let's see what you have to say when your pupils are back to being the same size, okay, Champ?"

"Uh, hi," Chris says, "I don't mean to be a whiner, but could we maybe do something about the hole in my arm?"

"Everybody to Sickbay," Jared says. He starts making shooing motions as he ushers the six grown men down the hall. Jensen would find it adorable if he wasn't having trouble keeping Jeff upright - fucker was heavier than he looked.

As they shuffle towards Sickbay - or the 'laundry room', as Jensen likes to call it - Jared peppers the non-concussed or bleeding with questions.

"I don't know who she was, man," Columbus says. "I've never seen her before." There are head shakes and grunts of agreement. "She was kinda cute, in a completely vicious and psychotic way."

There are head nods and more grunts of agreement.

"She had black eyes," Jeff says again. "Dolls' eyes."

"Course she did, mate," Idris says patting Jeff on his chest.
They reach the laundry room and Jeff and Chris get propped up against the washer and dryer, respectively. The far wall holds shelves upon shelves of medical supplies - and the odd box of dryer sheets - and Oscar rifles through the various packs of gauze and disinfectants.

"Should I call Sam?" Jared asks, staring hard at Chris' arm. "I'm gonna call Sam."

"No!" Chris says sharply. "Uh, I mean, no, thank you, that won't be necessary. Jensen can stitch me up. Right Jensen?" He turns his big, baby blues Jensen's way.

Jensen sighs and rolls his eyes. "As long as it's not too serious." Truth be told, he has no desire to deal with a rudely awakened Doc Ferris either. Jensen gingerly moves Chris' hand, then the towel he has pressed against his wound. He peers into the red, creased flesh. "You know cleaning this out is gonna hurt like a bitch, right?"

"Dude, you can Vicodin me any time now."

"Not until I get the full story," Jared says, crossing his arms over his chest and looking deliciously intimidating.

"We were at a club - the one Sheppard runs," Idris says, "and, I don't know, one minute everything was fine. We were having drinks, chatting with a few ladies. Grace, over there," Idris inclines his head towards Chris, "was doing his 'Flailing Around Like a Drunken Monkey' dance routine." Chris extends the middle finger of his right hand. "Then, all of a sudden, the girl Jeff was getting close to went nuts."

"No," Oscar says, "not nuts. It was deliberate. An attack. The way she moved in, got close, that was... calculated."

"You think she targeted Jeff?" Jensen asks before snapping on a pair of gloves and bending back over Chris' arm.

"I think she was targeting all of us," Columbus says. "She worked Jeff over in less than a minute and just when we realized what was going on, she had a gun out and was shooting up the place. She was trained, man. And fast."

"S'true," Idris says. He glances towards Jensen. "Might even be faster than you."

Jensen's not sure if Idris means that as a slight against Jensen's skills, his age, or as just as a simple observation, so he keeps his mouth shut and irrigates Chris' wound.

"Holy fuckballs!"

"Told you it would hurt,"

Chris pants. "Tell me we're gonna kill her."

"Yeah, man," Jensen says quietly, "we're gonna kill her."

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"Shut up, Jared."

Jared, Jensen, and what's left of the security team convene in Jared's office. More questions are asked and answered, and a more complete description is given before the exhausted men go off to get some rest of their own.

The assailant doesn't sound familiar, but Jensen knows where to start looking. He briefly considers going out tonight, but Jared, reading his mind, gives him a quick kiss and tells him to wait until morning.

"Get a least a couple hours of sleep," he says. "Start fresh." Jared pauses, his brow furrowed in thought. "If Oscar's right - and I think he is - if they were specifically targeted, then I don't think you need to worry about having to track her out of the country."

Jensen makes a noncommittal noise. There's something off about the situation, but the answer he's looking for isn't coming to him.

Jensen knows there's no point in chasing after that errant thought tonight, so he lets Jared take his hand and lead him upstairs to their bedroom. Besides, Jared was right; Jensen needs his sleep.

He's going hunting in the morning.

Jensen gets to Sheppard's club at around ten. He parks his bike in the back and takes a moment to study the area, noting several cameras mounted on the surrounding buildings. He sees a lot of grainy footage in his future.

The club doesn't officially open for hours but the door's unlocked when Jensen tries it. He hasn't been in Mark's pseudo English pub a lot over the years - Jared prefers to party at Mike's when they have a night out - but it's not hard to spot the damage their mystery assailant caused the previous night. Jensen feels glass crunch under his boot.

"Hey," he calls out to some random guy carrying a broom, "you missed some."

The guy nods, and Jensen ventures over to the bar. He's not surprised to find Mark there, holding court by the taps. He's having an animated conversation of some sort with two pale, skinny guys and a pretty redhead.

Jensen clears his throat and raises an eyebrow when Mark's gaze swivels toward him.

"I was wondering when you'd get here," Mark says to Jensen. Then, to the trio, "Scram. The grown-ups need to talk."

Jensen nods politely as the men and woman pass, and they all pretend not to size each other up. He takes one of their vacated seats at the bar, leans in, and asks in a low voice, "A bowtie? Really?"

Mark shrugs. "Eh. He thinks it's cool. And, before you ask, no, I don't know who she was." He rubs at a blemish on the wooden bar top. "The boys alright?"

"They will be." Jensen narrows his eyes. "You sure she wasn't familiar?" It's not that he doubts Mark's loyalty; it's just that the Brit has worked with a lot of people over the years. It's a standard assumption that Mark Sheppard knows everyone.
Mark snorts. "I don't know everyone, love." He gives Jensen a shark's grin. "Most everyone, but not everyone everyone." He licks his lips and somehow manages to look even shiffter than normal. "However," he says, "I do know someone who might be able to help you. Bloke showed up not too long before you did this morning; said he'd heard through the grapevine what had happened and offered his assistance."

"Who?"

"First, I want your solemn promise that you will not shoot, stab, or otherwise cause great bodily harm first, and ask questions later."

Jensen's eyes narrow again. "Who, Mark?"

Mark gives him a stern look. "Promise."

"Fine," Jensen huffs, "I solemnly swear I will not fly into a rage and immediately kill your informant. Happy?"


Jensen waves him off as he stands and leaves the bar area. "Yeah, yeah, got it."

Jensen slips through the doorway beside the bar then walks down the darkly paneled hallway to Mark's office. Jensen pauses. He intends on keeping his word, but he's not sure if Mark wrangled a similar promise of out whoever's on the other side of the heavy, wooden door. Deciding that Mark made no mention of not defending himself, Jensen turns the doorknob and slowly eases inside. The reveal of Mark's mystery person is anticlimactic to say the least.

Jensen leans against the doorframe and crosses his arms over his chest. "Milo."

"Jensen." Milo looks the picture of relaxation sitting in one of the two overstuffed leather chairs that flank Mark's desk. "Sheppard told you not to kill me, right?"

"He did request that, yes," Jensen says. "You know who the girl is?"

"Possibly."

Jensen huffs. "Either you do, or you don't."

"Easy, Cowboy," Milo says. "I didn't lay eyes on her myself, but from the description I got, yeah, I'm pretty sure I know her. Well," Milo amends, "I don't know her directly, but..." Milo shifts in the chair, crossing one leg over the other. "See, Adrian's kind of a control freak-"

"No! Really?"

"You're not as cute as Jared thinks you are," Milo says. "Anyway, Adrian likes to keep tabs on his people, even if they leave his organization. The chick ran with an old friend of ours for a while before said friend and his BF decided to move to Napa and take over a winery." Milo cocks his head and gives Jensen the strangest look. It's almost... amiable. "They do tastings every Saturday," Milo says, "and there are a couple B and Bs nearby. You and Jared should head up there for a weekend; it's really romantic."

"I... uh... 'kay." Jensen blinks a few times. "Yeah. The girl?"
"Right. Her name's Zoe Saldana," Milo says. "As far as I can tell, she's a free agent. I don't know why she went after your boys, or who might have sent her." He taps a finger against his knee. "We heard you had a bit of trouble not too long ago; might be the same people."

Jensen makes a noncommittal noise. "There anything else?"

Milo smirks and spreads both hands out in front of him. "That’s not enough?"

"More than I would have thought, actually," Jensen says. "So, I just have one more question."

"Shoot. Not literally, though."

Jensen rolls his eyes. "Why are you being helpful? It's weird."

"Hey, don't worry, we're not looking to hang out and sing Kumbayah around a camp fire," Milo says. "It's just, lately we've heard rumblings."

"What kind of rumblings?" Jensen asks.

"The ones that accompany new players coming into town." Milo shrugs. "Jared's the devil we know, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. Why do you think you and Pasdar are still breathing?" Jensen asks. He and Milo share a smirk. Jensen knows their two organizations will never be anything resembling friendly, and, if pressed, he'd still have no trouble slitting the guy's throat, but he can certainly appreciate a cordial ceasefire when he sees one.

"So," Jensen says, "where exactly is this winery?"

"Since you don't have a self-satisfied look on your face I'm going to assume that my office is still intact," Mark says when Jensen emerges from the back.

"I didn't even give him a papercut," Jensen says. He holds up two fingers. "Scout's honor."

Mark snorts. "You were never a scout."

"No," Jensen pauses as he thinks back, "but I dressed up like one once."

Mark gives him a disturbingly appraising look. "Kinky."

"Unfortunately not," Jensen says. "It was part of a ruse to get close to a mark. Though, it was a good opportunity for me to brush up on my knot skills." He shakes his head. "I'm gonna need to look at your security-"

"Cued up and ready."

"Good. And the cameras from the surrounding buildings are-"

"I sent some people around this morning to collect their footage too. It's all waiting for you."

"Much obliged," Jensen says, smiling and tipping an imaginary hat. "One more thing. Our mutual acquaintance mentioned something about new players in town?"
"Oh, love, there are always new players coming into town."

"Mmmm. There anyone I should be overly concerned about?"

Mark purses his lips and is silent long enough for Jensen to start to get antsy.

"There's a possibility," Mark says, "just a possibility, mind, that there's someone in the area who might, might, be able to give you a run for your money." Mark holds up both hands. "Allegedly.

"An assassin?"

Mark makes a wavy motion with one of his hands. "More like a... fixer, I suppose. I haven't heard any outright threats, but he and his lot have been disproportionately interested in the Padalecki organization. There have been...

"Rumblings?" Jensen offers.

Mark's smile has more than a hint of smarm to it. "I'm sure it's nothing you won't be able to handle, of course."

"Of course," Jensen says. "This fixer got a name?"

"Oh, lots," Mark says. "Probably as many as you do."

Jensen nods. He kinda figured. "Right. Email me a list?"

"'Course." Mark grins. "Happy hunting."

Saldana is surprisingly easy - too easy - to find. Jensen placed a quick call to Misha who made some calls of his own. Jensen only had to wait about half an hour before Misha called back with the requested information and an admonishment to be careful. Saldana had used her own name to rent a warehouse just outside an industrial zone. She was practically screaming 'come find me', and Jensen spends a good twenty minutes sitting a block away from her base debating with himself about calling in some backup.

His instincts tell him to go it alone, though, and Jensen always listens to his instincts.

He scopes the place, then sends a quick text message to Jared before he turns his phone off. He knows he'll probably get hell for it later, but any distraction, especially Jared's ringtone, could prove deadly.

The sun has set by the time Jensen decides to go in. There's a fire escape on the South side of the building, and, after checking for booby traps, he quickly and quietly scales it. Jensen peers inside the first window he comes to, and what he sees gives him pause.

There, sitting on a stool in the middle of the main floor, is Saldana. She has her eyes trained on one of the doors, and her hands are resting, palm down, on her thighs. She looks like she's waiting for something, or someone, but she doesn't appear to be armed. The only way she could be more of a target would be if her shirt had a giant bull's-eye on it.

"Great," Jensen mutters. He watches her for a few minutes, then he uses his elbow to break the glass he was looking through. Saldana flinches, but other than that, she doesn't move.
Jensen rolls his eyes and climbs through the window. The staircase is close by, and Jensen takes his time making his way down to the first floor. He's pretty sure how this is going to play out, even if he has no idea how it's going to end.

"I'm glad he sent you and not the sniper," Saldana says. She almost sounds bored, but Jensen can hear tension in her voice.

"Really?" Jensen asks. "Most people would prefer a bullet to the head rather than something long and drawn out."

She moves her head, slowly, until she's looking at Jensen over her shoulder. "True. But if my skull got perforated then we wouldn't be having this conversation, would we?"

Jensen ambles around the room until he's standing in front of Saldana. She tracks his every movement.

Jensen stares at her. She's pretty - beautiful, even - but there's a wildness in her eyes. Jensen's seen that expression before - prior to finding Jared he occasionally glimpsed it reflected in mirrors.

"You attacked some friends of mine," Jensen says.

"No," Saldana says, "that wasn't an attack."

Jensen raises an eyebrow. "Really? You incapacitated one, shot another-"

"If it had been an attack, I wouldn't have incapacitated beard-guy; I would have broken his neck. And I would have hit blondie in the chest instead of just grazing his arm." She raises an eyebrow of her own. "And you know it."

For a few long moments Jensen simply looks at her. She meets his gaze head on, chin raised, jaw set and defiant.

Finally Jensen says, "Was that the same kind of audition you used to get into your old crew?"

"Didn't have to audition," Saldana says, shaking her head, "we all just kind of... came together."

"Until you fell apart."

Saldana's eyes flash, and Jensen watches her rein herself in. "Yeah," she grits out. "So, you know my story-"

"The gist of it."

"-And I know yours."

Jensen smiles. "I highly doubt that."

"I know enough," Saldana says. "I've been studying you for a while. You're an artist, and not a novice either." She gives him a disturbing grin. "I'm glad you started killing again. Our kind isn't meant to be tamed."

"Our kind? Studying me?" Jensen grimaces. He knows his actions over the past year, ever since he started taking a more active role in Jared's business, had garnered some attention, but he thought had been discrete. At least, to people not in the 'know'. "And, for your information, I was never tamed; I was just kind of... domesticated." He sniffs.
Saldana looks dubious.

"I've never killed for kicks," Jensen says, "only for money. And, an occasional bout of vengeance. Nowadays I only get dirty to defend my home or my family." Jensen inclines his head and stares hard at Saldana. "The family you went after."

"I made a point."

"You made them bleed."

For the first time Saldana looks truly uncomfortable. "That too." She swallows hard then raises her chin. "You gonna kill me, or consider my offer?"

"I don't recall any offer," Jensen says. "Posturing, yes. An offer, no."

"I want in. In the organization, on the team. You know I'd be an asset."

"Uh huh," Jensen says. "Our bonkers quota is already filled, thanks."

"I'm not crazy!" Saldana blinks a few times. "Okay, maybe a little. Or a lot. No more so than anyone else in our line of work." She leans forward on her stool. "The guys you have now, they're good, but they're not like us. And you can't be everywhere at once."

Jensen studies her. She's young, eager, unhinged... He can feel himself waffling.

Saldana bites at her bottom lip then says, "Please. I liked being part of something. And when Zach and Chris left the rest of us tried to keep it together, but, like you said, it fell apart." Her shoulders slump. "Jesus, Karl even went back to New Zealand. Who the hell voluntarily goes back to New Zealand?"

"I've heard it's a lovely country," Jensen says absently. He lets out a deep breath, then sticks his hands in the front pockets of his jeans. "Okay, I'll talk to Jared. If he agrees, I'll get back to you."

"And if he doesn't?"

Jensen shrugs. "You'll never know." He starts walking backwards, towards the door. "One more thing, if I find out that this is all just part of some scam, I'll make sure you're conscious when I start cutting things off."

Saldana looks far too perky. "I wouldn't expect anything less."

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"Seriously?" Jared asks. "I mean... Seriously?!" He runs both hands through his hair. "Does she know how many resume builders there are online? She couldn't have, I don't know, emailed us or something?"

Jensen grimaces. "That's not exactly how people like us..." Jensen clears his throat. "Anyway, she's kind of nuts, which would actually work well around here."

Jared stares at him. "You're not suggesting we bring her in?! Dude, she-"

"I know what she did, Jared," Jensen says. "I also know she could have done a lot worse. And she has a point." Jensen sighs as he starts to pace. "It's possible that my more blatant actions have done
more harm than good. If I've garnered the wrong kind of attention, then-" Jensen turns and nearly runs into Jared's chest.

"Then we'll deal with it," Jared says, taking Jensen into his arms.

"Part of dealing with it may be hiring some new people." Jensen balances on his toes and kisses away the scowl that comes over Jared's face. "I'm not saying we move her into the mansion. I'm just saying that we utilize her skills from time to time."

Jared looks heavenward as his hands settle somewhere decidedly lower. When he brings his eyes back to Jensen's he hums, and smiles, and squeezes. "Yes, dear."

Jensen wriggles enough to smack him on the shoulder. "Ass. I'm trying to be serious."

"So am I," Jared protests. "If you think we need her, then we'll get her. On a trial basis," Jared adds quickly. "If she doesn't mesh with everybody then she's gone. And you're gonna be the one to tell the guys."

Jensen frowns. "That'll be fun."

"That's the price to pay for your protégée." Jared grins. "Ooh, rhyming and alliteration. I'm awesome!"

"You're something, all right," Jensen murmurs.

Jared nods brightly. "Yep. So, what was that about a winery?"
Jared loves Jensen with the heat of a thousand suns, and the passion of a thousand poets, and the... something else of a lot of something elses. Point is, he's pretty much head over heels for the guy and would do anything in his considerable power to keep Jensen happy, and safe, and secure.

But sometimes there are enemies that even Jared's influence, or money, or general bad-assery can't stop. Sometimes Jensen takes a hit, and all Jared can do is try to help him through it and make things right once it's over.

Jared's waiting outside his bedroom door. Jeff and the rest of his team are a respectable distance down the hall. Doc Ferris has been in the bedroom with Jensen for close to thirty minutes, though it seems like it's been longer. If Jared's frequently checked watch didn't tell him different, he'd have thought they'd been waiting for hours.

Finally, the door opens, and Sam steps out. She looks a bit perturbed, but not overly surprised, to find Jared hovering so close.

"Well," Jared asks anxiously, "is he gonna be okay?"

Sam looks at him, then looks down the hall to where the other men are waiting stoically. Well, most of them are being stoic; Chris is wringing his hands. Sam rolls her eyes and snorts. "Oh, for God's sake, Jensen's going to be fine! He's got a common cold, not the Black Plague." She steps fully out into the hallway and closes the door behind her.

"But, but," Jared grabs Sam's upper arm and holds onto it despite the epic stinkeye he gets, "Sam, he coughed, and there was stuff, and it came up, and it was yellow! And not like nice yellow, it was like day-glo, highlighter yellow. And it came out of his mouth." Jared loves Jensen's mouth and he really doesn't want to think of it as a gateway to icky, yellow goo, especially if said icky, yellow goo is clogging up his boyfriend's lungs.

"The human body is disgusting, Jared," Sam says, "and it gets even more disgusting when it's trying to fight off a virus. I'm not saying that yellow mucus is good - it obviously isn't - but Jensen is young and healthy, and with proper care he'll be fine." She reaches up and pats the hand that's still on her arm. "Now get the hell off of me."

Jared drops his hold and takes a few steps backward. "Sorry, sorry," he says. "This is just the first
time Jensen's gotten sick since I've known him. I mean, he has allergies, but—"

Sam holds up a hand. "Stop. Just make sure he spends most of the next few days resting, and when he's not resting, make sure he's drinking something. Give him an anti-inflammatory for his fever, a decongestant for the crud in his head, an expectorant for the crud in his lungs, and hot tea with lemon and honey for his throat. Oh, and make sure you keep him away from anything sharp."

"You think he might try and hurt himself?!" Jared asks in disbelief.

"No, I think he might try and hurt you." Sam looks back towards the closed door. "He's a grumpy bastard when he's under the weather."

"He can't be any worse now than when he is in the mornings before he gets properly caffeinated," Jared says. "I still have a scar from when he threw a mug at me the first morning after he moved in." He smiles wistfully and lightly touches the tiny sliver of raised skin by his hairline. "All I had back then was a French press, but Jensen couldn't figure out how to work it without fully opening his eyes, and Jensen's eyes don't fully open until he's had his coffee. It was a vicious circle. I'm just glad he couldn't see well enough to find the steak knives."

Sam stares at him. "Uh huh." She pinches the bridge of her nose. "Look, if he's not better in four days, or the stuff coming out of him turns green—"

"GREEN?!!"

"-Give me a call." Sam's muttering something under her breath as she stalks off down the hall. The security team parts around her then hustles over to Jared for an update.

"Well?" Chris asks.

"Sam said it's a cold," Jared says gravely.

"Wait a minute," Idris says, frowning. "A cold? We're getting all worked up for a cold? I thought he had, like, pneumonia or something." He sounds oddly dejected.

"Um," Columbus says, "so did I. A simple cold really isn't that big of a deal, Jay."

Jeff looks pained. "As long as Jensen doesn't have fever based delusions and kills us all in our sleep."

"Will you guys stop," Jared says. "First of all, yellow stuff came out of his lungs."

"That does sound serious," Chris says, "and also really, really gross."

"Thank you," Jared says to Chris. "And, secondly, if Jensen's fever is high enough for him to have delusions - not that I'm going to let it get that bad - he's probably not even going to be able to get out of bed, let alone stalk anyone to their bedrooms. Just make sure you stay out of arm's reach, and you'll be fine." Jared thinks for a moment. "I mean, I'm pretty sure Jen doesn't have any throwing knives stashed around the bed, but even if he does, he's super uncoordinated right now; you'd most likely be able to dodge them." Jared notices the wide-eyed stares of his men. "What?"

When Jensen wakes up he has an awful moment of not knowing where he is, of not even
remembering what his last job was. Then his eyes focus and his brain kicks in. He's home, in his and Jared's bed, thank God. But he still has gaps in his memory because he has no idea what happened to him. Jensen feels like he's been beaten to hell - his face feels swollen, there's this horrible pressure in his chest, and just about every muscle in his body aches.

He makes some kind of noise and Jared's immediately there, looming over him with a worried, yet sweetly concerned look on his face.

"How are you doing?" Jared asks. "Are you okay? Of course you're not okay, duh, Jared. Do you want some juice, ice chips, honey lemon tea?"

Jensen opens his mouth, but before he can ask what the hell is going on - and is the other guy at least worse off than Jensen is - he's taken over by a coughing fit. Jared helps him sit up. One hand starts rubbing Jensen's upper back and the other holds a tissue under Jensen's face.


Part of Jensen really wants to make a crack about how Jared usually likes it when he swallows, but a much larger part is busy just trying to remember how to breathe.

"Oh, God," Jensen groans when he finally gets himself under control, "what happened?" He focuses his bleary eyes on Jared. "And what the hell are you doing?"

Jared's got a tissue full of the stuff Jensen just hacked up in one hand and an LED flashlight in the other. "I'm checking to make sure it's not green." Jared shoves the tissue back under Jensen's face. "Does this look green?"

Jensen thinks everything looks green as he claps a hand over his mouth and forces the meager contents of his stomach back down where they belong.

"Whoops," Jared says, looking sheepish. "My bad. I'll ask Chris later." Jared lets the nasty tissue drop to the floor, then he reaches toward something on the nightstand. Jensen hears a squelch and the smell of anti-bacterial gel fills the air.

Jensen swallows a few times, then says, "What's wrong with me, and don't sugarcoat it, Jay."

"You're sick," Jared says, rubbing his hands together.

"Sick? Sick?!" Jensen's voice breaks as he croaks. "No, that's not it; I don't get sick. I never get sick."

"Uh, evidently you do. Do I need to show you the tissue again?"

Jensen tries to punch his boyfriend's thigh but instead watches as his arm just sort of flops to the side. "I'm dying, aren't I?"

"Of course not," Jared says, gently stroking Jensen's cheek. "Sam was by earlier and she said you'd be fine. I just need to take care of you."

"Sam." Jensen furrows his brow as he tries to remember. "I think... Oh, crap. I think I may have threatened to disembowel her." Jensen cringes. He's pretty sure all of his shots are going to really hurt from now on.

"It's okay," Jared says, "we'll send her one of those fruit flower basket things."
"Better make it muffins, just in case," Jensen says. "Or maybe some Godiva."

"An apology in chocolate form; got it." Jared reaches towards the nightstand again and comes back this time with a handful of pills and a bottle of water. "Take these."

Jensen dutifully takes the pills. The cool water feels heavenly going down his throat.

Jared presents Jensen with a package of Saltines. "Now, have some of these. I've got Chef making chicken soup for later, but you need to eat something with the pills."

The gurgle Jensen's stomach lets out is even louder than the rattling in his chest. Homemade chicken soup sounds divine.

Jared stands up and rounds the bed as Jensen dutifully munches some crackers. "Chad's downstairs, ready to put out any fires," he says, opening the armoire that holds the bedroom's television and Blu-ray player, "so, I'm thinking Monty Python marathon."

Jensen watches him fondly. "Jay, you don't have to stay with me."

"I know I don't have to. I want to."

"You'll catch what I've got."

"Please," Jared says, settling on the other side of the bed, remote in hand, "I have the constitution of a Clydesdale." He lifts up one arm and waits expectantly.

Jensen holds out as long as he can, but he's tired, and he hurts, and he's still half convinced that because he feels so bad this is some kind of new, advanced super-bug, and he's probably going to die in his sleep. After a good minute of internal hemming and hawing, he scoots a few inches across the bed and under Jared's arm. He squirms and fidgets a bit until he's good and comfortable.

Jensen would never admit it out loud, but being curled up against Jared's warmth is already making him feel a little better. "Being curled up with you is already making me feel a little better." Jensen frowns. He's never actually heard his internal monologue before.

Jared lets out a small chuckle, and he holds Jensen even tighter. "Sick you is kind of adorable." He pushes a button on the remote.

"Shut up. Pillows don't talk."

"Yes, baby."

Jensen somehow manages to gather up enough strength to poke Jared in the soft spot between two ribs. "No pet names." Jensen's world starts to vibrate and it takes him a few moments to realize it's because Jared is laughing. "Pillows don't laugh, either," Jensen mumbles. He feels something gently press against the crown of his head, and somehow Jensen just knows it was a kiss.

"Duly noted... Darlin'."

Jared's obviously far too pleased with himself, but Jensen dozes off before he can even think of retaliating.

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Five days later...

"Jeeeen, I'm dying."

"Uh huh."

"No, seriously, what I have is, like, way worse than what you had."

"I know it is."

"I think your germs mutated or something."

"Wouldn't surprise me."

"And what I have is also way worse than what Chris, Columbus, and Idris have."

"Of course it is."

"Those guys are total whiners."

"Yep."

"And Idris is mean."

"I think so too."

"Are you sure I'm not gonna die?"

"Jared, do you think I would let that happen?"

"Definitely not! But, um, if I do die you have to promise to spread my ashes at the Skywalker Ranch and get Chewbacca to do my eulogy."

Jensen somehow manages to corral the insane amount of laughter that's threatening to bubble up out of him. "I promise. I also promise to totally not tease you about this conversation when you're feeling better." He kisses Jared on his icky, sweaty forehead, then he leans back in the bed and resigns himself to an immediate future that involves nothing beyond being cuddled. There's a tightness in Jensen's chest, but since he coughed up the last of his phlem a few days ago, he's pretty sure it's just love.
Reunion

Chapter Summary

Jared's excited about his high school reunion. Now, if he can only get Jensen through the door.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for grrlgamer.

"Are you sure you're okay with this?" Jared asks as they walk through the plush hotel lobby. He's holding a heavy, cream colored envelope in one hand and his other hand is pressed firmly against Jensen's lower back.

"Of course." Jensen says, automatically taking note of the exits and the various people around them.

"Uhhuh." Jared gives him a sidelong glance. "You're wearing your 'I'm-about-to-horribly-murder-everyone-in-the-general vicinity' smile."

"No, I'm not," Jensen says. "I'm wearing my 'ask-me-how-normal-I-am-because-I'm-completely-normal' smile." Jensen reaches up to touch the skin around his mouth. "Aren't I?"

"Jen." Jared uses the hand against Jensen's back to direct him into a little alcove. "We don't have to do this."

Jensen rolls his eyes. "Oh, for... Of course we have to do this, Jared. We're here, aren't we? We got on a plane, we came back to Texas - God, do you know how long it's been since I've set foot in Texas?"

"Fourteen years," Jared says.

"Fourteen years," Jensen says. He rolls his shoulders and tugs at the bottom of his jacket. "We're not punking out now, Jay, not when we're only two hundred feet away from the damn thing."

"Okay," Jared says, "but just remember, I'd rather we duck out in the middle than have you go insane-er and start stabbing people with cocktail umbrellas."

"Like I could do any damage with... Well, yeah, I guess I could do some damage with a cocktail umbrella. I mean, if it was sharp enough, and I stuck it in the right place, and."

"Jensen?"

"Yeah, Jared?"

"Please stop."
"Okay." Jensen made the corners of his mouth twist upward. "What about this smile," he says through bared teeth, "does this smile look normal?"

Jared grimaces. "Maybe if you're a serial killer."

"Close enough."
Of Human Bonding

Chapter Summary

When Jared sees Zoe-shaped cracks in his team's foundation, he decides to call in outside help.

Chapter Notes

Not betad, grammarians beware.

Virtual cookies to anyone who recognizes the two former camp owners who are now working for a motivational company.

Jared waits until Jensen has swallowed his latest mouthful of coffee - because a spit-take would be hilarious, but the fall-out certainly wouldn't - before saying, "What do you think of team building exercises?"

Jensen coughs a little and blinks a few times. "You mean in general, or..."

"I mean for us."

Jensen raises an eyebrow.

"I mean not us us, obviously," Jared says quickly. "I mean for the team."

"The whole team?"

"No, just the security team."

Jensen makes a noncommittal noise and starts crunching on another mouthful of cereal. Jared can tell he's seriously pondering something so he patiently waits through the mastication and swallowing. Jensen licks his lips, then says, "Before I remind you that your security team is made up of highly trained, and competent, and kinda loony people, may I ask why?" He brightens. "Would it be just for kicks? It'd be funny if you did it just for kicks. Well, not for the motivational guy they're gonna murder, but-"

Jared scowls. "No, it wouldn't be for kicks," he says. "I'm concerned about the team's... dynamic."

"Dynamic?" Jensen repeats dubiously.

"Yeah. Don't get me wrong, I think you were right to bring Zoe in. She definitely adds a whole new dimension of menace to everything, but..." Jared sighs and uses his spoon to poke at the few remaining soggy cornflakes in his bowl. "Don't tell me you haven't noticed how weird everyone gets when she's around. And, I mean, I get it - she shot Chris and beat the crap outta Jeff; it's only natural for there to be some lingering ill will. But it's been a little while, and the tension seems to be getting worse, not better."
"Yeah," Jensen says, his drawl elongating the word and packing it full of some strange new meaning.

Jared perks up. "Yeah what?" he asks. "Do you know something? You do know something! What do you know, Jensen?!"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Jensen says before he takes a tiny, demure sip of coffee.

"Bullshit." Jared leans forward across their breakfast table. "As leader of this organization I think it's my right to be informed of things that affect my people."

Jensen snorts. "You just want to gossip."

"Yeah, that too. Now, spill."

"Fine," Jensen says. He leans in too and lowers his voice, even though he and Jared are the only people in their private quarters. "Zoe's not exactly the easiest person to get along with, but the only one still really pissed about the shooting is Oscar-"

"Awww."

"I know, right? When he and Chris finally get a clue we're probably gonna have to look into soundproofing." Jensen's eyes are twinkling as he pulls back, checks the empty room, and leans in again. "Anyway, Zoe's default setting seems to be stuck on abrasive, and that's not exactly endearing, so it's causing some issues. But, from what I gather, the majority of the tension is between Zoe and Idris, but mostly because there's tension of a different kind between Zoe and Jeff. If you get what I mean?" Jensen smirks.

Jared blinks a few times. "No, I don't."

Jensen rolls his eyes. "Tension. Not so unresolved. Between Zoe and Jeff." He makes a few completely incomprehensible hand gestures.

"I have no idea what you're trying to-"

"Oh, for God's sake." Jensen makes a few more hand gestures and wriggles his eyebrows.

"Seriously, what's with the-"

"Sex, Jared!" Jensen says. "They're having sex!"

Jared does not gasp, but the air he draws in is short and kind of noisy. "No. Way."

Jensen smirks again - he's obviously very pleased with himself. "Way."

"Oh, my God, that's-"

"I know."

"I mean-" Jared pinches the bridge of his nose. "Aw, man. I just thought of Jeff having sex. Wow. Did not need that in my head." Jared frowns. "So, wait, why is there tension between Zoe and Idris? Does Idris want Zoe?" He does another not-gasp. "Holy crap on a stick, does Idris want Jeff?! Oh, God, there goes my brain again."

Jensen grimaces. "Yeah, mine too. Thanks for that. And, no, I'm pretty sure Idris isn't harboring any secret, sexual feelings towards Jeff." Jensen sticks his tongue out and makes a few faces. "Those are
words I never need in my mouth again. Blergh. As for Zoe..." Jensen furrows his brow and thinks for a moment. "You know how psychopaths are kind of like betta fish?"

"Uh... They're pretty and like to live around the roots of aquatic plants?"

Jensen stares at him. "No, that's... No." He takes a deep breath. "Let me put it a different way; we don't always tend to play well with others, especially our own kind. I think that Idris is upset that he has to share Jeff's attention."


"Yeah, don't ever say that again."

Jared raises an eyebrow. "Should you have maybe thought of the whole fish thing before you brought Zoe in?"

"We had several discussions about the matter," Jensen says, "but how was I supposed to know that Miss May was on the prowl for a Mr. December?"

"To be fair, Jeff's more like a November. Maybe a mid to late October."

"Whatever," Jensen says. "I'm sure, given time, things will work out just fine. I mean, Idris and I don't hardly try to kill each other at all any more. Mostly."

"Wow," Jared says. He leans back and rubs his chin thoughtfully. "This puts things in a whole different perspective."

"So you're scrapping the team building plan?" Jensen asks.

"Oh, no. No, no, no. I think we need that now more than ever."

"Really, Jay? Are you sure?"

"We need to get these issues out in the open, Jensen," Jared says. "Letting something like this fester will just lead to hurt feelings, and lower productivity, and bloodletting."

"I don't know," Jensen says, crossing his arms over his chest. "Talking can be overrated. Repression always seemed to work wonders for conflicts in my family."

"That explains so much," Jared says under his breath.

"What?"

"What?"

"You just-"

"Anyway," Jared says quickly, "that cinches it; I'm calling the motivational people as soon as I get into my office."

"Jared..." Jensen sighs and rubs a hand over his already messy hair. "Even if I concede that you might have a point, I still don't think that bringing in a third party is the best way to handle this. Let's just do it in house. You can wear your deeply concerned face and badger everyone into some kind of catharsis."

"I don't badger," Jared says with huff. "Besides, the people I want to call are professionals, Jensen."
They're trained to deal with situations like this. If I try and delve into the complexities of the team's interpersonal relationships I'd probably make an even bigger mess of things, and then where will we be?"

Jensen stares at him for a good, long minute. "They're bringing toys, aren't they?"

"No, of course not," Jared says. "They're bringing games! I looked over some of the stuff on their website, and it looks like so much fun! Seriously, it's gonna be like camp." Jared studies the frown pulling down Jensen's (still completely attractive) features. "Come on, Jen, don't be such a Debbie Downer. This is gonna awesome!"

"I'm not a Debbie Downer," Jensen scoffs. "Whatever. Do what you want. Just don't be surprised when everything ends in screams and tears, and Gabe has to come over to get suspicious red stains out of the carpet."

"Oh, yeah," Jared says softly, "you're a regular ray of sunshine."

"What?"

"What?"

"Did you-"

"More coffee?" Jared asks brightly, already reaching for the carafe. "Everything's gonna be fine, Jen. Trust me," he says as he pours, "I've got it all worked out."

Jensen harrumphs.

Jared grins and says, "You are so adorable when you're grumpy." He licks his lips and lets his eyes trail over Jensen's still sleepy face, and mussed up hair, and wrinkled pajamas. "Want to have a nooner?"

"It's eight-thirty."

"Want to have an eight-thirtyier?"

Jensen rolls his eyes even as his lips curl up into a smile. "Fine," he says. "You're lucky you're cute."

"Yeah," Jared says with a grin, "I know."

_______

Three days pass and Jared is once again hit with the uncomfortably familiar feeling of waiting for Jensen to say 'I told you so'. He's standing out on the south lawn with a befuddled looking security team and two people from the motivational company. The duo aren't exactly what he had expected. Oh, they seem nice enough, but they're just so... just so...

"They're so perky," Jared says to himself. Or, at least he thought he was speaking to himself, but a far too amused snort from right behind his left shoulder alerts him to Jensen's presence. "Stupid, ninja boyfriend," Jared mutters. He raises his voice a bit and says as ominously as possible, "Not a word."

Jensen mimes buttoning his lips, but that doesn't do much to hide the mirth clearly still on his face. Jared crosses his arms over his chest and glowers at all and sundry. Any thoughts that Jared might have had about calling the whole thing off disappear in the face of Jensen's smugness. He makes a
silent vow to see this through 'til the bitter end, even if they have to get out the bonesaws.

"All right," the male of the duo says, gaining everyone's attention. His voice is dripping with what Jared thinks has to be fake enthusiasm. Either that or he's on something. "Let's get this party started! I'm Gary Granger!"

"And I'm Becky Martin-Granger!" his partner exclaims.

"And we understand that things have been kind of stressed around here lately." Gary's face falls into a comical frown.

"Stressed." Becky says with a frown of her own.

"That makes your boss, and us, sad."

"Very sad."

"So, we're here to get you folks back in tip-top shape!" Gary frown morphs into a manic smile. "Now, I know that change can be hard on a team's dynamic."

"Hard," Becky parrots, clasping her hands together and nodding solemnly.

"And sometimes interpersonal tensions can pop up."

"Through no fault of your own," Becky adds.

"But with a little work and a lot of F-U-N, we can steer this out-of-control ship around and get back to the port of productivity!"

Jensen lets out a loud bark of laughter. "Sorry," he says, his voice shaking. "Carry on."

Gary and Becky look a bit put out at their sales pitch being interrupted, but after a few rapid blinks those fervent smiles are plastered on their faces again. "Okay," Gary says, "well, someone's already got a good attitude, and good attitudes are what I like to call our metaphorical happy juice."

"We love our happy juice!" Becky says as she fist pumps.

Jensen claps a hand over his mouth, but a small, strangled sound of amusement still sneaks out.

"Oh, sweet Jesus," Jared mutters as he pinches the bridge of his nose.

"Okay," Gary says, "now, before we get started fortifying the foundations of our bridges, does anyone have any questions?"

The security team exchange bewildered glances. Chris hesitantly raises his hand. "Um," he says, looking at Jared, "are we being punished?"

Jensen snorts. Loudly.

Jared sighs. "No, no one's being punished."

"Are we being punk'd?" Columbus asks. He looks around. "Is Ashton here? I love that guy!"

"I hate that guy," Oscar says darkly.

"No one's being punished," Jared says again, "and no one's being punk'd. Gary and Becky are..."
Jared pauses to clear his throat, "professionals, and I expect y'all to treat them as such."

"Uh..." Jeff scratches at the ever present stubble on his chin, looks at his fellow victims, and shrugs. "Okay?"

While the male members of the team look bewildered, but complacent - for now - Zoe looks positively mutinous.

"No," she says putting her hands on her hips. "This sounds stupid. And ridiculous. Stupidly ridiculous. I'm not doing it."

"Oh, too bad," Idris says, "since it sounds like it's mandatory. Guess you'll just have to quit then." He mimes wiping a tear from his eye.

"Idris, stuff it," Jeff says. "Zoe, if this is mandatory..." He looks at Jared. Jared nods. "Super. It's mandatory. You're doing it."

"Is Jensen doing it?" Zoe asks.

Jensen snorts again. "Of course I'm not doing it."

"Are you sure about that?" Gary asks, injecting himself into the conversation with yet another wide grin. "I can't help but get the impression you're not much of a team player. These exercises could be extremely beneficial towards your placement in the company."

"Extremely beneficial," Becky chimes in.

"Yeah," Jensen says, "I doubt that." Jensen reaches up and drapes an arm across Jared's shoulders. "I'm fucking the boss; my placement's pretty much set."


"This is so odd," Becky says, looking forlornly at the empty balloon package. "We've never had all of them pop before. And all around a single person, to boot." She looks up at Idris. "You wouldn't happen to have anything sharp on you, would you?"

Idris gives her a shark's grin. Jared slaps a hand to his forehead.

"I'm seriously not comfortable with this," Columbus says. "And I don't know what's poking me but it better be a finger!"

"Whoops," Chris says. "Sorry, dude; I thought you were Oscar." What Jared can see of Chris' face turns bright red. "Uh, and I was definitely using a finger! It's a finger. 'Cause I wouldn't... I mean I was just... I was just trying to be annoying."

"Trying to?" Jeff mutters.
"Congratulations," Zoe says, "you succeeded."

"I hate you all," Idris says.

Oscar doesn't say anything, but Jared's pretty sure he's silently judging everyone.

Jared looks from the five burly men and one petite, but devastatingly lethal, woman forced to press together on a small tarp in the middle of the yard, to the still grinning faces of Gary and Becky. "And, uh, what exactly is this exercise supposed to promote?"

"Communication, cooperation, patience and problem solving strategy!" Gary says.

"Not to mention giving them a chance to get comfortable with their physical selves and how their physical selves react to others' physical selves." Becky says.

"Uh huh." Jared looks back to the security team. "I think their physical selves are doing just fine." Though Jared's not certain for how much longer since he's pretty sure that's murder he's seeing in Idris' eyes. "Maybe they should move onto something else."

Gary frowns. "Really? I was just about to make the tarp smaller."

"No!" Jared clears his throat. "I mean, no, that's not... Do you have any other games? Games are fun."

"Mr. Padalecki," Becky says, putting on a serious face, "we are professionals. We have been trained to handle all kinds of employees, and all kinds of employee-related problems. I think we know when it's time to stop a certain scenario."

"In your professional opinion then," Jensen says, "should that be before or after Idris chokes the stuffing out of Jeff?"

Jared looks back to the tarp and finds that, yes, Idris does have his hands around Jeff's throat. Jared also sees that none of the other team members are trying to assist either of them. But... "At least they're all still on the tarp."

Gary's jaw drops. "Oh, my... New game!"

Jared has a hand over his eyes and is watching through his fingers as the team is forced to do something that involves working together to move around stepping stones for the benefit of mankind, and puppies, and some other shit. Jared's not exactly sure what the official spiel is - he stopped listening to Gary and Becky a while ago. And he's kind of accepted that Jensen is definitely going to get to say 'I told you so' because this is not working. The exercises and games that Jared was assured - through a very professional looking website - would promote teamwork and togetherness are doing nothing but driving everyone further apart.

Jared's just thinking about heading inside to find some Tylenol when he hears a crunching sound. He turns towards the noise. When his pounding head processes what he's seeing, he fixes Jensen with the meanest glare he can rustle up. "Are you serious?"

"What?" Jensen asks, looking impressively guileless.
"Popcorn? You're eating popcorn?"

Jensen shrugs. "Hey, this shit is entertaining."

Jared has to consciously relax his jaw to keep his molars from grinding together. "Not. Helping. Jensen."

"Was I supposed to?" Jensen asks before crunching a few more kernels. He then holds his long, butter-covered fingers up and slowly, one by one, licks them clean.

Jared feels every single bit of his animosity drain away. "You suck," he says weakly.

Jensen's grin is pure sin. "Not yet, but I will later." His eyes flit to something beyond Jared's shoulder. "Looks like the kids are tusslin' again."

Jared doesn't even bother to turn around. "Idris! Jeff! Knock it the fuck off, now!"

Jensen's smile goes from just wicked to wickedly amused. "Such a good dad."

"Shut up."

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It's not that Jared isn't willing to admit when he's wrong about something, it's... Well, no, it's exactly like that. He had figured that the team building exercises would be lame, but he thought they would be the fun kind of lame. The kind of lame that everybody could laugh about and snark over. The kind of lame that would bring everyone closer together. Instead, the team dynamic that Jared so loved has disintegrated even further over the course of the day. The security team's now either not talking to each other, communicating through sarcasm alone - Chris' face after Oscar snapped at him for something would be haunting Jared's dreams for a long time to come - or, literally, at each other's throats.

And Jensen's snide asides and overall smugness is so not helping things.

Jared can feel something building in his chest. It's dark, and heavy, and clawing its way up his throat to the back of his mouth and then over his tongue before it explodes out of him in one loud, long bellow. "GOD-FUCKING-DAMMIT!"

Jared takes a second to bask in the surprised and wide-eyed expressions that are left in the wake of his outburst. He doesn't yell often, but when he does, he gets fucking results.

"No more sniping," Jared says as he stalks towards his team. "No more complaining. No more choking." He stops a few feet away from them, and he makes sure his shoulders are back, his head is held high, and there's the slightest hint of mayhem in his eyes. "Unless one of you wants to fight me to the death and take over, I am still the head of this organization, and if I say everyone's going to build a bridge out of newspaper, then everyone's going to build a goddamn bridge out of motherfucking newspaper, are we clear?!"

There are slight nods all around, even from Zoe, who's now looking at Jared with the kind of respect she usually reserves for Jensen.

"Good," Jared says. "Now, why the hell are we building a bridge out of newspaper?" He turns slightly to glare at Gary.
Gary gulps. "Uh, well, it uh, it promotes communication and creative problem solving."

"Somehow I doubt that, Gary," Jared says. "And, in all honesty, when my guys need to get creative about problem solving, they're not looking to build things. In fact, they're usually looking to blow shit up." Jared steps up to Gary and Becky and holds out his hand. "I appreciate you coming over, but this has sucked, and if you tell anyone anything that you saw or heard here, I'll hunt you down and kill you myself."

"Yessir," Gary says.

"Understood," Becky says.

"Good. Now, git." Jared watches them scurry off around the house. He then takes a deep breath and steels himself before turning back around. "That didn't turn out like I thought it would."

Jeff sighs. "Dare I ask?"

Jared scratches his head, and shuffles his feet, and looks to Jensen who gives him an encouraging grin and a double thumbs up. Right. Jared can totally do this. "I know there's been some tension between all of you guys lately, especially with adding someone new to the fold," Jared says. "And I thought that doing this kind of stuff would help you guys connect, and reconnect, and come out stronger, and whatever."

"What the hell are you talking about," Jeff asks. "There hasn't been any tension."

The five other members of the security team roll their eyes and snort. In unison.

"Jeez," Jared says, why can't you guys have that kind of cohesiveness in the field?"

Jeff looks startled. "Wait, what? You guys.. You guys aren't happy?"

"It's not that we're not happy," Chris says, obviously hedging.

"I'm not happy," Oscar mutters.

"It's just that we're not..." Columbus looks at his teammate's faces. He shrugs. "We're not as good as we used to be."

Jeff looks startled.

"I'm not blaming any one person," Jared says carefully.

"I am," Idris says, cutting in. He points at Jensen. "This is all your fault."

"How exactly is your inability to cope with change my fault?" Jensen asks coolly.

"If you had just killed her," Idris says pointing at Zoe, "like you were supposed to, like you said you were going to, then we wouldn't be having these troubles now, would we?"

"He has a point," Columbus says. He looks at Zoe. "No offense."

"None taken," Zoe says. "Though it's obvious why he didn't kill me; he knows how much you guys suck."

"No, they don't," Jared says firmly. He studies the proud, stubborn, and slightly cuckoo woman in front of him. "Zoe, I get it. Jensen told me what happened with your last crew." Her eyes drop.
"They crapped out on you. They left you. That must have been horrible. But it's not gonna happen here."

Zoe rolls her eyes and makes a scoffing sound.

"It's not," Jared insists. "I think of you guys as family. Hell, I think of everybody in my organization as family. From brothers and sisters, to uncles, to the creepy cousins that spend all their time in the basement."

Chris scrunches up his face. "Who-"

"Pretty sure he's talking about the IT peeps," Columbus says.

"Oh. Yeah, they are creepy."

"You set up a pretty elaborate way to get our attention," Jared says, "and you've got a chance with us, Zoe. Take it, or get out, but no more half-assing. If you want to be part of our team, you're gonna have to start acting like a teammate, understand?" Zoe nods at him. It's a tiny, almost imperceptible nod, but it's a nod, and Jared'll take it. "Now, Idris, why don't you tell Jeff why you've tried to crush his trachea several times today."

Idris' eyes get wide, then narrow as a scowl settles on his face. "I don't want to." He glares at Jeff. "Besides, he already knows."

"I know you're being an idiot," Jeff says.

"Oh, yeah," Chris mutters, "that's helpful."

"I'm being an idiot?!"

"Yeah, Idris, you are."

"Oh, that's rich coming from a guy tarring it up with a girl young enough to be his-"

"I am only twelve years older than she is," Jeff says quickly. "Twelve. And, also, it's none of your business."

"It's most certainly my business if she plans on taking my best friend and stomping all over his poor, old, grizzled heart."

"Old and grizz... I'm forty five!"

"Time out!" Jared says. "Idris, you're worried that Zoe's gonna break Jeff's heart?"

"I'm worried that she's playing him," Idris says, "and that the fool is too besotted to realize it."

"She's not playing me," Jeff says angrily. "Zoe, are you playing me?"

Zoe blinks a few times. "Um... No?" She offers Jeff a weak smile.

Jeff's face falls. "What? You-"

"I might have started out, you know, doing that," Zoe says, "'cause you were all 'hey, baby', and kind of skeevy-"

"I am not skeevy!" Jeff says, scandalized.
"Oh, Jeff," Jensen says, "you can be. Trust me. Or do I have to remind you of some of the things you used to say to me before."

"No!" Jeff yelps. He casts a quick look toward Jared. "No reminding necessary. I'm skeevy. Carry on."

"Anyway," Zoe says, "I thought I could play with you a little bit, and then, you know, rip your heart out with my teeth and take over as head of the security team."

"Zoe," Jensen admonishes, raising his voice so it carries over the grumbles of discord from the other members of the team. "What did I tell you about trying to eat your own? We're not sharks in the womb here. Jesus."

Zoe grimaces. "Yeah, I know, I know," she says. "It's just, looking out for number one is a hard habit to break. And I probably wouldn't have actually followed through with it." She looks at Jeff and somehow transforms her usually hardened eyes into something kind of doe-like. "Especially since once you stopped trying so hard you kind of became this giant, fuzzy teddy bear, and I started, you know, actually liking you."

Jeff stares at her.

She shrugs. "My bad?"

Jeff opens and closes his mouth a few times before finally saying, "Did you really have to call me a teddy bear in front of the guys?"

"A fuzzy teddy bear," Chris says.

"A giant, fuzzy teddy bear," Columbus adds.

Jeff puts a hand to his forehead. "Wonderful."

"Okay," Jared says, "just so we're clear; Zoe, you don't want to rip Jeff's heart out now, correct?"

"No," Zoe says, "I like his heart where it is."

"And, Idris, can you accept the fact that Zoe and Jeff are together?" Jared asks.

Idris scowls. "I still think it's bloody stupid."

"Noted," Jared says. "And can everyone - Zoe and Idris - try and get along. Or at least fake it enough so I won't worry and spend a boat-load of cash on completely useless consultants, or put Prozac in the house's filtration system, or something."

Chris grins. "I think we can do that, boss."

"Great!" Jared says. "'Cause, you know, you guys aren't just my employees, or my protection detail; you're my family - the only family I have. Or, well, the only family I have who's willing to speak to me, and I will do anything in my considerable power to keep everyone together." Jared is pleased to see soft expressions and happy smiles on everyone's faces. Jensen winks at him. "Hey, I guess, in a way, this whole team-building thing worked."

"Oh, I wouldn't go that far," Columbus says. "And we definitely never, ever have to do this again. Ever."

Oscar nods so hard he almost tips his hat off.
"Oh, come on," Jared says, his tone dangerously close to wheedling, "are you guys saying you didn't have any fun at all?"

"I had fun thinking of all the horrible things I could do to Gary," Zoe says.

"Maybe we should make this a regular thing." It takes all that Jared has to not burst out laughing at the matching expressions of horror everyone suddenly develops. "Not with Gary and Becky," he says quickly, "but, maybe, once a month, we have a kind of family game night?"

"Like the most dangerous game?" Idris asks. "I could get behind that."

"I kill at Monopoly," Jensen says.

"Beer Pong!" Chris flushes as everyone turns to stare at him. "What? I'm from Boston, okay?"

Jared fondly shakes his head and smiles as some of the closest people to him in this world start to squabble and tease each other. He raises his arm and Jensen sidles close and fits himself against Jared's body. Jared gives him a squeeze.

"Go ahead," he says. "Say it."

Jensen hums thoughtfully, then says, "Okay. You were right."

"Yeah, I know you-" Jared blinks a few times then twists and tries to look at Jensen's face. "Wait, what?"

Jensen pokes Jared in the ribs. "I ain't saying it a third time, Padalecki, so listen up. Turns out getting things out in the open was the right call. So, you were, oddly enough, right. This time." He shrugs. "It had to happen eventually."

"Oh." Jared beams. "I was right. I was riimight. I was-"

Jensen pokes him again. "Don't get cocky."

"You love it when I get cocky."

"Not in front of the kids, sweetheart. Not in front of the kids."

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Under normal circumstances, Jared knows that if he ever found Jensen snuggled up and sleeping beside another man there would be tears, and threats, and accusations, and more tears, and finally begging - and all of that would just be from Jared himself.

However, considering that the man Jensen is cuddled up to is Idris, and Chris is plastered to Idris' other side, and they're both leaving sizable drool puddles on Idris' shirt, and all three of them have somehow wedged themselves between the coffee table and the couch, the only reaction Jared has is to reach for his iPhone.

"God bless competitive natures and Beer Pong," Jared whispers as he snaps a picture of the trio.

There's the soft sound of a throat being subtly cleared and Jared looks to his left. Oscar's in one of the armchairs and is blearily peering at him from under the brim of his hat.
"I want a copy," Oscar says roughly. He then pulls his hat down further over his eyes and nestles deeper into the cushions.

Jared grins and complies. He eases out of the living room and starts down the hall towards his office, stopping along the way to peek into the dining room. Columbus and Zoe are face down on the table. Various bottles and sticky shot glasses surround their heads. Jared creeps close enough to check for signs of respiration, then he backs out again.

Jared's making a mental note to check their painkiller supplies when he rounds the corner and comes face to face with a rather ashen looking Jeff.

"You're looking chipper," Jeff says with a ghost of a grin.

"Somebody needed to be the designated adult last night," Jared says. "Besides, you would not believe the amount of blackmail material staying sober can net you." Jared pats the pocket containing his phone. "What about you," he says. "You only look partially dead."

"Thanks," Jeff says wryly. He runs a hand over his beard and sighs. "I guess it's good for a man my age to know when to cut himself off."

"Aw, Jeff, I-"

"No," Jeff says, holding up one hand. "I acted like a fool, Jay. Like an old fool. Thinking a pretty, young thing like that would be interested in me without any ulterior motives..." Jeff shakes his head.

"Ugh, I can't believe I'm gonna say this." Jared crosses his arms over his chest and tries to look stern. "Jeff, you are... God, help me... hot, okay?" Jared grimaces and shudders a bit. "You are still a very attractive man, and you really work the whole rugged look, and you usually smell nice, and since you're kind of like a dad to me, now I feel really inappropriate and kind of dirty. Happy?"

"Uncomfortable, actually."

"Well, good. That makes two of us," Jared says. "And, for the record, Zoe is not a pretty, young thing, Jeff. She's a cold-blooded killer; of course she's gonna have ulterior motives. But hey, you won her over, you giant, fuzzy teddy bear, you." Jared punches Jeff in the shoulder and grins at the look of utter desolation on the older man's face.

"That's not going to go away any time soon, is it?"

"Probably not," Jared says cheerfully.

"Great. And because you seem way too full of yourself, I am happy to tell you that one of the creepy cousins is waiting in your office."

"Uh."

"Wheaton," Jeff says. "And he doesn't look happy. Godspeed." Jeff snaps off a salute, then sidesteps Jared and walks off down the hallway. "Remember, we're all family."

"Oh, shut up," Jared says. He looks towards his closed office door with no small amount of trepidation. Then, deciding that there was no point delaying the inevitable, he squares his shoulders and goes inside.

"Wil!" Jared says, plastering on a fake smile. "Hey, man. How have you been? I love the Boba Fett shirt."
"Now's not the time to fawn over my swag, Jared," Wheaton says harshly. "We have a problem."

"No, no we don't," Jared says. "We had a problem, and I fixed it - because I am awesome - and now there are no more problems. At least for a day or two."

"O-kay," Wil says, drawing out the word. "So, if we have no problems, then I guess I just imagined having to postpone a marathon of C-O-D last night to fight off a hacking attempt."

"A hacking attempt?" Jared feels his heart momentarily seize up at the thought of how much information could be gleaned by someone looking in the wrong place. "Do you know who it was? Did they get anything?"

"Of course they didn't get anything," Wheaton says with a sniff. "I am the pinnacle of amazingness. I shut them down, and I shut them down hard." He smirks for a moment, then his expression turns troubled. "However..."

"However?"

Wheaton frowns. "Whoever it was, he or she was pretty good. Not great, like me, but not your standard drone, either. We got hit by a pro last night."

"Can you find them?" Jared asks. "Backtrack, or whatever, into their own system?"

"I've already asked Felicia from R&D to look over the logs to see if there's anything we can use. But, like I said, he or she was good."

Jared nods and claps Wheaton on the shoulder hard enough to make the smaller man stumble. "Nice work," he says. "Stay on top of things. Constant vigilance!"

Wheaton blinks at him. "Did you just Mad-Eye Moody me?"

"Uh... No. Let me walk you out." Jared puts a companionable arm around Wheaton's shoulders and steers him out of the office and towards the front door. "You know, I've been thinking about getting a new tablet..." Jared's gratified when he's suddenly inundated by a barrage of techno-babble. If there's a troubled expression on his face, he'd much rather Wil think it was due to an overload of geek-speak and not actual concern over the previous night's attack.

Not that Jared's worried per say - dealing with potential takedowns and takeovers is kind of par for the course when you're in his line of work - but there is a little uneasiness in the back of his mind. Jared's used to being hit head-on in extravagant and flashy ways by competitors who don't try and hide their identity or intentions. But a ghost attack, combined with Jensen's comments from a few weeks ago about possibly drawing unwanted attention and new players in town, has the definite potential to be disconcerting.

Whatever. Jared firmly decides he's not going to stress about it. He's surrounded by good people. Great people. The best people. He knows his family can weather any storm and come out the other side stronger.

"You know I love you guys, right?" Jared asks. He gives Wil's shoulders a little squeeze and ignores the panicked look he gets in return.

Wide-eyed, Wil opens his mouth, but before he gets a chance to respond, Idris' voice drifts out to them from the living room.

"What the bloody, fucking hell. Why is my shirt w... Oh, you two are disgusting!"
Jared grins. Yeah, they'll be just fine.
Jensen disappears, leaving behind just a short voice mail message.

"I'm not worrying," Jared says.

"Okay," Jeff says before exchanging a glance with Idris.

"I'm not."

"We totally believe you, boss," Columbus says.

"I am the opposite of worrying. I am... I am... What's the opposite of worrying?"

"Uh," Chris tentatively raises his hand. "not worrying?"

"Exactly!" Jared says. "And that's what I am. Not worrying."

"I'm confused," Zoe says, looking around Jared's office, "are we supposed to be placating him or..."

Oscar shrugs.

"I mean," Jared says, "just because I'm in love with a complete jackass who's been gone for four days now, and no one knows where he is, and he's not answering his cell, and the last communication I got from him was a back in a few days, Jay, that's no reason to worry. Right? Right?!!"

"Right."

"Yeah."

"Sure."

"Absolutely."

Oscar shrugs again.

"So, you are worrying?" Zoe asks. "I'm not sure what's going on."

"I know," Idris says, "human emotions are just so hard to decipher, aren't they?"

Zoe nods vehemently.
"Okay, you know what?" Jared says, "You guys aren't helping. Get out. Out!" Jared waits until the security team has filed out of the room before he picks up his phone.

An idea's been percolating in the back of his mind for a while now. It's a bad idea. A horrible idea. An idea that, if Jensen ever finds out about it, would probably lead to Jared breathing through a tube for a little while.

Still, if there's ever a question, Jared will be able to honestly say that Jensen brought it on himself.

"Hey, Wil," Jared says into his phone, "I'm going to need a subcutaneous tracker and some tranquilizer darts."
Chris wakes up and he knows he's on the good drugs. He feels floaty. It's nice.

He stares up at the simple tile ceiling and blinks a few times. His eyelids work. That's good. The eyeballs work too. He rolls them around, trying to scope out as much as he can without actually moving his head.

He thinks his head works, but he also thinks that if he tries to move it, he might throw up. Which would be bad. And messy.
He wants to know what's going on, though. And he's thirsty. He opens his mouth - another thing that still works - and, while he's pretty sure no real words come out, the sound he makes is enough to get someone's attention.

The attention of a lot of someones, as it turns out.

Chris closes his eyes against the bombardment of worried faces, and worried voices, and just worry that surrounds his bed.

He's in a bed.

That's nice.

It's a hospital bed.

That's not so nice.

"Give him space," Oscar says, his voice uncharacteristically stern.

Chris can feel everyone back off. He opens his eyes again. The only one in his immediate field of vision is Oscar. Blessed Oscar, he of the cup of ice chips.

Chris opens his mouth, and lets Oscar spoon feed him frozen water, and he immediately feels about a hundred times better. That must be some awesome ice.

And drugs. Awesome drugs.

"Don't ever, and I mean ever, do that again, you hear me?" Columbus says from somewhere down by Chris' feet.

"Okay," Chris agrees easily, though his voice is still rough. "Uh, what did I do?"

"Nearly gave us all fucking heart attacks," Idris says. "And, considering Jeff's age, I'm only half joking."

"Thank you, Idris," Jeff says.

Chris licks his lips. "What-"

"You fell," Zoe says. "Onto something sharp. That was stupid of you."

"I..." Chris grimaces as his nice, drug-induced floatiness clears some and things start coming back to him. "Ah, fuck me."

"There you are," Jeff says kindly. His face appears to Chris' left. "How're you doing, kiddo?"

"Is that a trick question?"

Jeff grins. "You gave us all a scare."

Chris feels a strong hand squeeze his shoulder.

"I wasn't scared," Zoe says. "I was... mildly concerned."

"You were mildly concerned out of your damn mind," Columbus scoffs. "Don't front."

"Am I..." Chris swallows a few times and accepts more of Oscar's ice chips. "My leg, is it..."
"It's not great," Jeff says. "But it's also not as bad as it could have been. You're gonna be laid up for a while, and then you're gonna have PT for a while after that."

"But I'm gonna be okay?" Chris asks. He's blaming the plaintive tone on the drugs.

"You're gonna be just fine," Idris says, an oddly warm tone to his voice.

"But the rest of you won't be if you all don't clear the hell out of my patient's room." Doc Ferris' tone is decidedly not warm.

Chris is abandoned almost comically fast, though everyone does reach out to pet or touch him lightly before they go. For one long moment it looks like Oscar's gearing up to say something. Instead, he grimaces, gently stroke's Chris' forehead, and hightails it out of there with the rest of them.

Chris feels like he just missed something.

"Oh, don't pout," Doc Ferris says as she comes over to check on him. "They'll be back soon enough. And my nurses will probably be chasing off at least half a dozen others too before you get released."

She listens to Chris' heart, and check's Chris' pulse, and shines a light into Chris' eyes. "In fact, I think I saw a certain oversized boss of yours and his scary boyfriend lurking by the vending machines. I should step out for a bit so they can sneak in."

"They love me," Chris says, the combination of drugs, injury, and sleepiness making his lips loose.

"You've got that right, honey," Sam says, brushing a hand against his hair. "You've got that right."
Jared to the Rescue!

Chapter Summary

Jensen is the best boyfriend ever.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for big_heart_june.

Jensen's nose itches.

He's tied to a chair in a small, dark, dank room. Blood's dripping into his left eye from a cut on his forehead, and there's more blood leaking from his lower lip. He's bruised, battered, and bound, and his nose really fucking itches.

The things he does for love.

Jensen scrunches his face in a variety of different ways. He tries blowing air up towards the maddening bit of skin.

It still itches.

Jensen slumps in his restraints. He doesn't know what's taking so long, but if Jared doesn't get here soon, Jensen's going to have to get himself out of this mess. And while that would be ridiculously easy to accomplish, it would also render this whole exercise moot. Jensen would have gotten captured and beaten up for nothing and that, that would piss him off.

But Jensen's nose really, really itches.

Jensen doesn't think this is a normal itch. He thinks it might be a super itch.

He also thinks he might have a head injury.

Whatever. He'll give Jared ten more minutes, and if he hasn't shown up by then, then he's obviously decided Jensen's not worth the effort. Or the tracker beneath the skin of Jensen's right shoulder blade - which Jensen totally knows about, thank you very much - is malfunctioning.

Jensen starts to count.

"Mississippi-one. Mississippi-two. Mississippi-three..."

Jensen loses track somewhere in the Mississippi-three-hundreds.

"Fuck it."

Just as Jensen's about to start seriously testing his restraints, there's a distant rumble and the room he's
in shudders ever so slightly. They're either having an earthquake, or something just went BOOM.

Jensen smirks and settles back in the chair. It's about time.

It doesn't take long now. Luckily Jensen remember to smooth his face into something a little less smug before Jared comes through the door like a human battering ram.

He looks like he should be on the cover of a romance novel - not that Jensen's ever looked at romance novels. Jared's hair is flowing; his eyes are wild. There's a bandolier across his wide chest, a gun in one hand, and a wicked looking blade in the other.

Hot damn.

Jensen swoons a bit. He blames it on the concussion.

And best of all, while Jared looks almost stricken at the sight of Jensen and the state he's in, there's none of that horrible, mopey depression that Jared's been wearing like a second skin since the last time he talked to his parents.

Jensen's an awesome boyfriend.


Jensen allows Jared to gently paw at him, checking out his injuries. More than once, he feels Jared's fingers press against the pulse point in his neck.

"Hey," Jensen says, "get this crap off me."

Jared complies. As soon as Jensen's arms are free, he ignores his screaming muscles and finally, finally scratches his goddamned nose.

Talk about torture.

Jensen's only unrestrained for about half a second before Jared's arms wrap around him. "I've got you," he says into Jensen's hair. "I've got you."

As if there was any doubt. Well, as if there was much of any doubt. Jensen's blaming that slight lapse on the concussion too.

Jensen lets his head rest on Jared's shoulder and listens to the sounds of distant screams.

"I told Jeff and the others to make sure they left some alive," Jared says. "I thought you might like to play later.

Jensen grins. "My hero."
Jealousy

Chapter Summary

When Jared invites his high school girlfriend to the mansion for a bit, the security team has to deal with a slightly homicidal Jensen.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for cattraine

"All right," Jeff says, rubbing a tired hand over his face, "Oscar has eyes on Jensen; everyone else, report."

"Trip wire on the stairs," Columbus says.

"Incendiary device under the toilet," Idris says.

"Brown recluse in the shower head," Zoe says.

"Where the hell did he find one of those?!" Chris asks before scratching at a sudden skittering sensation on the back of his neck.

"Who the hell knows," Jeff says. "They probably spring fully-formed from the back of his head or something."

"Can we revisit the option of sedating him?" Idris asks. "Just until she leaves?"

"Oh, sure, Idris," Jeff says. "You get right on that. And then, if you're still alive and functioning, you can explain all this to Jared."

"Maybe..." Columbus twists his face into a grimace. "Hell, maybe someone should explain this to Jared. I mean, I love the guy, don't get me wrong, but inviting your old high school girlfriend to spend a couple weeks at your house when the person currently sharing your bed used to kill people for a living, well, that's just stupid."

"But who knew Jensen is the jealous type?" Jeff asks.

"Especially of someone who Jared hadn't seen in over ten years," Chris says.

"It's..." Zoe sighs. "When you spend your time alone, like most assassins do, and then you're not alone, receiving attention and affection can be... heady. Good. Addictive." She clears her throat and smooths her already pulled back hair. "Jealousy is based in fear."

Jeff's nodding slowly. "Jensen's used to coming first in Jared's life," he says.

"But Jared's been too busy playing catch-up with the prom queen to give Jensen the attention he's
used to," Idris continues.

"So he started to perceive Cortese as a threat," Columbus finishes. "And we all know what he does to threats."

"Well, that's just great," Chris says. "How are we supposed to convince Jensen's that he's being an idiot?"

"We probably shouldn't actually use the term idiot," Jeff says.

"I nominate Chris," Idris says. "Jensen is less likely to permanently injure him."

"Hey." Chris says.

"I second that," Zoe says.

"Hey!"

"Third," Columbus says.

"Hey!"

"Motion carried," Jeff says. He shrugs. "Sorry, kid."

Chris folds his arms over his chest. "Oh, my God. You guys suck."

"Just give him the puppy eyes," Columbus says. "You'll be fine."

Chris is about to grouse some more when Jeff's cell rings.

"Hello? Oh, hey, Oscar," Jeff says. He listens for a moment. "Wait, what?" A look of alarm comes over Jeff's face. "Where the fuck did he get a crossbow?! Oh, hell. Yeah, yeah, we'll be there." Jeff ends the call. "Dammit." He runs his hand over his face again. "I am getting way too old for this shit."

Zoe pats him on the arm.

"When's Cortese leaving again?" Columbus asks.

"Five days," Idris says.

Jeff shakes his head. "God help us. God help us all."
Jensen doesn't know how long he stands there blinking at Chris like an idiot and trying to process the words he had just heard. Finally, he shakes himself, and sputters, and says, "I am not!"

Chris gives him a disturbingly sympathetic look. "Yeah, you are."

"I don't get jealous, Chris. I just don't. That's not how I'm wired."

"Uh huh. Then why are you trying to kill Jared's old girlfriend?"

"I'm not-"

"What are you going to do with the crossbow, Jensen?"

Jensen glances down at the weapon in his hands. "Uh... Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"That's right. Nothing."

Chris sighs. "Look, I get it. Really, I do. If the guy I was in love with invited his old flame to stay at our house for a couple of weeks, without asking me first... Good God, I would tear the place down. But Jared and Cortese dated back in high school, man. They haven't even seen each other for over a decade!"

"I know," Jensen snaps. "I'm aware of their history. And it's not like I think anything's going to happen. Jared's not gonna cheat on me or anything. His self-preservation instincts are way too high. Plus, I think she's happily married to a dentist or something. Or was it a dermatologist?” Jensen frowns. "It might have been a podiatrist. I wasn't paying that much attention."

"Okay," Chris says, "you don't think anything's going to happen between them?"

"That's what I just said, isn't it?"

"Then let me ask again, why are you trying to kill her?"

"I'm... Jensen has his lips ready to form a denial when it hits him. "Huh."

"What?"

"Well, that's..." Jensen frowns. "Oh." Jensen's frown deepens. "Oh."

Chris is trying to keep a hold on his panic, but Jensen's looking decidedly evil at the moment. "Oh, what?"

"First of all," Jensen says, "I haven't been trying to kill Genevieve. I've never tried to kill anyone in
my life. If I wanted her dead, she would be dead."


"Secondly, I think I may be acting out some feelings of rage concerning Jared."

"Oh," Chris says. "So, your target wasn't really Cortese?"

"I can't hurt Jared," Jensen says, "not really. I can hurt people adjacent to him, though."

"That's healthy."

"I think maybe Jay and I need to have a long talk," Jensen says.

"That's great," Chris says. "Well, that probably won't be so great for Jared, but, whatever. So, does this mean you're going to stop leaving booby traps all over the house now?"

"No more booby traps," Jensen says. "I promise."

Chris decides to ignore the hand Jensen's holding behind his back.
The Talk

Chapter Summary

Jensen thinks that he and Jared are in a rut.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for proserpine_1982.

"It's not that I'm opposed to us trying new things in the bedroom, Jen."

"Uh huh."

"It's just that, you know, I just..."

"Go on."

"I'm just... If it ain't broke, why fix it, right?"

"If... it's not... broke..."

"Exactly! I mean, our sex life is awesome, right? I mean, it... it is, right?"

"It's okay."

"See, it's... Wait. What do you mean, 'okay'?"

"Well, we have been together for a while, Jay."

"Wha... Are you not happy, Jen? Oh, my God, are you bored with our sex life?"

"You mean us doing the exact same thing? Night after night? No, how could I possibly find that boring?"

"Yeah, sarcasm really adds to a conversation."

"He said sarcastically."

"Oh, whatever. Look, do you... Do you want to break up with me, or something?"

"For the love of... I am not even going to dignify that with a response. Or, no, wait, yes I am. Don't be stupid, Jay! Jesus!"

"Well, I don't know! You said we were boring!"

"Jared... Is our entire relationship built solely on sex?"
"Of course not! I love you."

"Yeah, and I love you too, dumbass. But just because we love each other doesn't mean that we haven't gotten stuck in a rut. It happens in long term relationships. There are all these articles about... Um.... Yeah."

"Jensen?"

"Hmmm?"

"What have you been reading?"

"What? Just... magazines."

"What kind of magazines?"

"You know, the... monthly kind."

"Cosmo?"

"Oh, Jesus."

"Ladies Home Journal?"

"Jared, I swear to God..."

"Martha Stewart Living?"

"First of all, that's just got recipes and decorating tips... Not that I've ever looked through one."

"Oh, Jensen... Oh, baby, I'm so sorry. I've been neglecting you, haven't I? I promise, I will find someone for you to kill as soon as I can, okay?"

"That's not... Actually, yeah, I'd kind of appreciate that, thanks. But that still doesn't change the fact that we're in a-"

"Don't say rut again."

"Rut."

"Dammit, Jen. Fine. If it would really make you feel better if we-"

"It's not about that, it's... Jay, we're in this for the long haul. I'm planning on spending the next five decades with you, at least. And, during those fifty plus years, there will be time when we will need to, you know, spice things up a little bit. That doesn't mean we're not amazing together; it just means we're human."

"Oh. I see. You're human?"

"What the... Shut up."

"Make me."

"You know, Jared, you-"

"Oh. Oh."

"Yeah."

"Awesome."
The Security Team is Not a Lending Library

Chapter Summary

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean that there isn't a sniper watching you from the shadows.

Chapter Notes

Yes, the new characters in this fic are exactly who you think they are. More crossover/fusion-type stuff FTW!

By the time Jared's washed his face, and brushed his teeth, and triple checked the lock on the bedroom door, Jensen's already in bed. If it was any other night, Jared would be crawling across their comforter, and plucking Jensen's book out of his hands, and sliding Jensen's glasses off his cute, little nose, and then making with the sexy times. Even though they've been together for like five years now, Jared's still ridiculously smitten with his super hot, ex-assassin boyfriend.

But tonight is not like most nights. Tonight, Jared feels the weight of a talk weighing down on him.

"Jen," Jared says softly. He settles himself at the foot of their bed. "Jen," he says again, lightly letting one of his hands rest on one of Jensen's blanket-covered ankles.

"Yeah, yeah," Jensen says, his eyes still focused on his book, "let me just finish this chapter, okay? Oh, but if you don't mind, let's skip the foreplay and get right to the fucking; I've got to get up early in the morning."

For a moment Jared wonders where the thrill is and when it vacated the general premises. "Jen, could you just stop for a minute?"

"I've got, like, three more pages, Jay. Hold your horses."

Jared sighs and reaches out, placing one of his giant paws smack dab in the middle of Jensen's page. The scowl he receives for this action nearly has him quaking, but he doesn't back down.

"We need to talk, Jensen," Jared says, putting as much seriousness into his voice and expression as he can.


"Of course we're okay," Jared says with a fond smile. As if he'd ever break-up with Jensen; he doesn't have a death wish, for God's sake. "But I'm..." Jared shakes his head, losing whatever nerve he might have built up to have this conversation.

Jensen grabs both of Jared's hands and holds them tight enough to hurt. "You're what?! What's wrong?! Have you been to a doctor? Do you need to see a doctor?"
"What's wrong, Jared?" Jensen asks again, his voice just as steely as his grip.

"I think..." Jared takes a deep breath. "I think I might be cracking up."

Jensen stares at him for a few long moments, then he goes back to his book. "Oh, is that all?"

"What do you mean, is that all?" Jared asks with a sputter. "Jen, I think, I think I might be losing it. Seriously."

Jensen looks back up and raises his left eyebrow a fraction of an inch. "Jay, I hate to break it to you, but you've never exactly been the picture of mental health." Jensen shrugs. "I mean, neither am I, so glass houses and all that."

"Yeah, okay, fine," Jared concedes. "But, there's being a sociopath and then there's being a sociopath with paranoid delusions, which, you know, I'm pretty sure is a step down the specialized drug cocktail ladder."

Jensen frowns. "Delusions?"

"Paranoid delusions."

"Okay," Jensen says, "I'm probably going to regret this. What kind of paranoid delusions? Is an inanimate object telling you to kill everyone in the house? Because, if so, I think we might need to break out the restraints. And not the fun restraints, the real restraints."

"What? No," Jensen says, "it's nothing like that. I just... I can't shake the feeling that I'm being watched, almost constantly."

Jensen does the staring thing again, then he snorts. "Really? That's what you're upset about?"

"Yes!" Jared says, offended by Jensen's obviously cavalier attitude. "Are you... Are you laughing?! How can you laugh about this?!"

"Because you are being watched, Jared," Jensen says, snickering.

"I... What?" Jared just barely resists the urge to check over his shoulder. "Who? Why? What?"

"Oscar's been skulking around you for the past two weeks," Jensen says. "You really haven't noticed?"

"Oscar?" Jared's more than a little flabbergasted. "Why is one of my own security team trying to gaslight me? And why are you apparently okay with it?"

The eyebrow hitches up another few notches. "Seriously, Jay? What happened two weeks ago?"

Jared draws his bottom lip into his mouth as he casts his mind back. Two weeks... Two weeks...

Jensen sighs. "I'll give you a hint; it involves loaning someone out to another organization."

Jared's eyes widen. "This is all about Chris?!"

"Ding, ding, ding, ding."
"But... Why is Oscar... I didn't force Chris to go, Jensen," Jared says. "I asked if he wanted to shadow Jackson's crew for a little bit - in the spirit of inter-criminal-organization cooperation, or whatever - and he said yes. And you've talked to him the times he's called home; he sounds like he's having a blast, like he's at summer camp or something."

"True," Jensen says. "But, in a way, knowing he's having so much fun is kind of worse for the people left behind, don't you think?"

"Left behind? It's not like Chris moved to another country," Jared says. "He's gonna be back at the beginning of the month."

Jensen makes a noncommittal noise. "Just out of curiosity, what would you have thought if I had said I wanted to be the one shadowing Jackson's crew for a few weeks?"

Jared crosses his arms over his chest. "Well that just wouldn't have happened."

The Eyebrow reaches its apex.

"Unless you had really wanted to go, and then you would have had my full support." Jared smiles tremulously.

Jensen shakes his head. "Oscar's not happy, and he's just been showing his displeasure with the situation in the best non-firearm way he knows how."

"By trying to slowly drive me crazy?"

"I would say he's aiming for mild freakout instead of complete bonkers, but who knows."

"Yeah." Jared maneuvers himself around until he's sitting beside Jensen. He leans back against the headboard and sighs. "Maybe I should call Jackson tomorrow and see if I can get Chris back a little early."

"Oscar will be pleased, but Chris will probably be pissed."

"I'd rather deal with Chris' pouty face than deal with Oscar hiding in the shadows," Jared says. He lowers his voice. "He kind of scares me."

"Actually," Jensen says, "I think he's been hiding in the ceiling."

"Well, that makes everything loads better." Jared clears his throat. "He's up there now, isn't he?"

Jared hears two thumps from the area directly above their bed. Now that he's looking, he can clearly see a freshly drilled spy hole and one brown eye peering down at them.

Jared lets out a tiny gurgle and pulls the covers over his head.

"So, I guess that's a no on the sex, then," Jensen says.

Jared whimpers.

Jared twitches and fidgets, and when he finally can't stand it anymore, he checks his watch again. He barely registers the time - three minutes later than the last time he looked - before a finger is none-too-
gently flicking his ear.

"I told you to stop that," Jensen says, his voice deceptively mild.

"I know, I know," Jared says, cringing. "But they were supposed to be here, and-

"I'm sure they're fine."

"They're not here, and-

"There was probably some traffic."

"I can just feel Oscar lurking. He's... He's... lurking." Jared scans his surroundings again, turning a full 360 degrees twice before Jensen grasps his arm.

"You're gonna make yourself dizzy," he says.

"Good," Jared says. "Maybe I can pass out, and when I wake up this will all be over."

Jensen pats Jared's arm. "No passing out," he says. "Now, what have we learned from this experience?"

"Never lend Chris out again, unless I lend Oscar out with him." Jared gets a smile and another couple of arm pats.

Before Jared can check his watch or look for Oscar again, the rumbling purr of an engine reaches his ears. "Oh, thank Christ," he says as he watches Jeff's SUV come up the drive. It comes to a stop in front of Jared and Jensen, and the driver's side window rolls down.

"Sorry we're late," Jeff says with a grin. "Somebody wanted to stop for ice cream."

"Oh, my God, you guys!" Chris practically bounces around the SUV and envelops first Jensen, then Jared into huge hugs. "That was soooo cool! Seriously, we have got to work with those people. Soon. I mean, soon, soon. They were really nice, and fun. Oooh, ooh, guys, they had robots! Like, real robots, and all their day to day stuff is handled by an AI, and, and..."

Jared lets Chris' excited babble wash over him, and he abruptly realizes that Oscar wasn't the only one missing Chris these last few weeks.

Speaking of...

"Hey, Chris."

Oscar's voice comes from right behind Jared's left shoulder. Jared doesn't jump, or yell, but he does wheeze a bit and clutch at his chest.

Chris lets out a happy squeak and launches himself at Oscar. He gloms onto him, and Oscar gloms back.

"Missed you," Chris says softly, his voice muffled by Oscar's hat.

Jensen lets out a little cough and tugs on Jared's sleeve. "I think we should-"

"Yeah," Jared says, "definitely." He wraps an arm around Jensen's shoulders, pulls him in tight, and leans down slightly to press a kiss into soft, spikey hair. As they leave, Jared can hear Chris' happy chatter start up again.
"So, there were robots, right! Oh, and I think I may have met someone scarier than Zoe. Seriously. And there was a guy who likes to only use hammers when he fights - you'd think he'd be scary, but he was actually kind of sweet. Oh, oh, and have you ever thought about switching out your rifle for a bow and arrow?"
Sasquatches Can Totally Be Stealthy

Chapter Summary

Jared tries to out-stealth Jensen. Jensen finds it kind of adorable.

Chapter Notes

Comment fic for dugindeep.

Jared may not be some ninja-like, ex-assassin badass, but he is the very deadly and dangerous head of an incredible successful crime organization. He has skills.

Just, you know, stealth isn't really one of them.

"Jay," Jensen calls out, his voice loud and clear even though he's on the other side of the door, "why are you in the closet?"

"Uh, I'm not." Jared winces and thinks about smothering himself in one of the jackets hanging by his head.

"Okay," Jensen says after a moment's pause. "Should I be concerned? I'm really not sure... Do you want me to get someone else, or-"

"No!" Jared yelps. "No. It's okay. It's fine. I'm fine."

"Are you going to come out?"

"In a little bit," Jared says. Maybe once he's sure his face isn't roughly the same color as a stop sign. And, really, what the hell was he thinking? "It's actually kind of nice in here. It's quiet." This time Jared does push his face into one of the jackets.

"Okay," Jensen says slowly. "Is it all right if I come in, then?"

"Mmmphhh," Jared says, his mouth full of some kind of cotton blend.

The closet door opens just enough for Jensen to slip inside. Jared closes his eyes against the light from the hallway, then keeps them closed even after Jensen shuts the door.

"So..." Jensen's standing close enough that Jared can feel his breath ghost past his cheek. "Part of me is worried," Jensen says, "and part of me wants to make inappropriate jokes, and all of me is very confused."

Jared sighs. "You love me, right?"

"I believe the correct response to that is 'duh'," Jensen says.
"Even when I'm being kind of an idiot."

"Again, duh."

Jared winces. "I was going to surprise you."

"With... what... exactly..."

"With me," Jared says. "I was going to sneak up on you, and grab you, and then, you know, sexy times."

"Oh," Jensen says. "Yeah, if you had done that, I would have been very surprised. And then, after I instinctively crushed your trachea, I'm sure I would have been mostly devastated."

"Admittedly, I did not fully think this through." Jared blinks. "Wait, what do you mean, mostly devastated?"

"Well, you would have had it coming," Jensen says, ever practical. "Who the hell tries to sneak up on an ex-assassin?"

Jared slumps miserably into what he thinks might be the parkas from the last time they went skiing. His misery abates somewhat as Jensen presses himself close. Jared feels fingers brush against his stomach. A few seconds later his belt buckle comes undone.

"You know," Jensen says, his lips hot against Jared's cheek, "it is kind of nice in here."

It's not exactly how Jared had envisioned spending the afternoon, but he's really not going to complain, even though they end up having to get the parkas dry cleaned.

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